

# Dark tourism: Exploring tourist's experience at the Cape Coast Castle, Ghana

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates tourists' experience of the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana. Using a phenomenological research design, we explored the experiences of the tourist who visited the Castle. We used data from the Tripadvisor website and analyzed it thematically. The findings show that dark tourism experience is conceptualized from cognitive and emotional perspectives. Furthermore, the results show that tourists' experiences are shaped and co-constructed with the tourist guards and the artefacts available at the sites. Additionally, our results show tourists who visit dark tourist sites do not experience only anxiety and sorrow but excitement as well. The results also show that tourists who are of African descent see the Cape Coast Castle as a symbol of their identity and these tourists adopt the Castle as part of their personal identity. The implications of the findings are discussed at the end of the paper.

## 1. Introduction

Tourists' interest in and visits to places with negative or melancholic historical events have increased in recent times. Visitors to the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, for example, increased from 61,532 in 2015 to 70,326 in 2016 (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2017). Similarly, tourist visits to the Ground Zero in New York amount to 3.5 million annually (Kang, Scott, Lee, & Ballantyne, 2012). Correspondently, researchers' interest in this phenomenon which is termed as dark tourism has gained momentum (Podoshen, Yan, Andrzejewski, Wallin & Venkatesh 2018; Chen, Wang, & Xu, 2017; Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Yan, Zhang, Zhang, Lu & Guo, 2016; Podoshen, Venkatesh, Wallin, Andrzejewski & Jin, 2015; Podoshen, 2013; Sharpley & Stone, 2009). Dark tourism contributes to economic growth and creates an avenue to reflect on experiences of societies. However, research into the depth of consuming dark tourism experiences is scanty (Podoshen et al., 2018). Earlier, researchers like Stone (2011) and Yan et al. (2016) made a similar observation. These researchers thus, recommended the need for more research to be conducted on the tourist experience at the various dark tourist sites they visit. In response to this call, we investigated tourists' experiences with the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana.

The Cape Coast Castle was originally built by the Swedes in 1653 but was later acquired by the British in 1663. The British used the Cape Coast Castle as a center of slave trade in Africa during the transatlantic slave trade. The Cape Coast castle is a place of torment, and sorrow. It

reminds Ghanaians and many Africans in the diaspora of the atrocities their ancestors went through during the transatlantic slave trade. As William (2007) noted, the Cape Coast Castle was “the grand emporium of the British slave trade” from 1664 to 1807. The Cape Coast Castle is one of the preferred destinations for many tourists who visit Ghana. It was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1991. Prominent people like former President Barack Obama have visited the Cape Coast Castle. As noted by Abaka, “the flood of emotions one encounters, especially from some diaspora Africans who come face to face with these stark reminders of the inhuman slave trade, keeps the collective memory of the diaspora alive in the Castle” (Abaka, 2012, p.36).

The main objective of this study is to ascertain tourists' experience of the Cape Coast Castle by employing a phenomenological research design and using data from the Tripadvisor website. Addressing this research objective is essential since tourist experience with regard to dark enriches and makes dark tourism research complete (Podoshen et al., 2018). This research also helps us to understand tourists' experience of the slave trade phenomenon and how tourists' reflection on this melancholic event affects their lives and what they already know about slavery. From a marketing perspective, this study provides evidence that can be used to develop marketing strategies to attract tourists to the dark tourist sites. It also provides insights into how dark tourism products can be designed. The rest of the paper is divided as follows: theoretical background and literature review, methodology, findings, discussions and conclusions, implications and

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recommendations.

## 2. Theoretical background and literature review

### 2.1. Dark tourism

Dark tourism is defined as tourists' visits "to sites, attractions or events that are somehow linked to negative historical events where death, violence, suffering or disaster played a major role" (Sharpley & Stone, 2009). Lennon and Foley (2000) theorized dark tourism as a phenomenon situated in heritage tourism with meanings derived from media and encounter with rational behaviour. It explores the connection between tourism and death (Foley and Lennon 1996; Lennon & Foley 2000). It is a means through which people connect to the dead and it allows death to be strongly incorporated into societal discourse (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Dark tourism products are multifarious in design and characteristically varied (Yan et al., 2016). Stone (2006) classified dark tourism products into six categories: darkest, darker, dark, light, lighter, and lightest. These categories of products have a varying degree of political and ideological influences. For example, while products in the darkest category have higher political and ideological influences, the products in the lightest category have lower political and ideological influences. Again, the products in each of these categories have dominant features. For instance, the products in the darkest category are education oriented and history-centric while those in the lightest category are entertainment-oriented and heritage centric. In this case, a visit to each of these places may offer a different kind of experience. Dark tourism relates to tourist's visits to the place of tragedy or death where they interpret the site via the tragedies and raises awareness of the realities of the tragedies (Stone, 2013). Podoshen et al. (2015, p.325) state "dark tourism should not be viewed simply as a homogenous system of collective meanings and experiences, but rather as a praxis contingent on diversity in lived experiences and in conjunction with cultural affective and cognitive work". Dark tourism generates emotions and these emotions are steeped in dark tourism (Buda, d'Hautserre & Johnston, 2014). In their study, Podoshen et al. (2015) noted that visitors engage in pleasurable activities that recreate emotions.

### 2.2. Previous empirical works on Tourist's experience of dark tourism

According to Ruzzier and De Chernatony (2013), places of attraction make use of visual identity and uniqueness to attract tourists. These features are present at the Cape Coast Castle where many Africans were sold into slavery. The architecture of the building and the artefacts therein bring back memories to many who visit the place. Pearce (1982; p.36) posits that 'the tourist environment, has high transient populations, and structure to control visitor accessibility'. Robinson (2015) provides example of a dark tourist site like the Somme (France) where signage and self-guided trails are used to control tourists access to some areas of the site. In such sites, visitors may have different experiences. Some of these experiences may be co-created and shared. For example, Bødker and Browning (2012) note that during experience of a site, a tourist may seek to establish relationships with others he or she meets. However, this co-creation and sharing of experiences might not be overt in dark tourist sites as observed by Pearce (2011). In this case, dark tourism is perceived as a phenomenon. Stone (2012) for example studied dark tourism from phenomenological perspectives. Stone posits that dark sites offer an avenue for mediation, provides opportunity for tourists to experience and create meaning of afterlife. The desire to experience a dark moment, for example death, drives people to visit places associated with death. Dale and Robinson (2011; p.9) states that "for one to pass over and experience the afterlife and return must itself be the ultimate in travel and with the absence of the authentic/here and now, a visit to a dark site, with all its manifestations of previous dark activities, arguably comes a close second to

experiencing the afterlife". Caton and Santos (2007) explore the experiences of some tourists who travel along the Route 66 National Historic Corridor (USA), using phenomenology. The participants had different experiences. For example, they experienced historical education, personal growth, interactions with different landscape and people. They recommended the need to consider meanings tourist make from their experiences with tourist sites when theorizing tourism phenomena.

Aho (2001) categorized tourism experience into four groups: emotional experience, informative experience, practice experience, and transformative experience. Emotional experience pertains to the strong feelings deriving from the site. The strength of this feeling may vary and it may result in applause, excitement, and/or laughter. Informative experience deals with intellectual impression or knowledge acquired by the tourist. Practice experience involves skills that acquire from visiting a tourist site. This experience enhances tourists' capabilities. Transformative experience involves changes that occurs in the life of a tourist after visiting a site. This can be a permanent change in lifestyle or worldview. Earlier, Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) treated leisure and tourism experience from cognitive psychology and phenomenological approach. Cognitive psychology deals with how a tourist's perceptions influence their tourism experience. For example, they noted that a tourist's depth of experiential engagement and emotional state can affect his or her tourism experience. The phenomenological aspect deals with the immediate personal experience of the tourist. From these studies, it can be observed that tourists' experiences vary, but emotional and learning are common experiences of tourists who visit a site. Although these studies suggest that tourists experience different kinds of emotions and learning when they visit a site, the studies are limited in providing detailed information regarding the four categories of tourists' experiences. Podoshen et al. (2018) observed that many dark tourism studies occur in Western cities and thus recommend that similar studies should be conducted in other parts of the world. In response to this call and an attempt to provide a detailed analysis of the various forms tourists experience at dark tourists site, we investigated tourists' experience of the Cape Coast Castle, Ghana.

### 2.3. Methods used study tourist's experience in dark tourism research

Although different methods have been used to explore tourist's experience, a cursory look at the literature shows that phenomenology method dominates. Santos and Yan (2009) for example used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of tourists who visit the Fort Wayne Genealogy Library. They noted that the tourists were interested in finding their families' genealogy and used verbal discussions and observations to identify values related to genealogy search. Ziakas and Boukas (2013) have also used a phenomenological approach to study tourists' lived experience of Limassol carnival. They collected data using interviews where participants detailed their personal experiences of the Limassol carnival. Similarly, Podoshen et al. (2015) employed phenomenology to investigate tourist's experience of three destinations where tourists explore death and dystopia. They noted that many of the tourists engage in dystopian dark tourism as a result of an increased insecurity about death. The findings also suggest that the tourists' dystopian dark tourism experience reflects a society and its association with violence. They employed data from field notes, digital images and video recordings of tourists' activities at the three destinations. They also used non-recorded interviews and conversations with the tourists at one out of the three destinations. Podoshen et al. (2018) also used a phenomenology approach to study sixteen black metal concerts, tours, and festivals in Canada; United States; and Norway. They collected data using observation, structured, and unstructured interviews. Additionally, they used field notes to record the personal experience of the tourists. Unlike the researchers that have used phenomenology to explore tourist experience in dark tourism, Yan, Zhang, Zhang, Lu and Guo (2016) employed a survey

research design in the form of a questionnaire to ascertain why tourist visit disaster sites. From the literature, it appears that online archive data in the form of reviews written by the tourists have rarely been used as a source of data in dark tourism research. However, according to Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2012) online reviews by tourists is a rich source of data as such platforms provide tourists a relaxed and anonymous environment to reveal their thoughts and experiences. Thus, we used tourists' reviews on the Cape Coast Castle which were available on the TripAdvisor website.

### 3. Methodology

The objective of this study is to examine and ascertain tourists' experiences of the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana. The Castle served as the headquarters of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in West Africa in the early 1600's until mid-1800s. To address our objectives, we employed a phenomenological research design. According to Creswell (2007), "phenomenology describes the meanings of several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or a phenomenon" (p.57). This definition justifies our decision to use a phenomenological research design to address our research objectives. The tourists who have visited the Cape Coast Castle have different experiences even though they visited the same place. This research design enables us to explore the depth of the tourists' experiences and locate the quintessence of these tourists as they visit this dark tourist site. Again, we quote the view to support our decision to use phenomenology research design in this study. According to Merleau-Ponty "the chief gain from phenomenology is to have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world or of rationality. Rationality is precisely proportioned to the experiences in which it is disclosed. To say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xix). That is, by employing phenomenology in this study, we are able to obtain individual tourist's experience. Furthermore, our decision is consistent with the tourism literature such as that of Podoshen, Yan, Andrzejewski, Wallin, and Venkatesh (2018) who recommend the use of phenomenology research design in their study. It is used in a context that has varied and unique lived experiences. As noted before, Santos and Yan (2009) used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of tourists who visit the Fort Wayne Genealogy Library to look for their families' genealogical roots. They approached phenomenology "as action research into the human dynamics of tourism" (Ingram 2002, p. 1). Similarly, we approached phenomenology from this same perspective and used empirical data to ascertain the lived experiences of tourists' visits to the Cape Coast Castle, Ghana. We believe that people's experience is socially constructed, however, people have subjective perspectives of the same phenomenon they experience. According to Hycner (1999, p. 156) "the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants". In this study, the participants were tourists who had visited the Cape Coast Castle. The participants were from different countries as can be seen from Appendix 1.

According to the extant literature, many tourists who visit tourist sites write reviews on online portals (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2012). Consequently, we decided to search online for tourists' reviews on the Cape Coast Castle. We entered the search term 'travel reviews' on google and the TripAdvisor website was the first among the top 10 sites that were retrieved. Since these websites have their search engines, we decided to search tourists' reviews about the Cape Coast Castle. We used the search term 'Cape Coast Castle' to search the top 10 sites that appeared in the google search. In all these searches, TripAdvisor had the highest (436) number of reviews so we decided to use the data available on TripAdvisor for this study. Our decision to rely on data from TripAdvisor is justified because TripAdvisor is the largest travel review website. We believe that using data from a travel review website like the TripAdvisor enriches this study because the tourist wrote the reviews after they had visited the Castle and therefore could better share

**Table 1**  
Summary of findings: tourist experience.

Main themes	Sub-themes
Slavery experience	Uncompassionate slave masters experience Cruelty and atrocities experience Resilience experience
Emotional experience	Heart-wrenching experience Moving experience Horror experience
Cognitive experience	Experiential learning Learning History experience Finding their root experience

their experience. Additionally, the post or reviews by the tourist may show their true experience at the Castle because the platform is an anonymous environment. The data collection took place from 1st November 2017 to 18th November 2017. Appendix 1 contains the list of country of origin of the participants and the number from each country. Although there were 436 reviews, only 315 of the participants indicated their country of origin. The US has the highest number (104) followed by England (52). This trend is not surprising because both countries have links with the Cape Coast Castle. Many of the slaves transported through the Castle were sent to the US while the British were the slave masters at the Castle.

We analyzed the data using a thematic approach. After extracting the data from TripAdvisor, we read through all the data to identify the themes and patterns among the themes. We noted three major themes. We also found sub-themes under each of the major themes we identified. The themes and sub-themes have been summarized in Table 1.

In order to ensure trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, and confirmability) of this study, we followed the example of Guba (1981) and Shenton (2004). We quoted verbatim from the extracts to back our claims. We have also used an adequate amount of data from the transcripts as evidence to support all the themes. These extracts enrich the study and make the findings rigorous as they represent the exact thoughts of the participants with regard to their lived experiences with the Cape Coast Castle. Additionally, we employed member checking and peer debriefing to ensure trustworthiness of this study. That is, after the coding and the final analysis, we asked a researcher who is not part of our research team to read and compare the themes and the evidence that was used to support them and to give recommendations. Our research team then reviewed the recommendations and we decided to merge some of the initial themes and provided more extracts to support some of the themes. According to Guba (1981), peer debriefing "provides inquirers with the opportunity to test their growing insights and to expose themselves to searching questions" (p. 85). That is, the debriefing helped us revise the themes and make them clearer.

### 4. Presentation of findings

Our results show that the tourists who have visited the Cape Coast Castle had different kinds of experiences. We have grouped these experiences into three major categories namely; slavery experience, emotional experience, and cognitive experience. Each major theme has sub-themes and these have been discussed in detail below. We have also summarized the findings in Table 1.

### 5. Slavery experience

From the analysis of the data, we found that tourists who visited the Cape Coast Castle experienced slavery. Under the theme of slavery, we identified uncompassionate slave masters, cruelty and atrocities, and resilience of survivors as sub-themes.

### 5.1. Uncompassionate slave masters experience

One of the slavery experience expressed by the tourists is the lack of compassion shown by the slave masters. The tourist expressed a heartbroken experience due to the cruelty inflicted on the slaves by the European slave masters. This is how one of the tourists captured this experience;

*It was heart-wrenching to hear the cruelty inflicted by the European slave masters on the native population. But, one should visit such places to get a perspective on the rights we enjoy today (8 May 2017).*

From the above post, this tourist expressed shock about the inhumane treatments that were meted out to slaves. For this tourist entering the Cape Coast Castle reenacts pains the slaves had to go through. Although the slaves had this experience many years ago, this experience still exists in the Castle and tourists who visit the Castle go through it as if such cruelty is being meted out to them;

*The most striking part is how slaves are kept in underground chambers that are just beneath the church! So the Europeans are singing Alelullah just a few feet above thousands of human bodies in the darkness! (28 May 2017).*

This tourist sees and experiences a sharp contrast between what the slave masters preached at the church and what they do in practice. Compassion is one of the key virtues of Christianity, thus these slave masters are expected to show compassion to others. Instead, the slaves experienced brutality from the slave masters. The sense of the uncompassionate feelings is reechoed by this tourist as he describes his experience at the Cape Coast Castle.

### 5.2. Cruelty and atrocities experience

Another slavery experience expressed by the tourist is cruelty and atrocities. Although these cruelties and atrocities were meted to the slaves centuries ago, the tourists described it as if they had experienced these atrocities and cruelty;

*What transpired during the slave trade is worse than disgusting and to actually visit the place that some of the worst atrocities took place at, is mind-numbing. Prepare for an emotionally draining but necessary experience (29 August 2017).*

This tourist feels the intensity of the atrocities that took place during the era of slavery even though it happened long ago. In this case, a visit to a dark tourist site offered the tourist an opportunity to share in the experience and sympathize with the victims of the atrocities and cruelty.

Similarly, one tourist had this to say;

*This place reminds us of the cruelty of mankind. The slaves were treated like 'goods' for big companies to make high-profit margins and in exchange for goods. It is a sigh of relief to know that there is already an end to this history but it took a long 400 hundred years to end such a sad history (9 July 2013).*

They also saw cruelty and atrocity in the manner of human beings being traded as if they were goods. By this statement, this tourist sees the slavery experience as inhumane.

### 5.3. Resilience experience

The theme of resilience also emerged in the analysis. By entering the chambers where the slaves were kept and the conditions under which the slaves were kept, the tourist had the feeling that the slaves were resilient. The tourist saw the whole process the slaves had to go through before they were transported to the Western Worlds as a challenging experience. The following extract supports our claim;

*The conditions that men, women & children lived in & the brutal acts that they endured showed the resilience of all who survived the 1–3 most of these conditions prior to being shipped for another 60 days to the Western World. The excessive heat & poor ventilation in the dungeons is unimaginable for anyone (even your worst enemy to live through literally). (16 July 2017).*

Similarly, the words the tourists heard from the tour guide reinforces their feelings that the slaves were very resilient. This is captured in the following post by one of the tourists;

*As you listen to the tour guide lead you through the dark history of slavery and the slave trade from this castle, images come to mind of the mistreatment of human beings and what they went through trying to survive. (30 March 2012).*

From this post, we can infer that experience is developed and felt by encountering images and entering into a particular context associated with what is being experienced. Through the images and the Castle, the tourist felt that the slaves strived for their survival.

## 6. Emotional experience

Emotions are another major theme we identified. Under this theme, we identified heart-wrenching experience, moving experience, and horror experience. This theme is consistent with Aho (2001) who identified emotional experience as one of the dimensions of tourist's experience.

### 6.1. Heart-wrenching experience

From the analysis of the data, we found that the tourists who enter the Cape Coast Castle do not only feel sad but heartbroken as well. The tourists experienced how the fundamental human rights of the slaves were taken away by the slave masters. This situation creates a mixed feeling for the tourists. We find support in the following extracts;

*Our guide was amazing, he roped me in and had me feeling all kinds of emotions. It's a sad look at the history of slave trade. It's a must see if you are in the area (17 August 2017).*

In the above post, we can infer that tour guides can stimulate and instill in the tourist different kinds of emotions. The tour guides are able to connect with the plight and emotion of the Castle and its previous inhabitants. By doing this they also connect the tourist to the plight and emotion of the Castle and its previous inhabitants as well. That is, the tour guides co-create the experience with the tourists who visit the Castle. The manner in which a tour guides talks and emotions they attach to their narrations creates a heart-wrenching experience for the tourists. In another post by another tourist, we see the sadness that tourists go through when they visit the Cape Coast Castle;

*When I entered the doorway of the castle, gloom abound. Looking at signs that read "Cell" or "Male Slave Dungeon" reflects the depravity of some humans and what humans can do to one another. I cried and proved to be immobile for a while. It stimulated me intellectually and spiritually but drained me emotionally (26 May 2013).*

In this extract, it can be observed that entering the context where the slavery occurred creates a deep feeling of devastation. They are able to connect more to the story in the Castle on various intrapersonal levels.

### 6.2. Moving experience

Although the settings of the Cape Coast Castle usually put its visitors in a melancholic state, there are some tourists who defined their experience in the Castle as exciting. They defined their experience as "moving experience". They were enthused about the location of the

Castle and excellent condition of the Castle. The following extracts from some of the tourists' post serve as evidence;

*Cape Coast Castle is a fantastic thing to do in Ghana. The tour is very complete and gives you an excellent impression of the slave trade and life in those times within the castle.* (31 January 2013).

Similarly, another tourist had this to say:

*The slave castle in Cape Coast Ghana is an excellent one to visit with anyone who wishes to learn more about the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The castle/fortress costs about \$10 for foreigners but has a very worthwhile museum as well as a guided tour. Beautiful vistas for a photo taken from the castle as well. The guides speak several languages and are very informative* (27 March 2012).

From these posts, it is evident that tourists do not only experience sorrow at dark tourist sites, but such sites bring excitement to the tourists as well. The tourist enjoyed the beauty of the Castle and taking photos in the Castle excited some of the tourists. As captured by one of the tourists, the Cape Coast Castle is one of the best sights in Ghana. Thus, it serves as a good location for those tourists who like sightseeing;

*Best sight in Ghana! Visited the castle with a group of friends from Harvard. Very moving experience. The castle is in excellent condition, and we were able to visit all major chambers, including the dungeons where slaves were kept before being transported to America and Asia. Moreover, there are great views of the city and the beaches from the castle* (16 May 2017).

In this view, tourists who visit dark sites are not only interested in the main site of attraction; the sounding environment also creates and adds value to their experiences at the main site.

### 6.3. Horror experience

One cannot visit a dark tourist site like the Cape Coast Castle where human beings were traded like goods without experiencing horror. We found evidence of this from the post of some tourists who described their experience in the Cape Coast Castle as horrifying;

*The tour is very emotional – it really drives home the horrors of the global slave trade. If you're in the area, you should definitely stop in and experience the history* (18 July 2017).

This expresses a connection to the reality of the horror of the slave trade. In a similar post, another tourist expressed the horrific experience at the Castle;

*This experience made the past real. To see how and where the slave trade happened was very educational and most of all humbling. Slavery is such a horrific part of world history and this site was such a part of it. Even when learning about it in a classroom, one may never realize the real conditions that these people were put through. This is an experience that will stay with me* (20 June 2014).

Visiting the Cape Coast Castle brings meaning to the horrific experience this tourist learned about by reading about slavery. The tourist is able to relate more to the horrific experience by visiting the site where the slave trade took place.

## 7. Cognitive experience

Our third major theme that emerged from our analysis was a cognitive experience. This theme is similar to Aho (2001)'s informative experience. We noted that apart from the slavery and emotional experiences, the tourists also learn from their visits to the Cape Coast Castle. Under this theme, we identified experiential learning, learning history, finding their roots, and knowledgeable tour guides as the sub-themes. These sub-themes have been elaborated in the next paragraphs.

### 7.1. Experiential learning

The Cape Coast Castle in itself constitutes knowledge and embodies the history of the slave trade. The site offers a comprehensive and practical knowledge to the tourists who are interested in learning about slavery and the slave trade. In the following extracts, we notice that the tourists learn by visiting the site;

*Most people outside of Ghana (and Africa for that matter) have a good idea about the historical facts after the slaves arrived in Europe. The Cape Coast castle offers a great perspective and experience of what the slaves went through before they were shipped off. This place holds a lot of history and education about the slave trade* (22 July 2016).

A visit to the site offers a broader perspective of the slave trade and provides factual information about the slave trade;

*We all learned so much about the slave trade and Ghana's history and our guide was such a great storyteller that the stories really came to life for all of us – especially our kids who were able to learn the lifelong lessons from this side of history for the first time* (26 July 2017).

The Castle is also a place where tourists learn about Ghana's history. That is, the tourists not only learn about the history of the slave trade but also the history of the country within which the slave trade occurred. In this case, dark tourism opens a country to the global world. It makes countries and their histories visible to the global world.

### 7.2. Learning history experience

As a historical site, the Cape Coast Castle offers tourists an opportunity to learn about world history especially with regard to slavery. It is of historical importance to tourists. It is also a historical attraction. Thus, visitors to the site experience history of the world and slavery. This is how one of the tourists captured it:

*In travels to this part of Ghana, Cape Coast Castle is a must-see for several reasons. First is purely its historical significance. The history is unfortunate but stands as a monument to all the suffering that occurred as part of the Atlantic Slave Trade. The castle/fort was under the ownership of several different countries over the years, but for the longest part was a British outpost serving the needs of slave traders* (22 March 2014).

The site tells the history of slavery; it captures the suffering of the slaves and the role of the British in the Atlantic Slave Trade. In this view, by visiting the site, the tourist experience history of slavery and slave trade. We find another support from the following extract;

*If there is one historical attraction in Ghana to see then this is it. 40 Cedis gets you into the museum and a guided tour of the castle itself with opportunities to take plenty of photos. What happened here is very disturbing but an important part of world history. There are also some nice craft stalls inside* (18 January 2017).

The castle and its contents serve as a historical importance of the transatlantic slave trade in the world history. It can also be observed that tourists learn not only from the original structure, but also from the artefacts that have been created to complement the sites' historical contents.

### 7.3. Finding their root experience

As in the case of many historical sites, the Cape Coast Castle offers tourists an opportunity to trace their origin, especially for Africans in the diaspora. Some of the tourists consider the Castle as their ancestral home. It brings them memories of their ancestors and they are able to connect to that;

*As an American visiting this slave-trading castle, the place picked up a*

*special place for me. While I will never know the physical roots of my ancestors before 1830s in Mississippi, I adopted Ghana a while back; sure, it is a symbolic reconnection to the lineage for me. As a historian, the massive, historic structure symbolizes the slave trade and helps to better understand the context of the content of personal and ship diaries (primary documents) and maps (26 May 2013).*

Some of the tourists who are of African descent see the Castle as a symbol of their origin. The Castle helps them to relate better to stories about their origin. The following extract also buttresses our view;

*Cape Coast Castle is a definite Tourist 101 when you are in Ghana. If you can trace your roots to the slave trade, then come find them here (19 February 2014).*

Indeed the Castle serves as an identity of Africans in the diaspora and these tourists adopt the Castle as part of their personal identity. It is the origin of their current destination.

## 8. Discussions of findings and conclusions

Research in dark tourism has gained momentum in recent times. However, Podoshen et al. (2018) observed that there is a dearth of research on tourist's experience with dark tourist sites and called for more research to be done in this area. Responding to this call, we studied visitors' experience with the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana which was used as the headquarters for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in West Africa. According to Caton and Santos (2007) and Aho' (2001) tourists' experience of a site are varied. Our study confirms this; it shows that there are multiple dimensions of experiences that tourist express when they encounter a dark tourist site. We posit that tourists' experiences with a dark tourist site can be viewed from three dimensions: emotional experience, cognitive experience, and a third which is directly associated with the phenomenon visitors experience. In this study, we found the slavery experience as the third dimension. This third dimension is the basis for the formation of the emotional and cognitive experiences. In other words, the other two dimensions emanate from the third dimension. These dimensions are in line with Aho's (2001) who identified emotional, informative, transformative, and practice experiences as the dimensions of the tourist experience. These experiences are shaped and co-constructed with the tourist guards and the artefacts available at the sites. Again, tourists develop a deeper experience of a phenomenon when they come into contact with artefacts and structures objectifying the experience. Unlike Stone (2006) who classified dark tourism products into six categories (darkest, darker, dark, light, lighter, and lightest) with each offering different experiences, our study shows that one dark tourism product may offer different experiences to different visitors. This is as a result of the subjective meaning and interpretations that visitors make. For example, while some visitors experienced cruelty and horror with the Cape Coast Castle, others see it as fun. That is, a visit to a dark tourist site creates a mixed experience for the tourists. Our findings support the view that "dark tourism should not be viewed simply as a homogenous system of collective meanings and experiences, but rather as a praxis contingent on diversity in lived experiences and in conjunction with cultural affective and cognitive work" (Podoshen et al., 2015, p.325). Some dark tourist sites create anxiety for the tourist while others create excitement for the tourist. Dark tourist sites also create a context for likeminded people to interact, co-consume the product and share the "dark experience". The local people in the community where the dark site is located may shape the tourist's experience. This finding is in line with Caton and Santos (2007) who posited that local people at dark tourist sites shape visitors' experience. They may have their own perspectives of the site and tell stories and myths which might not be told by tour guides or found in the artefacts available at the site.

## 9. Implications and recommendations

Our findings have some practical implications. The findings of this study imply the need for tour guides to be knowledgeable of the dark tourism product they are marketing. They should provide detailed information about the site to the visitors. They should be able to tell the story of the dark site in a comprehensible manner. Although managers of dark sites may provide books and other educational contents to visitors, we believe that in order to co-create a memorable experience with visitors, knowledgeable tour guides should tell the story of the place. Additionally, we recommend that dark tourism products should be developed to satisfy the emotional and cognitive needs of visitors. Furthermore, we recommend that managers of dark tourist sites should maintain the authenticity of the site as it enhances the experiences of visitors. Furthermore, although dark tourist products have sadness as a central element, we believe that dark tourism products should have an element of attraction because some tourists visit dark tourist sites for fun. Similarly, marketing communication strategies for dark tourist sites should appeal to the emotions of visitors with emphasis on visiting the site to share in the experiences and anguishes of the people who suffered or died at the place. With specific reference to the Cape Coast Castle, we believe that management should position the site as the root of the many Africans in the diaspora and communicate how the site is linked to their identity. This will encourage many of the Africans in the diaspora to visit the site. Furthermore, we recommend that management of the site should develop marketing communications which target tourists' emotions to encourage a return visit.

In terms of future research, we recommend that researchers can employ participatory observational experiences and interviews to collect data. This will provide additional information which will make the findings more rigorous. Additionally, taking this approach will help draw more practical and theoretical implications about dark tourism.

Furthermore, we believe that race and country of origin have the potentials of shaping tourists' experience in dark tourism. For example, the experiences of tourists with African roots are likely to be different from those who do not have African roots. Thus, we recommend that a comparative study should be conducted to explore local visitors' experiences versus foreign visitors' experiences.

Another area that is worth researching is the consumption patterns of tourists who visit dark tourist sites. For example, future studies may investigate how a tourist's experience of a dark tourist site informs revisit intentions. Similarly, researchers should explore how the local people in the community where the dark site is located shape foreign tourist's experience.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

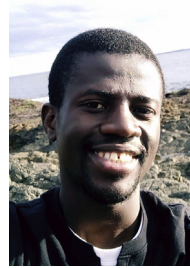
Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2018.05.004>.

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