Catherine Panter-Brick

What are the personal and academic reasons behind your becoming a Nepal researcher?
I went to Nepal for a 13-month stay, aged in my 20s, without any prior knowledge or exposure to the country. This was for fieldwork towards my PhD dissertation. My research was arranged as part of a large, collaborative project with the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). I was bilingual in French and English, and a dual national, having taken the school-leaving Baccalauréat certificate and then having gone over to England for university entry, to read for a BA in Human Sciences and an MSc in Human Biology at the University of Oxford. I stayed on at Oxford for my PhD (started in 1982 and completed in 1987) but took the opportunity of undertaking my field research with the CNRS.

What was the thematic focus of your research for your PhD? Also explain if any British national or disciplinary traditions were important in your selection of Nepal as a research site.
My research was on the organization of work patterns in a rural area, the arduousness of work for pregnant and lactating women, and the consequences of this for maternal-child health. I was brought into the French CNRS research team because of my own expertise as a biological anthropologist (measuring the energy expenditure and time allocation of work patterns), through the personal contacts of my British academic mentor at the University of Oxford, Professor GA Harrison, then head of department of Biological Anthropology. Rather than follow one particular national or disciplinary tradition, I went to Nepal to join a research project that was purposively multi-disciplinary, examining the inter-relationships between human communities and the environment (hence including in the team agronomists, geographers, ecologists, nutritionists, biological and social anthropologists, and medical expertise). In a way, the Baccalauréat in France and the Human Sciences degree in Oxford were excellent

preparation for multi- and inter-disciplinary work, at a time when the field of anthropology was divided into several specialties.

What is your research focus now? What other thematic transformations have occurred in your research in the mean time? How do you explain the changes that have occurred in your research focus?
My research focus is now medical anthropology (rather than biological anthropology). It is explicitly inter-disciplinary (intersecting public health, social anthropology, development, medicine) and comparative (across Nepal, Ethiopia, Arabia, Afghanistan, Gambia and the UK). My work still regards maternal-child heath, focusing on populations experiencing social marginality and poverty, such as street-children and youth in post-conflict areas, and on aspects of growth, nutrition and exposure to preventable diseases.

The source of change comes from the broadening of my research activities across areas and across countries, not from socio-political developments in Nepal. It is however consonant with one theoretical shift within (social) anthropology, which is now paying much more attention to the studies of youth and childhood.

Do you operate from a traditionally defined department or from an area studies centre?
I work in the Department of Anthropology, University of Durham.

Do you teach and if so, at what level? What kinds of courses do you teach (or have taught in the past) and what Nepal-related content are included in those courses?
I teach at 1st, 2nd and 3rd year undergraduate level (BA in Anthropology) and at postgraduate level (Masters courses by coursework and by thesis). I draw from my own research in Nepal as part of all these courses, but Nepal is one example out of many. Courses are called 'Wellbeing, Lifestyle and Society', 'Human Ecology', 'Nutritional and Medical Anthropology', 'Field Methods', 'Theory, Methods, and Practice'. My reading lists for students use the work of Judith Justice (1984, 1986, 1999) on appropriate 'development,' Joel Gittelsohn (1991) on food allocation, and my own articles on reproductive ecology, child health, work patterns and street children (all listed under the References section).

Where have you published your Nepal-related books, articles and essays?
I have incorporated work on Nepal in three of my edited thematic books, in review articles (e. g., the 2002 piece in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*)

or book chapters, and in numerous articles in international journals that are listed in the medical and social sciences databases. List of publications is given at the end of this text. Broadly speaking, the publications fall into the following categories: child health, especially growth; women's reproductive ability; street children and work patterns organization.

Do you converse productively with colleagues doing research and other works related to Nepal in the UK, other parts of the world and Nepal? If so, how (via email, letters, face to face conversations, exchange of draft written works, etc.)?
I continue to collaborate with the French CNRS who are still engaged in research in Nepal (by email and face-to-face and in joint fieldwork). These French colleagues include Igor de Garine, Directeur de Recherche and head of the International Commission on the Anthropology of Food (now retired), and Gérard Toffin, Directeur de Recherche for a unit working specifically in the Himalaya. I recently have begun to attend some of the workshops organized from SOAS by colleagues in the UK, and workshops on Nepal at conferences in the US. I am in infrequent email contact with Nepali researchers (such as Dr Shyam Thapa, Family Health International) and practitioners at Tribhuvan University or within NGOs such as Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN).

You have collaborated with other researchers of Nepal on scholarly projects. What has inspired you to execute such collaborative projects given the individual nature of most UK based work on Nepal?
I think that the nature of my work – advocating an interdisciplinary perspective – calls for such collaborations: at times I have needed laboratory or hospital-based facilities for biological or medical analyses, and therefore have approached Nepali colleagues in Kathmandu, while at other times I have wanted to involve Nepali individuals who worked at grass-roots on child welfare to complement my own academic perspective.

What institutional and human resources were available to you as a graduate student?
As a graduate student, I used the Radcliffe Science library at the University of Oxford, and the CNRS Centre d'Etudes Himalayenne, Paris, which has a very complete collection of books and articles on the Himalaya. My own supervisor, Professor GA Harrison, had no familiarity with the Nepal literature – he had no personal experience of working in Nepal, although he had worked in India. My French colleagues were the ones with specific and extensive experience in Nepal.

What kinds of funds were available for your graduate studies and for field research in Nepal as well as for the final write-up of your dissertation? What are the institutional and funding resources in the UK (outside of the UK as well) that have made it possible for you to continue your research and teaching on Nepal?

My graduate work was funded by a Leverhulme Study Abroad Studentship (12 months) for fieldwork in Nepal, and by a Studentship from the Medical Research Centre (3 years) for the Master-level dissertation write-up. Thus studentships from charitable organizations such as the Leverhulme Trust, or studentships from the Social Sciences or Medical Research Councils were available on a competitive basis at the time, as they are now. After I became a Lecturer and Reader at University, I obtained further funds from charitable organizations and competitive awards from University Funds.

I was lucky. Because I secured grants early in my career, I was well positioned to obtain further funds to build and extend my previous research work. This is why I seek to help students competitively apply for funds for their own fieldwork and graduate research. I have found it difficult to get funding either for myself or for students from UK Research Councils – because the Social and the Medical Research Councils are strictly charged with funding research that falls into either social or medical research, while the work I espouse is interdisciplinary. For this reason, I have found it easier to obtain funding from established Charities or Universities.

What was the job market like for you when you finished your PhD? How many times have you changed jobs since your first post-PhD appointment? Is your current job a 'permanent' one? What is the job market like for future advancement?

I obtained a job on my second interview, but I do think academic jobs were as difficult to secure as they are now. The job is permanent. Since my PhD, I obtained one Research Fellowship at the University of Oxford, one Lectureship at the University of Durham, which was promoted to a Readership at Durham. Thus I have moved once geographically, and twice up the academic ladder. I expect it will be quite hard to get future advancement, but that is because full Professorships are hard to come by.

Is a new generation (say mostly under 30 years of age now) of Nepal researchers being produced in the UK? If so, how is the next generation being mentored in the field?

I do not know the answer to this question for the UK as a whole. In Durham, I used to send a trickle of undergraduate and postgraduate students to Nepal, for their fieldwork – they have worked in areas such as

child growth, psychosocial stress, disease, livelihoods, and the impact of tourism. For example, one PhD student completed a study on homeless street children and social competence (Baker 1998). Publications ensuing from this research include Baker 1997, Baker 2000 and Baker and Panter-Brick 2000. One MPhil student did her thesis on psychosocial stress and physical growth in areas affected and not affected by tourism (Parkin 2001); another did her MPhil on worms, gut function and growth in very young children in squatter areas of Kathmandu (Goto 2001). Another group of my students did a project on tourism and health (Pollard et al. 2000). I have stopped sending students since the Maoist conflict in Nepal.

What is the attraction for this new generation to study Nepal?
The Nepalis are an extremely friendly people. The Nepali language is easy to learn. The country was an extremely safe place for Western researchers, especially lone women, to spend extended periods of time (say one year) in relative isolation (say in rural areas). There was and there still is plenty of scope for outstanding research to be undertaken in Nepal, due to its geographic, social and economic diversity. Permits and collaborations were easy to obtain. It was very fruitful to go back again and again to Nepal to build on previous work.

Are the conditions of their recruitment different from the time when you entered the field? How would you compare the institutional and financial resources available to them to become Nepal researchers today compared with those in your own time? What are their job prospects?
I don't think it is hard to recruit students to undertake their research in Nepal in the field of medical anthropology. It is certainly easier to work in Nepal than to work in say India or Pakistan or China (taking into account both bureaucratic demands for visa and research permits and the extent of local participation). However, I would hesitate to send relatively naïve students to Nepal given the present conflict (I had planned to send students to Afghanistan, until the recent war in Iraq put a stop to this project). I would only send students if they were fluent in the language and had prior experience of Nepal (I would dearly love to undertake a study of the consequences of the current conflict for children and youth).

As I work in anthropology as a whole, rather than in areas studies, I evaluate the significance of the academic project, the worth of a research candidate, the value of the research for local people (Nepali), the feasibility of the study (in Nepal) – before I recommend Nepal as a research site. I am not wedded to doing all my projects in Nepal just to keep working in the same area.

Do you communicate about your research with the national public at large in the UK? If so, how do you do it and how often?
Yes. I present my work (including work in Nepal) at conferences (about twice a year in the UK, and about twice a year in the US). I publish as well. I have organized workshops and international conferences. I gave one national radio interview (BBC radio 4) on children's physical activity in which I drew extensively from Nepal, and gave one TV interview on street children, which featured the homeless in Kathmandu.

What is the relationship between your current or past research and discussions in the various Nepali public spheres? Do you find that there is a tension between representing Nepal to your colleagues in the UK and making your research theme and conclusions 'relevant' and accessible for discussions in Nepali society?
I have not done enough to disseminate my work in Nepal. First of all, because I have worked mainly in rural areas, or with street children in urban centers, I tend to have spent little time with academics or opinion-leaders in Nepal. I do send a copy of all my papers and books to Tribhuvan University and, where relevant, to NGOs such as CWIN. However, I have not engaged in real dialogue with Nepali researchers or opinion-formers.

How do you evaluate the state of Nepal Studies in the UK at the moment? Do researchers on Nepal languish at the margins of South Asian Studies in the UK?
I can't make an evaluation for the UK as a whole. I don't think researchers on Nepal languish in the margins. At my department, there are currently two other full staff members who have extensive field experience in Nepal. These two colleagues are Dr Andrew Russell (Senior Lecturer) and Dr Tamara Kohn (Lecturer). Also in my institution, but in the Department of Geography, there is a colleague who works full-time on Nepal, Dr Dave Petley. However, I do not know whether these colleagues will choose to return to Nepal for their next research project. We tend to diversify and compare Nepal to other places, not to work on just Nepal. To my mind, that makes a stronger case for Nepal to be known as one of a number of very interesting and rewarding places in the world suited for academic research and applied work.

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