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SN 7135 – Empire and Civil Society in 20th century Scotland: Imperial Decline and National Identity c. 1918 – c. 1970

The research investigated interpretations of Scotland's imperial role and its displacement as a dominant representation of national identity between c. 1918 – c. 1970. Key aims of the research were to map civil society organisations concerned with empire in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow; and provide in depth case studies of two key Scottish institutions demonstrating a continuing interest in empire, the *Church of Scotland* and the *Scottish Trades Union Congress* (STUC). The research found that the late 19th and early 20th century represented the high point of imperialist enthusiasm in Scotland, manifested in celebrations of the Scottish contribution to empire. Thereafter attitudes to the empire became more differentiated: anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism became a consistent feature of the labour movement in Scotland, middle-class enthusiasm for the Dominions was pronounced in the inter-war years; in the post-war years adjustments were made to the changing British Commonwealth, the process of decolonisation itself provoked hotly contested positions between certain groups in Scottish society. Connections to and interest in the empire were part of the local identities of all four major Scottish cities. Major institutions such as the *Church of Scotland* and the *Scottish Trades Union Congress* moved from having divergent perspectives on empire to occasional parallel support for aspects of decolonisation, such as African independence movements. This laid the ground for the emergence of broad alliances on international issues, such as the *Anti-Apartheid Movement*. The experience of empire contributed to the development of a Scottish internationalism, which has often been claimed as a positive national characteristic.

Project overview

- To explore the ways in which attitudes to empire in Scotland changed between 1918 and the period of decolonisation in the 1960s;
- To seek evidence of active interest within civil society in Scotland in aspects of empire or imperial affairs (whether pro- or anti-imperialist groups);
- To map patterns of activity in terms of life cycles of organisations, membership, key issues, and relationships between organisations;
- To provide a detailed account and analysis of selected case study organisations to track shifting attitudes to and interest in empire and imperial affairs;
- To provide a comparison of the four major Scottish cities of patterns of civil society activity associated with empire;
- To assess the impact that the activities of such organisations had on wider public debate in Scotland;
- To analyse representations of Scottish national identity within discourses of empire in organisational literature and in press coverage;
- To contribute to the evidence base of social theorising about the impact of the end of empire on constructions of national identities in Britain.

Methodology

There were three component parts to the methodology

1. Mapping civil society organisations, which exhibited as either the central focus of or part of their activities an engagement with empire (whether pro- or anti-) in the four major Scottish cities. This identified a wide range of organisations which in some way exhibited an interest in empire, though very few had a primary focus on empire or colonial affairs. Types of organisation included: commercial, business and industrial organisations, churches, religious and philanthropic bodies,

non-party organisations concerned with citizenship, international peace, etc.; trade unions, pro-empire and anti-colonial organisations, university networks and student organisations, learned societies, and cultural organisations. Sources consulted included post office directories, newspapers, organisational records, occasional publications, university archives and magazines, personal papers, oral history interviews

2. In-depth case studies of two major Scottish institutions the *Church of Scotland* and its foreign missions, and the *Scottish Trades Union Congress* and Trades Councils. Both the *Church of Scotland* and the STUC have extensive archives, located respectively at the *National Library of Scotland* and *Glasgow Caledonian University* Sources consulted included committee reports, magazines and occasional publications, annual reports, minutes, correspondence, newspaper coverage, and oral history interviews.

3. Oral history interviews of 28 people, broadly divided into two groups – former missionaries and others who were connected to the *Church of Scotland*, activists in labour movement organisations, NGOs, and race equality organisations: Interviewees were identified through a 'snowball' technique, where contacts initially approached suggested other people. The purpose of the interviews was to explore individuals' attitudes to the British empire, through their experience of living in colonial territories (where this applied), and through activities which contributed to public debates about the nature of empire, colonialism, etc. The interviews contributed information that is not available in documentary form where organisational archives do not exist, or may not ever exist, as well as providing information about personal experiences and views likely only to be documented through interviews. The interviews were informative to our understanding of how attitudes to empire and colonialism changed from the 1950s through to the 1980s, the role of personal experience in shaping attitudes, the interconnections between civil society organisations; and generational shifts in attitudes and discourses.

Two seminars were held with interviewees to give feed-back on findings from interviews and to elicit comments and discussion on these from interviewees.

The interviews were professionally transcribed, and final versions agreed with interviewees, where possible. In a small number of cases the transcripts and recordings have been edited to remove personal comments or conversations. Our decision to do so was influenced by considerations related to the failing health of some interviewees.

Archives

Sources consulted were located in the following archives *Edinburgh University Library, National Library of Scotland, National Archives of Scotland, Dundee University Library, Dundee Public Library, Aberdeen University Library, Aberdeen City Archives, Aberdeen Public Library, Mitchell Library Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, School of Oriental and African Studies, London School of Economics, Women's Library London, Cambridge University Library*

Project Findings

From the First World War until decolonisation the empire was part of public consciousness in Scotland, moving from widespread celebration of Scotland's contribution to empire-building to majority endorsement of decolonisation. Renegotiation of political and constitutional relationships across empire was mirrored in civil society activities. While public interest in debates about empire was episodic, this cannot be described as a gradual descent into apathy.

Many civil society organisations with imperial interests had Scottish organisational structures within British or international organisations, and a Scottish identity was often articulated in their activities. The extent to which this was seen as complementary to British identity varied, depending on how much organisations sought to promote imperial solidarity. Wholly Scottish institutions, such as the

Church of Scotland and the STUC, most powerfully articulated Scottish attitudes to empire. The perspectives of these institutions were divergent, but over time moved closer together, facilitating the emergence of organisational alliances within civil society.

The changing nature and dissolution of empire was accompanied by discursive shifts in formulations of Scottish identity. Celebrations of Scots as empire-builders and contributors to its 'civilising mission' continued to be articulated in the inter-war years, while Scottish kinship with communities in colonies of settlement also occupied a prominent place in public discourse. Critiques of empire generally did not emphasise Scotland's historical role, but were directed towards British imperialism, European imperialism, or imperialist economic interests in general. New discourses of internationalism, in which concepts of humanitarianism, equality and solidarity were central, were expressed in terms of universalistic values. However, adherence to these values could be regarded as a matter of national pride.

Some civil society organisations lobbied governments or sought to influence public opinion, while major institutions such as the *Church of Scotland* and the STUC regarded it as within their remit to comment on colonial affairs. The 'high politics' of imperial governance were interconnected with the concerns of civil society, which were shaped by consciousness of the place occupied by both the British state and Scotland within wider geo-political formations. The range of organisations and their interrelationships were conditioned by local and regional characteristics. These varied according to economic links to empire, the importance of colonial experience among local elites, and working-class responses. An interest in empire crossed boundaries of gender and class, whether expressed as promotion of the empire or as a model for international relations, or as a historical relationship involving responsibilities vis-a-vis the peoples of the empire.

Interviewees

Date of interview	Interviewer (EB = Esther Breitenbach; LO = Lesley Orr)	Interviewee	Age	Sex	Occupation or relevant experience
24 November, 2010	EB	John McCracken	72	M	Retired professor; lived in Malawi; historian of Africa
25 November, 2010	EB	Alan Sinclair	56	M	Active on third world issues, founder of <i>Scottish Education and Action for Development</i>
25 January, 2011	EB	Des Loughney	c. 65	M	Trade unionist and secretary of Trades Council
31 January, 2011	EB	John Nelson	62	M	Anti-Apartheid activist
7 March, 2011	EB	Angela Smith	70	F	Retired professor; lived in Malawi; taught Commonwealth literature
10 March, and 31 March, 2011	EB	Ruth Najda	c. 50	F	Former VSO and development education worker
10 March, and 31 March, 2011	EB	Anne Kane	c. 50	F	<i>Oxfam</i> staff member since the 1980s
17 March, 2011	EB and LO	George Shepperson	89	M	Retired professor; founder of <i>Centre for African Studies, Edinburgh University</i>
22 March, 2011	EB	Martin Verity	63	M	Former race relations/race equality worker
6 April, 2011	EB	John Hargreaves	87	M	Retired professor; worked in Sierra Leone; taught African history
14 April, 2011	EB	Ida Jarron	89	F	Fundraiser for <i>Commonwealth Games, 1970</i>
15 April, 2011	EB	Fraser Falconer	60	M	Former <i>Oxfam</i> worker.
22 April, 2011	EB	Selma Rahman	66	F	Race equality activist and worker
13 July, 2011	EB	Edith Constable	68	F	Labour movement activist
26 July, 2011	EB	Sandy Hobbs	74	M	Labour movement activist
9 August, 2011	EB	Willie Thompson	72	M	Labour movement activist
26 October, 2010	LO	Graeme Brown	78	M	Former missionary in Nigeria and South Africa
27 October, 2010	LO	Liz Crosby	66	F	Former missionary in Malawi and Mauritius
27 October, 2010	LO	Brian Crosby	69	M	Former missionary in Malawi and Mauritius
25 January, 2011	LO	Douglas Aitken (with Fiona Aitken)	77	M	Former missionary in Kenya
26 January, 2011	LO	Jim Wilkie	77	M	Former missionary in Zambia, also worked in South Africa
14 February, 2011	LO	Duncan Forrester	78	M	Former missionary in India, later lecturer at New College, Edinburgh
25 February, 2011	LO	Iain Whyte	71	M	Worked in Ghana, then chaplain to overseas students in Glasgow, Anti-Apartheid activist
7 April, 2011	LO	Mark Wilson	85	M	Former missionary in India
8 April, 2011	LO	Elsie Moir	c. 70	F	Worked in South Africa
8 April, 2011	LO	Ian Moir	c. 74	M	Worked in South Africa
2 May, 2011	LO	Margery Turnbull	88	F	Former <i>Christian Aid</i> worker
18 May, 2010	LO	Evelyn Small	89	F	Active in <i>Royal Overseas League</i>

DRAFT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interviews

Introduction by interviewer

- Who we are
- What the project is aiming to do
- Permissions aspect
- Process – transcripts to be sent to interviewee
- Seminar to which they will be invited
- Permission to take photo.

[Intro – aim to focus particularly on 1960s and 1970s – earlier if appropriate – but also 1980s developments where appropriate. Important not to stray into present if people still involved in same organisations. Also need to get people to try to remember what it was like then, how it felt then, rather than re-evaluating from present perspective – though this is something to ask at end.]

Looking for information not just about interviewee's experience, but anything about key individuals, dates, events, etc. (which we can follow up via newspapers, journals etc.)

Where people have had direct experience within empire, would be good to explore this in some depth, and attitudes re particular territory – e.g. India, Malawi, Kenya, etc. – but also good to ask what were people's views about things happened that did not necessarily involve them directly. We may want to develop a checklist of these – e.g. 1959 campaign against Central African Federation (will not always be necessary to raise these).

Start recording at this point

Name of interviewer
Date of interview

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWEES

A. Information about individual

- Name
- Age
- Profession, type of employment they were in
- Organisational affiliation, or other connection relevant to project
- Family background – if perceived as relevant (issue of generational influences)

Follow either B.1 or B.2 questions as appropriate. In some cases it will be appropriate to go through both sets of questions.

B.1 Questions for those who were active in foreign mission work (or similar)

a. Can you say something about the kind of work you did, when this took place, etc.?

- b. How useful was the training and preparation you received?
- c. What kind of relationships did you have with Africans/Indians/local people in your place of work? In the local and wider community?
- d. What kind of relationships did you have with European settlers/residents? With other (non-Scots) missionaries?
- e. Were there key events, political situations or incidents which affected these relationships in particular ways?
- f. What would you say were the key characteristics of the work you did, and the main aspects of the Church's approach to missionary work at this time?
- g. Do you think that the missionary work of the Church of Scotland was distinctive in any way compared to the missions of other churches?
- h. How would you describe the relationship between the Church of Scotland/Foreign Mission Committee, and the local Church? Did it change during your time of service? In what ways and why?
- i. When you were at home/on furlough, what activities did you carry out/were expected of you? What kinds of response did you get?
- j. How do you think missionaries and missionary work were perceived generally in Scotland at the time?
- j. When did you leave missionary service, and why?
- k. What did you do subsequently?

[If the response to question B.1.k indicates that the interviewee subsequently became involved in organisations or campaigns in Scotland/Britain, continue with questions under B.2 heading. If not, move to Section C].

B.2. Activity in organisation/campaign and views of this

Your involvement

- a. Which organisation/s, campaign/s, or activities were you involved in?
- b. When was this?
- c. What were your reasons for getting involved?
- d. What kind of training and/or preparation did you receive?
- e. What role did you play? Did it change over time?
- f. Were you involved in or a member of other organisations/groups etc at this time: churches, trade unions, political parties, NGOs, women's movement, etc.

History/background of the organisation/campaign

- a. What were the organisation's/campaign's aims?
- b. Were you among the founders of this organisation/group?
- c. If so, can you tell us something about how it came about?
- d. If not, can you tell us something about the organisation/campaign's history and development before you got involved?
- e. Was the organisation/campaign locally based, regional, Scottish, UK, international?
- f. At what level were you involved?

Organisation/campaign at the time

- a. What were the activities of the organisation?
- b. What was its purpose/vision/aims?
- c. Who was involved in the organisation/campaign – leading individuals, types of activists, other organisations etc.?
- d. What are the main/most significant things the organisation/campaign did at the time, in your view?
- e. Were there specific events/incidents/occasions that had a high profile in debates at the time?
- f. Were there particular events/incidents etc. that made an impression on you?
- g. Were there particular people and/or groups that you saw as taking a leading role to promote the aims you were in favour of?

Responses/impacts

- a. Were there particular people and/or groups who were opposed to your organisation/campaign's aims or actions/interventions?
- b. What impact do you think the organisation/campaign had?
- c. How do they think other people saw the organisation/campaign and its activities at the time?
- d. How would you describe the response you got in Scotland to your organisation/campaign's activities – from other organisations, politicians, press, etc.?
- e. What would you say generally were the attitudes of people in Scotland to this issue at the time?

The organisation/campaign now and evaluating it

- a. Does the organisation/campaign still exist?
- b. If yes, do you have a view of how it has changed/developed over time?

- c. Looking back, what do you think now about your activity at the time?
- d. Was your organisation successful in its aims, did it influence opinion, did it change anything?
- e. Did your own attitudes, perceptions, actions change during your involvement?

C. Organisational attitudes to empire, etc.

- a. Did your organisation/campaign directly deal with any aspect of the British empire e.g. support for anti-colonial movements, independence movements?
- b. Was the empire/colonialism etc., something that you debated within the organisation, and/or publicly?
- c. What sort of view of empire/colonialism did the organisation have?
- d. What were your views of this?
- e. What, if anything, did you think about the Commonwealth?
- f. Did your organisation/campaign emphasise a local or Scottish identity in any way?
- g. Did you have a sense at the time of any specific organisations which promoted a particular view of empire – whether pro or anti?
- h. Our project has a particular interest in how people in Scotland thought about the British Empire – but there were other sorts of international organisations, networks, or perspectives. Do you have any comments about these?

D. Your views on empire/decolonisation

Your views at the time

- a. Even if you do not see this as closely related to your work/organisational or campaigning activity, what did you think at the time about the British Empire?
- b. What did you think about decolonisation?
- c. Did your views or perceptions of the Empire and decolonisation change during the time of your involvement?
- d. So far, you have mentioned a number of specific events/places, debates, etc. I am going to ask about some others now:
 - i. Do you remember this happening?
 - ii. What this something you were concerned about?
 - iii. Did you take any action on any issues associated with this event/development?

Checklist [need to judge starting point as appropriate]

- Indian independence and creation of Pakistan – 1947
- The Mau Mau movement in Kenya – early 1950s
- The Suez Crisis – 1956
- The Central African Federation issue – 1959
- Harold Macmillan's 'winds of change' speech – 1960
- Developments in South Africa – 1960s
- Evacuation of Aden – 1967
- Immigration to Britain of people from British colonies/former colonies – 1950s onwards
- Independence of various African countries – 1950s onwards
- Rhodesia/Zimbabwe – UDI 1965 to independence 1980

Your views on empire now

- a. What is your attitude now towards the British empire?
- b. How would you judge the role of Scotland in the British empire?
- c. What do you think is the general attitude of people in Scotland to their historical past in the British empire?
- d. How would you evaluate your activities/organisation/campaign now?

E. Further input by interviewee

Other information

- a. Is there anything that you would like to add – things we have not touched on in the interview, or more information about any of the things we have been discussing.

End of interview – stop recording