Chapter 3

Through the Gaze of Morbidity and Consumption: Comments on Dark Tourism in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

The chapter theorizes the rise of dark tourism in Southeast destinations. This represents an unexplored segment for the specialized literature that devotes its efforts in studying Western study cases. There were two important findings. Firstly, and most importantly, dark tourism gives an ideological explanation to the Cold War that sometimes singles out the history of colonialism, the rise of the US as a superpower, and the interests of the Soviet Union. Essentially in consonance with Tzanelli, Sather Wagstaff, and Guidotti Hernandez, the authors hold the thesis that the heritage of dark tourism serves an ideological instrument of power, which is orchestrated by a ruling elite to promote a distorted version of history.
INTRODUCTION

Without any doubt, dark tourism has become in a buzzword over the recent decades; in many cases resulting in a fresh alternative for devastated areas or cites which faced natural disasters (Rittichainuwat 2008), but in others revitalizing the economies through the articulation of heritage consumption. In fact, after disasters or catastrophes take hit, tourism helps locals in the recovery timeframe as well as in the arrival of foreigner investors to spend fresh quotas of money (Strange & Kempa, 2003; Stone & Sharpley 2008; Hartmann 2014). Phillip Stone (2012) defines dark tourism as an anthropological attempt to domesticate death, in a secular culture. While gazing dark tourism exhibitions, visitors confront with their own finitude, imagining their own death. In this vein, Duncan Light (2017) exerts a seminal review of the different voices, theories and approaches showing some contradictions in the specialized literature. His academic paper summarizes the outcome of published papers and books from 1996 to 2016. In perspective, Light identifies 6 key topics revolving around dark tourism literature such as: definition of concepts, ethical concerns, the political dimension of dark tourism, the nature of demand and offering, and the epistemology of dark tourism. What is clearly explained, as Light puts it, there are an increasing interest for scholars and policy makers for this niche, while it resulted in an academical chaos and misunderstanding of the phenomena, marked by a great dispersion and knowledge fragmentation.

While academicians of all stripes have agreed that dark tourism allows a much deeper theorization about the interplay between the life and death (Williams 2007; Robb 2009; Stone 2012; Biran & Hyde, 2013; Buda & McIntosh, 2013), no less true is that others scholars adopted a radical position suggesting that dark tourism serves as a mechanism of domination for the global North to subordinate the Global South (Korstanje 2016; Brown 2013; Tzanelli 2016). Most certainly, today`s tourist-delivering countries coincide with the old empires and industrial nations, which in former centuries, launched to colonize the world – and of course, part of what now is considered the underdeveloped economies. The problem lies in the fact not only European nations do not take the responsibility by their colonial past but also dark tourism commoditizes the poverty generated by the exploitative system colonial powers installed (Korstanje 2016; Tzanelli 2016). In the mid of this mayhem, the present chapter centers on the role of dark tourism in continuing the old prejudices, stereotypes and narratives of colonialism which put its eyes on Southeast Asia to fix the problems in the
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