Gàidheil resurgence and indigenous place-based knowledge in and of the Hebrides: Strengthening climate and cultural-ecological resilience.

Figure 1 Callanish Standing Stones, Eilean Leodhais, Alba. Photo by Lewis Williams.

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Community Research Report. Alliance for Intergenerational Resilience, University of Western Ontario, and University of the Highlands and Islands.

November 2024

Dedication

In memory of Sandra MacLeod of Nis, Eilean Leòdhais who passed away suddenly while this report was being prepared. Right up until her death in September 2024, Sandra contributed to this research in so many ways – her words and indomitable spirit are on every page. Passionate about traditional knowledge, Sandra was so curious about all sorts of things and at the time of her death was growing into her role and strength as a younger Traditional Knowledge Bearer. Sandra was as an immense force for good, always wanting the best for the communities she was part of.

Acknowledgements: A big thank you to the community members of An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhais for their generosity in showing me about their homelands, and sharing their rich perspectives on community life. Your good energy and the gift of spending time with you has made all the difference. I have learnt much in undertaking this research!

Special thanks to the British Academy for a Visiting Fellowship to undertake this research and to the University of the Highlands and Islands for hosting me during this time.

Executive Summary

In these times of societal transition in the midst of immense human and planetary challenge and suffering, one of the wisest things we can do as communities is to dig deeply for our ancestral knowledges and traditional lifeways – bringing these forth in ways which hold both time-sustained and new relevancies for this era.

Fuelled by the globalization of economies, cultural, financial and information systems, *"our new colonial culture, just keeps coming. It's relentless, it's all-consuming, it's inundating, it's immersive*[1]*"*. Yet despite the many ongoing colonialisms - such as corporate driven approaches to renewable energy, and the persistence of White epistemological supremacism throughout policy framings and much public conversation for examples - which continues to marginalize their Indigenous lifeways, communities within the Gàidhealtachd are resisting and drawing together to create their futures. Things are far from perfect and there are many issues to confront in navigating the stormy and unpredictable seas. Yet communities and specifically Gàidheil peoples are finding life-giving ways forward.

Drawing on historical and contemporary narratives with community members, this inquiry focuses on the revitalization and application of Indigenous Gàidheal place-based knowledge and related cultural traditions towards strengthening climate and cultural-ecological resilience. It focuses specially on the geo-cultural regions of Eilean Leòdhais and An t-Eilean Sgitheanach (the Isles of Lewis and Skye) where the Indigenous ecologies, knowledge systems and lifeways are still relatively vibrant and intact in contrast to other areas of the Gàidhealtachd (the Gaelic speaking Highlands and Islands).

Drawing on my Māori and Gàidheal genealogical connections, and in particularly my knowledge of Te Ao Māori, the Māori world, I explore a range of issues including historical and ongoing forms of colonization, the imperialist legacies that Gaidheil must confront in moving forward, the near erasure of their Indigenous mother tongue, contemporary identities, and dynamics of intergenerational knowledge transmission. In finding ways to move forward, I discuss a range of strategies already underway including emerging rituals for intergenerational knowledge transmission, the renegotiation of Indigenous identities and plural futures; and community driven approaches to climate and cultural-ecological resilience largely aimed at reversing corporate dominance over energy (energy colonialism).

There can be little doubt that the scars of colonization are viscerally embedded across the Gàidhealtachd and that its peoples are heavily colonized. However, with the exception of 'collective self-recognition' the communities in this study (who inhabit the relatively remote Western Isles of Scotland) meet the criteria for official recognition as Indigenous Peoples as defined by the guidelines adopted by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues[2]. While momentum is gathering, at the collective level of self-recognition there are some thorny issues – particularly at institutional levels - that need confronting. For these reasons, the communities in this study are referred to as "still Indigenous to place" throughout this report. This avoids their marginalization within framings of Indigeneity commonly drawn on by

[1] Iain MacKinnon, Fieldnotes (2024).
[2] United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. (nd). Who are Indigenous Peoples? Fact Sheet. https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf

official bodies, while acknowledging who they are, and the Indigenous resurgence work currently being undertaken in these communities.

Finally, the report discusses the implications of global Gàidheil diaspora as a result of the Clearances in colonial nation states such as New Zealand and Canada and how research of this nature might disrupt the ontological field of colonialism more broadly; thereby assisting the descendants of setter Gàidheil to draw on the knowledge of their own colonization and past ancestral indigenous lifeways more meaningfully in terms of meeting their obligations as tangata tiriti or treaty people.

Contents

Glossary

Alba	Scotland
An t-Eilean Sgitheanach	Isle of Skye
Baird	A poet or one who sings ballads
Dùalchas	Heritage or collective cultural memory
Duine	Person / one who comes from the land
Dùthchas	Ontology of interconnectedness
Dùthaich	Land
Eilean Leòdhais	Isle of Lewis
Feannag	Traditional raised bed for growing crops
Gàidheal	Person of Gaelic identity
Gàidheil	Persons of Gaelic identity
Gàidhealtachd	The Gaelic speaking highlands and Islands
Gàidhlig	The (Scots) Gaelic language
Te Ao Māori	The Māori world/worlds
Whakapapa	The genealogical connection between entities
Tūrangawaewae	Standing place, traditionally related to land.
Ahi Kā	Ancestral fires, continuous occupation.
Tino Rangatiratanga	Self-governance, collective rights.
Hapū, whānau	Sub-tribe, family, or extended family.
Aki	Mother Earth
Anishinaabemowin	The Anishinaabe language
Still Indigenous to Place	Peoples living on or in proximity to their ancestral lands who are either living or revitalizing their indigenous lifeways.
Indigenous Mind	The human capacity to be in intimate relationship with the Earth, spirit, and human communities.
Long ago colonized	Those who through colonization have lost almost all memory of the indigenous lifeways of their ancestors.
The Clearances	The forced expulsion of Indigenous Gàidheil by colonizers from their homelands from the 1750s – 1860s.
Whiteness	Dominant Eurocentric ways of thinking associated with White Epistemological supremacism.
white/whiteness	The fairness or whiteness of a persons, people's complexion.

> A hunter was one day returning from Beinn Brich and when he reached the bottom of the mountain, he thought he heard a sound like the cracking of two rocks striking each other, or like the grating of a stag's horns when he rubs them against a rock. He continued walking until he came in sight of a large stone that lay at the side of the road, and there he saw at the base of the stone a woman with a green shawl around her shoulders. She held a deer shank in each hand and was constantly striking them together. Even though he realized that she was a glaistig [Shapeshifter], he was bold enough to say to her "What are you doing there, poor woman?". But the only answer he got was "since the forest was burnt. Since the forest was burnt!". And she kept repeating this refrain for as long as he could hear her[3].

Indigenous futurities and planetary wellbeing

"Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul". (Emily Dickenson).

Our planetary wellbeing depends on our collective ability to pull together and once again put the Earth Mother at the centre of our decision making. The roots of our planetary unravelling – i.e., commodification of the land – lie at the heart of Empire. Yet "Empire" is not a monolithic entity. Crucially, in geo-political terms, that part of empire known today as Great Britain encompasses the homelands of the Gàidheil (Gaelic Peoples) who having been both colonized and then assimilated within colonizing structures elsewhere, are now undergoing a resurgence of their Indigenous lifeways in their homelands, the Gàidhealtachd. In the face of immense human and environmental challenge today this regathering of cultural traditions, including indigenous place-based knowledge, is significant not just for the ways it will strengthen Gàidheil climate and cultural-ecological resilience throughout the Gàidhealtachd (the Gaelic speaking Highlands and Islands), but for its possible ripple effect through the broader ontological field of colonialism.

In Gàidheal mythology the Cailleach is the original ancestor who creates the landscape and all of life that flows from it. Ruling the seasons and living high in the mountains, the Cailleach carries a hammer for shaping the hills and valleys. Revered within Gàidheil tradition and known for her ability to shapeshift there are many stories of her transformation from her divine-human form to deer, whom she herds[4]. The Cailleach is also the all-powerful spirit or deity who rules winter and can freeze the lochs within an instant! The unsettledness of the weather in the transition from winter to spring and autumn to winter is explained to be the result the seasonal struggle between the Cailleach and the other key seasonal deity St Brigid who rules the summer months. The tale at the beginning telling of the exchange between the hunter and the glaistig (the Cailleach) is instructive concerning our present-day conditions. As a leading authority on Scottish Gàidheil heritage and culture, Michael Newton explains:

> The Cailleach's natural home is at the top of – not bottom – of a mountain; her deer herd are represented in this tale only by the bones of a dead animal; the road is a sign of human impact and progress; the man is noted as being unusually lacking in fear of her. The beating of the bones in the Cailleach's hands echoes the practice of the striking of the palms in the rituals of keening, it is clear that she is mourning the forest, which represents the wilderness in general.

[3] Michael Newton. (2009). Warriors of the Word. The World of the Scottish Highlanders. Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited. Pp 313-314.

[4] See for example Dougie Strang. (2023). The Bone Cave. A Highland Journey Through Myth and Memory. Edinburgh: Birlinn General.

The tale indicates that humankind's adoption of modern rationality has dethroned the Cailleach, and hence she can no longer function as a protector of nature[5].

Figure 2: The Cailleach. Source:avid-archer.com

The time to re-enthrone the Cailleach arrived some time ago. The ongoing Clearances in their various forms only reinforce the relevance of this theme!

Currently, the reclamation and renegotiation of Gàidheil indigeneity is contested and complex. Gàidhlig indigeneity is often misconstrued, primarily because of the multifarious and ambiguous roles, positions, and statuses of many Gàidheil within British colonial/imperial structures, and their regular erasure as a distinctive people within national frameworks, whether Scottish or British. Ongoing efforts are being made by Gàidheil scholars and community groups to confront, research, and assess Gàidheil imperial legacies. Clan landlords and gentry were often enthusiastic participants in empire, dispossessors, and expropriators at home and abroad. While many of the colonized, cleared, and exiled Gàidheil peoples in time subjectively and materially became part of the colonizing structures of British colonies such as Canada and New Zealand[6], those that stayed and their descendants (including participants in this study) share crucial characteristics with the other still Indigenous to place communities around the world.

Both Aotearoa, the place to which I am first and foremost ancestrally bound through my Māori whakapapa and Turtle Island, where I have spent a good chunk of my adult life living, have significant populations of people of Gàidheil descent; a good proportion of whom, especially in the Maritime regions of Canada actively identify as Gàidheil[7]. Today, however, these populations being long intergenerationally disconnected from their ancestral lands have little or no knowledge of the indigenous lifeways of their progenitors. Furthermore, despite the

[5] Michael Newton (2009). Ibid.
[6] See for example, Dani Pickering. (2022). Harm received, harm caused: A Scottish Gael's journey to becoming Pakeha. *Genealogy,* 6, 82 http://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy6040082
[7] In 1867, at the time of Confederation in Canada a third of the settler population were Gàidhlig speaking.

racialization of their Indigenous ancestors in the old land, being fair skinned, these populations have over time assimilated into and became part of the colonizing structures in the modern colonial nation states of New Zealand and Canada. Once indigenous to place, they have become part of what Amanda J. Sepie has referred to as the "long ago colonized"[8]. This is also true of the descendants of entire Gàidheil communities now living in lowlands and central belt of Alba (Scotland) who were flushed out of the Gàidhealtachd through the Clearances.

Given the uneven processes of colonization across the Gàidhealtachd and the extent of Gàidheil diaspora throughout Alba itself, the study focuses on Eilean Leòdhais/the Isle of Lewis and An t-Eilean Sgitheanach/the Isle of Skye, two Gàidhealtachd regions where Indigenous knowledge and lifeways remain relatively vibrant, despite entrenched inequalities and ongoing and intensifying linguistic and cultural pressures. Within a global context where Indigenous futures are increasingly seen as playing a vital contribution to planetary wellbeing, this research is also significant for its contributions to this growing body of knowledge. Specifically it is also part of a larger inquiry into *"what forms could Indigenous-led intergenerational resilience take in 21st Century neo-colonial contexts of climate and cultural-ecological crisis?"*; a question of ongoing interest to me that has informed earlier work[9]. This research contributes to this growing global body of research across three themes:

1. Elucidating how Gàidheil Indigenous resurgence and related place-based knowledge is critical in the immediate sense to strengthening climate and cultural-ecological resilience of Gàidheil who remain Indigenous to place.
2. Stimulating critical thought regarding conflation of Indigeneity with racial characteristics rather than an emphasis on lived epistemologies of interconnectedness.
3. Growing awareness amongst newcomers and treaty people, across the Gàidhealtachd, Aotearoa, and Turtle Island of their historical indigeneity and subsequent inner colonization towards a greater first-hand understanding of the importance of the Indigenous Knowledge of place for planetary wellbeing; thereby forging as treaty allies a more meaningful ontological relationship with the peoples still Indigenous to place.

Introduction

> In Gaelic the phrase to ask: "Where are you from?" is *"cò às a tha thu",* literally "Who do you come out of?" The concept of belonging to a particular place is con specific with an explicit assumption that your ancestors/forebearers, are hefted to a locality in much the same way as other animals return to a specific place to feed, to breed and to shelter. There is an expectation that a person's history, their whole being in fact, is a continuous and inseparable part of their physical environment[10].

Gàidheil cultural survivance is gathering momentum across the Gàidhealtachd[11], the traditionally Gaelic speaking Highlands and Highlands of Alba (Scotland). Interwoven with this movement, is the reclamation of Indigeneity by those whose forebears occupied these lands

[8] Amanda, J. Sepie. Tracing the Motherline: Earth Elders, Decolonizing Worldview, and Planetary Futurity. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Otepoti (Dunedin): University of Otago.
[9] Lewis Williams (2022). Indigenous intergenerational resilience: Confronting cultural and ecological crisis. London: Routledge.
[10] Frank Rennie (2020, p.186). The Changing Outer Hebrides. Galson and the meaning of place. Stornoway: Acair.
[11] The boundaries of the Gàidhealtachd as a territory are contested. It has never been legislatively defined although, historically, it might be considered as equivalent to that area of Scotland 'north of the Forth' controlled by the justiciar of that area.

in pre-colonial times. Both developments are persistent, despite the reality of inner colonization for many and the ongoing onslaught of contemporary extractivist politics, evident for example in state-sponsored corporate approaches to renewable energy; sometimes referred to as energy colonialism[12]. The "cultural darning and mending work[13]" of Gàidheil resurgence takes a range of forms and is part of a bigger paradigm shift throughout the world in which Indigenous and Traditional knowledge systems are increasingly seen as central to environmental stewardship. In exploring the potential of An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhais to contribute knowledge and practice towards the larger question, three key themes underpinning this inquiry are:

- Local dynamics of Gàidheil resurgence & climate and cultural-ecological resilience.
- Intergenerational knowledge transmission.
- Representation of Gàidheil cultural and place-based knowledge within institutional practices and policies.

This project holds personal interest for me. Three of my key ancestral lineages which shape my experiences today and therefore my approach to this research (which I speak to later in this report) are Māori, Gàidheil and mid-belt or lowland Scots. Relatedly, the quote by Frank Rennie at the beginning of this section expresses the Gàidheil worldview of *dùthchas,* a kincentric ontology or a deeply interconnected reality that is held by Indigenous Peoples throughout the world. From my own Māori worldview, the two words that spring to mind on reading the quote are *whakapapa* (the genealogical connections between all beings – living, non-living, seen and unseen) and *tūrangawaewae* (one's standing place, traditionally linked to ancestral lands). In *Te Ao Māori* (The Māori World), these concepts place us in relationship to the collective and are an integral part of identity. From a Māori worldview, the troubles of our world have their basis in the unravelling of whakapapa, the loosening of our kinship bonds with the land – through confiscation and other means – and other beings. Our collective journey is to mend this whakapapa – plain and simple.

Therefore, in framing this research the terms *climate* and *cultural-ecological resilience* are used throughout this study to signify the intimate relationship between our actions and the resulting vibrance of our kinship relations, the living system (seen and unseen) we are part of. Culture shapes our relationship to the ecological systems which give us life. Cultural resilience is therefore indivisible from environmental resilience. Accordingly, a key assumption underpinning this research is that cultures that are grounded in Indigenous worldviews of interconnectedness (rather than Cartesian or even western relational consciousness) are vital to

[12] This refers to the process of global corporate entities in collusion with nation states proclaim the virtues of renewable energy while "intensifying neo-extractivism and inequalities in populations and territories of the Global South and the peripheries of the Global North" (Contreras et al, 2023, p.2). See Contreras, J., Ruiz, A., Campos-Celedor, A., Fjellheim, A. (2023). Energy colonialism A category to analyse the corporate energy transition in the global north and south. Sustainability, *Land, 12*(6), 1241; https://doi.org/10.3390/land12061241

[13] This term was coined by Mairi McFadyen and Raghnaid Sandilands to refer place based Gàidheil cultural revivance work around the Inverness area in the Highlands of Scotland where there is even a greater erosion of Gàidheal lifeways than parts of the Western Isles which are more remote. See McFadyen, M., & Sandilands, R. (2021). On 'Cultural Darning and Mending': Creative Responses to Ceist an Fhearainn / The Land Question in the Gàidhealtachd. *Scottish Affairs,* 30(2), 157-177.

restoring our relationships. The Indigenous knowledge of place is critical to our wellbeing - if the land is healthy, we can be healthy.

Through this research, I have learnt that people, particularly young people leave because of lack of job opportunities and affordable housing. Kenny one of the interviewees for this project and a native of Baile Ailein (Balallan), Leòdhas estimates that probably only about 50% of the population are indigenous to the area. Obviously, this is a challenge to the maintenance and revitalization of Indigenous knowledge and lifeways on the Island. In crude terms it tends to be the young and often Indigenous islanders who leave with incomers constituting wealthier older non-natives, in essence undermining the cultural and economic fabric of indigenous Hebridean lifeways:

> There's been a lot of…people moving into the community, in the Hebrides especially from places like England or further afield. English speaking monolinguists to narrow it down. Many but not all show no interest in learning the language (Fiona Rennie, Gabhsann, Leòdhas)[14].

Despite Gàidheil indigeneity remaining contested - largely because of the complex positioning of Gàidheil within colonial structures[15] and the conflation of Scottish Gaels with Anglo-British and to a lesser extent Lowland Scots[16], Gàidheil Indigenous resurgence and the recovery of traditional place-based knowledge throughout the Gàidhealtachd is increasingly a reality. (I unpack these issues later in this report in the section on Gàidheil Indigenous identities). Worthy of mention is that some incomers - including those I interviewed as part of this research – who discontent with the shallow offerings of modernity, are genuinely interested in how they can support these processes, including ways in which they might deepen their own sense of belonging to people and place. These people are valuable allies to Gàidheil resurgence. Given these dynamics, Gàidheil cultural-ecological resilience throughout the Gàidhealtachd might be assisted by thinking about indigeneity in the following two ways: 1) Indigenous peoples who have historical continuity with their ancestral lands and continue to practice and /or are engaged in revitalizing and making anew their traditional indigenous lifeways, and, 2) "indigenous mind" which refers to the inherent human capacity to be in intimate relationship with the Earth community, the seen and unseen.

Both conceptualizations are evident in the perspectives and identities of the people interviewed. Each is critical to generative ways of working towards Gàidheil revival and resurgence in ways that are inclusive but none the less centre the realities and knowledge bases of Gàidheil collectives still Indigenous to place. This avoids destructive Nationalist politics of exclusion or what Alastair McIntosh refers to as *"blood and soil"* as well as recolonizing dynamics which

[14] Fieldnotes (2024).
[15] Lewis Williams (2016). The human ecologist as alchemist: An inquiry into Ngāi Te Rangi cosmology, human agency, and well-being in a time of ecological peril. In Lewis Williams, Rose Roberts, Alastair McIntosh (eds). Radical Human Ecology: Intercultural and Indigenous approaches. London: Routledge. Pp.91-120. P.93
[16] Michael Newton. (2015).

involve the naturalization of settler identities onto indigenous lands, threatening to further displace Indigenous Peoples[17].

A starting place: My whakapapa & this research

Ki te taha tōku māma, e whakapapa ana ahau ki ngā iwi o Ngāi Te Rangi, Tauranga Moana, Aotearoa me Nan Argeantaich, Eilean Arainn, Kōtirana. Ki te taha tōku papa, nō Wēra, nō Hāmene ōku tīpuna. Engari, i whānau mai ki te whenua o Aotearoa. Nō reira:

On my mother's side I am a descendant of the Ngāi Te Rangi peoples, of the Tauranga Moana, Aotearoa and Clan Argeantaich of the Isle of Arainn, Alba/Scotland. On my father's side my ancestors were from Wales and Germany. I was born in and to the land that is Aotearoa. Therefore:

Ko Mataatua te waka,	*Mataatua is the canoe*
Ko Mauao te Maunga tapu,	*Mauao is the sacred mountain*
Ko Te Awanui te moana,	*Te Awanui is the harbour*
Ko Ngāi Te Rangi te iwi,	*Ngai te Rangi are the tribe*
Ko Ngāi Tūkairangi te hapū,	*Ngai Tūkairangi is the sub tribe*
Ko Whareroa te marae	*Whareroa is the meeting place*
Ko Ruawahine Puhi te tangata.	*Ruawahine is the person*
Ko Lewis Williams ahau.	*My name is Lewis Williams.*

In Te Ao Māori, the Māori world, it is tradition to mihi/introduce ourselves through a pepeha. This situates us in terms of belonging to land and people. In this way we recite some of the key whakapapa, or genealogical connections to the land, living peoples and our ancestors. In Te Ao Māori this forms the basis of who we are. It is important, therefore, that you the reader know my whakapapa because these connections to soil and soul set the foundations for my approach to this research. Someone with a different whakapapa would likely write quite a different narrative.

Through my mother, I whakapapa to the Tauranga Moana (Aotearoa) – specifically te iwi o Ngāi Te Rangi - the tribe or collective of people who descend from the common ancestor Te Rangihouhouri - and Clan Argeantaich, Eilean Arainn / Isle of Arran, of the Gàidhealtachd. These two ancestries are intimately interwoven. Following the loss and break down of hapū and whānau land into individual title after the battles of Pukehinahina and Te Ranga and the ensuing raupatu (land confiscations) throughout Tauranga because of colonial invasion[18], my great grandfather Edward Sellars (Ngāi Tukairangi hapū, Ngāi Te Rangi) left the Tauranga Moana for Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland). His parents were Jane Faulkner of (Ngāi Tukairangi)

[17] Scott Morgensen (2012). Theorising gender, sexuality, and settler colonialism. Settler Colonial Studies, 2(2), 2-22.
[18] Waitangi Tribunal. (2010). *Tauranga Moana: 1886–2006. Report on the Post-Raupatu Claims.* WAI 215. https://forms.justice.govt.nz/search/Documents/WT/wt_DOC_68361885/Wai215vol1.pdf

and Daniel Sillars[19]. Daniel who was born at the culmination of the Land Clearances on Eilean Arainn[20] emigrated from Imacher, Arainn to the Tauranga Moana as a young man in about 1850 where he met and married Jane.

The Tauranga Moana refers to the traditional territory of the Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngati Ranginui and Ngati Pukenga tribes. We are sea people. Tauranga Moana which lies on the East Coast of *Te Ika a Maui* / the fish of Maui (New Zealand's North Island) refers to an interconnected ecosystem of now partially bush clad hills, wetlands, and coastline. *Ki uta, Ki tai* - from the mountains to the sea. It was to this South Pacific coastline with its rocky shoals and sandy beaches that Daniel as a young mariner would bring his indigenous knowing of the Hebridean seas and lands.

Lesser known to me are the psychospiritual herstories of my other maternal *whanaunga* (kin) through my mother's mothers' lineage, who come from the small working-class town of Lesmahagow, situated in the lowlands of the south of Scotland. I have no knowledge of how many generations they dwelt there before my grandmother's family emigrated to Aotearoa when she was 12 shortly following the end of WW I. At 89 years of age, my own mother says *'there is no one left alive who can tell us'*[21]. I do know however that my maternal grandmother's parents bore the names of Ritchie and Rankin, and that the Ritchies are of the Clann Mhic an Tòisich (McIntosh) whose indigenous homelands were in the Highlands surrounding Inverness.

This whakapapa leaves me with many questions…Sometimes they burn more than others. *Were they too cleared from the lands to which they were heft? Did my ancestors bury their traumas of being torn from their homeland? Was their indigeneity - that intimate knowing of the land and capacity for deep attunement with other beings, seen and unseen – I wonder, simply assimilated into (what I have come to learn during this course of this research) what some refer to as the central belt psyche? Were they in time, I wonder, just like my mother's father who had wanted to forget the Māori part of himself, relieved to have the burden of their indigenous Gàidheal identity lifted from them in the name of modernity?*

My mother tells me that she never heard my grandmother speak about the clearances, but she does remember her mother jokingly (perhaps in a slightly derogatory way) referring to the Sassenachs (English) to the south of the border. Also interesting along this trail of whakapapa (the genealogical connection between entities, including language) is that Sassenach is derived from the Scottish Gàidhlig word (Sasunnach), literally meaning 'Saxon' and also used by Gàidhlig speakers to refer to non-Gaelic speaking Scottish Lowlanders! The irony of these layered forms of estrangement does not escape me.

[19] Our family believe that Daniel's surname was inadvertently changed to Sellars during the process of emigration to New Zealand.
[20] Barbara Wood (1994). An Echo of time. Sillars The Clan "Argeantiach". Sillars Family History 1660-1994. Gibson, Rob. (2023). The Highland Clearances Trail. Edinburgh: Luath Press.
[21] Fieldnotes. (2024).

I also have a long-standing relational connection to Turtle Island or Canada where I have spent a good part of the past twenty years living and working on the traditional territories of the Cree, Dene, Coast Salish, Annishinaabek and Haudenosaunee Nations. My own intergenerational displacement and subsequent engagement with my iwi and hapū, and efforts to learn the language of my tīpuna and engagement with rongoā Māori (Māori public health) practices on my ancestral lands as well as those with Indigenous communities I have worked with, have led me to be deeply interested in indigenous environmental repossession and how people become and/or rebecome of place.

In starting to close this section of the report, I return to the subject of Eilean Arainn and the clearances. Sillars is of course not a Gàidhlig name. Our McInuirighnach ancestors were forced to anglicize their name - which would eventually become Sillars - as part of colonization, a process which intensified following the Jacobite uprisings which culminated with the Battle of Culloden in 1746. Parish records suggest that our ancestors started off on the Kilbride side of Arainn and were evicted as part of the early clearances of the Hamilton estates in the 1700s; being moved to the Kilmorie side. Up until the 1700s the people of Arainn lived in compact *clachans*, villages where they grew their crops and tended their animals under the time-honored and collective land tenure runrig system. Of these times, my late relative Barbara Woods (nee Sellars) writes:

> Between 1766 and 1829, Arran folk saw their life and work utterly changed…In the interest of obtaining a greater income Lord Hamilton decided to divide [consolidate] 1000 farms…into 250 farms each to be let to a single family. This meant that 750 families had to leave the Hamilton lands. This coupled with the failure of the Islands two main industries, herring fishing and kelp burning, meant that that many hundreds of people had to leave the Island or face starvation. Some left voluntarily but many were evicted by force. Families went to the squalid industrial cities on the mainland of Scotland, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. Others took the only available alternative at that time – Canada[22] [23]

To all of this, I would add my observation of the vaguely 'looking for something' kind of diaspora apparent in many of the descendants of Gàidheil throughout Aotearoa and Turtle Island. The positioning of Gàidheil by themselves as semi-heroes of Imperialist expansion such as the engraving on the Emigrant's Monument[24] in Helmsdale, on the mainland of Alba, speaks to the silencing of intergenerational trauma – both received in their homelands and inflicted on others in the colonies. Inner colonization, particularly when manifest within those in positions of power, can cast a long shadow over Indigenous resurgence work. It is from these ancestral legacies of colonized and colonizing[25] peoples from which I research and write.

[22] Barbara Wood (1994). P. 11.
[23] My 2007 explorations on Eilean Arainn at the Arainn Historical Society paint a desperate story of the clearances and forced emigrations from Arainn, the Gàidhealtachd and throughout Éire (Ireland) from the 1840s – 1860s. The conditions on board the ships were appalling with nearly 20% dying either on route or soon after landing. Eilean Arainn Historical Society Handwritten notes.
[24] Catherine McPhee and Grace Wright. (2022). The stories we tell. In A person is not an individual. Portree: School for Plural Futures. Pp. 83-91.
[25] Pickering, Dani. (2022). Harm received harm caused: A Scottish Gael's journey to becoming Pakeha. *Genealogy*, 6, 82 http://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy6040082

People and Place: Methods

When I first began this study, I loosely (and perhaps rather vaguely) held the idea of applying the research objectives to the Gàidhealtachd. However, my own contacts and what I subsequently learned about the impacts of colonization on the Highlands and Islands quickly told me that it would be most fruitful to focus on the Western Isles. The Hebrides, because of their insulation from Anglophone centres of colonial power relative to other parts of the Gàidhealtachd on the mainland of Alba, are where the indigenous knowledge of these communities appears most concentrated. These factors coupled with my own contacts have meant that the study focuses on Eilean Leòdhais/Isle of Lewis (Outer Hebrides) and An t-Eilean Sgitheanach/Isle of Skye (Inner Hebrides).

This report is therefore the result of in-situ informal meetings with individuals and groups including dinner time conversations and fireside reflections, and semi-structured interviews with people of, from or now living on Leòdhas and An t-Eilean Sgitheanach. Each person is in some way involved with praxis concerning the application of Indigenous and/or place-based Gàidheal knowledge to human-environmental wellbeing. A snowball technique to participant recruitment was used in which community members either already known to myself or through my host organization, The University of the Highlands, and Islands (UHI) were contacted.

In the months from August to October 2023 introductions were made to community members and prospective participants over three trips from the City of Perth – where I was physically based at Perth's UHI campus - which lies about an hour north of Alba's capital city Edinburgh. The broad criteria that informed who I talked with, was that they be in some way working in the area of the resurgence and application of Gàidheil place-based knowledge to human environmental wellbeing and/or exploring the idea of Indigeneity within the context of Gàidhealtachd and Gàidheil diaspora in the context of Scotland's urban centres. In Glasgow I was hosted by Alastair McIntosh and visited the Galgael Trust and was also shown some of ancient history of the Kingdom of Strathclyde by Centre for Human Ecology Board member Luke Devlin. On a second trip I travelled to An t-Eilean Sgitheanach where I was hosted by Iain Mackinnon at his village of *Camuschros* at the edge of Linne Shleite, the Sound of Sleat. During this trip we met with members of Atlas Arts and the An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Lochalsh Archive Centre in Portree and then travelled across to the Inverness area to meet with place-based knowledge practitioners including those associated with Àirigh, the Sheiling Project. I also took a trip to Eilean Leòdhais which was facilitated by Baile Ailein community member and UHI academic staff Kara Smith, and UHI colleagues Ullrich Kockel and Mairéad Nic Craith. Here we spent two days travelling to sites of historical trauma (cleared villages) and Gàidheil political uprising including the Pairc Deer Raids, as well as sites of cultural significance such as the Callanish standing stones. This visit also included informal meetings with community members at Kinloch Historical Society, the Crown Hotel, Urras Oighreachd Gabhsann, (Galson Estate Trust), Urras Coimhearsnachd Bhràdhagair agus Àrnoil (The Bragar and Arnol Community Trust), Ness Cultural Centre and An Taigh Cèilidh, the Gaelic Café in Steòrnabhagh Stornoway.

The extended nature of the time frame within which people were interviewed (October 2023 – October 2024), the snowball technique utilized, combined with both in-depth and passing conversations with community members, consultation of relevant secondary sources (videos, articles) and my own reflections on all of these, undoubtedly shaped the research process and interview content as the study progressed. For example, as a result of conversations with Iain MacKinnon, who is listed as a member of the research team on the participant information sheet, a decision was made to include him in the interview process because of the direct relevance of what he had to contribute to the research conversation. These happenings led to a re-orientation of research questions, or decisions taken to follow or emphasise a particular line of inquiry with some participants. What follows then, is by no means a comprehensive survey of the resurgence and application of Indigenous place-based knowledge to climate and cultural-ecological resilience. Rather it is a largely Gàidheil-grounded, kaleidoscope-like narrative of the dynamics of Gaidheil Indigenous resurgence in the context of and as a means of addressing climate and cultural-ecological crisis.

The study is grounded in an Indigenist research paradigm[26], which centres Indigenous ontologies (our experience of the nature of reality), epistemology (our beingness in the world and how we come to know), and axiology (the values we carry). This paradigm acknowledges that Indigenous worldviews share broad ontological, epistemological, and axiological principles of interconnectedness[27], while respecting the specificity of these worldviews and ways of being to places and communities[28]. Rather than emphasizing identity, this framework prioritizes worldview and is therefore inclusive of those no-longer-indigenous-to-place. Therefore, as a researcher who is Indigenous to Aotearoa but no longer Indigenous to the Gàidhealtachd and whose Gàidheil whakapapa (genealogical connections) in fact ontologically connect to the specificity of the former Indigenous lifeways of Eilean Arainn, I can only try to approximate an understanding of Gàidheil ontology as best I can.

Research questions:

- How do traditional knowledge keepers engaged in cultural-ecological restoration work understand the significance of intergenerational knowledge transmission and the significance of place-based and related traditional knowledge to this work?
- How do youth understand the significance of place-based and related traditional knowledge in addressing cultural-ecological crisis and what are the challenges they face

[26] Shawn Wilson, (2008). *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*; Fernwood Publishing: Halifax, NS, Canada, 2008. Shawn Wilson and Margaret Hughes, (2019). Why research is reconciliation. In *Research and Reconciliation: Unsettling Ways of Knowing Through Indigenous Relationships*; Wilson, S., Breen, A.V., Eds.; Canadian Scholars' Press: Toronto.

[27] Matt Wildcat and Daneil Voth. (2023). Indigenous relationality. Definitions and methods. *AlterNative* 19, 475–483. Shawn Wilson and Monica Mulrennan. (2016). *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Concordia University: Montreal, QC, Canada. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rqYiCrZKm0M (accessed on 7th November 2024).

[28] Margaret Kovach, (2021). *Indigenous Methodologies. Characteristics, Controversies, and Contexts*, 2nd ed.; University of Toronto Press: Toronto, ON, Canada.

in accessing and implementing this? What are the dynamics and challenges of intergenerational knowledge transmission encountered by youth?

- How is place-based and related traditional knowledge understood and implemented within local / regional policy and practice aimed at addressing cultural-ecological crisis? How does this fit with the local realities and perspectives of traditional knowledge holders and youth?

Participants: The Who

A person's whakapapa or their location within kinship relations – past and present – is significant in terms of the perspectives they bring to this research. Therefore, some commentary about the research participants' social identities and cultural locations is important. Of the ten people interviewed, 8 of the study participants were Indigenous to Eilean Leòdhais (6) or An t-Eilean Sgitheanach (2), with another participant having grown up on Leòdhas from a young age. This is significant in terms of formative cultural values and contextual understandings bought to the research. At the time of their interview, participants were between 19 and 68 years of age; with a significant proportion either traditional knowledge bearers or in the process of evolving into this role. People's knowledge of their genealogy – in simple terms, the ancestral connections between people and place – varied greatly, with those whose ancestors had been less subject to clearance having the 'thickest' knowledge of these relationships.

Language is significant in terms of shaping people's worldviews and values. Five of those interviewed considered Gàidhlig (Gaelic) to be their first language, meaning that this was the primary language spoken at home growing up. Another interviewee had spoken some Gàidhlig at home growing up but had lapsed in its use later on. A further interviewee, whose son is in is Gàidhlig immersion school is learning Gàidhlig – as circumstances allow - as an adult. All of the eight participants who were Indigenous to either Leòdhas or An t-Eilean Sgitheanach had a least one Gaelic speaking parent growing up with varying educational experiences of Gàidhlig shaped by generational and local conditions[29].

Born in Doncaster, England, **Alastair McIntosh** moved to Leòdhas with this parents and sister at the age of four when his father got a job as a rural doctor in the Parish of North Lochs. His mother's people were Welsh and English while his father's people are Highland Gàidheil and Scottish borders. Alastair spent the remainder of his growing up years on Leòdhais, before moving away from the Island as a young man. While he has lived in Glasgow for many years, Alastair has remained strongly involved with land reclamation in the Western Isles and Human Ecology activism, (including his writings). He grounds his work in the community of Govan, Glasgow through his longstanding association with the Galgael Trust. Alastair will be seventy next year.

Kenny Rhoddy was raised in the village of Baile Ailein, Leòdhas in a crofting household. Kenny's family have been on the Island for many generations; his mother being from the village of Kinloch and his father from South Loch. During his growing up years, his family

[29] One research participant has not been described here as they wish to remain anonymous.

had a small croft, which Kenny considers to be an *"additionality"* to cash income brought into the household by both his parents. He grew up in a Gaelic speaking family with Gaelic being his first language until he went to school where English was the only medium of communication allowed. He has worked on a variety of jobs including banking, as a Harris Tweed Weaver, but has spent most of his working life in the community development activities on Leòdhas. He is currently the Chair of the Kinloch Historical Society and is actively involved in day-to-day activities.

Sandra MacLeod grew up in the village of Adabroc, on the coast just to southeast of Rubha Robhanais (the butt or the Northern tip of Leòdhas) and very close to the port of Nis (Ness). Her family have been on Leòdhas for many generations, with her great, great grandfather on her maternal side coming from another village nearby to establish the family croft at Adrabroc. The remains of the original blackhouse, which housed animals and humans is still visible on their land today. Whist growing up, only Gàidhlig was spoken in Sandra's household; like Kenny and Agnes she did not speak English until she went to school. During our interviews she recalled that for all her classmates in her local school, Gàidhlig was their first language. Like other children she went to the boarding school in Leòdhas' biggest town Steòrnabhagh (Stornoway) in her teen years. Sandra left the Island to get a university education spending many years living and working in Glasgow in Broadcasting before returning to Adabroc in recent years. She is involved in numerous community development projects aimed at the survivance of Gàidhlig lifeways including traditional knowledge, crafts, and language. Sandra was in her mid-fifties at the time of the interview and worked with Comann Eachdraidh Sgìre a' Bhac (Back Historical Society), a not for profit which preserves the culture and history of the Back area of Leòdhas.

Grace Wright is from Edinbane (An-t-Aodann Bàn), a small village on the coast a few miles from the larger town of Portree on the Isle of Skye. Her mother's family have been in this village for *"as long as they can remember".* Her father comes from a mining family in Liverpool, England. Grace grew up speaking Gaelic with her mother, who is fluent, and attended a Gaelic medium school. For practical reasons English was often spoken at home. Grace's mother grew up in a crofting and fishing family in which the produce harvested from the sea and their croft, was supplemented with income earned through road construction and other practical council related tasks which her Seanair (grandfather) undertook. During her childhood years Grace spent a lot of time on her grandparent's croft before her Grannie passed away. The values inherent in a land-based community way of life have been important in shaping who Grace is today. Grace who is 25 years of age is currently a PhD student at the University of Glasgow.

Peigi Ann Shields is 27 years old and a Gàidheal from the crofting township of Bragar on the West side of Eilean Leòdhais. She is Gàidhlig speaking, and her family have been in Lewis for thousands of years. Coming from a traditional Gàidhlig speaking family, she considers that Gàidhlig language and culture have been integral to shaping her life. Speaking Gàidhlig, working with the animals on the croft, peat cutting, looking after her home, and having a strong

sense of community lie at the heart of how she lives. Peigi Ann sees that she has a responsibility to teach her young daughter the knowledge of how to live as Gàidheil in the world that has been passed down by family members. Peigi Ann is a crofter and Assistant Manager at a local community centre, a centre for Gàidheal culture and arts and community gathering space.

Fiona Rennie is 32 years of age and grew up in Gabhsann (the village of Galson) to the North of Leòdhas. She grew up on a croft in the village where her mother's family have been for several generations following the area being cleared for large scale farming and then re-established as a crofting area for Leòdhas natives. Gaelic and English were the two primary languages spoken at home with Fiona being fluent in both. Growing up in a family concerned with land regeneration and the survivance of Gaelic culture and traditional knowledge, has given Fiona the opportunity to learn about Gaelic traditional ecological knowledge and lifeways growing up. A practising artist, Fiona is currently travelling in Australia.

Growing up in Glasgow, **Ainslie Roddick** moved to An t-Eilean Sgitheanach about four years ago. She is the Artistic Director of Atlas Arts, a community-based organization operating across An t-Eilean Sgitheanach, Rassay and Lochalsh. Atlas arts works with artists and local residents to facilitate conversations rooted in the geo-cultural context of Northwest Islands of Scotland through screenings, gatherings, shared food, and multi-media installations.

Iain MacKinnon grew up in the crofting village of Camuschros, a small crofting village on the west shore of Linne Shlèite (the Sound of Sleat) on An t-Eilean Sgitheanach (the Isle of Skye). Identifying as a Scottish Gàidheal, Iain comes from a long line of ancestors who have lived in close relationship with the land and sea. Iain is currently building a house on his father's family croft which was allocated to the Martins (his father's family) when the township was created around 1800 as part of ongoing commercialization and clearance of land. During his growing up years, his father worked as a mechanic and his mother as a bookkeeper for various local businesses, supplementing their income through produce from the family crofts. His community and university-based work contributes to understandings of Gàidheil Indigenous resurgence. In his late forties, Iain is a father and is enjoying the journey of Gàidhlig reclamation alongside his son who attends a Gàidhlig-medium school.

Agnes Rennie, (formerly Agnes Gillies) is a Gàidheal from Gabhsann (the village of Galson) located in the North of Leòdhas where she grew up on a croft. Both of her parent's families were resettled on the land 100 years ago, following its clearance in the 1800s for large scale farming and subsequent resettlement resulting in part from the 1919 Land Settlement Act. Growing up in the 50s and 60s Agnes recalls her family being almost entirely reliant on the croft and her father's additional work as a Harris Tweed weaver. Peat cutting provided all fuel. Her people have had an Indigenous relationship with and lived from the land of Eilean Leòdhais for many, many generations. Growing up in a Gàidhlig speaking family, Gàidhlig is Agnes' first language. As a young woman Agnes left Eilean Leòdhais for higher education, returning to Gabhsann, to undertake community development work and raise her family. Today Agnes is Chair of the Board of Directors of Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn, (Galson Estate Trust), a community owned trust overseeing the revitalization of Gàidheil Indigenous lifeways on

55,000 acres of community owned land. Agnes is also Vice Chair of Community Land Scotland.

Dùthchas sits at the heart of Gàidheil Indigenous worldview and lifeways.

"I'm of the maxim, if you don't know where you are from, you don't know who you are".[30]

The Gaelic concept of *dùthchas* is understood as an ontology and way of being "which expresses the interconnectedness of people, land, culture, language, and an ecological balance among all entities, human and more than human[31]." As a practice, dùthchas forms the basis of traditional ecological knowledge[32] and was also a system of law or native title associated with the traditional clan society, collective rights, and land practices[33]. Linguistically it is closely linked to the Gàidhlig word for land, *dùthaich* and *dualchas*, heritage or cultural collective memory.

The eviction of tenants during the Clearances was fundamentally in conflict with the kincentric epistemology of dùthchas, the principle that clan members had an inalienable right to live on and from the land in the clan territory. This principle was never recognized in Scottish law and was gradually abandoned by Scottish lairds as they began to think of themselves as commercial landlords rather than carers or leaders of their people. Nevertheless, the ontology of dùthchas remains embedded in Gàidheil worldview, lifeways, and language:

> My home and surroundings, the environment around me is part of who I am. My soul in intertwined with the land and that is the way I see the world. There is a Gàidhlig word "dùthchas" which is hard to explain, but it ties in with our connection to the world around us" (Peigi Ann, Bragar, Leòdhas).

> Gàidlig is still very active in my life, that's all I speak with my mum and sister…You don't own things in Gàidlig, it's with you, or alongside you or on you…We don't own the land, we may own the land on paper…but you know we're looking after it" (Fiona Rennie, Gabhsann,).

Dùthchas as an interconnected and kincentric ontology is clearly rooted in Gàidhlig as a language of the land. Michael Newton notes that words, concepts, phrases, and entire narratives in Gaelic transmit and reinforce particular ways of thinking about the relationship between people and the rest of nature; effectively reinforcing the landscape as a living entity. Among his many examples in his book "Warriors of the Word" are Tree Kennings emphasising the centrality of trees to the Gàidheil psyche and the repetition used in naming topographical

[30] Quote from Kenny Rhoddy, Baile Ailein, Leòdhas.

[31] Chiblow, S., and Meighan, S. (2023). Anishinaabek Giikendaaswin and Dùthchas nan Gàidheal: Concepts to recenter place-based knowledges, governance, and land in times of crisis. *Ethnicities.* Special Issue: Discourse of the Anthropocene. Pp. 7. DOI: 10.1177/14687968231219022

[32] Mhathúna**,** N. D. (2021). Traditional Ecological Knowledge and the relevance of Dùthchas in Gàidhealtachd Environmental Futures. *Scottish Affairs,* 30(2).

[33] MacKinnon, I. (2018). 'Decomonizing the mind': historical impacts of British imperialism on indigenous tenure systems and self-understanding in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. *International Journal of the Commons.* 12(1), 278-300. Pp. 284.

features and parts of the body. For examples: *Cean* (head, end), *aodann* (face surface) *gualann* (shoulder, mountain ridge), *Bràigh* (upper chest, uplands), *cìoch* (breast, pointed hills), *drium* (back, mountain ridge), *tòn* (buttocks, eminence), *bod* (penis, stone pillar) *feith* (vein, bog channel).

Scots Gàidhlig	**English translation and explanation.**
Gur deas am fiùran Air thus nan gallan thu	You are a handsome branch in the forefront of saplings.
Bha e 's an fhiodh	It was in the timber. - a person's personality or behaviour is explained by their hereditary.
Lub am faillean is chan fhairtlich a'chraobh ort	Bend the sapling and the tree won't defy you. - Used to advise re child rearing practices
Thachair ludh an uinnsinn fhiadhaich dhà; cinnidh e gu math ach millidh e a' chraobh a bhios an taice ris	The way of the wild ash befell him; it grows well but destroys the tree that is next to it.

Table One: Scots Gàidhlig Tree Kennings[34] (a compound expression with metaphorical meaning).

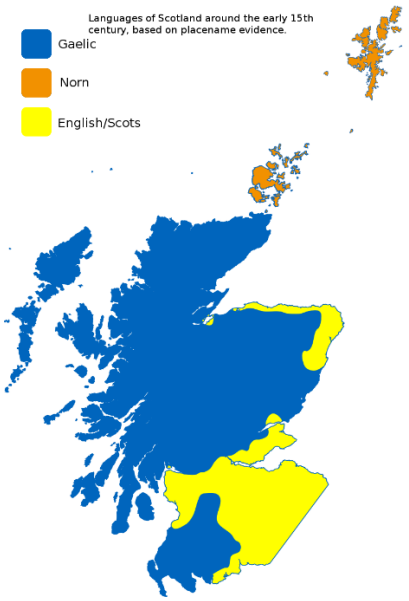

Figure 3: map depicting Scots Gaidhlig use in the early 15th Century[35].

Similarly, Māori whakatauki (proverbs or metaphorical sayings) are also deeply rooted in te taiao, (the environment) reflecting the same kincentric or whakapapa-based approach worldviews and lifeways.

Māori Whakataukī	**English translation**
Kua hinga te tōtara i Te Waonui a Tāne	A totora has fallen in the great forest of Tane - Used to convey the death of an important person.
He tangata ongaonga	A prickly person. - a difficult person is identified with the stinging Ongaonga (tree nettle).

[34] Michael Newton, (2009). Ibid, page 284.
[35] Wikimedia.

He tawa para, he whati kau tāna	The pulp of the tawa berry is easily crushed. - Cowardice is likened to the soft berry of the Tawa
Ka haere te tōtara haemata, ka takoto te pukatea wai nui.	The tōtara floats while the Puketea lies in deep water. - Young people are like te tōtara and can move around easily. Old people are more settled – they are like Puketea, a tree with heavy wood that grows in swamps.

Table Two: Māori whakatauki (proverbs)[36].

The triune relationship between dùthaich (land), dùalchas (collective memory) and dùthchas is reflected in the Gàidheil oral kincentric tradition of reciting people's ancestral connections. Similarly, storytelling forms the *bedrock* of collective memory. In this sense the genealogy of relationships between people, and people and place are held in collective memory - not just through reciting ancestral connections but also in the telling of historical events and happenings between people and between people and the other beings of the land. Kenny remarks that it is through the system of Gàidheil patronymics in which people would be known by several names (their own and perhaps their fathers and grandfathers) that you *"would find your place within the framework of the village"*. Today written records are replacing what traditional knowledge bearers and *baird* held in their memories on behalf of the collective. Sandra contrasts the depth of these relationships (or thick whakapapa) on Leòdhas with getting to know people in large urban centres in the Central Belt of Scotland:

> I'm from the village of Adabroc…my great, great grandfather came out from one of the neighbouring villages, came out with a spade and turned it over to make it arable…there was a blackhouse, it was a longer one with animals at the end. It became what's called a white house in the 1950s, a more modern build…We built our family house behind it on the same croft…I was brought up in that house. My granny was brought up herself in that house. And my mother was brought up there…So the people in the houses around me are the people I've grown up with…they've known you; their parents knew my parents; grandparents knew each other and stuff like that. They are really deep, long, [connections]. So, when you go to a city, you might meet someone's mother…but there is no depth of knowing.

Despite the Clearances, until very recently the collectivism inherent in dùthchas was evident in aspects of everyday life. Both Agnes and Kenny who were born in the 1950s speak about their memories of this. Kenny talks about the close-knittedness of his community reflected in everyday activities as he grew up:

> If you were doing peat cutting. If you were doing looking after sheep. If you were looking after cattle. Whatever you were doing you did it as a community…If we were cutting peats today, we would be cutting the neighbours' peats who had helped us the next day…. if we were out fishing and you got a large catch, you simply took what you needed and went around the other houses with the rest of it. There was no question of selling it.

Kenny remarks that there was a strong interdependency in his community with a related emphasis on knowing the skills and unique contributions of each person. In this sense the person

[36] Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, 'Te Waonui a Tāne – forest mythology - Sayings from the forest', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/te-waonui-a-tane-forest-mythology/page-5 (accessed 7 November 2024)

was not an individual, rather they existed in relation to the whole. This is the antithesis of contemporary materialist-based neo-liberal cultures in which peoples' value is often equated with economic status.

As a relative newcomer to An t-Eilean Sgitheanach, Ainslie speaks of her conversations with her Elder crofter neighbour about his intimate relationship with place:

> His family have lived there for a very long time, you know, very long time, and he has moved across island with animals, and he knows the… the name of every place and…He can tell the stories and he knows about the ways things have been done in the past that have worked well.

However, intergenerational shifts in the vitality of both dùthchas, as an ontology of interconnectedness and dùalchas as the quality of collective cultural memory and its expression, are evident in the comments of most of the participants of Gàidheil identity. Iain's comments about his experience of the diminishment of this as a person born in the mid-1970s are poignant:

> I would sense in my generation there is a rawness, a torn-ness and a rawness and an awareness of having been in immersed in a Gàidhlig milieu in a community. So, when I was a child this was a majority Gaelic speaking community. …And there was a whole set of fairly tacit relational norms, practices that have pretty much disappeared in the course of my life and that that brings a gulf, an absence…

Recalling this world of collective understanding, which he now regards as *"thin",* Iain relates a story where two joiners were building a house in a village. One day as impending heavy rain threatened, they noticed the recently gathered hay from a croft in the village still lying in the field. Knowing the crofter was gone, probably away at work, rather than focusing on their own work that afternoon, they spent several hours putting the neighbours away to keep it safe from the rain. Iain finished the story by remarking that the collective understanding of *"what the right thing to do is, has shifted decisively in An t-Eilean Sgitheanach over the last 25 to 30 years".*

Recent years however, particularly the last decade or so have seen a revitalization of *dùthchas* amongst Gàidheil identifying communities within land rights work, including explorations of its historical articulation, as well as the concept's relationship to women[37]. However, women's absence within historical narratives of dùthchas, and related land rights and activism plays out in contemporary activist articulations of the concept. Grace Wright whose PhD research is centred around making Gàidheil women's historical role in land agitation activism more visible asks the question of 'how women can inherit this inalienable right to land (dùthchas) when for the large part they are historically absent from past records of land ownership and activism?' Speaking about present day activism she points out that:

> People talk about dùthchas now based [on a historical narrative] where women are largely absent. The fact that the dùthchas that they're talking about is based on these narratives where women are absent is really alienating for women who are involved in land rights activism right

[37] Dziadowic, R. (2022). Did Gaelic Kinship custom lock out women? https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/blog/did-gaelic-kinship-custom-lock-out-women?l=en

> now…It's a lot harder to claim that dùthchas when you don't have concrete history to draw on to say 'this is where I fit'.

Notwithstanding these glaring gender gaps in dùthchas narratives, this historical form of native title is evident as a conceptual spearhead for contemporary land activism. Gàidheal socio-linguist Paul Meighan cites the recent example of the overturning of the Scottish National Party's proposed legislation of Highly Protected Marine Areas throughout the Western Isles. Highly contentious, this legislation if passed would disallow the indigenous and local community members the right to carry out their traditional fishing practices through vast areas of coastal and inshore waters; potentially devastating traditional sustainable fishing activities, cultural lifeways and whole traditional social-economies[38] In response to this threat, the protest song "The Clearances Again" was written by fisherman Donald Francis MacNeil and performed by the group Skipinnish in collaboration with over 50 islanders whose livelihoods were through traditional fishing. Powerfully interwoven throughout the song's lyrics is undoubtedly dùthchas as the collectively held ontology of the sea[39]. Whether through activism of this nature, the concept can regain its former ontological depth, given the currently diminished status of Gàidhlig as a community-centred and place-specific language, remains to be seen.

Rooted in the land – Cleaved from the Land: A brief physical, cultural and political history of the Gàidhealtachd

The contested and often misunderstood nature of Gàidheil indigeneity within the Western Isles and Highlands of Alba is in part due to the complexity and layered nature of human-cultural-environmental interactions as Britain and the Gàidhealtachd were peopled over thousands of years. Understanding the regions geo-physical-cultural roots and shifts over time is essential to unravelling and understanding Indigenous relationality to land throughout the Gàidhealtachd and An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhais more specifically.

In the estimated 4.5 billion years of the Earth's existence, homosapiens or the so-called modern version of human beings have only peopled the Earth in the last 100,000 years or so. The typography of what we know as the Gaidhealtachd with its ancient Gneiss, jagged strings of mountains, craggy peaks, rocky outcrops, peaty bogs, deep depressions, and rising moors is the result of repeated glacial episodes over the life of the Earth; stimulated by variations in the earth's tilt and orbit around the sun. In describing the formation of this topography Alastair Moffat writes: "The movement of retreating and advancing glaciers and the torrents of water from the shrinking ice sheets, scoured out Scotland's landscape and gave it much of its character"[40]. In Te Ao Māori terms the advancing and retreating glaciers resemble the seasonal battle between two wives of the Tamanuiterā (the Sun) Hineraumati (the original ancestor of

[38] Paul Meighnan. (2024). Dũthchas: A Gàidheal kincentric concept for sustainable futures. Blog post, 24th February. https://paulmeighan.com/f/d%C3%B9thchas-a-gaelic-kincentric-concept-for-sustainable-futures
[39] McBride, (2023). "The Clearances Again". Donal Francis MacNeil and Skipinnish now available. The Fishing Daily, April 14th.
[40] Moffat, A. (2023). Before Scotland. A pre-history. London: Th ames and Hudson Ltd. P. 35.

the summer) and Hinetakurua (the original ancestor of winter) as they war and tussle back and forth to rule the earthly seasonal conditions – each claiming and yielding territory in unison with one another.

According to Moffat the last ice age reached its maximum extension around 16,000 years ago when the ice dome over Europe also covered about a third of the planet with sea levels dropping over the earth by as much as 120 metres. Over the next 6,000 years temperatures on the whole increased. This process was sharply punctuated by the Loch Lomond Stadial or a cold snap which was according to Moffat "severe enough to bring pioneering settlements to an end and nearly chase all evidence of out of Scotland".[41] For the sake of a more localized topographical perspective, this new ice dome was centred over Rannoch Moor and Loch Lomond. From 8000 BC onwards glacial melt, seismic volcanic activity resulted – amongst many other land formations – in the now submerged Dogger Bank which lies off the coast of Britain and once supported an abundance and diversity of mammals, birds, and fish and by extension a substantial hunter-gather-fisher culture. As a continuous coastline linking Denmark and the Baltic with England following the last ice age, the Dogger Bank was key to the repopulation of Britain and in time, the Western Isles.

Archaeologist and specialist in Hebridean history Mary Rivett cites evidence of the first post-glacial human habitation of the Islands dating to around 7000 BC which suggests areas of woodland were being cleared for burning at this time. According to Rivett, these inhabitants would have arrived to an extensive mixture of woodlands, lochs full of fish, and abundant birdlife. Due to having been previously covered in ice and separated from the mainland, the ensuing lack of larger mammals posing a threat to humans such as bear, wolves and boar would have made the Islands a very desirable place to live[42]. Over the next few thousand years indigenous lifeways in the Hebrides transitioned from hunter-gatherer to an agrarian-hunter-gatherer culture whose focal points consisted of human settlements, including ceremonial, and burial sites. While there is some evidence of Pictish inhabitation, the Scots (Gàidheil) and the Norse appear to have been the key colonizing influences. Norse appears in many of the place names of Eilean Leòdhais agus Na Hearadh[43] and there is clear evidence of Nordic settlements. However, it is the Scots Gaelic language which had prevailed throughout the Hebrides and through which the Indigenous lifeways over the past 2000 years to the present are expressed. In describing this process, Alastair Moffat writes:

> For more than 2,500 years, Gaelic with its specialized way of thinking about the world has understood and described these very old habits of mind and marked them out as singular from our English-language culture…it should perhaps come as no surprise that the story of Scotland's First Peoples, the Old Peoples, should begin on its wild western margins[44].

[41] Moffat, A. (2023). Ibid, page 40.
[42] Mary MacLeod Rivett, (2021). The Outer Hebrides. A Historical Guide. Edinburgh: Birlinn ltd.
[43] Eilean Leòdhais agus Na Hearadh (Isle of Lewis and Harris) is one Isle. The North end and focus of this study, is Eilean Leòdhais (Isle of Harris), while the southern half of the Island is Na Hearadh (Isle of Harris). Sometimes each half of the Island is referred to separately, as is mostly the case in this report. It is also commonly referred to as one Island – Eilean Leòdhais Na Hearadh.
[44] Moffat, A. (2023). Ibid, page 57.

By 4000, BC the land bridge had been flooded leaving Britain isolated. Relevant to the later discussion on Indigeneity in relation to the communities of Leòdhas and An t-Eilean Sgitheanach a 1995 genetic study by Brian Sykes found that the people of Britain are overwhelmingly the descendants of the hunter-fisher-gathers, the prehistoric peoples who came across the Doggerbank[45]. This historical continuity is significant in later considerations of Indigeneity of Leòdhas and An t-Eilean Sgitheanach natives further on in this report.

"The people there, they lacked for nothing".

> They wanted for nothing. Because you're at the end of a sea loch, which is full of salmon and herring and haddock…You're surrounded by good fish. In the loch in front of it there's wild oysters and wild scallops. You've got land to grow your crops. You've got peats behind you. There's a river for fresh water. There are wells for fresh water. There's a stream on the hills so you had your mills to make flow. Everything you needed in this tiny spot….(Sandra McLeod, Nis, Leòdhas).

While there would have been many challenges, precolonial life on An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhas provided a strong communal way of life within which the necessities of shelter and a good-enough diet were mostly readily available. Documentation and descriptions from interviews with people point to a rich way of life that was supported by a communal land system called runrigs. Within the runrig system land was divided into long arable strips or rigs, which were shared out amongst families, with some of the land held for communal grazing. The rotation system implemented ensured that each family had an opportunity to farm the most arable land. It was not uncommon on An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhais & Na Hearadh for each runrig to run down to either a fresh water or sea loch, thereby ensuring access to either or both fresh water and transportation by boat. This subsistence farming generally produced enough for the clachan to live on with a smaller surplus to trade or barter. Many of these are still visible today:

> You can see these run rigs to this day. They turned the narrow piece of ground and then they dug a drain on each side of it and put that over to increase the depth. And that's what they grew potatoes in…And you can these runs of land…You can still see them, especially in the autumn when the growth has died back. (Kenny Rhoddy, Baile Ailein, Leodhas)[46].

However, life and people's largely secure sense of being 'heft to place' would radically shift throughout Western Isles and Highlands within a short space of time. At the basis of the decimation of these indigenous communal land systems (which were also inflicted on Māori and the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island/ Canada) were global systems of colonization and land tenure rooted in British and French imperial expansion. Ideologically, the enclosure of the commons throughout England drove very similar processes throughout Scotland and the colonies. Contrary to Indigenous collectivist philosophical understandings of belonging to the land, the view of land as private property and subsequent breakdown into individual title by the

[45] Alastair Moffat. (2023). Ibid, page 60.

[46] Potatoes are another colonial innovation. But runrig systems with complex crop rotation precede the arrival of the potato which was a means of retaining dense populations in particularly coastal areas for commercial/industrial activities.

Scottish and British Crowns was driven by the rationale that this provided the strongest motive for making the soil yield the greatest possible produce. In other words, the primary relationship to land would be shaped by the motives of profit and capital accumulation. The size and scale of the enclosures in England is aptly summed by Pākehā[47] lawyer Simon Carpenter in his 2019 report to New Zealand's Waitangi Tribunal, a commission of inquiry into claims brought by Māori concerning breaches by the Crown of the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding constitutional document. Writing about the Enclosures in England, Carpenter notes that in 1500 just over half of land in England was open or common land. By 1700 that figure had shrunk to 29% and by 1914 it was 5%!

The sovereignty of the Gàidhealtachd was undermined by a slew of legislative assaults designed to undermine the cultural, economic, and political sovereignty of land and people. These tactics, of which I name just a few were many and varied. Determined not to be thwarted in his attempts to colonize the Gàidhealtachd, some years following the attempted plantation of Leòdhas, King James VI of Scotland and Ist of England over saw the introduction of The Statutes of Iona (1609) – a particularly wide-sweeping and far-reaching piece of legislation. Aimed at reducing the power of the Clan Chiefs and undermining Gàidheil culture, the Act required clan chiefs in the Hebrides to send their heirs to lowland Scotland to be educated in English speaking protestant schools. It also outlawed *baird* and other bearers of traditional culture while providing support for the establishment of protestant highland parishes. The Crown's subjugation of the Gàidhealtachd only intensified after the Jacobite defeat at Culloden in 1746 during which time many Jacobites were hunted down and executed with others sold into indentured labour across the Atlantic. Following hot on the heels of Culloden were the Heritable Jurisdictions Act (1746), the Act of Proscription (1746) and the Dress Act (1746). The first of these Acts stripped the Clan Chiefs of their Judicial powers, effectively removing authority over their tenants while the latter two Acts made wearing of traditional dress by boys and men north of the Highland line (Dumbarton in the West to Perth in the East) illegal.

Fuadaichean nan Gàidheal (the eviction of the Gaels) or better known as the Highland Clearances occurred in two stages from around the 1730s to the 1860s. Phase One largely revolved around the desire for landlords to increase their incomes, some of whom had debts from the earlier mentioned laws and their integration into British elite society with its conspicuous consumption patterns. Phase one clearance involved the replacement of the communal run-rig system with sheep farms on which higher rents were paid and sheep farmed. Families were moved to poorer land with several families relocated to crofts that had previously supported one family. Many families were moved several times with displaced tenants expected to be employed in industries such as kelp-harvesting, fishing, or quarrying to support themselves[48]. Phase two essentially consists of the forced emigration of tenants who could no longer support themselves.

[47] New Zealander of European descent.

[48] However, phase one also involved whole communities leaving, led by the tacksman (village level chief), not destitute but under their own steam, possibly seeing how the wind was blowing under landlordism.

A people who forget their history become a substitute people". The Clearances have been cleansed to divert any blame for the crime from the British government, the Anglicized clan chiefs and landlords and the ministers of the Church of Scotland. Many of the names of cleared villages have been erased from the map[49].

Author's Reflection: Colonial reality tour. Do not romanticise – these ARE sites of trauma!
If one does not know better, it is easy to romanticise the remains of the small tenant cottages which lie scattered across the wild and beautiful landscapes of Leòdhas. I was lulled into this disposition myself as we were shown about Baile Ailein by Kara Smith on my first day on the Island. It was a mid-October afternoon; the sun still had a warmth, and I felt my body soften into the sentience of this beautiful place with its traces of bygone days. Vegetation reclaiming crumbling black houses, echoes of past mysteries. Meanwhile to the other side of me cars hurtled by on the road – tyres whooshing on tarmac. It was in that liminal space that I found myself when Kara's voice interjected my wafting thoughts: 'The half fallen down houses that you are looking at…people were cleared from these places. They are actually sites of trauma!' Her voice brought me up sharply. I nodded and hm hmd feeling like a tourist.

Interesting how easy it can be – this habit of going unconscious around these things. The land holds memory, stories…I'm writing this report from Tauranga Moana…a site of warfare, confiscation, and clearance. The land still bleeds…Pākehā farmers' cattle graze where tangata whenua fell and still lie buried in mass graves…right where they died more or less, defending their whenua. Did we have a scorched earth policy? Like you? Oh yes! Where legal means didn't work, the militia moved in to hassle them on - kainga and crops razzed to the ground…make it bad enough – people move on! Ae people were cleared from these places!

The improvements[50] on both An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhais were brutal and unrelenting. Assimilated into the power structures of imperialist capitalist expansion, one particularly notorious example is known in Gàidhlig as 'Soithich nan Daoine' – the ship of the people. In 1739 the Macdonald and Macleod chiefs of Skye were complicit in a scheme to kidnap some 100 of their own people from the islands and to sell them into indentured labour in America. The scheme failed only because some of those kidnapped were able to escape when the boat stopped in Ireland before its Atlantic crossing, alerting the authorities there. Glaswegian born historian and former member of the Scottish Parliament, Rob Gibson, described the orchestration of these improvements by clan chiefs and a tacksman as a "foretaste of the collapse of clan loyalty, and the bonds between chiefs and clans' people"[51]. This would be the ultimate undoing of the Gàidheal kincentric structures and societal norms which had ultimately held the ontology of dùthchas together.

The decision of the Fifth Earl of Seaforth to support the Jacobite uprising of 1715 ultimately opened the way for the clearances on Leòdhas. The Jacobite army lost the insurrection and land

Significantly, some of these communities moved to North America and were participants in the enslavement economy there.
[49] Donald, J. Macleod. (2015). The Highland Clearances on the Isles of Leòdhas and Harris.
[50] I use this word tongue in cheek.
[51] Rob Gibson (2023). Ibid. page 74.

confiscations of those who had dared to support the Jacobite cause followed. Seaforth's lands were taken by the Crown as part of these sweeping reprisals, with parts later leased to tenants "who were expected to pay rent as well as obedience to the new Hanoverian government"[52]. These developments would rupture the ontological underpinnings of indigenous lifeways on Leòdhas as people were torn from the land and life as they had known it. The motive of profit before people dictated the movements.

The first of the Leòdhas clearances began in the 1780s with people forced to leave the Barvas, Lochs, Uig, Stornoway and Pairc. Between 1780 and 1813 over 500 people were moved out to make way for sheep farming. Over the decades of clearance thousands were moved with hundreds at a time put on boats. For example, the clearance of Leòdhas townships culminated in the removal of 400 people onto an emigrant ship that left the adjoining Isle of Bernera on the 19th May 1851[53]. In researching the records of the 206 years of clearances of Gabhsann that followed Frank Rennie makes the stark observation that people appear to have been moved like "pawns on a Leòdhas chess board". He writes:

> Unfortunately, the record is just a list of names and approximate dates, which although carefully collated is akin to following the spoor of an animal without any knowledge of the life history or the ecological relationships of the species. Reading through the lists, matching the family names to now vanished croft boundaries around the village, produces a strong sense of helplessness; the realization that those people had no real-life choices[54]".

In 1793 the whole Parish of Uig which lies to the west of Leòdhas and includes a large coastal area of fertile machair fringe, freshwater lochs and an abundance of fish and wildlife was advertised for letting as a sheep farm by Frances Humberstone MacKenzie, Chief of the MacKenzies and later Lord Seaforth. These so-called land improvements led to the clearing of many Uig townships and the loss of fertile lands and grazing. Donald J. McLeod a native of the village of Enaclete, Uig, who was born early in the 20th Century has made extensive notes about these clearances based on the stories he heard as a boy. He writes about the clearance of Gisla, an Uig township whose river boasted an abundance of salmon and sea trout. According to McLeod local knowledge has it that as lady Matheson the wife of the Island's owner Sir John Matheson[55], passed by Gisla on her way to Uig Lodge one day she saw the river jumping [with Salmon] at the river estuary and that soon afterwards the people were evicted.

Sandra MacLeod whose village of Nis lies just to the east of Rubha Robhanais, (the Butt of Lewis) has 3rd and 4th generation Uig refugees corroborates this account with her Auntie's story of being cleared from Uig: *"But then my auntie's family were cleared from there because…they were catching salmon and the landlords were like, "they're mine!"* Sandra's forebearers would be pushed far inland onto much less habitable moorlands. With that would come the loss of territory for crops and grazing; the loss of vital access to the water and sea highway and

[52] Frank Rennie. (2020). Ibid, pp.113.
[53] Rob Gibson (2023). Ibid, pp. 81.
[54] Frank Rennie (2020). Ibid, pp. 115.
[55] Born in Sutherland, Sir John Matheson was an opium magnate who purchased Leòdhas to expand his asset base in 1844 for half a million pounds.

significantly, Sandra stresses "*the place where you were brought up";* or in Māori terms the loss of tūrangawaewae, one's place to stand:

Quoting John MacDonald of the Enaclate Post Office Donald J MacLeod tells the haunting story of the Gisla clearance[56] through a young girl's eyes:

> My grandmother never forgot the Gisla eviction. As a young girl she was with her mother north of Gisla at the mill grinding corn. As they walked back home with sacks of oatmeal on their backs they smelt burning and could not understand where the smell was coming from. When they reached the Hillock above Gisla to their consternation below them were the village houses on fire. They were most upset as they did not know what had happened. The factors and bailiffs had set the village on fire and evicted the people. My grandmother never forgot that awful scene[57].

The clearances disrupted people's livelihoods, cultural connectedness, and sense of inner coherence. People were shuffled from one site to another, often several times. Kenny of Baile Ailein talks about the clearances of thirty-four villages in Southern Pairc to create a deer forest for the gentry who would come up each year to shoot on the estate. Still visible are not just the ruins of villages but the agricultural system, the feannagan (raised beds) around them. He estimates that this area of Leòdhas in the 1850s went from having just over 2,000 people to having none. Kenny speaks about these impacts:

> These people were moved out at very short notice, and some went to where family were in places like Baile Ailein. That created a massive problem because these small holdings could help support one family. Now, in the space of a couple of months some of these holdings had five families on them and that led to mass emigration because there was nothing here for them.

Unable to scratch a subsistence living from overcrowded crofts, the people were forced to harvest kelp for the laird to make their way. The kelp market briefly became lucrative during the Napoleonic War as a naval blockade meant that chemical inputs for industrial processes could not be imported. Kelp could be processed as an alternative to these chemicals, and so the shores of the Hebrides became, for a time, what the Lord MacDonald of the period called a 'little Peru' of wealth for the landed classes. However, the inevitable collapse of the kelp market at the end of the Napoleonic War in 1815 meant that many people were now trapped on an area of land too small to be yield a subsistence living even if farmed in the communal way.

Iain Mackinnon's references to the process of commercialization of his village Camuschros is more broadly illuminative of events throughout An t-Eilean Sgitheanach in which people (like on Leòdhas) were shuffled to smaller and often less fertile parcels of land, before many were eventually pushed right out and off – whether that be to the industrial squalor of the cities or the fetid conditions of ships bound for elsewhere. In the case of Camuschros, it was a product of the then Lord MacDonald's decision to employ a lowland surveyor, John Blackadder, to entirely redesign his estates on Skye and North Uist along commercial lines. This involved the creation

[56] During the clearances it was common occurrence to use fire and faggot to evict the people. Donald Stewart – In Borve, Harris, in 1839 he caused the fires on the hearths to be drowned with domestic milk while the thatch was ripped off the houses with hooks and even the roof timbers and the thatch was collected and burnt, until there was nothing left but the blackened shells of the once hospitable homes". Angus MacLeod – "Leòdhas Maciver of Gress" in the Angus MacLeod archive. (Donald j. McLeod. 2015p. 3).

[57] Donald J. McLeod. 2015, p.3

of large single-occupier sheep farms in areas which had previously held larger populations. As a result, Iain recalls that whereas his own village Camuschros had about twelve tenants before 1800, by the 1820s however, there were 48 tenants on an even smaller piece of ground (relative to its previous size) inside the village. The unsustainability of this situation land-wise meant that entire families quickly became surplus labour; now pawned off by the Laird to which ever industry would keep the Lordship afloat in the tumultuous seas of rapid economic and political change.

Agitation for land resettlement became acute on An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhais during the economic slump of the 1880s. Led by Baile Ailein school master Donald MacRae, the Pairc Deer Raid of 1887 on the 32,000-acre deer forest from which landless and starving people (from the same thirty four cleared villages mentioned earlier by local Kenny Rhoddy), were excluded was ultimately a victory for the locals. For several days the slaughter of deer went on with a camp established at the edge of Loch Seaforth. Deer were boiled and roasted to "satisfy the pangs of hunger of those who had been without proper sustenance for so long"[58]. The land agitations of the 70s and 80s ultimately resulted in a piecemeal solution by the Government with the establishment of the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act of 1886 which granted security of tenure to crofters. However, the act was weak – it was not effective in terms of achieving a redistribution of land – and did little to quell the land agitations. Ironically in many ways it weakened dùthchas, the Gàidheil ontological understanding of belonging to the land:

> And even when the land tenure, the Crofting Act came in, it only secured a tenancy for one person, whether it was the father or the oldest son. Now if you had, back in these days, it was common to a family of 8 to 10 in a family, and only one of them had tenure, so there were people leaving all the time (Kenny, Baile Ailein, Leòdhas).

John McLeod's description of a cleared family's eventual fate in Ontario, Canada paints a compelling picture of misery:

> As my great, great grandfather, Donald MacLeod (Domhnall Calum Og) toiled in an open boat in the heaving swell of the Flannan Isles hauling in his *lion mor* (great lines), little did he envisage at the time that in old age, he his wife and seven children, would be squatters, mentally and physically exhausted, arduously chopping trees and clearing brushwood in the backwoods of Ontario, after being evicted from their croft in Valtos, Uig in 1851 by Sir James Matheson[59]

The quiet trauma of ongoing colonization

> The clearances on Leòdhas went on for decades…You've always got it at the back of your mind that it could happen again. And to many, it did happen again and again and again…you're not in charge anymore. Your locus of control is now external to you, and it belongs to someone who's not connected to your culture, doesn't know your language, doesn't care about any of it". (Sandra Nic McLeoid, Nis, Leòdhas).

Without exception, Indigenous psychological perspectives on the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples speak to both the experience of historical trauma as a result of alienation from traditional lands, culture, and spiritual practices as well as the ongoing dynamics of Anglo-

[58] Angus McLeod, n.d. An account of the Pairc Land raids by Angus McLeod of Calbost and Marybank. Hebridean Connections. https://hebrideanconnections.com/record/historical-events/15014/
[59] John, A. McLeod in Donald, A. McLeod. (2015). Ibid, p. 6

saxon exceptionalism which exacerbate these impacts, including the reality of intergenerational trauma. The American Psychiatric Association defines intergenerational trauma as the "intergenerational and [often but not always] unconscious grief from the historical trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples [that] is passed on from generation to generation". The narratives throughout this report - although referring to different time frames in the history of An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhais – are revelatory in terms of the cumulative impacts of trauma, as well as its intergenerational presence, for example in the sense of being pushed to the *"edge of the Atlantic"*[60] in both a figurative and literal sense. In talking with some of the natives of An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhais, the ongoing hostilities of colonialism, including its contemporary forms such as global neo-liberalism and energy colonialism is very evident. Even in the midst of acts of resistance and cultural survivance, which are many on both Islands, Settler colonialism and concomitant epistemologies of separatism and extractivisim bolstered by economic power continue to pose significant threats to Indigenous lifeways.

Whether conscious or unconscious, for the natives of An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhas, the impacts of Indigenous-cultural erasure are often further heightened by fragile local economies, worsening social and economic inequities, post Covid-19 impacts, and lack of investment by Scottish and U.K. governments. Younger people are particularly vulnerable to homelessness and under or unemployment. Recent demographics paint a bleak picture: The Western Isles are expected to lose between 21% and 24% of their total population, and between 27% and 33% of their working age population between 2018 and 2043[61]. Under-investment by government is cited by research participants as a key cause. In 2015 an average of 10% of homes in Scotland's Isles were classed as holiday homes, with rates thought to be much higher in An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhas. An excerpt from an open letter penned to the Scottish Government a few years later in 2021 by residents of An t-Eilean Sgitheanach aptly sums up the cumulative and entangled impacts of these so called 'modern clearances':

> We need a clampdown on second (third and fourth!) property ownerships for short-term lets. Multiple short-term let ownership is a key driver in killing our local communities, contributing to Gaelic's decline and degrading island opportunities and culture. It is mercenary behaviour that stands in complete opposition to local society and young people[62].

Suicide rates are higher in the western Isles than for most parts of Scotland with deaths of those working in traditionally male occupations of farming, fishing and forestry showing higher rates than the rest. Substance dependency rates, a reliable indicator of emotional and psychospiritual distress are also substantially elevated relative to population averages throughout the rest of

[60] This is part of a longer quote by Peigi Ann Sheilds on page 49.
[61] Heaton, J. (2022). Mental health and wellbeing in the Scottish Islands: A Review of the Literature. Scottish Rural Health Partnership and the University of the Highlands and Islands.
[62] Scottish Housing News. (2021). Petition launched to tackle housing and jobs crisis on An t-Eilean Sgitheanach. 8th April, 2021. https://www.scottishhousingnews.com/articles/petition-launched-to-tackle-jobs-and-housing-crisis-in-An t-Eilean Sgitheanach

Alba/ Scotland[63]. It is difficult to disentangle contemporary inequities and traumas from historical ones. But as Fiona Rennie from Gabhsann discusses, intergenerational trauma has an insidious tendency to wear away overtime in ways that people are not even aware of:

> Stumbling across the old villages in Galson, for example. Like when you're walking through the fields and you come across the shell of an old black house that was [in] the village before it was cleared…when I come across it on my walk, I'm overwhelmed with this feeling of grief. There's no other word for it….Just imagine having to leave this place…I think it's a hard feeling to convey…I'm not even able to articulate exactly how it is …I think people with that melancholic sort of sadness maybe even have some of that inherited trauma without even realizing it….people who feel floaty and don't have a sense of place….maybe its two or three generations ago that they were removed from their land…

Author's Reflection: Ia mau ki te tokanga nui-a-noho – there is no place like home.

During this part of the interview with Fiona, I became emotional about my own experience of the intergenerational mamae (pain) that is a reality here in Aotearoa. Māori identity, or loss of it, including connection to ancestral lands, is diversely experienced for those who whakapapa to Aotearoa's First Peoples. This part of my own story which I alluded to in the section on my whakapapa and this research, concerns the loss of ahi kaa by my family due to intergenerational absence, when my great grandfather left Tauranga Moana following the land wars and confiscations. When intergenerational absence occurs your relationship to your ancestral land is said to become matao (cold). In a sense you are cut off at the knees – dislocated from your tūrangawaewae (ancestral lands and place to stand). The insidious grief and cultural dislocation that I experienced growing up Pākehā in Auckland went on for years, until I could dig deep enough into my identity to claw my way back. But as I have learned, even through years of healing this split, amidst the complexities of having colonized and colonizing whakapapa (my Scottish, Welsh and Germanic Pākehā settler ancestors), there are still painful times when my hard fought for tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga with land and people feels painfully tenuous. Sometimes when I walk the lands, I hold the paradox of the warmth and ease of familiarity because my ancestors knew this place intimately, but also the melancholy that Fiona talks about that can come with the sense of being intergenerationally cast adrift.

It is also well documented that the Western Isles have extraordinarily high rates of cardiovascular illness; a disease which is associated not only with dietary causes but with increased levels of cortisol in the blood which is a stress response. Prolonged stress has cumulative impacts, as does absolute and relative deprivation within and between demographic populations. This is an area which is well researched and documented in the seminal work of British social epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Michael Marmot[64] and highly relevant to Alistair McIntosh's conversation with a nurse while making his 2016 'returning place' pilgrimage across Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh (Lewis and Harris). Alastair writes eloquently

[63] Heaton, J. (2022). Mental health and wellbeing in the Scottish Islands: A Review of the Literature. Scottish Rural Health Partnership and the University of the Highlands and Islands.

[64] Wilkinson, Richard & Marmot, Michael. (2003). Social determinants of health: the solid facts, 2nd ed. World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe.

about this in his book about this revelatory trek in his book "Poacher's Pilgrimage"[65]. This chance meeting and spontaneous dialog between the two of them and the nurse's words that it's like "the life never stopped bleeding out of the place' powerfully conveys the impacts of cumulative traumas from clearance, war, disaster, and mass emigrations that followed as soldiers returned to empty promises of land. The nurse continues:

> People have such deep memories here. That's what I see when I go from house to house. If you're a fully feeling human being, you can't just grin and bear such burdens and carry on unfazed. Not when the emotional currents run so deep, so very deep and between the generations[66].

Iain Mackinnon notes that much of the time trauma happens quietly, often because of what's been accepted by your people – including others in authority and your own family. He names this as "Quiet Trauma":

> So, for me even just the vague memories I have of conversations in Gaelic between my father and my grandfather to which I didn't have access, that's trauma. The knowledge of the seashore which I have got in some partial way as an adult which wasn't deemed worthy for me, that's trauma. Being in a place and knowing there is an ancestral way of being in this place which has not been given to you, that's trauma. And its trauma even when you don't know it's trauma.

Iain then continues on to talk about the irony of being "White" in the context of Black psychiatrist Franz Fanon's scholarly works throughout the 1950s and 60s, especially 'Black Skins White Masks'. In this book Fanon discusses how 'the black man may vie with his own skin' in the context of deeply oppressive colonial norms that equate whiteness (and Whiteness) with what it is to human. And yet ironically "blackness", because Black people actually can't fully assimilate because of the colour of their skin, eventually becomes a potential powerful point of agency from which to resist Whiteness. However, the need Iain points out for Gaels is that:

> I think one of the things we need to talk about is the quiet trauma of becoming white. The position for Gaels is we're white, so it's possible for us to be completely assimilated, to be completely absorbed and to lose our Gael selves forever. And that's the process that's part of becoming the lost generation (Iain Mackinnon, Camuschros, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach).

Perhaps one of the most insidious impacts of the deracination of the Gàidhealtachd has been not just the bleeding out of Gàidheil from their ancestral homelands, but the creep of White epistemological supremacy into (the Scottish Lowlands and central belt) what was once an almost entirely Gàidhlig speaking Alba. Much has been written on the topic of the lowlander's disregard and prejudice towards Gàidheil culture and lifeways[67]. However less stated is perhaps the opaque ignorance of central belt Scots towards the Gàidhealtachd together with a second trait that is typical of the disconnected "long ago colonized"; that is, a lack of an obvious sense

[65] McIntosh, A. (2016). Poacher's pilgrimage. An island journey. Edinburgh: Birlinn ltd.
[66] McIntosh, A. (2016). Ibid, pp. 44.
[67] MacGregor, M. and Broun, D. and Boardman, S. and Cohn, S.K. and MacLeod, A. and Lumsden, A. and Gifford, D. and Cameron, E.A. (2007) Mìorun Mòr nan Gall, 'The great ill-will of the Lowlander'? Lowland perceptions of the Highlands, Medieval and Modern. University of Glasgow, Glasgow. ISBN 085261820X

of cultural identity themselves. These sentiments are aptly captured by one of the study participants who originally being from Glaschu is now resident on the Isle of Skye:

> The central belt is a term that people would describe a lot…as maybe a different psyche…from my experience people in Scotland don't like to identify as being British…its an insult…the history between the two nations…predates the independence movement and is embedded in the psyche…a lot of people who grow up in the central belt don't have the opportunity to travel to the islands….so there is a bit of ignorance like about place names, culture, geography….and about what affects peoples in these places differently. Also, the contribution that the Highlands and Islands make to the country…And there is a bit of tension, I think, between the central belt of Scotland and the Highlands because of that too (Ainslie Roddick, newcomer, Portree, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach).

The internalization of this White epistemological supremacy by both Gàidheil and the culturally dominant central belt descendants of previously Gàidhlig-speaking peoples plays out in contemporary dynamics and politics surrounding the re-indigenization of the Gàidhealtachd.

Languages do not die, they are persecuted[68].

> Those classrooms were sites of terrorism…My mother and my mother's brother were both brought up without Gaelic in the 1950s. This was in a community that was Gaelic speaking. My grandmother had gone to school with only Gàidhlig and she had been belted by the headmaster for speaking Gaelic. And so, she didn't want to pass on what she had gone through to her children. I think that set up tensions in my mother and particularly in my uncle, you know, that had been with them all their lives (Iain MacKinnon, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach)[69].

Māori and Ngāi Te Rangi Koroua Hauata Palmer remarked to me once that without their language Māori are "White Māori", meaning that without the language the thinking of our people will become like Pākehā (White settler majority). In other words, the unique Indigenous identity and worldview of what it is to be Māori will be essentially lost. Relatedly, Gàidheal scholar poet Iain Crichton Smith potently alludes to the possibility of spiritual death through the erasure of his mother tongue in his poem "An Faigh a Ghàidhlig Bas" where he ponders the fate of the Gàidhlig language and culture. He rephrases and re-interprets his own question: "Shall Gaelic die? Shall Gaelic die! What that means is: shall we die?"[70]

The near erasure of Gàidhlig is evident in Gàidhlig language maps which show a wave like retraction of this indigenous language from East to West across the entire Gàidhealtachd. A solid block of red conveys the prevalence of this native tongue in 1881, as if like a blanket of dense foliage covering a land mass. As the decades pass however, it gives way to a blotchy patchwork of red, orange, and yellow shapes; and then finally a sparse scattering of fragment

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[68] Paul Meighnan. (2023). Languages do not die, they are persecuted. *Bella Caledonia*, 19th July. https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2023/07/19/languages-do-not-die-they-are-persecuted-a-scottish-gaels-perspective-on-language-loss/

[69] Iain has also recorded other instances of this treatment of Gàidhlig speaking children in schools in the parish and elsewhere in the Gàidhealtachd. In providing feedback for this report, he further reflected on what it must feel like for a small child to be confronted daily with an adult whom they know will inflict physical punishment and pain on children for speaking the only language that they know. It is not only the child punished that is made subject to terror, but every child in the room.

[70] Iain Crichton Smith.

like shapes, conveying the waning of what is a now relatively "thin" Gàidheal ontology. The first time Gàidhlig speakers were counted was in the 1881 census which showed that 6.2% of the Scottish population (231,594 of a total population of 3,735,573 at that time) identified as 'habitual speakers of Gàidhlig. By 2011 that figure was just 1.1 percent, with 49% of those with some Gaelic language skills living in the Western Isles, the Highlands or Glasgow[71].

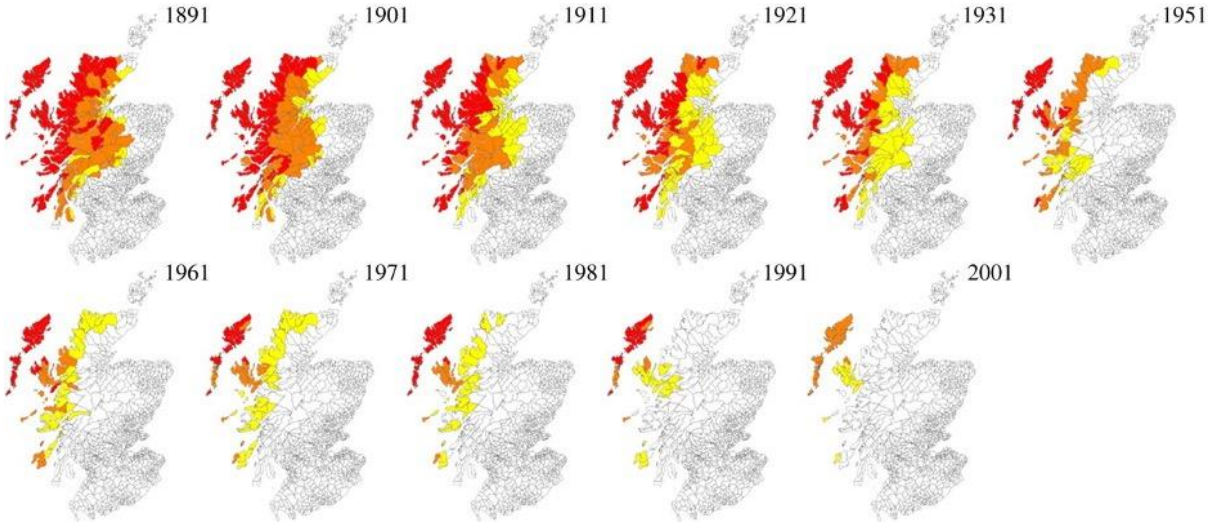

Figure 4: Map depicting the erasure of Gàidhlig language and culture from 1891-2001[72].

Figure 2. Maps depicting the erasure of Gàidhlig language and culture over a 110-year period from 1891 – 2001[73].

All of those interviewed talked in multi-generational terms of the colonialization of and efforts to reclaim Gàidhlig; with the timing of these generational impacts contingent on geographic location. In response to my question of whether he considered himself to be part of the lost generation – a term used in Te Ao Māori to refer to Māori born in the 1950s, 60s and 70s who through imperialism were denied the access to their native tongue – Iain MacKinnon answered:

> I do consider myself to be part of a lost generation and in Scotland it depends on where you were. If you were in say Perthshire, the lost generation was probably in the 1950s – 1960s. In Skye it was 1970s – 1980s…I think there's been more recent negative attitudes towards Gaelic in the Western Isles and outer Isles because the shift was later there.

He adds that the impacts of this wave of modern-day colonization can be easily quantified:

[71] Newsroom. (2017). How the spread of Gaelic language speakers has changed since 1891. The Scotsman. https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/map-how-the-spread-of-scottish-gaelic-speakers-has-changed-since-1891-1435525

[72] Figure 4. Percentages of Gaelic speakers (mono- and bilingual) in Scotland in successive census years, 1891–2001. Data for civil parishes: 1891–1971 from **Withers (1984**, pp. 227–234); 1981 from **Withers (1988**, p. 40); 1991–2001 from **General Register Office for Scotland (2005**, table 3). Red, 75–100% Gaelic speaking; orange, 50–74.9% Gaelic speaking; yellow, 25–49.9% Gaelic speaking; white, less than 25% Gaelic speaking. Source: https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2010.0051

> There were about 120 of us in my first year of high school and I would say at least half to two thirds had at least one Gaelic speaking parent. And in that year, there was [just] three children in the native speaker Gaelic class out of 120 (Iain MacKinnon, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach).

Those participants from Leòdhas born in the 50s, 60s and 70s who grew up with Gàidhlig as their first language at home and were immersed in this cultural milieu talk about the shock of starting school and at being told by often local Gàidhlig speaking teachers that *"from here-on in they would need to speak English only"*[74]. Reflecting on her own experience of this, Sandra recalls: *"And that was the last sentence she spoke to us in Gàidhlig and that's probably the last I heard [in school] for years…so straight away you've established that the language of learning is English".* Kenny alludes to the impacts of the social pressures to conform: Like Sandra and Agnes because Kenny was solidly grounded in a crofting, *Gàidhlig* community, his ontological and cultural foundations remained Gàidheil. He briefly describes this process:

> I went to school as did my sons a generation later with no English. I speak Gàidhlig, we still speak Gàidhlig in the home…I grew up speaking Gàidhlig, my parents were Gàidhlig speakers…As soon as you went to school you had to learn English and learn it fast! But because of the home life, I would say the Gàidhlig culture was stronger for me. I had relatives with no Gàidhlig. But Gàidhlig were where my values were rooted, where my thoughts were initially rooted.

Those interviewed now in their forties, fifties and sixties all speak of the changes they personally witnessed and experienced within the speaking of their Indigenous language; these changes were inexplicably interwoven with the outside influences of modernity, colonialism, and capitalism. The small size of contemporary crofts (commonly just 2.5 acres[75]) and the reality of other money coming into the household though ancillary work meant that people had less time to work their crofts, often individualizing formerly communal crofting-related activities. Modern transport and mass media and communications technology also increasingly opened the isles to the outside world. Agnes recounts the influence of newcomers on Gàidhlig language and culture:

> More people started coming into the community in our own village here who were non-Gaelic speaking…and you went from a situation where Gaelic was just the language…what you lived and breathed…and being the well-mannered people that we were you didn't speak Gaelic to another Gaelic speaker if there was someone in the company who couldn't understand what you were saying…so you begin to understand what a minority language and a minority culture actually mean (Agnes Rennie, Gabhsann, Leòdhas).

As the Gàidhlig language maps convey Agnes describes this process as happening at different rates in the communities, with the northern more isolated tip of Leòdhas having a slower rate of attrition. In the next generation Agnes recalls an almost unfathomable situation where parents would speak Gàidhlig to their children, and the children would answer them in English, while understanding every word their parents had said. She concludes:

[74] Interview notes, Sandra MacLeod.
[75] This figure was cited to me by several participants I interviewed. Fieldnotes (2024).

> That you know is just a killer to me…Some parents didn't go down that road. But a lot did. So, you can see the erosion starting and you can see the change (Agnes Rennie, Gabhsann, Leòdhas).

Most of the interviewees talked about the wider cultural maximum *'that Gàidhlig would not get them off the Island!'* {the future was clearly off the Island} that was regularly imparted by family or wider community members and institutions. Fiona recounts that the stigma attached to Gàidhlig has likely impacted people in ways they are not even aware of:

> Vast amounts of people just stopped speaking Gàidhlig and teaching Gàidhlig to their children because it was thought of as a peasant language…So there's that sort of visceral reaction to Gàidhlig (Fiona Rennie, Gabhsann, Leòdhas).

In the 1980s and 1990s however, Gàidhlig once again began being taught in schools. Accordingly, the narratives of some of the younger interviewees such as Fiona and Peigi Ann who grew up in Gàidhlig speaking crofting families, and attended Gàidhlig medium schools, convey an intactness of the intergenerational transmission of Gàidheil lifeways and knowledge of Gàidhlig that is deeply rooted in the land:

> I'm a Gàidhlig speaking Gàidheal and my family have been on Leòdhas for thousands of years. I come from a traditional Gàidheal speaking family, so I guess that has shaped my life…My knowledge of how to live as a Gàidheal in the world has been passed down by my family members and now I am teaching my daughter to do the same things. My home and surrounding environment is part of who I am. My soul is intertwined with the land and that's the way I see the world. All of the cultural traditions and way of life of Gàidheil on Leòdhas are important to me and I have no intention of moving away from them (Peigi Ann, Bragar, Leòdhas).

Despite this however, for those leaving the "Island" to pursue their education, Gàidhlig for the most part takes a very back seat in academic realm of English-speaking higher education institutions. Grace who attended a Gàidhlig-medium school and whose mother is fluent in Gàidhlig spoke little of her native tongue for several years in the earlier part of her tertiary education. 'She recalls her shock and disconcertion when her PhD supervisors (knowing she had been taught in a Gàidhlig medium school) asked if they could conduct her PhD advisory meetings exclusively in Gàidhlig.' For Grace it was a steep and fast-re-learning curve.

According to participants in this study, the re-introduction of Gàidhlig throughout the Gàidhealtachd and beyond has had various teething problems, which include: inequities in funding streams which privilege large urban centres, marginalizing the Gàidhealtachd and in particular the Western Isles; loss of poetry and metaphor and reversion to a more transactional usage of the language; disconnection of Gàidhlig from its local place-based knowledge, and the influx of largely English-speaking monolinguals who have little interest in Gàidhlig language or culture. Almost without exception each interviewee talked about the problematics of teaching Gàidhlig in urban centres such as Edinburgh or Glasgow, particularly when student's parents were non-Gàidhlig speaking:

> You know, there might be a city with a lot of people who want their children to get a Gaelic education. But they themselves may not have the Gaelic heritage and the Gaelic understanding as parents. They have moved off island….But they want – they know the value of it, and they

> want their children to know it, but they don't always – there's, like, granny or grandpa knows it, then a family who are moved away, and the next – the grandchildren are beginning to learn it. But there is a disparity there (Kenny Rhoddy, Baile Ailein, Leòdhas).

> I think a really major part of my concerns around [teaching] Gàidhlig is that it isn't rooted in the place you come from. It's not wrong Gàidhlig…it's just completely divorced from [Gàidhlig] contexts and culture. Traditionally the language was hand in hand with that intergenerational connection (Grace Wright, An-t-Aodam Bàn, An-t-Eilean Sgithenanch).

While not theoretically framed as such, these critiques, allude to a set of modernist-informed linguistic practices that Canadian-based Gàidheal scholar Paul Meighnan names as "Coloniallingualism". This refers to the overt or covert ways in which the educational practices uphold colonial mindsets which for example might commodify and disembody languages from place. Once a language becomes disconnected from local realities and worldviews – particularly kincentric ones – it then becomes a short step towards the implicit or explicit practice of "White (epistemological) supremacism" that positions humans as apart from and superior to nature[76].

As Meighnan points out, Indigenous languages embody a kincentric worldview in that they represent lifeways, ancestral guides, and ecological encyclopaedia's with linguistically unique and highly specialized place-based knowledges, and more. For my own people, Māori, te reo Māori (the Māori language) is considered to be the life-force of the people, and as such is a living entity. As I have written previously[77]:

> Rather than positioning objects or entities that are somehow separate from the whakapapa of the world, Māori philosophy views language as bringing the world ''into presence.'' It is a sort of gathering of entities rather than merely an instrument for singling out any one thing.

Another participant expresses her anecdotal observations of how she thinks Gàidhlig is doing within her community:

> In the 20th century, Gàidhlig was the main language…That was everyone's first language… if you come into my generation, 21st century, still is the case but I don't think it's as common… But I feel like I don't really hear it as much apart from if I'm just with my gran and my aunties. And people at work. People at work speak Gàidhlig all the time…I think it's [Gàidhlig] like the heart and soul because it keeps everything alive![78]

People continually emphasise the importance of Gàidhlig being reignited as a community language – that is given grounding in the community again through a number of strategies. These include encouraging existing fluent speakers to speak it again in daily life, particularly the older generations. People felt there is great danger of the language and funding streams being taken over by hobbyists, who are not interested in the survivance of Gàidheil lifeways or sustainability. This issue of 'groundedness' in relation to dùthaich (land/place), and dùalchas

[76] See Meighan, P. (2023). Colonialingualism: colonial legacies, imperial mindsets, and inequitable practices in English language education. *Diaspora, Indigenous and minority education.* Vol 17, No.2, 146-155. Williams, L. (2019). Re-shaping colonial subjectivities through the language of the land. *Ecopsychology,* Vol 11, no. 3 1-8.
[77] Lewis Williams. (2019). Ibid. In particular see Carl Mika within this work.
[78] Fieldnotes (2024).

(collective cultural memory) and the inter-connections between languages and the nuances of generational influences inevitably surfaces in a conversation between Iain and myself. In answer to my question as to how these influences might shape identity and cultural knowledge for younger people of Gàidheil descent, Iain answers:

> Many of them have Gàidhlig because Gàidhlig medium education became available to them. But I wonder what the language means to them…How is it grounded in them, and how are they grounded in it?

Renegotiations of Indigeneity in post-colonial Gàidhealtachd

> "I'm a Gàidlig speaking Gael and my family have been in Leòdhas for thousands of years…I am Indigenous, and I see myself that way 100%.....My ancestry shows that my people came from Northern Italy, walked across Doggerland and all the way to Bragar about 6,000 years ago and we are still here. My identity as a Gael means everything to me" (Peigi Ann Sheilds, Bragar, Leòdhas).

Like many groups, for Gàidheil peoples, the term Indigenous was coined long after the colonization of their lands and lifeways. They never thought of themselves as Indigenous – they just were who they were, "*na daoine"*, people of the land. Yet, the questions remain, particularly given the complexities inherent in their social locations within structures of colonization and Whiteness, as to how and in what ways a renegotiation of Indigenous identities in contemporary neo-colonial contexts might well be a critical strategy with which to challenge ongoing dynamics of energy, economic and cultural colonialism.

Of those interviewed, nine out of ten are living either on or in relative proximity to their ancestral lands where their indigenous lifeways have been practiced for thousands of years. For all intents and purposes, these Gàidheal participants and other members of their communities meet the criteria provided in the 'working definition' recommended by the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues:

> Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system[79].

However, the other caveat on claims to Indigeneity is self-definition – i.e., to claim official recognition of Indigeneity by the United Nations, people have to first think of themselves as Indigenous. This is a conversation which is currently happening throughout the Gàidhealtachd, more so in the Hebrides. As will be clear from the examples below, it remains a very much contested concept and identity, in part because of the extent of inner colonization, Gàidheil participation in the colonization of other Indigenous peoples throughout the colonies and

[79]United Nations. (2023). State of the World's Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples access to Health Services. United Nations. https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/03/The-State-of-The-Worlds-Indigenous-Peoples-WEB.pdf

nascent confusion between the reality of Indigeneity as a lived way of being with the land, rather than a racial identity.

> There's a debate that pops up every year about whether we are Indigenous…But yeah, I mean it fits…we are people with deep connections to where we live. We have looked after it [the land] for many generations…but its things like knowing about fairy hills, or knowing what a place name means, knowing that story that happened there. That deep cultural thing going back generations…there was a move about a year ago about trying to get us into official status [as Indigenous peoples] with the United Nations…I think it gives us a measure of protection and it gives us a status and makes folk treat us more seriously… (Sandra MacLeod, Nis, Leòdhas).

As other community members and interviewees have also talked about, Sandra then alludes to the lack of self and other recognition due to whiteness in the context of speaking with her cousin who has been living in Australia about some of the experiences of the First Peoples of that continent:

> And again, probably because we are a white population…But what they have done with your [our] language and your [our] knowledge, and your [our] heritage and stuff is exactly what they did in Australia we know. But he hadn't thought.

Agnes Rennie of the Galson Estate Trust notes that the *"the term Indigenous seems to be something that really draws very, very extreme responses from people".* However, for Agnes the word Indigenous explains a lot about who her community is:

> I think it explains a lot…for me the term means you know people with a link to the land. People with a clear cultural identity, with a shared cultural identity, often people who have been colonized in some way, but some people take it as a very, very negative descriptive.

Agnes then goes on to recount a situation in which she was co-authoring a paper and had used Indigenous to refer to her own community when she was challenged for using this word because the other person thought it to be divisive between the Indigenous and newcomer / settler members of the community:

> They thought it [the word Indigenous] was divisive and so it was causing – it was drawing a dividing line between me and people like me who you know were born and brought up here and several generations rooted here, and people who have arrived more recently and are choosing to make their homes here. To me…it's not introducing exclusivity. It's simply explaining the difference.

Agnes' next words are illuminative the extent of the internalized racism:

> Yeah, but you know for me that's because that word [Indigenous] is not used enough in this country, so it's associated with – yes, wait for it, it's associated with Indigenous people who seem to be [considered by others to be] lesser in other countries!

While these research findings are too limited in scope to draw any definitive conclusions, my impressions are that despite the incursion of ongoing colonizing influences, for those Gàidheil people who grew up with their Gàidhlig language intact, grounded in their ancestral lands and lifeways and some sense of dùalchas (a sense of collective cultural Gàidheil memory),

identifying as Gàidheil and Indigenous is both natural and a critical point of resistance to ongoing neo-colonialisms.

For those who are part of the 'lost generation' – i.e., they grew up in a state of displacement and dislocation, the journey to claim this part of their identity can be fraught and arduous. Iain MacKinnon who growing up without learning Gàidhlig and with quite limited knowledge of his cultural heritage, didn't consider himself to be Gàidheil until he was in his thirties. It was only through his studies at the Centre for Human Ecology which included reflections on land and indigenous ways of being with the land, recounts Iain that: *"being confronted with the depth of existence and the shallowness of my understanding of my own existence, [and] of my peoples' existence…so [the inquiry into my] indigeneity made me a Gael!"* Significantly for Iain, along with this new awareness also came his realization that a lot of the unhappiness and depression he'd been experiencing, including some harmful behaviours were a result of alienation from *"my ancestral identity, my alienation from my ancestors".*

Speaking further about his individual identity in relation to the collective Iain says:

> For myself, I know I'm Indigenous but primarily I'm colonized. So, I wouldn't consider myself to be an Indigenous scholar, I would consider myself to be a colonized scholar because I'm a scholar for a people who are primarily colonized. We haven't reached an Indigenous consciousness yet and there's not much point in me as an individual making claims about my own personal Indigeneity if I don't have an Indigenous people around me. So, if it's going to happen, it needs to be a wider awakening.

The ability to effect larger structural and collective shifts in the self identification of Gàidheil peoples - who remain on their lands and are concerned with issues of the cultural continuity of the Indigenous knowledge of place (Still Indigenous to Place) towards thinking of themselves as Indigenous is significantly impacted by public conversations, thought leaders and institutional policies and practices. To date institutional policies and practices – particularly as we shall see national policy framings – including academia – continue to privilege White supremacist thinking. Iain Mackinnon speaks to this in terms of academic institutions:

> There is no serious attempt at institutional levels to seriously engage with Indigenous cosmologies and how those [locally grounded] projects are doing and what their potentials are….Institutionally we are benighted. I suspect some of the key academic and cultural leaders would be looking at someone like Rueben [an Indigenous activist from Turtle Island] coming and they would be thinking something like 'Red Indians!' and 'its all a bit embarrassing because we are not like them!'

Reflecting further, Iain comments:

> These peoples – Indigenous visitors have the same kinds of concerns and trepidations as us…and they simply have a different set of mental anchor points or spiritual anchor points to cope with these things.

Powerful in institutional and discursive terms, Iain sees the great urgency in disrupting the *"epistemological pipe stream"* of these actors. Recalling a past conversation with Māori activist and

scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith[80] about the dramatic shifts in power inevitably involved in contesting the worldviews of the powerful, decolonization by its very nature often violent work:

> And this is violent work. Not because we are taking up guns but because we have to challenge people's minds. At some point you have to make that leap. (MacKinnon, Camuschros, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach)[81].

Such language and assertions can feel uncomfortable. However, as Iain impresses *"it needs confronting".*

Indigenous Mind. In more recent years some scholars, educators, and activists[82] have explored and aligned with the concept of Indigenous mind, which rather than focusing on identity politics, emphasises a deeply interconnected shamanic way of seeing and being. Indigenous mind recognizes that all peoples come from societies who were once indigenous and therefore all peoples have the innate capacity – however latent – to see and be in the world in ways that honour the deep interconnectedness of all beings[83]. In the words of Native American scholar Donald Fixico this Indigenous Life-World encompasses a "perspective that involves human beings, animals, plants, the natural environment and the metaphysical world of visions and dreams[84]. This perspective resonates with Alastair McIntosh's view of indigeneity in terms of the development of *spiritual depth* in people. This concept is important for its focus on the ontological nature of indigeneity and because of this focus on worldview and lived epistemologies of interconnectedness, it potentially has great significance for collective action across cultures for planetary wellbeing. Indigenous mind therefore forms the ontological container within which societal constructions of Indigeneity sit. It is possible within this conceptualization to be a member of an Indigenous group who is officially recognized by the United Nations, but because of colonization, not have access to Indigenous Mind:

> For me Indigeneity is a form of – it's a form of consciousness and a mode of awareness beyond being Gael or being Māori or being First Nations or whatever. You can be all those things without being Indigenous. You have to be aware that you're Indigenous and I think recovery is to move toward that. And the quiet trauma is the unawareness of that, the denial of that, the suppression of that (Iain Mackinnon, Camuscroise, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach).

As Alastair McIntosh describes, Indigenous mind centres the Shamanic way of being which is fundamentally about:

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[80] Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2022). Decolonizing methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC. 3rd Edition.

[81] Iain discusses this more in-depth in the following book chapter for which the citation is as follows: Iain MacKinnon (2016). Education for life: Human Ecology pedagogy as a bridge to Indigenous knowing. Lewis Williams, Rose Roberts, & Alastair McIntosh (eds). Routledge. Pp.139-160.

[82] Lewis Williams (2022). Indigenous intergenerational resilience: Confronting cultural and ecological crisis. London: Routledge. Lewis Williams, Rose Roberts, & Alastair McIntosh (2016). Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience. Confronting Cultural and Ecological Crisis. Routledge: London.

[83] Lewis Williams (2022). Indigenous intergenerational resilience: Confronting cultural and ecological crisis. London: Routledge. Pp.16.

[84] Donald Fixico. (2003). The American Indian Mind in a Linear World. New York: Routledge.

> Connecting the material in the unconscious into the realm of consciousness so that the flow of life from the inner world to the outer world and from the outer world back into the inner world can be complete so that we can be whole people in a whole world (Alastair McIntosh, Glaschu).

Indigenous mind has great relevance for all humans, particularly for large urban centres filled with people who constitute the long ago colonized as well as native communities struggling with incursion of settlers very much living consumerist lifestyles. Like most colonized societies the communities of An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Leòdhas now have significant settler, non-native populations who for one reason or another see the communities as offering an attractive lifestyle. While as Agnes Rennie says earlier, there's a definitive difference between native and newcomer peoples, in terms of their grounding within the specific indigenous lifeways of Gabhsann, for example, it is still possible through the cultivation of Indigenous Mind to have an appreciation of that wider, deeper reality – seen and unseen- that enfolds any place and people. As my own work articulates, as an "outsider" to a community, it is possible centre the Indigenous leadership and knowledge of any place, while also cultivating an Indigenous consciousness (Indigenous Mind) in ways that are culturally relevant to oneself. This is critical to planetary health and supports necessarily collective efforts aimed at the wellbeing of the Earth community.

Rituals of Intergenerational knowledge transmission in contemporary times

> We've internalized that our culture isn't good enough and our knowledge of our culture isn't good enough…It doesn't matter if you found out two centuries or two days ago! It's the same thing. You are part of that continuum of culture! (Sandra MacLeod, Nis, Leòdhas).

> What happens in this – the wave of the new colonial culture, you know, it just keeps coming. It's relentless, it's all-consuming, it's inundating, it's immersive and people who are wanting to do the right thing, its so difficult to find a place to stand and withstand that. We need to be those places. (Iain Mackinnon, Camuscroise, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach).

The globalization of economies, cultural systems, communication technologies along with the actual influx of non-native incomers continues to impact peoples' sense of identity, culture, and community. Yet at the same time, intergenerational knowledge transmission and the reproduction and re-creation of Gàidheil knowledge and traditions is also powerfully nuanced through localized agencies of individuals and communities. While both intergenerational knowledge loss along with the absence of rituals for its transmission is a reality throughout both Eilean Leòdhais and An t-Eilean Sgitheanach, this is differently experienced according to geography and generation. Furthermore, there are significant differences between those who are relatively "in place' – i.e., they are either living on or relatively proximity to their ancestral lands, including having some access to the traditional knowledge of those places, they speak their native tongue and have some access to rituals of cultural intergenerational knowledge transmission – and those who are dislocated from place on any one of the above variables. Sandra who grew up with some sense of intactness to her indigenous Gàidheil Life World talks about the impacts of colonization and dislocation on intergenerational-learning contexts:

> It's changed quite a bit in the last wee while. But when I was young there'd be folk who just wouldn't engage with Gàidhlig or the culture. A lot of it is about families protecting themselves

> from what's going on in the past…The past for them is associated with loss. And cultural loss is bloody hard (Sandra MacLeod, 54, Nis, Leòdhas).

As a relatively new resident to An t-Eilean Sgitheanach, who has grown up in Glaschu, Ainslie Roddick shares her observations of the simultaneous unique and tenuous relationship to Gàidheal cultural identity and sense of place for the Island's communities:

> …The conversation is different, and the stakes are different and it just and, you know, there's something just about the psychology and the geography and the Gaelic history and all of these things…and smaller communities, that just creates a different relationship to identity. You feel it as you come in …because so much of what is happening here that isn't going so well is because of the change that has brought in from people that haven't been here as long and who are buying up second homes or who are really putting pressure on the infrastructure or who don't understand what the place needs in order to continue to have a thriving community.

Intergenerational knowledge transmission is seen as being crucial to both collective cultural continuance and climate and cultural ecological resilience for communities. On the whole people felt there is a huge appetite for this learning. This is supported by the historical societies on both Islands which gather genealogical histories, stories and material cultural artifacts in ways which reveal "*the richness and depth"*[85] of Gàidheil worldview. Also occurring is the revitalization and reconstruction of traditional sea and land harvesting places and practices through the combination of old knowledge with new observations. This is laborious but vital work. Generally, there is a sense that one of the weakest or most threatened areas is the practical application of traditional knowledge, either through lack of opportunity or under recognition of the depth of this knowledge:

> I think it's in people minds right now that the way of life is changing very quickly and very dramatically away from that sort of first-hand practical knowledge. People are now worried of losing it and therefore trying to capture it and grasp it in as many different ways as they can. Whether that be digital recording or someone cutting peats. People are desperate to learn that…there is so much available for us to record and retain that information (Fiona Rennie, Gahbsann, Leòdhas).

However, alongside the passion and fervour to absorb as much as traditional knowledge as possible, these learning processes can often look more like "knowledge collection" rather than application. She then describes the situation of people burning peats for aesthetic or trendy reasons in multi-fuel or ornamentation stove where in fact it could be *"a gas combustion boiler doing all the work"*. Dislodged from sustainable practice and cultural tradition, for Fiona there's an evident *"loss of meaning and understanding of that cultural tradition".*

Intergenerational knowledge translation and loss of rituals. Community members talked about the quality of intergenerational dynamics, both in terms of how these relationships flowed as well as the tensions within them. Within music, singing, song and poetry the intergenerational relationship appears to be very much alive and highly valued with people going to Elders or tradition bearers for the "golden nuggets" of a song or the knowledge of learning a particular tune for the way it was historically played in the region. This very vibrant

[85] Sandra MacLeod, Nis, Leòdhas.

and vital area also inevitably carries its own tensions. Iain MacKinnon talks about his experiences of the ambiguity of attending local music festivals where traditional music and modern expression often meet, even clash:

> So the modern part of me is drawn to it, but the traditional part of me is 'what is this? Why is it like this?'…Even the posture that people take when they're singing a Gaelic song, but for some of them their posture is like that of a rockstar and a rockstar is something else!'...so there's a whole culture that you are coming from when you are giving that song… What does the mode of your transmission – literally your attitude – do to the song and to the message it conveys? There are very important questions here and I don't think we've really had a chance to think them through: it is important we do not lose essential things in accommodating, or assimilating, to modern conceptions of what music ought to be.

Intergenerational contexts in which Gàidhlig is spoken can bring its own set relational tensions. In the context of speaking about the continuing ambivalence that can come with learning Gàidhlig for younger people, because of the trauma that surrounds the previous persecution of the language, Fiona points out that this often strains intergenerational relationships:

> I think in most places, its [intergenerational knowledge transmission] not done or not given the opportunity to be done well…its often inorganic and awkward and the people who are there don't really know why they are there and don't really want to be there…In that context I think the intergenerational relationships are strained…the Elders want to pass on this information…but the younger [people] I don't know.

Grace tells a story which has some similar themes of Gàidhlig diaspora and the dilution of the Gàidhlig cultural milieu which once would have "held" intergenerational relationships. She relates a story where a group of them went along to a Gàidhlig society one evening to watch the recently released film Dùthchas. Most of the attendees were in their 70s and 80s. Not realizing she could speak Gàidhligh she remembers them voicing their annoyance in Gàidhlig – which they assumed she could not understand – that they would 'have' to put the English sub-titles on. After the film, Grace recalls the older people complaining in Gàidhlig amongst themselves about how the younger people *"don't make enough effort to learn Gàidhlig and root themselves in that culture".* Disillusioned, Grace adds *"We're not going to have intergenerational knowledge transmission if that's their approach to it. If they're blaming young people for not coming if they are not making space for them".*

Creating new norms for intergenerational knowledge transmission: Clearly the dissolution of community activities and contexts which do the job of holding relational norms for intergenerational knowledge transmission calls for new and creative praxis in terms of holding space for generation-to-generation exchange. One such initiative is the School of Plural Futures (SPF), which is an ongoing collaboration between Atlas Arts and people under thirty-five years of age. SPF intentionally makes space for participants to learn from one another, discuss and reflect together on the reality of life in Skye and Lochalsh and to create responses to local and global challenges. Social justice, climate crisis and pluralities in terms of understanding complex issues and responses are key themes. The concept of Plural futures aligns with the intention of *"creating conversations and spaces to expand understandings of identity, legacy,*

justice, history, the world and the future – as inhabitants of Skye and the Highlands"[86]. The SPF brings a cohort of contributors together each year who attend a series of eight consecutive gatherings or workshops over eight months. Intent on making space for a diversity of identities and realities, whilst valuing local histories and knowledges, the SPF includes themes of land-based learning, local Gàidheil history and culture, alongside broader issues of cultural, social, and environmental change. In other words, while SPF is not specifically Gàidheil, its pedagogical foundations support the continuance and renewal of local Gàidhlig culture and traditions. In this sense the SPF aims to disrupt a sense of future and identity that is singular and fixed; rather holding possibilities for localized expression of multiple lifeways and identities, which are however rooted in interconnectedness and community.

Ainslie Roddick, of Atlas Arts provides an example of how SPF has held space for developing understanding of intergenerational realities. She recalls a session between the Gàidheal poet Maoilios Caimbeul from Flodigarry (a hamlet near the township of Staffin, and Staffin is a township on An t-Eilean Sgitheanach) and the younger contributors to the SPF:

> Maybe there's this expectation that between generations we don't agree or that we've not had the same struggles. And I think what it revealed was that we do and that a lot of these kind of issues that we face are structural…or about institutions and kind of larger, much bigger sort of global and state-led kind of inequities.

Speaking about the relationship between Maoilios and the group and the sense of hope for the younger people this may have provided, Ainslie continues:

> …To see him say that he didn't get the education that he wanted at school and then for our group to say, well, we never got that either and for us to hear where he was doing that work and to sort of share some of his kind of loss. But also, I think the interesting thing was about where he's seen change and how he'd addressed – how he'd kind of celebrated that as well as mourned that. …That was helpful, I think, for our group to sort of navigate and think forward with.

Boats and the sea are a large focus of the rituals of intergenerational connection practiced by the Galgael Trust based in Govan, a working-class part of Glaschu. Focused on creating just and sustainable futures for its communities who are largely landless urban people, many of whom are experiencing poverty, multiple homelessness, loneliness, and addiction, the Trust uses boat building and boating activities on the nearby Clyde River within many of its activities. Alastair McIntosh explains:

> We're using the boats to connect people with each other and with nature. We're using the boats both practically as boats that we build and take out and row and sail. But also, metaphorically for navigating life, for journeying on. So, giving people a hammer and a chisel and a piece of wood and our trainers helping them to work it into something. That's the outer face of a much deeper inner [healing] process…It's coming out of a perspective that in a traditional society like I grew up in, in Lewis, we were held in the basket of the community…we wove our lives, and the community wove our lives, helped our lives weave for us. Because you're not an individual; you're woven into that fabric of the community.

[86] Atlas Arts https://atlasarts.org.uk/programme/about-the-school-of-plural-futures

In talking about what is important or powerful in his relationships with younger people within these activities, Alastair talks about the fundamental principal of the *"touch of the blessing"* as an intergenerational dynamic of passing on a sense of blessing to the younger person. Alastair recounts:

> I might take people out Mackerel fishing…I will be looking for opportunities to say to a young person, "oh you did well there, you learned that quickly. You handled your line well there". I'll correct them when they don't get it… But, you know, when they get it really look them in the eyes and say good on you, you got that one. That's a touch of blessing, you see. Gives them a sense of recognition of achievement. And you're also passing on – you know, taking them out on the boat is quite a powerful thing to do, I think, because you're passing on a competence and a confidence, a sense of achievement, especially if they catch a fish (Alastair McIntosh, Govan, Glaschu).

Gàidheal resurgence and climate and cultural-ecological resilience

> I've grown up in a culture where you're out in the land….One of the biggest things that's around us, whether it's looking at sea eagles or golden eagles or what's on the ground or the health of the ground to the health of the lochs and the sea around us, it's part of what we are….Because we are only custodians of the ground. And it's in the same way that we're custodians of the social history. We're custodians of the land around us as well (Kenny Rhoddy, Baile Ailein, Leòdhas).
>
> When people get their land back, the connection to place becomes fundamental (Alastair McIntosh, Govan, Glaschu).

Unlike some other colonized societies throughout the world who remain Indigenous to place, for the Gàidheil communities of Eilean Leòdhias and An t-Eilean Sgitheanach and Na h-Eileanan Siar (the Western Isles) more widely, self-determination, and specifically climate and cultural-ecological resilience is not built through the enforcement of broken Treaties. Indeed, the fact that there are no Treaties begs the question of whether "Terra Nullius" (uninhabited land) was even easier to legitimate within the Gàidhealtachd than the Empire's external colonies which lay on other continents and faced competition from other would-be colonizers.

Rather community grounded resilience happens through the only other mechanism available - community driven land buy backs from the often (offshore) wealthy elites and corporate entities; many of whom are in fact the proximal or distant recipients of prior Cleared Lands. What naturally follows is the ensuing ability for a community to collectively determine their relationship with the land and potentially the Gàidhlig Life World they either do or potentially inhabit. The most obvious example of collective self-determination within the traditional territories of those interviewed, is Urras Oighreachd Gabhsann, (UOG) or The Galson Estate Trust which stewards on behalf of its members and residents, 55,000 acres of community owned land. UOG which through local economic development is now a self-sustaining entity, undertakes a variety of Gàidhlig informed community development initiatives including land use and crofting education, intergenerational initiatives, health and housing and community festivals. Community chosen sustainable economic development activities such as the

installation of three wind-turbines[87] and other commercial ventures are critical to ensuring the long-term viability of UOG communities to determine their futures. Other significant examples – albeit more specifically targeted at the regeneration of historical and cultural knowledge are Comaan Eachdraidh Sgìre à Bhac (Dedicated to the history, heritage, and culture of the Back area of Lewis), Commun Eachdraidh Niss (Ness Historical Society) historical society, Urras Coimhearsnachd Bhràdhagair agus Àrnoil (Bragar and Arnol Community Trust).

Alongside these developments local communities continue to struggle against the same continual erasure within National policy frameworks mentioned at the beginning of this report. Sentiments about these centre-periphery relationships are strongly expressed by Peigi Ann Shields which, while not named as such, she clearly experiences as a form of energy colonialism[88]:

> "We are under threat by Net Zero. The young people want to bring up families in their precious homeland and not in industrial wasteland, and if they go – so will our language and culture. We have been pushed to the edge of the Atlantic and once we are pushed out of here, our language and culture as a living community language will die. I do not agree that it is worth ruining pristine nature and affecting Indigenous people so badly is for the greater good. …. The environment here has been looked after by the local population for thousands of years and there is a reason it hasn't been industrialised. We are constantly under threat from outside". (Peigi Ann Sheilds, Bragar, Leòdhas).

The struggle for community collective self-determination and specifically climate and cultural-ecological resilience is strikingly evident within the U.K. and the Scottish Government's strategies to achieve Zero Carbon[89] by 2050. This is pronounced in the Sottish Government's decision to grant Northland power, a global power producer to develop two offshore wind projects, Spiorad na Mara and Haybredey. Spiorad na Mara Wind Farm alone involves the installation of 66 turbines in the sea just off the coast. With a combined potential capacity of 2,400 MW, this project will service the needs of around 2.5 million homes on the Scottish mainland, saving approximately 3.9 million tonnes of Co2 emissions annually. However, the potential cost to the locals, who will receive none of the benefits and have been fighting back ardently, include disturbance to marine life, visual and aesthetic pollution and disastrous impacts on tourism which is strongly reliant on Leòdhas' stunningly beautiful coastline. This decision making is a clear indicator that local and Gàidheil place-based knowledge at present play little role in Scottish Government environmental policies and mirror the historic centre-periphery relationships rooted in the 1266 Treaty of Perth.

[87] In contrast to the large-scale wind turbine project instigated by global corporate entity Northland Power, described in the next section, the three wind turbines installed by UOG are community owned and installed as a result of a decision undertaken by the collective. The turbines directly benefit the local community first. This is in stark contrast with the energy colonialism being practiced by corporate entities in collusion with government.
[88] Sánchez Contreras, J.; Matarán Ruiz, A.; Campos-Celador, A.; Fjellheim, E.M. Energy Colonialism: A Category to Analyse the Corporate Energy Transition in the Global South and North. *Land* **2023**, *12*, 1241. https://doi.org/10.3390/land12061241
[89] This means that the total greenhouse gas emissions would be equal to the emissions removed from the atmosphere, with the aim of limiting global warming and resultant climate change.

Recent advocacy includes an ongoing petition[90] to halt the development of the wind turbines. However, community benefit has since been agreed upon by the developer and the West Side Estates Group. This was entirely negotiated by the Community owned estates and is not predicated on support for or an endorsement of the development, but on the premise that should the development go ahead, it should be those who are most affected who are compensated. The annual sum agreed to, has the potential to be transformational, for the immediate communities.

Figure 5: Artist's impression of proposed offshore windfarm. Source: change.org

Another equally disturbing example is Nature Scot's (an executive non-departmental body of the Scottish Government) to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a group of private finance houses; effectively giving state backing to wealthy landowners a market in which private investors secure returns for their investment, through the carbon credits market. Carbon credits are generated through carbon sequestering either through tree planting or peatland restoration which are then sold virtually to big businesses or private individuals needing to offset their rampant carbon use. Commissioned by Community Land Scotland, Alastair McIntosh penned a substantial critique of this MOU as a policy instrument for planetary wellbeing[91], including its likely further alienation of local communities from the land then see below. McIntosh makes the point that the MOU allows wealthy high carbon emitters to atone for their sins through purchasing carbon credits while failing to:

[90] See https://www.change.org/p/stop-the-proposed-northland-wind-farm-off-the-west-coast-of-the-isle-of-lewis-now

[91] McIntosh, Alastair. (2023). The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Carbon. Natural Capital, the Private Finance Investment Pilot and Scotland's Land Reform. Community Land Scotland. Fearhann Coimhearsnachd Na-H-Alba.

> grapple with the social implications of major land use changes, and the impact on a community's latitude of agency in choosing its own future - the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent[92].

The report goes onto to emphasise the sheer scale of land that tree planting for carbon credits makes unavailable for community land use citing a recent 240 Ha tree planting scheme on An t-Eilean Sgitheanach which will tie the land up for 95 years while in theory sequestering enough carbon to offset just 40 jumbo jet return flights from London to Sydney! At the public meeting with Nature Scot over this MOU, where Alastair presented his report, Alastair recalls impressing on them the Gàidheal ontological concept of dùthchas, the oneness of people with place. Reflecting on the policy implementation process he reflects:

> It's shocking really, that people involved in land conservation are not really deeply aware of these things but the reality is that so much conservation work comes from a scientific nature perspective, and they don't have the mentality that connects them with these cultural ways (Alastair McIntosh, Govan, Glaschu).

Currently throughout the Gàidhealtachd and more specifically in Leòdhas there is a movement to re-inspire and reconnect people of the Gàidhealtachd back to the cleared moors which are a rich source of traditional food and medicine. Significantly the moors also contain peat which can act either as a reservoir for carbon storage or can be used as a source of fossil fuel. For the communities of Eilean Leòdhais and An t-Eilean Sgitheanach, activities surrounding communal peat cutting and preparation, are key elements of cultural and community connection. Primarily cut during the summer, people look forward to a *"fun day at the peats!...like the cutting, like the turfing, the cutting and the drying and taking home!"*[93] The restoration of the peat beds therefore and their role as carbon sinks or storage needs to be carefully balanced with issues of community. connection both to people and place.

The case is being increasingly made that the the small-scale use of peat, for example on individual crofts used in conjunction with community-controlled renewable energy sources, (rather than corporate owned renewable energy entities) is culturally and environmentally sustainable, and an important source of cultural-ecological restoration (Fieldnotes, 2024). Implementing this strategy takes some negotiation as one participant briefly describes:

> Peat cutting is a traditional way of life as well. So, the controversy of we don't want to stop cutting our peats because that's what we do every summer and its free fuel…We've done it for how many years. Don't take it away.

In striking a balance between the need for peat restoration and environmental and cultural sustainability, the same participant recalls a specific instance on another part of the Island:

> They spoke to the grazings or the people who own the peat banks. They said we want to restore this. Are we allowed to? And they said yes. But [the result is] that they have to cut peat in another bit of land. But we want to still cut our peats. Where can we do it? So, they weren't willing to

[92] Alastair McIntosh, 2023, Ibid, page 4.
[93] Fieldnotes 2024.

> give their piece of peat back away unless they had another part that they could cut from. So, they found another part and that was fine[94].

Alastair McIntosh of the Galgael Trust has the last word:

> If we are going to respond to the ecological crisis we've got to be able to create a context where people are can be grounded…….Galgael is trying to do that in the urban context in ways that take account of peoples housing, education, the work that they do…..so it's not just middle class people that can go out and experience Loch Lomond…Reform is primarily psychological and spiritual…need a dwelling place where can find rest…you're being held, then you are capable of holding…….

Gàidheil Indigenous Resurgence and Treaty Futures in Aotearoa and Turtle Island.

> We performed with much activity a dance which I suppose the emigration from Skye has occasioned. They call it "America". A brisk reel is played. The first couple begin, and each sets to one – then each to another – then as they set to the next couple, the second and third couples are setting; and so it goes on until all are sets a-going, setting and wheeling round each other, while each is making the tour of all in the dance. It shows how emigration catches till all are afloat. Mrs MacKinnon told me that last year when the ship sailed from Portree for America, the people on shore were almost distracted when they saw their relations go off; they lay down on the ground and tumbled and tore the grass with their teeth. This year there was not a tear shed. The people on the shore seemed to think that they would soon follow. This is a mortal sign[95].

The cleared emigrants from Alba were remarkable for many things, not least of which was their collective forgetting of the traumas they left behind. New Zealander Dani Pickering gives an excellent account of his own Great grandfather's forgetting, when he left the old land because of the Clearances and came to the newly emerging colonial nation state[96]. Through analysing his great grandfather's diaries, he astutely narrates his ancestor's upwards psychological mobility within the colonial structures of Whiteness. These same psychologies of Whiteness are now pervasive amongst the descendants of their cleared ancestors within New Zealand and Canada; some of whom occupy powerful positions within the structures of neoliberalism. In the context of Treaty relations in both colonial nation states this raises two important questions:

1. How might engagement with their colonial histories (traumas received and traumas inflicted) alongside knowledge of the deeply interconnected Indigenous Life Worlds that their ancestors embodied and inhabited, assist long ago colonized settler people to engage at ontological levels with the Treaties they are party to?
2. How might public awareness of the reclamations of indigenous lifeways and identities underway in parts of the Gàidhealtachd help lend capacity to the unravelling of Whiteness throughout the central belt and lowland regions of Alba?

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[94] Fieldnotes (2024).

[95] See Rob Gibson (2023), ibid, page 71 which Scottish biographer James Boswell recounts his stay in Sleat with Sir Alexander MacDonald in October 1773.

[96] Pickering, Dani. (2022). Harm received harm caused: A Scottish Gael's journey to becoming Pākehā. *Genealogy*, 6, 82 http://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy6040082

Treaty relationships between the Indigenous and settler populations form the basis of both New Zealand and Canadian societies. Foundational to these treaty relationships is an explicit agreement to honour the self-determination of each group which in turn carries with it an implicit concurrence to honour the worldviews or epistemological foundations of each society. For all Indigenous peoples, self-determination is inexplicably linked to the sovereignty and wellbeing of Papatūānuku or Aki (Mother Earth in Māori and Anishinaabemowin respectively). However, by the time the long ago colonized arrived in Aotearoa and Turtle Island their societies – because of the Enclosures - had long given up their relational and Indigenous worldviews. Rather Land now equalled capital accumulation. As a result, Cartesianism, which represents a reductionist, materialist view of reality became the default worldview of the colonizing power and subsequent Treaty partner. Today, in Aotearoa and Turtle Island people of Gàidheal descent make up a good proportion of the Settler population and are therefore Tangata Tiriti or Treaty People, with specific treaty responsibilities towards the Indigenous peoples of each country. This inevitably raises tensions, particularly as the colonial nation state is geared towards capitalist accumulation.

Figure 6: Treaty Principles Bill Hikoi, November 10, 2024. Source: 1 News

In New Zealand, symptomatic of these tensions and dynamics in contemporary times have been nation-wide responses to the November 14th introduction of the Treaty Principles Bill to the House of Parliament[97]. In short, this Bill proposes to effectively dismantle Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the key constitutional agreement between Māori and the Crown on which New Zealand as a nation state was founded. Representing one of the strongest assaults on Earth democracy yet where the Māori principal of tino rangatiratanga is narrowly interpreted as the human right to exercise individual freedoms and choices, the Bill exaggerates the same White (epistemological) supremacism largely responsible for rapid global warming and environmental destruction. Yet *tino rangatiratanga* (self-governance and collective rights) is ultimately about the sovereignty of the collective, both human and more than human on whom we ultimately depend. One of the Bill's key critiques of Te Tiriti is that it accords special rights to Māori rather than treating all New Zealanders equally. However, as many people in New Zealand also recognize, it is Māori's collectivist notion of sovereignty and concomitant principle of *kaitaiakitanga* (guardianship of the land) that also stands in the way of opening up the country to further corporate exploitation – that is utter extractivism and the rape and pillage of Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother.

[97] Figure Six represents the Māori-led nation-wide response to the Bill. Source: https://www.1news.co.nz/2024/11/10/treaty-principles-bill-hikoi-begins-in-far-north/

Deeper understanding of the significance of Māori ecological knowledge within tino rangitaratanga and te tiriti's critical role in supporting this as the founding document of Aotearoa is urgently needed for the majority of non-Māori New Zealanders. My first question regarding the relevance of colonial histories and indigenous ancestral lifeway with regard to settlers descended from Gàidheil – and by extension other indigenous cultures - now finds more fertile soil in which to take root. From my own experience of teaching Indigenous Knowledge and Traditions to settler students in Canada, I have learned that encouraging people to find out about the colonial experiences of their ancestors as well as whatever they can about their previously practiced indigenous lifeways, is invaluable for cultivating inner shifts in consciousness and being towards a greater appreciation of the Indigenous knowledge in the land they are living. It's no longer purely theoretical! What's really at stake here is finding ways to assist settler people to go beyond an engagement with their treaty responsibilities at superficial levels, to much more fundamental questions concerned with worldview and the reality of a deeply interconnected world.

Figure 7: Double Hulled Waka. Source: Atea A Rangi. Educational Trust. https://www.atea.nz/waka-sailing

Unlike most contemporary Treaty framed approaches to knowledge generation in Canada and Aotearoa respectively, such as Two Eyed Seeing[98] and Waka Turua[99] (double hulled waka) which accord equal status between the Indigenous and the dominant (Western scientific materialism) knowledge system of the colonizing power, this paper positions the Indigenous Knowledge of each place as primary and foundational, to which other worldviews, including western relational epistemologies and scientific materialism, may contribute. Within this conceptualization, non-indigenous epistemologies such as western scientific materialism can be hauled up and down like sails on the waka (canoe) as they are needed. However, it is the interconnected Indigenous worldviews, in this case the hulls of the waka, that are foundational, and provide the underlying kincentric value system.

Settler people, including newcomers to the communities in this study, should and can come to an appreciation of the Indigenous knowledge of place which must in turn constitute the primary epistemological foundation of any society. This involves the redevelopment of Indigenous Mind and radical shift from reductionist to patterned thinking that comes with the cultivation of spiritual depth. In the past I have written about methodologies to undertake self-world

[98] Reid, A.J., Eckert, L.E., Lane, J-Francis, Young, N., Hinch, S.G., Darimont, C.T., Cooke, S.J., Ban, N.C., Marshall, A. (2020). "Two-Eyed Seeing": An Indigenous framework to transform fisheries research and management. Fish and Fisheries, 22(2). 243–261. https://doi.org/10.1111/faf.12516.

[99] Maxwell, K.H., Ratana, K., Davies, K.K., Taiapa, C., & Awatere, S. (2019). Navigating towards marine co-management with Indigenous communities on-board the waka-taurua. Marine Policy, 111, 1–4. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2019.103722

inquiry work of this kind[100]. This shift to an Indigenous Life World is an all-encompassing perspective that to repeat Donald Fixico's words involve "human beings, animals, plants, the natural environment, and the metaphysical world of vision and dreams"[101]. Within this paradigm, scientific materialism can play a vital role, particularly if decoupled from norms of capitalist accumulation. All of these principles of course have equal relevance for the resurgence of Indigenous lifeways and newcomer relations within the Gàidhealtachd, particularly the Western Isles where traditional ways remain most concentrated.

For the Aotearoa and Turtle Island contexts in which I work, this has been secondary purpose of this paper. Their ancestral lands bled people who forgot their Indigenous lifeways and repressed their intergenerational trauma. The time has come to release and reclaim nascently held embodied ancestral wisdoms; not in ways that recolonize, but rather to apply these self-understandings in ways that enable a deeper engagement with the Indigenous knowledge of place. This stream of consciousness is a vital part of plural indigenous futures for planetary wellbeing.

Towards Indigenous Plural Futures

In a recent interview, when asked whether or not all settler people need to deeply understand the Indigenous laws of place, Anishinaabe Legal Scholar John Borrows[102] recollected his childhood experiences of watching his mother bake bread and carefully infusing the yeast into the mixture. He likened the potency of the yeast in making the bread rise to creating widespread decolonial social change. While everyone need not have extensive knowledge of Indigenous legal law, (nor is that in many cases appropriate), what is critical, is that key social change makers and power brokers do have such an appreciation. In partial answer to question two posed in the previous section, such yeast spots are equally important in re-infusing Gàidheil indigenous lifeways and place-based knowledge through the Western Isles. Land buy backs, local action and critical thinking around how indigeneity might be mobilized as an identity and /or way of being as articulated in this report by people are all critical elements within this.

Our greatest hope lies in "living the truth" of our inter dependence with our earth family. This requires cultivating a deep regard for all beings, beyond shallow utilitarian commercial and social transactions. Love in its broadest, deepest sense is "the way." Love flourishes when trust and lived ethics of kincentricity are fully present. While the intergenerational road ahead for humanity is entangled and rocky, if brought to scale, Indigenous environmental philosophy, can greatly assist us collectively moving through our planetary predicament towards regenerative Indigenous futurities.

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[100] In the past I have written about my own experiences of this and methodologies for undertaking this journey. See for examples, Lewis Williams. (2013). Deepening ecological relationality through critical onto-epistemological inquiry: Where transformative learning meets sustainable science. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 11(2), 95-113 Available on lines at https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344613490997; Lewis Williams. (2016). The human ecologist as alchemist: An inquiry into Ngai Te Rangi cosmology, human agency, and well-being in a time of ecological peril. *Radical Human Ecology: Intercultural and Indigenous Approaches.* Williams, L., Roberts, R. and McIntosh, A. (eds), pp.91-120. Ashgate Publishing Group: U.K.

[101] Donald Fixico. (2003). Ibid, page 2.

[102] John Borrows (2022). Finding life's patterns. Story telling's role in Anishinaabe law. WordFest London, Nov 2022. https://www.facebook.com/wordfest/videos/john-borrrows-finding-lifes-patterns-storytellings-role-in-anishinaabe-law/1485319365303034/