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LAND, IDENTITY, SCHOOL: EXPLORING WOMEN'S IDENTITY WITH LAND IN SCOTLAND THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF BOARDING SCHOOL

by Chriss Bull, Alastair McIntosh & Colin Clark

This study explores the effects of private British boarding school on women landowners' identity and their relationship to the land. In noting how the private British boarding school system and the Empire were symbiotically related, it discusses how the ruling class were shaped within boarding institutions that cultivated hegemonic superiority and self-perpetuating patterns of subjugation and domination. Boarding school ethos has played a key role in maintaining these 'norms' of power as the young strive for place and identity within hierarchical, closed environments. Using an indepth qualitative, grounded theory approach, eleven women in Scotland shared their stories with the primary researcher, all of whom were ex-boarders and experienced being removed from their home environment usually in pre-adolescence. Almost exclusively, these women felt that their sense of identity had been damaged whilst being formed in the process. In adulthood, they felt possessive and territorial in arguably compensatory ways over their land, space and privacy. This possibly sheds light on dynamics of landownership that extend beyond usual considerations of economics and status. The study both commences and concludes by noting the implications for people-land relationships in the light of Scotland's land reform process.

ABSTRACT

KEY WORDS:
land reform;
boarding
school;
identity
formation;
women;
psychohistory

INTRODUCTION

Land reform, designated as 'flagship legislation' in the early stages of Scotland's new parliament, has involved a public debate focused mainly around community empower-

ment and recreational access.¹ Here we present a local area study that seeks to explore motivations and ownership patterns of private land in Scotland. Our tentative argument is that a displaced sense of childhood identity signified



Landed Power – the Duke of Sutherland's statue, paid for by grateful tenants, dominates the skyline over the Dornoch Firth. Contemporary residents debate whether to treat it as a relic of the past or to blow it up.

by, and perhaps, in part, a result of private boarding school experience, contributes to the reasons explaining the use of landed power as a physical 'marker' of controlled, relational identity in adulthood.

How is this cautious hypothesis supported? During 2005, eleven key informants (all women) were interviewed via a semi-structured, in-depth autobiographical method. This 'personal narrative' method is consistent with an oral history approach to data collection and analysis and is a useful tool for exploring attitudes, beliefs and inner processes through 'deep' personal reflection.² The extent of their land ownership (or that vested in their male relations) varied from very small farms to acreages incorporating tenants, housing and a castle. From oral history interviews, it was determined that most were from upper-middle class or aristocratic families in Scotland and all, as children, had attended fee-paying boarding schools. Two in the group were not from Scottish landowning families, directly, but they shared close professional links with boarding school clientele and possessed a concomitant insight into landowner social mores. These individuals also played a pivotal 'gatekeeper' role in creating initial introductions. We have therefore included them as being socially contiguous with the rest of the

group, although their contribution to the evidence presented in this paper is not direct but rather contextual.

Aside from the substantive data presented on land ownership and identity, we shall also discuss methodological issues involved in researching a social group and topic that presents a challenge in terms of access. Often, when 'hard to reach' groups are discussed it is in terms of the dispossessed, the marginalised, the poor. We suggest that that the affluent, elites, the powerful, also present challenges in terms of entry to a social world that is distant from the experiences of most social researchers. Such oral histories tend to be 'silenced', or at least retained as 'exclusive experience' to be shared amongst the family and extended family only; the hidden preserve of the privileged social classes. The interview data that has been generated will be presented, discursively exploring our hypothesis. Whilst our guiding principle has been to seek explanatory power that helps understand the tenacity of traditional landed power and can thereby inform land reform processes, a sub-text has been to interrogate and analyse the world as seen through the eyes of often-powerful landowning ex-boarder women. For the primary researcher (Bull), who gathered all the empirical data, this doubled as an exploration of her



emerging antipodean post-colonial identity, and, given that she shared a similar background as the interviewees, it allowed the study to be conducted with a certain critical empathy – a rich and meaningful sharing of oral histories through personal narratives – that undoubtedly assisted in the collection of rich and informed data.

Whilst the oral histories gathered here represent the *contemporary* experience of women from the landowning classes, we consider that they also shed light on the *past* and on the *future*: on the past because the world in which these women are embedded is, in many respects, a ‘traditional’ one, shedding light on a way of life, a way of thinking and acting, that formed more in the feudal era than in post/modernity and on the future, because for all that this social grouping comprises a small minority of contemporary Scotland, it holds disproportionate power on account of the nation’s highly concentrated structure of land ownership.

Land ownership, of course, impacts not least upon land availability and this in turn affects the rents, mortgages and capital outlays of the population as a whole, and so contributes to a picture of the present and future economy that is conditioned by Scottish socio-economic history.

SCOTTISH LAND REFORM IN CONTEXT

Scottish land is much more than economics and agriculture. As the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003* takes effect and the *Crofting Reform etcetera Act 2007* moves into place, it is clear that many people see land as part of their individual identity and an important context, a ‘space’, for enacting community cohesion.⁴

In not much more than the past decade, the area of land under community ownership in Scotland has risen sharply. Over one third of a million acres (140,000 hectares) are now in community ownership involving more than 150 communities – most of them advised and sometimes financially assisted by the Community Land Unit (CLU) that was set up under the government’s socio-economic development unit, Highlands and Islands Enterprise. This represents some two per cent of Scotland’s land area.⁵ Apart from the Stornoway Trust, which was endowed with 64,000 acres in 1923, ownership through community trusts in Scotland is a new phenomenon. The bulk of privately owned land has traditionally been held by a tightly concentrated and tightly connected landowning class.⁶ Culturally this may be understood from an indigenous standpoint as being highly Anglicised – a perception that is often linked to schooling and not necessarily to birth.

Dunrobin Castle, Sutherland – the focus of some of the most brutal 19th century Highland Clearances.



A typical 'big house' and associated buildings on a Scottish Highland estate. Note the whitewashed buildings, and the long straight lines that demarcate monocultural land use and encode the lines of a lawyer's pen.

Contemporary studies suggest that, apart from the new trend in community trusts, the power and control of the landed classes has not greatly diminished in recent years. Nearly two-thirds of private Scottish land continues to be held by just 1,000 owners.⁷ It is not surprising to learn that these owners are drawn almost exclusively from the aristocratic and upper middle class strata of society, with some *nouveau riche* and corporate investment holdings interwoven. For example, of the top ten non-public landowners in Wightman's seminal 1996 survey, nine of them, accounting for 1.2 million acres or six percent of the Scottish landmass, are individuals (or the corporate entities representing their families) deriving from British upper class backgrounds. *The Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc. (Scotland) Act 2000* and the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003* may have outwardly moved tenure into the Twenty First Century, but feudalism's residual power structures remain largely intact. People living in rural communities experience such structures and their day-to-day processes in all manner of political, economic and social impacts. For example, current land distribution and use implies a continual transfer of wealth (in the form of rents, resource access and capital payments) from relatively poor to relatively rich. In considering the progress of Scotland's land reform, it is important to hold in mind Lord Sewel's words in the introduction to the January 1999 Scottish Office 'Green

Paper' on land reform: 'But it is crucial that we regard land reform not as a once-for-all issue but as an ongoing process. The Parliament will be able to test how this early legislation works and ... will generate a longer-term agenda for further legislation'.⁸

New laws on their own, however, are not sufficient to sustain deep-rooted change in the face of tightly controlled economic interests with regard to land. The conduits into which legislation can flow first have to be dug so that they can guide subsequent political streams. At the deepest level, such work is more than just political. It has been argued that the processes must also involve a cultural 'shift' aimed at addressing injury to the 'soul' or 'psyche' of the nation.⁹ Here unjust land tenure is understood as being only an outer manifestation of what, in liberation theology terms, is recognised as an inner 'domination system' – that is to say, the tendency of one group to dominate another through such distinctions as class, colour, ethnicity, language, religion and gender.¹⁰ Oral evidence of this can be heard in radio broadcasts from the early days of modern land reform in the 1990s that are archived on the web.¹¹

A key stated government aim of land reform in Scotland is to achieve, 'increased diversity in the way land is owned and used ... which will lead to less concentration of ownership and management in a limited number of hands ... so that local people are not excluded from deci-

sions which affect the lives of their communities'.¹² This all implies elements of democracy, social inclusion and some redistribution of Scotland's nineteen million acres amongst her five million people (a per capita average of two hectares, or three football fields). Accordingly, it is incumbent upon policy makers and community activists, amongst other interested parties, to understand not just the dynamics of community transformation such as we now see happening in places like Assynt, Eigg and Gigha, but also, why it is that the existing landed classes generally resist such democratic, socially inclusive actions. In this study we acknowledge the primacy of economic explanatory power. However, we suggest that new light needs to be shed on the social – the actual psychology of ownership – and that it is not sufficient to relegate this to the periphery in accounting for the fascination and 'need' for the possession and maintenance of landed estates. That is, we argue, land ownership – for those interviewed – appears to offer a constructed sense of 'home' to those whose emotional 'attachment' needs were significantly disrupted during childhood. As private boarding school is a 'normal' marker of identity amongst the landed classes, and one that is often calculated to inculcate a sense of class-segregation in the children of the elite, we have chosen to focus on this as a point of entry for our study.

LAND, IDENTITY AND BOARDING

The experience of being sent away to boarding school marks, for better or for worse, a major change in a child's sense of 'home'. There exists a small but growing body of literature that speaks to the consequences of this in terms of 'exile' from home, extending into betrayal or exile from one's inner sense of self and identity.¹⁵ Drawing on this, we postulated (in a tentative and cautious fashion) that adult oral history testimonies of childhood boarding experience might offer powerful insights into the little-understood realm of landowner and landed class motivation.

From a thorough review of the research literature, it became apparent that there is a dearth of studies on whether and how boarding education impacts upon identity and territorial relationships. Given the history and prevalence of such schooling systems, especially in the UK, this not only surprised us but fascinated us – why is no one researching or writing about such practices and experiences? The closest we have found is Rich¹⁴ and Okely¹⁵ who variously explore the symbiotic relationship between 'public boarding schools' and the ruling elite, including the role that 'public' schools had in training colonial administrators under the

Empire. As one public-schooled reviewer of an early draft of this paper quoted his old headmaster, 'Others were made to serve; you were born to rule'.¹⁶

Duffell¹⁷ and Schaverien¹⁸ make seminal contributions to the literature, focussing on the psycho-socio-emotional effects of boarding. They explore how the boarding experience can hamper a child's and subsequent adult's ability to develop authentic intimacy and trusting relationships. Duffell, a psychotherapist who has pioneered the field of 'boarding school survival', portrays the boarding 'community' as being shrouded in a 'culture of silence'. He maintains that the painful exclusivity of the experience and the privileged mystique of these institutions silences the voices of (ex)boarders, inhibiting them from facing up to the consequences – the lived reality – of their experience. The mythical, romantic notion of boarding school that has characterised the privileged British social classes for centuries becomes periodically re-energised and re-legitimatised through such literary genres as the Harry Potter tales – themselves initiated by Harry's escape from traumatic home circumstances. The social commentator George Monbiot added his voice to the debate in *The Guardian* in 22 January 2008.¹⁹ Drawing on his own schooling experience and Duffell's work, he suggested that British public schools have produced an 'unhinged ruling class'. The massive blog response testified to the strength of feeling that this debate provokes from both sides.

METHOD, APPROACH AND 'THE BREED'

We recognised that the potential sensitivity of our topic, as well as the position of our informants, favoured gathering research data through a qualitative, in-depth interview approach rather than a more quantitative approach.²⁰ As mentioned above, our preference was to search out women's personal narratives on the issues of boarding experience and land ownership using an oral history frame of reference and approach. We deemed that such an autobiographical route into the data would produce the most fruitful avenues of enquiry and search out the most telling and informed data, connecting the key research themes of land ownership, women's identity and boarding school experience. As Bottomore and Brym²¹ surmise: 'There is a distinct upper class in Britain, a class whose privileges derive both directly and indirectly from the unequal ownership of capital, and a class which takes enormous pains to control entry into its own ranks'.

These barriers are both 'outer', in terms of the 'hardware' of family ('blood') and wealth, and 'inner', in terms of such social and psycho-

logical 'software' as linguistic accent, behavioural shibboleths, and postural bearing along with general ambience. In sum, they comprise the 'hexis' and 'habitus' by which, according to Bourdieu, *distinction* is recognised and sustained.²² Where new blood is accepted, mores and values must normally be homogenised, thus:

The test of membership has been the willingness of the newly arrived to socialise themselves into existing attitudes and practices, and to transmit both those values and their privileges to their offspring. The public schools and to a lesser degree, Oxbridge, have acted and continue to act, as the crucial mechanism for the production of those values and for the transmission of that privilege.²³

In his analysis of English identity (in which we can broadly include upper class Anglicised Scots who comprise the traditional landowning classes), Jeremy Paxman draws out these homogenous defining qualities. He cites 'Sapper' (H. C. McNeile), the creator of the fictional but archetypal pulp hero, 'Bulldog Drummond', who writes in one of his novels: 'He belonged, in fact, to the Breed; the Breed that has always existed in England, and will always exist to the world's end... They are always the same, and they are branded with the stamp of the Breed. They shake your hand as a man shakes it; they meet your eye as a man meets it'.²⁴

Paxman adds, 'Imitations of the Breed were mass-produced by the private schools'.²⁵ He corroborates a wider impression that we are examining, in fact, are deconstructing, a power elite who, as suggested earlier, are not only tightly concentrated and tightly connected, but also, *tightly patrolled* in terms of their *identity homogenisation*. To assure differentiation from 'the other', Okely²⁶ describes how British public schools 'are almost invariably set in rural areas, distant from urban concentrations, the threatening proletariat and metropolitan culture'. Okely relates her experience at boarding school that where any 'minority girls' – such as scholarship students – displayed differences, they 'were ridiculed and mimicked until repressed.'

This may be no different from the class homogeneity found amongst many other social groups. But what makes that of the landowning class distinctive in our view, as well as being a matter of wider public interest, is the asymmetric power over other people's lives that their social position can command. Boarding schools may claim that the picture just portrayed represents a characterisation that is today outmoded. Whether or not that is true goes beyond the scope of this study. But it is undoubtedly true

that the majority of today's landowners were educated under past norms, and these are what may influence the mores of contemporary landed power. Indeed, it would be disingenuous to simply react to such 'historical' personal testimonies by stating such narratives are past their sell-by date; an 'oral history' that no longer exists.

Being sent away to a private boarding school is therefore about more than 'just' education. It is, arguably, both a signal of separation from the family home, and a process of conditioning into the separate and separating norms of a class shaped by the power of capital. If it is valid to view this reproduction of 'the Breed' as being, in part, a *homogenising process of identity formation*, then we have a situation that, whilst probably not amenable to quantitative social research, may be open to qualitative techniques and in particular, the 'snowballing' sampling approach of 'grounded theory'.²⁷ Snowballing is a way of working with informants where one contact leads to another in a process that is continued until the yield of new information reaches 'saturation' in sharply diminishing returns. Such diminution determines 'sample' size and, arguably, permits working with what may be necessarily small samples (albeit backed up by literature review and other data collection methods that are both consistent with, and reflect, the oral history manner of approach to such methodological questions).

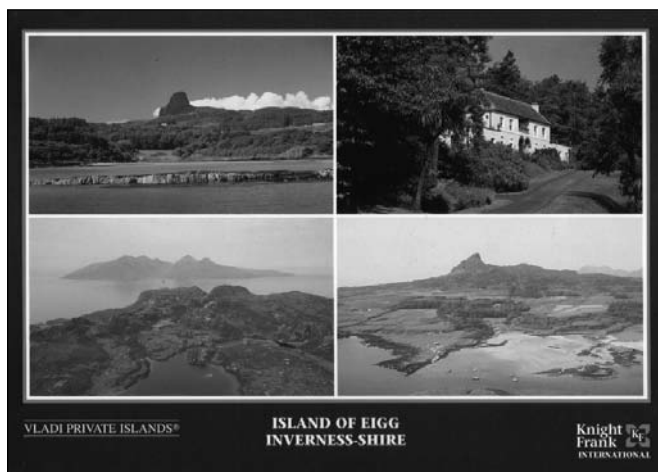
OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ENTRY

As an ex-boarder from a land owning family in New Zealand, the primary researcher had expected that her strong ties to boarding and land ownership would encourage women interviewees from similar Scottish backgrounds to share their oral history narratives with her. The early stages of the data gathering soon dramatically challenged this assumption, perhaps shedding light on why this area is under-researched. Both public information, such as *Who's Who in Scotland*,²⁸ and personal contacts were used to identify potential interviewees. However, they or their gatekeepers, whilst initially eager to get involved in the research, typically – and rather curiously – changed their minds once the boarding school connection with land ownership was raised. For example, in a phone conversation with a high ranking member of the *Scottish Rural Property and Business Association* (formerly *The Scottish Landowners Federation*), keen interest in people/land relationships evaporated as soon as the question of boarding education was verbalised: the exclamation, 'Oh, you've put another filter in – I'm not sure I will be able to assist you now,' ended any further contact.

Similarly, a personal contact – a lawyer whose firm factors for a number of female estate owners – was initially enthusiastic to introduce his clientele to the study. However, this connection terminated with a subsequent formal e-mail saying, ‘A Senior Partner of the Firm is uncomfortable to participate in involving Clients of the Firm given the potential political overtone...’ Other contacts similarly evaporated, usually warmly wishing the study well but declining involvement. A few issued blunt cut-offs like, ‘Quite frankly, I’m not interested’. One incredulous Aberdeenshire aristocrat thought that the project would be ‘unlikely to impress’ Bull’s academic superiors. She suggested that it would be more useful to study crofters – this being a rather familiar tactic of elites, shifting the focus away from themselves to others – retaining information to themselves and their extended class networks. The primary author quickly recognised these barriers to entry. They paralleled those of her own membership, as a Pakeha (i.e. white) New Zealander, of a group that similarly projects a largely unconscious, self-protective wall of silence around their landed power and consequent unacknowledged privilege.

However, eventual breakthrough occurred not in Scotland, but in England. A public school principal introduced the primary researcher to another female principal at a prestigious Scottish girls’ public school, who, passed her on to the senior housemistress. With alarming candour the housemistress opened her dialogue with the statement: ‘People who haven’t been to boarding school, do not and can not, understand what boarding is like’. The exclusive and secluded nature of these sub-cultural institutions was openly acknowledged, and the wall, once surmounted, allowed in the remaining research time for a swift snowballing of interviewees in Scotland – all of whom had left their family homes between seven and eleven years of age. The oral histories quickly emerged, and came alive, through the personal narratives that were shared and reflected upon with the primary researcher.

All research interviewees had ‘a significant relationship’ to Scottish land either through direct ownership or close family association. Women were chosen because of the primary researcher’s interest in eco-feminism and post colonial praxis, drawing parallels between the subjugation of those considered ‘close to nature’ – women and indigenous peoples – by western patriarchy and the scientific revolution. This symbiotic relationship of ‘white’ patriarchal dominance and British ‘superiority’ birthed a political and structural reality that legitimised white man’s entitlement to, and dominion over the earth’s resources, whilst alienating ‘other’



inhabitants from equitable access.²⁹

Boarding schools provide a ‘fast track’ into an imperialist and paternalistic system of subjugation/ domination through the employment of ‘divide and rule’ colonial praxis – divide children from their familial base and conquer their individual will.

Evidence of ontological angst caused by being sent away to boarding school might therefore be more homogeneously present amongst landowning women boarders than amongst their brothers who, often, sat on the security of probable future patrilineal inheritance to land. Whilst we did not set out to explore this as part of our primary argument, we were aware that as an added possible homogenising factor, it might auger for more rapid data saturation from our achievable sample size.

When interviews did finally take place they were conducted over a wide and usually remote geographical expanse. Eight were face-to-face with three undertaken by phone. Consistent with principles of oral history and action/participatory research, Bull integrated her questions with inquiry into her own identity – the sharing of personal narratives.³⁰ This allowed her to tell others, in effect, ‘I want to find out about this, because it affects me too’. Data was paraphrased where necessary and written down either during or shortly after each interview. Key points – we called them ‘indicative statements’ – were discerned and later classified through the development of a coding frame that reflected emerging ‘generative themes’.³¹

The method of data collection, sorting and reporting was agreed with participants prior to their involvement, including acknowledgment that the methodology deviated from a typical feminist paradigm³² because transcripts were not produced for participants. Respondents were agreeable because findings were reported in

The estate agent’s brochure produced for the Isle of Eigg while it was still privately owned in 1996. Note the name of one of the selling agents – Vladi Private Islands, owned by the Canadian-based Farhad Vladi.

Portrayal by the Daily Mail of landed power's fears on the passing of Scotland's land reform act in 2003.



narrative style using projective profiling (representing numerous 'typical' situations in an abstract story), rather than as case studies, thus assuring their anonymity.

All interviewees consented to the use of their material for possible publication. Many described the experience as having been valuable for their self-understanding. One woman, the first boarder in her middle class family, remarked that she felt 'a social responsibility to tell my story for this research'.

BOARDING AND PARADOX OF PRIVILEGE

Boarding schools, by their very existence, separate (pre)adolescents from the immediate familiarity and security of home, whilst simultaneously bonding the future privileged classes. Our literature review highlighted a tension between the emotionally austere exigencies of boarding, and modern child development theory. For example, Bowlby's³³ influential 'attachment theory' stresses the child's need for intimate environmental and emotional security, but boarding environments often encourage or even demand competitive and strategic responses to a full-time institutional life. This advances the notion that adolescents 'learn to stand on their own two feet' and that boarding is therefore 'the making of them'.³⁴

A minority of those interviewed in this oral history study spoke positively of such 'privilege'. These reported that, 'boarding school helps build independence'; it, 'had quite a nice atmosphere – always someone looking after you'; and, 'I wouldn't change it if I had it again'. However, the majority of our interview responses contra-

dicted these comments. Here paradox sat at the core of privilege. For these, a generative theme was the challenge of being faced, very suddenly, with the multiple demands of full-time institutional living at a very young age, without the relative safety of home – of 'Mum' – to retreat to. It was a harrowing and often traumatic experience. The paradox was that your parents were doing this supposedly because they loved you, wanted the 'best' for you, but it exiled you from that love and family support.

One middle class, thirty-something interviewee "Sue", the first of her hotel-owning family on the West Coast to attend public school, explained during our interview in her home that she had been excited by being packed off to school equipped with a trunk of new paraphernalia, said: 'I got worried when I saw the twenty foot wall around the school... [and] seeing my parents drive away. I remember feeling very small'. Another, Carol a woman in her forties, interviewed in an Edinburgh café, related that she was from a family who owned enough farms so that each of her brother's could inherit one. Carol said, 'It [boarding school] becomes total survival – there was no one looking after you'. Morag interviewed on her indigenous homeland of Argyll said she 'developed a photographic memory for all the stones, rivers and trees between the school and home – so I knew how to get home'.

Only two women dissented from this sense of privileged exile. Elizabeth, an older woman, interviewed in her large farmhouse near Edinburgh, came from a sizeable farm in Fife – she 'loved boarding and becoming a city girl'. She, however, avoided direct answers to questions about emotional aspects of boarding and when listening to the primary researcher's own experience of displacement concurred with, 'Yes. I understand what you mean'. Fiona, a woman in her forties who now owned an eco-healing centre near Edinburgh (where the interview took place), said that she wouldn't change her boarding experience, though she acknowledged that her sense of security had relied on 'having a gang around me'.

A CLASS APART

Most of the women described how hierarchical institutional living invoked survival tactics, essentially 'coping mechanisms'. Most described how they had developed strategies to avert a sense of powerlessness felt in the face of emotional uncertainty. Their top priority was to secure *safety and place* in the inner sanctum of the school's peer groups. Statements indicative of this included, Carol: 'Peer relationships at boarding school were very emotionally tiring because they can change at any moment –

you're very vulnerable'; Margaret (interviewed by phone), is of retirement age from a military family, raised in a castle in eastern Scotland, said: 'It was not a good education ... any individualism was thoroughly repressed [by pressures towards authoritarian and peer group conformity]'; and, Fiona from the healing centre said: 'I had a double life between home and boarding school – I played very different roles for each'.

Whilst this need for a chameleon identity may be interpreted as 'the making of them' – a skill at adjusting to life's variables – many interviewees challenged the assumption that boarding had created adaptability in them. Speaking initially of international students, the English boarding school principal said, 'It divorces them from their own culture and it may not be easy to reintegrate'. Her additional remarks suggested that socio-cultural severance and displacement was also strong for students boarding within their own country. For example, many noted that childhood friendships were unable to cope with the socio-cultural divide that grew between those who left to board and those who stayed at home. The schools superimposed their own social norms of a tightly connected elite group. As the house mistress from the prestigious Scottish girls' school put it, 'The public schooling community is very well known to each other'. Others spoke of 'emotional separation' from those back home, or the creation of 'an educational and economic gulf, not least 'because of the expense there are no students from low socio-economic backgrounds'.

MANAGED HEART AND FALSE SELF

Aware of their supposed privilege and place in society, many of the women said that they felt ashamed and embarrassed to admit that they had found boarding school emotionally and psychologically demanding. Some said they felt betrayed by their parents for sending them away – a pedagogical imposition that had been 'for their own good'.³⁵ Some felt it to have been a betrayal of their core identity, resulting in the need to cultivate a sense of self – a false or double self – that was strategic, or even, manipulative, in order to survive institutionalisation. Statements indicative of this included, Carol: 'My armour at boarding school was 'happy go lucky'; 'I played the clown'; Morag: 'Art became my rebellion'; and, 'I worked hard academically as my refuge'.

Sue said that she was kept from attending classes for her first two weeks at boarding school due to her 'hysteria'. She said, 'Dad had told me that if I needed to cry to do it openly, but that weakness was not rewarded'. When her



Portrayal by The Guardian of land reform agitation that contributed to the passing of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

father himself cried in response to her own upset over the phone one day, she felt so guilty that she ceased sharing her pain in his or others' presence. Sue added: 'It's a shame to lose that vulnerable part of yourself,' adding that throughout that first year, 'because Dad kept sending me back [to boarding school] regardless, I became one of the girls crying [in secret] in the bathroom with the taps running'.

Dumbing down one's voice became, in Okely's words, the 'duty paid ... to the parents whose financial contribution is translated as love and sacrifice for the child's greater good'.³⁶ Indeed, several women described varying degrees of 'frozen awareness' – conscious yet emotionally cauterised in the soul. Outwardly these became both victims and perpetrators of the so-called 'stiff-upper-lip'. This holding of emotional life under tight ego/cognitive control was not inconsistent with what some of the schools aimed to inculcate – thus interviewee's statements, Sue: 'I'm a super-achiever now' or, Morag: 'I know I can cope with anything'. And yet, with some women the forced character of these very achievements undermined them, as if to clutch defeat from the jaws of victory: Sue: 'As an adult I have a burning desire to cope alone – and an inability to do it'. Again, Morag: 'I feel like a fraud now. Whose life am I living?' And the woman who married and became an island laird – Lucy – said with resignation in her voice: 'I have blanked out a lot of memories from school'.

Women's awareness of the cost of their education, and the parental sacrifices made in some cases, engendered a "commercialisation of feeling" that, as Hochschild³⁷ puts it, constructs a 'managed heart'. While Hochschild's study focuses on the gender-laden, emotional work of female flight attendants, the same concept may be similarly paralleled with the way that the female boarder, by implication, is trained in the emotional work of projecting acceptance and acceptability to all that is external to her. Hochschild³⁸ refers to this as 'deep acting'. It is expected that such acceptability – sensibility – will allow the woman a smooth transition from the dominion of her father to her future husband. The taming of the inner, emotional, female wilderness to secure a portrayal of restrained, correct etiquette buys socio-economic safety now that she is, seemingly, in a position to restore her attachment needs as she is re-placed onto her marital land.

The literature suggests that where the psyche is forced to 'split' in this way, the 'true self' of a child's 'primal integrity' becomes obscured behind a controlled and often dysfunctional 'false self'.³⁹ Borderline and narcissistic character styles and even personality disorders may result, as joyous spontaneity, creativity and the capacity to sustain authentic loving relationships all become compromised in this playing out, metaphorically speaking, of the 'white man's burden' – the paradox of privilege.

INTERGENERATIONAL PERPETUATION

Interviewees manifested the depths to which they had compartmentalised and split off painful material as they commonly appended their own personal oral histories with reflexive accounts about how they subsequently, nevertheless, sent their own children away. The testimony and admissions were telling. For example, East Scottish aristocrat, Margaret testified: 'I sent my daughter to boarding school because it was fashionable and so she would make good friends... But it was the wrong school for the wrong girl and she has never recovered'. This same woman had earlier said that her brother had been 'bullied terribly at Eton' and, in her view, is still very wounded by his ordeal.

Aristocrat turned organic farmer, Barbara said, 'My husband and I both despised our boarding experiences but sent our three boys away for their last two years. We almost didn't send the youngest off but the other two said, "You have to put him through what happened to us."' Barbara, speaking in detached, third person, acknowledged she had been removed from her first boarding school 'after an apparent suicide attempt'.

Perpetuating the experience on the next generation of children was usually rationalised as being for socio-economic enculturation; 'matched' and continuing oral histories that ensured financial status and class power. Some, however, were still in the process of contemplating secondary education options for their children. The Hebridean laird, Lucy, originally from Irish small-holding roots, adopted into the British upper class, had been removed as a child from her boarding school 'because my school work wasn't happening'. She had failed to adjust and cope with the cliquey inner society that disallowed her entry. Yet, Lucy still believed that 'the social aspects of boarding school are better' than those of the local high school that her children would otherwise attend on their island. Similarly, Sue, who had cried silently with the taps running said, 'The local school isn't going to be good enough for my boys'. Both of these women, borne outside the landed gild but having endured the necessary hurdles to 'marry well' into the desired class, refused to lose their hard won membership by sending their own children to a government funded school. Despite this, Sue admitted that her own boarding experience resulted in her having 'spent two and a half years in cognitive therapy working on issues about 'departure' – goodbyes, fear of being alone, fear of dying or failing at anything,' and she remains in a state of self-confessed fragility. Bottomore & Brym's⁴⁰ 'test of membership – the transmission of values and privileges' through the mechanics of boarding and class succession, completes the circular journey.

The tendency of ex-boarders to perpetuate the 'no pain no gain' trauma on their own children is widely recognised. George Monbiot describes it as, 'Britain's most overt form of child abuse [that] offends no fewer than eleven articles of the UN convention of the rights of the child, which Britain signed in 1991'. And yet, he concludes, 'Our silence on this issue is astonishing'.⁴¹

ACCENT – DISTINCTION WITH DISCRIMINATION

Even the gain that comes from the pain is open to question. Consider a 'cultured accent' as one of the most outwardly evident marks of private schooling. Morag, who had returned to her indigenous childhood place said, 'My posh public schooled accent is frustrating – people don't think I'm a local, but my roots are firmly embedded here'. Here the split sense of self – even when 'authentic' in terms of space and place – is deemed inauthentic due to a constructed, shapely voice. Margaret from the castle testified, 'I had a privileged childhood – a



Children on the Isle of Egg celebrate the 10th anniversary of their successful community buy-out, 12 June 2007.

posh accent and posh education – but it was terribly insecure’. And Barbara remarked, ‘I find I am discriminated against by local farmers for being a woman [farmer] and for having a posh accent ... they won’t help me train my dog because that means they’d have to shout at me. Because of my aristocratic background I think they can’t bring themselves to do it’. In other words, social class differentials lead to blockages in flows of relationship. At the end of the day, these can leave both sides feeling awkward and the rich, impoverished, as is captured, for example, in the expression, ‘poor little rich boy’.

The public school accent becomes an emblematic symbol that is both ‘a sign and a weapon’⁴² – the acquisition of a prolonged initiation rite rewarded with ‘a passport of privilege’.⁴³ In Scotland such an accent, arguably, makes a ‘Brit’ out of a Scot. Indeed, the primary researcher had to check with all the public schooled informants that they were not English to reassure her untrained, Antipodean ear.

PRIVILEGE, NATURE AND SPLENDID ISOLATION

A resounding generative theme was many of the women’s acknowledgment of being socially isolated adults. The island laird said, ‘I don’t see my friends much now – I look after the animals on the farm’. Many noted that they, ‘... don’t make intimate relationships’ or have many close friends and when they did ‘make appearances’

at gatherings of ‘the membership’, it was perfunctory. Most made statements revealing of the managed heart like, ‘I don’t trust groups’ or ‘I avoid social gatherings as much as possible’. The aristocratic farmer, Barbara, noted with painful insight, ‘I hide behind my animals and my commitment to the farm – I think having such an affinity with animals is about having a defect in one’s personality – its compensating for a lack of human relationships’. Although these women felt that boarding school was the reason they’d become relationally reclusive, some interviewees perceived themselves as already segregated from their peers and their wider communities even before boarding school. Boarding had merely cemented this way of being. For example, the castle dweller recounted that she’d not mixed with neighbouring children, had been taught in isolation by governesses up until boarding school age and found it deeply shocking suddenly to be submerged into a peer group for the first time in her life at the age of twelve.

Barbara, said, ‘It is difficult to explain the deep bonds between the aristocracy and their employees – they have great trust and respect for each other, but wouldn’t socialise together’. She continued, ‘I had ‘real’ friendships with the gardener’s children but wouldn’t dream of taking them back to the big house.... Everyone knew their place – in that way it was actually more equal’. Barbara recognised that her noble

upbringing provided her with confidence as a young person, yet she failed to acknowledge that the deportment she enjoyed fundamentally contradicted her notion of 'equality'. Her status and her friends' survival were both dependent upon 'the big house'. Paradoxically it was Barbara who was removed from her first boarding school after an incident of self harm. She described being harassed incessantly by her peers because she 'had a photo of [her] goat by my bed' instead of usual 'photo of mother' as was the norm of her generation. Her failed attempts to hold her ground within her own class strata, away from the protection of 'the big house', sheds light on her favour of traditional power hierarchies where her lineage automatically places her at the top.

Elizabeth, when interviewed in her large farmhouse near Edinburgh surrounded by huge oaks, lamented a lack of relational standing in her adult life, said, 'Farmers [i.e. landowners] used to have much more standing in the community. A lot of people were dependent on them for a living. Now people hardly know who you are'. Lucy, the island laird commented, 'Our house is very private. We can't see the rest of the community. The people are nice but my husband's family are still considered "outsiders" after forty years'.

Almost exclusively, the women noted that they preferred their relationship with nature than with people. Aristocrat, Margaret surmised 'nature brings us perspective and brings one down to earth'. Fiona with the healing centre said, 'I like my own space so stay away from people quite a bit'. Similarly, Morag, living on the land of her roots but feeling exiled by her accent, remarked, 'My relationship with the land is the only relationship I can depend upon'. How far such statements might shed light on the oft-remarked 'British attitude to animals' could be a fruitful field for further study. Indeed, Barbara the organic farmer explicitly said, 'I prefer nature and animals to humans'.

Boarding in big houses, 'cut off by great oceans of land from the outside world'⁴⁴ merely reflected the reality of the landed boarders and strengthened the dynamic of segregation.

GROUNDING: THE LAND AND KNOWING YOUR 'ROOTS'

With marked clarity and resolve, the school principal asserted that, from personal experience and from her observation of students, 'Having one's own patch [of land] becomes very important in the context of boarding ... important for knowing where you belong'. She saw it as a marker of *rooted and grounded* identity where peer and family relationships may have suffered uncertainty and disconnection. This

point was highlighted by Morag's recollection that, 'During my last year [away at school] my parents sold the family home and land. They pulled the rug out from under me. It was very traumatic'. As adults, a minority had an active role working their land and noted the significance of this to their sense of identity and independence. Sue, the first boarder of her family, said, 'I'm addicted to the land now – it grounds me'. Barbara, an organic farmer testified to the visceral extent of this: 'I can't bear the thought of leaving the land or having someone else's animals on it – its very primitive really, very territorial'. Margaret similarly spoke of 'clinging to the castle as our stable family home because we moved constantly with my father being a [high ranking officer in the armed forces]'. And Ella, in her final year at an exclusive fee paying boarding school when interviewed said that when at home on the 10,000 acre family farm, 'I like knowing that everything I can see is mine'.

Consistent with ecopsychological theory,⁴⁵ several respondents described land in terms of providing 'a healing space'. Articulation of this tended to be spiritualised: for example, 'I have a very spiritual connection with nature, a healing connection,' or, 'My relationship to the land is definitely spiritual – God comes through the land, the beauty of the land'. With an ecofeminist twist the latter respondent added, 'We are all standing on the ground ... having babies is global. It connects me to all women'. The adopted Hebridian laird asked somewhat rhetorically, 'is it a homing thing?'

That said, many of the women noted that while their brothers inherited the family land, they were expected to find security and landed connection through heterosexual marriage. Such patrilineal inheritance continues to dominate Scottish land ownership.⁴⁶ Consistent with our reasons for selecting an all-female sample to study, it would suggest that women from the landed classes suffer even greater challenges to the security of their identity than do men. In short, their identity depends on other non-related men and forming lasting relationships.

CONCLUSION – LAND AND REFORMING IDENTITY

Within its limitations of sample and sample size, our oral history study found that, with few exceptions, the privileged women interviewed felt possessive and territorial over their land, space and privacy in ways that could, arguably, be understood as compensatory for their childhood and boarding experiences. Our opening hypothesis therefore finds a degree of support, enough to merit further study we would suggest with a larger sample group. However, we

consider that care should be taken in how far boarding schools should in themselves be focussed in on for this situation. It may be that boarding is just a presenting symptom of a much wider upper-class pedagogical constellation.⁴⁷ We would observe that in recent years, professional bodies such as the UK Boarding Schools' Association have shown growing awareness of the importance of child welfare and protection, in addition to 'opening up' their services and lands to preserve 'charitable' status. It could, therefore, be argued that our qualitative findings are somewhat anachronistic. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the current generation of Scottish landowners have often been through an un-reconstituted approach. Furthermore, many boarding schools remain manifestly proud of their historical narratives that revolve around an ethos of winning and ruling over others. Indeed, such historical narratives are drawn upon to promote the schools and secure future pupils. As Wellington reputedly claimed, 'Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton'. Such an ethos today arguably carries forward from imperialism to globalisation.

For the primary author, the colonial undertones of her observations in Britain resonate with her observations from within a white, landed, boarding family in New Zealand. Here British upper class pedagogical mores have held a largely unconscious sway in a manner that is often more apparent to Maori (indigenous) observers than to most Pakeha (settler) ones. This is unsurprising given the symbiosis between

the British private boarding school system and the Empire. While Britain's 'Celtic fringe' was being 'internally colonised' via the Clearances and earlier Enclosures,⁴⁸ the way was simultaneously being paved for the displaced to construct new identities in appropriated lands elsewhere.

The boarding ethos manages this 'burden' and morally justifies it by teaching *noblesse oblige*. Perhaps that was laudable in the past when feudal colonisation was a European norm. But in the new context of post-feudal Scotland, it must be asked whether such *noblesse* now represents what Illich⁴⁹ called 'the seamy side of charity', and Freire⁵⁰ describes as the 'false generosity' of which 'an unjust social order is the permanent fount'.

Leaving aside justice for the oppressed, we would close by arguing that it is not in the best interests of landowners as people to leave, unchallenged, a pedagogy that perpetuates representation of the self around the control of propertied power and the control over communities that it often carries. Again, we are reminded by Freire: 'This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well'. Perhaps it is in the needs of the children that we best discern the seeds of change, beginning with the recognition that the separation of home and land from boarding school is one that creates many intended and unintended consequences – consequences that have ramifications well beyond the gates of any bothy, country house or castle.

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Address for correspondence:
 chrissbull@yahoo.com.au
 mail@AlastairMcIntosh.com
 c.r.clark@strath.ac.uk