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International Research



Dr. David T. Brown Guest Editor

The exchange of ideas across international borders has occurred since the inception of the university. Be it through the visits of philosophers from neighbouring countries to the universities of the ancients, or through the modern exchange of digital information over the internet, the currency of ideas has always had a vital international component. Indeed, in the modern research world, the community of scholarship is defined far more accurately by the disciplinary and cross-disciplinary interests

of the researchers than by any de facto geopolitical boundaries.

Despite the fact that it is increasingly desirable (and common!) for university researchers to present their work at international research colloquia and publish in international journals and electronic media, our university mandate for internationalization demands that we go even further on the international front. The relatively rarefied communities of academic and applied researchers represent but a narrow slice of the demographic pie in most nations, developed or developing. Pragmatically speaking, there remain enormous differences in ways of knowing, doing, and understanding around the world – differences that must be appreciated and understood at a much more fundamental level than is currently the case. Research which is inherently international in scope, dealing with geographical, political, cultural, ethnic, or linguistic similarities and differences, is of great importance to the internationalization mandate.

David Butz's research on labour practices and transculturation in Pakistan is an excellent example of the kind of contemporary work which demands a broad base of intercultural understanding as well as a great deal of introspection and evaluation of one's own fundamental beliefs and tenets. This kind of awareness, so crucial to successful intercultural research, is also critical to the successful internationalization of the university community. Work of this nature, which intergrades with the area broadly classified as "international development research", often has concomitant pragmatic goals, policy objectives, or practical aims that do not always rest easily within the conventional research paradigms of academia. Yet the imperative to internationalize the university on all levels challenges us to develop more flexible and accommodating notions of acceptable research endeavour in our universities and allied institutions.

Brock has made significant progress with internationalization in recent years, but we still have a considerable way to go. Innovative, cutting edge international research can be harnessed not only as a tool for progress in academic and applied pursuits, but also as a mechanism for greater global understanding and applied sustainability. What better place for this process to unfold than in the university?

Dr. David T. Brown

Associate Vice-President for International Cooperation; Director, Brock International, Office of the President



Studies in cross-cultural contact lead professor to explore relationships between himself and Pakistani mountain community

Dr. David Butz

David Butz, an Associate Professor with the Department of Geography, began conducting research in Northern Pakistan in 1985, when he became involved in a Wilfred Laurier University project to develop a model for forecasting meltwater discharge into the Indus River. His masters research contributed to the project by investigating the social and hydrological aspects of a community-based meltwater irrigation system. Butz continued to develop his interests in community-level social organisation in his PhD thesis, which studied the effects of international development initiatives on community sustainability in Shimshal, a small Pakistani mountain farming community. From 1995 to 1999 Butz was principal investigator on a SSHRC-funded project that focused on portering (the carrying of loads for pay) in the region from colonial to contemporary times, again with a focus on the community of Shimshal. This research, he explains, was motivated by the fact that "portering relations have significantly shaped - perhaps even dominated – transcultural interaction in this region."

According to Butz, this

practice "creates and recreates important sites for face-to-face contact and continues to shape representations of self, other, and place among locals and visitors." The theoretical goal of the SSHRC project was, as Butz explains, "to understand this process of transculturation and see how people come to understand others and themselves through these labour relations." To do this, Butz says, "we had to investigate the labour relationship itself in both contemporary and historical contexts, because the Karakorum region, of which Shimshal is a part, has long been a zone of contact between indigenous civilizations and outsiders." Historically, Butz explains, "portering originated in pre-colonial times as a form of forced labour that citizens owed to their rulers. Later, the first European explorers would approach the ruler who then instructed the villagers to porter for the explorers. This labour practice later became institutionalized under colonial rule."

Whereas portering in colonial times "was the primary method for transporting luggage and equipment for European

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administrators and explorers," today it is "limited almost exclusively to tourism and trekking. The trekking industry relies on porters to carry tourist loads, but what we wanted to know was how the current system developed, discursively and materially. In our research, we looked at things such as how locals are represented and how people are paid. From that, we have tried to understand the ways that portering in contemporary times is rooted in colonial practices."

As a complement to his research in Northern Pakistan, David Butz has also been heavily involved in advocacy within the Shimshali community. He explains that this additional role is important to international research and that research and advocacy roles are intertwined and inseparable. "I want to do something less disingenuous than pretending to be a spokesperson. I place a greater effort on doing what the community asks me to do in order to help them to be better spokespersons for themselves."

Part of his advocacy role has been facilitating local dialogues with a global audience. Rather than solely speaking of Shimshal to a strictly academic community, Butz has helped facilitate locals' efforts to represent themselves to the larger world by assisting with obstacles such as language. Butz also helps by disseminating Shimshalis' representations of self in venues to whom the locals lack access. This is done primarily through his involvement with the Shimshal Nature Trust, a project that began as a strategy to offer an alternative representation of the Shimshali people. The Pakistani government had turned much of the agricultural community's land into a National Park, prohibited Shimshalis from grazing livestock, and thereby levelling a blow to Shimshali identity. The Nature Trust, in the 80s and 90s, became a means for community members to "demonstrate that they understood the consensus of international environmental concerns and that they too could speak in the language of ecological sustainability."

The Nature Trust, Butz says, "allows the community to explain their understanding of the environment in a

way that is comprehensible to an international audience. They wanted to express to this larger audience that they were concerned about the environment and that as Shimshalis, they understood themselves to be an integral part of that landscape."

Butz is insistent that his research projects attempt to benefit the Karakoram region, instead of exclusively benefiting a scholarly community. In reference to his SSHRC grant, Butz explains, rather than being purely academic, the knowledge generated by his research team is also useful to "those Pakistani and international organizations, and indigenous communities, who seek to manage the recent explosion of adventure tourism to the advantage of Karakoram societies."

Due to its remote location about forty kilometres from the nearest road, "Shimshal has had longer to think about its own future as it has witnessed the impact of the material modernization of nearby communities. As a result, community members feel they are in a good position to negotiate their position." Shimshal "is quite concerned with the impact that modernization will have on the values and cultural identity of its youth."

While Shimshal was three-days walk from the nearest road when Butz began working in the community, efforts have been underway since 1984 to extend a jeep road into Shimshal. The road will soon be completed and, for this reason, concerns over the preservation of local identity and culture have heightened.

What began as a study of labour relations in Northern Pakistan slowly evolved into a study of cross-cultural contact and local identity. "Being involved in the community," Butz says, "has been incredibly important in understanding how the community understands itself."

Rather than dealing exclusively with labour relations in Shimshal, Butz's research and advocacy in the community has led him to studying the relationship between the researcher and the community. Much of his recent work has further explored this partnership. "I have been trying to find ways of dealing with the violence of representation." This relationship has

forced Butz to explore more of the ideological implications of international research and to explore the interactions of researchers and the participants of their studies. The central challenge, he explains, "is to fully, in practice, understand the people you work with not as research objects, but as fully-formed human agents who are 'knowers' in their own right."

"The central challenge of my career," he begins, "has been finding ways in practice to represent people in ways that do not turn *me* into the *subject* and *them* into the *objects*. By conducting research, you are essentially turning participants into research objects and in doing this, you are doing violence to their subjectivity, their humanness. This is a very complex epistemological problem."

Particularly in research that is international in scope, and in research that involves cross-cultural interaction, Butz continues, "we need to find a way to acknowledge that any time someone provides knowledge to a researcher, the very fact of their speaking to him/her makes them, and not just the researcher, a cross-cultural 'knower."

Butz argues, "the notion of indigenous peoples as the providers of information while researchers do the translation is based on an assumption that they are not subjects to quite the same degree that we are subjects. In any cross-cultural research activity," he concludes, "participants in research must be seen as 'knowers,' and not just as informants."

• Article by Erin Kaipainen

The Offices of Research Services and Media Relations seek research stories that are of interest to other scholars and to the community.

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