

<p>Institution: SOAS</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 27 Area Studies</p>
<p>Title of case study: Promoting International Understanding of the Situation of Bhutanese Refugees (Michael Hutt)</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Bhutan is a little visited and understood Himalayan kingdom, from which over 100,000 ethnic Nepali refugees have fled since the late 1990s as a result of the Bhutanese government's exclusive nationalist project. Professor Michael Hutt's research into the history and culture of Bhutan and Nepal, particularly his book <i>Unbecoming Citizens</i> (2003), has been crucial to improving international public understanding of this population, enabling the refugees' story to be told on the world stage. It has also had wider impacts beyond academia, including inspiring a best-selling short story collection that was shortlisted for the 2013 Dylan Thomas Prize for young writers.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Michael Hutt is Professor of Nepali and Himalayan Studies at SOAS where he has been since 1987. A frequent visitor to the Himalaya, he has published extensively on Nepali literature, culture, politics and the Nepali diaspora more broadly, in addition to producing the definitive translations of several key Nepali texts. Hutt is Chairman of the Britain-Nepal Academic Council, and in April 2011 he received the Nai Derukha International Award for promoting Nepali literature to the world.</p> <p>Though his research focuses principally on Nepal, Hutt has also developed an interest in contemporary Bhutanese politics and society, largely stemming from a two-week visit to Bhutan in 1992 as a guest of the Bhutanese government. Following this visit, he convened the first international conference on Bhutan in an academic setting in March 1993 at SOAS, bringing together members of the Bhutanese government with a diverse selection of scholars. Featured conference papers were compiled by Hutt in output d.</p> <p>Through continued contact with conference participants, Hutt became further aware of the plight of thousands of ethnic Nepalis who, having been ousted from Bhutan where their families had resided for generations, were living in UNHCR-administered refugee camps in Nepal. With the implementation of the Bhutanese government's ethnically exclusive nationalist project in the late 1980s that sought to rid the nation's population of foreign influence, approximately half of the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese population (called 'Lhotshampa' in Bhutan) were forcibly evicted or coerced through various means to leave their land in southern Bhutan. They fled to refugee camps in Nepal where many still remain; by the late 1990s, an estimated 100,000 refugees occupied these camps. Hutt wrote first about the refugee crisis in 1993 (output e) and subsequently visited all five camps in Nepal on four separate occasions between 1995 and 2001. His fluent Nepali enabled his extensive fieldwork that included extended recorded interviews with refugees and often with the older among them who could better recount the history of their families' migration to and life in Bhutan. Hutt also examined refugees' personal documents and undertook archival research at the British Library in order to trace the historical pattern of Nepali settlement in Bhutan, and to clarify the processes by which the Bhutanese government was able to withdraw citizenship from and exile large numbers of Lhotshampa.</p> <p>Hutt has since written numerous publications concerning the refugee crisis, most notably his 2003 monograph <i>Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan</i>. This text is the only objective scholarly analysis of this topic, controversially challenging the Bhutanese government's claim that Nepali migration to Bhutan is a relatively recent phenomenon by evidencing waves of Nepali settlement from the late nineteenth century onwards. Moreover, it offers an insight into a little-studied Himalaya nation and questions prevailing idealised perceptions of Bhutan (that view it, both literally and metaphorically, as a Shangri-La), while also providing a</p>

well-evidenced description of the problems faced by minority ethnicities in small states.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- a. *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- b. "Being Nepali without Nepal: Reflections on a South Asian Diaspora." In *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom. The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*, edited by D. Gellner, J. Pfaff-Czarnecka and J. Whelpton, 101-44. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997.
- c. "Ethnic Nationalism, Refugees and Bhutan." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 9/4 (1996): 397-420.
- d. ed. *Bhutan: Perspectives on Conflict and Dissent*. Gartmore: Kiscadale Publications, 1994.
- e. "Bhutan: Refugees from Shangri-la." *Index on Censorship* 22/4 (1993): 9-14.
- f. "The Bhutanese Refugees: between Verification, Repatriation and Royal Realpolitik." *Journal of Peace and Democracy in South Asia* 1 (2005): 44-55.

Reference a was submitted to the RAE in 2008.

References b and c were submitted to the RAE in 2001.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Since 2007, over 80,000 Bhutanese refugees have been re-settled from Nepali camps to several Western countries including the UK and US under the auspices of a dedicated International Organisation for Migration re-settlement programme. As a consequence of this dispersal, the plight of the refugees has come to the attention of an international audience for whom Hutt's research, and particularly his *Unbecoming Citizens*, constitutes a rare and valuable source of expert yet accessible information for those seeking to understand the Lhotshampa and how they came to be exiled. The impact of this research has been felt on a wide array of individuals, sometimes in unanticipated ways.

The value of Hutt's research is confirmed by Kanak Mani Dixit, editor and publisher of the influential *Himal Southasian* magazine and prominent public figure in Nepal, who has written extensively on the refugee crisis himself (1, below). Dixit considers Hutt's book crucial to improving public understanding of the long-neglected Lhotshampa and motivating global actors to improve the situation of the refugees:

"The issue of Bhutanese refugees has been neglected by civil society, the media and academia and thus I salute Michael Hutt's commitment to a humane appreciation of a neglected people. He has done what all scholars should do: explore neglected matters, especially if they involve human lives and suffering (...). The book itself has played an important role in the on-going development of an understanding of the issue of Bhutanese refugees, as a resource used worldwide. It has helped to produce an international response to the refugee situation, keeping the issue on the diplomatic and scholarly table, and also helping push the resettlement programme as a humanitarian response. Additionally, though difficult to quantify, I feel that the book has helped to improve the treatment of the Lhotshampa in the refugee camps."

Matt O'Brien, a San Francisco-based journalist who has written no fewer than 6 articles and broadcast reports on Bhutan, one of which received a South Asian Journalists Association award, cites Hutt's work as the definitive source for those wanting to better understand the crisis (2, 3):

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“Michael Hutt’s book is the most thorough account and one of the only objective sources of information on the little-understood Bhutanese refugee crisis that emerged in the 1990s (...). Hutt’s work is essential reading for anyone trying to understand what brought these Bhutanese refugees to unlikely places such as Fargo, North Dakota and Laconia, New Hampshire in the past few years.”

Hutt’s work has also had an unexpected impact on creative endeavour, as an inspiration for the short story, “No Land is Her Land”, included in *The Gurkha’s Daughter* by acclaimed Nepali-Indian author Prajwal Parajuly (4, 5). A reading of *Unbecoming Citizens* motivated Parajuly’s visit to the refugee camps and his fictional story about a refugee family. Parajuly affirms that the story was “triggered by a reading and re-reading” of Hutt’s book:

“It was the first time that I had read a well-written, well-researched, well-edited book about the refugee situation in Bhutan. All the books I had read on Bhutan before read like propaganda pieces written by royal apologists. Michael’s book is by far the best on the subject; his work is very accessible and has the academic stamp of approval. Upon reading it, I went to Bhutan and travelled to the refugee camps of Nepal.”

The Gurkha’s Daughter is a bestseller in India and South Africa, it was critically acclaimed in several countries and has been nominated for the Dylan Thomas Prize.

The impact of Hutt’s research is also evident in the controversy and derision it has produced, particularly among the Bhutanese government. A pro-government blog, *The Story of the Bhutanese Refugees*, prominently features ‘5 Reasons Why Not to Believe Michael Hutt’, vehemently criticising Hutt’s research and inciting readers to ‘expose his lies’ (6). Aforementioned Matt O’Brien witnessed first-hand a charged reaction to Hutt’s work:

“I brought a copy of the book [Unbecoming Citizens] with me to Bhutan in 2009, and raised some of its arguments in an interview with Prime Minister Jigme Thinley, who bristled at some of the questions. Thinley’s familiarity with the research — even though the book appears to be (...) banned in the country — (...) is more evidence of its impact.”

In shedding light on an under-researched and little-discussed subject, Hutt’s research has made a significant contribution to raising awareness of the Bhutanese refugee crisis, enabling the refugees’ story to be told on the world stage (7). His thorough yet accessible writing on a sensitive and controversial issue has resulted in multifaceted impact on a diverse range of people, thus confirming Parajuly’s statement that “Hutt is the kind of writer whose work resonates far beyond academia”.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Kanak Mani Dixit, Editor and Publisher of *Himal Southasian* magazine: <http://www.himalmag.com/about-us.html>
2. Matt O’Brien, journalist
3. Article by Matt O’Brien citing Hutt: http://www.insidebayarea.com/ci_15906108?source=pkg [Most recently accessed 15.11.13].
4. Prajwal Parajuly, author
5. Parajuly, Prajwal, ‘No Land is Her Land’: in Prajwal Parajuly, *The Gurkha’s Daughter*. London: Quercus, 2013: 139-72.
6. Dylan Thomas Prize Shortlist: <http://www.dylanthomasprize.com/news/documents/Dylan%20Thomas%20Prize%202013>

Impact case study (REF3b)

[%20Shortlist.pdf](#) [Most recently accessed 15.11.13].

7. Pro-Bhutanese government blog:

<http://bhutanstory.blogspot.co.uk/2010/07/5-reasons-why-not-to-believe-michael.html>

[Most recently accessed 15.11.13].

8. Background to the refugee crisis, written by Hutt for the *Bhutanese Refugees: The Story of a Forgotten People* website:

<http://www.photovoice.org/bhutan/index.php?id=3>

[Most recently accessed 15.11.13].