

## June 2002, Issue 3

### Increasing the profile of International research



Dr. Michael Owen

Research is, necessarily, an international exercise. Faculty members are engaged in a large number of research collaborations and individual research programs that are transnational and trans-cultural. In this issue of *Research Reporter*, Erin Kaipainen interviews Dr. John Sorenson, Department of Sociology, on his recent book

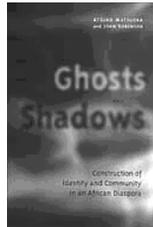
entitled *Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of Identity and Community in an African Diaspora* which explores the diaspora of Eritreans, Ethiopians and Oromos who fled the Horn of Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. This work, with his co-author Atsuko Matsuoka, illustrates well the complexities of adaptation of migrants to Canadian and North American societies and adds significantly to our understanding of the social and cultural milieu in which we live.

While we are aware of events such as Two Days of Canada, which often focuses on the Canadian-American connections of scholarship at Brock, many other Brock researchers in all faculties are engaged in research that is international in scope and importance. Among the researchers -- both senior and junior scholars -- whose research programs have international connections and collaborations are Doug Bruce, Art van der Est, Sandra Beckett, Elizabeth Sauer, David Gabriel, Alfredo Capretta, Andy Reynolds, Vince De Luca, Charles Després, Hilary Findlay, Thomas Wolf, Danielle Parks, David Fennell, Linda Rose-Krasnor, Sid Segalowitz, Alan Wheeler, David Butz, Murray Wickett, David Schimmelpennick, Ian Brindle, and Pierre Lizée. This is not a comprehensive list of all those whose research in Education, Applied Health Sciences, Business, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics and Sciences who contribute regularly to the international research agenda and integrate their research into the curriculum to the benefit of our undergraduate and graduate students.

It is only when one tries to identify all those whose scholarly activities are international in scope and international in reputation that one becomes aware of the exceptional quality and contributions of Brock faculty members to scholarship worldwide. Brock is truly an international university with an increasingly internationalized curriculum.

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*Ghosts and Shadows*

## Bringing light to the *Ghosts and Shadows* of the Past

The research of sociology professor John Sorenson has taken him to the Horn of Africa to study the influence that homelands and political unrest continue to have over diaspora communities in Canada. Rather than viewing displacement as a complete break from the past, Sorenson and his co-author Atsuko Matsuoka, contend that "exiles do not just move and start afresh." Rather, they claim that "the past continues to exert an influence over people's lives in various ways." Their recent book entitled *Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of Identity and Community in an African Diaspora* explores this influence of the past in the context of newly established communities of Ethiopians, Eritreans and Oromos in Canada.

Those who fled Ethiopia "during the decades of political repression, convulsive warfare and devastating famine that ravaged the entire Horn of Africa," represent one of the world's largest refugee populations. Fleeing political repression and famine, millions of people were displaced. Of those displaced, 10,000 refugees came to Canada in the 1980s. This group of Eritreans and Ethiopians is described by Sorenson and Matsuoka as constituting "the first sizable African immigrant population in Canada."

Sorenson and Matsuoka employ an interesting metaphor of ghosts and shadows to illustrate how experiences of the past and of the homeland continue to exert a haunting influence over immigrant communities in Canada. Sorenson explains that the concept of ghosts and shadows came out of his experiences working with a number of solidarity groups involving Central America, East Timor, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, and also through his contact with a number of personal acquaintances that have "come to Canada from elsewhere, often as refugees or political exiles." Sorenson

explains that while Matsuoka did not leave Japan for political reasons, she still "has direct experience with this phenomenon of transnationalism."

Sorenson and Matsuoka also apply the idea of ghosts and shadows to "those who write about the conditions that forced their exile." They explain that "despite declarations of objectivity, these dialogues duplicate homeland perspectives in that the texts themselves contain a sort of shadowy struggle." In this context, experiences of the past continue to influence the present. Representations of these experiences seem to take on an entirely new form of power.

Sorenson and Matsuoka also apply the idea of ghosts and shadows to the 1998-2000 war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. They demonstrate two ways in which this dispute came to be labelled a Phantom War. Despite being the "largest war at the time, it was overshadowed by other conflicts such as that in Kosovo." Sorenson indicates that this is due to a general lack of interest in Africa and a tendency to discount the value of African lives. The war did not seem real to much of the world, but Sorenson says, "It was real enough to those being slaughtered."

The conflict was also a Phantom War "in the sense that both sides produced their own versions of what was happening." These propagandist constructions then began to shape how people understood the war.

In 1998, Sorenson and Matsuoka were continuing their research on the situation of women after Eritrean Independence. At this time, another war broke out between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Sorenson describes this war as a conflict that seemed to come out of nowhere at a time when the two governments appeared to have established a good working relationship.

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## Ghosts and Shadows

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There was no evidence of tension between them. Initially, the war was believed only to be a small border skirmish, but Sorenson explains how he and his fellow researchers "watched it grow quickly and uncontrollably." They fled to Saudi Arabia, but before doing so, they witnessed first-hand how media images were used for political ends. At the time the war was quickly unfolding, Sorenson and Matsuoka were able to compare Ethiopian and Eritrean broadcasts. Initially, the two sides used media constructions of the war in different ways to influence perceptions of the conflict. "The Ethiopians were demanding war and showing footage of their soldiers in training, screaming for war while the Eritrean president spoke out for a negotiated solution. However, soon both sides were fully committed to fighting it out and we were seeing truckloads of young people going off to the frontlines."

The violent and unstable history of the Horn of Africa sets up one of Sorenson's main arguments, "People don't just move and start with a clean slate. The past continues to exert an influence over people's lives in various ways. We're arguing that the past doesn't just influence individual subjectivity, but that it influences the way exile, immigrant and refugee communities are structured." Exile communities have to contest with a

fracturing of home networks, leaving behind family members and community leaders. Individuals are forced to leave cohesive community networks for a new community in which "people from very different backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, class, region, religion, and language may be thrown together and treated as a homogenous unit." "These individuals," Sorenson explains, "do not begin with a clean slate. Their lives remain influenced by the politics of both the country of origin and their host country as they attempt to adapt social norms and expectations in host countries such as Canada. Adaptation can be particularly difficult for poor women without much education because their income is small and yet many of them are responsible for supporting relatives at home or someone else abroad."

Sorenson and Matsuoka have since returned to Eritrea in order to complete their integrated SSHRC-supported research project on gender and reconstruction in the State of Eritrea. The researchers, along with Eritrean friend and co-researcher, Alemseghed Asghedom, are continuing to look at the status of women after independence. Their research group took an interest in gender studies in post-independence Eritrea when they discovered an interesting development in gender

relations that emerged during the war with Ethiopia. During this war, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) was also carrying out a social revolution that included a commitment to the emancipation of women. Sorenson explains that within the EPLF itself, the status of women was radically transformed. Before the war, women had no right to own land or to choose marriage partners, "most women were uneducated, female genital mutilation was widespread and child marriages were common."

Sorenson's research team is currently investigating the extent to which these commitments to the rights of women are being upheld after the declaration of independence. Sorenson explains that "other nationalist movements have espoused similar rhetoric about women's emancipation but, in most cases, with Algeria being the classic example, once natural independence is achieved, the women are expected to go back to their former subservient roles and tasks." Because the EPLF has been described by a number of observers as "the most progressive of all Third World liberation struggles, especially concerning gender issues," Sorenson and his team want to see how women's rights are being maintained. •

## 2002 External NSERC & SSHRC Research & Equipment Grant Results

### NSERC 2002 COMPETITION RESULTS RESEARCH AND EQUIPMENT GRANTS Research Grants

**Michael Bidochka**, Biology - "Genetic analysis of conidiation in insect infecting fungi" - \$42,000/year for 4 years

**Charles Després**, Biology - "Deciphering signal transduction events in the arabidopsis NPR1 disease resistance pathway" - \$49,961/year for 4 years

**Heather Gordon**, Chemistry - "Monte Carlo simulations of antibody hypervariable loops" - \$41,000/year for 2 years

**Jim McNulty**, Chemistry - "New chirons and catalysts for asymmetric synthesis" - \$35,500/year for 4 years

**Art van der Est**, Chemistry - "Electron transfer in photosynthetic reaction centres" - \$55,000/year for 2 years

**Beatrice Ombuki**, Computer Science - "Evolutionary computation in search and optimization" - \$12,000/year for 4 years

**Brian Ross**, Computer Science - "Formal language inference using genetic programming" - \$12,705/year for 4 years

**Wayne Jolly**, Earth Sciences - "Volcanism and tectonics of the Eastern Greater Antilles Island Arc platform" - \$11,000/year for 3 years

**Francine McCarthy**, Earth Sciences - "Palynological insights into Pacific Paleoclimatology and late Cenozoic climate change" - \$19,000/year for 2 years

**Thomas Wolf**, Mathematics - "Computer algebra algorithms for linear and non-linear differential systems with applications" - \$17,000/year for 4 years

**Michel Ladouceur**, Physical Education - "The role of motor cortex for the adaptation of the human locomotor behaviour" - \$27,000/year for 4 years

**David Crandles**, Physics - "Optimal spectroscopy of highly correlated material" - \$24,000/year for 3 years

**Fereidoon Razavi**, Physics - "Electronic and magnetic properties of thin films of materials" - \$26,700/year for 4 years

**Karen Arnell**, Psychology - "Electrophysiological and behavioural investigations of dual-task attention costs" - \$22,000/year for 4 years

**Stefan Brudzynski**, Psychology - "Neural mechanisms of animal vocalization and communication" - \$32,000/year for 4 years

**William Webster**, Psychology - "Stuttering: neurophysiological perspectives" - \$17,000/year for 4 years

### Equipment Grants

**Charles Després, Doug Bruce, Vince De Luca**, Biology - "Growth Cabinets" - \$42,702

**David Crandles, Maureen Reedyk**, Physics - "Wide-range interferometer for measurements from helium-3 to room temperature" - \$149,565

**Art van der Est, Doug Bruce**, Chemistry & Biology - "Q-band resonator" - \$44,177

**Thomas Wolf**, Mathematics - "Parallelization of a computer algebra package for the solution of differential equations" - \$19,000

### Major Facilities Access Grant

**Fiona Hunter**, Biology (with co-applicants from the University of Guelph and Toronto) - "Algonquin Park Wildlife Research Station" - \$28,000/year for 3 years

### SSHRC 2002 COMPETITION RESULTS Research Grants

**Deborah Leslie**, Geography - "Geographies of Design: Networks of Creativity in Canadian Cities" - 3 years, for a total of \$42,492

**Michelle McGinn, Michael Manley-Casimir,**

**Carmen Shields**, Education - "Life on the Academic Periphery: Multiple Stories of Identity, Participation, and Belonging" - 3 years, for a total of \$73,488

**Donald Wright**, History - "Donald Creighton: A Life in History" - 3 years, for a total of \$28,140

**\*Fourteen SSHRC applicants were placed on SSHRC's 4-A List - Recommended, but not supported for lack of funds.**



Published by the Office of Research Services,  
Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario