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Vernacular Heritage as Urban Place-Making. Activities and Positions in the Reconstruction of Monuments after the Gorkha Earthquake in Nepal, 2015–2020: The Case of Patan

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Abstract: In an analysis of the reconstruction measures in the old city of Lalitpur (Patan) after the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal, it is shown that, contrary to usual assumptions, the reconstruction was not only concentrated on the prominent, strongly internationally promoted and financed world cultural heritage sites, but took also place at smaller sites—especially at arcaded platform (*phalcā*), small monasteries and shrines throughout the city. While the larger royal squares, often at the heart of tourism and heritage policies, are important for the status and hierarchy of kings, queens and associated castes, the smaller and possibly less visually spectacular buildings and rituals ‘off the 5-Star map’ (the intangible heritage) are not less and are possibly even more relevant to inhabitants. Understanding this intangible heritage requires a different approach to what heritage means and how it is experienced from a more vernacular perspective. Rather than being firmly defined, heritage, and the reconstruction thereof, dynamically and controversially shapes how the disaster of the earthquake has been experienced, and is also connected to larger discourses on urban and social transformation and to concepts of ethnicity, nation and citizenship as well as social, symbolic prestige and economic status and distinction. The Gorkha Earthquakes have also produced a rich field of vernacular heritage formations and processes that enable us to consider heritage as placemaking. In this context, controversial concepts like ‘authenticity’ as well as various qualities and temporalities of ‘community’ participation and formation should be considered.

Keywords: heritage monuments; reconstruction; Gorkha Earthquake; Kathmandu Valley; placemaking; Patan; vernacular; authenticity; community

1. Introduction—The Gorkha Earthquakes and Their Consequences

On 15 January 1934, Nepal was hit by a strong earthquake—as often happened in the centuries before. We know from historical sources, mainly chronicles and documents [1], that there have probably been ten earthquakes since 1255 with a magnitude greater than 7.3 on the Richter scale, most of which claimed several thousand victims (see Table 1). In Nepal, one sometimes hears that the country is shaken every hundred years. This view is not entirely unjustified if one considers the dates: 25 April and 12 May 2015, 15 January 1934, 28 August 1917, 26 August 1833, July 1767, January 1681, June 1505, August 1408.

The causes of these earthquakes are gigantic tectonic shifts. For millions of years, the Indo-Australian Plate has been moving slowly northwards at a speed of about 4.5 cm per year towards the much larger Eurasian Plate, shifting towards the Himalayan fold mountains. This plate movement takes place

under such high pressure that the tension built up is discharged erratically. As a result of the 2015 or Gorkha quake, Kathmandu was shifted 1.5 m to the south and raised by one meter. Even Mount Everest was shifted by 3 cm to the southwest. The geological pressure wave reached even central Europe after 10 min—with a speed of 29,000 km/h and a ground movement of 0.01 mm. The earthquakes claimed around 9000 lives. A total of around 22,300 people were injured. In addition, some 600,000 homes, schools and a large number of World Heritage sites were almost completely destroyed.

Table 1. Major earthquakes in Nepal 1255–2015.

Date	Magnitude (Estimated up to 1916)	Victims (Estimated up to 1916)
June 1255	7.8	2200
August 1408	8.2	2500
6 June 1505	8.8	6000
January 1681	8.0	4500
July 1767	7.9	4000
26 August 1833	8.0	6500
28 August 1916	7.7	3500
15 January 1934	8.4	8519
20 August 1988	6.6	1091
25 April 2015	7.8	8922
12 May 2015	7.3	213

Historic urban settlements, due to their need for reconstruction, received a specially created heritage bylaw focused on ‘community’ to preserve heritage—but Ninglekhu et al. [2] argue that this law—as ‘disaster management and governance’—would enforce rebuilding against heritage preservation; e.g., with the widening of roads. A new agency of ‘heritage brokers’ was created, a bureaucracy with people empowered to define the criteria for urban transformation and the channeling of financial capital, notions (e.g., of authenticity) and ‘expertise’ (know-how).

This situation prompted the question of how, where, and through whose initiative reconstruction and a concern for heritage as a cultural resource, vital for the regeneration of urban life, manifested after the Gorkha earthquakes. In the following study, we look at quantifiable data related to reconstruction initiatives in the old city of Patan (Lalitpur) and contextualize this with respect to the particular habitat of the city in which cultural heritage comes to play a vital role for thinking not only about recovery but also attachment to place and practices (often referred to as ‘traditions’), both of which can be understood as contributing to notions of sustainability (though the term is not much incorporated into the local vocabulary). We consider post-disaster regeneration in the context of urban heritage reconstruction initiatives as a way through which diverse social formations can surface and relate to each other. We look critically at terms such as ‘community’ or ‘neighborhood’ (concepts sometimes too quickly alleging a consensual, homogenous alliance of social agents while there might be more conflict, tensions and dissent than are contained in a term) and if we use the terms, we do so with the understanding that these groups are less homogenous and consensual than the terms imply. These social formations are distributed across scales of governance, power, influence, local politics, social hierarchies, ritual practices and understandings that define relations of groups and individuals to places.

Reconstruction is thus neither a neutral concept nor an interest-free practice, but rather a performative and often discursive statement (that is, ‘built rhetoric’), a declaration of influence, power and prestige, interpreting, rewriting, as well as shaping ‘the past’ into a matter that seems quantifiable, credible and suitable for the present, if not also an imagined future. This is indeed also reflected in the manner of reconstruction—if one can speak of reconstruction at all. Here, we have to come to terms with different conceptual, even if overlapping or blurred, qualities of what could all be subsumed under the term ‘reconstruction’. While we might want to define reconstruction as the restoration of a lost ‘original’ state—if one is able to define it (e.g., through, and on the basis of

exact visual documents and documentation), the term ‘restored’ also gestures towards the use of original material (something often used in authenticity debates but that challenges us in terms of what exactly from which time in history is invoked). We propose that our data from the post-2015 earthquakes context in Nepal underlines the need to depart from such canonizing terms since in most of our examples, we can see that ‘the past’ emerges in newly designed forms, or is rebuilt as such. In most of our cases, the reference to the ‘original’ is rather irrelevant for the local protagonists (even if they all call their new products ‘original’), for different—and often good—reasons. We consider the term ‘vernacular’ a suitable alternative to the sometimes-problematic concepts of ‘original’ and ‘authentic’: Vernacular means that even global flows and ideas can be attended to, as long as they have been incorporated into a local vision and version of, in this case, built as well as practiced heritage. In many ways, this is related to ritual and religious practice, which makes up large parts of the inner cities in South Asia, and, in particular, Nepal [3]). Vernacular heritage would be a local dialect that can still be global and relational, transregional and certainly transcultural, since the term heritage is not ‘of’ Nepal and yet speaks to people’s desire to coin their habitat and practices therein. So, vernacular is neither solely rooted in ‘a past’, nor is it a ‘thing’. Rather, it is part of an everyday practice that allows local contexts to make a claim to the present. It does so by enabling the appropriation of diverse circulating and different ‘dialects’ and rhetorical elements. In this trans-referential dynamic, vernacular heritage can never return to a source and this article aims at underlining the different compositions of sustainable heritage in post-disaster moments. Vernacular heritage can be both a dominant strategy and demotic tactic [4,5]. This view questions the ‘ICOMOS Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage (1999)’ [6] that sees a loss of vernacular quality through a rapidly globalizing world. In the South Asian context, this is interesting because vernacular heritage must be understood in relation to religious sites and practices in a context such as the parts of the royal city of Patan that this article has focused on. The cultural heritage of Patan is connected to royal dynasties that have impacted the architectural landscape of this old city, but also a vibrant and highly cosmopolitan fabric of social groups dwelling in Patan, and actively shaping the economic, multi-religious and ritual urban landscape. When considering the importance of vernacular heritage, a rethinking of religion and ritual’s role in the making of cities’ cultural heritage, or the relation of religious practice and cultural heritage—both in practice and discourse—must be critically explored. There is no space here to do so in detail, but it should be mentioned that many dominant discourses on cultural heritage are shaped by a compartmentalized view of ‘culture’ in heritage, but also of ‘religion’ as something still embedded in a discourse that sees a straight line of progress from ‘primitive’ to ‘modern’ civilization, with the ideal of a secular and ‘rational’ society placed higher than a ‘religious society’. ‘Faith’ is part of a tension-loaded relation of many ‘western’ or ‘western-educated’ scholars towards the production and transformation of cultural heritage as it is seen as less able to transgress or produce reformist qualities towards ‘modernity’ [3]. From such a perspective, the Past is often musealized, and fixed, with the ritually auratic being replaced by the secularized cult of the ‘original’; see also [7] (pp. 5–7). Religious and ritual qualities of everyday life are rarely taken as constituents of urban wellbeing and caretaking, and “it is (developmentalist, authors) sustainability, not religion, which is the dominant belief system and ‘faith’ that informs planners’ policies and action nowadays” (p. XII). One could argue that in the light of the role of tourism for Nepal’s self-management as a country rich of cultural heritage and nature, this also impacts the understanding of heritage management and restoration. Such a developmentalist model of cultural heritage, however, blends into a more comprehensive and pluralistic notion of sustainability. In this article, we propose such an approach with the concept of vernacular heritage.

To think about an often-inflationary use of, and attention paid to, in/tangible cultural heritage in post-disaster situations is to question linear narratives of ‘then’ and ‘now’, and to rather think about ‘pick’ and ‘choose’ to enforce a particular narrative. Moreover, it demands that we consider the engagement with ‘reconstruction’ as a rhetoric of shaping the future of the city. This is done to make certain places and practices (also those of remembering) sustainable, to retain and refresh what seems

‘at loss’. Thus, post-disaster engagements with sustainability, through cultural heritage, is a way of studying attachments to place, forms of place making and positionings in a field of discourse that also reconfigures how people live—and live together—in an urban environment that sustains and shapes their wellbeing and lifestyles. These lifestyles have been in a constant process of transformation but events like the Gorkha earthquakes in 2015 push these transformations even more.

Many heritage sites in South Asia are decaying due to rapid urbanization and changing living conditions as well as education/work migration and climate change. What is interesting for us is how local agents agitate and join hands to use heritage as placemaking in moments of emergency or in the aftermath of a natural disaster like a strong earthquake. Moreover, they may seek to fight eviction, road widening or real estate development, but also to enable and maintain certain religious-cultural and social practices that matter to them, for various reasons. Heritage then becomes the political argument over which different stakeholders, cultural owners and audiences negotiate a future for livelihood and belonging—ranging from very personal to national/ist contexts. And heritage as placemaking is a declaration of socio-cultural formation and management, as a form of self-empowerment and representation. This ‘commoning’—tangible and intangible intrinsically interwoven [8,9]—is a key process of forming solidarity and participatory action towards creating and sustaining heritage and urban regeneration. Here, the idea of solidarity (as neighborhood, as citizens, as Newars, for instance), becomes critical wherever it is made to substantiate exclusive claims to history, site access or use within the heritage discourse—stressing the importance of diverse claims raised by different agents to ownership over heritage [10,11].

This paper argues that rather than being firmly defined, heritage, and the reconstruction thereof, dynamically and controversially shapes in relation to how the disaster of the earthquake has been experienced and is also connected to larger discourses on urban and social transformation and futurities [12], to concepts of ethnicity, nation and citizenship as well as social, symbolic and economic status and distinction.

2. The Heritage Situation in the Kathmandu Valley

Our case study is Patan, one of the three old royal cities of the Kathmandu Valley, besides Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, which were particularly affected by the 2015 earthquakes. According to a report by the Department of Archaeology in Nepal from 2020, a total of 920 ‘heritage properties’ in 31 districts were ‘affected’. Another report from 2016 lists 745 in 20 districts of which 193 monuments collapsed completely, 95 partially collapsed and 517 were partially damaged [13]. In the three districts of the Kathmandu Valley, i.e., Kathmandu, Lalitpur (Patan) and Bhaktapur, altogether 444, or according to an updated version 540, monuments were damaged by the earthquake (Table 2). Lekakis, Shakya and Kostakis mention 753 temples, monuments and monasteries being destroyed [14] (p. 7).

Table 2. Heritage properties damaged by the earthquake in three districts of the Kathmandu Valley (source: [15]).

District	Number of Damaged Heritage Properties	Completed with Reconstruction	Reconstruction Work Going on
Kathmandu	319	99	168
Lalitpur	123	30	50
Bhaktapur	98	40	38
Total	540	169	256

In particular, the three squares of the former royal palaces, the Darbar squares, suffered significant damage. The results of a damage assessment of 2017 are shown in Table 3.

However, in a survey by the Nepal Heritage Documentation Project (NHDP) in the ancient city of Lalitpur (Patan), about 84 heritage buildings either completely collapsed (↓) or were partially damaged (↘), meaning that they are partially collapsed or demolished or show major cracks or structural damage

(see Figure 1 and, for details, Appendix A). This list, which covers about 80 percent of the urban area of Lalitpur but not the surrounding villages in the Lalitpur district, also includes those monuments that were not directly destroyed by the earthquakes, but whose decay process was significantly accelerated by them.

Table 3. Damaged monuments at the Darbar Squares (source: [16], p. 13).

Darbar Squares	Number of Completely Collapsed Monuments	Number of Partially Damaged Monuments
Hanuman Dhoka Darbar Square	39	39
Bhaktapur Darbar Square	29	14
Lalitpur Darbar Square	18	21
Total	86	74

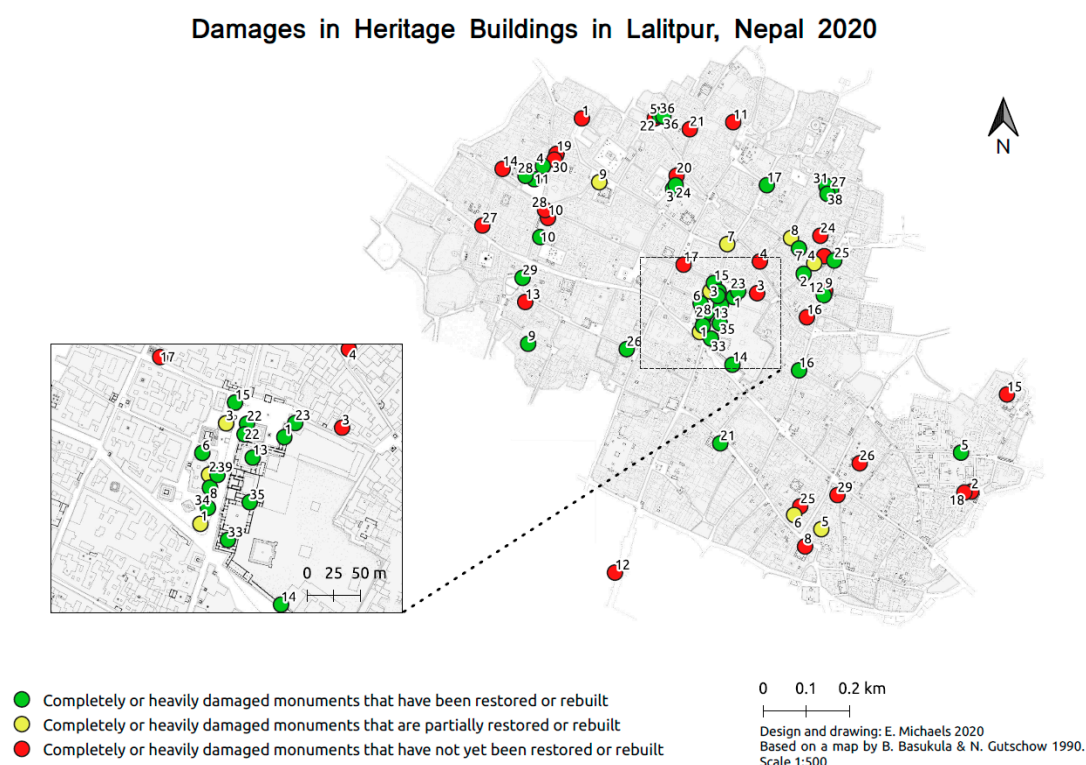


Figure 1. Totally Collapsed or Heavily Damaged Heritage Buildings in Lalitpur, Nepal (September 2020, numbers refer to Appendix A).

The survey is based on the work of the NHDP which creates comprehensive digital records of Nepal's endangered historical monuments. These include temples, monasteries, palaces, and other historic buildings. The NHDP, supported by the Arcadia Fund (www.arcadiafund.org.uk), is the first project to comprehensively photograph, describe, survey, analyze these monuments, and make the records available in an open access Digital Archive of Nepalese Arts and Monuments (DANAM). Until October 2020, NHDP focused on Patan, in and during the next six years, it will continue the work in the Kathmandu valley, and expand it to western Nepal and other places that are culturally and historically related to the Kathmandu valley. The project aims to document and inventory more than 2000 monuments, 2500 inscriptions and 8000 objects, as well as the unique intangible cultural heritage associated with the monuments: Rituals, festivals and other social and religious events and practices.

A closer look at the results reveals that of the 84 monuments that were completely or heavily damaged 39 have been restored or rebuilt anew (green colour in Figure 1), 11 have been partially (yellow), and 39 have not yet been restored or reconstructed (red). The map shows a concentration of restored buildings around the central Patan Darbar Square, the major attraction for tourists, whereas

the other buildings, mainly arcaded platforms (*phalcā, sataḥ*) or smaller Buddhist monasteries (*bāhāḥ, bahī*), which are mainly used by local groups (*guṭhī*), are mostly distributed over the rest of the city. In the red category 39 buildings are mainly arcaded platforms or rest houses (*phalcās*), small monasteries or shrines. This shows that there are different temporalities in the post-disaster ‘reconstruction’ efforts and investments: In general, the World Heritage Sites were quickly rebuilt within five years, while the less outstanding buildings are only slowly getting the necessary initiatives and funds for reconstruction. What consequences this fact has for urban development and strategies of heritage policy will be discussed below.

3. The Reconstruction Work and Its Stakeholders

Lekakis, Shakya and Kostakis underline the importance of a collaborative and synergetic commons-based governance for cultural heritage and preservation activities [14]. This seems to allow for an understanding of heritage as a resource embedded in a distributed field of agents and factors (Lekakis et al. define five interrelated components: The physical material; the communities, their values and stakeholders; secondary knowledge produced; inherited knowledge and belief and service infrastructures (e.g., tourism)). In the context of Nepal, this also affects the distribution of donations for work defined as earthquake reconstruction.

In Patan, we can see, on the one hand, major financial and media-related investment into the reconstruction of what we call ‘five-star’ heritage, that is, mostly heritage sites classified as ‘outstanding’ according to UNESCO criteria that have also come to map the World Heritage Monument Zones of Kathmandu Valley. These are a substantial magnet for the thriving tourism that constitutes one of the main sources of income for the state of Nepal. Reconstruction in this context has been fairly fast in Patan (not so much in Kathmandu’s Darbar Square).

On the other hand, we can see that there have been many activities around reconstruction of sites beyond the major area and where we can see a stronger quality of vernacular heritage practices. Much interest in this context was centered on the reconstruction of small—seemingly normal and everyday, often actively used sites and localities. Many of them are connected to ritual practice of particular, often caste-based groups from the locality or by actors seeking to upgrade and ‘beautify’ the places, often according to alleged ‘international’ standards and ‘world-class’ taste. Frequently, this is related to the aspired improvement of a quarter in the context of the city (or in comparison to others), for business reasons (e.g., attracting alternative tourism). Rather than seeing those new inventions as ‘diluting’ vernacular heritage, one could argue that they are part of the positioning in a very heterogenous present, based on the knowledge (or ignorance) of local and global actors.

These different grassroots and ‘five-star’ heritage approaches do not necessarily exclude each other—they constitute the vernacular in different ways. In the case of Patan, this can, to some extent, be connected to what has been coined as ‘Newar urbanism’, which is also a way to ‘protect’ the old city centers from a modernist or developmentalist transformation (though, of course, growth-oriented modernity and development are not rejected per se). But what must also be considered is that because of an alleged lack of modern and good lifestyles, many local residents from the old city considered their traditional houses and habits backward and aimed at challenging this by either leaving the place (allowing new people to move in), or wanted to include what is seen as ‘modern’ and ‘progressive’ into the everyday realms of their neighborhood. Many landowning castes sold their farmland and allowed it to be transformed into residential property, thus also enabling the enormous splintering urbanism at work in Kathmandu Valley. After the earthquake, many families sold land to finance the reconstruction of their houses, because the allocated state support was not enough. Since property prices have exploded because of the increase of migrants who have come from across Nepal into the Valley to seek an income, education, and a good life, local residents now increasingly start to see their land as symbolic capital (Newar), as important financial capital and as a strategy to claim symbolic ownership in times of increasing nativist contestations around ethnicity and citizenship. The clashes between ‘natives’ and ‘outsiders’ affects urban heritage debates and has heightened the

affective quality thereof after 2015. This, too, increased after the 2015 earthquakes, also because in 2015 a new constitution was declared and has since then been contested.

Since the 2010s heritage has increasingly become part of residential property, marking a trend that underlines a new interest in ‘traditional’ elements, also used for the expansion of private houses, as well as add-ons to new, cement-based structures. The stakeholders involved in the field of discourse that this diverse habitat of heritage ‘management’ involves have come up with different strategies, tactics and positions to use the ‘Newar style’ as part of the rhetoric of urban regeneration—not only to attract tourists and investment but also to bring back local residents who left the locality because it was apparently ‘too backward’. They played a major role in the reconstruction process and can be subsumed under the following three categories:

(a) (I)GNOs and institutions supported by foreign donors: Foreign aid for heritage reconstruction came by Indian Aid (500 Million NRs), American Ambassador’s Fund for Culture Preservation (60 Mio US \$), World Bank, and other embassies of, for example, Germany, Norway, China (95 Mio Yuan), Japan (330,000 NRs), Miyamoto Global Disaster Relief Fund (700,000 US \$), Switzerland (60,000 US \$), Sri Lanka (2000,000 NRs), International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), Japanese Funds-in-Trust (JFIT)-UNESCO, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT, Patan/New York), Gerda Henkel Foundation (Düsseldorf, Germany), international universities (e.g., Durham, Heidelberg, Sapienza Rome, Tokyo, Vienna) and many other institutions [14]. These donations predominantly went to the historically and architecturally outstanding buildings, not necessarily the ones that are religiously very active. Much attention was paid to the reconstruction of the Royal squares in Kathmandu and in Patan. KVPT, for instance, led the Patan Darbar Earthquake Response Campaign [17,18].

(b) National organisations: Among the national and local organizations engaged in the reconstruction and restoration work are several ministries, e.g., the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation with the Department of Archaeology; the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, or the Ministry of Urban Development with the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction, as well as the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) and the Nepal Tourism Board. Moreover, there are site-specific conservation area management authorities like Pashupati Area Development Trust (PAPT), Svayambhu Development Committee and Hanuman Dhoka Development Committee, Bauddha Development Committee. Other organizations engaged in reconstruction and conservation activities are the Heritage and Environment Conservation Foundation Nepal (HECFN), the Heritage Society, the Society of Nepalese Architects. At the civil society level, most municipalities, Village Development Committees (VDC), District Development Committees, academic institutions, and other NGOs can be counted as in as contributing to the idea of making heritage sustainable. The introduction of Tol Sudhar Samitis is new: These are the local development committees that have been installed after 2015 to decide about and monitor the renovation of heritage sites in the interest of publics, able to raise funds from various sources. Tol Sudhar Samiti operates beyond caste but at a local level—whereas in the next point, much private and local networking happened on the basis, for instance, of the caste-based *guthi* [19,20].

(c) Private support and local initiatives: a fairly active and heterogeneous topography of civil society groups and private land- or/and house-owners—sometimes with state-based mediators—surfaced after the earthquake, underlining a strong desire to reconstruct not only private and residential property but to support heritage reconstruction as a socio-cultural as well as economic resource. These ranged from caste-based *guthis* to larger associations such as Jyapu Samaj to temporarily formed committees and cultural associations that sought to access funding to private businessmen and also local residents living abroad.

In 2016, the Department of Archaeology (DoA) of Nepal approved the ‘Basic Guidelines for the Preservation and Rebuilding of Monuments Damaged by the Earthquake, 2016’ and is responsible for granting the majority of reconstruction projects. It also follows ‘Post Disaster Conservation Guidelines 1972’ and provides special guidance for heritage reconstruction sites [21] (p. 4). In the fiscal year 2020/21,

altogether 389 programs—153 from Govt. of Nepal, 29 from the Indian aid, 205 from the Indian Axim Bank and 2 from the Government of Japan—have been approved by the NRA, even though these figures are approximate, incomplete and not very reliable.

4. Debates and Strategies

The post-disaster scenario pushed interesting contestations about Newar urbanism to the surface of reconstruction discourses. In these debates, authenticity came to play a central role for a range of reasons: A new landscape of heritage experts could position themselves as power brokers in the field, and often did so on the basis of proposing ‘authenticity’ as an essential quality of reconstruction (see the debates on Kasthamandap and Rani Pokhari, see [14,22]; Kasthamandap Reconstruction Committee at <https://kasthamandapnepal.org.np/>), also understanding this moment as a moment of (ethnic) revivalism through which ‘impure’ materials (e.g., from the Rana period) could be replaced by a return to Malla architecture [17,23]. The remarkable development in this context is that the professional experts are now also joined by heritage activists from different professional, social, ethnic or caste backgrounds, shaping a varied field of community participation, often aligning themselves under the umbrella of an ‘endangered’ Newar authenticity.

However, in this context, previously allegedly clear-cut boundaries of ‘euro-centric’ global concepts like ‘modernism’ or ‘development’ [24] and ‘tradition’, are blurred, and it also becomes evident that ‘Newar’ attachment is considerably complex and by no means consensual and homogenous. Via the heritage authenticity-discourse (even though the term ‘authenticity’ is hardly used), different actors, activist and other community stakeholders could unite temporarily, stage solidarity and even enact lobbyist power—often against ‘big players’ (from parties, the government, but often also from abroad, such as UNESCO). Other interests, too, could be placed on the table of heritage reconstruction—e.g., by architects, urban planners and engineers who also claim interest in urban transformation, such as beautification and gentrification.

The authenticity debate, thus, covers up different local approaches to reconstruction, which are less focused on individual outstanding monuments, but instead concentrate more on places and urban settings and include intangible heritage aspects, including the craftsmanship needed for repair and reconstruction of heritage sites [17]. These community-based approaches, which have so far received little attention, have different temporalities, but are by no means uniform. Rather, they show different and multi-faceted approaches to vernacular architecture, which depend on the local residents and their access to resources. In the following section, we work out these approaches with examples from Patan.

4.1. The Authenticity Approach

The authenticity debate in heritage studies is vast and cannot be further outlined here. But of relevance here is what Michael Herzfeld [25] underlines as the desire to create a canonized ‘classical heritage’ in ancient Greece that also allows for a distinction of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ culture and civilization on which later generations draw upon to claim power and authority, particularly in the context of nation-building. The ‘Golden Age’, polemically put, is threatened by a ‘Dark Age’, and at stake in such a battle is, often placed prominently, the protection of the authentic. The romanticizing narrative sets up a repository of an ‘imagined community’ that often serves nationalist, globalist or other idealist aspirations. However, as Christoph Brumann argues: “a purely deconstructive approach that dissolves all claims about the past into mere positioned discourse comes at a cost” [26] (p. 181). Not every ‘authentic’ creation is ideological and part of the making of a large commodifying theme-park. Some claims and stakes of social actors should be taken seriously and considered as relevant, for vernacular heritage, and very often in Global South, postcolonial and crypto-colonial contexts.

This challenge surfaces in the context of post-earthquake debates surrounding heritage ‘reconstruction’ when deliberations focus on building materials and techniques that belong to a pre-globalization ‘Newar past’, on ‘ancient civilizations’ from which Newar settlements were built or on an ‘urban

civilization’ [27] (p. 2) that was diluted and buried by different threats (the latest one not being the Gorkha earthquake but uncontrolled (and globalized) urban development) [25] (p. 2).

Several studies on the performance of heritage buildings in Kathmandu Valley based on site-specific ground motions [28–30] have shown that brick and stone masonry have been the most affected by severe seismic movements and seem to indicate that a mixture of structural and architectural deficiencies, type, local site effects, ground-motion characteristics, age and maintenance level, material quality etc. caused the destruction of the monuments [21]. Apparently domed and tiered temples survived relatively well, whereas Shikhara structures, where different materials and statics were used, were more vulnerable [16,28]. Moreover, it was observed that structures that had been seismically retrofitted and well maintained appeared to perform well.

Large amounts of funding for earthquake-related reconstruction initiatives went into monuments at Darbar Square, especially in Lalitpur. One could argue that this investment was undertaken on the basis of restringing the ‘five star’-appeal of the outstanding monument area. The National Reconstruction Authority delayed the permission for reconstruction of some sites despite the availability of funds, partly because no agreement could be reached on how to rebuild the temples and also because archaeological excavations took a long time to be finalized. The authority itself avoided decisions by entrenching itself behind an influential faction of mostly Nepalese advisors. These experts demanded only ‘traditional materials’ such as wood, clay, and bricks. After all, the local Newar building methods have proven to be earthquake-proof. In contrast, others, including many Nepalese engineers and foreign architects, believed that the buildings would collapse again in the next earthquake and demanded ‘non-traditional’ earthquake protection measures. For the rebuilding of the Harishankara Temple, with funding from the Gerda Henkel Foundation, under supervision of Niels Gutschow and Bijay Basukala, only original materials and detailed restorations of the 1708 state were conducted. A faithful, ‘authentic’ reconstruction would not be possible anyway, because the buildings had already changed their appearance over the centuries. During earlier earthquakes, for example, no temple was rebuilt in the same way as it had been before. The international trend today is to reuse as much of the high-quality carvings and brick facings as possible. In fact, for the monuments on the Darbar Square, hundreds of small ornamental pieces have been attached to doors and windows with bamboo pins. Larger damaged or even missing parts—some parts were lost when clearing the ruins—were replaced, so that the parts have been returned to their previous state of construction. This conservative, ‘antiquarian’ method is new for Nepal. During earlier destructions, the temples were rebuilt in such a way that they resembled the previous ones in form, but not necessarily in size. The Cangu Narayana, Yaksheshvara and Kumbheshvara temples are ample examples of this. It was important that the gods had a roof over their heads again.

4.2. The Community Participation Approach

Today, even in Nepal, these are the most powerful motors for tourism, bearing the World Heritage label. Smaller local initiatives, too, celebrate a certain ‘authenticity’ narrative. For instance, Pimbahal’s reconstruction was allegedly modeled on a painting by Henry Ambrose Oldfield of the pond and photographs preceding the Great Earthquake of 1934. The debates on methods of reconstruction of the heritage buildings mainly concentrated on the ‘five-star’ monuments, and much attention was put on ‘original’ construction methods and their relation to the unique urban civilization from which they had emerged [25]. Moreover, efforts were undertaken to return to the ‘Golden Age’ of the Malla Period, constituting a key repository of today’s Newar urbanism by using the fact that later monuments had been destroyed by the earthquake, and could now be re-built as they had (allegedly) been in the Malla period. This topic has been discussed elsewhere (e.g., *Sharing Research on Architecture, Urbanism and Culture of Ancient Nepal*; www.kailashkut.com; debate around the reconstruction of Rani Pokhari) and cannot be further elaborated here.

However, it has been argued that the voices of the local residents, and more or less loud protests, are sometimes not heard and obstruct or delay the reconstruction process [21]. Discussing sustainability

and heritage in urban regeneration in Vietnam, Huong refers to this as a “living heritage approach in a ‘lived-in’ heritage city” [31] (p. 276). The challenges have been described by as follows: ‘Inconvenient access to local materials and technology has been one of the major challenges in the reconstruction process. One of the most important materials in Nepalese traditional architecture is the Sal Wood, and Surkhi Mortar, of which availability is rare and erratic in quality in the post-earthquake szenario. Reconstruction of the heritage structures of this scale is challenging in its own and the government was not prepared for such incidents ... the integration of modern materials and elements in the historic edifices leads to loss of the former authenticity’ [32]. That the relationship between modernism and heritage is much more entangled and can be seen as fruitful interplay is often overseen in such debates, also due to the narrow, static, folkloristic and compartmentalized definition of both concepts. Anthropologist Christoph Brumann has stressed the ambivalent process of paying attention to indigenous and ethnic particularities and relevance in coining bottom-up heritage production while likewise running the risk of romanticizing community as agency (while it is often heterogenous and fragmented) and reifying indigeneity into an exclusive, purist and folklorist concept—be it by agents such as the UNESCO or ICIMOS or local heritage activists [33].

Two examples from Patan, the quarters of Pimbahal (towards the West of the Darbar Square) and Cyasal (to the northeast), may illustrate the complexity of questions of technology, authenticity and political, social and religious agency or beautification that are crucial in these contexts. Such vernacular reconstruction projects are not necessarily part of the authenticity debate, and if so, sometimes in very ‘hybrid’ styles (hybridity being the rule rather than the exception), picking up new tastes of ‘traditional’ style as a form of class distinction (on the urban form of Punjabi Baroque [34], following new forms of aesthetic and material experimentation, while ignoring rules of traditional craftsmanship; for instance, the post-disaster reconstruction of two *phalcās* (LAL4204 and LAL4206) in Nagbahal in a style coined by Niels Gutschow [35] as ‘Newar Baroque’. However, the grade of distinction is not always along the line of ‘traditional’ aesthetics—there are also heritage sites made of concrete that still carry a strong degree of ‘ritual aura’ because of their involvement in certain important rituals.

4.2.1. Pimbahal—Selfbranding as Reinvention of Community Heritage

One of our case studies is Pimbahal (Figure 2), a locality with a substantial amount of ritually high-ranking castes, such as Rajopadhyaya (brahmans), Shakyas and Shresthas. Maharjan (farmers) and Kapali (musicians) can also be found. There are strong associations of Shrestha clans to a local demon, said to have created the pond in mythical times, a figure that is worshipped annually, and who shapes attachment to the place. Festivals have come to be organized and turned the Lakhe demon into a local attraction and piece of pride, especially after the Gorkha earthquake.

The earthquake of 2015 killed two people from Pimbahal. Several public monuments and residential houses collapsed. An icon of the disaster was Pukhula Phalcā (LAL4218) in the middle of the large and peaceful pond: It had collapsed in a few seconds.

Today, the area around the pond has become iconic insofar as it is a popular spot for visitors from the vicinity but also from surrounding towns and Kathmandu, many of them seeking the rarity of open space and views for evening walks: Pimbahal is a ‘bottom-up’ success story. The way in which the site has been renovated and ‘beautified’ has come to serve as a ‘model’ for urban regeneration and is considered an ‘impressive’ initiative from the locality itself. Boat rides, exhibitions around local history, music, street art and small galleries, guest houses, a few small cafés and the popular *phalcā* at the center of the pond that is lit up after nightfall have pushed Pimbahal onto lifestyle magazine covers, travel guidebooks and local social media sites. Two collapsed *phalcās*, Pukhula Phalcā (LAL4218) and Jagamaru Pukhū Phalcā (LAL4219), have been reconstructed in a few months’ time, and other sites were repaired, such as the famous Cilāchaitya (LAL0750) that had started leaking.

Earlier, the initiative of local players was mentioned who conduct surveys, assess damage, collect and monitor funds and reconstruction processes. This was done, for instance, in the case of the Caṇḍeśvarī Mandir (temple) at Pimbahal. Some of the conservation and repair works also included

improvement in order to prevent collapse in case of another earthquake, and allow for new ‘modern’ or ‘inauthentic’ materials to be introduced, such as metal, but also emphasize the reuse of historical and ‘original’ materials. In the case of the pond at Pimbahal, the notion of rainwater harvesting was appropriated and enabled the heritage brokers to apply for funding. Today, the pond is also popular because of the boat rides one can do and the carp fish that are also sold, the income of which is spent by the Tol Sudhar Samiti for cleaning, maintaining and repairing the pond (c. 25,000 NRs are needed per month for cleaning, about 3 lakh for maintaining overall per year).



Figure 2. Pukhula Phalcā, photographs by R. Shakya, 2015 and C. Brosius (r.), March 2018.

Pimbahal combines a range of motivations for reconstruction and further sustainability: (a) there is the awareness that the local residents will develop more attachment if the site becomes a source of pride and a model for others, be it because of the rainwater harvesting or heritage consciousness, (b) tourists will be attracted to the place, (c) models of community-friendly capital accumulation can be tested (a leading representative from Pimbahal calls this ‘economic upliftment’). For the fast and substantial financial investment for repair and reconstruction, impressive participation of local communities in collaboration with large INGOs and local state institutions joined hands to create the earlier mentioned ‘success story’ of post-disaster urban regeneration: Local residents from the Pimbahal, Chāybahal and Sulima areas formed a committee named Jagamadu Pukhu Kṣetra Vikāsa Samiti (The Jagamadu Pond Area Development Committee) led by a Mr. Shrestha, a water management expert. The committee had formed several sub-committees responsible for the task of stone paving, rainwater-harvesting and pond repairing, involving senior and junior heritage activists. Monitoring teams were also installed to see that the plans were actually realized. After the earthquake this committee, with the collaboration of Lalitpur Metropolitan office and World Bank, initiated the Pimbahal Pond Repair Project (holding almost six million NRs.), a project for stone paving around the pond area (costing circa six mio NRs.), a rain-water harvesting project (at almost five mio NRs.) in 2017 (for details see Appendix A). Another group, led by physicist Dr. Shrestha, helped to complete the renovation of the Caṇḍeśvarī temple (ca. 3 mio NRs), sanctioned by Lalitpur Metropolitan City office and other locally raised donations [36];

whoever donated more than five thousand rupees was thanked and mentioned in a public program in Pimbahal. A third group led by a Mr. Maharjan, chairman of Ward #20, renovated Lōh Phale Phalcā of Chaybahāl. For this initiative, Lalitpur Metropolitan office passed a budget of circa 32 Lakh NRs. Caṇḍeśvarī Bhajan Phalcā (LAL4217) was renovated with the help of another committee around a Mr. Shrestha, supported by a budget of circa 13 Lakh NRs that had been sanctioned from Lalitpur Metropolitan City office, with the needed ten percent local contribution. A heritage ‘activist’ underlines that the many initiatives also gesture towards what he considered to be a lack of larger initiative and vision, beyond small sites. Other local residents seem to indicate that the community participation in urban regeneration grew after the earthquake of 2015, compared, for instance, to the late 1970s, when plans for a communal garden failed. In 2012, a ‘consumer’s committee’ had already been formed to preserve the pond (c. 3 million NRs), founded by the German Centre for Technical Cooperation, the Urban Development through Local Efforts Initiative (GTZ/UDLE) and Lalitpur Municipality. Today, with sunken groundwater levels and a rise in water consumption due to changed lifestyle habits, the aspect of rainwater harvesting is gaining popularity—local ponds and water sources are currently cleaned and renovated, but Pimbahal pond was one of the models for this. Partly, this investment is also made in expectation of economic growth; through tourism, for instance. Local involvement in renovation, for instance in the Caṇḍeśvarī temple (LAL0770), is also due to the ritual association of several strong clans [37].

4.2.2. Cyasal—Heritage as a Resource for Community Regeneration

The second case study is Cyasal, where more than a dozen shrines, *phalcās*, temples and ponds ‘populate’ a large, slightly hilly open space, and where evening strolls and hanging out (possibly listening to music being performed in a *phalcā*) are part of everyday life. Even though its local residents are probably as proud of their cultural heritage as the Pimbahal fellows, Cyasal [38] has another, and slower, history of post-earthquake reconstruction than Pimbahal. Some (especially residential buildings) damaged back in 2015 are still in the process of being reconstructed. Delays were also due to the little financial support private homeowners received (or were able to access). There seems to be less focus on self-representation as an urban leisure-spot that attracts outsiders, rather there seem to be various active groups engaging in local heritage preservation and inclusion of the young generation to participate. While Pimbahal has received attention also in terms of lighting management, cleaning and media presence, Cyasal is a scale less ‘glossy’.

The Cyasal Mahankal Khala, which subsumes six *guṭhīs* under its umbrella, looks after all the development and construction of heritage sites around the large square, according to its General Secretary, Mr. Byanjankar (personal conversation, February 2019). While the Byanjankar *guṭhī* is less active, the Mahankal Khala organizes life-cycle ritual feasts for *jhaṅkus* (celebrating old age, see [39] or *kaytapūjā* (boy’s initiation)), the municipality, local authorities or the Local Development Bank gives money, for instance, five Lakh Rupees, to reconstruct a *phalcā* that was damaged badly in the 2015 earthquake and plays a relevant role for the women of the area. But private donations, for instance, by people from Cyasal who live abroad, also helped reconstruction. There are probably different reasons behind that, some related to the increasing costs of construction material and scarce availability of skilled manpower, and possibly also to the lack of access to knowledge about, and contacts for, funding organizations [40]. Guidelines for funding and monitoring are quite demanding, such as in the case of the Pro-poor Regeneration Pilot Project (PURPP), and beyond the first year several applicants would fail [41]. Guidelines for reconstruction are also rather unspecific, if they exist, and the constructors that are often commissioned and take over a reconstruction project might not be experienced in heritage preservation. In several cases, contractors left or were fired, workers had to be replaced because they were paid too little, other teams were unable to complete tasks or materials did not arrive: The lack of knowledge how to reconstruct heritage monuments has also been a major source of inertia in the post-disaster scenario, leading to inefficient calculations and mismanagement.

Moreover, some cases are reported that speak of corruption and misuse of donations. Even in 2018, certain *phalcās* that had been badly damaged were not repaired or reconstructed, or their reconstruction was dramatically postponed. Gaṇeśa Phalcā (LAL4143), Nārāmhiṭi Phalcā (LAL4151) and Nhu Phalcā (LAL4135) in Bhindyaḥlāchi waited for a donor before being repaired and Bhau Kisi Phalcā (LAL4153) was reconstructed in 2018, with a budget sanctioned by Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund. It seems that fewer ‘big players’ stand behind the communities, even though some of the ward member representatives, supported by the Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund, initiated *phalcā* restorations, for instance, of Gaṇeśa Phalcā in Chvachē, where three pillars had collapsed in the 2015 earthquakes. The reconstruction happened haphazardly, as a ward representative recalls in conversation with historian Dr Nutan Sharma: ‘During the time of renovation, the *phalcā* was dismantled without any measurement and when the time came to place the icons of Gaṇeśa and Mahakāla with a tympanum in the *phalcā*, we did not have any idea where to fix the icons. I just directed to the worker using my common sense where to place the icons’ (personal communication, 2018). Its renovation was considered as necessary because *dāphā bhajan* (a particular form of devotional music) was to be performed there (see Section 4.3).

Another reason given was the realization that *phalcās* could function as shelters in case of another earthquake or other emergencies. Intangible heritage as a resource for urban regeneration in such a post-disaster context becomes evident in moments when other *phalcās*, relevant for the display of statues of deities during particular festivals (e.g., Yamadyaḥ, elephant god during Indrayatra; Bhairava masks), receive attention and investment: But this is only the case when they fall under the responsibility of certain clans and families or *guṭhīs* (caste-based associations of a locality) who organize their worship (holding the masks in their house, offering food and light), or ancestral worship. There are other sites that do not have that auratic power any longer, because the *guṭhī* might have dissolved, or because its members no longer consider such duties as mandatory.

The quarters of Pimbahal and Cyasal demonstrate that there were different ways and temporalities of responding to the idea of reconstruction. What unites the two sites, which lie almost diametrically across the heart of Patan Darbar Square—Pimbahal in the West and Cyasal towards the northeast—are their close ties to farming backgrounds and accumulating capital by selling (or renting) land. The business-community of Shresthas in Pimbahal is probably more proactive in terms of investing and also ‘heritage marketing’. Moreover, they are their ritually active and locally committed communities (predominantly specific Newar castes), a remarkable density of what could be called ‘heritage sites’ and their involvement in vivid annual circles of rituals and processions, and their generous open space. Both intangible rituals and the open spaces are closely entangled and have become part of urban regeneration after the earthquake, albeit, in different ways, enabling a spirit of responsibility for heritage as both a public and a still caste-based resource through which local attachment and participation can be articulated and shaped. While Pimbahal seems to celebrate itself as a popular urban hub for a variety of local groups and outsiders, Cyasal is more inward-looking, closely-knit, and more conscious of boundary-drawing. Both areas show that the earthquake released both much energy and investment in heritage reconstruction—but it also facilitated substantial demolition and transformation in terms of residential living styles. It might even have contributed to the legitimization of the demolition of traditional structures on the basis of their alleged risk for residents.

4.3. Rejuvenating Intangible and Tangible Habitat(ion)s

Based on a concept coined by heritage scholars and practitioners like Sudarshan Raj Tiwari, ‘Newar Urbanism’ has come to stand for the unique urban fabric of Newar settlements when it comes to the densely interwoven assemblage of places and practices shaped by myths and legends, memories and rituals ‘in an urban setting populated by spirited spots and power places ... temples and trees ... networked through pathways assigned for the gods, the living and the dead’ (Tiwari, 2015, unpublished). It is the assemblage of divine, ancestral and contemporary relations manifest in people, festivals and places that constitutes the unique form of Newar heritages [33]. Another

important quality of Newar Urbanism is the fact that it is meant to be walked by people, while deities are pulled on wheeled chariots. The fact that Newar Urbanism gestures towards a multi-temporal and multi-sited density seems crucial for an understanding of the local initiatives in post-disaster reconstruction efforts (see also [2]).

One point of critique in this paper is that such notions of ‘Newar urbanism’ tend to essentialize and reify a monolithic and “old Newari way of life” through heritage—but that this is done through an interesting entanglement of globally circulating and locally appropriated and choreographed concepts and tactics. The idea of preserving heritage—tangible and intangible—as resources for a vibrant urban life (especially in the light of a trend towards rejecting ‘traditional’ living as old-fashioned and unmodern, and in light of larger moves out of ‘traditional’ settlements in favor of modern residential housing and lifestyle) is important to understand as highly ambivalent.

What matters more are the rituals, and thus the intangible heritage related to the monuments.

In fact, ritual practice can be seen as both an act of caretaking or custodianship and as urban placemaking, as it locates people in space, relates them to each other, shapes bonds (and of course, also excludes others) [19,20] and forms of belonging to and in place. Our database has placed much interest in mapping relations of heritage sites to intangible heritage—for instance, how processions connect and create a special time and place, and contribute to people’s communal attachment and relation to a place. These relations have a direct impact on the reconstruction work as the example of another rest house in Patan, the Cvalcā Phalcā, demonstrates.

Another important site damaged by the earthquake and renovated was the Bhairava Capāḥ of Kvalāchi (LAL4140), in Cyasal, with a Bhairava who accepts meat offering but no blood sacrifice, and whose blessing is said to keep the local residents from diseases such as smallpox and cholera. According to architectural historian Niels Gutschow, a Capāḥ is a house of the *guṭhī*, often related to the organization of funerary rites [33]. A local group from the Awale caste collected donations for the renovation. One of the prominent reconstruction projects in Cyasal was that of Nayanhiti (LAL4151), used for bhajan performance; in particular for the annual famous shadow play during Indrayatra, that had completely collapsed during the Gorkha earthquakes. Its reconstruction was funded by PhotoKathmandu and UNICEF with a sum of c. three million NRs, including local and private donations. Despite the aforementioned contexts and problems, the reason given for such reconstruction was that means had to be found to enable performance of *dāphā bhajan*.

Cvalcā Phalcā—Resilient Heritage

This *phalcā* (LAL4007) is a three-bayed arcaded platform, originally built in 1665 CE (Figure 3). It has been demolished and reconstructed several times and was quite severely affected by the 2015 earthquakes. However, it is relevant in this context that more than the Phalcā, the surrounding houses were badly hit and the residential block at whose corner the rest house stands was almost entirely demolished around 2017 and has by now been rebuilt. It is noteworthy that it would have been easy to also erase the *phalcā* and, because residential space is scarce, build a house there instead—[42] but this was not the solution for the locality. While the neighbourhood had looked (and felt) like a destroyed location for years after the Gorkha earthquakes, the *phalcā* remained intact and was rebuilt in 2019 due to the major damage caused by the earthquakes.

The arcaded platform was built for the day that the chariot of Buṅgadyaḥ, a popular deity also known as Matsyendranātha, stops in nearby Sundhārā (Nugaḥ Ṭola). The *phalcā* is looked after by Maharjans (Newar farmer caste, Jyapu) of the Karuṇāmaya Guṭhī, a religious caste association. On the day when Buṅgadyaḥ’s chariot halts in Sundhārā, a few hundred meters away, for a few nights, the *guṭhī* performs the tasks of lighting the lamps inside Cvalcā Phalcā and distributes *samaybaji*, a Tantric food with five kinds of edible things like beaten rice, buffalo meat, vegetable etc.

The fact that in light of the intense building the *phalcā* remained standing, and was even ‘revamped’ in 2019, underlines the resilience and importance of vernacular traditional sites because of their role in the ritual topography of processions and the active participation of local associations that still commit

to the nurturing of the rituals and thus also of the urban fabric. How such buildings are valued is expressed in an inscription from NS 785 (1665 CE) commemorating the foundation of the rest house: 'The rule of worshipping *Buṅgadyaḥ* on the day of every full moon is established. If anyone tries to destroy the Phalcā, he will have to bear Pañca Mahāpāpa (five worst sins) whereas a benefactor of it will be rewarded with happiness and prosperity.'



Figure 3. Cvalcā Phalcā, March 2014, March 2017, February 2019 (all photographs by C. Brosius).

Thus, the *phalcās*, as much as small shrines and caityas or stūpas, are a key part of the urban fabric. Though they have not lost their centrality for local practices and habitats, this quality often remains unnoticed by development and reconstruction institutions whose gaze is guided by other priorities and hierarchies. The rebuilding of such 'small' heritage sites therefore often takes longer (if it is not even halted in between, which is a very critical phase in which deterioration and destruction then take place, for instance, once the roof starts leaking) because funding is difficult to get, and if it is acquired, it is often not in one go, because certain lumpsums are granted for a calendar year, and have to be applied for again, along with proof of progress, in order to avoid misuse of the money. Many places' reconstruction and repair is put on long halt because the money granted or donated has been spent, because the local groups cannot source additional money or have no access to it in the following year any longer, or they do not know of the possibilities of applying for financial support altogether. This case study again underlines the relevance of documenting cultural heritage from and in the 'peripheries', or the shadow of the five-star heritage treatment.

4.4. Open Spaces: Resource for Safety and Socialisation

Another aspect relevant to the reconstruction work is that open and public space has been ignored by urban planners or bureaucrats. But these spaces are an important resource for social and ritual life, and for nurturing a sense of belonging. The 'blind spot' is also due to the fact that 'public' and 'private' do not serve as 'hard' concepts in South Asia, and if so, quite differently when compared to Europe or the USA, due to a different history of modernity, civil society, ideas of democracy, participation and purity. The dense and splintering urbanism in Kathmandu Valley (partly triggered by the Maoist insurgency and the civil war 1990–2000 and the lack of educational and work infrastructures outside the valley, but also by the earthquake bringing many local families to invest in 'safe' residential housing and also changing lifestyles and consumption patterns) has led to increasing urban density in the Kathmandu Valley, particularly in Kathmandu but also in the southern royal city of Patan/Lalitpur. Open spaces where people can hang out in their free time, but also where larger rituals can take place, have become a precious and increasingly appreciated resource for social life. The 2015 earthquake marked the arrival of yet another reason why open spaces have become part of urban regeneration and planning: The fact that many people, leaving their collapsing houses, seeking shelter, had few places to turn to and assemble in, led to a heightened sense of urban safety connecting to squares, courtyards, parks and even gardens.

Cābāhāḥ Phalcā—Sustaining Performance

This arcaded platform (LAL4101) is another example that stresses the resilience of ‘small’ sites to erasure, and the active participation of local agents, sometimes even just individual families, who are often ritually associated to the place in claiming space, and the ‘right to shape the city’, thus contributing to its regeneration. The Cābāhāḥ Phalcā (Figure 4), also referred to as ‘Tamrakar Phalcā’, has been an active ‘energy source’ for the performance of devotional music—also (but not solely) related to the deity Buṅgadhyaḥ. It is part of a small ‘family’ of ritually and religiously important buildings: Jyābā Bahī, a Buddhist monastery dating back to 1660s (LAL2610), that was badly damaged by the Gorkha earthquake and demolished by the local Maharjan caste late 2015 to avoid further collapse, Lūchē Nani Phalcā (LAL4100)—situated on the other side of the monastery’s entrance, and a Bālakumārī shrine (still used for animal sacrifice). Cābāhāḥ Phalcā collapsed completely during the 2015 earthquakes (mainly because the neighboring multi-story residential house collapsed), burying under its rubble the musical instruments that are stored on the first floor, and some ritual objects (said to have been stolen).



Figure 4. Cābāhāḥ Phalcā, March 2015, March 2018 and February 2019 (all photographs by C. Brosius).

For almost four years, no music was played on the arcaded platform, something that pained the musicians, who felt that it was their duty to play for the deities, and the locality. A *guṭhī* had been established to organize the worship (*pūjā*) of Lokeśvara and Tārā during Indrajātrā festival in 1668 CE. The (Tamrakar) community undertook the reconstruction with funding from the municipality. For about two years, they searched for private funding, too. Part of the reason that it took so long for the *phalcā* to be reconstructed was that the house against which it was embedded collapsed in 2015 and also needed to be rebuilt. A reconstruction report from 2003 states that ‘[t]he reconstruction of the *pāṭī* [‘rest house’] to its original state portrays a model attempt to preserve the historic architectural type of rest house, and retains the significance of the *pāṭī* and its open space for the modern community. The project also involved the training of Nepalese team in project management, restoration project design, community negotiation, publicity and financial reporting’ [43] (p. 3). The report also stressed that these historic rest houses play a central role in Patan’s World Heritage Site. Several inscriptions from the 17th century refer to the *phalcās* and the monasteries.

5. Conclusions

Since the new millennium, there is an increasing discussion around and sensitivity to preventing the rapid splintering urbanization in Kathmandu Valley, ‘eating up’ city centers, and with that also the ‘traditional’ architecture and intangible practices. Several initiatives were introduced to preserve tangible heritage. Art production and curation, too, focused on how heritage could be used to engage actively in community formation and urban regeneration [44,45]. The 2015 earthquakes were a dramatic shift, further pushing citizen-groups (state and non-state organizations) to articulate desires towards shaping the city ‘from below’ (even though many local residents would be in favor of cement and metal constructions rather than brick, wood and mortar), in order to ensure a local habitat. In this context, those advocating increased awareness of indigeneity and authenticity would possibly be as noisy as those advocating for the need to use the earthquake demolitions to further create ‘modern’, ‘developed’ and ‘safe’ cities.

Heritage sits strangely outside this discourse, though it is impacted by it too. What works in this context is the discourse of ‘foreign’ versus ‘indigenous’, and a rhetoric that argues that the massive influx of foreigners (e.g., non-Newars) contributes to the loss of identity in the Valley that has mostly been seen as ‘of Newar origin’. The rhetoric often glosses over the fact that the old cities began to be depopulated by Newar citizens since the late 1990s, because they sought a ‘better’ and ‘more modern’ life—either abroad or in the newly planned settlements outside the old cities. In the 2010s, a move towards gentrification and beautification led to a renewed pride in the ‘old way’. Several groups joined hands after the 2015 earthquake to reclaim and participate in the remaking of what they considered to be ‘their city’ that must be ‘defended’ against an ‘unhealthy’ urban transformation. We argued that this context must be seen in order to understand many of the reconstruction efforts we discuss here.

In addition to international organizations who help creating narratives for this ‘right to the city’, and provide expertise and policies (e.g., ICOMOS), there are also local players who write reports and surveys, such as [46] ‘Conservation Necessity of Neighbourhoods in the Historic Core areas: A Study of the city of Patan’, aiming at complementing, for instance, the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of Nepal, 2013, and its amendments. Sustainability and heritage come together in this case to promote cultural sustainability—often with a slightly reifying ethnic exclusivism (e.g., ‘Newar Urbanism’) but also with a sensibility towards the ways in which everyday life and religious practice and ritual impact—by taking care of the urban fabric. They call for area-based conservation rather than monument-centric perspectives, and Pimbahal, the first case study, is one such instance. One aim of such incentives is to facilitate respect for heritage and simultaneously promote it for cultural tourism. Moreover, local heritage activists aim at complementing the work usually done by more official organizations and institutions, such as the Municipality, Department of Archaeology, National Reconstruction Authority or even Municipality Ward office [36], showing much interest in research, funding, long-term preservation and heritage education (for instance, by promoting local artisans and craftswo/men) and monitoring of reconstruction efforts to ensure sustainability—often in collaboration with the bigger players. As such, we explored how heritage is instrumentalized as a powerful medium in placemaking and in ethnic politics. Cities and their intangible and tangible heritage are empirical and also methodological ‘excavation sites’ and resources for regeneration and transformation: the ways in which they change, adding new layers, altering others, or letting them go, speaks of the ways in which its inhabitants, often a very heterogenous habitat, dwell in space, and appropriate it in very different, rational and affective ways. This gives shape to particular dynamic forms of heritage perception—by which we mean that heritage is not stable and fixed in time and space but rather meandering and also dynamic in shape and quality. According to our reading, the city is also made up of overlapping and sometimes relational layers of cultural and political concepts or institutions, not just ‘local’, but transcultural in its fabric—as many different ideas, concepts and practices impact it—be they UNESCO-based ideas of heritage [31] or, for instance, agendas that have been developed within heritage activist contexts (sometimes not very different, however, from UNESCO approach towards ‘indigenous’ and ‘authentic’ renderings of heritage). In our case, we propose that heritage protection and reconstruction is not necessarily opposed to urban development—but responds to and seeks to shape it, even if sometimes the alterations are far from ‘the original’. Heritage protection and reconstruction should be critically rethought by rendering them independent from linear, teleological timelines and ideas of one universal form of progress and modernity. Problematic are also essentialist notions of heritage as a thing and urban development as a normative program under which everything must fall [47] (p. 1). One major point here would be to divert focus from looking for the fulfilment of criteria of ‘outstanding value’ and ‘original state’ with respect to heritage and cities and to pay attention to and develop a sensorium for vernacular, less spectacular and yet important everyday practices and sites.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Totally Collapsed or Heavily Damaged Heritage Buildings in Lalitpur.

Monument and Status 2019/20	Date (CE)	DANAM Number	Location	Main Rebuilder or Donors
Completely or Heavily Damaged Monuments that have been Restored or Rebuilt				
1 Bahādura Śāha Bhavana ☒	c. 1790	LAL1333	Darbar Square	KVPT, AFCP
2 Bhindyaḥlāchi Phalcā ☒	1880s	LAL4135	Cyasaḥ	
3 Campakanāga Phalcā ↓	?	LAL4205	Nagbahal	Province Government (90%), Local community (10%)
4 Caṇḍeśvari Mandira ☒	17th c.	LAL0770	Pimbahal	Local residents
5 Cvalcā Phalcā ☒	1665	LAL4007	Pinchē	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund
6 Cāra Nārāyaṇa Mandira ↓	1566	LAL1320	Darbar Square	KVPT, AFCP, Embassy of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany; WMF (American Express), John Eskenazi and Fausta Foundation (UK), Bonhams (USA), SAI, GHF, Manju and Jharendra SJB Rana, UNESCO & Nepal Investment Bank
7 Ganeśa Phalcā ☒	1782	LAL4143	Cvachē	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund (41 Lakh NR), newly built
8 Hariśaṅkara Temple ↓	1706	LAL1280	Darbar Square	KVPT, GHF; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany; University of Applied Arts, Vienna
9 Hariśaṅkara Mandira ☒	16th c.	LAL0310	Balima	
10 Iku Bāhāḥ ☒	c. 1878	LAL0470	Bubāhāḥ	Lalitpur Municipality
11 Jagamaru Pukhū Phalcā ↓	?	LAL4219	Pimbahal	Patan Museum Fund
12 Khapiṁchē Phalcā ☒	1840	LAL4131	Khapiṁchē Ṭola	
13 Keśavanārāyaṇa Coka ☒	1734	LAL1330	Darbar Square	
14 Kota Pāṭī ☒	c. 1700	LAL4126	Darbar Square	KVPT
15 Kṛṣṇa Degah ☒	1681	LAL1380	Darbar Square	KVPT, DoA
16 Kuti Saugah Phalcā ↓	?	LAL4026	Kutisaugah	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund
17 Kvabāhāḥ Bhagavati Phalcā ☒	?	LAL4173	Kvabāhāḥ	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund
18 Kvanti Sattah ☒		LAL4192 *	Kumbheśvara	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund
19 Kṛṣṇa Mandira ☒		*	Ga Bahal	
20 Lākhe Śreṣṭha Āgāchē ↓	?	*	Patan Darbar Square	KVPT
21 Lūchē Nani Phalcā ☒	1668	LAL4100	Cābahāl	Reconstructed—Mohr Foundation (Hamburg) and local donations
22 Maṇimaṇḍapa (2 pavilions) ↓	1701	LAL1361-2	Darbar Square	KVPT, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany; Himal Initiative Bamberg (Germany), Mangal Tol Sudhar Sangh, Embassy of Japan, Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, SAI, Himalayan Bank
23 Mūchē Āgama (Maṇichē) ↓?	15th c.	LAL1372	Darbar Square	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund

Table A1. Cont.

Monument and Status 2019/20	Date (CE)	DANAM Number	Location	Main Rebuilder or Donors
24 Nāga Bāhāḥ Phalcā ☐	19th	LAL4204	Nagbahal	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund
25 Nārāmhiṭi Phalcā ↓	1750	LAL4151	Cyasal	Reconstructed 2018, UNICEF/Photo Kathmandu, Kwelachhi Tol Sudhar Samiti, Ward No 9/11
26 Nārāyaṇa Mandira ↓	16th c.	LAL0110	Ikhalkhu	DoA
27 Om Bāhāḥ Phalcā (two) ☐	19th c.	LAL4164 LAL4166 *	Om Bāhāḥ	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund
28 Pukhula Phalcā ☐	?	LAL4218	Pimbahal	World Bank
29 Puncali Phalcā 1 ☐	1819	LAL4231	Gāḥbāhāḥ Tola	Lalitpur Metropolitan City
30 Puncali Phalcā 2		LAL4232 *		Sharma family
31 Seto Gaṇeśa Guṭhī Capāḥchē ☐	1737	LAL4163	Om Bāhāḥ Lāchi	Wall cracks have been repaired by <i>guṭhī</i> members & Samsad Kosh (Member of Parliament Fund) with technical support by KVPT
32 Subaha Phalcā ☐	17th c.	LAL4013 *	Subaha	
33 Sundari Chowk ↓	1647	LAL1220	Darbar Square	KVPT, DoA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany
34 Taleju Bell ☐	13th c.	LAL1250	Darbar Square	
35 Taleju Temple (North and South Towers) ☐	1620	LAL1270	Darbar Square	KVPT, DoA, AFCP, PCF, Sumitomo Foundation
36 Tāpā Hiti Phalcā West and East ☐	East: 1719	LAL4200 LAL4199	Tapahiti	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund, descendent family members
37 Tyagah Phalcā ☐	17th c.	LAL4069 *	Tyagah	
38 Yākah Phalcā ☐	18th	LAL4165	Om Bāhāḥ Lāchi	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund
39 Yoganarendra Pillar ☐	1690s	LAL1291	Darbar Square	KVPT, University of Applied Arts, Vienna (Austria)
Completely or Heavily Damaged Monuments that are Partially Restored or Rebuilt				
40 Bhindiyah Phalcā ↓	1751	LAL 4139	Cyasal	Lalitpur Municipality, Indian Embassy
41 Bhelāchē Capāḥ ☐	10th c.	LAL4145	Bhelāchē	
42 Dune Bāhāḥ ☐	1659	LAL2300	Oku Bāhāḥ	
43 Jagamaru Pukhū Phalcā ↓	?	LAL4219	Pimbahal	Patan Museum Fund
44 Jagat Nārāyaṇa Mandira ↓	?	*	Shankamul	DoA
45 Kṛṣṇa Cyāsīdegah ↓	1723	LAL1240	Darbar Square	KVPT, AFCP
46 Mahābuddha Temple ☐	1601	LAL2340	Oku Bāhāḥ	Local <i>guṭhī</i> and community with KVPT technical support
47 Naka Bahī Phalcā ☐	16th	LAL4206	Nakabahī Tol	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund
48 Narasiṃha Temple ↓	1590	LAL 1290	Darbar Square	Lalitpur Metropolitan City Fund
49 Rādhākṛṣṇa Temple ↓	1668	LAL1390	Svotha	DoA
50 Viśveśvara Temple ↓	1627	LAL1350	Darbar Square	KVPT, PCF, British Embassy, Embassy of Japan, Global Heritage Fund (GHF), Nepal Investment Bank & Himalayan Bank
Completely or Heavily Damaged Monuments that have not yet been Restored or Rebuilt				
51 Bāliphah Ganedyah Phalcā ↓	17th c.	LAL4209	Bāliphah	
52 Bhīmasena ☐	?	*	Patan Darbar Square	
53 Cvalcā Phalcā ☐	1665	LAL4224	Pimbahal	dilapidated
54 Bhelāchē Capāḥ ☐	10th c.	LAL4145	Bhelāchē	
55 Dathu Bāhāḥ ↓	1880s	LAL2080	Pilāchē	
56 Dattātreyā Temple ☐		LAL1760	Tuilakva Tol	

Table A1. Cont.

	Monument and Status 2019/20	Date (CE)	DANAM Number	Location	Main Rebuilder or Donors
57	Gajendramokṣa Nārāyaṇa Mandira ☒	1576	LAL1720	Ṭumbāhāl	
58	Gaṇeśa Mandira ☒	1662	LAL0840	Tāpāhiti	
59	Jāvalākhela Phalcā 2 ↓	19th c.	LAL4303	Jawalakhel	
60	Jāvalākhela Phalcā 3 ☒	19th c.	LAL4304	Jawahakhel	
61	Jyāba Bahī ☒	1652	LAL2610	Cha Bahal	Partly demolished by local residents (up to ground floor, with a temporary roof construction, waiting for Indian embassy)
62	Khapičē Phalcā ↓	?	LAL4130	Khapičē Ṭol	Not yet rebuilt (1994 rebuilt by GIZ/Udle)
63	Kisi Cuka Bāhāḥ ☒	1935	LAL0490	Bu Bāhāḥ	
64	Konti Bahī ☒	8th c.	LAL0101	Kumbheśvara	
65	Kumbheśvara Mandira		*	Kumbheśvara	DoA
66	Laganakhela Phalcā ☒		LAL4300	Laganakhel	
67	Māhādyah Nani Āgama ↓	18th cent.	LAL0340	Ola Ṭol	Deteriorated in the 2015 earthquake
68	Mū Bāhāḥ ☒	15th c.?	LAL0760	Pimbahal	
69	Mū(laṅgu) Guitaḥ Bahī ☒	542	LAL1980	Guitaḥ	
70	Nugaḥ Sataḥ ↓	1650s	LAL4046	Nugaḥ Ṭola	2019 dismantled
71	Om Bāhāḥ Dune Nani ↓	18th c.?	LAL1741	Olakhu	
72	Patukvā Sataḥ ☒	17th c.	LAL4182	Patukvā Ṭol	
73	Pilāchē Cidham Bāhāḥ ↓		LAL2070	Pilāchē	
74	Ratneśvara ☒	14th c.	LAL0800	Sulima	KVPT, Himalayan Consensus
75	Salachē ☒	1880s	LAL0932	Nāga Bāhāḥ	
76	Sarāḥ Phalcā ☒	17th c.	LAL4198	Ikhāchē	First instalment for roof repair by Lalitpur Metropolitan office
77	Sulima Āgachē ↓	10th c.	LAL0790	Sulima	KVPT, PCF, Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage (RIKSANTIKVAREN) & Sulima Guṭhī
78	Tāpā Hiti Gaṇeśa Phalcā ☒	?	LAL4202	Tāpāhiti	
79	Thabū Phalcā ☒	19th c.	LAL4150	Chyasal	Partly rebuilt by Lalitpur Metropolitan City and local donors
80	Triratnavihāra ☒	1871	LAL4162	Cyasal	
81	Umāmaheśvara ↓	17th c.	LAL1850 *	Nugaḥ	DoA
82	Vajradhara Phalcā ☒	19th c.	LAL4093	Oku Bāhāḥ	
83	Yachu Bāhāḥ ☒	c.1630	LAL1810	Yachu Ṭol	
84	Yākaḥ Bāhāḥ ☒	19th c.	LAL0680	Si Bāhāḥ	

↓ = totally collapsed; ☒ = Heavily damaged; * = not or only provisionally described in DANAM; AACP (American) Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation; DANAM Digital Archive of Nepalese Art and Monuments; DoA Department of Archaeology; GHF Gerda Henkel Foundation, Duesseldorf; GIZ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit; KVPT Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust; LAL Abbreviation for the monument identifier in DANAM; PCF Philanthropy Connections Foundation; SAI South Asia Institute. (source: Digital Archive of Nepalese Arts and Monuments, DANAM; accessed 15 September 2020).

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