The Notion of Thana-Capitalism explained with clarity: Dark tourism and Genocide

Maximiliano E. Korstanje

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Abstract

This short essay review intends to respond why and under what conditions a site of memory (like Auschwitz) becomes in a banal tourist attraction visited by people who remain unfamiliar with that sad events. My theory on Thana-capitalism not only suffices to give a snapshot to readers but also sheds light on power of the morbid taste. The risk society, a term used by modern sociologist like Giddens or Beck set the pace to a new stage of capitalism where the "Other´s death" still is the main commodity to exchange. Fascinated by the mass-destruction and death, the new morbid audience 24/7 news related to death, crimes and disasters. We are fascinated –if not dominated- by the obsession for the "Other´s pain".

Key Words: Thana-Capitalism, Dark consumption, The Spectacle of Disaster, Genocide, Civil Law.

Introduction

In a recently published book, I used the term *Thana-Capitalism* to denote a new stage of capitalism, where the meaning of risk, as least as it was thought by postmodern sociologists set the pace to a new morbid mode of consumption (Korstanje 2016). Let´s clarify to readers that modern sociologists turned their attention to the role of risk as to the articulator

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of a new social ethos. Per their viewpoint, risk mediates not only between the man and his institutions but also among all actors of the social system (Giddens 1999; Beck, 1992; 2009; Luhmann 2017), the end of the millennium, adjoined to 9/11 and the globalization of terrorism paved the pathways for the emergence of a new post-ethics, which makes from the others´ death a cultural form of entertainment. As David Altheide (2017) puts it, terrorism resonates in society not for the violence exerted against innocent people but for the impact in social media. Terrorism potentiates a much deeper culture of terror which is culturally enrooted in the US from its outset. Having said this, the present chapter explores the intersection of terrorism with media while laying the conceptual foundations to expand the current understanding of the thanaptopic culture. In so doing, we discuss and revolve around the figure of genocide as well as its limitations in the specialized literature.

The notion of Genocide, which was introduced by Lemkin at the platform of a new legal discussion-oriented to avoid the extermination of innocent civilian targets, opens the doors to an ethical paradox. In this respect, Michael Ignatieff (2003) argues convincingly that one of Lemkin´s worries was not only the gradual process of dehumanization millions of civilians suffered in WWII but also the ethical dichotomy of nation-states, which are originally oriented to protect the integrity of citizens finally vulnerated under other contexts. The rise of Nazis to power exhibited two important things that future generations should retain. On one hand, Germans applauded the inhuman Nazi´s resolution under the auspices of so-called democracy. Not only they had thought mistakenly they were free, but also the lesson seems to be that the discourse of democracy is politically manipulated even by the cruelest dictatorships (Mayer 2013). On another, the banality of evil –paragraphing Arendt- suggests that capitalism adopted the crimes of war –perpetrated by Nazism- as bureaucratic and standardized forms of behaviour (Arendt, 1963). At a closer look, Nazism, far from the climate of destruction prompted, imposed an unethical instrumentalization of death straddling to any type of ethics (Levinas, 1988; Korstanje 2017). The lessons of the holocaust, as Levinas adds, remind the importance of the instrumentalized "suffering". After all, Nazis operated in the fields of creative destruction and the life they proffered was circumscribed to the race (Skoll, 2012). The phenomenology of evil corresponds with the need of grasping the sense of pain. The useless pain exhibits not only the absurdity of

suffering but it leads to nowhere. Starting from the premise that Levinas understands *theodicy as* a human modality, which is supported by consciousness, helps to discuss the adversity within the terms of certainness, no less true is that Nazism inaugurated the ends of all theodicies in a way never imagined. Of course, Thana-Capitalism rests on the need of expanding the other´s suffering as a sublime object of redemption for a global audience that made from dark consumption a criterion of pleasure. Through the articulation of this ritual, the mobile elite re-affirm its status quo as a privileged class. If Nazism imagined a world reserved for only a few exclusive supermen while the rest of mankind were slaved or systematically exterminated, Thana-Capitalism fictionalizes the deaths of few to control ideologically the rest of mankind. With the benefits of hindsight, Hitler and Nazis lost the war but wined the ideological battle in the West –mutating towards social Darwinism. The present essay-review theorizes on the role played by the Holocaust in dividing the world in two, the victims who were condemned to perish and witnesses who were placed as a privilege elite which enjoy in consuming –if not gazing- the Other´s death.

The Holocaust in few words

Without any doubt, the holocaust is one of the tragedies of the twentieth century. For that reason, the holocaust has captivated the attention of social scientists worldwide (Skoll 2012; Bloxham, 2001; Nussbaum 2001; Friedrichs 2000; Feierstein 2014). Unfortunately, this event mainly marked the agenda of philosophy over decades. As Primo Levi notes, there is a connection between the "drowned and the saved" which merits to be discussed. Hannah Arendt speaks us of the *banality of evil.* Unlike radical evil, the banality of evil consists in the voluntary suspension of the ethical dimension. Lay-people, who often are in quest of safety, sacrifice voluntarily their moral reasoning. In the present section, we deal with different definitions and arguments revolving around the term Genocide, as well as the effects of the Holocaust in the modern western imagination. Primo Levi originally describes –in his memories- the traumatic experiences of the camps. The holocaust equates as living with the evilness all the time. He coins the term *Good Faith* to denote the different justifications that lead us to understand reality. While the oppressors cover their cruelty and

real interests probably to salve themselves, the victims believe their suffering associates with a divine goal. At the bottom, both are part of the same game, though in different positions (Levi 2017). Likewise, Richard Bernstein (2002) theorizes on the nature of radical evil. He argues convincingly that radical evil is culturally enrooted to modernity. Per his viewpoint, the archetype of Auschwitz inscribes not only to the human rights violations and crimes but also to the core of human nature. Events, like this, can repeat whether some conditions are given. In Bernstein, the radical evil coincides with the need of knowing if the trauma we want to forget appears again. As a result of this, Westerners are educated to believe they are the good boys, who act wrongly only if the evil is adopted. The figure of free will takes moral inclinations which help Westerners to understand moral disasters. One of main Hegel`s contributions rests on the impossibility for humans to understand the world beyond the good or the evil. Things are not good or evil things simply are! Secondly and most importantly, human behaviour changes according to time and cultural background. In the time, history witnesses a concatenation of countless battles, cruelty and violence. Genocides, also, are not the exception but the rule, as Bernstein adheres (Bernstein 2002). In consonance with this, Lang Berel (1999) calls attention to the role of ideology in the application of human rights. While demonizing Nazis we dispose them of the possibility to be judged. Berel recognizes that demons are pure evil-doers (not humans) who operate beyond the law. Humans are not pure evildoers and for that, they should be trialed when a crime is committed. Having said this, the holocaust runs the risk to be ideologically tergiversated; when this happens, so to speak, the possibilities for an event to repeat turns higher (Lang 1999). On the other side of the river, some specialists agree that deniers –who are real racists or anti-Semites – object to the cipher of victims as a moral bridge to show empirically the holocaust was a cultural fabrication (Lipstadt, 1993). To wit, Zygmunt Bauman agrees that a holocaust is a foundational event that marked modernity. Bureaucracy was successfully orchestrated to conduct the automatization of death in Nazi Germany. Doubtless, Auschwitz ultimately exhibits the triumph of apathy for the "Other". Genocide epitomizes the rise and expansion of the rational spirit which derives from scientific mentality as well as the need for efficiency. In this token, Nazism imposed a climate of terror and dehumanization against some minorities simply because they monopolized the instrumental techniques for total eradication. In so doing, they sanctioned

not only their laws and procedures but also the Nuremberg laws marked who should be exterminated (Bauman 1988; 1989). In this vein, Slavoj Zizek acknowledges that violence and cruelty are part of the human conditions, but he asks why some victims worth further than others. There are many events –like Auschwitz- which are today forgotten. What can be said about the human rights violations in Palestine or Guantanamo Bay? Zizek interrogates, (Zizek 2008). Zizek helps us in thinking of the problem of Genocide as a game where some voices are at least covered (Korstanje 2016).

As the previous backdrop, Pia Lara exerts a critical point against Zizek and his radical philosophy. For Zizek, Lara says, the nature of ethics is simply misjudged. Events like Auschwitz or the bloody Juntas in Latin America are real moral disasters, not simply acts evincing human nature. At the same time, genocides eradicate people creating moral damages which are very hard to cure. Genocide results from the lack of any reflexive judgment that recognizes the role of the "Otherness". Victims of camps are unable to tell what they experienced. The level of cruelty remains inenarrable. This radical crime is spoken when the term –of course to describe it- is finally created. Hence, society develops a collective memory that is formed by a socially shared narrative to explain the disaster. Only understanding society avoids repeating the tragedy (Lara 2007). Genocides are orchestrated in what Daniel Feierstein dubbed as "the marginalization process". In this stage, the minority is disposed of all the civil rights. They are pressed to live as "sub-humans" beyond the protection of the law and civil constitution. This process of dehumanization gives perpetrators the perfect excuse to commit the crime. Still, human rights violations are certainly accompanied by a so-called need for purification which corrects the social malady –through violence-. In so doing, as Feierstein adheres, genocides are based on "certainly-designed technologies" which accelerate an automated slaughter. Feierstein´s model very well applies not only to Nazi Germany but to Latin American Juntas. In sharp contrast with Feierstein, Jaime Malamud-Goti (1996) discusses critically the trials of Juntas not only as a political error which led towards a climate of instability in the presidency of Alfonsin but *as a game without end.* This does not mean that the perpetrators of crimes against civilians should not be trialed or subject to a dull punishment, but the fact is that analysts and officials should estimate the narrow aftermaths after such a decision. This is not only

the case of many countries as South Africa or Rwanda, where the question of retributivism, which is a legal theory that says all those who had committed crimes –though abiding orders- should be placed into trial inquiries, obscures more than it clarifies, but the decision to try criminals before a justice without stable institutions undermines the core of democracy (Malamud-Goti 1996). Specialists are not answering to the reasons why these macabre sites are recycled to tourist attractions. The next section will fill the gap.

Dark tourism: a critical insight

Dark tourism studies correspond with a new sub-discipline orientated to explore dark tourism as the main object of study. Over the recent years, dark tourism has eloquently captivated the attention of academicians, policy-makers and journalists worldwide (Hooper & Lennon, 2016; Mionel 2019). Dark tourism seems to be a novel niche where tourists look for consuming spaces of mass destruction or death (Sharpley 2009; Light 2017). These types of segments are psychologically motivated by many reasons which include the understanding of the own finitude through the Other`s death, history, as well as the need of engaging with spaces mainly marked by human suffering (Collins-Kreiner 2016). Dark tourism takes many similar forms such as prison tourism, mourning tourism, pain tourism, slum tourism without mentioning grief or ghost tourism (Stone 2012), only to name a few. Phillip Stone goes on to say that dark tourism sites evolve in a spectrum which has a darkest and lightest degree. Darkest sites, which include concentration camps or spaces of slaughter, have a strong emotional impact in public opinion. These sites are resisted to be seen as a cultural attraction; rather, others thematic parks are certainly considered more open to receive mass tourism (Stone 2006). Echoing Tarlow, concentration camps are valorized as spaces of nostalgia and mourning (Tarlow 2007). Scholars in dark tourism studies strongly believe that tourists are moved by empathy to the "Other`s pain". These results stem from applied research conducted in the dark sites. Of course, we go in the contrary direction. These works are based on what scientists know as "ecological fallacy" which means that the fieldworker often extrapolates what the interviewee said as the only source of information or what is a worse scientific correlation. Let`s put the following example, what would respond to a gangster if I ask for his

profession? Surely he will say I am a respectable businessman. But the question is this true? Anthropologists recognize that often interviewees lie to protect their interests while in other simply they are not familiar with their inner life. In a nutshell, dark tourism –at best for us- is only the surface of a much deeper tendency that is not associated with empathy (Korstanje 2016; Korstanje & George 2015).

Life and Death in Thana Capitalism

It is tempting to say, Auschwitz not only evokes the archetype of human suffering but the philosophical dilemma of tourism consumption. Auschwitz is a tourist destination as well as a reminder of the holocaust. This begs the question can these poles be successfully reconciled?

In my book, the Rise of Thana Capitalism and Tourism I explained that the risk society sets the pace to a new more morbid type of capitalism. At a closer look, the risk society at least as it was originally envisaged by German sociologist Ulrich Beck has mutated towards a new stage where death is the main commodity to exchange. In the risk society, scientists work hard to locate and eradicate future risks of course earlier they take places in reality. Rather, in the Thana-Capitalist society disasters are consumed and recycled according the taste of a wider (morbid) audience who loves consuming the "Other´s pain". Centered on Baudrillard´s legacy, I outlined a conceptual model that precise dark consumption is not limited to tourism alone. It permeates to other public and daily spheres of life. (Korstanje 2016). A whole portion of literature said that tourism consumption changes to a new morbid modality where tourists are encouraged to travel to sites of mass death and destruction. It is not simplistic to say that dark tourism is only the peak of the iceberg. We are accustomed to consume death everywhere in the days of Thana-capitalism. The Other´s death can be gazed at in video-games, TV fiction, TV series, Novels and films only to name a few. To put this simply, the Other´s death has eloquently been situated as a widely-consumed public entertainment. The thanaptopic society rests on two different logics: a) the need of getting outstanding experiences to distinguish from others, and b) the quest for security. The outstanding experience leads to a sentiment of narcissism where the self looks

to be different to lay people. The quest for security, contrariwise, makes all of us equal before death. Where is this sentiment of narcissism originated?

As stated, Nazis were finally defeated but they introduced successfully their allegorical message in capitalist society. The radicalism originally expressed by Nazism mutates towards a more subtle form: social Darwinism. As Richard Hofstadter (1944) puts it, social Darwinism postulated that races, as well as human groups, were far from being equal. Per this cultural theory, Anglo-Saxons and Europeans are certainly situated at the top of a racial pyramid because of their quintessential genetic features. IQ and intelligence marked the superiority of some groups over others. In the same way that groups are unequal also social Darwinism stimulates a climate of competence where the big fish eats the small one. Let explain this from another perspective; the need for competence comes from the original Puritanism which was cultivated in England and the US. Puritans need to know who were the condemned and the salved declared in the Life Book. For that, predestination played a leading role configuring the protestant ethos, not only in England but also in Germany. Here two assumptions should be made. On one hand, Nazis massacred millions of innocent people in silence, their crimes were systematically covered. What I want to say is that Thana-capitalism derives from the Holocaust. In Thana-Capitalism the crime of few seems to be packaged, commoditized and sold as a product of cultural entertainment. On another, echoing Phillipe Aries, we live in a secure world where people die less than in other epochs but when death knocks on the doors we are panicked. He toys with the belief that death has been domesticated but in so doing she becomes wilder. In modernity, death is certainly neglected. The secularizing process leads Europe to expand the life expectancies, but paradoxically in so doing Europeans were unaccustomed to the cruelty of death. In modern culture, death disorganized human relations (Aries 1975). How may I explain this spectacle of death?

If we start from the premise people live a secularized society negating the after-life, which suggests everything is consumed in the present, also death becomes a spectacle. In the Thanaptopic society, death is seen as a sign of moral inferiority. Life is defined as a struggle of all against all, where only one –of few ones- wins. Of course, the winner takes all! In Thana capitalism, the Other´s death gives pleasure to the self simply because after all, it

demonstrates its superiority. The best example that shows how Thana-capitalism works is the novel *The Hunger Games* where participants struggle with each other to be the only winner. While they are unable to cooperate to oust President Snow, his legitimacy and domination perpetuate in the thirteen districts. To put this in other terms, the obsession for consuming the death maximizes the self´s pleasure simply because it was touched by the Gods or destiny. The Spectacle of death captivates but at the same time enslaves us. We are accustomed to seeing horrendous imagines but despite this, we are unable to stop seeing them. The founding myth that legitimates Thana-capitalism is the Noah´s ark. Basically, this story tells us God – annoyed with mankind- organizes a great flood. Noah is instructed to build an ark and select a par per specie. Animals and Noah´s family ultimately escape from this world-engulfing flood, but at a closer look, this event divided the world in two, the victims who perished in the flood and witnesses who showed their moral superiority. Noah would advise mankind the disaster was coming but he preferred the silence becoming in the first dark witness of human tragedy. Above all, the so-called humans ´moral inferiority at the God´s eyes not only justified but determined their eradication. Noah was unique and special, like the visitors of dark tourism sites. In the Thana-capitalism crimes are not prevented but commoditized as forms of spectacle. The same example, doubtless, is the terrorist attack in Nice –France- when a jihadist running a 19-tonee cargo truck was deliberated driven against a crowd causing 86 victims and 458 wounded people. More surprisingly bystanders tried to record the event with their Cell-phone instead of trying to stop the drivers first. Like Noah, these bystanders felt that lives should not be salved because in this way, they simply remind how special they are! Our own superiority is given by the "Other´s death".

Having said this, the epicenter of Thana-Capitalism comes just after the attacks on the WTC (World Trade Center) on 11 September of 2001. This shocking event marked a new epoch where four civilian airplanes were weaponized against the most powerful nation in the world. The sense of mobilities, just after this, changes as never before. Educated in the best Western universities these jihadists –militating on Al-Qaeda- planned and executed the attack following a management guidebook. Whether Lisbon´s quake started with the risk society, which means the emergence of Science to prevent future disasters, 9/11 began a new time "where the Other" is seen as an undesired guest.

Conclusion

The current chapter focused on the Spectacle of disasters (Baurdillard, 1995), a term originally coined by Jean Baudrillard. The discussion around the crimes against mankind perpetrated by Nazis in the clandestine concentration camps opened the doors towards new insights respecting the roots of Thana Capitalism. Nazis violated human rights secreting their crimes, in a moment of the world where millions have certainly died. Today´s philosophers are shocked to see how Auschwitz-Birkenau, which was the sanctuary of the horrors of the Second World, sets the pace to a new allegory, intended to entertain thousands of tourists, so to say many visitors remain unfamiliar with these bloody events. As a tourist destination Auschwitz evinces the change of new postmodern ethics that commoditizes the other´s loss as a criterion of entertainment.

The example of terrorism shows one of the paradoxes of Thana-Capitalism simply because media covers and disseminates the cruelties of attacks to gain further subscribers and investors while terrorism finds a fertile ground to enter the homes of a wider audience. The audience seems to be devastated by the breaking news that is broadcast the moment people blast or is being decapitated, but at the same time, they are unable to stop watching!. Lastly, *Thana-Capitalism* has successfully disorganized the social ties through the imposition of allegories, dark landscapes and the spectacle of disaster for the status quo to keep untouched.

Capitalism should be understood as a cultural project, besides an economic system, which is based on two preliminary aspects; social Darwinism and the doctrine of predestination enrooted in the Protestant Spirit. Two scholars have explored with brilliant mastery on both, Max Weber (2012) and Richard Hofstadter (1944). While the former signalled to capitalism as a consequence of Protestant Reform that divorced from the Catholic Church, the latter one envisaged that social Darwinism was the key factor to grant the competence necessary for market expansion. Social Darwinism was a theory coined by Sir. Francis Galton, whose interests were oriented to adapt the concept "evolution of species" as it has been delineated by Charles Darwin into the social world. However, Galton not only misjudged Darwin´s advances in the fields of biology but confused "the survival of the

fittest", with "the survival of strongest". In contrast to Darwin, Social Darwinism observed that natural selections can be applied to social scaffolding. In the way, some species struggle with the environment to survive, humans, struggle with others to reach success. In this token, the Anglo-race was placed on the top of the social pyramid as the most evolutionary ethnicity respecting other minorities. At the same time, this doctrine paved the way not only for racist ideas in America that shaped capitalism, but also Nazism in Europe. In parallel, as Hofstadter puts it, the idea of a privileged race or dreams of the uphill city, contributed to a discourse of superiority of Anglo-Saxons over other cultures, which sooner or later encouraged "the war of all against all"; Social Darwinism works because rank-and-file workers struggle with other workers by a job or better opportunities. While capital-owners monopolize their power into few hands, the workforce is atomized to avoid unionization. Those who have not developed adaptive skills to survive are considered "the weak". After all, capitalism always grants the survival of the strongest, the best agent. In the fields of religion, Weber anticipated a similar landscape. Capitalism was the result of the Protestant logic of "predestination", which means that the soul´s salvation was pre-determined by Gods in the life-book. Only a few will be gathered by the Lord in the bottom days. For wayward Protestants, the world not only is a dangerous place but also a platform to show one deserves salvation. The force of labor seems to be the sign marking the boundaries between doomed and saved souls. This is the main cultural difference between Catholics and Protestants.

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