

Preface

Tirta Empul (translated as ‘holy mountain spring’) located in the Gianyar province of Bali, Indonesia, is a temple complex of shrines and purification/bathing pools sourced from the Pakerisan River. Built during the Warmadewa dynasty (1000–1100 AD), locals have for centuries frequented it to pay respect to and, in turn, receive blessings from, the spirits believed to reside in situ. This is done by making offerings, bathing in its pools, or bringing home ‘healing’ water from one of its elaborately designed spouts (see cover picture). Since its UNESCO designation as part of the ‘Cultural Landscapes of Bali’ in 2012, the complex is also, these days, a popular tourist attraction, its heritage touted for its spiritual values where people (mainly locals) still perform age-old traditions and customs. Yet, actual experiences on the ground tell different stories, ranging from awe to annoyance, owing to criticisms of overcrowding, commercialization, and the pollution of its waters from its use as a bathing pool and the concomitant use of the river as sewage channels by surrounding residents. While there are locals who go to the site for its sacred values, there are also those motivated to visit purely for its aesthetics as a tourist site. This underscores how heritage sites can be formally *represented* in one way – here as a religious site (with an enforced dress code and suggested visiting practices) – although how it is actually *experienced* differs from person to person.

The above speaks to how ‘heritage from below’ (HFB) is conceptualized in this book, as a call to consider beyond how heritage is manufactured from the ‘top down’ and put into the service of collective identity-making towards the ways in which heritage is encountered in myriad fashions on the level of the individuals themselves, even as these experiences, positive or negative, are fleeting, not aired publicly or detract from one’s enjoyment of the site (given how, despite the issues associated with the site, visitor numbers remain unabated). It is, however, still salient to seek out these less visible or vocalized experiences of heritage for what they tell us about the ways in which non-state agents encounter heritage and how plural interpretations (or even alternative sites) of heritage may emerge out of these. It is this desire to critically analyse ephemeral/intimate stories of heritage-making – particularly as they supplement/subvert dominant ideas of heritage – that is the driver for *After Heritage*.

Drawing on international case studies, and building upon the work of Laurajanne Smith and Iain Robertson in particular, *After Heritage* sheds critical light on heritage/heritagescapes that are, more frequently than not, located in virtual, less conspicuous and/or more everyday spaces. The book also considers, as highlighted above, the personal, often ephemeral, individual – vis-à-vis collective – experiences of (in)formal ways the past is folded into contemporary societies. In doing so, it unravels merits of examining ‘closest to the body’ materializations of heritage – often hidden ‘in the shadows’ and, therefore, less scrutinized by scholars – not only as a check against, but also complementary to, more formal heritage representations. Even so, the book argues against the tendency to romanticize how these alternative forms of heritage-making are produced, performed and patronized. Thus, ultimately, this book offers a much needed clarion call to reinsert the more individual/transient into heritage processes.

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