

Chapter 6

Political Reflections on Dark Tourism: The Case of Turkey

Funda Çoban
Aksaray University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

This paper argues the popular black spots of Turkey, which are really few, initially serve as a political instrument to construct and deepen the national identity. Gallipoli, Anıtkabir, National Park for Commander-in-chief, the deathbed of Atatürk, Ulucanlar Prison, and Sakarya Earthquake Museum are well-known black spots in Turkey which could be addressed to improve this argument. The discourse of sterile interior designs, introductory brochures, official web pages, digital presentation and the quantitative gap between domestic and foreign visitors are some proofs, supporting the claim. On the other side of the coin, however, the construction of realms of memory, belonging to the “others” is continuously suspended and included in official ideology through normalization processes. Diyarbakır Prison, Madımak Hotel Aşkale are the discursive given “darker sites,” exemplifying the counter-discursive black spots in this sense. So, it can be concluded that the initial function of few samples of dark tourism sites in Turkey is mainly political rather than being economic or cultural.

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INTRODUCTION

Battles, diseases, disasters, genocide, accidents and the rest of all tragic events which are the imprint of humane mortality... No matter what the cause, people have always had a special interest in such events, affirming their being isn't eternal. Funeral ceremonies, memorials, visits to cemeteries are direct reflections of this interest which has been part of the anthropological concern. However, appeal, connecting this interest to a touristic context is quite fresh (Stone, 2013). This "new" touristic field is called as black spot tourism (Rojek, 1993), milking the macabre (Dann, 1994); dark tourism (Foley & Lennon, 1996, 2000), thanatourism (Seaton, 1996, 2009a) or morbid tourism (Blom, 2000). It is also variously defined as "the commercial [touristic] developments of grave sites and sites in which celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent death" (Rojek, 1993, p.136); "the presentation and consumption of real and commoditized death and disaster sites" (Foley & Lennon, 1996, p.198); "to travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death" (Seaton, 1996, p. 240); "traveling to touristic sites focusing on sudden death and which quickly attracts large numbers of people and, on the other an attraction-focused artificial morbidity-related tourism" (Blom, 2000, p.32), "visitation to sites associated with death, disaster, and depravity" (Lennon & Foley, 2000, p.46), "the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre" (Stone, 2006, p.146), "traveling to the sites concerned with encountering spaces of death or calamity that have political or historical significance, and that continue to impact upon the living" (Stone, n.d.); or "one of a number of institutions which mediate between the living and the dead" (Walter, 2009a, p. 39). Regarding the variety of the definitions, many issues arise, not excluding the question if dark tourism is truly new. In this context, Seaton (1996) and Stone (2006) develop the claim that human concern on tragic sites dates back to Roman gladiatorial games, public executions of the medieval period, the guided morgue tours of the Victorian period and thus, ask in which way dark tourism is new as a respond to the pioneering researchers, Foley and Lennon (2000) asserting dark tourism is intrinsically a post-modern phenomenon. On the other hand Ashworth and Isaac (2015) question the assumption, "rising demand of dark consumer" (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Stone, 2008) by adding "the apparent growth of interest may have more to do with the growth in the investigators than with the phenomenon investigated" (p. 317). Also, "dark tourism" which logically sets a dichotomy between dark and light, triggers some other debates, stressing "dark" itself assumes that the black spots are "ill-conditioned, abnormal, disturbing, troubling, suspicious," (Browman & Pezzullo, 2010, pp. 190–191; Seaton, 2009b; Ashworth & Isaac, 2015) and consequently pathological and exceptional (Clarke et al., 2014, p. 228). Indeed, there seems to be no compelling reason to articulate death with

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