

Paper on land, identity and boarding school accepted for publication

Contributed by Chriss Bull
Wednesday, 04 June 2008

A paper co-written by CHE graduate Chriss Bull, CHE fellow Alastair McIntosh, and Colin Clark from Strathclyde's Department of Geography and Sociology has been accepted for publication in the Journal of Oral History later this year. The paper, entitled Land, Identity, School: Exploring Women's Identity with Land in Scotland Through The Experience Of Boarding School, arose from Chriss' work for her MSc thesis, which was partly funded with a Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) International research scholarship. According to Alastair McIntosh, the collaboration "is a fine example of the way in which the kind of insights that CHE brings can be balanced by wider skills in the Department of Geography and Sociology to bring about a result that reflects to the credit of us all." CHE director and department lecturer Isobel Lindsay also contributed.

Abstract for Land, Identity, School: Exploring Women's Identity with Land in Scotland Through The Experience Of Boarding School by Chriss Bull, Alastair McIntosh & Colin Clark

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

Chriss Bull graduated with Distinction from the MSc programme in human ecology at the Centre for Human Ecology where she contributed to a programme of research into urban and rural community regeneration assisted by WWF International. She is currently based in New Zealand.

Alastair McIntosh played a leading role in land reform on the Isle of Eigg as described in his book Soil and Soul. He is a Fellow of the Centre for Human Ecology, an Honorary Fellow of the Academy of Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster, and Visiting Professor of Human Ecology at the Department of Geography & Sociology, University of Strathclyde.

Colin Clark is a senior lecturer in Sociology at the University of Strathclyde (formerly lecturing in Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne) and completed his PhD in Social Policy and Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. His primary interests are concerned with contemporary social divisions, and issues of identity, disadvantage and multiculturalism.