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Brothers in Arms: Crossing Imperial Boundaries in the Eighteenth-Century Dutch West

Indies

Douglas Hamilton

In his inaugural lecture at Lancaster University in 1992, John MacKenzie outlined the importance of the connections between Scotland and the British Empire. Ever since, many scholars – including some who evinced little previous interest in the world beyond the Tweed – have been inspired to map out in ever-more critical terms the extent and durability of Scottish relationships with the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australasia.¹ MacKenzie himself has played a central role in the efflorescence of this scholarship.² Not content merely to make a point about the distinctiveness of Scottish experiences of empire, he also emphasised the importance of national variations across Britain and Ireland, and stressed the need for a ‘four-nation’ approach to the study of empire. For MacKenzie, alert as ever to the symbiotic relationship between Britain and its overseas territories, the Empire also shaped ‘vital ethnic distinctions’ at home.³ In

¹ Thomas M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); Douglas Hamilton *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); George K. McGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State: The Scottish elite and Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008); Angela McCarthy, ed., *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities in the Eighteenth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); and John M. MacKenzie and Thomas M. Devine, eds., *Scotland and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

² Among other contributions: John M. MacKenzie, ‘Essay and reflection: On Scotland and the Empire’, *International History Review* 15 (1993), 714-739; John M. MacKenzie, ‘Empire and National Identities: The Case of Scotland’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 8 (1998), 215-31; and John M. MacKenzie with Nigel R. Dalziel *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, Identity, Gender and Race* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

³ John M. MacKenzie, ‘Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? A Four-Nation Approach to the History of the British Empire’, *History Compass* 6 (2008), 1256. For his work on the broad influence of empire at home see John M. MacKenzie, *Propoganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion,*

framing his discussion in this way, MacKenzie advanced a clear argument not for a set of parallel and separate experiences of empire but instead for a need to ‘recognise the fact that the British Empire was merely a name which obscured many more complex phenomena’⁴. This complexity becomes even more labyrinthine when the ‘British’ framework, about which MacKenzie has distinct reservations, is removed and we try to understand empires in a broader European context.

Stephen Conway’s notion of a ‘European military international’ offers a suggestive line of argument for this imperial context.⁵ For Conway, military service (particularly for officers) represented a transnational profession marked by conventions of status, etiquette, dress, and weaponry in which ‘national boundaries were often of secondary importance’. For the men who served, ‘military Europe’ implied a ‘sense of professional solidarity [that] was not necessarily incompatible with feelings of national loyalty, or local allegiance’.⁶ Similarly, eighteenth-century Scots, like others in imperial contexts, did not feel themselves constrained by national allegiances nor by state boundaries, both of which they regarded as fluid and malleable. Individuals in empire – whether merchants, planters, officers, or emigrants – were interested in opportunities; formal imperial jurisdictions were sometimes regarded as inconveniences to be circumvented or just ignored. For example, as Andrew MacKillop has pointed out, one of the effects of the 1707 Anglo-Scottish Act of Union, which restricted Scots’ access to India and the East, was to redirect their imperial endeavour through Trieste, Ostend, France, and Sweden at precisely the point when Scots were meant to be bound to England.⁷ Yet this turning to non-British empires was not simply

1880-1960 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); and John M. MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

⁴ MacKenzie, ‘Four-nation approach’, 1244.

⁵ Stephen Conway, ‘The British Army, ‘Military Europe’ and the American War of Independence’, *William and Mary Quarterly* 67 (2010), 69-100; and Stephen Conway, ‘The Scots Brigade in the Eighteenth Century’, *Northern Scotland* 1 (2010), 37-8.

⁶ Conway, ‘Scots Brigade’, 38.

⁷ Andrew MacKillop, ‘Accessing Empire; Scotland, Europe, Britain, and the Asia Trade, 1665-c.1750’ *Itinerario* 29 (2005), 7-30; and Andrew MacKillop, ‘A Union for Empire? Scotland, the English East India Company and the British Union’, *Scottish Historical Review* 87 (supplement, 2008), 116-134.

a consolation prize to compensate for constitutional exclusion. Throughout the eighteenth century, Scots (and others) chose to pursue transnational opportunities. In the 1770s and 1780s, for example, the Glasgow West India merchants Alexander Houstoun & Co. supplied and traded with Scots across the Caribbean, including those whose primary markets were not British. Among them were the McFarlane brothers, one of whom was based in Danish St Croix, the other in Copenhagen. In 1780, Houstoun & Co. dealt similarly with Scots who were based in Dutch St Eustatius before the British capture of the island in 1781.⁸ For these people, the empires of multiple European nations provided a set of comparable and compatible commercial, social, and political conventions; they ignored or evaded legislation like the British Navigation Acts.

The ‘conspicuously cosmopolitan’ Dutch empire proved to be especially welcoming. The openness of the Dutch commercial world in the Atlantic has received significant scholarly attention, but it is also clear that its territories were accessible to the citizens of other countries, and became increasingly so over the course of the eighteenth century. Indeed, as Benjamin Schmidt puts it, the Dutch moved ‘to an expansive vision of the Atlantic, which declined to highlight any single imperial strategy and thus appealed to a broadly European community of consumers.’⁹ One effect of this transnational mobility across European empires was a shifting sense of allegiances, both personal and national, as this chapter suggests.

To explore these issues in depth, this chapter uses a case study of one Scottish family’s imperial engagement. It centres on the careers of two brothers, James and Robert Douglas, who were the sons of a notable Edinburgh lawyer and politician, George Douglas of Friarshaw. As the second and fifth sons respectively, neither stood to inherit the family estate, and so they both followed careers in the armed

⁸ National Library of Scotland (NLS), MS8794 (36, 63, 256), Alexander Houstoun & Co. Foreign Letter Book F.

⁹ Benjamin Schmidt, ‘The Dutch Atlantic: From Provincialism to Globalism’, in Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Reappraisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 181. Among the wider literature on the Dutch Atlantic see Wim Klooster, *Illicit Riches: The Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648-1795*, (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Gert van Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman, eds., *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1600-1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

services: one in the navy, the other in the army.¹⁰ As they pursued their careers, they developed and utilised a wide range of connections spanning the British and Dutch empires. They also – like many others – acquired a personal stake in empire by purchasing a sugar estate. In doing so, as with their military careers, their frame of reference was not merely the British Empire. Instead, they operated in a much broader context, and relied on Barbadian and Dutch merchants and planters as they developed their Caribbean holdings.

James Douglas, the elder of the two, was born in 1703 and joined the Royal Navy in 1715. He rose through the ranks and commanded ships at Cartagena and at Louisbourg during the War of the Austrian Succession. He earned enough money to acquire an estate of his own in the Scottish Borders at Bridgend, near Kelso, in May 1750. The estate (which he renamed Springwood Park) along with the house and gardens cost him around £5500 sterling.¹¹ The extent of his later investments in Dutch Demerara did not prevent James Douglas from extending this landholding in Scotland. In January 1765, just as his need to spend more on his plantation became apparent, he completed the purchase of the Barony of Longnewton, close to Springwood Park, from Sir William Scott of Ancrum. The lands included eleven farms, which were later augmented by further purchases in 1766 and 1769.¹² While it is now common for historians to connect domestic land acquisition with Caribbean estate ownership (or, indeed, other forms of imperial enterprise) it is clear in this case that Douglas was not using Caribbean revenue to fund purchases or improvement at home: his investments were simultaneous.¹³ In the mid-1760s, both sets of investments were being funded by independent income – probably derived, at least initially, from naval prize money – but he clearly saw them both as important aspects of his burgeoning portfolio of landed interests. A direct financial connection between them may be lacking, but it is revealing that an ambitious naval officer saw contemporaneous Scottish land acquisition and imperial investment as twin facets of his elite status.

¹⁰ NLS, MS8109, Douglas of Springwood Park, Pedigree of the family of Douglas of Friarshaw.

¹¹ NLS, MS8077(10), Douglas of Springwood Park, Minute of sale, 14 May 1750.

¹² NLS, MS8077 (43-6) Minute of Sale; (77-9) list of contents of the Barony of Longnewton.

¹³ Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, 196-202; Devine, *Scottish Empire*, 326-345.

In 1754, Douglas entered Parliament as MP for Orkney and Shetland and served until 1768. He was not, however, a career politician and devoted his professional life to the navy and to his landholdings. By the later 1750s he was sufficiently prominent among the naval and political elites to serve on Admiral Byng's court martial following the loss of Minorca in 1756. Three years later he brought home news of the British victory at Quebec, for which he was rewarded with a knighthood.¹⁴

James's younger brother, Robert, opted for a military rather than a naval career, but, instead of volunteering for the British army, he joined the Scots Brigade in the Netherlands. Scots had served in the Dutch army since the later sixteenth century, and by the eighteenth century they comprised three regiments (the 'Scots Brigade'), although they retained their allegiance to the British monarch.¹⁵ They formed an important aspect of the alliance between Britain and the Netherlands during the eighteenth century.¹⁶ In 1747, the Netherlands requested more Scottish volunteers, and Robert Douglas joined as a captain in a new fourth regiment that was raised by Henry Douglas, Earl of Drumlanrig. After joining the Scots Brigade, Robert Douglas settled in the Netherlands, where he married Helen de Brauw in 1754. In due course, he developed his own network of significant military, mercantile, and political connections in the Netherlands, the most important of which was with Count Willem Bentinck, a prominent Dutch nobleman, politician, and diplomat, and half-brother of the 2nd Earl of Portland.¹⁷ Shortly after he had

¹⁴ Ruddock Mackay, 'Douglas, Sir James, First Baronet (1703–1787)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7901, accessed 4 July 2017].

¹⁵ James Ferguson, *Papers Illustrating the History of the Scots Brigade in the Service of the United Netherlands*, Vol. II: 1698-1782 (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1899); Conway, 'Scots Brigade', 30-41; and John Childs, 'The Scottish Brigade in the Service of the Dutch Republic, 1689 to 1782', *Documentatieblad werkgroep Achttiende eeuw*, 16 (1984), 59-74.

¹⁶ H. M. Scott, 'Sir Joseph Yorke, Dutch Politics and the Origins of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War', *Historical Journal* 31(1988), 576-7.

¹⁷ Nationaal Archief, Netherlands, Raad van staat: Naamindex op de commissieboeken <http://www.gahetna.nl/en/collective/index/nt00195>; Ferguson, *Scots Brigade*, 370-3, 414 and 506; NLS, MS8109, Douglas pedigree; and Conway, 'Scots Brigade', 38.

signed up for the Scots Brigade, he met Robert Stedman, a captain who had arrived in Holland in 1745 and who also married into a Dutch family. Both of Stedman's sons joined the brigade. The younger of them, John Gabriel Stedman, later served on an expedition to suppress a revolt in Suriname in 1772. He wrote an account of his experiences there, and his *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition* (1796) has become one of the most significant eighteenth-century accounts of slave society. Robert Douglas was one of the original subscribers.¹⁸

That Robert Douglas should take this route into the Scots Brigade is not terribly surprising. Following a longstanding tradition of Scottish service in the armies of northern Europe that pre-dated the 1707 Act of Union, thousands of Scots had served in the Dutch army by the 1740s, and those numbers were swollen to around 7000 by the arrival of Drumlanrig's new regiment. For Scottish younger sons like Douglas, Dutch service offered pay, perquisites, and status comparable to that of the British army.¹⁹ Moreover, Robert's assimilation into the Dutch military and into Dutch life presented some interesting opportunities – as well as conundra – when the brothers' paths crossed in the Caribbean during the Seven Years' War. The connections between brothers who served different nations suggest something of the porosity of these imperial boundaries in the eighteenth-century Caribbean.

In 1760, James Douglas was appointed commander of the Royal Navy's squadron in the Leeward Islands, with bases at Antigua and Barbados. He led the naval forces at the capture of Dominica in 1761 and tried actively to suppress French and Spanish privateering. As the commander of the squadron, he was entitled to a one-eighth share of the prize money from captured ships. Like many naval officers, he developed strong connections among the planter class; he also, like about twenty percent of all the commanding officers who served in the Caribbean in the second half of the eighteenth century, sought to

¹⁸ Ferguson, *Scots Brigade*, 442; and John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London: J. Johnson and J. Edwards, 1796).

¹⁹ Conway, 'Scots Brigade', 30-41. Among the extensive literature on early modern Scots in European military service, see Steve Murdoch, *Scotland and the Thirty Years War, 1618-1648* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); and Alexia Grosjean, *An Unofficial alliance: Scotland and Sweden, 1569-1654* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

invest in local plantations.²⁰ During his time in the Leeward Islands he received a share of the sale of 145 ships and their cargo, and it seems likely that the prize money from these actions provided the capital for his Caribbean purchase.²¹ This was not the first time that a member of the Douglas family had purchased a Caribbean estate: James and Robert's uncle, Henry Douglas, had owned a plantation in Antigua with around 124 slaves before his death in 1753, and the continuing lease of that estate supported legacies to family members.²² James Douglas, however, did not buy land in either Antigua or Barbados where he had connections and influence. Instead, he took advantage of opportunities in the Dutch colony of Demerara, on the southern shores of the Caribbean Sea.

Demerara was controlled by the Dutch West India Company (WIC) and was primarily the responsibility of the Zeeland Chamber of the Dutch States-General. The complex set of relationships between the chambers of the States-General complicated the management of the WIC and its colonies such that, before the middle of the eighteenth century, Suriname received considerable attention, but the other Guyana colonies of Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo remained underdeveloped. In 1743, Laurens Storm van 's-Gravesande was appointed governor of Essequibo (the least undeveloped of the three) and quickly set about trying to create a plantation economy there. Three years later he made his son Jonathan the governor of Demerara, and between them they actively tried to attract not only private Dutch capital but trade and settlement from British planters in the southern Caribbean as well. They met with some success: within two decades, ninety-three plantations had been cut out from the bush, of which thirty-

²⁰ Sian Williams, 'The Royal Navy in the Caribbean, 1756-1814' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Southampton, 2014), appendix.

²¹ The National Archives, Kew (TNA), ADM 7/352, A List of Merchant Ships & Vessels belonging to the French, which have been taken or destroyed by His Majesty's Ships since the Declaration of War on the 17th May 1756. I am most grateful to Jeremy Michell of the National Maritime Museum for sharing his data, based on this list. Sian Williams, 'The Royal Navy and Caribbean Colonial Society during the eighteenth century', in John McAleer and Christer Petley, eds., *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750-1820* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 39-41.

²² NLS, MS 8094, Will of Henry Douglas of Antigua, 26 February 1753; and CH7647, Copy lease, Trustees of Henry Douglas Esq and Edward Grant the Younger, 28 April 1758.

four were owned by Britons or Irishmen.²³ Among them was James Douglas, whose connections with the Barbardian planters who were prominent among the early purchasers, his brother's Dutch networks, and his own cordial relationship with Storm help to explain why he was persuaded to invest in a Dutch colony, even as a serving British officer in the midst of the Seven Years' War.

In the summer of 1761, Robert Douglas travelled from the Netherlands to Demerara and was, as Storm reported, 'very well pleased with Demerara and with the plantation which his brother bought for him'. In fact, he was so impressed that he planned to go back to Zeeland to collect his wife and children and to return with them to Demerara. James Douglas wrote to Storm in October 1761 noting that the 'good reports' about the colony had been 'strongly confirm'd' by his brother.²⁴

i. Weilburg

The plantation the Douglas brothers acquired was called Weilburg. Situated on the west bank of the Demerara River, it extended to around 2000 acres. They bought it from a Dutch planter who had

²³ Gert van Oostindie, 'British Capital, Industry and Perseverance' versus Dutch "Old School"?: The Dutch Atlantic and the Takeover of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo, 1750-1815', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 127 (2012), 28-55; Simon D. Smith, *Slavery, Family and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 105-7 and 115-16; Cornelius Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and the Guianas, 1680-1791* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 442-53; C.A. Harris and J.A.J. de Villiers, eds., *Storm van 's-Gravesande: the Rise of British Guiana* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1911), II, 399; Richard B. Sheridan, 'The Condition of the Slaves on the Sugar Plantations of Sir John Gladstone in the Colony of Demerara, 1812-49', *New West India Guide* 76 (2002), 244-5; and Kit Candlin, *The Last Caribbean Frontier, 1795-1815* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 26-7.

²⁴ Harris and de Villiers, *Rise of British Guiana*, II, 391-2; TNA, CO116/33(138), Sir James Douglas to Storm, 30 October 1761.

acquired it in 1753 and, although some attempts had been made to clear the estate for sugar production, it remained largely undeveloped in 1761.²⁵

Robert Douglas stayed in Demerara for more than a year to supervise the readying of the land for planting. By July 1762, however, he had returned home to Zeeland, and the management of the plantation was placed in the hands of Lachlan McLean as the attorney and Thomas Grant as the manager. Both were experienced Demerara hands. Although they were both Scots, McLean's connection to Douglas did not come from Scottish networks. Douglas knew of McLean through Gedney Clarke Snr, an Anglo-Barbadian merchant and planter, whose Demerara interests he also represented. Under the direction of McLean and Grant, enslaved Africans were acquired to continue the process of converting the land to sugar production.

Across the Caribbean clearing land for production was an arduous task, but in Demerara it proved especially challenging. The geography of the region was dominated by the Demerara River and the many tributaries that ran into it. While this created conditions ideal for the spread of vegetation, it was not immediately suitable for the growing of plantation staples like sugar. To transform this territory, planters employed enslaved Africans to hack back the undergrowth. They also applied technology brought over from the Netherlands. They established plantation land by the creation of polders: low-lying land reclaimed or safeguarded through the construction of dykes and sluices. The labour was again provided by enslaved Africans, who bore the burdens of digging and maintaining the dykes and sluices on top of their 'normal' plantation work of clearing land and planting, tending, and cutting sugar cane.²⁶ This was a very significant undertaking and, despite the application of Dutch technology, they succeeded only

²⁵ Laurens Lodewyk van Bercheyck, *Caerte van de Rivier Demerary van ouds Immenary, geleger op Suyd Americaes Noordkust* (Amsterdam: Hendrick de Leth, 1759)
<https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:6t053s209> [accessed 9 May 2018].

²⁶ Gert van Oostindie and Alex van Stripriaan, 'Slavery and Slave Cultures in a Hydraulic Society: Suriname', in Stephan Palmié, ed., *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 80-82; and Oostindie, 'British Capital', 33. See also Alex van Stripriaan, 'The Suriname Rat Race: Labour and Technology on Sugar Plantations, 1750-1900', *New West India Guide* 63 (1989), 94-117.

in clearing a productive agricultural area similar in size to that found on the generally smaller estates on the Caribbean islands to the north.²⁷

The transplantation of this environmental knowledge did, however, provide the colony with a significant advantage. The management of water meant that Demerara was not faced with problems of shortage and desiccation as some Caribbean islands were, and the natural conditions allowed important competitive advantages over the island colonies. As the French Enlightenment writer and historian Abbé Raynal noted, ‘One of the principles of this fertility must be, the facility with which the planters can surround their habitations with water during the dry season.’²⁸ The additional heavy demands on the enslaved had consequences, however.

ii. The Berbice slave revolt

Shortly after Robert Douglas left Demerara, slaves on the Magdalenburg estate in neighbouring Berbice rose up on 27 February 1763. Four days later, they were followed by those on the Hollandia and Lelienburg plantations. Soon, almost all the 4000 slaves in Berbice were in open revolt. The planters and their families were imperilled: as slave forces assumed control of the colony, the ‘uprising’ increasingly resembled a ‘revolution’, as Governor van Hoogenheim of Berbice put it.²⁹ Run by the private and distant

²⁷ Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 80-130; and Richard S. Dunn, *A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life and Labour in Jamaica and Virginia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 131-180.

²⁸ Abbé Guillaume-Thomas François Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* (London: A. Strahan, 1798), 224. On the question of desiccation see Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 264-308; and B. W. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica 1750-1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2005), 180-90.

²⁹ Koninklijk Huisarchief, The Hague (KHA), Collectie Bentinck, G2-54 I, Bijlaag bij missive van Gouverneur en Raaden van de colonie van Berbice, rec. 11 July 1763. I am grateful to His Majesty Willem Alexander, King of the Netherlands, for permission to use this material. The fullest published account,

Berbice Company, the colony had long neglected its defences, and it was able to make little meaningful response. The first reaction came from the neighbouring colonies of Suriname, which mustered 100 men (forty of whom later deserted to the rebels); from Demerara, which sent between 1500 and 2000 Carib Indians to join the beleaguered Dutch forces; and from the island of St. Eustatius, from which reinforcements arrived in May.³⁰ In the meantime, a private expedition organised and paid for by the Barbados merchant Gedney Clarke Snr left from Bridgetown to support the Dutch. Comprising an eighteen-gun ship, two armed brigantines and 100 naval personnel from HMS *Pembroke*, the flotilla joined the Barbados militia.³¹ Although James Douglas had moved to Jamaica and was no longer the naval commander at Barbados, he was still actively involved in authorising the venture, which was described as 'having been put into commission by Admiral Douglas'.³²

James Douglas had maintained cordial relations with Storm van 's-Gravesande, and they were both deeply concerned about events in Berbice. They had corresponded while Douglas was on the Leeward station, with Douglas writing to Storm to thank him for assisting with the capture of naval deserters. He promised in 1761 that, 'in return I most cheerfully offer you all the assistance in my power, that in any way tend to the improvement of your infant Colony of Demerary of which it gives me great pleasure to hear such good Reports.'³³ This personal rapport, in addition to the Douglas family's stake in

based on Governor von Hoogenheim's reports, is Barbara L. Blair, 'Wilfert Simon von Hoogenheim in the Berbice Slave Revolt of 1763-64', *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land-, en volkenkunde* 140 (1984), 56-76. See also Marjoleine Kars, 'Policing and Transgressing Borders: Soldiers, Slave rebels and the Early Modern Atlantic', *New West Indian Guide* 83 (2009), 192-5.

³⁰ Blair, 'Berbice Revolt', 64; KHA, G2-54 IB, Robert Douglas to Count Willem Bentinck, 2 January 1764; British Library (BL) MS 1720(10), Egerton Papers: Bentinck Papers, Gedney Clarke Snr, Barbados, to Bentinck, 3 April 1763.

³¹ Smith, *Slavery, Family and Gentry Capitalism*, 116-7; KHA G2-54 IA Robert Douglas to Bentinck, 20 June 1763; BL, MS 1720(10), Clarke Snr to Bentinck, 3 April 1763.

³² Edward Bancroft, *An Essay on the Natural History of Guiana in South America* (London: T. Beckett & P. A. de Hondt, 1769), 355.

³³ Harris and de Villiers, *Rise of British Guiana*, II, 394.

Demerara, helps to explain why a British naval commander was prepared to commit British naval assets to maintaining the security of a Dutch colony. Douglas was clearly aware of the threat posed by the revolt, as Storm's message to the WIC that 'Demerara is in utmost danger' had arrived in Amsterdam in June, and Clarke Snr had informed Count Bentinck from Barbados only slightly later.³⁴

The British were not generally in the habit of deploying their forces to aid their commercial rivals, particularly to one whose neutrality in the Seven Years' War seemed to the British to be of benefit to their enemies and to be contrary to the spirit of their previous long-standing alliance. The response to the Berbice revolt in 1761 resulted from the close connections that had developed between the Douglasses, the Clarkes, and Bentinck over several years. In 1755, with the Seven Years' War imminent, Clarke Snr sent his son to the Netherlands to learn Dutch. He did not, however, immediately gain access to the Dutch elite. It is likely that it was Clarke Snr's acquaintance with James Douglas in Barbados that led Robert Douglas to write to Count Bentinck in July 1762 to introduce the younger Clarke.³⁵ This connection allowed Douglas and Clarke to express their alarm over the situation in Berbice directly to Bentinck, and to press for him to lobby for a vigorous response from the Netherlands. They impressed on him the urgency of the situation: 'How soon they [the rebellious slaves] may come upon us God knows! But whether they do it sooner or later, it is certain that all the work at present is Stopped & every thing going to Ruin & Destruction.'³⁶

Pressed by Robert Douglas and by the Clarkes, Bentinck joined the call for an expedition from the Netherlands to retake control of Berbice and to safeguard the other Dutch colonies. A decision was slow in coming, however, and Clarke wrote to express his frustration: 'How can it be expected that private men should support & defend for ever the Honour of a Nation, such as Holland, and the

³⁴ Harris and de Villiers, *Rise of British Guiana*, II, 419; BL, MS 1720(10), Clarke to Bentinck 3 April 1763.

³⁵ *The Lascelles and Maxwell Letter Books 1739-69* (Wakefield: Microform Academic Publishers, 2002), which includes transcripts of Richard Pares' notes from Rhodes House Library (hereafter Pares Transcripts) W&G VI, f. 161 George Maxwell to Gedney Clarke Snr, 5 May 1755; BL MS 1720(1-2) Robert Douglas to Willem Bentinck, 12 July 1762.

³⁶ BL, MS 1720(28-9), Clarke Jnr to Bentinck, 16 June 1763.

particular interest of the Individuals of an whole Colony.³⁷ Within a week, Douglas and the Clarkes implored Bentinck for a second time to help raise troops. Clarke Snr specifically asked for one of the regiments of the Scots Brigade to be sent. This was not simply a matter of their reputation for military prowess, as he told his son: ‘They may all settle there; and he [Bentinck] might know that it is now proper to send inhabitants from Europe (as we have many Islands ceded to the English to settle) which there was no occasion for before the last War.’ Attracting new settlers was a concern because, along with the revolt in Berbice, British territorial gains in the southern Caribbean in the Seven Years’ War had made the Guyanas a much less appealing prospect for settlers. There were now new opportunities on Grenada, St Vincent, and Tobago.³⁸ Clarke also recommended that Robert Douglas be appointed as commander, a point Douglas reiterated to Bentinck.³⁹

In late June, however, it became clear that ‘jarring interests’ in Dutch domestic politics and in the management of colonial affairs hampered the raising of the expedition, just as it had impeded the development of the Dutch West Indian colonies.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Bentinck persisted, and he wrote to Robert Douglas and asked him to come to The Hague to meet in person. But such were the entrenched divisions (especially between Middelburg and Amsterdam) that Bentinck believed he needed not to be seen to favour one side. He was happy to express his views as long as he did not appear to be lobbying. He wrote to Douglas ‘that if you do take the resolution of taking a trip here it must not be known that I desired you, which might cause unnecessary and untimely Suspicions.’⁴¹

In early August the States General – rather than the Berbice Company, the West India Company, or the Zeeland Chamber, all of which had more direct interests in the colony – eventually committed to an expedition, with Robert Douglas going as second-in-command and Lieutenant Colonel, and

³⁷ BL, MS 1720(28-9), Clarke Jnr to Bentinck, 16 June 1763.

³⁸ BL, MS 1720 (43v), Clarke Snr to Clarke Jnr, 6 June 1763.

³⁹ KHA, G2-54 IA, Robert Douglas to Bentinck, 20 June 1763.

⁴⁰ BL, MS 1720(27), Clarke Jnr to Bentinck, 16 June 1763; KHA, GA2-54 IA Bentinck to Robert Douglas, 23 June 1763. See also Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 949-51.

⁴¹ KHA, GA2-54 IA, Bentinck to Robert Douglas, 23 June 1763.

accompanied by his brother-in-law, Cornelius de Brauw, whom Douglas had recommended.⁴² Three ships carrying more than 400 troops left in November, almost nine months after the revolt began. The arrival of this contingent of regular European soldiers, combined with a significant mustering of indigenous Carib Indians and internal fractures among the rebels, enabled the revolt to be suppressed. By April 1764, Douglas was able to inform Bentinck that ‘our soldier work is done here ... & we all fondly flatter ourselves that our answers to these letters will be Orders for our Return.’⁴³

Although Douglas did not get the command he desired, the wishes of the two Scottish brothers, backed by two Anglo-Barbadian merchants, were advanced through their connections in the Dutch political elite to secure a positive outcome for their plantation in the Dutch Empire. The response to the Berbice rising – and specifically the mobilisation of British forces for a private expedition to aid another country’s colony – highlights both the blurring of private and public interests, as well as the myriad entanglements across imperial boundaries in the southern Caribbean. These individuals did not adhere to the technicalities of national political jurisdictions. As Robert Douglas, a Scottish officer in Dutch service put it, ‘I feel an uncommon satisfaction after seeing that Colony Receive Relief & perhaps preservation from where it should least expect it, an Englishman and a rival Colony.’⁴⁴

iii. Managing Weilburg estate

After the end of the slave revolt, Robert Douglas did not return to the Weilburg estate. His early optimism about Berbice was destroyed by his experiences there. On his departure for the Netherlands in May 1764, he wrote, ‘We are gone from a Country to where I would not Return for all the wealth the Indies gives.’ He hated the climate and deplored the ineptitude of the colony’s governance. He concluded, ‘Unlucky Berbice ... never will it flourish, but by striking the root all at once, putting the direction in the

⁴² KHA, GA2-54 IA, Robert Douglas to Bentinck, 20 June 1763; BL MS 1720(46) Bentinck to Clarke Jnr, 2 August 1763.

⁴³ KHA, G2-54 IB, Robert Douglas to Bentinck, 25 April 1764.

⁴⁴ KHA, G2-54 IA, Robert Douglas to Bentinck, 20 June 1763.

hands of the Sovereign & no longer leave in those who show so little of that paternal care an Infant Colony demands.⁴⁵

Shorn of his enthusiasm for the Guyanas, Robert Douglas returned to a military career in the Netherlands, but he remained involved in advising on running the estate and in providing support in the Netherlands. Sir James – despite his brother’s pessimism – retained ownership of Weilburg and continued to employ the manager and attorney in the colony. The family's ability to position themselves in a broad European imperial context remained important. As well as support from Robert Douglas in Zeeland, the family drew on Scottish and English correspondents – notably Gedney Clarke in Barbados – and others in the Netherlands. The produce of Demerara plantations could only (legally) be shipped to the WIC’s home port of Middelburg, and so the family utilised contacts among the Dutch merchant community, to which Robert Douglas was related by marriage.

By 1765, the plantation’s attorney, Lachlan McLean, reported that the estate was ‘now in pretty good order’ with some thirty-five acres planted with sugar canes, as well as provision grounds, a stock house, a hospital, and a landing and punt to access the Demerara River. The influence of water, and of the transplantation of Dutch technology, was apparent as McLean noted the estate also had '[a] Good sluis’ to regulate water across the plantation. The estate lacked a sugar works, and the harvested cane had to be moved across the river for processing at the Land of Canaan estate, part-owned by McLean. It was also, McLean noted, ‘absolutely necessary’ for Douglas to invest in more slaves.⁴⁶

As an absentee planter, Sir James Douglas needed reliable information and accurate accounts of the costs of establishing and running the estate, which was still showing little return. Indeed, it seems he was uncertain about continuing with it: McLean had reported that there was interest in the estate 'in case you shoud [sic] dispose of the Weilburg'.⁴⁷ Perhaps McLean's upbeat report in February 1765 persuaded Sir James to persevere, because that summer he appointed his brother-in-law, William Brisbane, to run

⁴⁵ KHA, G2-54 IB, Robert Douglas to Bentinck, 12 June 1764.

⁴⁶ National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (NMM), DOU/6 no fol, Douglas Papers: Lachlan McLean to Sir James Douglas, 21 February 1765; TNA, CO116/34 (333v), List of Planters, February 1765.

⁴⁷ NMM, DOU/6, no fol., Lachlan McLean to Sir James Douglas, 21 February 1765.

the estate, largely as a favour to his wife. Brisbane was hugely enthusiastic about the challenge, and even before he had left Britain, he concocted a series of ambitious schemes, such as hiring a ship to acquire Africans directly from Sierra Leone and building a water mill on the plantation.⁴⁸ More practically, he spent time acquiring materials to construct a sugar works and hiring skilled carpenters and coopers. He had anticipated recruiting these men in the Netherlands en route to Demerara, but he was advised by Robert Douglas that the impact of the 1763 Berbice slave rebellion was still being felt, not just for emigrants to Berbice, but to the Guyana colonies more generally: Dutch ‘people are set against that Country and may influence those we carry out.’⁴⁹

After calling at Barbados to meet Gedney Clarke, William Brisbane eventually arrived in Demerara in early 1766. He found the estate in good order, with fifty-two acres being cultivated, forty-two of which were in sugar canes. Sixteen new slaves had arrived via Barbados in February and, with their labour, Brisbane ordered the clearing of additional land and the construction of the sugar works. His voyage out, and his early impressions of the plantation, significantly tempered his enthusiasm for grand schemes, however. The direct importation of slaves, he realised, would mean entering the slave trade, and he told Sir James that this ‘would be leading you into Expenses I would by no means wish you to embark in’. He also abandoned the idea of a water mill; despite the technological changes to the land introduced by Dutch, he found ‘every body heartily tired of water mills’. Instead, following McLean’s advice he planned to construct a cattle mill.⁵⁰

The lack of a sugar works still presented a very significant problem: ‘All I have got ground is 2 punt loads of Canes but that will soon be remedied it brakes my hart to see the shifts we are put to & the Loss accruing from the want of works.’⁵¹ Nonetheless, by April the estate was producing sugar, and ten hogsheads had been shipped to Middelburg, the only port with which Demerara could trade directly. Despite this progress, Brisbane still felt the estate was not fulfilling its potential. He reckoned that the lack of a works meant that only a third of the estate’s produce could be readied for export, a situation that

⁴⁸ NMM, DOU/6, William Brisbane to Sir James Douglas, letters 12, 13: 12 & 23 August 1765.

⁴⁹ NMM, DOU/6, Brisbane to Douglas, letter 12, 12 August 1765.

⁵⁰ NMM, DOU/6, Brisbane to Douglas, letter 24, 4 March 1766.

⁵¹ NMM, DOU/6, Brisbane to Douglas, letter 25, 20 March 1766.

could only be remedied when the sugar works were completed. He remained conscious, however, that deploying the enslaved workers in construction 'thins unavoidably our gang in the field'.⁵²

Throughout 1766 Brisbane continued the work of developing the Weilburg plantation. Copper stills for rum production were installed to complement the sugar works. More Africans were brought in via Barbados to help with construction and with clearing more of the land for production. Although Weilburg seemed to be making real progress, Brisbane found his situation very challenging. He fell out spectacularly with Thomas Grant, the overseer, over what Brisbane saw as Grant's excessive brutality towards the enslaved. He was unsettled by a succession of earthquakes, and his health was weakened by the tropical climate. By January 1767, he was ready to leave and wrote to Douglas to tell him so.⁵³

In July 1767, Robert Milne arrived in Demerara to replace him. Milne's connection to Douglas probably came through the Royal Navy; indeed, it is likely that Milne was still an officer when he went to Demerara, because he had to apply to the Admiralty for leave for two-and-a-half-years in order to take up the position at Weilburg. He wrote to Philip Stephens, Secretary to the Admiralty, asking him to 'enterpose [sic] your kind offices with my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty in my behalf'.⁵⁴

It is clear from Milne's first letter home that Brisbane had not been popular among the colonists, but he reassured Douglas that the reports had impugned the previous manager. Milne concluded that man responsible for sending 'such disagreeable information concerning Mr Brisbane's Domestick affairs is a worthless fellow [whose] ascertions were false'. He was, Milne noted, 'a drunken idle fellow'.⁵⁵ As far as the estate was concerned 'none was ever better in the country'. He went on, 'I am convinced [Brisbane] has done wonders for the improvement of the Estate'.⁵⁶ Even so, Milne continued to hear gossip about Brisbane that alarmed him. In the first place, Brisbane's solution to problems on the estate appeared to have been to spend more money; Milne reported that Brisbane had spent excessive sums on bricks and stills. He also heard tales of Brisbane having organised a 'great feast in commemoration of the Pretender's

⁵² NMM, DOU/6, Brisbane to Douglas, letter 26, 14 April 1766.

⁵³ NMM, DOU/6, Brisbane to Sir James Douglas, 3 January 1767.

⁵⁴ NMM, DOU/6, Copied in: Robert Milne to Sir James Douglas, 1 July, 1767

⁵⁵ NMM, DOU/6 Milne to Douglas, 1 July 1767.

⁵⁶ NMM, DOU/6 Milne to Sir James Douglas, 25 July 1767.

birthday'. Many Jacobites had fled to the Caribbean in the aftermath of the failed 1745 rebellion, but few – by the 1760s – chose to mark their allegiance so openly. Jacobitism still tainted the reputation of Scots, even, it seems, in a colony owned by the Dutch.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the presence of Jacobites (and their apparently continuing allegiance to the Stuart cause) alongside Presbyterians and Episcopalians also usefully reminds us of variation among Scots in the eighteenth-century empire. It also suggests that if the nineteenth-century 'Scottish empire' was notable for its Presbyterianism, as MacKenzie argues, then its eighteenth-century iteration was rather more ecumenical.⁵⁸

Milne also heard from an army officer who had an estate in Demerara that Brisbane and his wife had been so lenient with the enslaved that 'the Negroes are under no manner of controul'. This echoed a dispute between Brisbane and Douglas' original estate manager, Thomas Grant, over the treatment of the enslaved. Soon after Brisbane's arrival, Grant wrote to Sir James explaining that he was leaving because Brisbane's 'over lenity with the slaves has effectually put it out of my power to be any reall service to the Estate.' Brisbane waited until June to inform Douglas, and in the process outlined the brutality of the punishment meted out to an enslaved man, which involved beating him senseless then setting fire to 'high wines' poured over him. As the dispute rumbled on, Brisbane argued that Grant's 'Cruelty was so grait he wou'd have soon maid you loose most of your Slaves as some were lamed & the rest wou'd have run away.'⁵⁹

Contemporary observers often regarded Dutch slavery as especially harsh, but it may be more likely that the high mortality rates in the eighteenth-century Guyanas were the result of the rigours of the polder environment. The extraordinary burdens placed on the enslaved clearly took their toll. The demography of Weilburg's slaves bear this out. By 1762, the Douglasses had acquired thirty-eight slaves,

⁵⁷ NMM, DOU/6 Milne to Sir James Douglas, 6 July 1767. On Jacobites in the Caribbean see Douglas Hamilton, 'Defending the Colonies against Malicious Attacks of Philanthropy: Scottish Campaigns against the Abolitions of the Slave Trade and Slavery' in Allan MacInnes and Douglas Hamilton, eds., *Jacobitism, Enlightenment and Empire, 1680-1820* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 194-5.

⁵⁸ See, for example, MacKenzie, 'Empire and National Identities', 220 and 222.

⁵⁹ NMM, DOU6/ no fol., Grant to Sir James Douglas, 7 March 1766; Brisbane to Douglas Letters 28, 30: 2 June 1766 and 3 January 1767.

but the slave population declined on the estate to only twenty-five in 1765 and 1766, before purchases increased it to fifty by 1768 and ultimately to ninety in 1770.⁶⁰ In any event, it is clear that non-Dutch planters and managers were as culpable as their Dutch counterparts.

Brisbane's concern about what he saw as Grant's excessively harsh treatment of the slaves also echoed warnings made by Robert Douglas during the Berbice slave revolt. As well as attacking the Berbice Company for its mismanagement of the colony, he also blamed the 'cruelty' of planters and their 'inhuman treatment' of their slaves for the Berbice rising itself. Further disturbances could be avoided, he wrote, 'provided Care is taken that more Humanity & better treatment is shown to the poor Negroes'.⁶¹ Robert Douglas' warnings were not heeded on his own family's estate.

How Sir James Douglas reacted to these conflicting reports of leniency and brutality is unknown, but the fact that the discussion about it lasted some months suggests that he did not immediately believe Brisbane's account. Indeed, he expressed his hope to Brisbane in August 1766 that Grant had not left.⁶² At the very least, he was not immediately appalled by the reports of gratuitous violence, as perhaps his brother would have been, and his naval background meant that he would not have balked at the idea of extreme corporal punishment. Under the so-called 'Articles of War', naval captains could impose a punishment of up to twelve lashes. For the serious punishments, courts martial were convened, and dealt with matters of theft, desertion, mutiny, violence, and refusal to follow orders. The courts martial had the power to impose capital punishment and corporal punishments of up to 1000 lashes.⁶³

⁶⁰ Oostinde and Stripriaan, 'Hydraulic Society', 80, 94. Data on the slave population comes from Lists of the Plantations in Demerara 1762-68: TNA, CO 116/33(168), CO 116/33(327v), CO 116/34(206v), CO116/34(332), CO 116/35(112v), CO116/36(203), CO 116/36(444) and NLS, MS8097(1) Letter from Mr Boddart to George Douglas, 30 June 1770.

⁶¹ KHA, G2-54 IB, Robert Douglas to Bentinck, 24 May 1764.

⁶² NMM, DOU/6 no fol., Sir James to Brisbane, 28 August 1766.

⁶³ N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Fontana, 1988), 218-229; A. G. Jamieson, 'Tyranny of the Lash? Punishment in the Royal Navy during the American War, 1776-1783, *Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 9 (1999), 53-66; and J. D. Byrn, ed., *Naval Courts Martial, 1793-1815* (Farnham: Ashgate for Naval Record Society, 2009), xvii-xxvii.

Having served on the court martial that condemned Admiral Byng in 1756, in the first two weeks after his arrival as commander of the Leeward squadron, Douglas oversaw courts martial of nine sailors. Robert Jefferson was sentenced to execution by hanging, while the other eight were sentenced to 1950 lashes between them, with William Tarding of the *Levant* sentenced to 500 alone. In each case, the culprit was to be ‘flogged round the fleet’, receiving a portion of the punishment on each of the naval vessels in port, both increasing the humiliation and serving as a more visible example. Naval punishments, therefore, for all the legal legitimacy of the courts martial, were often little less brutal than those meted out to the enslaved.

Grant’s letters to Douglas did not outline the nature of the punishments he had inflicted in the same detail as did Brisbane’s, but he did phrase his explanations for them in ways that might be comprehensible to a senior naval officer. He told Douglas that the slave in question had struck him while he was being punished for disobeying an instruction – both offences for which the consequences were severe for sailors in the navy. Grant also appealed to Douglas’ experience of the Caribbean: ‘I suppose you are West Indian enough to know that any change on one Estate that the slaves were troublesome at first until they are convinced by Due correction of their mistakes.’⁶⁴ Much like the planter class, therefore, with their aspirations to emulate the manners of polite British society, senior naval commanders encapsulated these apparently contradictory positions of gentility and brutality. Although the sorts of sadistic brutality issued by plantation overseers like Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica was unlikely on ships – though there were cases of extraordinarily violent captains – all naval officers are likely to have understood the language of discipline and control that justified the punishment of slaves and seamen alike.⁶⁵ Almost as striking as the punishments is the way that Douglas recorded them in his logbook: immediately after a note of the day’s weather and before his instructions to the captain of the

⁶⁴ NMM, DOU/6 no fols, Grant to Sir James Douglas, 7 March 1766, 31 May 1767.

⁶⁵ Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Rodger, *Wooden World*, 212.

Belliguieux to cruise to the east of Antigua.⁶⁶ For Douglas, these punishments were both routine and justified.

Even if he was not discomfited by the violence of slavery, Douglas grew increasingly concerned about the costs of the estate. As soon as he arrived in Demerara in 1767, Milne began to look for a purchaser for Weilburg, on which the slave population had grown to ninety. With Robert Douglas showing little interest in the estate, Sir James sold the plantation in the summer of 1770, having decided either that the return on his investment was too slow or low, or that he wanted to use the sale money to pay for some of his recent land acquisitions in Scotland.⁶⁷ The brothers gave up on Demerara, although they continued to benefit from legacies from their continuing stake in the Antigua plantation.

After the sale of Weilburg, the Douglas brothers' military careers continued to flourish. Robert Douglas remained in the Scots Brigade until the 1780s. He was commander of the Dutch garrison town of 's-Hertogensbosch from 1780 to 1784, after which he was appointed as its governor. Sir James, meanwhile, was commander-in-chief at Portsmouth between 1773 and 1777 and was promoted to admiral in 1778. The brothers thus continued to serve in the armed forces of two different countries in increasingly senior positions. Most of their careers coincided with the decades of relative amity between Britain and the Netherlands. Relations had been strained over the rights of neutral shipping in the Seven Years' War, however, and reached a breaking point in the late 1770s, when Dutch neutrality seemed to favour the Americans. Aggravated by British meddling in Dutch internal politics, the two states went to war.⁶⁸ As a result, when the Netherlands joined the American War of Independence in 1780, the brothers found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict that evolved into the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War.

The Dutch did not immediately disband the Scots Brigade but, by 1782, they regarded it increasingly as an enemy force with allegiances to the British monarch. Scottish soldiers in the brigade were offered the chance to remain in Dutch service on the condition that they repudiate their allegiance

⁶⁶ NMM, DOU/2 Journal of the proceedings of Sir James Douglas when he commanded the squadron of His Majesty's Ships at the Leeward Islands, Tuesday 13 May and Tuesday 20 May 1760.

⁶⁷ NLS, MS8097 (1), Boddaert, Middelburg, to Sir James Douglas, 30 June 1770

⁶⁸ Scott, 'Fourth Anglo-Dutch War', 571-89.

to Britain and become Dutch; many were unwilling to take these steps and returned to Britain. Robert Douglas was faced with a choice between his allegiance to the country of his birth and ancestry, and the place and people among whom he had lived for nearly forty years. Given his position in Dutch society by 1782, it is perhaps unsurprising that Robert Douglas chose to maintain his loyalty to his adopted home. He took an oath of allegiance to the Netherlands and joined the Dutch army rather than return to Scotland.

The eighteenth-century world exposed the Douglas brothers to complex and sometimes contradictory experiences. Both were born – unambiguously – as Scots. Both entered military service; both became involved in empire. But their world was not a Scottish one, nor even a British one. Robert Douglas' career relied on his ability to assimilate in the Dutch military and mercantile elite. For their private interests to flourish, these Scots needed the backing of Dutch and British merchants, systems of credit, and political influence, in the Caribbean, the Netherlands, and Britain.

Empire in the eighteenth century could be about much more than a projection of an emergent Britishness or, alternatively, as a means of ensuring the continuation and celebration of the four British nations after their political union.⁶⁹ This is because for many people, empires did not mean national empires: as members of a constituent part of one empire, they also accessed others. As Eliga H. Gould puts it in relation to the Spanish and British empires, 'far from being distinct entities ... the two empires were part of the same hemispheric system or community'.⁷⁰ The entanglements of empire allowed the Douglas brothers – indeed required them – to cross imperial boundaries, using political influence and state apparatus to advance their personal imperial interests. Their example also complicates our understanding of the effects of eighteenth-century empire on Scots and other Britons. John MacKenzie's call to arms in the 1990s to write multiple histories of the four nations in the British Empire needs now to sit beside scholarship that goes beyond the national and understands empires as a broader, and sometimes collaborative, venture. The effects on the Douglasses' individual allegiances were very different. Both, it is

⁶⁹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 130; Devine, *Scotland's Empire*, 346-60; and MacKenzie, 'Four-nation approach', 1247-55.

⁷⁰ Eliga H. Gould, 'Entangled Histories: Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery', *American Historical Review*, 112 (2007), 765.

true, became established in an elite – one was an admiral, the other military governor – but they entered different elites. While Britain and the Netherlands remained at peace these bifurcated allegiances proved useful, but when conflict came, the brothers found themselves at war.