

Dark tourism: The “heritagization” of sites of suffering, with an emphasis on memorials of the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi of Rwanda

Annette Becker*

Dr Annette Becker is a professor at Université Paris-Nanterre. She is also a member of the Editorial Board of the *International Review of the Red Cross*.

Abstract

Nowadays, there exists an international movement towards the extensive recognition as cultural heritage, or “heritagization”, of areas where wars, genocides and massacres have taken place. The phenomenon of “seeing” mass death, called “dark tourism” or the “tourism of desolation”, has become both an aim and a destination for visitors. The article examines this heritagization, with an emphasis on the memorials of the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi of Rwanda.

Keywords: dark tourism, memorials, genocide, cultural heritage, mass violence.

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Introduction

In a prescient 1909 manifesto, Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote:

Museums: cemeteries! ... Identical, surely, in the sinister promiscuity of so many bodies unknown to one another. ... In truth I tell you that daily visits to museums, libraries, and academies ... are, for artists, as damaging as the prolonged supervision by parents of certain young people drunk with their talent and their ambitious wills. ... So let them come, the gay incendiaries with charred fingers! ... Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!¹

A few lines earlier, he wrote: “We will glorify war – the world’s only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers.” History has proven that artists such as Marinetti should always be taken seriously: Marinetti’s “no-future”, which became almost an anarchist gesture, was turned into a future of wars and tragedies as early as 1904 with the extermination of the Herero and Nama and then the Libyan war of 1911, among others.

The word “tragedy” in Marinetti’s text indicates a situation where the protagonists together construct a scene in which the horrors follow a narrative logic, while a “catastrophe” is a future in which meaning has totally broken down. His writings predicted the rhythm of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: from 1914, and particularly from 1918, cemeteries and other traces of World War I, on all fronts, were turned into memorials and museums. Marinetti had been proven right, by a tragedy with 10 million dead soldiers and undoubtedly the same number of civilians. It was a tragedy that included the extermination of the Armenians (today called genocide, after the word was coined in 1943 by Raphael Lemkin) and which continued with violence, revolutions, counter-revolutions and an increase in radical nationalism, with all the associated destruction and exodus. The ultimate catastrophe of World War II followed, leaving at least 50 million dead.

Heritagization of sites of suffering and the phenomenon of dark tourism

The Italians have recently developed the concept of *museo all’aperto*, or open-air museums, to describe areas where traces of war, repression or mass death have turned into places of commemoration and mourning, where despair is anchored.² We could also refer to them as “landscapes after battle” as the filmmaker Andrzej

1 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism”, in Umbro Apollonio (ed.), *Documents of 20th Century Art: Futurist Manifestos*, Viking Press, New York, 1973, pp. 19–24.

2 Sten Rentzhog, *Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea*, Kristianstad, Carlssons, 2007. “Open-air museums” are broader than sites of war and catastrophe transformed into museums, but the term expresses the general idea.

Wajda does.³ There has been an upturn in the process of “heritization” since the 1990s, with more memorials appearing both because of the need for remembrance of the two World Wars and the Holocaust in Western countries, Eastern Europe, the United States, Australia and Asia (particularly in China and Japan), and because of the end of the Soviet Union.

Around the world, ruins (whether restored or left as they were found), cemeteries (whether visible or not), former concentration camps and forced work camps, prisons, extermination sites, and mass graves from massacres have become museums where objects, remains, photographs and films are displayed. Sometimes the opposite happens – they are forgotten, whether voluntarily or not. History is hidden and new stories are written.⁴

These places exist primarily in the minds of those whose past causes them suffering, both individuals and groups. They may have no grave where they can pay their respects, no photographs to look at and no voices to listen to. These places are sites of tears and prayers, bodies and remains of bodies, and landscapes and topography that may be legendary or not, to use Maurice Halbwachs’s expression.⁵ They are a kind of interpretation of trauma that is also a representation and a transfer of sacredness, from death to survival or revival. And through the eyes of visitors, we may ask ourselves how people’s lives can be made to reappear, when so much was done to extinguish them.

Such memorial museums are part of what is now often referred to as “dark tourism”,⁶ which combines a certain voyeurism for appalling objects with a search for emotion. Most of these museums have two parts: the site itself, which may have been adapted to make it suitable for visiting, and a section exploring the history. The degree of academic investigation and the use made of the site by the authorities for political purposes vary widely. These museums may be created in new buildings, such as the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which fills the empty space of the former Warsaw ghetto, destroyed by the Nazis in 1943; the Drancy Memorial, which is opposite the site of the internment camp; and the 9/11 Memorial and Museum at the site of the World Trade Center’s twin towers.

3 *Landscape after the Battle (Krajobraz po bitwie)* is a 1970 film by a Polish film director Andrzej Wajda, depicting the story of a Nazi concentration camp survivor.

4 Luba Jurgenson, “Paysages du désastre”, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, October 2010; Annette Becker, “Les musées des catastrophes, exposer guerres et génocides”, in Delphine Bechtel and Luba Jurgenson, *Muséographie des violences en Europe centrale et ex-URSS*, Editions Kimé, Paris, 2016; Nicolas Werth, *La route de la Kolyma*, Belin Litterature et Revues, Paris, 2012; “Le paysage après-coup”, symposium organized by Soko Phay in December 2017 at the FRAC Lorraine in Metz, France, in particular regarding Cambodia (proceedings forthcoming); “Does Memory Blend into the Landscape?”, *Mémoires en Jeu/Memory at Stake*, No. 7, Summer 2018.

5 Maurice Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre sainte*, PUF, Paris, 2008. This book is the most accomplished of Halbwachs’s essays on memory, and unfortunately the least well-known. Also see Annette Becker, *Maurice Halbwachs: Un intellectuel en guerres mondiales, 1914–1945*, Agnès Viénot Editions, Paris, 2003.

6 For more information, see “Dossier” section on “Dark Tourism: The Dark Side of the Earth?”, *Mémoires en Jeu/Memory at Stake*, No. 3, April 2017; Malcolm Foley and J. John Lennon, “JFK and Dark Tourism: A Fascination with Assassination”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1996; Philip Stone and Richard Sharpley, “Consuming Dark Tourism: A Thanatological Perspective”, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2008.

Alternatively, they may be in one of the site's original buildings, transformed from its function at the time of the catastrophe to become both museum and exhibit, such as the blocks of Auschwitz I, the Birkenau Sauna and the gatehouse of the destroyed village of Belchite, a symbol of the Spanish Civil War.⁷

Having a strong potential to elicit memories and emotions, these places undergo a sort of reclassification, becoming sites of sacrality and pilgrimage. In this vein, Révérien Rurangwa, a survivor of the genocide of the Tutsi of Rwanda, describes his trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau in January 2004:

Going to Auschwitz is not tourism ... it is an inner journey confronting the scene of Evil, the symbol of Genocide, the paradigm of Crimes Against Humanity ... A place where all the survivors find themselves in some way at home, I dare say. It is this strange brotherhood that I have just shared with other survivors of genocide ... Our group includes old Armenians, aged Jews, young Tutsi, Hereros from Mozambique. But survivors have no age ... It is impossible not to superimpose the images that I carry within myself ... These are not huts on a gloomy plain but laughing hills where colours burst under a clear sky. Come closer ... A whole country transformed into a killing field. Methodical, open-air barbarism ... This trip to Auschwitz plunges me into a painful reflection. Each thought wakes a sensitive memory, a flesh wound. I could not manage to distance myself.⁸

Whether survivor or not, one might ask how it is possible to “distance oneself” when faced with sites that are “unlimited: at the same time both at the heart of historical analysis, limited to a certain time and place, and a work of memory and therefore unlimited, prolonged, disappearing and returning, in spectres that are politicized and sometimes instrumentalized by those who work to preserve them”.⁹

As early as World War I, people wondered whether the Reims Cathedral should be rebuilt or whether the ruins should be left as a demonstration of the enemy's “barbarity”.¹⁰ In Hiroshima, while a modern museum designed by Kenzo Tange was inaugurated in 1954, the skeletal dome was left as a reminder of the catastrophe and has remained a constant feature in the shifting landscape of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. Should reconstruction be favoured or should ruins be displayed? Nowadays, the logic of Oradour-sur-Glane is more rarely followed, with its accusatory ruins giving the impression of being frozen in time.

The aim of these memorials is to symbolically bring people from the past back to life. That is the translation of Yad Vashem, the name of the huge World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. The phrase is borrowed from the Book of Isaiah: “And to them will I give in my house and within my walls a

7 Stéphane Michonneau, “Belchite ou l'impossible *Dark Tourism* de la guerre civile espagnole”, *Mémoires en Jeu/Memories at Stake*, No. 3, April 2017.

8 Révérien Rurangwa, *Génocidé*, Presses de la Renaissance, 2006, p. 47 (*Review's* translation).

9 Piotr Kosicki citing Victor Erofeev in his contribution on Katyn, in David El Kenz and François Xavier Nérard (eds.), *Commémorer les victimes en Europe, XVI-XXIème siècles*, Champ Vallon, Paris, 2011 (*Review's* translation).

10 Emmanuelle Danchin, “*Le temps des ruines, 1914–1921*”, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2015.

memorial and a name.”¹¹ The photographs that are used across museum sites often give these people faces. At former extermination sites, photographs of children are chosen on purpose, not only because emotions are stronger when we are faced with young lives that have been lost, but also because the extermination of children is central to the concept of genocide: it was through children that aggressors wanted to remove the Armenians, the Jews and the Rwanda Tutsi from the face of the Earth. Likewise, they are not objects that have been discarded, but are remembered as human beings. Memorials and museums give the dead an identity again.

Visiting these sites of catastrophe is not only a matter of clarifying the experiences of survivors and victims or their families, it is also a matter of trying to understand the different roles of everyone within the conflict. Not looking at the interactions between enslavers/executioners, slaves/deportees and those who found themselves in the affected area – whether directly involved or not – would lead to a one-dimensional view of history. The reflex is always to identify with the victims, but that can be problematic. Sometimes victims have been forgotten, or there is a sense of competition between the different victims, and the different memories. But other times victims can find an element of redress, of being given back their past. There are sites where optimistic “heritage entrepreneurs” offer an oxymoron to entice visitors to these “peace sites”, which were in fact created by war.

People visit such places when they want to see the suffering of their own people, or of others, and to get closer to it. Otherwise, how can the vast numbers of South Korean visitors to Auschwitz-Birkenau be explained? The camp, especially Auschwitz I – a key place for Polish remembrance and one that has come to symbolize the whole deportation and extermination of the Jews – has too many visitors nowadays, despite the efforts of the museum management, with the support of the international survivors’ association, to manage the flow of tourists. Mass tourism fails to guard the silence and the necessary respect owed to such sites, and puts at risk the fragile marshy soil and wooden structures of these locations.

At the intersection of the history of military, political, social and cultural violence against people, and the role of memory and trauma, researchers in “memorial tourism” create an intellectual sphere where history is written during the short term of destruction and the long term of remembering or forgetting, and thus form narratives between amnesia, anamnesis and hypermnesia. The intellectuals who study these sites decode at the same time as the visitor the “symbolic constructions” of museums and memorials, which attempt to raise awareness of the fact that the body, spirit and landscape are vulnerable, in the etymological sense of the word. How have the most painful, extraordinary wounds and devastations of the past been experienced, perceived, prolonged and unceasingly represented – “distilled”, as geographer and writer Julien Gracq

11 Isaiah 56:5. For more information on the importance of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, see Annette Becker, *Messageurs du désastre: Raphaël Lemkin, Jan Karski et les génocides*, Fayard, Paris, 2018.

said? Gracq invented the notions of the *esprit de l'histoire* (spirit of history) and *paysage-histoire* (history-landscape) – the idea that landscapes are shaped by people.¹² This article will focus on the remarkable heritage landscape of the post-genocide of the Tutsi of Rwanda, with comparison to other world memorialscape.

What appears on site: Beyond the taboo of death

In site museums, one is at the heart of the notion of “sites of memory” developed by Pierre Nora: they are a kind of “melting pot” where meaning is created, from the past to the present.¹³ For their creators and visitors, these places offer re-enactment, sometimes with a sense of reparation, of restitution of the past, and certainly with a vivid sense of conjuring up the victims and their fear. There is a re-appropriation of places that have become real or substitute cemeteries: people make pilgrimages to them because these memorial museums are very emotional, sacred places. More than anything, genocide has destroyed and killed, and the people who visit these museums are either victims or identify with the victims, hence the term “place of victim remembrance”.¹⁴

In Rwanda, the horror of the suffering and death inflicted on the Tutsi in 1994 is everywhere. It is communicated through surviving witnesses, escaped witnesses, eyewitnesses who have become guides at memorial sites. It has become their job – “they tell their story every day”.¹⁵ But they are more than simply guides, having become what Avishai Margalit calls moral witnesses: those who have known evil, suffered and taken risks to bear witness, in an ethic of remembering.¹⁶ One of these guides at Biseseo, whose face bears a long machete scar, says: “I am a guide because I am a survivor but also because I can do it.”¹⁷ The guides at the memorial sites in Rwanda embody the genocide: some of them tell their own stories of death and survival, while others, often younger, relate to the official regional or national version. “They are the region’s truth.”¹⁸ The guide at Nyange shows his own archive, a piece of paper that has been folded and unfolded thousands of times, and that speaks of his pain at seeing his truck requisitioned by the killers while his family were crushed and then burned in

12 Julien Gracq, interview with Jean-Louis Tissier, *Julien Gracq: Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 2, Gallimard, La Pléiade, Paris, 1995, p. 1206.

13 See Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 books in 7 vols, Gallimard, Bibliothèque Illustrée des Histoires, Paris, 1984–92.

14 Expression coined by David El Kenz and François Xavier Nérard. See D. El Kenz and F. X. Nérard (eds.), above note 9 (*Review*’s translation).

15 Interview with Magnifique Neza, April 2014. On file with author.

16 Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002.

17 Interview with A. B., April 2014. On file with author.

18 Interview with Martin Musoha, April 1994. On file with author. Musoha survived the genocide at age 14 and later became a member of the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide (Commission Nationale de Lutte contre le Génocide, CNLG), where he was in charge of exhumations.

their own church following the orders of their own priest.¹⁹ It is their bones that are displayed in the glass cabinet behind the guide.²⁰

In most genocide museums, the bodies themselves are not displayed, either because this would violate a strict taboo or because the bodies were burned, as in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where only traces of ashes were left. Marceline Loridan-Ivens, who survived Birkenau, writes to her father:

I imagine you looked just like all the corpses I saw scattered along the road as I returned. I can picture your arms outspread, your eyes wide open. A body who'd seen death and then watched himself die. A body no one would ever return to us. When your official document arrived, three years later, we were still hoping you'd come back, but without really expecting you to... If we'd had a grave, somewhere we could cry over you, perhaps things would have been easier.²¹

Is it easier? Are the survivors in Rwanda less haunted? Because in that country bodies of victims are shown, and even more than that, there is a veritable display of death.

This is the case in Kinazi, Kibeho and Murambi, where bodies are preserved with powdered lime, frozen forever in the position of their awful death in the classrooms where they thought they could hide. Murambi still smells of death, only a little less than when the mass graves were reopened so that the exhumed remains could be interred with dignity over twenty years later. One of the survivors, Élise Rida Musomandera, shares her impressions:

In Murambi, I smelled the smell of Rwanda in 1994, the smell of dead people. Murambi is the only place that still really smells of Rwanda in 1994. The smell of dead people is still there despite the twenty years that have passed.²²

The work undertaken at sites like Murambi is on the border between forensic science and forensic archaeology,²³ beginning with the forensic investigations requested by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda with the aim of gathering evidence. As the laboratory for the conservation of the bodies in

19 The priest Athanase Seromba was sentenced to life imprisonment for aiding and abetting genocide and extermination as a crime against humanity in 2008 by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). See ICTR, *The Prosecutor v. Athanase Seromba*, Case No. ICTR-2001-66-A, Judgment, 12 March 2008.

20 In September 2018, a huge new memorial was inaugurated by the CNLG in Nyange, next to the rebuilt church. The church is a new step in commemoration, as it completely replaces the original site of suffering. On the new church is written in French and Kinyarwanda: “This church replaces the former one which was deliberately destroyed during the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994. Their memory will never fade. We will always carry them in our prayers” (*Review's* translation).

21 Marceline Loridan-Ivens, *Et tu n'es pas revenu*, Grasset, Paris, 2015, pp. 48, 59 (*Review's* translation). This is the example used by Valérie Rosoux in her excellent chapter “Drames humains et réconciliations: Une mémoire commune est-elle possible?”, in Annette Becker and Stéphane Tison (eds.), *Un siècle de sites funéraires: De l'histoire à la valorisation patrimoniale*, Presses de l'Université de Nanterre, Nanterre, 2018.

22 Élise Rida Musomandera, *Le livre d'Élise*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2014, pp. 82–83 (*Review's* translation).

23 Caroline Sturdy Colls, “Holocaust Archaeology: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution”, *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2012.

Murambi shows, this is a place for study and research. The museum part of the site needs to encompass everything that happened to victims, to sum it all up in a *mise en abyme*, from death to proof of the cause of death. Although remains can no longer be identified because the resources required for DNA analysis are not available in Rwanda, studying the bodies means gaining a better understanding of how they were killed.²⁴ It is survivors who go down into the mass graves to “raise” the bodies, a religious expression that comes quite naturally to the Rwandans, who are predominantly Catholic. In their understanding, bodies and spirits “rise”. Often, women who are a fragile living proof of the genocide because of rape and AIDS work together to sort the remains of their people. Will they ever find those whom they have lost?

In Kinazi, for example, in 2014, there were still bags overflowing with soil mixed with rotting flesh, bones and dirty clothes; the smell of putrefaction was sickly sweet and vile. Does engaging in “memorial tourism” mean smelling the odour of death? In the new, white memorial, skulls, bodies and clothes are displayed in a manner reminiscent of a baroque *mise en scène*, an act of warning, or even an exorcism, in a country possessed by its dead. Visitors literally descend among the dead, into cellars. It is the role of the witness-guides and the cleaning staff (those who sweep in Murambi and Nyamata are survivors too) to embody the death of their people and the difficulty of surviving.²⁵ They bear extremely visible scars themselves (like the scarred man in Bisesero, whose explanations were so meticulous), not to mention the psychological scars that will be with them forever. The physical scars bring the past into the present, and the mental scars take the present into the past.²⁶

Bullet wounds, machete mutilation, severed limbs. The Hutus thought the Tutsi were too tall, and resented their tallness – they had risen too high. They had to be “brought down”, killed. Pleading positions – hands attempting to protect the face – represent a scene of humanity when there was no trace of it left in the executioner. “Bodies speak.”²⁷

24 Dozens of Australians killed at the 1916 Battle of Fromelles were identified by comparing their DNA with that of their descendants. They were reburied in marked graves in a military cemetery. See Bruce Scates, Annette Becker and Lucy Noakes, *Afterlives of War: Grief, Incarceration, Memorialisation and Repatriation*, research project on Fromelles, National Committee investigating the missing of Fromelles and Australian National University, Canberra.

25 At site museums, especially but not only in the United States, re-enactments or reconstructions are common, with guides in period costumes. Although these guides are sometimes costumed actors, many of them are passionate about the history, which they know from archives. This is the case for the Napoleonic War, the American Civil War and even the Second World War in Poland, where there is still widespread Holocaust denial. This is not necessary in Rwanda, where guides and cleaning staff are themselves survivors of the genocide.

26 Of course, anthropological explanations for the genocide can be sought, as Nigel Eltringham does in “Exhibition, dissimulation et ‘culture’: Le traitement des corps dans le génocide des Tutsi du Rwanda”, in Elisabeth Ansett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus, *Cadavres impensables, cadavres impensés: Approches méthodologiques du traitement des corps dans les violences de masse et les génocides*, Editions Petra, Paris, 2012. During genocides, perpetrators either show or hide their crimes. During the time of memorialization, showing is predominant.

27 Interview with Martin Musoza, April 2014. On file with author.

The children’s bodies stand out, some of them still covered by scraps of their school uniforms. As noted above, children were at the centre of the genocide, because it was by killing them that the Tutsi would be wiped from the Earth. In the words of one survivor:

The memorials of Nyamata and Ntrama ... I will never get used to seeing the bodies and skulls. In Ntrama, I can’t find the strength to take a step towards the wall that they hit children against, which is still stained with their blood. In Nyamata, the stairs that go down to the basement where the bodies are laid out on the table, I can’t cope with that.²⁸

Photographs from the time of the genocide are displayed on the walls of galleries: the memorials make it possible for visitors to visualize the time of the genocide and show the struggle against forgetting the death that occurred. This is the work of “internment with dignity” done by the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide (Commission Nationale de Lutte contre le Génocide, CNLG), which is responsible for all the memorial sites in Rwanda and is striving to coordinate them. There could be a memorial site every 100 metres, but to increase the impact – and to allow life to resume in a country that has suffered so much – just a few have been preserved. Not just educational but also political, they are both a display of death and an accusation, aimed at Hutu killers, neighbours who were involved in the genocide, or the French officials at the time and the mistakes of Operation Turquoise, as in Murambi.²⁹

These ruins-museums are at the same time places of prayer, mourning and condemnation, even more so when they are churches, schools and hospitals. Places of education, healing and faith became places of butchery, because genocide embodies the inversion of human values. In Kibeho – a highly sacred place where there was once an apparition of the Virgin – the church has been reconsecrated. The back of the church is a memorial, separated only by a curtain. There is a vengeful inscription in purple, the liturgical colour of mourning, in front of the skulls and bones, relics of the time of the genocide: “We ask that the perpetrators of genocide be punished and that it be forbidden to erase the evidence.” There is another inscription in front of the adjacent ossuary: “The people who died here demand that it never happens again.” As guides open the curtain so that visitors can see the bodies hidden behind it and better understand the inscription, it seems that arms are moving as if aiming to grab them. Statues of saints are also exhibited, with their limbs pulled off and their noses cut. The Virgin herself has been mutilated, brought to the same state as the people who believed she would protect them. The killers chose churches purposefully to show that their victims were no longer human.

28 E. Rida Musomandera, above note 22, p. 84 (*Review*’s translation).

29 Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Une initiation, Rwanda, 1994–2016*, Seuil, Paris, 2017. Operation Turquoise, conducted by the French military, took place in Rwanda in 1994. While the initial idea was to help the Tutsi, the military realized on the ground that they were mainly helping the perpetrators to escape. See Guillaume Ancel, *Rwanda, la fin du silence: Le témoignage d’un officier français*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2018.

Archives and objects in museums of catastrophe

Claude Lévi-Strauss reminds us:

The virtue of archives is to put us in contact with pure historicity. ... [O]n the one hand they constitute events in their radical contingency (since only interpretation, which forms no part of them, can ground them in reason), and, on the other, they give a physical existence to history, for in them alone is the contradiction of a completed past and a present in which it survives, surmounted. Archives are the embodied essence of the event.³⁰

The numerous genocide museums around the world, like the few existing slavery museums, are usually complete sensory spaces, with the explicit aim of shocking visitors.³¹ They are placed in the hands of professional museum curators who know how to organize written documents, drawings, photographs and objects.

The two museums organized in a Western manner in Rwanda, in Kigali and Murambi, were created by the Aegis Trust, which was set up by two brothers, James and Stephen Smith.³² The Aegis Trust is a British NGO that develops museums with the mission of using education to prevent genocide and crimes against humanity.³³ The Smith brothers began their activities in 1995 with a reflection on the genocide of the Jews through Beth Shalom, the National Holocaust Centre and Museum in the UK, which was created without the contribution of other researchers or curators working on the topic in the country, unlike the remarkable permanent exhibition on the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum. Drawing on this experience, they became interested in Kosovo and then Rwanda. The Holocaust model of memorials is very present in Kigali and Murambi: all museum materials were produced in the UK by the Aegis Trust and sent to Rwanda, where the exhibits were put together. Tour operators do not miss a chance to send visitors to the memorial site before or after they visit the National Parks to see the great apes.³⁴ These visitors are Westerners, like the museum curators, although many, especially high schools groups, also come from Rwanda and other African countries. Large numbers of Western tourists raise

30 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Savage Mind", in Jeffrey K. Olick, Veredsky Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy (eds), *The Collective Memory Reader*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, p. 175.

31 One example of this is the remarkable audio-visual display recreating the Middle Passage at the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. In this exhibit, the chained-up bodies at the bottom of a slave ship in a storm can be seen in their awful physical and mental suffering, huge, on three screens that make visitors feel physically and mentally sick.

32 There is a lot to write about the work of the Aegis Trust, but such a discussion is outside of the scope of this paper. For more information, see Aegis Trust, "Our Starting Point", available at: www.aegistrust.org/what-we-do/our-starting-point/ (all internet references were accessed in March 2019). For further insights, see the work of Rémy Korman on his website, rwanda.hypotheses.org, and in his upcoming thesis, *La construction de la mémoire du génocide des Tutsi du Rwanda: Etude des processus de mémorialisation*.

33 Aegis Trust, "Activities", available at: www.aegistrust.org/what-we-do/activities/.

34 The online advertisement for the Kigali memorial states: "The Kigali Genocide Memorial is the best known and most visited memorial site in Rwanda because of its easy accessibility. Tourists arriving at the Kigali International Airport will find the site an easy drive from the airport or from one of the many hotels located in and around Kigali." See "Kigali Genocide Memorial", *Genocide Archive Rwanda*, available at: rga1.lib.utexas.edu/index.php/Kigali_Genocide_Memorial.

questions about the mechanisms of Europeanization, and the clear-sighted, well-informed observer may experience a certain degree of shame: after colonization and complicity in genocide, has the West moved on to domination in historical and memorial representation?³⁵

The Aegis Trust’s museums are set out to provide a coherent account of the genocide under the patronage of the new Rwanda since 1994. The aim is also to provide an exhibition focusing on the fate of the victims, particularly through their personal possessions, which one might call “history through the senses”.³⁶

First, the dead are evoked by using metaphors, the clothes and objects that made them individuals; then by using photographs, as can be found in many genocide memorials around the world, particularly the Holocaust ones. The photographs presented are from prior to the catastrophe, depicting life “before”. The children murdered in Kigali because they were Tutsi resemble the children murdered because they were Jews depicted at memorials in Paris or Sydney.

In Kigali, as in Mechelen (the last Belgian transit camp before Birkenau), objects, such as tricycles or bicycles, are displayed just the way they were used. They tell stories of the individuals who used them, loved them, lost them, found them. In humankind’s eternal battle with death, genocide is a victory for death. These surviving objects bring back life. The simpler they are, the closer they are to the people. Children’s drawings give the impression of proximity to the deceased, through the marks they left on the object, which is both a historical inspiration and a trigger for the imagination. If too much is said about these objects, it deprives them of their voices. Too much staging makes them disappear – they must be left to speak for themselves.

These personal objects belonged to different people, and each of them tells a different story. Yet at the same time the objects are so ordinary that everyone in a group owned the same thing – for example, schoolchildren and their uniforms. They are similar yet different, displaying the collective through the individual and *vice versa*. This sharing of the personal, of objects that were otherwise part of an ordinary life, conjures up the immediacy of the horror. Ordinary objects are marked by the catastrophe, which gives them new meaning and speaks to the visitors. There are school shirts and sandals, hoes and identity cards, rosaries, pipes and sickles, watches, glasses and shoes – leather and plastic last better than cloth. These objects provide rough sketches of the people who were caught up in the machinery of death: they were Christians, like their killers; farmers, like their killers; and loved their families, like their killers.

These displays conjure up individuals and personalities beyond the stock of objects. They are not just things that have been cast away. They are people. A pair of glasses, a doll, a photograph – each unique. The cumulative effect of these objects does far more than merely describe; it brings the dead back to life. The same is

35 Matthew Boswell, “Reading Genocide Memorial Sites in Rwanda: Eurocentrism, Sensory Secondary Witnessing and Shame”, *Mémoires en Jeu/Memories at Stake*, No. 3, April 2017.

36 This is similar to the methods used by the curators and historians at the Buchenwald museum. See Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation, “Concept and Design”, available at: www.buchenwald.de/en/1455/.

true of the ubiquitous identity cards which showed that people belonged to the group to be killed and which now give them back their names and faces. We are close to the notion of “aura” that was so dear to Walter Benjamin:

If we designate as aura the associations which, at home in the *mémoire involontaire*, tend to cluster around the object of a perception, then its analogue in the case of a utilitarian object is the experience which has left traces of the practiced hand.³⁷

At the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva, the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda is represented by photos of children who survived. There is a case number on each photo of the children separated from their families: TRU 227, TRU 228, TRU 229. How much work went into bringing back together the separated families that are hidden behind these numbers? The humanitarian effort is also represented through an artwork made by prisoners, depicting former genocidal killers awaiting trial or already sentenced. We see the prison building, visited by the International Committee of the Red Cross, food stalls, a medical centre and a school. Normal life comes afterwards: sentencing, helping, teaching and healing.

Yet, after having seen the memorials and mass graves, one cannot help but think how sanitized most museums are. The display cases do more than merely protect the artefacts; they also protect the visitors from the awful reality of the events. In Kigali National Memorial, the clothes are hung up artfully. They have been washed. There are no smells, no blood. It is a far cry from the force of the site memorials at Kinazi and Murambi.

This is all the more true when the instruments of death are displayed, be they weapons or radios that broadcast calls for murder on the Libre des Mille Collines radio station.³⁸ These objects have another function – to communicate a message that summarizes and symbolizes the collective. This can also be seen at the Museo Memoria y Tolerancia in Mexico, where the Aegis Trust was called upon to set up the section on the genocide against the Tutsi. The exhibition focuses on long-running propaganda – the radio and the caricatures in the magazine *Kangura*. There, we see the French presence: François Mitterrand, who was friendly with the Hutu regime which perpetuated the genocide; Operation Turquoise; and a large portrait of Maurice Papon, representing France’s complicity in another genocide, the Holocaust.³⁹

37 Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, in *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York, 2007, p. 186.

38 Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines was a Rwandan radio station which, along with *Kangura* magazine, played a significant role in the genocide. For more information see Russell Smith, “The Impact of Hate Media in Rwanda”, *BBC News*, 3 December 2003, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3257748.stm>.

39 Maurice Papon was a French civil servant convicted of aiding and abetting crimes against humanity (responsible for the deportation of Jews between 1942 and 1944). For more information, see Trial International, “Maurice Papon”, available at: <https://trialinternational.org/latest-post/maurice-papon/>.

From genocide to world heritage

Today the CNLG is applying for UNESCO World Heritage Site status for the memorials in Nyamata, Murambi, Bisesero and Gisozi-Kigali. To do so, it needs to prove the sites’ oxymoronic “outstanding universal value”.⁴⁰ What will UNESCO classify? Death, the smell of death, blood, weapons, decay, surviving objects? UNESCO is calling such traces of genocide “negative memory” and is reluctant to add these remarkable witnesses of horror to its World Heritage List.⁴¹ As Auschwitz-Birkenau is on this list, we can only wonder about UNESCO’s criteria. At the same time, the sites and their presentation of cruelty also need to meet certain criteria for visiting. After mass death comes mass tourism, protecting sites, classifying them as “cultural property” and often sanitizing them through restoration. The system of heritage protection should garner international attention for an exceptional history, but it simultaneously forces that history into a mould which is acceptable to everyone. Seeing “their” site included on the UNESCO World Heritage List is, in a way, the ultimate aim of the survivors and their descendants who have allied themselves with the memorial tourism businesses. The death of their relatives or their extreme suffering could, they believe, become an internationally recognized “destination”, without ceasing to be enshrined and stored in them. Such a destination would be a cultural one, revealing the human and historic nature of the events, offering a sometimes challenging experience and adding to our historical knowledge of the genocide.

Inclusion of a site on the UNESCO World Heritage List involves a very complicated application process. Political or diplomatic factors often play as big of a role as cultural ones. The resulting insistence on modern conservation methods and the need to deal with increasing numbers of tourists can lead to technical changes which may alter the traces that were originally preserved, as is currently feared with the huge number of visitors in Auschwitz, for example.

Elsewhere, denial is a terrible factor. For example, the Republic of Armenia registered some heritage sites, but those that were in Anatolia were destroyed during or after the genocide of Armenians and obviously denied by Turkey. As for recognized sites that are destroyed by war and the murder of memory, as seen with Palmyra, the Buddhas in the Bamiyan Valley or the shrines in Timbuktu, UNESCO can only express protest.⁴² The process of memorial tourism can be

40 Extract from the preliminary report: “The sites of Nyamata, Murambi, Bisesero and Gisozi are serial properties including sites of memory that constitute unique and exceptional historical testimonies of the history of humanity. Each site represents the value of the memorial elements that express the unique and exceptional history of Rwanda and the modern world” (*Review’s* translation). On file with author.

41 Informal conversations between UNESCO officials and the author.

42 See, for example, UNESCO, “La directrice générale de l’UNESCO condamne fermement la destruction du Tétrapyle et les dégâts causés au théâtre de Palmyre, inscrit au patrimoine mondial de l’UNESCO”, 20 January 2017, available at: <https://fr.unesco.org/news/directrice-generale-unesco-condamne-fermement-destruction-du-tetrapyle-degats-causes-au-theatre>. In the case of Mali, the International Criminal Court found Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, a Tuareg Malian citizen, guilty of the war crime of intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments in the context of the armed conflict in Mali. He was sentenced to nine years of imprisonment in September 2016.

seen at work here: thousands of years created these works of art, and they were then destroyed by war, making them modern destinations for dark tourism – as if war, including religious war, added something by erasing that which came before it.

Conclusion

At the museum in Kigali, the visit ends with a reflection on the long-term consequences of war and genocide, such as refugees and trauma, and with some historical context for the different markers of extermination, including the Herero, Armenians, Jews, Cambodians and Bosniaks. Objects have been chosen that show shared experiences: German identity cards indicating that the bearer was a Jew, drawing a parallel with the Tutsi identity cards, where the word “Hutu”, which saved people during the genocide, is crossed out; piles of bones belonging to Herero, or Cambodians assassinated by the Khmer Rouge. Minimal context is provided, but there is an emphasis throughout on the certainty of genocide, under the key figure of Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term in 1943: from *genos*, which means “race” in Greek, and *occidere*, “kill” in Latin – a linguistic barbarism to describe the most barbaric of acts. Lemkin also said that not only can one not survive a genocide unscathed, but one can never leave it behind:

After a war, even if it’s lost, a nation can rebuild its technical and financial resources, start a new life. But those who have been destroyed in a genocide are lost forever. One can repair the losses of a war; the losses of a genocide are irreparable.⁴³

Lemkin gave the example of surviving Armenians and Jews to justify his devastating thought: there is no future for the victims of genocide.⁴⁴ Those Rwandan Tutsi who are not familiar with Lemkin’s works nevertheless speak of experiencing what he referred to as “the continuation of the psychological scar”. Sociologist Esther Mujawayo is one such example:

The power of a genocide is just that: horror while it is going on and horror afterwards. Internally, there is no end to a genocide. The killing, the massacres and the pursuit all stop, but there is no end to the destruction.⁴⁵

Claudine, a resident of Nyamata who survived the genocide, speaking at the time of her later wedding, says: “Thanks to the wedding, time wears a kind face at present. But only the present. Because I see clearly that the future has already been eaten up by what I have lived through.”⁴⁶

43 Raphael Lemkin papers, Microfilm 2, New York Public Library Archives & Manuscripts, 1950.

44 Annette Becker, *Messagers du désastre: Raphaël Lemkin, Jan Karski et les génocides*, Fayard, Paris, 2018.

45 See Esther Mujawayo and Souad Belhaddad, *SurVivantes*, Editions de l’Aube, La Tour-d’Aigues, 2011.

46 Jean Hatzfeld, *La stratégie des Antilopes*, Seuil, Paris, 2007, p. 3.

The future has been “eaten” like the future of the survivors who have tried to live again in their region where genocide took place. The Jews in Poland and Ukraine post-1945 and the Tutsi in Rwanda post-1994 have faced denial and the continuation of the genocide due to the continuing presence of their neighbours who were killers, and the sense of impunity:

I am still living the genocide that started with you ... But that does not intimidate me, it does not stop me from speaking for my dead, because in my opinion they surround me even if they will never speak again.⁴⁷

As Élise Rida Musomandera said: “There are people who survived because the genocide stopped, but do survivors really exist?”⁴⁸ She could have used the frightful expression that Soazig Aaron used when talking about the genocide of the Jews: *sous-vivants*⁴⁹ – a play on the French word for survivor, *survivant*, but replacing the prefix *sur-* (over) with *sous-* (under). A parallel can be drawn to the expression “walking dead” (*bapfuye buhagazi*) that is often used in Rwanda to describe survivors.⁵⁰ This is something that, without a doubt, no museum will ever be able to display.

47 Joséphine Kampiré quoted in Hélène Dumas, *Le génocide au village: Le massacre des Tutsi du Rwanda*, Seuil, Paris, 2014, pp. 277, 290 (Review’s translation). See also Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Une initiation*, Seuil, Paris, 2017.

48 E. Rida Musomandera, above note 22, p. 72 (Review’s translation).

49 Soazig Aaron, *Le non de Klara*, Pocket, Paris, 2004, *passim*.

50 “Rwanda’s Ghosts Refuse to Be Buried”, *BBC News*, 8 April 2009, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7981964.stm>.

