

## Reseña de Publicaciones

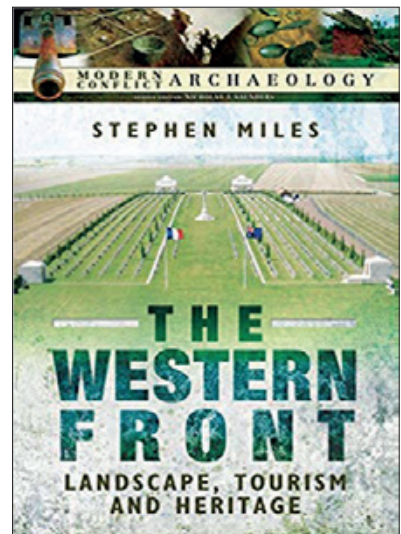
Stephen Miles. (2017); *The Western Front: Landscape, Tourism and Heritage.*

ISBN 978-1-47383-376-0

**Maximiliano E. Korstanje\***

University of Palermo (Argentina)

In the recent decades, some voices alerted on the emergence of new morbid destinations, where the main commodity was death. Dark tourism, Thana Tourism, War tourism and so forth questioned the hedonist nature of sand-and-sun products. However, at a closer look, it is tempting to say that war and culture are inextricably intertwined. From this belief departs the present book which is entitled *The Western Front: landscapes, tourism and heritage*, authored by Stephen Miles. The main goal of this work consists in discussing the conceptual tensions between forgetting and remembering past battles and episodes of conflicts. Though much has been written about the archeological sites of battlefronts left by Second World War, less is said respecting to First World War's Western front. Over these years, the western front has situated as some highly-demanded sites of tourists and visitors interested in knowing further on what happened in this historic and large-scale military conflict. An ever-growing industry of battlefields-tourism not only has imposed to draw the contributions -at museums and other types of exhibitions- who lost their lives in wars, but also the current technologies allow the identification of "the missing" who are soldiers fallen in the battleground in which case families lost any contact with them. In this respect, Saunders in the foreword eloquently writes that



*"Yesterday and today the places where battlefield visitors go are framed (some would say corrupted) by commerce just as the conflict itself produced vast profits for war related industries. Different perspectives create widely varied responses to the modern commercialization of war, from the multitude of tour companies offering specialist itineraries to war-themed food and drink...."* (Saunders 2017: x).

This leads us to think that wars have different connotations and meanings according to the moment and societal background; for example, wars are imagined differently while they are being struggled and for next generations once a considerable timeframe elapsed. Beyond its capacity of destruction war situates as a new alternative way of production which confronts -if not sanitizes- the glitches and asymmetries produced by economy. This book reflects not only the intersection of war with landscape and tourism consumption, but also the role played by heritage in configuring the "memories of war".

\* University of Palermo (Argentina); E-mail: mkorst@palermo.edu

Through the articulation of tours the past interrogates the present at the same time what happened in the history is politically evoked to give a lesson to society. This begs the questions against the fictional character of battlefield tourism as well as the multiple alternatives to expropriate the past.

To some extent, the western front not only has the capacity to engage with our imagination but invites to tourists to experience what fallen soldiers did. In the first chapter, Miles debates the economic and socio-cultural context for the First Great War, which took place from 1914 to 1918. This great war involved two great empires, Britain-France-Russia (which was known as the allies) with Central Powers -Germany and Austro-Hungarian empire. Written in a polished style and dotted with some accurate details of the events, this chapter provides readers with the remarkable facts and battles of WWI. The influence of this event in Britons still remains stronger to the extent to reproduce a biased mythology which are discussed in the second and third chapters. In this vein, Miles defines tourism as a vital force that captivates the attention of the global publics, laying the foundations towards a commemorative landscape. The fifth chapter places the figure of heritage under the critical lens of scrutiny, reminding that memories should be defined as fabricated stories that tells something about ourselves. It is important not to lose the sight of memories are interlinked to objects, vocabularies, allegories or at the best war-folklore that from the landscapes of wars which have a strong impact in the contemporary culture. However, heritage in many ways exhibits a simple interpretation of a much deeper history eclipsing -if not commoditizing- the cruelty of wars into fashionable objects to be gazed. These consumptions pave the ways for the formation of place, or in terms of Miles, "the sense of place". The rest of the book, which is formed by sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth chapter rest on the industry of experiences and the power of tourism to produces a specific discursivity revolving around the armed violence and conflict. This echoes the needs of re-considering the nature of museums according to an urgency that leads us to interpret the days of our ancestors, simply because we need valid answers in this fragmented and scattered and chaotic world. Doubtless this is a fascinating project which toys with the belief that heritage is based on the dichotomy of remembering or forgetting sometimes valorizing but tergiversating history. While the Western front can be deemed as a site of "Thana or Dark-Tourism", Miles adds, its connotations go into the darkest specter of dark tourism industry as a something else than pedagogical project.

Last but not least, Smiles agrees with Phillip Stone that the Western Front can be catalogued as a product of dark consumption, but at a closer look, it escapes to Stone's definition of the issue as some philosophical needs to imagine the own finitude. In fact, Miles clarifies, a "closer examination has detected a number of more precise reasons such a curiosity, entertainment, empathic identification, compassion, nationalist motives, pilgrimage, event validation, identity research, education and a sense of social responsibility" (Miles, 2017: 34).

To cut the long story short, Miles's argumentation attempts to conceptualize the obsession for a violent past, while the nation-state builds the contours of an romantic nationalism which lest it is politically regulated may ushered the society to new belic conflicts. Nonetheless, Miles ignores what we have highlighted in *The Rise of Thana Capitalism and Tourism*. Oddly the culture of a new capitalism has commoditized the other's death as an ideological platform to reinforce the so-called European supremacy (Korstanje 2016). Beyond the interests of dark tourism does not lie the quest of history or heritage as Miles or Stone suggest, but a narcissist trend that ossify the others as subordinated to the European rational rule. What dark tourists want is to captivate the others` pain to feel special, outstanding, touched by the grace of the lord. This is a radical cosmology, which was historically enrooted in the puritan spirit and the reasons why dark tourism is not widespread in Catholic countries.

## Bibliografía

- Korstanje M.  
2016. *The Rise of Thana Capitalism and Tourism*. Abingdon: Routledge.  
Saunders, N.  
2017. "Modern Conflict Archeology". In *Western Front: landscape, tourism and heritage*. Miles, S. Barnsley, Penn & Sword Archeology (ix-xi).  
Stone, P. R.  
2006. "A dark tourism spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions". *Turizam: znanstveno-stručni časopis*, 54(2): 145-160.

*Recibido:* 10/12/2017

*Aceptado:* 26/12/2017

*Sometido a evaluación por pares anónimos*