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Tradition and Modernity in Scottish Gaelic Language Media

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Popular understandings of minority language communities often include negative characterizations of both language and speaker as "outdated" or "backward." Those characterizations stem from a dominant Western practice of separating the world into the dichotomous categories of "traditional" and "modern," then positively valuing that which has been labeled "modern" (generally the central elements of majority language communities). In this dichotomy, minority languages and their speakers fall under the less-desirable label of "traditional." The practice is problematic because it creates an ideology of difference that does not accurately reflect the complex reality of the majority/minority relationship and negatively pigeonholes members of the minority language community so that even they may find it difficult to identify convincing reasons for continuing to use the language.[1] The ideology thus undermines the intergenerational transmission that Joshua Fishman says is required for a language to be "self-sustaining," i.e. not in need of conscious steps toward "maintenance" (1996: 7).

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[1] In this context, I use the term "ideology" to suggest "representations that are contestable, socially positioned, and laden with political interest" (Hill and Mannheim 1992: 382). In this vein, Joel Kuipers defines language ideologies as "ideas with which participants frame their understandings of linguistic varieties and the differences among them, and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities" (1998: 18). Language ideologies come into play every time that language does, and they guide what we do or think in relation to language. As Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin put it, "A wealth of public problems hinge on language ideology" (1994: 72).

In the past, scholars have tended to credit the proliferation and circulation of majority language media with reifying this dichotomy and aiding in the decline of minority language use, but Patrick Eisenlohr notes a growing awareness that media can also be a tool for challenging widely held beliefs (2004: 23-24). Minority language media has the potential to reflect the true variety within its associated language communities and thereby counteract one-dimensional understandings of them as "outdated," "backward," or any other of the "non-modern" characterizations that may be encouraging intergenerational language shift. Minority language communities are increasingly turning to media as a site for breaking down the false dichotomy between "traditional" and "modern" so that the past, present, and future of the language receive equal attention. Correspondingly, I use media as a means of exploring how the future of the Scottish Gaelic community (taken as an instance of wider trends among minority language communities) may benefit from attempts to simultaneously highlight its inseparable "traditional" and "modern" aspects.

Having accepted a traditional/modern dichotomy, Gaelic-speaking parents may think it unimportant to pass on their native language and/or they may think it vital to completely immerse their children in the dominant English language in order to ensure future prosperity. Likewise, young people may find the social and economic prospects of the English-speaking community to be sufficient motivation for turning away from Gaelic. The traditional/modern ideology primes people against imagining simultaneous engagement in both language communities and questioning their mutual exclusivity. In the case of Gaelic, the traditional/modern dichotomy translates into expectations about the geographic location, age, and favorite pastimes of the entire language community. Those expectations have been normalized

over hundreds of years and are very limited in their scope. Few people can, or would even want to, live up to them.

The stereotypical Gaelic speaker (an elderly person living somewhere in the rural Highland and Islands[2] and possessing a rich knowledge of story and song) exists on the periphery of each of the three categories of geography, age and interests. The content of some of the Gaelic-language television programs that aired while I was conducting fieldwork in Glasgow in the spring of 2007 seemed to support those associations for the language. The series "*Iomall Nan Tonn*"(translated into English as "The Islands of Scotland," though a literal translation would produce something like "The Edge of the Waves") reinforced the geographical association by presenting aerial views of the Islands with a Gaelic voiceover that provided brief histories of each. A number of other programs featured elderly Gaelic-speakers sitting in front of a camera and telling stories, or singing songs. There are certainly people who enjoyed, and could relate to, the content of these programs. However, many of the people I talked to in Glasgow who were not part of the Gaelic media sector cited these types of programs to support their arguments that Gaelic language programming was, at best, in dire need of a makeover and, at worst, a complete waste of time and money.

Those who held the contrasting opinion that some Gaelic programs actually outshone their English-language counterparts usually referenced "*Èorpa*" ("Europe"), a news program that covers European stories that have been passed over by other news outlets. That program in particular inspired admiration among those who did not understand Gaelic and pride among those who did. Another program that my informants spoke of positively was "Dè a-nis?" (literally: "What now?," colloquially: "What's up?"). It was commended for the engagement it

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[2] The "Islands" in the phrase "Highlands and Islands" generally refers to the Inner and Outer Hebrides, also known as the Western Isles.

encouraged among school-aged viewers with its variety-show format, interactive competitions (including quizzes on popular culture topics), and segments filmed on-site at Gaelic-medium education units throughout Scotland. Both of these programs were Gaelic and yet did not fit stereotypes of Gaelicness. My conversations in Glasgow suggested that those who were familiar with the full range of Gaelic television programs had more positive opinions about the Gaelic language and its speakers than did those who were only aware of the programs that featured "traditional" indexes of Gaelicness.[3]

In the Field

My own research in this subject area is anchored by the fieldwork I carried out in Glasgow. I chose that location for its access both to media practitioners and Gaelic speakers. The majority of companies responsible for Gaelic media production are centered in Glasgow and the city actually boasts the most concentrated Gaelic community in Scotland. While in Glasgow, I spoke with people who held various positions related to the production of media in the Gaelic language. Most of my informants were employed in the television sector and interviewing them provided me with the perspectives of writers, directors, heads of funding organizations, heads of production companies, students, and instructors. My informants were further divided between employees of public and independent corporations, and people who were raised inside and outside of historically Gaelic-speaking regions. The bulk of my interview questions were

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[3] I recognize that initial positive interest in Gaelic may motivate certain people to actively seek out Gaelic programming (rather than simply stumbling upon it while channel surfing) and familiarize themselves with its true breadth.

centered around a new Gaelic Digital Service (GDS) that was then in the planning stages.[4] The

GDS is unique in that it was conceived of as tripartite. At that point, Gaelic already had a strong

radio presence in the form of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) *Radio nan Gàidheal*

(Radio of the Gaels), but its presence on television was decidedly weaker (roughly six hours each

week, the majority of which was non-fiction programming) and websites in Gaelic were mainly

grassroots efforts. These three types of media were to be the foci of the new GDS, and a shift to

the increasingly dominant practice of 360° commissioning (asking producers to create content

that can be presented across media formats rather than programs for a single medium) was to

help unite them into a cohesive whole. Particularly when speaking of plans for the television

component of the GDS, my informants often made comparisons with Welsh-language media,

stressing the success of S4C (*Sianel Pedwar Cymru*, or Channel Four Wales), which was then

celebrating its twenty-fifth year on the air. Elin Haf Gruffydd Jones, director of Mercator

Media[5], informed me that it is common for minority language communities to look to other

groups when trying to set aspirational, yet attainable, goals for their own media endeavors. The

Scots look to the Welsh (and, to a lesser extent, the Irish), the Welsh look to the Basques, and so

on.

I supplemented interviews by playing the participant observer at Gaelic events held by

members of the Glasgow Gaelic community, and I gratefully acknowledge the Glasgow office of

the Gaelic development agency *Comunn na Gàidhlig* for helping me identify those opportunities.

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[4] The service finally debuted on September 19, 2008, long after I had left the field and roughly a
year after the date that was initially projected for its launch.
[5] Mercator Media is an organization funded by the European Commission and housed at the
University of Wales, Aberystwyth. It is part of the larger Mercator Institute, which also includes
Mercator Education and Mercator Legislation. The purpose of each branch is, "to gather, store,
analyse and distribute information through a documentation and information network for
regional and minority languages in the European Union" for the subject area that appears in that
branch's title (Mercator Media 2006).

They included *Ceol 's Craic*, the monthly night of music and dancing that one member of *An Lòchran* (the Glasgow Gaelic arts organization that ran those evenings) said was started as an attempt to give young people a Gaelic-only alternative to English-language night clubs. I also took language classes sponsored by the Glasgow City Council each Monday night at Glasgow's Gaelic school, and I attended a conference held by the regional *Buidheann Sgrùdaidh Ionnsachadh is Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd airson Gàidhlig* (Community Learning and Development Review Group for Gaelic) on the theme "Engaging with Young People in Gaelic."

While traveling elsewhere in Scotland, I attended a talk on Gaelic and television at the University of Edinburgh and spoke with members of the Celtic Studies Department there. Attending the annual Celtic Media Festival brought me to Portree, on the Isle of Skye. I also went to Stornoway, on the Isle of Lewis, where I visited the headquarters for independent production company Mac TV and the studio for MG Alba (a shortened version of *Meadhanan Gàidhlig Alba*, or Gaelic Media Scotland, and the government funding body that has worked with the BBC to create and run the GDS).

Alarmist Discourse About Language Loss

An article by Peter Monaghan that recently appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* began, "Last year, when 89-year-old Marie Smith Jones died, a language died with her ," that being the Alaskan language, Eyak (Monaghan 2009). This method of introducing the topic of endangered languages by citing the death of a single remaining speaker is a popular one and it encourages readers to understand languages that face similar fates as not wholly existing in the modern present. In that vein, Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine started their book *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages* by introducing Tefvik Esenc, "a

frail farmer believed to be the last known speaker of the Ubykh language once spoken in the northwestern Caucasus" (2000: 1). The final sentence of that first paragraph reports his death and, therefore, the death of Ubykh. The frailty of the speaker easily takes on a metaphorical quality, suggesting that the language itself was frail. Frailty is not a condition from which one recovers and so this manner of broaching the topic discourages readers from understanding the fight against language loss as an actionable cause, or possibly even from imagining that there might be enough people interested to raise such a fight. In the next two paragraphs of *Vanishing Voices*, the reader learns of five other languages (three Native American, one European and one Australian) through reports of the deaths of their last fluent speakers (2000: 2). Nettle and Romaine accompany the text with pictures of four of these late members of single-speaker minority language communities. Again, the authors forefront the most severe and irreversible cases of the phenomenon of language shift, allowing the reader to imagine minority languages as existing on the extreme periphery of modern experience and existence.

The alarmist academic discourse about minority languages is connected to popular discourse that allowed a newspaper article praising UNESCO for "helping the case" of Scottish Gaelic by putting it on a map of dead **and threatened** languages to be titled, "'Endangered' Gaelic on map of world's dead languages" (Ross 2009). The actual content of the article was very optimistic about the wide array of language revival efforts it reported, including greater-than-expected uptake for the new digital television channel and Gaelic medium education. The author concluded that, "The decline has slowed and the number of young people interested in the language has been growing" (Ross 2009). However, the wording of the title suggests that differentiating between "endangered" and "dead" would be splitting hairs, since neither term would place Gaelic on a map of the world that includes vital dominant languages. The title is

seen as an acceptable summary of the article's content despite its misleading, and actually false, character.

Characteristics of the Scottish Gaelic language

While many in the United States will understand the word "Gaelic" as referring to the Irish language, this confusion is avoided in common usage partly by a difference in pronunciation of the initial vowel sound of "Gaelic" to indicate which language is being discussed[6], and also by referring to Irish Gaelic simply as "Irish." Scottish Gaelic is the indigenous minority language of Scotland and when lists of "endangered," or "dying," languages are made, it is often present.

The Scotti tribe brought their language from Ireland around 500 C.E. (Smith 2000: 174). Both Irish and Gaelic have since diverged from their common ancestor, Old Irish, and they now share the Goidelic (or "Q") branch of Indo-European's Celtic sub-family with Manx (Isle of Man). Welsh, Breton (Brittany, France) and Cornish (Cornwall, England) are also in the Celtic sub-family, but they belong to the Brythonic (or "P") branch. The Q/P distinction has to do with a sound change, which may be seen in the Gaelic word for son, *mac*, and the equivalent word in Welsh, *ap*.

Celtic languages were once spoken throughout Europe, but those that remain were pushed to the physical periphery of the countries of which they are now a part. Speakers of those languages move freely in the major cities of Ireland, Britain and France, but there are certain aspects of their languages that often appear far too foreign for speakers of the majority language to view them as acceptable ways to communicate in a modern, rational world. A list of notable

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[6] This phonemic differentiation is practiced in Scotland, though not in Canada.

facts about the Gaelic language might include that its alphabet consists of 18 of the letters found in the English alphabet, with some sounds that are represented by one of the "absent" letters in English being represented by digraphs ("mh-" or "bh-" is usually pronounced [v], and "taxi" becomes *tacsi*). This may seem both confusing and unnecessary to non-native speakers, but it is useful in writing because in cases where, for instance, *math* ("good") becomes *mhath* after a feminine noun, the connection with the root word is clear despite a change in pronunciation. Changing *mhath* to *vath* would unnecessarily obfuscate its meaning.

The general sentence structure is of the verb-subject-object type, and verbs do not change according to subject. They do, however, reflect tense and they have separate affirmative, negative, and interrogative forms. In Gaelic, there are no words that translate directly to English's "yes" or "no." Instead one would answer a question with the affirmative or negative form of the verb that is given in its interrogative form in the question asked. For instance, if one were asked, *Am faca thu an cù?* (Did you see the dog?), one would answer either, *Faca* (Did see), or *Chan fhaca* (Did not see).

While such elements of the language may seem to be only the concern of those with an academic interest in grammar, they have been claimed as proof that the Gaelic language is unfit for modern society. Evidence of this appeared in The Sunday Times on October 5, 2008 (soon after the launch of the new devoted Gaelic channel, BBC Alba) in an article by Allan Brown, titled, "BBC Alba shows power of Gaelic lobby." The columnist expresses anger about the disproportionate amount of money being spent on the channel, but it soon becomes clear that $20 million dollars being put toward a minority language service is not the only thing stuck in his craw. After picking apart each program broadcast during the channel's first night on the air, Brown moves onto the Gaelic language itself: "I say language but Gaelic isn't one, not really. Its

vocabulary is tiny, with no form of saying yes or no and attuned to a distant, pre-technological world. It's essentially a kind of rural patois, a bonsai idiolect; a way of specifying concepts central to a particular, highly codified way of life" (Brown 2008). For Brown (and, one assumes, many who read his article), the Gaelic verbal structure that is so fascinatingly different than that of English, boils down to a simple lack in lexicon. If Gaels cannot say "yes" or "no," surely the most basic words in English, what **can** they say that is of value to English speakers living in the technological here and now?

Locating Minority Languages in a Traditional/Modern Dichotomy

There are multiple dichotomies that combine in the construction of the concept "modernity" and its supposed opposite that may be called "tradition." Bruno Latour has outlined the uneven treatment of the paired categories that make up this overarching dichotomy. Latour introduces the major problem he sees with the discourse of modernity thusly: "Modernity is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of 'man' or as a way of announcing his death. But this habit is itself modern because it remains asymmetrical" (1993: 13). Here, Latour acknowledges that some view modernity positively ("the birth of 'man'") and others view it negatively ("his death"), but his point is that both types of theorists are of the opinion that they need only outline the modern side of the proposed shift to provide sufficient support for their arguments. Whether the wonders or the terrors of modernity are enumerated, it is always the characteristics of modernity that are enumerated.

Where endangered languages are concerned, they are often described as lacking the capabilities or vitality that are characteristic of dominant (and, therefore, "modern") languages.

Counterarguments that seek to prove the value of endangered languages are also often based on characteristics of their more vital counterparts. While attending Gaelic classes in Nova Scotia, I heard fellow students extol the virtues of Gaelic's lack of a verb meaning "to have." The fact that one would have to say "Tha bàta agam" (literally "A boat is at me") to express the meaning of "I have a boat" was interpreted as evidence that Gaelicness sees ownership as temporary and is thus essentially opposed to the evils of materialism that English allows. For them, Gaelic was great because it cannot perform a function of the "modern" English language that they valued negatively. Gaelic has verbs meaning "buying" and "selling" that are not English loan words, but that did not tarnish my fellow students' understandings of the language. They readily accepted that Gaelic is not "modern," and they accepted it as a point in Gaelic's favor.

Latour is forgiving in his assessment of this tendency toward asymmetry, noting that it is very difficult to locate a central vantage point that would allow for equal study of all aspects because modernity deals mainly in dichotomies that pose each "modern" segment as entirely mutually exclusive from its "non-modern" counterpart. The traditional is incompatible with the modern. They cannot and should not coexist peacefully. For ease of understanding, Latour likens this to dominant US discourse about the separation of power between branches of the Federal government. Each branch is talked about and understood as having completely different powers than the other two branches so that a Venn diagram of all three would consist of circles that do not overlap at all. This conception blinds the eye to the many instances of one branch working with another in what Latour terms "hybrids" (i.e. a language in which buying something makes it "at you").

For Latour, a proper description of the modern world would detail the workings of both sides of every dichotomy equally and include examples that bridge those divides to illustrate the

essential falseness of those dichotomies. Because the modern tendency is to distribute these things to either side of one of many dichotomies that ultimately line up with an overarching not-modern/modern one, such a position could only be achieved by somehow stepping outside of modernity itself. This ideal position for symmetrical analysis would have to be situated in the space between not-modern and modern, and it is only possible to imagine such a space from a standpoint that does not take the two to be essentially different and opposed to one another. That standpoint is difficult to imagine from within modernity, or even post-modernity, but its imagining is key to counteracting language ideologies that turn power differentials between language communities into traditional/modern dichotomies between languages and their associated cultural practices that then reify those power differentials. As Bruce M. Knauft so nicely put it, "Unless [modernity] is clarified to be an analytic perspective rather than an empirical grid for mapping the world, the differentiation of modernity still presents us with dichotomous categories and choices" (2002: 3). Realizing that modernity is but one way of "mapping the world" allows us to search for other ways that might characterize minority language situations more accurately and better support efforts to widen the range of people able to imagine themselves as part of those minority language communities in the future. This is where questions of regional and generational transmission of languages like Gaelic come into play.

In his quest to denaturalize visions of the Scottish Highlands as a romantic land of tradition,[7] Matthew Wickman locates the source of this romanticism in the failed attempts by Lowlanders and Englishman to industrialize the Highland people and their lands in the late 18th

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[7] The Highland region is second only to the Islands in its historical and ideological associations with Gaelic. They are often treated as a single entity as in the phrase "the Highlands and Islands."

and early 19th centuries. When they realized that the Highlands would not bow to their

modernizing efforts, the region took on the romantic and improbable meanings that gave rise to

stories like "Brigadoon." As Wickman says, "Highland romance originated as a nostalgic image

of the receding past, compensating as 'literature' and 'culture' for what was irretrievably lost

with the onset of 'science' and 'industry'" (2007: 140). Again, the "traditional" was defined by

that which modernity was seen to lack. Those on the "modern" side of the rift may have highly

valued literature and culture as cultural capital, but they would have been a luxury in comparison

to the necessary science and industry that provided actual capital.

Jane Sillars and Myra Macdonald have identified a similar theme in twentieth century

films set in the Highlands, with the region being, "used as the location for a voyage of discovery.

A refugee from the modern world finds there respite and a reconnection with the natural world"

(2008: 184). Here we see powerful cultural forces (film studios) viewing the region in much the

same way that my anti-materialist fellow students viewed the language.   For Sillars and

Macdonald, films like "Brigadoon," "Local Hero" and "Loch Ness" portray the Highland region

as "existing beyond the reach of modernity" and, regarding the latter film, "The Loch Ness

monster may have become an icon of Scottish kitsch, but Nessie…speaks of a vision of Scotland

so physically distant from the centres of modernity that history is unable to reach it" (2008:

184). This last comment is particularly reflective of understandings of the Gaelic language and

Gaelic culture as oddities that have mysteriously survived through to the present.

One cannot claim a direct cause-and-effect relation between these representations of the

historic stronghold of the Gaelic language and the language itself, but it is easy to that they are

intertwined. The Highlands index some portion of history that is unnaturally coexisting with the

present, and so does Gaelic. Gaelic indexes cultural practices that do not "work" in an industrial

world and so do the Highlands. Though films like "Brigadoon" are not the ultimate source of these indexical relationships, they aid in the reproduction of the relationships.

Bringing into question the dominance of these representations of the Highlands in mainstream media is but one of the tasks that practitioners of minority language media face. Their work has the potential to address the problem, faced by many language revitalization movements, of getting people interested and involved in the language through their daily lives. This is particularly significant, and difficult, where young people are concerned. Research with lesser-used languages has found that mass media may in fact encourage the use of such languages by providing consumers with opportunities to gain and maintain language abilities, while at the same time introducing new indexical relationships for that language and challenging dominant ideological valuations of it that may have contributed to intergenerational shifts away from its use. As Patrick Eisenlohr (2004) and others have noted, the resultant ideological changes may lead the language to be valued positively in terms of social interaction, economic viability, and the like, by those who had previously assigned it negative values in those categories. Still, one of the first steps toward making these positive changes is dealing with the problematic views of outsiders. Speaking of the situation in Wales, Elin Haf Gruffydd Jones remarks, "Indigenous production carries the expectation of counteracting the images of Wales and the Welsh produced by outsides and these are generally considered from the inside to be extremely stereotypical" (2007: 197). The indigenous audience is aware of the stereotypes others hold and wants their media to take extra steps to prove an equal awareness. This is significant because minority language media content often does end up representing the community to outsiders who may not be sympathetic to revival efforts and whose vocal objections may influence the language choices of younger generations.

The stated aim of BBC Alba is, "to reflect and support Gaelic culture, identity and heritage" (BBC 2009). However, Magnus Linklater, a writer for the London newspaper *The Times,* welcomed the channel's first night on the air with these words: "BBC Alba aims to bring Gaelic well and truly into the modern era by staging programmes about Elvis Presley, the French football star Zinedine Zidane, and the mass-murderer, Peter Manuel" (Linklater 2008). BBC Alba failed to unveil programs that fit Linklater's view of the language (as existing at least partially in a different era) and he interprets this not as proof that he had previously had an incomplete grasp of the complexity of the Gaelic community, but instead as evidence that the channel is a last-ditch effort to revamp Gaelic's image. The closing line of the article affirms that he takes this to be a sad and ultimately fruitless attempt by the Gaelic media sector: "The language is in retreat and pouring £21 million into broadcasting it will do little to halt the decline" (Linklater 2008). Treating this as a likelihood would be understandable, but Linklater decrees it a certainty and thus leaves no room for doubt or hope. His approach is symptomatic of larger ideological trends that are tied in with alarmist discourse about language loss.

Allan Brown is just as willing to interpret these programs as a grand, but wishful, statement about the state of the language in his piece for *The Times* (2008). The program that Linklater claims is "about Elvis" is titled "*Eilbheas*" and is actually, "a comedy drama set on Lewis, in which the growing pains of an intense Gaelic teenager are assuaged by his friendship with the ghost of Elvis Presley" (Brown 2008). Like Linklater, Brown insists that the content of this program was not created for mere entertainment purposes: "The implication is clear; that the Gaelic world and the modern world do co-exist happily. The message is obvious, too — just because you're dead don't mean you ain't still alive. It was a message custom-made for the Gaelic constituency, who are never deterred in applying defibrillators to the fading heart of their

native language" (Brown 2008). The first meaning Brown extracts, "that the Gaelic world and the modern world do co-exist happily," echoes the understanding of the Highlands as a space existing outside of modernity that Wickman, Sillars and Macdonald have identified. However, Brown does not see this Gaelic world as a place of refuge and rejuvenation. Instead, it is a world on life support and Gaelic speakers need to admit that it is time to pull the plug. As if to prevent any doubt about his true feelings, Brown goes on to say that Gaelic is, "a language that is really little more than a geographical and historical vestige, a linguistic comfort blanket for a hard-pressed, marginal community" (Brown 2008). When BBC Alba seeks to "to reflect and support Gaelic culture, identity and heritage," they must be aware that some of their harshest judges may share Linklater's and Brown's inaccurate and, ironically, traditional view of that "culture, identity and heritage."

Despite what people like Linklater and Brown think, the fact that 58,652 Scots speak Gaelic (BBC Trust 2007c: 25) does not mean that 58,652 people in Scotland share the exact same culture, identity and heritage. Certain stereotypes are associated with Gaelic speakers and like most stereotypes, they apply to some, but nowhere near all, of the people they are meant to describe. Jones explains the situation well: "The problematic nature of stereotyping lies in the awareness of an image being too limited in its depiction of those whom it claims to portray rather than it being inherently negative or having no truth in it at all" (2007: 198). The stereotype of Gaelicness as something that is shared by Highlanders and Islanders who, like the language, are near death is not inaccurate because that connection doesn't exist, but is instead inaccurate because the stereotype treats it as the only connection that exists for the language.

There are those who might seem to justify Gaelic stereotypes because they live in Scotland's Highlands and Islands, are elderly, participate in fiddle and bagpipe-centric

community dances, and/or are more interested in local communities than national or global ones.

However, there are also those who live in the Lowlands, prefer to attend rock concerts, and/or

take full advantage of the connections with communities outside of Scotland that Gaelic media

outlets offer. Though those groupings of characteristics are often thought of as being on

different sides of a traditional/modern dichotomy, it is important to note that a person may in fact

exhibit characteristics from both groupings. It is fortunate then that one sign may have indexical

relationships with many different social meanings (Ochs 1992: 338), so indexical links could be

formed between Gaelic and other parts of the world, or speakers of varying competencies,

without ignoring the importance of the Highlands and fluent native speakers in the imagining of

a Gaelic language community. Many language revitalization movements would benefit from

recognizing, and taking advantage of, this characteristic of indexicality. Doing so might bring an

end to such categorical dichotomies as "traditional/modern," freeing them from feeling the need

to choose between looking to the past (alienating younger generations) and looking to the future

(alienating older generations). Gaelic may not be historically rooted in areas outside of the

Highlands and Islands, but those who moved away from that region (often for economic reasons)

did not automatically become monolingual English-speakers once they crossed the imaginary

Highland/Lowland boundary.[8] Today, Gaelic-speakers can be found in all of Scotland's major

Lowland cities, with the 2001 Census showing 44.5% of all Gaelic speakers residing in the

Lowlands (MacKinnon 2004 in McLeod 2005: 1). The greatest concentration of Gaelic

speakers in all of Scotland can be found in the Lowland city of Glasgow (Cormack 1993: 105)[9],

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[8] Nor did that necessarily happen when they crossed the ocean, for there is still a small Gaelic-speaking community and revival movement in Nova Scotia, Canada.
[9] Nearly 9.8% of the total Gaelic population resides in Glasgow (*Comunn na Gàidhlig* 2006).

and acknowledging that reality bestows significance on the Lowland region without belittling the significance of the Highlands and Islands.

Glasgow is also the geographic center of most Gaelic production companies, and that is another reason that media proves a useful site for studying and breaking down a supposed dichotomy between "traditional" and "modern." The practices of these companies (i.e. filming programs in locations throughout Scotland), the content they produce, and the wider Glasgow Gaelic community of which their employees are a part can all be taken as evidence that a traditional/modern dichotomy is not an accurate way of representing the differences between minority and majority language communities. Mass media produced in the Gaelic language brings attention to Gaelic's current presence both inside and outside of the traditional Scottish *Gaeltachd* and of mainstream Scottish culture, while at the same time illuminating Gaelic's place in institutions involved with producing and reproducing culture.

That being said, it is fair to note that Magnus Linklater's last line, "The language is in retreat and pouring £21 million into broadcasting it will do little to halt the decline" (2008), makes a good point for language revitalization even if it is not the one he intended to make. If one takes "broadcasting" to mean only the distribution of media content, as Linklater clearly does, then it is true that broadcasting can do little to ensure the future of a language. However, if one takes "broadcasting" to mean an entire web of activities, many of which include exciting new career opportunities for young Gaelic speakers, then that £21 million could do a great deal. When Joan Pujolar conducted ethnographic fieldwork with young people in Barcelona to find out why they were resisting pro-Catalan language policies, the complex answer involved their perceptions of themselves, their relations with other social groups, the conditions of their contact with Catalan, and many other aspects of the lifelong linguistic experience of group members

(2000). Pujolar's study provides concrete evidence that a simple change in policy cannot erase years of local lived experience. This is why the mere existence of media in minority languages is not enough to encourage their use. £21 million may be able to do much to halt the decline of Gaelic, particularly if it is spent in ways that address the obstacles Pujolar identified. A broadcasting budget used wisely can produce much more than content.

Gaelic in Scotland

One possible means of beginning to counteract the current language ideology that treats Gaelic as incompatible with modernity is by tracing its development. Gaelic was once the language of power in Scotland, and actions taken by English-speaking southerners (both in England and the Scottish Lowlands) can be viewed as attempts to rest that power away from people they found threatening. In a move that is not peculiar to the Gaelic case, these actions were often justified by claims that the changes in cultural practice they demanded would "civilize" the target population.

When the Kingdom of Scots was formed in 843 C.E., Gaelic was the language of the court, and its widespread use is evidenced by the presence across Scotland of Gaelic place names that are still in use (Smith 2000: 174). Since then, the language's foundation of speakers has been eroded by the official and unofficial actions of English speakers, as well as by the effects that those actions have had as an ideological backdrop for the everyday practices of Gaelic speakers. For instance, the 1609 Statutes of Iona forced the clan chiefs of the Western Isles to send their eldest sons and daughters away to English-medium schools. The Statutes labeled the Gaelic language, as well as dress and customs closely associated with it, as "Irish" (Lynch 2003: 241), which was a clear signal that they were seen as not belonging in Scotland despite their long

existence there.[10] This, and similar rulings that followed, can be seen as based on an understanding of Gaelic's presence in Scotland as not only peripheral, but also inappropriate and undesirable in its foreignness. In this view, traits of Gaelic speakers are posited as incompatible with the traits that all "civilized" people within Britain's borders aspire to achieve.

The union of Scotland and England in 1707 was brought about through compromise. Scotland was allowed to maintain its distinctive church (Presbyterian), education and law systems. At the same time, the Union dissolved Scotland's parliament and made the Hanoverian succession to the Crown official, ending the claims that the Catholic Stewarts had to the Throne. In 1745, loyal Highlanders made a final attempt to restore the Stewart line to power. Despite initial success, the uprising ended in defeat at the Battle of Culloden. Robert Clyde has described "outside agencies" trying to "bring order and economic prosperity" to the Highlands and Islands after the last Jacobite uprising of 1745: "In their eyes, the transformation of the Gaels from rebellious and indolent barbarians to loyal and industrious Presbyterians required the supplanting of Gaelic with English and the elimination of the non-juring Episcopalian and Roman Catholic clergy whose influence prevented the instilling of 'proper' beliefs, morals and habits" (quoted in Wickman 2007: 211). This task of education was largely carried out by the "Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge", "which operated on the premise that 'civilization' was something the Lowlands could pass on to the Highlands" (quoted in Wickman 2007: 211). The forced shift from Gaelic to English was a necessary part of the whole endeavor to recreate the Highlander in the image of the Lowlander.

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[10] That document, and the motivation behind it, becomes even more interesting when it is noted that some items now universally understood as "Scottish" (for example whisky, tartan, and bagpipes) originated among the Gaelic Highlanders and, at various points in history, were outlawed by authorities headquartered in the Lowlands (MacDonald 1997: 5).

While some parts of this whole were successful, Lowlanders were ultimately forced to admit defeat in their attempts to modernize and industrialize the Highlands in the late 1700s. As a result, "The Highlands thus acquire[d] the status of an anachronism, of a remote and uncanny space which evokes the past but is still alive in the present, making the region a perpetual curiosity that must be seen…in order to be believed" (Wickman 2007: 96). Gaelic was no longer treated as a direct threat to a civilized Scotland on the national level, but its new role as part of the "perpetual curiosity" of the Highlands did not bring support for its speakers. On the local level, the "civilizing" continued as students were often punished for speaking Gaelic. In 1881, the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland stood at 250,000, dropping to less than 100,000 by the 1950s and 79,307 by the 1980's (Ross 2009).

Drawing comparisons with the circumstances of the Welsh language can be very useful when attempting to understand the Gaelic case, particularly where governmental support of media is concerned. After a successful national memorandum in 1997, the Scottish Parliament reopened in 1999. It was not until the 2007 National Plan for Gaelic that this national government took an official stance on working to ensure the language's future. In contrast, the Welsh Language Act 1993, which made Welsh co-official with English in Wales, was an act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. Television broadcasting is one area in which government organizations at the United Kingdom level have expressed interest in supporting Gaelic, but an analysis of some official documents on the subject indicates that they have often deemed Welsh to be more worthy of their attention (both symbolic and economic) because of its larger speech community.

Broadcasting Indigenous Minority Languages in the United Kingdom

In the case of Gaelic, the BBC has always been the largest contributor to its presence in the broadcast media (Dunbar 2006: 7). It is usually only print media that are left in the control of minority language communities, with majority language groups exerting power over the broadcast media (Guyot 2007: 36). This is where a public service system of broadcasting, like the system that has traditionally dominated in the UK and still thrives in the form of the state-run BBC, may offer minority language communities unique opportunities for attempting methods of reversing language shift that they would otherwise be unable to pursue using their own resources. The BBC's status as a public service broadcaster allows for specialized attention to be paid to small groups like those communities that speak minority languages and requires that they be mentioned in the Public Purposes that the BBC is bound to fulfill as best it can. While the traditional British approach to treating broadcasting as a public service differs greatly from the approach that was decided on in the United States, it is in line with the broadcasting policies of most countries in Europe (Guyot 2007: 36). This shared background makes an examination of the form that the "public service" approach takes in Britain, and the role it has played in creating a relatively fertile environment for Gaelic-language media, particularly significant as it may inform future comparisons and collaborations between minority language groups within Europe and in other parts of the world that similarly treat broadcasting as a public service.

Broadcasting in the United Kingdom began as a commercial venture. On October 18, 1922, six British and American electrical companies (Marconi, Metropolitan-Vickers, Radio Communication Company, British Thomson-Houston, General Electric and Western Electric) joined forces to create the British Broadcasting Company (*British Broadcasting Company* 2008). On January 1, 1927 the British Broadcasting Company became the British Broadcasting

Corporation, having dissolved its assets and accepted a Royal Charter. This new incarnation took the form of "a publicly funded yet quasi-autonomous organization" (Crisell 2002: 28). After this, perhaps the largest change in BBC practice occurred on November 2, 1936 when the previously radio-only broadcasting system opened "the world's first regular high-definition television service" (*Timeline* 2008). Despite such dramatic shifts in practice, the stated reasons and plans for the BBC's existence have remained relatively unchanged since its creation.

The constitutional basis for the British Broadcasting Corporation was, and is still, set out in a combination of the Royal Charter and an Agreement between the BBC and the Secretary of State for the Culture, Media and Sport (a department that was known as the "Department of National Heritage" at the BBC's inception). The Charter describes the functioning of the main bodies that control the corporation and it fleshes out the concept of "public service" by breaking that down into a list of six Public Purposes for the organization. The Agreement builds on the Charter to provide further detail about how appropriate action on those Public Purposes can be ensured, as well as covering necessary funding arrangements. Both of these documents must be periodically reviewed and renewed with the help of the public and the Houses of Parliament.[11]

With license fee payers providing a certain level of guaranteed budget for the BBC, it becomes less essential to figure out cost effectiveness for each program. This then enables the corporation to, "provide amply funded, high-quality programmes for minorities who are small and poor as well as large and rich" (Crisell 2002: 114). This is a possibility of the British public service system that creates a beneficial situation that minority language community members might not enjoy under other broadcasting types. At approximately 1.2% of the Scottish population, Gaelic-speakers might not warrant much attention from strictly commercial

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[11] The most recent incarnation of the Charter took effect on January 1, 2007 and the newest Agreement was approved in July 2006 (BBC Trust 2007a).

broadcasters, even if *every* speaker were guaranteed to watch *every* show (which occurrence would be highly unlikely).

It should be noted that the British broadcasting system did not start out by setting up a complete dichotomy between public service and commercial broadcasters. Though recent technological developments have changed the landscape, non-BBC broadcasters were initially required to have a license to operate, and in order to get that license they had to express their commitment to the public service mantra: "inform, educate and entertain." During the time period when most households only received four channels, two of which were operated by the BBC, this requirement was quite effective for keeping independent channels in line with those goals (Crisell 2002: 29). As technologies like cable and satellite increasingly undermine the British government's monopoly on broadcasting and regulation thereof, increased audience choice has led viewers to question claims that the BBC must provide "something for everyone" and "everything for someone." The universal license fee has also become a hot topic of debate, particularly in those cases of "amply funded, high-quality programmes for minorities who are small and poor," as in the Gaelic case. If money from the license fee goes mainly to funding BBC productions, and a viewer must pay the fee even if they never watch the BBC, is this not a case of viewers being forced to pay for a public service they don't use (Crisell 2002: 114)? This question arises in many current discussions about what actions are, and are not, appropriate for the BBC, so it is important to keep in mind when investigating the basis for the BBC's continued commitment to producing programs in the Gaelic language.

The simplest explanation of this commitment lies in the list of "Public Purposes" the fulfillment of which is the BBC's main object, according to the *Agreement* (Department of Culture 2006: i). Those public purposes are laid out in the *Charter*. There are six of them, but,

"representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities" is the most relevant to my interest in the indigenous minority languages of the UK. It calls for the BBC to represent all parts of the UK citizenry by "reflect[ing] and strengthen[ing] cultural identities" at various levels of association. It also requires that the BBC make others aware of those cultural identities and the viewpoints that may go along with them. To carry out this Purpose, the BBC "must have regard amongst other things" to religious differences and "the importance of appropriate provision in minority languages" (Department of Culture 2006: 4). Religion and language are, then, not the *only* examples of cultural identities, but they are deemed to be the most in need of official mention.

While the wording "minority languages" does not specify that those languages be indigenous, further official documents regarding the running of the BBC make special mention of Welsh, to a lesser extent Gaelic, and to an even lesser extent Irish[12]. Many of those mentions include some comment about the difficulties presented by the presence of these languages, as in: "the need first to tackle the special problem of the Welsh language" (Home Office 1974: 29). Welsh presents a problem that is "special" in that it is not encountered when the BBC does business in England, but it must be "tackled" in order to ensure that the BBC "reflects and strengthens cultural identities" in Wales because BBC policy makers understand language and culture as inseparable pieces of each other.

In the 1978 publication *Broadcasting*, the Home Office commented: "Broadcasting has an important role to play in the preservation of Gaelic and Welsh as living tongues and in sustaining the distinctive cultures based upon them" (22). This led into a discussion of the necessity of offering a greater range of television programming in Welsh, "to help preserve the

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[12] These differences in BBC attention can be linked to the differences between the historical and geographical contexts of the UK's three indigenous languages.

distinctive Welsh language and culture." The piece was written during a period of intense protesting by Welsh speakers who demanded their own channel, and the Home Office emphasized the government's commitment to meeting that demand as soon as sufficient funds became available (1978: 24). That clearly stated promise came only a few years after another publication from the Home Office announced: "The argument for making special provision for the Welsh language is a compelling one. The Welsh language, whose survival is seen as the key to the preservation of Welsh culture, is fighting a difficult battle for survival in the modern world" (Home Office 1974: 39).

The main concern in relation to the Welsh language (and, therefore, the Welsh culture) in both of those documents is the possible effects that television may have on the vitality of the language. If young people are presented mainly with programming in English, that is the language they will believe is most valuable, which will encourage them to abandon all use of Welsh in favor of English. However, if those same young people have the opportunity to watch Welsh programming, "of comparable quality and at the peak family viewing-times" the Welsh language may have a fighting chance (Home Office 1974: 39). This concern may have actually translated into practice, at least for the national BBC channel for Wales, since in 1981 that channel was producing slightly more output in Welsh (7 hours) than in English (5 hours) each week, with the intention of those Welsh programs eventually being moved to a devoted Welsh language channel (Central Office 1981: 10).

While the above concerns were largely those expressed by viewers, the government also received pressure from people involved in policy-making who insisted that television "help assert and reflect national or regional identities, i.e. in Scotland and Wales…to preserve the culture and language of Wales and of the Gaelic-speaking districts of North West Scotland…and

in general to deepen and strengthen the particular characteristics of the various parts of the country" (Home Office 1974: 25). This mandate seems to put Scotland (or at least part of Scotland) at the same level of importance as Wales, but one cannot locate discussions about Gaelic use in these documents that parallel the expressions of commitment to preservation of the Welsh language.

The difference has much to do with the historical context of the documents and the two languages. One significant difference is in the number of people who speak each language. At the time of the 1971 census, around 542,000 people reported speaking Welsh (Home Office 1974: 39), whereas only some 70,000 reported speaking Gaelic (35). Though the BBC has prided itself on not making audience size its main concern in programming decisions, this difference is clearly one that was hard to ignore. This is stated outright when the Home Office laments that broadcasting in Gaelic cannot be increased by much because Gaelic speakers make up such a small amount of the population. Here we see the government itself making the case that many of today's English-speaking, monolingual Scots make against seemingly lavishing attention and production money on a minority group.[13] However, the Home Office draws back a bit: "Nevertheless the broadcasting authorities have a clear responsibility to ensure that the needs of this section of the community are met, and the Government trusts that they will take note of the view expressed by the Annan Committee that there should be some increase in the output of Gaelic programmes" (Home Office 1978: 22). When this sentiment is compared to the

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[13] News articles announcing the debut of the Gaelic Digital Service offer a number of examples of these arguments. Magnus Linklater provided one in *The Scotsman* on the day: "Today sees the launch of a brand new £ 21million Gaelic television channel… Worthy as this enterprise is, the enormous cost of a service which will, at best, reach fewer than 60,000 viewers (the most optimistic estimate of those speaking Gaelic in Scotland) must raise serious questions about the BBC's priorities" (2008). This is one of the nicer ways of describing the situation. Notably, the initial viewership of the Gaelic television channel actually fell around 600,000 people (Nutt 2009).

clear statement of support for a devoted Welsh-language channel only a few years earlier, the

difference is striking. Where in the Welsh case the government openly states its commitment to

the cause, in the Scottish case it merely "trusts that [broadcasters] will take note of the view

expressed" by the government that "there should be some increase" in Gaelic programming. It

would be difficult to formulate a more passive declaration of support.

For a further explanation of this difference in government response, we must move

beyond sheer number of speakers to consider the various approaches those speakers have taken

to argue their causes. For this, it is particularly relevant that minority language provisions are

only mentioned in the Public Purpose for representing the UK, "its nations, regions, and

communities." There is the obvious fact that "Welsh" seems to conflate membership in a

linguistic community and national community in one word, and Gaelic does not. That might

explain why, when the BBC Audience Council Scotland met to compare BBC Scotland's

performance to the Public Purposes, they concluded that, in terms of "Representing the UK

nations," **"**Much television content achieved national resonance," and no mention was made of

Gaelic (BBC Audience 2008). As the call "to preserve the culture and language of Wales and of

the Gaelic-speaking districts of North West Scotland" (Home Office 1974: 25) suggests, the

BBC may categorize the representation of minority language communities as a national concern

in Wales, but a regional concern in Scotland. The Audience Council that overlooks the BBC's

work in Scotland must have this same understanding.

If the significance and availability of Gaelic-medium programming in Scotland seems

slight in comparison to the support and provisions for the Welsh language, it should be noted that

those Gaelic offerings might seem like unimaginable wealth to Irish speakers that reside in

Northern Ireland. I witnessed first hand the government's belief in "the importance of

appropriate provision" in that minority language situation when I attended a session at the March 2007 Celtic Media Festival. The speaker for the session was the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Tessa Jowell (the woman whose name appears on the current Agreement), who had come to announce how much funding her Department would be committing to the launch of the new Gaelic Digital Service, which was then still in the planning stages. After she had announced the sum, which many thought a puny amount, the floor was opened to questions from the audience. One man explained that he was a member of the Irish-speaking community in Northern Ireland, and he asked the Secretary what her Department's plans were for providing Irish-language programming on BBC Northern Ireland. Her rather ill-considered response, given her audience, was that there were no such plans because he should be able to get Irish-language programming by picking up a signal from the Republic of Ireland.

Though members of the British government have at least expressed some level of concern about the future of Gaelic and the need for developing television programs in the language, Welsh has been their top priority. This has been justified both by the significant difference in numbers of speakers and by incomparable levels and types of political action. The way that Welsh is discussed in the official government documents cited here, as well as the official government actions toward creating and maintaining a devoted Welsh channel (S4C), are evidence of governmental acknowledgement of Welsh's relative strength in both of those respects. Thus we find the Home Office expounding on the necessity for Welsh children to have access to Welsh-language programming "of comparable quality and at the peak family viewing-times" in order to save the language (1974: 39) in the same document that it encourages people to accept the reality that, "Radio programming is less expensive and more flexible, and should make the main provision for Gaelic" (1974: 36). The BBC was already contemplating

suggestions that the new fourth channel that was in development for Wales be made into a devoted Welsh language channel while they were providing only one program a month in Gaelic and projecting no possibility of increasing that output in the near future (Home Office 1974: 36).

While today's Gaelic media practitioners greatly admire the Welsh-language channel S4C, its creation in 1982 contributed to a sense of indignation among the Scots. As Gaels watched the successful creation of a minority language channel in another nation of the UK, "they began to ask themselves why Scots Gaelic was not entitled to similar levels of support and exposure in the broadcast media" (Hourigan 2007: 78). The result was that in the mid-1980's, Gaelic speakers became more vocal in their demands for increased broadcasting provisions in their language. The Scottish Office soon formed *Comunn na Gàidhlig*. Having decided that they would not have the audience numbers necessary to secure proper support and funding for an entire channel and having recognized that the BBC and Scottish Television (Glasgow's independent commercial channel, also known as STV) had already made inroads into Gaelic language broadcasting, they suggested that further financial support for the existing broadcasting model be ensured by establishing a fund (Hourigan 2007: 79). The Broadcasting Act of 1990 created *Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig* (Gaelic Television Committee) as a management body for a new Gaelic Television Fund from the Secretary of State for Scotland (Cormack 1994: 115). Through sustained commitment to that cause, provisions for Gaelic have since been on the increase and have been supported by subsequent incarnations of the initial CTG, all the way up through to the current MG Alba.

In 1974, when the Home Office offered little hope for increased levels of Gaelic programming on television, the Gaelic-speaking population made up about 1.5% of the total Scottish population (Home Office 1974: 36). The 2001 census showed an even smaller 1.2% of

the population to be fluent Gaelic speakers, but in 2008 MG Alba and BBC Scotland received governmental permission to go ahead with plans to launch BBC Alba (to be closely intertwined with internet and radio provisions as part of a wider GDS), and September 19 of that year finally saw those plans come to fruition. If we are to believe that success in Wales was due to a combination of population and politics, and we cannot point to an increase in the number of speakers to explain this turnaround, Gaels surely must have achieved this by making more of a political nuisance of themselves than they had in previous decades.

The published results of the Public Value Assessment (PVA) for the proposed GDS, required by the current Charter and Agreement, help to situate this new horizon for minority language media in the UK. My attempts to locate a model that the BBC follows when dealing with the autochthonous minority languages of the UK were unsuccessful and I instead found vague references to "the importance of appropriate provision in minority languages" (Department of Culture 2006: 4). I also found that, when asked what the strategy is for deciding the appropriate provisions for each minority language, the BBC Executive admitted: "There is no BBC co-coordinated strategy for indigenous languages other than to act on a case-by-case basis… The BBC Executive takes account of the wider public policy framework, market provision, and other factors in deciding the appropriate provision for each language" (BBC Trust 2007c: 31). So, even with the heavily centralized regulation of broadcasting that the British public service system requires, it is difficult to predict or fully explain official decisions made by the BBC with respect to Gaelic's presence in the broadcast media.

Though its wording is ambiguous, segments of the "Representing the UK, it's nations, regions, and communities" Public Purpose are referred to more than any other in the PVA, which affirms my understanding of that Purpose as the root of most justifications for decisions

concerning broadcasting in minority languages. Public service concerns are addressed in another way by assurances that, by combining a small investment from the BBC with the larger budget controlled by MG Alba to create the GDS as a joint venture, the BBC would be able to provide a far greater return to license fee payers than they would have been able to with the BBC money alone (BBC Trust 2007c: 32). This, of course, does not deal with the fact that the money provided by MG Alba is distributed by the Scottish Executive, and so comes from viewers' pockets in a more roundabout way, but neither the Charter nor the Agreement demand that the BBC be concerned with that kind of public spending. Finally, in line with popular comparisons between Welsh and Gaelic, the PVA also indicates that Scottish policy makers are concerned with emulating the relative success of reversing language shift in the case of Welsh and believe that the Welsh channel S4C may have contributed greatly to that success (2007c: 28). However, little is said about why that channel may have helped encourage use of the language, and it is certainly not the case that **all** television programming creates positive understandings and practices where minority (language) communities are concerned.

Gaelic-speakers and Gaelic supporters have argued for increasing amounts of representation through media, and the Charter and Agreement call for the UK's minority languages to be represented in broadcasting, but few have taken steps to define precisely what the word "representation" means in those contexts. The general aim seems to be to portray minority language communities in a way that is accurate, encouraging, and affirming of some "cultural identity" that is understood as being essentially linked to the language in order to maintain and, hopefully, propagate those communities. But how can that be achieved via television programming, and is attempting to outline a **distinct** culture that is shared by **all**

members of a minority language community (and **only** them) always helpful in promoting use of that language? In order to answer those questions, it is useful to examine the range of genres represented in Gaelic television programming. For policy makers and those who must abide by their policies, program content is secondary to program genre. The Gaelic Digital Service's *Operational Plan 2008-2009* gives evidence of the centrality of the concept of genre in their world. It contains a number of charts that use "genre" as the independent variable and cost, hours of programming, or the like as the dependent variables. It also states: "The priorities of the GDS are to ensure that the genre mix and editorial specifications clearly target specific audiences…" (Gaelic Media Service 2008: 14). Additionally, the official statement about how BBC Alba will deliver on the Public Purposes specifies only genres: "BBC Alba will commission original programming across a range of genres, including news, weather, sports, live events, children's, music and entertainment, factual programming, educational output, and some comedy and drama" (*Statements of Programme Policy* 2009). This is how the producers of Gaelic television whom I spoke to in Glasgow most often discussed the exciting new programming possibilities that the GDS would offer.

Initial television programming in Gaelic was explicitly intended as a public service and a cultural defense (Cormack 1993: 112). The emphasis was on identifying and communicating those cultural elements that were "uniquely Gaelic," and, therefore, foreign to a wider Scottish culture. This created the interestingly awkward goal of faithfully broadcasting "traditional" cultural formats within the "modern" cultural format of television. Programs usually focused on music, poetry or storytelling, which were, not coincidentally, the most easily identifiable and accessible aspects of "traditional" Gaelicness for those outside of the language community (Cormack 1993: 112). An example of this type of program would be an attempt to recreate a

cèilidh (a local get together, usually held in a home or a community hall, with participatory music and dancing) for the camera, the results of which would really only be understood as authentic and worthwhile to those who lived outside of the Gaelic communities that held such events and were unable to experience one in person. The cultural form would not translate well onto the television screen as it lacked any chance of the audience participation that is so central to the live event. The same can be said for the music programs broadcast weekly (around midnight on a weekday, but rarely at the same time or on the same day from week to week) on STV during my stay in Glasgow. These consisted of one or more people singing/playing in a sparsely decorated room with a camera on them, and the programs lacked the energy that both performers and audiences bring to make the live version enjoyable.

The failure to find creative ways to communicate the spirit of the event through the medium of television could be partly the fault of small budgets, but the effect goes far deeper. Few of the Gaelic speakers that I met in Glasgow enjoyed the late night music shows on STV despite their eagerness to travel across the city for a good ceilidh. For those viewers who had not experienced the cultural form first hand, STV's programs surely reinforced their views of Gaelic and its speakers as being both cultural and temporal (due to the late and inconsistent hour) anomalies that are not compatible with mainstream cultural practices.

It has since been recognized that that approach to creating Gaelic-language programming is not entirely beneficial if one is trying to attract a wide range of Gaelic-speaking viewers, or if "cultural defense" includes creating positive valuations of the language that encourage its use. Early Gaelic programming created outcomes similar to, though perhaps not as extreme as, those described by John Hartley in relation to representations of Aboriginal people on Australian television (2008). It is very possible that Scottish television audiences outside of traditionally

Gaelic-speaking areas encountered the members of that language community more often through the media than in their local streets and shops. The result of a similar situation in Australia was that Aboriginals' claims to citizenship were either under-valued or over-valued (Hartley 2008: 82). The initial television programs produced in the Gaelic language, which concentrated mainly on "traditional" aspects of "Gaelicness" like storytelling, affirmed previously held beliefs that Gaelic culture was peripheral to mainstream Scottish culture. Depending on the audience member, Gaelicness was further understood as being either backward, and thus **incompatible** with modern Scottish life (under-valued citizenship), or essentially and authentically Scottish, and thus something modern Scots should strive to **reclaim** (over-valued citizenship). In either case, Gaelic culture was seen as anterior to some current mode of practicing Scottishness.

While the BBC has generally interpreted its duty in the Gaelic case as providing programming proportional to the Gaelic-speaking population rather than offering programs in a range of genres equal to that available in English (Cormack 1993: 106), they have recently done as much as they can (given extreme budget limitations) to increase the range of genres available in Gaelic. In describing a change he noticed in Gaelic television offerings in the early 1990s, Mike Cormack noted: "The attempt to present a modernized view of the language could be seen by the programmes' avoidance of traditional images of the Gaelic community… In the new programmes these stereotypes have either been avoided altogether or are apparent only as minority concerns" (Cormack 1994: 118). That solution, however, seems to have shifted the imbalance in representation rather than correcting it.

Those in the television industry would certainly be remiss not to embrace genres like music and travel programs that can celebrate the rich cultural traditions and histories that are the products of Gaelic speakers. However, they would also be providing a terribly inaccurate

representation of today's Gaelic community if they ignored other popular genres like competition reality shows, sketch comedy, and soap operas, or if they failed to incorporate Gaelic speakers who are full participants in mainstream Scottish culture into their productions. The difficulty with the stereotypes that were (re)produced by early cèilidh-type programs is that they were often simply too limited in their depiction, rather than being entirely negative and incorrect, so some representational acrobatics are necessary to successfully manage the complex relationship between the truths of "traditional" Gaelicness and "modern" Gaelicness, including their basic inseparability (Jones 2007: 198).

As a means of explaining this difficulty, Hartley turns to a discussion of television as a "national narrative," commenting: "It is important that a sufficiently broad selection of stories finds its way into the national narrative otherwise marginalized 'subjects' will be excluded from citizenship as well as stories" (2008: 76). He divides all possible stories into two categories: "anomalous" and "law-forming." This division is a significant one because if marginalized groups, like the Aboriginals in Australia, or Gaelic-speakers in Scotland, are represented only through stories that fall into the "anomalous" category, they themselves are likely to be understood as problematic anomalies. In contrast, representation via "'law-forming' narratives of cultural renewal and reproduction" (Hartley 2008: 76) would encourage understandings of those marginalized groups as integral to the national community. This dichotomy that Hartley sets up provides a nice framework for understanding the difficulties that minority language media producers face as they seek to provide viewers with programs that are more than just remakes of majority language programs and have a reason that they could not have been made as well in the majority language (thereby justifying the extra expense minority language media usually requires), but are still understood to hold some vital role in a wider national community.

If television is to help reverse language shift in the case of Gaelic, the BBC's "appropriate provisions" would ensure that a balance is achieved between stories from both the "anomalous" and the "law-forming" sides of Hartley's dichotomy. The range of programs must work together to represent Gaelic as something that is simultaneously distinctive (and thus worthy of special attention and support) and commonplace (and thus a viable medium for day-to-day commerce, computing, conversation, etc.).

At the time that I was conducting interviews, practitioners of Gaelic media were very excited about the new GDS largely because its change in schedule and budget would create possibilities for branching out in both "distinctive" and "commonplace" directions. Up until that point, their need to prove the worth of minority language programming particularly limited their practical ability to work on creating "commonplace" programming. During my stay in Glasgow, the majority of Gaelic television programming was non-fiction, but all of those I spoke to in the industry looked forward to a time when the increased budget and decreased scheduling restraints that would come with a devoted channel would aid in the creation of popular comedies, dramas and soap operas that could draw devoted audiences from those familiar with the genres, but perhaps unfamiliar with the Gaelic language. Each of my interviewees could name only one example of a past success story for each of those genres, and the examples were the same from one person to the next so that only three programs were ever mentioned. *"Ran Dan"* was the comedy they spoke of, though they found it difficult to describe to me. *"Gruth is Uachdar"* ("Crowdie and Cream"), based on author Finlay J. McDonald's childhood on the Isle of Harris,

was the drama. The soap opera was *"Machair,"* which took the name of a geographical feature

found on most of the islands in the Outer Hebrides.[14]

   The fear that comes with all of the possibility of the new channel is that even if such a

representational balance is achieved in programming for BBC Alba, the channel itself will seem

anomalous in a national broadcasting narrative of law-forming English-language channels. If

Gaelic programming does not warrant a mention in the review of BBC Scotland's performance

against the Public Purposes when it is actually present on the same channel with programs that

are discussed, what will its chances be when it leaves that channel for a new home? S4C

debuted at a time when all regions of the UK had only four television channels, but BBC Alba

has to contend with the proliferation of cable, satellite and digital channels from the start.

   The British system of public service broadcasting and the license fee-run BBC have a lot

to do with the current state of the UK's autochthonous language movements. Everyone that I

have read or spoke to on the subject agrees that the Welsh language is healthier than it would be

without Government-assisted broadcasting, particularly where the creation and maintenance of

S4C is concerned. I gather that there is a similar consensus about the significant contribution of

previous BBC provisions for Gaelic and an excitement about the possibilities for BBC Alba.

Recent Issues in Gaelic Broadcasting

   When I arrived in Glasgow in the spring of 2007, the Gaelic media (as well as the English

media sector) was in the process of transitioning from a single-medium type of commissioning to

what is called *360° commissioning*. The head of MNE Media, one of Scotland's largest

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[14] Soap operas have wider viewing audience in the UK than they do in the US, which may be
partly due to their airing around the start of prime time. One of the former stars of "*Machair*"
now appears in the only Scotland-based soap opera, "River City," which is set in a fictional part
of Glasgow but filmed in a real one.

independent production companies, described this new method to me by explaining that, "one aspect [of the content in question] on television could be played in different aspect on radio. It could be distributed a different way, commercially or non-commercially, on the web, and, for example, in the case of sport, it could be downloaded into mobile phone result services, and so on and so on." This transition was occurring at the same time that plans were being devised for a new digital service, to combine and enhance Gaelic's presence on television, radio and the Internet. This conception of holistic content development, as opposed to previous practices of commissioning content separately for each medium, accompanying the imagining of the GDS might be seen as simply following a change in the prevailing channels (i.e. dominant language outlets) of mass communication. However, the particular configuration of media that was to make up the new service is still a relatively novel one in that the Gaelic case requires the establishment of a *stable* presence on both television and the Internet, where other situations may only lack the strong Internet component. That novelty added a level of excitement, but also of uncertainty, when my informants spoke about the eventual set-up and content of the service.

Though they would be leaving old understandings of programming behind, they maintained many of their previous beliefs about the purpose of their programming: to reach as wide a Gaelic speaking audience as possible, and to present Gaelic use in a positive light. For most, fulfilling that purpose required finding ways to reach young people and ensure that they begin and/or continue to feel a connection with the language.

This need to prove Gaelic's worth to young generations was echoed in the keynote address of the Community Learning and Development Review Group for Gaelic conference on the theme "Engaging with Young People in Gaelic." The speech was delivered by the head of education for *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* (Scotland's governmental organization for Gaelic development),

and when presenting a list of possible reasons that a large number of students in Gaelic medium primary schools are not continuing on to the associated Gaelic medium secondary schools, she concluded with, "And let us not forget that for many young people – Gaelic simply isn't cool enough for them." She further noted that, "They don't have the same opportunities to engage in past times through Gaelic," and, "They never talk Gaelic outwith the school environment."

These are the very difficulties that I had originally thought to address through a study of television, but one of the workshops at that same conference was devoted to addressing the role of internet technologies like instant messaging and social networking in the lives of young people. The organizer led a discussion about sites like Myspace and Bebo and wondered how those sites might be utilized to encourage use of Gaelic in ways that are "cool" and "outwith the school environment." A major difficultly with capitalizing on networking sites comes from the vary nature of them, since the people that need such encouragement to use the language may find it objectionable to effectively shut out their friends who are monolingual in English from fully participating in their social network. An option may be to start a Gaelic-only network, which has been done in Wales for Welsh, but that would still limit interactions.

A panel at the 2007 Celtic Media Festival was aimed at the adaptations necessary when previous methods of programming meet with the new 360° approach *and* shifting consumption patterns among the youth audience. It was entitled "Youtube, My Tube, the Tube," and one of the most striking features of the panel was that 4 students from local Portree High School had been placed in the audience. This seemed odd at first, since students had not been present at other festival events, but I soon realized that they had been brought in to answer questions posed by the panel. It was a unique solution to the difficulty many of my informants expressed about figuring out what the teenage audience wants to watch. The chair of the session addressed the

students directly to find out what their favorite program was (the popular teen drama "Skins" for all of them) and where and when they watched it (on their computers, whenever they wanted).

During my interview with the chief executive of the Gaelic Media Service (now MG Alba), we discussed the organization's need to distinguish which demographics they should focus on, and which may be too difficult for them to access. In response to my questions about the importance of media for encouraging Gaelic use among young adults, he noted that the teen demographic is notoriously "hard to crack" and speculated that further research may find that the best GMS can manage is to let that audience go and hope they return to Gaelic (the language and its media) when they begin to raise children.

If one discusses the possibility of foregoing a focus on young adults in favor of more easily "understood" demographics, it should also be noted that practitioners of Gaelic media are becoming aware of a new, international audience for their output. In my conversations with people both in the Gaelic media industry and in wider Gaelic social circles, the topic of discussion often turned to "Cuairt Nam Blog," a program that appeared during my first few weeks in Glasgow as part of the two-hour block of Gaelic programming shown every Thursday evening on BBC Scotland. The program begins in a Gaelic immersion course offered at Glasgow's STOW College (which I was fortunate enough to be welcomed into on a few occasions) to find out why those students are learning the language, then it turns to a discussion of the role of the internet in helping people outside of Scotland in their pursuit of Gaelic fluency (the site "Tir nan Blog," meaning "Land of the Blog," is featured most prominently). The presenter, who also teaches the immersion class at STOW, travels to Los Angeles and Alaska to interview two of those Gaelic learners, neither of whom have ever been to Scotland, about their interest in the language and the speaking community they have developed for themselves via the

Internet. Programs like this show the importance of new media in a global Gaelic movement, as well as Gaelic media's awareness that their audience may reach far beyond the borders of Britain.

Furthermore, my informant at MNE Media told me of a pilot program jointly conducted by MNE, the BBC and GMS in 2006 that put previously televised shinty[15] matches out over the Internet. They found that people were watching them online from locations as far a field as California and Thailand. This helped them to realize, "the worldwide potential of the web," and, "opened [their] eyes to the potential of a global market, even for a niche language community." Perhaps as a result of such findings, one higher up at BBC Scotland admitted to questioning whether they are solely responsible to the citizens of Scotland who pay their TV license fees, as the BBC's charge to produce public service programming would suggest, or if there is also a responsibility to support those who are working to revitalize the language far from any geographical center of speakers.

Conclusion

It should be mentioned that some scholars are not wholly optimistic about the possibilities of BBC Alba, or even of minority language television in general. Mike Cormack believes, "It is also important to note that asking media to encourage the speaking of a language is in fact asking them to do something they were not designed to do – it is a direct behavioural effect, as well as a long-term attitudinal one" (Cormack 2006: 217). From that, he continues that such a goal is likewise incompatible with the BBC's mantra of "inform, educate and entertain," as none of those imply that sort of behavioral effect either.

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[15] Known as *camanachd* in Gaelic, this sport is related to Irish hurling and is something like field hockey with more in-the-air action.

Jacques Guyot is similarly hesitant to entrust public service broadcasting with the fate of minority languages. He notes that, with public service media, linguistic concerns are just one of many issues that the media are obliged to address and precise prescriptions for practice tend to be absent (Guyot 2007: 37). He further believes that centralization of regulatory power makes it difficult to promote "regional" languages because minority language production units are often made to depend on government subsidies and public institutions for funding (Guyot 2007: 37). That being said, he concedes that television is a very expensive medium, and channels that are entirely devoted to minority languages tend only to appear in countries that use the public service system and "where political autonomy or devolution were granted to regions," such as the United Kingdom (Guyot 2007: 39). While this system of broadcasting is far from the ideal form for minority language communities, those located within the UK are afforded greater privilege than those without, and the BBC's contribution to that privileged status must be considered in studies of reversal of language shift in the UK. The participation of the BBC is vital to the Gaelic language movement in its current form.

Media has a key role to play in the reimagining of the Gaelic community so that it may break free of "traditional" stereotypes and include members of the Scottish population (or even other populations) who may currently find it difficult to relate to the form of Gaelicness that has been circulated in dominant cultural circles. Highlighting the inaccuracy of using a traditional/modern dichotomy to describe the relationship between minority and majority language communities is a significant contribution that media can make in aid of resisting language shift and encouraging young generations to take part in reversing it.

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