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IRISH OVERDETERMINATION: STRATEGIES FOR ENTERING AND LEAVING THE GAELTACHT[1]

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ABSTRACT. ***Irish Overdetermination: Strategies for Entering and Leaving the Gaeltacht.*** *Irish* and *Gaels* are terms that refer to historical and contemporary peoples. Both terms, however, are overdetermined, freighted both with negative stereotypes and impossible standards of cultural authenticity, such that the Irish and the Gaelic part in historical processes is distorted. This article looks at a difficult history in which Gaelic Ireland was nearly destroyed, yet from the eighteenth century, Gaelic heritage was accumulated in the capital, later providing fodder for a linguistic and cultural revival movement that reshaped modern Ireland. Marginal and yet central to modern Irish identity, the Gaelic inheritance today is threatened and thriving, and the Irish language is a minority language that has a superior constitutional standing to majority English.

Keywords*: Irish, Gaelic, identity, racism, authenticity, language, migration.*

REZUMAT. ***Supra-determinare irlandeză: strategii pentru intrarea și ieșirea din Gaeltacht.*** *Irlandezi* și *Gaels* sunt termeni care se referă la popoare istorice și contemporane. Ambii termeni, însă, sunt supra-determinați, încărcați atât de stereotipii negative cât și de standarde imposibile de autenticitate culturală, astfel încât partea irlandeză și cea gaelică în procesele istorice suferă distorsiuni.

[1] This was given as the annual Ó Buachalla Lecture at the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame on 2 March 2018. Breandán Ó Buachalla (1936-2010), Professor of Modern Irish Literature at University College Dublin (1978-1996) and Thomas J. and Kathleen O'Donnell Chair in Irish Language and Literature at the University of Notre Dame (2003-2010), was the foremost Irish scholar of his generation.

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Articolul de față discută o istorie dificilă în care Irlanda gaelică a fost aproape distrusă, și totuși, începând din secolul XVIII, moștenirea gaelică s-a acumulat ca un capital, furnizând mai târziu materie primă pentru o micare de renaștere lingvistică și culturală care a modelat Irlanda modernă. Marginală și totuși centrală în identitatea modernă irlandeză, moștenirea gaelică astăzi e pe atât de amenințată pe cât de înfloritoare, iar limba irlandeză e o limbă minoritară care se bucură de un statut constituțional superior englezei majoritate.

***Cuvinte cheie**: Irlandez, gaelic, identitate, rasism, autenticitate, limbaj, migrațiune.*

The University of Notre Dame, where I now work, has a long association with Ireland. I first visited it in 2002, and one of my first memories is of seeing a young American wearing a pair of shorts with "Irish" written across the seat. This was the first time that I became aware that "Irish" does not always mean "Irish" as I understood it then. It was only later that I learnt that the use of the word "Irish" in Notre Dame primarily refers to the university and its community and especially to its sports teams. Indeed the "Fighting Irish" is the moniker for the university's famous football team.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2018) gives other apparent inconsistencies in the usage of the word "Irish," mostly drawing on British and especially English speech. Some of them would probably confuse most young Irish and Irish-Americans today, although their parents' or grandparents' generation would wince at hearing others. One example is an obsolete Scottish usage of the word "Irish," meaning a native, especially Gaelic-speaking, inhabitant of the Scottish Highlands or Islands. Another *OED* explanation is "Characteristic or typical of Irish people, life, or culture. In earlier use frequently with derogatory connotations, esp. of foolishness." It also states that in slang, now usually considered offensive, "Irish" modifies "the names of fruit to designate a potato, as *Irish apple*, *Irish apricot*, *Irish grape*, *Irish lemon*," and it also refers to the synonym, "Irish fossil." Another example is referred to as colloquial, and "somewhat offensive" "of a statement or action: paradoxical; illogical or apparently so." Another is also given as colloquial and originally American, "Fieriness of temper; passion, anger, rage," and "chiefly with *up*, esp. in to get one's Irish up." Then there are well-known expressions such as "Irish bull," "a statement which is manifestly self-contradictory or inconsistent, esp. to humorous effect." There are less well-known expressions, such as "Irish confetti," slang, originally American, for "bricks, stones, etc., especially when used as weapons," and "Irish evidence", "false or perjured evidence." Then there is an "Irish hint," which is "a blunt statement." "Irish horse" is old sailors' slang for

"salt beef which is particularly tough, especially through being old," as is an "Irish hurricane," for "a dead calm." An "Irish promotion" is a demotion, an "Irish rise," now a rare expression, is a fall in value, especially a reduction in wages, while "Irish twins," an American colloquialism, refers to siblings born less than a year apart.

Some of these expressions belong to a rather broad category of regional or ethnic slur, stereotype or caricature, manifest in jokes and other expressions, often known by the French term *blason populaire*. Often only the social and cultural context can ascertain how offensive they are, or whether they are offensive at all. The same joke told about the Irish in England, the Poles in America, the Norwegians in Sweden, the Belgians in France, the Newfoundlanders in Canada and Kerrymen in Ireland may or may not be racist. Yet the uses of "Irish" in the expressions quoted imply violence, stupidity and a *penchant* for perjury, which is why to the Irish in Ireland or in the diaspora they evoke a well-known history of prejudice and discrimination.

The historical name that the Irish had for themselves was *Gael*, anglicised as "Gael," which is not, perhaps, a well-known term to most English-speakers, unless they have read G.K. Chesteron's

> For the great Gaels of Ireland
> Are the men that God made mad,
> For all their wars are merry,
> And all their songs are sad (Chesterton 1911, 35).

But this too seems to feed into the attribution of the illogical and the bizarre to the Irish, as in Samuel Johnson's "The Irish are a fair people -they never speak well of one another," which is funny, but uncomplimentary (Boswell 1999: 415). The adjective *Gaelach* or "Gaelic" corresponds to the substantive, *Gael*. This word seems to be originally a borrowing from Old Welsh, a derivative of the word for "forest," and meant something like "forest people", "wild men" or later "warriors." The fact that the Irish borrowed the word suggests perhaps an identity that was most obvious to foreigners, among whom we might mention a certain Patrick, abducted from Britain by a band of these wild men and set herding sheep in Co. Antrim. The Gaels spread across the water into what we now call Scotland, a word which derives from Latin *Scotia*, the land of the *Scotti*, a term first used to refer to the Gaels, and which terms initially seems to have referred more to Ireland and the Irish than to Scotland and the Scots.

"Gael" for centuries was what the Irish and the Scots of the Highlands and Islands called themselves, and their language they called Gaelic. In Scotland, the Gaelic language for a time expanded over most of the territory of

the kingdom, until it contracted in late medieval times to what is called the "Highland line," which divided the Gaelic world from the English-speaking Lowlands until well into the 19th century. The Irish at the time of Patrick were aware of the Romans – Patrick's culture, after all, was Roman and Latin was presumably his native language – and through the Romans, the Irish were aware of Gaul and the Gauls, the country we now call France and its inhabitants. The word for a Gaul, was borrowed into Irish as *gall*, and was re-applied in turn to a succession of foreign invaders.

The dictionary[3] gives *Gael* as "an Irishman, a Highlander; a Catholic." The adjective *gaelach* means "Irish, Gaelic, Irish-speaking, Irish-made, simple, unsophisticated, generous, easy-going; common, native." As "native," it is applied to certain flora to distinguish a native variety from an imported one, such as *cabáiste Gaelach* (native cabbage), *aiteann Gaelach* (native gorse). The noun *Gaeltacht*, derived from *gaelach*, refers to "the state of being Irish or Scotch; Gaeldom, Irishry, the native race of Ireland; Irish-speaking district or districts; the Gaeltacht." So, to speak of strategies for entering and leaving the Gaeltacht, we may be speaking of the use of modes of transport, a bicycle or a bus, or of processes of self-fashioning, of identity. In Scotland, in its Scottish Gaelic form, *Gàidhealtachd* also refers to the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and islands, though not in a precise geographical sense given that the Gaelic domain has shrunk over the centuries.

Next, let us look at the word *gall*, according to the dictionary "a foreigner; applied in succession to Gauls, Franks, Danes, Normans and English; *al*[so]. a Protestant," and, in Scottish Gaelic it means a Lowlander. The corresponding adjective, *gallda*, is glossed "foreign, strange, surly; pertaining to an Englishman; Protestant." The noun *Galldacht*, derived from the adjective, means "foreign manner or tendency; using foreign airs; state of being fashionable; ... English association; the Englishry or foreign race of Ireland," and in its Scottish usage also means the Lowlands (Dinneen 1927).

These terms show a certain fuzziness. If *Gael* also meant Catholic, what happens if a Gael became a Protestant? The expression in Irish was "*d'iompaigh sé/sí ina Shasanach*," "s/he turned English," *Sasanach* denoting an English person as well as a Protestant of the Anglican denomination. A well-known Irish poem by Laoisioch Mac an Bhaird, probably from the beginning of the 16th century, admonishes a man who, in the words of the poem's editor, "adopted the dress and manners of a Tudor courtier" (Bergin 1970, 49-50 and 231-32; for a perceptive interpretation of this poem, see McKibben 2010, 24-36). "*A fhir ghlacas a ghalldacht*," "O man who follows English ways," begins the

[3] *Gael* is the modernised spelling. The dictionary I cite, Dinneen's venerable work, originally published in 1904, uses the historic spelling, *Gaedheal*.

poem, and it unfavorably contrasts this man with his brother Eóghan Bán, both of them sons of a man called Donnchadh:

> A man who never loved English ways is Eóghan Bán, beloved of noble ladies.
> To English ways he never gave his heart: a savage life he chose.

A *savage* life? The word is chosen, of course, partly because *alltacht* rhymes with *galldacht*, but it might be better to see its meaning coming from a semantic spectrum that would include, besides "savage," both "wild" and "natural," i.e. closer to nature. If in contemporary Ireland, the English administration used a discourse of civility that was contrasted with the manners and customs of the "wild Irish," could Mac an Bhaird then be making an ironic comment? After all, Eóghan Bán would hate – among the items of apparel or fashion accessories mentioned in the poem – to wear stockings and a jewelled spur, a cumbersome gold ring, "a satin scarf down to his heels," and to carry a "blunt rapier that would not kill a fly," which is what his brother does, the man who rejects *Gaeltacht*, Gaelicness or Gaeldom. Rather than on a feather bed, Eóghan Bán would rather lie on a bed of rushes. Not for him such effete behavior, rather:

> A troop of horse at the brink of a gap, a fierce fight, a struggle with foot-soldiers, these are some of the desires of Donnchadh's son -and seeking battle against the foreigners!

From the 12th century Anglo-Norman conquest, there were two recognised ethnic groups in Ireland, the *Gael* and the *Gall*, the Irish and the new, mostly English-speaking, settlers, subjects of the English King who from this time claimed the title of Lord of Ireland. The Reformation and the ensuing English conquest helped to bring *Gael* and *Gall* together in a new identity as Irish Catholics, and it is in the 17th century that we find Irish-language writers using a new umbrella word that transcends the divide. The name of Ireland in Irish is *Éire*, and the country's inhabitant is the derivative *Éireannach*. A semantic shift in its meaning is noted in the early 17th century, especially in the usage of the Franciscan writers in the Irish College in Leuven in Flanders, when "the word takes on a more restrictive application, denoting an inhabitant of Ireland either of Gaelic or Old English stock who is characterised by allegiance to the Catholic faith" and to the king of England – as long as he respects their rights (Mac Craith 2005, 194). Thus *Éireannaigh* (plural of *Éireannach*) includes one category of English, henceforth called the Old English, who are Catholic, and excludes the "New English," the Protestant colonists who were in the process of conquering Ireland and dispossessing the Irish Catholics.

One of the most influential books ever written in Ireland was *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, a history of Ireland from the Flood to the Norman invasion, by Geoffrey Keating (Seathrún Céitinn), a Tipperary priest, poet and theologian. Completed about 1634, it updated the traditional history of the successive invasions of Ireland by adding one more, that of his ancestors, the Anglo-Normans, which was legitimate because it was a "Christian-like conquest," it did not try to destroy the Irish language, and the Norman lords frequently intermarried with the Gaelic Irish. Ó Buachalla characterises the work as "the origin legend of the emergent Irish Catholic nation" (Ó Buachalla 1987, five). In gathering sources for the work, Keating faced a certain hostility in Ulster, the hostility of Gaels towards a *Gall*. Two centuries later, in 1844, the Anglo-Irish antiquarian Thomas Crofton Croker, referring to Keating, wrote that it was 'a matter of notoriety in the history of Ireland, that English settlers and their descendants, or, as they are termed, “the degenerate English,” have always been more inimical to English government than the genuine Irish’ (Croker 1844, 8).

If the Protestant English conquerors of the 17th centuries saw Irish cultural difference in terms of nationality, of an "Irish" culture, the conquest itself integrated the Irish into a new political order and under a new ruling class. From then on, Protestants, whether English or the Anglo-Irish descendants of the 17th century conquerors, saw a "popular" culture. All of Gaelic society, whether the remnant of its upper classes or the popular classes, was subjected to the dominance of a non-Gaelic ruling class hostile to it. The conflation of Gaelic learned and popular traditions in such pioneering Anglo-Irish works as Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789) and Edward Bunting's *A General Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland* (1796) is an effect of this subaltern status.

For various reasons, Daniel O'Connell's movement for Catholic Emancipation and for the Repeal of the Act of Union was not influenced by Romanticism, but Romantic influences appeared from the 1840s in the works of the writers of Young Ireland who were, however, largely ignorant of the Gaelic tradition. Gaelic culture had, of course, already made an impact with the *Ossian* poems in the 1760s, though James Macpherson, their Scottish author, downplayed the Irish connection. For a brief moment, indeed, Macpherson brought the Gaelic world to the centre of European literary modernity. The German philosopher Herder, a great admirer of *Ossian*, argued that each nation had its own artistic genius, its *Volksgeist*, expressed both in the works of those writers who were true to their own native traditions, and in folksongs, the artistic products of the most authentic and least cosmopolitan stratum of the people. Romanticism intensified these developments and

facilitated a much more positive evaluation of the Celtic and Gaelic tradition, although often infused with a dose of cultural pessimism. Irish Romanticism's assimilation of elements of the Gaelic tradition and in particular its perception of a lingering Gaelic world were a key characteristic that, by the end of the 19th century, was to become central to the Anglo-Irish tradition (Dunne 1989).

There was a temporal as much as a spatial distancing in the representation of Gaelic Ireland. Antiquarians had characterised Gaelic culture by its pastness since "the most genuine and least adulterated form of Gaelic culture was that of the past, before the contamination of the English presence in Ireland," contends Joep Leerssen (1996, 49). Yet if Gaelic culture came to be categorised in this way, intellectual developments in the 19th century provided two different ways of judging its pastness, an evolutionary, and what might be called a "devolutionary" perspective (Dundes 1975). The one saw Gaelic culture as a living fossil from a more primitive past, a "survival" to use the term of the anthropologist Edward Tylor made famous in *Primitive Culture* (1867). The other saw it as a fragment of a former golden age that survived the vicissitudes of history, a thread that still linked us to a glorious past.

The Gaelic League, founded in 1893, became the motor for a new type of Irish national movement, one that placed the emphasis on language and culture above religion and land. If Gaelic Ireland came to be seen by many as a reservoir of national authenticity in this period, the keeper of a national genius and a creativity lost by other sectors of Irish society, it continued to be seen by others as a backward region that could only be integrated into the benefits of modernity by a process of development. In general, state intervention in social affairs in Ireland in the 19th century was much greater than in Britain and was, according to Niall Ó Ciosáin (1998, 93), "in response to what was seen as acute economic crisis and continuing violence and disorder." Gaelic Ireland, then, represented either the Irish nation at its most essential and most authentic or it was a "congested"[4] and miserable region awaiting the benefits of modernisation, and the decline of traditional Gaelic society was experienced either as national disaster or as the inevitable march of progress.

The writings of Séamus Delargy, director of the Irish Folklore Commission (1935-1970), are very eloquent in this regard. He expressed his anguish at the death of the Irish language in South Kerry and the attendant loss of a wealth of tradition:

> The real importance of the living language that still lives on the lips of the old people of the *Gaeltacht* was not understood – and many people

[4] The reference here is to the Congested Districts Board, established by the British government in 1891 to deal with the problems of poverty and high population on lands of poor agricultural quality.

> still do not understand it. When they are dead that will be the end of the Middle Ages in Western Europe, and the chain that is still a link between this generation and the first people who took possession of Ireland will be broken. (Ó Duilearga 1977 [1948], xii)

A crisis of authenticity was one of the spurs to the Gaelic Revival. The Gaeltacht became an ideal of authenticity and, in a time when new nation-states were being built on a Herderian model of national language and culture, the Irish national movement co-opted Gaeldom as its yardstick of authenticity. Gaeldom hence was not only an ideal. It also became a project, a means for de-Anglicising Ireland, for correcting the deviation caused by conquest, colonisation and modernisation, and for reconciling the country with its *Volksgeist*.

In Ireland, the modern period began with conquest and colonisation: Beckett's *The Making of Modern Ireland* (1966) begins in 1603, Cullen's *The Emergence of Modern Ireland* (1981) begins in 1600, Foster's *Modern Ireland* (1988) begins in 1600, Bourke and McBride's *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (2016) begins in the 16th century.[5] Modern Ireland was built on the ruins of Gaelic Ireland. Yet, from the 18th century, there was a gradual accumulation of Gaelic heritage in the capital city as emigration, language shift and modernisation reduced it everywhere else, and this was only to intensify with independence. The Royal Irish Academy, Trinity College, the National Library and later the other universities, the Irish Folklore Commission, the national broadcaster Radio Telefís Éireann and other national institutions gradually developed a metropolitan semi-monopoly of the Gaelic heritage. From these resources a national culture was posited and synthesised, Dublin, once the core of the Pale, the center of Anglicisation in Ireland, now spearheading the modern movement to recuperate a Gaelic tradition for modern Ireland and more or less dominating all modern Irish discourses of Gaeldom since then.

The Gaelic Revival succeeded in attributing Gaelicness to all the Irish and making Irish everyone's ancestral language. Henceforth, and especially with the founding of the Irish state, Gaelic identity in Ireland was both a given – children being given Irish versions of their names in school – and a matter of self-ascription. It undoubtedly helped that, unlike Scotland with its Highland Line, there never had been an acknowledged and long-standing Gaelic boundary in Ireland; the notion of the Pale[6] seems to have begun in the fifteenth century and ended with the Tudor conquest. The fact that the Irish

[5] J. C. Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London: Faber, 1966); L. M. Cullen, *The Emergence of Modern Ireland 1600-1900* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981); R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Allen Lane, 1988); Richard Bourke and Ian McBride (ed.), *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[6] A region around Dublin with shifting boundaries that was directly controlled by the English crown in the late medieval period.

language had been so marginalised socially, politically and geographically in Ireland by the second half of the 19th century made it impossible for the relatively few natives of Irish-speaking districts to define the terms of the cultural nationalist debate. This task was taken up by a new Irish-speaking intelligentsia that was renewed in every generation, partly biologically, partly through a self-ascription that was actively facilitated after independence by the state, both through an educational system that provided the possibility of fluency in Irish (since Irish was made mandatory from elementary school onwards), and through a public sector that provided intellectual positions for Irish speakers (and indeed made Irish a requirement for such jobs).

Once an Irish state was established, it became the most powerful supporter of Gaelic culture in Ireland, with an official policy promoting Irish in the educational system and the public service and with various state institutions, from the Presidency down, giving a greater or lesser degree of support to the language. The state supported research into Irish language and Gaelic literature, the collection of folklore from Irish-speaking districts, the publication of text books and creative literature, the broadcasting of Irish, grants for Irish-speaking children, the industrial development of the Gaeltacht, and an Irish-language educational system.[7] It created an Irish-speaking intelligentsia, largely situated in Dublin and in state employment. The state thus became central to the role of Irish in modern Ireland while at the same time the Irish language bestowed a historical legitimacy on it and asserted a historical continuity that could be traced through an Irish-language learned culture from today back to the Middle Ages. It is not a coincidence that the inauguration of Douglas Hyde, founder of the Gaelic League, as first President of Ireland in 1937 was greeted by de Valera with the following words: "In you we greet the successor of our rightful princes and, in your accession to office, we hail the closing of the breach that has existed since the undoing of our nation at Kinsale[8]" (cited in Ó Crualaoich 1986, 53).

The Gaeltacht as a geographico-cultural entity was, initially, at least, imagined through the Gaelic League and, later and more concretely, by the policy of the state, which established its limits (see the Coimisiún na Gaeltachta

[7] For example, the School of Celtic Studies at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies was established by *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) Éamon de Valera in 1940, the Irish Folklore Institute was founded in 1930-and its successor the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935. The state publishing house for the Irish language, An Gúm, was established in 1925. State broadcasting began in 1924 with 2RN, which also broadcast in Irish, as did its successors Radio Éireann and RTÉ. The development of the Gaeltacht was the remit of Gaeltarra Éireann, founded in 1957, and its successor Údarás na Gaeltachta (1980).

[8] At the Battle of Kinsale (1601), the English defeated the Irish and their Spanish allies and sealed their conquest of Ireland. This is why the histories of modern Ireland begin at this time.

[Commission of the Gaeltacht] Report of 1925). The state thus became central to the definition of the Gaelic in Ireland, yet the state Gaelic apparatus was largely aimed at people in the Galltacht and at inculcating a Gaelic memory in them. In certain ways the Gaeltacht was written off. More than eighty years after independence there is still no Irish dictionary (all the existing dictionaries are bilingual), and the syllabus in Gaeltacht schools has always been the same national one aimed largely at learners in the Galltacht, presenting no intellectual challenge to native Irish speakers: this is something that Breandán Ó Buachalla justifiably criticised. The fact that the Gaeltacht was a specific region with specific needs, not least those peculiar to a separate linguistic community, was lost between an official discourse that elevated the Gaelic to a paragon of national authenticity and the hard economic facts on the ground: it is estimated, for example, that some two thirds of native Irish speakers left the Gaeltacht in the 1950s for the UK or the USA. It was to be the late 1960s before a new discourse of civil rights challenged some of these contradictions.

Still, the achievements of the Gaelic Revival are not insignificant, not least through the dissemination of an identification with Gaelic heritage throughout Ireland, for a time even transcending nationalist and unionist politics. So, when did the Irish state begin to withdraw from the promotion of a Gaelic Ireland? In 1941, more than half of all schools, both primary and post-primary, were teaching some if not all classes through Irish, but by the early 1960s, the aim of restoring Irish as the national spoken language had been largely abandoned and opposition had grown to compulsory Irish-medium education. By 1973 "only eleven primary schools (outside of the Gaeltacht) and five second-level schools were still teaching solely through Irish" (Mac Gabhann 2004, 95-6).

The categories with which we understand the Gaelic – as an ideal, as a project – are products of the 19th and early 20th centuries, of a specific type of modernity, that Ulrich Beck calls the first modernity. Zygmunt Bauman, for example, has pointed out that the modern state worked to make national identity "a duty obligatory for all people inside its territorial sovereignty" (Bauman 2004, 20). Four developments are undermining this first modernity according to Beck. Firstly, individualisation, secondly, globalisation, thirdly, underemployment or unemployment, and fourthly, an ecological crisis that challenges the whole industrial mode of production (Beck 2001, 206). He contends that the characteristic sources of collective and group identity in industrial society that had maintained their vigor into the 1960s – national identity, class consciousness, faith in progress –are disintegrating. But today, in the move to the second modernity, people are released from the national industrial societies of the first modernity into a much more individualised

world. With the weakening of the nation-state and social class it is up to the individual to make his or her own identity, biography and livelihood and organise them in relation to others: "traditions must be chosen and often invented, and they have force only through the decisions and experience of individuals" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001, 25-26). Beck and Bauman were writing before the economic crash of 2007 and the recession that followed, and some of the premises of globalisation have been questioned in its aftermath, especially in the rise of populist governments. It is doubtful, however, that they have much chance of realistically undoing globalising processes and closing the relatively open societies, on which their economic prosperity largely depends.

Culture has become more and more a part of the private domain as the state became either indifferent to, or at least in a real way helpless to challenge, cultural and ethnic pluralism within its boundaries. In other words, there has been a tendency towards what Bauman has called "the privatisation of nationality" (Bauman 1990, 167). The retreat of the Irish state from an active role in promoting the Irish language has been balanced by civil society. The dynamic movement for Irish-medium schools, *gaelscoileanna*, has shown extraordinary results in recent decades: from eleven primary and five post-primary schools in 1973 to 305 and 72 respectively in 2017. Of the latter figures, 145 and 44 respectively were outside of the Gaeltacht in the Republic of Ireland and 35 and 6 in Northern Ireland (Gaelscoileanna 2017). This has been driven exclusively by parents, language activists and teachers, even if state support was eventually received. Pressure from civil society too has been largely responsible for the establishment by the state of a dedicated Irish-language radio station, Radio na Gaeltachta (in 1972), and television channel, Telefís na Gaeilge (in 1996, later TG4), and for the recognition of Irish as an EU working language in 2007.[9]

Today Ireland has one of the most globalised economies in the world. Representations of Irishness and Irish Gaeldom are recognised parts of global popular culture, from the ubiquitous Irish pubs with their Gaelic kitsch to *Riverdance*. It seems to me that the question of the survival or continuation of a Gaelic culture in Ireland is distorted by the late 19th and early 20th century terms of the debate. The notion of cultural authenticity still hovers in the background. The changes that have come about in our notions of community, of place, of nation, of class have changed the terms of the debate and those concepts, key coordinates for mapping the Gaelic, have become hollowed out.

Authenticity has represented a corrosive ideal for Irish-speaking communities, The people of the Gaeltacht in a modern world could never be

[9] When Ireland joined the then European Economic Community in 1973, Irish was given the status of "treaty language," but not of working language.

authentic enough. Hence the commonly voiced complaints that the spoken Irish language has deteriorated in every generation, has become little more than a *patois*. But such challenges are experienced by many languages today, a result of the centrality of digital media in our lives as compared to traditional literacy, of the predominance of English in popular culture and of widespread bilingualism among the educated. In principle, we expect that the training in language that is adequate to the demands of life in a modern society should be supplied by the educational system rather than by some essential native quality, and this applies as much to literary creativity as to more functional domains of language. There are battles being fought over the control of digital technology and over the ownership of cultural heritage. In 2018, 53.1% of all Internet websites used English, followed by German at 6.3%, Russian at 6.1%, Spanish at 5.0%, Japanese at 5.1%, and French at 4.2%. This particular web technology survey only includes languages of 0.1% or more of Internet websites, and thus excludes Irish, and it covers a total of 39 languages, none indigenous to Africa and only 11 from Asia, including Turkish and Hebrew. It is rather shocking to see how disadvantaged all other languages are compared to English (W³Techs 2017).

A recent report by META, the Multilingual Europe Technology Alliance, assessed the level of technological support for 30 of the approximately 80 European languages and concluded that most are unlikely to survive in the digital age. It found that digital support for 21 of the 30 languages investigated was either non-existent or weak at best. Languages such as Basque, Bulgarian, Catalan, Greek, Hungarian and Polish have only "fragmentary support," according to this survey (META-NET 2018). In early 2018 *The Guardian* correspondent Jon Henley carried an article from Iceland on this very problem. "In an age of Facebook, YouTube and Netflix, smartphones, voice recognition and digital personal assistants, the language of the Icelandic sagas... is sinking in an ocean of English," he wrote. An Icelandic expert spoke to him of "digital minoritisation," which he explained as "When a majority language in the real world becomes a minority language in the digital world." Young Icelanders were spending such a large part of their time in an entirely English digital world that secondary school teachers reported 15-year olds carrying out whole playground conversations in English (Henley 2018). Irish does not come out too badly in this kind of comparison if we accept that no language other than English does.

Pascale Casanova pointed out that "[h]istorically, where a centralised state fails to emerge, neither the attempt to legitimise a vulgar tongue nor the hope of creating a national literature is able to succeed" (Casanova 2004, 55) and this is why the language question has been intrinsic to European nationalism, and why the citizens of countries shaped by 19th and 20th century national

movements know that language cannot be taken for granted. Speakers of Irish have a deep historical understanding of the challenges that languages may face over time, challenges that speakers of many other European languages, perhaps, do not fully appreciate. A cheese shop in Amsterdam was ordered to be closed last year as part of a restriction on the number of shops in the historic center of the city aimed only at tourists, not because its signage was only in English, but because the English-only signage, advertising and pricing were an indication that it was aimed only at tourists (Boffey 2018).

At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Convention on Biological Diversity was signed, and it has been ratified to date by 196 countries. It made clear that biological diversity depended on cultural diversity. To date 176 countries have signed the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which dates from 2003. Other such instruments include the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the 2003 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace, and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.[10] Implicit is the notion that difference should not die, whether because each ecosystem, each culture, each language is a separate bank of information that may offer different solutions to various problems of the human condition now or in time to come – rather like the Svalbard Global Seed Vault stored on a Norwegian Arctic island that holds more than a million samples – or because the recognition of diversity is an effective means of broadening cultural citizenship. The local, once a source of diversity that threatened political unity, is now often seen a bank of diversity essential to the future of the human species, or as a proof of authenticity in a globalised world: an *appellation controlée*. This has provided a new means to validate cultural and linguistic difference.

The state has always had a major role in promoting a symbolically Gaelic Ireland but with a declining participation in cultural activities. On the other hand, a discourse of equality and diversity in Ireland can only benefit Irish, and it is not insignificant that a rejection of that discourse has led to the collapse of the Executive in Northern Ireland.[11] The digitisation of Gaelic

[10] The texts, the signatories and other information can be found on the appropriate websites: https://www.cbd.int/convention/ for the Convention on Biological Diversity; http://www.unesco.org/new/en/santiago/culture/intangible-heritage/convention-intangible-cultural-heritage/ for the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

[11] This is Northern Ireland's devolved government, established following the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. It collapsed on 9 January 2017 and, at time of writing (September 2018), remains in suspension. For the connection between the proposed Irish Language Act and the fall of the Executive, see "Explainer: What is the Irish Language Act and why is it causing political deadlock in Northern Ireland?" at http://www.thejournal.ie/irish-language-act-explainer-3851417-Feb2018/.

literature and folklore and their being made available online offer huge possibilities to make this patrimony available not just to Irish or Scottish Gaels or to the Irish and Scots in general or to their diasporas, but to a much wider world that can identify it as a heritage of all humankind. Indeed in 2017, the Irish Folklore Commission's collection was added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, where it joins the Book of Kells, added in 2011.[12]

Irish-speaking networks move back and forth between the Gaeltacht, Irish cities, America, Britain and continental Europe (the establishment of a pool of Irish-speaking interpreters in Brussels is an interesting new development in this regard). They intersect with English-speaking Irish or non-Irish communities in Belfast, Dublin, Chicago or London. Irish-speakers text and e-mail each other in both English and Irish. Those who grow up with Irish also grow up with English and navigate their way through both (and sometimes a third) linguistic landscape.

Ireland will not be predominently Irish-speaking again. But it will probably never be as English-speaking again either. Today's western cities are particularly diverse in language and culture owing to globalised patterns of official and unofficial labour migration, refugee movements spurred by war and ecological degradation, and tourism. Ireland will most likely remain a relatively diverse country even if migration levels drop significantly. According to the 2016 census, 17.3% of the Republic of Ireland's population has foreign nationality. A quarter of all children born in the state in 2012 had a non-Irish mother. The 2016 census showed roughly 13% of the population to be speakers of languages other than English and Irish, and 30% of those were Irish-born. The most common foreign languages spoken at home were Polish, Romanian, Lithuanian and Spanish, but in all over 180 different languages were spoken from all over the world. The Irish language and Irish-speaking communities or networks are part of Ireland's cultural and linguistic diversity, bolstered by official status at national and European level, and there is every reason to expect that, just as the children of immigrants are now playing hurling and Gaelic football, they will also contribute to the next generation of Irish-speaking intellectuals. It has been claimed that some parents choose Irish-medium *gaelscoileanna* so that their children will have less contact with immigrants; if this is true it certainly represents the perspective of a very small minority. Any attempt to remove the obligatory position of Irish from the school system could further such an agenda and make it much more difficult for immigrants to appropriate Irish as part of their heritage too. But it must be said that the atavism of a section of the Gaelic revivalists of the past

[12] See http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/access-by-region-and-country/ie/.

has been largely replaced by a progressive Irish-speaking intelligentsia, familiar both with minority rights discourse and open to other linguistic and cultural experiences. By and large, the prospects for a continued presence in and relevance to Irish society of the Irish language and of Ireland's Gaelic heritage are, in my opinion, reasonably good.

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