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**Wha' s Like Us?**

**Racism and Racialisation  
in the Imagination of  
Nineteenth Century Scotland**

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**Submitted in Fulfillment of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## SUMMARY

This thesis contributes to research into the historical sociology of racism, the correspondences between racist ideologies and discursive constructions of social collectivity, and the theoretical problems associated with these issues. The historical source material for the research is a range of nineteenth century Scottish texts concerned, in various ways, with the description and explanation of human difference. This material is the focus of an analysis which unpacks and examines various kinds of racist argument, paying attention to ways in which the latter displace and succeed each other. On the basis of this analysis it is argued that an understanding of shifts in the construction of collective categories contributes to the sociology of racism by highlighting historical continuities and discontinuities between different racist theories.

The thesis is presented in two parts, in the first of which I discuss historical and theoretical topics relevant to the issues summarised above. In Chapter One I review literature on the sociology of racism in Scotland and I address some pertinent aspects of Scottish social history: these include the development of Scottish capitalism, Scottish involvement in British imperialism, and migration from Ireland and the Scottish Highlands to the Lowlands. In Chapters Two and Three I discuss the concepts of ideology and discourse, assess the sociological significance of the idea of "race", and suggest a definition of racism. This discussion leads me to propose a theoretically and historically informed approach to the analysis of racist discourses and the discursive construction of social collectivity. In Chapter Four I conclude Part One of the thesis by dealing with a number of methodological problems involved in the research.

In Part Two I present a series of analyses of nineteenth century discourses. In Chapters Five and Six my focus is on texts which describe the history, geography and ethnology of Africa. I establish evidence of the prevalence of racist accounts of the continent during the period and argue that the texts exemplify contradictions between different racist ideologies. I also argue that these contradictions are related to a historical shift between two distinctive ways of constructing social collectives.

In Chapter Seven I pursue this argument further through discussion of the nineteenth century discipline of phrenology. I show that Scottish theorists and practitioners of phrenology made a significant contribution to the development of scientific racism, and that the biological determinism which is fundamental to the phrenological project corresponds to a distinctive way of constructing social collectives. I explore the history of the discipline and its relationships to orthodox science and to Christianity in this context.

In Chapter Eight I offer an analysis of some aspects of the significance of racism for the construction of collective categories identifying populations within Scotland. I pursue this analysis in two directions. First, I cite and analyse nineteenth century histories of Scotland which refer to the "racial" composition and "racial" qualities of the population of Scotland. Second, I discuss scholarly and governmental literature which describes the contemporary Irish and Highland populations of nineteenth century Scotland.

In the final chapter I summarise the results of the analyses presented in Chapters Five to Eight, and conclude by drawing out the implications of these results for the problems raised in Part One. I pursue the issue of the construction of Scottish "national identity" through discussion of recent debates concerning nineteenth century



Scottish politics and culture, and I suggest that this area could be more fully researched by taking account of the significance of imperialism and racism.

The thesis makes original contributions in two areas. First, by providing a detailed examination of nineteenth century Scottish discourses, it adds to the literature concerning the history of racism and racialisation in Scotland. Second, in the course of examining the discursive construction of collectivity, it analyses changes in meaning pertaining to the term "race" and to other related terms. In doing so it offers a means of understanding these changes in terms of the antagonistic relations between different racist ideologies.

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## PREFACE

Anyone involved in research concerning racism in Scotland is likely to be struck by the reactions of people who are surprised that this subject should merit attention. The notion that racism is notable in Scotland only for its absence is a commonplace one, despite the accumulation of evidence to the contrary: what strikes me as remarkable, however, is the particular way in which this reaction is often expressed. "There is no racism in Scotland," I have frequently been assured, "because the Scots are more tolerant than the English".

So far as its explicit claim is concerned, this remark speaks at that level of vacuous generality which characterises most such assertions of national chauvinism. Of greater interest is the implicit assumption it betrays concerning the category "Scot". If the purported absence of racism in Scotland is attributed to the tolerant nature of the Scots, then it is implied that people of Pakistani, Indian and Chinese descent born in Scotland are not themselves Scottish. How can they be, when it is the Scots who "tolerate" them, with all the implications of distance and otherness which that word carries? This elementary but revealing assumption suggests a relationship between racism and the construction of identities in contemporary Scotland. The initial motivation for the research documented here was a desire to explore some aspects of the history of that relationship, and led to a more general exploration of the history of racism in Scotland.

While pursuing this project I have been helped by a large number of people in the Department of Sociology at the University of Glasgow. Bob Miles has been a stimulating and diligent supervisor, whose assistance has not been limited to his invaluable intellectual contribution. He has helped me in obtaining resources and has



frequently made himself available at short notice despite the pressures of other commitments. I am happy to have this opportunity to thank him for his patient perseverance and creativity. Pru Larsen, Anne Adamson and Pip Townshend provided valuable help on frequent occasions. Barbara Littlewood and Bridgette Fowler read drafts of parts of the thesis and made useful comments, as well as providing practical assistance. Anne Dunlop read parts of the text, listened to many long-winded accounts of its structure and content, and gave me greatly appreciated advice, help and encouragement.

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**PART ONE**

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Here's tae us  
Wha's like us?  
Damn few  
and they're a' deid.

(Traditional)

The twist of gallows humour in this Scottish toast celebrates camaraderie born in adversity, boasting of a superior identity while grimly announcing the fate of the excellent. In Scots idiom, the question "Wha's like us?" can mean either "Who can match us?" or "Who is similar to us?". This allows the final line a sinister ambiguity; the deid could be lost companions, but they may equally well be slaughtered rivals.

It has frequently been noted that collective categories (for example those which are said to identify "racial" groups) are founded upon the signification of boundaries which both include and exclude: that is, on the inclusion of persons who are imagined to be identical with each other in some significant sense, and on the exclusion of those who are significantly different (Hay, 1968; Said, 1985a: p 119; 1985b: pp 7-8; Kaye, 1984; Cohen, 1985: pp 11-14; Miles, 1989: pp 75-76; Anthias, 1990: p 22; Rée, 1992: p 4). To put this another way, the social construction of the *identities* of members of such categories depends upon relationships between the *identical* and the different. Questions such as the one which forms the title of this thesis therefore imply their opposite; "Who is unlike us?".

A considerable amount of academic work has been done in relation to questions of identity. For example the nature of relationships between group and individual identities has been extensively discussed in social psychological and philosophical literature (eg, Berger and Luckman, 1966: pp 194-204; Glover, 1988: pp 195-202; Tajfel, 1981). My focus in this thesis is not on the social psychology of the individual but rather on the social construction of categories which identify "racial" and "national" types (the problematic nature of these terms will be discussed in Chapter Three). Specifically, my concern is with ways in which collective categories were constructed in texts produced by Scottish intellectuals during the nineteenth century. I argue that in these texts questions and answers concerning human difference were premised on the presumed existence of mutually exclusive "racial" categories, and upon a variety of physical and cultural characteristics which served as "racial" boundary markers.

Several commentators who have examined the social construction of collective categories have made use of the concept of "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991). Anderson originally introduced this term in order to solve the problem of defining "nationhood", offering it as part of a definition made "in an anthropological spirit" (Anderson, 1991: p 5). By this he appears to mean that he does not consider nations to be simply *imaginary*. Rather, he suggests that all communities are imagined, in at least two senses: in the sense that in a large community no member will know or even meet all of the other members, with the consequence that the totality of the community must be imagined by each member; and also in the sense that the history and identity of any community are, in part at least, fabrications. That is they are the product of what Hobsbawm has called the invention of tradition, the various means by which myth-histories are institutionalised as the basis for collective identity (Hobsbawm, 1983). For Anderson, this does not imply that national



communities are mere fabrications or convenient political fictions; unlike some other "modernist" analysts of nationalism, he considers the national to be a real and significant dimension of the social (Anderson, 1991: p 6; cf Seton-Watson, 1977: p 5; Foster, 1989: pp 31-35; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992: pp 23-24).

It has been suggested that the term *imagined community* can appropriately and usefully be applied to other categories, including "racial" ones (Miles, 1987: p 6; Hall, 1992: p 205). This has led to some interesting comparisons between the categories of "nation" and "race". Miles, for example, notes that "races" and nations alike are simultaneously exclusive and inclusive categories; where a discourse describes an inferior "race" or nation it typically constructs, either implicitly or explicitly, an inclusive group whose superior "racial" or national qualities are the measure of an excluded group's degradation (1987: pp 6-14; 1989: p 79). My interest is, for the most part, in one part of this dialectic of identification; specifically, the discursive construction of "the other". However I take a somewhat similar starting point to Miles, in that I use the notion of *imagined community* to refer not only to "races" but also to "nations". I also apply it to groups identified by other epithets, such as "peoples" and "tribes". In this sense I can state my first aim as an analysis of the "imagination" (in a transitive-verbal sense) of "racial" and other identities.

Processes of "racial" identification cannot be understood in isolation from the racist theories and assumptions which inform them. My second aim, therefore, is to examine some aspects of the history of racism in Scotland, and to analyse their relation to responses to the question "Wha's like us?". This constitutes a neglected area in sociological research, in contrast to the larger volume of work dealing with the history of racism in England (Solomos, 1993: pp 38-39).



### **Racism in Scotland: the literature**

In an analysis of the history of sociology in Scotland, McCrone has noted a tendency towards an Anglocentric and homogenising perspective in British sociology. He argues that until the 1970's specifically Scottish problems and issues, and the Scottish dimensions of more general issues, were virtually disregarded as objects of sociological enquiry (McCrone, 1992: pp 4-8).<sup>[1]</sup> Sociological work on racism in Britain has exhibited, and continues to exhibit, the tendency which McCrone identifies. Among the large number of sociological texts which deal with the history and contemporary nature of racism in Britain (eg Bolt, 1971; CCCS, 1982; MacKenzie, 1984) there are few which discuss Scotland at any length, and many which do not refer to the reproduction of racist ideology in any part of Britain other than England (eg Shyllon, 1977; Fryer, 1984; Visram, 1986; Ramdin, 1987).

Whereas analyses of the history of racism in England have discussed the linkages between this history and the development of imperialism (eg, Bolt, 1971, 1984; Rose et al, 1984; Lorimer, 1978: pp 13-20), similar approaches to Scottish history are rare. There has in fact been a tendency in Scottish historiography to neglect the entire issue of Scottish involvement in imperialism. I discuss this tendency, and some notable exceptions to it, later in this chapter.

Whatever the reasons for these omissions may be, they tend to duplicate a commonsense view that racism is neither a part of Scottish history nor a feature of contemporary Scottish society.<sup>[2]</sup> The prevalence of this view has been noted by a number of commentators (eg Miles and Dunlop, 1987: p 119; McCrone, 1992: p 21) and its error is demonstrated by those few studies of racism which focus specifically on Scotland. These include investigations of the incidence of racist harassment and discrimination (eg, MacEwan, 1980;

Walsh, 1987; Bowes, McCluskey and Sim, 1990), and a number of articles which refer to racism in the context of analyses of the settlement of particular migrant groups (e.g. Lobdan, 1971; Lunn, 1980; Ford, 1985; Swift and Gilley, 1985; Dunlop, 1990; Dunlop and Miles, 1990). References to racism can also be found in texts dealing with aspects of the history of religious sectarianism (eg Curtis, 1968, 1971; Miles, 1982; Murray, 1984).

To a large extent these contributions are concerned with issues relating to contemporary racism. However enough has been written to suggest that an investigation of the eighteenth and nineteenth century history of racism in Scotland is also required. In this context three areas of research deserve to be mentioned in particular. First, various commentators have noted the racism implicit or explicit in Scottish philosophical texts written, and widely read, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One well known example is the racist position adopted by the eighteenth century Scottish philosopher David Hume, in his essay *Of National Characters* (Hume, 1753: p 252; Popkin, 1980: pp 92-95, 251-266). Others include the more sustained contributions to racist theory made by the Scottish lawyer and judge Lord Kames in the eighteenth century and by the surgeon and anatomist Robert Knox in the mid-nineteenth century (Kames, 1993; Knox, 1850; Harris, 1968: pp 99-100; Lorimer, 1978: pp 137 ff).

Second, racist tendencies in writings by Scottish explorers of Africa have been noted, both in studies concerned exclusively with Scotland, and in literature dealing more generally with British exploration of Africa (eg Centre of African Studies, 1972; National Library of Scotland, 1982: p 15; Hibbert, 1984: pp 208-209, 261, *passim*). Miles and Muirhead refer to the production of "images of the colonial 'races'" in Scotland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and extend their survey of such images beyond those produced by



explorers (Miles and Muirhead, 1986: p 114). They compile a number of examples from texts by Scots whose involvement in various aspects of the British imperialist project brought them into contact with the populations of Africa, including soldiers, merchants, missionaries and colonial administrators (1986: pp 114-117; Miles and Dunlop, 1987: p 122).

The third area of research which should be mentioned concerns the ideological reaction to labour migration from Ireland during the nineteenth century (Curtis, 1971: p 97; Miles, 1982: pp 130-135, 137-145; see also Miles and Muirhead, 1986, 119-125; Bowes, McCluskey and Sim, 1990: pp 86-87). Some work in this area has emphasised that sectarian agitation and violence against Irish migrants in Scotland occurred against a background of claims that the Irish population were "racially" inferior to the "indigenous" population (Miles, 1982: pp 141-142).

These contributions point towards two issues which are relevant to my aims, and which will be explored in later chapters: the reproduction of racist ideology in nineteenth century Scottish discourses concerning populations encountered overseas, particularly in the territories of the British empire but also in areas of the extra-European world not colonised by Britain; and the construction of populations within Scotland itself as "racially" distinct and inferior. I turn shortly to a discussion of some aspects of Scottish history which are pertinent to analysis of these issues. Specifically I look at economic and other aspects of Scottish involvement in imperialism and at the nineteenth century socio-economic history of Scotland's Irish and Highland populations. Both of these areas can be more easily approached, however, if I begin by making some general comments concerning the internal politico-economic history of Scotland during the period.

## **The Development of Scottish Capitalism**

There is general agreement among sociologists and historians on two important points concerning the development of capitalism in eighteenth and nineteenth century Scotland. The first point is that capitalist economic development began, and gained momentum, later than was the case in England. The second is that, following this "delay", there was an extremely rapid development of the industrial economy during the last two decades of the eighteenth century and the first three of the nineteenth (Smout, 1969: pp 230 ff; Dickson, 1980a: p 181; McCrone, 1992: p 43).

This rapid expansion of industry was grounded in a longer process whereby capitalist relations of production were established throughout the Lowland Scottish economy, and by concomitant processes of capital accumulation (Dickson, 1980a: p 137). By the late eighteenth century there was a secure basis of capital accumulation, which was facilitated by several factors; an agricultural revolution similar to that which occurred in England, the growth of trade in cattle, the expansion of the tobacco trade between Glasgow and the colonies in North America, and the establishment of the linen industry. From the 1780's to 1830 capitalist relations of production were extended throughout the Scottish economy. This period saw an acceleration in the rate of capital accumulation, the rapid growth of an industrial proletariat, and the emergence of an industrial bourgeoisie capable of threatening the political dominance of the land-owning classes (Dickson, 1980a: pp 137-177).

As the eighteenth century ended the linen industry became increasingly important as a site of capital accumulation; from the 1790's the industry expanded rapidly, becoming the major employer of industrial labour by the 1820's and replacing the cotton industry as the principal area of development (Murray, 1978; Smout, 1972: pp 223-



230; Dickson, 1980a: pp 95-102; Dunlop, 1988: pp 58-70). However after 1830 the textile industries declined as a result of international competition and dependence on external markets (Dickson, 1980a: p 187; Dunlop, 1988: p 68); by the mid-nineteenth century heavy industry, which had begun to develop rapidly after 1830 with the growth of pig-iron production, was the most dynamic area of the economy (Dickson, 1980a: pp 187, 191-194). Expansion of this sector eventually led to Scotland's world dominance in the production of heavy industrial goods. By the 1870's, with ship-building and related engineering the principal and most dynamic area of growth, heavy industry dominated the economy (Cairncross, 1954: pp 4-5; Dunlop, 1988: p 74 ff; Dickson, 1980a: p 181).

As in the case of other capitalist social formations, this rapid and dynamic economic growth entailed contradictions. The development of the industrial proletariat was accompanied by the growth of a labour movement and the organisation of strategies designed to limit or disrupt surplus-value extraction. The growth of working class radicalism was already evident during the period up to 1830, particularly significant crises in the political class struggle being the periods of the Scottish Conventions of 1792 to 1794 and of the Radical War of 1820 (Smout, 1972: pp 413 ff; Young 1979; Dickson, 1980a: pp 140, 166, 156-158; Foster, 1989: p 48). After 1830, with the increasing concentration of workforces employed by heavy industry, there was a massive growth in trade unionism, which largely paralleled similar developments in England. Support for working class political organisations was grounded in the extreme deprivation which characterised working class life, particularly in the Glasgow area. Phases of political agitation recurred throughout the nineteenth century, with a marked increase in working class activism after 1890 (Young, 1979; Dickson, 1980a: pp 245 ff, p 268).

A second important area of contradiction derived from the dominance of heavy industrial goods production in the Scottish economy. In the context of international recession, dependence on heavy industry (and especially on shipbuilding) eventually led to a series of extreme economic crises. It has been argued by Dickson, and other contributors to the 1980 study *Scottish Capitalism*, that the ascendancy of heavy industry was achieved through a high degree of specialisation in the Scottish economy. Whereas this initially brought advantages through the capturing of lucrative world markets, when those markets contracted during the crisis of 1873 the economy was radically undermined (Hobsbawm, 1969: p 127; Dickson, 1980a: pp 247 ff). A recovery was effected by the last decade of the century, largely as a result of imperialist expansion. However similar crises in the early twentieth century eventually had disastrous consequences and led to longterm economic decline (Dickson, 1980a: pp 247, 253, 287).

### **Client Capitalism and Imperialism**

Dickson and his colleagues argue that the specialisation which they identify in the late nineteenth century Scottish economy was a feature of Scottish capitalism even before the escalation of capital accumulation in the 1780's. Controversially, they propose that this specialisation is to be explained in terms of "client capitalism" (1980a: p 90). They use this term to indicate that, as a consequence of the Act of Union, the Scottish bourgeoisie were dependent upon the English state for the political management of Scotland, and that this led to the acceptance of "complementary rather than competitive forms of capitalism" (1980a: p 90). Westminster, they argue, ensured that Scottish industrial capitalism developed in ways which would not present a threat to English capital: the implication is that long-term economic disadvantages accompanied the short-term advantages which the Union brought to the Scottish bourgeoisie, and that these



disadvantages resulted from the political imposition of a mode of economic development which ultimately proved unstable and unsustainable.

The authors of *Scottish Capitalism* are not alone in seeing Scotland's economic trajectory as one dominated and controlled, even in its most dynamic phase, by Westminster and by English capital. In a similar argument, Wallerstein proposes that Scotland constitutes a case of dependent development, and that its history therefore bears some parallels with those of other dependent, peripheral economies in the world capitalist system (Wallerstein, 1980). Wallerstein concedes that the Scottish case is an unusual one, since it is characterised by the emergence of a dependent economy into the ranks of industrially developed capitalist economies. However, like Dickson et al, he understands this transition to have been effected under the domination and control of England.

These arguments have given rise to a debate, still current within the sociology of Scotland, concerning the extent to which the client capitalism thesis and the underdevelopment model correspond to the evidence of Scotland's economic history.<sup>[29]</sup> The details of this debate are not directly relevant here: however it is worth noting that Dickson and his colleagues' position entails an argument concerning the significance of imperialism in Scottish history. Dickson argues that the advantages which derived from dependent participation in British imperialism were among the factors which made the Act of Union (and client capitalism) "tolerable if not positively acceptable" to the Scottish ruling class (Dickson, 1989: p 102).

This comment is notable because, as I mentioned above, Scottish involvement in imperialism is an issue which has been largely neglected in the academic literature. A particularly striking example

of that neglect occurs in Fryer's *Black People in the British Empire* (Fryer, 1988). In the introduction to a section entitled *How Britain Became Great Britain*, intended as an account of the history of the British empire, the author slips easily from references to "England" to references to "Britain", without pausing to consider the significance of the Act of Union in the creation of "Great Britain" (Fryer, 1988: pp 3-4).<sup>[4]</sup>

Insofar as Scottish involvement has been discussed in academic literature, two approaches to the question predominate. One is epitomised by Andrew Dewar Gibb's 1937 text *Scottish Empire*, which celebrates Scotland's contribution to the establishment and execution of British imperialism, while implying that this contribution, and the evident competence of Scottish administrators in the empire, demonstrate Scotland's capacity for self-government (Gibb, 1937: pp 308-315).

The other approach is characterised by an implication that the "British" in "British Empire" denotes England and an English history within which Scotland is peripheral to the political power, economic advantage and ideological heritage of imperialism; as if Scotland were carried along in English designs but never as a willing partner. Nairn finds evidence of this kind of approach in Hugh Macdiarmid's assessment of Walter Scott. In reference to Macdiarmid's comment that "Scott's work has real value where a stand is being made against imperialism", Nairn notes that the interest of this remark

... is not in its misinterpretation of Scott, but its assumptions about Empire. By its precocious development Scotland had in Scott's own time left the category of "subject nations" for good and joined the ranks of the "Imperialists" (Nairn, 1981: p 167).



The tendency to present Scotland's rôle in the history of British imperialism solely as that of a subject nation is also evident in more recent texts, such as Hechter's *Internal Colonialism* (1975). The title of this analysis of England's economic and cultural domination over Scotland, Wales and Ireland gives a clue to its lopsided preoccupations. It is a bewildering experience to refer to the index of the text and to discover that every reference to colonialism, imperialism or racism discusses the exploitation of the Celtic periphery of Britain. Not only is there no reference to parts of the world which can without contention be described as colonies but there is no acknowledgement that Scotland (even if it can accurately be said to have been "internally colonised") played a rôle as coloniser and imperialist in India, Africa, North America and elsewhere.

Other recent studies of Scottish politics and history have given greater recognition to the significance of imperialism. Two examples are Harvie's *Scotland and Nationalism* (1977) and Nairn's *The Break-up of Britain* (1981), both of which were first published in 1977. Harvie suggests that during the nineteenth century imperialism became a major element in Scottish political culture, as Scotland's semi-independence was "absorbed effortlessly into the expansion of British political and economic influence" (Harvie, 1977: p 110). Subsequently the reality and mythology of Scottish involvement in imperialism became central components in constructions of Scottish national identity (1977: p 102; Colley, 1994: pp 117-132). Like Dickson, Nairn argues that the advantages of imperialism made the Union acceptable to the Scottish bourgeoisie:

During the prolonged era of Anglo-Scots imperialist expansion, the Scottish ruling order found it had given up statehood for a hugely profitable junior partnership in the New Rome (Nairn, 1981: p 126).

I discuss Nairn's contribution to the historiography of Scotland in Chapter Nine.<sup>[5]</sup> My immediate concern, however, is to take up his comment by turning to the relation between British imperialism and the development of the Scottish economy.

### **Imperialism and Scottish Capitalism**

The concept of imperialism has been defined in a variety of ways (eg Barrett-Brown, 1974; Brewer, 1980; Mommsen, 1980). Here I use the term in a broad sense to refer, on one hand, to the exploitation of formally colonial markets and sources of raw materials, but on the other hand to refer also to the exploitation of global circuits of exchange by core capitalist economies whose relationship to peripheral social formations was not directly colonialist. The period of colonialism which occurred in the last three decades of the nineteenth century was one of vast expansion; between 1870 and 1914 five million square miles of territory was added to the British empire (Saville, 1923: p 167). However it was only one phase in a long era of European imperialist activity. Many European countries had established colonies before this period of "High Imperialism", and the development of European national economies was already tied to imperialist forms of exploitation (Said, 1993: p 266). In this sense I can agree with Balibar that

... imperialism is contemporary with capitalism itself, though it was only after the industrial revolution that the whole of production became organized for the world market (Balibar, 1991c: p 175).

As the latter proviso implies, this statement does not entail endorsement of Wallerstein's thesis concerning the priority of the world capitalist system over the "internal", national development of



capitalist relations of production (Balibar, 1991c: p 174; cf Wallerstein, 1974, 1979: pp 71-85).

Prior to the Act of Union there were a number of unsuccessful attempts to establish Scottish colonies and thereby to circumvent the domination of international trade by English capital (Cage, 1985: pp 2-3; Smailes, 1981: p 9). The most notorious and disastrous of these ventures was undertaken in the 1690's, when the Company Trading to East Africa and the Indies raised funds to found a colony at Darien. Dickson describes this project as "a last ditch effort to secure the preconditions for independent bourgeois survival" (Dickson, 1980a: p 85; Donaldson, 1966: p 43; Smailes, 1981: p 10). It has been argued that the economic jeopardy in which the Darien episode embroiled the Scottish bourgeoisie was a motivating factor in their acceptance of the terms of the Union of Parliaments; a significant part of the financial settlement involved in the Union was designed to compensate for private losses occasioned by investment in the colony (Harvie, 1977: p 64; Mackie, 1978: p 261).

In the longer term, the Union had positive, rather than merely compensatory, economic effects. Access to English colonies and other overseas markets eventually facilitated the development of the Scottish mercantile economy (McCrone, 1992: p 68). Colonial markets in North America and the Caribbean were important for the growth of the linen industry during the eighteenth century, and access to the North American colonies was crucial to the rapid expansion of the Glasgow tobacco trade in the same period (Price, 1954; Soltow, 1959; Devine, 1974, 1976: p 1, 1978: pp 177-179; Dickson, 1980a: p 86). The cotton industry too was dependent on colonial sources for its raw materials and, after 1830, was heavily reliant on overseas markets which delayed its decline (Dickson, 1980a: p 187). Later in the nineteenth century the production of heavy industrial goods was largely dependent on export trade and, by extension, on British



imperialism. For example, as I noted above, the strength of the shipbuilding industry in the late nineteenth century was increased by the demands created by imperialist expansion: the same comment could be applied to the production of locomotives (Dickson, 1980a: p 192; Dunlop, 1988: pp 76-77). During the late nineteenth century there was also a trend towards the export of capital, as a developing Scottish rentier bourgeoisie took advantage of investment opportunities in British colonies (Dickson, 1980a: pp 193-194).

There has been some debate as to the nature of links between colonial mercantile activity and the rise of the manufacturing sector in Scotland. Specifically, the significant question here is whether colonial trading profits became a source of capital investment in industry and were thus a causal factor in the process of "internal" primitive accumulation in Scotland. The details of this debate can be pursued elsewhere (Campbell, 1967: pp 17-21; Devine, 1976, 1978; Slaven, 1975: p 89; Lenman, 1977: pp 91-92; Burgess, 1980: p 99). However the history of Scottish involvement in imperialism cannot be understood in economic terms alone. Indeed, my principal reason for discussing the economic basis of Scotland's relations with the extra-European world during the nineteenth century is that it constitutes an important part of the context for another aspect of imperialism's "internal" effects in Scotland; that is, the ideological impact of imperialism. In order to explore this aspect it is necessary to consider the activities of Scots whose relationship to economic exploitation of the colonies was tangential, but whose experience of Asian, Australasian, American and African cultures was nonetheless structured by imperialism. Many Scots who explored, soldiered, settled or proselytised overseas made significant contributions to the flow of information concerning the extra-European world which was available in Scotland; they also contributed, indirectly or directly, to the development of ideological assumptions and arguments concerning non-European people. It is therefore relevant to review

some aspects of the history of Scottish involvement in such activities.

### **Scots in the British Empire**

The earliest example of Scottish colonisation overseas consisted in participation in "the plantation of Ulster". This was a settlement strategy which formed part of England's efforts to dominate Ireland and which involved the usurpation of Irish land rights in favour of colonists sympathetic to English interests (Gibb, 1937: pp 7-12; Curtis, 1991: pp 15 ff). By the middle of the seventeenth century there were 50,000 Scots in Ulster; there were 100,000 by 1691 (Donaldson, 1966: p 30; Harvie, 1977: pp 93-94).

The seventeenth century was also a period of increasing Scottish migration to the Americas. I have already referred to the unsuccessful Scottish attempt to establish a colony at Darien. Scots also colonised East New Jersey, South Carolina and Nova Scotia (Insh, 1922; Donaldson, 1966: pp 33-37; Landsman, 1985). However, as I noted above, the failure of attempts to sustain Scottish colonies overseas was part of the reason why members of the Scottish ruling class agreed to the Act of Union in 1707. After the Union emigration from Scotland continued, extending now to colonies established by England in North America, the West Indies and elsewhere. The colonists included political exiles as well as economic migrants: Scottish criminals and Covenanters, as well as vagrants and other economically displaced people found themselves on ships to America or to the West Indies during the eighteenth century (Donaldson, 1966: p 39, 57-80). During the first half of the nineteenth century, the government promoted "voluntary", economic migration to North America (Donaldson, 1966: pp 92-96; Harvie, 1977: p 93; Seton-Watson, 1977: p 215; Smailes, 1981: pp 112-113), and there was also large scale migration to Canada (Smailes, 1981: p 12; Donaldson, 1966: p 59). Later in the



century Australia and New Zealand replaced North America as the main destinations for Scottish migrants to the colonies. (Smailes, 1981: p 11; Donaldson, 1966: pp 160, 168 ff).

There was a large Scottish presence in India both before and after the Act of Union, in the form of administrators, military personnel, missionaries and merchants. These included many of the most powerful figures involved in British domination of the sub-continent. There were several Scottish directors of the English East India Company, which effectively governed India until 1858; Henry Dundas, the Earl of Melville, was president of the Board of Control of the company from 1793 until 1801, and exerted a great influence on the proportion of Scots in administrative positions (Smailes, 1981: p 57). Harvie refers to "a tradition of Scottish predominance in the Civil Service", which was initiated by Dundas' presidency (Harvie, 1977: pp 97-98; Parker, 1985: pp 191-198; Bryant, 1985: p 22).

Along with Africa, India was a major field for Scottish missions in the nineteenth century; indeed India was the first target identified by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland when it voted in favour of foreign missions in 1824 (Smailes, 1981: p 74). Many of the most prominent and influential missionaries in India were Scots, including the first missionary sent by the Church, Alexander Duff. In the 1830's and 1840's Duff revolutionised the approach and scope of missionary work, basing it on education for "civilisation", and founding the mission school system. His intention was to cultivate the "Anglicisation" of India's intellectual elite, with a view to the formation of an educated Indian management class (Harvie, 1977: p 103; Smailes, 1981: pp 74-75). Almost as influential as Duff was another Scottish missionary, John Wilson, who went to India under the authority of the Scottish Missionary Society in the early nineteenth century. Wilson did educational and missionary work in Bombay, with similar ideological aims to those of Duff (Smailes, 1981: pp 75-77).



Scottish involvement in the administration and attempted Christianisation of Africa was just as extensive as in India. During the nineteenth century individual adventurism by Europeans in the African continent gave way to organised, state-supported exploration and led to the introduction of Christianity, technology and capitalist relations of production. Scots were involved in all aspects of the "civilising" project (Kiernan, 1972: p 23). For example a large proportion of the pioneering explorers of Africa were Scots, and in many cases their explorations were carried out with explicitly imperialist aims. Early nineteenth century efforts to map the major river systems of Western and Northern Africa were initiated because of interest in the commercial possibilities which might arise out of the establishment of transport routes in Africa. Scots such as Park, Clapperton and Laing (whose writings I examine in Chapter Five) were prominent in the exploration of these rivers, and Glasgow merchants were well aware of the potential commercial gains which could result from such projects (Donaldson, 1966: p 183).

In the 1850's, the focus of imperialist attention shifted to East Africa, with Livingstone's attempts to open that region of the continent to trade and Christianisation (Smailes, 1981: p 28). Scottish businesses were substantially involved in the exploitation of this part of Africa, as they were in the north of the continent (Miles and Muirhead, 1986: p 110). So were Scottish missionaries, though less directly. To some extent Scottish missionaries can be described as imperialism's avatars in the continent (Smailes, 1981: p 28). For example, in the early 1820's Robert Moffat initiated the first white colony in Central Africa, at Kuruman in Bechuanaland. His work was completed by David Livingstone, another Scot, and the expansion of the settlement eventually led to British economic and political domination in what was to become Rhodesia, and later Zimbabwe (Smailes, 1981: p 36).

This was not the only case in which Scottish missionary activity led to colonisation. In 1874 the Free Church of Scotland founded Livingstonia on the northern shore of Lake Nyasa (later named Lake Malawi) and in 1876 the Church of Scotland responded by establishing Blantyre, another mission memorialising Livingstone, on the southern shore of the lake. The few hundred Scots who settled at these sites shortly became involved in conflict with slavers supported by the Portuguese, and the conflict was exacerbated when the African Lakes Trading Corporation, founded in 1878 by Glasgow businessmen, took an interest in the territory. When the British government intervened a war ensued, which lasted from 1885 until 1896, and which led to the establishment of a formal protectorate in Nyasaland (Smailes, 1981: p 41; Harvie, pp 104-5; Donaldson, 1966: p 184; Dickson et al, 1980: pp 250-251). For eighty years Nyasaland (now Malawi) was in effect a Scottish colony, supported by the British government and the British army (Harvie, 1977: p 105).

As is well known, the British army contained a large number of Scottish soldiers and officers. In his account of eighteenth century debates on the militia issue, Robertson argues that Scotland has a long history of militarism.

Since the high middle ages - to recede no further - both the social structure and the national identity of Scotland (has) been closely bound up with military prowess (Robertson, 1985: p 1).

In the eighteenth century the armed forces were regarded favourably by the Scottish public, in contrast to the situation in England where, as Harvie states, joining the army was tantamount to social suicide (Harvie, 1977; p 96; but see Cheyne, 1981). This militaristic tradition facilitated the raising of new Scottish regiments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and their use overseas in



imperialist war and repression. Given the size of the Scottish population, Scottish regiments were particularly over-represented in India and in Africa (Bryant, 1985: pp 23-41; Gann and Duignan, 1967: pp 79-80).

This evidence of Scottish military imperialism has to be examined carefully however. Harvie argues that Scottish military exploits in the empire are part of a martial mythology which is belied by the statistical evidence of regimental demography. He notes that there was a high proportion of Irish and English officers and men in Scottish regiments during the nineteenth century, alongside a diminishing proportion of Scots in the British army as a whole (1977: pp 96-97; Nairn, 1981: pp 166-167). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Scottish soldiers played a large rôle in the gain and maintenance of British imperial territory. Of twenty major campaigns listed by Said in illustration of the rapacious aggression of British imperialism between 1803 and 1899, sixteen involved Scottish regiments (Said, 1993: p 126; Wood, 1987: p 76, *passim*).

### **Intellectuals and Imperialism**

The discussion presented above gives some indication of the scale and scope of Scottish economic and political involvement in British imperialism. For my purposes the relevance of these aspects of Scottish history is that they constituted an important part of the context in which Scottish intellectuals sought to describe the extra-European world, and attempted to analyse the significance of human difference. Following Gramsci, I mean by intellectuals those individuals whose work helps to create a sense of the homogeneity of the class to which they are allied, and who provide ideological rationalisations of the economic and political activities of that class (Gramsci, 1988: pp 301, 304-5). Such people are not necessarily professional scholars; whatever their particular professions may be,



however, they form a specialised (though diverse) group allied to the class whose interests they share. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci observes that although "all men (*sic*) are intellectuals ..."

... not all men have in society the function of intellectuals ... Thus there are historically formed specialized categories for the exercise of the intellectual function (Gramsci, 1988: p 304).

On this basis the texts I examine in later chapters can be regarded as the products of intellectuals, whether or not they were written by professional scholars. The explorers of Africa whose first hand reports I examine in Chapter Five and the amateur or professional phrenologists whose books and pamphlets I discuss in Chapter Seven share the intellectual function with the scholars whose secondary accounts of Africa I examine in Chapter Six.

Gramsci's analysis of the intellectual function suggests that the dominant class in a social formation tends to be connected with a particularly elaborate and extensive group of intellectual producers (1988: p 305). This was true of the Scottish ruling class during the period which concerns me here. Throughout the nineteenth century the class alliance which ruled Scotland was associated with intellectuals who described and rationalised their changing socio-economic position and their political aims. This rôle extended to description and rationalisation of British imperialism, and of the place of the Scottish bourgeoisie and its allies within imperialist politics and economics. Not all intellectuals in Scotland consistently applauded imperialist expansion; as was the case in England, there were periods of broad intellectual opposition to certain aspects of imperial policy (Saville, 1983: 173-177; Kiernan, 1972: pp 166-167, 173-177). Nevertheless, throughout the century there was no shortage of explicit or implicit attempts to justify continuous and progressive

accumulation of capital through imperialist exploitation. In many cases the basis of such rationalisations consisted in claims about the supposed inferiority of non-Europeans. Thus in Scotland, as in England and in France, the power of imperialism brought with it

... the ability to be in far-flung places, to learn about other people, to codify and disseminate knowledge, to characterize, transport, install, and display instances of other cultures (through exhibits, expeditions, photographs, paintings, surveys, schools), and above all to rule them (Said, 1985b: p 129, cf Chinweizu *et al*, 1980).

In other words certain cultural productions were both products of and instruments of imperialist administration and exploitation: the power to produce texts such as those which I examine in Chapters Five, Six and Seven therefore derived from the powers exercised by the British empire in the extra-European world.

However the relationships of power and exploitation within which racist texts were produced in nineteenth century Scotland did not pertain solely to imperialist exploitation: social relations within Scotland are also relevant here. Spivak argues that, in order to understand what she calls "the worlding of 'the Third World'" (Spivak, 1984: p 151) it is necessary to examine "how Europe ... consolidated itself as a sovereign subject by defining its colonies as 'Others' ..." (1984: p 128). The reflexivity implied by Spivak's prescription indicates that attention must be paid not only to the worlding of the Other, but also to the construction of identities for the colonising, sovereign nations of Europe. In Chapters Eight and Nine I examine this issue by looking at ways in which Scotland itself was imagined during this period. In part this involves an examination of the interest which Scottish intellectuals took in differences between populations within Scotland; specifically, the populations of the



Highlands, and the Irish migrant population of nineteenth century Lowland Scotland. In order to provide a context for this examination, I turn now to a discussion of some aspects of the socio-economic history of these groups.

### **Irish Migrant Labour in Scotland**

During the nineteenth century, labour shortages consequent on the rapid growth of industry in the Scottish Lowlands, and particularly in the western Central Belt, attracted great numbers of migrants from other regions. It is sometimes overlooked that throughout this period, and especially during the early decades of the century, a large proportion of migrants to the growing urban centres of Scotland came from rural parts of the Lowlands (Dickson, 1980a: p 138; Smout, 1986: p 59). My focus here, however, is on labour migration from the Highlands and from Ireland. Both of these regions were sources of migration to overseas colonies (and particularly to those in North America), to coastal areas of Scotland (in the case of Highland migrants) and to England, as well as to the industrial areas of Lowland Scotland (Redford, 1964; Bumstead, 1972; Hunter, 1976; Dickson, 1980a: p 138, 185; Richards, 1982).

Records of migration between Ireland and Scotland date back to the fifth century. It was not until the nineteenth century, however, that migration and permanent settlement of Irish immigrants in Scotland took place on a large scale, as well-established patterns of seasonal migration to rural Lowland Scotland gave way to longer-term migrations to industrial areas (Handley, n.d., 1947; Mason, 1971; Dickson, 1980a: p 149; Miles, 1982: pp 128, 130-135). Migration increased at a particularly dramatic rate during the period from 1841 to 1861; between these dates the Irish-born population of Scotland increased from 126,000 to 204,000 (that is, from 4.8% to 6.7% of the total Scottish population). According to some estimates,



people of Irish descent constituted at least a quarter of the population of Glasgow during the 1840's, and in 1848 one thousand people were said to be arriving in Glasgow from Ireland every week (Handley, n.d.: p 55; Freeman, 1957; Lawton, 1959: p 38; Jackson, 1963: p 11; Garvey, 1963: p 23; Smout, 1986: p 22). By 1901 there were 205,000 Irish-born people in Scotland (4.6% of the total population).

The scale of Irish migration in the 1840's was in part attributable to the pattern of industrial expansion in Scotland during the period. However the agricultural and general economic crises which occurred in Ireland during the first half of the century were powerful "push-factors". The series of famines which afflicted the Irish population during this period, and which culminated in the disastrous "Great Hunger" of 1846-1849, were brought about as a result of several factors; these included over-dependence on the potato crop, increased rent demands made by landlords and the continued export of agricultural produce to London, Liverpool and Glasgow. As the Irish economy moved deeper into a crisis exacerbated by British intervention, large numbers of Irish workers migrated from rural areas to Dublin and Belfast, or left Ireland for North America or Britain (Cullen and Smout, 1972; Bumstead, 1972; Gibbon, 1975; Lees, 1979).

In Scotland, as in Britain generally, the greatest concentrations of Irish settlement were around ports of entry and in industrial areas (Lawton, 1959: p 40; Smout, 1972: p 367, 1986: pp 22-23, 93-94); the availability of Irish migrant labour was of crucial importance for the development of industry in the central Lowlands (Dickson, 1980a: pp 185, 196, 201). Male Irish migrants were over-represented in those areas of industry where there was a high demand for unskilled, low-paid labour; for example in cotton and paper mills, in construction, coal mining, ironworks, the chemicals industry, and sugar refining (Handley, 1947; Jackson, 1963; Smout, 1986: p 93; Lobdan, 1971).

Within these industries Irish workers were over-represented in physically demanding and dangerous occupations (Jackson, 1963: p 79; Campbell, 1979: p 178). Employment patterns for Irish women during the nineteenth century suggest that they too were concentrated in particular occupations, especially in the textile industries and in domestic service (Jackson, 1963: p 192; Swift and Gilley, 1985: p 17). However Lobdan notes that although there were marked concentrations of Irish labour in a small number of occupations, the overall range of occupations in which Irish workers established themselves in Scotland was larger and included shoe-making, tailoring, hawking and work in the customs service (Lobdan, 1971: p 272).

The nature of the ideological reaction to the Irish presence in nineteenth century Britain has been discussed by a number of writers, but only a few of these contributions have addressed the issue in relation to Scotland (eg Jackson, 1963; Curtis, 1968, 1971: p 15; Gilley, 1978; Curtis, 1986; Miles, 1982: pp 121-150; Miles and Dunlop, 1986: pp 27-30, 1987: pp 122-124; Miles and Muirhead, 1986: pp 120-125). I return to this topic in Chapter Eight, but here I want to note that there is some evidence that patterns of employment established among the Irish population of Scotland during the nineteenth century were shaped in part by discrimination against Irish workers. For example Lobdan refers to competition for employment between migrants from the Scottish Highlands and migrants from Ireland in nineteenth century Greenock. He notes that Irish women appear to have been excluded from employment in domestic service, in certain sectors of the clothing trade, and in retail work, in favour of women from the Highlands who successfully competed with them for jobs. Irish women consequently sought work in factories and in paper mills (Lobdan, 1971: p 272; Handley, n.d.: p 21). As this observation indicates, Highland migrant workers were present alongside Irish workers in Lowland Scotland during this period.



## **Migration and the Highland Divide**

Large numbers of Highland women and men migrated to Lowland Scotland during the nineteenth century, contributing further to the depopulation of the region which had already become so marked during the notorious clearances of the eighteenth, and which was reinforced by state intervention following the 1745 rebellion. The clearances, along with the disintegration of the clan system, were among the more destructive and dramatic results of a process of socio-economic transformation which involved the introduction of capitalist agriculture in the Highlands, the consequent creation of a surplus population, and the eventual absorption of part of this surplus into Lowland industrial development and overseas colonisation (Marx, 1976: pp 889-895; Gray, 1957, 1983; Smout, 1986: pp 62-64).

During the eighteenth century, depopulation and emigration overseas became political issues in the context of anxieties over potential future labour shortages, prompting the government to encourage employment initiatives in Scotland (Bumstead, 1972). However this policy was effectively reversed during the course of the nineteenth century, so that by the 1830's the state was positively encouraging emigration (Smailes, 1981: pp 10-11). Alongside migration overseas, there was continuous migration from the Highlands to the Lowlands throughout the century. Most of the migrants settled in Lanark, Renfrew, Dumbarton and Ayr (Dickson, 1980a: p 138). Like their Irish peers, Highland migrant workers were concentrated in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations (Lobdan, 1971: p 275; Treble, 1972: p 123).

The depopulation of the Highlands and the rapid erosion of Highland cultural traditions did not go unremarked by Scottish intellectuals, and the region became a focus of philosophical and social scientific attention during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To a large extent this intellectual activity was intended to provide an

explanation for the socio-economic, cultural and political differences between Lowland Scotland and its "uncivilised" hinterland. Indeed the theories of civilisation developed by Fergusson and other philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment were formulated partly in response to questions raised by the apparent "barbarity" of the Highland region, compared to the economic and cultural development of the Lowlands (Fergusson, 1819; Harris, 1968: pp 29-31; Chapman, 1978: pp 19-20; Nairn, 1981: p 111; Womack, 1989: pp 20-26, *passim*; Colley, 1984; Colley, 1994: pp 14-15, 395 ff). If the war of 1745 (and the destruction of Highland culture which was its aftermath) made this an important issue in a political sense, the coincidence of geographical, cultural and economic divides made it a fascinating one in intellectual terms, since it seemed to indicate some causal connection between these factors. The explanations which were formulated in this context were influential upon subsequent theories of human difference which were applied both to Scotland and to Africa.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Conclusion

Anderson's work suggests that the notional unity of a nation is imagined partly in discourses which erase historical, socio-economic and cultural divisions within the supposed homogeneity of "national identity" (Anderson, pp 199-201, 204-206). Scotland presents an interesting case in this respect since, although it is one of the "old nations", it has always displayed a marked lack of cultural homogeneity, not least with regard to contrasts between the Lowlands and Highlands (Seton-Watson, 1977: pp 7, 21). Ironically, representations of a unitary "Scottish identity" often utilise imagery derived from Highland culture at the same moment that they elide the economic, political and ideological divisions which have separated the Highlands from Lowland Scotland (Womack, 1989; Kellas, 1989: p 242; Pittock, 1991: pp 88-89, 144; McCrone, 1992: p 17).



In Chapters Eight and Nine I discuss some aspects of the history of ideological corollaries of the socio-economic divide between the Highlands and the Lowlands, and their relation to the construction of Scottish "national identity". It is here, and in discussing ideological reactions to Irish settlement, that I am most immediately concerned with the way in which Scotland was imagined during this period. However this is not the only sense in which the thesis addresses "the imagination of Scotland". As the discussion above indicates, I am also concerned with ways in which Scottish writers "imagined" the populations of other countries. This should not be taken to mean that I propose the existence of a "Scottish imagination", in the sense of some collective consciousness or *zeitgeist*. On the contrary, an important theme of my analysis concerns the ways in which various collective identities were differently constructed in Scottish texts occupying different (and opposed) ideological positions during the period. The problem of finding an appropriate way in which to analyse such constructions is one of the theoretical themes which I will expand upon in the following two chapters.

## Notes

[1] Wormald identifies a similar pattern of neglect in academic studies of Scottish history (Wormald, 1991: p 8).

[2] During 1988 I contacted a major opinion polling agency to ask if it was possible to extract information relating to Scotland from their data on attitudes to immigration and racism in Britain. I was informed that no polls relating to racism had been conducted in Scotland because "there isn't any racism up there". The same agency, contacted again in 1994, confirmed that this remained their policy. As an example of the reproduction of unwarranted commonsense assumptions, this is remarkable enough. In the context of widespread unwillingness to acknowledge the problem of racism in Scotland, it indicates a dangerous complacency.

[3] Dickson *et al*'s arguments have been criticised by Kendrick *et al* (1985) and by McCrone (eg 1992: pp 63-68). Dickson defends the client capitalism thesis in a paper entitled *Scotland is Different, OK* (1989). Contributions which broadly cohere with Dickson *et al*'s thesis include Lenman's (1977) and Wallerstein's (1980): Wallerstein's paper is a response to Smout, who questions the applicability of Wallerstein's model of dependency to Scotland (1980a, 1980b).

[4] However Fryer is one of the few writers to have commented, albeit briefly, on the early history of immigration to Scotland from Africa (Fryer, 1984: pp 2-4).

[5] Harvie and Nairn also discuss the relationship between Scottish involvement in imperialism and the history of Scottish cultural developments during the period (Nairn, 1981: pp 165-169; Harvie, 1977: pp 139-40). However although their important contributions address the significance of imperialism in Scottish cultural and political



history, it should be noted that where they allude to the relevance of racism they do not attempt a systematic analysis (or even a survey) of the issue (eg Harvie, 1977: pp 99, 102).

[6] The nature of the historical reasons for the perpetuation of a development gap between the Highlands and Lowlands has remained a controversial question for contemporary social scientists (McCrone, 1992: p 50). Writers working within the underdevelopment problematic have applied externalist theories in order to argue that, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Highland region was an "internal colony", underdeveloped as a result of its *servitor* relationship to Lowland Scotland (eg, Carter, 1974; Hechter, 1975: pp 137, 147-148; Hunter, 1976; Dickson, 1980a: pp 128-130). An interesting study of Shetland by Smith (1989) reconstructs the externalist approach in the light of evidence of the priority of production relations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### IDEOLOGY, DISCOURSE AND MEANING

#### Introduction

Any study of racism which is based to a large extent on the analysis of texts is bound to encounter a problem at the same time that it takes advantage of a valuable resource. The problem is that a way must be found of placing texts in a social and historical context. It is through the written record that we have access to arguments and assumptions which can be identified as racist (according to a definition which I will introduce in Chapter Three). But if analysis of textual meaning is divorced from the political and economic contexts in which meanings are produced, then an indispensable dimension of the history of racism is lost. An analytical strategy must be found which acknowledges the specificity of the textual but which also takes account of its relation to a history which, though it is certainly present in texts, is not exhausted by them. Insofar as it ignores these considerations, and treats "ideas" as abstractions divorced from the material circumstances of their production, any "history of ideas" must be a misguided project.<sup>[1]</sup>

There is another, related but distinct sense in which some commentators would insist that the history of racism is not a history of ideas. It has been argued that racism consists in particular practices (for example discriminatory practices) and that racist ideas and texts, though they are correlates of these practices, do not exhaust the materiality of racism. The theoretical difficulties which arise from this proposition are among those which I address in the next chapter, where I will discuss the definition of the concept of



racism, and some problems associated with the notion of "race", its ontological status and its place in social scientific analysis.

In the present chapter my aim is to deal with issues which relate in a more general way to the analysis of texts. Specifically, I discuss work on ideology and discourse, including contributions which take account of the political contexts of discursive production, and which address the politics of meaning.

### **Ideology and Discourse**

The concept of ideology has been defined in a large variety of ways, several of which are incompatible with each other (Williams, 1977: pp 55-56; Eagleton, 1991: pp 2-3). Recently a number of commentators have taken a jaundiced view of debates concerning these disparate usages. Not for the first time it has been suggested that the concept of ideology can serve no useful purpose in sociological and philosophical analyses; the viability of the concept has been questioned on the grounds that it is at once too crude and too inflated to have any purchase on analytical problems (eg Sayer, 1987: p 95; Rorty, 1992: p 40). Nevertheless I will go on, in the next chapter, to define racism as ideology. This is because the concept of ideology has been the focus of indispensably useful theoretical work, despite confusions arising from the diversity of perspectives which have been brought to bear on it.

Two specific areas of enquiry are of particular relevance here. The first concerns the devices of ideological reasoning; that is, the rhetorical strategies which recur in ideological discourses. These are described and analysed in Marx's work, as Parekh illustrates in an illuminating, if partial, exegesis (Parekh, 1982). The second area consists in theoretical work which derives from Althusser's studies of ideology, and is concerned with the antagonistic relations which

pertain between discourses. The concept of discourse, like the concept of ideology, is much contested: furthermore it has been used by theorists who have strong reservations about the use of the term "ideology" (eg Foucault, 1980: pp 118-119). In what follows I define the senses in which I use the terms ideology and discourse and I deal in turn with each of the two areas I have identified. I argue that attention to the forms of ideological reasoning is important, but that analyses of ideological rhetoric are of little value if they disregard the social determinants which bear upon the production of meanings.

### **The Characteristics of Ideological Reasoning**

The term ideology is inextricably linked to the work of Marx, who used it in a highly original way (although he was not its originator).<sup>[2]</sup> Marx's texts do not offer a succinct definition of the concept of ideology; neither are the theoretical innovations which accompany its use reviewed there in a unified, summarised account. This partly explains the large number of secondary exegeses of those passages by Marx which refer to the ideological, its conditions of existence and its effects (Larrain, 1983).

Parekh's *Marx's Theory of Ideology* (1982) promises an account which summarises Marx's work on ideology and which corrects what the author regards as erroneous or distorted interpretations. Parekh considers Marx's critique of ideology to be addressed primarily to the inadequacies of particular forms of "ideological reasoning" (1982: p 1) and he pays particular attention to Marx's examination of the fallacious forms of argument evident in the work of some social theorists. This focus makes Parekh's account a useful one for my purposes, as the analyses which I present in later chapters deal with formal texts, many of which can be described as works of social science. However I will argue that Parekh's summary of the logical



fallacies typical of ideology is limited by his restricted understanding of determinism.

Parekh's reading of Marx is based largely on the latter's critique of the work of writers such as Hegel, the Young Hegelian philosophers attacked and satirised in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1976), the classical economists and others. Marx argues that these writers base their social theory on the assumption of a dualistic opposition between the ideal and the material, within which the realm of consciousness (or the spirit, or the ideal) is given epistemological and sometimes ontological priority over the material and the corporeal. A symptom of such idealism is a tendency to build arguments and explanations around abstractions referring to general categories, such as "man" or "property".

For Marx, notions such as "property in general", "man in general" or any other general ideas, are too abstract to be of more than very limited use in the analysis of concrete, historically specific phenomena. The latter can only be grasped using concepts which specify their particular, historical characteristics. For example the idea that it is possible to apply the category of "property in general" to the analysis of historically specific forms of property is an idealist fallacy: particular forms of property pertaining to particular social formations cannot be analysed in terms of a universal and transhistorical idea. The idealist supposes otherwise, however, and attempts to discover the essential features of a transhistorical category before bringing it to bear on the analysis of a particular social formation (Parekh, 1982: p 3). This approach entails giving analytic priority to the ideal.

Marx is not opposed to abstraction in principle. As Parekh rightly points out, Marx allows that the use of "rational abstraction" is necessary in order to generate concepts which grasp the common

features of phenomena appearing in different epochs and in different social formations (Marx, 1981: p 85; Parekh, 1982: pp 152-156). However, although abstraction is a necessary step in the analysis of social formations, it can only be appropriate if it facilitates the apprehension of concrete, historically specific structures and processes (Sayer, 1979: pp 146-148; Marx, 1981: pp 100-101).

This point is relevant not only to the critique of ideology, but also to the generation of appropriate analytical concepts for social science; since this and the next chapter are concerned in part with the definition of concepts, it is relevant to look aside from Parekh's account for a moment, in order to explore this topic further. In the 1857 Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Marx sets out a number of methodological guidelines concerning the analytical procedures through which the structures and processes of concrete historical conjunctures can be grasped (Marx, 1981: pp 83-88, 100-108). Paraphrasing his arguments it could be said that movement from the concrete and historically specific to an appropriate level of "rational abstraction", and then back to the historically specific, allows the organisation of the concrete to be apprehended and coherently laid out. However Marx emphasises that the use of concepts generated by abstraction must be judicious. The concept of production in general, for example, allows a grasp of what the various historically specific forms of production have in common; on the other hand it gives little indication of the particular characteristics of the diverse, concrete forms of production which have existed in different social formations at different points in history (Parekh, 1982: p 88). This analysis of the relationship between abstract concepts and concrete, historical phenomena has some relevance to debates concerning the concept of racism, as I will argue in the next chapter.



To return to Parekh's account; he argues that, in texts prior to *The German Ideology*, idealism and ideology are synonymous and interchangeable terms for Marx, and that both refer to the error described above. In these earlier texts the tendency to treat ahistorical abstractions as if they were analytic concepts whose definition adequately described historically specific phenomena is taken to be typical of ideology and paradigmatic of idealism (1982: pp 2 ff).

In *The German Ideology* and in subsequent texts, however, the concept of apologia becomes increasingly important for Marx's critique of ideology. Apologia is now seen by Marx as both the logical outcome of idealism and as the *sine qua non* of ideological reasoning. The tendency, inherent in idealism, to employ abstract concepts as if they were wholly sufficient for the purposes of historical analysis typically entails an error characteristic of apologetic reasoning. This is because a social theorist who employs such concepts will inevitably fail to recognise radical differences between the forms of, for example, property or production in different historical periods and in different social formations. Furthermore, in using abstract concepts, such a theorist will typically define them in relation to forms of property, production and so on which are familiar to him or her. As a result, social relations pertaining to a specific historical social formation are universalised and regarded as transhistorical phenomena (1982: pp 136-140). They are also seen as ideal (in several senses of the term) forms which may require to be perfected but which cannot be transcended. This leads to an apologetic stance; the theorist posits the norms, values and social relations of his or her own social formation as the only possible or defensible ones (1982: pp 9-10).

Marx conceives the processes which generate apologia in terms of the "point of view" or "standpoint" of the theorist (1982: pp 18-20, 231).

Every individual theorist has a perspective or point of view which is mediated by the class and other social relations which construct his or her position in the social formation. Thus the philosopher or social theorist works not only with epistemological and ontological assumptions but also with "socially constructed premises" (1982: p 18). These may be intentionally imported into the arguments of the social theorist or philosopher (as is the case, in Marx's judgement, with the "vulgar economists", whose adopted task is to justify the contradictions of capitalist social relations), or they may be the result of unintentional (though systematic) error, examples of which Marx finds in the work of Smith and Ricardo (Marx, 1977, Vol 3: pp 814-831). In either case ideological reasoning, with its idealistic and apologetic character, fails to consider the socially constructed premises of its arguments. If this were not so, Marx argues, then the social theorists he criticises would be forced to embark on a critique of society which apologetics, being biased towards a point of view mediated by class and other social relations, systematically avoids.

Having presented this reading of Marx's work on ideology, Parekh summarises the characteristics of ideology which Marx identifies in analyses of capitalist social formations (Parekh, 1982: pp 136-142): here I will mention those features of ideological reasoning which are relevant to my analysis of racism. The first of these, which has already been noted, is the tendency to dehistoricise and universalise the relations and values of a social formation. The paradigmatic example of this tendency is identified in Marx's critique of the classical economists. The latter conceptualise capital, wage labour and the commodity in such a way that capitalist social relations appear as germane to all social formations. This leads to the absurd and inaccurate assumption that wage labour existed *in a capitalist form*, in pre-capitalist social formations (1982: pp 136-137).



Second, and as a consequence of the first fallacy, ideological analyses present the full development of the capitalist mode of production as the most satisfactory and rational way of organising social relations. Thus social theorists such as the classical political economists were able to produce a hierarchical ordering of contemporary human societies within which their own appeared as the pinnacle of human development (1982: p 137).

The third characteristic typical of ideological analyses is a tendency to assume, or to make claims for, the naturalness of social relations and institutions. Ideologies which take an apologetic stance in relation to capitalism tend to claim that capitalism is the system most compatible with "human nature". This characteristic of ideological arguments is often linked to the first (though not invariably; it is possible to universalise a phenomenon without claiming that it is natural) (1982: p 137-138).

Fourth, ideological reasoning tends to "reduce a relation to a quality and prefer a quality-signifying to a relation-signifying vocabulary" (1982: p 139). For example economic inequalities and inequalities of power may be explained in terms of the "natural" endowments and rights of members of different classes. Personal wealth may be accounted for in terms of the supposedly enterprising and diligent character of the wealthy, rather than in terms of their ownership of the means of production. Similarly poverty may be explained in terms of the lack of thrift and the laziness of the poor, rather than in terms of exploitative social relations. As Parekh points out, such reductions of relations to qualities involve a double fallacy; the supposed qualities of individuals or classes are used to justify social relations and the inequalities produced by those social relations are cited as evidence of the different qualities of individuals or classes (1982: p 139).

Finally, the supposed self-evidence of "common sense" (that is, a set of values and arguments which may appear to correspond to the reality of social experience but which are often inconsistent and contradictory) is frequently invoked in ideological arguments. This involves appeal to a "realism" erroneously based on ideologically constructed "facts" concerning human nature and social relations (1982: pp 141-142).

### **The Limitations of Parekh's Account**

Parekh's account of Marx provides an interesting and useful summary of the idealist and apologetic fallacies which typically occur in the texts of social scientists. It is therefore especially relevant to work on ideology which is based on textual analysis. However the limitations of Parekh's account are even more interesting than its merits. As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, attention to the textual content of ideological arguments and assumptions is inadequate without an understanding of the relationship of those arguments and assumptions to their economic and political contexts. Although Parekh addresses this problem, he does so on the basis of a partial and tendentious reading of Marx's work. He confines his comments to a critique of Marx's arguments concerning the "socially constructed premises" of ideological reasoning and, in doing so, attempts to demonstrate that Marx cannot provide a coherent account of the determination of ideology. My concern in what follows is not so much to correct the partiality of Parekh's reading of Marx, as to point out the limitations of his understanding of determinism.

As I noted above, Parekh's discussion of the social bases of ideology focuses on the concept of "point of view". The point of view or standpoint of a social theorist is given by his or her position in social relations, and delimits the theorist's perspective. When a theorist incorporates these limitations into his or her analysis, in



the form of socially constructed premises, the resulting analysis will be biased and flawed. Ideological reasoning arises because, and insofar as, a theorist's experience of a social formation is mediated by his or her point of view.

Parekh insists that this theory of ideology does not entail any form of determinism. Marx's theory simply points to the limitations of a particular, erroneous form of reasoning; limitations which result from the bias inherent in a limited point of view, but which are not, for all that, the ineluctable outcome of social relations (1982: p 27). Furthermore, Marx's project, Parekh argues, is to transcend the partiality of any limited point of view by achieving "the standpoint of the whole"; that is, an objective perspective unstructured by hidden, socially constructed premises. This standpoint is a prerequisite for avoidance of the twin traps characteristic of ideological thought, and Marx considers it to be the basis of his own analysis. Here Parekh opposes readings of Marx which argue that the latter adopted and theorised the point of view of the proletariat. Parekh argues that such a project would be inconsistent with Marx's view of the causes of ideological fallacies (1982: pp 176, 220).

Parekh acknowledges that this constitutes a problem in Marx's theory (as it is presented in his reading); indeed the position he attributes to Marx forms the basis of one of his major criticisms of Marx's theory. This consists in the surprising conclusion that Marx's theory is fundamentally anti-deterministic.

The best proof of Marx's rejection of determinism lies in the fact that he systematically explored how men can be made conscious of, and thereby helped to *rise above*, their basic assumptions ... Marx is guilty not of determinism but the opposite (1982: 27).

Parekh describes this "opposite" of determinism in his critique of Marx:

Marx has been frequently criticised for not appreciating the human capacity to transcend the social and class influences. In fact, he is open to the opposite criticism that he exaggerated the human capacity to do so ... In conferring upon self-consciousness the power to transcend the deepest influences of class and society, he remained an "idealist" (1982: p 222).

It would not be relevant to review the debate over the extent to which various parts of Marx's work exhibit an idealist tendency.<sup>[3]</sup> The correctness or inaccuracy of Parekh's reading of Marx is not the central issue here. However it should be noted that Parekh's reading is tendentious, in that it disallows the possibility of a coherently theorised determinism. It could be said that Parekh offers Marx two options. The first option consists in the view that a given individual's subjectivity is wholly constrained by class relations; in this case ideology effectively expresses the point of view of a class and is therefore determined by the relations of production of a social formation (class relations being nothing other than relations of production). According to the second option, the individual's subjectivity is the "free" source of thought or discourse. "Free agents of thought" can freely produce their beliefs and ideas, freely taking account of their positions in social relations (1982: p 27). Finding that Marx does not argue for the first of these options, Parekh assumes that he endorses the second and charges him with idealism (1982: p 222-3).

Parekh's claim, that by demonstrating that Marx does not assume a relationship of mechanical mono-causality between class position and



ideology he has provided a "proof of Marx's rejection of determinism" (1982: p 27), implies that any deterministic theory of ideology must entail a mechanical economism. But this is to dismiss the contributions of Marxist theorists who, while explicitly arguing against economism, do not reject deterministic theories *per se*.

### The Critique of Economism

Gramsci describes economistic versions of the theory of ideology as incorporating the claim that "every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure", a claim which "must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism, and combatted in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx..." (Gramsci, 1988: p 190). In fact, as Williams points out, Marx's writings are not entirely free of the tendency to treat the sphere of consciousness as a mere epiphenomenon of the structure of the relations of production of a social formation (Williams, 1977: pp 59-61). For example, in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels occasionally refer to psychological processes using metaphors such as "reflexes", "echoes" and "phantoms" (eg, Marx and Engels, 1976: p 42). Where such a vocabulary is used it can easily be assumed that the writers take ideological phenomena to be the insubstantial by-products of material processes, existing in a separate, abstract sphere of mental activity.

However, as Arthur notes, it is inadvisable to attach great weight to isolated metaphors which were employed by Marx and Engels in order to emphasise their opposition to idealism (Arthur, 1970: p 22). The overall tendency of *The German Ideology*, and of much of Marx's other work, is towards a conception of the unity of consciousness and material existence which is indicated in the statement that

... Consciousness (das Bewusstsein) can never be anything else than conscious existence (das bewusste Sein), and the being of men is their actual life-process (Marx and Engels, 1976: p 42).

The pun on *bewusstsein* in this comment encapsulates Marx and Engel's anti-idealist stance by denying the autonomy of "consciousness". However it does not specify the relationship between "consciousness" and "the actual life process".

Among the most influential statements of that relationship is the passage from the 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* which refers to "the totality of ... relations of production" as constituting the "real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness" (Marx, 1970: p 20). This has been read as proposing a mechanical relation of causality between the economic "base" and an ideological "superstructure", such that the content of ideology (conceived either as being identical with the general category of "social consciousness" or as a type of consciousness which is flawed in a particular way, see Larrain, 1983: pp 168-173) can be wholly accounted for in terms of the direct effects of economic relations. Since the publication of the 1859 Preface such reductionist interpretations have formed a large part of the basis for economistic readings of Marx (Williams, 1977: pp 77-78; Larrain, 1983: p 169).

However the coherence of the base-superstructure model has been questioned by several writers opposed to the reductionism it implies. Sayer, for example, argues that the 1859 Preface should be understood as referring to "internal relations" between categories which should not be regarded as separate entities (Sayer, 1979: pp 19-22).<sup>[4]</sup>



Since, in this sense, the economic base is not an entity distinct from superstructural elements, it is quite erroneous to propose a relationship of external causal determinacy between base and superstructure.

Larrain also rejects the base-superstructure model as an explanatory device, but for somewhat different reasons. He argues that the model can be regarded as a useful *description* of a state of affairs which is, arguably, peculiar to capitalist social formations. It is a "static image", which describes the existence, in capitalist social formations, of specialised and *apparently* separate (though actually inseparable) economic, political and ideological spheres (Larrain, 1983: p 179). It cannot, however, *explain* this development, nor can it adequately explain how the relations of production have determinate effects in the sphere of ideology (1983: p 193).

In order to develop such an explanation, Larrain proposes that the concept of the determination of ideology should be understood to be multidimensional, by which he means that it should involve "both the idea of conditioning and of production" (1983: p 193). The conditioning aspect of the determination of ideology consists in the setting of limits and constraints by institutions and by the demarcation of "fields" which they institutionalise. These objective constraints are themselves consequent on the division of labour within capitalist social formations and are therefore an aspect of the organisation of relations of production (1983: pp 194-197). Specific historical examples of the ways in which constraints on "what can and should be said" may inhere in the structures of institutions, and in the discourses associated with them, have formed the substance of some interesting and controversial research (Macdonell, 1986: pp 82-125).

The base-superstructure model can accommodate this type of determination but, crucially for its usefulness as an explanatory model, cannot incorporate the productive aspect. The latter refers to determination as the dynamic process whereby, to paraphrase Marx, ideology becomes the means by which men and women become conscious of the conflicts inherent in the economic conditions of production. In this process forms of ideology are actively produced and "specified" (1983: p 194).<sup>[5]</sup>

Emphasis on the importance of the active, productive dimension of the determination of ideology is valuable and allows clearer identification of the error which Parekh makes in his critique of Marx. It is because Parekh considers determination only in terms of the constraints imposed on thought by the relations of production that he finds Marx's position inconsistent; he considers that if Marx does not suppose that the thought of social theorists is locked within patterns corresponding to class points of view, then he must abandon the concept of determination altogether. Larrain's discussion of determination suggests the error of this view by proposing a materialist conception of the active production of ideology.

Larrain's assessment of the base-superstructure model bears some similarity to Althusser's argument that the model, as it appears in the work of Marx and Engels, is a spatial metaphor and an item of "descriptive 'theory'" which requires development if it is to become explanatory (Althusser, 1971: p 132). Larrain is critical of Althusser (Larrain, 1983; pp 154-164): nevertheless I will argue that, in order to further elaborate Larrain's conception of the positive determination of ideology, it is necessary to turn to an aspect of Althusser's work which has often been overshadowed by the attention paid, especially in the British literature, to the functionalist tendency in some of his arguments. As Macdonell points out, Althusser's work on the nature of ideology and its relationship



to class struggles has laid the groundwork for important developments in theories of ideology and discourse (Macdonell, 1986: pp 24-60). Among these developments the work of Pêcheux is particularly important: I conclude this chapter by discussing his work and its relation to that of Althusser.

### **The Determination of Meaning**

Althusser's work on ideology defies succinct summary, as it addresses a large number of distinct problems, and as his position on certain questions changes in important ways from text to text. However, two consistent features of his arguments are, first, a rejection of the idea that individual subjects can be regarded as "free agents of thought", freely producing ideas (on the contrary, and controversially, Althusser argues that subjectivity and its appearance of abstract freedom are effects of ideology); and, second, his opposition to the view that the ideology of the members of a class will always correspond, in a mechanical fashion, to their position in relations of production (Althusser, 1970, 1971, 1977). In other words, he rejects both of the alternatives which Parekh proposes in his critique of Marx.

In describing how Althusser conceives an alternative, and more coherent view of the determination of ideology, it is relevant to note, *contra* his critics, that Althusser does not conceive of ideology as inevitably serving the interests of the ruling class. In reading his influential essay on *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* as a functionalist argument, a number of commentators have assumed that, for Althusser, ideology invariably serves to reproduce the relations of production of capitalist social formations (Callinicos, 1976; Johnson, 1979: p 69; Clarke et al, 1980). However it is important to note that in this essay, as in other parts of his work, Althusser argues that ideology should be understood as a field

constituted by struggles *between* classes (Althusser, 1971: pp 141-2). As Macdonell puts it in her account and defence of Althusser's work and its influence:

... ideologies are set up in what are ultimately antagonistic relations: no ideology takes shape outside a struggle with some opposing ideology (Macdonell, 1986: p 33)

Just as classes are constituted by their antagonistic relation to each other, rather than being autonomous "teams" which meet when their contest begins, so ideologies are formed in antagonistic relation to each other. Thus ideologies "emerge, so to speak, from between the classes" (1986: p 34), and their conceptual and rhetorical content is determined as the outcome of antagonistic dialogues between opposed positions. This formulation conceptualises the production of ideology through relations of class struggle while refusing the simplistic assumption that each class has "its own ideology".

In drawing attention to the antagonistic relations between ideologies, and to the antagonistic social relations which structure them, Althusser lays the foundation for a theory of discourse which addresses the politics of meaning, and which thereby allows analysis of texts in terms of their political and economic contexts. Such a theory is offered in Pêcheux's study of the politics of discourse, which is based to a large extent on Althusser's work (eg Pêcheux, 1978, 1982).<sup>[5]</sup> Attempting to develop a materialist theory of meaning, Pêcheux argues that contemporary semantic theories are marked by a common assumption that the source of meaning is in subjective consciousness; as a result of this assumption they are unable to explain changes in the meanings of words except by reference to individual creativity. In order to challenge this



tendency, Pêcheux develops Althusser's argument that ideologies always exist in antagonistic relation to other ideologies. His work suggests that the production of meanings can be understood neither in terms of the subjective conscious intentions of a speaker or writer, nor by reference to the supposedly "internal", extra-social features of language use. Rather, Pêcheux proposes that

.. the *meaning* of a word, expression, proposition, etc., does not exist "in itself" ... but is determined by the ideological positions brought into play in the socio-historical process in which words, expressions and propositions are produced (i.e. reproduced) ... *words, expressions, propositions, etc., change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them ...*  
(Pêcheux, 1982: p 111)

"Position" in this formulation is defined in terms of two sets of relations; first in terms of positions within class relations and, second, in terms of positions within ideological institutions and the "fields" of knowledge and enquiry which they demarcate.

A concern with the ways in which meanings are constituted through social relations is characteristic of much of what has come to be known as "discourse theory". This label is applied, often somewhat indiscriminately, to a wide variety of recent theoretical work (Cousins and Hussain, 1984: pp 77-78). For my purposes it can perhaps be best understood as indicating theories of meaning and communication which refuse to attend only to the formal characteristics of language; that is, to processes "internal to" language. Rather, work on discourse is marked by an insistence that the uses to which a text is put, and the ways in which it is "interpreted" are absolutely dependent on the social relations within which it is produced and consumed. As Said puts it, "the questions

making for a politics of interpretation" are "Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances?" (Said, 1983: p 135). Questions of this kind pertain to a definition of discourse as being fundamentally social: discourse could be said to refer to the ordering and interactive use of signs (whether verbal or non-verbal) within institutions and social practices. Being social, discourses take shape in processes of dialogue, that is to say in relation to other discourses which condition and inform them (Macdonell, 1986: pp 2-4).

In order to address issues such as these, Pêcheux focuses on the social determination of changes in meaning. Proposing a way of approaching the analysis of texts, he uses the concept of *discursive process* to refer to

... the system of relationships of substitution, paraphrases, synonymies, etc., which operate between linguistic elements ... in a given discursive formation (Pêcheux, 1982: p 112).

A word or phrase will change its meaning when used in one discourse rather than another ("freedom", for example, may mean one thing to a socialist activist and another to a member a right wing party). On the other hand, two or more different words appearing in the same discourse may be synonymous, this being the condition for their having a meaning at all ("if you see what I mean", Pêcheux adds drily, 1982: p 113). Pêcheux's work suggests that the discursive processes through which the meanings of a discourse are fixed or changed are aspects of struggles between ideologies. As Hall has commented in the context of a different discussion, ideology is "precisely, this work of fixing meaning through establishing, by selection and combination, a chain of equivalences ..." (Hall, 1985: p 93). By elaborating this view of the production of meanings, Pêcheux's work demonstrates the political significance of the ordering of words.



## Conclusion

In attributing an idealist theory of ideology to Marx, Parekh's account assumes that the only alternative to exclusive adoption of the conception of determination as "constraint" is abandonment of the problematic of determination. This either/or proposition is displaced by Larrain's proposals concerning the multidimensional nature of ideology, by Althusser's arguments concerning the antagonistic relations which pertain between ideologies, and by Pêcheux's work on ideology and meaning. These contributions suggest that ideologies can be analysed in terms of dialogic relationships between ideological discourses, and in terms of the productive constitution of meanings. This approach does not depend upon an idealist view of consciousness as the autonomous source of meaning; rather, changes in the meanings of words and propositions can be understood in terms of struggles between ideological positions. Such a perspective facilitates textual analyses which take account of the ideological, economic and political contexts in which texts are produced.

Although neither Althusser's work does not deal with racist ideology, Macdonell has proposed that it can be used to analyse "the historical, including current, relations between ideologies that come from positions of race and gender as well as from class positions" (Macdonell, 1986: p 36). With this proposal in mind, and applying it also to Pêcheux's arguments, I go on in the next chapter to explore ways in which the accounts of ideological production and discourse which I have described here, along with Marx's analysis of ideological fallacies, can be applied to the analysis of racism.

## Notes

[1] Foucault presents an important critique of the history of ideas in his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972: pp 135-148). A central element of his critique is succinctly summarised by the following comment, made in an interview in 1976:

Anyone envisaging the analysis of discourses solely in terms of temporal continuity would inevitably be led to approach and analyse it like the internal transformation of an individual consciousness. Which would lead to his erecting a great collective consciousness as the scene of events (Foucault, 1980: p 69).

Questioning and displacing notions of continuity, Foucault's work has emphasised conflicts and uneven transitions in the histories of knowledges. For an illuminating discussion of the extent to which Foucault's work contributes to understanding of the material bases of such processes, see Macdonell's *Theories of Discourse* (1986).

[2] Discussions of de Tracy's theory of ideology and its relation to Marx's adoption of the term can be found in Williams (1977: pp 56-57) and Eagleton (1991: pp 66-70).

[3] This debate was instigated by Althusser and Balibar's reading of Marx (Althusser and Balibar, 1970). Their arguments are further elaborated and modified in Althusser's *Essays in Self Criticism* (1976). Parekh's approach is far from Althusserian, but parallels the latter's work in one respect; both find certain aspects of Marx's work incompatible with a materialist perspective. In Althusser's case the "young Marx" (prior to *The German Ideology*) is said to be influenced by an idealist Hegelianism with which he was later to make a decisive



break. In Parekh's view, on the other hand, no part of Marx's work provides a satisfactory materialist account of the production of ideology.

[4] On the concept of "internal relations", and its relevance to the base-superstructure model see Ollman (1976).

[5] For another, somewhat similar analysis of the multi-dimensional nature of the concept of determinism, see Williams (1977, 83-89).

[6] Critical reviews of Pêcheux's work include Woods (1977), Macdonell (1986: pp 43-59), Belsey (1984) and Thompson (1984: pp 232-254). Grillo (1985: pp 8-9) comments on the work of Althusser and Pêcheux in the context of an analysis of ideological reactions to migration to France.

# CHAPTER THREE

## RACISM AND IMAGINED COMMUNITY

### Introduction

In this chapter I build on the preceding discussion of ideology and discourse by turning to issues concerning racism and the construction of "racial" categories. My first aim is to provide a definition of racism which can be applied in textual analyses. Second, I review debates concerning "race" and "race relations", paying particular attention to the argument that "race" should be regarded, not as an analytic concept, but rather as an ideological category to be deconstructed in sociological work. Third, I discuss some aspects of the discursive construction of imagined community. In doing so I extend the discussion of Pêcheux's work presented in Chapter Two, arguing that his approach to the analysis of changes in meaning provides a means of conceptualising discursive relationships between "racial" and other categories.

Recent work on racism has examined not only written and spoken discourses, but also the range of practices, including violence, discrimination and other abuses, with which racism is associated in modern social formations (Balibar, 1991a: p 17). Some commentators have defined racism in terms of such practices (eg Sivanandan, 1982; Todorov, 1986: p 370). Other writers insist that if the definition of the concept of racism is not restricted to its appearance in written and spoken discourse, then considerable conceptual and analytical difficulties arise (eg Miles, 1989: pp 53-61). This issue relates to a broader one, concerning the materiality of ideology (Althusser, 1971; Hall, 1980; Pêcheux, 1982; Macdonnel, 1986). Neither



issue can be resolved here, but this does not present an immediate problem for my analysis, which is principally concerned with the reproduction of racist ideology in formal texts. In defining racism, therefore, my aim is to designate those characteristics which allow identification of racist ideology in written discourse.

### **Racisms**

A number of recent discussions warn against the assumption that it is possible to identify some singular, paradigmatic form of racist ideology, recurring throughout history in different economic, political and cultural contexts. These contributions emphasise that there are wide variations between different *racisms*, with regard to the content of racist arguments and assumptions, the discursive context in which they are articulated, the categories of person against whom they are aimed, the political aims associated with them and so on (eg Gilroy, 1987: p 38, 1990: p 265; Husband, 1982c: p 326; Jackson, 1987: p 9; Goldberg, 1990b: pp xiii-xiv). To some extent this emphasis on plurality has arisen as a means of taking account of the emergence of new forms of racist ideology in Europe since 1945 (Barker, 1981; Miles, 1992: pp 1-2, 9-11). However, as I demonstrate in later chapters, the existence of a multiplicity of racisms is not a new phenomenon. For example although the nineteenth century saw the emergence of scientific racism and the biological determinism associated with it, this was not the only form of racist ideology current during the period. Furthermore nineteenth century scientific racism itself was not a monolithic ideology; it should, rather, be regarded as a category embracing a number of different theories, arguments and assumptions. Solomos' comment that "racism is not a static phenomenon" therefore applies to the nineteenth century as much as to the twentieth (Solomos, 1993: p 9).

The multiplicity of racisms has caused some commentators to doubt the feasibility of an abstract, general definition of racist ideology. Indeed, it is notable that certain, otherwise sophisticated analyses of racism have failed to provide any such definition (Barker, 1981; CCCS, 1982; Gilroy, 1987). In his influential paper, *Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance*, Hall warns against

... extrapolating a common and universal structure to racism, which remains essentially the same, outside of its specific historical location. It is only as the different racisms are historically specified - in their difference - that they can be properly understood ... (1980: p 337)

In support of this position, Hall appeals to Marx's discussion of the tendency towards idealism which typically accompanies abstraction, a dimension of Marx's theory of ideology which I reviewed in Chapter Two.

Hall is right to insist that the specificities of particular racist ideologies must not be glossed over. However analyses which leave the concept of racism undefined risk unhelpful ambiguity and, at worst, analytical incoherence. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, abstract concepts are necessary components of historical analysis, one of their uses being that they allow different examples of a phenomenon to be identified as instances of the same type. With regard to the analysis of racist ideologies the necessity for abstraction derives from the fact that, unless some general definition is available, it is not possible to specify what different racisms have in common; what it is that allows us to identify them as *racisms* (Miles, 1992: p 11). Appeals to a Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance do not vitiate this problem (cf Goldberg, 1990c: p 296).



## Defining Racism

What, then, are the common, definitive features of racist ideologies? The first step to take in answering this question is to point out that racisms are founded on the naturalisation of social difference; "on the transposition", as Hall puts it, "from historically and culturally created differences to fixed natural or biological or genetic differences ..." (Hall, 1980: p 64). That is, racist ideologies identify social collectives, or individual members of social collectives, on the basis of differences which are putatively natural. Some commentators have limited this specification further, by stating that racist ideology identifies social collectives not just as *naturally* distinct but, more particularly, as *biologically* distinct groups. The history of the concept of racism began, in the early twentieth century, with the work of theorists who emphasised the centrality of notions of biological difference in racist ideology (Miles, 1992: pp 3-5). More recently Miles has offered persuasive arguments in favour of such a definition: for Miles the identification of collectives which are the "objects" of racist discourses is premised on the attribution of biological difference (Miles, 1982: pp 78-79; 1989: p 79). He notes that in some racist discourses natural collectives may be identified or constructed on the basis of cultural differences; however he argues that in such cases the explicitly attributed cultural traits function as substitutes or euphemisms for implicitly attributed biological differences (Miles, 1992: p 24).

"The natural" is a notoriously nebulous category and certainly requires to be spelt out in some specific way (Guillaumin, 1980: pp 44-46). However to define the concept of racism so that it refers exclusively to ideologies which construct collective identities on the basis of putative biological differences, either explicitly or implicitly, is too narrow a specification. Appeals to biology are

only one way of naturalising the social; cultural characteristics may also appear in a racist discourse as the signifiers of a group's natural identity, and may do so without functioning as euphemistic substitutes for biological traits (Jackson, 1987: p 12-13; Cohen, 1988: p 14; Anthias, 1990: p 24).<sup>[1]</sup>

In order for such cultural characteristics to be represented as "natural" they require some notional link with the pre-social. This link commonly consists in an appeal to the idea of inheritance; a putatively inherited trait is commonly regarded as natural whether or not it has a biological aspect. This is demonstrated by various nineteenth century arguments concerning cultural difference. For example some of the "moral" traits referred to in the nineteenth century texts which I discuss in later chapters would be regarded as cultural characteristics in late twentieth century terms. Yet, in contrast with common late twentieth century assumptions, nineteenth century theorists assumed that many such traits were natural, because they believed them to be inherited (Harris, 1968: p 81; Cohen, 1988: pp 23, 101). Within a racist discourse the mechanism of inheritance may be specified as genetic (in the sense of post-Darwinian genetic theory, and thus in a way which firmly links it to a biological mechanism); alternatively, it may be specified as some non-genetic mechanism, or it may not be specified at all.

For non-biological characteristics the capacity to be inherited is the *sine qua non* of naturalness or innateness. Biological traits, on the other hand, are often supposed to be natural even where they are not said to be inherited. This point is illustrated by various environmentalist theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which proposed that a wide range of physical characteristics could be modified by an individual's exposure to climatic influences (Harris, 1968: pp 86-87; Walvin, 1973: pp 5 ff). For example it was argued that Africans, being white at birth, changed colour through exposure



to the sun. Blackness, in this discourse, was both an acquired condition and a natural one. Discursive relationships between the biological and the natural do not always have the simple self-evidence upon which racist ideologies typically trade for their plausibility.<sup>[2]</sup>

The ideological processes through which social collectives are identified by the attribution of biological or putatively inherent cultural characteristics can be described as processes of racialisation (Fanon, 1967: p 171; Banton, 1977: pp 18-19; Omi and Winant, 1986: pp 64-66; Miles, 1989: pp 73-77). I use the term "social collectives" here to refer to communities imagined as consisting of women, children and men, and imagined as able, under normal circumstances, to reproduce themselves "naturally"; that is through heterosexual intercourse, childbirth and familial childraising (Miles, 1989: pp 87-88). The latter processes are routinely taken to be natural constants and, as such, are often assumed to be invariable. In fact they are reproduced in social contexts and within relations of power which are typically dehistoricised within racist and sexist discourses. This is one point of entry for analyses of the relations between sexist and racist ideologies (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983, 1992: pp 96-131; Anthias, 1990; Wallerstein, 1991a: pp 107-112).<sup>[3]</sup>

Racialisation is a central component of racist ideology. Nevertheless it is possible for processes of racialisation to occur in the absence of racism (Satzewich, 1988). As this qualification implies, there are further features which define racism at a general level. A chief feature of racist ideologies is that, in addition to racialising social collectives, they assess as inferior, or as threatening, or in some other negative way, characteristics ("natural" or not) which the group's members are supposed typically (there are always exceptions to ideological "rules") to possess (Miles, 1989: p 79).

This definition accommodates racist discourses which posit hierarchical relations of inferiority and superiority between racialised groups, such as the biological determinist theories of nineteenth century scientific racism. On the other hand, it also accommodates racisms which eschew arguments concerning "racial" inferiority and which refer, instead, to the putative mutual incompatibility of racialised social collectives. Contemporary racist ideologies of this kind are sometimes referred to as examples of "the new racism". Barker uses this concept to refer to late twentieth century discourses which identify supposedly natural and radically incompatible differences between communities, but which make no reference to hierarchies of inferiority and superiority (Barker, 1981; Husband, 1982c: pp 319-322; cf Miles, 1989: p 66).

Noting the same ideological development, Solomos argues that

... there is little to be gained from seeing racism merely as a signifier for ideas of biological or cultural superiority, since it has become clear in recent years that the focus on attributed biological inferiority is being replaced in contemporary forms of racist discourse by a concern with culture and ethnicity as historically fixed categories (Solomos, 1993: p 9).

These considerations draw attention to the historical variations which are apparent in the reproduction of racist ideologies. However, to repeat a point already made, they do not make definition of racism at a general level impossible or inadvisable. For example the definition I propose here can embrace the notion of radical and dangerous difference at work in "the new racism", since such references entail the allegation that the presence of some "alien" cultural group represents a dangerous threat to social stability.<sup>[4]</sup>



Racist discourses may make claims such as these by spelling out causal connections between the threatening or inferior character of a racialised group and the racialised features which identify it as a natural collective. However a further point to note concerning the definition of racism at this general level (and one which further acknowledges the variety of racisms) is that some racist discourses entail no such causal arguments. Two types of case demonstrate this. First, racist ideology may consist in series of statements, arguments and assumptions, wherein the connections between statements are not explicitly stated, so that what is said depends on what is unsaid, deferred or assumed. This is often the case with spontaneous or popular racisms reproduced in commonsense discourse. The latter lack the formality typical of scientific or other scholarly discourses, though they may inform (or be informed) by them (Appiah, 1990: p 4; Balibar, 1991d: p 38; Miles, 1989: pp 79-80, 1992: p 7). Such informal discourses may not express a deterministic argument but may nevertheless *imply* a deterministic or causal link between a racialised collective's putatively natural essence and its supposedly inferior or threatening attributes.

Second, a racist argument may be explicitly anti-determinist. That is a racist discourse may racialise a collective, attribute to it various negative characteristics (cultural or biological or both), and at the same time deny that there is any determinate link between these negative traits and the collective's racialised identifying features. Such examples (several of which will be examined in later chapters), illustrate the point that linkages between the natural, the biological, the inherited and the cultural are not consistent between different racist discourses. On the contrary, all four categories and their relations to each other can be constructed in a variety of ways. Such linkages and their implications for the logic of a racist discourse have to be established through historical research rather

than being assumed in advance and by definition; I return to this point towards the end of this chapter.

Some further features of racist ideology can be indicated by reference to the fallacies of ideological reasoning which I discussed in Chapter Two. As I have already noted, all racisms (whether or not they are deterministic) depend on the naturalisation of the social. This is so not only in the sense that the identities of social collectives are constructed in terms of their supposed natural characteristics, but also in the sense that racisms tend to naturalise (and thereby to dehistoricise and legitimate) social relations between racialised groups. For example relations of political dominance and subjection between one racialised group and another may be justified as evidence of "natural" differences between the groups. This tendency is related to a second typical feature of racist ideology; the reduction of relations to qualities. For example the technological underdevelopment of a society may be attributed to a supposed deficiency in the character of that society's members; that is, rather than an explanation of difference being offered, difference itself may be cited as evidence of "racial" inferiority. Third, claims concerning the inferiority of a racialised collective commonly entail an ideological appeal to "common sense", by appealing to the "obviousness" of a racialised group's innate shortcomings.

In Chapter Two I noted that ideological reasoning typically dehistoricises, universalises and naturalises existing social relations and values, and that these are aspects of the apologetic nature of ideology. As has been noted by many commentators, racist ideology has frequently been a feature of apologetic accounts of European imperialism; for example some of the ideological strategies mentioned above (the dehistoricisation and naturalisation of underdevelopment, political subordination and so on) have been mobilised in defence of expansionist and colonialist policies (Kiernan, 1969: p 233; Porter,



1975; Saville, 1988: pp 169-174; Bolt, 1984; Miles, 1989: pp 100-111). However, contrary to the conclusions arrived at by some (though by no means all) Marxist analyses, racist ideology, its origins, and its causes cannot be wholly explained in terms of the determinant effects of capitalist relations of production or of the history of eighteenth and nineteenth century European imperialism (cf Cox, 1970; Castles and Kosack, 1973: p 16; Lecourt, 1980: p 282; Wallerstein, 1991b: pp 33-36). Such conclusions are untenable given, among other considerations, evidence of the existence of pre-capitalist racist discourses, evidence of racisms which are not "functional" for capital (in the sense that they do not serve the purpose of facilitating capital accumulation), and the history of racisms not immediately related to imperialist practices (Walvin, 1973; Jordan, 1968: pp 3-25; Banton, 1977: pp 13-17; Cohen, 1988: pp 28-40; Delacampagne, 1990; Balibar, 1991b: pp 204-216).

Partly on the basis of the considerations just listed, a number of Marxist and non-Marxist contributions have offered convincing critiques of reductionist and economistic accounts of the origins and history of racism. It has been pointed out that in failing to take account of "inconvenient" but relevant historical evidence, such accounts underestimate the complexity of relationships between the reproduction of racism and the reproduction of capitalism (eg Miles, 1980, 1982: pp 81-92, 1989: pp 99-100; Omi and Winant, 1986: pp 30-37; Solomos, 1988: pp 84-88, 104; 1993: p 27).

However the production of a coherent economistic explanation of the origins and reproduction of racism is not a test of the viability of Marxist analysis in this area. On the contrary, understanding of the reproduction of racism has been much advanced by historical materialist analyses which reject economistic and functionalist assumptions. These studies demonstrate that the reproduction of racist ideologies has been an important factor in the history of

capitalism. In a number of cases racism has facilitated the establishment of capitalist relations of production, though seldom "functioning" entirely and unproblematically in the interests of capital (Miles, 1989: pp 100-113; Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991).

Some commentators have discussed the relationship between racism and the development of the capitalist mode of production in terms of relationships between class and "race" (Solomos, 1988: pp 102-103; 1993: pp 28-30). Anthias and Yuval-Davis, for example, have analysed the conceptual and historical links between "racial", class and gender categories (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Anthias, 1990). Other contributors to this area include Gilroy, who argues that the importance of class for analyses of racism is increasingly marginal, and increasingly eclipsed by the centrality of politics based on "racial" identities (Gilroy, 1987: pp 14-42). These discussions involve complex theoretical and methodological questions, including the problem of the theoretical status of the idea of "race". It is relevant to review some aspects of this question here, as it has a direct bearing on the analysis of the social construction of "racial" categories.

#### **"Race" as a social construction**

Throughout the preceding discussion I have avoided defining racism in terms of arguments or assumptions concerning "races". There are two reasons for this. First, it is not appropriate to define racism in such a way that it refers exclusively to discourses within which the term "race" occurs. This is because discourses from which the term is absent may have all of the defining characteristics I described above (Miles, 1989: pp 74-75; 1992: pp 5-7; cf Omi and Winant, 1986: p 145). Second, the meaning and usefulness of the notion of "race" are highly problematic, a fact which militates against its inclusion in any definition of key concepts (Jackson, 1987: p 6; Back and



Solomos, 1992: p 328). These problems require an investigation of "... the ontological and social commitments of any sort of 'race talk'" (Goldberg, 1990b: p xi).

"Race" is certainly a difficult notion; as Back and Solomos comment, "critical analysis seems to be persistently bedevilled by the paradox that the concept of 'race' has political consequences but is ultimately an analytical paper tiger" (Back and Solomos, 1992: p 328). In order to see why this is so it will be useful to look briefly at the history of the idea of "race". I restrict my discussion here to the usage of "race" in the English language; related terms occur in other European languages, but have a different history (Solomos, 1993: p 5).

Banton traces the first appearance of the term "race" to the early sixteenth century (Banton, 1987: p 1; cf Williams, 1985: p 248). From this time until the beginning of the nineteenth century "race" was generally employed to refer to the lineage of living entities; that is to say, to the historical origins and genealogical descent of various plants and animals, including humans (Banton, 1987: p 28 ff; Gould, 1981: pp 39-42). The terms of this usage can be clarified by considering the example of a black woman whose grandfather is white: in this early sense of "race" the woman could be said to be "of the race" of her grandfather, despite the difference in their appearance, and regardless of any other traits which might differentiate them from each other. That is to say that biological and other differences were not at issue for the purposes of establishing a person's "racial" genealogy (Banton, 1987: p 30).

From around the beginning of the nineteenth century this sense of "race" was displaced by one which referred to the existence of natural types among living creatures, including more or less clearly differentiated types of human. According to the new usage (to

pursue my example) a black woman could not be of the same "race" as a white man; even if they were related by genealogy, they belonged to naturally distinct, "racial" groups (Banton, 1987: pp 28-97; Lorimer, 1978: pp 131-144). This view of "race" is still prevalent in late twentieth century Britain and elsewhere; however for natural scientists, social scientists and others it is radically undermined by genetic and social theories which began to be developed in the late nineteenth century. Social scientific use of the term "race" now carries with it an assumption that "racial" groups are socially constructed (Husband, 1982b: pp 11-17).

This account is by no means comprehensive; as later chapters will demonstrate, further variations in nineteenth century usage must be identified in order to understand the history of racism and "racial" categorisation. However even this brief and schematic review serves to indicate that the idea of "race" has acquired different meanings in different historical, political and theoretical contexts. Among other things these changes of meaning have entailed variations in the criteria upon which distinctions between "races" have been based. In this sense "races" are formed in discourse, rather than being objects which are discovered in their reality by a positive science (Gordon, 1980: p 236; Belsey, 1984: pp 27-291; Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman, 1992; Lee, 1993).

The proposition that "race" is a discursive (and therefore social) construction, and not a natural category akin to *species* or *genus*, is no longer controversial in sociological and Marxist literature (Jackson, 1987: pp 6-7); for contemporary social science, controversy begins with the theoretical and methodological consequences of this observation. It is relevant to review and compare some different assessments of those consequences here, in order to arrive at a theoretically coherent perspective on the notion of "race".



## The Critique of the "Race Relations" Problematic

Within the British literature the emergence of a critique of the sociology of "race relations" was an important moment in the history of the sociology of racism (Miles, 1982: pp 22-43, 1984; Lawrence, 1982; Solomos, 1993: pp 25-31). In one sense, the debate has moved on since that moment. Gilroy, for example, refers to Miles' critique of the sociology of "race relations" as an appropriate starting point for his own discussion, without feeling obliged to rehearse its arguments (Gilroy, 1987: p 40n). On the other hand an issue which is at the heart of the dispute between supporters and critics of the "race relations" problematic continues to be debated in recent literature, and is in fact discussed at length in Gilroy's text. [5] This is the question of the analytical status of the idea of "race".

For writers working within the "race relations" problematic, the social construction of "race" presents an important sociological problem but does not prevent social science from using the term as a descriptive and analytical category (eg Rex, 1970: pp 161 ff, 1981; Lyon, 1985; Yinger, 1988; Banton, 1989). For critics of the problematic, such usages of the term are unacceptable as they appear to endorse the proposition that "races" have a "natural" existence which is ontologically prior to their social construction: they argue that, even where an explicit denial of that proposition is present, work carried out within the terms of the "race relations" problematic flirts with the assumption that "racial" categories represent natural divisions between human populations (Guillaumin, 1980; Lecourt, 1980: p 267).

An extensive critique of this aspect of "race relations" sociology has been offered by Miles, who condemns the use of the terms "race" and "race relations" as social scientific categories. (eg, 1982: pp 22-43; 1984; 1988a; 1988b). In his work Knox's dictum that "race is

everything" is reversed; "race" is now nothing but an ideological chimera (Knox, 1850: p 7). Miles' objection to the use of the term "race" as an analytical or descriptive term rests upon two points concerning the nature of the "race relations" approach. He notes, first, that work on the sociology of "race relations" claims that "races", though socially constructed, can enter into social relations with one another (Miles, 1988b: p 8). That is, such work assumes that social relations between (socially constructed) "races" are a legitimate object of theoretical and empirical analysis. Miles argues that this is a fallacy. The fact that people attach particular meanings to racialised differences and interact in ways which attach importance to such meanings does not imply that "races" exist: they do not, and therefore social relations between "races" cannot exist either. Miles second point is that work based on this approach reifies the ideological category of "race", constructing it as an active subject with determinant effects and thereby marginalising or ignoring the significance of class relations (Miles, 1982: p 34).

Miles' critique is consistent and forms the basis of a well-formulated theoretical grounding for analyses of racism (Miles, 1982, 1989; Solomos, 1988: pp 98-101; 1993: pp 28-29). However it is worth noting that the second part of his critique is not logically consequent upon the first. Formally it is possible that an analytical strategy could be found wherein "races" and social relations between "races" would be regarded as objects of sociological enquiry, but which avoided attributing to putative "racial" essences (whether biological essences or supposedly transhistorical cultural essences) determinant effects which are properly attributable to racialised individuals or class fractions. If realised, such an approach would avoid the trap of reification while retaining "race" as a sociological concept (Banton, 1989: p 129; cf Appiah, 1990).



However to say that a strategy is formally possible is not the same as saying it has been successfully carried out. As Miles' critiques of specific texts demonstrate, the notion of "race" is in fact reified in much if not all work carried out within the terms of the "race relations" problematic. His critique of Rex's work on migration to Britain, for example, demonstrates that Rex ignores the position of migrant groups in relations of production, in favour of an analysis in terms of "race relations"; the result is a differential treatment of migrant and "indigenous" groups. This approach reifies "race" and effectively reproduces, in sociological analysis, the differentiation and exclusion which racism facilitates in the sphere of production (Rex, 1970; Miles, 1982: pp 26-30). As a demonstration of the efficacy of an analysis based on political economy and the critique of ideology, this assessment of Rex's work is exemplary. However it does not establish that the use of "race" and "race relations" as analytical categories is a flawed strategy *in principle*, since it does not demonstrate that such an approach inevitably entails reification.

#### "Racial Formation"

The relevance of these comments on Miles' work becomes evident when some other contributions to the sociology of racism are reviewed. For example Omi and Winant's work can be understood as an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of the "race relations" problematic (including the reification of "race"), while acknowledging and giving analytical space to the centrality of "race" in modern social formations (Omi and Winant, 1986). Through the concepts of racialisation and "racial formation" they seek to keep in view the social construction of "race" and to avoid slipping back into an assumption that "race relations" explain the situation of social groups. "Race formation" entails an array of practices whereby social collectives come to be constituted along "racial" lines; Omi and Winant pay particular attention to the rôle of state intervention in such processes.

While recognising that "races" are not natural entities, Omi and Winant insist that it is a mistake to neglect "the specificity of race" and its importance as a focus of political organisation (Omi and Winant, 1986: p 52; Outlaw, 1990: p 77). This aspect of their work is summarised by the comment that

... there is continuous temptation to think of race as an essence, as something fixed, concrete and objective ... And there is also an opposite temptation: to see it as a mere illusion, which an ideal social order would eliminate (1986: p 68).

Although they have not commented directly on his work, Omi and Winant would perhaps regard Miles as having succumbed to the second of these temptations.

Certainly this is the view of Gilroy, who argues that to regard "race" as a phantasm of the ideological sphere is to reduce it to a refraction of class (1987: pp 22-25; cf Miles, 1988a).<sup>[5]</sup> Taking a position similar to that of Omi and Winant, and referring to a definition of "race formation" which is close to theirs (Gilroy, 1987: pp 38, 41-2n), Gilroy maintains that arguments about the epistemological status of "race" are of secondary importance; the primary analytical objective should be to understand how "racial meanings, solidarities and identities provide the basis for action" (1987: p 27). Gilroy refers to the "elasticity and emptiness of racial signifiers" and advocates deconstructive analysis of the ways in which the categories they signify are constituted. However he argues that such an analysis is not incompatible with the retention of "race" as an analytical concept (1987: p 39). "Race formation" has effects as real as those of class formation and "race" must therefore have the same conceptual status as class. He insists on the point ...



... not because ("race") corresponds to any biological or epistemological absolutes, but because it refers investigation to the power that collective identities acquire by means of their roots in tradition (1987: p 247, my parenthesis).

To adopt a phrase from Foucault, Gilroy wants to bring "race" to the threshold of scientificity; to make it operational and useful in the field of social science (Foucault, 1972: p 187). Gilroy has accused Miles of supposing that if people stopped using the term "race", then all the problems associated with it would be resolved (1987: p 22; cf Miles, 1988a: pp 45-47n). In fact, this charge of indulgence in the Tinkerbell theory is not supportable by reference to Miles' work, much of which examines the ways in which social collectives have come to be understood to be "racial" groups: Miles makes no suggestion that a mere change of vocabulary would radically affect such processes.

Nevertheless, there is a difficulty in Miles' position. All collective categories, all communal identifications, are in some sense ideological constructs; for example there are persuasive (if controversial) arguments to the effect that categories such as "woman" or "homosexual" are ideologically constructed (Foucault, 1978: p 101; Plummer, 1981b; McIntosh, 1981; Weeks, 1981: pp 96-121; Schiebinger, 1987). Both of these terms, and others, are also used as analytic and descriptive terms in the most rigorous of materialist analyses: why, then, should "race" be refused analytic and descriptive status? (Fromm, 1986; cf Todorov, 1986: pp 370-371; Gates, 1986b: pp 4-6, 402-406) To put this another way, it is not immediately clear why "race" should be placed in inverted commas, as it is consistently in Miles' work and intermittently in the work of others (eg Husband, 1982; Gates, 1986a; Gilroy, 1987), when the same writers routinely use terms such as "woman", "man" and "homosexual"

without any such cautionary symbols of their socially constructed and problematic nature.

Some discussions of this topic rehearse arguments developed by contemporary genetic science (eg Husband, 1982b: p 14-18; Miles, 1982: pp 10-19; 1989: p 70; Appiah, 1986; Gates, 1986b: p 4, 1986c). Since genetic scientists generally (though not unanimously) dismiss "race" as a viable scientific category, it can be concluded that "race" corresponds to no real phenomenon in biological terms. The consequence of this for social science, so the argument runs, is that "race" should therefore be regarded as a pure illusion; and since natural scientists have discredited the concept of "race", social scientists should do the same.

This argument has considerable appeal, for two reasons. First, it emphasises the crucial point that racialised categories correspond to no biological types. This is not to deny difference. There are observable physical differences between human beings, and historical patterns of social development have regularly given rise to social collectives with relatively consistent phenotypical features. However what is at issue in racism and racialisation is the significance and meaning given to these differences, which have no social significance in themselves. Furthermore, although there are differences of culture and history between populations, what must be recognised is that the ideological distortions of racialisation and racism naturalise these differences and obscure their origins. The argument from genetic science gives a clear basis for explication of these important points.

Second, the argument draws attention to the fact that commonsense and political understandings of human difference are, to a large extent, informed by the fallacious theories and assumptions on the basis of which nineteenth century science constructed "racial"



categories and hierarchies. The natural scientific critique of "racial" categorisation is therefore of great importance, since it refuses scientific credibility to contemporary biological determinist arguments. It also has an important place in critiques of contemporary socio-biological arguments concerning the putative incompatibility of racialised population groups (Barker, 1990).

However the appeal to natural science does not resolve the question of the descriptive and analytic status of "race" for social science, although some versions of the argument from genetics appear to assume that it does (Appiah, 1996). This point can be made by reference to another example of a socially constructed category. Recent biological research has led to claims that homosexual men have significantly different genotypes from those of heterosexuals (Levay, 1993; Hamer et al, 1993; cf, eg, Weeks, 1986a: pp 50-52). The history of such claims dates back, at the latest, to the rise of sexology in the nineteenth century, and the enthusiasm for categorisation which it shared with "racial" anthropology; more recently, however, the claim has been backed up with putative evidence from genetic science.

This claim raises the issue of the relationships between homosexual behaviour, homosexual orientation and homosexual identity. Without entering too deeply into that complex area, it can be said that some researchers have concluded that homosexual orientation may be influenced by genetic factors; this may or may not lead to homosexual behaviour and the adoption of a homosexual identity or rôle. These claims are highly dubious for a number of reasons, not least of these being that a question must arise as to how "subjects" for the research were selected in the first instance. Any means of categorisation used to select samples of homosexual and heterosexual people (whether relying on self-identification or some other criterion) must inevitably have a socially constructed element at the

very least (cf LeVay, 1993: pp 107-108). The homosexual category is a historically specific phenomenon; as Foucault argues, sex between men existed before the late nineteenth century, but homosexuals did not (Foucault, 1979: p 126). Therefore social construction enters into such research at its very outset, in the selection of a sample.

Furthermore, even if this objection is ignored, and even if a biological basis for homosexuality was established by natural scientists, this would not render the homosexual category unproblematically "natural". On the contrary, sociologists would quite properly continue to regard homosexuality and heterosexuality as social constructs. The social construction of the two categories would have to be considered in relation to whatever element of biological predisposition was demonstrated, but they would continue to be historically variable, socially constructed identities. In this sense demonstration of such a biological predisposition would move the case of sexual orientation and identity closer to that of gender, insofar as discussions of the social construction of femininity have emphasised the independence of such construction from biological differences between males and females (Schiebinger, 1987; Stepan, 1990).

The example of homosexuality is a revealing one, because claims concerning the existence of a genetic basis for homosexual orientation have not been conclusively proved or disproved. The point which the example clarifies is that, whether such a basis exists or not, the homosexual category is socially constructed. Nevertheless, it is a useful, coherent and possibly indispensable category of analysis. By extension, the fact that there is no biological basis for racialisation does not definitively preclude the use of "race" as an analytical category. "Race", it can reasonably be argued, is one socially constructed category among many used in sociological analysis.



In presenting this argument I am not suggesting that the social construction of "race" closely parallels the construction of the homosexual category. Indeed there can be no general model of social construction. This is not only because of the rather vague nature of the term (after all, what category is not socially constructed at some level?: even chairs have to be constructed twice) but also because different categories are constructed in differential relations to natural scientific categories, to the body, to relations of production, to institutions and to the state. "Race" is not socially constructed in the same mode as sexuality, or gender, or class (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; Balibar, 1991c: pp 153-184; Evans, 1993).

Nevertheless, the example of sexuality reinforces the point that there is no *prima facie* case for dismissing "race" as an analytic or descriptive term on the basis of evidence from natural science. Any solution to the problem must have a political dimension rather than being abstractly scientific. On this basis I agree with Miles that the continued use of "race" as a concept in sociological analyses appears, at worst, to lend support to commonsense and political arguments which depend, tacitly or otherwise, upon the discredited categories of scientific racism. At best the practice tends to lead to analytical confusion.

The latter consideration is especially relevant to my analytical aims in this thesis. As one of those aims is to analyse the construction of racialised collective categories in discourses which take them as objects of enquiry, it is appropriate to maintain a critical distance from the notion of "race". By regarding usage of the term as something to be explained, rather than comparing nineteenth century usages to a "correct" twentieth century usage, it will be possible to avoid confusion in discussions of the texts I examine in later chapters. The textual convention of placing "race" in inverted

commas is a useful reminder of this perspective.<sup>[23]</sup> However to take a critical distance from the notion of "race" is only a starting point. It remains to find a means of conceptualising and analysing the discursive construction of racialised groups.

### **Discursive Constructions of Imagined Community**

How should analysis of the discursive construction of imagined community be approached in research work which has its focus on the reproduction of racism and racialisation? The implication of the preceding discussion is that it is necessary to find a means of conceptualising the construction of collectivity and collective difference which avoids the vocabulary of "race". Racialisation provides one element of a conceptual apparatus which facilitates this project, because it allows discussion of the ways in which characteristics attributed to social collectives can be naturalised and dehistoricised.

Yet it cannot be assumed, in advance of analysis, that all imagined communities are racialised. Social collectives may be described in terms of geographical or environmental location, historical or genealogical identity, cultural or psychological characteristics, dress or physical appearance and so on. These and other traits may be combined in various constellations: for example texts may construct social collectives through various discursive linkages between the natural, the biological, inheritance and culture. Some such linkages will produce racialised identities but this is not true of all discursive constructions of imagined community. Furthermore even among racialised constructions there are further variations in the ways in which social collectives may be constructed. The causal priorities attributed to various traits may vary; for example in some constructions of racialised collectivity (including several discussed in later chapters) biological traits are held to have a determining



influence on cultural characteristics; in others, biological characteristics have no such special significance. Again, the order and history of such linkages cannot be assumed in advance. As I noted earlier, they have to be established by a *posteriori* analysis of historical and contemporary discourses.

Textual analyses of these discursive relationships can be supplemented by another approach. This consists in examination of changes in meaning around "race" and other terms. Within racist discourses, racialised collectives are not always referred to as "races" (Miles, 1989: pp 74-75): by exploring changes in the meanings which have been attached to such terms as "nation", "tribe" and "people", as well as to "race", it is possible to contribute further to the mapping of the history of racialising and racist discourses. Following the work on discourse reviewed in Chapter Two, and recalling Macdonell's proposal that it can be used in the analysis of conflicts grounded in "race", it would be expected that "race" and other, related terms "change their meanings according to the positions held by those who use them" (Pêcheux, 1982: p 111). More specifically, this suggests that the active constitution of the meanings of terms such as "race", "nation", "tribe" and other words indicating social collectivity should be examined in relation to struggles between ideological positions which correspond to different racist theories. That is, they can be examined by focussing on oppositional relationships between racisms.

I began this chapter by discussing work which emphasises the variety of different racist ideologies which can be found in contemporary and historical social formations. By applying the principles outlined in Pêcheux's work on ideology and discourse it is possible to explore relationships between different racisms in a way which illuminates the construction of imagined communities. To any particular racist theory there will correspond not only different meanings for key

terms such as "race", but also particular ways of discursively constructing social collectives; that is, different racisms will correspond to different patterns of discursive linkage between attributed traits. As any ideology is shaped by its relation to other ideologies, such discursive linkages may become sites of conflict between different racisms. Conflicts of this kind, and the ideological positions which inform them, will be important foci of attention in later chapters.

### **Conclusion**

Arguments about discursive construction, like the notion of social construction, can seem to imply that social categories are constructed through the development of "ideas" (Evans, 1993; pp 35-37). It is therefore important to emphasise that, although racialised groups are constituted in discourse, this does not mean that they are mere linguistic conventions. Racialising and racist discourse is not "just words", because language is always inserted in material practices; the discursive context in which racialisation occurs and in which racist ideology is reproduced consists both of discursive practices and material practices (which are not "just words" either, despite what some theorists appear to argue). These categories are not mutually exclusive. All material practices have a discursive element (as Hall points out, no practice of production exists "outside" of discourse and meaning). On the other hand discursive practices do not exist in an ethereal plane of consciousness, detached from relations of production, markets and the state (Hall, 1985: pp 103-105). This argument does not imply that "race" is a concept referring to a real, material entity. It does imply that real, material social collectives are constituted as racialised groups through discourse and in the context of specific social relations.



In looking at the construction of racialised groups it is important to keep in view the historical social relations within which racialising and racist discourses are reproduced. That is, it should be understood that changes in racisms, in the meanings of "race" and in the construction of social collectives are located within particular "discursive fields" (Back and Solomos, 1992). For the purposes of this study, these include domestic class relations and relations of imperialist exploitation. The Scottish history of both of these fields has been reviewed in Chapter One and will be referred to again in later chapters.

## Notes

[1] This definition of racism has implications for the relation between racism and nationalism. Miles argues that if racism is defined so that it refers to ideologies which identify collectives on the basis of non-biological traits, then the distinction between the concepts of nationalism and racism is collapsed (1992: p 12). However in my view a definitive distinction pertains which prevents the concepts of racism and nationalism from collapsing into each other. As Miles points out, nationalist ideologies insist on the right of nations to self-determination (Miles, 1992: pp 24-26). This is not a definitive characteristic of racism.

Furthermore, nationalist ideologies do not invariably present nations as natural collectives: unlike "races", nations may be presented as historical and cultural constructs, yet still be regarded as legitimate and necessary loci of collective identity and allegiance (Seton-Watson, 1977; Nairn, 1981; Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1979, 1988, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1990). Where nationalisms do suggest or insist that the nation is a natural entity this demonstrates the interaction of racism and nationalism, and indicates a way in which racist arguments and assumptions may be recruited in support of nationalist claims.

[2] An important distinction should be introduced here, between biological characteristics in general and phenotypical characteristics in particular. In terms of modern genetic theory, phenotype is the expression, or manifestation, of the genetic make-up (or genotype) of a biological organism. Not all of the genes in an organism's cellular nuclei are expressed in the phenotype of the organism; that is, not all of them give rise to the growth of biological structures. On the other hand not all of the physical or corporeal features of an organism are phenotypical; some (such as callosities, scars, skin



decorations and so on) are entirely the result of environmental conditions rather than being (even in part) the expression of genotype. These terms are part of a fairly clear and coherent schema of the relationship between inheritance (the determinant of genotype) and biological structure (the expression of genotype). They are not terms which were available to nineteenth century writers, who worked with other, generally more ambiguous models of inheritance. They are, nevertheless, a useful point of reference for analysis of nineteenth century texts.

[3] Barthes' comment on "facts of nature" is illuminating in this regard:

Birth, death? Yes, these are facts of nature, universal facts. But if one removes History from them, there is nothing more to be said about them; any comment about them becomes purely tautological ... True, children are *always* born: but in the whole mass of the human problem, what does the "essence" of this process matter to us, compared to its modes which, as for them, are perfectly historical? (Barthes, 1973: pp 101-102)

[4] Unlike some other definitions of racism (eg Wellman, 1977: p 236), the one I propose here also allows analysis of racisms which do not take black populations as their "objects" (Miles, 1982: pp 121-150; Dikötter, 1990; Weiner, 1994)

[5] By referring to a problematic I mean to indicate a theoretical perspective which, in informing the agenda and assumptions of an area of sociological work, allows and foregrounds certain questions and objects of enquiry, while disallowing others. As Althusser suggests, there is a relationship of necessity between the "visible" and the "invisible" in a given problematic: "the invisible is defined by the visible as *its* invisible, *its* forbidden vision" (Althusser and Balibar,

1971: p 26). To identify a problematic is not necessarily to condemn work carried out within it. Indeed any social analysis must arise within one problematic or another. However the identification of a problematic is often effected from a critical point of view, in order to identify work which is unconscious of its assumptions and, therefore, of the questions which it disallows. This is one of the ways in which the term differs from the more neutral and relativistic "paradigm" (Kuhn, 1970).

[6] Miles has countered the charge of reductionism by arguing that no conceptual relationship, reductive or otherwise, can be established between class and "race", as they are not commensurate terms. "Race" is an ideological notion whereas class is an analytical concept; commentators who discuss the supposed relationship between the two therefore commit a kind of category error (Miles, 1988: pp 457-458).

This issue has important political consequences. For Miles, any effective anti-racist strategy must be grounded in class struggle and class identifications. The implication of his argument is that political action based on racialised identities is inevitably compromised by its complicity with ideological subjection (Solomos, 1993: p 29). Gilroy on the other hand is committed to the importance of developing strategies of resistance based on "racial" identity and culture (Gilroy, 1987; Solomos, 1993: p 30).

Other interesting contributions to the debate concerning the relationship between "racial" and class identities can be found in Anthias' and Yuval-Davis' *Racialised Boundaries* (1992), in Cohen's "The Perversions of Inheritance" (1988) and in Solomos' *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (1993). Balibar's fascinating essay, "From Class Struggle to Classless Struggle?" (1991c), discusses the distinction between class as a universal structural element in social formations, and the development of class identities through political struggles:



he also comments on connections between class struggles and anti-racist struggles (eg Balibar, 1991c: p 181).

[7] Gilroy is not consistent in his assessment of the place of "racial" terms in analyses of racism. For example, although some parts of his 1989 text call for the use of "race" as an analytic category (eg Gilroy, 1989: p 247), other parts criticise the sociology of "race relations" for its attempt "to elevate that concept into an analytical rather than merely descriptive term" (1989: p 149). His text has the virtue of directly addressing the question of the status of "racial" terminology but succumbs to a certain amount of confusion.

[8] Perhaps the deconstructionist's "under erasure" sign would provide an appropriate means of indicating the problematic nature of "race". Unfortunately my pre-Derridean word-processor does not feature such a device.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Having discussed some of the theoretical issues which are relevant to my aims, I can now give a more specific description of the approach I take in analysing the nineteenth century texts introduced in the remainder of the thesis. Two moments of analysis are brought to bear on the discourses investigated in the chapters which follow. On one hand I aim to ascertain whether or not racist ideology can be identified in the texts examined. This involves application of the definitions of ideology and of racism which were discussed in Chapters Two and Three. On the other I analyse the discursive construction of imagined community in the texts. This involves investigation of the relationships between such constructions and the racist positions which inform them. It also requires analysis of shifts in the meanings associated with terms identifying imagined communities.

A number of methodological issues remain to be discussed before proceeding. These concern the historical period to be covered, the selection of texts for analysis, and the approach adopted in analysing them.

#### Period

The period covered in this study is perhaps unconventional by the standards of some approaches to historical research, in that it extends over an entire century. However it has several advantages. I have already indicated, in Chapter One, that this period saw



significant developments in the history of capitalism in Scotland, and in Scottish involvement in imperialism. This consideration is significant in relation to examination of the construction of imagined communities in texts discussing African and other non-European populations. The period is long enough to embrace several significant phases in the development of modern racist ideologies, and to facilitate examination of changes in the usage of terms such as "race", "nation" and "people". These advantages would be lost if a shorter period was selected. On the other hand an even longer sweep of history, though it might prove illuminating in other ways, would effectively prohibit, through lack of space, the close examination of particular texts which is necessary for a satisfactory analysis of the discursive relationships which are relevant to the project.

### **Selection of Texts**

The second methodological issue concerns the criteria adopted in selecting texts for examination. The first criterion is that the texts should be Scottish, but this immediately presents a difficulty. In 1889, "in compliance with the request of Count de Bizement, on behalf of the Paris Geographical International Congress", Arthur Silva White, secretary to the Royal Scottish Geographical Association, wrote a report *On the Achievements of Scotsmen during the Nineteenth Century in the Fields of Geographical Exploration and Research* (White, 1889: p 1). White's report is thorough and well-organised, but not quite exhaustive. He apologises more than once for not reviewing the work of certain missionary travellers and explorers whose names appear to be Scottish, giving as his reason the "insuperable difficulty of ascertaining their nationality" (White, 1889: p 6). "Scottishness", institutionalised in the Royal Scottish Geographical Society of which White was secretary, is a problem in this report: the report as a whole can in fact be read as an attempt to establish the existence of a distinct Scottish identity within which the

recently formed RSGA (junior cousin, like so many other institutions of Scottish civil society, to its London based equivalent, *the Royal Geographical Association*) can operate. The function of the terms "Scottish" and "Scottishness" in this thesis are different from their function in White's paper but their use raises a similar problem: how to decide if a text is "Scottish" or not?

Given that some of the arguments of this thesis problematise the notion of "Scottishness", a certain methodological embarrassment must attach to the aim of analysing texts by "Scottish authors". The most coherent solution to this problem would perhaps be to examine only texts published in Scotland. However as a result of the centralisation of the British publishing industry in the nineteenth century (Harvie, 1977: p 134-35) many texts which were read in Scotland, and which were written by individuals resident in Scotland, were published in London. It would be absurdly inappropriate to exclude such texts, and equally so to exclude the work of explorers and missionaries, such as Livingstone, whose texts were published outside Scotland (eg Livingstone, 1865, 1899).

It is possible that any attempt to arrive at a completely coherent definition of what constitutes a "Scottish text" must be futile. In a spirit of pragmatism, therefore, I have selected texts written by individuals born in Scotland. Even this is not so obvious a solution as it may at first appear, since it excludes texts written by individuals who, though they were born in Canada, Australia or England, regarded themselves as Scottish (Harvie, 1977: pp 101 ff). It does, however, have the virtue of being clear.

This difficulty having been negotiated, it is necessary to account for the choice of particular Scottish texts as relevant examples of the discourses with which the thesis is concerned. In Chapters Five and Six I examine texts which present geographical, ethnographic or



anecdotal accounts of Africa. The focus on Africa is warranted by the considerable degree of Scottish involvement in the exploration, administration and missionary activity which resulted from British interventions in Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Harvie, 1977: pp 102-3; Ross, 1991: pp 3-13). The same could be said of the Indian subcontinent, North America, and other areas of the world, but an additional consideration attaches a particular interest to Scottish involvement in Africa. This is the high profile, in nineteenth century Scottish historiography, of Scottish careers in African exploration and missionary work.

A key element in the nineteenth century myth of the Scottish diaspora ("the nation of twenty millions"), which re-presented Scotland's imperialist experience in heroic terms, was the figure of the Scottish missionary. Harvie comments that:

Even today, for every Scots schoolchild who knows who Sir John Macdonald was, ten know about Mary Slessor - the Dundee mill-girl who became a missionary in Calabar - and a hundred about David Livingstone (Harvie, 1977: p 102).

For the benefit of those schoolchildren who were not listening, it should perhaps be explained that Sir John Macdonald was a key figure in the establishment of a federal Dominion in Canada. Harvie's point illustrates the extent to which the mythical status of particular individuals affects how the world is imagined. It would be difficult to name Scottish figures whose careers were in India, North America or Australia and whose place in the popular collective memory of Scotland is equivalent to that of Livingstone or Slessor. As this status had already been achieved in the nineteenth century (Jeal, 1973), the discussion of Africa in Scottish texts of that period has an interesting relation to the way in which Scotland itself was imagined.

Chapter Seven examines Scottish texts on phrenology. The significance of phrenology for the argument of the thesis is discussed in that chapter; for the moment it is sufficient to note that Scottish individuals made a major contribution to the discipline, making Edinburgh the principal centre of international debate concerning its "discoveries" during the first half of the nineteenth century. In doing so they contributed significantly to the development of scientific racism. Given that few analyses of phrenology have presented extensive discussion of its racist aspect, these are compelling reasons for including a study of the discipline (Gould, 1981: pp 92 ff; Stepan, 1982: pp 23-28, 1990: pp 46-48).

The choice of particular phrenological texts for analysis is relatively straightforward. One author, George Combe, was internationally acknowledged as the key representative of the discipline's claims to legitimate scientific status. In addition to Combe's work I also refer to a number of other Scottish phrenological writers, and to critics of the discipline.

The topic dealt with in Chapter Eight, the construction of Scottish "national identity" in relation to "race", impinges upon a vast area of literature, and therefore does not allow such a comprehensive selection of texts. In dealing with the racialisation of populations within Scotland the chapter is limited to a discussion of particular aspects of the subject. I examine three categories of text: first, a number of Scottish histories, some of the them selected on the basis of their authoritative status (judged according to references in nineteenth century texts and in twentieth century historiography); second, ethnographic studies of the contemporary nineteenth century Scottish population; and third, a document written by the Registrar General for Scotland which makes significant remarks concerning the "racial" composition of the Scottish population.



## Conclusion

It is appropriate to conclude this Chapter, and Part One of the thesis, by returning to the issue of the relationship between racism and the discursive construction of population categories. As I have indicated, my method in this thesis involves examination of terms used by Scottish commentators to refer to imagined communities. Many of these terms are archaic; most of them are inextricably associated with historic and contemporary discourses of colonialism. The occurrence of such terms in colonialist literature has been discussed by Spivak, who shows how British governmental documents contributed to "the construction of a fiction", the misreading of which "produced the proper name 'India'" (Spivak, 1984: p 129).<sup>[1]</sup>

This formulation is relevant to the material I analyse in Part Two. For example texts which I examine in Chapters Five and Six refer to "the African" and "the Negroe", generic terms which erase the identities of the different cultures of the African continent. The use of such Eurocentric terms by Scottish writers and others in the nineteenth century entailed the construction and misreading of a fiction which produced not only the proper name "Africa", but also "the African" and a range of other proper names which operated as subcategories of that misleadingly generic term. Scottish writers on Africa referred to communities by titles which were European inventions ("the caffres") or inaccurate European reproductions of local names ("the Berbes"). Similarly, the Scottish writers I discuss in Chapter Seven attached Eurocentric labels to Asian, Indian and American population groups. Where I reproduce such names in my analysis of the texts (and when, in Chapter Eight, I discuss terms used to identify population groups within Scotland), this does not imply that they are appropriate or legitimate terms. My aim is, rather, to display the ideological arguments and assumptions which accompanied their use.

## Notes

[1] In his, *L'Empire des Signes*, Barthes describes his approach to discussion of Japan as follows:

### Over there

If I want to imagine a fictional people, I can invent a name for them, treat them quite openly as a novelistic subject, found a new Garabagne, in a manner which does not in the least compromise any real country in my fantasy (anyway, what I compromise, by placing it among literary signs, is the fantasy). I can also, without any pretence of representing or analysing reality (these being the grand gestures of western discourse), take certain features (a term used in graphics and linguistics) from somewhere in the world (*over there*), and deliberately form them into a system. This is the system I will call: Japan (Barthes, 1970: p 9).

Barthes' playful recognition of the constitutive function of discourse makes self-conscious the pattern of fabrication which Spivak identifies in colonialist writing.



[2] The major Scottish libraries hold a vast quantity of nineteenth century Scottish texts which present ethnographic, anthropological, geographical or anecdotal accounts of the populations of various parts of the world. In order to further clarify the bases on which I have narrowed and filtered this broad spectrum of material, it will be useful to describe three criteria which I employed when selecting texts for analysis. The first of these was that the texts should deal with regions and populations with which Scotland had strong connections in material and ideological terms. Second, the texts should be sufficiently reflective and rich in argument and description to allow detailed analysis. Third, the texts should have had some demonstrable impact in terms of their contemporary readership and influence.

The first of these criteria immediately suggested that accounts of Africa would be of special relevance to my aims. As I indicated in Chapter One, Scottish entrepreneurs had interests in the exploitation of Africa's human and other resources throughout the nineteenth century. Certainly there are other parts of the world (the Indian subcontinent and Canada, for example) where Scottish business interests were also strongly represented. However, other kinds of connection between Scotland and Africa make examination of Scottish views of the continent particularly interesting for my purposes. I have already indicated one aspect of these connections; that is, the prominent and revered status enjoyed in Scotland explorers and missionaries who worked in Africa. I have mentioned Livingstone, who is the best-known example of a Scot whose activities in Africa strongly affected Scottish views of the continent and its populations, and whose views of the importance of commerce strongly affected contemporary views of the nature of missionary work. However, Livingstone was not the only Scot who achieved an eminent reputation through work in Africa, though his name is unique for its continued

resonance in twentieth century Scotland. Joseph Thomson, whose writings I examine in Chapter Six, was another who represented a particular myth of Scottish enterprise and heroism. Earlier in the century, missionaries such as Robert Moffat and Thomas Pringle combined evangelism, trade and (in some cases) the establishment of Scottish colonies in Africa, in ways which were developed and extended in later decades. Such material and ideological connections suggest the central place which Africa occupied in the imaginative geography of the Scottish diaspora (Ross, 1991).

With regard to my second criterion, I have chosen texts which, though in most cases they do not have a theoretical agenda, are to some degree conscious of the issues raised by their statements concerning human difference and its significance. All of the texts take positions in relation to major debates of the period, such as those concerning the origins and meaning of biological and cultural variations between population groups, the political and moral issues relating to slavery and the slave trade, and the possibility of the "civilisation" of "primitive" or "savage" populations. This criterion has led me to exclude from the study a large number of accounts of African exploration and missionary work which largely dwell on autobiographical information concerning the author, travel anecdotes which have little content relevant to my aims, and discussions of local issues concerning the religious development of individuals or congregations. On the other hand it has allowed me to include texts on Africa by writers such as Leyden and Murray, Thomson, Park, Bruce, Laing and Clapperton, all of whom engage in various ways with questions regarding the significance of racialised and other differences between imagined communities. It has also allowed me to examine phrenological texts which deal with populations from all over the world, including Africa, and which show a high degree of reflectiveness with regard to their theoretical claims and assumptions. In looking at texts on populations within Scotland, this



criterion has directed me towards texts by historians and ethnologists, and towards state documents which show a particular awareness of racialised politics.

Turning to the third criterion I should note, first, that in most cases, the circulation and readership of these texts is difficult to ascertain with accuracy. However, in some cases the phrenological texts which I examine in Chapter Seven have a well-documented circulation. This is particularly true of Combe's work, which sold in exceptionally high numbers and which was reprinted many times. Other phrenological writers, though less popular than Combe, were also widely read, as I indicate in Chapter Seven (Cooter, 1984). In selecting texts on Scotland I have focussed on historical and ethnographic publications aimed at an intellectual readership and, to a large extent, on texts by writers who were eminent in their time, and whose status as influential writers is recognised by contemporary commentators.

With regard to the material on Africa, I have chosen texts which were reviewed in contemporary journals or referred to in other contemporary texts, and which are referred to as influential texts in modern, secondary works (eg Curtin, 1965; Centre for African Studies, 1971). In general, explorers' accounts of Africa started to be more widely read in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the work of Thomson and Livingstone (which I examine in Chapter Five) exemplifies this trend (Curtin, 1965: pp 318 ff). However Park and Bruce are examples of texts produced early in the century which continued to have a large circulation for many decades; this is demonstrated by the fact that their texts went through many reprints and re-editions throughout the century. Other texts, such as Leyden's and Murray's (which I review in Chapter Six) had a more limited, scholarly readership, but had an important influence on other writers.

**PART TWO**



## CHAPTER FIVE

### IMAGINING AFRICA

#### Introduction

A large number of texts offering descriptions and analyses of African geography, history and culture were produced in Europe throughout the nineteenth century, and some of this material has been referred to in twentieth century sociological and historical literature on the ideological dimension of imperialism (e.g. Curtin, 1965, 1972; Harris, 1968; Jordan, 1968; Bolt, 1971; Kiernan, 1972; Hibbert, 1984; Miles, 1989; Filling and Stuart, 1991). In this chapter and in Chapter Six I contribute to work in this area by offering a close analysis of a selection of Scottish texts. Together the two chapters present an analysis which, by focussing on textual features relevant to the construction of imagined communities, addresses the continuities and discontinuities between various kinds of racist argument and assumption which were prevalent during the period.

In Chapter Six I look at a set of publications from the early nineteenth century which illustrate the involvement of two prominent Scottish authors in international debates concerning the significance of "race". The first texts I examine in the present chapter were originally published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and consist of reports written by a number of more and less well known explorers of Africa. I then move to an analysis of the work of Joseph Thomson, whose accounts of late nineteenth century African exploration were highly regarded by contemporary readers. In concluding the chapter I comment on differences between the two sets of texts, and contextualise those differences through a discussion of the writings of David Livingstone.

## Contexts

Before turning to the texts, some comments should be made concerning the institutional and philosophical contexts in which they were produced. The conditions within which the arguments of these Scottish contributions to European knowledge of Africa were made and read can be categorised here under three headings: the sources of information regarding African populations which were available during the period; the institutions and economic relations within which this information was produced; and the philosophical and scientific arguments and debates which informed (and were informed by) descriptions of African social collectives.

First, then, I take up the question of sources of information on Africa. At the end of the eighteenth century, European knowledge concerning Africa's geography, natural history and human inhabitants was limited to the coastal areas of western Africa, where the slave trade was conducted. Fairly detailed information concerning the north-western coastline was available but the interior of the continent was a region virtually unknown to Europeans (Curtin, 1965: p 9). This pattern of knowledge reflected the lack of incentive for European exploration and settlement of the inland regions. Although there were exploitable resources inland, the economic rewards they offered did not justify the risks involved in finding and obtaining them. The slave trade, on the other hand, could be conducted in relative safety from north-western coastal areas (Porter, 1984: p 68).

Curtin refers to four principal categories of information available to late eighteenth century European scholars interested in Africa. The first dated back to the tenth century and to the beginnings of Arabic geographical studies: Arabic texts describing western and northern Africa, written between the tenth and sixteenth centuries, were available in Scotland, either directly or through secondary sources



(Curtin, 1965: p 10). Second, accounts of European commercial voyages along the western coast of Africa, beginning with the first Portuguese attempts in the fifteenth century, were easily available. The third category consisted of the writings of late eighteenth century Europeans who travelled to Africa with a novel purpose; to "discover" the continent and (largely without commercial or military intent) to collect information about it. These individuals included researchers such as those sent by Sir Joseph Banks, who founded the African Association in 1788, with the purpose of increasing scholarly knowledge (Curtin, 1965: pp 17, 207). Finally, a number of compendia of information concerning geography, history, ethnography and natural history were published in the eighteenth century, and some of these contained extensive sections on Africa (1965: pp 11-13).

During the early decades of the nineteenth century these sources of information were supplemented by the reports of explorers whose interests were somewhat different from those of the "enlightened" eighteenth century travellers who visited Africa in pursuit of scholarship. From the 1810's onwards, exploratory missions in Africa tended to become more highly organised and to be sponsored or commissioned by government bodies rather than by scholarly associations such as the African Association. The new expeditions were oriented towards establishing conditions for trade, as well as towards the pursuit of scientific interest, and were particularly concerned with the establishment of adequate transport routes in the interior of the continent. During the first decades of the century attention was focused on western Africa, and particularly on the Niger, which was supposed by many to be the key to exploitation of the continent's resources and markets. As the century progressed, however, the entire continent was explored, mapped and eventually colonised (Kiernan, 1982).

The institutions which promoted exploration, and which thus facilitated imperialist exploitation, were not exclusively governmental. For example the activities of the various Geographical Societies were an important part of the development of imperialist interventions overseas. Some of the Societies, such as those established in Manchester and Edinburgh, were overtly commercial in their orientation, candidly declaring that their purpose in funding and promoting exploratory parties was the promotion of trade and colonisation. The avowed intentions of the Royal Geographical Society, on the other hand, were strictly scholarly. However it has been argued that the connection between the promotion of exploration and the expansion of capitalism was inherent in the formation of the Royal Geographical Society also. Its existence and its ability to finance expeditions "... was made possible by the subscriptions of an increasingly prosperous Victorian bourgeoisie and its outgrowth in India" (Centre of African Studies, 1972: p 122). Whether or not this fact influenced the research agenda of the Royal Geographical Society is a matter of debate: what seems clear, however, is that information obtained by all of the British Geographical Societies, including the Royal Geographical Society, facilitated colonial enterprises.

Similar societies with similar interests and resources emerged in other European countries during the nineteenth century. There was an international European network of institutions involved in the production of knowledge concerning the African continent, with individuals such as the Scottish explorer Joseph Thomson having membership of several different associations. This situation provided an institutional basis for international debates concerning various aspects of the African continent, debates which were pursued or reported in gentlemen's journals, in educational institutions, and in parliament, as well as in the Societies. One area of debate which preoccupied some participants in these fora concerned the



philosophical and scientific implications of biological and cultural differences between human populations. Scottish contributions to discussion of this problem were numerous, and I discuss some of these contributions below. First, however, it is relevant to sketch some of the philosophical and theoretical background to discussions of human difference during the period.

Throughout the eighteenth century, environmentalism was the theory most commonly adhered to by intellectuals and by "lay" persons with an interest in the significance of human difference. Environmentalists held that differences between population groups could be largely or entirely accounted for by the effects of the environment, and particularly by climate and diet (Harris, 1968: pp 84-87; Lorimer, 1978: p 133-134). For some commentators this applied to physical as well as to social or "moral" characteristics. There was debate concerning the extent to which physical traits acquired in response to environmental stimuli could be inherited by succeeding generations, and regarding the mechanisms by which this occurred. For example, among the many eighteenth century commentators who held that "black" skin was a result of exposure to extremes of sunlight, some considered it to be a trait passed on from one generation to the next, but expected it to disappear, albeit over several generations, when "negroes" were enslaved and brought to live in a temperate climate. Others considered "blackness" to be a condition which was brought about in each individual; they supposed that Africans were born "white" and that their skin colour changed during infancy (Harris, 1968: p 85; Stepan, 1982: pp 36-37).

Two other important theories were widely accepted during the period, both of them environmentalist in tendency: these were monogenesis and the theory of degeneration. Monogenesis was an item of religious orthodoxy as well as a philosophical position, and referred to the doctrine that all humans derived from the same original pair,

the Biblical Adam and Eve (Harris, 1968: pp 83-87; Lorimer, 1978: p 134; Stepan, 1982: pp 29-35). As the eighteenth century progressed, this became an increasingly difficult position to maintain. If it was to be coherent, then the vast array of physical differences between human populations which were becoming evident (as more information concerning populations of the extra-European world became available) had to be accounted for as deviations from the original pair. The implausibility of the theory arose from the timescale which was imposed on it by Christian theological orthodoxy: since adherents of the Mosaic account of creation insisted that Adam and Eve were created only a few thousand years before their own century, this was the period of time during which all the varieties of human being must be supposed to have emerged (Bolt, 1971: p 9; Banton, 1987: p 39). To all but the most committed of religious orthodoxists, this appeared an unlikely story.

One way of accounting for human difference, and one of the most influential among monogenesisists, was the doctrine of degeneration. Degenerationism formed the basis of a number of theoretical models of human history, all of which proposed that variations in human appearance and character were the results of progressive degradation from the condition of the original pair (Harris, 1968: pp 58-59; Popkin, 1980, pp: 86-87; Lorimer, 1978: pp 146-147; Stepan, 1982: pp 36-37; cf Banton, 1987: p 6). These models were compatible with environmentalist theory, since they necessarily implied the adaptive nature of "racial" traits; and like the various environmentalist theories, degenerationism was vulnerable to attack on the chronological point described above.

For this and other reasons, polygenesisists found monogenesisism and the doctrine of degeneration equally absurd. They held that groups allegedly constituting distinct "races" were radically and originally different: that they were, in effect, distinct subspecies (Harris,



1968: pp 87-94; Stepan, 1982: p 40; Fabian, 1983: pp 11-16; Banton, 1987: pp 37-41). Varieties of polygenicism were already current in the eighteenth century; the Scottish philosopher Hume was one of its advocates (Hume, 1753; Popkin, 1980: pp 253-254). However the theory did not displace environmentalism as the dominant model of human difference until the mid-nineteenth century. Among Scottish writers of that period Robert Knox was probably the most significant and influential proponent of the theory (Knox, 1850; Harris, 1968: pp 99-100; Banton, 1987: pp 54-59). The dispute between monogenists and polygenists was to some extent undermined by Darwin's theory of evolution, which proposed a longterm process of differentiation without supporting degenerationism; and which supported the idea of longstanding "racial" differences between humans without allowing that these corresponded to differences of external appearance. Nevertheless, late nineteenth century (and early twentieth century) polygenicism accommodated itself to a distorted version of Darwinian evolutionary theory, maintaining that Darwin's work confirmed the existence of absolute differences between human "races" (Harris, 1968: pp 86-87, 93-94, 118-119).

A theory closely related to polygenicism was biological determinism, which was founded on the assumption of a necessary and invariant correspondence between a range of cultural traits and the physical make-up of those who displayed them. With regard to "races" this meant that certain physical characteristics identified with a racialised group were both the sign *and the cause* of that group's cultural character. Observable (though not necessarily external) physical differences between racialised groups were held to be invariably linked to cultural differences (Stepan, 1982: pp 20-46). This assumption was a main stay of nineteenth century "scientific racism", with its claims that, for example, the size and proportions of the brain determined cultural and intellectual capacities.

These philosophical positions were not debated in a political vacuum. On the contrary, texts which advocated the merits of monogenesisism, polygenesisism and biological determinism did so in the context of highly politicised debates on religious orthodoxy, the status of science as a basis for moral judgement, the justification for colonial policies, and the morality of the slave trade. For example monogenesisism's eventual decline, and its displacement by polygenesisism, were part of the historical process through which institutionalised science displaced organised religion as the reference point for moral and political values (Stepan, 1982: pp xii-xv).

Similarly, and connected to this, there was some correspondence between positions on the question of monogenesisism and political attitudes to slavery and the slave trade. To a certain extent polygenesisists tended to be in favour of slavery, while abolitionists favoured environmentalist accounts of "racial" difference. This correspondence was not absolute, however, and certainly did not mean that abolitionists did not articulate racist arguments (Harris, 1968: pp 91 ff). It was perfectly possible to base racist arguments on environmentalism and to articulate them in support of the abolition of slavery. Equally, proponents of slavery did not invariably embrace polygenesisist accounts of "race" (Bolt, 1974: pp 127-129).

#### **(1) Early Nineteenth Century Scottish Accounts of Africa**

Keeping these historical and philosophical parameters in view, I turn now to a review of a number of texts produced in the early nineteenth century. I examine the extent to which the texts racialise the social collectives they describe and I comment on whether their descriptions can be said to be racist. As a preliminary conclusion, before moving on to work produced later in the century, I then summarise some of the similarities and differences between the texts.



#### (i) James Bruce (1730-1794)

The first two authors I deal with, James Bruce and Mungo Park, first published their accounts in the late eighteenth century. However their texts were reprinted several times during the early decades of the nineteenth and both men were among the most celebrated explorers of the period.

James Bruce was born on his family's estate at Kinnaird, in 1730. He took up the official position of consul at Algiers in 1763 and during the following ten years he made a number of exploratory journeys in Northern Africa, most of them in Ethiopia (known in Scotland and England, at that time, as Abyssinia). His five volume text, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile , in the years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773* (1830), first published in 1790, was the only substantial description of Ethiopia to be produced by a European in almost two hundred years (Curtin, 1965: p 25). As the title of this account of his expeditions indicates, Bruce's ambition was to find the source of the Nile; something which he mistakenly believed he had achieved (Moorehead, 1963: pp 62-63). Notwithstanding this failure, Bruce made a significant contribution to knowledge of the geography of northern Africa and his writings were a valuable source of information for subsequent explorers (Moorehead, 1963: p 43). At the time of his return from Africa in 1773, however, his reports met an uneven reception. In France he was praised and entertained, but in London, when he arrived there in 1774, he was treated with considerable scepticism and even derision. Parts of his account (for example his description of the preparation and consumption of raw meat) were simply too strange for certain important figures of the London intelligentsia to believe. Johnson, whose novel *The History of Rasselas* had lent him the status of an authority on Ethiopia, refused to believe that Bruce's accounts of Africa were anything other than fantasy (1963: pp 37-38; Hibbert, 1984: p 50). The fact that Johnson

himself had never been to Africa did not prevent his opinion from weighing heavily against Bruce's credibility.

When Bruce published the written account of his travels, it was an immediate and large success in terms of its circulation. However, although his English contemporaries bought and read the text, they treated it with the same amused or irritated disbelief which had greeted his first reports (Hibbert, 1984: p 51). In Scotland, where Bruce lived for the rest of his life after leaving London, his account was treated more seriously (Moorehead, 1963: p 38). The Preface to the 1830 edition of *Travel to Discover the Source of the Nile* reflects the vagaries of the text's reception. An attempt to substantiate Bruce's claims is guarded by the remark that ...

... at the time when Mr. Bruce returned from Abyssinia, few men could expect either notice or patronage, who did not describe their adventures as miraculous, and boldly pretend that they had left nothing undone (Bruce, 1830: Volume 1, p xiii).

This charitable view somewhat undermines the Preface's claim that the text represents an accurate report of first-hand observations, and suggests that the editor was uncertain whether or not to market Bruce's account as a "true narrative".

Nevertheless, the facts that the text was reprinted frequently for decades after its first publication, that it was referred to as an authoritative source in compendia of information on Africa published in Scotland (eg Leyden, 1799; Murray, 1818), and that the Edinburgh intelligentsia seem not to have reacted to Bruce's reports with the scepticism of their London contemporaries, are all reasons for treating *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* as a highly significant example of the representation of Africa in early



nineteenth century Scotland. Although the text is not primarily ethnographic, it describes various communities encountered by Bruce during his journeys, and thus illustrates the kind of information available to Scots curious about the populations of Africa during this period.

### **Imagined Community in *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile***

I look first at the occurrence of cultural and physical traits in the descriptions of imagined community which are offered in Bruce's text. *Travels to the Source of the Nile* takes the form of an episodic travel narrative, with references to the characteristics of different individuals and communities scattered throughout the text. To a large extent these references describe social collectives in terms of their supposed cultural traits. In Volume One, for example, it is mentioned in passing that the Arabs of Hydra "are called the Welled Sidi, the 'sons of flocks'", that they "are immensely rich" and that "at the institution of their founder, they are obliged to live upon lion's flesh for their daily food ..." (Bruce, 1830: Volume I, p 31). The Welled Orman are described as "a lawless, plundering tribe ..." (1830: Volume 1, p 37).

The preface to the second edition projects a classification based on cultural factors as an aim of exploration in Africa.

It is pleasing to indulge the idea, that, by the exertions of our countrymen, all the African nations will, at length, be surveyed, and the different tribes classed according to the similarity of their manners and languages (1830: Volume 1, p xix).

However physical characteristics are also remarked upon in Bruce's descriptions. He relates that at Jibbel Hirez he met

... to my great astonishment, a tribe, who if I cannot say they were fair like the English, were of a shade lighter than that of the inhabitants of any country to the Southward of Britain. Their hair also was red, and their eyes blue (1830: Volume 1, p 35).

Bruce refers to "the English" as a standard of comparison, rather than to the Scots. This is consistent with a general practice in eighteenth and nineteenth century Scottish texts, whereby the term "English" is used to refer to all inhabitants of Britain other than the Irish (Dawson, 1991: p 138).

Having remarked on his surprise at the physical appearance of the inhabitants of Jibbel Hirez, Bruce immediately passes on to description of the cultural and moral traits of the tribe.

They are a savage and independent people ... Each of the tribe, in the middle between their eyes, had a Greek cross marked with antimony ... Though living in tribes, they have among the mountains, huts, built with mud and straw ... whereas the Arabs live in tents on the plains (1830: Volume 1, p 35).

However no logical or causal connection is made between the physical and cultural traits described, a point to which I will return shortly.

Volume Two of *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* contains an account of some aspects of the history of Ethiopia, and these include extensive speculations on the historical origins of particular communities. Here, philological, classical and biblical sources are referred to as sources of genealogical evidence and phenotypical characteristics are also mentioned (eg Bruce, 1830: Volume 2, pp 301 ff, 304 ff). For example Bruce asks rhetorically



... is there no other people that inhabits Abyssinia, but these two nations, the Cushites and the Shepherds? Are there no other nations whiter or fairer than them living to the south of the Agaazi? Whence did these come? At what time, and by what name are they called? To this, I answer, That there are various nations which agree with this description, who each have a particular name, and who are all known by that of Habesh, in Latin Convenae, signifying a number of distinct people meeting accidentally (sic) in one place ... (1830: Volume 2, p 313)

In this passage classical authority is alluded to in the Latin name for the Habesh; the composition of an imagined community is described in terms of the aggregation of distinct groups with distinct characteristics; and certain phenotypical features are identified as a factor which the aggregate have in common. As in the passing comments referred to above, phenotypical features are one among several disparate factors which are invoked in the construction of a community, but no order of causal priority between these factors is indicated.

Nevertheless, phenotypical features are a recurring topic of discussion in the text. For example, having noted that certain inhabitants of Ethiopia have skin which is light in colour, Bruce quotes from the biblical book of Jeremiah the question, "can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?". He objects to the notion that all Ethiopians (or Abyssinians) are "black-moors":

... many Ethiopians being white, it does not appear why they should be fixed upon ... But had (the original Hebrew) been translated negro, or black-moor, the question would have been more easily understood - can the negro change his skin ... ? (Bruce, 1830: Vol 1, p 325, my parentheses)

Bruce's concern to correct erroneous physical descriptions of African populations, together with the attention he pays to phenotypical characteristics, are examples of the racialisation of social collectives.

His text also attributes negatively assessed characteristics to these populations, thereby articulating racist assumptions and assertions. For example, in the *Dedication of Travels* the inhabitants of Africa are collectively ranked at a low level of moral development. Drawing attention to the novelty of his account of Africa by emphasising the inaccessibility and inhospitability of the physical environment of Ethiopia, Bruce comments that

... these terrible barriers inclosed (sic) men more bloody and ferocious than the beasts themselves, more fatal to travellers than the sands that encompassed them; and who, thus shut up, had long been growing every day more barbarous, and defied by rendering dangerous, the curiosity of travellers of every nation (1830: Volume 1, pp 5-6).

Elsewhere, Bruce refers to the people he encountered in Africa as "savages" (eg 1830: Vol 1, p 3).

However, although the text articulates racist arguments and assumptions it is not informed by a theory which makes a deterministic link between cultural and biological characteristics. This is consistent with the environmentalism of Bruce's assertion that barbarism results from the condition of being "shut up". It is also consistent with the monogenesisism underlying Bruce's view of the correct approach to dealing with the people of Africa. He asserts that travellers should act according to the belief



... not that all men are equal, but that they are all brethren; and that being superior to the savage in every endowment, it was for that very reason their duty to set the example of mildness, compassion, and long-suffering to a fellow-creature, because he was weaker, and, by no fault of his own, less instructed, and because he was always therefore perfectly in their power ... (Bruce, 1830: Vol 1, pp 3-4)

This combination of humanism and racism is an ideological pattern which recurs frequently in later Scottish texts on Africa.

#### (ii) Mungo Park (1771-1806)

The other outstanding Scottish figure in late eighteenth century exploration of Africa is Mungo Park. Born near Selkirk in 1771, Park trained as a surgeon at Edinburgh university. In the early 1790's he moved to London, there attracting the attention of Joseph Banks, who was president of the Royal Society, and a founder member of the African Association (Hibbert, 1984: p 55).

The main concern of the African Association at this time was to ascertain the route of the River Niger, as it was believed by some capitalists and politicians, including Wilberforce, that this would open up opportunities for trade. A recent expedition to the Niger, commissioned by the Association, had ended in the death of its leader, Daniel Houghton, in 1791. Park, who had been working as a surgeon's mate on trading voyages to the East Indies, applied to make another attempt. His application succeeded, with support from Banks, but although an expedition had been planned on the basis of joint funding by the government and the African Association, Park's mission was eventually financed by the Association alone (Hibbert, 1984: p 55).

Unlike Bruce, then, Park did not embark on his expedition without institutional direction and backing. His mission was motivated by the need to obtain technical, geographical, and ethnographic knowledge of an area where the Association hoped to promote trade; by the government's hope that legitimate trade could be made to replace the slave trade; and by Park's personal curiosity and hopes of a financial return (Curtin, 1965: p 109; Hibbert, 1984: pp 55-56).

The expedition was the greatest success in the history of the African Association. Park established part of the route of the Niger, thereby inaugurating a period of intense public interest in the exploration of Africa. Curtin argues, furthermore, that his reports describing the populations of western Africa, and detailing the resources at their disposal, excited speculation concerning the economic potential of the western part of the continent (Curtin, 1965: pp 144-6).

A second expedition, which was intended to establish further information regarding the Niger, was led by Park in 1805, but this did not reproduce the success of the first. It ended with Park's death, and that of several dozens of the other African and European members of the expedition (Hibbert, 1984: pp 76-78). This was the first African expedition to receive government funding, and set a precedent in terms of the direct involvement of the British government in attempts to develop trade with Africa.

Park's account of his first expedition, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: performed under the direction and patronage of the African Association, in the years 1795, 1796, and 1797* (1810) was first published in 1790 and was highly successful in terms of its influence and sales. It was reprinted many times during the nineteenth century and has, remarkably, been continuously in print since its first publication (Centre of African Studies, 1972: p 12). The geographical and ethnographic information it recorded provoked



discussion in Edinburgh as well as in London and had a sustained influence on speculations concerning the course of the Niger (Curtin, 1965: pp 202-203).

The journal kept by Park during his second expedition was published posthumously in 1815. It too was a popular text and the two works were published in combination by the Edinburgh firm Chambers; for many years they were kept in print in that form for use as Sunday school prizes (Centre of African Studies, 1972: p 12). This suggests that Park's descriptions of Africa not only had a wide circulation in Scotland among both adults and children, but had something of the status of popular classics.

#### **Imagined Community in Park's texts**

Park's two texts differ greatly in structure and in the emphasis which they place on the description of social collectives. The later text is an edited reproduction of Park's journal, with the interests and emergencies of selected days recorded in chronological order. Communities and individuals are described as they are encountered, but there is little evidence of any attempt to systematically catalogue their characteristics or to compare one community with another.

On the other hand geographical information is recorded very systematically, with exact positions regularly and carefully documented. The techniques used by local people to build bridges and other structures are also described in detail, with occasional diagrams (eg Park, 1815: pp 95, 108-9). Recalling Curtin's comment that Park's second expedition marked the beginning of an increasing interest in the possibilities of trade and in the transport systems and commodities which would facilitate it, it is reasonable to assume

that this balance of emphasis reflects the priorities of the expedition.

Where Park does describe local populations, it is often in the context of the same kind of technical or practical interest. For example he records the cooking techniques of "the Negroes" (eg 1815: p 19), the use of iron furnaces (1815: p 34) and methods of mining for gold (1815: p 78). Occasionally Park distinguishes between collectives solely in terms of their trading habits. The entry for June 1st records the expedition's arrival at the town of Julifunda, which Park describes as having been "founded by people who formerly received goods in advance from the European traders on the Gambia ..." (1815: p 44). He goes on to explain that "...these people, who trade on credit, are called *Juli* in distinction from the *Slatee* who trades with his own capital" (1815: p 44).

Not all of the descriptions of communities which occur in the journal dwell on such considerations. Religious affiliations are noted:

Bamiserile is a Mohometan town; the chief man, Fodi Braheima, is one of the most friendly men I have met with. I gave him a copy of the New Testament in Arabic with which he seemed very much pleased ... (1815: p 48)

And the moral character of a community is occasionally impugned when the expedition has run into difficulties:

Very desirous to be gone, as we have found the people thieves to a man ... This can only be accounted for, by considering that Mansa-Numma is the reputed father of more than thirty children; and as they all consider themselves as far above the common people, they treat every person with contempt (1815: p 97).



As these two quotations indicate, Park does not devote much space to reflective analysis of the characteristics he mentions. The second quotation could be construed as an environmentalist argument, in the sense that it attributes a social collective's alleged character to an environmental cause. However Park does not make any explicit remarks concerning such issues; his statement concerning Mansa-Numma and his children is made in the same anecdotal spirit as the comment that "the chief man ... is one of the most friendly men I have met with".

Nevertheless, *Journal of a Mission* is not an irrelevant text for my purposes, as it highlights two important points. First, its immediate reflection of the practical context in which its descriptions of communities were written (the gathering of technical information, the observation of mercantile customs) demonstrates the significance of non-discursive processes for the production of discourses of imagined community. Second, it is of interest that, like Bruce's account, Park's text is entirely free of biologicistic explanations.

The record of Park's first expedition, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, has a different form from *Journal of a Mission*. Its narrative structure is chronologically simple, beginning with the expedition's departure and avoiding lapses of time or anticipation of events. However, in contrast to the journal form of the later text, it allows for extensive reflection on events and observations. One aspect of this difference is that *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* includes more comparative discussion of cultural and physical characteristics.

For example Park offers a detailed analysis of the "four great classes" among the social collectives in the region of the Gambia; the Feloops, the Jallofs, the Foulahs, and the Mandingoes. He notes that all of these communities have been won over to "the religion of Mahomet" but goes on to catalogue differences between them. These

differences comprise both cultural and phenotypical traits. The Feloops are described as being "of a gloomy disposition ... supposed never to forgive an injury ..." (1815: p 22). The Jallofs are

... an active, powerful, and warlike race ... they differ from the Mandingoes, not only in language, but likewise in complexion and features. The noses of the Jallofs are not so much depressed, nor the lips so protuberant, as among the generality of Africans ... (1815: p 24)

Park adds that, notwithstanding this difference of appearance, the "manners, superstitions, and government" of the Jallofs have "a greater resemblance to the Mandingoes ... than to any other nation ..." (1815: p 24).

The Foulahs, the other "great class" which Park identifies in Gambia, are described as being "chiefly of a tawny complexion, with soft silky hair, and pleasing features. They are much attached to a pastoral life ..." (1815: p 25). The Mandingoes, too, are described in both cultural and phenotypical terms. They are said to be

... generally speaking, of a mild, sociable, and obliging disposition. The men are commonly above the middle size, well shaped, strong, and capable of enduring great labour; the women are good-natured, sprightly and agreeable ... (1815: p 29)

It may be that something of the slave-trader's eye for good quality "stock" can be detected in these descriptions. The commodification of phenotypical and social traits is in fact made more explicit in other passages. For example Park writes of the Yallofs that "although their skin is black, they are considered by the white traders, as the most sightly Negroes in this part of the continent ..." (1815: p 24).



In the latter quotation blackness is presented as a negative quality, even in the context of a relatively positive assessment of the Yallofs' physical appearance.

### **Racism in Park's Account of Africa**

Denigration (a significantly appropriate term) of characteristics associated with "the Negro" can also be detected by comparison of two descriptions of the Foulahs which occur about sixty pages apart in Park's text. The first has already been cited; the second is very nearly identical but contains a significant difference:

The Foulahs in general ... are of a tawny complexion, with small features and soft silk hair ... their complexion, however, is not exactly the same in the different districts ... they are of a more yellow complexion in the southern states ... (1815: p 87)

In the earlier quotation the word "pleasing" is substituted for "small" in the description of the Foulahs' features. The fact that the other descriptive phrases ("soft silky hair", "tawny complexion") are identical in each passage, confirms the synonymy of "small" and "pleasing". The apparently aesthetic import of the latter word is overlaid by a racialised significance which derives from a Eurocentric aversion to the "large" or "prominent" features of "the Negro".

This is an example of racist ideology, in that it involves the negative assessment of physical features which are used as the basis for identification of a social collective. In addition, Park's text also assesses the *cultural* traits of racialised groups in a negative way. For example, in an extensive discussion of the Mandingoes, Park relates his interpretations of their theory of time, their model of the planetary system, their religion, medical practices, and

mourning rituals (1815: pp 405-427). Having summarised the first three of these topics, Park goes on to comment that "Their notions of geography are equally puerile" (1815: p 407).

However, although the racism of Park's text consists in the negative assessment both of cultural and physical characteristics, it does not link the two in a relation of causality or necessity. It is neither asserted nor implied that the possession of cultural traits by a community is causally linked to the physical constitution of the community's members. Neither is it made clear whether or not Park presumes that the Mandingoes' cultural characteristics are inherent.

Curtin suggests that Park constitutes a transitional figure between two distinct phases of commissioned research in Africa; that of the "enlightened travellers" of the eighteenth century, and that of the explorers of the nineteenth. The former were often selected for their scholarship, and their researches typically involved taking up residence in one place in order to study its natural history, ethnology, or geography in detail. For example, as I noted above, Joseph Banks sent botanists to Africa prior to the establishment of the African Association. Karl Linnaeus also commissioned naturalists to make scholarly expeditions to the continent (Curtin, 1965: pp 15, 207).

The explorers of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, tended to be selected on the basis of their ability to endure long distance journeys through difficult terrain, rather than according to their interest in the natural phenomena of Africa. They were less inclined than their eighteenth century predecessors to offer detailed descriptions of the cultures they encountered and this approach encouraged a greater dependency on generalisation and stereotyping in their written accounts of expeditions. In many cases they came from a military, rather than a scientific background (Curtin, 1965: pp 207



ff). The next two texts fall into the latter category; both were written by Scottish individuals with a military background and both are reports of expeditions to western Africa commissioned by the armed forces or by government institutions.

**(11) Alexander Laing (1793-1826) and Hugh Clapperton (1788-1827)**

Alexander Gordon Laing was born in Edinburgh and attended the university there. After working for some years as a schoolteacher he joined the army, eventually becoming a major. He was stationed in Sierra Leone in 1822 and was commissioned by the Governor of the colony to explore the interior of western Africa, with a view to establishing trading relationships between the inhabitants and the European settlements on the coast. The mission was a success; Laing contacted a number of inland communities and recommended that the colonial authorities should establish trading and diplomatic relations with them. Aside from his official assignment Laing also hoped, in vain as it turned out, that the expedition would lead to his finding the source of the Niger. Laing's account of this expedition was published as *Travels in the Timannee, Kooranko, and Soolima Countries in Western Africa* (1825). He died on a subsequent expedition during which he succeeded in becoming the first nineteenth century European to reach Timbuctoo (Curtin, 1965: p 170; Hibbert, 1984: pp 154-156, 160).

Hugh Clapperton, the son of a surgeon from Annan in Dumfriesshire, was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy when he first became involved in the exploration of western Africa. He and another Scot, Walter Oudney, were commissioned in 1822, along with Major Dixon Denham, to make an expedition to the Niger and to report on commercial and scientific aspects of the areas through which they passed: the expedition was sponsored and organised jointly by the Colonial Office and the Admiralty (Curtin, 1965: p 172; Donaldson, 1966: p 182).

Clapperton led a subsequent expedition to approach the Niger from the south in 1825. He died before this was accomplished but another member of the expedition, Clapperton's personal servant Richard Lander, survived and went on to establish the course of the lower Niger. Clapperton's journal of the second expedition was published posthumously in 1829.

It is likely that neither Laing nor Clapperton were so well known, to the reading public in Scotland, as either Park or Bruce (Centre of African Studies, 1972: p 9). However their expeditions and reports attracted considerable attention among the Edinburgh intelligentsia, due to their significance for the much discussed Niger question. An indication of this interest is that Denham and Clapperton's account of the 1822 expedition was extensively reviewed and discussed in *The Edinburgh Review* and in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Their reports were dealt with as important evidence to be used in estimating the probable geography of the Niger region (Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 1826; Curtin, 1965: p 203). Clapperton's second expedition was also discussed at length in the *Edinburgh Review* (1965: p 206).

#### **Imagined Community and Racism in Laing's Text**

Certain aspects of Laing's account bear out Curtin's thesis concerning the approach to exploration which was typical of the militarily trained explorers who succeeded Park. Commenting on delays in his journey caused by what he perceives as the unnecessary prevarications of the Timannee people, Laing reflects that

... it was idle to fret at disappointments which the traveller must lay his account to meet with daily, among a people who set no value on their own time, nor on that of others (Laing, 1825: p 39).



The plural senses of "idleness" which play through this statement obtain not only to a Eurocentric inability to recognise other and unfamiliar conceptions of time and its use, but to a specific agenda dictated by the context of Laing's mission. Progress in the journey must, at certain points, take precedence over spending time in contact with the "natives".

Nevertheless *Travels in the Timannee* does contain descriptions of communities encountered during the expedition. Laing rarely refers to physical characteristics in these descriptions but when he does he sometimes makes qualitative comparisons between the appearance of one community and another. For example the Mandingoes are described as "engaging, their features ... regular and open; their persons well formed and comely, averaging a height rather above the common" (1825: p 135), whereas the Koorankos, although "in language and custom ... closely related to the Mandingoes", are said to be "by no means so handsome or so intelligent a race of people ..." (1825: p 197).

On the whole, however, Laing devotes more of his attention to the social and cultural traits of the social collectives he encountered than he does to their physical appearance. These include references to political administrations, agriculture, systems of education and trading patterns (eg 1825: pp 68-107, 108-109). Laing also describes the moral character of communities, and where he does so his assessments are often racist. The Timannee, for example, whom Laing racialises in a description of their physical traits, are negatively assessed in terms of their alleged moral character. They are described as "... depraved, licentious, indolent, and avaricious" (1825: p 106).

The Timannee are in fact presented as a standard of moral depravity; for example the Koorankos "are Pagans, whose manners bear a stronger

affinity to the Timanee than the Mandingo" (1825: p 197). Such claims are combined with an environmentalist explanation of difference. For example, having criticised the Timanee, Laing makes the following observation:

The considerate reader will judge of the degree in which their character is to be attributed to the long prevalence, in their country, of that detestable trade, which strikes at the bonds of social order, and even extinguishes the most powerful natural feelings ... Their moral and social disorganisation may be viewed as an example of its deeprooted and pernicious influence (1825: p 106).

The text does not indicate whether Laing assumes that "moral disorganisation", though caused by environmental factors, can be transmitted by inheritance from one generation to the next. Nevertheless Laing's deprecation of the character of African populations is racist according to the definition of racist ideology which I introduced in Chapter Three, as he also identifies those populations in phenotypical terms.

Laing's environmentalism had political and economic correlates. It was his view that missionary work should be applied in a concentrated effort to convert the inhabitants of some selected area of the interior of Africa. If this could be done, he argued, then this one area could serve as a centre for the spread of Christianity throughout the African continent, and would also become a base for the dissemination of British manufacturing products (Curtin, 1965: p 282). As British technology and legitimate trade spread, slavery would gradually be eliminated and the character of the people of Africa would improve. Thus Laing's belief that altered environmental conditions could bring about changes in the character of social



collectives was tied to a crusading optimism regarding the power of Christianity and commerce.

### **Imagined Community and Racism in Clapperton's *Journal***

A similar optimism can be found in the reports of Laing's contemporary, Clapperton. In discussing Clapperton's writings on Africa I will focus on his account of the 1825 expedition, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (1829). The text which describes his earlier expedition is co-written by his colleague Denham, who appears to have been largely responsible for its composition (Denham and Clapperton, 1826). As Denham was English, the text does not qualify for inclusion here.

Clapperton's *Journal*, like Laing's text, is much concerned with the problems of covering ground in order to reach desired destinations. This is reflected in his discussion of the African people he encounters. For example at an early stage of the expedition he records that, despite the use of "ten relays of carriers" from the district of Jannah, a great deal of progress has been made in only eight days, and nothing has been stolen from the expedition's baggage. This "unprecedented fact" is

... a circumstance evincing not only somewhat more than common honesty in the inhabitants, but a degree of subordination and regular government which could not have been supposed to exist amongst a people hitherto considered barbarians (1829: p 13).

The "improvement" of local populations through the institution of a particular kind of order is a recurring theme in Clapperton's journal. This implies the inferiority of African social organisation when

compared to Europeans, an assumption which is made clear at other points. At Laydoo, Clapperton records a conversation with "the principle people of the town" which appears to have taken the form of a lecture:

I told them, that to encourage people (sic) to come and settle in (the town) by treating them well, and also to encourage them to come and trade .... Mr. Houston then gave them a word on the riches of Old England, enlarging on the general cultivation of the country, its roads, carriages, and modes of travelling ... and that this prosperous state of things resulted from good government, the king encouraging the people from all parts of the world to come to England and trade, and sending his own people to visit the most distant corners of the earth to see what in every country might be of use in England (Clapperton, 1829: p 31, my parenthesis).

Mr. Houston's idyllic description of English civilisation also includes a warning against the dangers and immorality of polygamy, thus combining advocacy of Eurocentric cultural standards with promotion of the mercantile interests of the expedition.

These interests are reflected in Clapperton's descriptions of African communities, in that he records details of their trading practices, agricultural production and industry (eg 1829: pp 13-14, 96, 223, 229). However he also describes other cultural or "moral" characteristics. The latter are assessed against a Eurocentric standard, and are often found wanting. For example although Clapperton finds the population of Wawa to be "cheerful, good-natured and hospitable", he deplores their "want of chastity and drunkenness" (1829: p 95). The Berbers are said to be "extremely dirty", and the



Kiama are described as "the greatest thieves and robbers in all Africa" (1829: pp 74, 76).

Like Laing's text, Clapperton's journal contains racist assumptions and claims. Each of the three communities mentioned above is racialised in the text and each is assessed negatively: the people of Wawa are "strong and well-made, but have a debauched look"; the inhabitants of Kiama are "nearly white, but pagans"; and the Berbers are "a fine manly looking race of men ..." but are uncivilised. The accounts of these three communities are therefore examples of racist ideology.

Clapperton does not offer any explanation of the differences in character between population groups, other than the implicit environmentalism of his comment on the honest and efficient carriers who assisted his progress. As in Laing's text, there is no suggestion of biological determinism or of polygenism.

### **Common Features**

The five texts I have examined so far have a number of features in common. First, all of them construct imagined communities through the identification of various kinds of attributed characteristics, including cultural and biological traits. Second, they all articulate racist arguments, claims and assumptions; they racialise the social collectives they describe and they negatively assess physical or cultural characteristics attributed to those collectives.

A third feature is common to the texts by Park, Laing and Clapperton; all of these texts reflect the non-discursive context of the missions which they describe, by focussing on the mercantile or industrial possibilities of African communities. Furthermore, the texts by Laing and Clapperton to some extent bear out Curtin's thesis concerning the

priorities which shaped expeditions after Park, and the consequences of those priorities for the representation of African communities.

However, despite this peculiarity of Laing's and Clapperton's texts, there is not a marked difference in their racist content compared to the earlier accounts. This brings me to a final feature which is common to all of the texts; none of them implies or explicitly articulates a polygenesist or biological determinist view of human difference. But they are not explicitly monogenesist either, and though each of them suggests at some points that environmental factors may cause differences between the characters of different social collectives, this suggestion is not discussed at any length. On the whole the racism of the texts is not accompanied by explicit theoretical discussion of human difference and its causes.

## **(2) A Late Nineteenth Century Account: Joseph Thomson (1858-1895)**

So far I have looked at accounts of Africa which were published or reprinted during the early decades of the nineteenth century. I turn now to the work of Joseph Thomson, and to his late nineteenth century descriptions of African social collectives. The contrast between Thomson's treatment of racialised difference and the approach to "race" which is evident in the earlier texts illustrates changes in the ways in which Africa was presented to the reading public of Scotland throughout the century.

Joseph Thomson was born in Penpont, Dumfriesshire in 1858. He studied geology at the University of Edinburgh and was the author of numerous scientific publications (Thomson, 1896: pp 346-348). He was a member of several geographical societies, including the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, the Royal Italian Geographical Society and the Netherlands Geographical Society. In 1878 Thomson joined a Royal Geographical Society



expedition which had been commissioned to find a route from Zanzibar to Lake Malawi. Early in the expedition its leader, Alexander Keith Johnston, became ill and died. Thomson, who had originally joined the expedition as a scientist, took Johnston's place and successfully established the desired route. After surveying the area between Lakes Malawi and Tanganyika he made an unsuccessful attempt to lead the expedition in search of the source of the Congo, before returning to the coast. Thomson's leadership of this expedition won him a reputation both in scientific circles and with the general public. His narrative account of the journey, *To the Central African Lakes and Back* (1881) went through several editions.

However it was Thomson's leadership of a subsequent Royal Geographical Society expedition, from Mombassa to Lake Victoria, which established him as a celebrated explorer. The journey to Lake Victoria had not previously been negotiated by Europeans, the main obstacle being the Masai people, who had acquired a reputation for hostility towards intruders in their territory. Thomson's success in traversing this region without violent incident, during 1883 and 1884, was perceived as a testimony to his bravery and his remarkable skill as a negotiator. His *Through Masai Land: a journey of exploration among the snowclad volcanic mountains and strange tribes of Eastern Equatorial Africa* (1885), "took the world by storm", according to the 1909 *Dictionary of National Biography* (Lee, 1909b: p 743). The text was re-printed several times and, like *To the Central African Lakes*, was translated into French and German (Thomson, 1896: pp 346, 347).

These two publications, along with an account of explorations in the Atlas Mountains (1889) and several articles in popular journals (Thomson, 1896: pp 346-348), reached a wide readership and contributed to Thomson's reputation as "distinctly the greatest African explorer of our time". The latter assessment appeared in an

obituary in *The Speaker*, while the *Pall Mall Gazette* declared him "the only traveller of our time who, as regards his pluck, his persistence and his methods, is worthy to rank with Livingstone ...". Both comments are cited in a twenty page list of tributes which appears at the end of a biography of Thomson written by his brother (Thomson, 1896: pp 325-345). The editors of Thomson's biography of Mungo Park, published in 1890, refer to him as being a name "too familiar with the public to require introduction" (Thomson, 1890: p vi). It is not possible to ascertain the number of copies of Thomson's books which were sold, but these descriptions of him suggest that his work was well known and highly regarded among the reading public of nineteenth century Scotland (Gibb, 1937: p 130).

As Ross points out, accounts of exploration reached their greatest popularity after the 1860's (Centre of African Studies, 1972: pp 9 ff). In this context, Thomson was one of those who represented to the late nineteenth century public of Scotland and the rest of Europe, "a new type of hero, whose example served as a novel model of well-being - the life of adventure and scientific curiosity" (Hallet, 1972: p 4). The distinctively Scottish contribution to this new heroic model is acknowledged by Thomson in *To the Central African Lakes and Back*, when he remarks that despite being daunted by the prospect of taking over leadership of the 1878 Royal Geographical Society expedition, "I remembered I was the countryman of Livingstone, and my Scottish blood would not allow me to retreat" (Thomson, 1881: Vol 1, p vi). This allusion to Scottish origins is, however, an unusual feature; most of the authors I refer to in this chapter make no reference to being Scottish.

In turning to the accounts of African populations which are presented in Thomson's non-scientific texts, it is relevant to note that his activities in Africa were not motivated by "adventure and scientific curiosity" alone. He used his geological training to survey for coal



in the Ruvuma valley in 1881, and in the early 1890's he was employed by Cecil Rhodes to make treaties which would allow the extension of the British South Africa Company's territories into what was later to become northern Rhodesia. In doing so Thomson contributed to the establishment of British colonies in eastern Africa (Gibb, 1937: p 135; Hibbert, 1982: p 316). No such direct relationship to the process of colonisation existed in the case of the two Royal Geographical Society expeditions. Nevertheless, in turning to Thomson's accounts of those expeditions, I argue that his description of African social collectives is refracted through a concern to promote an apologetic model of European capitalist society, wherein civilisation is perceived as a process to be achieved through trade and political stability.

#### **Imagined Community in Thomson's Texts**

The preface of *To the Central African Lakes and Back* contains an apology for the "somewhat meagre" references to "native customs" contained in the text. Despite the fact that as a result of the expedition "several new tribes have been discovered and described", Thomson states that "travelling experience has convincingly shown me that no one can hope to become genuinely acquainted with African society without a long residence among the people ..." (Thomson, 1881: Vol 1, p viii). Nevertheless the text does contain a large number of passages describing African social collectives, including these new "discoveries".

For the most part the text constructs imagined communities through comparison of one social collective to another. In these comparisons both cultural traits and biological characteristics are cited as indicators of difference. Often these characteristics are ranked in an order of quality, so that one population group wins Thomson's

approval on moral, aesthetic or "racial" grounds. For example Thomson describes two neighbouring communities as follows:

The tribal differences between Makula's people and the Wanyika were of the most marked sort, not only as regards their mental and physical features, but also their habits and customs ... Physically, the Wanyika were not so good-looking, having long lank bodies with exceedingly narrow craniums (1881: Vol 1, p 285).

Here both cultural and phenotypical characteristics are compared and contrasted.

Cultural traits feature prominently in Thomson's comparison of the Wazaramo and the Waswahili; the two groups are compared in terms of their dress, their housing, their language and social customs (1881: Vol 1, p 135). However the Waswahili, who are referred to as "a hybrid race" constituted by the descendants of freed slaves from many different tribes, are also described in terms of their phenotypical characteristics.

They comprise every type of negroid physiognomy to be found in East Central Africa, from well-made faces, to others with prognathous jaws, everted lips, and bridgeless noses. In some instances, hair on the face is found, though in the majority it is, as with most negroes, absent (1881: Vol 1, p 92).

As this passage indicates, Thomson grades phenotypical features such as facial structure according to a hierarchy which excludes those with "prognathous jaws, everted lips, and bridgeless noses" from the ranks of the "well-made". I will return to discussion of this hierarchy shortly. First, I will show that Thomson not only considers



biological features to be relevant indicators of the distinctiveness of imagined communities, but also attributes causal significance to such features when attempting to explain social differences.

### **"Race" and Capacity for "Improvement"**

At several points in his discussion of the "character" of the tribes encountered during the expedition, Thomson is concerned to demonstrate their improvability; that is, the possibility of their approaching closer to European standards of "civilisation" than they have so far achieved. In doing so he seeks to establish environmental factors which may account for differences between what he takes to be more and less advanced African tribes.

The weight which Thomson attaches to environmental factors as causes of difference is evident in his discussion of the Wazaramo, whom he takes as an example of the "moral revolution" or "revolution of character" which can be achieved among "East African tribes" (Thomson, 1881: Vol 1, p 136). Noting Burton's assessment of the Wazaramo as holding "the lowest place" among "the East African tribes" and as having an "apparent incapacity for improvement", Thomson concedes that Burton's report of the tribe's violent and "ill-conditioned" nature may have been accurate, but contrasts it with his own experience, twenty-three years after Burton's expedition, of the Wazaramo's stability, generosity and peaceful pursuit of trade: "Is there no improvement in all this? If not, what can improvement mean?". He proposes to treat the disparity between his experience of the Wazaramo and Burton's as "a sociological problem" and to "discover if possible the causes which have led to this change" (1881: Vol 1, p 137).

Thomson settles on two factors which he considers crucial in this regard: first, the emergence, in the territory inhabited by the

Wazaramo, of a hegemonic political regime capable of preventing the conflict and violence which result from shifting alliances between rival tribes; and second, the establishment of legitimate trading relations, by which Thomson means trading relations which depend neither on robbery nor enslavement (1881: Vol 1, pp 138-139). Thomson argues that the improvement in the Wazaramo's "moral character" can be attributed to the emergence of these two conditions. On these grounds he rejects Burton's assessment of the Wazaramo:

The natives were not naturally what he (Burton) found them, as he leads us to believe, but were made so by generations of brutal oppression and violence (1881: Vol 1, p 138, my parenthesis).

Thomson suggests that the Anti-Slavery Society could use the case of the Wazaramo as an argument in favour of the improvability of the inhabitants of Africa, and as proof of the pernicious effects of slavery.

We have no right as yet to come to rigid conclusions about the character of the negro, and what his capacity for improvement may be. Travellers who have made such sweeping denunciations of the negro have seen him as degraded from ages of exposure to the curse of slavery, ever fighting like a wild beast for his very existence - his hand against every man, and every man's against him (1881: Vol 1, p 139).

So far, Thomson's analysis of "the negro's" capacity for improvement appears to be environmentalist.



Other parts of Thomson's work also show a strong environmentalist element: for example, in *To the Central African Lakes and Back* Thomson discusses the Wakhutu, whom he judges to be "one of the most degraded tribes to be found in Africa" (1881: Vol 1, p 160). In analysing the causes of this condition, Thomson begins by citing environmental causes. He elaborates further on the "two great steps which every tribe must take before it gets on the highway to improvement". These are "a social aggregation for mutual protection and safety", which requires a strong local state, and "a differentiation of the social aggregate, so that by exchange of services they may become mutually useful to each other" (1881: Vol 1, p 161).

The prerequisites for moral progress and the civilisation of character include, in other words, components of the capitalist economy as analysed by nineteenth century British political economists; specifically, the social division of labour, the production and exchange of commodities, and a state capable of enforcing legal restraints. The latter requirement also entails the formation of a national state and a structure of social stratification:

African tribe life teems with proofs of the fact that with the progress of organization and social aggregation there is a corresponding advance in social improvement ... There first arises a controlling chief, who acts as the "thin edge of the wedge" in the mass of barbarism. He brings village after village under his influence, till his country becomes too large for personal government. Sub-chiefs are chosen, classes are formed ... New wants are raised, and thus step after step is gained in the ladder of progress (1881: Vol 1, pp 161-2).

Conversely, subsistence economies tend to bring about degradation of character, since there is "no mutual dependence or exchange of services" (1881: Vol 1, p 162).

Despite the environmentalist tendency of these arguments, *To the Central African Lakes and Back* also presents biologist explanations of human difference. For example, in his examination of the case of the Wakhutu, Thomson supplements environmental explanation by reference to the causal role of biological factors. He argues that one of the reasons for the Wakhutu's degradation is that they have been dominated by a more aggressive tribe, the Mahenge, who have subjugated them and have thereby inhibited their social and moral development. Thomson describes the Mahenge as "a race evidently superior to the Wakhutu ..." who "... are much lighter in colour, and have far finer features ..." (1881: Vol 1, p 189). This description links the dominance of the Mahenge to phenotypical signifiers of their superiority; their relative physical similarity to Europeans sets them apart from their supposed inferiors. And just as the superiority of the Mahenge is evident in the racialised physical characteristics which identify them, so the visible phenotypical signs of the Wakhutu's inferiority explain their moral and social degradation.

A further example of Thomson's appeal to a racialised hierarchy of physical types as an explanation of differential progress occurs in his 1885 text, *Among The Masai*. According to Thomson certain Masai tribes, on being forced to resettle in a region less affected by violent territorial disputes than their original environment, have developed a new mode of existence. "The establishment of these colonies has been an unmitigated blessing to the country" (Thomson, 1885: p 415), as they have become centres of trade. Furthermore, the displaced Masai have shown a "remarkable development of peaceable habits and honest ways" (Thomson, 1885: p 415).



In an earlier passage, offered as "a few words ... descriptive of the Masai as a race", Thomson notes that philologists have proposed that the Masai may be related to North African tribes, since their language belongs to "the Hamitic family" (1885: p 411). However he considers this to be inconclusive evidence, and stresses that the clearest indicator of the fact that "the Masai are in no sense negroes, or allied to the Bantu tribes ..." is to be found in their physical appearance.

In their cranial development as in their language, they are widely different from the natives of Central and South Africa, occupying in the former respect a far higher position in the scale of humanity (1885: p 411).

This "racial" superiority is referred to again in the context of Thomson's explanation of the exemplary progress of the displaced Masai tribes. Their improved social and moral character

... shows what the Masai *with their distinctly higher mental development*, are capable of when cut away from their traditions and brought under conditions more favourable to their advancement towards civilisation ... (1885: p 411, my emphasis)

The higher mental development of the Masai is signified by their cranial development: in terms of the biologism to which Thomson adheres, it is also *proven* by this visible sign of their biological superiority. Furthermore, in Thomson's model of progress the favourable biological characteristics of a "race" can facilitate social change: the corollary of this is that the biological make-up of a collective can also restrict its progress, as in the case of the Wakhutu and their (biologically determined) subjection to domination by the Mahenge.

In the 1881 and 1885 texts, Thomson implies or explicitly asserts that certain phenotypical characteristics are indicators of a population's inferior or superior position in a racialised hierarchy. In the racialised semiotics which inform Thomson's analysis, phenotypical features associated with "the negro" are an indication of inferiority, as some of the examples cited above indicate. That "negro" physical characteristics function as a negative standard in the texts is confirmed by Thomson's description of the Wafipa, in *To the African Lakes and Back*:

Thick lips are common, but as a rule the shape of the head is above the average negro type. In colour they vary from a light brown to sooty black (Thomson, 1881: Vol 2, p 21).

In the same text the reader is informed that the Wahehe are "upon the whole a rather good-looking class of negroes, not very dark coloured ..." (1881: Vol 1, p 235). In *Through Masai Land*, Thomson comments that, among the Masai:

The most degraded tribe physically is that which is known to the coast traders by the name of Wa-kwafi. They seem to have acquired a strain of Negro blood ... (Thomson, 1885: p 413)

And in describing the young women of the El-Moran, Thomson refers to them as "easily the best looking girls I have ever met in Africa ...", explaining this by noting that "Their figures are slender and well formed, without the abnormal development about the hips characteristics of the negro ..." (1885: p 428).

As these examples demonstrate, "Negro" physical characteristics are described as degraded, inferior or abnormal in Thomson's accounts of Africa. They function as counter-signifiers opposed to a Eurocentric



ideal of physical normality, as this approving description of the El-Moran men indicates:

In most cases the nose is well raised and straight, frequently as good as any European's (though passing into the negro type in the lower class, such as the Wa-kwafi). The lips also vary from the thin and well-formed down to the thick and everted (1885: p 427).

Here and elsewhere Thomson equates an alleged similarity to "European" physiognomy or body type with a notion of class superiority. The Wa-kwafi, to whom he refers as a "negro type", form a "lower class": "the most aristocratic ... clans", on the other hand

... are undoubtedly superior to the others in the shape of the head, the less depressed nose and thinner lips. Indeed, - but for a prominence of the cheek-bones, a tendency to a Mongolian shape and upward slant of the eyes, the chocolate-coloured skin, and the hair with a tendency to become frizzy - they might pass muster as very respectable and commonplace Europeans (1885: p 412).

It has been argued that, in nineteenth century England, class differences were commonly constructed as "racial" differences and that, conversely, the alleged inferiority of foreign "races" was discussed in the same terms as were used in assessments of the alleged characteristics of England's "lower classes" (Lorimer, 1978: pp 131-161; Cohen, 1988: pp 29-32). It has also been noted that the superimposition of "racial" and class hierarchies is a common figure in late nineteenth century European texts on Africa. This has been interpreted by some commentators as part of an apologetic argument in favour of European colonisation; since "the African" has always

been ruled by "superior races", European rule is consistent with an indigenous tradition (Kiernan, 1969: p 214).

Given Thomson's involvement in colonial expansion, his reproduction of the equivalence of class and "race" may lend some support to this interpretation. However no explicit discussion of the desirability of European rule in Africa occurs in the 1881 or 1885 texts. Thomson's main concern there is to explain the differential capacities for moral and social improvement which he attributes to various African communities. In explaining these capacities, which are always measured against a Eurocentric norm, he attaches most weight to the allegedly deterministic effects of biological differences. Environmental factors have their own effects, but the limits of a community's capacity to respond to them are determined by the biological characteristics of their "race". Further examples of this usage of "race" can be observed in the writings of a commentator who was perhaps the most celebrated Scottish writer on Africa, David Livingstone.

### **(3) Livingstone and the Meanings of "Race"**

David Livingstone began his explorations of Africa in 1849, having joined the London Missionary Society in 1837 in order to work at a mission station at Kuruman. The successes of his expeditions were numerous and included, famously, the "discovery" of the Zambesi, Victoria Falls and Lake Nyasa. Eventually Livingstone left the institutionalised missionary movement and became increasingly involved in government funded expeditions. His 1858-1864 expedition to the Zambesi was commissioned for the purpose of establishing a British colony in the Central African highlands, an aim which was not successfully achieved and which was not widely publicised (Smailes, 1981: p 40).



This was not the only connection between Livingstone's career in Africa and the British imperialist project. He worked to encourage the establishment of British trade in Africa, believing that a combination of Christianity and commerce could bring about the abolition of the slave trade. His activities did have an impact on the history of slavery, though this impact was more decisive after his death than during his life. His journals of his last expedition, which were recovered by Stanley after Livingstone's death in 1873, sold extremely well and shocked the British reading public with their descriptions of the Arab slave trade. It is probable that they influenced the government's increasing opposition to slavery in Africa (Centre of African Studies, 1972: p 9; Smailes, 1981: p 34).

Livingstone's death was the catalyst for a new wave of British interest in Africa, and resulted in the recruitment of large numbers of new missionaries. It also led to further Scottish imperialist activity, with the establishment of the African Lakes Company's settlements at Lake Nyasa, in the territory first established as memorial mission stations for the "Herculean figure" which Livingstone had become (Centre of African Studies, 1972: p 11; Smailes, 1981: p 42).

It has been argued elsewhere that when nineteenth century missionaries were advocating financial and political support for their activities they tended to emphasise the supposed degradation and depraved character of the inhabitants of Africa. By contributing in this way to the reproduction of racist ideology, they hoped to emphasise the urgency of philanthropic intervention (Curtin: pp 324-328; Bolt, 1971: p 130; 1974: p 129; Miles, 1982: pp 110-111). Livingstone's struggle against the slave-trade and his championing of the rights of the inhabitants of Africa have been documented as thoroughly as his career as a missionary and explorer (Livingstone, 1899: pp 75-90; Jeal, 1973; Listowel, 1974; Ransford, 1978; Ross, 1991:

pp 6-7). However, despite his well-established philanthropic stance, Livingstone's journals and his descriptions of expeditions make it clear that he too viewed the populations of Africa through the prism of a Eurocentric and racist model of "civilisation". For example his journal of 1853 contains this comment on the character of the MaKololo, a tribe identified in terms of racialised characteristics in a previous passage:

Barbarism or savageism is the effect of ages of debasement and vice. And agriculture, fishery, hunting, manufactures ... afford no criterion whereby to judge of the civilisation of a people. Neither of these pursuits raises certain tribes in this land from the lowest forms of barbarism, as evinced in the perfect nudity of the men and mere pretence at covering the private parts in women. They possess neither courage, patriotism, natural affection, honour, nor honesty (Schapera, 1960: p 253).

For Livingstone, the nudity of the tribes he disparages confirms their barbaric or savage state. Their moral depravity gives the lie to any degree of civilisation which might seem to be indicated by their technological development.

The fact that racist views were articulated in Livingstone's journals and in his accounts of expeditions is of special interest as they were very widely read in Scotland and elsewhere. In Scotland he stood as an icon of Christian imperialism, his heroism demonstrated equally by his exploratory missions and his efforts to Christianise African people. By the late nineteenth century, publicity concerning Livingstone's exploits had elevated him to a revered position in the popular imagination of Scotland which was perhaps unrivalled by any other nineteenth century Scottish figure. In this context it is important to note that the myth of Livingstone was created not only



by his own writings but also, and to a large extent, by what was said and written about him by others, in Scotland and elsewhere in the world. Commentaries on Livingstone are therefore equally as interesting as his own writings, from the point of view of an analysis of racist discourse during the period.

Here I focus on one example of such commentary, Charles Bruce's *Stirring Adventures in African Travel*. Published in Edinburgh in 1892, and subtitled *Great Explorers - Hunting Exploits - Shipwreck - Captivity - Bombardment*, this text is of particular interest because it was intended for use as a school book, and therefore gives some indication of the image of Africa which was presented to Scottish children in the late nineteenth century. The text recounts the adventures of eminent European explorers of Africa, constructing historical narratives in a form which is typical of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century boys' adventure fiction. Out of six chapters, three are devoted exclusively to Livingstone, his expeditions and his famous meeting with Stanley (surely one of the most widely circulated narratives of African history; or rather, of the history of European imperialism in Africa).

The narratives emphasise the qualities of fortitude, courage and endurance characteristic of the ideology of "muscular Christianity" which was prevalent throughout Britain at this time (Saville, 1988). The climactic moments of the plots involve the experience of personal danger: in approximately half of the narratives, this danger is represented by wild animals which are hunted by the explorers; in the remainder, including the chapters describing Livingstone's life, it is represented by the African "natives".

When Livingstone landed he found himself in the sickening smell, and among the mutilated bodies of the slain ... This is not an unfrequent incident in African travel ...

Although, by command of the chief, the inhabitants of the various villages were friendly and hospitable, they were yet fearful savages ... This amiable potentate was addicted to running a-muck through his capital, and beheading anyone he met ... (1892: pp 37, 45)

The savagery of the "natives" is used to demonstrate and highlight the virtues of European explorers, such as the courage, decisiveness and technological superiority displayed by Livingstone when his "native" bearers become rebellious:

... the manners of the natives grew worse, tricks were resorted to, to detain him ... but they were quickly silenced when they saw the muzzle of the traveller's gun pointed at them (1892: p 38).

There is an unmistakable tone of jingoistic superiority in such passages. The European hero is both more resourceful and more morally admirable than the impudent, child-like "natives" under his benevolent but firm authority.

It is notable that the stereotypically masculine qualities celebrated in the text are enhanced through being displayed by characters who face danger and adventure "alone". For example Livingstone's fortitude and courage is presented as being all the more remarkable given the strain of isolation. In a paper discussing the part played by Africans in European explorations of Africa, Kirk-Greene has posed

... the fundamental question of whether it is really accurate to say, as convention has it, that Mungo Park discovered the course of the Niger "single-handed"? Did Barth really spend three years "alone" in the Western Sudan ... ? (Centre of African Studies, 1972: p 40)



The answer is that these figures, like Livingstone, were accompanied by African auxiliaries. Yet in Bruce's text, as in the convention Kirk-Greene identifies, Africans are discounted as companions.

A corollary of this is that where male companionship is celebrated in the text, it always occurs between European characters. In one episode, an exception which proves the point, a "native chief" gives Livingstone his own blanket, suffering cold in order to help the sick explorer. This is described as "An act of generosity hardly to be expected from a savage chief" (Bruce, 1892: p 60). Doubt over the likelihood of male bonding between European and African men further distances "the natives" from "masculine", European virtues.

The text's treatment of the "natives" is simplistic in its almost unremitting disapproval of all aspects of African life. This is significant given the age of the readership for which the text is intended. However it is possible to discern, even in this childrens' book, an anxiety concerning the "civilisation" of Africa. Describing the Fans, who have "gained an unenviable notoriety for cannibalism", the text notes that this reputation has diminished as the tribe has had more contact with French colonists, but also observes:

... it is sad to think that through their intercourse with the European, their moral character has deteriorated; they have become thievish, cunning and indolent (Bruce, 1892: p 62).

I return to examination of this theme in nineteenth century imperialist writing in Chapter Six.

*Stirring Adventures* does not refer in detail to the physical characteristics of African characters in the narratives. However their interactions with Europeans are framed in terms of

relationships between "the natives" and "white" men. Where the text refers to African "races" the term therefore has a biological and racialised sense. I noted, above, that a biological definition of "race" was predominant by this point in the nineteenth century. It is interesting to note that Livingstone's writings of the 1850's and 1860's sometimes employ such a usage of "race" while appearing to argue *against* the idea that physical differences are of primary importance in comparing populations and their capacities. Livingstone's opposition to polygenism is evident in several passages from his reports on exploratory journeys. For example, in *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries* (1865), co-written by Livingstone and his brother Charles, polygenist arguments are rejected in favour of an environmentalist account of "racial" difference.

In reference to the status of the Africans among the nations of the earth, we have seen nothing to justify the notion that they are of a different "breed" or "species" from the most civilised. The African is a man with every attribute of human kind. Centuries of barbarism have had (a) ... deteriorating effect ... This degradation, however, would hardly be given as a reason for holding any race in bondage, unless the advocate had sunk morally to the same low state (Livingstone, 1865: pp 596-7, my parenthesis).

Here, both slavery and the polygenist arguments used by some of its supporters are dismissed.

Elsewhere Livingstone seems to be opposed to the very notion of "races", in the sense of fixed physical types, even where it occurs in the work of monogenist commentators. For example, in his journal of 1853 Livingstone comments on debates concerning the categorisation of African social collectives (Schapera, 1960: pp 186-



187). Noting that Prichard has documented and illustrated the physical features of the "Caffre" and the "Hottentot", he questions the viability of finding "typical" examples of a "race".

The ugliest seem to be selected for their very ugliness ... to obtain a typical face of any of the black races is, considering the immense variety of countenance which exists, what I fear will not soon be accomplished (1960: p 187).

This objection appears to suggest that Livingstone denied the supposed existence of definite and fixed "racial" types.

However a refusal to admit the existence of clearly distinguishable physical "types" did not preclude a belief in "racial" superiority. In the same text Livingstone goes on to confirm that different populations can be graded according to a "racial" hierarchy. The African is said to be "by no means the lowest of the human family", being "nearly as strong physically as the European, and, as a race, ... wonderfully persistent among the nations of the earth." (1865: pp 596-597). And slavery in America is described as a "blunder", partly on the grounds that it involved "The introduction of an inferior race from a barbarous country" (Livingstone, 1865: p 595).

Furthermore, neither Livingstone's rejection of polygenesis, nor his doubt about the existence of typical examples of "the black races", prevent him from using the term "race" to refer to physical differences between populations, as is clear from his reference to "black races". This point is of some interest when set against the other material I have reviewed here: in concluding this chapter, I review that material and compare the usages of "race" found there and in Livingstone's work.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified the racist tendencies in a variety of nineteenth century Scottish texts on Africa and I have emphasised differences in the ways in which they construct racialised imagined communities. For Thomson, the character of a collective is a composite of moral and intellectual habits which are affected by the social and physical environment and, decisively, by biological make-up. The relation between social and biological factors is a relation between facilitating environmental factors and an innate potential for improvement which is limited to different degrees by the different biological profiles of the racialised groups he discusses.

In contrast, the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century texts examined earlier in the chapter do not attribute causal or explanatory significance to biological characteristics. Although Bruce, Park, Laing and Clapperton all treat visible biological features as important identifying marks, they frame their explanations of collective human differences in terms of the effects of environmental factors. Furthermore, where they use the term "race" it has no specifically physical connotation, being equivalent to other terms used to indicate social collectivity in a general sense.

Livingstone's case is different again. He defends a monogenesist and environmentalist account of human difference, but in doing so he uses the idea of "race" to refer to physical differences between social collectives. In this sense his usage of "race" is closer to Thomson's biologicistic references to "racial" characteristics than to Bruce's or Park's. Yet Livingstone rejects the theory which underpins Thomson's descriptions of African communities and argues against the possibility of identifying clearly distinguished physical types among African populations.



In Chapter Three I suggested that shifts between different constructions of imagined community are of particular interest in the history of racism and racialisation. In addition to demonstrating that racist discourses were in circulation in nineteenth century Scotland, the material I have discussed so far indicates that changes in the construction of racialised groups, and changes around the meaning of "race" may be detected in texts of the period. I explore this theme further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX  
"RACE" AND AFRICA  
IN FOUR EARLY  
NINETEENTH CENTURY TEXTS

Introduction

The history of racism in nineteenth century Scotland can be further explored by examining in greater detail the discursive construction of imagined communities in texts discussing Africa. In order to do so I focus, in this chapter, on a smaller range of texts than was the case in Chapter Five. Three of these texts comprise a series of works on Africa which were published in Scotland between 1799 and 1853. The earliest of the series, John Leyden's *A Historical and Philosophical Sketch of the Discoveries and Settlements of the Europeans in Northern and Western Africa, at the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (Leyden, 1799) is a synthesis of European reports and speculations regarding the African continent. It was originally published in the last year of the eighteenth century but was reprinted several times during the early years of the nineteenth. The second text in the series is the result of extensive revision of and additions to Leyden's work. This was first published in 1817 under the editorship of Hugh Murray, as *Historical Account of Discoveries and Travels in Africa, by the late John Leyden, M.D., enlarged and completed to the present time, with illustrations of geography and natural history, as well as the moral and social condition of its inhabitants* (Murray, 1817), and it was published again in 1818 with further, though less extensive revisions.

Two other texts, also by Murray, are sometimes described as being, likewise, revised editions of Leyden's 1799 work (eg, Curtin, 1965: p



214; National Library of Scotland, 1982: pp 46-47). This is inaccurate. In fact, Murray's *Narrative of Discovery and Adventure in Africa from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time* (Murray, 1830) and his *The African Continent: narrative of discovery and adventure* (Murray, 1853) are the original and a revised, extended re-edition of a separate text which was commissioned, together with several other geographical studies, by the *Edinburgh Cabinet Library* (eg Murray, 1840). Whereas the 1817 and 1818 volumes contain sections of Leyden's work reproduced with little or no alteration alongside original material by Murray, the 1830 text and its revised re-edition of 1853 contain nothing of Leyden's.

Nevertheless there is a family relationship between all three of these texts in their various editions. They discuss similar aspects of African history, geography and exploration, they rely upon the same sources to a large extent, and they organise their material in a broadly similar way. Nineteenth century texts on Africa can be regarded as constituting an intertext whose cross-references and borrowings construct Africa as an object of enquiry; the texts by Leyden and Murray present a particularly clear example of this intertextuality. Murray's revisions of the Leyden text use Leyden's material as the basis of new theses concerning Africa, and these theses are to some extent carried over to Murray's later work.

Cunningham, who (erroneously) describes all three texts as versions of Leyden's original work of 1799, refers to the texts as constituting, collectively, " ... the standard work in English on the subject for half a century" (National Library of Edinburgh, 1982: p 46). Certainly they seem to have been in demand for several decades. All of them were reprinted several times, and Murray's edition of Leyden's text was published in a French translation. Murray's 1830 text was re-edited four times in order to accommodate new information.

The authoritative status of the series is all the more significant given Curtin's assessment of the formative importance of early nineteenth century ethnography. He argues that the image of Africa which had been formed in the work of Scottish and English commentators by the middle of the nineteenth century had a sustained influence on subsequent accounts of the continent and its populations.

The hardened image of Africa was complete by the 1850's. It was to change slowly in later years, but the later image of Africa was very largely drawn from Europe's first impressions, taken during earlier and formative decades (Curtin, 1965: pp vi-vii).

In the light of this argument, and of Cunningham's comment, it is relevant to take Leyden and Murray's texts as a body of work which warrants close analysis.

In presenting that analysis I am concerned not only with the "hardened image" of Africa which emerges in the 1830 and 1853 editions of Murray's work, but with differences between these and the original version written by Leyden. Comparison between these versions reveals significant differences in theoretical perspective and in substantive content. The differences are illuminated further in the fourth text to be examined in this chapter, Murray's *Enquiries Historical and Moral, respecting the Character of Nations, and the Progress of Society* (Murray, 1808). Together the four texts indicate some aspects of the way in which intellectual views on Africa, and on human difference in general, developed in Scotland during the first half of the nineteenth century. For example the differences of theoretical perspective which are evident from a comparison of Leyden's and Murray's work cast more light on the changes in racist ideology, and in the meanings of the term "race", which I discussed at



the end of the previous chapter. I begin by examining Leyden's original text of 1799.

### **The Context and Sources of Leyden's Work on Africa**

Some impression of the social and intellectual context in which Leyden's work on Africa was produced can be gained from descriptions of him in an early twentieth century edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography* (Lee, 1909a: pp 1094-1095; see also Sinton, 1912; Reith, 1908). This brief biographical article alludes to relationships between Leyden and prominent members of the intelligentsia in late eighteenth century Edinburgh. It presents Leyden as a scholar in the tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment; a man of multiple talents and interests. He is described as a poet (befriended by Walter Scott, to whose *Border Minstrelsy* Leyden contributed, and who wrote a eulogy on the occasion of Leyden's death in 1811), a physician, a linguist, a philosopher and a theologian. In the course of this tribute the biography makes reference to distinguished colleagues, patrons, publishers and friends who promoted Leyden's projects and provided resources for their execution. This is an indication of the fact that Leyden's work on Africa was carried out in a social context which provided him with contacts in several different areas of research and scholarship, some of them established at Edinburgh University, where he studied for seven years. Given this network of contacts, and the success of *A Historical Sketch*, it is reasonable to assume that in undertaking to write a text on Africa Leyden was responding to a curiosity about the continent which was shared by other members of the Scottish intelligentsia.

Leyden never visited Africa although, according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, he considered "emulating Mungo Park's example as an African discover" (Lee, 1909a: p 1094). Instead he took a post as Assistant Surgeon at Madras, eventually becoming "Professor of

Hindoostani" at a college in Calcutta. In any case *A Historical and Philosophical Sketch* was written before Leyden had considered a career in African "discovery". Published when he was twenty-four years old, it was among his best known works, along with an edition of the sixteenth century text *The Complaynt of Scotland* (Leyden, 1801) and a record of a tour of the Highlands (Leyden, 1800), both of which acquired some importance during the nineteenth century revival of interest in Scottish literature and culture (Haldane, 1990: pp 112-113).

*A Historical and Philosophical Sketch* begins by summing up the total of western geographical knowledge of Africa as it had stood at the time of the foundation of the African Association, eleven years previously:

... the geography of Africa extended very little within its coasts; a few positions were ascertained, and a few lines traced upon the margin of the map; while the interior was a charta rasa, an extended blank of immense size, where every thing was unsettled and uncertain (Leyden, 1799: p 1).

Leyden's text is a synthesis or compendium of the information concerning the continent which was available in Scotland at the time of writing. As his comment indicates, the sources of such information were geographically limited. They were also chronologically diverse. In Chapter Five I referred to four categories of information concerning Africa to which European scholars of the late eighteenth century had access: Arabic texts of the tenth to sixteenth centuries; reports from European sea voyages; research carried out by "enlightened" European scientists and travellers; and eighteenth century compendia of these and other sources. Leyden relies to a large extent on the third of these



categories, combining scientific documentation with travel narratives. Strictly ethnographic treatises, unlike travel literature, did not have a large readership at the end of the eighteenth century. This was one reason why descriptions of the cultural and social characteristics of African communities which were published during the period were usually incorporated into accounts of the explorations and adventures of western travellers (Curtin, 1965: pp 213-214). Another was the tradition of "travel-as-science", which was established, during the eighteenth century, by European intellectuals who regarded voyages to distant countries as an important part of the secular philosophical project (Fabian, 1983: pp 6-7). As its title indicates, *A Historical and Philosophical Sketch of the Discoveries and Settlements of the Europeans* conforms to this tradition. Throughout the text Leyden quotes from and paraphrases the accounts of eighteenth century European travellers, many of them commissioned by the African Association. Among the travel narratives and the discussions of geography, geology, natural history and other subjects which make up the text there are also numerous, scattered comments on the social institutions and "character and manners" of the inhabitants of Africa. Of thirteen chapters, four are concerned almost exclusively with geographical description and with accounts of the adventures of European travellers and explorers; the rest include extensive descriptions of African populations, and it is with these that I am primarily concerned.

In discussing this ethnographic material I am interested in the same issues which informed the analyses in Chapter Five; that is, the racialisation of imagined communities and the reproduction of racist ideology. However in this chapter I pursue these issues through a more detailed examination of textual features, in order to give particular attention to changes in the meanings of key terms. My discussion is organised under five headings. I begin by examining the terminology used to designate social collectives, in order to

comment on the usage of the terms "race", "nation", "tribe" and "people", and the discursive relationships of substitution and opposition which operate between them. Second, I examine the criteria which are taken to be significant in describing population groups; that is, the features which are highlighted as relevant indicators of difference. I then assess the extent to which Leyden's account can be described as racist. Fourth, I discuss various factors which are held to cause differences in "moral character" between social collectives and, finally, I comment on the theory of "progress" which informs Leyden's account of the character of African populations.

### **Leyden's Terminology**

The terms in Leyden's text which indicate a population group or community are "race", "tribe", "nation" and, less commonly than these, "people". These terms are used interchangeably in discussions of African populations; there is no indication that any one of them has a specific meaning which distinguishes it from the others. For example there is not a particular type of population group which is always described as a "race" but which is never described as a "tribe" or a "nation". The synonymy of the terms is evident in the following historical description of the inhabitants of Sierra Leone:

At the close of the last century, the *tribes* of Sierra Leone consisted of two great divisions, the Capez or Zapez, the original inhabitants, much more polished than any of the surrounding *tribes*, and the Manez or Monous, a barbarous ferocious *race* of cannibals, who, migrating from a very distant region in the interior of Africa, attacked the *nation* of the Capez, massacred and sold for slaves immense numbers, and seized a considerable part of their territories (Leyden, 1799: p 236, my emphases).



The Capez are described as a "tribe" and as a "nation", and there is no indication that the apparently anonymous "race of cannibals" could not also be described using either of these terms. The synonymy of "race" and "nation" is confirmed by a description of the Foulahs of the Gambia:

By the Negroes they are reckoned an intermediate race, who derive their colour from the intermixture of Moorish blood, while they themselves regard the Negroes as their inferiors, and class themselves among white nations (1799: p 252).

Although "race" is used here to describe a group identified by a phenotypical characteristic, it is not the only term used in this way, as the reference to "white nations" demonstrates.

A further collective designation, one which appears in Leyden's text less often than the terms "tribe", "nation" or "race", is "people". The ambiguity of this term has been noted elsewhere (eg Wallerstein, 1991c: p 71); it appears to be used here as an equivalent for the other terms I have discussed, as in the following passage:

Few of the ancient Arab race seem now to remain unmixed in Africa; but there are different tribes of mountaineers between Morocco and Algiers, and behind the Algerine territories, who are a proud though a pastoral people ... (Leyden, 1799: p 28)

Here the terms "tribe" and "people" are equivalent, though in this passage the relation of each of these to the "Arab race" is not made clear. The significance of the comment on "racial" mixing is not spelt out, nor are its implications for the meanings of "race", "tribe" and "people" made explicit. Given eighteenth century usages of "race"

to refer to matters of lineage, it is possible that the term appears here because genealogy is being discussed (Banton, 1987: p 30). Nevertheless, it is evident that in general all of these terms participate in relations of substitution which indicate their synonymy.

### **Peculiar Manners**

In Chapters Two and Three I argued that semantic relationships (including what Pécheux refers to as relations of discursive process) have political and ideological significance. In order to understand the significance of the usages I have discussed above it is necessary to move beyond the analysis of linguistic features, and to discuss the ideological assumptions and arguments which inform Leyden's descriptions of "tribes", "nations", "races" and "peoples". I begin to do this by turning now to the criteria which Leyden considers significant in describing differences between social collectives. In the Preface of *Historical and Philosophical Sketch* Leyden alludes to the "difficulty of distinguishing between the rude tribes of Africa" (Leyden, 1799: p v). Nevertheless he devotes a large proportion of the text to precisely that task. Indeed the Preface promises such a classification, offering "a description of the peculiar manners of the African tribes, with a detail of the adventures of the travellers by whom these researches were accomplished" (1799: pp v-vi). Later Leyden insists on the diversity of human types to be found in the African continent; the "general African character" is described as "comprehending a variety of tempers, and powers of mind ..." (1799: p 29).

References to "character" appear frequently in *A Historical and Philosophical Sketch*, and it is worth commenting on the usage of the term. In Leyden's work it signifies a number of different factors, including means of subsistence, typical cultural behaviour and



intelligence. For example the statement that the mountain tribes of Morocco and Algiers are "a proud though a pastoral people, more elegant in their manners, and more strict in their morals than the Moors" is a comment on their "character" (1799: p 28). However cultural and economic characteristics are not the only factors which Leyden highlights. The "peculiar characters" of the Brebers (sic) of Morocco are summarised as follows:

They acquire a strength of body which fits them for war or labour, and an energy of character which appears in their countenance. A ferocious look, eyes full of fire and courage, an aquiline nose, manly features, nervous arms, a tall figure, and a haughty gait, distinguish them from the more wretched inhabitants of the plains ... (1799: p 31)

Here physical features are listed alongside a reference to an aspect of the moral character of the Brebers, their "energy". Leyden frequently makes specific reference to the physical appearances of different population groups in order to establish their distinctive identity. The skin colour of the Foulahs

... varies with the districts they inhabit, approaching yellow in the vicinity of the Moors, and among the Negroes deepening into a muddy black, like that of the Mandingoes. They are very similar to the East Indian Lascars, and neither exhibit the jetty colour, the crisped hair, the flat noses, nor the thick lips, of the Mandingoes and Jallofs (1799: p 252).

Similarly, the Copts of Egypt are described as "the original negro-stock, corresponding to that race in the nose and lip; their hair is curled, not close, like the negroes, but the mulattoes" (1799: p 10). As this comment indicates, phenotypical appearance is one of the

means which Leyden uses to determine the genealogical origins of populations. However, although "race" is referred to in this instance, Leyden does not consistently use the term where social collectives are identified in phenotypical terms; he also refers to the phenotypical characteristics of "nations" and of "tribes". This confirms that "race" is not the only term in Leyden's vocabulary which can carry a biological significance.

As these examples demonstrate, Leyden's text racialises particular population groups in his discussion of Africa, in the sense that groups are identified in terms of their physical characteristics. Furthermore, the text collectively racialises the entire population of Africa. At several points Leyden refers to relations between "the Whites" (meaning Europeans) and "the Africans" (eg 1799: pp 103-104). These comments identify the populations of Africa collectively, as one, non-"White", category. Relations between Europe and Africa are thereby racialised at the most general level, by reference to a phenotypical difference which, for Leyden, is at least as significant as the cultural differences between "Africans" which he discusses elsewhere. This brings me to the issue of the ways in which Leyden's text accounts for the biological and cultural differences it ascribes to African populations.

### **The Causes of Character**

In conformity with the predominant late eighteenth century position on the question of human difference, Leyden presents an environmentalist explanation of the characteristics he ascribes to African population groups (Harris, 1968: pp 82 ff). This does not prevent him from speculating on possible reciprocal relations of causality between "moral" and bodily traits. Yet these speculations should not be confused with the biologism or biological determinism which became predominant in the latter part of the nineteenth



century. In order to avoid such an assumption it should be noted that it was not usual, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to make a distinction between the biological and cultural characteristics of humans such as that maintained by twentieth century science. This is not to say that no distinction whatsoever was made between "moral" character and the appearance or structure of the human body. Rather, a distinction of a different kind was made, which allowed for considerable ambiguity with regard to the relations between the two aspects. The nature of this ambiguity can be grasped by considering the reference to the "haughty gait" of the Brebers which appears in one of the passages quoted above (Leyden, 1799: p 22). This phrase is both an indication of the Brebers' moral character and a reference to an aspect of their physical constitution. A similar entwining of "moral" and corporeal characteristics is evident throughout Leyden's text. Traits which twentieth century anthropologists would categorise as *biological* or *cultural*, and as belonging to distinct spheres, are discussed together in Leyden's text as mutually interactive aspects of an individual's (or of a group's) "character".

For example in a discussion of the environmental causes of the moral character of "the negroes", Leyden argues that:

The emotions in the breast of the savage derive a degree of wildness and ferocity from the ruggedness of the objects which surround him; numerous objects affect his mind, which do not injure his person; and whatever acts upon the moral frame, tends to establish a physical habit. The expression of the features is gradually moulded to characterize the predominant passion, and every affection of the corporeal system re-acts upon the animating mind (1799: pp 97-98).

This passage demonstrates a conception of the relation between physical and moral characteristics which predates the modern dichotomy between the objects proper to biology on the one hand and those proper to psychology or sociology on the other. Here an interrelation between the corporeal and moral spheres is proposed which assumes neither their separation, nor the causal primacy of one over the other, but the imbrication of the two in their subjection to environmental influences.

As the passage quoted above suggests, Leyden, in common with a number of other eighteenth century commentators (including Jean-Jaques Rousseau and the Scottish lawyer Lord Monboddo), argues that physical characteristics as well as behavioural and social traits are the result of environmental factors. For example in his discussion of the "Brebers" he notes that their skin colour is lighter than that of the "negroes" who, he speculates, may be the "indigenous" inhabitants of the region: he comments that it remains to be seen whether "the soil and climate are able to reduce the present varieties again to the negro standard" (1799: p 29). That Leyden considers it likely that environmental factors determine corporeal characteristics is confirmed by his discussion of a community who, although "they boast their Portuguese extraction ... are hardly distinguishable from the darkest negroes". This phenomenon, he claims, "seems to show, that Europeans, adopting the negro manner of life, would in time acquire the negro hue" (1799: p 102).

Leyden combines an environmentalist view of human difference (both biological and cultural) with an assumption that environmentally conditioned physical appearances can be inherited. However his discussions of "character" make no reference to any possibility that physical traits may determine, cause or limit the "moral" characteristics of a group.



What, then, are the environmental factors which Leyden considers effectual in the shaping of character? In addition to climate, he places great emphasis on the conditioning effects of the forms of state to which people are subject. This is evident in several parts of his text, but especially in his account of the Moors. Leyden claims that the Moors have acquired a particularly pernicious character as a result of their social environment.

At every period of history, the same character appears to have marked the Moorish nations, and seems to have been always composed of the same quick and volatile, though weak and combustible materials. A considerable part of this character may probably proceed from physical causes; but the spirit of their laws, institutions, customs, and manners, have always retained a certain uniformity of operation on the minds of the people ... (1799: p 22)

The "physical causes" to which Leyden alludes are environmental factors such as soil and climate, rather than the Moors' biological characteristics. The laws and institutions which he criticises are those associated with the "Mahometan" religion. Leyden regards these as inimical to social progress: "Every idea of change is excluded by the laws of Mahomet" (1799: p 27). By pursuing Leyden's negative assessment of Islamic culture, I can begin to address the racism which is evident in his descriptions of African communities.

#### ***Racism in A Historical and Philosophical Sketch***

It is interesting to note that in addition to arguing that skin colour may be environmentally determined, Leyden discusses and critically examines negative European attitudes towards people with "black" skin. He points out that such attitudes are attributable in part to a European history of negative associations with the colour

black, and notes that these associations are not found in the North African cultures he discusses.

Those sinister ideas do not prevail in Barbary which, in many parts of Europe and Asia, are attached to the colour black. The Turks reckon it ominous, the modern Greeks use the term *Mauros* indifferently for a black, or an unhappy person. An Egyptian, who has committed an error, says he is black with shame; the Europeans mourn in sable, and array the ministers of religion and justice, who are both supposed to have renounced earthly pleasures, in that colour (1799: p 29).

These observations have something in common with more recent commentaries on the history of European views of Africa and their relation to the cultural associations which cluster around the notion of blackness (eg Jordan, 1968: pp 4 ff)).

Yet, this incipient critique of racism notwithstanding, Leyden identifies imagined communities on the basis of biological characteristics and, additionally, describes them as having negatively assessed characteristics. Several of the examples of the construction of imagined community which I have discussed illustrate this, and therefore demonstrate that racist arguments and assumptions are presented in *A Historical and Philosophical Sketch*. This is further illustrated by Leyden's assessment of the character of the Moors. Leyden's description of the Moors racialises them; he refers to them as being "fatter, heavier, and more copper-coloured" than the Brebers (Leyden, 1799: p 28). As I indicated above, it also presents a negative account of their moral character. Leyden not only maintains that "Mahometan" government has prevented progress among the Moors, but also argues that it has resulted in their having "always been quick, fiery, and impatient, treacherous and cruel ..." (1799: p 22).



Leyden's assessment of "the Negroes", too, is racist. In some late eighteenth and nineteenth century discussions of Africa the term "negroe" is used, generically, to describe all the non-Arab populations of West Africa (Curtin, 1965: p 37). Leyden, however, uses the term more specifically, to indicate a particular physical type. He invariably describes "the negroe" in terms of phenotypical characteristics, and these characteristics themselves are regarded as inferior to those of other groups, including those of other population groups in Africa. For example Leyden argues that certain environmental factors may "reduce" the physical appearance of certain population groups inhabiting Barbary "to the negro (sic) standard" (Leyden, 1799: p 29). Similarly, the Suzees of the Sierra Leone coast are described as being "of a yellowish hue, but inferior in person to (the Timmaneys), as they have thick lips and flatter noses" (1799: p 216, my parenthesis). Elsewhere in the text these phenotypical features are consistently identified with the "negroe" (eg 1799: pp 136, 184). As I pointed out above Leyden thinks that both physical traits and moral character are affected by the environment. With regard to "the negroes", he finds the results of their exposure to the African environment unsatisfactory on both scores; his assessment of the moral characteristics attributed to "the negroes" is as negative as his view of their supposed physical features:

Where the intellectual powers are left uncultivated, the passions acquire superior energy and violence. The understanding is much less cultivated among the Negroes than among Europeans; but their passions, whether benevolent or malevolent, are proportionately more violent (1799: p 98).

This hydraulic model of moral character is one which will be explored at greater length in Chapter Seven, where its appearance in a particular form of biological determinist theory is discussed. In Leyden's text it appears in the context of an environmentalist view

of difference, and in the context of a view of "the negroe" which is as negative as any example of scientific racism. Leyden enlists another commentator in support of his assessment:

Falconbridge's character of the negroes is unquestionably just; "They feast", said he, "round graves; and were they to see their country in flames, they would cry, let it burn, without interrupting their singing, dancing, or drinking. They are equally insensible to grief and necessity. They sing till they die, and dance into the grave" (1799: p 104).

Here "the negroes" are portrayed as being both corrupt and ignorant in their childishness.

#### **Civilisation, Progress and Degeneration**

Eighteenth and nineteenth century images of "the negroe" as childlike and irresponsible are the counterpart of an anxiety concerning the rôle and effects of European interventions in Africa (Curtin, 1965: pp 254-255, 268-269, 275; Porter, 1984: p 23). This anxiety is evident in Leyden's text; he notes that

... it appears that all intercourse with the negroe, as it has been carried out on commercial principles, has tended uniformly to the debasement of their understanding, and the degradation of their moral natures ... (Leyden, 1799: p 105)

Here Leyden poses a serious problem for the theories of degeneration and civilisation which were prevalent in the eighteenth century. I have already alluded to the theory of degeneration and the



explanation of human difference which it offered; I can expand on it here in order to bring out the significance of Leyden's comment.

According to Joseph Blumenbach, the Comte de Buffon and other eighteenth century commentators on issues of "race", the biological and moral differences between population groups were the result of degeneration from an ideal, "white" norm embodied, as God's image, in Adam and Eve. Black people's appearance and moral character were the result of environmental influences which had caused their degradation. This did not mean that their situation was irremediable however. Given the correct environment all forms of human life (including "white" European forms; even these were not perfect) could be restored to their original condition (Gould, 1981: p 38; Stepan, 1982: p 36-37; but cf Banton, 1987: p 6; Harris, 1968: p 85).

Like others interested in Africa, Leyden supposed that this possibility imposed a responsibility on Europeans to encourage the "civilisation" of the continent. In this sense his assertion that contact with civilised Europeans has caused further debasement and degeneration in Africa speaks to an extremely disturbing doubt. If contact with civilisation is pernicious, what does this imply for the civilised and their practices?

In order to understand Leyden's response to this anxiety, it is necessary to look at his position on the practice which he regarded as that most calculated to bring about the degeneration of Africa; the slave trade. Leyden was opposed to slavery and the slave trade both on moral and practical grounds. As a supporter of the French revolution of the period before the Terror (Leyden, 1799: p 126), Leyden's radicalism led him to oppose slavery on principle, as an infringement of the rights of "man". It also informs his caustic criticisms, in *A Historical and Philosophical Sketch*, of the seizing of property rights over African territory by European states whose

"laconic and satisfactory" justifications for doing so disguise nothing better than piracy (1799: pp 74-75).

But if Leyden objects to the cruelty and dishonesty which he perceives in European expansionism, this does not mean that he objects to European intervention in Africa as such. Rather he advocates a paternalism which he regards as a duty so far betrayed by civilised nations.

The relation of rude nations to those which are civilized, has been compared to that which subsist between children and parents. In virtue of this relation, a claim to the exercise of a species of authority over uncivilized tribes, has been asserted by their more refined neighbours. If the parallel be of any importance, this authority ought to be mild and humane, as that of a father over his children (1799: p 90).

However, to Leyden's dismay, "Instead of converting to purpose of utility that admiration and unbounded curiosity, which European refinement excited in their simple minds", Europeans in Africa have encouraged a trade which is bound to aggravate the worst aspects of the moral character of "the African"; " ... their barbarity has been supplied with new incentives by the traffic in slaves" (1799: pp 90-91). European slave traders have introduced "a general insecurity and anarchy" along the west coast of Africa (1799: p 93) and this has encouraged violence, dishonesty, and the abandonment of family and communal loyalties among the African population.

Leyden objects to any suggestion that the negative aspects of moral character evident in the "African" are inherent or fixed. In an argument of some sophistication he points out an ideological strategy



by which participants in the slave trade justify their activities. He argues that

... the slave-trade not only debases the understanding, and degrades the moral character of Africa, but urges in its defence those very vicious propensities which it has fostered (1799: pp 95-96).

This critique of the apologetics of naturalisation may appear to be undermined by Leyden's own assessment of the character of the "Negro" which, as I noted above, is negative in the extreme. However, though Leyden's views are racist they are also radically environmentalist. The "negroes" may be "crafty ... ferocious ... uncivilised", :

... but they are not wicked; nor can they be charged with greater enormities than other nations in the same state of civilization. As the process of deterioration has been going on without intermission for about two centuries, it ought not to surprise, if the negro character had even acquired a peculiar degree of malignancy (1799: p 98).

The "negro" character has been acquired in response to environmental influences and, it is implied, is therefore capable of improvement.

Having established Leyden's position on the slave-trade and its effects as a major factor determining "the general African character" (and "negroe" character in particular), I can now return to the question of his doubts concerning the benefits, for Africa, of contact with Europeans. That Leyden was aware of debates concerning slavery is apparent from his comment that the cultural and political effects of the trade have

... induced some of the *friends of humanity*, who have interested themselves in the fate of African nations, to regard with extreme suspicion the introduction of every species of commercial speculation ... (1799: p 104, Leyden's emphasis)

Leyden opposes this position, arguing that "every method, by which the curiosity of the savage may be roused, and his industry excited" without actually aggravating "his" negative characteristics "must ultimately tend to the amelioration of his social state" (1799: pp 104-105).

By asserting the beneficial effects of "legitimate" trade, Leyden is not only addressing an economic question, but defending, in the face of the evidence presented by the African case, the secular basis of the process of "civilisation" (it is notable that Leyden makes virtually no reference to the theological objections to slavery; nor is he significantly concerned with the Christianisation of Africa). The beneficial effects of trade for Africa are, in a sense, a test of the claim to superiority of civilised countries, for if contact with Europe is pernicious, then European civilisation itself must be in doubt. This explains the significance of a rather tortuous argument which Leyden produces during discussion of the character of the Arabs. Noting that the Arabs have a reputation for viciousness towards strangers, Leyden comments on the habits of Europeans, adopting a relativist stance:

Is not the method, by which civilised Europeans display their patriotism, and their affection for their friends, very similar to that of the Arabs? ... they pour forth the grossest invectives against hostile nations, and echo the most scurrilous misrepresentations of their character (1799: p 74).



Immediately, however, he turns this argument around in order to defend the virtues of European civilisation:

Such coincidences show, that the radical principals of the human constitution are everywhere the same, however they may happen to be modified by adventitious circumstances: that civilised society is not the cause of evil and vice, since the caprice of the savage may convert his stupidity into the most ferocious and inhuman passion (1799: p 74).

Appealing to monogenesisism, Leyden argues that the vicious aspects of character constitute part of a common human nature which cannot, therefore, be seen as the result of civilisation.

As I indicated above, Leyden's conviction concerning the superiority of "civilised" populations over the "uncivilised" people of Africa was based on a particular theory of civilisation. I examine this theory here in order to show how it incorporated a model of human difference, relating racialised differences to various stages of social and historical development. Later in the chapter I move on to examine how subsequent revisions of Leyden's text altered the presentation of this theory.

Leyden describes the difference between the African and European continents in terms of their relative historical progress.

The rude tribes of Africa are distinguished by striking and obvious characters from the civilised nations of Europe, but are with much greater difficulty discriminated from each other. By contemplating their manners and customs we may discover the simple and unmixed operation of those principles which, in civilised society, are always combined with extraneous circumstances (1799: p vi).

The first thing to note about this passage (apart from the fact that, as I pointed out earlier, Leyden devotes a great deal of his text to discriminating between "rude tribes") is a point concerning the usage of the terms "tribes" and "nations". I argued, above, that these terms, along with "race" and "people", are synonymous and interchangeable in Leyden's text. As this passage indicates, however, the synonymy of the terms is contextually limited. Only the terms "race" and "nation" are used in discussing European populations, whereas "tribe" is reserved for discussion of African populations. Tribal society is incompatible with civilisation; a "tribe" is a "nation", yet at the same time civilised "nations" are not "tribes". This is to say that the discursive relationship between "tribe" and "nation" is structured by Leyden's racist assessment of the uncivilised state of Africa.

Second, and related to this, it should be noted that Leyden's comments in this passage establish a number of the relationships between culture and difference which are constructed in his discussion of Africa. Civilisation is defined in terms of European cultural standards, so that the lack of civilisation in Africa appears as a lack of culture *tout court*. Lacking culture, African communities also lack distinctive cultural identities. They lack difference from each other because they represent society in its "rude", undifferentiated state.

At the same time, Africa holds up to Europe an image of its pre-history, so that "the opinions, manners, and customs of the modern Africans, are capable of being applied with great advantage, in elucidating the early history of mankind ..." (1799: p 419). This view is consonant with Leyden's monogenesist position, since a shared history implies a common nature. The notion that radical principles in human nature can be discovered in "primitive" people and can be



studied there in a way which will reveal the nature of their modified presence in civilised societies, indicates an evolutionary theory within which "primitive" cultures are viewed as living museum pieces. To study Africa is to study the origins of human society and the unpolished, elemental state of human nature.

This theory rests on an opposition between "primitive" and civilised societies which defines the latter as historically dynamic. By comparison, primitive society is prone to a virtual stasis; "the interior of Africa", Leyden declares, "exhibits, in the 18th century, the same appearance it presented at the commencement of the earliest historical records" (1799: p 419). As I noted above, Leyden regards "Mahometan" culture as being especially slow to change. He understands this condition to be the result of environmental conditions within Africa. However the moral character and the institutions of the populations of Africa can become dynamic through contact with Europeans, and this may lead to the civilisation of Africa if those contacts are of the right kind.

In other words the fate of Africa is in the hands of Europeans. To be more precise, it is in their minds. If Europeans base their approaches to African on "reason", then civilisation will spread and will be vindicated in the process. This view rests upon a model of history which was developed in the moral philosophy of the Enlightenment, a tradition within which Leyden occupies the position of a late imitator. According to the Enlightenment philosophy to which Leyden subscribes, "man" can pursue perfectibility through the application of reason to the problems presented by "his" environment (Harris, 1968: pp 76, 82). The standard and end of this process is western European civilisation, and this fact imposes a moral duty upon civilised Europeans. It is through the application of European reason that the reasoning faculties of African people will be developed, and their progress towards civil society encouraged. The

corollary of this, for Leyden, is that if slavery and the slave trade continue, then Africa will continue to degenerate.

**Towards a New Model: Murray's *Enquiries Historical and Moral***

In its treatment of the "moral character" of the inhabitants of the African continent, Leyden's text is informed by a model of human difference which is based on a number of assumptions: first, the existence of certain fundamental principles which are common to the physical and moral constitution of all human beings; second, the existence of social collectives (designated as "nations", "races", "tribes", or "peoples") which differ from each other in moral character, in their cultural traits and habits, in their social institutions, in their physical appearance or in combinations of these aspects of collective character; third, the superiority of European moral character over that of non-Europeans, and the potential of the latter to achieve a level of civilisation which will allow them to emulate this superior character; fourth, the absolute priority of environmental influences (over the reactive effects of physical type) in determining character. This model can be reconstructed by reference to Leyden's text but it is important not to exaggerate the consistency or coherence of Leyden's approach; for the most part the premises listed here are implicit.

To a certain extent some of these principles become explicit in later editions of the text. Under Hugh Murray's editorship there was extensive alteration and reorganisation of the content of Leyden's work, as well as expansion to accommodate new information. These alterations involved a shift in the theoretical perspective of the text and an increasing tendency to make explicit the model of difference which informs it.



Murray was born in 1779 at North Berwick. He was the son, the grandson, and the younger brother of ministers, but he did not become a minister himself. Instead he entered the Edinburgh excise office, while at the same time pursuing an interest in literature and philosophy. He wrote two novels (Murray, 1804, 1814) and two philosophical treatises (Murray 1805, 1808), and became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1816.

The following year he published his extended and revised edition of Leyden's *Historical and Philosophical Sketch* (Murray, 1817). Leyden had been dead for six years by that time but his text was still highly regarded and influential. Murray's revised edition of it met with success, and led to a decision to pursue geography as his principal study. His most celebrated work was an *Encyclopaedia of Geography* (Murray, 1834), which had large sales in the USA as well as in Scotland and England. He also wrote studies of India, China, the Polar regions and British America, as well as further work on Africa (Murray, 1829, 1831, 1832, 1836). Many of these texts contributions on natural history by various collaborators.

In discussing Murray's work I turn first to one of the philosophical treatises mentioned above, *Enquiries Historical and Moral, respecting the Character of Nations, and the Progress of Society* (1808). Curtin refers to this text as "an important and neglected work in the history of anthropological theory" (Curtin, 1965: p 246). He notes that although eighteenth century Scottish philosophers such as Robertson, Millar and Fergusson had produced models of social development, few had made a special study of the early stages of society (Harris, 1968: pp 29-35). This was Murray's project, and I will briefly outline the model of social evolution which he developed in pursuing it. However the interest of Murray's text in the present context is more specific, and concerns his treatment of the notion of "race".

The philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment proposed that general laws could be discovered which shaped (though they did not wholly determine) the nature of societies and their historical development. This involved the construction of dynamic models of society which were to supercede static studies of mercantilist economics, moral history and so on (Curtin, 1965: p 246; Harris, 1968: pp 48-52). In line with this aspect of Enlightenment philosophy, Murray bases his thesis on a dynamic model of progress. The model is environmentalist, and again this is consistent with the mainstream of Scottish eighteenth century philosophy; however he rejects the common eighteenth century view that climate was a direct and crucial influence on progress (Murray, 1808: pp 148-9).

In place of this view Murray substitutes a more complex theory. He refers to four progressive principles and two regressive principles which facilitate or impede progress. The progressive principles are increase in population density, free communication between and within societies, accumulation of wealth, and wars or revolutions. Each of these principles may have a negative effect in their first manifestation but tend to become a positive influence on progress as they accumulate. For example increased population density may be a problem for a subsistence economy but will tend to bring about progress in production techniques if the problem persists (Murray, 1808: pp 21-63).

The same notion of reversibility pertains for the two negative principles, which are "coercion" (by which Murray means structures of social subordination) and the necessity for labour (Murray, 1808: pp 64-95). All of these factors are related to each other in a hydraulic system of balances. For example if no other progressive principles are present, then wars or revolutions will be common in a society; if there is no social subordination, then the economy will be so labour intensive as to impede economic progress.



Like earlier Scottish philosophers, Murray refers to a number of different stages of society, each of which is more advanced than the one which precedes it (Harris, 1968: pp 29 ff). Murray discusses four stages, which he calls Primitive Society, Savagery, Barbarism, and Civilisation. Civilisation is defined in terms of a Eurocentric notion of "progress"; thus Murray asserts that the enquiry he proposes

... must be conducted with reference to man as a progressive being ... the aspect of human society is continually changing: it is continually becoming more numerous, more splendid, and more civilised. In modern Europe, above all... it has arrived at such a height, and is going on with such unprecedented rapidity, as imperiously to force itself on our attention ... (Murray, 1808: p 2)

Murray argues that throughout history the locus of civilisation has moved northwards; the earliest societies developed in warm climates but the most advanced contemporary societies are in the north. This is because the necessity for labour in warm climates is limited due to the favourable conditions for agriculture. Although this was an advantage in the early stages of human history it has led to stasis, since the extent of coercion is correspondingly great and impedes progress beyond a point prior to the development of Civilisation (1808: pp 147-148). Thus although Murray rejects the notion that climate has a direct influence on development, he sees a temperate climate as an indirect precondition for advanced progress (1808: pp 140-7).

Whereas the environmentalism and rationalism of Murray's thesis draw upon dominant positions in eighteenth century philosophy, and especially on themes developed by philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, there is another aspect of his text which is significantly novel. *Enquiries Historical and Moral* announces itself

as the first study to take as its primary object "the moral history of men... the manners and character of nations, and the circumstances on which these are dependant" (1808: p 1).

As I have pointed out, Murray adopts a Eurocentric standard of Civilisation. He concedes that some "nations ... may have remained for a long time stationary; nay, some have even experienced a retrogradation", but insists that "the general progress of the species" has been continuous and tends towards the standard set by European societies (1808: p 1). In accounting for variations from that standard, Murray's text seeks nothing less than the foundation of a science of "national character" which will establish "general laws" allowing explanation of the differences in moral character between nations. This science, by "shewing to every society the place which they occupy in the great chain of human things", will allow governments to make decisions calculated to encourage progress (1808: p 4).

Murray's project should be understood not only as a response to the increasing amount of knowledge concerning differences between European and other cultures which was becoming available in the early nineteenth century, and to the increasing significance of the notion of "nationhood" in early nineteenth century Europe (Williams, 1983: p 213; Smith, 1991: p 69; Anderson, 1991: pp 83 ff), but also as a response to the polygenesist account of "racial" difference referred to in Chapter Five. At the time of Murray's work on *Enquiries Historical and Moral* the significance of racialised physical characteristics was becoming an issue of increasing importance in discussions of human difference and its causes. This coincided with changes in meaning around the term "race", and Murray's text is of particular interest in this regard. In the course of a discussion of the distinction between cultural (or "moral") traits and physical characteristics, and of the extent to which these are inherited,



Murray attempts to differentiate explicitly and definitively between the notions of "race" and "nation". He rejects the view that there is some causal connection between biological and cultural traits, and uses an exclusively biological definition of "race" in order to do so.

### **Murray's Discussion of "National Character" and "Race"**

Murray defines a nation as "any number of men, who are united by the same common government, language, and habits of life...", excluding biological traits from consideration. He defines "national character" as consisting of those distinctive "moral peculiarities" which every such group possesses, arguing that

... even among the nations of Europe, whose progress in civilisation nearly approaches that of each other, this distinction is very decisively marked. But it becomes far more evident, when we consider man in his progressive state; when we contrast the naked savage, traversing the woods in quest of prey, with the polished and opulent inhabitants of an European city (1808: p 14).

Though presented as a supra-class phenomenon, "national character" is nothing of the kind. The European city presented here as a contrast to the savage state is a vision of bourgeois civil society, and excludes the working class experience of urban Europe.

Murray constructs an explanation of human difference which is based on the assumption that this idealised vision of European civilisation represents a standard against which extra-European societies should be judged. In doing so he takes up a monogenesist and environmentalist position. His monogenesism is evident in several parts of the text, and is made explicit in a passage from its introductory pages. Here Murray declares it

... a fundamental principle, that between any two great portions of the human species, (whatever be the age or country to which they belong) there exists no radical distinction; that the total amount of moral and intellectual endowments, originally conferred by nature, is altogether, or very nearly, the same ... (1808: p 14)

Second, and consistent with this monogenesist claim, he argues that the question of "moral peculiarities" is entirely a matter of the effects of the environment; "the wide differences we observe, arise wholly from the influence of external circumstances" (1808: p 14). In this comment Murray's position is similar to Leyden's. However his position is somewhat ambiguous, being qualified by the proviso that "A slight limitation of this maxim will be noted under the head of *Race*" (1808: p 14).

Turning to a section entitled "On Certain Circumstances, upon which National Character has been supposed to depend...", the reader finds a treatment of the difference between "national" and "racial" categories. "Races", Murray argues, are distinguished "by certain peculiarities of external organisation". These differences are produced by environmental factors but "when once formed, they are transmitted from one generation to another..." (1808: p 149).

Murray notes that ...

It has sometimes been supposed, that there are certain dispositions of mind corresponding to these varieties of external form; that national character, instead of being the result of the passions and habits to which men's situation excites them, is merely a stamp originally impressed upon certain tribes, and transmitted, without variation to all their posterity (1808: p 149).



In this passage Murray identifies the biological determinism which was frequently the concomitant of polygenist positions (Harris, 1968: p 87). However, in doing so he is careful to maintain the integrity and separation of the two notions he wishes to distinguish; these being "national character" and "race".

This is one of the most interesting features of Murray's text, as it shows how a shift in meaning can emerge from disputes between ideological positions. In opposing the view that biological difference is a prime determinant of moral character, Murray endorses and theorises the meaning of "race" which makes biological determinism "thinkable". That is to say that in summarising the polygenist position, Murray defines "race" as a (biologically defined) factor which is properly separable from, but which is wrongly supposed to be a cause of "national character". Denying this putative influence, Murray adduces as evidence the "national" variations among the ranks of such "racial" groups as the "Mongol", "African negroes" and "copper-coloured Americans". He notes that

... the three races, which are the most numerous and widely diffused, have no appearance of being distinguished by any particular moral characteristics (1808: p 150).

"Racial" differences must therefore be independent of national differences.

Having separated biological from cultural traits, and having placed them in different spheres, Murray now addresses the problem of inheritance. He concedes that "it must be admitted that national distinctions, like those of external form, do seem to be, in certain cases, hereditary" (1808: p 151). However he insists that this circumstance does not affect the strict distinction which he makes

between physical and cultural ("racial" and "national") traits. Significantly, his insistence collapses into empty assertion:

I think it is evident, that the characteristic qualities which are thus propagated (by inheritance), are wholly unconnected with those external marks by which races are distinguished: that they are indebted to moral causes for their original formation, and on the removal of these causes will, in a few generations, be altogether obliterated (1808: p 151, my parentheses).

The difficulty can easily be appreciated: Murray has to find some way of explaining the apparently consistent cultural characteristics of what he takes to be "national" groups. Given the project of establishing a science of "national character", it is essential to separate cultural traits from "racial" characteristics; the causal factors involved in their making must therefore be principally environmental rather than inherited.

Yet Murray supposes that some cultural traits can be inherited (a notion which is entirely consistent with eighteenth century environmentalist theory, but which is not explicitly discussed in, for example, Leyden's discussion of Africa). This raises the possibility of a causal connection between cultural traits and biological characteristics, since he accepts that the latter are certainly inherited. Having no means of arguing against such a connection from evidence or theory, Murray flatly rejects it, proclaiming that it is self-evidently incorrect. By describing collective national characteristics as inherited but wholly determined by environmental influences, Murray is able to maintain the integrity of his object of analysis. His arguments concerning the relation between "race" and "national character" are, in this sense, calculated to allow the construction of a new discipline.



Similarly, if Murray's theory of "national character" is to be successfully established, then its object must be distinguishable from individual character, otherwise the project has nothing to separate it from individualist approaches to moral philosophy. Murray therefore argues that the "general character" of a nation

... can with no propriety be considered as applying to every individual without distinction. When we say that a nation is honest, we merely say, that it contains a greater number of honest men, a greater amount of honesty on the whole, than most other nations (1808: p 14).

Here again, Murray's arguments can be understood as attempts to establish a distinct sphere of research with its own objects and aims.

More significantly than this, however, they constitute an opposition to polygenicism and biological determinism. In engaging with those positions, Murray defines the relation between "national identity" and "race" in a way which accords to the latter notion a specific significance: "race" is a matter of the body and especially of its external appearance. Furthermore, the biological or corporeal sphere is separable from the moral or social dimensions of human difference; indeed it must be separated, as a matter of philosophical strategy, in order to oppose the linkage between the two spheres which is asserted by polygenist and biological determinist positions. Like Leyden, Murray was a monogenist and an environmentalist. Unlike Leyden, he attempted to defend that position by making an absolute distinction between two spheres which, in Leyden's text, are not clearly separable. This difference between the two writers is especially interesting because, as I show below, when Murray revised Leyden's work he reframed it in terms of the model of human difference which is delineated in *Enquiries Historical and Moral*.

### Murray's Revisions of Leyden

The first revised edition of Leyden's work, published in 1817, produced a text which is radically different from the 1799 edition not only in prose style but also in the subjects it discusses and, most significantly for my purposes, in the way in which the ethnographical material is organised and explained. The edition fills two volumes and runs to one thousand pages, of which only one hundred and ninety six are taken from Leyden's original. These are revised by Murray, so that although the same information is conveyed, the wording is different. The theoretical framework of Leyden's arguments is also altered; in effect Murray imposes a new argument on the extensively edited and expanded material, and this argument is continued throughout the new work, which is entitled *Historical Account of Discoveries and Travels in Africa*.

Murray's version of Leyden's text begins by drawing a distinction between, on one hand, "foreign races" which rule northern Africa and, on the other, "native Africa; the population of which ... has been so long established as to ... appear now to be wholly indigenous" (Murray, 1817: p 476). The latter population is found south of a notional line which extends from the rivers Senegal and Niger in the west to the Mountains of the Moon in the east. Having made this distinction, Murray proceeds to discuss the characteristics of the two categories it constructs.

The discussion of populations north of the dividing line is broken down into sections dealing with each of several communities; the Moors and the Jews of Barbary, the Arabs of the rural districts, the "aboriginal races" of the mountains and deserts, the Copts of Egypt, and the Arabs and Negroes of Abyssinia are each described (1817: pp 476-484). Some, though not all of these populations are described in terms of phenotypical characteristics, and the moral characteristics



of all of them are discussed. For the most part Murray does not indicate whether or not specific moral traits are inherited.

Murray describes the Moors of the cities of Barbary as being "not a single race, but aggregated from several sources" (1817: p 476). As a result of generations of existence under "the minute severity of Mahometan institutions", the aggregate has been "moulded together", so that they are now indistinguishable from each other. Later Murray refers to the Moors as "an inferior race" compared to the Turks and mentions, as evidence, that they are "more mean, turbulent and treacherous" (1817: p 486).

Here, as in Leyden's text of 1799 (but somewhat inconsistently with Murray's 1808 text), cultural traits are mentioned as features of a "race". As in Leyden's study, no causal relation between biological and cultural characteristics is imputed or discussed. On the whole, however, Murray's usage of the term "race" is more specific than Leyden's. This is evident in his discussion of the Copts.

Murray describes the Copts, as a "native race" of "mixed origin", in whom

... the blood of the ancient Egyptians is adulterated by the confused mixture of the Persian, Grecian, Roman, and Arabian races (1817: p 480-2)

He traces the "racial" origins of the Copts and detects signs of those origins in their physical appearance, noting "The similitude of the modern Copt to the ancient Egyptian, in the more characteristic features, and in the colour of the skin ..." and suggesting that this is "an astonishing proof" that "The characteristic features of every race of men, by whatever causes they are produced, are difficult to be erased..." (1817: p 482).

However,

... when we turn our attention from the features to the minds of this race, we are mortified to discover few indications of that profound intelligence which marked the Egyptians, or that brilliant genius which characterised the Greeks, from whom the most considerable mixture of Coptic blood is derived (1817: p 482)

This observation is consistent with Murray's thesis in *Enquiries Historical and Moral*, insofar as it implies that the intellectual and moral degeneracy of the Copts has been developed or inherited independently of their physical characteristics.

The same distinction is made explicit in Murray's discussion of the "tribes belonging to the Negro race" which inhabit the areas south of the Mountains of the Moon. These tribes are described both in terms of their phenotypical characteristics and in terms of cultural traits (1817: pp 484 ff). However in referring to the latter Murray asserts that

... the character and state of society ... among the negro tribes ... cannot, I apprehend, be supposed to arise from any peculiarity of their race, but merely from the state of knowledge, government, facility of subsistence, and other causes, which act on the moral nature of man (1817: p 486).

In support of this claim he cites differences of moral character between physically similar sub-groups of the "negro race".

Consistent with the theory of civilisation presented in *Enquiries Historical and Moral*, Murray identifies specific environmental factors



which have brought about the moral and social condition of the "negroes". For example he attributes their "Improvidence, gentleness, and ... thoughtless gaeity" to the relative lack of necessity for labour in this part of Africa. Being unaffected by scarcity, the "negroes ... devote themselves wholly to pleasure". They lack one of the negative elements which can eventually force a society to progress, and have therefore remained at a low level of moral and social advancement (1817: p 485).

A number of the examples discussed above demonstrate the racist content of Murray's text. Like Leyden's study of Africa, Murray's adopts an environmentalist position while at the same time making racist assumptions and arguments. The major differences between Leyden's account and Murray's (apart from the greater volume of material in the latter) are, first, that Murray presents a more detailed account of the environmental factors affecting the characteristics of African populations; and, second, that whereas Leyden assumes an environmentalist position without problematising it or explicitly defending it, Murray spells out his opposition to the notion of biological determinism and presents evidence calculated to demonstrate its error.

#### ***Murray's Narrative of Discovery and Adventure in Africa***

In further editions of Murray's version of Leyden (eg Murray, 1818), more material is added to the text but the analysis is not significantly altered. However, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Murray produced another treatment of Africa which, though it draws upon the arguments of the 1817 volume, is in fact a different text. *Narrative of Adventures and Discoveries in Africa* was first published in Edinburgh in 1830. Written in collaboration with two natural scientists, it describes the flora, fauna and geography of the continent, as well as its history. The most significant part of the

text, for my purposes, is a chapter entitled *On the Social Condition of Africa* (1830: pp 306-329). Here, as in the revised version of Leyden, Murray begins by distinguishing between the "native races" and the "foreign races" of the continent (Murray, 1830: pp 306-7).

The "negroes" are "in that stage of society which is generally denominated barbarian" (1830: p 307), a circumstance which is evident from the primitive state of their agriculture, housing, commerce and monetary systems (1830: pp 307-312). Murray pays particular attention to the absence of private property, and especially of private land ownership, among "negroes", and links this to a putative lack of social stability and safety.

Every city or village is encircled by an unoccupied domain of forest or waste ... while the remainder forms an immense common ... There are in Africa no country-seats, no rural farms, such as embellish the aspect of a European landscape; and which in fact, could not exist in safety, where each little state is begirt with hostile neighbours, and so many predatory bands are prowling in every direction ... (1830: pp 307-8)

The rural idyll of European civilisation is contrasted with the anarchy of the barbarian state.

(Africa) ... has been the most conspicuous theatre of crime and of wrong; ... social life has lost the traces of primitive simplicity, without rising to order, principle or refinement; ... fraud and violence are formed into national systems, and man trembles at the sight of his fellow-man (1830: p 12).



This Hobbesian nightmare is not to be understood as a state of nature. Rather it is the result of the negroes' failure, having transcended savage society, to progress beyond barbarism and to reach the civilised stage of social development. The "original simplicity" of the savage state has been lost and "its place has not yet been supplied by the restraints of law and refinements of civilised society" (1830: p 317). This condition is attributed to the lack of those positive environmental elements which assist progress. This, and not any "original character stamped upon the race", is the cause of the deficient intellect of the "negro" (1830: p 487). Again Murray rejects any deterministic link between biological and cultural characteristics. In this respect the argument of the 1830 text is consistent with the environmentalism of Murray's revision of Leyden, and with his *Enquiries Historical and Moral*. In the latter text, however, the four stage model of the process of civilisation is not intrinsically racist, as it does not refer to racialised groups in order to establish its argument. In *Narrative of Adventures and Discoveries*, on the other hand, the barbarian state of the "negroes" is in itself a negatively assessed condition, and forms part of a racist, though environmentalist argument.

The other of the "two races ... native and foreign" to which Murray devotes space in this chapter are the Moors, whom he also refers to as "Arabs" or as "Musselmen" (1830: p 320). Murray's aversion to "Mohammedanism" and to the social conditions which accompany it are clear.

The Mohammedan religion, wherever it is established, has abolished the horrors of human sacrifice, - a great and important good. In all other respects, the introduction of this foreign race and foreign creed seems only to have deepened the evils under which Africa had formerly suffered (1830: p 322).

Murray's view of the Moors is in fact more negative than his assessment of the moral character of the "negroes", who are said to be "more liberal than the Moor ...". The Moorish "race", rather than the "negroes" have been responsible for most of the violence which Europeans in Africa have met (1830: p 319).

The final edition of the text was published in 1853 as *The African Continent: narrative of discovery and adventure*. The main substance of the text is unchanged from the 1830 edition, apart from the addition of accounts of further exploratory expeditions, and a number of new comments concerning the slave trade and colonisation. The latter are of some interest, as they argue for the positive influence of colonisation on the character of the African population, an influence which results from the "moral ascendancy" of the colonists (Murray, 1853: pp 464, 468). Together with extensive and approving discussions of the state of British trade with Africa (1853: pp 454-7, 440-1, 466-468), these passages indicate the ease with which imperialism could be supported from a philosophical position opposed to biological determinism but committed to "philanthropic" racism. Like Leyden's account of Africa and Murray's revisions of it, *The African Continent* presents an apologetic account of European civilisation, using racist arguments in order to establish Britain's natural right to extend capitalist exploitation in the African continent.

### **Conclusion**

The significance of the texts I have discussed in this chapter can be summarised in two stages. First, the three texts discussing Africa represent further evidence of the reproduction of racist ideology in nineteenth century Scotland. As syntheses of information concerning the continent, they draw upon the observations of explorers and other visitors to Africa and, in doing so, racialise and negatively assess



African populations. This is highly significant given the commercial success of the texts (as evidenced by successive reprintings) and their authoritative status throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

Second, comparison of all four texts demonstrates a shift in perspective regarding the significance of "race". This shift does not entail a rejection of environmentalism; all four texts are consistent with each other in this respect. Yet Murray's work is based on a perspective which is absent in Leyden's treatment of Africa. In its construction of imagined communities Leyden's text allows for attention to biological traits, alongside references to moral and behavioural differences. However in examining the detail of Leyden's arguments I have argued that he regards biological and cultural characteristics as interrelated elements of "character", co-existing under the overarching influence of environmental factors. His approach does not allow for the possibility that the biological make-up of an individual or group may be the primary cause of moral character. Significantly, examination of the relations of discursive process between terms signifying difference and collectivity in Leyden's work shows that he does not reserve any one term for reference to biological characteristics; he has no need for such a term, as he does not demarcate a biological realm requiring special attention or laden with special explanatory significance.

The most novel element in Murray's work, on the other hand, and an element which is not present in the eighteenth century Scottish philosophical tradition on which he draws, is a new kind of attention to relations between "race" and "nation". Murray effects a definitive separation of biology from culture, reserving "race" for reference to the biological traits of communities and using "nation" to refer to cultural (or "moral") communities. I have argued that his attention to the definition of "race", and to the import of biological

characteristics, marks a significant difference from Leyden's work. Furthermore it is part of a critical response, on Murray's part, to the growing prominence of biological determinism and polygenicism. Murray is involved in a conflict between opposed ideological positions. Being fought out in a discursive arena, this conflict entails shifts in meaning, and shifts in the relations between key terms such as "race" and "nation". In his defence of environmentalism Murray makes a tactical engagement with these discursive shifts. In order to attack biological determinism and polygenicism he adopts a usage of "race" which refers exclusively to the biological characteristics of a social collective; a usage which helped to make biological determinism "thinkable". In this sense Murray's work takes part in an ideological struggle over the meaning of a term which was to acquire key significance in nineteenth and twentieth century social science.

The discursive shift which Leyden's and Murray's texts demonstrate is not chronologically discrete; it is not a matter of the sudden and absolute displacement of one way of constructing imagined communities by another. Rather the shift is uneven. As I pointed out earlier, polygenicism positions were developed in the eighteenth century by several prominent commentators, including Scottish philosophers such as David Hume. However polygenicism and biological determinism did not begin to become dominant positions until the 1820's and 1830's (Harris, 1968: pp 83 ff; Curtin, 1965: p 235; Stepan, 1982: pp 20-46). On the other hand environmentalist positions continued to be maintained well into the period when biological determinism achieved this dominance, as the final edition of Murray's text on Africa demonstrates.

Neither is this shift limited to the particular texts I have examined in this chapter, or to texts produced in Scotland. As Harris indicates, every significant discussion of human difference written in



Europe and the United States during the first six decades of the nineteenth century was concerned with the ideological conflict between monogenesis and polygenesis (Harris, 1968: p 93). At the time when Murray was writing his *Enquiries Historical and Moral*, he was almost certainly aware of the work of polygenesists such as White (1799), and Kames (1793). It is also likely that he was familiar with the arguments of monogenesists such as Blumenbach (1865) and Buffon (1800). These references further emphasise that early nineteenth century Scottish writers were engaged with international debates concerning the significance and explanation of human difference.

I have suggested that the group of Scottish texts discussed in this chapter is of particular interest because of their intertextuality and, within that, their differences of theoretical perspective. In order to explore this theme further, it will be relevant to look at texts whose position is supportive of biological determinism and opposed to environmentalism. In the next chapter I will do this by analysing Scottish texts which made a significant contribution to the development of that ideological position.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### PHRENOLOGY AND RACISM IN SCOTLAND

#### Introduction

In Chapters Five and Six I examined texts concerning one continent but representing a number of different disciplines and sources. In this chapter I take a different approach, examining one early nineteenth century discipline, phrenology, and looking in detail at its arguments and assumptions concerning population groups located throughout the world. Being drawn from one discipline, the range of texts to be examined here is more restricted than was the case in Chapters Five and Six. Nevertheless, my aim is to use an approach similar to that applied to the texts on Africa: that is, to examine the kinds of social collectivity which phrenology constructed as its objects and, using the concept of racism, to analyse the ideological content of phrenological arguments.

Why devote an entire chapter to phrenology? Although, in the early nineteenth century, phrenology was a contender for institutional acceptance as a legitimate academic science, by the mid-century it had decisively failed to win the support of the mainstream scientific institutions. By the end of the century many of the doctrines and theories which had won it international attention from a scientific and popular audience had virtually disappeared in Scotland and elsewhere in Europe; insofar as it continued to be practiced at all it was regarded by legitimised science as being of no more significant than arcane practices such as palmistry or astrology.



This is not a ground for ignoring phrenology, however. As Foucault's work suggests, the organising assumptions and premises of a discursive formation are not only to be found in those disciplines which achieve recognition as legitimate science. In fact, there are several reasons for examining the content of phrenological theories and doctrines. First, the discipline represents an early instance of an attempt to establish, by putatively scientific methods, the existence and the order of "racial" types and "racial" hierarchies. Phrenology established the principle that measurement of the skull and the brain was a key to the categorisation and description of "races". Unlike some other aspects of phrenology, this principle was not quickly discredited; on the contrary, it had a lasting influence on subsequent biological determinist theories of "race". Phrenology is therefore a significant element in the history of scientific racism (Stepan, 1982: p 28; 1990: p 46; Gould, 1981: p 92).

Second, although a considerable sociological and anthropological literature on the social context and significance of phrenology is available, little of it attends to the racist aspect of the discipline in any detail (de Giustano, 1972, 1975; Shapin, 1975a, 1975b; Cooter, 1984 for social scientific approaches to phrenology; Harris, 1968: p 99; Stepan, 1982: pp 20-28; 1990: pp 46-47 deal with its racist aspect). A final reason for choosing to investigate phrenology in the course of a thesis on the history of racism in Scotland is that Scottish phrenologists played a central role in popularising phrenology in Britain and internationally (Cantor, 1975; Shapin, 1975a; Cooter, 1984). The history of the discipline therefore demonstrates the rôle of members of the Scottish intelligentsia in propagating arguments concerning the hierarchical arrangement of "races". Before going on to look in detail at these aspects of phrenology it will be helpful to explain something of its history and intellectual content.

## **What was Phrenology?**

Today most people, if they have any notion at all of what the term "phrenology" refers to, probably think of it as being to do with analysing the shape of a head in order to claim some insight into the personality of its "owner". There were phrenologists who claimed no more than this for their practice. However phrenology's original practitioners, theorists and advocates claimed for the discipline the prestige and significance of an authentic science. "Science, from the Latin word *Scientia*," wrote Hewett Watson in his review and celebration of phrenology's national popularity, "literally signifies Knowledge: but common acceptation limits the application of the term to a knowledge of the facts and laws of nature" (Watson, 1836a: p 1). Phrenology claimed to be a science of previously undiscovered laws of nature governing the character of individuals and the structure and history of societies.

The fundamental premise of phrenology was that the brain is the organ of the mind. While this was not a highly controversial proposition in the early nineteenth century, it was not universally accepted. Models of the human constitution which located mental functions, feelings and emotions in various parts of the body still had some currency. The theory of the passions located these phenomena in the heart, for example, while the physiological orthodoxy that the soul was the repository of the will and of sensations was displaced by theories of the nervous system only in the latter half of the eighteenth century (Cooter, 1984: p 3; Lawrence, 1976, 1979: p 24).

Phrenology was innovative not only in asserting that questions of mind could be translated into, and indeed were nothing other than, questions of physiology and anatomy, but also in arguing that the brain was composed of multiple organs, each of which was the physical



embodiment and the means of a different mental function. These functions were referred to as *faculties*. Various speculations concerning the cerebral compartmentalisation of mental functions had been made since the time of Plato, but phrenology claimed that the anatomical and physiological investigation of the brain could establish definitively, without speculation, the physical location of psychological phenomena. Cooter argues that the methodology through which phrenologists obtained their schema of the physiology of the brain was in fact speculative, and that the anatomical and physiological experiments used to "demonstrate" the validity of the schema were of little relevance to the substance of the phrenological thesis (Cooter, 1984: pp 3-4). Nevertheless, phrenology's claim to originality and significance rested on rejection of speculative philosophy and on an insistence that only the techniques of natural science could provide a rational account of human behaviour and psychology.

Two other claims were central to the phrenological model of mind. First, it was held that the size of any organ of the brain was directly related to the power of the mental faculty with which it was associated. Second, the shape of the skull was supposed to correspond to and reflect the outer conformation of the brain. The putative consequence of the latter claim was that features of an individual's character, abilities and defects could be read off from the shape of the skull of the living individual or from the cast of the skull of a dead person. The practice of such techniques brought phrenology many converts but also attracted ridicule from contemporary critics of its pretensions (de Giustano, 1975: p 12).

The faculties which phrenologists claimed to have identified were categorised, on a dualist principle, as *feelings* and *intellectual faculties*. Feelings were further subdivided into *propensities*, which humans had in common with other animals (examples of these were

*amativeness*, which "produces sexual love", *combativeness*, *destructiveness* and *constructiveness*) and *sentiments*. The latter were again sub-divided: sentiments common to humans and some animals included *self-esteem*, *love of approbation*, *cautiousness* and *benevolence*; sentiments found only in humans included *veneration* (which "gives origin to religious adoration"), *firmness*, *hope*, *wit* and *conscientiousness*.

Intellectual faculties consisted of four types: those which were associated with the senses (*feeling*, *taste*, *smell*, *hearing* and *sight*); those which "perceive the existence and qualities of external objects" (*form*, *size*, *weight* and so on); those which "perceive the relations of external objects", including *locality*, *number*, *order*, *time* and *language*; and finally the *reflecting faculties*. The latter were comprised of *comparison* (which "gives the power of discovering analogies, resemblances and differences") and *causality* (which "traces the dependencies of phenomena, and the relations of cause and effect"; all quotations from Combe, 1847: pp 14-15)

To read from the beginning to the end of each of these two lists is to progress from what phrenologists regarded as the basest faculties, those associated with animality, to the most superior and the most human. In phrenology's anatomical geography of the brain, the various faculties were located in organs arranged in a way which symbolised their relative importance. While the baser faculties were literally located at the base of the brain, the higher, uniquely human sentiments and the intellectual faculties were located nearer the vault of the skull. All of the faculties were potentially useful and necessary for a "well-organised" brain. A deficiency or an excess of any of them, however, might lead to aberrant behaviour or a flawed character. For example "Attachment, friendship and society" resulted from the organ which governed the feeling of *amativeness*, but its



abuse could lead to "Clanship for improper objects, attachment to worthless individuals" (Combe, 1847: p 14).

These claims were first brought together in the work of Franz Joseph Gall and Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, two physicians who were trained in Vienna but who carried out most of their original research in France. From 1805, Gall and Spurzheim toured Europe in order to present demonstrations and lectures, having been forced by the Austrian government to leave the country because of controversy over the materialist tendency of their claims. Gall, whose anatomical research established him as a key figure in the history of neuro-anatomy (despite the disrepute into which phrenology eventually fell) settled in Paris (Clarke and Jaynce, 1987: pp 220-244; Brazier, 1988: pp 114-117). Spurzheim continued to travel and, in 1814, arrived in Britain where he continued both to propagate the results of his work with Gall and to develop their conclusions along lines which eventually led to a rift between the two colleagues. Spurzheim, unlike Gall, regarded their anatomical research as a mere starting point. Not content with the attempt to establish the anatomy of the brain and its relation to mental functions, he envisaged a complete philosophy or science of human nature and human interaction (de Giustano, 1975: p 15; Brazier, 1988: pp 115-117).

Spurzheim's phrenology emphasised the interaction of the mental "organs", proposing that the hierarchical organisation of the brain allowed some faculties to override others. The balance between the "power" (and, concomitantly, size) of the organs determined the personality and character of an individual; thus it was desirable that a favourable balance should exist between the various propensities and sentiments. It was especially desirable that the superior sentiments and the intellectual faculties should dominate the baser sentiments and the feelings. In an individual whose base, animal feelings were dominant (that is, an individual in whose brain the

organs of the higher sentiments and the reflecting faculties were relatively underdeveloped) there was little hope of a refined, civilised, or industrious character being evident. On the other hand an individual's capacities could equally well be marred by a deficiency in the lower faculties. For example it was important to have a certain measure of the animal faculty of *combativeness*, provided that this was under the control of the higher faculties. *Combativeness* gave necessary courage but, if unrestrained or overdeveloped, led to "Love of contention, and tendency to provoke and assault" (Combe, 1847: p 14). That is, brutal, animalistic behaviour would be produced by the overdevelopment or unrestrained operation of an animal faculty.

Despite the limitations imposed on individual ability by the organisation of the brain, phrenologists argued that a certain amount could be done to alter the balance between the faculties and propensities of a given individual. Indeed one reason for phrenology's popularity was its offer of an apparently scientific programme of self-improvement. This programme consisted in an effort to exercise and thus strengthen those higher faculties which were known, as a result of a "reading" of the skull by a trained practitioner, to be deficient in power. Given a mental organ of a certain size, exercise of the faculty which it embodied could maximise its potential. Ultimately however, the capabilities of an individual were limited by the relative sizes of the various organs of the brain: "The effects of education ... are limited by the size of the organs. When these are defective, education is impossible." (Combe, 1836: p 23).

A second important trend in phrenology was the application of phrenological theory to social problems, and particularly to problems of social reform. Like the theory of the interaction of the cerebral organs, this trend developed after Spurzheim's intellectual departure



from Gall. Phrenologists believed that the liberal reform of social institutions could be effected by the application of scientific knowledge, and they argued that phrenology could provide rational solutions to social problems by elucidating the relationship between mental constitution and social environment. For example phrenologists were involved in debates over educational, penal and political reform (eg Combe, 1847: pp 67-84). Social reform was a predominant theme in the work of Scottish phrenologists who, in pursuing this line of enquiry, regarded themselves as inheritors of the tradition of Scottish moral philosophy. More than this, they considered their work to be the first scientific and non-speculative approach to the questions posed by philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment.

The economy of the self offered by phrenology elevated reason and morality above feeling and impulse. This was by no means a novelty; as a premise of moral philosophy it can be traced back to Aristotlean theory. What is more significant is that the phrenological account of mind used abstract concepts to refer to complex, human capacities, and reified those concepts so that they were understood as the natural and universal functions of "cerebral organs". This statement requires some elaboration in order that its significance for the racist tendency of phrenological theory can be appreciated.

Many of the phrenological faculties were representations of traits which can be described as culturally specific complexes of social and psychological skills; examples of these are powers of reasoning and tendencies to behave according to a particular set of moral standards. In phrenology these traits were universalised and treated as unitary phenomena. Being universal they were invulnerable to cultural relativism: being unitary they were capable of being rooted in anatomical substrates; the organs of the brain. This fundamental feature of phrenology, which epitomises many of the

aspects of ideological reasoning discussed in Chapter Two, is echoed in the twentieth century "intelligence quotient test" (Gould, 1984: pp 23-25). Just as the IQ test reifies a culturally relative notion of "intelligence", phrenology reified (and found a biological cause for) a wide range of abilities and traits. As I explain below, this feature of the theory allowed for the racialisation of virtually all aspects of human behaviour.

### Phrenology in Scotland

The first five decades of the nineteenth century were the period of greatest popular and scientific interest in phrenology, and at the height of that interest, in the 1840's and 1850's, Edinburgh was the most important centre of phrenological activity in Europe (De Giustano, 1975; Cooter, 1984). The most significant figure involved in bringing this about was George Combe, whose involvement in the discipline began at the time of Spurzheim's visit to Edinburgh in 1815. Indeed, the development of phrenology throughout Europe and the USA was linked to Combe's widely-read and highly influential work (De Giustano, 1975: pp 24-25; Cooter, 1984: p 101; Clarke and Jaynce, 1987: pp 143-144; Brazier, 1988: p 115).

Combe's most popular and influential publication was *The Constitution of Man considered in Relation to External Objects*. First published in 1828, this work had sold over 80,500 copies by 1847 and was translated into several European languages (Cooter, 1984: p 120; 1989: p 72). Some idea of the significance of such a circulation can be grasped by comparing it to that of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, which sold 16,000 copies in Britain during the fifteen years following its publication (de Giustano, 1975: p 3). By 1860 (thirty-two years after its first publication) approximately 100,000 copies of *The Constitution of Man* had been sold in Britain and around 200,000 had been sold in the U.S.A. (Cooter, 1984: p 120).



Combe was based in Edinburgh throughout his career and was the key figure in the formation of the first Phrenological Society of Edinburgh. This remained the best equipped and most renowned of the phrenological societies which, during the following decade, sprang up in towns and cities all over Britain. There were many Societies in Scotland, particularly active centres (other than Edinburgh) being in Dundee and Glasgow (Watson, 1836a; de Giustano, 1975: p 3). Eventually, as phrenologists directed their social and psychological doctrines beyond the bourgeoisie to the skilled working class, Mechanics Institutes too acquired the classic phrenological texts and *The Phrenological Journal*, the national journal of phrenology which was published in Edinburgh until 1848 (Cooter, 1984: pp 160-165).

A further indication of Scotland's importance as an area of phrenological activity is that a large proportion of British lecturers on phrenology were born in Scotland or had their education and training there. Of a sample of two hundred and eleven public lecturers compiled by Cooter, fifty-five were born, educated or trained in Scotland (Cooter, 1984: pp 272-300). This represents a high proportion given the difference in population between Scotland and the rest of Britain.

By the mid-century phrenology had "infused itself into common language and thought" (Cooter, 1984: p 135), having extended its constituency to the educated working class, partly through its inclusion in the curricula of Mechanics' Institutes and the Study Groups associated with them (1984: pp 136-137, 145-151, 158-161). However in terms of its status as a science phrenology declined during the second half of the century. By the 1890's it had completely lost credibility as a scientific discipline. Contemporary commentators blamed this development on the "vulgarisation" of phrenology; that is, they regretted the increasing number of working class phrenologists and phrenological clients. However Cooter argues

that the decline of the discipline as a practice with scientific pretensions was linked to the hostility it encountered from the beginning in the established journals and societies of "legitimate" science. *The Phrenological Journal and Miscellany* was established after a discussion at the second session of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society in 1820, where it was proposed that, due to the opposition to phrenology of "the Editors of the Periodical Publications, both in London and Edinburgh", a "Phrenological Magazine and Review" should be published (Edinburgh Phrenological Society, 1821: p 15).

It is significant that this journal was set up in response to a lack of sympathy with phrenology on the part of established journals. Periodicals such as *The Gentleman's Quarterly* and *The Edinburgh Review* provided an important forum for intellectual and political debate in nineteenth century Britain and the editorial positions of the most prestigious journals, of which *The Edinburgh Review* was one, were extremely influential. The *Review's* position on phrenology was hostile throughout the rise in popularity of what it saw as a dangerous intellectual fraud (Cantor, 1975; Cooter, 1984: pp 22-28). In the context of this marginalised position, *The Phrenological Journal* served as an alternative to the mainstream journals, just as the Phrenological Societies served as substitutes for the learned societies from which most phrenologists were excluded.

Cooter argues that advocates and practitioners of phrenology tended to be characterised by a common socio-economic position.

... what *by and large* distinguishes those attracted to phrenology was their recently heightened sense of social worth being incommensurate with their place and power in the social process (Cooter, 1984: p 47).



Combe and other young Scottish men who embraced phrenology wholeheartedly in the early decades of the century tended to be aspirant professionals who had not yet secured a respectable status or income in their fields. To these individuals a philosophical and practical career in phrenology was particularly attractive as it appeared to afford a means of acquiring status and authority (albeit in a marginalised field) to which their class position and their career position denied them access in the world of the learned Societies and "legitimate science".

However by the mid-century it was increasingly clear that the learned Societies would not accept phrenology as a legitimate science. Such acceptance was made even less likely by the increasing popularity of the discipline among the working class. As the early generation of Scottish phrenologists grew older they tended to abandon the discipline, often establishing themselves as legitimate professionals and denying their phrenological past as they also denied any former radical sympathies.

Nevertheless, in its hey-day phrenology commanded a large constituency of practitioners and adherents from diverse class backgrounds. This widespread popularity (and, as I argue below, phrenology's lasting influence on scientific racism) makes investigation of the content of its arguments and theories particularly relevant.

### **Imagined Communities**

Having introduced the theory and the history of phrenology, I turn now to a more specific analysis of its ideological content. In doing so I follow the same procedure as in Chapters Five and Six, looking first at the imagined communities which are constructed as objects

of investigation in phrenological texts before examining the racist content of phrenological arguments.

I noted above that phrenological theory was founded on the reification of human capacities which were said to be embodied in anatomical organs of the brain. This founding principle of phrenology parallels a type of argument and supposition typical of racialisation. Ideological processes which naturalise the social by eliciting from the body signs of its membership of a supposedly biologically-founded social collective are, by definition, processes of racialisation. Phrenology sought in the body the physical substrates of behavioural and social characteristics, and attributed these characteristics to social collectives as well as to individuals. This is not to say that all of phrenology can be described in terms of racialisation. It does mean, as I argue below, that racialisation is central to the explanations of social organisation and social behaviour which phrenology offered.

In offering examples of the phenomena which phrenology claimed to explain, phrenological texts frequently refer to the characteristics of individual personalities; characteristics which are then shown to correspond to the phrenological pattern of the individual's skull. This correspondence is taken to have explanatory significance, the individual's cerebral organisation explaining his or her character and behaviour. As a reviewer remarked of Combe's account of the phrenological types he encountered in the United States, every phrenological investigation confirms "the grand theory".

One would like to find a little discrepancy now and then; but no such thing ever occurs. Phrenology is a rule without any exceptions (Anon, 1841: p 245).



The structure of the "rule" of phrenology is:

- 1) The owner of head *x* is known to have (or have had) characteristics A and B
- 2) A phrenological analysis of head *x* reveals that the proportions of the organs of the brain favour the expression of characteristics A and B.
- 3) Therefore the phrenological theory is supported by examination of this case.

A large proportion of the content of phrenological texts, including *The Constitution of Man* and many of the articles published in *The Phrenological Journal*, consist of analyses of this kind, plotting the character of an individual against his or her phrenological profile and thereby simultaneously providing both an explanation of the individual's character and a "proof" of the coherence and validity of phrenological principles. In many cases the operation of the various faculties is illustrated by reference to well-known historical and contemporary figures such as King Robert the Bruce, Robert Burns, William Hare and Martin Luther (eg Combe, 1836: pp 57, 63; 1847: p 41; Smith, 1838: p 144). Many of these examples, perhaps two dozen of which recur in phrenological texts published in Britain, are presented as famous instances of particular character traits. For example the head of Robert the Bruce demonstrates the physiology of courage (Smith, 1838: p 144), whereas Sheridan demonstrates intelligence marred by "degrading and discreditable vices" and so on (Combe, 1847: p 41).

In *The Constitution of Man*, in the course of demonstrating the significance of the relative size of the animal propensities in comparison to the higher faculties, Combe refers to William Hare, "the associate of Burke"

... who, acting in concert with him, strangled sixteen individuals in Edinburgh for the purpose of selling their bodies for dissection. In this head the organs of the animal propensities decidedly preponderate over those of the moral sentiments and intellect (1847: p 41).

Where such well-known cases are referred to, the "proof" of phrenology is premised on the reader's awareness that the individuals concerned are famous or notorious for the characteristics in question. The individual examples function, in other words, as moral or psychological archetypes.

Not all of the archetypical examples are individuals however. There is in phrenology a tendency to slide from the description of individual characteristics to the description of group characteristics (Stepan, 1982: p 23). Here is Combe, demonstrating a point while lecturing on the significance of the organ of *philoprogenitiveness*, which putatively governed affection for children.

Here is the skull of a negro; this of a Scotch highlander; this of a Charib from the island of St. Vincent: see how large the organ is developed - and these people strikingly manifest love of children (Combe, 1839: p 140).

The skulls referred to in this comment are representative of collective types ("the Scotch highlander", "the negro") rather than individuals. Similarly, according to Combe's *Elements of Phrenology*

*Philoprogenitiveness*

... is large in Robert Burns, and in the Hindoo, Negroe, Esquimaux, Ceylonese, and Carib skulls; and small in the Peruvian skull ... (Combe, 1836: p 57)



Combativeness is

... generally large in persons who have murdered from the impulse of one moment. It is large in the Caribs, King Robert the Bruce, General Wurmser, Hoggart, Maxwell, Linn; moderate in Rev. Mr. M., and small in most of the Hindoo and Ceylonese (1836: p 63).

Destructiveness

... in Bellingham may be compared with the same organ in the skulls of Hindoos, the latter people being in general tender of life ... (1836: p 68)

In some instances the way in which these examples are cited could, arguably, be taken to suggest that only the characteristics of particular, individual skulls are being referred to. The quotation concerning Philoprogenitiveness, for example, can be read as referring to particular, individual skulls ("this skull, which happens to be Ceylonese", rather than "the Ceylonese skull in general" or "all Ceylonese skulls"). In other cases, however, the reference is certainly to a collective type. Combativeness is large in *all* Caribs, Destructiveness small in *all* Hindoos. This kind of assumption is also clear in the following passage, which discusses Constructiveness:

(It is) large in the ancient Greek skulls ... small in the New Hollanders, who are remarkable for an extreme deficiency of constructive talent (1836: p 74).

Here the New Hollanders are referred to collectively, as a type which is "known" to display certain characteristics, just as Sheridan is "known" to have displayed others. This explains the apparent category error found in statements such as the following:

The organ is large in... the Peruvians, American Indians ...  
David Hoggart, and Hindoos ... (1836: p 69)

The logic of comparing "David Hoggart" with "American Indians", apparently examples of different category types, depends on an assumption that all American Indians share the same neuro-anatomy and, therefore, the same character. The skulls referred to are archetypes of the social collectives to which they are supposed to belong.

For the most part this slide from individual to collective objects of investigation is unannounced. However it is notable that even when it is explicitly discussed no explanation or justification is offered. The following passage from an article in *The Phrenological Journal* illustrates the way in which the racialisation of social collectives is taken for granted in phrenological texts:

If the peculiarities of individual character are so easily referable to, and explicable by, the principles of Phrenology ... it is natural to suppose that those of national character will admit of as simple a reference and explanation (Combe, A., 1836: p 337).

The "naturalness" of this supposition arises directly from the reification of human capacities. If every social and psychological skill is a unitary and measurable faculty with an anatomical substrate, then the supposed collective differences between imagined communities must be grounded in collective biological differences. In this sense the racialisation of collectives is a central and fundamental feature of phrenological theory. Furthermore it is a feature which recurs frequently in almost all Scottish phrenological texts.



## "Nations" and "Races"

In explaining such collective differences, what kind of imagined communities did phrenology construct as objects of enquiry? In her historical review of scientific racism, Stepan comments that in phrenology,

Supposed national traits, often established by the most cursory knowledge of a people, were correlated with faculties of a "race" established by head measurements, and the faculties in turn used to explain national cultural styles (Stepan, 1982: pp 24-25).

In fact this comment implies a more coherent and systematic notion of the relation between "race" and "nation" than can be found in most phrenological texts. Stepan's comment implies that phrenologists employed more or less clearly distinguished and defined usages of the terms "nation" and "race", and that they accounted for "national characteristics" in terms of the "racial" composition of "nations". In most phrenological texts, however, there is a more ambiguous relation between the terms "nation" and "race" than is suggested by Stepan's argument.

This ambiguity is evident in an article published in *The Phrenological Journal* (Anon, 1834-6), entitled *The Physiological Characters of Races of Mankind Considered in Their Relations to History*. The title of the article is the title of the publication which the article reviews. However, like other nineteenth century journals, *The Phrenological Journal* repeats the title in running headings at the top of each of the pages on which the article appears, allowing ease of reference for the browsing reader. It is significant that the editor of the journal (George Combe, who also wrote many of the articles in the journal), substituted a different title for the page headings of this

article: *Hereditary Descent of the Physical Characteristics of Nations*. The exchange of "Nations" for "Races" implies the synonymy of the two terms and thus casts doubt on Stepan's claim that phrenologists sought correlations between traits which were categorised, in some more or less systematic way, as either "racial" or "national" traits.

The ambiguity of phrenological usage of the term "nation" can be further illustrated by reference to a catalogue published in 1838 by Anthony O'Neill and Sons, Artists to the Phrenological Society of Edinburgh. Many of the phrenological examples which appear in phrenological texts published in Scotland (and in England) were drawn from the collections of skulls and casts held by phrenologists and phrenological societies. These collections were the most important research resource available to phrenologists, and the most important collection of all was held by the Phrenological Society of Edinburgh. O'Neill and Sons' *Catalogue of Casts of Skulls of Different Nations, selected from the Museum of the Phrenological Society, Edinburgh* lists a large number of items available to the phrenological enthusiast, including casts of an Icelandic skull, a Swiss skull, a Hindoo ("affording, as nearly as possible, an average specimen"), a Negro, an Ashantee, a Charib, and twenty four others. A footnote to the advertisement comments that:

With a few exceptions in which the Society possessed only one or two of the same nation, each skull was selected from a number of the same tribe or nation, so as to present as nearly as possible, a type of the whole in the Society's collection (Artists to the Phrenological Society, 1838: p 1).

It is unclear, from this list and from the notes attached to it, what a "nation" is supposed to be. The note quoted above refers to the



category "tribe" alongside "nation", but the relationship between these terms is not specified. Furthermore, since the title of the catalogue refers exclusively to "Skulls of Different Nations", it seems that, for O'Neill and Sons' purposes at least, the category "tribe" is either synonymous with or subsumed by the category "nation". Yet the notion of collectivity at work here does not depend on the political nationhood of the groups referred to. Several of the items in the list refer to examples of members of political nation-states but others, for example the "Ashantee" and "Negro" skulls, do not.

This ambiguity recurs in texts on phrenological theory. In *Elements of Phrenology* Combe notes that the faculty of *Ideality* is

... larger in civilised than in savage nations; in the European, for example, than in the Negro, American Indian and New Hollander (Combe, 1836: p 69).

Here both "the European" and the "American Indian" are referred to as "national" categories. These examples indicate that phrenologists used the term "nation" to refer to a variety of kinds of collective, often without making any clear distinction between them.

This does not mean that the inconsistency with which different collective categories are used in phrenological texts is arbitrary or insignificant. On the contrary, in many cases it is the incoherent result of attempts to resolve the ambiguity of category-terms. For example an attempt to address the question of the relation between "nations" and "races" can be found in one of Combe's earliest publications, *Essays on Phrenology* (Combe, 1819). Here Combe notes that Gall considered the great variation between individuals an obstacle to making any useful comment on "national" character. Any such project would require analysis of "a great number of

individuals, - entire regiments -, the whole nation so far as possible". Combe` rejects this argument on the grounds that Gall "overstates the extent of the differences between individual skulls belonging to the same people" (1819: p 334). However he does recognise that there is a problem concerning the relationship between "racial" and "national" categories. This relates to the question of the accessibility of different collective categories to phrenological analysis. He concedes that:

The variety of tribes of mankind is very great, and the political do not always coincide with the natural divisions of the races. A collection of Russian crania, for instance, might contain almost every variety of the human species, except Negroes; they would all be Russians politically; but in their natural characteristics they would belong to the Celtic, Teutonic, Mongolian, and Circassian races, and their varieties (1819: p 335).

In view of this circumstance

Distinct and well-marked tribes alone should be considered as nations when we are considering the peculiarities of national skulls; but if this be done, it appears to me that the study is possible, because a general type pervades the great majority of each tribe (1819: p 335).

Combe concludes by noting that

... a peculiar character pervades the skulls of each nation which strikingly distinguishes them from others. It is not extraordinary that this should be so, considering that the nation consists of individuals, whose characteristics are closely analogous (1819: p 336).



The argument presented in these passages can be summarised as follows. Combe begins by drawing a distinction between two ways in which population groups can be categorised; according to biological criteria and on a social or political basis. He goes on to note that the political and the "natural" divisions of collectives are not coincident, and suggests that only one type of collective can be analysed successfully by phrenological methods. Only the "natural" divisions of populations provide collectives with enough internal consistency of type to facilitate the phrenological project, and so Combe concludes that populations with the same "natural characteristics" are the appropriate objects of analysis.

However the presentation of this argument introduces a number of ambiguities and slippages around the terms used to designate collective categories. The equivalences between the terms "nation", "race", "variety" and "tribe" shift throughout these passages, in a way which, though confused, is not entirely arbitrary. In the opening sentence "tribes" and "races" are equivalent terms, and designate populations which have both political and natural divisions. In the following sentence "race" is used to refer to biological collectives internal to the politically defined category "Russians". In the second passage "tribes" and "nations" are equivalent terms, and both refer to the biological collectives which phrenology is competent to analyse. Finally, in the last passage, the "nation" is defined as a population group whose individual members display a homogeneity of natural characteristics.

The significant point here concerns the circularity of argument which allows Combe to assert that "a peculiar character pervades the skulls of each nation which strikingly distinguishes them from others". This claim is made in the form of an empirical observation which is consistent with the preceding argument: "nations" exhibit an internal

homogeneity of phrenological characteristics, and this is because their members are of the same "natural" variety. However the argument is vacuous, since it merely repeats a definition in the form of an observation. Given the labour which Combe invests in distinguishing between natural and political divisions, and the care with which he attempts to establish a justification for dismissing Gall's caution, this sleight of hand is significant. The incoherence of Combe's argument results from his determination to show that the "nation" is amenable to phrenological analysis by virtue of its "natural" constitution, despite the fact that the category has an irreducibly political dimension.

#### **Identity, National Sovereignty and Biological Determinism**

The significance of the claim that "nations" are based on "naturally" constituted categories can be illuminated further by reference to phrenological discussions of national independence and self-government. In an article on *Our Rule in India* Combe comments on the relation between national sovereignty and "racial" character.

Love of independence is an elementary feeling in human nature which cannot be extinguished ... In our social capacity as a nation or a tribe, the same feeling assumes the form of love of national independence, or patriotism. In India we are conquerors. Our superior prowess has extinguished all national independence there. The people are ruled by men alien in race, in religion and in language. No argument will persuade me that this can be acceptable to the people of India ... It is immoral to dominate over an inferior race, and to deprive them of national existence (Combe, 1858: pp 2-3).



This explicitly anti-colonialist argument suggests that the "race" or "nation" indigenous to India have a natural right to sovereignty. It also belies the oversimplification of Fryer's comment that "phrenology justified empire-building" (Fryer, 1984: p 171).

Yet by no means all populations are supposed by phrenologists to have such a right. In *The Constitution of Man* Combe proposes a number of prerequisites for national sovereignty. These include the stipulation that "To secure and maintain national independence the first requisite in the people appears to be adequate size of brain" (Combe, 1847: p 92). This principle is reiterated in other phrenological texts by Scottish authors, for example Macnish's *An Introduction to Phrenology in the Form of Question and Answer*.

A large brain, therefore, will, caeteris paribus, be superior in power to a smaller one?

Facts place this beyond doubt ... A nation of small-brained people is easily conquered, and held in subjection; witness the facility with which the small-headed Hindoos were subjugated, and the extreme difficulty experienced in overcoming the Charibs, whose brains were large and active (MacNish, 1836: p 7).

However a large brain is not a sufficient qualification for national sovereignty; the brain must also be well-organised. Combe's second and third prerequisites are a well-developed intelligence and love of country, both of these capacities being determined by the relative size of certain organs of the brain (Combe, 1847: p 92). Thus the Charibs, despite having large brains, are not equipped for national sovereignty because their cerebral development is greatest in the animal organs: national sovereignty, being the political corollary of moral civilisation, is the prerogative of highly-developed and well-organised brains. A similar

argument is presented in Andrew Combe's article *On the Causes of the Independence, as Distinguished from the Liberty of Nations, and On the Phrenological Causes of the Different Degrees of Liberty Enjoyed by Different Nations* (Combe, 1850: pp 198 ff)

In these and other articles discussing national sovereignty, the term "nation" is used to refer to the political nation-state constructed by nationalist ideology. As we have seen, however, this usage is by no means consistent throughout phrenological writing. Summarising his conclusions regarding national independence, George Combe comments:

These facts in the *natural history of nations* were unknown until Phrenology brought them to light. Formerly, all differences between different tribes of people were accounted for by differences of climate, education, and institutions; but we see now that development of the brain is fundamental ... (Combe, 1847: p 93, my emphasis).

The ideology of nationalism informs phrenological thinking in a sporadic manner but does not wholly determine the meaning of the term "nation". Phrenological texts racialise all social collectives, whether they are referred to as "nations", "races" or "tribes", and so the "natural history of nations" is constructed both on the nationalist principle that a "nation" should correspond to a state, and on the basis of the racialisation of "national" categories.

As the title of *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects* suggests, Scottish phrenologists were concerned with the interaction between the human organism and its environment. However, as the material above demonstrates, for phrenology the biological structure of the brain has an overriding and decisive influence both on the collective character of communities and on the formation of the individual personality. In discussing the effects of



environmental conditions, phrenology makes them entirely subsidiary to biological and physiological factors.

### "Racial" Hierarchies

Discussion of these arguments concerning the biological prerequisites for national sovereignty brings me to the racist content of phrenology. The argument that only certain populations possess brains adequate to the task of creating a nation state implies the existence of a hierarchy of racialised groups. Only a small number of phrenological texts formally set out a theory of "racial" hierarchy, but the assumption that such a hierarchy exists is evident in most phrenological discussions of the differences between the cerebral organisation of various "nations" or "races". A number of the quotations cited in the previous section provide some evidence of this; a few more examples reinforce the point.

An article in *The Phrenological Journal*, entitled *Observations On the Phrenological Standard of Civilisation*, notes that "the savage" exhibits behaviour which directly corresponds to the presence of large organs of destructiveness, combativeness and self-esteem, these organs being given unrestrained scope as a result of the deficiency of the moral and intellectual faculties.

The occupations of the savage ... are, scarcely with any variation, destructive ... Covered with glory and blood, the savage feasts, and eagerly seeks the luxury of intoxication, if he possesses the fermented liquor or the drug, and falls down in sleep and lethargy (Anon, 1834-6: p 361).

As a more specific example, the author cites the courting rituals of the New Hollander, who:

steals towards the woman he courts, springs upon her like a wild-cat, stupefies her with blows, and in that state drags her home (Anon, 1834-6: p 361).

In many phrenological texts the New Hollander appears as the epitome of savagery. Smith's *the Principles of Phrenology* describes the New Hollanders as "the only people hitherto discovered who have no conception of God", an aberration which derives from their deficiency in the organs of "Wonder ... and Constructiveness, which produces the desire to account consistently for ... all phenomena" (Smith, 1837: p 165).

Not only extra-European populations were ranked according to their "race" in phrenological analyses. According to Andrew Combe:

Among the barbarous and civilised nations of America, Asia, and Africa, the differences of cerebral development are more perceptible to the inexperienced eye, and the traits of character are, in general, more broadly marked, than among the civilised nations of Europe ... (Combe, A., 1836: p 344).

Nevertheless, differences between European populations are described in phrenological texts. Combe travelled extensively in Europe and published his assessments of the phrenological character of various European populations (Gibbon, 1878: Volume 1, pp 303 ff). He notes, for example, that the people of Cologne are dirtier than the Dutch, which is explained by their "flat and shallow coronal region" (1878: p 305). At Bühl, in Baden, Combe finds himself fascinated by the heads of a procession of churchgoers. He comments on the "great deficiency in the moral organs generally" of the people in the procession, and concludes that they "appeared of another race compared with the Dutch" (1878: Volume 1, p 303). In Switzerland he claims that "we



have observed the coronal region increasing, and we are among a cleaner, more intelligent, and more moral people" (1878: Volume 1, p 303).

In a letter to his brother Andrew he describes the French as having "small heads of the Celtic type", and claims that in France there is "a want of an all pervading serious moral interest, and of comprehensive and deep reflection in the head." (1878: Volume 1, p 255). Andrew Combe notes that French women are dominant in relation to men. He attributes this to the deficiency in reflective organs which is evident in French male heads (quoted in Combe, 1850: p 71).

The racist elements implicit in these examples are made explicit in a number of essays on "national crania" written by George Combe and others. Combe's first major text, *Essays on Phrenology*, was published in 1819. Like his other texts it went through various re-editions and reprints and, also like his other texts, it made liberal use of arguments based on the preconstruction of "racial" characteristics. Many of these preconstructions were derived from Leyden's text on Africa which, as I noted in Chapter Six, was regarded as an authoritative account of the African continent (eg Combe, 1819: pp 100, 135).

Much of *Essays on Phrenology* consists of a descriptions of various "national crania" represented by examples in the collection of the Phrenological Society. In one edition of the text, published in 1830 as *A System of Phrenology*, Combe states that the New Holland skull

... indicates a great deficiency in the regions of the moral and intellectual organs ... The most unaccustomed eye will perceive how far this skull and that of the Carib fall short of the European in the organs of Reflection, Ideality, and Constructiveness (Combe, 1830: p 339).

The same text goes on to describe the skulls of New Zealanders, North American Indians, Brazil Indians, Sandwich Islanders, Negroes, and so on, ranking each in relation to the others and all in relation to the European skull.

An article published by "A Member of the Alloa Phrenological Society" comments that

... The Caucasian races are generally pointed to as being the races with whom all intellectual improvement has originated, and who possess the finest cerebral conformation. This is certainly the fact ... (A Member, 1839: p 5)

Scottish phrenologists were familiar with contemporary theories of "race". It was Combe who prompted Samuel Morton, the American physician, to begin his collection of skulls, which became the largest resource for "racial" research in the world (Harris, 1968: p 99). He also contributed an appendix to Morton's *Crania Americana* and discussed Blumenbach's theory of "race" in an appendix to a school edition of his own *The Constitution of Man* (Combe, 1855: pp 127-9).

This appendix, entitled *Five Principal Races of Men*, is one of the clearest phrenological statements of a theory of "racial" hierarchy. It begins with a reference to:

... five leading classes or races, each distinguished by such peculiarities... as to stand apart from the rest. They are named the CAUCASIAN, MALAY, MONGOLIAN, AMERICAN, and ETHIOPIC (Combe, 1855: p 128).

Combe comments elsewhere that "Blumenbach's extensive work on national crania is destitute of moral interest, owing to his omission



of all notice of the characters of the nations whose heads he represents" (Combe, 1819: p 371). In the Appendix to the school edition he corrects this oversight by making clear the moral and intellectual hierarchy which pertains between Blumenbach's "races". Combe's modification of Blumenbach replaces the environmentalism of the latter with a biological determinism putatively founded on his work.

According to the appendix, the Caucasian "race"

... is widely spread on the face of the globe, and is remarkable for the highest order of physical beauty and intellectual eminence ... in this variety of men we find the furthest remove from the animal in brain, features and hair, with a superiority of intellectual and moral power, love of the arts, science, and poetry. The progress of the human family seems to be made wholly through this race (Combe, 1855: p 128).

The American "race", at the other extreme of the spectrum of human types,

... are averse to cultivation, and slow in acquiring knowledge, sedate, proud, restless, sly, revengeful, fond of war, and wholly destitute of maritime adventure. The American race is tending to extinction before the march of the Caucasian, and such is the fate of every variety, when they are brought in contact. The superior swallows up the inferior (Combe, 1855: p 129).

This fate is the logical extension of the theory behind Combe's prerequisites for national sovereignty; some populations are destined,

by their biology, to succumb completely and fatally to the power of a superior "race".

For phrenologists it was the "organisation" of the brain, rather than its absolute size, which determined the character, and the superiority or inferiority of a "race". An article by Combe's brother, Andrew Combe, stresses that the relative size of the different cerebral organs is the relevant criterion by which to judge the capacities of different "races". The article criticises Tiedemann for his proposition that "the Negro brain ... is equally capable of civilisation" as the European. Combe approves Tiedemann's assertion that the smaller size of the brains of idiots and women indicates their inferior mental power and that the larger size of the brains of eminent men indicates the reverse. However he stresses that a large brain with a small anterior lobe (and large middle and anterior lobes) indicates strong intensity of feeling but weak intellect.

If, for example, we compare the Charib with the Hindoo brain, we find the entire mass of the former considerably to outweigh the latter; and, according to Tiedemann, we should find more intellectual talent in the Charib. The fact, however, is notoriously the reverse ... (Combe, 1850: p 306)

Combe piously expresses sympathy with Tiedemann's wish to assert the equality of "racial" types but insists that philanthropic motives must not be allowed to obscure scientific evidence; "de facto the Negro brain is inferior in intellectual power to that of the European" (1850: p 305).

A similar argument appears in another passage, in the course of a discussion of the Charibs.



The brains of Charibs seem to be equal in absolute size to those of average Europeans, but the chief development of the former is in the animal organs, and in the latter in the organs of sentiment and intellect; and no Phrenologist would expect the one to be equal in intellect and morality to the other, merely because their brains are equal in absolute magnitude (1850: pp 171-2).

This argument also implies that the Charibs are closer in their physiology and psychology to animals, since their animal propensities dominate their brains.

George Combe pursued the question of the nature of "racial" hierarchies throughout his career. At one of the first sessions of the Phrenological Society, in 1820, he read to an audience of less than a dozen

... an Essay... accounting for the rise and progress of Society on Phrenological principles... illustrated by casts of the skulls of individuals of a variety of nations, in different stages of civilisation (Edinburgh Phrenological Society, 1821: p 6).

Twenty years later, at the third annual meeting of the national Phrenological Association in Glasgow, he lectured to an audience of more than six hundred Association members on "national crania", a lecture he also delivered during a tour of the United States in 1838 (Combe, 1839: pp 303-309).

This was not a private obsession peculiar to Combe. The comparison of national or "racial" heads was considered to be an essential method of research for phrenology and the subject was written on extensively, not least by other Scottish phrenologists. James

Straton, Secretary of the Phrenological Society of Aberdeen, published several monographs on the relative size of the crania of different national groups in order to establish a correspondence between the cranial capacity and the supposed intellectual superiority of the European (Straton, 1845, 1851). Andrew Combe wrote extensive notes on national crania in letters to colleagues (Combe, 1850: pp 2-4, 76, 198) and, in an essay in the *British and Foreign Medical Review*, commented that "the coincidence of the development of brain with the known character of the respective races, appeared such as could hardly fail to strike every intelligent observer" (Combe, A., 1840: p 21).

The circularity of this comparative project is made clear when the above statement is compared to one written by George Combe in his 1819 essay:

The real characters of foreign nations will never be philosophically delineated, until travellers shall describe their temperaments, and the size and combinations of their brains (Combe, 1819: p 371).

According to Andrew Combe's statement, the "known character" of foreign nations is an empirical constant against which the authenticity of phrenological theory can be tested and judged. According to George Combe, on the other hand, both phrenological data and other, behavioural evidence of temperament are required if the "characters of foreign nations" are to be properly established. This inconsistency is indicative of the way in which phrenological arguments concerning "national character" are typically constructed. They depend on biological determinist, racist assumptions which are spuriously presented as "evidence" in favour of phrenological theories.



## Individuals and "Nations"

Further illustration of the ways in which phrenological texts present racist assumptions as phrenological "findings" can be found by looking at the textual construction of relations between individuals and racialised groups. Phrenologists were aware of a need to explain the relation between individual and "national" differences but offered an explanation of this relation which glossed over its problematic nature. In *The Constitution of Man*, Combe reiterates the point that the general characteristics typical of any "national" type are inherited, and asks the reader

... if the general forms and proportions be thus palpably transmitted, can we doubt that the individual varieties follow the same rule, modified slightly by causes peculiar to the parents of the individual? (Combe, 1847: p 45)

However, having argued that, broadly speaking, members of the same "race" will all possess the same general pattern of mental organisation, phrenologists were left with the problem of individual cases which deviated dramatically from what was taken to be a national/"racial" norm.

An example of how this problem was dealt with is the treatment, in phrenological texts, of the case of Eustache,

... a Negro... who was ... much distinguished for high morality and practical benevolence .... During the massacre of the whites by the Negroes in St. Domingo, Eustache, while in the capacity of a slave, saved, by his address, courage, and devotion, the lives of his master and upwards of 400 other whites, at the daily risk of his own safety ... (Combe, 1836: p 30)

This surprising behaviour (surprising to phrenologists because it seemed to demonstrate a power of morality beyond that bestowed on the Negro "race") is explained in an essay by James Straton, another Scottish phrenologist (Straton, 1845). Straton's *Researches in Cerebral Development* concerns the question of the average sizes of the skulls of members of different European and extra-European "nations"; in it Straton claims that Caucasian heads range from an average phrenological measurement of 137 to a maximum of 220, while Ethiopian (or Negro) heads measure an average of 123 and a maximum of 155. The latter figure is that for the cast of the skull of Eustache ("one of the finest specimens of human nature ever known"), whose head so far excels over others of his "race" that it measures in excess of the average Caucasian (Straton 1845: p 2). Eustache is therefore a puzzling case, since his cerebral measurements are beyond those to be expected from his "race"; he is a benign aberration of nature.

Nevertheless, he is a member of the "negro race". That is to say that despite having the cerebral organisation associated by phrenologists with exceptionally "well-organised" Caucasians, he is not categorised as a member of the Caucasian "race". This example confirms that phrenology did not inaugurate a new principle of "racial" categorisation based on experimental observations; rather it refracted current racist assumptions, incorporating them into the phrenological theory of cerebral organisation and "racial" hierarchy. In articles such as Straton's, phrenologists employ racialised categories based on phenotypical differences such as skin colour, failing to challenge conventional racialised categories even when they do not cohere with phrenological principles. Some further examples of how phrenologists racialised categories which they borrowed from non-phrenological social science can be found in phrenological texts which discuss the nature of class differences and the division of labour.



## Nations and Classes

According to phrenological theory the characteristics of any population group will be biologically determined: this applies to classes as well as to populations labelled as "races" or "nations". For example a discussion of political economy in Combe's *The Constitution of Man* argues that the existence of classes arises from a biologically determined division of labour:

The Creator has arranged the spontaneous division of labour among men, by the simplest, yet most effectual of means. He has bestowed the mental faculties in different degrees of relative strength on different individuals, and thereby given them at once the desire and the aptitude for different occupations. Phrenology renders clear the origin of differences of employment (Combe, 1847: p 46).

The result of this happy arrangement is that even the humblest member of an exalted "racial" type such as the British participates, (provided that she or he is "respectable"), in the advantages which arise from superior phrenological development.

In point of fact, an able-bodied, steady and respectable labourer in Britain, is better clothed, better fed, and better lodged, than the chief of a savage tribe in New South Wales (Combe, 1847: p 47).

The British labourer is, nevertheless, less intelligent than a member of the British bourgeoisie (1847: p 50). In racialising class and attributing negative characteristics to particular classes, phrenology participates in what Balibar has referred to as "class racism" (Balibar, 1991b: pp 204-216). By identifying a natural basis for the division of labour, phrenological texts present an apologetic argument

in favour of the dominance of the bourgeoisie (Gibbon, 1878, Vol 2: pp 265-266).

Phrenologists also pursued a reform of the class structure which would bring about the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie. Combe argued that the lack of social leadership and industriousness evident among the aristocracy would eventually, and naturally, bring about their demise. This would not be achieved by violence, he emphasised, but by enlightening the nobility as to the shameful irrationality of "hereditary titles, decorations, and privileges, which testify nothing in favour of their merit" (Combe, 1847: p 97). Combe argues that "in the course of a few generations" the aristocracy can be persuaded to enlist in the bourgeoisie. This extraordinary claim is the logical extension, in racialised form, of the ideology of "rationality": since the bourgeoisie literally *em-body* the highest development of the rational faculties, they also represent the pinnacle of human progress. The bourgeoisie in Scotland and England are, therefore, biologically destined to occupy the most powerful positions in a "nation" which occupies the pinnacle position in a racialised world-hierarchy.

The hierarchy of "nations" which phrenology theorises is not only organised according to a Eurocentric view of progress, then, but according to a view of history which exalts the values of the bourgeoisie. In this context it is relevant to recall Cooter's argument about the class character of adherents and practitioners of phrenology. As I noted earlier, supporters of phrenology tended to be young, male professionals aspiring to social status. In identifying with phrenology these adherents of the discipline embraced a theory of social reform (putatively based on the principle of meritocracy but actually founded on class conflict) which, in seeming to guarantee the social ascendancy of the bourgeoisie and



their allies, also provided phrenologists themselves with a racialised and naturalised class identity.

### **Savagery, Barbarism and Civilisation**

The naturalisation of class hierarchies did not prevent phrenologists from maintaining that all members of a "civilised race" (including the lowliest, working class members), shared an innate superiority over "uncivilised races". According to phrenological theory there were supra-class differences in phrenological type between "races" which corresponded to differences in moral and intellectual character. These differences were understood in terms of a theory of civilisation similar to that which I described in Chapters Five and Six.

For phrenologists, "civilisation" was the end point of a historical process which began in the "savage" state and progressed, through the "barbarian" stage, towards a norm exemplified by the best aspects of contemporary European society, including the achievement of political sovereignty. European nations had reached their present state of civilisation after centuries of progress. This involved a gradual adaptation between the brain and the environment; that is to say that as European society had become more civilised, the organisation of the European brain had gradually improved.

Man, ignorant and uncivilised, is a ferocious, sensual and superstitious savage ... Man is, apparently, a progressive being; and the Creator, having designed a higher path for him than for the lower creatures, has left him, by the exercise of ... intellect to find out for himself the method of placing his faculties in harmony among themselves ... Time and experience are necessary to accomplish these ends (Combe, 1847: p 3).

Phrenology offered a biological explanation of "civilisation", explicitly attributing the progress of human society through various "epochs", to the ascendancy in each epoch of different mental organs (eg 1847: p 4). I pointed out above that, according to phrenological theory, an individual could improve the power of his or her higher faculties through the disciplined practice of rational activities. The extent of improvement possible for an individual was limited by the relative size of the organs of the brain. However the offspring of such an individual might well acquire a better organised brain than his parents had possessed (1847: pp 44 ff). Thus, through a kind of Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characteristics, each generation could pass on to the next an improved cerebral organisation and further the process of "racial" improvement and civilisation.

Like other progressive theories of history developed during the nineteenth century, phrenology claimed that its insights were only now capable of comprehension, and that the perfection of human society was possible through their practical application (eg 1847: pp 4, 6). Only with the discovery of physiology and, most importantly, phrenology, was it possible for man finally to understand the effects of the adaptation of the human brain to the natural and social environment. Phrenology, declared the author of *Observations on the Phrenological Standard of Civilisation*,

... offers the desiderated philosophy, and its discovery is destined to be held the greatest of all the epochs of human advancement. It opens a view, however remote, of the true *golden age* of human society (Anon, 1834-6: p 371):

The model of history which phrenology endorsed was, in this sense, an echo of Enlightenment rationalism: it was based on the assumption



that European "man" could achieve anything given a correct understanding of human nature and its interaction with the environment.

### **Phrenology and Polygenesis**

This model of history presented a question concerning the extent to which "savage" nations or "races" could be expected to progress towards the Eurocentric norm of "civilisation" against which they were measured. For phrenology not only asserted the existence of a supposed "racial" hierarchy but also set limits on the extent to which any given "race" could improve upon its current stage of development.

For phrenologists the scope of individual self-improvement was limited by the relative size of the organs of the brain. Given the difference in cerebral organisation of the different national or "racial" types, this implied that there were biologically determined limits to the extent of improvement possible for any particular racialised collective. In *The Constitution of Man* Combe comments,

It appears to me that the native American savages, and native New Hollanders, cannot, with their present brains, adopt Christianity or civilisation ... every method used for their cultivation, which is not calculated to improve their cerebral organisation, will be limited in its effects by the narrow capacities attending their present development ... (Combe, 1847: p 50)

This argument is tantamount to an assertion of the unimprovability of "primitive" populations, and echoes the claims of polygenesist theory. Elsewhere Combe cites examples of individual "savages" who had apparently been civilised but who had ultimately returned to

their former way of life. He argues that these cases constitute evidence of the futility of attempts to bring about improvements beyond the physiological limits imposed by mental organisation (eg Combe, 1830: p 342).

Phrenological support for polygenetic theories formed a part of the ideological conflict between polygenesists and monogenesists which was referred to in Chapters Five and Six. Much of the criticism of this aspect of phrenology came from theologically founded monogenesist positions. In 1836 William Gillespie published *An Exposure of the Unchristian and Unphilosophical Principles Set Forth in Mr. George Combe's "Constitution of Man"* (Gillespie, 1836); an abridged version of the text was published for circulation at low cost the following year (Gillespie, 1837). Both attack phrenology for its materialism and for its blasphemous implication that distinct "races" are radically different in their origins and in their capacities for Christian improvement.

Gillespie's tract was reviewed favourably by a number of journals which are all quoted in the pamphlet as accusing Combe of being "Unchristian" or even "an Infidel writer". A number of articles defending phrenology against such attacks were written, some by phrenologists who attempted to argue that phrenological theory was compatible with scriptural doctrine. In some cases these articles were critical of Combe's suspected agnosticism and sought to distance phrenological theory from the more theologically controversial aspect of his work (eg Scott, 1827, 1828, 1836; Werne, 1836; Wright, 1836).

The charge of blasphemy or atheism was a severe one in early nineteenth century Scotland; this may explain why some other Scottish phrenological writers, such as Mackenzie, were more cautious than Combe in their claims concerning the potential for Christian conversion among "savage" populations.



If we are to judge of the natives of New Holland ... we should say that the knowing and reflective faculties give little hope of their being capable of great improvement in knowledge, while the religious and moral faculties may be improved by exertions properly directed (Mackenzie, 1820: p 235).

As this quotation illustrates, such circumspection could be accommodated to the conviction that "racial" limitations made civilisation a distant prospect for those with an unfavourable mental organisation.

### Conclusion

I have argued that Scottish phrenologists developed and propagated a racist theory based on biological determinism. They articulated their arguments from a position which was structured institutionally, through the phrenological societies and their journals; and ideologically, in opposition to those who rejected their reformism, and to those who rejected biological determinism. Through its emphasis on the measurement of the skull as a means of assessing "racial" qualities, and more generally through its insistence on a biological basis for all the collective characteristics of racialised groups, phrenology contributed significantly to the growing ascendancy of polygenist and biological determinist positions.

The biological determinist position which phrenologists articulated was controversial at the time of the discipline's greatest popularity. By the time of phrenology's decline, however, it had become "scientific" orthodoxy. By 1893, when the ninth edition of the "Constitution of Man" was published, Combe had been dead for thirty-four years and phrenology was no longer a significant intellectual movement, although its popularity among working class adherents was

maintained into the twentieth century. The editors of the new edition comment in their Preface that:

The central idea of the Treatise is independent of the system of Phrenology, with which the author's name is usually associated ... The system of Phrenology which the author incorporated with his ethical teaching has been to many readers a hindrance rather than a help. The Editor has therefore ... retained only as much of that system, and of its terminology, as seemed to be warranted by the estimate of its scope and utility now adopted by men of science (Combe, 1893: p x).

This distancing of Combe's text from the disreputable taint of phrenology leaves the racist arguments of the thesis intact. The sections of the text dealing with national crania lose some of their phrenological terminology in the ninth edition but the substance of their arguments remains the same. For example the revised text continues to maintain that:

Mental qualities ... are determined by the form and constitution of the brain; and these are transmitted by hereditary descent ... the differences of *national character* are as conspicuous as those of national *brain* (1893: p 106).

Comparing the 1893 text with the original edition it is possible to see Scottish phrenology's lasting contribution to the history of science. Rather than founding the revolutionary and comprehensive philosophy of mind and society which was proclaimed by Combe, it contributed to the development of biological determinist theories of "race", and became a building block in the construction of scientific racism.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### "WHO ARE THE SCOTCH?"

#### Introduction

In preceding chapters I have been concerned, for the most part, with discourses describing populations "discovered" in the extra-European world. However as the phrenological material which I referred to in Chapter Seven demonstrates, European populations too were racialised during the nineteenth century. Indeed European scholars were preoccupied with the "racial" composition of Europe before they extended the scope of racialisation to populations in the rest of the world (Banton, 1977: pp 13-27). Scotland was not exempt from this history of racialisation, which continued through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. It would therefore be inappropriate to present a discussion of the history of racism in Scotland without noting that processes of racialisation occurred there "internally", as well as in relation to the "external" world.

The terms "exterior" and "interior" must be used cautiously in this context, as they indicate the boundaries of an imagined community which was constructed, at least in part, through the very processes of racialisation to which I refer (Miles, 1989: pp 14-21). In Chapter One I noted that the construction of collective identities depends upon boundaries which both exclude and include. In the nineteenth century such boundaries were constructed *around and within* Scotland, in ways which involved racisms directed both against migrant workers and against long-settled populations. In what follows I begin to explore this issue (albeit with a less detailed approach than was applied to the material in previous chapters) by offering some examples of Scottish texts of the period which racialise populations

within Scotland, which articulate racist arguments concerning them, or which do both. The survey I offer here is not intended to be comprehensive; a thorough and broad-ranging analysis of the significance of racism and racialisation in historical and ethnological accounts of Scotland would require a separate work to itself. However the selection of texts which I examine below is sufficient to establish that this is an area worthy of exploration, and to preface the discussion of Scottish national identity which follows in Chapter Nine.

The main targets of internal racism in nineteenth century Scotland were the Irish and the people of the Highlands, both groups being widely regarded as examples of inferior and barbaric "races" (Colley, 1994: p 15). The way in which each of these groups was racialised was related to debates concerning the rôle of "Celts" and "Anglo-Saxons" in Scottish history: I begin by discussing this issue in order to set the context for the examples of racialisation and racism I present later in the chapter.

### **Anglo-Saxons and Celts**

A number of discussions of English cultural history have identified the importance of various notions of "racial" identity in the ideological construction of "Englishness" since the seventeenth century (Curtis, 1968, 1971; Banton, 1977: pp 16-26; Solomos, 1986: pp 28-21; Colley, 1994). For example MacDougall notes that, in the wake of the Reformation and the English Civil War, historians and politicians emphasised the specifically "Saxon" nature of the English Christian tradition and of the English parliament. The incorporation of the Church of England and Parliament into a putatively Saxon "racial" heritage stretching back to early history endowed these institutions with the privilege of participation in mythic national



origins, whilst simultaneously positing the English nation as a "racial" entity (MacDougall, 1982: pp 33 ff).

For seventeenth century historians it was in terms of lineage and tradition that the notion of a Saxon "race" had significance; as I noted in Chapter Three, and as the texts examined in Chapters Five and Six indicate, the definition of "race" as a biological type did not displace other meanings of the term until the nineteenth century (Banton, 1987: pp 28-64). However the theme of a Saxon "racial" tradition persisted in English historiography, well into what Banton refers to as the period of "racial typology" (Banton, 1977: pp 24-26; 1987: pp 37-45). One example of this persistence is a debate pursued by nineteenth century English intellectuals, concerning the relative significance of "Anglo-Saxon" and "Celtic" ancestry in the genealogy of the contemporary English population (Curtis, 1968).

Various positions were adopted in this debate, some of them equally as favourable to the Celtic as to the Anglo-Saxon elements which were supposed to constitute the "racial" composition of the English. For example in the mid-nineteenth century Matthew Arnold argued that the mixture of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon elements in the population of England was a source of strength and balance (Arnold, 1867; Chapman, 1978: pp 91 ff). However by the latter part of the century Anglo-Saxon supremacism was a more common position. This involved assertions of the antiquity of the Anglo-Saxon heritage of the English, of the superiority of Anglo-Saxon "racial" characteristics, and of the merely marginal importance of the inferior Celtic "race" in English history. Among the virtues claimed for the Anglo-Saxons were a robustness of character, a capacity for courage and tenacity in the face of adversity, and a love of freedom embodied in the traditions of English political and religious institutions (Rich, 1986: pp 13-15; Curtis, 1968; Solomos, 1993: pp 30-31).

During the nineteenth century, then, perceptions of English national identity were entangled with notions of "race" (Cohen, 1988: pp 28-32). A matter which has received less attention in sociological and historical literature is the way in which arguments concerning the relative merits and historical importance of the Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and other "races" also arose in Scottish historical and ethnological discourses during the nineteenth century, sometimes in response to the English debates discussed above; in other cases with a specifically Scottish focus. By looking at some historical texts which present such arguments it is possible to see how they contributed to the discursive construction of mutually exclusive "races" inhabiting the Highlands and the Lowlands.

#### **The Celtic/Anglo-Saxon Debate in Scotland**

As in the English literature, Scotland and Ireland were discussed in Scottish texts as repositories of Celtic culture and as territories occupied (either in previous historical periods or currently) by members of the "Celtic race": however the Celts were only one of the "races" supposed to have historical and contemporary significance in the ethnology of Scotland. Investigation of the "racial" origins of the Scottish nation is a persistent theme in nineteenth century historiography, and texts of the period (especially those dealing with Scotland's early history) commonly plot reconstructions of migrations, usurpations and integrations among a variety of "races".

Tytler, for example, whose influential *History of Scotland* was written at the suggestion of Walter Scott (Tytler, 1841; Smout, 1972: p 75; Ash, 1980: p 87), specifies four "distinct races" which were the ancestors of the contemporary Scottish population; these included the "Celtic people" who inhabited "nearly the whole of Scotland north of the Firth of Forth" and "the Saxons" who dominated the Lowlands (Tytler, 1841: p 188). Two other texts produced by Scottish



antiquarian scholars also use "racial" categories: Gregory states that "The earliest inhabitants of the Western Isles or Elubes ... were probably a portion of the ... Picts", but speculates that in "some of the southern isles, particularly Isla, this race must have been displaced or overrun by the Dalriads ..." (Gregory, 1881: p 3). Skene, in his influential history of Scotland (1876), refers to "four nations - the Britons, Picts, Scots, and the Saxons ... colonies of foreign races who came into Britain at different periods ..." (Skene, 1876: p 165).

A mid-nineteenth century school history of Scotland, written by MacArthur, moves from such schemes of early "racial" history to the composition and nature of the contemporary population of Scotland. MacArthur's arguments suggest that the Highland and Lowland regions have been, and still are, associated with "racially" distinct populations.

As the country is thus naturally divided into two parts distinctly opposite in character, so the people are made up of two distinct branches of the great *Aryan* family, the *Celtic* and the *Teutonic* ... In later times we find three *Celtic* peoples in North Britain ... The *Picts* were those *celts* who dwelt north of the Firths in *Alba* ... they were more akin to the *Gaelic* than to the *British* branch of the *Celtic* race ...

The Celts called all these newcomers *Saxons*, though this was really only the name of one of the first tribes that came over; and as they gradually spread over the *Lowlands*, the word *Saxon* came to mean simply *Lowlander* (MacArthur, 1879: pp 2-5, MacArthur's emphases).

Here geography and ethnology are conflated in a way which confers the legitimacy of the natural on racialised categories; the people of Scotland are "naturally" divided along with the country's geography.

Furthermore, the "racial" categories which mark this division are transhistorical not only in name (ancient "Celts" faithfully using the taxonomy of nineteenth century racialisation) but also in character. MacArthur explicitly connects the "racial" genealogy of early Scotland with recent and contemporary history, using transhistorical "racial" characteristics to make the connection. Writing of the 1745 rebellion, she states that some Lowland Scots

... fought for the independence of the Celtic kingdom as fiercely as if they had themselves been of the Celtic race. But the whole of the country is not of the same nature ... The Lowlands are well watered and fertile, and the people who lived there were peaceful and industrious ... The Highlanders, who were discouraged by the barrenness of their native mountains ... have at all times been much given to pillaging the more fortunate Lowlanders, of whom they are justly the dreaded scourge (1879: p 2).

The oscillation between the past continuous and present tenses is symptomatic of the way in which MacArthur's arguments dehistoricise and reify racialised categories. The Highlands and the Lowlands are "not of the same nature" because they are populated by "races" whose contrasting characteristics have set them apart in the past and continue to do so in the present.

MacArthur's negative assessment of the Celtic "race" exemplifies a specifically Scottish version of Anglo-Saxon supremacism. This position was articulated not only in the context of the general debate concerning the respective Anglo-Saxon and Celtic contributions



to Scottish history, but also in the context of a long-running debate in nineteenth century literary studies and historiography concerning the existence and aesthetic value of a Highland cultural tradition. A particular, and particularly notorious focus of this debate was the question of the authenticity of the Ossian poems, published in 1760 and claimed by their "discoverer", James MacPherson, to be translations from the work of an ancient Gaelic poet (Haldane, 1990: pp 107-113).

The poems were one of the chief artefacts in an attempt to construct the Scottish Highlander as a "noble savage", alongside such other candidates for this dubious honour as the native American (McCrone, 1992: p 184). Writers as prominent as Scott and Johnson engaged in arguments over the authenticity of these "discoveries", as did Leyden, whose work on Africa I reviewed in Chapter Six (Leyden, 1800: p 135). The debate continued into the nineteenth century: Laing (1819), whose history of Scotland was one of the most important and widely read of those published in the period, maintained that it was incredible that poetry of any aesthetic value should be produced in the Scottish highlands at a date so early as that claimed by Ossian's "discoverer". He was correct about the inauthentic nature of the attribution of the poems, though it is now argued by some scholars that the unattributed sources of the poetry were genuinely of ancient origin (Chapman, 1978: pp 29-52; Pittock, 1991: pp 73 ff). The details of this issue are of less interest here, however, than the language in which Laing presents his argument:

In ascribing such primeval refinement to the first and rudest stage of society, we must believe that the highlanders had degenerated on emerging from the savage state, and become more barbarous in proportion as they became more civilised (Laing, 1819: p 428).

Here Laing alludes to the sequence of stages of civilisation which I discussed in Chapter Six: since, in his view, contemporary Highland culture is at a stage of development prior to "civilisation", it is implausible to suggest that art of any refinement might have been produced in an earlier era of Highland history.

It was against the background of such refusals to acknowledge the possibility of civilised cultural artefacts emerging from the Highlands, and against the background of English and Scottish Anglo-Saxon supremacism, that McLaughlin published his *Celtic Gleanings, or, Notices of the History and Literature of the Scottish Gael* (McLaughlin, 1857). This text, which exemplifies the defensive reaction of some Scottish intellectuals against the denigration of "Celtic" populations and cultures, is the published version of a series of four lectures delivered to Edinburgh antiquarian scholars. In it, McLaughlin presents a partisan and impassioned paean to the Celtic "race". He begins by discussing the "Ethnological Relations of Celtic and Saxon races in Great Britain and Ireland ...", and with the comment that Britain is occupied by "two races between which for ages there would appear to have existed a powerful rivalry ..." (1857: p 2). These are the Celtic and the Teutonic, or Anglo-Saxon "races". McLaughlin makes much of the fact that the advocates of Anglo-Saxon supremacy are prone to changes of terminology:

For a long period they were Saxons, a name now well-nigh obsolete ... Then they became Goths ... Then they suddenly became Anglo-Saxons, and now they are passing into Teutons. What they will be before all is over it is hard to say. Who knows but that our good friends may become Celts ... (1857: pp 11-12)

This comment may appear to question the fixity or authenticity of "racial" categories. However, as Chapman points out, McLaughlin's



criticism is barely less applicable to his own work than to that of those he criticises (Chapman, 1978: p 52). The category "Celt" became a common historiographical device only in the eighteenth century, and functions as means of suggesting spurious connections between ancient and contemporary populations; in this sense the "Celts" are as much an ideological construct as the "Saxons" or "Anglo-Saxons" (Chapman, 1992: p 24). Furthermore, the very notion of relations between "races", of the type which McLaughlin's argument constructs, is an aspect of nineteenth century racist ideology.

McLaughlin's sarcasm about the repeated reconstruction of the "Anglo-Saxons" is best seen as an attack which does not question the fundamental premise that "races" exist and can be correctly identified, nor the assumption that they can be compared to each other in terms of a hierarchy of virtues. His adherence to these premises is evident, for example, in his discussion of the Highland land clearances. McLaughlin explains the promotion of mass emigration from the Highlands in terms of "racial" antagonism; specifically, a desire for the "extirpation or extradition of the native population" which was the result of hostility to the Celtic "race" on the part of "parties possessed of leading influence" (McLaughlin, 1857: p 15). The hostile reaction of the Highlanders to the land clearances is also explained in terms of "racial" factors. According to McLaughlin, a concept and tradition of land-tenure which excludes the possibility of personal ownership of the land is part of the "forms of thought peculiar to the Celtic races". It is for this reason that "the Celt look(s) with such marked antipathy on a process of eviction" (1857: p 26). This account reifies "race" and relations between "races", so that economic and political events leading to the clearances are displaced, as explanatory factors, by "racial" essences.

Regarding the question of the relative merits of the two "races", McLaughlin asserts that the claims made for the Anglo-Saxons are unrealistic:

Reviews, newspapers, popular lectures, all teem with the incomparable excellencies of the Anglo-Saxon; and the Celt ... is almost stunned into acquiescence with what he finds is a very general and popular belief ... It would appear as if everything great and good in this land of ours were due to its Anglo-Saxon connections! (1857: pp 10-11)

In order to refute such claims McLaughlin cites France as a Celtic culture whose undoubted cultural and political virtues prove that there is no "well-founded call upon the Celt to admit the superiority of the Saxon ..." (1857: p 14). It is worth noting here that McLaughlin does not question the assumption that "races" can be assessed as entities whose characters are comparable one against another; on the contrary, his objection is that the character of the Celtic "race" has been *wrongly* assessed by advocates of Anglo-Saxon supremacism.

The Anglo-Saxon supremacist position and the pro-Celtic position in nineteenth century Scottish historiography were founded on arguments and assumptions about the "racial" diversity of the Scottish population. It was assumed by proponents of both positions that the Highlands and the Lowlands were inhabited by distinct "races" with distinct characteristics; this much was not a matter of dispute. The area of debate concerned the relative merits and historical origins of these "racial" types. In order to explore this topic further, I turn now to some nineteenth century texts which discuss Scotland in terms of the composition and character of its contemporary population.



## "Race" in Scottish Ethnology

James Bonwick's *Who Are the Scotch?* announces itself as an account of Scotland's population which will attempt to mitigate the "war of races" in Scotland. Bonwick proposes to do this by demonstrating that a mixture of "racial" types has developed historically in all parts of Scotland:

... when it is known that, in spite of some talking Gaelic and others English, the North is both Teuton and Celt, and the South is both Celt and Teuton ... a better feeling of brotherhood will be established (Bonwick, 1880: p vi).

However despite its stated intention of demonstrating "racial" connections between different parts of Scotland, the text is in fact preoccupied with the differentiae which set "races" apart from each other.

In pursuing a delineation of Scotland's ethnological history, Bonwick refers to a large number of Scottish historians, many of them quoted in support of the contention that the predominant "racial" elements in the population of Scotland are Celtic and Anglo-Saxon (eg Bonwick, 1880: pp 53 ff, pp 96 ff). Knox is quoted as follows:

To me the Caledonian Celt of Scotland appears a race as distinct from the Lowland Saxon of the same country as any two races can possibly be (1880: p 55).

Hector MacLean is cited as an anthropological authority attesting to the fact that "The Scotch Highlanders of the present day are a commixture of several races, Keltic and Scandanavian" (sic) and it is suggested that, in contemporary Highlanders, "some traits distinctive

of ... the primitive races of our country ... have continued to exist" (Bonwick, 1880: p-18).

Racialisation of the Scottish population is also evident in a reference to the historical presence of the Fleming "race". This is said to be evident in the physical appearance of the contemporary population of north-east Scotland. The people of Aberdeen, for example, are described as having the "broad, round, and rather flattish face observed in Flanders or Belgium": Beddoe (author of *The Races of Britain* (1885) and *Contribution to Scottish Ethnology* (1880)) is quoted as stating that "the fisher-folk of Portel are very fair, and very Dutch-like still" (Bonwick, 1880: p 118).

Bonwick does not define "race", but his usage of the term owes a great deal to contemporary, late nineteenth century theories concerning the significance of biological difference. However a biologicistic approach to the analysis of Scotland's "racial" composition can also be found in Scottish texts published in the early nineteenth century. Examples can be found by returning to phrenology, for Scottish phrenologists' concern with the "racial" characteristics of populations internal to Europe extended to Scotland itself, as the work of James Straton demonstrates. His *Researches in Cerebral Development to discover the Average, and Variety of Size, and form of the Human head at all Ages* (Straton, 1851) describes the ethnology of Scotland in terms of the distribution of phrenologically distinct "racial" types. Straton's purpose in demarcating a racialised geography of Scotland is "to preserve the classification of race as pure as possible for future comparison ..." (Straton, 1851: p 20). His research reflects the ideological conclusions of the English debate on the relative merits of the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic "races". This is evident in his comment that:



The third and last ethnological district of Scotland extends from the Clyde northward, including the Highlands and western islands ... a population of Celtic origin. In this district the average head is probably a few inches less than in the other districts ... (Straton, 1851: p 23)

For phrenologists, as I noted in Chapter Seven, a small head indicates a small brain, and a small brain is poor "racial" capital indeed. In phrenological terms, Straton's comment therefore implies the inferiority of people of Celtic origin. The inhabitants of the Highlands and Islands are effectively declared to be inferior to their non-Celtic contemporaries.

As with all "racial" categories which appear in phrenological discourse, the "Celts" are not a clearly defined entity in Straton's text. Nor are they clearly delineated in texts by other phrenological writers; the significance of the term shifts and alters from text to text and within texts, as does the significance of the category "Scottish" or "Scotch". For example one phrenological text of the 1830's ignores any "racial" distinction between Lowland and Highland Scots, drawing a phrenological distinction between England and Scotland instead:

The large size of the Scotch brain was probably one of the causes which rendered the permanent subjugation of Scotland by the English impossible (MacNish, 1836: p 7).

Similarly, Thomas Stone, conducting an experiment with the aim of discovering the typical phrenological features of "Atrocious Murderers" and "Most Notorious Thieves" in prisons in Edinburgh, tabulates his results according to national types which include the "English, Scotch, and Irish" (Stone, 1829). No distinction is made

here between Celts and Anglo-Saxons or between Highland and Lowland Scots.

In an article published in reply to Stone, Combe reproduces Stone's "national" categories without comment. He refers to the Scots as a "race" or "nation" distinct from the English, and presumably more or less homogeneous in their phrenological character. However this is at odds with distinctions which Combe draws elsewhere, between the racialised phrenology of the Highlands and the Lowlands. For example Combe's biography of his brother, the physician and phrenologist Andrew Combe, contains comments which suggest that the latter are to be understood as being "racially" distinct from their Celtic contemporaries in the Highlands. "The Lowland Scotch" are "descended from a Celtic stock" which has been "imbued with Teutonic blood". This mixture of the Teutonic and Celtic elements is described as affording an "equable endowment of faculties" which "affords the elements of much good and evil; and renders the Scotch in a remarkable degree susceptible of improvement by training and education" (Combe, 1850: pp 2-4). The positive aspect of this assessment is close to Matthew Arnold's thesis in its estimation of the benefits arising from a mixture of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon characteristics (Arnold, 1867; Chapman, 1978). However Combe, unlike Arnold, also distinguishes sharply between the "Lowland Scotch" and the Celtic Highlanders, asserting the "racial" superiority of the former. Unlike the Highlanders, the Lowland population have

... quick, prudent, self-preserving, and self-advancing qualities, for which they are celebrated wherever they are known. They possess, moreover, a large development of the moral and religious organs, accompanied by a natural seriousness of character, a deep interest in religion, and a strong sense of moral responsibility (Combe, 1850: pp 2-4).



This is the "racial" category of which Combe considered himself an example.

Combe's adherence to Anglo-Saxon supremacism is evident in his discussion of the population of rural Wales, which strongly implies the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon "race" over Welsh and Scottish Celts. Although Combe declares the Welsh "the best race of Celts I have seen", and praises their industriousness, he comments that

... there are strong marks of their Celtic character. They are dirty ... the cottages and humbler houses for tradesmen, shopkeepers and farmers are destitute of all beauty ... exactly like the same edifices in Celtic Scotland ... (quoted in Gibbon, 1878: p 311)

These reprehensible characteristics he attributes to the fact that "their brains have the Celtic narrowness in the anterior region, and Ideality is deficient" (1878: p 311). Combe's final comment on this topic indicates a hope that Welsh rural society might be reformed through the addition of Saxon "racial" types to the "national" stock:

... the population is much mixed, and one sees many finely organised, and some very pretty auburn-haired children with blue eyes, whose brains are of Saxon forms (1878: p 31).

The aesthetic appeal of the superior, "Saxon-brained" children contrasts with the Celtic ugliness of the homes in which they and their "racially" inferior contemporaries live.

Combe and Straton both echo the terms of the debate over Anglo-Saxon and Celtic elements in Scottish history, by suggesting that the contemporary inhabitants of the Highlands are "racially" distinct from

their Lowland peers. They also order Scottish populations in a "racial" hierarchy, claiming that this is "evidence" for the inferiority of the Highland Celts. Their work therefore provides examples of racism directed against a community "internal" to Scotland. In the following section I examine some further instances of such internal racism.

### The Wild Clans of the West

The Highlanders and the Irish are the most common targets of racism in nineteenth century discourses on Scotland and, as I point out below, the two groups are commonly linked together in racist texts of the period. Bonwick consistently affirms the "racial" inferiority of the Highland population; he argues that, with the settlement of a "race" which was a "compound of the blood of Angles, Danes, Saxons, Flemings, Normans, and Norsemen ..." in Scotland

... the Scot lost his pre-eminence, and sank into the reputed barbarous Highlander ... (who) had still the honour of giving his name to the country ... though relinquishing his political power to the superior Anglo-Norman, and even resigning his very language to that of the Teuton in court, in commerce and in letters (Bonwick, 1880: p 97, my parentheses).

Similarly, Keith's *History of Scotland Civil and Ecclesiastical* judges that the "unadulterated modern descendant of the Scot" (that is, the modern Highlander) retains the "profound ignorance and latent savageness" of his ancestors though these faults are "skilfully concealed by a pride and self-conceit" (Keith, 1886: p 67).

Bonwick claims that a "distinguished modern ethnologist", in considering the Highlanders



... refuses to acknowledge them as a people. He declares that they are the ne'er-do-wells of other races. Outcast Irish, rebel Northmen, banished Saxons, conspiring Northumbrians, restless Lothians, unyielding Normans, intriguing barons, hunted freebooters, decayed gentlemen, and loafers of all orders ... (Bonwick, 1880: p 123)

He quotes this negative assessments of the Highlanders without demur, a fact which weighs against his avowed intention of diminishing the tendency towards "inter-racial" hostility.

Alongside the debate concerning the relative merits of Anglo-Saxons and Celts, another theme which recurred in Scottish historiography, from the eighteenth century through to the late nineteenth, concerned the relative significance of Irish and Scottish "Celts" in the genealogical history of Scotland. Smout notes that until the mid-nineteenth century, Lowland Scots commonly referred to the population of the Highlands as "the Irish" (Smout, 1972: p 311). This was a reference not only to the Celtic culture of the Highlanders, but to a supposed genealogical connection with Ireland and, indeed, a denial that the Highlanders were Scottish. Some writers were provoked into a defence of the Highland population against this "racial" slur. For example Robertson's history of the Highlands, published in 1866, argues that:

The Highlanders of Scotland are unquestionably a most interesting race of people, the true descendants of the Caledonians ... the true narration of ancient facts respecting them, is independent of all the vain prejudice of those who would represent them, and their language, to be merely derived from the insignificant colony of Irish Scots which came into Argyleshire in the sixth century (Robertson, 1866: p v).

Robertson promises to "refute the unfounded claims of some grasping Irish writers" and to reveal "the early history of the descendants of the noble race of the Caledonian Gael" (1866: pp v-vii).

Robertson's denial of an ancestral link between Ireland and the population of the Highlands is premised on a negative view of the Irish, a view which is shared by those who argue for such a genealogical connection. For example Bonwick's comment, quoted above, implies the existence of a "racial" link between the Irish and the Highlanders, and constructs both populations as a problematic presence in Scotland. Elsewhere, discussing the middle ages, Bonwick makes the same connection:

... the wild clans of the west gave so much trouble to the central government at Edinburgh, often getting Irish help in their contests with the Scottish kings, that Irishmen became more than ever offensive in the sight of respectable Scotchmen (Bonwick, 1880: p 121).

"Respectable" no doubt has a class resonance in this context. However it also indicates, in this passage at least, the supra-class "racial" category of the Lowland Scots and their distinction from the Celts, including both the Highlanders and the Irish. Another dimension of "respectability" is indicated in Bonwick's assertion that among "loyal and Protestant Scots" in the period he is discussing, a hostility towards the Irish developed as a result of their being "ever ready to join rebel marauding clans in the desolation of the prosperous Lowlands". The Catholicism and Jacobite history of the Highlands was not so great a threat to Lowland Scotland as it had been one hundred years previously, but it had not been forgotten by "respectable" Protestants such as Bonwick (Bonwick, 1880: p 121).



## These Irish

In his description of relations between the Lowlands and the Western Highlands in the middle ages, Bonwick alludes to several of the elements which characterised the ideological reaction to Irish migration to Scotland in the nineteenth century, including protestant anti-Catholicism and claims concerning the wild lawlessness and lack of responsibility of the Irish (Curtis, 1968, 1971; Miles, 1982: pp 141-143; Colley, 1994: pp 327-328). These ideological characteristics are transposed to a different historical period and are interpreted as transhistorical "racial" qualities which link the Irish to the population of the Highlands.

In the course of his defence of the Highland Celtic "race", McLaughlin reproduces a similarly negative, stereotypical image of the Irish. Although he complains that the Irish have suffered abuses at the hands of the English, he is careful to position himself as a Protestant writer. While conceding that he speaks on behalf of the Highland Celts, he states that he hopes that he "will not be readily accused of sympathizing with much that is characteristic of the native Irish" (MacLaughlin, 1856: p 15). He goes on to distance himself from any such charges by making appropriate criticisms of Irish lawlessness and Catholicism (1856: p 15).

As I argued above, both of the texts in which these examples appear racialise the "Celtic races", including the Irish. There is a considerable amount of evidence concerning the marginalisation, discrimination and violence which was suffered by Irish people in nineteenth century Scotland. This textual evidence presents support for the argument that this reaction had a racist dimension and that it was related to, and entangled with, anti-Catholicism (Miles, 1982: pp 139-145; Miles and Dunlop, 1986: pp 27-30; Miles and Muirhead, 1986: pp 120-125).

Further evidence of a racist reaction to the Irish can be found in a report written by the Registrar General for Scotland at the beginning of the 1870's (Dundas, 1871). In the nineteenth century, as in the twentieth, the quantification and analysis of population was a vast ideological and political project. This project was a leading characteristic figure of "the human sciences", and it marks many of the historiographical and ethnological texts which I have discussed (Foucault, 1979: pp 139-141). It also shaped the functions and practices of a large number of political institutions, including the Registrar General for Scotland, one of the Scottish state institutions whose autonomy was partly preserved after the Union.

In 1871 the office of Registrar General was filled by William Pitt Dundas. His report accompanying the Census Returns of that year brings together several of the themes which I have discussed in this chapter. Dundas' concern with the "racial" composition of populations is evident throughout his report; however it is made particularly clear in a section entitled *Races of Men in Scotland*. Dundas begins this section with a comment on the importance of "race" as a concept applied in population analysis, stating that documentation of "the Races of Man who inhabit a Country has always been deemed of importance when considering the Statistics of its Population" (Dundas, 1871: p xviii). Here Dundas takes the contemporary, late nineteenth century notion of "race" to be simply the most sophisticated and significant account of a natural phenomenon which has always been significant to the statistician.

Dundas' report draws upon contemporary theories regarding the "racial" composition of Scotland. For example he states that the Lowland area of Scotland is "inhabited by that mixed race to which the term Anglo-Saxon is now generally applied" (1871: p xviii). This "energetic race" is contrasted with the Celts, who occupy all of the



Highlands (apart from Caithness, which is inhabited by "nearly pure Norsemen"). They are

... a nearly pure Celtic race, still retaining their ancient language, and showing in their configuration and general character the peculiarities of that race (1871: pp xviii-xix).

Dundas' descriptions of the Highland and Lowland populations include no adverse comments concerning the character of the Anglo-Saxons and Highland Celts. Turning to the Irish in Scotland, however, he adopts a markedly more judgemental tone.

Under the heading *Irish Immigrants and Their Effect on the Native Scot*, he comments that in 1820

... an invasion or immigration of the Irish race began, which slowly increased till it reached enormous dimensions after 1840, when the railways began to be constructed over the country (1871: p xix).

He suggests that the effects of this "invasion" are more serious than historical invasions by "warlike hordes of Saxons, Danes, and Norsemen". The "racial" integrity of Scotland is threatened by the sheer numbers of Irish arriving in "many of our Towns", where "if we include their children born in this country, from ten to thirty per cent of the Population ... consist of the Irish Celtic race." (1871: p xxxiv)

Dundas describes the effects of Irish immigration in terms which are common to many anti-immigration discourses: he mentions the threat of being outnumbered by "aliens" and the danger of what amounts to an unarmed "invasion"; he warns that the Irish "have penetrated to

every country of Scotland" (1871: p xxxiv) and describes the moral and cultural dangers which arise from this. These include the difficulty of raising the Irish out of their "uncivilised" state, and the consequent risk that they will degrade the Scottish population.

The immigration of such a body of labourers of the lowest class, with scarcely any education, cannot but have the most prejudicial effects on the Population. As yet the great body of these Irish do not seem to be improved by their residence among us; and it is quite certain that the native Scot who has associated with them has most certainly deteriorated. It is painful to contemplate what may be the ultimate effect of this Irish immigration on the morals and habits of the people, and on the future prospects of the Country (1871: p xxxiv).

The fact that the Irish migrants are "labourers of the lowest class" presents a danger to the preservation of order among working class members of the "native races" of Scotland. Under the heading *High Proportion of Irish and How Distributed*, Dundas reiterates this point in even clearer terms. The "very high proportion of Irish in Scotland" has "lowered greatly the moral tone of the lower classes, and greatly increased the necessity for the enforcement of sanitary and police precautions ...". (1871: p xxxiv)

Dundas' report demonstrates that racist discourses concerning the Irish were in circulation not only in scholarly texts, but also in texts produced by institutions of the Scottish proto-state. That there was a process of cross reference between these two types of text is evident in Bonwick's discussion, where Dundas' report is referred to at length. Bonwick remarks that the report "might well alarm many sober-minded, prudent Scots" and notes that the Registrar General



... who doubtless supposes himself a Scotchman, and free from the taint of Irish blood, is by no means jubilant at the prospect before his thrifty, intelligent, and Presbyterian brethren ... A Scotchman is already pretty composite as to race, though some predict that in fifty years' time his Irish blood will be in excess of any other (Bonwick, 1880: p 122).

In this passage the mixture of anti-Catholicism and racism which is all but explicit in the Registrar-General's report is made entirely so. The "sober-minded, prudent" Presbyterians of Scotland are endangered by the immigration of the Catholic, and "racially" distinct Irish.

### Conclusion

The internal racialisation of nineteenth century Scotland had several different aspects. Here I have focussed on three: the interpretation of Scottish history in terms of conflict between Anglo-Saxons and Celts; the view of the Highlanders as a distinct and inferior "race"; and the ideological reaction to Irish migration into Scotland. Each of these aspects of racialisation also involved a racist discourse, and each of the three was connected to the others. I noted, at the beginning of this chapter, that "racial" boundaries were constructed within and around Scotland during this period. The effectivity of these boundaries as markers of significant difference is attested to by the history of violent and discriminatory behaviour towards Highlanders and Irish people in Scotland (Lobdan, 1971: p 275; Treble, 1978: p 123; Miles, 1982: pp 135-145). However the material I have discussed suggests that the distinction between boundaries demarcating the imagined national community of Scotland on one hand, and boundaries separating racialised groups *within* Scotland on the other, was not clear cut. In other words the internal racialisation

of imagined communities was entangled with questions concerning "racial" affinities between Scottish people and the racialised "exterior".

For example the debate concerning historical and genealogical relations between Celts and Anglo-Saxons involved additional arguments concerning the relations between Irish and Highland Celts. As I noted above, some nineteenth century commentators did not regard the population of the Highlands as Scottish (a view based in part on their supposed "racial" relationship to the Irish), while others rejected this account by asserting the "racial" distinctiveness of the Highland Celts (Robertson, 1866: p v). Proponents of both parties were agreed that the Celts of the north were distinct from the Anglo-Saxons of the Lowlands, but the significance of this distinction in terms of the Highlanders' status as *Scots* was a matter of dispute. In this dispute the Irish played the rôle of intruders; defined, by the Registrar General and others, as a threat to social order, both through their alleged effects on the Lowland working class, and through their "racial" affinity with the Highlanders.

Bonwick's question, *Who are the Scotch?* is a more interesting one than he supposed. Although some notion of "national identity" had been present in Scotland for several centuries prior to the nineteenth, the definition of this identity was not fixed and unproblematic (Seton-Watson, 1977: 25-26). Just as the acceptability of the name "Scotch" has changed since the nineteenth century (being attached now to whisky exclusively, and provoking dismay amongst some "Scots" when it is applied to people), the imagined boundaries of the Scottish national community are also changeable. In the next chapter I will explore the issue of Scottish national identity further, by discussing the conclusions of the research presented in this thesis, and by commenting on recent debates concerning Scottish cultural history.



CHAPTER NINE

IMPERIALISM,  
RACISM AND THE  
IMAGINATION OF SCOTLAND

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss some implications of the findings which have emerged from the preceding analyses. In the first part of the chapter I review some features of the examples of racialisation and racism which I have examined. I also consider the historical and theoretical significance of the changes in usage and meaning which I have discussed, and their correspondence to different ways of discursively constructing imagined communities. In the second part I comment on the construction of national and class identities in nineteenth century Scotland. In doing so, I adopt a different approach from that of Chapter Eight, where I was primarily concerned with the analysis of nineteenth century texts; specifically, I review some recent debates concerning nineteenth century Scottish politics and culture and I suggest that work in this area should take account of the significance of imperialism. In conclusion I propose some areas of research which are pertinent to this project.

To begin with it is worth reiterating the point that the texts I have examined in the preceding four chapters indicate the involvement of nineteenth century Scottish intellectuals in the production of racist and racialising discourses. Whether taking as their objects population groups in Africa, Asia, Australasia, the Americas, continental Europe or Scotland, these texts are informed by assumptions about the supposedly natural inferiority of certain imagined communities. An interesting and significant aspect of this

finding is that the nature of other "races" is not a *principal* topic of many of the texts I have reviewed. Some, for example, are primarily concerned with the geography of Africa or the history of Scotland; yet they make extensive use of racialised categories and racist arguments, often without attempting to justify or substantiate them. This indicates that in Scotland, as elsewhere in Europe, such categories and arguments were a familiar part of intellectual discourse of the period. On the other hand a number of the texts I have examined in Part Two do not merely draw upon racist arguments and assumptions but make positive interventions in contemporary debates on the nature of "races" and "racial" hierarchies. This demonstrates that the Scottish contribution to the development of racist theories during the period was not confined to more celebrated examples such as Knox's work.

Whether or not they are primarily concerned with the significance of racialised differences, the texts I have looked at contribute to the discursive construction of imagined communities. To put this another way, I have demonstrated that Scottish intellectuals of this period were involved in the discursive production of the racialised objects (tribes, "races", nations, peoples and so on) which they described. This is not to say that the imagined communities which they discussed were entirely unrelated to actually existing social collectives in nineteenth century Africa or Scotland. However the descriptions which appear in their texts are mediated by layers of presupposition and presumption. They are in part reconstructions based on ideologically conditioned observation (as in Park's journals); and in part further reformulations, at second hand, of such reconstructions (as in Murray's compilations of extant descriptions of Africa).

The end products of these processes of representation are informed by racist arguments concerning the nature of human difference, its



causes and its significance. Passages of description are preconstructed by ideological assumptions: the choice of one emphasis rather than another in the physical description of an individual, emphasis on "moral" characteristics which are implicitly evaluated against a presumed European ideal; these and other ideological figures recur wherever the texts refer to differences of economic organisation, cultural habit or physical appearance.

I have drawn attention to differences between ways of racialising social collectives which are evident in the texts, and to the different varieties of racist ideology which correspond to those modes of racialisation. Broadly speaking, Scottish racist texts written in the early part of the century endorse environmentalist theories of human difference. Texts from the latter half of the century, on the other hand, generally embrace forms of biological determinism. The ideological opposition between environmentalist and biologicistic racisms is evident in the different ways of constructing social collectives associated with them. For example biological determinists such as Thomson give central importance to phenotypical difference as a means of identifying imagined communities, emphasising the fixity of "racial" hierarchies. Environmentalists, on the other hand, consider biological difference as one of a range of attributes by which collectives can be identified; often not as a significant one in terms of the explanation of difference, and never as a factor affecting potential for progress towards "civilisation".

As the phrenological texts examined in Chapter Seven demonstrate, this transition developed "unevenly". Combe and his colleagues articulated biological determinist arguments, and a biologically based model of racialisation, at a time when the dominant discourse was environmentalist. The uneven nature of the discursive transition is also evident in the texts which I examined in Chapter Six. In work such as Murray's, where the tension between two forms of racism

informs the structure of the text's arguments, the term "race" becomes a site of conflict. Although Murray demurred from the growing support for biological determinism and polygenism, he could not ignore the emergent emphasis on biological difference (Curtin, 1965: p 228; Stepan, 1982: pp xii-xiv and 4-5). The transitional (and seemingly paradoxical) character of Murray's work consists in his theorisation of a new, biologicistic way of constructing imagined community in order to oppose the biological-determinist positions which could be articulated within it.

During the period when these texts were produced, the questions which Scottish intellectuals asked about the nature of human difference, and the answers which they offered, were shaped by political and economic conditions, including imperialist relations with the extra-European world. The various ways of constructing racialised imagined communities which are evident in Scottish texts of this period, the various racist ideologies which correspond to them, the models of historical progress which inform them and the theories of civilisation which they endorse, are all indicative of a relationship between imperialist power and forms of knowledge (Said 1993: pp 127 ff; Fabian, 1983). For example, as I indicated in Chapter Five, the accounts of Africa written by Park, Clapperton, Laing, Thomson, Livingstone and many other Scottish explorers were produced in the context of efforts to exploit the economic potential of the African continent (Smailes, 1981: pp 19, 32, 40).

The racist ideologies which are evident in Scottish texts of this period (whether environmentalist or biological-determinist, and whether "philanthropic" or frankly hostile to extra-European populations) are compatible with, and capable of facilitating, the processes of subordination and exploitation on which imperialism depends. However imperialism does not exhaust the political and



economic contexts in which racist ideology was reproduced in Scotland: social relations within Scotland must also be considered.

Lorimer argues that in mid-Victorian England, perceptions of domestic class relations were equally as significant for the formation of racist views as perceptions of the empire and its populations. Ruling class views about the working class had a marked racist element, and racist attitudes towards the populations of Africa, India and other parts of the British empire drew upon hierarchical models which had their origins in ideological representations of domestic class relations (Lorimer, 1978: pp 15-16, 206). The pattern of reproduction of racist ideology in nineteenth century Scotland can also be illuminated by reference to domestic class relations, though in a somewhat different way from that proposed by Lorimer.

As some of the material I have discussed in Part Two suggests, there was a strong element of racism and racialisation in the views of class which were prevalent in nineteenth century Scotland. For example, although the Lowland working class were regarded as Anglo-Saxon by intellectuals such as Combe, their ruling class peers regarded them as their natural, as well as social inferiors. On the other hand, Scottish intellectuals interested in "race" considered that the Scottish bourgeoisie and their class allies had both a social and a "racial" affinity with the English ruling class. The Lowland Scottish bourgeoisie not only aspired to England's politico-economic success; they also set about acquiring English ruling class culture. Beginning in the eighteenth century, and increasingly as the nineteenth century wore on, English manners and language were taught to socially aspirant Lowland Scots (Hechter, 1975: pp 110, 115-116, 182). This identification was racialised. Ruling class Lowland Scots regarded themselves as Anglo-Saxons, like their English contemporaries, and to the extent that this identification was racialised, it naturalised (and thus supported) the view that the

Lowland population was superior to the predominantly "Celtic" populations of the Highlands.

As the pioneers and guardians of civil society, the Lowland Scottish ruling class regarded themselves as superior, both in politico-economic terms and culturally, to the Highland hinterland, which was perceived as a region subject to barbaric, pre-civilised conditions (Smout, 1972: pp 321, 462; Womack, 1989: pp 20-27; Colley, 1984: pp 15, 395). This perception of the Highlands had a basis in real differences. The region was economically underdeveloped, partly as a consequence of interventions made by Lowland Scottish interests; furthermore, Highland culture was Gaelic speaking, predominantly Catholic and residually tribal, whereas the people of the Lowlands were largely non-Catholic, spoke English or Lallans, and had experienced the rapid industrial development of some regions. As I argued in Chapter Eight, Scottish intellectuals racialised these and other differences between the people of the Lowlands and the Highlands, regarding the two populations as naturally distinct.

Yet the identity of the Lowland ruling class was also constructed as distinctly Scottish, and resisted complete cultural or political absorption by England. This suggests complex links between class, national and racialised identities in nineteenth century Scotland. In what follows I turn to some recent literature which has dealt with the construction of Scottish cultural identities, paying particular attention to contributions which have examined links between, on one hand, domestic politics and, on the other, the significance of imperialism and racism. As I note below, Scottish involvement in imperialism has received little attention in the literature. Nevertheless, there has been some work on Scottish cultural history which indicates the possibilities which could be opened up by research into these connections.



## **Imperialism and the Cultural Representation of Scotland**

The relationships between imperialism, racism and the representation of "Englishness" have been investigated in several studies of English cultural history. An important aspect of these studies is the argument that nineteenth century representations of the English as a national community were typically constructed in relation to colonised "counter-identities" (eg Bolt, 1971: pp 159 ff; Spivak, 1984; Mackenzie, 1984; Rich, 1986). "England's national identity", argues Hall,

... cannot be understood outside of England's colonial dependencies. Jamaica ... may never have been seen by the majority of English population yet it occupied a place in their imaginary. Their ethnic identity as *English* was rooted in a series of assumptions about others (Hall, 1992: p 209).

Apologists for imperialism presented the English as possessing characteristics which guaranteed English superiority over other nations; characteristics which inverted the inferior qualities of the populations of the colonies, and which fitted them for the tasks of imperial government and economic domination (Said, 1993: pp 126-128; Spivak, 1984). Pursuing this analysis through examination of literary fiction, Spivak comments that:

It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English (Spivak, 1985: p 243).

It should be no more possible to forget the significance of imperialism (or of racism) in the representation of Scotland to the Scottish during the

nineteenth century. Yet the significance of Scottish involvement in imperialism has largely been neglected in debates concerning Scottish cultural history.

This oversight is surprising since, on the face of it, the hypothesis that imperialism informed and shaped the representation of "Scottishness" during the nineteenth century seems highly plausible. Given the involvement of Scottish merchants, industrialists, soldiers, missionaries and others in the administration and exploitation of the British empire, it seems likely that Scotland was perceived, by these participants at least, as part of a project which palpably demonstrated the superiority of its agents over the millions whose socio-economic world it annexed and transformed. To this extent it might appear that Spivak's comment on the significance of imperialism for the representation of England to the English refers to an ideological configuration which can be unproblematically transposed to the Scottish case.

The comparison is not so simple however. The ambiguities and paradoxes of Scotland's position within the Union are complicating factors which differentiate the Scottish and English cases with regard to the ideological construction of nationhood during the nineteenth century. One such paradox consists in the structure of political power in Scotland during this period: a province within Great Britain, Scotland was also in some senses a subsidiary nation, with a distinct history of national struggles and wars, a number of extant distinct political structures and a distinct civil society (Seton-Watson, 1977: pp 25-26; Harvie, 1977: pp 59-90; Smout, 1977: p 1; Dickson, 1980a, 1980b; Nairn, 1981).

Furthermore, as I indicated in Chapter One, it has been suggested by some commentators that although the Union permitted the Scottish bourgeoisie increased access to English markets, and allied them to English imperial power, it also consolidated and deepened Scottish economic dependence in relation to England (Dickson, 1980a; Wallerstein, 1980). To say that Scots



were both colonised and colonisers is perhaps too simplistically neat a formulation, given the problems inherent in the "internal colonialism" thesis (Hechter, 1975; Harvie, 1977: pp 92-93; McCrone, 1992: pp 57-62). However it seems reasonable to say that during much of the nineteenth century the country was in the ambiguous position of participating in the political and economic advantages of British imperialism, while being dominated politically by Westminster. In discussing the representation of "Scottishness" during the nineteenth century it is therefore necessary to address not only Scottish involvement in British imperialism, but also the economic, political and ideological relationships which pertained between Scotland and England.

In fact, discussions of Scottish nationalism and national culture have for the most part explored the second of these issues to the exclusion of the first, taking British (or, somewhat less narrowly, European) political and cultural history to be their relevant context. In what follows I review one notable exception to this trend, Nairn's *The Break-Up of Britain* (1981). I suggest that although Nairn's contribution neglects to fully explore the significance of imperialism, his arguments actually demonstrate the salience of such an approach. Elsewhere in this thesis I have explored the history of racism in nineteenth century Scotland by reference to primary sources. In turning to the question of the relationship between imperialism and Scottish cultural identity I am concerned largely with secondary material, my main aim being to draw out some implications of existing research on the subject. In conclusion, however, I propose a number of ways in which primary research in this area could be extended.

### **Scotland and Nationalism**

No significant nationalist political movement arose in Scotland until the early twentieth century, and this despite the presence of several of the preconditions which, during the nineteenth century, facilitated the rise of such movements elsewhere in Europe. By the late eighteenth century

Scotland had a rapidly ascendant bourgeoisie and a prominent intelligentsia. It had autonomous civil institutions (Scots law, the Church of Scotland and the Scottish educational system being then, as they still are today, distinct and autonomous from their English counterparts) and a relatively recent history of political independence. Together these factors can, by straightforward comparison with European countries where a significant nationalist political movement *did* emerge, be listed as archetypical "raw materials" for the mobilisation of political nationalism (Smout, 1977: pp 11 ff).

Yet, as Dickson notes, "the latter part of the eighteenth century and the majority of the nineteenth century are interesting not because of the presence of nationalism in Scotland, but rather because of the relative absence of such activity" (Dickson, 1980b: p 120). Part of the interest of this situation lies in the contrast which it provides with the political histories of other European countries where nationalism emerged and flourished during the period: "for virtually the whole century of nationalism's classical development ... there simply was no Scottish nationalist movement of the usual sort" observes Nairn, who proceeds to offer an explanation of this absence (Nairn, 1981: p 105).

Nairn's *The Break-Up of Britain* (1981) is a collection of essays which deal with various aspects of British regional separatism, as well as elaborating a general theory of nationalism. The arguments concerning the history of Scottish nationalism and the complexities and ambiguities of Scottish culture presented in the text have been influential in shaping recent debates concerning these issues and have been referred to both in Scottish nationalist polemic and in academic texts. The suggestiveness and influential nature of Nairn's work warrants a detailed discussion of his thesis.

Nairn seeks to demonstrate that the history of nationalism in nineteenth century Scotland appears to the historian as an anomaly unique in Europe;



that it is the history not only of an absence but of an absence which presents itself as a kind of aberration. This claim and the explanatory hypotheses which underpin it are founded on Nairn's general model of the pattern of development of nationalism in nineteenth century Europe; the general model must therefore be explained before Nairn's arguments concerning Scotland can be addressed.

Following arguments developed by Gellner (1964), Nairn argues that nineteenth century European nationalism is best understood as being, in essence, a response to the "imperialism built into 'development'" (Nairn, 1981: p 99). The uneven development of nineteenth century capitalism forced a "nationalism-producing dilemma" on the bourgeoisie of a succession of European states (1981: p 99). According to Nairn, this dilemma followed from a recognition among the bourgeoisies of economically and politically peripheral countries that, in order for economic and political advancement to be achieved, the capitalist development of core socio-economic formations such as England and France must be both emulated and resisted: emulated, because the overthrow or displacement of feudal and absolutist regimes was perceived to be a prerequisite for economic prosperity and political power; resisted, because economic subjugation and political domination by the core countries was a threat which flowed directly from the enviable advancement of the latter.

This dilemma precipitated nationalist struggles and the development of nationalist ideologies. The development gap between core and peripheral socio-economic formations was perceived as both a threat and a promise by the bourgeoisies of the periphery: nationalism appeared to provide a political solution which could fulfil the promise while offering a means of mobilisation against the threat. For example the nationalism adopted by the bourgeoisies of the German-speaking states and Italy sought "modernisation" while resisting political and economic subordination to England or France. Similarly, the bourgeoisies of the underdeveloped

"hinterland" of Central and Eastern Europe adopted nationalism as a means of resisting domination by Italy or Germany.

Nairn builds on this general analysis of European nationalism as the context and the premise for an explanation of the absence of a political nationalist movement in Scotland during the nineteenth century. He argues that this absence should be understood as the consequence of material factors which are thrown into relief by comparative analysis. Between the Act of Union in 1707 and the end of the eighteenth century, Scotland's economy developed rapidly as a result of access to international markets restricted, prior to the Union, by the Navigation Laws and other English legislation (Hechter, 1975: p 93; Nairn, 1981: pp 109, 113, 139). As I noted in Chapter One, the period between the 1770's and the 1830's saw Scotland's economy making considerable progress and, arguably, reaching a threshold point in the process of capital accumulation. To a large extent the threshold was reached as a result of advantages accruing from Union with England (Smout, 1972: pp 223-239; 1977: pp 13-14). One consequence of this, Nairn argues, was that during the first period of the development of European nationalisms the Scottish bourgeoisie were not caught in a "nationalism-producing dilemma". Unlike other small, peripheral countries in nineteenth century Europe, Scotland was not subject to a development gap great enough to provoke concerted nationalist political resistance. Having gained from economic and political affiliation to "Great Britain", the Scottish bourgeoisie had no economic reason for breaking their political relationship with the British state.

If the Union was conducive to the development of capitalism in Scotland, it also provided for the maintenance of the autonomy of Scottish civil society, through the preservation of distinct civil institutions. To Unionists at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the fact that the preservation of a distinct Scottish Kirk, legal system and educational structure was written in to the terms of the Act of Union more than



compensated for the loss of a Scottish parliament (Harvie, 1977: pp 67 ff; Smout, 1972: pp 1-21). As Smout puts it:

The Scottish church was left intact, the Scottish legal profession was left quite separate; the Royal burghs, their merchants and tradesmen, were left in possession of their ancient privileges ... Scottish education and Scottish Poor Law developed unhindered taking a radically different direction from their English equivalents. All that was incorporated was parliament, and eighteenth-century parliaments did much less, and mattered much less in the lives of ordinary people than parliaments do today (1977: p 12)

To many members of the Scottish bourgeoisie it appeared that they could enjoy all the advantages of participation in English markets while preserving their civic autonomy. A century later Unionists saw little reason to doubt the wisdom of that assessment. Scotland was neither wholly assimilated into England's political and cultural structures, nor forced into a nationalist resistance against assimilation: it was, to use Nairn's phrase, a semi-autonomous "decapitated nation-state" (Nairn, 1981: p 129).

### **Nationalism and National Culture**

The conditions of Scotland's relationship to Westminster and to the English imperialist economy determined the politico-ideological anomaly which Nairn seeks to explain; Scottish nationalism "failed" to develop during the nineteenth century because political mobilisation of that kind would have been contrary to the interests of the Scottish bourgeoisie and their class allies. Nairn argues that these circumstances had a radical effect on the development of Scottish culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and particularly

on the representation of Scottish "national identity". Nationalism, he argues, was an important factor in the production of European "high culture" during the nineteenth century. It is not surprising, therefore, that Scotland's anomalous politico-ideological trajectory during the period was accompanied by anomalous cultural consequences.

Nationalism, Nairn suggests, "is always the joint product of external pressures and an internal balance of class forces" (1981: p 41). If the external pressures are generated by the processes of uneven development, the internal balance depends on a particular relation between the bourgeoisie and "the masses", who constitute an indispensable force in nationalist struggles. Mobilisation of this force requires the development of a cultural language capable of being comprehended by a significant proportion of the reading population, and capable of articulating an appeal to distinctively "national" values, sentiments and traditions. This language is Romanticism, the cultural medium of nineteenth century nationalism. In European countries where a material dilemma of uneven development provoked a nationalist response, the intelligentsia played a vital role as bearers and manipulators of this cultural medium. In fictional and academic texts they reconstructed a nationalist historiography and ideology adequate to the task of mobilising political nationalism among the bourgeoisie and, crucially, among the masses.

In Scotland there was no such role for the intelligentsia, despite the fact that the materials for a romanticised, nationalist history were present in abundance. In fact, the inheritance of Scottish military and regal heroes, struggles against England and distinctive cultural traditions were recycled and transformed in romantic literary productions throughout the nineteenth century, but this material was dealt with in a manner which was emphatically not nationalist. Nairn takes Scott to be the exemplar and model for this trend and argues



that Scott's novels portrayed a nostalgic, depoliticised vision of pre-modern Scottish history, which offered no practical, political connections with the present of the nineteenth century. Scott was the avant-garde of a "cultural sub-nationalism" which functioned as an inert substitute for political nationalism (Nairn, 1981: pp 117, 163-169; see also Harvie, 1977: pp 132-4; Womack, 1989: p 146; Pittock, 1991: pp 84-90; cf Ash, 1980).

These arguments suggest the importance of the relationship between Scottish participation in British imperialism and the ideological representation of "Scottishness". By making connections between, on one hand, Scotland's political and economic position within the Union and within the Empire and, on the other, the ways in which Scottish history and Scottish culture were represented in academic and fictional literature, Nairn suggests a way of pursuing the line of enquiry proposed by Spivak in relation to "Englishness". I argue, below, that although Nairn's thesis is a potentially productive one in this regard, the nature of the relationship to which he alludes is inadequately explored in his analysis. First, however, it is necessary to address some other criticisms which have been levelled at Nairn's thesis.

Both the general theory of nationalism presented in *The Break-Up of Britain*, and the arguments specifically concerning Scotland, have been the object of a number of critiques. Among Scottish nationalist critics of Nairn's work, Beveridge and Turnbull have argued that it is flawed by a jaundiced view of Scottish culture, which ignores the possibility that Scottish cultural consumers may creatively appropriate what appear to be reactionary cultural products; this is not an issue which is directly relevant to my discussion (Beveridge and Turnbull, 1989: pp 58 ff). McCrone attacks Nairn from a position critical of Scottish nationalism, claiming that it displays a certain kind of nostalgia typical of contemporary left-wing nationalists. By

decrying the distortion of Scottish "identity", he suggests, Nairn implies a need for some more positive or radical identity which can substitute for it (McCrone, 1989: pp 161-173; 1992: pp 191-2). McCrone objects to this project on the grounds that the impulse to search for a "better" identity is anachronistic and misleading; there is no reason why Scotland should have one, unifying "identity", and the construction of such a chimera might have dangerous consequences (1992: p 190). This criticism does not do justice to the sophistication of Nairn's argument. Far from seeking to reconstruct a Scottish "national identity", Nairn is concerned to deconstruct the ideological elements which have made such a thing seem possible. McCrone's strictures may be more applicable to the other writers he discusses in this context. I am not convinced, however, that Nairn commits the same error.

Both Hobsbawm (1977) and Blaut (1987) challenge Nairn's assertion that nationalism spread eastwards during the nineteenth century in tandem with the "tidal wave of modernisation" which swept through Europe at that time. Hobsbawm draws attention to a number of cases which do not accord with Nairn's chronology, while Blaut argues that although the "spread" of nationalism does appear, broadly, to have been from west to east, in a number of significant cases the securing of nationalist independence was connected, not to the spread of capitalism but to the political consequences of the 1914-18 war and the Bolshevik revolution (Blaut, 1987: p 82). These criticisms do not fundamentally affect Nairn's argument concerning Scotland and I therefore move on to consider a criticism of his text which is more relevant to my purpose here.

This consists in the charge that Nairn's analysis of the Scottish case is based on a false premise. The claim that the absence of a nationalist political movement in nineteenth century Scotland is an anomaly has been challenged by Hobsbawm, who argues that Nairn's



analysis is flawed by anachronism (Hobsbawm, 1977: p 5). In attempting to explain the supposed "belatedness" of twentieth century Scottish nationalism, Nairn betrays his misunderstanding of the nature of nineteenth century nationalist movements. The latter, Hobsbawm argues, did not aim to achieve the autonomy of all "nations", irrespective of their size, but to create politically and economically viable states. In the period in question such viability required geographical and demographic mass, so nationalist movements typically sought the assimilation or coalescence of small countries into larger political units. Nationalist movements such as those in Italy and the German states aimed at the political unification of hitherto autonomous states within empires; the unification of Czechoslovakia resulted from an amalgamation of two states with no historical unity outwith nationalist mythology, and so on. On the other hand

... movements for the actual state independence of small nations, however defined, were exceedingly rare, as distinct from various degrees of autonomy or lesser recognition within larger states (1977: p 5).

Nairn's assessment of nineteenth century Scotland as an anomaly is therefore "pure anachronism"; he applies to nineteenth century cases, criteria which are specific to twentieth century nationalisms, and which are therefore inappropriate.

Hobsbawm's criticism is decisive if correct, as it appears to refute Nairn's assertion of the uniqueness of the Scottish case, thereby depriving him of an explanandum. However Blaut has questioned Hobsbawm's judgement on this score (Blaut, 1987: pp 107 ff; see also Anderson, 1991: pp 88-89). He challenges Hobsbawm's assertion that nineteenth century nationalist movements were typically assimilationist rather than separatist in tendency:

... the essential character of ... national movements was their struggle for independence ... and the matter of the size and shape of the sought-after sovereign state was a somewhat different and subordinate question. Czechs and Slovaks, for instance, might agree to go in tandem, rather than separately, but they would not agree to remain under foreign rule (Blaut, 1987: p 107).

The significance of this debate for Blaut is its relation to radically different assessments of the political validity of twentieth century nationalism on Hobsbawm's part and his own (1987: pp 101-102; Hobsbawm, 1990: pp 163-183). It is not a debate which can be resolved here. Nevertheless, Blaut's criticism of Hobsbawm is relevant, as it allows me to argue, *contra* Hobsbawm, that Nairn correctly identifies the Scottish case as an anomaly in the history of nationalisms.

Nairn attempts to elaborate on the nature of the anomaly by arguing, not only that it was against the interests of the Scottish bourgeoisie to mobilise a political nationalist movement, but that it was *in* their interests to suppress any popular agitation for separatism. He claims that there were "separatist or national trends which were still implicit in the persistence of such a distinct civil society" and implies that working class nationalism presented a threat to the bourgeoisie: "the problem of the bourgeoisie" he claims, "therefore became - put in its starkest terms - that of neutralising and repressing the country's more distinctive and proto-national features" (Nairn, 1981: pp 146-147).

The question of the extent of working class nationalism in nineteenth century Scotland has been debated extensively in Scottish historical and sociological literature and must be regarded as still unresolved (eg Young, 1979; Dickson, 1985). Nairn himself offers no evidence in



support of his claim that such movements were so extensive as to constitute a major problem for the bourgeoisie. However, he does not need to demonstrate the existence of a working class nationalist tradition in the period in order to maintain his principal thesis. The anomaly of the Scottish case is adequately demonstrated by the fact that the autonomous civil institutions which were preserved by the Act of Union were consistently defended by the Scottish Lowland bourgeoisie (Harvie, 1977: pp 38-42). Certainly, movements such as the Home Rule agitation of the 1880's were never orientated towards a break with the Union; rather, the aim was to strengthen the position of Scottish capital *within* the beneficial environment of British imperialism (Dickson, 1980b: pp 121-123). Nevertheless, such pressure groups are a reminder that the historical, cultural and political materials for national separatism were present in the Scottish case, and they therefore lend weight to Nairn's argument: that is to say, the absence of a nationalist movement in nineteenth century Scotland requires some explanation, and the consequences of Scottish involvement in British imperialism provide it. This argument identifies an anomaly which Hobsbawm's strictures do not nullify. In other European countries, nationalist movements (whether they aimed at unification or separatism) were supported by the bourgeoisie. In Scotland the bourgeoisie had quite contrary aims, and Nairn is correct to argue that the Scottish case was unusual in this respect.

It is in the context of this argument that the last of the three criticisms of Nairn's thesis which I listed above is relevant. Blaut, in his *The National Question* (Blaut, 1987), challenges Nairn's usage of terms such as "modernisation" (in relation to the spread of capitalism) and "domination" (with regard to the relationship between "core" and "peripheral" economies). He argues that they indicate Nairn's adherence to a diffusionist theory of capitalist development which is at odds with the Marxist theory of imperialism to which he pays token service (1987: pp 77-83). Nairn displaces the Marxist

theory of imperialism as a specific form of class exploitation, by describing it in terms of the bourgeoisie of one nation-state being "dominated" by the bourgeoisie of another, as "modernisation" spreads in the manner of an infection from one nation-state to the next. The corollary of this is that the question of nationalism, conceived as the reaction of the bourgeoisies of peripheral nation-states against "domination" (or potential domination) by the bourgeoisies of the core, is divorced from the question of the struggle of the proletariat of a colonised state against the bourgeoisie of an imperialist nation-state (or against the latter and the "indigenous" bourgeoisie).

This criticism is accurate, insofar as Nairn does not pursue the question of Scottish working class attitudes to nationalism and national identity. Despite his references to the significance of internal class struggles for the development of nationalism, the political struggles of the Scottish working class are treated in a functionalist manner, as factors provoking, but never shaping, the political and cultural practices of the intelligentsia and bourgeoisie. In Nairn's defence it could be pointed out that research into nineteenth century working class attitudes on any topic is a project fraught with notorious difficulties. To a large extent the historical record tends to favour the views of the literate, few of whom were members of the working class (Smout, 1972: p 450; McCrone, 1992: pp 92-95): this is a problem which is reflected in my own focus, in this thesis, on intellectual discourses, rather than on working class racism.

A more surprising area of neglect in Nairn's work is his failure to pursue his own suggestion concerning the decisive impact of imperialism in Scottish cultural history. He does not pursue analysis of the relationships between imperialism and the construction of Scottish national identity beyond a discussion of, first, the



production of de-politicised accounts of Scottish history by an intelligentsia deprived of its nationalist "function"; and, second, the conditions of possibility for the semi-autonomy of Scottish civil institutions (Nairn, 1981: pp 65, 138).

I have already discussed Nairn's treatment of the first of these factors. With regard to the second, he observes:

At bottom, this freer, less painful, less regimented form of assimilation was simply a function of the unique imperialism England established in the wider world, and of the state form which corresponded to it internally (1981: p 65).

Because of the economic and political security which the British state enjoyed as a result of the developmental priority of British imperialism, it could "afford" to permit the semi-autonomy of Scottish political institutions: they constituted no political threat and could therefore be tolerated. In other words, the autonomy of Scottish civil society was possible because of the unique prosperity and power of British imperialism.

These arguments suggest that British imperialism is an important factor in the history of Scottish nationalism and in the history of representations of Scottish culture. Nevertheless, Nairn himself neglects to follow up his brief, though suggestive comments on this subject. Indeed, few writers have pursued the lines of historical and sociological enquiry indicated by *The Break-Up of Britain*. Womack makes some original contributions concerning Scottish involvement in imperialism in the eighteenth century (Womack, 1989: pp 30-33, 147-8, *passim*) but the nineteenth century remains virtually unexplored in this regard.

## Conclusion and Some Directions for Further Research

My principal aim in this thesis has been to discuss aspects of the history of racism and racialisation in nineteenth century Scotland. Earlier in this chapter I suggested that this history cannot be explained solely in terms of Scottish involvement in imperialism, or in terms of ideological rationalisations of imperialist politics; I argued that Scottish domestic politics (including class relations in the Lowlands, and political and cultural relations between the Lowlands and the Highlands) partly informed the reproduction of racism in Scotland.

However the work I have examined in the latter part of this chapter suggests that in certain respects too *little* attention has been paid to the history of Scottish imperialism. Specifically, research on the construction of Scottish cultural identities could be extended by moving away from discussions focussed exclusively on Scotland's internal, domestic politics (or political relations with England) and turning attention to the significance of Scotland's political, cultural and economic relationships with the extra-European world during the nineteenth century. Looking at the literature concerning Scottish culture, it is apparent that the impact of imperialism has not been thoroughly explored by contemporary sociologists and social historians, despite some suggestive work by Nairn and others.

Nairn's analysis of Scottish cultural history indicates that participation in British imperialism had complex effects on the construction of Scottish cultural identities, allowing the Lowland Scottish bourgeoisie and their class allies to identify with the political and economic aims of the English ruling class, while retaining a distinctively Scottish cultural and political identity. I have argued that this complex of identifications had a racialised aspect. As I noted in Chapter Eight, the Lowland Scottish ruling



class were identified by some Scottish intellectuals as Anglo-Saxons, and therefore as having a "racial" affinity with the English; an affinity which also implied their superiority to the population of the Highlands. However, notwithstanding their political, economic and putatively "racial" associations with England, Lowland "Anglo-Saxons" also identified themselves as Scottish, and as politically and culturally distinct from their English contemporaries. Part of the value of Nairn's work is its suggestion that such constructions of identity can be understood in terms of the history of Scottish involvement in imperialism. In conclusion, therefore, I suggest some directions for research into the area which *The Break-Up of Britain* opens up.

In the light of the material examined in Chapter Five, one starting point for such research could be found by looking at the way in which certain Scottish explorers became national heroes during the nineteenth century. As I pointed out in Chapter Five, figures such as Thomson and Livingstone acquired a mythic status as representatives of Scottish bravery and enterprise. Examination of biographical texts, missionary journals and "gentlemen's magazines" describing these figures could yield interesting insights into the construction of such national icons. Given the imperialist agenda often associated with Scottish exploration in Africa and other parts of the world, it is possible that such research would reveal interesting evidence concerning Scottish attitudes to the British empire, as well as to Scotland itself.

Most people who left Scotland during the nineteenth century did not achieve individual fame. Nevertheless, Harvie has argued that the figure of the emigrant was a centrally important cultural symbol in Scotland during this period. He proposes that what he calls an "emigration ideology" became a major, perhaps the principal, repository of Scottish national identity from the 1830's onwards,

following the relative decline in autonomous political power of Scottish political institutions. Throughout the eighteenth century and until 1832 (and despite the formal authority of Westminster), Scottish government was substantially independent of, and markedly distinct from, that of England. An important element in the continuation of a distinct Scottish political sphere was the extent of the franchise; only one in six hundred Scots were entitled to vote in 1831, compared to one in thirty in England. Furthermore, Scottish Members of Parliament did not represent their electorate; rather, they represented "managers" appointed by the British government. Scottish legislation was agreed in Edinburgh by these managers, in partnership with Scots law officers, the Faculty of Advocates, administrative bodies and, importantly, the Church (Harvie, 1977: p 102). By the early 1830's, however, this complex system of government had gone through a series of crises and when the Whigs came into power they dismantled it. The Reform Bill of 1832 extended the franchise in Scotland and instituted virtually direct government of the country from Westminster.

Despite these changes, the institutions of Scottish civil society remained a repository and focus of Scottish cultural identity. As I noted earlier, the Home Rule movement mobilised political support in their defence on several occasions. However Harvie argues that after 1832 access to major political, administrative and mercantile institutions became much more difficult for aspirant Scots hoping to make a career in these areas. Given these impoverished prospects for advancement, emigration and a career in the colonies became the best prospect for many young, male members of the Scottish middle classes (1977: p 101). It was in this period that the notion of the "Scottish diaspora", "Greater Scotland" or "the nation of twenty millions" emerged; titles which may be taken to indicate that some Scots perceived their involvement in imperialism (as settlers, administrators or merchants) as a specifically Scottish success.



It may seem surprising to discuss emigration from nineteenth century Scotland in terms of middle class careers, given that much of the history of emigration from Scotland concerns displaced small-holders and members of the working class. However, as Harvie points out, the history of Scottish emigration has been somewhat misrepresented by accounts which ignore the fact that many Scottish emigrants during the nineteenth century were relatively prosperous people seeking to improve their career prospects (1977: p 94).

Harvie's argument is interesting, but he provides little documentary evidence of the extent to which "emigration ideology" was a powerful cultural force in Scotland during the period. Furthermore, he neglects to consider the alteration in perceptions of Scottish identity experienced by less prosperous migrants, such as the impoverished and forcibly displaced who left the Highlands during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, his thesis could be tested by examining journalistic commentaries on emigration published in Scotland during the century, including those in "gentlemen's journals" and news-sheets. Superficial examination of such accounts suggests that some Scottish commentators were sceptical of claims for a "Scottish diaspora": an article published in *The Scottish Geographical Magazine* in 1885 notes the frequency of

... either direct statements or playful allusions to the "ubiquitous Scotsman"... One is apt to gather an impression that in various countries of the world and our own colonies in particular, persons of Scottish birth or origin positively outnumber the representatives of the other sections of the United Kingdom ... (D.P., 1885: p 372)

The writer goes on to note that available figures do not bear out this view. However it is arguable that his concern to correct what

he perceives as a "popular impression" (1885: p 373) lends some support to Harvie's argument, and suggests that this is an area which would repay further investigation.

If emigration was a feature of Scottish national identity in the nineteenth century, this was so not only in the way that Harvie suggests, but also in the sense that emigrants themselves contributed to a mythology of Scottish identity and created new Scottish traditions in their adopted countries. Throughout the nineteenth century, Scottish settlers in Canada, New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere formed associations dedicated to the "preservation" of Scottish traditions (Donaldson, 1966). Their rôle was in fact more creative than the term "preservation" suggests; Caledonian Associations, Highland Societies, Burns Clubs and associations for the promotion of Highland Gatherings played a part in re-inventing, as well as preserving Highland culture. For example, some of the "Highland" institutions and festivals which were begun by emigrants were subsequently taken up by Scots in Scotland. Emigrants were also responsible to some extent for generating the iconography of "tartanry" and the romantic view of the Highlands which became such a prominent feature of nineteenth century Scottish culture (Harvie, 1977: p 101 ff; Jarvie, 1989; Wood, 1987: p 46).

Several writers have noted that certain aspects of Highland culture became symbolic of Scotland as a whole during the nineteenth century, even seeming to represent the "essence" of the nation's history and culture (Kellas, 1989: p 242; McCrone, 1992: p 17). To a large extent the version of Highland culture which was popularised in Lowland Scotland was romanticised and distorted. George IV's visit to Edinburgh in 1822 is often cited as a seminal event in the history of this cultural appropriation; the tartan extravaganza organised for him by Sir Walter Scott set a precedent for subsequent royal visits, and for the image of Scotland which was to be successfully marketed to



English and Lowland tourists later in the century (Haldane, 1990: pp 260-300).

One further avenue of research concerns the history of the Highland and Lowland Scottish military regiments. As I noted in Chapter One, Scottish regiments were involved in imperial wars and conquests throughout the nineteenth century, and a certain amount has been written about popular attitudes to this activity (Wood, 1987: pp 42 ff). For example several writers have commented on the prominent place of militarism in Scottish popular culture, noting that this enabled the British government to recruit regiments for imperial duty. Harvie claims that the armed forces were regarded favourably by the Scottish public, in contrast to the situation in England where military service was held in contempt by many civilians (Harvie, 1977: p 101). However Robertson, although he agrees that "both the social structure and the national identity of Scotland (have) been closely bound up with military prowess", also argues that militarism was not so unambiguously entertained by the civilian population of Scotland as Harvie suggests (Robertson, 1985: p 23; see also Cheyne, 1981: pp 43-50; Bryant, 1985: pp 22-41).

With regard to the history of Scottish military exploits in the empire, Harvie argues that these are part of a mythology of martial tradition which is belied by the statistical evidence of regimental demography. There were in fact many Irish and English officers in Scottish regiments during the nineteenth century, alongside a limited and diminishing proportion of Scots in the British army as a whole (Harvie, 1977: pp 96-97; Gann and Duignan, 1978: pp 79-80; Nairn, 1981: pp 166-167; Wood, 1987: p 55). Nevertheless, an important area of research could be explored by examining nineteenth century publications for evidence of popular views of Scottish militarism, particularly with regard to perceptions of the Highland and Lowland regiments' rôle as an active force in British imperialist exploits.

This area is of special interest as it is arguable that the creation of the Highland regiments set a precedent for the British policy of recruiting soldiers from the ranks of defeated armies. In this sense the crushing of the Jacobite forces in the eighteenth century can be compared to the subsequent fate of the Gurkhas, Pathans, Kikuyu and others (Wood, 1987: p 42).

It is appropriate to conclude this thesis by noting that the history of the Scottish regiments has a bearing on the issue of the appropriation and alteration of Highland culture and dress to which I referred above. Since the eighteenth century, Scottish soldiers have worn various, modified versions of Highland dress. The formation of Highland regiments after the 1745 rebellion began this tradition (Fergusson, 1968: p 263-265), but by the beginning of the nineteenth century there were also a large number of Lowland regiments wearing regimental tartans. As Fergusson puts it, the reputation of the Scottish regiments contributed considerably to a new view of Highland culture; from "being viewed as barbarous nuisances (the Highlanders)" became regarded as in some ways the very embodiment of Scotland" (Fergusson, 1968: p 265, my parenthesis).

The use of modified Highland dress by the Scottish regiments did a great deal to establish the imagery which increasingly came to represent Scottishness to the Scots and others, but it did not become popular among regimental officers until late in the nineteenth century (Chapman, 1978; Womack, 1989: pp 144-145; Pittock, 1991: pp 88-90; Kellas, 1989: p 242). In the early part of the century officers did not wear the kilt, as it was regarded as the clothing of the poor. Later, however, the kilt became acceptable fashion for gentlemen and officers. Indeed, it was often obligatory: for example in 1853 a Highland Gathering, the largest military manoeuvres since the Napoleonic wars, was held at Chobham, and kilts were required dress for officers wishing to enter. Henderson suggests that the



change in attitudes towards Highland costume may have resulted from the enthusiasm shown for the kilt by the Queen and Prince Albert. Certainly it reflected, and contributed to the identification of Highland dress and culture as the essence of Scottish identity (Henderson, 1989: pp 121-122).

This is especially ironic, as the symbolism of tartan and the kilt derives by a twisted path from a culture which was virtually eradicated by the progress of industrial-capitalist Scotland (Nairn, 1981: p 111-112). The reputation of the Highland regiments was established through their rôle in securing territory and political stability for the British Empire, thereby helping to colonise or eradicate other "uncivilised" cultures; it is perhaps here, therefore, that the representation of Scottishness meets most strikingly with imperialist ideologies of racism, and that the question "Wha's like us?" becomes most acutely ambiguous.

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