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‘HIS SPIRIT WAS GIVEN ONLY TO WARRE’:
CONFLICT AND IDENTITY IN THE SCOTTISH
GÀIDHEALTACHD C. 1580—C. 1630

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The military activities of Gaelic-speaking Scots in Ireland and Europe in the period c. 1580—c. 1630 are well known. Many Scottish Gaels had served as mercenaries in Ireland before the defeat of the Irish at Kinsale in 1601. In the decades following the Union of the Crowns, Scottish Gaels served as soldiers in the Netherlands, France, and in northern Europe during the Thirty Years War.¹ There was also considerable military activity within the *Gàidhealtachd*.² Maclean of Duart conducted a feud with Macdonalds of Islay and Kintyre (*Clann Iain Mbòir*) resulting in the death of Lachlan Mòr Maclean in 1598.³ The feud between MacLeod of Dunvegan with Macdonald of Sleat led to several pitched battles.⁴ The Campbells prosecuted vigorous campaigns against the Macgregors and Macdonalds of Islay and Kintyre

1. See G.A. Hayes McCoy, *Scots Mercenary Forces in Ireland* (Dublin and London: 1937) and S. Murdoch, ‘More than just ‘Mackay’s’ and Mercenaries; Gaelic Influences in Scandinavia 1580-1707’, *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, LX (1997-8) 161-186. A. Mackenzie, *The History and Genealogy of the Mackenzies* (2nd edition, Inverness: 1894) 523-4.

2. The Scottish ‘Gàidhealtachd’ or the area which was (and still is) mainly Gaelic in speech and culture is difficult to define. There was a blurring of cultures and bilingualism, rather than a sharp demarcation at the edge of the ‘Highland Line’. For the purposes of this paper, see the list of Clans in: ‘A Roll of Clans in the Highlands 1587’ and a list of landlords who owned ‘Highland’ land as at least part of their estates, in *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (Edinburgh: 1847) [hereafter *Collectanea*, 35-38. Up to 30% of the population of Scotland are estimated to have been Gaelic Speakers in 1698. In the period under discussion this figure may have been higher. C.W.J. Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981: the Geographical History of a Language* (Edinburgh: 1984) 30-31, 53. For a definition of the territorial extent of the Gàidhealtachd in 1698 see C.W.J. Withers and K.M. Mackinnon, ‘Gaelic speaking in Scotland, Demographic History’, in D.S. Thomson, ed., *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland* (2nd edition, Glasgow: 1994) 109-110.

3. N. Maclean-Bristol, *Murder Under Trust: The Crimes and Death of Sir Lachlan Mòr Maclean of Duart 1558-1598* (East Linton: 1999) 238-244.

4. A.I. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart 1603-1788* (East Linton: 1996) 37.

in Islay.⁵ In the north the Mackenzies had a period of conflict with the Munros over the possession of the Chanonry of Ross and an intermittent 'war' with the Macdonnells of Glengarry from the 1580s, culminating in the latter's capitulation in 1606.⁶ The settlement of the Glengarry feud freed Mackenzie to concentrate his attention on the luckless MacLeods of Lewis (*Sìol Torcail*) following the failure of the Fife adventurers to colonise Lewis and adjacent lands.⁷ It is well known that the Government interpreted such activity as part of what they perceived as a 'Highland problem'.⁸ What has not been as widely discussed is the means adopted by the Edinburgh (and latterly London-Edinburgh) administration for solving this and the way it impinged on the Gaels' own identity in a military context. This paper intends to examine aspects of identity and assess where possible the motivation of the Gaels involved in such conflict.

Identity in the Gàidhealtachd

Much of the documentary evidence for the *Gàidhealtachd* originates from the administration in Edinburgh which was concerned with bringing 'civility' and 'order' to places and people seemingly bent on barbarism. The comparative dearth of non-'official' sources from within the north and west of Scotland has made the history of this area difficult to interpret from any other perspective than that of Edinburgh. This poses a particular problem regarding identity. The government view of Scots Gaels found a parallel as far afield as the East Indies. Anthonio van de Heuvel, Dutch governor of Ambon in the East Indies, writing to another Dutchman in 1633 drew a comparison between the 'wild men' of Scotland and Ireland and those of Ceylon and the islands of India.⁹ It may also have been a long-

5. E.J. Cowan. 'Clanship, Kinship, and the Campbell acquisition of Islay', *Scottish*

Historical Review, LVIII (1979) 145-157.

6. Sir G. Mackenzie, 1st Earl of Cromartie, 'History of the Family of Mackenzie', in W. Fraser, ed., *The earls of Cromartie: their kindred country and Correspondence*, ii (Edinburgh: 1876) 504.

7. W.C. Mackenzie, *History of the Outer Hebrides* (Paisley and London: 1903) 173-265.

8. I would like to thank Dr Sonja Cameron for letting me see her (as yet) unpublished paper 'Contumaciously Absent: The Lords of the Isles and the Scottish Crown'. Dr Cameron has challenged the traditional view of the Macdonald lordship of the Isles as contributing towards a 'Highland problem', suggesting instead that the problem lay in Edinburgh.

9. S. Murdoch. 'The Good, the bad and the anonymous: A preliminary Survey of Scots in the Dutch East Indies 1612-1707', *Northern Scotland*, 22 (2002) 1 and fn. 1

held stereotype, drawing on a common idea that barbarity lay in the north.¹⁰ This was a pre-conception that would presumably be well known to his countrymen. Although this view could have been transmitted to the Netherlands via the Lowlands of Scotland or England, it might have been gained at first hand. The Dutch had more knowledge than most about the *Gàidhealtachd*. They had long been frequent visitors to the Western (and Northern) Isles of Scotland as fishermen.¹¹

While the sentiments of James VI and Sir Robert Gordon, to name but two, are well known with regard to Highlanders, and clearly had a European-wide currency, the views of the Gaels themselves are difficult to determine. From the mid-seventeenth century poetry generated by the circumstances of the British and Irish Wars becomes increasingly polemic and provides some insight into clan propaganda and identity.¹² The corpus of vernacular poetry that survives prior to the 1640s is not as specific, nor as obviously useful as a historical source, but it nevertheless represents a view from within the *Gàidhealtachd*, and cannot be ignored. What evidence there is, whether in the form of poetry or documentary evidence, when it does shed light on the Highlands, is usually from the perspective of the elites.

The identity of the 'clan' members is enigmatic, and will probably remain so through lack of evidence. Some fragments, however, suggest that the commoners were not always unthinkingly obedient. The tenants of Loch Broom unanimously refused to accept Robert Munro heir of Foulis as their landlord in July 1540.¹³ According to later Mackenzie histories of the seventeenth century, the people of Lewis, with the exception of remnants of the MacLeod hierarchy, had tired of conflict and 'submitted' to the Mackenzie invaders.¹⁴ The invasion was directed by Sir Roderick Mackenzie of Coigeach,

10 See A.H. Williamson, 'Scots, Indians and Empire: The Scottish Politics of Civilisation', *Past and Present*, 150 (1996) 50-53.

11 NAS, Seaforth Muniments, GD 46/18/147. For an account (1629) of Dutch activity in the Hebrides from the 1590s, see Mackenzie, *The History of the Outer Hebrides* 586-7, Appendix D.

12 See A.I. MacInnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom, 1638-1651: The Vernacular Response to the Covenanting Dynamic', in J. Dwyer, et al. eds., *New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh: 1982) 58-94.

13. C.T. McInnes, ed., *Calendar of the Writs of Munro of Foulis 1299-1823* (Edinburgh: 1940) 15, no 51.

14 J. Mackenzie of Applecross 'The Genealogie of the surname of Mackenzie (c. 1667)', 1-68 in J.R.N. MacPhail, ed., *Highland Papers*, II (Edinburgh: 1916) 62-3. [hereafter: 'Applecross MS, HP II'].

the Tutor of Kintail during his nephew's minority. He made such an impression that he was remembered, both in Ross-shire and in Lewis until relatively recently by the proverb, stating that there were only two things worse than the Tutor: *`reothadh Chéituin agus, agus ceò san iucharr'*.¹⁵ This impression is reinforced by the report made to the Privy Council in 1615, stating that Lewis was now so depopulated that no one could be enlisted there.¹⁶ This may confirm that localised sentiments from unofficial, oral sources can occasionally be trusted to accurately reflect military realities.

Gaels who straddled the demarcation of territory imposed by London and Edinburgh could prove difficult to define in terms of 'nationality'. It is tempting to think that those more immediately concerned with this, the Macdonalds, who held land in both Scotland and Ireland could conceive of themselves as Gaels first and take on an additional designation to suit the immediate situation. If this held true in political and social situations, then clearly there are implications for how Gaels would identify themselves when fighting. All the evidence suggests that such flexibility did indeed exist. In April 1594, James Macdonald of Glens in Ireland came to Edinburgh and was knighted by James VI. A contemporary description produced at the Scottish court stated: *`This Sir James wes ane Scottis man of bluid, albeit his landis lvis in Yrland. He was ane braw man of persone and behaviour, bot had nocht the Scottis tong, nor na language bot Eirse'*.¹⁷ James was at this time preparing to act against the Earl of Bothwell and making preparations to head up to Aberdeen to confront the Earl of Huntly, and may have been making a play for Macdonald support.¹⁸ This may be a typical example of the centre, when it suited its own purposes, accepting cultural identities it normally found suspicious and actively deploying the very militarism its civilising propaganda denounced so roundly. James Macdonald was later described by the Spanish Ambassador in London in 1620

15 In: W. Fraser, ed., *The Earls of Cromartie*, I (Edinburgh: 1876) xlix. Mackenzie supplies only an English translation: 'There are but two things worse than the Tutor of Kintail frost in Spring, and mist in the dog-days', in Mackenzie, *History and Genealogy of the Mackenzies*, 550.

16 F.J. Shaw, *The Northern and Western Isles of Scotland, Their Economy and Society in the Seventeenth Century* (Edinburgh: 1980) 69.

17 J.W. Mackenzie, ed., *A chronicle of the kings of Scotland from Fergus the First to James the Sixth, in the year M.DCCC.XXX* (Edinburgh: 1830) 157. I am grateful to Steve Murdoch for this reference.

18 *RPCS* V, 138-141. English reports indicate that Macdonald was to join the Earl of Argyll for this purpose in September 1594. See *CSPS*, XI, 450.

in very similar terms; namely as both Scottish and Irish.¹⁹ Yet there is no indication that these kindreds, such as Macdonalds (other than those who held lands in Ireland), MacLeods and Macgregors, the most spectacular malefactors of James VI's reign, thought of themselves as anything other than Scottish. Of the many charges levelled at them such as godlessness and the ubiquitous barbarity, there is no hint at them being un-Scottish. An idea of the dual identities drawn on by Gaels is given in a song from the other side of the *Gàidhealtachd*. The Grants, or their hierarchy, seemed perfectly at home in 'Lowland' towns such as Elgin, conducting much of their legal business there.²⁰ Attitudes towards their identity are hinted at in the reference to *Eilginn nan Gall* in '*Oran do Thighearna Ghrannt*', thought to date from around 1640.²¹ Seumas Grandd is complimented on his skills at the gambling table before returning to his gaming and the *clàrsach* (Gaelic harp) music at his house. However despite the reference to 'Gail' in Elgin, the poet refers to drinking and taking pleasure in Scotland's reputation.²² This panegyric poem, while centred on the local, also reveals a sensitivity towards wider identities. While celebrating the laird of Grant, his wife Mary Stuart with her Royal and Gordon bloodline are also honoured in the final two verses, revealing an awareness of larger regional and national notions of loyalty.²³ From the military perspective Seumas's prowess

19 A. Ballesteras Beretta, ed., *Documentes para la Historia de Espana: Correspondencia oficial de Don Diego Sarmiento de Aina, Conde de Gondomar* (4 vols. Madrid: 1936-1945) I, 287. Thanks to Dr David Worthington for this reference.

20 The Chiefs of Grant frequently conducted their business in Elgin and Forres, and many of their legal instruments in this period are drawn up there —in Scots. W. Fraser, ed., *The Chiefs of Grant* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1883) III, 'Charters', no. 130, 140, 141, *passim*.

21 Reference to 'Elgin of the Lowlander', in 'A song to the laird of Grant' in C. Ó Baoill, ed., and M. Bateman, translation, *Gàir nan Clàrsach: The Harps' Cry* (Edinburgh: 1994), 126.

22 'Gall' can be translated in different ways depending on the context. Although often meaning Lowland, or at least non-Gaelic, it can also apply to foreign or alien. It also appears in *Innse Gall*, or the Western Isles (the Islands of the foreigners), and the epithet 'Gallda' is also applied to a person from 'Gallaibh' (Caithness), who might themselves be Gaels. For discussion see J. Machines, 'The Gaelic Perception of the Lowlands', in W. Gillies, ed., *Gaelic and Scotland: Alba agus a' Ghàidhlig* (Edinburgh: 1989) 89' 100. Ó Baoill, *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, 126.

23 C. Ó Baoill, and D. Macaulay, *Scottish Vernacular Verse to 1730: A checklist* (Aberdeen: 2001) 21, no. 164. If it was composed at the date of Grant's marriage to Mary Stuart in 1640, the royalist sentiment, and in particular the phrase 'Cha Dhuibhneach a tà me luaidh' (no Campbell do I intend to praise), anticipates Iain Lom's later more vituperative anti-Campbell sentiments in songs such as '*Oran air Latha Blàir Inbhir Lòchaidh*', in Ó Baoill, *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, 106-112, 124.

in battle is proclaimed, together with the good news that whatever he could be called it is not Campbell. Above all, for the poet and his audience there would appear to be no contradiction in praising Scotland and the identification of Elgin as a town of 'Gail', anymore than there would have been in disparaging a fellow Gael.

In addition to the problem of whether Gaels had a local, Scottish or Gaelic identity, the Union of the Crowns brought another concept, that of Britain, into play. Englishmen appeared in the north and west Highlands as traders, surveyors and even as pirates.²⁴ In most of its manifestations this was part of James' determination to integrate all his British Isles subjects as part of his vision for a wider regal union. An Englishman Robert Arden, together with James Spens of Wormiston and George Hay of Nether Liff attempted to dispossess the Macaulays from their lands in Uig in Lewis in 1605.²⁵ Andrew Lord Ochiltree was accompanied by 'the Admirall and remanent Captaines of the Inglish fleet', at the outset of his punitive expedition to the Western Isles in 1608.²⁶ Captain John Mason, an Englishman, had been in command of two warships and two pinnaces, accompanying Bishop Andrew Knox between 1609-1610, in order to subdue the 'rebellious redshankes in the Hebridean Ilandes'.²⁷ James VI and I made a point of projecting this British identity, reminding chiefs of its existence not only by the style adopted in official documents, but also in the unit of currency.²⁸

24 The Earl of Seaforth had an English surveyor whom he brought to Lochewe in 1624. See NLS, Denmilne Papers, Adv MS. 33.1.1 (11), no. 61. English wood-smiths were present in Strath Carron in 1625, and bear witness to the granting of the Sasine of a saw mill in Glen Calvie, property of Andrew Ross later provost of Tain. For this see RJ. Adam, ed., *The Calendar of Fearn: text and additions, 1471-1667* (Edinburgh: 1991) 222. Neil MacLeod of Lewis attempted to negotiate a pardon through his capture and handing over of Peter Love, an English pirate to the Privy Council in 1611. See *Collectanea*, 48-9.

25 R.C. MacLeod, ed., *The Book Of Dunvegan, Being documents from the muniments room of the MacLeods., vol. 1, 1340-1700* (Aberdeen: 1938) 116. Robert Arden seems to have been a customar in Berwick in 1576, and to have made a fishing expedition for ling and cod to Iceland in 1593. BL, Manuscript catalogue, Add. MS 34729, f. 63.

26 Denmilne Mss no. 17, in, J.R.N. MacPhail, ed., *Highland Papers*, III (Edinburgh: 1920) 112.

27 B. Lenman, 'The Highland Aristocracy and North America 1603-1784', in L. Maclean, ed., *The seventeenth Century in the Highlands* (Inverness: 1986) 176. For details of Charles I's fishery policy see A.I. Macinnes, *Charles I and the Making of the Covenanting Movement 1625-1641* (Edinburgh: 1991) 108-116.

28 Ruairidh MacLeod of Dunvegan had been remiss in payments owed to John Sempill, a fish merchant, for spoliation and theft of his goods by MacLeod and his

The threat of English naval power could potentially now be brought to bear in the Western Isles by the king, a seminal change in military reach and leverage which must have forced a major reappraisal by chiefs of whither, when and for whom they would mobilise. While the experience of the 'barbarous' Gaels at the hands of the British state may have been negative, those Gaels who had been actively engaged with the government were in a position to take advantage of this shift in power. The Campbells remained influential throughout and beyond this period, a fact that has left them with the reputation of having been inimical to the Gaelic interest.²⁹ This perception is a result of the highly effective bardic propaganda emanating from the likes of Iain Lom during the Civil Wars of the 1640s. It is also partly a result of Argyll success at assimilating into Lowland power structures. This enabled John Colville in his 'Catalogue of the Scottis nobilitie' to refer to the Argyll Earls as being 'Protestant', and of 'great might', without any ethnic distinction. Other Gaels, such as Mackenzie, Macdonald, MacLeod and Maclean were given the epithet 'Irish'.³⁰ In the opinion of William Gillies, Campbell poetry shows a more Scottish (and latterly British) theme than other poetry from the *Gàidhealtachd*.³¹ The Campbells were also quick to adopt the usage of the words 'British' and 'North British' in the first decade of the seventeenth-century.³² Clearly, if they identified with these concepts then they were as likely to fight for them as any clan which, not recognising Britain, felt entitled to oppose its political and physical manifestations.

Rebels on the fringes of the Hebrides such as Niall Odhar (MacLeod) certainly experienced the British dimension and were forced to react to it. Surprisingly, such responses could entail a mix of contempt,

accomplices from his 'bark' at the mouth of Loch Lorn in 1597. Whereas the penalty incurred by MacLeod for this would have been in Scots money, the discharge given to him when he finally paid in 1605 stated that 'ane hundred punds money of North Brittain ...'. See MacLeod, ed., *The Book of Dunvegan*, 214-5.

29 For Clan Campbell's 'Gaelic' identity see W. Gillies, 'Some aspects of Campbell History', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 50 (1976-8) 256-295. The exception to the generally good Crown-Campbell relationship was the 7th Earl of Argyll's recusancy and departure to Spain.

30 J. Colville, *The Original Letters of Mr John Colvile, 1582-1603, to which is added his Palinode, 1600* (Edinburgh: 1858) 350-352.

31 Gillies, 'Some aspects of Campbell History', 294-5, fn. 49.

32 A.I. Macinnes, 'Slaughter Under Trust: Clan Massacres and British State Formation', in M. Levene and P. Roberts, eds., *The Massacre in History* (London and New York: 1999) 131.

indifference and even opportunistic co-operation. Peter Love, an English pirate, had been haunting the north-west coast, and may for a time have been collaborating with disaffected elements such as the MacLeods of Lewis. Niall attempted to assuage the Privy Council and earn leverage at the centre by handing him over.³³ This, however, failed to appease the establishment in Edinburgh. In fact Alexander Hay, the clerk register of the Council, believed that by far the best thing to do with Niall Odhar was transportation to Virginia. Virginia according to Hay was suitable for the likes of MacLeod, for if he went there, 'there wald be no suche danger there as his being of Iyreland, for albeit bothe speiches be barbarous, yit I hope he sal neid ane interpretour betwix him and the savaiges'.³⁴

Hay seems to suggest that there is a clear difference between the Gaelic of Ireland and Scotland, although not enough to warrant an interpreter.³⁵ The type of distinction drawn by James VI and his political agents was given sharper focus by Colville who listed the nobility with regard to their military threat to the state, their religious persuasion and political tendencies. The 'Lord of the Iles, callit Makrenold', and the 'The Lord of Kyntyir, callit Makoneill', together with MacLeod of Lewis are described as being 'Irish, and barbar'. Mackenzie of Kintail however, a member of the Privy Council, is Irish; a Protestant, and very Politique'. His nephew Maclean of Duart, is 'Irish, a child, of good expectation'. These five are given an 'ethnic' designation suggesting that their identity was perceived, by Colville at least, as being Gaelic. The Earl of Argyll unsurprisingly is: 'callit Campbell: Protestant, of great action and micht'; while the Lord Lovat is 'callit Fraser: Protestant of small action'.³⁶ That Fraser is not designated as 'Irish' may have been the result of a conscious effort on the part of the clan not to be seen in this light.³⁷ Such pandering to government sensibilities mirrors the attempts by the likes of the Mackintoshes to realign themselves more obviously with the centre's agenda, as discussed by Alison Cathcart in this volume.

33 Mackenzie, *History of the Outer Hebrides*, 248-252.

34 *Collecteana*, no. 12, 48-9.

35 Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland, 1698-1981*, 23. For a more detailed discussion see D. Horsbroch, *When Was Gaelic Scottish? The Origins, Emergence and Development of Scottish Gaelic Identity, 1400 1750'*, in C. Ó Baoill and N. McGuire, eds., *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000* (Aberdeen: 2002). I am grateful to Professor Ó Baoill for these references.

36 Colville, *The Original Letters of Mr John Colvile*, 350-352.

37 *Wardlaw MS*, 284, 325-7.

Although ostensibly anti Gaelic, Sir Robert Gordon had a good knowledge of the Gaelic World and its Social Structure.³⁸ Much of his genealogical history contains references to the neighbouring house of Caithness and reveals another layer of Gaelic identity which was to form an element in their approach to war. In an obituary notice of Sir John Sinclair, brother of the Earl of Caithness in 1622, Gordon noted that he had been a great favourer of the Clan Gunn:

with whom he had been fostered and bred in his infancie, which is accomplished the strictest poynt of amitie and freindship among all the Hielanders of the kingdome of Scotland, preferring oftentimes their fosters and foster bretheren unto their parents and neirest kindred; they will follow and depend upon them, befor their naturall Lords and masters.³⁹

Although fosterage is generally taken as a Gaelic custom, Sir Robert had inside knowledge, for he himself had been 'in his infancie noorished' and was fostered with 'Margaret Mackrcth' the widow of John Gordon of Drummuy.⁴⁰ It has been observed recently that 'the primary function of fosterage was the creation of alliances both within clans and between clans.'⁴¹ The closeness of this kinship tie is as important, if not more so, as any ideology for the *Gàidhealtachd* in this period and the practice of fosterage seems to have been widespread.⁴² The system was clearly a means of bonding people together in a way which could be as strong or stronger than the appeal of an ideology, regional or national. People tended to follow such kin-based allegiance to the detriment of ideology within the hounds of the 'clan' and it formed a central dynamic underpinning Gaelic

38 D. Allan, 'Ane Ornament to Yow and Your famelie'; Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun and the Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland', *Scottish Historical Review*, LXXX (2001) 24-5, 27-9; 'Seill Torquill' (*Siol Torcaill*); 'Clan-wickGill-Cholm' (*Clann Mhic Ghille Chaluum*, MacLeods of Raasay), 'Clan wick Gill-woir' (*Clann mhic Ghille Mhoire*, Morrisons of Ness), Gordon, *Sutherland*, 269, 272-3.

39 Gordon, *Sutherland*, 374.

40 Gordon, *Sutherland*, 314; the Frasers of Lovat also practised fosterage. MacShimidh's son, Thomas, born in 1603, was fostered with McGruers in Abertarf: See *Wardlaw MS*, 236.

41 A. Cathcart, 'Patterns of Kinship and Clanship: The Mackintoshes and Clan Chattan 1291-1609', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberdeen (2001) 181.

42 Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart*, 13-14; F.J. Cowan, 'Fishers in Drumlie Waters: Clanship and Campbell Expansion in the Time of Gillesbaig Gruamach', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, LIV (1984- 6) 276 8. The importance of fosterage is reflected in some poetry of the time. See 'MacGriogair à Ruaro', in Ó Baoill, *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, 54- 55.

militarism. In the poem *Iorram do Shir Lachlann'*, ascribed to Eachann Bacach:

Bhiodh fir Mhuile mu'd bhrataich
'S ann mud ghualainn gum faight' iad;
Bu ni duilich am fasdadh's do leòn.⁴³

This was no idle sentiment, and no less than eight of Maclean of Duart's foster brothers are said to have died in an attempt to save their chief at the battle of Inverkeithing.⁴⁴

Central Policies and Gaelic Military Reaction

The complexity of these elements and the subtle interactions that constituted identity in the *Gàidhealtachd* found reflection in the crude way Edinburgh demarcated its military opponents. Alexander Seton, the first Earl of Dunfermline, reflected the Government view of the Highlands, commenting dismissively of 'malefactoris in the Hielandis' with 'onpleasand onworthie and ungodlie names', suggesting that he was as uncomfortable with Gaelic patronymics as with the individuals they identified.⁴⁵ Presumably this did not apply to Colin Mackenzie of Kintail, his son-in-law, known to his Mackenzie kinsmen as Cailean Dearg'.⁴⁶ Dunfermline was probably following the lead of James VI in *Basilikon Doron*. The king made the distinction between those Highlanders dwelling on the mainland who despite being rather barbarous had a veneer of 'civilitie', and those Gaels from the Islands who were 'alluterly barbares'.⁴⁷ The Gaels described as the most 'incorrigible' were those who were at the greatest distance from the

43 ('The men of Mull would he by your banner, they'd be found by your shoulder, it would he a difficult thing to seize them and wound you'. Dated tentatively to c. 1636) C. Ó Baoill, ed., *Bàrdachd Chloinn Ghill Eathain: Eachann Bacach and other Maclean poets* (Edinburgh: 1979) 6.

44 Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart*, 14.

45 J.N.R. MacPhail, ed., *Highland Papers, III* (Edinburgh: 1920) 117. Dunfermline to James VI, 1609.

46 ('Red' Colin) So called by 'Cailean Dubh Chùil Challaidh' ('Black' Colin Mackenzie of Kilcoy) his first cousin. See 'Cumha Chailean Deirg Mhic Choinnich, Iarla Siophoirt, le Cailean Dubh Chùilchallaidh sa bhliadhna 1633', in W. Matheson, *Further Gleanings from the Dornte Manuscripts, Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, XLV (1967 8) 155-6.

47 James I, 'Basilikon Doron' in *The Workes* (originally published London: 1616, Anglistica and Americana Reprint, New York: 1971) 159.

central government, both geographically and administratively. However, the complex sequence of ethnic indicators described by John Colville and Seton masked the reality that it was the acceptance or refusal of central authority that ultimately mattered. For such clans, militarism was expected of them and the centre's policies often forced nothing less than a self-fulfilling cycle of events.

Set within this context the arrival of centralising forces became an obvious factor re-defining pre-existing Highland militarism. Scots merchants and fishermen were leading the charge to exploit what for them had hitherto been remote areas. The Hebrides were not the only area to feel the effects of the Scottish fishing effort. James VI and I and his loyal subjects tried to muscle in on the Faeroe Islands, the Norwegian coasts, Greenland and Icelandic waters in the first two decades of the seventeenth-century.⁴⁸ The rich fishing grounds of the north and west coasts of Scotland, unlike the possessions of Christian IV, were, in theory, James' to dispose of as he wished.⁴⁹ From about 1585 Scottish burgesses began to show an increased interest in the fishing grounds of the north and west coast of Scotland, known as 'the fishing of the Ilis'.⁵⁰ The burghs of Scotland complained to the Privy Council in September 1585 that Edinburgh was undermining their privilege 'to mak, pak, and peill thair hering and fishes at Garloch, Loch Lung, Loch Fyne, Innerkeip, and uthir placeis quhair thay pleis'.⁵¹ While an appeal to the Council or the machinery of law could be effective against the burgesses of Edinburgh, this course of action stood less chance of success in the north west.

The Register of the Privy Council gives numerous instances of depredations committed by Gaels against Lowland fishermen in the final two decades of the sixteenth century. Very little other than barbarism and presumably the sheer love of piracy prevalent in people of such a disposition is offered in the way of motive for such attacks.⁵²

48 S. Murdoch, *Britain, Denmark-,Norway and the House of Stuart 1603-1660* (East Linton: 2000) 32--3.

49 'This fishing [30 Nov. 1629] hath been used by the Scots above 40 years, and by them is esteemed above that of New found Land'. See Mackenzie, *History of the Outer Hebrides*, 586, Appendix D.

50 An entry in the Register of the Privy Council neatly defines the extent of the north-western seaboard of the Gàidhealtachd. The burgesses of Renfrew, 4 September 1601, were to repair to 'the fishing of the Ilis, callit the herring fishing in the Wester seas between the Pentland Firth and the Brig of Glasgow', *RPCS*, VI, 694.

51 *RPCS*, IV, 18.

52 The lowland fishermen operating on the west coast were themselves not above

The possibility that the inhabitants of the coasts adjacent to the 'filching of the Yllis' may have felt they were losing out to an influx of strangers operating in areas in which they themselves had fishing rights is not alluded to. As early as January 1572/3 Robert Munro of Foulis had been given a five-year tack 'of all customs and duties of whatever goods within the burgh and sheriffdom of Inverness and Lochs of Lochbroom, Lochcarron, the lochs of Lewis and all other lochs of the north Isles', for an annual payment of £ 100.

Having a pre-established legal framework meant that the perceived threat to their rights posed by the Lowland merchant fishermen induced a rare, and brief, unified response from the chiefs of the western seaboard in 1586. The majority of chiefs controlling shorelines north of Ardnamurchan Point were denounced as rebels for interfering with the fishing by exacting landing, anchorage charges and rent for buildings on the shore, as they were entitled to do under Scots law.⁵³ The fishermen were harassed and their nets and gear stolen. More seriously from a government viewpoint this resulted not only in a shortage of fish, but also a loss of revenue.⁵⁴ When Niall Odhar attacked and took a ship belonging to burgesses of Perth at Loch Broom in 1598 he may have been ejecting what he regarded as a party of trespassers.⁵⁵ To have stood by and not defended his rights in such a situation could well have been regarded by his followers as a dereliction of duty. While the merchants of Fife had reached an agreement with Patrick Stewart Earl of Orkney over the fishing rights in the northern Isles by September 1594, there seemed to be no prospect of a similar deal with regard to the west coast.⁵⁶

the sort of actions they often complained that they were subjected to by Gaels. Walter Dull, an Englishman from Bristol, had his ship taken from him by merchants from Fife and Lothian, while fishing at Lochcarron in 1570. *RPCS*, XIV, 329-338.

53 C.T. McInnes, ed., *Calendar of the Writs of Munro of Foulis 1299- 1823* (Edinburgh: 1940) 28, no 88.

54 The chiefs included Mackenzie of Kintail, Mackinnon, Mackay, MacDonald of Sleat, MacLeod of Lewis, MacLeod of Coigeach, MacLeod of Assynt, MacLeod of Raasay, Macleod of Harris, Munro of Foulis. The main cause of complaint by the fishers was that the chiefs had raised the charges for ground leave from 3/-4 d per last, to 20/ 4 d. per last. *RPCS*, IV, 121 5. Thanks to Professor A.I. Macinnes, Department of History, University of Aberdeen for this point.

55 Niall was accompanied 'with ane nu[m]ber of thevis and lymmeris yo[ur] associatis to the nu[m]ber of fourtie men or quhairby All bodin in feir of weir'. See NLS Denmilne Manuscripts, Adv Ms 33. 1.2, vol. 14, no. 12.

56 A.W. Johnston and A. Johnston, eds., *Orkney and Shetland Records (Diplomatarium Orcadense et Hialtlandense)*, I (London: 1907 13) 215-9, no. 76.

The commercial imperative, together with the inability of the Crown to exercise its will in the north west, led James VI to license a group of merchants to colonise Lewis. Not only did a location in Lewis enable ready access to the fishing grounds, it also provided the crown with a base of loyal support, from which another front could be opened on recalcitrant and hitherto relatively inaccessible Gaels of the north and west.⁵⁷ The Lewis scheme was clearly a sophisticated offensive, mixing commerce, colonisation and the physical subjugation of those areas deemed unacceptably recidivist. Yet this mixture of tactics suggests that when Gaels attacked fishing vessels and fishermen they did so either for financial reasons or for the sheer love of it. Included in the 'Articlis to be contracted amongst the Societie of the Lewis' were: 'The pairting of the landis, peopill, and guiddis; The Salmond fischingis, myndis, mynerallis, quhaillis, teindis, or excyse of fische cuming be resaitt of utheris nor ourselflis'. There was an insistence on separation between the natives and the incoming settlers, with a clause stating that there was to be: 'Na marriage or uther particular freindschip to be any of the societie, without consent of the hail, with any Hyland man'.⁵⁸ This was not confined to Lewis, and included Waternish in Skye. Neighbouring chiefs must have thought that this was the start of a more general financial and indeed colonial assault. Writing to Robert Cecil in August 1598 of the departure of the 'Lewisers' Nicolson noted that 'the gentlemen of Fife hold their conquest against Lewis: a good platt for her majesty to subdue our Ireland with'.⁵⁹ In Nicolson's view the Scottish offensive in the Isles seemed to be an action which complemented his own government's actions in Ireland. It was in no west-coast baron's interest to see this succeed, and in fact most of the chiefs of the

57 'It is also to be considerate if fisching be knawin to abound ather in the continent [mainland] in any loch or bay th[e]roff or in any of the Iles aforsaid, he q[uh]a remanes at Starnway may apon aduertisement, in one tyd or tua at most come to any place or harbour th[er]of'. Quoted in 'Ane descriptioun of the Course that the Herrings taks to fisch in the seas belonging to his sacred majestie ...' Undated, but a reference to 'McClويد of Lewes' suggests the author's information of the areas was gathered prior to 1598, or 1610 at the latest. It was committed to paper (or a copy made) after 1603, as the King is referred to as 'his sacred maiestie of Great Britiane'. NAS, Seaforth Muniments, GD 46/18/147.

58 *RPCS*, XIV, Appendix to introduction, cxxix--cxxx.

59 Nicolson further commented in a missive of 26 September 1598 on the 'Lewisers' who, having been delayed now departed, saying that 'This `platt' is no evil precedent for the conquest of Ireland'. *CSPS*, XIII, 271, 301. 'Platt' is defined as a blow or a stroke. See M. Robertson, ed., *The Concise Scots Dictionary* (Edinburgh: 1985).

north and west coast opposed the venture either overtly or covertly. Even Mackenzie of Kintail, himself a member of the Privy Council, was implicated by a captured member of the MacLeods of Lewis, for secretly providing support and information to Niall Odhar against the Fife Adventurers.⁶⁰

There is little or no written evidence from the natives surviving to show what they felt about this incursion. Their exclusion and the lack of any benefits offered to them would seem certain to have bred resentment. The intermittent but continuous resistance to external colonisation would suggest that the natives looked on the planters' aims less than favourably. It may be that the chiefs of the north and west coast had been able to co-operate with Dutch fishermen, and strike a more favourable bargain with them than they were able to with the Lowland burgesses. Even the Earl of Seaforth attempted to bring in Dutch traders in 1629, and encountered fierce resistance from the burghs in doing so.⁶¹

The issue of fishing rights was simply evidence that by the end of the sixteenth century it was becoming increasingly difficult for chiefs in the *Gàidhealtachd* to avoid engagement with Edinburgh. While content to pay lip service to the capital when they so chose, the government may have been viewed from a north western perspective as something best kept at arm's length. While the authorities were willing to raise taxes, they were unable to administer justice, particularly in the north and west. Edinburgh had in the past only been able to effect limited strikes against those it considered barbarous. Kin groups left to their own devices had developed their own power structures independently of the state. The dismemberment of Clan Donald's Lordship of the Isles left little in the way of a credible alternative power structure and seems to have been responsible for

60 Mackenzie, *History of the Outer Hebrides*, 1867, 193.

61 `... the burgh of Edinburgh to doe all things fitt for the quid of thair busines against the patent grantit to the Earl of Seaforth for Erectioun of the Burgh of Stornoway ...' 23 July 1628, in M. Wood ed., *Extracts from the Records of the Burghs of Edinburgh 1626 to 1641* (Edinburgh: 1936) 47. The Burghs got Charles I on their side, and not only stymied Seaforth's plans but called his title to Lewis into question. *Collectanea*, 105 -1 11. For Seaforth's Dutch contracting see NAS, Seaforth Muniments, GD 46/20/Box 5 `Contract between Captain Mungo Hamilton (on behalf of Seaforth) and a party of Dutchmen led by the Lord Deputy of the Admiralty of Zealand, granting them fishing rights and privileges'. English translation dated the Hague, 31 May 1629.

much of the 'chaos' that overtook the north and west.⁶² James V's sharp but short-lived 'diplomacy' in 1540 (tactics repeated by Bishop Knox in 1609) had essentially consisted of kidnap and blackmail, followed by a retreat of royal power.⁶³ James VI, however, enjoying the benefit of a long reign and spurred on by his impecunty, presented a much more serious and sustained threat to the western and Gaelic kin groups.

James VI's most consistent tactic, the use of militarised clanship against itself, was only possible because of the *Gàidhealtachd's* extremely divisive territorial politics. It is often assumed that the ideal of the Lordship faded with Dòmhnall Dubh's death in 1545. This after all was the last major concerted effort that achieved any semblance of unity among the former kindreds of the Lordship. However sept's of the divided Macdonalds did not abandon their aspirations to their inheritance. They in fact competed with each other for territory and power. But a lack of consensus over who was the legitimate heir to the Lordship scuppered their attempts at unity. By the end of the sixteenth century, the branches of the former Macdonald hegemony had been coming under increasing pressure both from government and from neighbouring clans who had benefited from the forfeiture, notably the Campbells, Mackenzies and Macleans. Despite this new emerging order, the northern branch of the Macdonalds had not abandoned their aspirations to the Lordship of the Isles. Dòmhnall Gorm of Sleat was the focal point of this aspiration at the close of the seventeenth century. George Nicolson, the English informant in Edinburgh, writing to Lord Burghley, said of the Islesmen that 'the Islanders come not in, neither giving their obedience, looking for troubles between her majesty and the king'. Argyll, it was hoped, would be around to counteract this threat. According to Nicolson the aim of Dòmhnall Gorm was to take advantage of discord between Elizabeth of England and James VI, in order to create the most favourable conditions to further his claim to the Lordship.⁶⁴ Indeed, Dòmhnall Gorm was prepared to go further, to the point of offering

62 For the origins and apogee of the Lordship see R.A. McDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles: Scotland's Western Seaboard c. 1100-1336* (East Linton: 1997).

63 Robert Lindesay of Pitscottie, *The Historic and Chronicles of Scotland From the Slaughte of King James the First To the Ane thousande fyve hundreidth thrie scoir fyftein zeir*', in A.J.G. Mackay, ed., (3 vols., London and Edinburgh: 1899-1911) I, 351-2. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart*, 60, 64.

64 Nicolson writing from Edinburgh, 29 March 1598, in *CSPS*, XIII, 182.

service to the English. It was stated that: 'Donald Gorme MacDonnell Lord of the Isles of Scotland and chief of the whole Clandonald Irishmen his allies, Clanranald, Glengarrie, the Captain of Cameron, MacIan of Ardnamurchan, Mackinnon of Strathordill, Neil Makcloyde Tutor of Lewis, MacLeod of Dunvegan and Macdonald of Dunnyaivaig and the Glens ... intend noways to acknowledge his majesty's authority ...'. Dòmhnall also invoked the strong 'favour and friendship shown by the Queen's predecessors to his predecessors the Lords of the Isles'.⁶⁵ As noted previously, much is made of the Campbells and their adroit role as a 'Scottish', later 'British' clan. Yet the Macdonalds differed little if at all from their Argyll rivals in seeking external patrons. In their case their failure to retain influence and favour in Edinburgh, which promoted the Campbells and Mackenzies against them, left them little option but to seek English assistance. The difference arose only in that the Scottish-British factor worked for the Campbells while England never delivered for the Macdonalds.

In the north meanwhile the Macdonnells of Glengarry fought against Mackenzie encroachment onto their lands. It is probable that the Glengarrys regarded themselves as the rightful heirs to a larger share of lands in Ross than they now possessed and indeed lost to the Mackenzies and the Munros, in Lochalsh, Lochcarron and Loch Broom. They did seem, however, to accept the loss of the earldom of Ross.⁶⁶ That the continuing aspirations of the remnants of the northern septs of Clan Donald (*Clann Iain Mhòir* having been crushed by the Campbells) to resurrect the Lordship of the Isles in some form was a real if increasingly unrealistic one, was demonstrated in a retour of 1622. Donald Macdonald of Sleat, John MacLeod of Dunvegan, and 'John McRonald of Yllintirrim' were among the witnesses to a deed registered in Edinburgh in which it was stated that the:

deceased Celestine de Ilis of Lochelsche, brother of deceased John Earl of Ros, lord de Ilis, great great grandfather of Donald McAngus of Glengarrie, died at faith and peace of the king, and that the said Donald McAngus is lawful and nearest heir of [the] said deceased Celestine de Ilis of Lochelsche, his great great grandfather, and that he is of lawful age.⁶⁷

65 *CSPS*, XIII, 191-2.

66 A. MacBain, and J. Kennedy, eds., 'The Book of Clanranald', in *Reliquae Celticae*, II (Inverness: 1894) 164 5.

67 'Extract retour of Inquest', Edinburgh, 26 April 1622', in McInnes, *Calendar of the Writs of Munro of Foulis*, 54, no. 185.

Glengarry wished to keep his claim open should a change in circumstances arise. His possessions had been diminished by the Mackenzies, however, and he was in no position to make good his putative claim. Neither by the 1620s were his witnesses. Macdonald of Sleat was a frequent witness to Seaforth's (his brother-in-law) charters, Clanranald acknowledged Seaforth as his superior for his lands on the mainland. Ruairidh Mòr of Dunvegan, who had countenanced Macdonald pretensions in this respect, died and was buried at the Chanonry of Ross, the main residence of the Earl of Seaforth, in 1626.⁶⁸

This example represents one expression of Highland warfare, a conflict with its dynamic rooted in clan interests and sensibilities. Yet such activity was now distorted by the intervention of the centre to varying degrees, with the Mackenzie's defeating but not liquidating the Glengarry kindreds. Outcomes could often be more extreme however. By employing 'pro-government' clans, and colonists from the Lowlands for the subjugation of 'uncivilised' clans, the Crown granted the domain of 'barbarous' clans to people who had no interest in any amicable solution. This left marginalised clans such as the Macdonalds, Macgregors and MacLeods with little option other than outright resistance as a measure to counteract their Lowland problem. Their defensive wars took on an element of desperation and finality that might not have emerged had the conflict lacked external government interference. This was demonstrated when Norman MacLeod of Lewis, having rallied his besieged clan and expelled the Fife Adventurers sought to negotiate from a position of relative strength, against the advice of his half-brother Niall Odhar.⁶⁹ He went to London to see James VI under a promise of safe conduct. Although he initially seems to have impressed the king, members of the court apparently persuaded the king to imprison him.⁷⁰ When he was finally released after ten years, Lewis had been conquered completely by Mackenzie of Kintail, and his pardon was conditional on his banishment from Britain.⁷¹

Beneath these levels of violence lay more localised conflict. In the absence of any other authority to replace the Lordship, raids or

68 NAS, Clanranald Papers, GD 201/1/16, 28 and 36; D. Warrand, *Some Mackenzie Pedigrees* (Inverness: 1965) 17. I.F. Grant, *The MacLeods: The History of a Clan* (Edinburgh: 1981) 232.

69 Mackenzie, *History of the Outer Hebrides*, 202-204, 222.

70 Mackenzie of Kintail presumably was one of those who opposed the success of MacLeod's appeal to the King. He was responsible for MacLeod's expenses while he remained imprisoned in Edinburgh. Mackenzie, *The History of the Outer Hebrides*, 221-2; *RPCS*, X, 302.

71 *RPCS*, X, 302.

conflicts of varying intensity were endemic. A disagreement between George Ross of Balnagown and Robert Munro of Carbisdale over salmon fishing and teinds on the Oykel and Cassley straths is typical of the latter. By 1588 it had turned violent, and cattle were lifted from Munro by 'broken men' at the behest of Ross.⁷² The initial hostilities were thus against property and stand in marked contrast to the all-encompassing economic, social and cultural violence implied in the articles regarding Lewis. On recovering his cattle Hector Munro of Assynt, grandson of Munro of Foulis, attempted to repledge the cattle at Tain and was attacked with 100 men who 'schoit arrows at them, woundit thame with dirkis'.⁷³

This type of low-grade hostility constituted an indigenous form of Highland warfare quite distinct from that induced by the Fife or Mackenzie assault on Lewis. Kindreds who incurred the wrath of the centre for this kind of activity were not necessarily beyond redemption. Some mainland clans who had been regarded as 'broken' in the 1590s were presumably mixed with some 'show of civilitie', and contrived to rehabilitate themselves in the eyes of the Crown.⁷⁴ This was possibly because the Crown valued Highland militarism, whatever proclamations to the contrary were issued denouncing its domestic unsuitability. By the 1620s attempts to stamp out perceived militarism were replaced with a more pragmatic approach. Individuals were offered a remission provided they were prepared to serve the Crown overseas. In 1627 when Charles I was keen to raise a levy of soldiers for service against France, letters were despatched to Scottish chiefs and noblemen to furnish 'the greatest number of men for warelicke service'. Alasdair MacNaughton was given a specific commission to recruit and trans-

72 For more on this concept of 'broken' men see A. Cathcart's chapter in this volume.

73 R.J. Adam, ed., *The Calendar of Fearn: text and additions 1471 1667* (Edinburgh: 1991) 184 and footnotes.

74 The Mackenzies had for a time been regarded as a 'broken clan', as had 'Clanmorgan' (Mackay of Strathnaver) together with some members of the 'Monrois'. See 'The Roll of the Broken Clans in the Highlands and Islands, 1594' in *Collectanea*, 39 40. Some of the Grants had also been regarded as 'broken'. In 1613 Archibald Primrose reported that Grant promised 'to serve faithfullie in the particular aganis Clangregour or any other his majesteis rebellis as he hopes to deserve both thanks and benefit'. See *Miseellay of the Maitland Club Consisting of Original Papers and other Documents, vol. III*, (Edinburgh: 1843) 29. In 1622, the Grants together with the Mackenzies were given a commission of fire and sword against the Camerons. W. Fraser, ed., *The Chiefs of Grant, III* (Edinburgh: 1883) 334.

port 200 Highland bowmen. He was empowered to endorse the granting of remissions to Highlanders 'fugitive from laws', providing they enlisted.⁷⁵ Even Germany was not safe enough for some of the remnants of MacLeod of Lewis. *Tormod mac Iain is Torcail Dubh* had apparently fled there after killing Iain mc Connil, piper to Mackenzie of Kintail. On arrival there he found that Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscardine was serving nearby, forcing him to try his luck in Ireland.⁷⁶ Donald Mackay of Strathnaver, chief of his clan was made a lord, largely through his efforts in recruiting soldiers to the greater glory of Stuart foreign policy. The Munros of Foulis in Easter Ross also played an active role in foreign military service. Robert Munro, in his account of the wars in Germany, ascribed the reason (and that of Donald Mackay) for their willingness to fight on the continent against the forces of the Holy Roman Empire as that of the defence of Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia, the daughter of their king.⁷⁷

More importantly, Highland warfare was very much a part of the Scottish Crown's apparatus of coercion. Edinburgh sought to channel the energies of favoured clans by 'licensing' violence. The issuing of commissions of Fire and Sword enabled summary justice to be enacted, and often afforded the recipients of such commissions opportunities to settle old scores.⁷⁸ These kindreds who practised 'government violence' benefited massively from Crown patronage, and made themselves indispensable to the Edinburgh government, which could only control the north west with their help. Both Huntly and Argyll suffered periods of eclipse during James VI's reign. This possibly benefited the Mackenzies who gained increasing royal favour during this period, and may have been promoted by the Crown as

75 C. Rodgers, ed., *The Earl of Stirling's Register of Royal Letters: Relative to the Affairs of Scotland and Nova Scotia from 1615 to 1635* (2 vols., Edinburgh: 1885) I, 195-7.

76 Applecross MS, H.P.II, 56; Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscardine was son of Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail, and half brother of Colin, the first earl of Seaforth. Mackenzie, *The History and Genealogy of the Mackenzies*, 224, 355. For details of his service on the continent see S. Murdoch and A. Grosjean, 'Scotland, Scandinavia and Northern Europe, 1580-1707' (SSNE Database), published on the Internet at <www.abdn.ac.uk/history/datasets/ssne>

77 W.S. Brockington, 'Robert Munro: Professional Soldier, Military Historian and Scotsman', in S. Murdoch, ed., *Scotland and the Thirty Years War 1618-1648* (Leiden: 2001) 224. Brockington has commented that Robert Munro's identity 'initially revolved around his clan, his region and his religion', but that in the course of his service, as more Scots from other areas came into his depleted regiment, a stronger Scottish identity was forged. op. cit., 236.

78 Macinnes, 'Slaughter Under Trust', 105-7.

a counterweight to Gordon hegemony in the north.⁷⁹ Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail was made a peer in 1610, and his son Colin, was created Earl of Seaforth in 1623. Internal policing and overseas service could both be expected. Clanship's official deployment across the North Channel into Ireland was also an important development as government sought to regulate a destabilising aspect of Gaeldom's indigenous military economy. James VI, wanting to put troops into Ireland in 1602, had required 100 men of Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail, together with a levy of men from most of the other Highland kindreds.⁸⁰ Mackenzie seemingly was in better favour than most, including Glengarrie with whom Mackenzie was at 'warre'.⁸¹ James wrote to Henry Lord Howard 'I hope Mackenzie shall be an instrument of some good service to be done against Tyrone, for I find him very willing ...'⁸² This willingness to serve, and perhaps the opportunity they were given to serve, differentiated the Mackenzies and Campbells, and to a lesser extent kindreds such as the Mackays and Munros 'mixed with sum shew of ciuilitie', from those clans regarded as 'barbarous' such as the MacLeods, the Macdonalds and the Macgregors.

The expansionist impulse favoured by clans is demonstrated by the stranglehold developed notably by the Campbells of Argyll in the south-west Highlands and the Mackenzie network in most of Ross-shire. Although not perhaps traditionally identified as 'Highland', the Gordon conglomerate, controlled by the earls of Huntly and Sutherland, presided over many Gaelic kingroups. These magnates, when given the opportunity, embraced the colonial ideal as readily as their southern counterparts. Campbell of Cawdor benefited from the forfeiture of *Clann Iain Mhòir* and Mackenzie had obtained a title to the Isle of Lewis. The Earl of Argyll was given 20,000 merks and lands in Kintyre as a reward for service against the Clan Gregor in

79 The 1st Earl of Cromartie states that Mackenzie by displaying loyalty to the Crown was rewarded 'by the King's Special favour', with the 'Lordship of Ardmannoch', (i.e. the Black Isle, Crown Property since the forfeiture of the Earldom of Ross in the 15th Century), in 1595. Sir G. Mackenzie, 1st Earl of Cromartie, 'History of the Family of Mackenzie', in W. Fraser, ed., *The Earls of Cromartie: their kindred country and Correspondence*, II (Edinburgh: 1876) 502-3.

80 *Collectanea*, 45.

81 Applecross MS, HP II, 47.

82 G.P.V Akrigg, ed., *The Letters of James VI and I* (London: 1984) 197.

James VI to Henry Lord Howard, from Falkland, 29 July 1602.

1607.⁸³ Scottish Gaels also settled in Ulster, and were interested parties in Charles I's abortive scheme to colonise Nova Scotia.⁸⁴

What is perhaps surprising about the era of centralisation c. 1580-1620 is the proliferation in the types of warfare evident in the *Gàidhealtachd*. Clan society was already militarised but James and his successor's policies merely drew this into new and often legalised forms. It is hardly surprising that, with such pre-existing and external stimuli, Gaels had a sophisticated sense of military identity.

Expression of Gaelic Military Identity

A society like the *Gàidhealtachd* required strong leadership. Failure to demonstrate such leadership could result in a diminution of the status of the wider group. As a result the ability to command men was a central pillar in the Gaelic understanding of soldiering. This obviously varied according to the personalities involved. It may have been one of the factors influencing Glengarry, who strove long and hard against Mackenzie expansion. In Mackenzie tradition he was remembered with grudging respect as 'the most resolute of his name, his father would often have settled with Mckenzie, but during his lifetime he would never settle, for his spirit was given only to warre'.⁸⁵ Despite this, Glengarry by 1604 was reportedly 'brought to ane verie low estait be McEnzie', and considering submitting himself to 'McEnzie's reverence'.⁸⁶ According to Dennis Campbell, Dean of Limerick, good leadership was vital, and if the Islanders were well led they would fight in a 'lustie' and 'curragious' manner.⁸⁷ Sir George Hay the Chancellor knew the Highlands well and was likely to have

83 For Islay see D. Stevenson, *Highland Warrior, Alasdair Mac Colla and the Highland Problem in the Seventeenth Century* (Edinburgh: 1980) 34-58; Akrigg, ed., *The Letters of James VI and I*, 505; *HMC, Appendix to 6th Report*, Part I (1877) 615.

84 Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart*, 68. Sir John Mackenzie of Tarbat was made a baronet of Nova Scotia in 1628. See Mackenzie, *The History and Genealogy of the Mackenzies*, 551.

85 Applecross Mss, HP II, 47.

86 John Macintosh of Culloden writing to Mr Alexander Hay, Clerk of the Council and Session, 21st May 1604, in *HMC Appendix to the 9th Report*, part II (London: 1884) 197. Thanks to Dauvit Horsbroch for this reference.

87 Dennis Campbell was from Kilmun in Argyll and a close kinsman of the Campbell chiefs. 'Observations of the Deane of Limerick for the West Isles of Scotland' (c. 1595). Printed in the *Miscellany of the Maitland Club, Consisting of Original Papers and other Documents illustrative of the History of Scotland*, IV, part I (Glasgow: 1857) 52.

been better informed than most as to the way society functioned in the north.⁸⁸ Having difficulty in raising 3,000 men for service in Denmark in 1627, Hay wrote to ask Campbell of Glenorchy for assistance. He went on to ask Glenorchy to advise him how to get gentlemen of Glenorchy's kin and country, 'whom utheris of the inferior sort will follow to undergo this journey'.⁸⁹ Respect for leadership was not confined to the clan chief. An incident in 1639, when a party of Camerons arrived in Aboyne on an extortion raid, illustrates the importance of reciprocal military loyalty between the clan's middle elite and ordinary clansmen. Cornered by a militant priest, Gilbert Blackhall, who threatened to burn them to death, a parley ended with the Cameron gentleman in command noting that his men would accept death or surrender depending on his orders alone. 'They have all sworne fidelity and obedience to me, and therefore they must stand to whatever I promise, and perform it'.⁹⁰

Despite the apparent attractions of good leadership, at least in the minds of the elite, recruitment of 'the inferior sort' seems to have been difficult at times. Although the nobles and gentlemen from Scotland in general seem to have had no difficulty in volunteering themselves and large numbers of their tenants, the lower orders did not seem so keen. Tullibardine, after having failed to raise a suitable body of men for service in Sweden in 1629, wrote to his nephew John Grant of Freuchie for his assistance in getting 'uppe the nomer ...'.⁹¹ 'Na *buannachan*, or mercenaries, have been called 'a parasitic class billeted in townships'.⁹² It is unlikely that clan gentry thought of themselves as parasitic even if those who supported them

88 He had been one of the Fife Adventurers and had then acquired rights to the forests of Letterewe from Mackenzie and operated an Iron Foundry by Loch Maree. Rev. A. Macdonald, 'Fragment of a Mackenzie MS, Being an account of the struggle between the Mackenzie and the Glengarry People, written in the script of c. 1650', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, XXXVI (1931-3) 210. He had also been a burgess at Inverness, with lands at Bught during the period of his commercial enterprise in the north from 1611-1623. HRA, Sasine to Sir George Hay, 1611. HRA, IB 12/1; NAS, Warrant of Bught Papers, GD23/1 / 1 1-16.

89 NAS, Breadalbane Muniments, GD 112/39/73/3. Sir George Hay to Campbell of Glenorchy, 20 March 1627.

90 G. Blackhall, *A Brief Narration of the Services Done to Three Nobles Ladyes* (Aberdeen: 1846) 84.

91 J.A. Fallon, 'Scottish mercenaries in the Service of Denmark and Sweden 1626-1632', unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Glasgow (1972) 52.

92 A.I. Macinnes, 'Crown, Clans and Fine: Scottish Gaeldom 1587-1638', *Northern Scotland* 13, (1993) 33-4.

did. Moreover they had fulfilled a function in Gaelic society that the Edinburgh government could not. Allan Macinnes notes that the sphere of activity for *buannachan* was diminished following the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland.⁹³ The Irish market for their activities had indeed dried up after the defeat of the Irish at Kinsale. However, those kindreds which had been prominent in supplying *buannachan* for the Irish theatre, MacLeods and Macdonalds, had been either crushed or at least subdued by the later 1620s, when recruitment of Scots for Dutch, Danish and especially Swedish service expanded. It was northern clans that spearheaded this recruitment in the *Gàidhealtachd*, notably Munros and Mackays, a fact which suggests that clans of whatever political hue throughout the *Gàidhealtachd* supported this military class.⁹⁴

Gaeldom's shift from an older form of overseas soldiering in Ireland to more contemporary, politically acceptable forms of European service underlines the vitality of its militaristic culture. As well as the cult of leadership, military activity was a daily routine. Niall Odhar of Lewis according to the 'dittay' of his trial in Edinburgh, was from his 'verrie youthe ye being tranet up in all maner of birbirus crewaltie and wicketnes'.⁹⁵ This may have been no idle rhetoric. Niall, if he had not himself served in Ireland, would probably have been raised up with and accompanied by people who had. The Frasers too had a tradition of training their men. The author of the Wardlaw MS was told by his grandfather, James Fraser of Phopachie who was Lovat's 'major-domo', that Lovat had 'kept a weekly muster of all his men training them to arching, hagbutting, jumping and wrestling, putting the stone and throwing the barr, and all manner of manly exercise'.⁹⁶ Lovat's son Hugh who succeeded him in 1633 continued with this practice, no doubt with a view to training his men for the possibility of mercenary service on the continent.⁹⁷

Eóin Óg Ó Muirgheasáin (c. 1626) wrote an Elegy for Ruairidh Mòr of Dunvegan, in Classical Gaelic. Great attention and notice is

93 Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart*, 58, 67-8.

94 S. Murdoch, 'More than just Mackay's' and Mercenaries; Gaelic Influences in Scandinavia. 1580-1707', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, LX, (1997-8) 161-186.

95 NLS, *Denmilne Manuscripts, Adv MS 33.1.2*, vol. 14, no. 12.

96 Fraser, *Wardlaw MS*, 255, 257. Martin Martin gives a similar account. See M. Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland ca. 1695, and a late Voyage to St. Kilda* (Paperback edition. Edinburgh: 1999) 72.

97 Fraser, *Wardlaw MS*, 257.

given to the chief's exploits in various theatres of war. Not only does it reveal motives and priorities it underlines the centrality of personal leadership within military identity. Some notice is also given to the consequences of the death of the chief:

Biodhha le gceiltear a cháin
mionca do bheireadh am buaidh;
téid go each dá gcomhthaihh féin
an réir ba gnáth orthaibh uain.⁹⁸

This would suggest that one of the prime duties of the chief was the extraction of tributes from lesser kingroups, in the manner of a protection racket. The poet implies that with the loss of Ruairidh Mòr, the MacLeods would no longer be able to do this as effectively. In reality, however, Ruairidh had been unable to aspire to these ideals. He had been compelled in his lifetime also to adjust to the new realities of a far more intrusive and interfering government. He, together with other Island chiefs who were being leaned on by the government, had also had to undertake an arduous and expensive annual trip to Edinburgh.⁹⁹ James VI increased the pressures on chiefs by the use of Acts of Caution in order to bring them to account and to make them responsible for the lawlessness of their dependants.¹⁰⁰ R.C. MacLeod identified these Acts of Caution as one of the factors which triggered the indebtedness of the MacLeods of Dunvegan in the first quarter of the seventeenth century.¹⁰¹ Arguably such humiliation in the civilian sphere merely served to heighten the tendency to seek compensation in notions of military virility. In war, the elegy states, Ruairidh Mòr had been a successful leader, in Ireland, Uist and Skye, where he provided well for his troops:

98 'Enemies who withhold their tribute now, he often vanquished; the cess that they were wont to pay us, now goes to others who are their friends'. Gaelic with facing translation in J. Macdonald, ed., 'An Elegy for Ruaidhrí Mòr', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, VIII (1958) 35.

99 *RPCS*, XIV, 582-585.

100 By an Act of Parliament of July 1587 all landlords were charged with keeping 'good rule' in their country and responsible for their men. Failure to do so incurred a penalty under 'pain of rebellion'. Lauchlan Mackintosh of Dunnachton was to find caution for the sum of £10,000; Cailean Cam of Kintail 20,000 merks; Ross of Balnagown £10,000; Torcal MacLeod of Lewis £10,000 together with many other leading figures in the both the Highlands and adjacent districts, 16th December 1590. *RPCS*, IV, 803. D.P. Menzies, *The Red and White Book of Menzies: the history of Clan Menzies and its chiefs* (Glasgow: 1894) 239.

101 R.C. MacLeod, ed., *The Book Of Dunvegan, Being documents from the muniments room of the MacLeods...*, vol. 1, 1340-1700 (Aberdeen: 1938) 264.

Crodh Bóghaineach d' éigsibh uaidh
dá óroineach ní hé a-mháin,
ní thug ar ais uatha féin
réir 's na tuatha lais do láimh.¹⁰²

The importance of plunder could, however, be overstated, as is, it would be fair to say Ruaridh's prowess. Yet wider notions of what benefits and losses warfare entailed are evident in vernacular poetry. In a work by Ailean Dubh à Lòchaidh thought to date from the Mackenzie-Glengarry feud in 1603, the plunder of cattle figures strongly, together with the spoliation of the victim's crops.

Sguab thu mo sprèidh bhàrr na mòintich
Loisg thu m' iodhlann chorca is eòrna,
Mharbh thu mo thriùir bhràithrean òga,
Mharbh thu m' athair is m' fhear pòsta.¹⁰³

Tradition, perhaps reflecting Mackenzie propaganda, built this raid on Killichrist into an episode of mass murder, with a congregation being burnt inside a burning church.¹⁰⁴ However there is no sign of any such massacre in contemporaneous documentation. This is surprising for had there been such an incident the litigious Mackenzies would have used the incident as a club with which to beat Glengarry in the courts. This suggests that while governments undoubtedly exaggerated the scale and scope of Highland warfare, Gaels themselves were not beyond the odd case of military hyperbole. The events in this snippet of song are generally given corroborating evidence in a letter of gift by James VI against Allan McRannald of Lundy in Glengarry. Allan's goods were escheat and given by the king to Sir John Grant in 1622. This was as a result of letters of horning obtained by Mackenzie of Killichrist against Allan for a raid he conducted against Killichrist in 1603 when Kintail and Glengarry were at feud.¹⁰⁵

102 `To give away the cattle wealth of Banagh to his bards, was characteristic of his golden generosity, and not that only, he did not take in return from his clansmen that were with him the tribute due him'. Macdonald, ed., `An Elegy for Ruaidhri Mór', 45.

103 `You swept my cattle from the moorland, you burnt my stockyard of oats and barley' from the song: `Ailean Dubh à Lòchaidh', in Ó Baoill, *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, 58.

104 This has been refuted by Macdonald historians, claiming that the church was disused. J. Dawson, `Calvinism and the Gàidhealtachd in Scotland', in A. Pettegree, et al., eds., *Calvinism in Europe 1540-1620* (Cambridge: 1994) 250, and fn. 63.

105 In Allan's expedition on Killichrist four of Mackenzie's tenants were slain. 27 houses and their adjacent outhouses were burnt, and `Mr Johne his haill librarie and buikes' were also burnt. Mackenzie's barn and barnyard were burnt, containing

Later Mackenzie propaganda portrayed Glengarry as a barbarous lawbreaker who had attacked Mackenzie with no cause.¹⁰⁶

Grievances in the locality could often initiate conflict of a type that had little or nothing to do with national issues or cultural aggression by the government. When three Fraser gentlemen tried to regulate and 'ingages for a set soun for a tack of the faires yearly', at Beauly in 1626, it was enough to trigger a 'great riot' between the Erasers and Mackenzies.¹⁰⁷ It is telling how much attention and glorification localised violence engendered. Nothing illustrates this conceptualisation of what was important militarily than reactions to the attempted colonisation of Lewis. Little survives in Gaelic tradition regarding the episode of the Fife adventurers. However in one of the songs that does, 'Iomair thusa Choinnich Chridhe', the focus is on an internal feud in Lewis between the Morrisons of Ness (*Sliochd a' Bhreitheimh*) and members of MacLeods of Lewis, without remembering external influences. Fear and the desire for revenge against the MacLeods are the driving motives.¹⁰⁸ It is surprising that it is an account of this feud that survived, rather than the much greater (from a 21st-century perspective) conflict caused by the privatised forces of James VI attempting to conquer Lewis.

The local feud was later presumably perceived as having as much, or more, importance as the activities of the Fife colonists and, latterly, the Mackenzies. The immediate focus of the subject-matter of orally preserved poetry may be due to the circumstances surrounding its transmission. The locality and the people associated with it would probably remain much more important than external interlopers who had long since faded away. The descendants of those discussed in such songs and poems however were often in the forefront of locales. The familiarity of the themes and the locations also probably helped contemporaries identify with events rooted in the past. Yet this local emphasis can also be misleading, in that it suggests that protagonists in conflicts such as that of Lewis had, at the time, no appreciation of a wider national dimension.

120 bolls of oats, 160 bolls of bere. Ten horses and 70 head of cattle were plundered by Ailean Dubh, including Mackenzie's 'awin best hors'. Fraser *The Chiefs of Grant, III*, 426 7.

106 Mackenzie, *History and Genealogy of the Mackenzies*, 201-3.

107 Fraser, *Wardlaw MS*, 249.

108 Ó Baoill, *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, 48-50.

Poetry by the widow of Macgregor of Glenstrae reveals how issues of marriage and kinship could dictate approaches to any given conflict. Glenstrae had been executed by Campbell of Glenorchy and, in her elegy to him, his widow (herself a Campbell) called for Argyll and Glenorchy to be locked up together with the men of Glenorchy who she thought should be handcuffed.

Chuirinn Cailain liath fo ghlasa[i]bh, Agus Donnachadh Dubh an làimh,
'S Bach Caimbeulach a to am Be[a]lach, Gu bhith 'giulain nan
glaslàmh.¹⁰⁹

That she may have been a Campbell could have had an influence on both the attitude and on the measures *bean MhicGriogair* (Macgregor's wife) called for by way of retribution. This again reveals a military culture that could be at odds with government perceptions. Kinship links, at an immediate level at least, were certainly a way by which clans could extend their military capability, but the same influence might also work along more pacific lines, inducing caution and a greater willingness to exact limited revenge. Once, of course, clans were committed to national objectives such local issues could have little ameliorating effect.

There is also the issue of to what extent Gaels fought for their faith. Gillesbaig Gruamach, the 7th Earl of Argyll although (at this stage) a Protestant, seems to have had his own political agenda, mixed with a desire to revenge the death of the Earl of Moray in his campaign against Huntly which culminated in his defeat at Glenlivet in 1594.¹¹⁰ The composition of the forces of both sides, however, again shows that ties of kinship and bonds of manrent influenced the combatants as much as confessional allegiances.¹¹¹ Protestant Argyll was accompanied by the Catholic MacNeills of

109 'I'd put grey Colin under lock, and take black Duncan in hand, and I'd have each Campbell in Bealach sporting handcuffs'. See 'Cumha Ghriogair MhicGhriogair - le a mhnaoi', in A. Maclean-Sinclair, ed., *The Gaelic Bards from 1411 to 1715* (Edinburgh: 1890) 18 20.

110 This is the interpretation that the Earl of Cromartie gave of Argyll's motives. Sir G. Mackenzie, 1st Earl of Cromartie, 'History of the Family of Mackenzie', in Fraser, ed., *The Earls of Cromartie*, II, 502-3.

111 J. Wormald, *Lords and Men in Scotland: Lords and Men in Scotland: Bonds of Manrent 1442-1603* (Edinburgh: 1985) 118- 121. This seems to have concerned the Privy Council some years later, who feared that Huntly and Argyll might take sides, escalating a serious conflict between MacLeod of Dunvegan and Macdonald of Sleat. *RPCS*, VI, 279, 19 Aug 1601.

Barra. The ability of manrent links to produce mobilisation that cut across confessional boundaries was epitomised when the MacNeils appeared in the Presbyterian Army of the Covenant.¹¹² An allusion is made to confessionalism in 'A Fragment of a Mackenzie Manuscript' relating to the conflict between Mackenzie and Glengarry, c. 1603. The writer alleged that Glengarry was 'an idolator'.¹¹³ This is unconvincing as a motive for both sets of protagonists as there is only this brief mention of religion in the account. Alexander Hay, clerk of the Privy Council, keen to find a reason to denigrate Neil MacLeod of Lewis, commented that 'Neill is thocht to be of the Romish faith'.¹¹⁴ If this had been the case it is surprising that this charge was not levelled at Neil and other members of the MacLeods of Lewis, who tended instead to be labelled 'godless'.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

While Gaels held strong religious beliefs there is little evidence that this in itself initiated conflict. James' government had forced its way into the Highlands, and was increasingly able to exercise its will. This had far-reaching consequences both in the military means employed and its effects on the *Gàidhealtachd*. James gave Gaels a Lowland problem in the form of more consistent government alliances with certain clans that in turn generated new, more intensive forms of warfare. Macgregors and the MacLeods of Lewis faced obliteration as meaningful clan entities and were forced to up-the-ante in terms of their commitment to long drawn out conflicts of attrition. Mirroring the growth in methods of warfare were expressions of

112 N. Maclean-Bristol, *Murder Under Trust: The Crimes and Death of Sir Lachlan Mòr Maclean of Duart 1558-1598* (East Linton: 1999) 130; E. Furgol, *A Regimental History of the Covenanting Armies 1639-1651* (Edinburgh: 1990) 388.

113 Rev. A. Macdonald, 'Fragment of a Mackenzie MS, Being an account of the struggle between the Mackenzie and the Glengarry People, written in the script of c.1650', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, XXXVI (1931 3) 196.

114 'Letter from Sir Alexander Hay, Clerk Register of Scotland, to 'a friend at court', 3 Sept 1610', in *Collectanea*, 48.

115 1606 (no date) 'the long continuance of the godles barbaritie, crueltie, and rebelloun of the indwellaris of His Majesteis West and North Iles and brokin Hielands of Scotland, who having from their birth having nethir ressaveit instructioun nor example from their foirbeares, bot of contempt of all religioun, knaledge, and worschip of God', in *RPCS*, XIV, 436-438.

identity. Indeed, the two phenomena were closely linked. In terms of military identity, clans, or at least their hierarchies, had developed a dual or in some cases triple layer; Gaelic, Scots, and latterly the beginnings of a British identity. These concepts came to operate in a society already endowed with very specific and often brutal ideals of warfare. There existed therefore different types of violence. Lowland against Gael and vice versa, and Gael against Gael and 'pro-government' Gael against 'rebel' Gael. Yet while professing qualities of civilisation, the Crown and its agents also adopted tactics which were equally if not more 'barbaric' than the targets of their 'civilitie'. What had been a series of internal feuds and dissension in island kindreds was ruthlessly exploited. The Crown had extended its power by licensing Commissions of Fire and Sword, giving pro- government clans immunity from any legal sanction. Those on the receiving end, while often perpetrators of indigenous forms of Highland warfare like cattle reiving and feuding, had no recourse to law against more sustained aggression. The Macgregors were ruthlessly harried, MacLeods of Lewis were eradicated and although *Clann Iain Mhòir* were crippled, the discontent of the Macdonald axis was suppressed rather than eliminated.¹¹⁶

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