

Persistent Catastrophes: Slow Memory and Slow Violence in Exploring Dark Heritage

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This theoretical article explores the emerging concept and approach of slow memory and its relevance to dark heritage sites, focusing on how slow violence continues to impact the communities and histories these sites commemorate. It addresses the key research question: How does slow memory, which highlights gradual and often obscured forms of violence, intersect with dark heritage sites that reflect ongoing destruction and suffering? The article investigates three critical dimensions of the relationship between slow memory and slow violence: the temporal and spatial aspects of these phenomena, the invisibility of affected communities' narratives, and the representational challenges inherent to these sites face. The study applies the slow memory framework, revealing how dark heritage sites, typically regarded only as representations of specific historical events, can also serve as enduring symbols of persistent suffering. This approach has the capacity to challenge official narratives of these sites, advocating for re-evaluating ecological and historical catastrophes as enduring processes rather than isolated events. This study seeks to contribute meaningfully to slow memory studies by integrating the themes of memory, violence and heritage, emphasizing the importance of understanding how past injustices continue to shape contemporary realities. It promotes a more comprehensive approach to addressing historical and ongoing injustices.

Keywords: catastrophes, dark heritage, injustices, slow memory, slow violence

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Introduction

Memory studies have evolved significantly, reflecting shifts in how the past influences the present. Erll (2011) identifies three phases in developing collective memory studies. The first phase focuses on foundational concepts developed by Halbwachs (1966, 1992), along with contributions from Warburg, Benjamin, and Bartlett. The second phase, introduced through Pierre Nora's concept of 'sites of memory' (1984–1992), emphasizes the role of the nation-state in shaping memory. The third phase introduces transcultural perspectives, encompassing the 'cosmopolitan' (Levy, Sznajder, 2001), 'transnational' (Huyssen, 2003), 'multidirectional' (Rothberg, 2009), and 'prosthetic' (Landsberg, 2004) qualities of memory, as synthesized in Erll (2011). Craps (Craps, Cronshaw, Wenzel, Kennedy, Colebrook, Nardizzi, 2018: 500) proposes a fourth phase, marked by growing awareness of the Anthropocene. This phase challenges event-based approaches by emphasizing ongoing environmental changes. Slow memory studies, aligning with this emerging phase, critique the prevailing inquiries of 'eventful' and 'sited' pasts, instead spotlighting slow-moving pasts that often go unnoticed (Wüstenberg, 2023: 60). This perspective highlights gradual transformations and their effects on collective memory, influencing how the past is remembered, forgotten, and interpreted over time.

By considering memory of processes, this theoretical article intends to explore the connection between the emerging concept and approach of slow memory, the studies on slow violence and dark heritage. Central to this inquiry is the question: How does the concept of slow memory – as both a scholarly framework for studying how people remember slow changes and slow processes and an activist approach advocating for sustained engagement with historical injustices and acknowledging the complexities of collective remembrance – intersect with dark heritage sites affected by slow violence? The study uses slow memory in these two interconnected senses and demonstrates its potential to bridge these overlapping areas of study. It explores sustained and often hidden forms of violence, revealing how dark heritage and slow memory address long-term ecological and historical traumas. First, I explain the concept of slow memory in relation to slow violence, which 'occurs gradually and out of sight' (Nixon, 2011: 2). Next, I discuss how the lens of slow memory uncovers the hidden dimensions of slow violence at dark heritage sites, often portrayed as markers of specific events and locations. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the main arguments.

Slowing Down Violence and Memory: Temporospatial, Narrative, and Representational Dimensions

Slow memory studies primarily explore memories of gradual transformations stemming from dispersed and often uneventful developments, such as climate

change, the erosion of the welfare state, gentrification, shifts in gender relations, or the spread of disinformation. Although some developments may lead to disruptive and traumatic consequences comparable to wars or authoritarianism, others bring positive changes and joy to communities. What makes these processes distinct is their resistance to being easily tied to specific dates or locations, with the roles of victims, perpetrators, and beneficiaries often remaining ambiguous and, hence, hard to ascertain (Wüstenberg, 2023: 60–61). The slow memory approach emphasizes the prolonged and subtle ways in which past events, historical injustices, and crimes against humanity continue to influence both individuals and societies. Unlike the spectacular forms of memory associated with immediate, visible, faster, and louder events, slow memory engages with the ongoing and understated effects of social, environmental, and cultural phenomena over time. Responding to the call for ecological thinking in memory studies beyond social perspectives (Craps et al., 2018: 500), Wüstenberg (2023: 62) argues that the emerging ‘fourth wave’ of memory scholarship, characterized by its sensitivity to temporality, has shaped the slow memory framework. Rather than merely adding ecological considerations to our social understanding of memory or thinking in terms of nonhuman agency, slow memory aims to integrate ecological insights to better comprehend human remembrance over long durations and non-eventful, un-sited, or multi-sited phenomena (Wüstenberg, 2023: 62).

Wüstenberg (2023: 61) claims that Nixon’s concept of slow violence, defined as ‘a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all,’ provides valuable insights for studying slow memory. This concept highlights the contrast between conventional views of violence, which emphasize immediacy, explosiveness, and spectacle, and the more gradual, incremental nature of slow violence, where harmful effects emerge gradually over varied timescales. Moving beyond visible, event-focused, and time- and body-bound forms of violence leads to the temporal dispersion of slow violence, impacting our perception and reactions to social issues (Nixon, 2011: 2–3). Building on Galtung’s concept of structural violence, Nixon emphasizes issues of social justice, hidden agency, and often imperceptible forms of violence. For instance, the structural violence inherent in neoliberal practices such as austerity measures, deregulation and the growing wealth gap indicates a form of covert violence that frequently acts as a catalyst to more overt and recognizable forms of violence (Nixon, 2011: 10–11). This insight underscores the importance of addressing the root causes of systemic inequality and the need for a nuanced understanding of violence in its many forms. It calls for policies and reforms that not only tackle the immediate manifestations of violence but also dismantle underlying structures perpetuating these conditions. Structural violence reconsiders causation and agency by focusing on systemic inequalities that indirectly harm individuals. However, slow violence broadens this concept by encompassing complex forms of violence that develop slowly over extended periods, emphasizing their prolonged and often imperceptible

impacts on both environmental and human systems (Nixon, 2011: 11–12). This distinction becomes crucial for aligning slow memory studies with slow violence, as it deals with the overlooked, gradual processes shaping long-term historical traumas and societal conditions. Slow memory, understood in this context as both a research framework and an activist approach to the past, plays a crucial role in both recognizing and making visible these extended and subtle forms of violence, as well as ensuring that the experiences of those affected are remembered and addressed comprehensively throughout the study of slow violence.

Based on this theoretical framework, the concepts of slow violence and slow memory intersect in three key aspects. First, slow violence exhibits a transnational character. Reflecting its dispersal across time and space (Nixon, 2011: 2), the causes and effects of this type of destruction involve diverse actors and unfold in varied temporal and spatial contexts. Hence, global environmental, political, and economic conditions, along with systemic inequalities and nation-state actions, contribute to the emergence of slow violence, which is not necessarily confined to specific times and locations. Studies focusing on slow violence emphasize its global and multifaceted nature of harm and its long-term impacts on communities and ecosystems. For example, Davies' (2019) ethnographic research in Louisiana, known as Cancer Alley, illustrates how studying slow violence prompts engaging with past inequalities and violent structures that continue to threaten contemporary life. In an era of rapid media consumption, Davies questions, how society can fully comprehend long-term disasters that lack dramatic moments of terror but instead gradually accumulate and delay their destructive impact over time (Davies, 2019: 410). Similarly, Bond and Rapson (2023: 80–81) connect contemporary racial and environmental injustices in the Deep South to the enduring legacy of structural racism. They emphasize how environmental racism continues to affect the same communities historically impacted by atrocities. Their case studies of the San Jacinto Monument and Museum in Texas and the San Francisco Plantation in Louisiana reveal how marginalized memories of environmental racism are rooted in settler colonialism and slavery. Bond and Rapson argue that environmental racism is not merely a contemporary issue; it has historically shaped race relations and land use, with Native, Latin, and African American communities enduring slow violence through systemic exploitation.

In similar fashion, Golańska (2023) criticizes mnemonic strategies that focus exclusively on extreme atrocities and massive sufferings confined to specific times and places. Instead, she advocates for a critical engagement with feminist geopolitics and minor remembrance. This perspective draws attention to how unspectacular forms of slow, latent, and silent violence are often marginalized in memorial practices. For instance, the temporal and spatial dimensions of slow violence in the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, India (Skotnicki, 2019) reveal how harm persists across generations through consequences such as premature deaths and congenital disabilities. Recognizing these effects invites a broader understanding of memory

encompassing various forms of suffering, fostering deeper connections to the past without imposing prescriptive narratives on how individuals should remember. The Chernobyl disaster, for example, further exemplifies how slow violence transcends geographical borders, impacting global environments amid geopolitical struggles over resource extraction (Nixon, 2011: 68–102). In a similar vein, Trumble's (2021) study on flooding in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina unveils how environmental disasters amplify latent harms over time and across regions. Building on Nixon's pioneering work, a growing body of literature on slow violence enriches our understanding of slow violence as a gradual, often invisible phenomenon that persists across temporal and spatial dimensions.

Aligned with the transnational scope of slow violence, research on slow memory aims to move beyond nation-state-centric explanations within memory studies. Critiquing Nora's concept of sites of memory, Rothberg (2010: 7) proposes an alternative approach, known as *knots* of memory. This approach sees memory as intertwined across diverse places and actions, forming intricate webs of temporal and cultural connections that resist efforts to confine memory to specific territories or simplistic identity constructs (Rothberg, 2010: 7). This perspective deepens the understanding of slow memory by emphasizing its role in documenting the gradual, dispersed, and frequently overlooked effects of historical traumas and societal transformations. Slow memory thus enables the recognition, transmission and documentation of instances of slow violence across different geographies and temporal scales. This suggests that slow memory may offer a pathway to escape the constraints of the 'presentist regime of historicity' (Hartog, 2015), which tends to overlook the gradual and dispersed impacts of slow violence. Hartog's (2015: 9) concept of regimes of historicity explores how societies relate to their past and construct perceptions of time and history. Western historical temporality has evolved through three successive regimes: a past-orientated approach (from early modern humanism to the French Revolution); a future-oriented period focused on progress (from the French Revolution to the fall of the Soviet Union); and the current presentist era, which centers predominantly on the present as the focal point despite being aware of both past and future (Hartog, 2015: 203). This concept, thus, underscores how the socio-cultural context shapes the relationship between the past, present, and future (Lorenz, 2021) and acknowledges the diversity of temporal experiences within a particular epoch (Bouton, 2019). Presentism, as Hartog (2015: 203) explains, reflects a crisis of time, where individuals feel confined to an eternal present – one that lacks connection to the past or future. Therefore, the past remains obscured, visible only through the lens of the present, whereas the future is perceived as a menace rather than a prospect (Hartog, 2015: 191). Escaping presentism, I argue, is essential to addressing the enduring consequences of historical injustices on marginalized communities today. In this context, slow memory has the potential to counteract presentism by integrating past, present, and future, allowing us to recognize the ongoing effects of historical processes on contemporary realities.

Understood as an activist approach, engaging with slow memory can connect past struggles with present challenges, fostering a sense of agency. It can also cultivate grounded hope by enabling individuals to envision meaningful change beyond immediate constraints through collective, historically informed action.

Second, regarding the prolonged impacts of ecological and humanitarian disasters, studies of slow violence and studies of slow memory focus on the victims of these catastrophes and those who witness them. Both frameworks emphasize the importance of acknowledging the enduring consequences for affected communities. Nixon (2011) also draws attention to the environmentalism of the poor, emphasizing how individuals with limited resources often endure slow violence, with their hidden poverty exacerbated by its invisible nature (Nixon, 2011: 4). Victims of slow violence are often 'the casualties most likely not to be seen, not to be counted' (Nixon, 2011: 13), underscoring the connection between vulnerable populations and sacrifice zones. This connection demonstrates the intertwined dynamics of exploitation, marginalization, and environmental inequalities. These 'disposable people' (Bales, 2004) are considered as expendable within the global economy, often subjected to exploitation and unfree labor. Similarly, 'sacrifice zones' (Lerner, 2010) are areas disproportionately affected by toxic exposure and environmental degradation, typically inhabited by low-income communities and people of color. Thus, the positioning of slow violence victims reveals how systemic neglect perpetuates their vulnerability and marginalization.

Two key issues emerge from this discussion. First, Davies (2019) challenges Nixon's (2011) characterization of slow violence as being out of sight, asking, 'Out of sight to whom?' We can better elucidate the power dynamics and politics behind uneven pollution distribution by incorporating the perspectives of communities in polluted areas. For those living in toxic environments, the impacts of pollution are often highly visible, directly challenging the assumption that such harm is inherently invisible (Davies, 2019). Second, as geographers have shown, vulnerability to harm in the context of violence is not uniform across human or nonhuman bodies. Factors such as race, class, gender, species, sexuality, and disability significantly influence the production and experience of slow violence. Neglecting these structural dimensions leads to an incomplete understanding of the concept (Davies, 2021: 24). At this juncture, the slow memory framework has the potential to serve as a crucial response, addressing the moral imperative to acknowledge slow violence and its victims, making visible their experiences and preserving their stories (Wüstenberg, 2023: 67). Given that slow violence can stem from 'epistemic and political dominance of particular narratives or understandings' (O'Lear, 2016: 4), the slow memory approach can provide a counter-narrative by foregrounding the experiences of victims. Unlike conventional commemorations focused on dramatic events, slow memory engages with the continuous and pervasive nature of slow violence, highlighting its enduring impact on affected communities. As the persistence of slow violence relies on disregarding the 'arresting stories' of victims (Davies, 2019: 421), sharing these

narratives may disrupt this cycle of silence. Disseminating narratives over time and across various platforms can challenge dominant narratives perpetuating environmental and social injustices, enabling more diverse remembrance processes. Hewer and Kut (2010) argue that social memory and historical representations are shaped by cultural beliefs, often resulting in oversimplified narratives. Incorporating diverse victim perspectives fosters a more nuanced understanding of history, reflecting the complexities of past injustices. In post-conflict societies, such efforts are especially vital. Wing (2010) emphasizes that remembrance projects can create counter-narratives that challenge dominant constructs and demand acknowledgment of state-sponsored violence. Similarly, Olesen (2012) highlights how the global memory of the Rwandan genocide has evolved to include discussions of moral responsibility, demonstrating how victim narratives can reshape collective memory and influence contemporary justice claims. Thus, disseminating victim narratives is crucial in challenging dominant narratives and fostering a more inclusive understanding of historical injustices.

Third, the challenge of understanding and addressing slow violence intersects with the concept of slow memory, particularly due to the representational difficulties inherent in this form of violence. In a media landscape dominated by sensationalism and immediate public policy concerns, transforming the prolonged crises of slow violence into compelling narratives that mobilize public sentiment and drive political action remains critical. These challenges are exacerbated by the anonymity of slow violence and the absence of easily identifiable victims (Nixon, 2011: 3). Leveraging slow memory can help overcome these representational barriers by amplifying the voices of those affected. Continuously disseminating victims' narratives raises awareness and fosters a deeper understanding of the systemic issues involved. This ongoing documentation of marginalized communities can influence public opinion, shape policymaking, and ultimately contribute to dismantling the structures that perpetuate slow violence. As these stories gain visibility, they can catalyze social change by ensuring that the suffering of affected communities is acknowledged and addressed. Thus, slow memory can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between the often-overlooked impacts of slow violence and the urgent need for meaningful political and social responses.

Addressing the representational challenges of slow violence also requires an epistemological intervention through a feminist geopolitical framework. Feminist scholarship has extensively documented the slow, routinized, and banal nature of violence, arguing that its invisibility is closely tied to raced and gendered epistemologies. Traditional epistemologies often reinforce binary distinctions such as personal versus political and dramatic versus mundane. Feminist perspectives challenge these binaries, revealing the pervasive and frequently overlooked dimensions of slow violence. The concept of slow memory is particularly relevant here, as it actively confronts the invisibility surrounding slow violence. Just as feminists struggle to highlight the significance of intimate or everyday experiences,

addressing slow violence requires overcoming the gendered and raced geographies that contribute to its marginalization (Christian, Dowler, 2019: 1070–1071). More importantly, Christian and Dowler (2019: 1072) argue that fast and slow violence should be understood as a single complex rather than as dichotomous categories. The gradual nature of slow violence often reinforces divisions between public/private and intimate/global spheres by separating the political causes of violence from their embodied consequences. Treating fast and slow violence as interconnected provides the conceptual tools needed to challenge the gendered and raced epistemologies that depoliticize or erase slow violence. This relational perspective treats both spectacular and unspectacular violence as part of a unified system, providing conceptual tools to challenge raced epistemologies that politicize what is considered spectacular while simultaneously depoliticizing the unspectacular. It also reveals the multiscale, parallel, and entangled operations of different forms of violence (Golańska, 2023). Therefore, integrating the concept of slow memory with feminist epistemological interventions offers a powerful approach for developing awareness of the impacts of ecological and humanitarian catastrophes. Feminist perspectives emphasize the often-overlooked gradual implications of these crises on marginalized populations, fostering a more empathetic understanding of slow violence. This approach can stimulate both local and global responses, encouraging solidarity and more effective efforts to address these enduring challenges.

Analyzing Dark Heritage and Slow Violence through the Slow Memory Framework

Slow violence and slow memory, as previously mentioned, share overlapping characteristics, including temporal and spatial dispersion, victim narratives, representational challenges, and mobilization of public sentiment. The often-invisible nature of slow violence can be illuminated through the framework of slow memory, particularly by emphasizing dark heritage sites, which frequently represent specific past events. Although heritage is often associated with positive achievements of humanity, the role of memory in addressing darker facets of human heritage, such as wars, colonial violence, slavery, genocide, and human-made disasters, has been recognized since the late 1990s (Sather-Wagstaff, 2015: 195–196). These sites associated with tragedies have increasingly been categorized as dark heritage sites attracting ‘dark tourism’, which commodifies traumatic historical events into consumable experiences (Lennon, Foley, 2000). Sather-Wagstaff (2015: 196) notes that dark heritage can be described by using various terms such as ‘difficult heritage’ (Logan, Reeves, 2009; Macdonald, 2009), ‘dissonant heritage’ (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996), and ‘heritage that hurts’ (Schofield et al., 2002; Sather-Wagstaff, 2011). Research on dark tourism mainly concentrates on visitor experiences, researchers’ reflections on visiting these sites, and perspectives of nearby communities. Studies

predominantly explore the sites of human-induced tragedies, such as genocide locations, battlefields, abandoned prisons, assassination sites, and places connected to the Atlantic Slave Trade, such as plantations and shipping ports (Scarlett, Rothenberg, Riede, Holmberg, 2024: 225). These studies underscore how various stakeholders and visitors understand and interact with dark heritage sites, illustrating the complex interplay between memory, heritage, and tourism.

Although dark tourism is closely aligned with studies on dark heritage, defining what constitutes heritage and categorizing it as dark are still challenging. Smith (2006: 11) argues that heritage is not static but a hegemonic discourse that shapes societal perceptions, discussions, and records. The 'authorized heritage discourse' often prioritizes certain elements for preservation, promoting Western elite cultural values as universal. This process legitimizes specific practices that dominate both popular and expert perceptions of heritage while marginalizing alternative or subaltern interpretations of heritage. Furthermore, this discourse depends on the authority of technical and aesthetic experts, institutionalizing it within state agencies and cultural organizations. It further privileges monumentality, grandeur, innate artifacts/sites linked to historical depth, scientific/aesthetic expert judgment, social consensus, and nation-building efforts (Smith, 2006: 11). These factors often normalize the transformation of spaces affected by slow violence into dark heritage sites. Although the slow memory framework views destruction as an ongoing process rather than a fixed event, people may still perceive slow violence through the lens of other forms of violence- frequently as specific, eventful moments within broader processes. For instance, Tavory and Wagner-Pacifi's (2022) analysis of climate change demonstrates how individuals often anchor complex and ongoing issues to specific moments that encapsulate broader narratives about the past, future risks, and necessary actions. As an activist approach, the slow memory framework challenges the top-down practices of state heritage authorities in designating dark heritage sites. These practices often overlook intangible cultural heritage and fail to consider how some individuals engage with these sites.

For instance, Auschwitz-Birkenau stands as a dark heritage site representing immense trauma and violence, serving as a place for reflection and education on historical injustices. Similarly, Hiroshima, impacted by the 1945 atomic bombing, serves as a powerful dark heritage site, reminding visitors of nuclear warfare's devastation and the importance of peace. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, including the Atomic Bomb Dome, commemorates those affected, fostering reflection on conflict and promoting peace and reconciliation. Similarly, the Chernobyl exclusion zone, initially the site of a nuclear accident, now attracts tourists as a dark heritage site. Likewise, Robben Island, once a prison during apartheid in South Africa, reminds visitors of past injustices and the enduring struggle for equality. New York City's Ground Zero, with the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, honors victims of the September 11 attack and invites reflection on this event. However, these sites hold significance beyond being mere reminders of past events. They invite recognition of

the lasting impact of slow violence-historical, environmental, and social forces that influence both communities and the environment. This necessitates a thoughtful engagement with history to foster healing and resilience. Nixon (2011) emphasizes that environmental degradation, resulting from slow violence, continues to disrupt communities long after the initial harm, embedding these sites with evolving layers of meaning across generations. Similarly, Dwyer and Alderman (2008) describe dark heritage sites as complex memoryscapes where individuals ascribe meaning to ongoing harm. Till (2012) conceptualizes them as 'wounded landscapes', where memory, trauma, and resistance intersect, allowing communities to reinterpret past injustices in the light of present experiences. These interpretations show that people do not merely perceive these sites as historical artifacts but actively engage with them and reshape their meaning over time.

However, national governments often restrict the interpretation of catastrophes and victims' sufferings to narrow temporal, spatial, and interpretative frameworks, framing the past as settled and concluded. This selective framing, as Dwyer and Alderman (2008) argue, shapes memorial landscapes by limiting how historical events are remembered and commemorated. Such constraints often serve political agendas by foregrounding certain narratives while marginalizing others. In contrast, the slow memory approach, described as 'a reframing of how the past is made meaningful in the present' (Wüstenberg, 2023: 59), challenges this static view by proposing the understanding of 'a persisting past' (Bevernage, 2011). This concept of persisting past disrupts conventional distinctions between past and present, suggesting that these temporal dimensions are intricately connected and mutually influential. Certain dark heritage sites embody this dynamic perspective by adapting their practices to address contemporary issues, moving beyond commemoration to active engagement. For instance, the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, addresses ongoing displacement and urban injustice, linking apartheid-era evictions to current housing challenges through community engagement programs and workshops. In Cambodia, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum offers educational programs for youth on human rights. These examples demonstrate how dark heritage sites can evolve to not only preserve memory but also inspire proactive engagement and positive change.

Reflecting on the idea of a persisting past raises two fundamental questions: What does it mean for something or someone to be considered past, and how are events, individuals, or things classified as such? (Bevernage, 2011: 5). This critical inquiry, central to the slow memory approach, can uncover the narratives of victims and testimonies of witnesses concerning slow violence, potentially shifting these experiences from unspectacular to spectacular. This shift may also counteract the commodification and exploitation of dark heritage, which often reduces the complex memorialization of environmental and historical atrocities to marketable products. The authorized heritage discourse typically views tourists as 'Others' frequently generating revenue for site maintenance and conservation (Light, 2015: 115).

Nonetheless, the slow memory approach often advocates for recognizing that the memorialization of atrocities can exist outside a profit-driven tourism model. Golańska (2023) points out that the impacts of slow violence unfold gradually, requiring deep and sustained engagement rather than the transient interactions typical of commercial tourism. Similarly, Lischer (2019) critiques how Western-led memorial projects often homogenize atrocity narratives, overshadowing local experiences. This perspective supports the view that memorialization should honor local contexts and community experiences with violence. The slow memory framework has the potential to challenge superficial mainstream historical narratives and heritage practices by promoting reflective remembrance. However, this outcome is not always guaranteed, as memorialization efforts can sometimes be co-opted or shaped by dominant power structures that dilute or erase marginalized voices. Hence, it has the capacity to serve as a powerful tool for social justice that ensures the voices of the marginalized groups are heard and integrated into a more inclusive historical consciousness.

The consumption aspect of this transformation is also crucial in debates over state heritage authorities' efforts to transform spaces marked by slow violence into dark heritage sites. For example, polluted industrial sites, rebranded as educational tourist destinations, prompt questions about whether they allow visitors to genuinely grasp the long-term experiences of affected communities and whether a slow memory approach can reveal the hidden nature of slow violence. The relationship between the tragic and the unethical in dark tourism has sparked ethical and academic discussions regarding the intertwining of leisure and tragedy (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996: 112). This intersection raises concerns about the morality of commodifying suffering and the implications of transforming such experiences into spectacles for consumption. For instance, guided tours of historically significant yet traumatic sites risk trivializing profound suffering for mere entertainment. In an era of 'fatal attractions', commercial developments at grave sites and locations of sudden violent deaths have become prominent 'black spots' (Rojek, 1993: 136). Rojek (Ibid.: 136) argues that places such as Auschwitz and Cambodia's Killing Fields, while serving as spaces for reflection and education on historical injustices, also exemplify a trend toward prioritizing spectacle over meaningful engagement, raising questions about how such sites navigate their dual roles as spaces of commemoration and commodification. The commercialization of genocide memorials often emphasizes narrative dramatization rather than a deep understanding of the causes and consequences, allowing visitors to enjoy the experience and purchase souvenirs without confronting the various causes behind these events. To attract audiences, heritage sites frequently present contested pasts in ways that minimize critical engagement or political action (Baillie, Chatzoglou, Taha, 2010: 59–60). Moreover, they simplify the political complexity of the events they commemorate, reducing them to mere tragedies and promoting narratives that perpetuate fear or absolve the majority culture of complicity. This commodification risks sanitizing these sites,

diminishing their impact and shock value (Baillie et al., 2010: 65) and potentially concealing ongoing systemic issues and inequalities. To honor the memories of affected communities, creating spaces that encourage critical reflection and engagement is essential, ensuring that dark heritage sites serve as powerful educational tools rather than mere spectacles for consumption.

The commodification of history for mass consumption often leads to trivialization, exemplified by ‘spooky’ dungeon tours of castles. However, it does not necessarily exclude the presentation of counter-hegemonic stories or tales of injustice. The appeal of unsettling historical sites is influenced by tourists’ preferences and marketing strategies, evolving with political and cultural shifts. The thanatouristic perspective changes as wars or regime changes occur, whereas new forms of representations, such as memoirs, films, and novels, offer diverse and moral interpretations of violence-associated sites (Strange, Kempa, 2003: 387). From this perspective, the slow memory framework, identified as an activist approach, facilitates deeper engagement with ongoing injustices and narratives of resistance. This perspective may also be applicable to how the gradual harms of pollution are recognized through slow observations, providing local communities with a framework to better understand and articulate their complex relationships with degraded environments (Davies, 2018: 1541). This research framework extends beyond ecological injustices and affected communities; it can also be applied to other forms of injustice and their witnesses and audiences. More importantly, slow observations generate both geographic and temporal local knowledge, capturing distinct temporalities developed over years of routine and embodied experiences with pollution. This framework offers a vital tool for communities exposed to environmental harm, helping them understand the persistence of environmental pollution and explore strategies to resist its long-term effects (Davies, 2021: 33). Although such observations may not prompt radical political change, they can contribute to environmental justice through small but meaningful acts of resistance (Davies, 2018: 1549). However, scholars question whether diverse forms of slow memory always benefit society (David, 2020; Gensburger, Lefranc, 2020; Pisanty, 2021). Gensburger and Lefranc (2020) argue that memory policies often fail to prevent hate, genocide, and mass crimes, whereas David (2020) contends that the memorialization of human rights can reinforce national sentiments and deepen ethnic divides instead of cultivating genuine appreciation for human rights. Pisanty (2021) further critiques that memory regimes, even when well-intentioned, often operate within the same discursive space as ultranationalist rhetoric, albeit from opposing standpoints. These critiques highlight the complex and sometimes counterproductive effects of memory initiatives, suggesting that the outcomes of slow memory practices may be far more ambivalent than often assumed. Nevertheless, a slowed-down approach to remembering can foster new forms of resistance against authorized heritage discourses that dictate what, when, and how to remember events. Slowing down remembrance can encourage a deeper understanding of past injustices and ongoing struggles, creating space for thoughtful

and informed resistance. This approach can reveal overlooked connections and inspire meaningful actions, ultimately strengthening collective efforts toward justice and reconciliation.

Conclusion

This theoretical article explores the emerging concept of slow memory in relation to slow violence and dark heritage. It focuses on central question of how the slow memory approach advocating for deep engagement with historical injustices and the complexities of collective remembrance intersect with dark heritage sites shaped by slow violence over time. To address this question, I explore three interrelated aspects of slow violence and slow memory. The first aspect points out how gradual destruction is caused by various actors across different times and spaces. The slow memory approach sheds light on both the temporal and spatial dimensions of slow violence, drawing attention to the enduring impacts of disasters on the public. The second aspect examines the transmission of narratives and experiences of communities affected by slow violence. The slow memory approach has the potential to unveil the sufferings of these victims. However, it is essential to question whose suffering remains invisible and how vulnerabilities can vary across race, class, gender and other forms of inequalities. The third aspect addresses the representational challenges posed by contemporary media portrayals and immediate public policy concerns regarding slow violence. Integrating the slow memory approach with a feminist framework is provided as a path to address these challenges. This combination can provide a more comprehensive understanding of slow violence, highlighting the complexities often overlooked by mainstream media and policy discussions. I examine dark heritage sites through the lens of slow memory, viewing them not only as touristic sites or historical representations but also as symbols of ongoing destruction. This perspective challenges dominant heritage discourses and addresses the commodification of dark heritage by emphasizing the moral need to recognize slow violence and its victims. By revealing the lasting impacts of historical injustices, the slow memory approach fosters ethical public engagement and promotes a deeper awareness of how past injustices continue to shape present realities.

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