

CHAPTER SEVEN

**Roots-tourism as return movement:
semantics and the Scottish diaspora**

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However ambiguous or polysemous our discourse may be, we are still able to bring our meanings into the public domain and negotiate them there. That is to say, we live publicly by public meanings and by shared procedures of interpretation and negotiation. Interpretation, however 'thick' it may become, must be publicly accessible or the culture falls into disarray and its individual members with it.

(Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*)

Although the terms 'return migration' and 'return movement' are sometimes used interchangeably in migration studies literature, there is actually a significant difference between them. Whilst migration is undoubtedly movement, a movement is, of course, more than migration: it may be a collective project, a cause or campaign. There are religious movements, political movements, aesthetic movements. In diasporan contexts there are return movements such as Zionism and Rastafarianism, movements that are at once religious, political and aesthetic. With the obvious exception of Zionism, the role of 'homeland' for most such movements has remained largely symbolic.

This chapter is concerned with the contemporary phenomenon of 'roots tourism' in the Scottish Highlands and Islands: journeys made by people of Scottish Highland descent (or part-Highland descent) ordinarily living in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in other regions where Scots have historically settled to places associated with their ancestors in the 'old country'. To borrow a phrase from the psychologist Jerome Bruner, these journeys are, without doubt, acts of meaning, but, indeed, what are the meanings of these acts? Might they be understood, for instance, as a form of return movement in the distinctive sense outlined above? Such a proposition would presuppose the existence of a Scottish diaspora – but on what grounds may this supposition be made?

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Cultural dynamics are affected not only by the spatial migration of people and things, but also by the migration of meanings and discourses across and between groups which may or may not be spatially distinct. Thus, in a context defined by historical migration, indeed, in which migration has become foregrounded (suggesting it had previously formed a background), another kind of migration will be examined – a semantic migration – which makes these propositions tenable. It has been said that ‘there is a will to power in nomenclature’, and the concern here is with the nomenclature of diaspora and homeland in a Scottish, and particularly Scottish Highland, context.²

The observations are drawn from anthropological fieldwork conducted between 1999 and 2001. An exercise in ‘multi-sited ethnography’, the ‘field’ encompassed both the physical spaces of the Scottish heritage landscape and the discursive spaces of the global ‘mediascape’.³ The research thus involved meeting and making journeys with roots tourists in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, working with genealogists and heritage organizations, participating in heritage events and so forth, but also sustaining a ‘conversation’ with members of the transnational Scottish heritage community throughout the fieldwork period – maintaining a dialogue, as it were, with the diaspora.⁴ The Internet, particularly, has become an important ‘contact zone’ where members of this dispersed and informal community ‘meet’ to exchange stories, experiences and opinions, and consequently the Internet formed a key part of the research methodology. The informant comments with which the themes of this chapter are introduced were made in response to an online questionnaire that featured on a dedicated project Web site or in the context of an email discussion list devoted to the research.⁵

Disparate acts and disparate meanings

‘Ancestor hunting has been very much a growth industry in recent years,’ writes the Scottish historian Gordon Donaldson in the foreword to one family history how-to guide, ‘part of the package for visitors from overseas.’⁶ Indeed, so popular has roots tourism become that, in 1999, the newly reconstituted Scottish Parliament identified it as one of three key niche markets to be targeted in its New Strategy for Scottish Tourism and commissioned the Scottish Tourist Board to research and develop a plan with which to encourage it further.⁷ Of course, what the Scottish Tourist Board’s visitor profiles and market research statistics fail to answer are those most fundamental questions: Why do people make these journeys? What is it that they find among the ruins and graveyards of their family histories? Perhaps most important, their

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research fails to ask why it is that these 'tourists' rarely consider themselves to be tourists at all and may even take umbrage at being identified as such. 'My Scotland feelings are very personal to me', writes a Canadian questionnaire respondent.

Your questionnaire is the very first format that gave me permission to explain such feelings without being labelled 'tourist'. I am not, and never will be, a tourist in Scotland . . . I felt Scotland many years before I was there. I paid tribute to Scotland on purpose and continue through my quest to learn all that I can about it and how Scotland, and especially the Highlander, evolved. It's only through their world, through their eyes, and through their pains and joys that I want to understand Scotland. I owe Scotland that, because I feel that Scotland invites me home, to be me . . . (BV, Ontario, Canada)

Such 'homecomings' take on many forms. They may involve journeys to those sites which recall the grand narratives of Highland history – places like Culloden, Glencoe and Glenfinnan with their 'intentional monuments' – but also to sites which figure in the more intimate narratives of the family history – the graves of relatives never known, the ruins of deserted croft houses and other settlements, places which, in Riegl's terminology, function as 'unintentional monuments'.⁸ Some are highly organized, packaged events such as the 'Orkney Homecoming' of 1999 in which over 150 Canadians of Orkadian descent travelled together to their ancestral islands for a week of tours and lectures, concerts, and a special homecoming service at St Magnus's Cathedral.⁹ Others are organized by the clan associations and societies which proliferate in the United States and Canada in particular, and which typically involve visits to places associated with clan history and lore, and often culminate in a march through the clan's historical territory behind the clan insignia, saltire, stars and stripes, maple leaf and other flags: a parading of identity which is at once local and transnational.¹⁰ Many are much more personal journeys, undertaken by individuals or small family groups, to ancestral places discovered in the process of family history research or to meet with newly discovered 'cousins', far removed branches of the family tree still rooted in Scotland.¹¹

Many issues emerge in these practices – issues that go to the heart of current discussions regarding globalization and localization, mobility and identity, transnationalism and multiculturalism, the perceived loss of continuity with the past. Such themes, and the anxieties they provoke, are often articulated in the comments of questionnaire respondents. Thus an informant from Pennsylvania describes an erosion of traditional values in America, and a consequent sense of disorientation or alienation:

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I know that too many people in my country are lost, because they have no set of norms or rules to follow, and they are losing their traditions. I think this is hurting us as a whole, and that people need to take pride in the knowledge of where they come from. You have to know where you come from to know where you are going. (S.S., Pennsylvania, United States)

Interest in family history may be a response to the increasingly multicultural nature of 'New World' societies, the sense of one's particular ethnic identity gradually and inevitably being absorbed into the melting pot. An informant from British Columbia writes:

Canada was built by people from many different nationalities and cultures and I feel it is important to at least attempt to leave some sense of history for my children, grandchildren and generations to come. My personal heritage is Scotch/English, my wife's is English/Polish and now one of our daughters has married a fellow of Dutch origin. As these nationalities meld together as Canadians we must remember our forefathers and their customs and heritage. (D.A., British Columbia, Canada)

Some informants allude to an increasingly problematized sense of belonging in their countries of birth, a post-colonial unsettling of settler society.¹² This from Auckland:

For most of my life [my roots] didn't matter at all, though a vague wonder came to me from time to time. It is now important because, though a fourth-generation New Zealander, there is a feeling of belonging elsewhere. The major importance was in learning about that 'elsewhere' and realising it did have a real connection for me. I dare to say almost a sense of belonging to a place other than the country of my birth. (A.S., Auckland, New Zealand)

To find that 'elsewhere' and to visit it is often an extremely powerful, emotional and even life-changing experience. From New South Wales:

It gives one a sense of belonging and I did not seem to have this before I began the family history research. It is hard to describe but there was no depth to my existence—now I feel there is. (S.J., New South Wales, Australia)

Given the distinctions in the way Scottish heritage is enacted across both geographic and social space, the variety of forms of roots tourism, the different anxieties and desires which motivate an interest in genealogy, and, indeed, the particular contingencies of each individual family history, it is evident that these practices can have no single meaning. It is also evident, however, that in the processes of bringing meaning to these disparate acts, much of this potential for polysemy is lost. As Bruner suggests, the 'symbolic systems' that individuals use in constructing meaning are systems that are 'already in place, already

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“there”, deeply entrenched in culture and language’.¹³ The following discussion demonstrates how a dominant cultural narrative of the Scottish Highlands and Islands comes to eclipse the particularities of personal family narratives, and, furthermore, how the meaning of this cultural narrative is determined in relation to other symbolic systems which arguably have little to do with Scottish migration at all. In offering this interpretation, it is not suggested that there are not alternative cultural narratives through which meaning is brought to bear on the practices of genealogy and roots tourism in the Highlands and Islands – there are, for example, explorations of the influence of popular discourses of indigeneity on the desire of people of Scottish descent overseas to identify and visit their own ‘aboriginal’ landscapes.¹⁴

A child of the clearances?

The semantic migration with which the chapter is concerned may be introduced by a more detailed examination of the comments of another questionnaire respondent/e-mail correspondent, a 49-year-old businesswoman, born and residing in Vancouver, referred to as Christina. Although also of Irish and Lowland Scots descent, Christina describes her cultural identity as a ‘Highlander’ of the MacInnes clan. It was her paternal grandparents who emigrated separately from Skye and Sutherland to Canada in the early years of the twentieth century. Christina articulates a sense of problematized belonging in the New World similar to that described above by the informant from Auckland, contrasting the shallowness of her settler roots with the deep-rootedness of native populations.

I think there is a place on this earth that has the collective history of your people in the very ground you walk upon. If you live in North America you understand that you have only a very tenuous hold on the geography. There has to be a place to which you have a stronger connection, that tells the myths and legends of your ancestors, not someone else’s. In this country we will always be immigrants, not really belonging in that very primal way.

In search of such ‘primal’ connections, Christina has made two visits to Scotland and intends to make another with her daughter. She describes being strongly affected by the Highland landscape, particularly by its emptiness and her encounters with the remains of deserted settlements, which are quite prevalent in certain areas. She attributes this emptiness to that most iconic episode of Highland history, described by Richards as ‘one of the sorest, most painful, themes in modern Scottish history’: the Highland Clearances.¹⁵ The Clearances, occurring in the period approximately 1790 to 1860, are much

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mythologized and often evoked as the completion of a process that began in the aftermath of Culloden, involving the eradication of the Highlanders and their culture from their native glens in order to open the land up for intensive sheep farming.¹⁶ The narrative of the Clearances has become well known among Scottish heritage communities throughout the world particularly through the work of popular historians and novelists.¹⁷ John Prebble, in the most popular of the popular Clearance histories, begins:

This book . . . is the story of how the Highlanders were *deserted* and then *betrayed*. It concerns itself with people, how sheep were preferred to them, and how bayonet, truncheon and fire were used to *drive them from their homes*. It has been said that the Clearances are now far enough away from us to be decently forgotten. But *the hills are still empty* . . . It is worth remembering, too, that while the rest of Scotland was permitting the expulsion of its Highland people it was also forming that romantic attachment to kilt and tartan that scarcely compensates for the *disappearance of a race* to whom such things were once a commonplace reality. The chiefs remain, in Edinburgh and London, but *the people are gone*. (emphases added)¹⁸

Christina's descriptions of her visits to the Highlands demonstrate how she has internalized this powerful cultural narrative:

I had been brought up on very positive stories about Scotland and Celticness. When I first went to Scotland I was ready to enjoy the country, and to have some fun looking up all the places that I had heard about. When I got there and as I traveled north my thoughts began to change. *The place was empty, everyone was gone*. There were no places to see that I had heard so much about. No one even knew where they might be. *We weren't missed!* This had been *an ethnic cleansing* . . . If anyone remembered that it had taken place at all, their attitude was that it was really a benefit to the evicted! . . . I also saw the remnants of *broken cottages*, the *remains of runrigs* up the mountains, the *empty glens that used to be full of people* . . . all of this had an impact on me that I truly wasn't expecting . . . *The land is still full of ghosts* . . . and *no one is telling their tale*.

She goes on,

I find it hard to believe that *my people were so unwanted in their own land*, and especially hard to believe that nothing ever has been done about it.

Maybe it is the fact that we come from Canada where past injustices are expected to be rectified before moving on into the future that we had these views. *We really didn't see that much difference between what happened in the Highlands to the Gaels and what happened in North America to the Native Indian population. Except that the Indians were not actually expelled from the continent.*

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Christina was struck by the apparent lack of understanding or care of the Scots she met during her visit.

It seemed very moving to me and yet oddly surreal, because nobody there seemed to acknowledge or even be aware of the feelings it engendered in someone like myself who is a *child of the outcasts*. I guess I don't understand the *silence* about the whole issue both here and in Scotland. They mostly seem indifferent.

Finally she states,

I have never understood the way that Scotland ignores its sons and daughters all over the globe. The Irish are not so foolish, neither are the Jews.

... I don't think Scotland will ever be completely whole until the question of the clearances is put to rest. Don't forget, *we, on this side of the pond, were not wanted, and made to leave*, so maybe we are starting from a feeling of inferiority that makes us very sensitive. On the other hand, there is, in the *exiles*, a strong feeling of belonging to the land, what is needed maybe is a link to the people. That is really what I think the Irish and the Israelis have done. (emphases added)

Christina's comments reflect convictions that are widespread among people of Highland descent overseas, but a number of important points should be kept in mind. Firstly, knowledge of these 'past injustices' is rarely derived from stories passed down within the family – as Christina explains, she had been brought up hearing 'very positive stories about Scotland'. Such knowledge is instead most often acquired from popular history books (elsewhere in her questionnaire Christina herself recommends the work of Prebble) and historical fiction, as well as at Web sites and heritage centre displays that are often drawn from the same sources and which perpetuate their genocidal rhetoric. Secondly, the equation of Clearance with expulsion overseas is, generally speaking, spurious. The Clearances occurred at a time of huge social and economic transformation throughout the British Isles (and much of Europe), which included the general shift of populations from rural areas to the industrializing urban centres as well as the first waves of mass emigration – migrations driven as much by the so-called 'pull factors' of the New World (land, opportunity, the prospect of wealth, etc.) as by the 'push factors' of rural poverty, famine and, indeed, avaricious landlords.¹⁹ Finally, it should be noted that Christina's grandparents emigrated from Scotland in the early twentieth century, at least fifty and ninety years after the Clearances that occurred in Skye and Sutherland respectively. In others words, Christina's grandparents were not exiles, outcasts or the victims of an ethnic cleansing. It is more likely that they left Scotland voluntarily, hoping, with so many millions of other European migrants, to 'better their fortunes' in America.²⁰

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The issue is not, of course, whether the story this and many other informants have constructed around their families' pasts is true or false so much as how and why this particular narrative comes to dominate and shape a new exilic imagination. One explanation may be found in the rubric of 'diaspora' and 'homeland' itself.

The nomenclature of diaspora

In a 1996 article, Khachig Tölölyan, the Armenian-American editor of the journal *Diaspora*, asks: how and why is it that, at the end of the twentieth century, 'a term once saturated with the meanings of exile, loss, dislocation, powerlessness and plain pain' becomes a useful and even desirable way to describe a range of dispersions?²¹ He believes 'diaspora' has become a 'promiscuously capacious category that is taken to include all the adjacent phenomena to which it is linked but from which it actually differs in ways that are constitutive' – phenomena such as expatriate communities, immigrant communities, ethnic and racial minorities.²²

Indeed, within academic discourse there has been much debate regarding the appropriate use of the term. Some believe that if it is to retain any discrete significance, its use ought to be limited to describing the dispersion and exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and that its use in other contexts must remain at the level of metaphor, 'in much the same way', suggests Safran, 'that "ghetto" has come to designate all kinds of crowded, constricted, and disprivileged urban environments, and "holocaust" has come to be applied to all kinds of mass murder'.²³ Whilst many accept that this 'Jewish paradigm' may be applied to the experience of other victimized people – the Armenians, Gypsies and African slaves, for example – there is some consensus that 'Diasporic populations do not come from elsewhere in the same way that "immigrants" do', and that the term, even if it is to be applied broadly, is still a category of subaltern identification.²⁴

Others still believe it is necessary to transcend the 'Jewish tradition' and return to the etymological roots of the word, the Greek 'to sow over' or scatter, and its earliest usage in relation to human dispersion, referring to the Greek colonization of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean. Such a tactic permits Robin Cohen, for instance, to recognize the multiple causes of population dispersal and assemble a new ideal typology of diaspora which includes not only victim diasporas, but also trade diasporas, imperial diasporas, labour diasporas, and so forth.²⁵ Pursuing this project, Cohen has assembled a list of common features of global diasporas, the first two statements of which allude to the causes of population displacement, as follows:

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- 1 Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions.
- 2 Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions.²⁶

Within Cohen's inclusive and flexible framework it is certainly possible to posit the existence of a Scottish diaspora and to demonstrate how it displays characteristics of the various types: the Scots as victims of forced emigration, as agents of British imperialism, as colonists appropriating the lands of others.

The contest over the appropriate use of 'diaspora' in academic discourse is made possible because there is a semantic instability around the term. This might be understood as a tension between the denotative meanings and the connotative meanings of the word. At a simplistic level, denotation is the primary, direct or literal meaning of a given text, whereas connotation includes its metaphorical, symbolic or secondary meanings. Roland Barthes explores this distinction in his book *S/Z*. 'Definitionally', he writes, connotation 'is a determination, a relation, an anaphora, a feature which has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior, or exterior mentions, to other sites of the text (or of another text).'²⁷

If Robin Cohen's argument is accepted, the primary or denotative meaning of diaspora is its original meaning, a neutral term which might be appropriately employed to describe colonization as much as forced exile. It must, however, also be accepted that one cannot divorce the denotative meaning of a term from its connotations. Thus, in referring to a Scottish diaspora, one cannot help but imply an association or relationship with the Jewish diaspora. Thus one might agree with Jonathan Boyarin when he writes, 'It is important to insist, not on the centrality of the Jewish diaspora nor on its logical priority within comparative diaspora studies, yet still on the need to refer to . . . Jewish diaspora history within the contemporary diasporic rubric'.²⁸

This, then, is the first semantic migration that affects what may be understood when invoking a Scottish diaspora. But within academic discourse this is somewhat incidental, since the term is rarely used without some qualification as to what exactly is meant. A more serious slippage occurs when the notion of a Scottish diaspora enters popular consciousness, which, without doubt, it has. And here it is necessary to return to Roland Barthes because, in this migration, the hierarchy of denotation and connotation is turned on its head. What is, in academic discourse, the connotative or secondary meaning becomes, in popular discourse, the denotative or primary meaning. Barthes writes that actually: 'denotation is not the first meaning, but

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pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations, . . . the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature'.²⁹ In other words, outside the close readings of academic discourse, it goes without saying that 'diaspora' means victimization, enforced exile and all the other associations of the Jewish paradigm. Thus it is that, in the popular Scottish diasporan imagination, a moral rhetoric of exile comes to dominate a morally ambiguous history of emigration and colonization.

A rhetoric of exile

This rhetoric of exile is particularly conspicuous in that most democratic of media, the Internet. 'We're the children of the clearances . . .' go the lyrics of one song which circulates on Scottish-interest e-mail lists:

. . . the wanderers old and young
 And a heart and soul in Scotland just like you.
 So when you sing of the great white sheep this you must also know:
 While Scotland mourns her tragedy it was us that had to go.
 In exile now far away from the land of our race's birth
 We're the living flag of Andrew scattered all across the Earth.³⁰

And from an Internet essay entitled 'Cries of the never born', written by an American Scot living in Florida:

In the last 270 years, more than a quarter of a million indigenous people were forced off their ancestral lands, burned out of their homes, sold into slavery, and forcibly assimilated into a foreign culture. But these were not Native Americans, or black Africans, or Jews; these were the white residents of the Scottish Highlands. Their crime: Occupying land that others coveted.³¹

Note how the crimes against the Highlanders have now escalated to include slavery and forced assimilation. At the end of the article, the author encourages readers to contact an Arkansas-based 'Highland Clearances Memorial Fund' for further information. Such are the 'webs of retrospective indignation', Richards describes, through which 'the uninhibited passions and prejudices of a worldwide network of Highland sympathizers' are orchestrated.³²

The hyperbole is not, however, restricted exclusively to the diaspora. In May 2000, for instance, the letters pages of the Scottish broadsheet *The Herald* were buoyed up with angst for weeks in response to comments made by the historian and columnist Michael Fry, who was accused of issuing 'utterances on the Clearances reminiscent of the Holocaust denial of David Irving'.³³ Thus, one letter writer, Dennis

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MacLeod of Easter Ross, leading a campaign to erect a Clearance monument and study centre in Helmsdale, promulgates the popular misconception that to be descended from Highland Scots is necessarily to be descended from the victims of the Clearances when he writes:

The descendants of the cleared people are measured today in only tens of thousands in the Highlands of Scotland. But throughout the world they comprise tens of millions. The project, therefore, belongs not just to today's Highlanders but as much if not more to all of Highland descent, be they from the Lowlands of Scotland, England, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Africa, or elsewhere.

It is hoped that such descendants will embrace and support this project as their own. It will be an opportunity for millions of people, scattered to the far reaches of the earth, to focus in one location their long-held quest for the recognition of their unique history, culture, and heritage.³⁴

Another letter-writer, again conflating Clearance and emigration, equates the plight of Highland emigrants in Canada with that of the biblical exile of the Jews:

I remind [Michael Fry] of two exiles who wrote of the agony of being driven from their homeland. The first, the Psalmist, wrote, 'How could we sing the Lord's song in a strange foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither away.' The second was written by John Gait . . . 'From the lone sheiling of the misty island, Mountains divide us and the waste of the seas; Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland, And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.'³⁵

Such explicit parallels between Jewish and Highland experiences are not particularly new. Andrew Matheson, a somewhat overlooked land reform agitator, whose father had been evicted from Kildonan and he himself from Dunbeath, published a booklet in 1870 entitled *The British Looking Glass* which is peppered with biblical references, providing precedents for his arguments that his readers would no doubt be familiar with. Thus the 'British landlord' by his practice of rack renting is placed 'in full position parallel with the Egyptian bondage (Exodus 1: 11-14)', while the tenants have become 'white slaves . . . a step lower than the Hebrews were under Pharaoh (Exodus 5: 7-19)'.³⁶ Even the 'Assyrians, who put the Jews to the sword and took them prisoners of war' were not as evil as the clearing landlords because they 'would not remove them from their places in Samaria till they provided for them in Assyria (2 Kings 17: 6)'.³⁷ Alas, Matheson was also a man of his time and he apparently did not perceive the inconsistencies in his argument when, with missionary zeal, he justified the forcible appropriation, colonization and exploitation of other people's lands:

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Idolatry and abuse of their land talents are the justifiable causes which entitle and warrant Britain to make war upon heathen countries, such as Australia &c., for making their lands, by artificial industries, more fruitful and useful by the yields of both mines and crops to support mankind, and making their inhabitants tributaries (Deut. 20: 11 and 15).³⁸

But neither are these parallels limited to the biblical history of the Jews: much popular writing on the Clearances today is laced with hyperbolic references to the Holocaust and other modern genocides (see box). Indeed, even the aforementioned proposal for a Clearances monument at Helmsdale arguably draws from the mnemonic architecture of many Holocaust memorials and museums, with its 120 ft high bronze statue, its processional pathway marked with 'standing stones' inscribed with Clearance history, its 'Wall of Descendants', and its anticipated collections of oral testimonies and other records housed in a dedicated 'Clearances Centre'.³⁹

The Highland Clearances as Holocaust: excerpts from popular histories, 1962–2000

- the victims of the Clearances [were] objects of intense hatred such as the gypsies and the Jews were to experience under the Nazis and other groups in the Western World (Francis Thompson, *The Highlands and Islands*, 1974)
 - like the shipping-off of the Polish and other Jews in cattle trucks (David Craig, *On the Crofters' Trail*, 1990)
 - Sellar's crimes against the people of Strathnaver, he said, were to be ranked with those of Heydrich, the man who perpetrated unspeakable acts against the Jews in Prague in the Second World War (Eric Richards, *The Highland Clearances*, 2000, discussing Ian Grimble)
 - *Na Hitleran breun Breatannach* Those stinking British Hitlers
A mhurt mo thìr mu thuath Who murdered my northern land
Gu Lebensraum do chaoraich To make *Lebensraum* for sheep,
Is na daoine sgiùrs' thar chuan Who scourged the people across the ocean
- (Murchadh MacPhàrlain quoted by Michael Newton, *A Handbook of the Scottish Gaelic World*, 2000)
- She had been to Auschwitz concentration camp but there was no statue to Hitler. Back home she felt that the first Duke of Sutherland had dealt in genocide . . . (Rob Gibson, *Toppling the Duke*, 1996, discussing Winnie Ewing MEP)

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- Highland Holocaust (Gibson, *Toppling the Duke*)
- a planned *blitzkrieg* against the Gaelic civilisation (Craig, *On the Crofters' Trail*)
- Sutherland's managers kept records of their shipments of people with the obsessional thoroughness of an Eichmann (Craig, *On the Crofters' Trail*)
- The policy of genocide could scarcely have been carried out further (Ian Grimble, *The Future of the Highlands*, 1968)
- a diaspora which has many recent counterparts . . . that of the Jews from Germany and Poland (Craig, *On the Crofters' Trail*)
- the first Duke ranked with Hitler and Stalin (Gibson, *Toppling the Duke*, discussing the views of Councillor Sandy Lindsay)
- the cultural genocide of the Highlands (Newton, *A Handbook of the Scottish Gaelic World*)
- the Gaels were, and indeed are today, in no way different from the Red Indians, the Jews, the Eskimoes and the vanishing tribes of the Amazon River (Thompson, *The Highlands and Islands*)
- akin to genocide (Grimble, 'Gael and Saxon Scotland', 1962)

Sources: David Craig, *On the Crofters' Trail* (London: Cape, 190), 3, 72, 79, 129; Rob Gibson, *Toppling the Duke* (Evanton, n.p., 1996), 6, 22, 38, 40; Ian Grimble, 'Gael and Saxon Scotland', *Yale Review* 52 (1962), 3–25; Ian Grimble, 'Introduction' in Ian Grimble and Derick Thomson (eds), *The Future of the Highlands* (London: Routledge, 1968), 23; Michael Newton, *A Handbook of the Scottish Gaelic World* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000), 73, 281; Richards, *The Highland Clearances*, 142–3; Francis Thompson, *The Highlands and Islands* (London: Hale, 1974), 61–2.

Furthermore, the influence of a global 'politics of reconciliation' (evinced in the Australian Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act of 1991, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 1995, etc.) is apparent in a motion brought before the Scottish Parliament by Jamie Stone, Liberal Democrat MSP for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, in September 2000:

That the Parliament expresses its deepest regret for the occurrence of the Highland Clearances and extends its hand in friendship and welcome to the descendants of the cleared people who reside outwith our shores.⁴⁰

Among many similar contributions to the ensuing 'debate', Fergus Ewing, Scottish National Party MSP for Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber, supported Stone's motion, reiterated familiar sentiments regarding confronting the past in order to move forward, and again drew parallels between the 'Highland diaspora', Native Americans and Australian Aborigines.

In other countries, the genocide and ethnic cleansing that has taken place, against the Indians in America and the Aborigines in Australia, was acknowledged long ago. Today, the time to acknowledge what happened

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to those who were cleared from the Highlands has come. We can now acknowledge and regret what happened and perhaps then move on.⁴¹

Despite the implicit invocation of a 'Truth Commission', Stone and Ewing are not concerned with interrogating the 'truth' of the Clearance narrative so much as asserting a supposedly self-evident equivalence of this particular cultural trauma with other less equivocal instances of 'genocide'.

As has been suggested, the experience of the majority of my informants is characterized by a sense of discontinuity with the past, particularly the past prior to their ancestors' emigration. Few have grown up knowing just how, when and why their ancestors emigrated, or even necessarily knowing from which country or countries. This lacuna of knowledge partly motivates their current interest in family history research, but it also makes them vulnerable to this vivid cultural narrative that seems to explain their fate. Thus, in popular Scottish diasporan discourse, and according to Robin Cohen's heuristic framework, the Highland Clearances come to constitute the traumatic event which caused the dispersal of their ancestors from an original centre and which provides the diaspora with a 'folk memory' – albeit an 'acquired' one – of the great historic injustice which binds the group together as a diaspora.⁴² The strength of this narrative displaces Cohen's second proposition, which, in fact, accounts for the vast majority of emigration from Scotland, i.e. 'the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions'.⁴³

Homecomings for homeless minds

Before drawing together some conclusions and relating all this back to the phenomenon of roots tourism, it is worth considering another problem that confronts those who seek to imagine a Scottish diaspora. As noted earlier, there is some academic consensus that the category of diaspora remains one of subaltern identification. Using examples as diverse as the Chinese in Malaya, Kurds in Turkey and Sikhs in Britain, Cohen argues that diasporan populations generally experience antagonism and legal or illegal discrimination in the host countries in which they have settled, and may even become the objects of violent hatred.⁴⁴ This alienation from the dominant society leads to diasporan communities retaining primary allegiance to their original homeland and thus failing to assimilate as other immigrant groups supposedly do. It would, however, be absurd to refer to people of Scottish descent in the United States, for instance, either as an ethnic minority or as victims of ethnic discrimination. As is well known, Scottish migrants were influential in shaping those societies in which they settled and thus form part of the

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dominant culture of the 'host countries', which they are, as a diaspora, supposedly defined against. And yet an implicit assertion of ethnic minority status is also arguably evident in the Scottish diasporan rhetoric of exile.

This claim may be seen in the context of what is sometimes described as the 'new white ethnic movement': the desire of white suburban, middle-class, assimilated citizens to effectively unassimilate themselves and recover a more distinct, particular ethnic identity.⁴⁵ Individuals thus turn to their family histories and choose which of their various ancestors' ethnicities to identify with – generally speaking, the more 'ethnic' and the more persecuted the better. This may seem a rather cynical suggestion but the trend is certainly evident, and, of course, the phenomenon is not restricted to the descendants of Scottish Highlanders.⁴⁶ In a recent book exploring the emergence in the 1960s of a Holocaust-centred Jewish-American identity, Peter Novick identifies the concurrent rise of a more general 'culture of victimization'. He describes a state of 'Holocaust envy' in which different groups, each with its own atrocity to commemorate, compete to be 'America's number one victim community'.⁴⁷

One explanation for this may be found in the desire to maintain a positive or moral self-image in which it is more acceptable to identify with the oppressed than with the oppressors.⁴⁸ However, it is also tempting to find some analogy between this social phenomenon and the psychological phenomenon of false memory syndrome, where an identifiable – even though imagined – traumatic episode is believed to account for the symptoms of trauma, the true causes of which remain obscure. Perhaps this sense of exile evinced by many informants is less a result of any historical trauma than that consequence of modernity described by Peter Berger *et al.* as 'a metaphysical loss of "home"'.⁴⁹ As the familiarly Durkheimian argument goes, with the mobility of modernity comes not only dislocation from a physical home place but also a movement away from the cohesiveness of a 'social' home or milieu represented by 'traditional' society. Whilst this liberates the individual from perceived societal constraints, such mobility has 'correlates on the level of consciousness', resulting in a widespread sense of personal alienation.⁵⁰ This, in turn, gives rise to what Berger *et al.* term a 'demodernizing impulse', which 'seeks a reversal of the modern trends that have left the individual "alienated" and beset with the threats of meaninglessness' and protests 'against the allegedly excessive individualism of modern society'.⁵¹ They go on, 'The individual is to be liberated from this individualism to the solidarity of either old or new collective structures.'⁵² Unfashionable though the Homeless Mind theory is, there seems to be much to support it in the field of genealogy

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and roots tourism, practices which may be seen as responses to that demodernizing impulse in which the alienated individual so evidently hungers to belong and seeks to connect itself spatially, temporally and socially with something beyond itself, but authentically of itself. Desiring to relocate the story of the self – the dislocated, ahistorical self – within the history of a people and its place.

Drawing equally from psychoanalytical theories and historiography, a more recent exploration of these themes may be found in the work of Dominick LaCapra. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra contrasts 'structural trauma' with 'historical trauma'. Structural trauma is described as an 'anxiety-producing condition' to which 'everyone' is subject and is associated with absence (for instance, the 'absence of an absolute').⁵³ Absence is transhistorical in so far as it 'is not an event and does not imply tenses (past, present or future)', and so the source of anxiety or trauma remains elusive. As part of the cognitive process, however, absence becomes narrativized and is typically misrecognized as loss. 'The conversion of absence into loss,' writes LaCapra, 'gives anxiety an identifiable object – the lost object – and generates the hope that anxiety may be eliminated or overcome' (i.e. through recovering the 'lost object').⁵⁴ Structural trauma thus becomes converted into a historical trauma: an identifiable, datable event, 'the scene of losses that may be narrated as well as of specific possibilities that may conceivably be reactivated, reconfigured, and transformed in the present or the future'.⁵⁵ Put simply, through this process, the perplexing and irresolvable state of 'paradise absent' is transformed into 'paradise lost', and with this is implied both 'the notion of a fall from a putative state of grace, at-homeness, unity, or community' and the possibility that this Golden Age might be regained. One consequence of this misrecognition of structural trauma as historical trauma is the emergence, as noted by Novick, of a generalized 'wound culture' based on false memory and 'surrogate victimage'.⁵⁶ Thus, according to LaCapra, the conflation of absence and loss facilitates 'the appropriation of particular traumas by those who did not experience them, typically in a movement of identity formation which makes invidious and ideological use of traumatic series of events in foundational ways or as symbolic capital'.⁵⁷

In LaCapra's terms, the Highland Clearances emerge as the historical trauma through which the existential anxieties of people of Scottish or part-Scottish descent dispersed throughout the world may be acted out, narrated and brought into the public domain. The Clearances are thus misidentified as the foundational trauma of the Scottish diaspora, a myth in which the Highlanders (who come to stand for all Scots, see note 2) suffered a genocide, were expelled from their ancestral

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homeland, and forced to live in slavery and exile overseas. According to the mythic structure, prior to this 'Highland Holocaust' was a paradisaical Golden Age of 'at-homeness, unity [and] community' – an idealization of all that is perceived to be absent in the postlapsarian modern world of the diaspora.⁵⁸ But, as LaCapra argues, 'Paradise absent is different from paradise lost' and, as absence is transformed to loss, there is also created the potential for redemption and return: a (not im)possible homecoming for the homeless mind.⁵⁹

So it is that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, 'a term once saturated with the meanings of exile, loss, dislocation, powerless and plain pain' comes to be a useful and even desirable form of self-identification by a group for whom such connotations would seem to be largely inappropriate.⁶⁰ 'Diaspora', then, provides a language through which such individuals can both articulate generalized senses of personal alienation and recover a sense of belonging to a historical community. The process reaches its zenith in the journey 'home' – to the ancestral homeland where Berger's metaphorical and metaphysical home is made material and where a paradise, of sorts, may at last be regained. Understood in this way, it may indeed be appropriate to describe these two- or three-week return migrations to the Scottish Highlands and Islands as instances of a diasporan return movement.

Notes

- 1 Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 13.
- 2 Ihab Hassan quoted in Khachig Tölölyan, 'Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment', *Diaspora* 5: 1 (1996), 4. It will be apparent that references to 'Scotland' and the 'Scottish Highlands' (and, consequently, the Scottish and Scottish Highland diaspora) are somewhat imprecise. This imprecision is actually fundamental to Scottish diasporan identity. Generally speaking, when Scotland is imagined outside Scotland, it is Highland Scotland that is imagined. As T.M. Devine points out, 'To the rest of the world in the late twentieth century Scotland seems a Highland country. The "land of mountain and flood" adorns tourist posters and those familiar and distinctive symbols of Scottish identity, the kilt, the tartan and the bagpipes, are all of Highland origin.' This is certainly borne out in Celeste Ray's study of the Scottish heritage revival in North Carolina, where, she reports, 'The identity embraced as "Scottish" by the Scottish-American community is a Highland identity,' though not necessarily one that would be recognizable as such by Highlanders in Scotland. T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation, 1700–2000* (London: Allen Lane, 1999), 231; Celeste Ray, *Highland Heritage: Scottish Americans in the American South* (Chapel Hill NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 17 and xiii.
- 3 On multi-sited ethnography see George E. Marcus, 'Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-sited Ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), 95–117. Concerning global cultural flows, including mediascapes, see Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', *Theory, Culture and Society* 7 (1990), 295–310.

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- 4 Nikos Papastergiadis, *Dialogues in the Diasporas: Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity* (London and New York: Rivers Oram, 1998).
- 5 For a more detailed discussion of the Internet and diasporan consciousness, including the use of online research methodologies see Paul Basu, 'HOMEpages/HOMELands' in Mark Johnson, David Mills and Hildi Mitchell (eds), *Digital Socialities: The Internet and Ethnographic Imaginations* (forthcoming).
- 6 In Kathleen B. Cory, *Tracing your Scottish Ancestry* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), ix-x.
- 7 Scottish Executive, *A New Strategy for Scottish Tourism* (Edinburgh: Stationery Office, 2000).
- 8 Alois Riegl, 'The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and its Origin', *Oppositions* 25 (1982), 21-51. For a discussion of 'intentional' and 'unintentional' monuments in the Scottish Highland landscape see Paul Basu, 'Narratives in a Landscape: Monuments and Memories of the Sutherland Clearances', unpublished MSc dissertation (University College London, 1997) and Paul Basu, 'Sites of Memory - Sources of Identity: Landscape-narratives of the Sutherland Clearances' in John A. Atkinson, Iain Banks and Gavin MacGregor (eds), *Townships to Farmsteads: Rural Settlement Studies in Scotland, England and Wales* (Oxford: Hedges, 2000).
- 9 See Paul Basu, 'My own Island Home: The Orkney Homecoming', *Journal of Material Culture* (forthcoming).
- 10 For a North American perspective on 'heritage pilgrimage' and the Scottish 'landscape' see Ray, *Highland Heritage*, 127-52.
- 11 Three such personal journeys are described in Paul Basu, 'Pilgrims to the Far Country: North American Roots-tourists in the Scottish Highlands and Islands' in Celeste Ray and Michael Vance (eds), *Scottish North America: Regional Constructions of Ethnicity and Memory* (forthcoming).
- 12 D. Stasiulis and N. Yuval-Davis (eds), *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class* (London: Sage, 1995).
- 13 Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 11.
- 14 See Paul Basu, 'Homecomings: Genealogy, Heritage-tourism and Identity in the Scottish Highland Diaspora', unpublished PhD thesis (University College London, 2002).
- 15 Richards, *The Highland Clearances: People, Landlords and Rural Turmoil* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000), 3.
- 16 The Highland Clearances must, of course, be understood within a much broader political, economic and ideological context which is beyond the scope of this chapter. See, for example, Eric Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances* (2 vols, London: Croom Helm, 1982, 1985); Charles W.J. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988); Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).
- 17 See Laurence Gourievidis, 'The Image of the Highland Clearances, c. 1880-1990', unpublished PhD thesis (University of St Andrews, 1993), and Basu, 'Narratives in a Landscape'.
- 18 John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 8.
- 19 The 1851 Lochboisdale emigration aboard the *Admiral* is a notorious *exception* where there are considerable grounds for associating clearance and forced emigration. Having previously agreed to accept assisted passage to Canada, a number of Colonel Gordon of Cluny's erstwhile tenants absconded from their homes prior to embarkation. With police assistance, the abscondee were pursued and those who were caught were handcuffed and forced on to the waiting ship. See Richards, *The Highland Clearances*, 219-24, for discussion.
- 20 The phrase appears frequently on emigration certificates.
- 21 Khachig Tölölyan, 'Rethinking Diaspora(s)', 9.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 23 William Safran, 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora* 1: 1 (1991), 83.

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- 24 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 250.
- 25 Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997).
- 26 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 27 Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 8.
- 28 Quoted in Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 3.
- 29 Barthes, *S/Z*, 8.
- 30 'Born beyond the Border', lyrics by Maggie Innis, posted to gen-trivia-scotland@rootsweb.com, 3 May 1999.
- 31 Scott Robert Ladd, 'Cries of the Never Born', www.coyotegulch.com/bookart/sym00006.html.
- 32 Richards, *The Highland Clearances*, 3.
- 33 Bill Macaskill, Letters to the Editor, *The Herald*, 12 May 2000.
- 34 Dennis MacLeod, Letters to the Editor, *The Herald*, 19 May 2000.
- 35 Fred McDermid, Letters to the Editor, *The Herald*, 18 May 2000. See Michael Kennedy, "'Lochaber No More": A Critical Examination of Highland Emigration Mythology' in Marjory Harper and Michael E. Vance (eds), *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scotia and Nova Scotia c. 1700–1990* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 1999; Edinburgh: John Donald, 2000) for an examination of nineteenth-century emigrant discourse in Nova Scotia, and Womack, *Improvement and Romance*, 178–80, for analysis of 'The Canadian Boat Song'.
- 36 Andrew Matheson, *The British Looking Glass* (Wick, 1870; repr. Dunbeath: Laidhay Preservation Trust, 1993), 31, 32.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 39. I am grateful to Steve Murdoch for drawing my attention to the use of biblical metaphors by Scottish royalists in the mid-seventeenth century to describe the exiled royalist leadership: see Murdoch, 'The Search for Northern Allies: Stuart and Cromwellian Propagandists and Protagonists in Scandinavia, 1649–60' in Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton (eds), *Propaganda: Political Rhetoric and Identity, 1300–2000* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999). Regarding the use of biblical precedents in Jacobite rhetoric see Damhnait Ni Suaird, 'Jacobite Rhetoric and Terminology in the Political Poems of the Fernaig MS, 1688–1693', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 19 (1999), 105–10; also Murray G. H. Pittock, *The Invention of Scotland: The Stuart Myth and the Scottish Identity, 1638 to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 9–10.
- 38 Matheson, *British Looking Glass*, 46.
- 39 Clearances Project brief, March 2001. Concerning the mnemonic architecture of the Holocaust see, for example, James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 1993).
- 40 Scottish Parliament Official Report, vol. 8, No. 7, col. 700, 27 September 2000.
- 41 *Ibid.*, col. 703.
- 42 Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 23.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 26. See Devine, *Scottish Nation, 1700–2000*, 468–85, for an overview of Scottish emigration trends; T.M. Devine, 'Landlordism and Highland Emigration' in Devine, *Scottish Emigration and Scottish Society* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1992), and Eric Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances II*, 177–283, for discussion of Highland emigration in this wider context.
- 44 Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 186.
- 45 Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley CA and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990).
- 46 *Ibid.*, 150–5.
- 47 Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 190.
- 48 For discussions of 'positive social identity' and 'collective self-esteem' theories in social psychology see Stephen Worchel, J. Francisco Morales, Dario Páez and Jean-Claude Deschamps (eds), *Social Identity: International Perspectives* (London: Sage, 1998).
- 49 Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Random House, 1973), 82, emphasis added.

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- 50 *Ibid.*, 184.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 196.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 196.
- 53 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 82.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 40.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 65. A second consequence is the 'projection of blame for a putative loss on to identifiable others'. In the Highland Clearance narrative this is usually identified as the English or anglicized Lowland Scots.
- 58 See my analysis of the Highland Clearances as myth in Basu, 'Narratives in a Landscape'.
- 59 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 57.
- 60 Tölölyan, 'Rethinking Diaspora(s)', 9. This is not to deny the dislocative trauma of even voluntary economic migration, but it is to recognize the qualitative difference between those *forced to choose* emigration owing to the paucity of viable alternatives and those forced to emigrate by the threat of physical violence.