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LAND AND POWER IN SCOTLAND: HISTORY, LAW AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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The Centre d'Études et de Recherches de Sciences Administratives et Politiques (CERSA and CNRS), in partnership with the Université de Picardie Jules Verne (équipe CORPUS), will host a two-day international conference on « **Land and Power in Scotland: History, Law and the Environment** » on june 25 and 26.

Organizing and scientific committee :

> Juliette RINGEISEN-BIARDEAUD, associate Professor at Paris-Panthéon-Assas University
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Abstract :

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!

Immediately after these famous lines, their author, Sir Walter Scott, went on to describe his 'native land' as 'O Caledonia! stern

and wild/… Land of brown heath and shaggy wood/ Land of the mountain and the flood'. Although part of a wider romantic nationalist tradition of professing love for one's native land through love of its landscape, Scott's words reflect the special place of the land in Scotland's identity. Scottish landscape defines Scottishness both within and beyond its borders. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Donald Dewar chose to quote Scott's words at the opening of the new Scottish Parliament on 1st July 1999.

There are few nations where views of the land are both so fundamental and so fraught. Historically, Scotland combined a high proportion of harsh and often marginally productive land with the need to maintain an effective warrior class to resist English expansionism. The solution was a heavily militarised aristocracy endowed with vast territorial estates and innumerable retainers, over which it exercised almost princely power. While by no means unique when it originated in the Norman period, the resulting pattern of concentrated landownership has persisted to this day, even as social, economic and legal relationships have undergone dramatic change. Most notably, the 18th- and 19th-century Clearances upended the mutual obligations that underpinned the old feudal order, as the great landowners sought to transform their estates for intensive agricultural exploitation. The Clearances' enduring legacy of social conflict, environmental degradation, and vast material inequality has given land a uniquely complex and controverted role in Scotland's contemporary cultural, political and legal life.

Scotland now has one of the most concentrated patterns of land ownership in the world with an estimated 432 families owning half of all private land. Reflecting this situation, land reform has, since devolution, become a key issue in Scottish politics. Successive legislative initiatives have focused mainly on ending feudal tenure and simplifying titles to land, as well as creating a celebrated 'right to roam' and establishing a 'community right to buy' from existing landowners. Further legislation, the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, was introduced to Parliament on 14th March 2024 to, inter alia, increase the influence of local communities when large landholdings of over 1,000 hectares which represent more than 50% of Scotland's land are being sold.

The aim of this international and pluri-disciplinary two-day conference is to explore the current concern for land reform in its social, cultural, legal and environmental contexts. The intention is to gather specialists from a range of disciplines including history, geography, law, literature, political science, economics, sociology, and the arts, as well as environmental and climate change specialists, to explore the interactions between land and power in Scotland along three main axes:

> History: historical and symbolic roots of land and identity/power in Scotland, and their past and contemporary implications, the (mis)use of history to claim or retain rights, the history of Scottish landscapes in art and science, the history of environmentalism in Scotland, etc.
> Law: land law and policy reform in Scotland, its origins and current concerns, such as the 'right to roam' and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, land reform, community ownership, transmission and inheritance, the notion of 'environmental justice', etc.
> The environment: eco-activism and sustainable development, for example rewilding, reforesting and repeopling, renewable energy, eco-tourism and rural development, the environment as a source of wealth and power, green nationalism, nature and Scottish identity, etc.

The conference will be held in English and French, and a selection of papers will be published in an academic publication after the conference.

> Registration



Gustave Doré, Landscape in Scotland, c. 1878

(Walters Art Museum, public domain)

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