

**Dùthchas ann an Tìr nan Craobh: An Exploration of TEK, Human Ecology and
Responsibility to Land Among Gaels in Mi'kma'ki**

By

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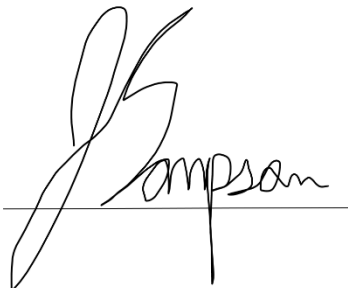
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Sampson', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Signature of Author

Abstract

This research is based off the historical context of traditional Gaelic society having its own traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) that demonstrates a connection and responsibility to land (MacAonghuis & Newton, 2005). This can be attributed to the Gaelic word dùthchas, as part of the wider Gaelic worldview, or Sealladh nan Gàidheal (P. J. Meighan, 2022). Due to the Highland Clearances, thousands of Gaels were displaced from their traditional territory in the Highlands of Scotland. Approximately 50,000 of them resettled to Mi'kma'ki, thus playing an integral role in the colonial displacement of the Mi'kmaq (Nova Scotia, 2019). This created a complex situation as Gaels, their language, culture and worldview are now present in Mi'kma'ki, but the aspect of dùthchas that connects them to their native territory cannot be applied in the same way as they are not native to Mi'kma'ki. Through this research I aim to explore how Gaelic (TEK) and the concept of dùthchas has translated into Gaels in Mi'kma'ki. Through interviews (or as I have reframed them, céilidhean) with community members and tradition bearers I aim to understand how Gaelic TEK and dùthchas is present outside of An t-Seann Dùthaich (The old country/Scotland) and in Mi'kma'ki. The stories and narratives that emerge from these conversations are analysed collaboratively with scholars and community leaders of Gaelic nova scotia. I hope I can use these discoveries to demonstrate how cultural revitalisation in settler communities (specifically Gaelic nova scotia) could provide an opportunity for a better understanding of Mi'kmaq ecological knowledge, our responsibility to land as settlers and ultimately, climate justice.

Key Words: Dùthchas, Gaelic, Climate Justice, Gaelic nova scotia, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Cultural Revitalization, Settler Colonialism, Human Ecology

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Positioning Myself

As I have progressed through my double major in Environment, Sustainability, and Society & Canadian Studies, I have found myself using my degree as a means of reconciling with my own identity. Specifically, the way my ancestors were involved in the colonization of the Mi'kmaq, but also the shared issues they had with the state and the development of Anglo-Saxon assimilation practices. The majority of my ancestry is Acadian, from my paternal grandfather, Gerald Alfred Sampson, whose family settled in l'ardoise, Unama'ki (cape breton), and Gaelic, from my maternal grandmother, (Anna) Louise (MacDonald) Hubley. She grew up in Àrasaig (arisaig), antigonish county, to Gaelic speaking parents. Our ancestors were displaced from their homelands in the highlands of Scotland (some directly from Àrasaig Scotland) during the highland clearances and settled in what is now known as nova scotia, thus displacing the Mi'kmaq from their traditional territory. Due to the pressures of Anglo-Saxondom, the language was lost during my Gram's generation, and as she describes "died in arisaig". Despite this loss, I've begun learning Gaelic and reconnecting with the culture and community of Gaelic nova scotia throughout my time in university. While this research has strengthened my relationships to the community of Gaelic nova scotia, I recognize my position as someone who did not grow up immersed in the community, culture or language. Therefore, I must clarify that I do not aim to insert myself as a representative of this community, nor do I aim to embark on a "quest of the folk" to preserve these stories. While the majority of the stories shared in this research are in the past tense, the culture and language is alive. At the time of formulating this thesis, I was also taking a course on Indigenous research methods which has greatly influenced the development and paradigm of my research and is why I've chosen to position myself prior to introducing my research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 A Note From the Author

While the academic fields of Sustainability and Celtic Studies respectively, are quite large, the specific field of Gaelic nova scotian studies is quite small, and even smaller once I focus on traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), human ecology and the environment. This is in part due to the lack of institutional support for Gaelic nova scotia, with the provincial office of Gaelic Affairs having only been opened in 2006 (Nova Scotia, 2019). But also, the lack of acknowledgement of the harms of colonialism in Mi'kma'ki and the role of Gaels in this harm. If we don't acknowledge the displacement and lasting effects of colonialism caused by Gaels settling in Mi'kma'ki, we can't even begin to analyse how that legacy led to the decline of our own culture and language.

Therefore, I want to emphasise the importance of this research and its contribution to the field but also acknowledge the risk of my research being misinterpreted by accidentally defining concepts that have multiple understandings. In completing this research, I need to recognize the colonial way of thinking that has led me to want to 'prove' that these foundational values are not lost to nova scotian Gaels. I want to ensure that wherever my research ends up, it is clear that I understand the risks of bringing these living cultural aspects into academia and aim to avoid any assumption that Gaelic culture requires academia to justify or preserve it. Climate action is not a new thing, sustainability is not an emerging field. It's new to this constructed western capitalist system. It is not new to Indigenous people, just as it is not new to other cultures outside of Anglo-Saxondom such as Gaelic culture. I also want to emphasize that I do not aim to declare that this responsibility and attachment to land is unique to Gaels.

Specifically, I want to make clear that I do not aim to compare Mi'kmaq ecological knowledge (MEK) and Mi'kmaw ties to land with Gaelic TEK and dùthchas, or even search for similarities, as I am not Mi'kmaw, and thus cannot determine what is similar to Mi'kmaw knowledge and worldviews or not. In whole, I merely aim to determine how Gaelic TEK/dùthchas exists in Mi'kma'ki and the opportunity this presents in listening to, and working with the Mi'kmaq to achieve climate justice.

Ultimately, despite the many overlapping crises facing us, I believe that another world is possible and that it requires the dismantling of capitalism and colonialism through climate justice. One aspect of this work is ensuring not only the survival, but the thriving of cultures that colonialism tried to eradicate.

1.2 A Note on Terminology

What is lost in the reading of a thesis on paper, is the ability to know the reader and therefore know what terms they may be familiar with and their interpretations (notably as this thesis focuses on a language other than English). Therefore, I will provide some translations as well as explaining the use and definitions of some terms used throughout.

When using the term “Gaelic” in the context of this thesis, I refer to the language and culture of the inhabitants or descendants of the highlands of Scotland. Known in their native language as Gàidhlig. Their territory known as the Gàidhealtachd (land of the Gaels, more contemporarily known as a place where Gaelic is spoken). I use the term “Gaelic” to describe their culture so as to differentiate it from Scottish culture which is more associated with the history and practices of the lowlands. This also extends to my usage of the term “Gaels” to describe the people and “nova scotian Gaels” to describe the specific community on this side of the Atlantic. When referring to that community as a whole, I use the term “Gaelic nova scotia”.

As this work is tied to place and environment in a settler colonial state, I am attempting to avoid the use of colonial understandings of land in my writing. While Mi'kma'ki spans over what is colonially known as nova scotia, new brunswick, prince edward island, newfoundland, québec and maine, in the case of my research, I am using "Mi'kma'ki" to refer to what is in the colonial bounds of nova scotia as I am focused on the Gaelic community unique to this province. When describing the settler colonial state I place "nova scotia" in lowercase as I do with "canada", and other provinces.

Given that place names are a representation of a people's linguistic and cultural interpretation of place, they are unique to their interpretation (D. MacDonald, 2013). Since I am dealing with Gaelic understanding of place, I am using Gaelic place names (with english in brackets) rather than Mi'kmaw place names when referring to specific places in Mi'kma'ki. Therefore, I will use the term Tìr nan Craobh (Land of the Trees) to refer to canada as this is a descriptive term for their new home used by the Gaels upon settling in canada. Subsequently, when discussing Indigenous knowledge or worldviews on the continent of north america, I will use the term "Turtle Island" as this is the term most commonly used across Indigenous nations of this continent in a contemporary context. When referring to Scotland, I use the term "An t-Seann Dùthaich" which translates to "the old country", rather than the Gaelic name "Alba" as this is the term most used by nova scotian Gaels.

Accordingly, where Gaelic place names are simply Gaelicized or translated versions of colonial place names, I use either the Mi'kmaw name or the colonial name in lowercase. Therefore, I am not using the term Alba Nuadh as it is a direct translation of "new scotland" (nova scotia being "new scotland" in latin, the name coming from the 1621 Royal Charter, over

100 years before Gaels' arrival to Mi'kma'ki (Kehoe & O'Neill, 2024)) into Gaelic and am using Unama'ki in place of Ceap Breatuinn (Gaelicized Cape Breton).

While this thesis is written in English, there are some terms that are only appropriate in their native language as they are representations of their cultural importance. These can be found in the list below:

Bàrd (Plural: bàird) – Poet/Bard

Cànan – Language

Coille-dhubh – Burnt Garden (directly translates to burnt forest)

Daltachas – Fosterage

Manadh (Plural: Manaidhean) – Forerunner

An Dà-Shealladh – The second sight, the two sights

Seanfhacal (plural: Seanfhaclan) – Proverb (directly translates to old word)

Sealladh nan Gàidheal – Worldview of the Gaels/Gaelic worldview

Stiùbhartachd – Stewardship

Spioradalachd – Spirituality

Additionally, I use the term “seanchaidh” (seanchaidhean as plural) in place of “Gaelic elder” or “tradition-bearer” as it has additional associations with storytelling as an important practice among Gaels. Some of these terms have specific interpretations among Gaelic nova scotia and in relation to my research such as the term “céilidh”. While this word more contemporarily describes a classic “maritime kitchen party” it originally encompassed the rich

cultural practice of engaging in oral tradition while visiting your kin as its direct translation is “visit”. This informs and inspires my research approach when conducting interviews. Therefore, I refer to these planned semi-structured interviews as “céilidhean” (plural, céilidh being singular).

Following this reasoning I use a person’s Gaelic name (when available) and provide their English name in brackets such as “Iain MacAonghuis (John MacInnes)”. In terms of the Gaelic names of those involved in the céilidhean and collaborative analysis, you will find a mixture of “first name-last name” and sloinneadh (multi-generational list of who you come from). Rather than attempting to put a single system onto each person identified, I went with the naming convention they either provided me or I knew them to most commonly use, thus presenting this mix.

The most important term in relation to my research is “dùthchas”. It is a Gaelic word I will be using in connection with Gaelic traditional ecological knowledge, and relationship between people and land, both in An t-Seann Dùthaich and Mi’kma’ki. It does not have an exact english translation but has links to the english words of “heritage” “sustainability” “ancestral” and “belonging” and presents a description of the way humans’ relationship with the land is governed by the relationships between the earth and our ancestors.

In connection with the term “dùthchas” we see “dualchas” which again, does not have a direct english translation but describes the collective cultural knowledge passed through generations. This encompasses how you are shaped by those who come before you in their knowledge of songs, place names, geneolgy, etc.

While this last term “Climate Justice” is in English, it has come to have many different understandings. Therefore, I must explain my interpretation of it and its use in my research. As defined by the University of California’s centre for Climate Justice (n.d., paras. 1 & 2):

“Climate Justice recognizes the disproportionate impacts of climate change on low-income communities and communities of color around the world, the people and places least responsible for the problem. It seeks solutions that address the root causes of climate change and in doing so, simultaneously address a broad range of social, racial, and environmental injustices.”

In application of this term to the context of the settler colonial state that is Nova Scotia, when referring to climate justice, I am specifically referring to climate action that demonstrates the above definition and is led by Mi’kmaq ecological knowledge.

While there are standardized orthography guidelines in An t-Seann Dùthaich, Gaelic in Mi’kma’ki still maintains a lot of the ‘old ways of spelling’ such as the grave accent. Therefore, I have chosen to employ a more ‘traditional’ way of spelling Gaelic words in order to more accurately represent the vernacular of the language on this side of the Atlantic. For example, we see “cèilidh” in An t-Seann Dùthaich, and “céilidh” in Mi’kma’ki. On that note, I would like to thank Sionainn ni’n Aonghais Iain Pheadair for looking over the Gaelic words and place-names used throughout this document, and specify that any remaining mistakes are my own.

Additionally, any Gaelic text taken from elsewhere maintains its original spelling from its document of origin, and may contradict spellings found throughout this document.

1.3 Outlining What's to Come

This thesis will begin with an introduction to the research in which the significance of this work is situated in the modern context, and the historical context, by connecting the past & present, and the Gaels and the Mi'kmaq. The problem, and theory of the research will then be explored with an outline of the research questions and limitations. This will be followed by a literature review contextualizing the field of research by highlighting the presence of dùthchas and Gaelic TEK in early Gaelic literature, the contemporary “old country”, its connections to Indigenous worldviews of Turtle Island, and its presence in Mi'kma'ki. Following this, the methodological framework will be outlined, identifying its influences, my céilidh process, the process of collaborative analysis, and the archival material that compliments it. I will then present summaries (including transcriptions) of the céilidhean in order to give the reader a glimpse into our céilidh and the stories shared. My analysis will be based off of the conclusions of myself and the scholars and community leaders involved in my collaborative analysis process. These conclusions will be organized into emerging narratives of discussion and each one will be paired with a piece of archival song-poetry connecting the Gaels of early settlement to the Gaels of today. Finally, I will revisit my research questions and examine how my research has either addressed them or led to avenues for future research. This conclusion will be woven in with my personal reflections and hopes for the research.

1.4 Connecting the Gaels, the Mi'kmaq, and the Past and Present of the Colonial Project

As this study focuses on a cultural group (Gaels), it is important to provide historical context in order to better understand their actions towards cultural revitalization and connections to land. While both the Gaels and the Mi'kmaq have different histories on this land, notably one being Indigenous and one being settler, they share similarities in present-day linguistic and cultural reclamation movements, as well as the existence of pre-colonial TEK and emphasis on

responsibility to land. Yet, as the focus is on the Gaels in Mi'kma'ki, it is imperative that the legacy of settler colonialism enacted by this community of settlers and their descendants is understood.

1.4.1 The Gaels in Mi'kma'ki

During the second half of the 18th and first half of the 19th century, thousands of Gaels were displaced from their traditional homelands in the Gàidhealtachd (Highlands of Scotland) through a process known as the Highland Clearances (Kennedy, 2002). This consisted of forcing the southern commercial land-holding model onto the traditional clan system, taking away Gaels' right to their land and attempting to disconnect them from their culture, language and worldview (Kennedy, 2001; Galloway, 2008).

The traditional clan system upheld a society that was land and community based, with Gaels holding their own traditional ecological knowledge (MacAonghuis & Newton, 2005). Notably, the word dùthchas points to this knowledge as an integral part of sealladh nan Gàidheal (Gaelic worldview) and stresses the connection between people, the land, their culture and heritage (P. J. Meighan, 2022).

During the clearances, many Gaels were forced to pay rent or were simply evicted to be replaced by agricultural lands owned by English landlords (Mackinnon, 2017). Approximately 50,000 of these Gaels re-settled to Mi'kma'ki, then playing an integral role in the colonial project that dispossessed the Mi'kmaq from their traditional lands (Nova Scotia, 2019).

Many of these early settlers found the colonial world an opportunity to identify as Britons for the first time, therefore placing them in higher class above another group (Kehoe & O'Neill, 2024). As Gaelic nova scotia grew out of land dispossession, many Gaels found themselves very drawn to the prospect of owning land as a way of ensuring they would not be displaced again (S.

MacDonald, 2017). This hunger for land possession also manifested in a development of a lack of land care practices, leading these Gaelic settlers to be the main perpetrators of the rapid deforestation of Mi'kma'ki in the second half of the 18th, and first half of the 19th century (S. MacDonald, 2017). Simultaneously, many Gaels still had great care for nature and their environment, providing a contradictive narrative that will emerge as a recurring discussion throughout my research.

Unfortunately, those who clung to their roots found themselves yet again in an Anglo-Saxon environment attempting to assimilate them away from their language and culture (Kennedy, 2002). As nova scotia joined in the confederation of the settler colonial state of canada, the lack of institutional support for the Gaelic language and culture became more apparent, and Anglo-Saxon assimilation practices became more effective (Kennedy, 2001).

By the late 19th century, it is estimated that approximately 250,000 people in Tìr nan Craobh spoke Gaelic (Dembling, 2006). Yet by the time the first canadian census included Gaelic in 1931 (3 years before my gram was born), there were 32,402 recorded speakers of Gaelic in the country, 26,419 of those being in Mi'kma'ki, and 23,909 of those being in nova scotia (*Seventh Census of Canada, 1931*, n.d.). That number has now diminished to 2170 as of 2021 due to almost a century of Anglo-Saxon assimilation and the effects of rural outmigration in the boom of capitalism of the 20th century (Government of Canada, 2024; Kennedy, 2002). Despite this rapid decline, Gaelic nova scotia continues to work towards the revitalization of their language, culture and worldview.

1.4.2 The Mi'kmaq

The Mi'kmaq have inhabited their traditional territories of Mi'kma'ki for millennia, and despite efforts of settler colonialism, have persevered and defended their language and culture,

part of this being their worldview and ecological knowledge (M'sit No'kmaq et al., 2021; Prosper et al., 2011) Mi'kmaq have never surrendered their lands, as laid out in the signing of the first Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the British and the Mi'kmaq in 1725 (Young, 2015).

However, in 1763, the British signed The Royal Proclamation, laying claim to much of Turtle Island and beginning the process of forcing the Mi'kmaq, among many other Indigenous nations, into reserves and limiting their access to traditional territories in order to continue the settler colonial project (Young, 2015). Shortly after the signing of The Royal Proclamation, the process of the highland clearances was well under way across the Atlantic and thousands of these cleared Gaels began to settle on Mi'kmaq territory (Kennedy, 2001). As we progressed into the 19th, and 20th centuries, British colonialism only worsened with the introduction of the Indian Act, the establishment of residential schools and the manipulation of the child welfare system (Young, 2015).

1.4.3 The Climate Crisis and Climate Justice in a Settler Colonial State

This brings us to today, watching the climate crisis unfold in front of our eyes in a state where the Indigenous people of this land are a minority not only in population but in language and culture (Wilson, 2008). Many of the descendants of the settlers who once made Gaelic the most spoken language in Nova Scotia now only know English, and their main connection to their heritage is through transplanted tartan (the use of stereotypical Scottish imagery and props) and clan memorabilia (McKay, 1992).

As settlers in what is known as “Nova Scotia” we are unable to truly grasp Mi'kmaq ecological knowledge (MEK) as we are not Indigenous to this land (Hallstrom, 2016). Unfortunately, the western colonial society that we uphold is also an incompatible space to

understand Indigenous TEK as the two directly contradict each other (Jacob et al., 2021). Thus, we as settlers tend to align more with western science, not only as proof of this crisis but as a solution (M'sit No'kmaq et al., 2021). Seeing as the ignorance of Indigenous TEK through the development of capitalism and colonialism is what led to our current state of climate emergency, we must now focus our efforts on Indigenous TEK led climate action (Jacob et al., 2021; P. J. Meighan, 2022).

1.5 The Theory & Research Questions – Cultural Revitalisation as a Path to Climate Justice

Having laid out the context of the problem, the theory of cultural revitalization as a key to climate action can now be further examined. As we see Mi'kmaw cultural revitalisation growing alongside Gaelic cultural revitalisation in Mi'kma'ki, the reinforcement of their respective worldviews presents a way of understanding through TEK and relationship to land (Nicholas et al., 2023). By highlighting the existence of dùthchas in Mi'kma'ki, Gaelic settlers have the opportunity to reclaim their own TEK and reinvigorate their responsibility to land through linguistic and cultural revitalisation. This could lead to the potential of gaining the decolonial lens needed to understand and follow MEK in order to act on this responsibility.

To put it more concretely, I aim to answer these three questions in my research:

- How does Dùthchas/Gaelic TEK exist in Mi'kma'ki?
- Can Gaelic cultural revitalization in Mi'kma'ki lead to climate justice?
- Could Dùthchas/Gaelic TEK be used as a framework for nova scotian Gaelic settlers to understand MEK?

1.6. Methodology

Through a mix of a literature review, archival material and conversations with members of the Gaelic nova scotian community I hope to explore these questions. As the study of dùthchas in

Mi'kma'ki is relatively sparse, and the language and culture place heavy emphasis on oral tradition rather than written, I held céilidhean with community members, seanchaidhean, and scholars in hopes of finding the presence of dùthchas directly in community. To compliment my céilidhean, I analysed a mix of historical texts relating to Gaelic human ecology and worldview in Mi'kma'ki in the form of song-poetry. Finally, I employed a collaborative approach to my analysis, inspired by Indigenous research methods of collaborative story analysis. This entailed discussions with scholars and community leaders in the field of Gaelic studies both in An t-Seann Dùthaich and Mi'kma'ki, in order to gain their perspectives on the topic and results.

1.7 Limitations of the study

While my research focuses on the community of Gaelic nova scotia, I was not lucky enough to grow up in a Gaelic-speaking environment, let alone know anyone still alive in my family who had the language as my Great-Grandparents were the last. Therefore, I have been learning the language for the past 5 years but am nowhere near fluent. I hope someday to dig deeper into this topic by conducting my research in Gaelic, but that is currently not possible.

Thus, this presented a limitation to my research as I was not able to hold the céilidhean in Gaelic, leading me to exclude some narratives that may only exist in the Gaelic language. Additionally, as I wanted to use as many primary sources as possible, this greatly limited what I was able to research and understand. Markedly, as I am researching mainly in English, which is the language of those who caused the decline in TEK both in Gaelic and Mi'kmaw communities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As Shawn Wilson (2008) questions the inclusion of a literature review in his research ceremony, I too, questioned the place of a literature review in my work outside of its place as an epistemic convention. Therefore, prior to delving into the review itself, I must clarify this chapters' place in my thesis by outlining what it does and does not aim to do. This literature review aims to situate the reader in the state of my field of research during the time of writing this thesis in order to give an idea of where I was starting from. Additionally, it aims to demonstrate how the gap in literature informed the focus of my work. This review does not aim to defend my research, and does not aim to use academia to justify the importance of my research. Furthermore, this literature review does not provide a relational presentation of the literature reviewed as it is brought out of its own context, into my own. Therefore, I highly encourage the reader to look further into any of the reviewed literature that interests them, whether that be positively or negatively, as I am unable to review it in its whole context.

2.1. Scope of the Literature & Organization of the Review

Due to past experience attempting to research TEK, human ecology and responsibility to land among Gaels in Mi'kma'ki, I knew that the literature was sparse. This literature gap itself was one of the motivations behind engaging myself in this work. Therefore, I began with a review of the literature concerning immigration, the clearances, settlement, and relations between Gaels and Mi'kmaq in an attempt to find literature discussing related topics.

Unfortunately, I found the literature had a large focus on other areas of Tír nan Craobh, notably Ontario and the prairies as evident in Galloway (2008) and Szasz (2007)'s work. I was not alone in finding this literature gap, as I soon discovered that the limited literature on these topics in Mi'kma'ki often began with a critique of the literature gap itself.

Dr. Michael Newton identified that while Mi'kma'ki is home to the only Gàidhealtachd outside of An t-Seann Dùthaich, the representative literature of past, and present Gaelic nova scotia is limited (Newton, 2011b, 2013, 2015). Additionally, Dr. Michael Kennedy (2002) described in *Gaelic Nova Scotia: An Economic, Cultural, and Social Impact Study* that the literature that does exist is quite often unrepresentative. He states that much of the work was written by Anglophone historians that ignored most of the historical commentary supplied by Gaels, casting an unrepresentative narrative of their experiences (Kennedy, 2002). Building off of Kennedy's point, Newton (2015) states that the historical commentary that was not ignored by said Anglophone historians was that of Gaels who had assimilated into Anglo-Saxon society.

Kennedy (2002) explains this process of assimilation by stating that the settler colonial state required English for social advancement. He notes that anything that fell outside of the Anglo-Saxon society, such as Gaelic culture, language or worldview, was excluded from the so called "new world". This leads Kennedy to deduce that many Gaels saw the assimilation into Anglo-Saxon society as the path out of poverty and powerlessness and contextualizes this by explaining that any form of Gaelic medium education did not exist until the mid 1930s in Mi'kma'ki. He expands by explaining the vicious cycle this created in which educated Gaels were more likely to be disconnected from their culture, and the more education they sought, the more likely they were to play a role in diminishing the use of the language. To support his point, he looks to these two verses of the song written by Rev. James MacGregor of Pictou County in the mid 1820s:

Bha na Gaidheil ro aineolach, dhall,
 Bha ionnsachaidh gann 'n am measg:
 Bha 'n eòlas cho tana, 's cho mall,
 'S nach b' aithne dhoibh 'n call a mheas.
 Nis togaidh na Gaidheil an ceann,

The Gaels were so ignorant, blind,
 Education was scarce in their midst:
 Their knowledge was so narrow, and weak,
 That their loss they could not judge.
 Now Gaels will raise their heads,

'S cha bhi iad am fan na's mo;
 Bidh aca ard fhoghlum nan Gall
 Us tuigse neo-mhall 'n a choir.
 (Dunn 1953, 110-112)

They will no longer be helpless;
 They shall have the high learning of the English,
 And powerful, virtuous understanding.
 Translation by (Kennedy, 2002).

(Kennedy, 2002)

Michael Kennedy views these verses as a prime example of Reverend MacGregor's dissatisfaction with Gaelic culture and admiration with English society, and identifies the reverend's profound contribution to the vicious cycle identified above.

As both Newton and Kennedy have noted, there is an unfortunate history of unrepresentative literature on Gaelic Nova Scotia, making a small field of research even smaller, and further reinforcing the focus of my work. Yet, what emerged from this review of the literature gap was the focus and organization of my literature review. Therefore, some of the literature reviewed may not exclusively be on the topics I am studying, thus bringing it out of its own context and into my own.

As the aim of this literature review is to provide context to the reader, its sections will be organized according to the context I aim to provide. To begin, I will present an overview of the literature concerning dùthchas and Gaelic TEK in early Gaelic literature, and then in the contemporary "old country" in order to give the reader some insight into how dùthchas is emerging in academia across the Atlantic. Then, I will present an overview of connections made between sealladh nan Gàidheal and Indigenous worldviews of Turtle Island to provide the reader with an idea of how dùthchas could exist away from its native territory through its connections to the native worldviews of this continent. Finally, I will review literature relating to dùthchas specifically in Mi'kma'ki (however sparse) in order to give the reader an insight into the literature directly relating to my field of research.

2.2. Dùthchas and Gaelic TEK in Early Gaelic Literature

As Chiblow & Meighan (2022) establish, language is a representation of worldview, and as the Gaelic language is tied to the land, so is the sealladh nan Gàidheal. The Gaelic alphabet has 18 letters, and is sometimes referred to as “the tree alphabet” as each letter is tied to a craobh (tree) or a preas (bush). This provides the fundamentals for a language that emphasizes its ties to the natural environment.

2.2.1 Gaelic TEK in Early Gaelic Literature

Dr. Michael Newton identifies the homologies between humans and nature in numerous publications, one of them being his PhD dissertation, *The Tree in Scottish Gaelic Literature and Tradition* (Newton, 1998). In his research, he expands on the work of Iain MacAonghuis (John MacInnes) who coined the term “Gaelic Panegyric Code” in order to systemically classify Gaelic praise poetry (Newton, 1998). In this classification, MacAonghuis identified that the most common kenning used in Gaelic poetry was that of the tree or forest and links the sacred trees of Ireland (oak, yew and ash) with the tree symbolism used to praise social leaders (MacAonghuis & Newton, 2005). Newton (1998) expands on this by highlighting the use of these kennings not only in reference to individuals, but also families, clans, and Gaels as a whole. In an earlier article on the symbolism of mountains in Gaelic tradition, Newton highlights a similar role of mountains in the panegyric code and attributes this to the association of mountains with supernatural creatures, ceremony, and celebrations (Newton, 1996). Additionally, in *Warriors of the Word: The World of Scottish Gaelic Highlanders* (2009) he highlights the vast amount of vocabulary related to hills and mountains in Gaelic, noting a survey concerning Gaelic mountain names in Siorrachd Pheairt (Perthshire) that identifies twenty different terms identifying specific shapes and characteristics in the county alone. In the same book, he identifies several of the common nature kennings used as seen in this table below.

Gaelic word	Associated body part	Associated reference in nature
Ceann	Head	End
Aodann	Face	Surface
Gualann	Shoulder	Mountain Ridge
Bràigh	Upper chest	Upper lands
Druim	Back	Mountain Ridge

Additionally, in a chapter on human ecology, Newton expands on many aspects of traditional Gaelic life that we might now identify as Traditional Ecological knowledge. For example, the importance of good parenting could be conveyed in the seanfhacal (proverb) “Lub am faillean is chan hairlich a chraobh ort” (Bend the sapling and the tree won't defy you), directly connecting the raising of children with trees. Furthermore, he highlights a nickname attributed to the MacCodrums of the outer Hebrides “sliochd nan ròn” (the seal-people) as they were said to be descended from seals, and sometimes have the ability to assume the form of a seal. Due to this, a MacCodrum would never kill or eat a seal as they were their kin (Newton, 2009).

Another similar belief can be seen in the Cailleach, who is an old woman usually accompanied by a herd of deer seen as a protector of nature and in many stories, stops human hunters from over-hunting deer. Newton (2009) views the following tale to further explain the Cailleach's role in the protection of nature, and her response to its destruction in the name of modernity. In the case of this story, the Cailleach is referred to by another name “glaistig”.

“A hunter was one day returning from Beinn Bhric and when he reached the bottom of the mountain, he thought he heard a sound like the cracking of two rocks striking each other, or like the grating of a stag's horns when he rubs them against a rock. He continued walking until he came within sight of a large stone that lay at the side of the road, and there he saw at the base of the stone a woman with a green shawl around her shoulders. She held a deer shank in each hand and was constantly striking them together. Even though he realised that she was a glaistig, he was bold enough to say to her, 'What are you doing there, poor woman?' But the only answer that he got was, 'Since the forest was burnt! Since the forest was burnt!' And she kept repeating this refrain for as long as he could hear her.”(Newton, 2009, p. 324)

Newton explains that the Cailleach's home is at the top of the mountain, further reinforcing the symbolism of mountains, and notes that in this case, her deer herd is dead. He attributes the Cailleach striking bones together to the ritual of keening in mourning and states that she is mourning the forest, representing wilderness in general. He views the road and the lack of fear of the man as a representation of human impact and 'progress' and states that the story itself demonstrates that humankind's impact has prohibited the Cailleach from acting as a protector of nature. More broadly, he views these literary references as a reinforcement of the notion that humans are inherently a part of nature and can be understood within the same terms and frames of references, viewing dùthchas as a word to represent this.

2.2.2 Dùthchas in Early Gaelic Literature

Dùthchas is a Gaelic word with no exact English translation (Newton, 2009). But, as Pòl Miadhachain-Chiblow (Paul Meighan) (2022) describes, it is a fluid concept essential to the sealladh nan Gàidheal (P. J. Meighan, 2022). Due to its fluidity, it has been interpreted in English through many different definitions. In *Dùthchas Nan Gàidheal*, a collection of essays by Iain MacAonghuis (John MacInnes) curated by Dr. Michael Newton (2005, pp. xi, xxii), dùthchas is described as “the focal web of belief and kinship” and “hereditary territory and customs”. Similarly, Heather Menzies (2014, p. 25) describes dùthchas as “a lived set of rights and

responsibilities toward one's family and the land that they inhabited". As Iain MacKinnon and others note, the word is similar to dùthaich, meaning ancestral homeland, and has the same root "du(th)" which comes from an ancient Indo-European word translating to "earth", rooting these words directly in the soil (Mackinnon, 2017; P. J. Meighan, 2022; Menzies, 2014; Newton, 2009).

Heather Menzies expands on this connection by stating that dùthchas can represent a living covenant with the land. She specifies that this is not in the western understanding of land as property, but a "lineage of connections and a responsibility towards a particular piece of land, as place, that's passed on from generation to generation" (Menzies, 2014, p. 27).

As is evident in the myriad of translations this word has accrued in English, any attempt to directly translate it out of Gaelic robs it of its complex emotional energy (Newton, 2009). Yet, this thesis is in English. Therefore, we can attempt to mitigate some of this loss of emotional understanding by turning to the all-important world of seanfhaclan (Gaelic Proverbs). Ryan Dziadowic notes dùthchas is "a Gaelic word which carries so much complexity, it needs its own thesis" (Dziadowic, 2022). In his article, dùthchas is provided four English translations from Edward Dwelly's dictionary:

"The Place of one's birth."

"Heredity, native or hereditary temper, spirit or blood."

"Visage, countenance."

"Hereditary right."

While none of these definitions describe the connection between Gaels and their native land as Newton, Meighan, and Menzies describe it, Dziadowic goes on to provide these connections through an analysis of seanfhaclan.

“An uair a thréigeas na dùthchasaich Ìle, beannachd le sith Alba!”

When the natives forsake Islay, farewell the peace of Scotland!

“Sliochd nan rìghribh dùthchasach, ‘Bha shìos ‘an Dùn-s-dà-innis,

Aig an robh crùn na h-Alb’ o thùs, ‘S aig am beil dùthchas fhathas ris.”

Children of the native kings, Who reigned down at Dunstaffnage, Who first the crown of Alba owned, And still have native claim to it.

Dziadowic states that these first two seanfhaclan demonstrate the far-reaching consequences of displacing an Indigenous population from their homelands, but also that this connection to land can last centuries despite displacement (Dziadowic, 2022).

2.3 Dùthchas in the Contemporary “Old Country”

Dùthchas, its understanding, and importance to Gaels in An t-Seann Dùthaich has changed with time, as is evident in the literature reviewed above. Michael Newton (2009) notes that many of these associations with hereditary right or claim are more commonly seen in early Gaelic literature, with metaphysical associations of hereditary traits arising in the Medieval period. He states that the powerful emotive qualities of words such as “dùthchas” tend to be more prominent in literature during times of social crisis. As an example, Gaelic poetry of the 18th and 19th centuries repeatedly uses the word dùthchas in response to the violation of dùthchas during the clearances. (Newton, 2009).

In the contemporary world, we can see a need to connect dùthchas with sustainability initiatives in light of the climate crisis. Déirdre Ní Mhathúna (2021) takes a look at this in her

research on TEK and the relevance of dùthchas in environmental futures of the Gàidhealtachd in An t-Seann Dùthaich. Through her exploratory and collaborative research, she identifies a conflict between the embodied knowledge of dùthchas and efforts of conservation and sustainability. Notably, when these efforts of sustainability and conservation are not rooted in the communities of the Gàidhealtachd themselves. She encourages the understanding of TEK to be collaborative in order to inform conservation and sustainability initiatives, especially in our current climate crisis (Ní Mhathúna, 2021).

Joseph Murphy (2009) identifies some of these conflicts in his research on place and exile, identifying one case of a proposed wind farm on Eilean Leòdhais (the Isle of Lewis). While this development would have contributed to the needed development of green energy, it would have also risked environmental impacts on more than 25,000 hectares of moorland and disconnected community members from that land, threatening an intrinsic part of their culture and violating dùthchas (Murphy, 2009).

In contrast, scholars such as Donovan (2014), Kenrick (2011), and Toogood (2002) have demonstrated how community-run initiatives are based off of elements of the sealladh nan Gàidheal, such as dùthchas, as opposed to the state run conservation and sustainability initiatives. Donovan notes that the community of Eilean Eige (The isle of Eigg) was greatly affected by the highland clearances, and thus, was a crofting community during the majority of the 20th century. In 1997, after almost a decade of work, the community trust of Eigg bought back the Island and inspired the creation of the Land Reform Act of Scotland in 2003 (Donovan, 2014). Many scholars view this as leading to a growing movement of community buy-back and the dismantling of the landlord system that has come to plague us all (Donovan, 2014; Mackenzie, 2006; MacKinnon, 2018).

This self-determination being exerted by the Gaels of An t-Seann Dùthaich is motivated by this connection to the land, and as Pòl Miadhachàin-Chiblow highlights, can be explained in the Gaelic philosophy of dùthchas.

“Dùthchas goes beyond a mere feeling of identification with place and community to tangible conduct and action motivated by a sense of ethics, respect, and responsibility for said place and community to maintain ecological balance” (P. Meighan, 2024, para. 7)

2.4 Dùthchas and Indigenous Worldviews of Turtle Island

In many works (such as Galloway (2008) and Szasz (2007)) discussing encounters and relationships between Indigenous people of Turtle Island and Gaels, the foundation of their cultures and worldviews are seen as mirroring each other, specifically in their conception of land. Yet, as Dr. Michael Newton points out in his various publications on the topic, the interactions between Gaels and the Indigenous people of the continent they settled on tend to be oversimplified in lumping both together into a category of “tribal peoples”(Newton, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). Newton demonstrates that when comparing sealladh nan Gàidheal or terms such as dùthchas, to Indigenous worldviews of Turtle Island, the modern context of the Gaels who gave into Anglo-Saxon assimilation must be kept in mind, as their rise in society was at the expense of Indigenous people and their own community (Newton, 2011a). The nuances of this context are well represented in the mass deforestation of Unama’ki (cape breton) at the hands of early Gaelic settlers as demonstrated by Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach (Shamus Y. MacDonald) (2017), and Dr. Karly Kehoe (2024). Dr. Kehoe emphasizes that while both Gaels and Mi’kmaq theoretically have similar understandings of land, in practice this is contradicted by the Gaels in power who abandoned this aspect of sealladh nan Gàidheal in order to engage in settler colonialism.

When looking at the contrasting understandings of land, we can point to Dr. Brian Noble's analysis of first nations heritage transactions with Canada (Noble, 2008). He describes a radical difference in the understanding of "owning as belonging" and "owning as property", the first being the understanding of First Nations, and the latter being the understanding of Canada. This understanding of land is similar to the *sealladh nan Gàidheal* identified by Heather Menzies (2014). She explains that Gaels do not say they came from a place, instead they say "Buinidh mi do" (I belong to a place), emphasizing the concept that people belong to a place, rather than a place belonging to people. This aspect of the *sealladh nan Gàidheal* is what came in conflict with the understandings of land of the British, who both enforced this on Gaels through the clearances, but also welcomed assimilated Gaels to adopt in order to enforce this on the Indigenous nations of Turtle Island (Williams, 2024).

As an example of the similarities between *sealladh nan Gàidheal* and other Indigenous worldviews, we can look to the work of Pòl Mac Angusina Doileig Aonghais 'ill Easbaig (Pòl Miadhachain-Chiblow/Paul Meighan), a Gaelic scholar originally from Glaschu (Glasgow) now working in Tìr nan Craobh with his Anishinaabe-Ojibwe partner Susan Chiblow (P. J. Meighan, 2022). The two have published multiple works on the connections between their two worldviews, identifying the importance of land reform and language revitalization in the modern day (Chiblow & Meighan, 2022, 2024). In the latter publication, they acknowledge the importance of naming Indigenous worldviews, rather than lumping them all into the framework of traditional ecological knowledge. Therefore, they respectively describe the Anishinaabe term *giikendaaswin* and the Gaelic term *dùthchas* and how they are connected by their emphasis on interconnectedness (Chiblow & Meighan, 2024). In their publication of 2022, they further explore these connections by identifying the importance of language in this time of humanitarian

and climate crises. They emphasize the ties between language and land that are present in both Gaelic and Anishinaabemowin and the consequences of language loss on the environment (Chiblow & Meighan, 2022).

In Pòl Miadhachàin-Chiblow (2022)'s exploration of dùthchas as a research method, he also ties in the Anishnaabe participatory methodological framework Biskaabiiyang (return to ourselves) to guide his reconnection to dùthchas and research within an Anishnaabe community. He identifies 6 facets of a dùthchas led methodology, interconnectedness; responsibility; respect; ecological balance; and càirdeas (kinship), and uses this to follow Anishnaabe research protocols. He describes Biskaabiiyang as beginning with the researcher working on their own decolonization process in order to conduct meaningful research with the Anishnaabe community. As a methodology for his own decolonization, he turned to dùthchas, demonstrating the potential for collaboration between sealladh nan Gàidheal and Anishnaabe worldviews, and the importance of looking to connect your own cultural practices to the cultural practices of the community you are researching with (P. J. Meighan, 2022)

2.5 Dùthchas in Mi'kma'ki

When looking at examples of dùthchas in Mi'kma'ki, there is limited literature directly looking at this aspect of the sealladh nan Gàidheal, but literature on the conflicting accounts of connection to land and culture during the period of highland settlement in Mi'kma'ki can offer some perspective. In Dr. Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach (Dr. Shamus Y. MacDonald) (2017)'s dissertation, he presents a theory as to how Gaels in Mi'kma'ki understand land. Dòmhnallach looks closely at the topography of place, and insinuates a connection between Gaels and land in Mi'kma'ki. He includes this statement from community members in Flambus (framboise) "These

names suggest a people who knew their adopted homeland so well that they had a name for every stone and blade of grass” to describe this connection (Cummming et al., 1984).

Dr. Dòmhnallach expands on this by telling the story of Craobh a Mhathain (The Bear Tree). He notes that according to oral tradition, an immigrant from Loch Aber (Lochaber) named Iain Rankin (John Rankin), was attacked by a bear on a nearby mountain. The immigrant found refuge in a sturdy tree, but unfortunately was injured and died two years later, leaving behind his wife and thirteen children. From then on, the tree was protected and generations of children played around the tree as it reminded them of their ancestors and the need to be vigilant in the forest. Dòmhnallach notes that one community member states that “the land gave them their history as opposed to a classroom” (S. MacDonald, 2017, p. 169).

Dòmhnallach also discusses the tradition of healing wells that was brought over from an t-Seann Dùthaich. These were natural springs frequently credited with healing properties, and settlers traveled long and far to experience their miracles. He goes on to include a story about a healing well located in Camus Nan Éireannach (Irish cove), Unama’ki (cape breton) from Cape Breton’s Magazine:

“According to local tradition, an entrepreneur recognized the commercial potential of the popular water source. After constructing a fence around the spring, he began to sell its water. Not long afterwards, the spring dried up and reappeared on the other side of the fence. For many tradition bearers, the story confirmed the sacred nature of the site, as Josie MacNeil concludes: “You can’t commercialize on anything that’s blessed” (“At the Glengarry Mineral Spring,” 1981, p. 34)

He identifies that these traditional stories show a people aware of the familial, cultural, and linguistic ties that bind them to an t-Seann Dùthaich, but who hold a sense of place tied to Mi’kma’ki.

Yet, Dòmhnallach doesn't shy away from recounting the harms Gaels have done to their "adoptive homeland", and instead recounts them with critique, despite some understanding. He explains that given their history of dispossession, many Gaels found a sense of security in private land ownership in Mi'kma'ki (S. MacDonald, 2017). But, this manifested towards a "conquering" of the land in which many settlers deforested far beyond sustenance needs, leaving a violent ecological legacy still seen in present day Mi'kma'ki (S. MacDonald, 2017). Dòmhnallach notes that despite the history of land dispossession shared with the Mi'kmaq, many Gaels routinely ignored Indigenous land claims and pushed aside their Mi'kmaw neighbours in order to own the most fertile properties (S. MacDonald, 2017).

Dr. Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach's research into Gaels and their relationship with land in Mi'kma'ki suggests that as descendants of these settlers, the modern-day Gaelic community in Mi'kma'ki must be cognisant of the harm our ancestors inflicted upon the Mi'kmaq, and the cognitive dissonance of being displaced and displacing others that is present in our heritage. Furthermore, he demonstrates that when examining our connection to the land through the stories that are tied to trees, or the local tradition of healing wells, we must see this as a reason to uplift Indigenous claims to land and sovereignty. As a way of tying it all together, Dòmhnallach brilliantly states "if one group can feel this connected to land after two hundred years, imagine what another feels after time immemorial." (S. MacDonald, 2017, p. 273).

In *Gaelic Nova Scotia: A Resource Guide*, some common practices are identified in relation to stiùbhartachd (stewardship) (Nova Scotia, 2019). For example, some Gaels connected astronomy to their interactions with the land through their adherence to the phases of the moon, notably in relation to the waning of the moon as it was referred to as the 'dark' 'growing' or 'planting' phase (Nova Scotia, 2019). During this phase of the moon, people wouldn't cut their

hair out of fear of it receding, with the same applying to butchering animals out of fear of the meat shrinking (Nova Scotia, 2019). Yet, they would cut wood for building and burning as it would dry and cure well during the waning of the moon (Nova Scotia, 2019). Additionally, this resource guide describes the intimate connection between the land and its creatures as Gaels expressed in the practice of assigning Gaelic speech to the sounds of animals. This resource guide explains this practice of animism as a relationship to nature that personifies wildlife, and also identifies the role of spioradalachd (spirituality) in emphasizing the care for each other, animals, and the natural world (Nova Scotia, 2019).

This is where I encounter the limits of my literature review, and am reminded of the need for other forms of knowledge-keeping such as that in the oral histories of the Gaels. Yet, I have found I am not alone in wondering how dùthchas has evolved in Gaelic nova scotia. In the appendices of *Gaelic Nova Scotia: A Resource Guide*, I came across an article written by Daniel MacDonald titled *Tìr is Teanga* (land and language), in *An Rubha*, the Highland Village's Gaelic Folklife Magazine (2013). In this article he examines the nova scotia Gael and their relationship to their environment. MacDonald begins the article by establishing that the Gaels have always had deep connection to the land, but this relationship has come to exist on a number of different planes. He identifies the obvious attachment to physical landscape formed through agriculture, which is shared by many communities and cultures around the world. But he also points out that there is a socio-linguistic element in relation to connection to land that comes from cultural interpretations of nature. In relation to dùthchas, MacDonald states

“As a society based on the oral passage of knowledge, the Gaels’ concept of dùthchas includes a strong cultural element that is heavily reliant on symbolism and representation” (D. MacDonald, 2013, p. 14).

He notes that when describing a landscape, it is not enough to only describe the physical, this must also be accompanied with the relationship to the landscape. MacDonald explains that as time passed, Gaels' connection to the land in Mi'kma'ki became stronger, and sees the description of landscape in oral literature as a reflection of this. He uses the examples of *A' Choille Ghruamach* (The Gloomy Forest) written by Am Bàrd MacGilleain (The Bard MacLean), and *Moladh Albann Nuaidh* (In Praise of Nova Scotia) written by Ailean a' Rids Dòmhnallach (Allan "the ridge" MacDonald) to demonstrate the representation of this growing connection in oral literature. Macdonald notes that in the first song, the Tiriodh (Tiree)-born bard condemns the land he has found himself in shortly after settling in Mi'kma'ki, but in the second song, written years later, the land is praised. He explains that the lyrics of Ailean a' Rids Dòmhnallach create links between nature, and his perspective of it from the views of his own community, demonstrating how the connection to land grew with time (D. MacDonald, 2013).

I also found similar wonderings of Gaels' connection to land in Mi'kma'ki through *Air Chéilidh* (The Gaelic Narrative Project) which hosted conversations highlighting how our Gaelic traditions nourish and sustain us throughout our lives. While discussing the landscapes of an t-Seann Dùthaich, Màiri Britton (Dùn Eideann/Edinburgh) and Ceit Langhorne (Glaschu/Glasgow) see their connection to their homeland as Gaels of an t-Seann Dùthaich as a starting place for future conversations around the Gaels' connection to their newer homelands in Mi'kma'ki (Britton, 2024). In another conversation, two other members, Frances MacEachen and Sionainn Ni'n Aonghais Iain Pheadair (Shannon MacMullin) met with three Mi'kmaw women, Susan Copage, Ella Nicholas and Eva Nicholas, to discuss how they as settler Gaels can uplift and listen to their Mi'kmaw neighbours (Nicholas et al., 2023). Susan Copage finished

their discussion by stating that one of the most important things Gaels can do, is share our culture with our children, and thus, teach them to respect other cultures (Nicholas et al., 2023).

2.6 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this section shows hope for dùthchas existing among Gaels in Mi'kma'ki. Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach presents stories that demonstrate connection between Gaels and their “adopted homeland”. Kennedy’s analysis of Gaelic nova scotia and Dziadowic’s analysis of seanfhaclan both highlight a resilience in dùthchas through this seanfhaclan:

"Théid Dùthchas an Aghaidh nan Creig"

dùthchas will survive the rocks

This tells us that dùthchas is a force that will go through one of the strongest things in nature, rock. Dziadowic suggests that if it is cultivated and nourished, dùthchas can be “a wellspring of transformative energy for place-based revitalisation” (Dziadowic, 2022). As demonstrated in the resource guide on Gaelic nova scotia, language, culture, religion and stories were transplanted from An t-Seann-Dùthaich, to Mi'kma'ki, which leads me to wonder how dùthchas fits into that.

As Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach’s dissertation demonstrates, attitudes towards land have changed in the process of clearance and settlement. But as Newton, Miadhachàin-Chiblow, Menzies, and Dziadowic describe, the connection between land and people is still present. Yet, in order to understand how this connection exists in Mi'kma'ki, rather than An t-Seann Dùthaich, I must look past a literature review, and to the people of Gaelic nova scotia. To do so, I must first explain the methods of my research, thus leading to my next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methods

The following chapter will explain the methodological framework behind my research and its influences, extending from some of the literature discussed in the previous chapter. I will then explain the application of these methodologies in the re-framing of semi-structured interviews as céilidhean, the process of these céilidhean, the inclusion of archival material, and the process of collaborative analysis. It is here that I will introduce the reader to the many people involved in this research, both through céilidhean and collaborative analysis, as an enactment of the relationality central to my methodological framework.

3.1. Source Selection & Methodological Framework

During the formation of my research questions and project plan, I was taking a course on Indigenous research methods with Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* as the main source of discussion. Therefore, much of the framework for my methods is influenced by Wilson's Indigenous research paradigm. The concept of relationality is a core component to my research and methods, notably as the foundation of my research is centered on relationships between humans and land. This is reflected in my decision to write in first person in an effort to account for the relationship between myself as a researcher and my audience. As Shawn Wilson (2008) describes, in order to be accountable in your relations, you must honour the knowledge you have gained by viewing it as a part of you. Thus, bringing the relationships into yourself, whether that be relationships with people, literature, knowledge, culture, the land, or the research itself. Relational accountability prioritizes holistic analysis which in practice can be aided by cumulative and collaborative analysis in contrast to western dominant research methodologies such as coding (Wilson, 2008).

Additionally, I have taken inspiration from Indigenous research methods such as those used by the Aanji'bide (Changing our Paths) team. The Aanji'bide team employed a method of collaborative story analysis where they gathered community members and scholars to listen to transcripts of the semi-structured interviews they conducted, in order to analyse in a collaborative setting (Perron et al., 2024). Specifically, they did not code, or look for patterns, but instead asked questions such as “What really makes an impact on you? What touches your heart as you listen to this person's story?” “How does this person’s story compare with others we listen to?”. This approach to analysis ensured that the relationship between stories and people was not broken.

Despite the literature gap in Gaelic nova scotia, research into dùthchas in An t-Seann Dùthaich is growing with the increasing effects of the climate crisis (Gordon, 2023). Pòl Miadhachàin-Chiblow (Paul J. Meighan) has demonstrated how to expand this into research with Indigenous communities in Tir nan Craobh, by developing a Scottish Gaelic methodology to guide self-decolonization and conceptualize a kincentric and relational approach to community-led research under the framework of dùthchas (P. J. Meighan, 2022). Miadhachàin-Chiblow provides these questions to guide research under dùthchas:

- (1) What do my own self-decolonizing processes entail?
- (2) What does kinship and responsibility towards participants and the land in my research mean
for me?
- (3) How do I build my own responsibilities, kinship, and loyalty with the communities and lands
where I work?
- (4) What is my methodology for emplaced ethical relations in action?

This framework can be conceptualized visually in the form of a Gaelic knot which symbolizes interconnectedness, connecting responsibility, respect, ecological balance, and càirdeas (kinship) into a framework for guiding decolonial research (P. J. Meighan, 2022).

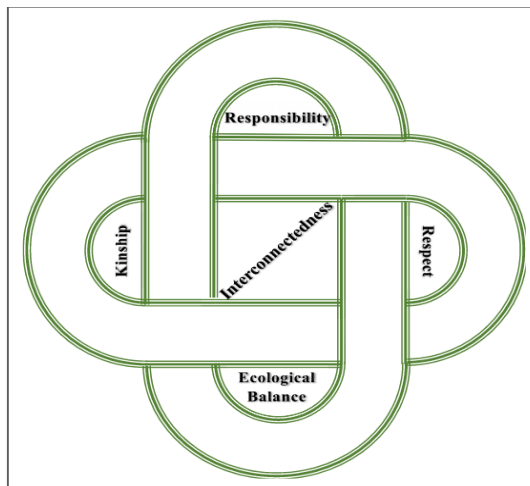


Figure 1 Gaelic Knot Representing dùthchas methodological principles (P.J. Meighan, 2022).

In terms of the practical methods used in my research, I have found inspiration from Dr.

Seumas Y, Dòmhnallach's PhD dissertation "*Dh'fheumadh iad àit' a dheanamh*" (*They would have to make a place*) *Land and Belonging in Gaelic Nova Scotia*. In doing semi-structured interviews, he emphasized the importance of positioning himself in relation to the seanchaidhean he talked with, the value attached to identifying research participants, and the precarious nature and process of transcription, notably when working with a community whose main language is not English (MacDonald, 2017).

Additionally, I have taken inspiration from Dr. Michael Newton's PhD dissertation *The Tree in Scottish Gaelic Literature and Tradition* in my analysis of archival material. Pre-clearances, the majority of Gaelic song-poetry was that of panegyric poetry focused on praise pieces for clan chiefs and others of aristocracy (Dunbar, 2021). In a sense, bàird (poets), projected the values clan chiefs were meant to uphold. When the clan chiefs abandoned these values by taking on the role of landlords during the clearances, the focus of the panegyric poetry turned to community leaders, and in settling in Mi'kma'ki, much of it it turned to nature (Dunbar, 2021). As Dr. Michael Newton (1998) analyses in his dissertation, bàird make great use of metaphors, kennings, hierarchies and mnemonics based on nature and their surrounding

environment in order to project values onto the social order. In his analysis of human ecology in Gaelic song-poetry, Newton focuses on material from no later than the 19th century and states “I leave the analysis of continuities and innovations in Gaelic literature from this period onwards to a future scholar” (Newton, 1998, p. 14). While this leaves me with much to cover, the purpose of my archival analysis is to compliment the stories and cultural narratives collected during my céilidhs, therefore I continue to leave an in-depth analysis of Gaelic literature from that period onwards to a future scholar.

3.2. Application of Methodologies

3.2.1. Céilidhean

As I am conducting cultural research, I began by using a mixed approach of purposive and snowball recruitment which resulted in a deeper relationship between myself as the researcher and the seanchaidh or community member, as we had a pre-existing relationship or had been introduced by a pre-existing relation. Therefore, I either reached out directly to the seanchaidh, or community member [Appendix A], or they reached out to me via a call-out I’d put in a Gaelic Council newsletter [Appendix B]. We then coordinated a time and place for the interview, and I provided them with more information including a consent document [Appendix C] and my proposed guiding questions [Appendix D].

When described in the dominant academic system, my research method falls under the realm of semi-structured interviews. But, in order to be relational, research methodologies need to be based in the context of community (Wilson, 2008). This led me to conduct my semi-structured interviews as céilidhs. In direct translation, the word céilidh means visit, whereas the modern anglophone understanding of the word is a kitchen party. Both of these interpretations of

the word provide the environment for conversation, storytelling and knowledge sharing with the céilidh acting as the informal educational vehicle Gaelic life (Nova Scotia, 2019).

As my intentions with semi-structured interviews were to allow traditional narratives to emerge, and to foster the importance of storytelling that exists in Gaelic culture, it only felt right to do so in the context of community through a céilidh. While I entered as an “interviewer”, my guiding questions [Appendix D] acted as more of an opportunity to allow the seanchaidh or community member to lead the conversation, following the traditional narrative of a céilidh. The following statement from Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach in his PhD dissertation demonstrates the purpose of this re-framing.

“Indeed, by maintaining an informal and conversational atmosphere during interviews, participants were able to fall into the familiar routine of a céilidh, in which traditional knowledge has long been shared and cultural competencies naturally come to the fore.”(S. MacDonald, 2017, p. 54)

An extension of relational accountability can be found in the extensive use of transcription in my thesis in order to avoid academic jargon and ensure the accessibility of my research to the community I am working with. This allows the seanchaidhean or community members to speak for themselves, in context, and diminishes risk of misinterpretation on my part.

As I am not yet fluent in Gaelic, the céilidhean took place in English, but as there are no longer any Gaelic-only speakers in Mi’kma’ki, this did not cause a barrier in recruitment. While the knowledge is tied to the language, lack of fluency in the language does not necessitate a lack of knowledge, as many of the people I spoke with grew up around the language, gained this knowledge from their fluent parents, etc. I also encouraged them to use Gaelic terms when talking and I would ask for clarification where needed. As the focus of these conversations are the stories and traditional narratives, I have eliminated aspects of everyday speech such as “um”

“ah” or consecutive repeated words. In some cases I have added a word for ease of readability, where this takes place, you will see square brackets []. The remainder of any transcription included was written as spoken and was reviewed by the speaker prior to publication.

Following the guidance of Shawn Wilson, and the example of Pòl Miadhachàin-Chiblow and Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach, I have decided to identify the seanchaidhean and community members (with their permission). This allows the reader to form a relationship with them, give credit to their knowledge and emphasize the individual narratives rather than making any overarching claims about communities as a whole. In order to ensure proper representation, these bios were crafted in collaboration with those I talked with.

Dòmhnall MacGilleain

Dòmhnall MacGilleain/Don MacLean is a writer and retired fisheries biologist from Léig Ghabarus (Gabarus Lake), Unama’ki (Cape Breton). Dòmhnall is the son of Alasdair mac Sheòrais 'ic Iain 'ic Iain (Alex George MacLean), and Annie (Munro) MacGilleain (Annie MacLean) of Canoe Lake. Dòmhnall’s great great grandfather came from Uibhist a Tuath (North Uist) in the 1830s. Despite growing up around the Gaelic, Dòmhnall didn’t have the opportunity to learn as a child but is now taking classes with his wife in Unama’ki. Dòmhnall responded to my callout in the Comhairle na Gàidhlig (Gaelic Council) newsletter, interested in speaking with me about my project and its connection to his upcoming book on community in Unama’ki.

Raibeart MacAonghais

Raibeart MacAonghais/Robert Pringle is from Na Rubhannan, Bàigh an Iar (The Points, West Bay) and got his interest in the Gaelic from his late grandmother, Anna Dhòmhnallach. He returned to Unama’ki a few years back to live on and care for the land his family settled on in 1822. I first met Raibeart at a Gaelic immersion weekend at the Gaelic College last spring where

he was the instructor for the class I was in. During this weekend I briefly brought up the idea of my thesis and he very quickly told me he felt the land he lived on and cared for was an extension of himself. Raibeart is a musician, Gaelic advocate, and teacher in his community.

Charlie Teasdale

Charlie Teasdale is a forester & retired sawyer/owner of Teasdale's Pulp & Lumber. He is a passionate amateur historian and knowledge keeper, often called upon to help families find the homesteads of their ancestors. He believes the sharing of stories keeps his large family close and strong. His mom Catherine MacLellan (who's own mother was a MacEachern) was the last in his family to live on Beinn Eige (the Eigg Mountain Settlement). His family came from Eilean Eige (the Isle of Eigg) around 1826. I connected with Charlie through Dr. Rod Bantjes after stumbling upon the work the two of them did to document Beinn Eige (Eigg Mountain) in my research. In reading the way Charlie described the land, I knew I wanted to talk to him, especially as I knew my family had lived near, maybe even on, the settlement at one point. With the help of Charlie's daughter Laura Teasdale and Dr. Rod Bantjes we were able to meet over Microsoft teams.

3.2.2 Archival Material

As mentioned prior, my archival analysis aims only to compliment my céilidhean. For many of the same reasons there is a lack of representative literature concerning Gaelic nova scotia, Gaelic archival material cannot be truly representative of this living community. These song-poems are a small glimpse into the TEK and dùthchas in Gaelic nova scotia at the time, further emphasizing the importance of the céilidhean, and therefore taking up a much smaller portion of my work. Yet, it is also essential that I tie these two types of sources together in order to represent the connection between the Gaels of early settlement and the Gaels of today.

As I am looking at the presence of TEK and dùthchas in Mi'kma'ki my temporal scope for analysing archival material is wide, including material from the late 18th century to today. But my analysis is based in the same foundations of Newton's dissertation, taking into account the great use of metaphors, kennings, hierarchies and mnemonics.

In terms of materials, I searched the Alexander MacLean Sinclair Papers both in person and online through the Nova Scotia Archives, The Nova Scotia Gaelic Folklore Project at St. FX online, and the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University online. I narrowed down my materials using Caint is Ceathramhan (The Gaelic Nova Scotia Song Index) and in cases where the material was not too vast (such as the Sinclair Papers) I scanned the materials for song-poetry containing any of the words in [Appendix E].

3.2.3 Collaborative Analysis

As mentioned prior in reference to Shawn Wilsons' work on Indigenous research methods, the practices of cumulative and collaborative analysis provide holistic analyses of cultural research and enact relational accountability. Therefore, there is no set time (other than the constraints of one academic school year) for the analysis of my research, acknowledging the interconnectedness of cultural knowledge and its fluid nature. This means that I am not constraining my analysis to the period of time I am holding céilidhean, or conducting collaborative or archival analysis, allowing me to draw upon any knowledge gained prior to or after this period. This ensures I am being accountable to my relationship with knowledge and my research by avoiding any process that stagnates traditional narratives (Wilson, 2008).

Additionally, I analysed my findings collaboratively with four scholars and leaders in the community of Gaelic nova scotia. As the nature of my methods was collaborative through the framework of a céilidh, it naturally extended into my analysis, leading me to discuss my research

with other scholars and community leaders before coming to any final conclusion. This is with the intention of providing a final analysis of my research that does not solely reflect my interpretation of the céilidh results, and instead provides a more holistic analysis while also helping to mitigate my lack of fluency as I will be analysing with fluent speakers.

In practice, this looked like a meeting of 60-90 minutes between myself and each scholar or community leader in which we discussed the results of the céilidhean. I provided them with a bio of each person I had a céilidh with, then a summary of our discussion including transcriptions from that céilidh. Afterwards I asked what stood out, whether that be in relation to their own work, life experiences, or knowledge. This methodology is inspired by Shawn Wilson's work, as well as the work of the Aanji'bide team. Based off the same reasoning for identification in the céilidhean, I have provided bios of the scholars and community leaders involved in my collaborative analysis below.

Dr. Michael Newton

Dr. Michael/Michael Newton was awarded a Ph.D. in Celtic Studies from the University of Edinburgh in 1998 for his dissertation *The Tree in Scottish Gaelic Literature and Tradition*. He has written several books and numerous articles on many aspects of Gaelic tradition and history, many of which take up a sizeable portion of my literature review. He is not only a fluent speaker but also a leading authority on Gaelic scholarship and has made it his mission to bring the story of the Gaels to a wider audience.

Lodaidh MacFhionghuin

Lodaidh MacFhionghuin/Lewis MacKinnon is a community activist, poet, writer, musician, speaker, Gaelic tutor and author born in An Sìthean (Inverness) and raised in Bun na h-Aibhne a Deas (Lower South River, Antigonish). Lodaidh first learnt the language from his grand uncle

Dùghall and is now a fluent speaker who has raised his two boys in Gaelic. He currently works as the executive director of the Office of Gaelic Affairs, Government of Nova Scotia.

Sionainn ni'n Aonghais Iain Pheadair

Sionainn ni'n Aonhais Iain Pheadair/Shannon MacMullin is a mother, grandmother, Gàidhlig aig Baile teacher (Gaelic in community/immersion) and she sees language and cultural reclamation as a road to decolonization and allyship. Raised in Unama'ki (cape breton) but with roots in Ceann Mhira Shuas (Upper Grand Mira), she currently works as a Gaelic Outreach and Engagement Officer with the Office of Gaelic Affairs, Government of Nova Scotia.

Dr. Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach

Dr. Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach/Shamus Y. MacDonald has a PhD in folklore from Memorial University, Newfoundland and wrote his dissertation on land and belonging in Gaelic nova scotia. A Gaelic learner, he often visited Mickey MacNeil, and other seanchaidhean to hear tales and stories. He lives in Am Baile Mór (town of Antigonish), with his wife and their two sons, and currently works as the manager of Language and Culture at the Highland Village.

3.4. Limitations

Due to my lack of fluency, reading the archival materials took considerably longer than it would have taken a fluent speaker, therefore causing me to filter through based off of the presence of certain words prior to reading and translating. While I tried to find all possible interpretations of the words used in order to account for the metaphors and kennings in Gaelic poetry, this is obviously limited, further emphasizing the need for my céilidhean. Furthermore, the timeline of an undergraduate honours thesis constrained how deeply I dug into the archival literature and my ability to engage in collaborative analysis as profoundly as I would have hoped. Despite my best efforts, I still separated stories and narratives from their full context by only

providing a summary of the céilidhean with those I collaborated with, rather than presenting them with the full transcripts and recordings.

3.5. Conclusion

Due to the focus of my research and the literature gap that exists, it was imperative that I used the applicable methodologies in order to conduct my research. As Gaelic is an oral language, it would be a disservice to rely solely on literature and archival analysis to answer my research questions. Therefore leading me to be incredibly intentional about my framework, methodologies and analysis. Per these methods, this research was approved by Dalhousie's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board under file number 2024-7588 in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans as seen in [Appendix F].

Chapter 4: Results

As mentioned prior, I held three céilidhean, one with Dòmhnall MacGilleain, one with Raibeart MacAonghais, and one with Charlie Teasdale. Unfortunately I was not able to make it out of Halifax, so all three of these were done over Microsoft teams. The following chapter consists of summaries of my conversations along with direct quotes and transcribed sections of the conversations. This is provided in order to give the reader more context into my analysis and provide space for the narratives and stories collected on their own. I haven't included the full transcribed interviews as they would triple this thesis document in size. Therefore, what I have included can be seen as a glimpse into the starting points of my analysis.

4.1 Dòmhnall MacGilleain

My first conversation was with Dòmhnall MacGilleain (Don MacLean), and while my céilidhean were loose in structure, I started all my conversations by asking them how they interacted with the land, did they hunt, fish, farm?

Dòmhnall told me he sport-fished and hunted a bit, but mostly he talked about growing up on a farm. He said he was the tail end of the generation to grow up on a farm in Unama'ki and while his parents both worked (his mom as a teacher, and dad as a carpenter) they still had the farm growing up. They had a horse, two cows, kept hens, sheep, some pigs, and planted potatoes, which Dòmhnall described as a typical cape breton rural farm. He concluded this by saying he thinks his upbringing and the relation to land that came with that influenced him to become a biologist.

In connection to that: I asked later on if he thought this was more influenced by where he grew up or who he grew up around, to which Dòmhnall responded:

“Well, I think a combination of both, I guess. Cause we grew up playing in the woods and building forts and then playing in the brook and then fishing and snaring rabbits. We used to snare rabbits and that was about the only way you could make money. It was a common thing for kids in the area to sell rabbits to the milkman and then he’d sell them in Sydney.

I tell people I made my first million snaring rabbits.

The woods was just second nature, my brother and I would go off all over the place and we weren’t getting lost or anything, we always found our way home, it was different.”

In talking about his family, he described them as being attuned to nature and living their life close to the land many times, stating that the seasons were really important to them. He told me that planting was done according to the moon, that they looked at the moon and when they were going to have the last frost in June. He also told me he heard stories that in the old days, they wouldn’t butcher an animal in the fall if the moon was waning because the meat would shrink.

When discussing this, he told me this story:

“And then I remember being in the forest, my father would take my brother and I hunting rabbits or whatever and my grandfather MacLean would be commenting, he would see a tree that had a particular bend in it or something and he would file it in the back of his head so if he needed it at some point to make a sleigh runner for instance (where the front of the sleigh needs to be turned) he would remember that and go and cut it and saw it. So, yeah, they were very attuned to the environment.”

Another practice Dòmhnall heard lots of stories about were burnt gardens or coille-dhubh.

Dòmhnall said when cutting down trees to make cabins and other things, they would burn the branches and leftover wood and plant potatoes in among the tree stumps. The burning released a lot of nutrients and there were no weeds as they were planting in the forest. He even sent me his mother’s book *Only A Memory: The Story of Canoe Lake, Cape Breton* (1991) about community traditions and highlighted the section she wrote on them. On the following page is a depiction of coille-dhubh:

Dòmhnall also talked about how his family had to “fight the forest” in order to maintain pastures and contrasted that with his current effort to re-forest some of the land he owns stating:

“That’s why I felt kind of conflicted when I replanted the field because I know my grandfather and my father both would have worked really really hard to keep the spruce away. But I’m going the other way. But I think it’s so important to me and it was my life’s work, I guess working as a biologist, I could bring it back to growing up and the time spent in the environment.”

That statement was in response to me asking if he felt this connection to land had to do with Gaelic culture, to which he later told me there was certainly a feeling that the land was a part of you and that living in harmony with the land was something they attempted to do.

With all this talk about routines, rituals and knowledge, I asked Dòmhnall if he knew or thought if any of it came from living experience in Mi’kma’ki or (in his family’s case) from Uibhist a Tuath (North Uist), to which he replied:

“Yeah, “something they took from the old country” was an expression I heard lots of times when I was growing up, everything from folklore to the things with the planting and stuff, but they had all kinds of stories about the little people and using charms to heal themselves and that sort of stuff, that all came from Scotland.”



Figure 2 – Coille-dhubh (Burnt Garden) as drawn by Dòmhnall’s father in his mother’s book (A. MacLean, 1991)

4.2 Raibeart MacAonghais

The next day I talked with Raibeart MacAonghais (Rob Pringle), and based off my conversation with Dòmhnall, I specifically asked if there was any sort of routine him or his family kept to when working with the land. He told me that there's a sense of not doing too much at once and not putting too much of a demand on the land as the weather can be very volatile. He explained that they wouldn't want to clear too much and have the heavy spring or fall rains rush out and lose all the soil. He said they maintain that by just going at a slower pace and not using big machinery such as bulldozers or tractors. He explained that if they want to clear a little section to make more pastorage they'll just do it themselves with a chainsaw and poke at it so it's not a major rush.

Knowing Raibeart's family had lived on this land since settlement, I asked if there were any places with stories attached to them around the property, he told me about two:

“There's a strange ritual about an old rock up in the mountain we used to take toys to. When I was a kid, we had to go make a little offering of a toy on this rock, not sure what that was, but I guess my dad did the same thing when he was a kid.”

“There's some old foundations and stuff like that of old homes. There was a foundation, I guess it would have been one of my great, great uncles' and it ended up being just kind of a cavity in the ground and there was always water in it, so we always called it the little pollywog pond because there was always frogs and tadpoles in there. That ended up being nearby where my aunt built a summer cottage sort of a thing. But they preserved this. They didn't touch these old foundations, they left the little pollywog to do their things out in their backyard, and it's kind of cute where it is now.”

We returned to this idea of routines and rituals, and I asked Raibeart if he or his family farmed or butchered according to the moon. He told me that his family would butcher at the full moon and quoted his Uncle Jack saying *“if you butchered when the moon was waning, the meat would basically shrink in the pan on you”*

Similarly, I asked if he knew if this practice came from the old country or if it was a result of becoming familiar with the environment in Mi'kma'ki. Raibeart told me he's come to learn that many other families did this and noted that they would have certainly been very aware of the cycles of the moon when coming over here. Additionally, he'd heard that people would curtsy the new moon, as in going outside and doing a little bow for the new moon.

I asked Raibeart if he thought his connection to land was more influenced by growing up on the land, or knowing family had grow up there. He told me he thinks it's a mixture of both, as he has lots of relatives who have as much of a tie to the land in term of genealogy but they grew up in different places whereas:

"I've always felt very much that this is sort of an extension of my own body in a weird way, if I saw a bulldozer come along and just tear down a bunch of trees here, I would feel a sense of pain, you know.

Because I've grown up here, and I'm close to where the stories of my ancestors here are, I've fed into that. They're with me sometimes when I'm doing things. Sometimes I feel they're very close to me when I'm doing things, like my great grandfather or my great grandmother. People I haven't met that I've heard so many stories about that I do feel that I know quite well. I sort of cultivate their presence in a way that I don't think I could do if I lived in the city."

He specifically described this connection as *"something like a garden that has to be cultivated"*.

Raibeart noted that our ancestors probably felt very connected to the land just by virtue of eating and living off it, but that some of them probably grew to hate it too. This led me to think about the that contradiction of knowing the land so well and working with it, but also sometimes working against it which led Raibeart to talk about clearing for pasture.

"When I was a kid my grandfather was making hay in the pasture where I have my cows now. That stopped when I was about 10 years old. But my father (even though he just worked at the pulp mill) he kept those fields cut down. So we have enough pasture, we have a lot of woodland and we're not in any hurry to get rid of it because we love trees.

Half the time I go up and talk to Dad, we just sit around and talk about the trees. There's certainly a hierarchy of trees, which I've learned sort of after the fact might be a Gaelic thing. You know, with the alphabet and the different letters, but we have a hierarchy of trees in there.

My dad would never cut down an apple tree or an oak tree. There's some trees that you can cut down for firewood, but Dad will not cut down an oak tree. He's planted lots of oak trees and he's grafted lots of apple trees and we're very fortunate in this because we have the farming thing too. So we have pasture and some fields in that, but we have lots of mature oak and maple rows, and we're not going to cut that down. If a tree blows down or dies, we'll use that tree for firewood. I pasture some of my cows in that stuff in the summertime because it's so much cooler under the canopy and they don't do a lick of harm to it, cause the tree's almost as wide as they are.

There's a legend here that one of my ancestors actually planted oaks that he brought over from Scotland. I don't know how true that is. We certainly have a lot of oak along here and some of them are very big, it would take two people to put their arms around them, they're huge. But it was just said to me, don't cut the apple. Even as a little kid, I'd be out with those little loppers kind of clearing around, doing little things, he'd say don't cut the apple trees. Even a wild one, if a deer ate it and did his business, and then an apple tree goes up over there, that's where there's going to be an apple tree. Now, if Dad is putting in a little road into the woods for the tractor for firewood, he will go around that apple tree.”

We talked about this in relation to the clearing to excess that often happened among Gaels settling in Mi'kma'ki. Raibeart told me his great grandfather used to say what a shame it was that they cut all those trees down. He said they evidently had to cut some, and they may not of had a sense of what would make a good field or not, but he thinks they went overboard and that it wasn't too long after they came that they may have thought the same.

Similarly on this topic, Raibeart said:

“Obviously there was a big effort in the early days and to do something different, they were in a new place to them. They had to make improvements on the lot. They had to cut the trees down, otherwise the neighbor could make a claim on their grant. They had to have so many acres cut and stuff like that. So there was an imperial sort of push behind them to do a lot of destructive work.

But I think eventually that cultural love of nature and natural rhythms and stuff like that kind of came out in the people because there's lots of nature songs from cape breton. They're being written up into the 1920s. They have these people who have no recollection

of Scotland at all and they're talking about how much they love cape breton, the beautiful glens and the fog coming in the evening and this sort of thing. And that stuff kind of came out again even after that period of intense change.”

We also talked about other ways of interacting with the land and environment and Raibeart told me something his neighbour told him that he found quite interesting. She used to go picking blueberries with her grandmother and her grandmother would be speaking to the bushes. She would thank them and leave a certain amount on the bush to say thank you and to leave some for the birds and other animals. He also noted that it's important in Gaelic culture to be careful with water and its source, stating that there's a mineral well on the side of the mountain that people would go to when they were sick. He told me another story relating to this water source and said he still stops there for water on the side of the road:

“This woman was going to the store on horseback and this probably was in the 1860s or 70s. And her husband was at sea, and she stopped at this brook for her horse to get a drink, and she knew as soon as she went to have a drink, or soon as she was at the brook, she knew that her husband was dead. So she carried on to the store and I guess she told the people at the store that she had this vision, a forerunner, that her husband had died at sea.

And sure enough, they got word two or three weeks later that he did die, his boat was going down about that time that she was at the spring.”

In relation to these stories we also talked about how the land has changed:

“The island sort of makes the main shelter of the harbor and then there's a little spit of land from the mainland that comes out kind of like a little arm. When I was a kid that was 6 feet tall and gravelled, it had beach grasses and stuff like that and it all washed away in a storm about 12 years ago. Now whenever the tide is high, you can't go across there with the storm surges, you would be risking your life to walk across there. My dad and I said, I don't think my great grandfather who kept his boat down there would recognize this place even though it's named after his family. “

And how this relationship to land is connected to Gaelic culture. Raibeart noted that he grew up around Gaelic culture, but as he learnt from teachers, books and the language, some family stuff started to make sense, such as the hierarchy of trees. It made him realize that these weren't just family quirks and were actually an element of shared culture.

Raibeart finished off the conversation by talking about how important it is for people to spend time in the woods. He noted that it's good for mental health, and in his opinion, it's the best medicine. He told me he hopes there's more opportunity for Mi'kmaw children to go cramp around the woods like he got to as a kid. He noted that we as Gaels should try to help with this as we're often the ones with lots of land, while the Mi'kmaq (who have the right to it) are pushed onto reserves.

4.3 Charlie Teasdale

My last céilidh was with Charlie Teasdale, and we started a little carried away in finding familial connections. Luckily, Dr. Rod Bantjes reeled us in by telling me some of the practices he heard of when working with Charlie and other knowledge keepers on Beinn Eige (Eigg Mountain). Notably, he told me that Gaelic settlers would watch the cattle and where they would nestle down for the night to see where to build a house as it would be fairly sheltered. He also noted about a family that was known to be able to assess the quality of soil by tasting it.

Once we'd gotten into conversation, I asked Charlie if there were any stories that were so miraculous that people didn't believe them. He decided to tell me one of his own:

“One time I was up there [Eigg Mountain], I think it was in October or November, and one of my neighbours was with me, and we heard this noise coming, I just couldn't believe it. We were kind of in the edge of the hardwood and softwood and this big bull moose, beyond big, I think his horns were about 7 feet wide, and he was coming through the trees and his horns were hitting and he came down into the hardwood and when he'd seen us he just stopped and stared at us and I looked for a tree I could climb in case he came towards us but he really didn't. But you could hear him when he left for probably a

mile through the trees cause he was getting into softwood. And I was even scared to tell people cause I didn't think they would believe me, but then I found out that about every 7 years, somebody used to see that moose, and they weren't much for talking about it either. Cause it must have been old, and they just happened to see it cause it was massive and it must've been the oldest moose that was on the mountain."

He then told me about a story from his family where his grand uncle Lame Angus MacEachern killed a bear with a crow bar:

"Well, he was out fencing, and he was making moonshine, and he had the hops and the stuff that was leftover and he dumped that out making the beer or liquor and the bear got into that and it was half drunk. He hauled the bear around Antigonish until it rotted, they had to keep him out of town."



Figure 3- Charlie told me it was in every paper in the eastern united states and canada so I found this in the Archives (Antigonish Heritage Museum, 1940)

His daughter Laura noted that Lame Angus hauled the bear around in an effort to be invited in for free drinks as he went from home to home telling the tale. This surprised me as I assumed it would be quite heavy, to which Charlie responded:

"No, he had a team of horses, he was a really famous horseman, he kept wild horses from the west, used to drive them out of town out to his farm on the mountain. He had about 50 horses one time on the farm."

Laura noted that the name MacEachern means "son of the horse lord" in Gaelic and said it was interesting that they came here, and he was taming and training horses. She also reminded

Charlie he'd said lame angus had a sixth sense of knowing when women were going to have a baby. Charlie responded to that saying that Lame Angus never went away in the summer for work like the rest of the men because he had the horses, so he was always around. He said "*there were so many people, women especially, that had a spell on him*" and that when women were pregnant, Angus would just show up.

I asked Charlie if there were any other people like that, who knew things and you didn't know how they knew it, and he told me about Lame Angus' mother.

"Yeah, his mother was one, I think she was a matriarch. When I was growing up I used to think that that there was something wrong with me because she didn't speak to me, or if she did speak it would be in some other language."

Charlie and Laura told me she went to Mount Saint Bernard College, meaning she could speak English very well. Yet, she never spoke english at home or to the kids, she would only speak Gaelic.

Charlie also told me about the seventh son, explaining that if you had seven sons in a row without a daughter, the seventh son would have healing abilities. He mentioned they had a seventh son who lived near Lame Angus, and another one named Ranald that they brought sick people to. Charlie told me one of his brothers is a seventh son and while he didn't want to recognize it at all, people still sometimes came to him for help.

I asked Charlie if there were any places that had stories attached to them or their names and he told me about the holy rock. I've included an excerpt of the transcription here to show the conversation in context:

Charlie:

Yes, not too far from where my mother lived there was a place they called the holy rock. Cause to get to Arisaig for church was a massive trip way back then, especially in the winter, so they would go there and make a picnic with the kids and pray. I know where the holy rock is.

Laura:

Did you feel there's a special feeling in that land?

Charlie:

Yes, I think you could see the 4-5 steeples from that rock, but they're just miles away.

Jude:

Do you think it was that rock because you could see the steeples? Do you know why there?

Charlie:

No, I think that the people then had faith that we don't have anymore, if they couldn't get to church, which they couldn't cause it would be a horse ride and it would probably take half a day to get to church.

Laura:

Do you think that land itself has a special feeling?

Charlie:

Yes

Jude:

Do you think some of that being special is knowing that your ancestors were there and knowing that your people were there or knowing the stories there or do you think it just is special?

Charlie:

No, you're right. I have the feeling not just for the holy rock, for the whole place, cause there's so much history of the people that lived there, that are gone now. All the people are gone from that mountain, and I just felt that you had a part of them with you.

Rod:

Sometimes when we were looking for house sites, Charlie would sometimes say he feels people here.

Do you remember that, Charlie?

What did that mean for you, Charlie?

Charlie:

Well the best I could describe it is one time I was on another... (you were there too Rod) we were on a big flat called big marsh and there was miles across, and one time I went there and I was looking for old basements. But for schools there's never hardly ever a basement cause they didn't have basements for schools. But I got to talk to one of the old people after I left that area, I went to one of the farmers and I said "I think there was a place there, or people, and the old fellow said "no wonder, that was a school".

Rod:

Do you think the spirits of the people were still there?

Charlie:

Definitely.

Rod:

And what did you think they thought of us looking for them?

Charlie:

I always thought they wanted me to recognize, that's why for many years I kept that in my mind that somebody would, like you've done, would write it down.

Laura told me that people will frequently come to her dad and he'll help them find their people. She said they talk a lot about the fact that Charlie is sometimes the last person who remembers what these places look like and that it's a lot of burden on him. She told me that when they were children, her dad would say that an easy way to find the places where the ancestors were was to look for old rhubarb, current or gooseberry patches. Charlie and Rod explained that this is because people would have their kitchen gardens outside their cellar door in order to bring produce in easily. She said they'd be up in the middle of nowhere, in wilderness where there was once a school, a house, or a post office, and even in the middle of nowhere you can still find their fruit. Charlie told me that no one taught him how to do this, he just figured it out by looking at things and wanting the history to be kept.

I asked Charlie if he thinks he would still feel this connection to land if he went back to Eilean Eige (the Isle of Eigg) and he told me he thinks he would. He said that he wasn't able to

visit, but he was able to go to Àrasaig (Arisaig) (where my family is from) and even there, he felt a connection. He told me that Àrasaig (Arisaig) was the place they got loaded onto the boats for here and that his family waited all night long in the rain to get the boat in the morning.

Laura added that when her dad met people there in Àrasaig (An t-Seann Dùthaich) he was incredibly surprised because he always thinks of his family and their longing for home and looking back to their ancestral home but he learnt that they also missed us.

Near the end of the conversation Rod brought up that they'd found in their research on Beinn Eige (Eigg Mountain) that someone told them about how they would plant potatoes in the forest. He didn't remember whether they burned the tree first, but they would plant them around the base of a dead tree and then they would only harvest it one year.

Rod also highlighted Charlie's use of the word "attached" noting that:

"He's a knowledge keeper for his community and the most important structure of knowledge is genealogy, but the second thing is land and he's always interested in how people are attached to land, and his memory is really kind of place based.

And I learnt this because we would spend hours driving in his truck, not even just on Eigg Mountain but all over and he would say "now over there was somebody, and they were connected to somebody else, but they were attached to the land here". When he's doing a genealogy he'll start with someone on Eigg Mountain and say they were connected to so and so and they were attached to somewhere in cape breton.

So there's kind of a like a meeting together of place and people. Attachment is really important cause it's about love of the land, ownership of the land, and other types of connections to the land. So when you think about land from the Gaelic perspective it's not really so much physical place but it's an interweaving of people and place."

4.4 Connection to Land as Demonstrated by Common Practices

Many of the practices identified in the céilidhean led to the scholars and community leaders involved in my collaborative analysis telling me of others they'd heard of in their work. Prior to delving into the analysis of the narratives identified through collaborative analysis that

will be found in the next chapter, I've gathered all these practices together here for easy reference. While a lot of this material emerged in collaborative analysis, most of the analysis coming from these practices will be found in the subsequent chapter.

One of the agricultural practices that was common across my conversations was *coille-dhubh* (burnt garden). This was first shared with me by Dòmhnall MacGilleán, who later on sent me his mother's book (*Only a Memory: The Story of Canoe Lake, Cape Breton*) which included the drawing by Dòmhnall's father shown on page 50. When talking with Charlie Teasdale, Dr. Rod Bantjes noted that they came across this agricultural practice on Brown's mountain (located next to Beinn Eige/Eigg Mountain) and Dr. Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach (Dr. Shamus Y. MacDonald) noted this as a practice he was familiar with through his years of fieldwork. As Dòmhnall explained to me, this process fertilized the soil for planting. Dòmhnall also told me that people would use capelin and lobster shells to fertilize the land as well.

Another agricultural practice shared in the *céilidhean* was the practice of tasting the soil to gauge where the best location for planting would be. This was shared with me in my *céilidh* with Charlie Teasdale in which I also learnt that people would note where animals would lay down to rest as a good location for building a house. Seumas told me he'd heard of tasting the soil, but this was the first time he'd heard of it as a practice here. Additionally on these practices, he noted that he'd heard of animals leading people to a good place to settle, but this was the first he'd heard of watching where they rested in order to determine a place to build.

A recurring character in the *céilidhean* was the moon, notably the outcome of something shrinking due to being cut or harvested on the full moon. Both Dòmhnall and Raibeart mentioned their families planted according to the moon cycle and only butchered on the waning moon in fear of the meat shrinking. After my conversation with Dòmhnall I mentioned the practice of

butchering on the waning moon to my dad who immediately responded telling me that was an “old hunting superstition” he was aware of. As my dad’s heritage is Acadian, this showed me that this is one of the many practices that is cross cultural. As is becoming pattern, everyone in collaborative analysis immediately brought up their familiarity with these practices regarding the moon with some of them telling me of their families’ participation as well.

They all informed me of various practices they’d been told of regarding the cutting of wood, bushes, or hair in relation to the moon cycles. Sionainn n’in Aonghais Iain Pheadair (Shannon MacMullin) told me that cutting wood for fence posts was done on the waning moon, or else the posts would be twisty. Lodaigh MacFhionghuin (Lewis MacKinnon) told me that as the moon waned, the wood would shrink, giving you a nice strong piece of wood. Seumas told me it had been explained to him that as the moon grows, the sap gets drawn into the tree, so if you cut it, it will be full of sap. Therefore you want to cut it on the waning of the moon as the sap will be in the roots providing you with a drier and more rot resistant piece of wood. Sionainn also told me that in order to keep alder bushes under control, some people watched the moon and cut them on the waning moon in August. Additionally, Lodaigh told me people wouldn’t cut their hair during the waning of the moon as it would shrink.

Raibeart mentioned that some people would go curtsy or bow for the new moon, and this narrative of new moon worship was also repeated by Sionainn as she told me of practices people followed in relation to the new moon:

“you would never want to see the new moon through glass, some people would get down on one knee, some people would see the new moon and say “Ceud beannachdan air a’ ghealaich ùir” (100 blessings on the new moon) and that was sort of an invocation of protection on oneself and one’s family until the next new moon.”

Notably, Dr. Michael Newton told me the watching of the moon was something he's come across more in Mi'kma'ki than in An T-Seann Dùthaich in recent history. While Dòmhnall and Raibeart both identified these practices as "coming over from the old country", this leads me to wonder if this is a practice shared across all living close with the land in Mi'kma'ki, or if it is also still present in An t-Seann Dùthaich.

In discussing this, Sionainn noted that she had learned of many of these practices from visiting Mìcheal Eòin Chaluim Sheumais Mhóir (Mickey John H. MacNeil). As the moon can also be an indicator of weather, he had told her of many indications of how winter would go, or how much snow you would get.

To predict winter, the spleen would be opened at butchering time and its stones would be counted, they would also watch the size of the orange stripe on those black and orange striped furry caterpillars. Whether the apples were heavy on the tree was another indicator of the nature of the winter that year and if the wasps built their nests up high it meant we would get a lot of snow.

Sionainn noted that a lot of this was common knowledge as everyone was aware of the moon, how the fog sits, it's colour, etc. and was able to recognize regular outcomes from these observations as a result of being aware of their surroundings and connected to the land in their daily lives.

When telling Sionainn about Dòmhnall's story of his grandfather recognizing trees as potential sled runners, she shared that her dad has the same story about her grandfather. She noted that the generations before her were aware of their surroundings in ways that we are not. For example, if her dad or grandfather needed an axe, they would know where to find a good tree

to make a handle. Nowadays, if we need an axe, we'll just go to the store. This results in us viewing nature differently and not sharing that same level of awareness as the generations before us that lived connected to the land.

Raibeart's story of a neighbour's grandmother talking to the blueberry bushes prompted another connection in my collaborative analysis with Sionainn. She told me that her mother talks to every living being, and she's recently been embracing this practice herself. She noted that it is a way of remembering our interconnectedness and the animism of all things.

Representing this animism and interconnectness, we can look to another story shared with me by Lodaídh. He told me of his father blessing the cattle in the barn late in the evening, saying that he would say something almost like an incantation and make the sign of the cross over the animals. Lodaídh specifically noted that his dad shared a special connection with the cattle as he helped deliver their calves, nursed them back to health, and named them. This connection made it impossible for him to butcher them and Lodaídh recalls his father having someone else come to do it, saying that he doesn't think his father could stomach butchering what he's cared for.

Another recurring topic of conversation among the céilidhean and collaborative analysis were the connections between people, healing, and water. Notably this was seen in the presence of healing wells and the importance of water to both Gaels in Mi'kma'ki and An t-Seann Dùthaich. Before we had easier access to doctors, the injured or sick would drink the water of these wells for healing as they were believed to be blessed. Other methods of healing included going to the seventh son as described to me by Charlie, and the use of charms as told to me by Dòmhnall.

As an example of the importance and connection to water, Sionainn told me about dowsing for water. She described it as a practice to find underground water sources in which you cross rods or find a y shaped stick, and the stick would bend down when over water. Once the dowsing rod was used to find the water, you would hold a pendant overtop and count its revolutions. The amount of revolutions the pendant made would determine how many feet you needed to dig to reach the water.

It should be noted that many of these practices are not exclusive to the Gaels. While many of them are practices they “took from the old country” (as Dòmhnall’s family, among many Gaels in Mi’kma’ki would say), they are shared across many cultures and many people who live close to the land. However, the cultural interpretation of these practices, and the connection to land demonstrated by them can be connected to the sealladh nan Gàidheal and thus builds the foundation for the analysis of my results.

Chapter 5: Analysis & Discussion

The following chapter will follow the recurring narratives in the céilidhean identified by myself, Sionainn ni'n Aonghais Iain Pheadair, Dr. Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach, Lodaidh MacFhionghuin and Dr. Michael Newton in conversation during my collaborative analysis. Each area will be paired with an archival piece of either song or poetry in order to demonstrate the connection between the Gaels who have come before us and Gaels today. This analysis is a combination of my own reflections of the stories and narratives collected and those shared with me through collaborative analysis, providing not only my own analysis but also that of scholars and leaders in the community of Gaelic nova scotia.

5.1 Caring for, and Fighting Against the Land

A' Choille Ghruamach (selected verses)

Gu bheil mi 'm ònrachd 's a' choille ghruamaich,
 Mo smaointinn luaineach, cha tog mi fonn;
 Fhuair mi 'n t-àite so 'n aghaidh nàduir,
 Gu 'n thréig gach tálanta 'bha 'nam cheann;
 Cha dean mi òran a chur air dòigh ann,
 'N uair 'ni mi tòiseachadh bidh mi trom;
 Chaill mi 'Ghàidhlig seach mar a b' àbhaist dhomh
 'N uair a bha mi 's an dùthaich thall.

Cha 'n ioghnadh dhomh-sa ged tha mi brònach,
 'S ann tha mo chòmhnuidh air cùl nam beann,
 Am meadhon fàsaich air Abhainn Bhàrnaidh
 Gun dad is fear na buntàta lom.
 Mu 'n dèan mi àiteach 's mu 'n tog mi bàrr ann
 'S a' choille ghàbhaidh 'chur às a bonn
 Le neart mo ghàirdein, gu 'm bi mi sàraicht'
 A's treis air fàilinn mu 'm fàs a' chlann.

'N uair 'théid na dròbhairean sin g' ar n-iarraidh
 'S ann leis na briagan a nì iad feum;
 Gun fhacal firinn a bhi g 'a innseadh
 'S an cridhe dìteadh na their am beul;
 Ri cur am fiachaibh gu bheil 's an tìr so
 Gach ni is prìseile 'tha fo 'n ghréin;
 'N uair thig sibh innte gur beag a chì sibh

The Gloomy Forest (selected verses)

I am all alone in the gloomy forest,
 My thoughts are restless, I can raise no song;
 I have found this place to conflict with nature,
 Since all my mental skills have forsaken me;
 I am unable to construct a song here,
 I get despondent when I try my hand;
 I've lost the Gaelic as I once had it
 When I lived over in that other land.

I'm not surprised that I am doleful,
 I have my home in the back of beyond,
 In the middle of a wilderness, on Barney's River,
 With nothing better than threadbare potatoes;
 Before I till the soil and harvest a crop
 And dig the frightful forest from its root
 By strength of my arms, I will be exhausted,
 And long in decline, before I raise my brood.

When those drovers come to get you,
 It is with lies that they succeed,
 Without uttering a truthful word,
 Their heart condemning what their mouths say;
 They make pretences that this land possesses
 The most precious gem under the sun;
 On your arrival, you will see little

Ach coille dhireach 'toirt dhibh an speur.

Gur h-iomadh coachladh 'tigh'nn air an t-saoghal
 'S ro-bheag a shaoil mi 'n uair bha mi thall;
 Bu bheachd dhomh 'n uair sin mu 'n d' rinn mi gluasad
 Gu 'm fàsainn uasal 'n uair thiginn 'nall.
 An car a fhuair mi cha b' ann gu m' bhuannachd
 Tigh'nn thar a' chuain air a chuairt 'bha meallt'
 Gu tir nan craobh anns nach 'eil an t-saorsainn,
 Gun mhart, gun chaora, 's mi dh'aodach gann.

Ged bhithinn dìchiollach ann an sgrìobhadh
 Gu 'n gabhainn mìosa ris agus còrr
 Mu 'n cuirinn crìoch air na bheil air m' inntinn
 'S mu 'n tugainn dhuibh e le cainnt mo bheòil.
 Tha mulad dìomhair an déigh mo lionadh
 Bho 'n 's éiinn strìochdadh an so ri m' bheò,
 Air bheag thoilinntinn 's a choille chruinn so
 Gun duine faighneachd an seinn mi ceòl.

But a towering forest that blocks off the sky.

Many a change is coming over my world,
 That I scarcely imagined when in that isle;
 It was my intention before I left it,
 That when I came here I'd reach a noble style;
 The misfortune that hit me has brought no profit,
 Coming over the ocean on a deceptive course,
 To the land of the trees where there's no freedom,
 No cattle or sheep and few clothes on my back.

Though I should be diligent in writing it,
 I would need a month on it or more,
 Before I could express all that is on my mind,
 And present it to you in my own words;
 A subconscious sadness has filled my being
 Since I must submit here all my life long,
 With little pleasure in this constricting forest,
 And no one asking if I'll sing a song.

Poem (MacLean, 1928), translation via (Dunbar, 2006)

The selected verses above were chosen as they were those that discussed the forest, as is the reason of inclusion for this poem. The full poem itself can be found in the appendices of *The secular poetry of John MacLean 'Bàrd Thighearna Chola' 'Am Bàrd MacGilleain'* (Dunbar, 2006) and paints a detailed description of Iain Mac Ailein (John, son of Allan)'s interpretation of the clearances and settlement. The author, more commonly known as Am Bàrd MacGilleain (The Bard MacLean) in Mi'kma'ki, was also known as Am Bàrd Thighearna Chola (The Laird of Coll's Bard) in his native Tioridh (Tiree) (Linkletter, 2006). This poem, as stated by Michael Linkletter (2006) "has become the locus classicus in discussions of the Highland Diaspora and first impressions of Highland settlers upon reaching the wilderness of the New World".

As established prior, Gaelic settlers were responsible for unforgiving deforestation of Mi'kma'ki through the over-clearing of land (S. MacDonald, 2017). In reference to this, I repeatedly came across narratives attempting to explain the over-clearing of land as an unfamiliarity with a forested landscape (Newton, 2015). Most Gaels came from a barren

landscape void of trees in An t-Seann Dùthaich to what some (notably Am Bàrd MacGilleain) called Tir nan Craobh (land of the trees) (Newton, 2015). As is evident in A' Choille Ghruamach, this drastic change in landscape was overwhelming and threatening.

With this in mind, I ensured this was a point of discussion in my collaborative analysis. What emerged from this was a contradictory narrative of working with and against the land. All of those I talked to in collaborative analysis emphasized Raibeart's point that connection to land is something that has to be cultivated, and that this connection and care needed time to emerge.

As Raibeart discussed, there was an imperial push behind clearing land. This was emphasized to me by Dr. Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach who addressed this narrative in more detail in his dissertation, but also in our conversation. Dòmhnallach explained that the first generation viewed the clearing of the land as a way of claiming it. While they needed to legally claim it and clear it to do so (as discussed by Raibeart), he believes that the over clearing seen in those first few generations was also a way of claiming land psychologically. He explains that there was a lust for land as Gaels had never had the possibility to have access to landownership. Thus taking advantage of that access in ways that we look back on now and recognize as harmful.

On this topic, Dr. Michael Newton told me that him and Màiri Britton had recently talked about how clearing land of trees is also a way of showing increased agricultural productivity. In a time where monetary wealth was sparse, this was also a way of displaying wealth.

When discussing this contradiction with Lodaidh MacFhionghuin, he noted that there's a historical narrative that Gaels came here with no other choice. They came to places like Mi'kma'ki because they were being politically and economically forced off their ancestral lands

and knew they were going to be given land grants or access to land upon arrival. As Lodaidh said:

“Knowingly or unknowingly, they engaged in further colonization of Indigenous people. I would argue as well that by extension, due to minoritization – the marginalization of Gaelic language and identity – that that became more entrenched once they started to leave their language and culture behind. People from the Gaelic community became lawyers and judges and politicians in an Anglo-centric society that furthered these policies of colonization and harm upon First Nations.”

Lodaidh explained that this history carries one or more truths. The language and culture of the Gaels also continues up to the present with richness, beauty, and a source of renewal and strength. This is a miracle of no small proportions, and within this contradiction of over-clearing and narratives of love and appreciation for the land, we have to acknowledge that there is a truism specific to the persistence of Gaelic language and cultural heritage that is profoundly lifegiving.

“Given the complexity of our historical narrative, we as Gaels have to actively work towards righting the wrongs of the past regardless of how our ancestors viewed their situation.”

Additionally, as we have identified, the attachment to land grows over time. None of these first settlers would have had this attachment in the first month or so, it’s something that grows. In the words of Seumas:

“We know that some settlers were very happy to come here and to be able to claim land while also recognizing the beauty of this place, but they didn’t have a sense of attachment to it. The sense of attachment comes later and it requires an investment of time and in being in place”.

This explains a discomfort I associate with some of the early nature praise poetry based in Mi’kma’ki. These poems and songs written by early Gaelic settlers discuss the beauty of this land, but their appreciation lacks attachment. The attachment is what provides the environment

for care and responsibility and this didn't emerge until the connection was able to grow with time.

As Lodaidh established, there are multiple truths to this early relationship with land. *A' Choille Ghruamach* shows that Am Bàrd MacGilleain had many names for this new land, "A' Choille Ghruamach", and "Tìr Nan Craobh" among them. These names are not colonial or jurisdictional, as noted by Lodaidh. These names are an environmental description of where Gaels settled, where they were going, or where they ended up, not only in Mi'kma'ki, but across what we now call "canada". Both these poems and place names are examples of how the connection to land, place and others was understood. As Lodaidh said "*Looking at the poetic tradition, it's just brimming with those kinds of references over and over again.*"

5.3 Cultural Interpretation of Attachment and Responsibility to Land

An Innis Àigh

Seinn an duan seo dhan Innis Àigh,
An innis uaine as gile tràigh;
Bidh sian air uairean a' bagairt cruaidh ris
Ach 's e mo luaidh-sa bhith ann a' tàmh.

Càit' as tràith' an tig samhradh caomh
Càit' as tràith' an tig blàth air craoibh
Càit' as bòidhche an seinn an smeòrach
Air bhàrr nan ògan? 'S an Innis Àigh!

An t-iasg as fiachaile dlùth don tràigh
Is ann m'a chrìochan is miann leis tàmh;
Bidh gillean èasgaidh le dorgh is liontan
Moch, moch ga iarraidh mun Innis Àigh.

Tiugainn leam-sa chun na tràigh
'S an fheasgar chiuin-ghil aig àm an làin,
'S chì thu 'm bòidhchead 's an liuthad seòrsa
De dh'èoin tha còmhnaidh 's an Innis Àigh.

'S ged thèid mi cuairt chun an taoibh ud thall,
'S mi 'n dùil air uairibh gu fan mi ann,

The Happy Island

Sing this song to the Happy Island,
The green isle with the whitest beach;
Storms sometimes attack it severely,
But I love to live there.

Where does gentle summer arrive earlier
Where does blossom appear on trees earlier
Where does the thrush sing more beautifully
On the young branches? In the Happy Island.

The most valuable fish close to shore
Prefers to live near your boundaries;
Active lads with handlines and nets
Fish very early around the Happy Island.

Come with me to the beach
On a calm evening at high tide,
And you will see the beauty and many species
Of birds that live in the Happy Island.

And although I go to visit yonder country-side,
Sometimes thinking that I may stay there,

Tha tàladh uaigneach le teas nach fuaraich
Gam tharraing buan don Innis Àigh.

O 's gearr an ùine gu 'n teirig là;
Thig an oidhche 's gun iarr mi tàmh.
Mo chadal buan-sa bidh e cho suaimhneach
Ma bhios mo chluasag 's an Innis Àigh.

A mysterious attraction with heat that will not cool
Draws me relentlessly to the Happy Island.

Oh, the time is short till the day ends;
Night will come and I will seek rest;
My eternal slumber will be so tranquil
If my pillow is in the Happy Island.

(MacLellan, n.d.)

This song was written by Aonghas Iain 'ic Iain 'ic Chaluum (Angus Y. MacLellan) of Bràigh Na h-Aibhne (Southwest Margaree) (MacLellan, n.d.). His grandfather came from Mòrar (Morar) and as said in the description of the song at the Beaton Institute, “his nature poems are considered among the finest in any language” (MacLellan, n.d.). This poem describes the beauty of “the happy island” (Margaree Island) and the composer’s attachment to the island as evident in the lines “A mysterious attraction with heat that will not cool draws me relentlessly to the Happy Island”. Notably, Aonghas was the 3rd generation to be living in Mi'kma'ki, demonstrating that the attachment had had time to grow. The remainder of the song is singing the praises of the nature and beauty of the island. Notably that there are many species of birds and the most valuable fish, insinuating that the animals recognize the beauty of the island as well.

While the common practices present in my research may not be exclusive to the Gaels, the interpretation of connection and responsibility to land is what connects these practices to sealladh nan Gàidheal. Seumas and I discussed how this relationship to land itself is not what is cultural, but the conceptualization of that relationship is. He highlighted that the connection to land is not unique. However, the way that connection is expressed and maintained is often culturally constructed, and he believes it’s especially significant in Gaelic nova scotia.

One common practice with deep cultural origins for Gaels was the presence of a hierarchy of trees in all aspects of life, but specifically in this case, in working with the land.

Both Sionainn and Raibeart noted that their dads would never cut down an apple tree and while Raibeart noted that he was never told why, something in the back of my head told me there was a reason. A few days before talking with Raibeart I was reviewing Dr. Michael Newton's PhD thesis on the symbolism of trees, and when sharing Raibeart's story with Dr. Micheal Newton in collaborative analysis, he reminded me that apple trees hold great cultural significance to Gaels as they are seen as portals to the otherworld. Dr. Newton identified this in his thesis as this was present in many of the early works he analysed (Newton, 1998). When sharing this with Sionainn, she too, made the connection but told me she had never thought of it before our conversation. Raibeart had also shared that his dad would never cut down an oak tree and linked this to a story that one of his ancestors planted oaks with seeds he brought over with him from An t-Seann Dùthaich. While this familial legend could be the reason why Raibeart's family would not cut down an oak tree, the importance of oak in Gaelic tradition runs much deeper.

As has been established through my collaborative analysis, the existence of nature praise poetry in Mi'kma'ki demonstrates the importance of the relationship between people and land in the sealladh nan Gàidheal. Yet prior to the destruction of the clan system through the clearances, the majority of praise poetry placed its focus on chiefs and heros, rather than nature itself. As is evident in much of Dr. Michael Newton's work, notably his Phd dissertation, nature was used as an element of comparison in praise poetry. Specifically, as identified to me by Sionainn: *"If you want to praise a hero who is strong and loyal and good, you'll compare them to the oak tree"*. This is also true of the reverse, in the case that there's someone like a landlord who you want to put in the ground, you would compare them to a tree or an animal such as aspen, alder, or a frog.

Sionainn also told me of a word she learned from Dòmhnall's dad, Alasdair mac Sheòrais 'ic Iain 'ic Iain (Alex George MacLean). He was the first native speaker she'd gone to visit on

her own and she learned a word from him that she hasn't heard from anyone else. Alasdair referred to a bat as "luch iteach" which directly translates to feathered mouse. While bats don't have feathers, they do have wings, making it so that the word itself provides you with the imagery.

In addition to this element of nature comparison, Gaels also associated Gaelic speech to animals. To Lodaidh, this is evidence of an intimate knowledge of our environment as Gaels.

"Our ancestors had ways of reinforcing this idea of their connection to the natural world because they ascribe sounds to other animals. They were basically communicating that they're Gaelic speakers as well and this is how they speak in Gaelic."

Lodaidh stated that this is incredibly impactful from an identity perspective. He emphasized that this part of our tradition, this element of dùthchas, is not lost, and is something that can and should continue.

Another example of this intimate knowledge is the wealth of words to describe mountains in Gaelic. This is something that Dr. Michael Newton has written extensively about and that Sionainn brought up in our discussion (Newton, 1996). We noted that you have to have a very intimate knowledge of the land to know all these words, and to even need all these words is evidence of this intimate knowledge within the sealladh nan Gàidheal.

As Raibeart told me in our céilidh, there's an emphasis on being careful with water and it's source in Gaelic culture. Throughout the céilidhean and collaborative analysis, this was made very prevalent to me. While there was familiarity with practices among those I talked to, there was no overlap in stories shared with me, minus one. Raibeart, Michael, and Lodaidh had shared this story with me when talking about healing wells, and I had already been familiar with it from Seumas' dissertation as I'd included it in my literature review. This story specifically is the one

of the healing well that dried up when a man tried to charge people entry (which you can revisit on pg 32)

Notably, Raibeart told me he'd heard stories both here in Mi'kma'ki and An t-Seann Dùthaich of farmers polluting wells and fairies moving them overnight, but said he'd never heard this 'anti-capitalist' twist on these stories outside of Mi'kma'ki.

To conclude on this narrative, Lodaigh noted that these practices of connection, honouring ourselves and our interactions with each other and the environment is something that is more prominently integrated into gatherings of the Mi'kmaw community. Whereas we as Gaels could take more from that part of our tradition that was once incredibly prevalent. These customs and practices exist and we as Gaels should work to grow their prevalence in our daily life, not only for our own cultural revitalization, but also in order to decolonize our own actions in Mi'kma'ki.

5.4 Dùthchas as Interconnectedness Between People and Place

Cumha Cheap Breatuinn

Séist:
Chì mi bhuam, fada bhuam,
Chì mi bhuam ri muir làin;
Chì mi Ceap Breatuinn mo luaidh
Fada bhuam thar an t-sàil.

Chì mi Creiginish nan craobh,
Le cuid aonaichean àrd;
'S an Rugh' Fada tha ri taobh
Gheibhte maoin ann 'us bàrr.

Bha na Glaisrich ann gu éis
Bheireadh feum às an fhàl;
Bha iad modhail, bha iad gleusd',
Bha iad spéiseil 'nan gnàths.

Chì mi Siudaig nam fear cruaidh,

Lament for Cape Breton

Chorus:
I see far, far away,
I see far o'er the tide;
I see Cape Breton, my love,
Far away o'er the sea.

I see Creiginish of trees,
With its pasturelands high;
And Long Point that is so near
And so rich in its crops.

Where the Strathglass people without stint,
Brought us gain from the land;
So well-mannered and well skilled,
They were always beloved.

I see Judique of strong men,

*Chì mi Bruaich nam fear àrd,
Bha Clann Sheumais ann ri uair -
Laoich a bhuanicheadh blàr:*

*Bha iad fearail, bha iad treun,
'S iad gun eucoir 'nan càil,
Ach nuair chasadh iad gu streup
'S iad nach géilleadh do nàmh.*

*Chì mi Seastago nan tùr,
'S am bheil bùthan 'us sràid;
Chì mi Màbu air a' chùl -
B' i siud dùthaich mo ghràidh.*

*'S e na thug mi dhi de m' rùn
Rinn mo dhùsgadh gu dàn,
'S gu bheil m' fharmad ris gach gnùis
Tha mu bruichibh a tàmh.*

*Gu bheil togradh ann am inntinn
Bhi leibh mar a bha,
Ged tha fios agam 'us cinnt
Ribh nach till mi gu bràth.*

*Chì mi cladaich Meinn a' Ghuaill,
'S am bidh buar agus gràn;
'S Rugh' an t-Seallaidh fad mu thuath,
Creagach, fuar agus àrd.*

*Tha mi ruith gu ceann mo réis,
'S mi fo éislein gach là;
Sguiridh mi 's chan eil mi réith,
'S chan eil feum ann am dhàn.*

*Nis bho 'n tha mi air bheag stàth,
Leam a b' àill, nuair nach beò,
Mi bhi còmhla ri m' chàirdean,
Am Màbu fo 'n fhòid.*

*I see Braes of tall men,
Once Clann Sheumas lived up there -
Men who would win battles.*

*They were manly, they were strong,
No injustice would they do,
But when joining in the fray
They'd not yield to a foe.*

*I see Seastago of spires
With its shops and its streets,
I see Mabou to the rear -
It's the land that I love.*

*It's because you have my love
That I'm raising my song,
And I envy every face
That now dwells on the ridge.*

*There's a longing in my heart now
To be where I was,
Though I know that it's quite sure
I shall never return.*

*I see Coal Mine beach again,
With its cows and its grain;
And Sight Point far to the north
Rocky, cold and so high.*

*Now I soon shall end my race,
I am failing each day,
Though I stop I'm not at rest,
There's no worth in my song.*

*Now that I am so useless,
I would love, when I die,
To be joined with my kindred,
In Mabou at rest.*

(Fergusson, 1977)

This song was written by Alasdair Ailein an Rids Dòmhnallach (Alexander, Son of Allan "the Ridge" MacDonald). As is evident by his name, he was born in Rids am Màbu (Mabou Ridge) and is the son of the bard (poet) Ailean An Rids Dòmhnallach (Allan "the Ridge" MacDonald), but his family moved to Bràigh na h-Aibhne Deas (Upper South River) (Fergusson, 1977). Years

after the move, he wrote this song in honour of his old home. He talks about the people left behind as if they are attached, and he himself longs to return. Notably, he wishes to be buried there, stating he would be at rest if joined with his kindred, emphasizing the connection between where our relatives are buried, and attachment to place.

As discussed, attachment takes time to grow, and as detailed by Charlie's use of the word 'attached' it consists of the intertwining of people and place. The narrative of attachment connects community, culture and care for land. The development of this attachment is discussed thoroughly in Dr. Seumas Y. Dòmhnallach's dissertation (S. MacDonald, 2017). Thus, the emphasis of this section will be on the narrative of caring for land that couples this attachment, and how this falls into the realm of understanding of dùthchas as discussed with Sionainn, Seumas, Lodaigh and Michael.

When discussing this in greater detail with Seumas, he told me of an example of this intertwining that's been highlighted in my research. In a conversation with Catherine MacNeil from Eilean Na Nollaig (Christmas Island), he asked her to draw a map of the island. But what she drew was not a map in the conventional sense. Instead, it was a series of names and where people were located, showing that you can't separate people and place, and you can't understand one without the other.

This connection between people and place was identified to me by Michael as the very essence of dùthchas. He stated that this element of dùthchas is very noticeable among Gaels in Mi'kma'ki.

“When two people of Gaelic background meet for the first time, people can take 20 minutes asking who your family is and where they're from”.

This common social practice among Gaels in Mi'kma'ki translates to notions of belonging and attachment. The land does not belong to people, people belong to the land. As is evident in the stereotypical maritime phrase “who’s yer fadder?” there’s a notion of connection and belonging in a very Gaelic way here, even if many people have lost the language itself.

Both Sionainn and Michael identified a difference in the connection between people and place in Mi'kma'ki versus An t-Seann Dùthaich. They noted that the perception of attachment in An t-Seann Dùthaich has much more of a connection to an ancient landscape. Michael tied this into the fairies, stating that there are fairy mounds here in Mi'kma'ki, but they're much more common in An t-Seann dùthaich due to their connection with ancient landscape. There are prohibitions about disturbing the fairy mounds which in effect creates little protected biospheres.

Sionainn discussed this notion with me by tying it to stories. Many of the ancient stories are attached to a place where you can literally stand there and tell the story. But in uprooting and coming to Mi'kma'ki, there's no land-based location for these stories.

“Fionn didn't lay down over there on that hill, Oisean wasn't hunting on Juniper Mountain or some other place in Mi'kma'ki”.

Sionainn also identified that some of these places in An t-Seann Dùthaich are more protected ecologically because of their association with that story. While we don't have this for our stories in Mi'kma'ki, what we do have is Mi'kmaw stories attached to place or other sacred sites. The existence of our stories attached to places in An t-Seann Dùthaich should reinforce the importance of these places in Mi'kma'ki and the duty we all have to protect them.

As Dr. Michael Newton discussed in *Warriors of the Word* (2009), the notion of dùthchas is about an ancestral connection. The focus of that ancestral connection is the presence of your

ancestors in the soil. As examined above, the attachment and care for land takes time to grow, and as Michael told me, it requires this anchor of your ancestors in the soil. Once that anchor exists, the dead are a living presence in the community.

When talking about this, Sionainn shared the seanfhacal “Cuimhnich air na daoine bho’ n d’ thàinig thu” remember the people from who you came. She noted that she often notices that in Gaelic, we speak about people who died in the present tense, with this even translating into how we talk in English.

“Even though everybody knows that they died, we say “he is a good singer, he is a great storyteller, he is so funny, etc.” but they’re somebody who passed.”

In reference to this, Sionainn shared with me the Gaelic word “tuspag” which is the term for the intro you give before a song you sing. You describe who you learned the song from, where it came from, or who’s tradition it’s from.

“When you share the song, you’re consistently and constantly calling people back into presence and back into memory.”

This alludes to how dùthchas works among Gaels in Mi’kma’ki. Based off Michael’s description of the word, dùthchas in whole could not be present in that first generation as they were tied to An t-Seann Dùthaich by their ancestors graves. While we descend from those Gaels, and thus have ties to our ancestors in An t-Seann Dùthaich, we also have ties to our ancestors here in Mi’kma’ki and thus dùthchas is present here in Mi’kma’ki.

When talking about my céilidh with Charlie, Michael noted that whole communities that were connected to each other resettled as a community. Places like Beinn Eige (Eigg Mountain) are named because everyone who lived on the mountain came from Eige (Eigg). As an example

of the connection between the two places, we can look to the story of the Holy Rock (pg. 58). After my céilidh with Charlie, Laura and Dr. Rod Bantjes, Laura had taken a trip to Eilean Eigg (The Isle of Eigg) in An t-Seann Dùthaich and told me that at the time their ancestors had left, there was no church on the island as the ancient monastery had been in ruins for ages. Therefore, the community that was transplanted to Beinn Eige (Eigg Mountain) was accustomed to having mass outside.

While the connection to place in Mi'kma'ki may only be a century or so old, the settlement of Beinn Eige (Eigg Mountain) was the anchor to Eilean Eige (the Isle of Eigg). Therefore, when communities like Beinn Eige (Eigg Mountain) scatter, the loss is not only of the community in Mi'kma'ki, but also An t-Seann Dùthaich.

This connection between people and place means that when place changes, people are impacted. When talking about this interconnection with Lodaidh, he noted how Raibeart and his father were talking about the changes they've seen in the places they're attached to. He shared with me that personally, he thinks of the golf course in An Sìthean (Inverness). He stated that he has a visceral reaction to this development as the course is on reclaimed mines. The mines went out under the ocean and his grandfather, among many other men were killed in a mining accident.

"I think of my ancestors, I think of those who toiled, and in many ways how their lived experience was passed onto my father and siblings and have formed me".

Lodaidh said that there's lessons there around holding space for stories, that in his view, we do a very poor job of currently. These narratives and stories attached to land connect us to land, our community, and our responsibility to care. Circling back to the beginning of my conversation with Raibeart, there's value in taking things slow, and Lodaidh and I both see a push for things to

happen quickly in our current society, making it very challenging to keep space for this care and connection. Our environment is changing rapidly around us not only due to rapid growth and development, but also due to climate change and this impacts those places that we hold precious in our memory.

5.5 Dùthchas, Cànan agus Dualchas in the 21st Century

Tàladh na Beinne Guirme

A dhaoine, bha mi ‘seo bho’ n a bhris an là,
 Sinte, gu sìtheil ‘na mo shuain,
 S an t-siorrach, am bòidhcheadh slàn mar a dheònaich E,
 S an nàdur a’ freagairt dha mo dhan.

Air maduinn, dh’ fhairich mi ann dealachadh,
 Mo chairthris is m’ ònarachd tighinn gu ceann,
 Ceòl na tuaighe is nan duanagan,
 Dh’ éisd mi is thog mi fhìn am fonn.

Daoine, daoine còire, curanta,
 A ghiùlain gach cruadal ‘s càs gu trun,
 Dualchas, dualchas beaiteach, briagha, beò,
 Mar chàirdean, gu’n d’ thug iad orm seinn.

Ach thàinig, thàinig oirnn an darna là,
 Is chunnaic mi mo dhaltan a’ sìoladh às,
 S gann gu’n cluinn mi an cànan ceòlmhór,
 Blasda, binn,
 Cànan coimheach, cruaidh a’ tighinn ‘n h-àit’.

Tha sgleò, tha sgleò air tighinn air an àite seo,
 Is sàmhchair bho’ n a dh’ fhalbh móran,
 Nam chaifthris air mo chloinn ‘nan cadal buan,
 Fanaidh mi ‘gan tàladh ann le’ m òran.

The Blue Mountain’s Lullaby

O people, I was here since the dawning of the first day,
 Reclining, peacefully in my slumber,
 In eternity, in total beauty as He willed it,
 And nature suiting and replying to my song.

In the morning, I sensed a change,
 My watching and my solitude coming to an end,
 The music of the axe and of songs,
 I listened and I joined in with their chorus.

People, a kind and dauntless people,
 Who bravely endured every hardship and distress,
 A culture, a rich beautiful, living culture,
 As friends, they caused me to sing.

But great change overtook us,
 And I saw my foster-children dying out,
 Rarely do I hear the melodious, sweet language,
 There’s a foreign, hard-sounding language in its stead.

A pall has come upon this place,
 And silence, since so many have departed,
 I am wakeful and watchful over my children in their
 eternal slumber,
 I will remain, lullabying them with my song.

(Dòmhnallach, 2011)

This song is an example of the practice of animism among Gaels in Mi’kma’ki as it is sung from the perspective of a mountain mourning the loss of Gaelic language and culture. Notably, this song was written in 2004, demonstrating the presence of this practice in the present day. It was

written by Goiridh Dòmhnallach about A' Bheinn Ghoirme (The blue mountain) that runs through Bràigh na h-Aibhneachd (Glendale, Kingsville and Queensville). Goiridh described the song as the mountain saying it will eternally sing its lullaby for it's foster children who slumber in the soil of Mi'kma'ki (Dòmhnallach, 2011).

It's important to note that the mountain calls the Gaels it's foster children, identifying that they are not tied here the same way that the Mi'kmaq are, but are still seen as relations. This could refer back to the term "adopted homeland" in reference to Tìr nan Craobh in much of the Gaelic scholarship concerning this side of the Atlantic. Additionally, this ties into the practice of daltachas (fosterage) as "a practice that included both biological and non-biological relations, reinforcing a sense of solidarity amongst groups of Gaels more broadly" (Nova Scotia, 2019). The mountain also sings of "the music of the axe" which I view as calling back to the clearing that was done. The inclusion of this right off the bat indicates the strong association between the Gaels arrival and the clearing of the land, further emphasizing the importance of including the contradicting narratives of relationship with land in this analysis.

Behind the main message of loss of culture and community, lies the unignorable fact that the mountain itself is constant. The song begins with "I was here since the dawning of the first day" and ends with "I will remain". This links to a saying of Lodaidh's grand uncle Dùghall that he shared with me in our discussion.

"If something catastrophic or bad happened in the world he would frequently say "Tha e gorm air a' léig". Which means it's blue on the lake. The way that I interpreted it (and I could be off base) is that the blueness is on the lake and you can't change it. It's just the way the lake is, there's things that happen and you have to accept them to try and carry on in life."

This saying shares connotations of continuity amongst change with *Tàladh na Beinne Guirme*.

As Raibeart said, the cultural love of our environment came out again even after the period of

intense change through clearance and settlement. As evidence of this, every nook and cranny on the land had a name when Gaelic was more prevalent. Lodaidh told me that the naming of a place in one's language gives significance to the connection between people and land. There is a profound sense of groundedness that comes from this, and reconnecting with the collective memory of Gaelic nova scotia presents current and future opportunities for personal and community growth.

Sionainn told me that she feels like “living in different relationship with the land also leaves space open to have a different relationship with the mind” this is connected with the collective knowledge of place names, genealogy, and stories. A lot of this discussion was prompted after talking about my céilidh with Dòmhnall as Sionainn told me her grandfather and Dòmhnall's father (Alasdair/Alex George) were very good friends. In describing his growing up on a farm, Dòmhnall told me he and his brother were always outside in the woods, and never got lost. This would have been the same for his father (among many generations of Gaels in Mi'kma'ki), and Sionainn noted that her grandfather and his siblings would have shared this experience as well. They ate breakfast and left to go fish, sled, or go on their rotation of visiting, and then bring the cows home in time to for supper.

In talking about this, Sionainn and I discussed how much this comfort and familiarity in nature has changed. This prompted Sionainn to share something her father had once told her. He'd said that that there was nothing like the joy of seeing the spring lambs. But she didn't get to see that, and he expressed deep sadness in reference to the immeasurable lifestyle changes between himself and his daughter.

Just as the Gaels of early settlement experienced drastic change in coming to Mi'kma'ki, so have the Gaels of the 21st century living in Mi'kma'ki. Much of Sionainn and I's conversation

centered on this change, and this loss of collective knowledge and interconnection. Both she, and Lodaidh discussed the astronomical difference in life between them and their parents generations, or their parents and grandparents generations. The cultural, linguistic and lifestyle change that has happened in the past few generations has been incredibly drastic.

One of the changes that Sionainn noted is the almost extinction of manaidhean (forerunners). In reference to this, she told me of a story from her family.

“My grandfather had twin brothers, Duncan and Hughie, they grew up the same way I described earlier...no fences, no electricity...and in the evening one of the kids would bring the cows home. The kids had been out fishing and they heard the cowbell telling them to come home, so Duncan went to get the cows and told the rest of them he’d meet them at home...but he never showed up.

Pretty quickly, word spread and there were neighbours out looking for him. [During this time,] Dòmhnall MacVicker from Gabarus had a dream that they would find Duncan where Dougal MacDonald saw the light. This was June, a busy time in the farm and he [Dòmhnall] couldn’t leave, so he sent one of his sons to Upper Grand Mira with this message...They went over to see Dougal MacDonald and he said “well about five years ago across curries lake, I just saw this round light and never ever knew what it meant”. So the searchers went, and that’s where they found Duncan. By this time I think it was 6 or 7 days later and I don’t know if he had lost his way or what happened to him but he perished.”

After telling this story, Sionainn asked me “why doesn’t this happen anymore? Are we numb, or cut off?” Sionainn theorized that this connection present in manaidhean is what happens when you’re living close to the land, with the land, on the land, in harmony with the land. Whereas nowadays, there’s a deficit in our awareness, we don’t even know our neighbours and are so focused on everything else that we don’t even allow this level of connection. In reference to this connection, she told me of the term “an dà-shealladh” which can be translated as the second sight, or as the two sights.

“It is being able to see this literal world, and that otherworld at the same time.”

While this connection to land, community and culture has significantly decreased in the last century, that does not mean it has to be lost. Loidaidh explained that in a modern context, dùthchas is a construct of the mind.

“These four walls are my dùthchas right now, right? And certainly for people learning Gaelic through online platforms, or those living in community without a Gaelic presence around them, dùthchas has been a mental construct. [Dùthchas] is ways of attempting to be in the now. Whether that’s how we see our relationship with our immediate environment, urban landscape, or our rural landscape, or how we interact with one another. The time honoured trades of hospitality and generosity that is part of our cultural ethos, the sense of being interconnected [is dùthchas].”

In writing this thesis I have felt the need to repeat the limitation of my lack of fluency as I want to ensure that the importance of learning the language and keeping it alive is not lost. Though, I’ve come to realize that everyone I’ve held a céilidh with is either fluent now, or was raised by Gaelic speakers, even if that Gaelic wasn’t spoken to them. This showed me that my research was steeped in the language even though it was primarily conducted through English. Specifically, after talking with Charlie Teasdale and thinking of our shared attachment to place, I wrote myself a little message titled: We come from the Gaelic.

“Gaelic has a way of seeping into your life and influencing your worldview whether you’re aware of it or not. After talking with Charlie Teasdale today, I’m sure that dùthchas is alive and well in Mi’kma’ki. He didn’t have the language, but he was raised by someone who did, just as my gram was. The values don’t disappear even if the language doesn’t get passed down. They are imprinted onto each generation as they are raised. Charlie is so aware and connected with who he came from, and where in he land they’re attached to, I see myself in him. I see that “théid dùthchas an aghaidh creag”. Despite the clearances and drastic expansion of the Gaelic diaspora, the integral nature of our connections to each other and land remain.”

Chapter 6: Conclusion

As this research was exploratory in nature, none of my research questions are answered with a simple yes or a no, but I do believe my results and analysis provide answers to some extent. These answers also lead to avenues for further research that are woven in with my own personal reflections, thus making up the conclusion of this thesis.

6.1 Revisiting my Research Questions

How does Dùthchas/Gaelic TEK exist in Mi'kma'ki?

Through my research, I have highlighted some of the elements of Gaelic TEK that exist in Mi'kma'ki. While many of these were brought over from An t-Seann Dùthaich, many are also shared among others a result of living with the land. While generations of Gaels did and still do live with the land in Mi'kma'ki, they are certainly not the only cultural group to do so, and there are many Gaels (myself among them) that do not fall under this statement. Therefore, it became evident to me that the TEK present in Gaelic nova scotia is both a mixture of TEK rooted in the soil of An t-Seann Dùthaich and general knowledge from a few centuries of living in Mi'kma'ki. Whereas Mi'kmaq ecological knowledge is rooted in the soil of Mi'kma'ki and comes from millennia of living with this land. By highlighting the makeup of our own TEK as Gaelic nova scotia, it emphasizes the need to follow MEK in Mik'kma'ki.

In terms of dùthchas, I wouldn't say my research "proves" its existence in Mi'kma'ki as it is not something to prove, but I do believe dùthchas has a strong presence among Gaels in Mi'kma'ki. This is also something I knew prior to beginning this research, but it was the *how* that was unknown to me. I've come to understand that *how* dùthchas exists in Mi'kma'ki is in many different ways. Just as it's understanding has changed overtime and emerged in times of crisis, it continues to have a fluid existence in Mi'kma'ki. However, I believe that it's popularity

as the focus of discussion in Gaelic communities currently, is yet another case where it emerges in times of crisis. But, the active revitalization of it will not, and fundamentally can not, be done in the same way in both An t-Seann Dùthaich and Mi'kma'ki.

Can Gaelic cultural revitalization in Mi'kma'ki lead to climate justice?

I do believe that Gaelic cultural revitalization is a key aspect of climate justice in Mi'kma'ki. Just as the health of all other cultures and communities on this land are. This is something I have always known and believed, and in some way, I thought that by examining this in an academic setting, I could “prove” what I knew to be true. While I could have looked at this through a western lens and found some empirical evidence linking the health of a culture to the health of an environment, I've come to realize that that does not diminish or uplift the value of that connection any more than the research I conducted. In that case, I guess this makes this question the easiest one for me to provide an answer of yes to. Yes, Gaelic cultural revitalization can lead to climate justice in Mi'kma'ki.

As climate justice “seeks solutions that address the root causes of climate change and in doing so, simultaneously address a broad range of social, racial, and environmental injustices.” it is obvious to me that this includes Gaelic cultural revitalization in Mi'kma'ki (UC Center for Climate Justice, n.d.). Through this research, I have highlighted the connection between Gaelic culture and responsibility to land. I have also highlighted that many Gaels who assimilated into Anglo-Saxondom here in Mi'kma'ki abandoned that responsibility and care along with their culture and language. While in this case it is hyper-specific to a certain region and community, I do believe that the abandonment of dùthchas as this responsibility can be seen as a root cause of climate change. Furthermore, colonialism is widely understood as a root cause of our current crisis, and in the case of Gaelic nova scotia, the abandonment of dùthchas was both due to

colonialism and enacted colonialism. In terms of the specific definition of climate justice in Mi'kma'ki (that includes following MEK) that I'd provided at the beginning of this thesis, I do believe Gaelic cultural revitalization fits into that. Revitalizing Gaelic culture revitalizes our responsibility to land through dùthchas, and thus, responsibility to follow MEK in order to enact that responsibility.

Could Dùthchas/Gaelic TEK be used as a framework for nova scotian Gaelic settlers to understand MEK?

As to this question, I believe what I have highlighted through my research provides an opportunity and an impetus for Gaelic settlers to follow MEK. As to the question of if our own connection to land and TEK could be used as a framework for understanding MEK, I've come to realize that I am not the one who can answer that. In order to answer this question, I would need to be able identify similarities between the two. While I have found similarities between some of my results and some of what I know of MEK and Mi'kmaw worldview, this is not something I could do alone as someone who only belongs to one of these communities. Therefore, this leads me into the many opportunities for future research I identified through my own research.

6.2 Further Research

As I mentioned above, a collaborative project between Gaels and Mi'kmaq could be enacted to explore similarities between their respective worldviews and TEK. Additionally, this research has prompted me to wonder if any sacred places (such as healing wells) among Gaels have any crossover with those sacred to the Mi'kmaq.

If I were to expand on the research I conducted, I see two avenues for exploration. One being a focus on these topics among women in Gaelic nova scotia, and the other being a deeper dive into archival materials. As all my céilidhean were with men, I realized that most of the

stories told were concerning other men in their life. While I recognize the traditional gender roles that lead to men spending more of their time outside through hunting and fishing, I'm curious as to whether women's connection and responsibility to land would differ in both practice and expression. Additionally, I would love to conduct a deeper analysis of Gaelic song-poetry through this lens of dùthchas once I am attained more fluency in Gaelic.

Finally, I am also curious as to the connections and potential differences between TEK in Mi'kma'ki and An t-Seann Dùthaich, particularly in recent history. We know that many of the practices present in Mi'kma'ki come from An t-Seann Dùthaich, but I am curious as to how they may have changed, or survived over here in comparison to the practices present in An t-Seann Dùthaich in the past century.

6.3 Personal Reflections

It is my hope that in the period of rapid intense change that is the 21st century, this element of dùthchas among Gaels in Mi'kma'ki will persevere and come out strong in this time of need. The aim of this research was to highlight the existence of dùthchas among Gaels in Mi'kma'ki as a source of hope.

Therefore,

I hope that by highlighting our own cultural connections to land as Gaels, this thesis has emphasized the importance of following Mi'kmaq ecological knowledge in caring for this sacred land.

I hope that by highlighting this foundational aspect of our culture and its presence in Mi'kma'ki, we can bring it back to the forefront of our lives.

I hope that among the many settlers that share this cultural heritage in Mi'kma'ki, this research urges even just one, to reconnect with their language, their culture and of course, dùthchas.

Finally, my hope is that this will further encourage the revitalization and support of culture and language in our fight for climate justice, as one cannot happen without the other.

Appendices

Appendix A

Personalized message to be sent to prospective participants of whom I already know and have contact with

[Greeting] [insert name of prospective participant]

My name is Jude Sampson and I am an undergraduate Honours student at Dalhousie University. I am studying the prevalence of traditional ecological knowledge in Gaelic Nova Scotia, and how it could help us as Gaels enact climate justice.

[explain my relationship to prospective participant/relationship to person whom I got their contact from]

[Explain my understanding of their eligibility for my study]

I am wondering if you would be willing to participate in my study. It would consist of a semi-structured interview of 60-90 minutes that I would record and transcribe.

Please let me know if you are interested, and we can set up a time and place (whether that be online or in person).

Feel free to ask any questions by responding to this email. I have attached my guiding questions, and the consent script I will be using. We will review these prior to beginning the interview at which time I will orally ask your consent.

[Guiding questions] [Consent script]

Appendix B

Text to be put in Gaelic Council Newsletter:

My name is Jude Sampson and I am an undergraduate Honours student at Dalhousie University. I am studying the prevalence of traditional ecological knowledge in Gaelic Nova Scotia, and how it could help us as Gaels enact climate justice. I am looking for either Gaelic knowledge keepers, elders or scholars interested in participating in a semi-structured interview of 60-90 minutes to discuss their knowledge and/or experience related to the topic of Gaelic traditional ecological knowledge or the term dùthchas.

Please email jude.sampson@dal.ca if interested or with any inquiries.

Appendix C

Consent Script

For the purpose of analysis this interview will be recorded on my password protected iphone and securely transferred via usb-c cord to my password protected laptop. Do you consent to being recorded?

My name is Jude Sampson and I am an undergraduate honours student. You were identified as a possible participant in this study due to your connection to Gaelic Nova Scotia and/or traditional ecological knowledge. Your participation in this semi-structured interview is completely voluntary.

The purpose of this research study is to determine how Gaelic traditional ecological knowledge exists in Gaelic Nova Scotia, and whether it could be used as a means of allowing Nova Scotian Gaels to gain further insight and understanding into climate justice in Mi'kma'ki.

If you agree to participate I will ask you a few questions about the topic, which will take approximately an hour.

This study is minimal risk, but as always, there is a chance that something comes up that is disturbing or discomfoting, please tell me to stop at any time if this occurs and we can either take a break or stop the interview completely.

There are options to how or if you are identified in this study. If you wish to be de-identified, your data will be coded with a pseudonym, the correlation of the pseudonym to your name, will only be known to me and will be kept in a password protected document on my personal password protected laptop and backed up via OneDrive, a Canadian encrypted cloud storage

software. This means that you will only be identifiable to me, as a pseudonym will be used in the collection, analysis and publication of your data.

Do you consent to being identifiable in the publication of this thesis? Specifically:

Do you consent to being identified by your first name?

Do you consent to being identified by your last name?

Do you consent to being identified by your general geographic origin (Arisaig, Skye Glen, etc.)?

Do you consent to being identified by your sloinneadh (Son of __, son of __, etc.)?

Do you consent to being identified by your geographic ties to the old country (originally from Isle of Skye, etc.)?

Do you consent to being quoted in the publication of this thesis? (If you wish to be de-identified, you can opt to be quoted while remaining de-identified)

The recordings of these interviews will be input into the transcribe function via Microsoft Word, both the audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored in my password protected personal laptop and backed up via a protected university server (OneDrive). Upon graduation from Dalhousie, all materials will be deleted from the server.

Do you consent to being identifiable in the long-term storage of data? Specifically:

Do you consent to being identified by your first name?

Do you consent to being identified by your last name?

Do you consent to being identified by your general geographic origin (Arisaig, Skye Glen, etc.)?

Do you consent to being identified by your sloinneadh (Son of __, son of __, etc.)?

Do you consent to being identified by your geographic ties to the old country (originally from Isle of Skye, etc.)?

The final thesis will be uploaded to the College of Sustainability's thesis repository, and presented in the Honours presentations. If any unpublished data is to be used in the future by me, I will ask for your consent at the time. Otherwise, any unpublished data will remain securely in my possession.

You may contact me at jude.sampson@dal.ca with any questions or concerns about the research or your participation in this study.

Or if you have any questions right now:

Do you have any questions or would like any additional details? [*Answer questions.*]

Taking part in this study is your choice. You can choose whether or not you want to participate.

Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you. You have a right to have all of your

questions answered before deciding whether to take part. If you decide to take part, you may leave the study at any time, and you may withdraw your data at any point leading up to March 1st 2025.

Do you agree to participate in this study?

Appendix D

Guiding Questions to be used in the semi-structured interview

Please describe how you feel connection to the environment, or land, and if this is relevant to your identity as a Nova Scotian Gael.

- How do you interact with the land? Do you farm? Fish? Etc.?
 - Do you have any rules or rituals when doing this?
 - (Is any of this connected to the seasons?)
 - (are you aware of any of these being influenced by Mi'kmaq knowledge or Gaelic knowledge?)
- (Do you feel called to protect the land? Nature? Environment?)
- Is any of this influenced by your Gaelic heritage?
 - Do you think any of these practices were carried over from the old country?
- Would you say you feel a connection with the land?
 - (Is this influenced by your family's history on the land? How you were raised?)
- How is this connection affected by not being Indigenous to this land?
 - (how do you perceive this connection despite not being where your ancestors are from)
- Are you familiar with the term Dùthchas, if so, what does it mean to you?

Please describe your understanding of a Gaelic worldview in relation to the environment

- Do you know any stories tied to the land, or how we interact with the land specific to NS?
 - Maybe why somewhere is called what it is?
- Do you know of any folk stories that relate to the environment?

Appendix E

Words used to filter song-poetry and other archival written material

Gaelic	Approximate english translations
Dùthchas	The right to a place, sense of belonging and thus responsibilities to care for it.
Dùthaich	Land, country, etc.
Dualchas	Culture, knowledge, etc. shared generationally by the people you come from
Bile	Sacred tree
Tobar naomh	Holy well
Craobh-shidhe	Tree of peace, tree of the otherworld
Sìthichean/sithean	Fairies, people of the otherworld/fairy knoll
Fionn Mac Cumhail/Fianna, Bradan an Eòlais	Finn McCool, folk hero (leader of a group of warriors, gained wisdom eating the salmon of knowledge)
Niall mór nam breac	Big Neill of the trout, folk hero
Cailleach	Old woman, Creator/protector of nature
Bodach	Old man, Trickster, paired with Cailleach, used to describe things with a connection to the otherworld
Each-uisge/tarbh-uisge	Mythical water-horse/water-bull
Geamhradh	Winter
Earrach	Spring
Samhradh	Summer
Fogher	Autumn
Àm breith nan uan	Lambing season
An Dàmhair	Deer-roaming season
Abhainn	River
Allt	Stream
Àth	Ford
Boglach	Bog
Bùrn/Usige	Water
Cuan/mara/muir	Ocean/sea
Eas	Waterfall
Inbhir	Confluence of rivers
Àird	High place
Aonach	Steep place
Bàrr	Summit
Bruthach	Slope
Cnoc	Hill
Cuach	Heep, hollow
Craobh	Head
Blàth	Blossom
Guacag	Bud
Craobh	Tree
Preas	Bush

Coille	Forest
Duilleag	Leaf
Geanm-chnò	Horse-chestnut
Ùbhlán	Apple
Darach	Oak
Giuthas	Pine
Ainnseann	Ash
Faidhbile	Beech
Giuthas MhicDhùglais	Douglas Fir
Giuthas-Albannach	Scots Pine
Calltain	Hazel
Learag	Larch
Spruis	Spruce
Caoran	Rowan
Beithe	Birch
Sice	Sycamore
Siris	Cherry tree
Iubhar	Yew
Carra meille/corm/curim	Wild liquorice that wards off hunger
Spiolag	Fir Candle
Isean	Young creature/chick
Bò	Cow
Broc	Badger
Cabar	Antler
Caora	Sheep
Cear	Hen
Crodh	Cattle
Dàmh	Stag
Fiadh	Deer
Dòbhran	Otter
Ròn	Seal
Sionnach	Fox
Druid	Starling
Faoileag	Seagull
Feannag	Crow
Fitheach	Raven
Gèadh	Goose
Iolaire	Eagle
Iach	Duck

Appendix F



Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board

Letter of Approval

December 19, 2024

Jude Sampson

College of Sustainability\College of Sustainability

Dear Jude,

REB #: 2024-7588
Project Title: Gaelic Cultural Revitalization as Climate Justice in Nova Scotia
Review Type: Delegated Review
Effective Date: December 19, 2024
Expiry Date: December 19, 2025

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board has reviewed your application for research involving humans and found the proposed research to be ethically acceptable in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. This approval will be in effect for 12 months as indicated above. This approval is subject to the conditions listed below which constitute your on-going responsibilities with respect to the ethical conduct of this research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Cameron".

Dr. John Cameron
Chair, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board
Dalhousie University

ethics@dal.ca

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