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This article considers the position of the Gaelic language in the new political context in Scotland created by the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Although Gaelic has benefited from an unprecedented programme of promotion and development in recent years, Gaelic issues stand at the margins in Scottish political life. In particular, the connection between Gaelic and Scottish nationalism and national identity is a frail one, and deep-seated anti-Gaelic ignorance and antipathy retain surprising vitality. Part I gives an overview of the provision put in place for Gaelic during the last fifteen years and the issues that loom largest in current political discussion, especially proposals to grant official status to the language. Part II then gives a more detailed analysis of the assumptions, ambiguities, divisions, and prejudices that shape policy discussion relating to Gaelic in Scotland – both at the national level and within the Gaelic community itself – giving particular attention to the rhetoric used in these conversations and debates.

In recent years Gaelic in Scotland has benefited from an unprecedented programme of promotion and development, transmitted through a wide range of initiatives across a number of fields, notably education, the media, and the arts. The effect of these initiatives in increasing the visibility and public profile of the language is commonly described as a Gaelic "renaissance" in Scotland (Rogerson & Gloyer 1995). At the same time, from the end of the 1970s onwards a vigorous consensus emerged in Scotland in support of national self-rule, a demand that has now been realized with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the first such body since the Union between Scotland and England in 1707. The establishment of this devolved Parliament and the accompanying Executive are widely recognized as steps of historic significance, to the extent that the concept of the "new Scotland" has come into common parlance (Paterson et al. 2001). This paper will consider the situation of the Gaelic language within this new political environment in Scotland: the proposals that are on the political agenda, the ways that the language and its speakers are viewed and discussed, the assumptions that shape public discourse, and the obstacles that constrain progress or require resolution. The paper is presented as an analysis of public policy rather than an exercise in theoretical social science, and is occasionally, and unavoidably, impressionistic. Referencing is as complete as is practicable, but in some cases the paper endeavours to give the flavour of ongoing discussions and debates, carried out in a wide range of fora, that are predominantly oral and informal in character.

Part I presents a brief overview of the present position of Gaelic, giving particular attention to the provision put in place during the last fifteen years and the proposals and issues that loom largest in current political discussion. (For a range of in-depth presentations see McCoy with Scott

2000). This summary serves as background to Part II, which gives a more detailed analysis of the assumptions, ambiguities, divisions, and prejudices that shape policy discussion relating to Gaelic in Scotland, and the varieties of rhetoric used in these conversations and debates.

I. Political background: history and politics

A. The decline of Gaelic in Scotland

Although the level of initiative and provision for Gaelic in Scotland remains very low when set against the achievements of lesser-used language communities in other European countries — Wales, Catalunya, Euskadi for example — the achievements of the last thirty and especially of the last fifteen years must be understood as highly significant, for the starting point was near zero: until the 1960s Gaelic language development was to all intents and purposes nonexistent (John Lorne Campbell 1950; Kenneth D. MacDonald 1968). The rate of change has been rapid, even if the absolute level reached to date is still low.

Gaelic was once spoken throughout almost all of Scotland, but language shift in the south and east of the country during the late Middle Ages meant that Gaelic became largely confined to the north and west of the country (the "Highlands" or "Gàidhealtachd") from the fourteenth century onwards. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, a combination of military repression, dramatic economic change, heavy emigration, persistent material deprivation, and diverse cultural pressures have brought about ongoing language shift from Gaelic to English within the Gàidhealtachd (Withers 1984; MacKinnon 1991, 2000a). The number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland fell sharply over the course of the twentieth century, and many formerly Gaelic-speaking areas have become entirely English-speaking. The 1991 census showed 65,978 Gaelic speakers in Scotland, a mere 1.35% of the national population, down from 79,307 in 1981 (1.6%) and 210,677 in 1901 (5.2%).

The heartland of the language now lies in the Outer Hebrides, commonly (if ahistorically) known as the Western Isles, which remained more than 66% Gaelic-speaking in 1991, with significantly higher proportions recorded in most of the rural districts (General Register Office Scotland/Àrd Oifis Clàraidh Alba 1994: 24, 39). Gaelic-speaking majorities were also returned from the Isle of Tiree and parts of the Isle of Skye (General Register Office Scotland/Àrd Oifis Clàraidh Alba 1994: 37, 27). At the same time, almost half the total Gaelic-speaking population was spread out

over parts of Scotland other than the Gàidhealtachd, the largest concentration (some 11,000) in the greater Glasgow area, Scotland's principal population centre (MacKinnon 2000a: 47; General Register Office Scotland/Àrd Oifis Clàraidh Alba 1994: 82-83, 85, 88-93, 96-99). Another census will be conducted in 2001, and a significant drop in the number of Gaelic speakers is anticipated, perhaps down to not much more than 50,000.

Intergenerational transmission of the language is weak; the 1991 census showed that only 72.6% of those children living with two Gaelic-speaking parents spoke Gaelic, 37.6% of those living with a lone Gaelic-speaking parent, and a mere 14.3% of those living with two parents, only one of whom spoke Gaelic (with this last being the most common situation, some 55% of all families) (MacKinnon 1995: figure 8). The 1991 census showed that only 49.5% of the 3-15 age group in the Western Isles spoke Gaelic, and more recent evidence suggests that only about a quarter of the children entering the islands' primary schools during the late 1990s had acquired Gaelic in their homes (General Register Office Scotland/Àrd Oifis Clàraidh Alba 1994: 106). Gaelic thus appears to be seriously endangered in the very last districts where it remains a community language.

B. The Gaelic "renaissance"

The two fields where recent Gaelic initiatives have been most significant and successful are education and broadcasting (on both television and radio), although a range of other developments, principally of a cultural and artistic nature, are also important. Total financial support for Gaelic from central government now exceeds £13 million (20 million Euros) annually, and local governmental authorities also make a significant monetary contribution (Scottish Parliament Information Centre 2000: 3). Without question, these initiatives have significantly raised the profile of Gaelic in Scotland even if the sociolinguistic situation of the language remains extremely weak.

Across Scotland, some 1,862 primary school pupils in sixty Gaelic units or schools are now receiving their education through the medium of Gaelic; as recently as twenty years ago there were none. Given the traditional exclusion of Gaelic from the educational system, the establishment and expansion of Gaelic-medium education is a development of historic proportions. Nevertheless, the scale remains dangerously small; it has been calculated that the numbers enrolled in Gaelic-medium education would need to grow six-fold simply to maintain

the existing Gaelic-speaking population, and even in the Western Isles, less than one-third of children receive their primary education through the medium of Gaelic (MacKinnon 2000b).

In addition, progress on the educational front appears to have slowed in recent years. The numbers of pupils enrolling in Gaelic-medium primary education rose at a rate of 15.2% each year between 1993/94 and 1997/78, but only 2.4% between 1997/98 and 2000/01. A 1994 government report described expansion of Gaelic-medium provision at secondary level as "neither desirable nor feasible in the foreseeable future" (Scottish Office Education Department 1994: 3), and this policy has not yet been effectively reversed despite the intervening political changes; only 326 secondary students received even part of their education through Gaelic in 2000/01. As in other minority-language development efforts, a perennial obstacle has been the shortfall of trained teachers, but the crisis drags on from year to year with no significant initiatives to improve the situation (McLeod forthcoming a).

Until the 1970s Gaelic broadcasting in Scotland was minimal in scale, but since then there have been important advances on radio and, especially, on television. Government support for Gaelic broadcasting now stands at £8.5 million (13.5 million Euros) per year (Scottish Parliament Information Service 2000: 5). From 1985 onwards, the BBC Gaelic radio service, Radio nan Gaidheal, has steadily increased the amount of hours broadcast and broadened its geographical range. Programming now exceeds forty hours per week and is accessible not only to the great majority of the Gaelic-speaking population but to the great majority of the Scottish population as a whole (Lamb 1999). Gaelic television has expanded rapidly as a result of the Broadcasting Act 1990, and some 350 hours of programming are broadcast annually. Gaelic television has reached a crossroads, however, for both political and technical reasons: annual budgets have not been increased to reflect inflation and indeed have recently been cut, while programming has increasingly been shunted to inconvenient time slots late at night. An official government task force has recently recommended the establishment of a separate, dedicated Gaelic television channel, using new digital technology, and the government appears to be giving this proposal serious consideration (Gaelic Television Task Force 2000).

C. Proposals and politics

The principal political question regarding Gaelic in recent years has been the campaign to strengthen the legal status of the language. At present Gaelic is effectively excluded from public administration and enjoys no meaningful protection in law, other than a few relatively tokenistic

provisions relating to certain minor public appointments and to immigration rules (McLeod 1997). Since the mid-1990s the official (albeit non-governmental) Gaelic development body Comunn na Gàidhlig has pressed the Government to enact legislation that would give what it calls "secure status" to the language. The CNAG proposals (Comunn na Gàidhlig 1997, 1999a), which drew significant inspiration from the Welsh Language Act 1993 and were backed up by a petition with several thousand signatures, urge a range of protections in the public sphere, including a statutory right to Gaelic-medium education and basic provision for the language at all layers of government, including the judicial system. Their principal inspiration was a widespread perception in the Gaelic community that the achievements of the last fifteen years, particularly with regard to education, lacked a secure foundation and overarching structure, and depended entirely upon the whim of national and local politicians; hence the chosen phrase "secure status". Despite making repeated statements of support, the ruling Labour party, which controls both the London government (since the 1997 election) and the new, devolved Scottish Executive in Edinburgh (since its creation in 1999), now appears to have decided against introducing such legislation, to the considerable frustration, even anger, of many in the Gaelic community. Instead, the government has endeavoured to reinterpret the phrase "secure status" by arguing that it is "working towards" securing the status of the language through incremental adjustments to pre-existing policies (Meek 2000).

The government's new stance became manifest in the summer of 2000, when it helped vote down an amendment to its Schools Bill that would have imposed a legal obligation upon local authorities to provide Gaelic-medium primary education upon a showing of reasonable demand (Dunbar 2000a: 84-87). Making use of the flexible procedures of the new Parliament, supporters of that proposal now plan to introduce, sometime in 2002, a more wide-ranging Private Member's Bill that would give force to the secure status recommendations, but its likelihood of enactment appears doubtful.

The government's perceived backtracking on secure status, coupled with the lack of significant progress in terms of education and broadcasting, has brought a palpable sense of frustration to most Gaelic activists; the prevailing mood is one of disappointment and disillusionment (see, for example, Iain MacLeòid, "Agus a' Ghàidhlig – trì faclan nach dean feum sam bith tuilleadh?", *The Scotsman*, 25 May 2001). Indeed, it is commonly asserted in Gaelic circles that the previous Conservative governments were better for Gaelic than the current Labour one, although it may

be questionable whether this view is genuinely held, given the extremely low level of Conservative support among Gaelic speakers and the Scottish population more generally.

As a response to the submissions concerning secure status and more general concerns about the effectiveness of existing organizational structures, the government established a task force in 2000 to make recommendations concerning future policy directions. Among other things, this task force recommended a substantial increase in the level of Gaelic development funding, the establishment of a Gaelic-speaking "Department of the Gàidhealtachd" within the Executive, and the creation of a Gaelic Development Agency (Taskforce on Public Funding of Gaelic 2000). As a transitional measure, the Executive has recently announced the appointment of a Ministerial Advisory Group on Gaelic. While this step has been broadly welcomed, there continues to be concern at the slow pace of progress and the lack of movement on the task force's more substantive recommendations.

The position of Gaelic within the new Parliament itself is essentially symbolic rather than substantive — a situation that might stand as a metaphor for the general situation of the language in the new Scotland. The parliamentary buildings have been fitted with bilingual Gaelic/English signs, a parliamentary Gaelic officer has been employed, and a glossary of Gaelic parliamentary terms has been published; but the Parliament's procedural rules give little place to Gaelic as a working language, and indeed impose an "English only" requirement for many purposes. Only two of the 129 members speak Gaelic fluently (a proportion actually slightly higher than the proportion of Gaelic speakers in the national population) and the language has been very little used in parliamentary business, except in a largely symbolic debate in March 2000, described in detail below. While the simultaneously created National Assembly for Wales was expressly designed as a bilingual institution, the position of Gaelic in Scotland's new Parliament demonstrates that the new Scotland is not a bilingual entity in any meaningful sense and that Gaelic remains an ambiguous presence on the margins of national life.

II. Gaelic in the public discourse of the New Scotland

A. Marginality and monolingualism

The most basic fact about the place of Gaelic in Scottish political life is its extreme marginality and perceived lack of importance. Some 98.6% of Scots do not speak Gaelic, and the Gaelic-speaking population is concentrated in a peripheral region far removed from the highly urbanized

Central Belt (the Glasgow-Edinburgh area) where Scottish political, economic, and cultural life are centred. Gaelic is not given a significant place on the national agenda and it attracts the attention of the general Scottish population, and its elected representatives, only occasionally and sporadically.

The Scottish educational system gives most Scots almost no instruction either in or about the Gaelic language, and the overwhelming majority of Scots would not even be able to recognize or pronounce the most basic words in the language. Far more Scots would know the French words *petit* and *rouge* than their Gaelic counterparts *beag* or *dearg*, for example, despite a national track record in foreign language learning that is by no means impressive in comparison to most European countries (Nicolson 2000: 118-19). Similarly, most Scots do not realize that Gaelic was once spoken far more widely in Scotland than it is today and do not understand the reasons for its decline over the centuries. These gaps in knowledge are important in public policy terms, for they lead to a devaluing of Gaelic initiatives in general and to the oft-asserted contention that such initiatives have no proper place outside the areas where Gaelic is widely spoken today. Certainly there is very little awareness of what might be called the "catastrophic dimension", the feeling that the loss of Gaelic as a living language would be a disaster of historic proportions and a calamity for the nation.

Such views often shade into harder attitudes — evident, for example, in the upper levels of the civil service — that Gaelic is a trivial annoyance and a distraction from more important matters. Similarly, Gaelic is frequently dismissed with expressions of derision and contempt, as discussed in more detail below. Such negative attitudes coexist with a more general attitude of mild support, albeit one that is often romanticized, inarticulate, and frailly informed. All in all, the prevailing position of Gaelic for most Scots is out of sight, out of earshot, and out of mind.

B. Nationalism, national identity, and party politics

Given the marginality of Gaelic in Scottish national life and consciousness, it is not surprising that the Gaelic language does not serve as a talisman of Scottish national identity. In Ireland, where the Irish language does serve such a function to a substantial degree (although considerably less so than the Welsh and Basque languages), some two-thirds of those questioned in national surveys agree with the propositions that "Ireland would not really be Ireland without its Irish-speaking people" and "without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture" (Ó Riagáin 1997: 174-5). Although concrete evidence is limited, it is probably

safe to say that only a relatively small proportion of Gaelic speakers, and an infinitesimal minority of non-Gaelic-speakers, would assert such a strong connection between Gaelic and Scottish national identity. For many Scots, Gaelic is of regional rather than genuinely national significance. A survey in 1981, for example, found that a (slight) majority of Scots disagreed with the proposition that "the Gaelic language is important for the Scottish people as a whole" (MacKinnon 1981: 6-9). Opinion over the last twenty years has certainly become more favourable towards Gaelic, but the view that Gaelic is an essential core component of Scottish national identity, and that Gaelic is Scotland's national language, is by no means universally accepted. (For a representative argument challenging the importance of Gaelic for Scottish national identity, see Allan Massie, "From Gael Force to Farce", *The Scotsman*, 21 March 1998.) For example, a recent statement by George Reid, Deputy Speaker of the Scottish Parliament, could be considered a fairly strong, even mildly controversial statement of connection between Gaelic and Scottish national identity, and by no means a rehearsal of conventional, universally accepted rhetoric: "without Gaelic, Scotland would simply not be Scotland; Gaelic is one of the forces that has shaped us". (Cited in Scottish Parliament Official Report, 2 March 2000.) At the same time, Gaelic is understood as something inherently and indisputably "Scottish", one item among many that gives the nation its character and distinctiveness, and it does attract a degree of value, prestige, and support on that basis (see, for example, Sharon MacDonald 1999).

The link between the Gaelic language and Scottish nationalism — in the more strict sense of support for the establishment of a Scottish state independent of the existing United Kingdom — is a weak one. Support for Scottish independence by no means signals a commitment to the Gaelic language, and speaking the Gaelic language by no means signals support for Scottish independence. Language revitalisation efforts in Scotland thus have little connection, overt or otherwise, to the nationalist cause.

However, it may be the case that nationalist support is unusually strong among Gaelic language activists, as distinguished from less activist, mainstream Gaelic speakers. This may well be the case among the more motivated native speakers of the language but is particularly likely to be true of learners. One survey of Gaelic learners, for example, showed strongly disproportionate support for the Scottish National Party (SNP), with some 60% expressing support for the SNP and only 14% expressing support for the Labour party, at a time when the two parties stood relatively equal in public opinion polls (MacCaluim 1998: 3).

In general, the Gaelic revitalization movement has endeavoured to stay free of party politics and to build support among all parties. Significantly, the Conservative governments of 1979-97 went out of their way to give substantial support to Gaelic initiatives even though Conservative support was unquestionably low within the Gaelic community. An established argument in Gaelic circles is that the Gaelic movement should stay outside the political realm, especially the party-political realm; however, this argument appears to be losing its force in the more fluid political environment of the "new" Scotland.

Historically the Liberal/Liberal Democrat party has been dominant in most of the Highland area, but this has not been the case in the most strongly Gaelic area, the Western Isles, where Labour support has been well established from the 1930s onwards. Since the election of Labour administrations at the UK election of 1997 and the Scottish election of 1999, the impact of the Labour organization in the Western Isles on Gaelic affairs — by which Labour politicians in the Western Isles give vocal and undeviating support to the acts and omissions of national-level colleagues — has been palpable. A slightly different phenomenon, one common to many weak political movements (cf. Moody 1988), has been the tendency of Gaelic organizations to identify and become heavily dependent upon "friends", individual politicians who may have a certain commitment to Gaelic but whose actions are more reliably driven by their attachment to party and career.

C. Romanticism and 'Gaelic Granny syndrome'

While Gaelic remains out of sight and out of mind for most Scots most of the time, the most widespread attitude with regard to Gaelic is one of mild support, a support often expressed in rather hazy and romanticized terms. As the columnist and historian Michael Fry put it, "one basic, boring fact about the new Scotland is that everyone from the diehard unionist to the most rabid nationalist is in favour of Gaelic, just as they are in favour of motherhood and apple pie" ("They didn't say yes, they didn't say no, so there could not be a conclusion", *Scottish Daily Mail*, 3 March 2000). A summary of the stereotyped image, perhaps commonest in travel writing rather than political discussion, might be that "the Gaelic" is a "soft", "ancient" language and that the Gaels are a "courteous" and "hospitable" people. (Gaelic uses the definite article before the names of languages, and earlier generations of Gaelic speakers who acquired English imperfectly tended to transfer this usage into their English, speaking of "the Gaelic" and "the English". This usage became incorporated into stereotype, now irritating to many.)

An important illustration of prevailing attitudes was the debate about Gaelic in the Scottish Parliament in March 2000, described by Donald Meek as "a remarkable mix of reality, romanticism, bonhomie, historical allusion, cultural celebrationism, and . . . 'Gaelic Granny syndrome'" (Meek 2000: 3). With his term "Gaelic Granny syndrome", Meek refers to the tendency of politicians who have no Gaelic to discover "Gaelic grannies", Gaelic-speakers somewhere in the family tree through whom a connection to the Gaelic tradition can be asserted, in warm and fuzzy terms (Meek 2000: 3).

In this debate, the Labour Minister for Gaelic, Alasdair Morrison, described Gaelic as "a precious jewel in the heart and soul of Scotland" and claimed that "there are many precious components in the heritage of Scotland, but none is as ancient, as profound and as worthy as the Gaelic legacy" (Cited in Scottish Parliament Official Report, 2 March 2000; the report is available on the Internet at http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/session-00/or050403.htm [18 April 2001]). The comments of the Scottish Conservative Party's Gaelic spokesman, Jamie MacGrigor, illustrate Meek's point particularly well:

> I cannot emphasise enough the value of Gaelic. Gaelic is different and has bred different values. Things such as silent Sundays in Stornoway or guga hunting from Ness appear as peculiarities to us, but are quite normal to the inhabitants of those areas. . . . At the beginning of this century, children were forbidden to speak Gaelic, their native language, in the school playground. Language is the basic fabric of our culture and we owe past generations a debt. We can now repay our debt in part through our support for Gaelic. There are many Gaelic songs, for example, about waulking the tweed; I look forward to hearing a new Gaelic song on hacking the computer before too long. (Cited in Scottish Parliament Official Report, 2 March 2000.)

While "Gaelic Granny syndrome" is certainly more favourable to Gaelic than the rhetoric of contemptuous dismissal with which it co-exists, there is a crucial gap between such mild, soft-focus support and a commitment to concrete spending plans and binding language legislation. (For example, four months after this Gaelic debate, both the politicians quoted above chose not to support the amendment to the Schools Bill that would have imposed a statutory obligation on local authorities to provide Gaelic medium education.) To date that gap remains unbridged, although there is broad-based support for the relatively modest Gaelic initiatives that have been put in place so far, almost all of them funded by the public purse.

D. ***Mì-rùn mòr nan Gall***

For several centuries Gaelic has been the subject of contemptuous attacks from the non-Gaelic-speaking majority in Scotland, an onslaught famously described by the eighteenth-century poet Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair as "mì-rùn mòr nan Gall" ("the great ill-will of the Lowlanders"). The contours of this hostility have changed considerably over the centuries, from concern about "popery" and "barbarity" in the seventeenth century to the racialist theorizing of the nineteenth century (MacKinnon 1991: 40-52; Fenyö 2000). Today, Gaelic and Gaelic speakers continue to be subject to aggressive denigration in the media and other public spheres. While it would be a mistake to over-emphasize either the frequency or importance of these attacks, it is certainly the case that such abusive hostility is considered acceptable within mainstream public discourse in Scotland, and is in no way stigmatized, as are similar attacks on Jews or on the country's "visible" ethnic minority groups like Pakistanis and Afro-Caribbeans.

Some examples of the sort of abuse that regularly finds its way into Scottish public discourse are given below. Several different lines of attack can be discerned: contempt for Gaelic as a useless, dying language, contempt for Gaelic speakers as alcoholic country bumpkins, and contempt for Gaelic revitalization efforts as a wasteful "life-support machine".

> There is nothing in Gaelic that is worth passing on to the rest of mankind. In the history of ideas or of invention Gaeldom is a desert. No philosopher, no insight, not even any joke illuminates us non-Gaels from the body of Gaelic literature. . . . Day to day vernacular Gaelic is a low level peasantish sort of debris that we need not be the least reverential about. (Peter Clarke, "Who needs the Gaelic?", *The Scotsman*, Weekend magazine, 11 March 1995.)

> Grampian Television has the exclusive and highly valuable right to produce programmes in Gaelic, a language spoken by almost a hundred people dotted around the country. The fact that these people generally spend their time eating, drinking and supporting their ailing fish-farm by making sure it doesn't fall under the jurisdiction of the Inland Revenue matters not a jot. These people represent our National Heritage, and this must be protected at all costs. Because the English find it rather amusing to imply that Scots are descended from a rabble of fat tax-dodging alcoholics, and the majority of executive decisions regarding television funding are made in London, the government is willing to pump a great deal of money into the creation of programmes aimed at the Gaelic-speaking viewer. (Chris Rae, "My Observations on Gaelic TV in Scotland" (1997) (available on the Internet at http://www.chrisrae.com/gaelictv.html [23 March 2001])

> It's less the aesthetics of the Gaelic language than the methodology of the Gaelic lobby that has come to earn Gaeldom its sceptical press. Image problem would be putting it mildly. Subsidy-abuse; persecution mania; rampant inferiority complex – to the Lowlander, a well-balanced Gael is one with a chip on both shoulders. Recently I was in a television studio where 13 offices were occupied by Gaelic

> broadcasters: 'You can barely hear the telephones for the clinking of tumblers', said a sceptical member of staff. For most, this encapsulates the black art of the Gael; sodden in whisky, puffed with self-righteousness, oblivious to his comic tweeness, the Gael has a fathomless thirst for taxpayers' cash and is barely accountable for the nebulous benefits the spending of it achieves. . . . Gaelic is a zombie language. (Allan Brown, "Gael warning", *The Sunday Times*, 18 October 1998.)
>
> Our politicians can't stand up in public and speak English without making fools of themselves. Kids pour out of schools no better than semi-literate. And what does the Government do? It kow-tows to a bunch of troublesome Teuchters who want to force every council, court and hospital to start speaking Gaelic. Gaels may even get their own TV station. What's the point of encouraging people to blabber away in a redundant tongue? Let's put more money into teaching our kids to speak the Queen's English. Gaelic should be allowed to die a quiet, dignified death. (Gary Keown, "Foolish, at Gael force. . ." *Sunday Mail*, 13 June 1999. "Teuchter" is a moderately abusive term for a Highlander or Gaelic speaker.)
>
> It really does beggar belief. Picture it: a chamberful of political representatives, every one of whom speaks English, sitting with their hands clamped to their ears, struggling to keep up as a stream of Hebridean twittering assails their senses, all for the sake of a handful of over-indulged zealots. . . . Curiously this comes in the same week as health workers in the land where sheep are gods have issued a pamphlet full of handy Gaelic phrases for the bracken-munchers to use when they find themselves in hospitals staffed by heathen English-speakers. It is sure to prove an invaluable aid when Gaels go to report their maladies, given that the [National Health Service] has never had the foresight to school its practitioners in obscure prehistoric dialects. (Allan Brown, "A tongue lashing from the Gaels", *The Sunday Times*, 20 February 2000.)
>
> When those children unfortunate enough to endure 'Gaelic immersion' schooling reach adulthood, they will find that having Gaelic as a second language will add about as much value to their employability in the world market as chronic halitosis. I hope these children will then have the courage to sue the education authorities responsible for this ongoing child abuse. (Letter to the Editor, *The Scotsman*, 7 March 2000.)

While such anti-Gaelic views are more prevalent among right-wing commentators, contemptuous hostility towards Gaelic is also surprisingly common among some on the political left, especially in the highly urbanized Central Belt, where Gaelic is sometimes seen as a wasteful distraction from bread-and-butter issues. (See the discussions in David Eyre, "Why Gaelic deserves our support", *Scottish Socialist Voice*, 17 November 2000, and Joyce McMillian, "Unwilling to face a history of humiliation and abuse", *Scotland on Sunday*, 11 December 1996.)

Significantly, however, the flow of "mì-rùn mòr nan Gall" appears to have lessened somewhat since the 1997 devolution referendum and the subsequent opening of the Scottish Parliament.

Perhaps the most striking indication of the changed mood is the contrast between the February 1981 debate in the Westminster Parliament on an unsuccessful Private Member's Bill to give Gaelic limited legal status, in which MPs pondered hypothetical problems of incomprehensible "drunken Highlanders" (McLeod 1997: 101-02), and the debate on Gaelic policy in the Scottish Parliament in March 2000, when representatives of all the major parties made consistently positive and constructive remarks explaining their support for the language.

E. The matter of Scots

The position of Gaelic in Scottish national life is distinctly different from that of Irish in Ireland or Welsh in Wales in that it is not the only language at stake in national(ist) discourse. The situation of Scots — the traditional speech of the Scottish Lowlands, where Gaelic passed from use during the later Middle Ages (Withers 1984; MacKinnon 1991) — complicates the picture considerably.

Although conceivably as many as 1.5 million people might be said to speak some form of Scots (Máté 1996: 2; see Macafee 2000) — thirty times as many as speak Gaelic — it suffers from several important disabilities that do not impinge on Gaelic. First, there remains a significant degree of disagreement and confusion as to whether Scots should properly be considered a language in its own right or a mere dialect of English (Smith 2000: 159). For purposes of public policy and public discourse analysis, the question at stake is not the merits of this debate but the fact that such disagreement and confusion do exist at the popular, public level, and that this uncertainty serves as a constant distraction for Scots activists and significantly hampers efforts to improve the position of Scots. In early 2001, for example, the BBC Scotland website derided Scots as mere "Nedspeak", using a derogatory term for the urban lower classes and implying that Scots is nothing more than the low-prestige patois of this low-prestige community. In contrast, although many Scots know or care little about Gaelic, only its most extreme opponents dispute its status as a *bona fide* language (as argued by the journalist Allan Brown on the current affairs programme *Newsnight Scotland,* 7 September 2000; transcript prepared by Emily McEwan-Fujita available on the Internet at http://www.abdn.ac.uk/arkleton/hrn/NewsntA4.PDF [24 March 2001]).

Second, as the blatant class prejudice of the "Nedspeak" example shows, views about Scots are more closely connected to the divisions and neuroses of mainstream Scottish society, in contrast to Gaelic, which is often understood as being distant and "different". For several centuries Scots

has been strongly associated with low-prestige aspects of Lowland Scottish life and culture and Standard English with social refinement and material advancement. Antipathy to Scots has been an integral part of the so-called "Scottish cringe", the rejection of Scottishness in favour of southern, English norms (McClure 1995).

Third — and this is a controversial point — Scots activists have been surprisingly ill-focused and ineffectual in comparison to those involved in Gaelic development. Although the limited success of Scots revitalization must be attributed largely to the debilities identified above and partly to Gaelic's more effective appeal to a fuzzy and safe sense of "Scottishness", there has been a puzzling degree of realism and professionalism in Scots activism and campaigning work (e.g. Jackson & Niven n.d.). The nature of this ineffectiveness lies outside the scope of this paper; the point for present purposes is that the Scots question is of rather less significance than it might be because Scots activists have not, for one reason or another, succeeded in establishing it as a political priority.

Significantly, and perhaps surprisingly, there has been relatively little conflict between Gaelic activists and Scots activists, although arguments of a "zero-sum" nature are common (i.e. that Scots initiatives should be taken instead of rather than in addition to Gaelic initiatives) and occasional disparaging remarks emerge from one camp or the other. Several key figures consciously advance an inclusive, multilingual approach, and the more common dynamic, at the public level at least, is one of cautious mutual respect (see, for example, Grant 1997 and Lorna Campbell, "The Mither Tongue: a wee thochtie", *Banffshire Advertiser*, 6 April 1999; available on the Internet at http://www.mlove.free-online.co.uk/Sitemap2.html, as "The Mither Tongue" [29 March 2001]). On the other hand, the tendency to speak of "Gaelic and Scots" in conjunction with each other can be damaging, for it can often result in inaction; the perception that taking particular measures to advance both Gaelic and Scots would be too difficult or too costly can mean that nothing is done for either. The dominant mentality in Scotland is clearly monoglot rather than polyglot (Nicolson 2000).

III. The Gaelic movement: characteristics, preferences and divisions

A. "Foghlam, foghlam, foghlam" and "higher-order props"

In 1997 the newly appointed Minister for Gaelic — itself a newly created office — announced the top priorities of the new Labour government with regard to Gaelic as "foghlam, foghlam,

foghlam": education, education, education. This emphasis reflects the overwhelming orientation of the Gaelic movement in Scotland, which has stressed Gaelic education far beyond all else in the revitalization effort. The unabashed assumption of Gaelic educationalists — an assumption sometimes made explicit (e.g. Comunn na Gàidhlig 1999b: 10) — is that every child taught Gaelic in primary school thereby becomes a "Gaelic speaker", and that the language will be "secured" if the number of children beginning Gaelic-medium primary education each year exceeds the number of Gaelic speakers who die each year.

Warning forcefully that a schools-based strategy cannot bring about effective language revitalization, the leading sociolinguist Joshua Fishman has criticized the Gaelic movement as relying almost exclusively on "higher-order props" (Fishman 1991: 380). Fishman makes clear that minority-language education must be connected to broader community-based language initiatives and intergenerational mother-tongue transmission in the home, and in their absence will lead to expensive and disappointing failure. The language must be used for a wide range of functions, especially those at the level of family and neighbourhood. If the language is confined to the school setting and never used outside it, deep-rooted language revitalization will not be possible, and the best that can be achieved is an Irish-style success: expensive, inefficient, and limited (Ó Riagáin 1997; Ó Riagáin 2001).

Fishman's message has been largely ignored in Scotland (Tormod Caimbeul 2000: 65-66). His warning about reliance on "higher-order props" was delivered a decade ago and yet the simplistic rhetoric of "foghlam, foghlam, foghlam" remains overwhelmingly dominant in Gaelic circles, and very little is being done in terms of linguistic initiatives at local level (in striking contrast to the important *mentrau iaith* community-level linguistic animation efforts in Wales (Williams 2000)). There is considerable debate about the scale or adequacy of Gaelic educational provision, and about the question of distinct Gaelic schools replacing Gaelic units within English schools, but the basic strategic issue of reliance on formal education as the principal means of linguistic regeneration is generally accepted without question, despite negative international experience and specific Scottish evidence that Gaelic-medium education as currently established is unlikely to produce active, confident adult users of Gaelic (MacNeil & Stradling 2000a, 2000b).

B. Community initiative and government-as-provider

If Gaelic revitalization efforts have largely been characterized by a "top-down" approach, there can be no doubt that the "top" is the government: Gaelic provision has been seen as one more kind of government provision, and the government has been seen as the service provider in classic welfare-state form. The consequence of this approach is that Gaelic activists have overwhelmingly focused on securing governmental funding and governmental support rather than undertaking grass-roots, independent initiatives.

This "top-down" approach has become increasingly dominant in recent years as the Gaelic community grows accustomed to established Gaelic organizations and institutions and large-scale public funding packages. In contrast, a more independent, grass-roots approach was evident in the 1980s, particularly in the remarkable efforts of Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Àraich (the Gaelic Play-Groups Association), which not only succeeded in establishing a network of pre-schools across the country but also built up a powerful head of steam in terms of demand for further educational provision (Tormod Caimbeul 2000).

In more recent years, the orientation has been more that of attempting to obtain different kinds of service provision from local or national government, and the prevailing mentality has been that characteristic of the welfare state. This orientation has been especially striking with regard to education. The usual pattern in minority-language education efforts in most countries (Brittany, Ireland North and South) has been to open independent schools under the control of the parents and community outside the control of government and only later, once they have taken root, to secure governmental funding. In Fishman's typology, there is an immense difference between schools under the control of the minority-language community ("type 4a schools") and schools under the control of the majority-language community ("type 4b schools"), with the former having much greater potential as an instrument of reversing language shift (Fishman 1991: 98-103).

In Scotland, Gaelic educational initiatives have been entirely confined to the state sector, which has left the Gaelic community at the whims of mainstream educationalists and politicians, who may well be indifferent or ill-informed. The dangers of such an approach can be seen in the 1999 refusal of Edinburgh City Council to open an all-Gaelic school despite strong support from parents, and in the periodic proposals by various local authorities to eliminate existing Gaelic provision for fiscal reasons, proposals that require time-consuming and stressful rear-guard

actions. The "welfare state" mentality means that governmental refusals to make provision for Gaelic tend to result in acquiescence and paralysis, rather than the decision to take independent action outside the scope of government control.

A different form of dependence is the tendency to look to the various Gaelic organizations — all of them, not insignificantly, effectively entirely dependent on public funding rather than community-based subscription — rather than self-help for initiative and action. As Robert Dunbar comments:

> The professionalism of the various Gaelic organisations . . . has also allowed certain members of the Gaelic community to sit back and say: 'Let CNAG do it', or 'let CNSA do it', or 'let CLI do it', or 'let the CCG do it'; 'after all, they are the ones who are getting paid to promote the language' . . . This is a dangerous view which compromises the political dynamism of the community as a whole and weakens the hand of the organisations themselves.
>
> (Dunbar 2000a: 84; These abbreviations refer to the following Gaelic organizations: Comunn na Gàidhlig, the general Gaelic development agency; Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Àraich, the Gaelic pre-school playgroups association; Comann an Luchd Ionnsachaidh, the organization serving Gaelic learners and non-traditional Gaelic speakers; and Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig, the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee.)

Also significant is the role of the National Lottery and the various special funds established to distribute its proceeds. These funds provide grants, sometimes running into the millions of pounds, to a wide range of projects, and several Gaelic initiatives have benefited. On the other hand, the prospect of the lottery "jackpot" tends to prompt extremely ambitious and costly proposals of a kind that far exceed the normal means of the Gaelic community. In some cases — a proposal for a Gaelic cultural centre in Edinburgh, a project to digitize a huge archive of Gaelic folklore material, for example — expensive and complex plans have, thus far at least, come to naught either because the Lottery has declined funding altogether or because the requisite matching funds could not be raised. It is certainly arguable that the dependence on the whims of an outside benefactor tends to be less productive in the long run than reliance on the community's own resources, but this "gold-plated" approach seems firmly rooted within the Gaelic organizations.

C. Making Gaelic pay: the Gaelic economy

Gaelic development strategy in recent years has depended heavily on promotion of the so-called "Gaelic economy", by which public funding of Gaelic organizations has created well over a thousand "Gaelic-related" jobs in Scotland, an initiative that has had a significant impact upon perceptions of the language (Sproull 1996; McLeod forthcoming b). Gaelic is understood as sustaining a certain number of jobs, indeed "career opportunities", and the ability to speak Gaelic is seen, to that extent, as a marketable skill. The decision to expend public funds on projects and organizations that create these jobs can be seen as a language policy of an indirect kind, helping to change established attitudes in which Gaelic is perceived as having little practical value, and creating incentives for young people to learn Gaelic or improve their level of competence. Some observers, however, have become concerned that an overly instrumental attitude towards Gaelic may not create secure conditions for language maintenance; as the Gaelic journalist Tormod Caimbeul writes, "what was a family culture may soon become only a career option or a marketing tool" (Tormod Caimbeul 2000: 65).

Perhaps the most fundamental problem with the rhetoric of the Gaelic economy is that it has created an expectation that Gaelic can provide direct pay-offs in the form of employment opportunities, and that language development initiatives should be assessed primarily in terms of their economic impact and only secondarily in terms of their linguistic impact. It has now become normal in media and political discussions of Gaelic initiatives to emphasize their value in economic and employment terms to the exclusion of almost all else. Some local politicians seem to have taken this view to an extreme, treating Gaelic as a sort of North Sea oil in reverse: a resource that will not last forever, given existing use patterns, but can be used to justify pumping in development money until it does.

In accordance with the familiar Irish formula "no jobs, no people; no people, no Gaeltacht" (Williams 1988: 279), it is often suggested that strengthening the economy in the Western Isles and, in particular, reversing population decline are necessary preconditions for the revitalization of Gaelic. Yet the possibility exists that such changes may not serve to slow down the process of language shift, and may indeed accelerate it. The economy of the Western Isles can be developed in such a way that Gaelic does not benefit at all, indeed in ways that do actual harm to the position of the language. For example, the "industrialization" of the Irish Gaeltacht in the 1970s appears to have accelerated the process of shift from Irish to English as new enterprises imported key non-Irish speaking personnel and promoted the use of English in the workplace (Ó

Cinnéide, Keane & Cawley 1985). Economic growth also served to bring about an influx of return migrants into Gaeltacht communities, often accompanied by English-monoglot spouses and children — another factor tending to promote language shift in the communities affected (Ó Cinnéide, Keane & Cawley 1985; Hindley 1991).

In the current Scottish context, there is little awareness that unless economic development programmes and strategies are designed with an explicit language-planning component, there is a real risk of undermining the language traditionally marginalized from economic activity. This risk is especially strong when the weaker language is in manifest decline at a more general level, as is clearly the case with Gaelic even in the strongest areas of the Western Isles. The existing dynamic in the Western Isles is one in which Gaelic has been traditionally marginalized in economic life and intergenerational transmission of the language is rapidly breaking down. Unless economic development endeavours to reverse both aspects of this dynamic, it will not succeed in altering that linguistic situation. Conversely, conventional economic development that maintains the existing language dynamic means that language shift will continue. Without an explicit language-planning dimension, then, economic development will not change the existing patterns by which Gaelic continues to decline, and indeed may give added strength to the forces causing that decline.

D. "Little Islanders" and "Gàidheil Ùra"

Because of Gaelic's marginal status in the educational system and Scottish life more generally, very few people have learned the language to any significant degree of fluency. Ten years ago, it would have been difficult to find five hundred adults in Scotland who had learned Gaelic to fluency, and even today, following the substantial expansion of Gaelic-medium education, and without resorting to any linguistically sophisticated discussion of the nature of "fluency", it would be safe to say that there are no more than 1,500 fluent learners. Today's Gaelic community consists of at least 95% native speakers and at most 5% learners, a ratio very different to that of Ireland (65-98% learners, according to one's definition of 'Irish speakers') and Wales (probably now slightly over 50% learners).

Nevertheless, the number of learners has increased dramatically in recent years and, in particular, the presence of learners in the "Gaelic world" (*saoghal na Gàidhlig*) — working in Gaelic organizations, in the Gaelic media, and in Gaelic academia — has become significant.

These trends will continue and intensify in coming years. Already most academic posts are held by learners and the overwhelming majority of those earning advanced degrees in Gaelic over the last decade have been learners of the language. As such, the relative influence of learners is rather greater than their numbers might suggest.

Learners' viewpoints can often differ from those of traditional native speakers. Although generalizations are perilous, learners are often more motivated and "activist", tend to focus on the language per se rather than in connection with general community and economic development, and are more inclined to see Gaelic as a national patrimony for all of Scotland that should be developed at a national level (Morgan 2000; Kenna Campbell 1983). Many native speakers, including the majority with connections to the Western Isles, tend to focus more closely on the situation of the islands, placing heavy reliance on the rhetoric of community (*a' choimhearsnachd*), and to have relatively little interest in Gaelic-related developments outside the supposed Gaelic "heartland". Some appear uncomfortable about learners in general and find it difficult to accommodate them or relate to them. The educationalist and writer Criosaidh Dick, a native Gaelic speaker, has probably been blunter than most (see, for example, "Gàidhlig fhileanta 's gun iad 'nan Gaidhil", *The Scotsman*, 29 November 1999). Debates about the future direction of Gaelic — especially those relating to its development and expansion into new, non-traditional fields of use — can therefore implicate the "ownership" of the language (cf. Sharon MacDonald 1999).

Many learners express considerable diffidence concerning their position in the Gaelic world — "that the language doesn't belong to them, that it isn't <u>their</u> language", that they are "on the periphery of the periphery" (MacCaluim 2000). Donald MacAulay has suggested that learners tend to imbibe the "politically correct" view that they are not "Gaels" no matter what their degree of competence in the language (MacAulay 1994: 42); important here is the existence of such a "politically correct" attitude, which unquestionably does reflect the dominant view in public discourse within the Gaelic world. The term "Gaidheil Ùra", literally "New Gaels", is sometimes used as a label for learners (as in a radio series of that name profiling individual learners that was broadcast in 2000), together with an English counterpart "nouveau Gaels", which consciously echoes the pejorative "nouveau riche" (cf. Morgan 2000: 130).

Nevertheless, it is important not to overstate the significance of the division between native speakers and learners. For example, Gaelic has hitherto been spared problems arising from significant linguistic divergence between the kind of Gaelic spoken by "traditional" speakers and that spoken by "non-traditional" speakers. To some extent at least this is simply a consequence of the low proportion of non-traditional speakers within the Gaelic community, and it may well be that such difficulties will increase as that proportion grows in the future. Some commentators have voiced unease about the quality of Gaelic acquired in the schools; yet concerns have also been expressed for some time about the diminished command of Gaelic among younger native speakers (MacAulay 1986; Thomson 1994). The crucial point for present purposes is that there is no doubt or disagreement whatsoever that the target language of Gaelic education is the speech of the mainstream native-speaking Gaelic community; but this is by no means the case in the Basque Country, where the new Standard Basque taught in the schools differs very considerably from the traditional dialects (Elordui 1999), or in West Belfast, where a new, hybrid form of Irish, adapted to the phonology of the local English dialect and considerably diluted in terms of grammar, is considered by some speakers to be equally as valid as, or indeed more appropriate than, the traditional dialects of the Irish Gaeltacht (Kabel 2000).

E. Minority rights discourse

The Gaelic community has demonstrated a distinct reluctance to engage in what might be described as minority rights discourse. Although Gaelic speakers tend to speak of themselves as as a distinct group, freely (if perhaps imprecisely) use the group term "Gaels" (*Gaidheil*) to label themselves, and differentiate themselves quite clearly from non-Gaelic speaking Scots (*Goill*), Gaels have always understood themselves to be members of the Scottish nation (MacInnes 1981, 1989) and there has never been any kind of separatist movement. In no meaningful sense do Gaels view themselves as a distinct *ethnic* group within Scotland (e.g. Euromosaic 1995), with concomitant rights under national or international law, even though such a classification may well be valid according to pertinent legal definitions (McLeod 1998, Dunbar 1999). It is certainly quite antithetical for most Western Isles Gaels to think of themselves and the South Asian and Chinese immigrant communities of the Lowland cities as fellow "minority groups", and very little work of a "coalition-building" nature has been undertaken either at a theoretical or practical level. By the same token, existing UK-wide institutions dealing with ethnic minority issues give little attention to autochthonous minority language groups. One manifestation of this attitude is the production of government publications in languages other than English: while

documents like election and census materials are published in a range of "community languages", the government commonly declines to produce Gaelic versions on the ground that all Gaelic speakers are sufficiently competent in English. This argument is understandable from the standpoint of "linguistic tolerance", but makes little sense in the context of autochthonous European languages whose speech communities have received majority-language education for many decades; here, proactive efforts oriented to the preservation or promotion of group linguistic identity are required (McLeod 1998; Dunbar 1999, 2000b, 2001). Considered from a comparative international perspective, the absence of a defined "ethnic" identity and of minority rights discourse from the Gaelic situation must be accorded very considerable weight, and that situation will be fundamentally misunderstood unless this factor is taken into account. Unfortunately, the subtleties of this situation have escaped some scholars who have published in the field: while outstanding work has been done on Gaelic identity and Gaelic perspectives of past centuries (e.g. MacInnes 1981, 1989), much recent sociological and anthropological work has been of questionable value (e.g. Chapman 1978, 1992; Sharon MacDonald 1997), and the pioneering community studies based on fieldwork of the 1960s and early 1970s (Dorian 1980; MacKinnon 1977) are now somewhat dated.

By the same token, "international" minority rights discourse has little impact on Gaelic affairs; Gaels rarely identify themselves in "European" terms, as one of Europe's minority language communities. The award-winning BBC current affairs programme *Eòrpa* notwithstanding, relatively little attention is given in the Gaelic media and other Gaelic circles to language revitalization efforts in other countries (*pace* Sharon MacDonald 1997: 238-9). At best, the "European" dimension is an occasional feature of some publications and projects funded by European agencies, for essentially instrumental reasons; "European" awareness in the Gaelic community is generally very low, as shown by the Euromosaic (1995) survey, in which a mere 28% of Gaelic speakers claimed a "European" identity, by far the lowest of seven proferred identities (*pace* McEwan-Fujita 1997, 1998). There is certainly considerable appreciation in the Highland and Islands for general European structural funding and agricultural support programmes, but this phenomenon has little to do with language or identity. An exception here is the professed connection to Gaelic Ireland, as expressed most demonstrably in Iomairt Chaluim Chille (the Columba Initiative), a programme funded by the governments of Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland to build links between the different Gaelic-speaking communities (note that Irish and Scottish Gaelic cannot now be considered mutually intelligible, although they evolved from a common linguistic ancestor

and shared a common "high culture" for many centuries (MacGregor 2000)). Even here, however, the links may not always be entirely heartfelt and some Scottish Gaels profess limited interest in the Irish connection.

F. "Amateur hour"

Despite the growing institutionalization of the Gaelic movement in Scotland — an institutionalization underpinned by millions of pounds of government investment every year — very little specialist professional expertise is brought to bear on Gaelic development, a phenomenon one activist has unkindly described as "amateur hour". Almost none of those steering the various Gaelic organizations have any specialist training or experience in applied linguistics or language planning, and there is relatively little awareness of theoretical and analytical advances in the field of language revitalization and language planning in general (cf. Tormod Caimbeul 2000: 65-66). Remarkably little sociolinguistic research — language use surveys, language attitude surveys and so on — has been conducted by the various Gaelic organizations or by government bodies, and no staff with specialist qualifications have been appointed to these entities, in contrast, for example, with the Welsh Language Board. More generally, policy discussion of language policy matters, both within the Gaelic world and in Scottish public life more generally, is often conducted at a very superficial level, most obviously when some of those participating have failed to read the basic policy documents under review, notably the detailed recommendations of Comunn na Gàidhlig with regard to secure status (Comunn na Gàidhlig 1997, 1999a). In addition, there is widespread confusion about basic premises, and distracting debates about first principles can prevent continuing progress; the Gaelic movement has arguably not achieved the "ideological clarification and awareness" that Fishman (1991: 394-5) deems a prerequisite for language revitalization efforts. In general, this lack of professional input and focused attention has significant ramifications for the course of Gaelic development.

G. Gaelic "culture" and "raising the profile"

A great deal of discourse about Gaelic has little to do with the language per se, as an actual linguistic phenomenon, as a medium of personal expression or community interaction. Two particularly common concepts that merit scrutiny in this connection are "Gaelic language and culture" and "raising the profile".

In much public discussion, the term "Gaelic language and culture" is used as a catch-all for a variety of phenomena in which the language itself may not play a central role (Rogerson & Gloyer 1995); the use of the disjunctive structure "language and culture" suggests that the "culture" may be pursued or developed independently of the language, and it is certainly the case that many with an interest in "Gaelic culture" express no meaningful commitment to or interest in the Gaelic language. This is not necessarily a new phenomenon; Gaelic culture, as manifested most obviously in material items like the kilt and the bagpipe, has long played an important role in conceptions and expressions of Scottish national identity (Chapman 1978; Trevor-Roper 1983), but the Gaelic language itself has not received any such priority.

These issues are most visible in connection with the "Gaelic arts" and "cultural tourism". The key term here is "accessibility", a fine-sounding word that can often mean preparing and delivering Gaelic cultural events or products that do not actually involve the use of the Gaelic language as a means of communication. This is particularly the case in connection with "cultural tourism", where artistic events are, of necessity, staged in English for the benefit of the paying customers, very few of whom understand Gaelic. Gaelic thus tends to be used only ritualistically or tokenistically (McLeod forthcoming b; Cox 1998). Initiatives generally classified as part of the Gaelic "renaissance" may have little Gaelic-language content; for example, all but one of the *fèisean* (youth traditional music festivals) that have grown up in recent years are conducted through the medium of English, and the one Gaelic-medium event struggles to attract sufficient numbers of pupils (see the discussions in Galloway 1995: 305-308 and Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul, "Cà'l a' Ghàidhlig am Fèisean nan Gaidheal?", *The Scotsman*, 20 September 2000). "Raising the profile" of the language is another common idiom among politicians and individuals employed in the Gaelic sector. The operative principle here is that Gaelic will benefit if it is made visible and audible, if it is shown as a real living language shown by real living people. Everything from bilingual road-signs to Gaelic soap operas on prime-time television can be understood as contributing to these efforts, which might conceivably be classified as forms of status planning. While the position of Gaelic in Scottish life has unquestionably been strengthened as a result of such initiatives, little effort is made to ensure that there is a direct connection between this impact and the actual maintenance, transmission, or acquisition of the Gaelic language. It may be that for some at least, a linguistically neutral cultural impact may be sufficient, or all that is desired (Rogerson & Gloyer 1995; Cox 1998).

H. Some distortions and non-issues

Much of the writing about Gaelic most widely cited outside Gaelic circles is produced through the distorting filter of stereotype and misunderstanding, often by writers burdened either by prejudice or limited knowledge and awareness of the linguistic, cultural, and political situation (e.g. Chapman 1978, 1992; Rogerson & Gloyer 1995; Sharon MacDonald 1997). As such, misconceptions and misplaced emphasis are rife.

Gaelic is relatively fortunate among small minority languages in that its dialectal variation is relatively limited (Morgan 2000: 130). Although Gaelic was never as dialectally divergent as some languages, in part this relatively limited divergence has emerged because the language has, by and large, retreated to a more-or-less contiguous area in the northwest of the former speech area, in contrast, say, to Ireland, where Irish is now confined to several widely dispersed pockets, with significant distinctions between dialects. More important for present purposes, there is no sense that attention needs to be given to dialectal "balance" in Gaelic initiatives: ensuring that only teachers with the "right" dialect are hired for a particular school, for example, or that an appropriate "mix" of dialects is to be heard from radio announcers. In a linguistic community as numerically and organizationally frail as that of Scottish Gaeldom, the freedom from such expensive distractions is a valuable one. This is not to say that Gaelic speakers do not identify with or favour certain dialects (usually their own) over others, simply that such sentiments do not lead to any meaningful level of divisiveness in policy terms. Ironically, the dialect with the largest number of speakers – that of the Isle of Lewis – is the most disliked among speakers of other dialects. It is also significant that, as with other languages, the growth of the Gaelic broadcast media has brought about a greater familiarity with other dialects and some degree of dialectal leveling in the forms used by media personnel (Morgan 2000: 130).

The issue of religious affiliation in the Gaelic community is an important and often misunderstood one. In Scottish public discourse, Gaelic speakers are often stereotyped as "Wee Frees" (members or adherents of various conservative Presbyterian denominations), that is to say, rigid, dogmatic, joyless Calvinists who delight in droning psalms and chaining up childrens' swings on the Sabbath. The term "Wee Free" is most properly applied only to those affiliated with the Free Church of Scotland, the largest of the Presbyterian denominations that have broken away from the established Church of Scotland, but is often (particularly outside the Highlands) applied more loosely to other churches, including the Free Church Continuing, the Free

Presbyterian Church, and the Associated Presbyterian Church. Although evangelical Protestantism has played an important role in the Gàidhealtachd since at least the early nineteenth century, this stereotype tends to reinforce the view of Gaelic as something marginal, peculiar, old-fashioned, and unattractive. It also overlooks the importance of the indigenous Catholic community in the islands of Barra, South Uist, and Benbecula, together with associated mainland districts; for some, these Catholic areas may be understood as having formed the cultural core of the Scottish Gaelic world from the seventeenth century onwards (cf. Meek 1996: 52-3). Relations among the different religious communities in the Western Isles are generally perceived as good, and there is no meaningful counterpart to the sectarianism of urban west central Scotland (cf. Ennew 1980: 89; Parman 1990: 131-2). A recent statement by the Minister for Gaelic in connection with Iomairt Chaluim Chille captures the prevailing rhetorical mood:

> *'S e ministear Clèireach a bha nam athair ann an Uibhist-a-Tuath. Fhad 's a bha sinne dol dhan eaglais gu seirbheisean Gàidhlig, bha grunn de mo chàirdean anns an sgoil cuideachd a' dol gu seirbheis Ghàidhlig shìos an rathad anns an Eaglais Chaitligich. Cha do rinn an [t-]eadar-dhealachadh diofar sam bith. Sin mar a bha e agus, tha mi an dòchas gur ann mar sin a bhios e.*
>
> My father was a Presbyterian minister in North Uist. While we were going to church to Gaelic services, a group of my school friends were also going to a Gaelic service down the road in the Catholic Church. The distinction made no difference at all. That's how it was and, I hope, how it will remain. ("Ceangal nan Ceilteach a' fàs nas treise", *An Gàidheal Ùr*, 40, February 2001 [author's translation].)

Although this may give a somewhat idealized vision, certainly there is no sense of religious divisions as a difficulty requiring constant attention and negotiation in the process of language revitalization, as seen in Irish-language initiatives in Northern Ireland.

IV. Conclusion

The proposal to "secure" the status of Gaelic is an appropriate if highly ambitious one, for the language is currently profoundly insecure. Language shift is ongoing, and may be nearing a terminal stage at which Gaelic ceases to be used as a traditional community language anywhere in Scotland. The position of the language in national institutions — from the educational system to the new Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive — is equally frail and marginal.

The position of Gaelic in Scottish public life and discourse is contradictory: a dominant soft-core, romanticized support coexists with a residual contemptuousness that borders on racism. Gaelic is low on the political agenda and tends to be dealt with as an afterthought — if it all.

Within the Gaelic community itself at the present time there is a pervasive sense of lost momentum, pessimism, and uncertainty. The forthcoming 2001 census has been anticipated with considerable unease: a significant drop in the number of Gaelic speakers, from 65,978 down to 55,000 or even 50,000 is predicted. Such bad news will strengthen the fears of some within the Gaelic movement that they are fighting a losing battle and embolden those opponents who see Gaelic initiatives as a wasteful and pointless "life-support machine". To date, the arrival of the "new" Scotland has had little impact on the position of Gaelic, and that position may be expected to continue to deteriorate unless significant, indeed drastic, new measures are put in place. Momentum may yet be gathered quickly, but a significant new push is still awaited.

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