



A 5* Destination: the Creation of New Transnational Moral Spaces of Remembrance on TripAdvisor

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Abstract

In this article, we demonstrate how the digital sphere and individual contributions within it add to a process of worldmaking by creating a new transnational moral order that reinforces notions of a transnational humanity and shared values. Specifically, tourists' interactions in the digital sphere create a new moral space—in our analysis on the internet platform [TripAdvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com)—where they comment on their particular experience when visiting memorial sites of atrocities such as mass violence or genocide. This article contributes to approaches that see dark tourism not in terms of voyeurism or amorality but instead as a constituent part of moral meaning-making in individuals' experiences of post-genocide spaces, expanding these arguments from the material visits of the tourists to their discussions in the digital sphere. This is affected by—yet at the same time contributes to and thus perpetuates—the transnationalisation of memory by which the way we remember and commemorate is increasingly becoming similar on a global scale. This transnationalisation is both forwarded by and constitutive of the digital sphere in which we study it. Empirically, this article draws on visitor reviews that were posted on the travel website TripAdvisor regarding the dark tourism sites Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and Kigali Genocide Memorial in Kigali, Rwanda, expanding our understanding of responses to these memorial sites into the digital sphere.

Keywords New transnational moral spaces · Worldmaking · Transnational memory · Digital memorials · Dark tourism · TripAdvisor

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Introduction

Research on memory and memorials increasingly focuses on dark tourism (Lennon and Foley 2000) and the responses of travellers to mass graves, battlefields, torture centres, prisons and the like. Against the backdrop of a global shift towards remembrance—or what has been referred to as the “global rush to commemorate atrocities” (Williams 2007)—and an imperative to remember past violence at particular locations (Buckley-Zistel and Schäfer 2014), many of these sites have turned into memorials or memorial museums that welcome visitors by offering tours, exhibitions and information. Since the rise of dark tourism, tourists’ experiences at these sites have started becoming a topic of interest (Hughes 2008; Bolin 2012; Isaac and Çakmak 2016). This article expands this focus by exploring how tourists review these memorials on the internet platform [TripAdvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com). We argue that this interaction may contribute to ways of worldmaking (Goodman 1978; Hollinshead et al. 2009) through virtual posts that construct a particular ethical view of the visited memorial. In doing so, tourists may create a new moral space in which they comment on their experience when visiting sites of atrocities such as mass violence or genocide. Through the web 2.0, they produce a transnational moral space that is detached from the actual physical tourist destinations—the memorial—and that transgresses borders.

The underlying interest of this article rests in understanding the contribution that the digital sphere can have on worldmaking processes and the construction of transnational moral orders in the field of dark tourism. We have analysed several hundred visitor reviews that were posted on the travel website TripAdvisor regarding the sites Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and Kigali Genocide Memorial in Kigali, Rwanda. These two sites are the primary memorial sites for their respective countries, both of which have experienced genocide in recent history and are commonly perceived as post-genocide countries in media depictions of the countries. Across the data drawn from TripAdvisor, we distil various topics that are prominent across the reviews including very emotional (albeit different) reactions to the memorials. While the informational content and historical context varies, both sites are discussed as absolute “must see” destinations with normative expectations that people visit. We selected these two cases as the sites are very different in their curation; the genocides themselves that are commemorated here were very different in their execution as was the role of the international community—by selecting such different sites, any commonalities become more significant.

In this way, both memorials are constructed as part of a transnational moral space. The comments that visitors leave on TripAdvisor construct a narrative that appeals to the ethical conscience of the visitors regarding past failures as well as future hopes of “Never Again!”. We draw on Stone’s (2009) concept of new moral spaces to propose a perspective on the TripAdvisor reviews that locates the individual dark tourist within a new transnational moral order that renders the visit ethically meaningful. Tourists do so by turning the digital travel guidebook into a guest book or book of condolence, where they leave personal reflections about what they have seen and experienced at the site. This moral space is a result of the multitude of individual actors reacting to the dark tourism sites in very similar ways in the cyber space, creating a new moral space that transcends the borders of the memorial site being spoken about and locating responsibility and mutual experiences of suffering across various locations. It is the similar reactions to very different memorial sites in geographically very separate spaces that create this new *transnational* moral space.

This article is concerned with the response of tourists to genocide memorials in a particular digital space—a website. It therefore does not consider the exhibitions in detail, even though their curation and the meaning transported in their display have a significant impact on the visitors' views,¹ nor does it consider interview material with tourists in the space itself as we are focussing on their reactions to the site online. Instead it focuses on constructions within the digital sphere and for the first time draws on hundreds of TripAdvisor reviews to enhance our understanding of how memory is constructed in the digital sphere and how this contributes to processes of worldmaking and the construction of a new transnational moral space. We will first discuss the trends towards transnational tourism and TripAdvisor's position within that before discussing memorial sites as new moral spaces. After this we will discuss our methodology and the results of our empirical analysis of TripAdvisor reviews.

When we initially conceived of this research project, we expected some variation on the comments on TripAdvisor across cases.² As the analysis below reveals, there is a strong similarity in terms of content and structure of the messages, provoking the question as to why this is the case. In this article, we seek to provide some answers. One caveat must be articulated in the beginning, though. Memorials narrate a particular version of an event which is often in competition if not in conflict with other accounts of the event. This is certainly true for the two memorial sites under investigation in this article. Even though this is a very important perspective, it is not relevant for the analysis of this article.³

TripAdvisor and Transnational Tourism

We have selected TripAdvisor as it is the largest travel website worldwide to review tourist destinations, hotels, restaurants and sightseeing sites and thus serves as a digital guidebook for travellers. The website features around 8.1 million accommodations, airlines, experiences and restaurants and is visited around 490 million times per year (in terms of monthly unique visitors). The key feature of the website is that it allows for crowd-sourced opinions on these various travel-related categories and works with user-generated content so that registered members can share their view on particular places, rating and writing reviews. Altogether TripAdvisor features over 730 million reviews and opinions.⁴ While other platforms would exist, we have chosen TripAdvisor as it is dedicated to precisely these kinds of reviews⁵ and because it is the largest website with the most reviews, rendering it most relevant to travellers' discourses.⁶ Although it is also possible to engage in debate on questions on the platform, this feature is not used very frequently, so that this article will focus only on the reviews. In particular, we are interested in reviews that people leave for memorial sites that are increasingly also being rated on TripAdvisor.⁷

¹ This we do elsewhere in the context of a larger project on cultural heritage and the politics of memory (www.peaceandmemory.net). We are very grateful to the Swedish Research Council (grant number: 2016–01460) for funding this research.

² For the study, we evaluated two more memorials yet felt this was too comprehensive to cover in a single article.

³ We engage with the critique of the dominant narratives in the context of our wider research project, though. See footnote 1.

⁴ All statistics are from <https://tripadvisor.mediaroom.com/US-about-us>, accessed 9.3.2019.

⁵ As opposed to analysing discussions of memorial sites on vlogs on YouTube or Tweets on Twitter

⁶ Compared with Google Maps, for example, where reviews can also be left, but it is primarily used as a tool for orientation.

⁷ Of course, some biases are introduced by focussing on this website and these are discussed below.

Analysing TripAdvisor situates us *inter alia* in the study of tourism. Tourism is continuously growing and already one of the largest income generating sectors as well as one of the central ways of moving people, capital, technologies of travel and images from place to place (Salazar 2010), rendering it an often understudied yet truly global phenomenon. This is also true for the norms and values produced and transported by tourists as they travel the world and share their views and opinions on websites such as TripAdvisor. Importantly, tourism does not simply reproduce a given realm of meaning but creates and re-creates places; it is thus a process of worldmaking. Worldmaking “is the creative – and often ‘false’ or ‘faux’ imaginative processes and projective promotional activities – which management agencies and other mediating bodies engage in to purposely (or otherwise unconsciously) privilege particular dominant/favoured representations of people/places/pasts” (Hollinshead 2007). Through worldmaking, a particular view is normalised and naturalised; it becomes the frame through which to see and assess a site in the present and in the future. Tourist websites such as TripAdvisor construct and regulate the tourist’s gaze (Larsen and Urry 2011, 1111); they may thus influence how future tourists see the sites. These normalised views are, of course, not without contestation, competition and failure—what has been labelled “dissonant heritage” (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996)—the analysis of which would exceed the scope of this article.⁸

While sandy beaches and rocky mountains will remain uncontested tourist destinations, there is a growing interest in visiting former sites of atrocities in post-conflict countries—either as a deliberate destination or as a form of sightseeing when already in the country or city, i.e. in dark tourism. In this context, tourists play a significant role in the interpretation of these sites and as brokers of memory through their power to produce narratives that lead their audience to a particular moral judgement. They turn memorials into global commodities probing the question, who owns the memory of these sites (tourists, victim groups, local entrepreneurs, politicians, etc., Marschall 2004, 104) and what (i.e. which views) this memory actually entails. Our article starts from here when it analyses how tourists to sites of atrocities—in our case genocides, but we hold that the argument is true for other memorials to violence as well (Björkdahl et al. 2017)—report on what they have encountered on TripAdvisor fora.

Memorials and New Transnational Moral Spaces

We analyse the comments on TripAdvisor through the lens of new moral spaces—in our case new *transnational* moral spaces. The notion of new moral spaces was first introduced by Stone (2009) as an antidote to the critique that tourist visits to sites of atrocity are always simply dark: the search for pleasure, excitement and entertainment at places of death and destruction. Dark tourism, also referred to as thanatourism (death tourism), focuses on sites that are associated with death, crime, violence and other topics that conventionally have negative connotations. This form of tourism has been attacked for its lack of moral direction and how it is a primary feature of thrill-seeking tourists who are searching for extraordinary experiences. This is particularly virulent as tourists seek to visit conspicuous sites in order to enhance the social “value” of their travels (Podoshen 2018).

In contrast, Stone argues that these sites can actually produce values and that they are not amoral but rather individuals construct “new moral orders mediated by collectives of embodied individuals who are emotionally engaged with their social world” (Stone 2009, 60). One space where this emotional engagement takes place is at memorial sites where visitors can

⁸ We address these aspects in our broader project, see footnote 1.

communicate their individual thoughts in messages, such as in a guest book or—as in our case—on a website yet also in other fora. These individual moral judgements merge into a collective constitution of one morality about the interpretation of a particular event. “[C]ollectives of embodied individuals are both socially and emotionally bound within a dark tourism space” (Stone 2009, 67), (re)inventing these places as contemporary spaces for reflecting, interpreting and articulating moral concerns. In other words, the sites serve to stimulate questions regarding the meaning of life and death, pain, loss and justice which might be interesting at an individual level but, more importantly, as a collective phenomenon leave a mark on the society. This is for instance illustrated in a study by Rachel Hughes who interviewed visitors to Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia, a place of dark tourism. These visitors, through their visits, were hoping to create what they consider as some kind of transnational humanity, also a highly morally charged endeavour (Hughes 2008; see also Lisle 2008, 2016; Bolin 2012). As such, Hughes (2008, 328)—in her analysis of Tuol Sleng—explains that:

while many arrive at the museum with the expectation of a better understanding of the Pol Pot period, they leave with the hope that their ‘being there’ was at least significant. [...] Their visiting involves returning to a moral terrain in which mass political violence and its ongoing social and (geo)political effects are approached through dutiful exposure.

Similarly, at Choeng Ek Killing Fields in Cambodia, Louis Bickford (2009, 7–8) reports that most tourists he interviewed “believed that they would be better global citizens as a result of visiting Choeng Ek. Visitors seemed genuinely changed by this experience”.

Leaving a comment on TripAdvisor is thus similar to leaving a comment in a condolence or guest book at a physical or digital memorial (web)site, turning the travel guidebook into a guest book in which people inscribe their thoughts and position within the new moral space as transnational actors, much like they do in offline, physical guest books.⁹

Like writing in a guest book, composing a review *inter alia* serves the function of expressing empathy, yet it may also serve as an outlet for personal emotions into a space—a website, a book—where people with the same experience do the same because they feel the same. As argued above, in doing so, visitors participate in a new moral order which helps them to organise their experience into the wider scheme of things and thus to cope with it. There is a strong resemblance in terms of the words and phrases used on TripAdvisor and in condolence books, as illustrated below. There seems to be an unspoken rule as to what can be said about a site of atrocity and how this should be phrased, even though it is impossible to prove without speaking to the reviewers in person. However, it resonated with the observation of visitors’ behaviour at memorials “in the real world” more generally that also follows a set of unspoken rules that individuals adhere to when walking through a site (Clark 2014; Bolin 2012). What differentiates TripAdvisor from digital memorials, though, is that individuals who share their thoughts do not primarily seek to commemorate an event in and of itself but remain in the genre of tourism and travel advice.

New transnational moral spaces are spaces in which local ideas cumulate to form pervasive norms. This new space is thus the outcome of social interaction, in our cases rating memorials on TripAdvisor. As such, we understand the reactions that we are analysing as part of an in-between space that is in the nexus of the cyber space of the internet and the physical spaces of

⁹ In an analysis of guest book comments at Tuol Sleng genocide museum, Brigitte Sion found five categories of entries: “feelings of sadness; bewilderment at human evil [...]”; variations on ‘never again’ and ‘do not forget’; praise for the exhibit and the learning experience; and positive messages of hope, peace, reconciliation and love, sometimes with religious reference”. (Sion 2014, 103–4). These are indeed partially mirrored in the TripAdvisor reviews, although with important additions.

the sites themselves, in which meaning is created through and becomes visible in this intersection between the global and the local, the cyber and the physical (Engelsdorfer 2017). As such, TripAdvisor reviews refer both to the physical space of the memorial sites and the cyber space of the website, and in this position themselves in a transnational moral space that links the physical site to a larger transnational moral argument, what has been labelled “virtual cosmopolitanism” (McEwan and Sobre-Denton 2011).

Global conditions—or conditions of globalisation—have had a strong influence on remembrance (Assmann and Conrad 2010; Levy and Sznajder 2006; Huyssen 2003). National boundaries have become less important due to an increase in travel—including tourism—and new means of communication, giving rise to what has been referred to as transnational memory (Assmann 2014; Erl 2011). In the case of TripAdvisor, this is particularly relevant: as a web-based, interactive social network, it can be accessed globally, even though there is a particular demographic audience it attracts, as further specified below. From this website, a new transnational moral space can be constructed that draws on the experiences with places of suffering. This process of constructing a new transnational moral space is not an active process that is consciously pursued by reviewers on TripAdvisor; instead, it is a product of the reviews and subsequently a reference point through which reviews become increasingly legible in moral terms.

Importantly, the globalisation of memory entails a homogenisation of memory discourses (Craps and Rothberg 2011, 517) and aesthetic language. This has led to a global script which promotes a shared morality, the identification with distant others and the wish—if not concrete activities—to lessen their suffering (Levy and Sznajder 2010, 36). It is therefore not surprising that there is a resemblance between the TripAdvisor pages for memorials and digital memorials that are springing up in the World Wide Web. The latter pay tribute to individuals who have deceased yet also to violent events such as 9/11 (Moncur and Kirk 2014). These memorials often employ the same characteristics as offline memorial sites, displaying a uniformity of expression (Foot et al. 2005), again feeding into the transnationalisation of memory.

It is important to note that although TripAdvisor can be accessed from anywhere in the world, “the senses and sensibilities that we bring to the web are woven through with our locatedness in histories, in place, in culture – all of which play their part in producing the never random associative leaps that constitute the rhetorics of memory” (Radstone 2011, 111). As a consequence, the reactions on TripAdvisor we analyse—as well as the transnational memory culture itself—are situated in a particular cultural horizon (broadly described as “the West”) that shapes their form. Talking about global or transnational memory therefore risks essentialising situated positions while at the same time reproducing a liberal utopia of a borderless world (Rothberg 2014, 653). Given that memory is always constructed—representing a made world—there is an almost endless variety of possible memories, including strongly dissonant heritage on the basis of discrepancy and incongruity (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996).

It is moreover important to note that transnational memory is also not entirely removed from local memory and memorial sites; rather, there is a “significance of the local to the reality of transnational remembering” (Wüstenberg 2019, 371). In other words, the way transnational memory is shaped is also always connected to the specific site; it is not detached from it and “somewhere up there”. This is relevant because, as Björkdahl and Kappler argue, local norm entrepreneurs might intentionally translate local memory for global audiences through mechanisms of commercialisation (with the financially strong international tourism industry being a lucrative target in this regard) and professionalisation (Björkdahl and Kappler 2019). This act

of translation renders local memory more comprehensible on a global scale so that (international) visitors to the sites can relate—and in the context of TripAdvisor communicate—their own experience better.

Studying TripAdvisor Reviews

We have selected TripAdvisor as it is the primary web-based travel review platform and thus is important for travellers and their opinions; much research has already been conducted on TripAdvisor from various business-psychological or social perspectives, although not in the realm of memory studies. The following empirical analyses are based on reviews sampled from the web platform [TripAdvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com) in September 2017, drawing a random sample of reviews that were of a minimum length (minimum three lines to ensure that there would be enough content to actually analyse). 307 English language reviews were randomly sampled for Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (TSGM) from the years 2012 to 2017, as well as 306 reviews of Kigali Genocide Memorial (KGM) from the years 2013 to 2017.¹⁰ Of these reviews, there was almost an equal split between self-identifying male and female reviewers, as well as a “bell curve” regarding ages, with most reviewers being between 35 and 49, followed by the categories 25–34 and 50–64, with considerably fewer reviews by those 24 and under, as well as 65 and above.

It is important to emphasise that the following analysis of TripAdvisor reviews comes with several caveats and some biases are introduced into the research by focusing explicitly on this website. However, many of these caveats would be similar for other similar platforms, and we included a critical reflection of these caveats during our analysis. Of course, these reviews reflect only the perspectives of those visitors to these sites who are technically literate enough to post reviews online. Also, the vast majority of the reviews are by international tourists as we only analysed English-language reviews, meaning that this is *not* an adequate representation of local perspectives. Moreover, they belong to a privileged group with access to digital spaces (McEwan and Sobre-Denton 2011, 253),¹¹ as well as the financial means to travel internationally. While this is of course an important and significant limitation regarding our research, we are nevertheless able to draw some relevant conclusions regarding this specific demographic group, particularly as the English-language reviews are by people from a wide range of countries, not just countries in which English is the first language. As such, the reviews analysed here are almost exclusively from dark tourists who are foreigners in the countries that the memorial sites are located; and yet, visitors come from all over the world. At TSGM, most reviewers came from the English-speaking countries of the UK (25.5%), Australia (21.2%), the USA (12.4%) and Canada (5.4%), although the next most frequent reviews were from eight Asian countries (20.1%). At KGM, the same four English-speaking countries dominated (altogether 58.6%), albeit with the US accounting for almost two thirds of those; again the next most populous after this were five African countries (17.6%). This is important as our argument about how these reviews contribute to the construction of new transnational moral

¹⁰ Both samples include reviews over several years so that changes in the visitors' experiences must be expected. The diverging timeframe stems from the fact that no data was sampled from the year 2014 in TSGM, as this year saw the introduction of an audio guide that provides considerably deeper context and more information to visitors. As such, we wanted to be able to see the possible impact this had on the reviews. Changes to both sites were considered as part of the analysis, but did not appear to make fundamental differences to the reviews.

¹¹ Even as TripAdvisor is available globally, internet access to it may not be.

spaces would possibly be different, if more Cambodians or Rwandans posted reviews in English. Visitors from these countries will most likely assign different meanings to these sites. For instance, Cohen (2018, 169) argues that Asian “visitors to thanatourist sites in Asia may mourn for the dead, pay homage to them, desire to assist them, and make merit for themselves by worshipping at the sites, or even supplicate the deceased for personal benefits” but do not demonstrate thanatopic motivations for coming, that is, the contemplation of their own mortality does not play a role. This would also potentially be reflected in how they review the sites. While exploring these views would be highly relevant, in particular to challenge and undermine a dominant, Western perspective on the sites, it is not the objective of the present article that is interested in the intersection of memory, tourism and TripAdvisor as a digital space.

Another methodological caveat is that we cannot know whether the trends discussed here are self-referential and to a certain degree circular. We know that many of the reviewers in our sample had been relatively active prior to posting their review of this specific site, with the average number of reviews by the reviewer being 93.6¹² at TSGM and 83.8¹³ at KGM. But it is plausible that of the many visitors to the website, the people who tend to write reviews are also those who look at the reviews in depth in advance of their visit, thus framing the way they perceive the memorial sites and influencing the topics they then discuss in their own reviews. Without conducting interviews with the people who have written these reviews, we cannot exclude this possible circular logic; however, there are *very* few references in the reviews that would indicate such a prior reference to others’ reviews. Moreover, conducting interviews with reviewers exceeds the scope of our project, and we are able to provide some insights based on the analysis of the sites only. Finally, TripAdvisor is a public space and as such not necessarily anonymous, so there is a possibility that people will say what they believe is expected of them, not what they think; however, in the context of this article, this is equally interesting.

Finally, content can be flagged for being inappropriate, meaning that any content that is offensive could have been removed from the sample; however, the main drive behind the flagging of content appears to be related to fraudulent reviewers rather than inappropriate content.

Unsurprisingly, the reviews were overwhelmingly positive (out of five possible points, the average rating was 4.59 for TSGM and 4.79 for KGM), but there was variation across the marks (including just evaluations of one point (2 at TSGM), two points (3 at TSGM; 2 at KGM), three points (16 at TSGM; 9 at KGM), four points (77 at TSGM; 39 at KGM) and five points (209 at TSGM; 256 at KGM).

For our analysis, the reviews were coded and analysed using qualitative content analysis to search for overarching themes and topics. This form of analysis allows for us to delve as deeply into the reviews as possible individually, and then through comparison between the reviews draw out broader patterns. As a qualitative method, it relies on the researcher to draw connections between topics as they emerge, and by taking a broad view of the data, inter-relations between the topics can be found. Drawing on substantive knowledge of the sites and the contexts, it is possible to not just identify salient topics, but also silences in the reviews, if there are topics that are barely or not spoken about. In addition to this content analysis, we

¹² The mean was 52, the reviewer with the least amount of reviews had reviewed 2 sites and the highest amount of sites reviewed was 1089.

¹³ The mean was 43, the reviewer with the least amount of reviews had reviewed only 1 site and the highest amount of sites reviewed was 888.

looked at the demographic backgrounds of the reviewers (age, gender, country of origin), but no noteworthy patterns emerged.

The Sites

The two sites under consideration in this article commemorate genocides and are located in the respective capitals Phnom Penh and Kigali. While both employ very different aesthetic languages and curatorial strategies, the globalisation of memory discourse and aesthetics is evident in the predominant focus on victims and the encouragement to identify with them. This curative strategy aims at personal experience and an educational strategy which focuses on learning about the past as a form of genocide prevention (Bickford and Sodaro 2010, 425; Jinks 2014). They differ in terms of their original role, given that TSGM is a so-called authentic place (or primary site) where atrocities were committed, while KGM was built later as a memorial and educational site (secondary site). Interestingly, as illustrated below, both sites are similarly powerful in transmitting their messages. We chose these sites because of the strong differences between their curations and the histories they are commemorating. Given the constraints of this article, we cannot discuss these differences in detail but do refer to some of them implicitly in the discussion of the TripAdvisor reviews below. These differences would suggest that tourist reactions on TripAdvisor should diverge strongly, lending more credence to any similarities found with regard to transnational moral spaces.¹⁴ Exploring such different sites in terms of curation and the actual genocides renders any commonalities in their portrayal on TripAdvisor more significant and moves the actual form of the memorials into the background.

In the absence of important historical sites and landmarks in both capitals, genocide tourism has turned into an important activity for visitors (Margolin 2007). Even though the genocides are not marketed as a tourist attraction (in contrast to visiting gorillas in Rwanda or Angkor Wat in Cambodia), once in the country, tourists are encouraged to visit the memorials, leading to an “accidental genocide tourism” (McKinney 2014, 302). Studies of visitors show, however, that they feel insecure about engaging with the sites due to uncertainties regarding etiquette such as dress code, appropriate behaviour or display of personal emotions (Bolin 2012, 202).

The Kigali Genocide Memorial was inaugurated in 2004 to commemorate the death of more than 800,000 Tutsi in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. It is comprised of three permanent exhibitions which narrate the history of the genocide and the actual event as well as a children’s memorial with a wall of pictures of children. Further, there is an exhibition of other genocides such as the Holocaust, Srebrenica and Armenia which contributes to the multi-directionality of memory (Rothberg 2009) by situating the Rwandan event in the global context of other similar atrocities. The site also houses the Genocide Archives of Rwanda, gardens and a mass grave for 250,000 victims. The KGM emphasises documentation and education turning it into a memorial museum; its structures are moreover not part of a place in which actual violence took place. Nevertheless, it is Rwanda’s most visited memorial and serves as the national focal point of remembrance (Friedrich et al. 2018).

¹⁴ Two further sites were also analysed, District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, and the Tunnel Museum in Sarajevo, Bosnia, and similar findings were found; however, it would go beyond the scope of this article to present all four memorials. For more details on the broader project, see footnote 1.

Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum was opened to an international audience in August 1979, almost immediately after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. The space was designed to evidence the horrific rule of the Khmer Rouge and shock Western journalists and other visitors in an effort to legitimise the Vietnamese invasion to the international community (Brown and Millington 2015; Ledgerwood 1997; Williams 2004). The memorial museum is located in the buildings of the former security centre S-21 where an estimated 18,133 prisoners were tortured and killed.¹⁵ As such, Tuol Sleng draws on many purportedly authentic elements from this time that shock visitors, providing less information and emphasising more strongly an emotional reaction (Hughes 2008; Isaac and Çakmak 2016; Violi 2012). Several more shocking elements have been removed over the past years, such as an exhibit portraying a map of Cambodia made up of victims' skulls that had the country's rivers drawn as streams of blood, and the introduction of the audio guide provides considerably more information; nevertheless, the site is still strongly founded on its presentation of torture equipment, cells and quite graphic photography of the site when it was found. Along with Choeng Ek Killing Fields, it is the most important memorial site for tourists to visit.

How Tourists Review Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Kigali Genocide Memorial

We now come to the TripAdvisor reviews themselves and will discuss some of the key themes that emerge within these for the cases of TSGM and KGM. In our findings, we did not find sufficiently strong narratives to create a full typology, but nevertheless we identify five salient topics that reviews frequently refer to: (1) the significance of visiting the memorials, (2) the emotional responses, (3) the materiality and content of the sites, (4) expected practices within the sites, as well as (5) reflections on the character of the genocidal violence and its transnational moral significance.

First and foremost, regarding the significance of visiting the memorials, overwhelmingly the reviews for both sites were positive with almost all visitors framing their experience of the site positively, for the most part implicitly; this does not mean that the visit was portrayed as a happy and positive experience but as an experience that the visitors were glad to have made. For example, 13.4% of reviews of KGM referred to the site and their visit there as “powerful” as illustrated by one review that began “Well, what can you say? Staggeringly hard hitting, powerful and sad. Definitely a MUST if you're near / in Kigali.” In around half of the reviews, it is emphasised that the memorial sites are a “must see” destination that visitors “should visit” or constitute an “essential” component to any visit to Phnom Penh or Kigali (TSGM, 139; KGM, 155). While the language of “must see”, “must do” and “must go” is not unfamiliar to tourist destinations, it takes on a moral character in the context of these reviews. There is a normative expectation that people visit, both in terms of this place being essential in gaining an understanding of the history of Cambodia and how the genocide occurred, as well as an understanding of Cambodia today and the Cambodian people (TSGM, 69), but also that the space facilitates general understanding and learning (KGM, 116). At the same time, many also emphasise how hard such a visit is despite its importance (TSGM, 40; KGM, 18). However, in several reviews, it is made clear that it is the terrible horror of the place itself which is the

¹⁵ ECCC, Co-Prosecutors' Closing Brief in Case 002/2 (E457 6 1; Case File No 002/19-09-2007/ECCC-TC, page 420), referring to Annex F.1 Revised OCIJ S-21 Prisoner List

reason to go, that the endurance of the horrible experience is part of the expectation to visit. This is exemplified in one review: “Horrible demonstration of the wickedness, cruelty and egoistic nature of man. An ABSOLUTE MUST SEE!”

Second, reviewers discuss their visits in emotional terms with most reviews referring to at least one emotion. The emotional focus of the two sites diverged somewhat, however. Almost one third of the reviews of KGM (93 reviews) discussed that the reviewers were touched or moved by the site, such as one reviewer who shared that it was “[b]y far the most moving and horrifying museum experience of my life.” This held true for about half as many in TSGM (41 reviews). Conversely, 33 reviewers described KGM as sad or depressing, as opposed to almost a quarter of reviewers at TSGM (68 reviews), including one reviewer who reflected: “I never thought I’d feel so numb and sad for the countless people whom suffered so much”. TSGM also appears to prove a more visceral experience for visitors with 58 reviewers describing themselves as having been horrified, chilled or shocked and 42 as disgusted or disturbed by their visit at TSGM; this contrasts lower numbers at KGM with 29 people being horrified, chilled or shocked and only 6 disgusted or disturbed. While 25 reviewers described the site at TSGM as haunting or eerie (as opposed to 8 at KGM), 25 reviewers found their visit hopeful or inspiring at KGM (TSGM, 0 reviews), and 21 reviewers were thoughtful after their visit to KGM (TSGM, 8 reviews). One reviewer, for instance, wrote: “Thankfully some of the stories warm the heart and allows you to keep some faith in humanity.” At the same time, fewer, but still around 10% of the reviewers of both sites referred to the sites as being heartbreaking (TSGM, 30; KGM, 30) or sobering or sombre (TSGM, 16; KGM, 23). As such, similar numbers revealed that they had cried during their visit (TSGM, 21; KGM, 34), while others stated in their reviews that they had been speechless or traumatised (TSGM, 23; KGM, 27) or overwhelmed (TSGM, 20; KGM, 16). An example from one review puts it as follows: “I did find it all a little overwhelming by the end, as the vast walls of photos staring helplessly back was confronting”.

This wealth of contrasting numbers on emotions at the two memorial sites reveals, first, that emotional responses to the two sites are extremely strong. The emotional reaction to these two genocide memorial sites is considerably stronger than to other memorial sites that are not on genocidal issues. While the focus here is on TSGM and KGM, as part of the project, we also conducted similar analyses for the Tunnel Museum in Sarajevo and District Six Museum in Cape Town, where a considerably more muted emotional response was evident. Second, while both places are discussed as overwhelming and heartbreaking, leaving their visitors speechless and tearful, TSGM is constructed more in terms of negative emotions (sad, horrifying, disturbing, haunting), while KGM provokes a more inspired emotional response (touching, thought-provoking, hopeful).

Third, the materiality of the sites figures prominently in many reviews, also partly producing the diverging emotions discussed above. At Tuol Sleng—a primary site—a large part of the constructed emotionality could be due to the central role that the photographs of victims play in the exhibition. These photographs of victims are discussed by 77 reviewers explicitly, while dozens more refer to photographs or pictures displayed in the exhibition, making the photos absolutely key to many of the reviews; furthermore, the experience of meeting survivors of this space figures prominently in the reviews of TSGM, with 83 reviews mentioning them. One review describes this in detail:

The highlight of this experience was seeing 2 of the 7 still living survivors of S21 - Bou Meng & Chum Mey. It was so surreal seeing them sitting there selling their survival

stories. We took pictures with both of them and bought their books which were amazing short reads. Seeing them in the flesh after reading about the torture they endured (and even seeing Chum's cell) was surreal.

Further, TSGM is predominantly referred to as a site of torture or “holding facility” en route to killing fields such as Choeung Ek, another memorial site popularly visited directly before or after TSGM. The focus is clearly placed on the torturous nature of the regime and how it fits its “insane” ideals. For example, at TSGM, the visceral materiality of the place itself encompasses several elements that are key to creating a shocking effect: reviewers frequently refer to the place as a torture chamber or speak about the displayed torture equipment (32 reviews), discuss the cells and their spatial effect on them as visitors (33 reviews), the blood perceived to be on floor and the purportedly visible stains (14 reviews), as well as the displayed skulls and bones (9 reviews). A particular emphasis was also placed on the contrast between the former usage of these buildings as a school that was re-functioned into the security centre (41 reviews): “nothing prepared me for the emotions of seeing a school turned into an horrific place of cruelty and torture.”

At KGM—a secondary site—a particular emphasis is put on the fact that there are mass graves at the site (39 reviews), as well as very emotional descriptions of the exhibition room dedicated to the memory of children killed during the genocide: “seeing photos of some of the children murdered is painful and haunting”. The tragedy of the genocide itself is contrasted by the site’s beautiful surroundings in the lovely and peaceful gardens that provide a facilitative environment for reflection (22 reviews). As such, the genesis and spatiality of both places very much influences the emotional responses of the visitors.

Fourth, within the reviews, one can also find references to what Erl (2011, 13) could call transportable practices. Reviewers stipulate how they feel it is appropriate to remember in these spaces, explicitly formulating expectations about how people should behave when they are visiting the memorial.¹⁶ These all relate to how the behaviour of other visitors can and should demonstrate respect, presumably for the space. Most prominently is that about one in ten reviews stipulates that it is important to take time and reflect (TSGM, 23; KGM, 34) and an explicit expectation to “read all the stories” at TSGM (4 reviews). Along these lines, one reviewer labelled those who “were in and out in minutes” as “morons”, In this context, there is an expectation that people “feel something” (TSGM, 4; KGM, 4) or show compassion (TSGM, 4; KGM, 2). Only in TSGM did reviewers formulate a few practical expectations that were supposed to show respect regarding clothing (4 reviews) and not taking photos (9 reviews).

Fifth and finally, the character of the genocidal violence and its transnational moral significance are commented on. TripAdvisor reviews of both memorial sites include scant historical details surrounding the events they memorialise. In reviews of both sites, the “insanity” of the regime and the senselessness of killing is emphasised in some reviews (TSGM, 11; KGM, 8) and while reviews of KGM emphasise the word horror in respect to the genocide (TSGM, 7; KGM, 22), the cruelty (TSGM, 8; KGM, 2), barbarity (TSGM, 5), brutality (TSGM, 8; KGM, 2) and inhumanity (TSGM, 5) of the Khmer Rouge regime is emphasised differently. While few visitors talk about the actual perpetrators themselves, these ascriptions to the regime also resonate at the individual level, for example, with one reviewer

¹⁶ See also Bolin (2012). It would be interesting to analyse why and how visitors “know” what comments are appropriate or not. While this would expand the scope of our study, Bolin (2012) provides some insights through interviews with visitors to the KGM.

describing them as “beasts who in my mind can not [sic!] be called humans”. Another review asserts that “you cannot imagine the torture and humiliation that these poor people went through [;]”¹⁷ the barbaric torture methods that these lowest forms of human nature thought up to maim [sic!] and kill innocent people is beyond belief”. There is also little engagement with individual victims, beyond an ascription of innocence at TSGM that is not so prominent at KGM (TSGM, 16; KGM, 2). More concrete references to historical context are considerably more common in reviews of KGM with 22 reviews referring to the role of colonialism (which is also an important part of the memorial exhibition) and the lack of international intervention (TSGM, 5; KGM, 32).

Furthermore, and importantly in the context of the debate on transnational cultural memory, the Holocaust is seen as an “eminently transportable” “memory figure” (Ertl 2011). This plays into Levy and Sznajder’s (2002, 92) concept of “cosmopolitan memory” that we do not need to understand as “one totalizing signifier containing the same meanings for everyone. Rather its meanings evolve from the encounter of global interpretations and local sensibilities.” Indeed, the reviews do discuss other genocides in general, for example, one in five of the reviews on KGM (60 reviews), in particular here with reference to the part of the exhibition that is dedicated to these. But also the Holocaust features in the reviews albeit to a considerably lesser degree (TSGM, 13; KGM, 32), as well as a few references to Auschwitz (TSGM, 9; KGM, 6). More than the explicit comparisons or references to other genocides, TSGM and KGM are very much presented as part of an international community experience. This is partially also related to the idea that both cases of genocide have occurred not so long ago, that is, in living memory of many of the people writing the reviews. But at the same time, it is also connected to the experiences that tourists have when visiting the sites, particularly how the exhibitions create an emotional identification with the victims. For example, this is created in both places through the display of hundreds of pictures of victims, even as these pictures are curated very differently in the two spaces since they include private pictures of individuals who were later killed in the genocide in Rwanda and mugshots of already imprisoned persons in Cambodia or through the graphic depiction of the violence rendered against the victims, albeit more viscerally at TSGM. It is this identification with the victims and the empathy created for them that prompts joint distress about this terrible past as well as hopes for a peaceful future. As such, the reviews also refer to a future-oriented dimension of cosmopolitan memory (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 101–102) in periodic calls for “never again” (TSGM, 18; KGM, 29). This also ties in with the educational aspirations tied to tourists’ visits to TSGM and KGM where they hope to learn more about the country they are visiting but particularly about this dark chapter in the countries’ pasts. This educative aim is explicitly mentioned in several reviews, as discussed above, and helps tie these sites into experiences that visitors have had at other memorial museums.

In sum, while we initially expected more variance in the TripAdvisor reviews, we found a prevalence of canonical narratives, i.e. accounts that are socially acceptable in the particular group of dark tourists. They correspond to current ways of talking about memorials as discussed above,¹⁸ as well as the practice of entering comments on TripAdvisor more generally where reviews tend to become canonical (Vásquez 2012). In the process of writing

¹⁷ This reviewer did not include any punctuation in the entire review; we have added punctuation to facilitate readability.

¹⁸ How do these reviews relate to the five categories identified for the guestbook at TSGM (Sion 2014, 103–4)? Similar to Sion, we find emotion to be key, as well as references to “never again” and overall positive statements regarding the site and that one can learn in this space. However, we find that TripAdvisor reviews go further, discussing the materiality of the site, formulating behavioural expectations and most importantly also framing the reviews within a broader transnational moral space.

a text, users of TripAdvisor and other digital media (but also more generally) draw on the previous text in order to embed a post's meaning in multiple layers of pre-existing texts as well as in social practice (Vásquez 2015). Textual analysis of online texts shows the importance of the verbal co-context in which posts are positioned, including surrounding discourses, the website within which the story is located, accessibility and membership, as well as the projected or imagined context created cognitively by participants' knowledge and situated expertise (Page 2012)—in our case, an awareness of discourses around memorials. This might explain the similarities in statements across the two sites.

TripAdvisor as a New Transnational Moral Space

In the global rush to commemorate atrocities (Williams 2007), the reviews on tourist internet platforms such as TripAdvisor indicate that instead of dark tourism being a structured form of excitement-seeking—at least for the reviewers—it was a moving- and thought-provoking experience. As such, dark tourism does not need to be part of an amoral engagement with the spaces of past violence but instead can be part of an ethical endeavour to understand, participate and create larger meaning. Against this backdrop, in this article, we illustrated how tourism contributes to a process of worldmaking (Hollinshead 2007) by creating a new transnational moral order that reinforces a sense of humanity and shared values. TripAdvisor serves as a new moral space where visitors to the genocide memorials Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Kigali Genocide Memorial comment on their particular experiences, particularly constructing their visit as essential and a morally necessary part of a trip to this country. This is affected by yet at the same time contributes to and thus perpetuates the transnationalisation of memory by which the way we remember and commemorate is increasingly turning similar on a global scale.

In this article, we were less concerned with the memory discourse the memorials seek to convey than with how visitors respond to what they encounter and are exposed to in these places. In this sense, not just curators of memorials but also visitors contribute to meaning making, provoking questions raised above regarding “who owns the memory of these sights” (Marschall 2004, 104), the people affected by the violence, the governments who seek to put forward a particular account of the past or the tourists who travel through the country? The answer can only be all of them. Nevertheless, through the access to global digital websites such as TripAdvisor, tourists have a very powerful tool for spreading their particular view worldwide. Their worldmaking through reviews on the website is influential for it is widely accessible and informs future visitors to the memorial site. In this sense, then, tourism is a highly political endeavour (Naef 2016, 223; Cochrane 2015, 54); the way tourists gaze at the world and how they communicate this back to future tourists and other captive audiences have a significant effect. The emphasis on the political nature of tourism is important because at first sight tourism seems to serve exclusively recreation, excitement, education and so on, and the *raison d'être* of TripAdvisor is to function as a guidebook and to assist fellow travellers with information and advice. It is not meant to be a site for political activism or the promotion of moral values. Nevertheless, through serving as a (web)site for worldmaking, it inadvertently turns into just this: a new moral space.¹⁹

¹⁹ To what extent the comments on TripAdvisor have an impact of the communities affected by the violence lies beyond the scope of this study.

As our discussion of the reviews illustrates, it was important to the visitors to emphasise that visiting the memorial is significant, positive and they highly recommend this experience. Second, they articulate their emotional response, highlighting the enormity of the atrocities and how thinking about it and being at the sites made them feel. Third, through assessing the materiality and the content of the sites, they reflected on the actual exhibition and how it narrates the past violence. Fourth, expectations were formulated as to how reviewers expected other visitors to behave during their visits to the site. Fifth and finally, reviewers discussed the genocidal violence, the senselessness of mass killings and their particular focus on victims that lead many to emphasis of moral values and ethical concerns in a transnational context.

As illustrated in our findings, the new moral space on TripAdvisor is thus instilled with a sense of humanity. The relationship between tourism and the contribution to a transnational humanity has been critically assessed with reference to Lonely Planet as a guidebook that implicitly and explicitly encourages travellers to engage ethically with the countries and the people they encounter (Lisle 2008). Similar to this analysis of the guidebook rhetoric that suggests a moral framework for travel, the comments made on TripAdvisor reveal a moral superiority as well as a process of othering of the society in which the violence occurred. This othering is either contemporary and spatial—violence occurred recently in this particular location yet not back home—or temporal, violence occurred back home yet in the distant past (through references to the Holocaust). Despite the call for a transnational humanity that underlies the website entries, travellers who share a new transnational moral order detach themselves from the local community which they are visiting. As a consequence, the people affected by the violence are not part of this transnational moral space, this transnational moral order.

One important feature of TripAdvisor as a new moral space is that it is digital and thus virtual. People do not meet in person, they do not physically engage with each other and—in contrast to other social media—members tend not to respond to each other's posts, i.e. they talk at each other but they do not communicate with each other. For tourism, having a digital platform is essential because it is fairly unlikely that tourists with similar interests are at the same place at the same time so that they can exchange their impressions in person. For the creation of a new moral space—and in analogy to web memorials—the TripAdvisor pages on which the memorials are reviewed serve as websites where tourists can articulate their emotions and sentiments which might seem personal and unique at first sight yet turn out to be paralleled by the feelings of other visitors. There is an interesting circular movement at place, though. The wish to align oneself with others who had the same experience is at the same time conditioned by the fact that there is a strong tendency to homogenise statements on the memorial pages, as evident in our analysis yet also beyond (Clark 2014). As stated above and illustrated by our two cases, there is a set of unspoken rules regarding what can be stated so that the TripAdvisor posts are not simply expressions of similar feelings but of a discursive worldmaking that cannot be transgressed. Visitors feel they are part of a wider sentiment, but by becoming a part of it, they can only have this sentiment.

What, then, are we to make of this new moral digital space? To return to Stone, it is the absence of moral certainties that make people—here visitors to memorial sites—come together with reference to particular experiences. Given that in our example, this happens through a digital website that is somehow out there, rather than in a material location, adds a new dimension. The tourists who commented on memorials on TripAdvisor purport a shared morality beyond geographic boundaries rendering it truly transnational for those who fit into this particular demographic group of internet users. The common sentiment of “never again”

and the emerging humanism stance correspond to this view. Yet the group of tourists is also truly virtual (McEwan and Sobre-Denton 2011) since it is bound to a digital space, and it is highly transient since it only accesses the website in order to retrieve travel information or to post personal views on the sites visited rather than engaging with other tourists.

Regarding future research, our analysis opens many avenues. As pointed out throughout the text, our analysis has a number of limitations regarding the demographics of the tourists, its impact on the ratings of memorials and the emerging moral order. It would therefore be important to reflect on what these findings actually say about this new transnational moral space. What constitutes this particular morality and what are the limits of the evoked notion of humanity? How transient is the nature of these spaces given the ephemeral nature of tourism and the participants' short engagement? What are the alternative, competing moral spaces, what competing narratives are on offer and can they be explored? How do the narratives on TripAdvisor relate to those of the educational material of the actual sites? Do other digital spaces provide similar insights? In this article, we were only able to hint at these aspects and strongly encourage researchers to take them as an inspiration for future endeavours.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

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