

Urban development in the margins of a world heritage site: In the shadows of Angkor. By Adèle Esposito. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018. 337 pp. Price: €105 (Hardcover) and €104.99 (eBook PDF).

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In this monograph review, I examine how Esposito contextualizes, conceptualizes, problematizes, and operationalizes her work and present her key arguments, as well as my reflections. This book walks us through the emergence of the ‘heritage and non-heritage space’ concepts that have been promoted in many cities in Southeast Asia and internationally. The dominant trend in Cambodia is for urban studies scholarship to focus on the capital city of Phnom Penh; including key issues such as land conflicts (Springer, 2015), real estate development (Fauveaud, 2014), and the eviction of the urban poor (McGinn, 2013) to make way for the development of modern high-rise buildings and satellite cities (Tom, 2016; Nam, 2017; and Yamada, 2018). However, in this book the author problematizes rapid urban transformation in Siem Reap. She shifts our attention towards the second largest city in Cambodia, which attracts more than two million foreign tourists each year (Esposito 2018:48).

Other scholars have tended to focus on macro level issues and the economics of tourism nationally. For instance, Chheang (2008) outlines how the economic value of tourism in Cambodia almost doubled from 823 to 1594 million USD between 2005 and 2006; and Liu et al. (2019) describe how the numbers of tourists arriving at Cambodia's Angkor heritage site increased by around 400% between 2004 and 2017. Meanwhile, Chen, Leask, & Phou (2016) examine symbolic and functional consumption, as well as destination attachment related to cultural heritage. These studies are representative of many more that are framed heavily from a positivist perspective. In contrast, Esposito moves deeper into the human aspects of tourism spaces and tourist practices, in line with her background as an architect and urban planner.

The book is divided into five sections. In the introduction, Esposito contextualizes the concept of tourism spaces and their problematization from the perspective of the urban margins. She also describes her research design and provides an overview of the book. Chapter 1 examines the institutional practices of heritage management from an architectural point of view. Esposito focuses on a triad of concepts: including the foundations of the monuments, their boundaries, and the parks which have formed as part of the colonial and post-colonial legacy of heritage preservation and development in Siem Reap.

Drawing from an alternative lens of anthropology and development practice, Chapter 2 examines the interplay of key actors, including international donors, consulting firms, and the national institutions that have been established since the early 1990s; as well as how they have used their knowledge, skills, and ideas to shape the development of the city. The author

illustrates how two former enemies of the country during World War II, the French and Japanese, have been highly influential in planning the spatial layout of the city; through development models known as the vegetal city and compact city, respectively.

Chapter 3 positions the city as a playground, laboratory, or urban development experiment. Using the same worldview that frames Chapter 2, Esposito builds on the work of de Certeau (1984) regarding the tactics and strategies employed by donors, development agencies, business tycoons and groups of consultants to conceal information about capital investment and gain access to land resources. Details about the development practices observed in the Wat Bo and Taphul areas, two urban cores along the eastern and western side of National Road No. 6, respectfully, are outlined.

Chapter 4 shifts back to an architectural perspective, examining role of architectural spaces in developing a modern city and a series of replica that represent and reconstruct local realities. This includes the reconstruction of monuments, traditional Khmer wooden houses, restaurants, and cafés to create a realistic local culture with emotional authenticity. This is used to attract foreign visitors and an emerging Khmer middle class for tourism purposes. The book demonstrates how Cambodia has used the concept of urban heritage and tourist spaces to promote urban development through the preservation and restoration of a designated UNESCO World Heritage site. Further, it describes how this has been used to revitalize the economy Siem Reap, as a tourist destination by co-operating with regional and international networks.

Alongside this transition, the author describes two models of urban governance that have emerged. First, the Angkor site, which received international recognition and UNESCO World Heritage status in 1992 and has attracted an influx of investment and development aid from donors, international development agencies, consulting firms and other professionals through the imposition of neoliberal development practices is analyzed. Then, the nature of existing cultural practices embedded within social structures and how they have evoked the adoption of neo-patrimonialism is addressed. It is shown how this has blended modern bureaucracy with personalized patron-client relations, with no delineation between the public and private realm. While this was a feature of European society in the Middle Ages, where power networks of political elites and business tycoons were constructed through family alliances and marriage to gain control over strategic resources; it has not typically been a feature of Cambodian society.

In recent years, these two models have both exerted a strong influence over the power structures and institutions of the country. Emerging actors have emerged to manipulate institutions, rules, and regulations (Esposito 2018:28). While this concept was not fully elaborated on, it may be related to the dominant strategic groups described by Evers and Korff (2000), as influenced by structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). The concept of strategic groups, including both dominant and subordinate groups, remains relevant in the Cambodian context, as it cuts across social classes and structures. This has occurred mostly through emerging migrant groups of business men that have settled in the country over generations.

Drawing from her early work between 2005 and 2006, a one year period where she resided in Siem Reap in 2007, as well as follow up visits in 2015; Esposito uses three major approaches to understand the urban transition of Siem Reap. Firstly, as an architect, she observes, describes, and diagnoses the malfunction of built forms within urban spaces, using design tools to create solutions dictated by strict, normative guidelines. Secondly, she uses the historical tools of urban planning to describe the concepts of zoning and inventory, introduced by colonial governments, but later standardized among contemporary urban planners. Yet, this did not enable her to development knowledge about how different groups and actors perceive and contest non-heritage spaces. Her third approach using political anthropology and development theories did. In it, she focuses on rules and regulations and the collective tactics of strategic groups of concealing, evading, and manipulating access to non-heritage spaces. Using this perspective, her study shows that tourism promotion in Siem Reap has taken place largely after the colonial regime.

The production of tourism service industries and non-tourist spaces has been influenced by both professional and international development agencies, known as cultural brokers. Esposito examines how spaces have been created through land-use zoning and inventory. She articulates how two urban planning models led by international donors have been used to contest urban space in Siem Reap. The first, introduced by the French Development Agency (AFD) prioritized vegetation and water as major focal points for urban planning. The design of roads, canals and artificial lakes are often associated with this model, which is very much in line with the Khmer cosmology of urban

spatial arrangement. The second, known as the compact city model was introduced by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). It emphasizes land-use efficiency as part of the development of urban spaces to prevent urban sprawl and the overexploitation of resources. However, this model has only been shown to have potential if the required skills, attitudes, and technologies are in place.

The planning tools of land-use zoning and inventory have played a critical role in expanding development to non-heritage spaces such as tourist enclaves, the port at the Tonle Sap, and potential exclusion zones that impact local residents; especially the urban poor. With this knowledge, Esposito shifts her analysis from the structure-oriented approach that uses normative standardized, urban planning concepts and architectural models towards an analysis of tactics and strategies adopted by various strategic groups. Esposito examines how these groups, including architects and real estate developers, have acquired power that enables them to extend their influence over urban spaces designated for development. She describes how tactics, such as the diversion of land laws, concealing information about the origins of investment capital, and negotiating the ongoing diluting of urban regulations have been used to better serve their interests.

The production of cultural and heritage tourism spaces has also been influenced by local architectural design. However, modern tourist spaces have been constructed with an emotional authenticity that blends both traditional Khmer and modern architecture. White, European worldviews that have valued the preservation of colonial buildings and traditional wooden houses may be compared with modern infrastructure in this way. Traditional, wooden

Khmer housing has been restored and promoted to attract foreign visitors to give them an opportunity to experience authentic, local culture. Esposito applies an anthropological lens to tourism using this knowledge to accurately demonstrate how authenticity, tradition, and identity have been reconstructed to create a unique culture where traditional Khmer wooden houses, restaurants and hotels are designed to represent specific meanings, and an image of the city. She identifies how the consequences of the restrictions, regulations and zoning rules of urban heritage conservation, manifested through the '*APSARA conservation zone*' interplay with the local agency of residents when they contest the economic benefits of tourism spaces and their exclusionary practices.

Esposito clearly demonstrates how tourism and heritage programs have been a major factor in influencing urban revitalization, reflected not only in the case of Siem Reap, but also in other Southeast Asian cities include Battambang, in the neighboring province of the same name. This argument entails the co-existence of local and colonial buildings, as well as post-colonial architecture in places where urban development and cultural identity have been framed as a legacy of economic development and the restoration of a national identity. She suggests that the colonial regime has left significant resources to build and create stories that promote attractive tourism sites.

Esposito concludes that the conceptual models of both heritage and non-heritage spaces have been key to understanding the relationship between recognition of the Siem Reap-Angkor archeological park with UNESCO World Heritage status; and the influence of key actors over these designated spaces. To achieve this, she draws from the work of Sack on human

territoriality (Sack, 1986). This may be defined as the ability to exert control over objects, people, and their relationships within bounded territories. This concept has led to the formation of a national authority, APSARA, but questions remain about how this system of control over heritage spaces may continue to be enforced.

With this in mind, Esposito invites us to appreciate the Khmer cosmology of the city, elaborating on the concept of *Tuek* (water) and *Dei* (land), being combined into a territory as *Tuekdei* (space). Her approach has predominantly drawn from architectural, urban planning and anthropological perspectives and as such, she tends to focus more on dominant strategic groups. However, the role of subordinate groups, who may be drawn from local residents affected by heritage restrictions; and other actors, including those residing in informal settlements must also be considered. These groups are also involved in developing networks with civil society, the media and local politicians to contest the allocation of local resources and development spaces in the city.

Esposito's book may be read alongside other classical books written by McGee (1957), who first examined the role and function of Southeast Asian cities between precolonial and postcolonial times; as well as Evers & Korff (2000) who examines urbanism in southeast Asia. The latter examines the city through the concept of emerging strategic groups, or migrant businessmen who exert influence over the politics and economics urban spaces via the strategic resource allocation that occurs as part of an urban transition. The concept of a tourism gaze (Urry and Larsen, 2011) may also provide a background understanding of how tourists come to appreciate places and buildings framed as local traditional architecture, culture and experiences. The

original ideas Esposito presents about 'the function of zoning, inventory, and classification' that have been adopted by urban planning since colonial times, when regulations, laws and institutions were imposed may be enhanced by these complimentary resources.

Many urban development interventions aimed at improve human conditions have often failed to meet their intended outcomes. Yet, this book tells us more about heritage and non-heritage spaces being imposed by dominant groups, rather than how residents and subordinate groups resist in a struggle to gain access to these spaces. This leads to the idea that if urban planning is the better improve human conditions, there is a need for: autonomous state institutions that are less influenced by neo-patrimonialism and neoliberalism; greater trust in civil society; and greater use of local knowledge and participation in a shared urban development agenda. Esposito's book confirms that while the Angkor cultural and heritage tourism sites have become key resources for the reconstruction of a national identity, cultural consumption, and economic growth; there is a still need to rethink the consequences of uneven development as a result of tourism.

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Brief Biography

Try Thuon recently graduate from a PhD in Social Science from Chiang Mai University focused on the politics of urban space making in Cambodian

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