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Scots and Imperial Frontiers[1]

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Frontiers come in many different forms. There are conceptualised frontiers of thought and of the imagination, frontiers of politics and of policies. There are geographical frontiers apparently drawn upon the ground, beaconed and mapped, frontiers that are imprecise, like mountain ranges and deserts, and ones that are as reasonably precise as the course of rivers (which may, however, sometimes change course). There are also frontiers that have been major and sometimes extensive contact zones, frontiers of group interaction, where the key conditioning characteristic is ethnicity. Such frontiers invariably symbolise either freedom or thraldom, the pioneering frontier of romantic and heroic endeavour which is also the frontier of violence and dispossession. And still the categories are not exhausted. Frontiers should also be demarcated in economic and environmental terms. Here we can identify a frontier of exploration and of hunting, a forestry frontier, and, as the borderlands are settled, the frontier of commodities, both pastoral and agricultural, and perhaps more unusually we should also consider a maritime frontier. As we progress, if progress is the right word, through these different frontiers, the balance between subsistence and commerce constantly changes. As the frontier is pulled more closely into international exchange, so the environmental transformations proceed apace. And finally as the frontier is conquered by modern infrastructures, by railways, steamships – ocean-going, riverine and coastal – the telegraph, roads and ultimately the internal combustion engine, so are the ecological changes speeded up.

That is a lot of 'frontiers' for one paragraph. But frontier is a difficult word for which to find a substitute since 'border' and 'borderlands' do not entirely cover the same range of meanings and implications. Frontier is certainly a highly emotive and potent term that has long meant many different things both in the virtual world of the mind and the supposedly real world of landscapes, peoples and nations. Of one thing we can, however, be sure and

[1] This paper was delivered as a keynote address at the conference on 'Irish and Scottish Migration and Settlement: Environmental Frontiers' hosted by the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen on 21 June 2008.

that is that both conceptual and actual frontiers are immensely dynamic, never fixed, always moving. And these dynamic processes are of course constantly shaped by the environment. This interaction of the dynamism of the frontiers and the environmental contexts in which they occur will be the main theme of this paper. Our focus here will be on frontiers of European, and more specifically Scottish, overseas settlement in the modern period. The word frontier is therefore used here in a manner defined largely from a western perspective. Of course indigenous peoples also have concepts of frontiers, progressively overtaken by the new imperial dispensation.

Imperial frontiers of settlement were perhaps the most dynamic of them all, although dynamic means shifting rather than speedy. When Jan van Riebeck created his 'Tavern of the Oceans' at the Cape of Good Hope in the 1650s, he planted a thorn hedge round his settlement, supposedly to keep out the lions which still infested those latitudes, but also marking out territory, however tiny, and conveying to the local Khoesan people a strange new concept of the frontier. As it happened, Scots soon joined the Dutch, both because of Scots communities in the Netherlands and because of their well-established role as mercenary soldiers in other European armies. But the Dutch frontier in southern Africa would become British within 140 years. There, the frontier of settlement and white dominance took almost 250 years of constant onward marching to reach first the Limpopo and then the Zambezi and beyond in the 1890s. That moving frontier crossed the territories of many African peoples, occupying both lush and drier lands, where manifold flora and fauna were to be found.

When in 1788 the initial settlers and convicts at Botany Bay first drew a line in the sand, ordering Aborigines not to cross it, we already had a new frontier, thoroughly insubstantial yet deeply ingrained in notions of security, the self and the other, the fundamental and arrogated right of possession. That simple line in the sand effectively declared that within the invading European's conception, the *terra nullius* was no more, at least in terms of the piece of ground encircled by that line. In Australia, there were many more metaphorical lines in the sands to come, as the vast arid interior was slowly invaded and partially understood, pressing upon the lands of Aboriginal peoples who had marvellously adapted to the testing conditions of the great Outback. What had started in 1788 was only completed with the trans-continental telegraph line from Adelaide to Darwin, an infrastructural frontier all of its own, in 1872 and the many expeditions which criss-crossed the continent in the decades up to the First World War.

North American frontiers were similarly slow moving, taking from the seventeenth century to the 1890s to be fully worked through. By the time Frederick Jackson Turner formulated and published his celebrated thesis of the frontier as the basis of all American culture, social relations and politics in 1893,[2] the frontiers of the North American Indians (or Native Americans),[3] geographically, economically and culturally, had been seriously constricted. In Canada, as in the United States, the frontier distinctively moved through a whole sequence of geographical zones, from some of the gentle lands of Lower and Upper Canada (later Quebec and Ontario) and the Maritimes to the more rugged great Canadian Shield and on to the Prairies, the Rockies, the Pacific, and finally the frozen north. New Zealand, though smaller, had frontiers constituted by ecological zones and by ethnic distinctions, but because of the size of the two main islands, the processes were greatly speeded up. The multiple frontiers of New Zealand had almost all been embraced by settlers within fifty years of the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840. Thus the 1890s were, intriguingly, a decade of closing frontiers almost everywhere. I shall shortly return to this theme of closure.

There were other imperial frontiers than those of settlement, though these concern us less today – notably the ramparts of the Indian Empire in the North West, in the Himalayan foothills, and between the presidencies and provinces of British India and the princely states. It was this kind of frontier which Henry John Newbolt characterised as a zone of romantic and patriotic heroism in his poem 'Clifton Chapel' with the resonant line 'The frontier-grave is far away – ' implying that a piece of an exotic frontier would be forever England.[4]

Inspired by Frederick Jackson Turner, historians have often used the concepts of the 'open' and the 'closed' frontier.[5] The 'open' frontier is one

[2] Turner's thesis was published as a short paper, but has probably received more citations than almost any other work, certainly in American history. It first appeared in 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History', *The Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington, 1894), 199 – 227, and has been reprinted many times since.

[3] So-called Native Americans themselves prefer 'American Indians' as the Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, has made clear. The term 'Native Americans' was always foolishly politically correct, not least because 'American' is itself an imported concept. The Canadian 'First Nations' is both more sensible and more widely accepted.

[4] Henry John Newbolt, 'Clifton Chapel' in idem, *The Island Race* (London, 1898).

[5] A useful survey of all these issues can be found in Howard Lamarr and Leonard Thompson (eds), *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared*

that has yet to be demarcated and mapped. It is therefore a frontier where the incomers' knowledge is incomplete, a frontier where settlement is tentative, tenuous and frequently tested by warfare or natural disaster. It is a frontier where peoples, invading and indigenous, invariably interpenetrate each other's territory. It is also a frontier where the control of the state is light, where the western concept of the rule of law has been scarcely established, and where, additionally, environmental carrying capacity for human settlement is scarcely understood. Another characteristic is that it is a frontier where the most effective forms of economic exploitation have not yet been established, and where wild animals may well vie for possession with humans. Moreover, at this stage the invaders are predominantly male. Yet we should stress that the open frontier is a place of negotiation as well as of confrontation. Incomers and indigenous may co-operate in economic exploitation as in the hunting and fur trading frontier of Canada. Indigenous leaders struggle to incorporate the newcomers as well as confront them. Attempts are made to pull them into social and political relationships through marriage alliances and other forms of association. Often, these relationships occur outside such formal efforts: the frontier is a place of sexual negotiation and exploitation, a zone of miscegenation–the Métis of Canada (a mixture of First Nations people, Scots and French) are the result of just such processes, as are people of mixed race in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand–and Scottish genes always had a significant input into this. In some cases, indigenous chiefs succeed in turning invaders into clients. Occasionally, an invader could even become a chief himself. But these sorts of relationships occur relatively briefly as the frontier inexorably moves towards a state of closure.

This happens precisely because the open frontier pulls the colonial state outwards, wherein the endemic violence, the roving individualism and group action of settlers forces government to send in troops and administrators. Almost all colonial frontiers end up on a spectrum between the primarily raw open condition and the processes of closure produced by the very problems of openness. Hence the 'closed' frontier is one where white dominance has been established, often after long periods of skirmishing and open warfare, where the writ of the state runs more effectively, where towns are created, and where infrastructures begin to penetrate. The gender balance of the invaders is righted and miscegenation comes to be frowned upon. Since all frontiers should be seen as double, that is both from the point of view of settlers

(New Haven and London, 1981).

and from the perspective of the indigenous peoples, the closed frontier is one where the indigenous predecessors of the whites have either been driven further out into a new open frontier, have been defeated and constricted into reserves, or have begun to be forced into patterns of labour migration associated with advancing capitalist enterprise – the latter is perhaps more an African phenomenon than a North American or Australian one. And as you will have gathered from this exposition of the open and closed frontier, what invariably happens is that the open frontier has simply been pushed further out. Eventually, barriers such as impassable mountain ranges, the sea, effective indigenous resistance or diminishing marginal returns bring a halt to the outward movement of the frontier in specific regions.

What of the environmental transformations wrought by this progression from the open to the closed frontier? The frontier is frequently a place of excess. Animal species are often rendered locally extinct. In Africa, for example, it is possible to chart the creation and progression inland of species frontiers as hunters cleared the land. The great pachyderms – elephants, rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses – retreated ever further into the interior.[6] So did the big cats, regarded initially as vermin and wholly incompatible with human settlement. The quagga was rendered extinct. Giraffe, antelope all retreat and it is an immense irony that the vast migrations of the hugely fecund springbok, destined to become the emblem of South Africa, were eliminated. These processes were driven onwards by the desire for ivory, for horns of every kind, for meat as a subsidy to exploration, railway building and settlement, and simply because the humans of the settled closed frontier had no desire to share their territory with large and dangerous animals which had a keen interest in their stock or their crops. All of this was only arrested with the creation of national parks in the later nineteenth century.[7] This was also, of course, a characteristic of North America, driving bison close to extinction and beaver into remoter places. Whereas indigenous peoples had lived in a

[6] These processes were charted in John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester, 1988). See also Greg Gillespie, *Hunting for Empire: Narratives of Sport in Rupert's Land 1840–1870* (Vancouver, 2007).

[7] An excellent analysis of the origins and development of one park is Jane Carruthers, *The Kruger National Park: A Social and Political History* (Pietermaritzburg, 1995). For a Scot intimately involved with these processes, see Jane Carruthers, *Wildlife and Warfare: The Life of James Stevenson-Hamilton* (Pietermaritzburg, 2001). For a wider discussion of reserves and national parks, see also MacKenzie, *Empire of Nature,* chapter 10 and John M. MacKenzie, 'Conservation in the Commonwealth: Origins and Controversies' in Richard Maltby and Peter Quartermaine (eds), *The Commonwealth: A Common Culture, Essays by Shridath S. Ramphal and Others* (Exeter, 1989), 63–78.

state of comparative, if uneasy, balance with such animals, often deriving their sustenance from them, Europeans wished to establish economies where great wild mammals, dangerous competitors, had no place.

If that is the fate of the fauna of the frontier, the flora also comes under threat. Settlers are usually regarded as hating trees – though it has now been shown that this is not universally the case. Generally, trees and pastoral or agricultural settlement seldom go together. The clearing of the land becomes one of the great heroic – and supposedly positive – attributes of the frontier, as, we should note, it had been at the time of Iron Age agriculture too. One of the most moving Bushmen paintings I know depicts a man wielding an iron implement upon a tree – inconceivable to the Stone Age artist.[8] Thus, forests and woods often retreated like the animals that invariably inhabited them. Lesser flora also came under threat from clearance, from the creation of pasture, from fencing, and above all from the invasion of introduced species. The closing frontier is a place of settlement not just for humans, but also for introduced flora, fauna and pathogens, as well as for grazing animals.[9]

If the expansion of Europeans created these vastly complex frontiers everywhere, what can be said of the Scots' relationships with these phenomena? Scotland was, of course, itself a frontier and one which contained other geographic, ethnic and cultural frontiers of its own. It might be said that this is also true of Ireland. Scotland has always been one of the ultimate frontiers of North-West Europe, Ireland the Atlantic frontier to the West. The Romans vacillated as to where the frontier should be, whether at Hadrian's Wall between what is now Tyne and Solway or Antonine's Wall between Forth and Clyde, or yet further north at the signal stations of the Gask Ridge or great legionary fortresses like Inchtuthil in Perthshire. The Romans were trying to accommodate landscape and ethnic features as best they could and they made some, if relatively light, environmental changes

[8] This cave painting is in the McIlwaine National Park just south of Harare in Zimbabwe.

[9] A useful overview of these processes can be found in William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford, 2007) and William Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock and the Environment, 1770–1950* (Oxford, 2003). See also Stephen Dovers, Ruth Edgecombe and Bill Guest (eds), *South Africa's Environmental History: Cases and Comparisons* (Cape Town, 2002). Alfred Crosby's classic *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge, 1986) provides a global, but necessarily incomplete, survey. The special New Zealand issue, edited by Tom Brooking and Eric Pawson, of *Environment and History*, 9 (November 2003), is very valuable, as well as many other articles in this journal.

to the frontier. They may have helped in some processes of long-distance exchange, though these should never be underestimated in both pre- and post-Roman periods. Moreover, Scotland was still a frontier more than 1,500 years later when the British state in the shape of General Wade set about building frontier defences which inherited much from the Romans – roads, bridges, garrison forts and other features – throughout the Highlands. Within Scotland itself, there was a geographic and mental frontier between the supposedly civilised, commercial South, Central Belt and East and the allegedly wild and barbaric lands to the North West.[10] Yet the British Empire served to iron out these severe cultural frontiers by placing Scots in overseas communities where the need for a supportive and almost defensive critical mass led them to submerge the apparent differences of home in churches, societies, social, sporting and cultural events in which they could view themselves as Scots rather than Borderers, Lowlanders, Highlanders or Islanders.[11]

At least in the case of the last two categories, Highlanders and Islanders, Scots were marginal people struggling with marginal lands. It is perhaps significant that in the Empire, Scots were consequently typecast as being the people who could most cope with marginal places on the frontier. This was, of course, an extraordinarily interactive process. Clearances, the agricultural revolution, industrialism and attendant urbanisation fundamentally changed the full range of Scottish environments and in doing so sent migrant peoples to transform environments elsewhere. As small-scale crofting and relatively small-scale farming gave way to the running of sheep, migrant Scots paradoxically came to run sheep in distant climes, though the sheep were often different – such as the hugely influential Spanish merinos, a vital component of several colonial frontier economies – and the environments were certainly drastically different. As sheep in their turn gave way to shooting grounds for grouse and stag, Scotland became the classic instance in Europe of a frontier land where the elite could pursue their 'sport', creating whole new patterns of employment, architectural forms, and heather-clad hill environments as they did so.[12] This is perhaps why Scotland became – often incongruously – the standard landscape comparator for travellers and hunters throughout the British formal and informal empires.

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[10] Charles W.J. Withers, *Geography, Science and National Identity: Scotland since 1520* (Cambridge, 2001) deals with some of these issues.

[11] John M. MacKenzie, *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, Identity, Gender and Race* (Manchester, 2007).

[12] Willie Orr, *Deer Forests, Landlords and Crofters* (Edinburgh, 1982).

We should, however, inject a note of caution. Scots were far from alone upon the frontiers of empire. But we should think, it seems to me, in terms of reputation, of myths that were both self-generated and also imposed by others. Clearly the Dutch in South Africa thought of themselves as classic frontiers people, creating one of the most notable world myths of migration, ultimately celebrated in the astonishing Art Deco Voortrekker Memorial in Pretoria. Here was a people for whom the myth of their frontier endeavour was central to their identity, even if the majority of them actually inhabited towns and gentler lands that ended up well to the rear of the frontier. The same could be said of the French in North America, whether in Canada or on the Mississippi: they too established a national and ethnic myth of the frontier, once again germinated from a group of people who were actually in a minority. And in each case, this was in many ways a surprising development. The Dutch in the Netherlands were closely packed in a land where the frontier was only the sea, where civilisation was urban and settled. If the French situation was more environmentally, geographically and economically complex, still the metropolitan territory gave no hint of providing a model of surviving and training in frontiersmanship. The intensive pastoralism of home was sometimes transformed into the extensive grazings of the frontier. Only the Scots, perhaps, had some experience of a more extensive hill pastoralism. They certainly put this into practice in very different environments, on the plains of New South Wales and what became Victoria, in the Canadian Maritimes, and upon the southern African veld. Everywhere they were active and influential as graziers. But sometimes frontier environments came close to defeating them – areas of South-West Ontario, for example, were too wet for them, as they discovered to their cost.[13] Grazing districts in Australia were so dry that the search for water became the major resource requirement.

Yet all this was nothing new. Scots had already been at the forefront of the hunting frontiers. Their role in the fur trading frontier of Canada requires no exposition. They were among the most prominent hunters in southern Africa – we need only mention Andrew Smith in the 1820s, Roualeyn Gordon Cumming, Mungo Murray and many others. They usually combined their hunting exploits with natural history fascinations, with a desire to trade ivory, horns and skins to finance their exploits, with a yearning for publication,

[13] For a popular generalised account, see Jenni Calder, *Scots in Canada* (Edinburgh, 2003). Among more specialised works, see Marjory Harper and Michael E. Vance (eds), *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scots and Nova Scotia c.1700–1990* (Halifax and Edinburgh, 1999).

and for memorialising their exploits in donations to museums. Scots seem to have had an advanced sense of a culture of print capitalism, as well as a desire to develop scientific and pseudo-scientific concerns. They were also highly trained in practical subjects, thereby contributing to mineral and other discoveries.

This reveals the extent to which the frontier is indeed a place of discovery. Here I mean the whole range of scientific and meteorological discoveries relating to newly-discovered colonial ecologies. The environmental historian Richard Grove, who had no reason to issue propaganda for the Scots, pointed to the ways in which Scots observers and theorists were more in touch with European ideas than the English in the eighteenth century and consequently wrote of problems of deforestation, declining rainfalls and attendant desiccation.[14] He also observed the manner in which Scottish missionaries took up these and related issues in the nineteenth century.[15]

The creation of colonial infrastructures opened up opportunities for environmental knowledge. When Sandford Fleming, born in Kirkcaldy, embarked upon his great survey of the route of the trans-Canada railway in the mid-1870s, he took with him a historian and a naturalist to complement his own extensive interests in the natural world.[16] Whenever such parties headed inland towards and beyond the frontier, geologists, botanists, artists, entomologists and zoologists had a tendency to accompany or to follow. Soon anthropologists were among this number and indigenous artefacts came to be collected, as well as much else about frontier societies which were considered doomed to extinction in the aftermath of conquest. As telegraph lines, railways and roads carved their way across the landscape, they everywhere caused the bleeding out of geological samples, of palaeontological mysteries and of archaeological remains.[17] The frontier became a place where the intellectual disciplines framed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, partly out of the Scottish Enlightenment, discovered laboratories that would transform their

[14] Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge, 1995), 312, 347, 384 and passim.

[15] Richard H. Grove, 'Scottish Missionaries, Evangelical Discourses and the Origins of Conservation Thinking in Southern Africa, 1820–1900', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15 (1989), 163–87, reprinted in Grove, *Ecology, Climate and Empire* (Knapwell, 1997), 86–123.

[16] Clark Blaise, *Time Lord: Sir Sandford Fleming and the Creation of Standard Time* (London, 2000), 112.

[17] For a wider discussion of these effects, see John M. MacKenzie, *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (Manchester, 2009).

study. Landscapes and what lay beneath them became the subjects of intensive investigation. Soon government departments like geological surveys, newly-developed museums and educational institutions were, in effect, feeding off these frontiers. Often botanical, geological, fossil and archaeological samples were transferred to the metropole to fuel the rapidly developing natural and human theories of the age. They also promoted the development of colonial museums, soon seen as a prime marker of the advance of civilisation into the colony.

The frontier, in other words, was transmitted almost piece by piece back to the imperial mother country and to the cities and towns of the colonial region where the processes of closure had given way to the replication of the supposedly civilised characteristics of the advancing state and its attendant urbanisation. Among the influential metropolitan figures generating these interests were Charles Lyell of Kinnordy in Perthshire. He is credited as a founder of the discipline of geology[18] while Roderick Murchison, born in Tarradale, Rossshire, the immensely influential president of the Royal Geographical Society, was another geologist who produced global, overarching theories of the formation of the earth and of geological zones.[19]

Related to these intensive studies were the mineral discoveries promoting the rapid growth of colonial economies. Diamonds and gold, copper and other minerals prompted almost explosive transformations of colonial frontiers in Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Such mineral discoveries sucked in white settlers in ever-growing numbers, and also pulled in non-European peoples both from across the frontier and from overseas, such as the Chinese in Australasia. All these contributed to mushrooming urbanisation, with all the environmental consequences that that implies, particularly the destruction of timber resources, excess extraction of water supplies, and the rapid overwhelming of indigenous flora and fauna.[20]

Beyond the zone of urbanisation, it is also instructive to look at some typically Scots professions of the frontier. I am going to start, perhaps unexpectedly, with plant hunters, both because there can be little doubt that the proportion of these frontier botanists that came from Scotland bore little relation to the balance of population within the British and Hibernian Isles

[18] Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, published between 1830 and 1833, reached Charles Darwin while he was still on his *Beagle* voyage and greatly influenced him.

[19] Robert A. Stafford, *Scientist of Empire: Sir Roderick Murchison, Scientific Exploration and Victorian Imperialism* (Cambridge, 1989).

[20] One account of these processes is *William J. Lines, Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia* (St Leonards, NSW, 1991).

and because looking at them allows me to make a number of significant points about the interaction between Scotland and imperial frontiers. It seems to me that the reason for the high number of Scottish plant hunters – Francis Masson, William Paterson, David Douglas and George Fortune to name but a few – was because of the well-established combination of gardening and forestry traditions on Scottish estates. Most of them were indeed practical gardeners by origin rather than academic botanists and they generally learned their trade on a Scottish estate – an alternative might be a university botanic garden. Eighteenth-century Scottish landowners were in the business of tree planting and they often developed an interest in exotica. The botanic gardens at Scottish universities were invariably auxiliaries to the pharmaceutical concerns of medical schools; in other words they too had an interest in exotic botanical pharmacologies.

Such plant hunters ranged out into frontiers outside the British Empire. Francis Masson, a garden boy from Aberdeen, who worked at Kew, arrived at the Cape in 1772 and penetrated further into the interior of southern Africa than any other Briton of the time. William Paterson, another lowly gardener from Kinettles in Angus, who worked at the Chelsea Physic Garden, was funded by the extraordinary Mary Eleanor Bowes, countess of Strathmore. Both men published and helped to reveal the remarkable botanical riches of the region. It is intriguing that the Dutch East India Company became very suspicious of their activities, worrying that they were actually engaged in imperial espionage under the cloak of botanical study, insisting at one stage that they should stay inland and never work on the coasts.[21] Invasion anxieties ensured that an interior frontier was safer than a maritime one.

David Douglas and Robert Fortune came later, with Douglas collecting on the west coast of North America between 1824 and his death in 1834, and Fortune travelling and botanising in China and Japan in the 1840s.[22] Douglas' formative years were spent on the Mansfield estate at Scone, Fortune's at a nurseryman's establishment in Berwickshire and then at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. All of these plant hunters provided images of frontiers in southern Africa, North America and the Far East. They were all destined to change the environments of Scotland as well as England, Wales and Ireland,

[21] MacKenzie, *Scots in South Africa*, 31–5.

[22] Among many popular accounts, see Charles Lyte, *The Plant Hunters* (London, 1983), 47–79; Mary Gribbin and John Gribbin, *Flower Hunters* (Oxford, 2008), chapters 3, 4, 6; and Ann Lindsay Mitchell and Syd House, *David Douglas, Explorer and Botanist* (London, 1999).

with the trees, shrubs and plants they brought home. A visit to any arboretum, any country estate or urban park, almost any residential garden, reveals the extent to which they transformed the appearance of the Scottish frontier. They reveal not only the importance of the Scottish estate and of botanical institutions in relation to exotic frontiers – a theme to which I shall return – but also the interactive fashion in which one frontier could influence another.

A closely related frontier profession is that of forestry. In India, forests constituted a vast internal frontier, available to be exploited for the hard woods required for railway sleepers and telegraph poles. The forests were seen as wild and untamed, the residence of the so-called tribes, Aboriginal peoples unrelated to the great religious ethnicities of the sub-continent, and also as the place where the best hunting could be found. The Indian Empire required a forestry service and it is striking that up to the late nineteenth century, the senior figures in the Indian Forest Service were all either German, with names like Brandis, Ribbentrop, and Schlich, or Scots – such as Alexander Gibson who came from Stracathro or Hugh Cleghorn from Stravithie near St Andrews.[23] Once again, Scottish foresters first cut their axes, as it were, on the traditions of Scottish forestry developed on the great estates in the eighteenth century. This was not only an Indian phenomenon. John Croumbie Brown, who was also a Presbyterian minister, was the most important forester and colonial botanist in the nineteenth-century Cape whose many publications helped to develop forestry as an academic subject in Britain. He insisted that colonial forestry services could best be developed by Scots who were particularly amenable to training.[24] Though he suffered many administrative setbacks at the Cape, he nevertheless helped to establish the system of forest reserves there. Scots who had experience of India and of South Africa fanned out into many other colonial territories to help found their forest services. This eventually happened in parts of Canada, but there the forests seemed so vast that almost unbridled exploitation was often the order of the day. Almost inevitably, Scots became important in the lumber industry there.

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[23] There is now an extensive literature on forestry. See Grove, *Green Imperialism* and Gregory A. Barton, *Empire Forestry and the Origins of Environmentalism* (Cambridge, 2002), among many other works.

[24] John M. MacKenzie, *Empires of Nature and the Nature of Empires: Imperialism, Scotland and the Environment* (East Linton, 1997), 67, 70–1, 80. John Croumbie Brown often referred to the suitability of Scots as foresters. See for example his *Management of Crown Forests at the Cape of Good Hope under the Old Regime and the New* (Edinburgh, 1887), iii.

If plant hunters and foresters are characteristic visitors to the open frontier, so too are missionaries. Here Scots were to play a really major role. Although the Church of Scotland was famously hesitant about establishing missions, Scots clerics were appearing on the frontier, certainly in southern Africa, from at least the second decade of the nineteenth century.[25] By the 1820s they were well established on the highly disturbed eastern frontier of the Cape. This was very much a violent military frontier and was to remain so for at least another fifty years. Missionaries had a highly ambivalent relationship with the military and colonial authorities, often deprecating the violence of the frontier, sometimes advocating the cause of African authorities even though it was ultimately the break-up of African political systems which helped to swell the numbers of their adherents and converts. What is intriguing about this is the extent to which missionaries set about replicating some of the environmental and social conditions of Scotland at their mission stations. For one thing, they swiftly abandoned the use of wood and thatch in their building techniques. It is quite clear that they considered building in stone to be a marker of civilisation. The Scottish superintendent of the London Missionary Society, John Philip, specifically suggested this. They then set about creating villages that had a distinctly Scottish appearance, with cottages along a street frontage and long gardens laid out behind. Many visitors remarked that they would have thought they were in Scotland but for the black faces.

The 1843 Disruption provided a tremendous burst of energy on several colonial frontiers as many mission stations, like churches at home, were doubled with the arrival of the Free Church, itself more eagerly evangelical, in a mission sense, than its established predecessor. Education, printing, technical training, gardening, all became vital aspects of many of the missions, themselves repeatedly moving out further beyond the frontier in search of fresh souls to save, as they would have seen it. At this point, it seems to me, you can see the appearance of the forms of the Scottish estate on a remote colonial frontier. Missionaries were great tree planters. The mission community, like that of the estate at home, had its church, its school or college, its arboretum, its saw mill, its experimental garden, even its own brick works, with more substantial residences inhabited by the missionaries, and the humbler ones by their adherents. When you look at the design of so many Scottish mission stations, at the plans which the missionaries sometimes lovingly drafted, this analogy seems to me to emerge clearly

[25] MacKenzie, *Scots in South Africa*, chapter 4.

from the documents.[26] Some of the missionaries themselves, like the plant hunters, had backgrounds associated with such estates. One such was James Stewart who, like David Douglas, came from Scone and was described as ploughing with his rifle to hand and his Bible in his pocket.[27] This was useful experience for Africa and he described the moment when he received his 'call' to missionary work on the frontier in a field so carefully that its location on the edge of Scone is readily identified.

Of course, the true paradigm, not to mention paragon, of the missionary frontier was David Livingstone of Blantyre. None of Livingstone's biographers has ever adequately noted the ways in which he was truly a child of his environment. He himself described the intense natural historical interests of his childhood, the manner in which these fed into his medical studies, his botanical interest in pharmacology, and his concern with mission and garden on the southern African frontier.[28] Both he and his father-in-law Robert Moffat saw the mission garden as a prime marker of civilisation, something which distinguished them from both Africans and Afrikaners. When on his explorations Livingstone reached the Victoria Falls, his first instinct was to lay out a garden on an island in the Zambezi. His great work, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857), underestimated by a biographer like Tim Jeal,[29] is significantly dedicated to Sir Roderick Murchison and famously displays an image of the tsetse fly on its title page. Livingstone placed stress on the 'researches' of the title. He viewed himself as a scientist and was hailed as such by such notable scientific figures as Adam Sedgwick and William Whewell. Livingstone, the classic Scots frontier explorer and investigator, inspired an entire generation who sought to put his scientific as well as his religious principles to good effect.

If this sounds a little like a celebration of Scots achievements on the frontier, I draw back: celebration is never part of academic discourse and

[26] For a plan of a mission station, see W.P. Livingstone, *Laws of Livingstonia: A Narrative of Missionary Adventure and Achievement* (London, 1921), plate opposite 209.

[27] James Wells, *Stewart of Lovedale: The Life of James Stewart* (London, 1909), 1, 4, 6.

[28] David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London, 1857). See the 'personal sketch' which opens this work, as well as many references throughout the work to gardens, natural history, geology, meteorology etc. These are analysed in John M. MacKenzie, 'Missionaries, Science and the Environment in Nineteenth-Century Africa' in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880–1914* (Grand Rapids, 2003), 106–30, particularly 107–10. See also some of the contributions in John M. MacKenzie (ed.), *David Livingstone and the Victorian Encounter with Africa* (London, 1996).

[29] Tim Jeal, *Livingstone* (London, 1973).

should certainly be avoided in writings about Scots overseas. Robert Knox, doctor, anatomist and influential racist, always stands as a reminder of the great variety of Scots in the Empire. Knox was also a figure of the frontier. A military doctor, like so many other Scots medics of the time, he served on the Eastern Cape frontier. His book *The Races of Man* of 1850 and his notion of 'the war of the races' were unquestionably influenced by his frontier experiences. There can be little doubt that pseudo-scientific racism and the experience of empire were closely connected. Intriguingly, Knox argued in an article of 1869 that white settlement in the tropics was a failure. Anglo-Saxons in particular, he suggested, unlike the Celts, were incapable of acclimatising there.[30] He was proved wrong, as on almost everything else, but his view of the distinction between Anglo-Saxon and Celt was a common one at the time.

Knox offered some racial justification for the intrusion of settlers, and their appearance on frontiers is often described in contemporary records as being the 'planting' of people. It is a powerful environmental metaphor intended to convey parallel notions such as the planting of grasses to hold sands together, the planting of trees to prevent erosion and avoid desiccation. The planting of peoples was indeed designed to consolidate territory and, supposedly and hopelessly unrealistically, produce peace. The 1820 settlement at the Cape was designed to do all of these things: consolidate a frontier, exclude the Dutch from dominance upon it, create better relations with indigenous people, and produce new commercial relationships with both Africans beyond the frontier and in the colony itself, thereby enhancing production and trade, incidentally contributing to hard-pressed colonial revenues. Scots constituted about 10 per cent of the settlers and the Governor decreed that they should be 'planted' to the north and west of the settlement in hilly country, with English and Welsh to their South and East.[31] The suspicion that the geographical relationships of the United Kingdom were being reproduced on this distant frontier seems irresistible. In this settlement, as elsewhere, Scots liked to think that they were different and the English – and others – sometimes found it convenient to play upon and exploit these differences.

One of the settlers, the writer and journalist Thomas Pringle, whose party had been sponsored by Sir Walter Scott, was convinced that Scots made the better frontier settlers. He wrote that the 'sublimely stern' aspect of the country filled the English with 'a degree of care approaching to consternation', as they were used to what he described as the 'rich tameness' of their

[30] Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London, 1971), 22.

[31] MacKenzie, *Scots in South Africa*, 48–57.

own landscape. But the Scots, on the other hand, were activated by 'stirring recollections of their native land … vividly called up by the rugged peaks and shaggy declivities of this wild coast', exciting them to 'extravagant spirits', while some 'silently shed tears'.[32] Pringle continued to think that Scots made the best settlers, that they were more practical, more inured to hardship and more capable of coping with the environment. In 1823 a writer, identified only by initials, wrote to the *Daily Chronicle* urging that more Scots, particularly Highlanders, should be sent to the frontier as only they were able to cope with the conditions there.[33]

The Scots in South Africa, as on other frontiers, developed a twin reputation: they were as violent as the next frontiersmen, swept up as commandos and volunteers in the frontier wars. But they were also said to be willing to learn from their Dutch and Khoe neighbours on the frontier. They observed, investigated and followed their techniques for coping with the environment, using seeds they secured from the Boers and following their stock-rearing practices, as well as learning pharmaceutical techniques (for example in dealing with snake bite) from the Khoe. Livingstone too had studied the African pharmacopoeia. Perhaps marginal men and women took an interest in others who lived on the margins.

This raises the question of whether Scots were indeed more adaptable to new environments, more willing to learn from indigenous peoples than other Europeans. The Orcadian Arctic explorer John Rae may well have been more successful than so many of the failed Franklin research expeditions because he learned from the Inuit and was prepared to follow their practices. It has been suggested that Scots settlers in New Zealand were more willing to learn from Maori agricultural techniques, thereby coping better with a new environment in the process.[34] We also know that Scots administrators in India adopted different techniques of ruling the Indian peasantry, and that Scottish-born William Farquhar, the first British Resident and Commandant of Singapore, was regarded as being much more sympathetic towards native authorities than his more autocratic boss, Stamford Raffles.[35] But we always need to check

[32] Quoted in MacKenzie, *Scots in South Africa*, 52.

[33] Quoted in ibid., 55.

[34] Tom Brooking, 'Weaving the Tartan into the Flax: Networks, Identities and Scottish Migration to Nineteenth-Century Otago, New Zealand' in Angela McCarthy (ed.), *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2006), 194.

[35] Interestingly, the National Museum of Singapore has a feature in which this characteristic of Farquhar is prominently asserted.

ourselves. Examples of sympathy with indigenous peoples can readily be found, but Scots whether in North America, Africa, Asia or Australasia were often endowed with as much arrogance and disdain, running of course to violence, as any other settler group.

Still it seems to me that in order to understand frontiers and other aspects of the so-called British Empire, we should take a four-nations approach. The fact of the matter is that it is possible to identify, in effect, four empires: Irish, Scottish, English and Welsh. Moreover, each of these 'empires' had a reciprocal effect upon the nationalities of the United Kingdom. As I have pointed out before, it is a huge paradox that the British Empire, far from submerging the different ethnicities of the British Isles, actually served to emphasise and enhance them.[36] Imperial studies, it seems to me, should pay more attention to these effects in the future. And perhaps the best route into this is an expedition towards a new historiographical frontier. A number of the papers in this issue of the *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies* attempt to do just that.

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[36] John M. MacKenzie, 'Empire and National Identities: The Case of Scotland', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 8 (1998), 215–31.