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Cultural heritage, specifically built heritage – including monuments, urban ensembles, religious and palatial complexes – has emerged as a central focus of tensions and negotiations within the post-disaster recovery landscape in Nepal following the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake. This reflects a growing recognition of heritage within international disaster risk management frameworks but also responds to the critical role played by heritage at national, regional and local levels. This paper examines the entangled realities of ‘local’ and ‘global’ operating in ongoing reconstruction of built heritage in Bhaktapur, Nepal. This paper is an account of reconstruction practices observed in Bhaktapur between 2018 and 2020. It is based on data collected by layering ethnographic methods with textual and historical analysis. In seeking to analyse manifestations of global and local, I present my reflections from fieldwork carried over seven months in Bhaktapur and describe the micro-politics enacted out between researcher, heritage custodians, translators, intermediaries, and participants.

Reconstruction of built heritage in Bhaktapur negotiates between developmentalist paradigms of post-disaster recovery, heritage conservation discourses, as well as religious and quotidian practices of care. It is simultaneously informed by global institutions and policy and local politics and aspirations which operate in constant tension and negotiation.

This work responds to the call for reframing research agendas and practices set out in the Disaster Studies Manifesto by critically engaging with ideas of local and global. It builds on the growing body of research linking heritage with disaster risk management.

Emerging voices and pathways to inclusive disaster studies