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**'Of crofters, Celts and claymores: *The Celtic Magazine* and the Highland cultural nationalist movement, 1875-1888'**\*

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In 1983, Hugh Trevor-Roper famously eviscerated the provenance of the most celebrated Highland customs, dismissing the kilt as the invention of an Englishman, rejecting the pipes as the traditional instrument of the 'Scotch', and even accusing the Scottish of stealing Irish Celtic culture.<sup>1</sup> It is curious, in a study so self-consciously claiming to pursue historical veracity and so damning of Highland culture, that Trevor-Roper repeatedly used the term 'Celt', one of the most problematic words in the British historical lexicon. An ethno-cultural definition little understood but frequently used to describe those inhabiting the periphery of the isles, 'Celt' refers to an identity of people who were marginalised in the past as racially or culturally inferior and today are often quickly dismissed as 'invented' or 'imagined'. Yet Celtic identity, whether invented or not, played an important role in the construction of modern Scottish identity and its place within a wider British identity. In the late nineteenth century, Celtic ideas underpinned a Highland cultural nationalist movement that fought for land reform in what it viewed as the culturally, ethnologically and geographically distinct Highland nation.

The prevailing historical narrative of Scotland in the nineteenth century is that of the birth of an industrial behemoth easily seduced by the spoils of empire.<sup>2</sup> Although lacking the heavy

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<sup>1</sup> H. Trevor-Roper, 'The invention of tradition: The Highland tradition of Scotland', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 15-43.

<sup>2</sup> e.g., T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: A History 1700-2000* (London, 1999).

industry of the south, the Highlands were not immune to the monetary influence of the empire, but imperial profits benefitted mostly lords and businessmen, who used the money to finance large estates. For example, on his return from China, James Matheson purchased the entire Isle of Lewis in 1844, where he built Lews Castle near Stornoway.<sup>3</sup> However, the majority of Highlanders experienced the period very differently, with recurrent famine and the clearances inflicting mass suffering on the population and leading to widespread emigration. Although at first many landowners attempted to aid their local populations, emigration became actively encouraged and led to rapid depopulation in some counties. Many Highlanders viewed this as a deliberate attack on Highland life, and in response some began to promote a Highland nationalism dependent upon the supposedly ancient Celtic heritage of the Highlanders. This Highland cultural nationalist movement mobilised for land reform in the Highlands and eventually secured political gain in the *Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act* of 1886, agitating on the basis that the crofters had been deprived of their historical rights by the landlords. The rapid expansion of the Highland popular press and the emergence of a plethora of Celtic societies and associations assisted in cultivating the Celtic identity. One of the most influential groups formed during the period was the Gaelic Society of Inverness, out of which arose *The Celtic Magazine*, the main focus of what follows.

Published monthly from 1875 to 1888, *The Celtic Magazine* offers an excellent insight into the events occurring in the Highlands at the time and also serves as an archetypal example of the kind of historicist publication developed in a cultural nationalist movement and employed in its service. Initially focused on Celtic history, philology and culture, the magazine became concerned with the plight of the crofters in the late eighteen-seventies and grew increasingly devoted to securing a solution to the Highland land question. Crucial to the magazine's

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<sup>3</sup> Devine, *Scottish Nation*, p. 418.

interpretation of the Highland situation was an idealised Celtic version of the Highlands supposedly existent prior to 1745, and a commitment to Celtic culture. Implicitly recognising the racial stereotypes foisted upon the Highlanders by the Lowlanders and the English, *The Celtic Magazine* internalised such smears and replied by promoting Celticism, a response of the type that Colin Kidd has called 'a Patriotic Celticist counter current to Teutonic racialism'.<sup>4</sup> Who, then, were these Celts?<sup>5</sup> There is a long, complex history related to the Celts, a European tribe that swept into Britain before the rise of the Roman Empire and was subsequently pushed to the fringes of the isles by successive invasions from the continent.<sup>6</sup> However, this article is not concerned with the complicated history of the Celtic peoples, but with how the modern conception of 'Celt' was used to promote a Highland identity during the eighteenth seventies and eighties.

Several commentators have shown how perceptions of the Highlands and its people were transformed during the gap between the Jacobite defeat at the battle of Culloden in 1746 and the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Highlanders were thought of as 'backwards' by outsiders for a variety of reasons, most of which were linked to their Celtic traditions.

Following the 'Forty-Five' an assimilationist policy was inaugurated by the Whig government in order to both pacify and modernise the Highlands. This initiative was characterised

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<sup>4</sup> C. Kidd, 'Teutonist ethnology and Scottish nationalist inhibition, 1780-1880', *Scottish Historical Review*, lxxiv (1995), 64.

<sup>5</sup> Many scholars have used 'Gael' as opposed to 'Celt' in reference to Highlanders, perhaps because of the nebulous history of Celtic peoples. Contemporaries, including Alexander Mackenzie and John Murdoch, seemed to use 'Celt' and 'Gael' interchangeably; therefore, for the sake of simplicity this article will use the term 'Celts'.

<sup>6</sup> B. Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 39-67.

<sup>7</sup> see, e.g., P. Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (London, 1989); K. McNeil, *Scotland, Britain, Empire: Writing the Highlands, 1760-1860* (Columbus, 2007); R. Clyde, *From Rebel to Hero: The Image of the Highlander, 1745-1830* (East Linton, 1995).

principally through the pursuance of 'improvement', by which agricultural traditions were transformed following the principles of *laissez-faire*. The method of runrig was discarded and replaced by the crofting system,<sup>8</sup> while commercial farming also grew, leaving the Highlands vulnerable to the fluctuations of far-away markets. Accompanying these measures were legislative policies – including disarmament, the proscribing of Highland dress, and the abolishment of heritable jurisdictions – designed to stamp out Celtic traditions.<sup>9</sup>

With the Highlands no longer posing much of a threat to either the Lowlands or England, the image of the Highlander evolved from 'uncouth savage' to 'noble savage'. This shift in thinking was aided by the many Highlanders who enlisted in the army and distinguished themselves on the battlefield, allowing their supposed militarism to be celebrated by Britain for the first time.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, a debate took place between James MacPherson, a Highlander and the author of the Ossian poems, and Joseph Pinkerton, a Lowland antiquarian, on the nature of the Celtic 'race'. MacPherson praised the racial purity of Highlanders and claimed they were the first Britons, whilst Pinkerton argued that Celts were racially inferior, citing their links to the Irish as proof.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the poor historical analysis, it is obvious that the Celtic Highlanders were viewed separately from the rest of the Scots and British. This distinctiveness began to be celebrated by some, most notably Walter Scott, who romanticised the Highlands in his novels in a pro-Union context, beginning with *Waverley* in 1814. Famously, Scott organised George IV's visit to Edinburgh in 1822, decorating the city in tartan

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<sup>8</sup> J. Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Womack, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Womack, pp. 27-29.

<sup>11</sup> McNeil, pp. 35-38.

kitsch and outfitting the king in a kilt.<sup>12</sup> It is this episode that is normally presented as the apogee of the Highlands' transformation, with the kilt, and Celtic culture more generally, transformed from criminal to costume.

Ewen Cameron has argued that these romantic perceptions of the Celtic Highlanders were devised principally by outsiders during the early part of the nineteenth century, and that a more assertive Highland identity was advanced by Highlanders themselves during the latter half of the century.<sup>13</sup> This was a response to the assimilationist policy that began after Culloden and rhapsodised the Celtic past thought to have existed before the Union. Publications produced by the Celtic cultural nationalist movement during the eighteen-seventies reveal the stark differences that the Highland Celts viewed between themselves and Lowlanders, with language seen as the key component of their identity.<sup>14</sup> J.S. Blackie lectured to the Gaelic Society of Inverness about the importance of different 'types [sic], language, traditions, and character' between the "'Scotch", English and Celt': 'let the Celt glory in being a Celt, the Scotchman in being a Scot'.<sup>15</sup> By the eighteen-seventies then, there was a Highland identity which posed Celtic character and culture as the central difference between Highlanders on the one hand and the Lowlanders and English on the other. There were of course other existent identities: the Orkneys and Shetlands, as well as parts of the Hebrides, were presented by some as more Nordic than Celtic, and some urban Highlanders preferred to

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<sup>12</sup> McNeil, p. 7, pp. 51-81.

<sup>13</sup> E.A. Cameron, 'Embracing the Past: The Highlands in Nineteenth Century Scotland', in *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-making of Scotland Through the Ages*, ed. D. Broun, R. J. Finlay, M. Lynch (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 195-219.

<sup>14</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, i (1876), 179-185.

<sup>15</sup> *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, i (1871-2), 116-120.

distance themselves from any sense of Celticism.<sup>16</sup> There were those who propagated the superiority of Celtic culture and explicitly excluded outsiders, such as Alasdair Macdonell who formed a 'Society of the True Highlanders' in response to the romanticisation of the Highlands and the popularity of the Highland Society of London.<sup>17</sup> Highland Celts employed pejorative racial labels of their own, directed particularly at the English; indeed, the Gaelic word for 'English' is 'Sassanach', or 'Saxon', so native Gaelic speakers could not help but think of the English in racial terms, and therefore intrinsically different from themselves. The editor of *The Celtic Magazine* also seemed to believe that Highland lairds and factors forfeited their place in the Celtic fraternity due to their treatment of crofters and cottars, even though in many instances they were actually Highland chieftains and identified with Celtic culture.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, 'Celt' could be used as a catch-all term for Highlanders, but there were clear instances where the definition did not apply.

It should be noted here that the 'Invention of Tradition' paradigm is particularly evident in the discussion of the Celtic case, with the manufacture of Celtic culture universal across the Celtic nations. Many Irish nationalist narratives of the period relied on 'bardic' histories and Celtic myths for their conception of the modern Irish nation.<sup>19</sup> In Wales the invention could be seen in the sculpture scheme in Cardiff City Hall, as well as in the Investiture of the Prince of Wales;<sup>20</sup> Cornwall and the Isle of Man appealed to their Celtic pasts in order to promote

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<sup>16</sup> McNeil, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> McNeil, pp. 78-9.

<sup>18</sup> S. Wallace, *John Stuart Blackie: Scottish Scholar and Patriot* (Edinburgh, 2006), p. 289.

<sup>19</sup> R.F. Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 1-22.

<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of Boudicea, who was obviously not a Welsh figure makes the invention glaringly obvious, A. Gaffney, "A National Valhalla for Wales": D.A. Thomas and the Welsh historical sculpture scheme', *Transactions*

tourism, as well as antiquarianism.<sup>21</sup> Although there were certainly genuine links to the ancient Celtic past, most notably the Celtic languages, the vast majority of traditions seem to have been greatly exaggerated or invented outright. But it is a mistake to focus solely on this issue and ignore the fact that people believed the Celtic narrative – however ‘invented’ – and used it to effect change in the systems and institutions of the time. Therefore, the paradigm should be kept in mind not for the purposes of deconstruction, but to reveal how useful invented traditions were in the construction of Highland Celtic identity. After all, it was not only the Highlanders who believed in their distinctiveness, the Lowlanders and English were equally convinced.

So, although there were elements of continuity between the modern Highland Celts and their ancestors, many of the gaps were filled in by invented traditions, which Hobsbawm has argued are inherently tied to the rise of nations and nationalism.<sup>22</sup> But can the Highlands be considered a ‘nation’? Benedict Anderson’s influential definition of a nation as ‘an imagined community’ suggests that the answer is ‘yes’,<sup>23</sup> for the Highlands were certainly viewed as a distinct territory in terms of geography, ethnicity, language and culture, and remain so to this day. Scholars have struggled to define the peculiar place of the Highlands within Scotland and Britain, with Womack stating they had ‘all the differentiae of nationality and none of those of statehood’ and terming the Highlands a ‘domestic underdeveloped country’.<sup>24</sup> Cameron has

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*of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorian*, v (1991), 131-32; J.S. Ellis, ‘Reconciling the Celt: British national identity, empire, and the investiture of the Prince of Wales’, *Journal of British Studies*, xxxvii (1998), 392-4.

<sup>21</sup> *Illustrated Guide to Devon and Cornwall* (Bristol, 1907), pp. 1-4; J. Belchem, ‘The little Manx nation: antiquarianism, ethnic identity, and home rule politics in the Isle of Man, 1880-1918’, *Journal of British Studies*, xxxix (2000), 218.

<sup>22</sup> E. Hobsbawm, ‘Inventing Traditions’, in *Invention of Tradition*, pp. 13-4.

<sup>23</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Womack, p. 178, p. 167.



pointed out the separate elements that constituted a distinct Highland identity, including its own legislative area, but there is still little consensus about how to actually define the situation of the Highlands.<sup>25</sup> Taking into account the separate treatment of the Highlands by contemporaries and scholars,<sup>26</sup> this article suggests that it may indeed be helpful to think of the Highlands as a nation, within the wider *nation-states* of Scotland and Britain, due to the peculiar place the Highlands have held and still occupy in the minds of those concerned with Scottish history and culture.

During the eighteen-seventies and eighteen-eighties there arose a Highland 'cultural nationalism', which combined the Celtic cultural revival with the political unrest of the crofting controversy. John Hutchinson has encouraged scholars to view 'two...different types of nationalism – cultural and political – that must not be conflated, for they articulate different...conceptions of the nation...and have sharply diverging political strategies'.<sup>27</sup> For Hutchinson, cultural nationalists seek a 'moral regeneration of the national community rather than the achievement of an autonomous state', which is the aim of 'political nationalists'.<sup>28</sup> A short examination of these ideas will help to reveal the congruity between Hutchinson's model of a cultural nationalist movement and the Highland cultural network that emerged during the eighteen-seventies.

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<sup>25</sup> Cameron, 'Embracing the Past', p. 211.

<sup>26</sup> Devine indicates that the Highlands were not thought of as separate until the latter fourteenth century, T. Devine, *From Clanship to Crofters War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> J. Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London, 1987), p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, p. 9.

Taking the Irish cultural revivals of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as his subject, Hutchinson argued in his 1987 work *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism* that the advent of modern nationalism has witnessed the rise of cultural nationalist movements as components of wider nationalist trends.<sup>29</sup> The main ideas put forward by Hutchinson are that cultural nationalism is independent of political nationalism and has distinct aims; that historical memory rather than language serves to define the national community; that cultural nationalist movements rely on intellectuals – termed ‘ethnic revivalists’ – and the grassroots spread of ideas; and finally that cultural nationalism is a modernising, not regressive, force.<sup>30</sup> But perhaps most crucial to the purposes of this article is Hutchinson’s wider emphasis that cultural nationalists seek the cultural regeneration of traditions and do not pursue the establishment of an autonomous state.<sup>31</sup> It will be helpful to keep this framework in mind regarding the consideration of what the goals of the Highland cultural network actually were, as there has been a significant amount of confusion over the aims of the different groups active during this time.

It is hoped here that by thinking in terms of the Highlands as a nation with its own *cultural* nationalist movement, the Highland land controversy of the eighteen-eighties may be better situated within the contemporary Scottish and British contexts. The Highland cultural nationalist movement was comprised of many disparate groups and featured people of various political persuasions, with some figures going on to found other associations and

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<sup>29</sup> see, e.g., Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam, 2006), for examples of how cultural nationalism has been a key part of European nationalist movements throughout the modern period.

<sup>30</sup> Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, pp. 8-14, p. 16, p. 30, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> J. Hutchinson, ‘Cultural nationalism, elite mobility and nation-building: communitarian politics in modern Ireland’, *British Journal of Sociology*, xxxviii (1987), 486.

organisations, including the Scottish Labour Party, after the splintering of the network.<sup>32</sup> But the fact that the Highland cultural nationalist movement was broadly non-separatist allowed it to sit comfortably within a Scottish 'Unionist-nationalism', the idea that Scottish patriotism can co-exist with loyalty to the Union, as advocated by Graeme Morton.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, as this article will demonstrate, the Celtic cultural nationalist movement can be seen to have strengthened the Highland nation, allowing it to sit harmoniously within a Scotland confident in itself and its place within the Union.

### ***The Celtic Magazine and the cultural revival***

Although the first Celtic societies were founded in London during the eighteenth century, Celtic revivals became recurrent events in the Celtic nations throughout the modern period, helping to spawn the Highland cultural network of which *The Celtic Magazine* was a part.<sup>34</sup> This loose network was a Highland variant of the 'decentralised clusters of cultural societies and journals', which Hutchinson states were 'designed to inspire a spontaneous love of community in its different members by educating them of their common heritage of splendour and suffering'.<sup>35</sup>

The growth of print-capitalism in the Highlands was the vital ingredient in the emergence of this network, with a Highland popular press budding during the eighteenth century, allowing new voices to enter onto the stage in the promotion of local causes. John Murdoch stood out as an ambitious innovator, founding *The Highlander* in Inverness and publishing it weekly from

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<sup>32</sup> C. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and politics 1707 to the present* (1977), p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> G. Morton, *Unionist Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830-1860* (East Linton, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> The Highland Society was founded in 1778, with its Welsh equivalent existent since 1751; Highland Society of London, *Act of Incorporation*, 21 May 1816; R. Coupland, *Welsh and Scottish Nationalism: A Study* (1954), p. 205.

<sup>35</sup> Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, p. 16.

1873 until 1881, when it moved to monthly publication before its ultimate collapse in 1882.<sup>36</sup> Murdoch had grown up on the island of Islay, about twenty-five miles from Ireland, and worked as an exciseman in Dublin in the 1850s; these experiences created within him a sympathy for the Irish nationalist cause.<sup>37</sup> Fiercely proud of his Celtic heritage, Murdoch was inspired by the Irish land agitation and felt the Highland crofters could benefit from the lessons of the Irish disturbances. He was an early pan-Celticist and thought the best way to communicate to his fellow Highlanders that the Irish were kindred spirits was to stress their ancient Celtic connections, announcing openly in 1878 his aim of ‘sinking the differences between the different members of the great Celtic family’.<sup>38</sup> Ewen Cameron points to *The Highlander* as an example of an ‘educative’ publication in that Murdoch sought to instil political awareness into the Highlanders and provide them with the knowledge and motivation to oppose the injustices that they suffered under the contemporary land and social systems.<sup>39</sup>

Murdoch was by far the most outspoken journalist in the Highland cultural network, and it is probably for this reason that a disproportionate amount of historical scholarship has focused upon him, as opposed to other journalists or the cultural network as a whole. However, by 1882 *The Highlander* had gone bankrupt, just as the land controversy was flaring into acts of open resistance. Following Murdoch’s lead, albeit less vociferously, was *The Oban Times*, which upon its takeover by Duncan Cameron in 1882 moved from a moderate, anti-Irish,

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<sup>36</sup> E.A. Cameron, ‘Journalism in the late Victorian Scottish Highlands: John Murdoch, Duncan Campbell, and the “Northern Chronicle”’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, xl (2007), 281.

<sup>37</sup> J. Hunter, ‘The Gaelic connection: The Highlands, Ireland and Nationalism, 1873-1922’, *Scottish Historical Review*, liv (1975), 181.

<sup>38</sup> *Highlander*, 15 May 1875.

<sup>39</sup> Cameron, ‘Journalism’, 282.

liberal position to a pro-crofter stance, and was by 1886 advocating Irish Home Rule.<sup>40</sup> The Tories also realised the importance of the press during this time and, following a failed takeover attempt of Murdoch's *Highlander* in the late 1870s, established the *Northern Chronicle* in 1881. Even though the paper was essentially a conservative agent and emphatically pro-landlord, the importance of time and place was not lost upon its editor, the antiquarian Duncan Campbell, who published items in Gaelic that were concerned with Celtic culture, and who blamed the Highland land agitation on the Irish, speaking of the Highlanders as part of a 'British race'.<sup>41</sup> Other outlets reporting on Highland issues were the *Inverness Advertiser*, *Ross-shire Journal* and *North British Daily Mail*, all of which tended to adopt a liberal, pro-crofter point of view, while the *Inverness Courier* and Edinburgh-based *Scotsman* were Whig papers that joined the *Northern Chronicle* in support of the landlords, although the *Scotsman* did occasionally criticise landlords when it felt they neglected their duty.

Comprising a substantial portion of the Highland cultural network were the various associations advancing pro-Celtic ideas, the most important of which was the Gaelic Society of Inverness, which aimed to 'stimulate and give vent...to that public spirit which is awakening in [the Highlands]', and sparked other societies in Greenock, Aberdeen and Dundee.<sup>42</sup> The Federation of Celtic Societies was founded in Glasgow in 1878 and sought to consolidate the various urban and Highland Celtic associations.<sup>43</sup> Also founded in Glasgow were the Skye Vigilance Committee and Glasgow Highland Society, among others.<sup>44</sup> One of the most

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<sup>40</sup> A.G. Newby, 'The *Oban Times* and the early land agitation in the Highlands, 1877-1881', in *Scottish Local History*, liv (2002), 13.

<sup>41</sup> Cameron, 'Journalism', 282-3, 291.

<sup>42</sup> *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, i (1871-2), ix; I.M.M. MacPhail, *The Crofters' War* (Stornoway, 1989), p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Hunter, 'The Politics of Highland Land Reform, 1873-1895', *Scottish Historical Review*, liii (1974), 48.

<sup>44</sup> MacPhail, p. 88.

important societies was the Highland Land Law Reform Association (HLLRA), which emerged as the Federation of Celtic Societies lapsed, and adopted a highly political stance on the crofting controversy. The HLLRA will be discussed later in this article.

It was in this culturally fertile context that *The Celtic Magazine* was founded by Alexander Mackenzie in Inverness. Mackenzie grew up on a croft in Gairloch in Wester Ross, and although his family was not evicted, he knew several families who were; he was no stranger to the hardships of crofting life, having had to work for 'destitution meal' during the famine of 1846-7. After working as a farmer, fisherman, railway labourer and draper, Mackenzie settled in Inverness in 1869.<sup>45</sup> He was known for always wearing Highland dress to formal events, where he refused to speak any language other than Gaelic, and has been described as 'perhaps the most effective[Highland] journalist of the era', being most famous for documenting the events of the crofting controversy in his book *The History of the Highland Clearances* (1883),<sup>46</sup> which Devine has described as 'a compendium of Landlord misdeeds'.<sup>47</sup>

Mackenzie assisted in the foundation of the Gaelic Society of Inverness in 1871, and began *The Celtic Magazine* in 1875. It ran until 1888, which made it the longest running Celtic publication in existence to that point and claimed, in its final issue, to be the 'most successful Celtic periodical ever published in [Scotland]'.<sup>48</sup> Listed as 'A Monthly Periodical Devoted to the Literature, History, Antiquities, Folk Lore, Traditions, and the Social and Material Interests of the Celt at Home and Abroad', the magazine was clearly centred on the Highlands, with

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<sup>45</sup> *Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands*, (4 vols. 1884), iv. 2682-2684.

<sup>46</sup> E. Richards, *Debating the Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh, 2007), p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Devine, *Clanship*, p. 224.

<sup>48</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, xiii (1888), 572.

virtually no mention of the mammoth industrial undertakings occurring contemporaneously in the Lowlands during its thirteen year existence.<sup>49</sup>

Although concerned with contemporary events in the Highlands, it is fairly obvious that *The Celtic Magazine* was first and foremost an antiquarian magazine, especially during its early years, when the land question was only beginning to smoulder. Some features were written in Gaelic, but the vast majority of articles were in English, supporting Hutchinson's point that, while native languages are important, the real glue that binds cultural nationalist forces together is historical memory. Accordingly, *The Celtic Magazine* promoted a historicist conception of the Highlands by printing a range of articles about Highland history and 'traditions', including the supposedly ancient origins of the kilt and bagpipes, 'historical' articles such as 'Tales of the Heroic Celts', and the links between the 'Ancient Celts', the 'Ancient Celtic Church' and the contemporary inhabitants of the nineteenth century Highlands.<sup>50</sup>

Literature also permeated the pages of *The Celtic Magazine*, assisting the historical articles in cultivating a Celtic identity. Short stories, poetry and folk tales, occasionally written in Gaelic, helped to further the impression of an ancient people possessed of many rich cultural traditions. Various authors contributed poetry to the magazine, perhaps most significantly Sir William Allan, Liberal MP for Gateshead, whose poem 'The Highland Claymore' listed the various historical enemies of the Highlands in its final verse:

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<sup>49</sup>*Celtic Magazine*, i (1875), 1.

<sup>50</sup> 'The Highland dress', *Celtic Magazine*, viii (1883), 198-201; 'The Highland bagpipe', *Celtic Magazine*, ix (1884), 109; 'Heroic tales of the Celts', *Celtic Magazine*, xi (1885), 25; 'The Celtic Church in Scotland', *Celtic Magazine*, xi (1886), 97-105.

It baffled the Norseman and vanquished the Roman,  
'Twas drawn for the Bruce and the old Scottish throne,  
It victory bore over tyrannous foemen,  
For Freedom had long made the weapon her own.  
It swung for the braw Chevalier and Prince Charlie,  
'Twas stained at Drum Mossie with Sassenach gore:  
It sleeps now in peace, a dark history's ferlie,  
Oh! ne'er may be wakened the Highland Claymore.<sup>51</sup>

Thus the literary contributions to the magazine should be considered both in terms of their intrinsic literary value as well as their role in constructing Celtic historical memory. In every issue of the magazine there was at least one poem or short story, which usually either harkened back to a golden age before the Union or lamented the sorry state of the contemporary Highlands. As both Donald Meek and I.M.M. MacPhail have pointed out, poetry was an important medium through which crofter discontent was voiced,<sup>52</sup> and *The Celtic Magazine* should be recognised as an agent that accorded a prominent place to 'agitation verse'. Their poignancy was enhanced by the articles written about the clearances and published in the magazine alongside the poems.

Combining literary and historical elements, the construction of national memory in the Highlands also took more abstract forms, such as the intellectual debate that raged over the Ossian controversy. The first article published in the magazine opened with the aphorism, 'It's an ill bird that befouls its own nest', and was a scathing criticism of Macaulay's contemptuous

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<sup>51</sup>'The old claymore', *Celtic Magazine*, i (1875), 49.

<sup>52</sup> *Tuath is Tighearna: Tenants and Landlords*, ed. D. Meek (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 10-11; MacPhail, p. 8.



treatment of the Ossian poems, questioning where his loyalty as a 'Highlandman' had been to the Highlands.<sup>53</sup> Still debated by scholars today, the Ossian poems were written by James Macpherson in the early seventeenth-sixties;<sup>54</sup> although he claimed to have translated them from third century remnants of Gaelic poetry, their authenticity was essentially debunked by the time of the publication of *The Celtic Magazine*. Nonetheless, the Ossian controversy was a central topic of the magazine, which unsurprisingly supported the legitimacy of the poems and discussed them in nine of the thirteen volumes, often with 'Anglo-Saxon' scholars challenging the legitimacy of the poems.<sup>55</sup> The Ossian poems were popular not just in Scotland but all over Europe, where they have been attributed as a source of the romantic nationalism which began to grip the continent in the early nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> Napoleon, Victor Hugo, Goethe, Herder, Schiller, Hazlitt, Poe, Tennyson, Whitman and Matthew Arnold have been cited as figures influenced by the poems.<sup>57</sup> Ossian emerged at a time when the image of the Highlands was transformed into one of romance and legend, in the Highlands, Britain and across Europe. A tremendous source of Highland pride during the period, the Ossian poems provided a supposedly tangible link between the modern Highland nation of the nineteenth century and the ancient Highlands of popular myths.

Language has frequently been seen as the keystone of nationalism,<sup>58</sup> particularly with its implied connection to authentic native culture, but theories of cultural nationalism have

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<sup>53</sup> Macauley's treatment of Ossian', *Celtic Magazine*, i (1875), 4-8.

<sup>54</sup> Devine, *Scottish Nation*, p. 242.

<sup>55</sup> See *Celtic Magazine*, i-vii, xii-xiii (1875-1882, 1887-1888)

<sup>56</sup> T. Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution* (2010), pp. 145-8.

<sup>57</sup> Devine, *Scottish Nation*, p. 242; H. Gaskill, 'Introduction', in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, ed. H. Gaskill (London, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., E. Hobsbawm, 'The rise of ethno-linguistic nationalisms', in *Nationalism*, ed. J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith (Oxford, 1994), pp. 181-2.

challenged this with the idea that historical memory is the real root of the nation.<sup>59</sup> Ernest Renan, the Brittany-born national theorist and author of a book on Celtic poetry, stressed the importance of collective remembrance over race or language, at the same time as the 'land war' was breaking out.<sup>60</sup> But language could have substantial historical value, as asserted by *The Celtic Magazine*, which regarded language as 'the strongest link in the chain that binds the Highlander to the past'.<sup>61</sup> Other Celtic nations recognised the importance of language and literature in reinforcing national consciousness, with Wales hosting annual *Eisteddfodau*, and the creation of the Gaelic Union and the Gaelic League in Ireland.<sup>62</sup> Alexander Mackenzie criticised Charles Stuart Parnell for not being involved with the Gaelic Union, stating 'a patriotism which ignores the language and literature of the Irish people' did not seem 'at all like the genuine article'.<sup>63</sup> For all the importance placed on language, the 1881 census, which was the first that sought to identify the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland, revealed that only 231,602 people in Scotland had any knowledge of Gaelic, approximately 6.19% of the population. The fact that the Gaelic question made it onto the census at all should have been a victory for the cultural nationalist movement and Charles Fraser Mackintosh, who had petitioned parliament to have it included. But although at least sixty-five percent of the population in the counties of Argyll, Inverness, Ross and Cromarty and Sutherland spoke Gaelic – and the proportion was likely even larger at parish level – the numbers were still

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<sup>59</sup> Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Ernest Renan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?', quoted in *Nationalism*, ed. Hutchinson and Smith, pp. 17-8.

<sup>61</sup> 'The future of the Gaelic language', *Celtic Magazine*, x (1885), 251-6.

<sup>62</sup> K. O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: A History of Modern Wales* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 18-19; B. Maier, *The Celts: A History from earliest times to the present* (Notre Dame, 2003), pp. 206-7.

<sup>63</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, vi (1881), 248.

disappointing to many, including Alexander Mackenzie and Fraser Mackintosh.<sup>64</sup> But the importance of language in the construction of historical memory must not be underestimated, for there was a sense of urgency attached to the preservation of Gaelic, which was often cited as the main impetus for the foundation of Celtic cultural societies in both the Highlands and the Lowlands, allowing Highlanders to connect more easily and envision a Highland historical nation.<sup>65</sup>

Those most crucial to the construction of Celtic identity were the individuals termed ‘ethnic revivalists’ by Hutchinson and described by Anthony Smith as ‘humanist intellectuals – historians, artists, philologists’.<sup>66</sup> These were the figures responsible for devising the historicist ideology of the nation and promoting it in cultural associations, journals and more broadly in civil society. In the Highland case, such individuals were deeply imbued with a love for the Highlands and were committed to Celtic culture in general. Alexander Mackenzie was of course one of these figures, employing *The Celtic Magazine* in the service of the Highland revival before beginning a more polemical newspaper, *The Scottish Highlander*, which appeared for the first time in July, 1885.<sup>67</sup> Two MPs wrote regularly for the magazine: Sir William Allan wrote poetry, and Charles Fraser Mackintosh, Liberal MP for Inverness, wrote contemporary Highland history.<sup>68</sup> John Stuart Blackie, Chieftain of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, Professor of Greek at Edinburgh University and one of the foremost intellectuals in

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<sup>64</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, vii (1882), 248; C. Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland, 1698-1981: The Geographical History of a Language* (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 209-13.

<sup>65</sup> The Gaelic Society of Inverness lists *The Gael, The Highlander, The Celtic Magazine and the Glasgow Highlander* as publications of Gaelic cultural preservation, *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, v (1875-6), xiv-xv.

<sup>66</sup> Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, p. 9; A. D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, iv (1884), 192; MacPhail, p. 102.

<sup>68</sup>e.g., ‘Can this be the land?’, *Celtic Magazine*, i (1876), 86; ‘The Highland crofters’, *Celtic Magazine*, vii (1882), 562-3.

Scotland at the time, wrote a range of articles, from histories of the Gaelic language to articles in support of the campaigns to teach Gaelic in schools.<sup>69</sup> The individuals involved in the magazine were also those prominent in other Highland associations, such as the Highland Land Law Reform Association and the Gaelic Society of Inverness, called the 'leading Highland cultural body' by Blackie;<sup>70</sup> a symbiotic relationship therefore existed between the Highland intelligentsia and *The Celtic Magazine*, which provided a platform for the intellectuals to disseminate their historicist ideas on the Highlands, offering what Shaw has described as 'a pre-existing vision of the Highlands...back to the people'.<sup>71</sup> At the same time their participation gave the magazine a greater sense of gravity and importance.

An essential feature of cultural nationalism is that it is a creative force that synthesises the idea of tradition with the modern nation.<sup>72</sup> It is important to make this point as cultural nationalist movements should not be conflated with regressive movements that desire a return to a purported past 'golden age'. In the first issue of *The Celtic Magazine*, Alexander Mackenzie, who grew up on a croft, stated that 'unhesitatingly...we cannot recommend it to any able bodied person who can leave it for a more promising outlet for himself and his family', indicating that the magazine was chiefly concerned with the land question as a way to help fellow Highlanders, and was not pursuing a solution out of a blind sense of tradition.<sup>73</sup> Several Celtic campaigns gained publicity in the magazine - the Celtic chair at Edinburgh, the teaching of Gaelic in Highland schools, and the broader goal of land reform – using

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<sup>69</sup> See 'The education of the Highlanders', *Celtic Magazine*, ii (1877), 385-91; Wallace, p. 267.

<sup>70</sup> Wallace, p. 267.

<sup>71</sup> J. Shaw, 'Land, people and nation: historicist voices in the Highland land campaign, c. 1850-1883', in *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, radicals and collective identities in the British Isles, 1865-1931*, ed. E. Biagini (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 306-7.

<sup>72</sup> Hutchinson, 'Cultural nationalism', 486.

<sup>73</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, i (1875), 1.

conceptions of the imagined Celtic past to effect real and meaningful change in the contemporary Highland world of the nineteenth century.

John Stuart Blackie was the chief driver behind the campaign for the creation of a Chair in Celtic Studies at the University of Edinburgh, and appealed to *Celtic Magazine* readers for funds to help establish it.<sup>74</sup> As well as convincing ordinary Highlanders to donate, Blackie was able to convince the Lords Argyll, Sutherland and Rosebery, the Marquis of Bute, the Earls of Crawford and Zetland and even the Queen to contribute to the Chair.<sup>75</sup> Within a year of his initial announcement of the campaign, there were plans for Celtic Chairs at Oxford and Trinity College Dublin.<sup>76</sup> The creation of these chairs was momentous as they signalled that the study of Celtic languages and cultures was a genuine scholarly enterprise, in turn legitimising other cultural projects like *The Celtic Magazine*. Blackie viewed the Gaelic language as a matter of life and death for Highland culture, stating ‘The moment the Gaelic language dies, the Highland people die with it’, a belief that helps to explain his tenacity in campaigning for the Edinburgh Chair, which took the better part of a decade to endow.<sup>77</sup>

A related but more local cause was the issue of teaching Gaelic in Highland schools. As indicated by Blackie’s words, the intellectuals of the cultural nationalist movement viewed the resuscitation of Gaelic as a way to save the collective Celtic soul of the Highlands. *The Celtic Magazine* debated the issue of Gaelic in Highland schools, at first questioning whether it should be taught at all, before supporting the decision of 1878 that it be taught as a special

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<sup>74</sup> ‘On Celtic literature and the Celtic professorship’, *Celtic Magazine*, i (1875), 10-11.

<sup>75</sup> Wallace, p. 274.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Professorship of Celtic at Oxford’, *Celtic Magazine*, i (1876), 168; ‘Resolution to adopt a new Celtic chair at Trinity College Dublin’, *Celtic Magazine*, ii (1876), 66.

<sup>77</sup> J.S. Blackie, *The Gaelic Language* (1864), quoted in Wallace, p. 267.

subject,<sup>78</sup> which was further validated by the Napier Commission's recommendation in 1884.<sup>79</sup> Again, the magazine demonstrated that it was not interested in blindly pursuing policies that served no other purpose than artificially preserving Celtic customs, even a tradition as symbolic and indisputably genuine as its ancient language. In 1884 a reprinted article from the Irish *Gaelic Journal* provided Highlanders with an affirmation of the success of the Highland cultural campaign. The journal described the Irish battle to have Gaelic taught in schools and the inspiration it drew from the Highland success, in a rare example of Ireland taking a cue from the Highlands and not vice versa.<sup>80</sup>

The contributions of a few MPs to *The Celtic Magazine* have been touched upon, but the magazine also published correspondence about the land controversy from both the Eighth Duke of Argyll and William Gladstone.<sup>81</sup> Gladstone wrote to *The Celtic Magazine* twice before his 1880 election in Midlothian, once concerning the land question and its relation to the situation in Ireland, and another time pertaining to his own Highland ancestry as a descendant of the Mackenzies.<sup>82</sup> He therefore appears to have been interested in and influenced by historicist considerations long before either the *Land Law (Ireland) Act* of 1881 or the *Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act* of 1886.<sup>83</sup> Given that the crofting controversy in the Highlands was addressed largely as a result of Gladstone's historicist beliefs, it seems likely that the historicist view of the Highlands promoted by the cultural nationalist network, and

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<sup>78</sup>'Teaching Gaelic in Highland schools', *Celtic Magazine*, i (1876), 169-174; 'Teaching Gaelic in schools', *Celtic Magazine*, iii (1878), 193.

<sup>79</sup> Devine, *Scottish Nation*, p. 400.

<sup>80</sup>'Gaelic in schools', *Celtic Magazine*, ix (1884), 435-9.

<sup>81</sup>*Celtic Magazine*, iii (1878), 119.

<sup>82</sup>*Celtic Magazine*, iii(1877), 33; *Celtic Magazine*, iv (1879), 307.

<sup>83</sup> Clive Dewey has shown how Gladstone was considering historicist interpretations in the Irish case in as early as 1869, C. Dewey, 'Celtic agrarian legislation and the Celtic revival: historicist implications of Gladstone's Irish and Scottish land acts 1870-1886', *Past and Present*, lxiv (1974), 56.

*The Celtic Magazine* in particular, had a considerable bearing on Gladstone's thoughts about the Highlands.<sup>84</sup>

Although the cultural nationalist movement remained free of the predominant influence of either the Liberals or the Tories – despite the Liberals' eventual support of the crofter – it was hardly apolitical. Initially the Celtic revivalists, including *The Celtic Magazine*, sought to keep the cultural revival distinct from political causes but the cultural implications of the crofting controversy made this impossible. Alexander Mackenzie stated adamantly in his first editorial that *The Celtic Magazine* would be apolitical, but he went on in the very next paragraph to lay out what could be mistaken for a manifesto for crofters' rights, calling for 'more enlightened management' of the Highlands and stating that there existed enough room for both men and animals, before expressing his dismay with emigration and the diminution of crofting society.<sup>85</sup> The magazine was therefore overtly political, and the 'land question' became its *cause célèbre*, but it was an agent of the Highland nation and therefore advocated whatever course most benefitted the Highlands.

The cultural nationalist movement eventually secured a political solution to the crofting controversy and even elected MPs dedicated specifically to remedying the Highland land question. Before the elections of 1885 the only organised political group that the crofters could look to for parliamentary support was the Irish Parnellites, many of whom supported the crofters' cause out of a sense of Celtic solidarity and in order to draw attention to oppressive land practices, despite the fact that many Highlanders sought to distance themselves from the Irish.<sup>86</sup> The 'Crofters' Party' was a loose coalition of individuals who

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<sup>84</sup> Dewey, 64-7.

<sup>85</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, i (1875), 1-3.

<sup>86</sup> A.G. Newby, *Ireland, Radicalism, and the Scottish Highlands, c. 1870-1912* (Edinburgh, 2007), p. 1, p. 71.

adopted the HLLRA programme drawn up at Dingwall in 1884.<sup>87</sup> Five individuals who adopted the manifesto were elected to parliament in 1885 and then again in 1886,<sup>88</sup> reflecting the significant increase in strength the cultural nationalist movement enjoyed in a relatively short period.<sup>89</sup> However, once the Crofters' Act was passed the members quickly went their separate ways. At no point did representatives of the 'party' collectively mobilise for anything other than to ameliorate the situation of the crofters. The Highland cultural nationalist movement was therefore chiefly concerned with the restoration and improvement of the historical community, and was the exclusive means through which political change was achieved. It is telling that soon after the Crofters' Act was passed, in 1886, *The Celtic Magazine* went into decline and ceased publication in 1888.<sup>90</sup> Its decline mirrored the disintegration of the 'crofters' party' in that both were committed to the improvement of the Highland nation; although popular demonstrations continued after the passage of the 1886 Act, the many agents in the cultural movement began to split,<sup>91</sup> and the group seemed to lose its unifying *raison d'être*.

*The Celtic Magazine* helped cultural nationalists to engage with a wider audience about the importance of the past in the formulation of solutions in the present. This imagined historical community became increasingly real as the cultural network expanded and reached a larger audience. According to Hutchinson, cultural nationalist movements seek the regeneration of a national community, a target that *The Celtic Magazine* and others went a long way towards

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<sup>87</sup> A.G. Newby, 'Land and the "crofter question" in nineteenth-century Scotland', *International Review of Scottish Studies*, xxxv (2010), 24.

<sup>88</sup> Though DH MacFarlane lost his Argyll seat in 1886, Angus Sutherland was elected in Sutherland, Hunter, 'Politics', 57.

<sup>89</sup> Harvie, p. 20.

<sup>90</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, xiii (1888), 572.

<sup>91</sup> Wallace, p. 291.



achieving; however, the regeneration of the Highlands, tied to land reform, could not be completed without a legislative solution, which the government was unlikely to pass simply on the basis of the Celtic cultural revival. It would take popular protest by the crofters themselves to gain the attention of the government and to meet the goals of the cultural nationalist movement.

### **The Highland 'land question'**

The dominant issue confronting the Highlands during the period was the 'land question', a concern across all of Britain.<sup>92</sup> In the Highlands, the 'land question' was primarily depicted as the story of oppressed peasant crofters against the entrenched aristocratic power of the landlords, but scholars have correctly recognised the matter as a multi-faceted issue concerning history, race and culture.<sup>93</sup> *The Celtic Magazine* experienced a peak in popularity during the eighteen-eighties when the crofting controversy rapidly gained momentum, with the subject showcased in nearly sixty consecutive issues from 1881 to 1885.<sup>94</sup> During this time crofter protests erupted across several of the western islands, and the limelight of British national attention shone, however briefly, upon the Highlands. A symbiotic relationship existed between the crofters and the cultural network, whose emergence in the 1870s created a setting in which the popular protest of the people could be greatly amplified. It was the combination of these two forces that comprised and catalysed the cultural nationalist movement.

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<sup>92</sup>*The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950*, ed. M Cragoe & P. Readman (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Shaw, pp. 305-6; Dewey, 30-70.

<sup>94</sup> See *Celtic Magazine*, vi-x (1881-85).

It will be helpful to give a brief outline of the crofting system and the controversy that surrounded it. The state had been encroaching upon Highland laws and customs for centuries,<sup>95</sup> but following the battle of Culloden in 1746 the British government and Highland landlords, influenced by the tenets of political economy, repeatedly interfered with the Highlands in an attempt to make the agrarian economy more profitable. This intrusion also pursued the aim of quashing potential resistance after the Jacobite uprising, and saw the traditional clanship system disintegrate.<sup>96</sup> As a result, landlords re-organised their estates and divided common holdings into separate plots known as 'crofts', many of which were established on the least arable parts of the property.<sup>97</sup> When a depression hit the Highlands during the late eighteenth century, crofters were driven from their land by landlords in order to make room for commercial farming.<sup>98</sup> The nineteenth century saw Queen Victoria popularise the Highlands for sport, so sheep gave way to deer and other game.<sup>99</sup> Forced evictions, known as 'clearances', continued and led to substantial emigration, with the result that by the eighteen-eighties there was a largely diminished crofting population with few legal options, little money and minimal influence. Cottars, who only possessed a small cottage and perhaps a 'potato ground' but no farmland, were in an even more pathetic position.<sup>100</sup> J.S. Blackie named the Highland treatment one of John Bull's three great blunders.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Devine, *Clanship*, pp. 11-7.

<sup>96</sup> Dewey, 9-11.

<sup>97</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> E.A. Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle: Scotland since 1880* (Edinburgh, 2010), p. 47.

<sup>99</sup> W. Orr, *Deer Forests, Landlords and Crofters: The Western Highlands in Victorian and Edwardian Times* (Edinburgh, 1982), pp. 2-11.

<sup>100</sup> MacPhail, p. 6.

<sup>101</sup> Blackie identified the other two blunders as the treatment of the Irish and the failure to educate 'the people', Wallace, p. 271.

Highlanders were often characterised as passive in the face of oppression, but the eighteenth-seventies saw them begin to rebel against landlords, beginning with the Bernera riot on Lewis in 1874.<sup>102</sup> Crofter discontent with the land system, augmented by severe agricultural depression, simmered until the Kilmuir estate rent-strike on Skye in 1881, which occurred at the same time as attention was riveted on Ireland.<sup>103</sup> Another rent strike at the beginning of 1882, on Lord MacDonald's Skye estate, forced the crofting controversy onto the national stage. The conflict began with crofters in the Braes township burning eviction notices after refusing to pay rent, protesting the fact that the hill of Ben Lee had not been returned to the community as common grazing land.<sup>104</sup> After fifty policemen were attacked by crofters in the 'Battle of the Braes', on 19 April 1882, the crofting controversy was brought further into the open.<sup>105</sup> Conflict spread across Skye to Glendale, where a gunboat was sent to restore order.<sup>106</sup> Demonstrations continued throughout the Highlands over the next several years, with crofters seizing land, destroying fences and dykes, cutting wires, using boulders to obstruct roads and staging rent strikes. In response, Inverness-shire policemen were outfitted with service revolvers from the War Department, and it took the presence of three hundred marines to finally restore order on Skye.<sup>107</sup> Even after the passage of the 1886 Act, crofters revolted well into the twentieth century, despite several rounds of legislation being passed to amend the original act.

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<sup>102</sup> MacPhail, pp. 15-6.

<sup>103</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, pp. 131-3.

<sup>104</sup> MacPhail, pp. 39-40.

<sup>105</sup> 'Land agitation in the Highlands; with special reference to the Isle of Skye', *Celtic Magazine*, vii (1882), 393-403.

<sup>106</sup> MacPhail, pp. 60-1.

<sup>107</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, pp. 149-150.

Because Highlanders were seen by many contemporaries as docile, it was believed that the crofting controversy could only have been driven by external Irish agitators. The Bernera riots were blamed on a 'fenian enclave' in 1874,<sup>108</sup> and eight years later landlords and factors were still blaming a 'fenian fraternity' for the establishment of the first Highland branch of the HLLRA, in Glendale.<sup>109</sup> The Queen felt the 'wild and impossible' demands of the crofters were 'the result, to a great extent, of Irish agitators' preaching of sedition'.<sup>110</sup> But it was not just conservative elements who viewed the Irish with disdain; Charles Fraser Mackintosh, and, initially, Alexander Mackenzie were both contemptuous of the Irish unrest. Mackenzie admonished John Murdoch, whom he detested, for involving himself in Irish issues and for accepting money from the American Fenian Group *Clan na Gael*, and while Mackenzie called for crofter protests, he declared that 'we shall never advocate such extreme measures as have been adopted on the other side of the channel'.<sup>111</sup> Although Mackenzie eventually grew more sympathetic to the Irish, Fraser Mackintosh did not, controversially adopting Liberal-Unionism in 1886.<sup>112</sup> Irish involvement in the Highlands certainly did exist, but not to the extent that the conservative elements described above seemed to believe. Michael Davitt toured the Highlands three times, once accompanied by the American land reformer Henry George, urging the Highlanders to unite in agitation.<sup>113</sup> A Glasgow branch of the Irish Land League was headed by John Ferguson,<sup>114</sup> and the HLLRA itself was modelled on the Irish Land

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<sup>108</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 25.

<sup>109</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, p. 145.

<sup>110</sup> A.G. Gardiner, *Sir William Harcourt*, i (London, 1923), p.523, quoted in MacPhail, p. 126.

<sup>111</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 39, p. 42.

<sup>112</sup> Cameron, *The Life and Times of Charles Fraser Mackintosh, Crofter MP* (Aberdeen, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 31, pp. 76-77, p. 95; MacPhail, p. 95.

<sup>114</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 31.

League and sought reform similar to the Irish Land Act.<sup>115</sup> Thus, there were many instances of pan-Celtic sympathy and the exchange of ideas, but Newby has stressed the point that the Irish example inspired rather than instigated the events in the Highlands.<sup>116</sup>

Although, as discussed earlier, the image of the Highlander had improved since Culloden, undoubtedly still underpinning much of the hostility towards the Highlanders was the issue of race, and Irish involvement certainly did nothing to alleviate this perception. Revealingly, it was the Prime Minister himself, Lord Salisbury, who coined the term 'Celtic Fringe' in 1890, but even Lowlanders viewed the Highlanders with contempt, as Arthur Balfour demonstrated when he suggested that the dividing line between England and Scotland should be far further north than the contemporary border due to the linguistic, ethnological and character differences of the people.<sup>117</sup> Some landowners viewed the clearances as a way to cleanse their territory. The Duke of Argyll declared in 1851 that he viewed the clearances not in terms of economic potential but as a way to rid his lands of 'that class'.<sup>118</sup> Evander McIver, factor of Scourie on the Sutherland Estate and a native of Lewis,<sup>119</sup> was more explicitly anti-Celt: '[...]they must submit to rule. They are Celts and by no other system can order be preserved among them'.<sup>120</sup> *The Celtic Magazine* chafed at the racial stereotypes foisted upon the Highlanders by the 'Anglo-Saxons', but the labelling Highlanders suffered also served to

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<sup>115</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, p. 143.

<sup>116</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 56.

<sup>117</sup> C. Kidd, 'Race, empire and the limits of nineteenth-century Scottish nationhood', *Historical Journal*, xlvii (2003), 874-5.

<sup>118</sup> Devine, *Scottish Nation*, pp. 420-1.

<sup>119</sup> *Memoirs of a Highland Gentleman Being the Reminiscences of Evander MacIver*, ed. Rev. George Henderson (Edinburgh, 1905), p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> A. Tindley, *The Sutherland Estate, 1850-1920: Aristocratic Decline, Estate Management and Land Reform* (Edinburgh, 2010), p. 147.

strengthen the conception of their distinctive Highland community. Alexander Mackenzie blamed the clearances on 'South Country sheep farmers'.<sup>121</sup> The Reverend Thomas McLauchlan urged Celtic solidarity, terming the Highlanders 'Anglo-Celts' and exhorting them to stand up for themselves '[...]for Celts are just as good as other men...and will suffer nothing from comparison with their Anglo-Saxon neighbours'.<sup>122</sup> Michael Davitt expressed a similar notion to McLauchlan's 'Anglo-Celticism', believing that 'the native impulsiveness of the Celt is kept strictly under control by the intermixture of Saxon coolness and calculation'.<sup>123</sup> Race, important to both sides of the controversy, was central to the cultural revival of the 1870s, and once violence broke out in the eighteen-eighties new impetus was given to the racial delineation between the Highlands and the rest of Britain.

Intellectuals were the figures primarily responsible for emphasising and perpetuating the importance of race, which formed a critical part of the historicist prism through which they viewed the Highlands. The 'land war' allowed the cultural nationalist movement to manifest in the shape of a historically informed protest movement. After the 'Battle of the Braes', Alexander Mackenzie, who served as a kind of mediator between the crofters and Lord MacDonal, declared that 'the time for argument had gone' and that if the crofters did not respond they would be 'pushed into the sea'.<sup>124</sup>

Although the crofters' revolt was not as organised or as extreme as the land revolt in Ireland, instances of popular protest were reported widely in the Highland press, which made crofters better able to imagine their uprising as part of a broader movement. Celtic journalists capitalised on the unrest, using the increased attention to substantiate their historicist claims.

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<sup>121</sup>*Celtic Magazine*, i (1875), 2.

<sup>122</sup>*Celtic Magazine*, v (1880), 406-10; 'Celtic literature', *Celtic Magazine*, iii (1878), 300.

<sup>123</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 81.

<sup>124</sup> 'Social Unrest in the Isle of Skye', *Celtic Magazine*, vii (1882), 335-344.

Symptomatic of the historicist view of the Highlands was William F. Skene's *Celtic Scotland* (1880), the most influential work of Highland history at the time, which argued that the historical bases of society in the Highlands 'from time immemorial' were the clan and township, which were communitarian in nature and saw land divided up evenly amongst the members, a system which was wiped out after Culloden.<sup>125</sup> However, it was not enough for these historicist ideas to merely exist, though Skene's work was read by many, including Gladstone;<sup>126</sup> the ideas had to be transmitted to 'the people' themselves. It is in this capacity that the importance of intellectuals must be stressed. Hutchinson indicates that the success of a cultural nationalist movement will depend on the ability of members to effectively link land, cultural practices, and socio-political organisations. These connections have been demonstrated in the Highland case by Shaw, who claimed that the instances of direct action by the crofters can be seen as 'expressions of the nation'.<sup>127</sup> If this assertion is valid, then it was the Celtic cultural network that was responsible for connecting the crofters to a wider imagined nation that could supposedly be traced back to ancient times.

The Highland popular press was the key to joining historicist ideas of land to contemporary protest. In an early issue of *The Highlander* John Murdoch laid out concerns over the land: 'There are our rivers, our lochs, our moors. Are they for no better purposes than sport while our people are half idle in their bothies and the nation wants food from the land?'<sup>128</sup>

Alexander Mackenzie expressed similar ideas in *The Celtic Magazine*, stating there was no

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<sup>125</sup> Dewey, 52.

<sup>126</sup> Gladstone recorded reading the text in his diary, 28 June 1876, *The Gladstone Diaries*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew (14 vols., Oxford, 1968-1994), ix. 136.

<sup>127</sup> Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, p. 20; Shaw, p. 309.

<sup>128</sup> *Highlander*, 16 May 1873.

need for 'families...starving themselves...on barren patches of crofts'.<sup>129</sup> These two publications, along with *The Scottish Highlander*, *The Oban Times* and *Highland News* formed part of the network described by Devine as 'a publicity machine which even the wealthiest landowner could never hope to equal'.<sup>130</sup> Newspapers included contributions from Highland historians and other intellectuals, going far beyond the functions of normal news agents and attempting to influence agitation by educating the Highlanders. Alexander Carmichael, an eminent collector of Celtic folklore, wrote for *The Gael*, *The Highlander*, the *Celtic Review* and *The Inverness Courier*; he also composed a chapter for Skene's opus and a substantial report for the Napier commission.<sup>131</sup>

Attempting to oppose the pro-crofter press were the *Northern Chronicle*, *Inverness Courier* and *The Scotsman*, in support of the landlords.<sup>132</sup> Blackie launched an attack on *The Scotsman* in 1883, accusing its editors of misrepresenting his words and denouncing it for supporting the 'landocracy'.<sup>133</sup> *The Scotsman* replied by accusing Blackie and Mackenzie of manipulating the minds of crofters, blaming them for the imprisonment of the 'Glendale Martyrs', whom Mackenzie had been in contact with following their protests.<sup>134</sup> Before the Napier Commission arrived, both Mackenzie and Murdoch travelled – separately – throughout the Highlands helping crofters to prepare their opinions and statements on the rights to the land.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>*Celtic Magazine*, i (1875), 1-3.

<sup>130</sup> Devine, *Clanship*, p. 224.

<sup>131</sup> Derick S. Thomson, 'Carmichael, Alexander (1832-1912)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48849>, accessed 28 Feb 2014].

<sup>132</sup> Cameron, *Land for the people? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c. 1880-1930* (East Linton, 1996), p. 14.

<sup>133</sup>*Celtic Magazine*, viii (1883), 262-3.

<sup>134</sup>*Celtic Magazine*, viii (1883), 307-8.

<sup>135</sup> MacPhail, pp. 73-4.



Intellectuals at the forefront of the controversy therefore went beyond writing about crofter discontent and played an important role by meeting and advising crofters in person, indirectly assisting in the protest movements and connecting them to the wider Highland cause.

It was in order to link crofter protests to each other and the intellectual cultural movement that the Highland Land Law Reform Association was created in 1882.<sup>136</sup> Although the organisation was founded in London, it was designed specifically to deal with the crofting controversy, and was the most effective organisation in the Highlands, in large part because it successfully managed to connect the crofters to the Celtic movement. Alexander Mackenzie helped to found the Inverness branch of the society and was the secretary in its inaugural year; he announced the aims of the organisation as 'to prevent the waste of large tracts of productive lands in the North...promote the general welfare of the people'.<sup>137</sup> The HLLRA sought fair rents, fixity of tenure, compensation for improvements, and most importantly the redistribution of land.<sup>138</sup> The Association understood the power that popular protest generated and urged the crofters to organise themselves and to prepare for the elections of 1885 when many would be enfranchised: 'An organisation embracing the whole of the Highlands should be aimed at'.<sup>139</sup> The crofters heeded the call and progressively there arose a substantial HLLRA presence in the Highlands; following a meeting in August 1883 in Fraserburgh, the crofters who were fishing there resolved to set up new associations when they returned home for the season.<sup>140</sup> By 1884 the HLLRA included around five thousand

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<sup>136</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, p. 143.

<sup>137</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, vii (1882), 461; *Celtic Magazine*, ix (1884), 175-7.

<sup>138</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, ix (1884), 176.

<sup>139</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, ix (1884), 176.

<sup>140</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, p. 144.

crofter members.<sup>141</sup> That year the first conference took place at Dingwall, with delegates from across the Highlands vowing to only support candidates at the next election who adopted the HLLRA manifesto.<sup>142</sup> The result was a remarkable success as four of the five constituencies elected their HLLRA representative in 1885.<sup>143</sup> Although the 1886 Act addressed several of the HLLRA's concerns, crofter unrest continued and the HLLRA declared it would continue its campaign, recasting itself as the Highland Land League at the 1886 Bonar Bridge conference.<sup>144</sup> Though it did not achieve all of its goals with the 1886 Act, or the various subsequent land acts, the HLLRA was still a vitally important organisation, serving to connect crofters and giving political shape to their grievances.

The direct involvement of intellectuals put pressure on politicians and led in some instances to progress. Alexander Mackenzie, particularly irked by two government inquiries in the eighteen-seventies into the scarcity of lobsters off the Highland coasts, appealed for an inquiry of 'a subject of, at least, equal importance, the *scarcity of men and women*, and the best way to protect them from the inroads of sheep and deer (his emphasis)'.<sup>145</sup> He asked Fraser Mackintosh why the government 'did not care about the wretched condition of the people of the Highlands, but cared about lobsters and crabs enough to have an inquiry'.<sup>146</sup> Fraser Mackintosh eventually appealed to parliament for an inquiry, which was granted in 1883.<sup>147</sup> Mackenzie asserted several times in *The Celtic Magazine* that his dogged pursuit of the case of

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<sup>141</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, p. 147.

<sup>142</sup> Hunter, 'Politics', 52.

<sup>143</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, p. 154.

<sup>144</sup> MacPhail, p. 108.

<sup>145</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, ii (1876), 45 [original emphasis].

<sup>146</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, vii (1877), 34-5.

<sup>147</sup> Devine, *Scottish Nation*, p. 430.

crofters over crustaceans was what led to the Napier Commission ultimately being called.<sup>148</sup> During Mackenzie's testimony before the commission, Fraser Mackintosh identified him as having a claim to being the first person to suggest a commission.<sup>149</sup> This peculiar episode illustrates the power intellectuals generated in the cultural nationalist movement, and that it was not solely due to crofter protests that the Highland issue began to be considered by the government. It took only six years for the issue to transform from a local to a national matter, though popular uprisings accelerated the demand.

The Napier Commission, covered extensively by Cameron and Shaw,<sup>150</sup> was hailed by Mackenzie as 'the most important event for the Highlanders since the battle of Culloden', despite the fact that initially many felt the commission would be biased towards the landlords.<sup>151</sup> Its composition of five historians signalled a willingness to consider historicist interpretations of the Highlands. Fraser Mackintosh, who was appointed as a commissioner and had pushed hardest for its formation, had contributed several articles on the historical implications of the clearances to *The Celtic Magazine*.<sup>152</sup> The Highland nation was given a more concrete basis as the Napier Commission was the first acknowledgement by the government that, based on history, the Highlands were a unique area deserving of particular consideration. The 1886 Act reinforced this idea and the boundaries of the 'Highlands and Islands' it defined are still in place to this day.

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<sup>148</sup> 'The royal commission and the Highland crofters', *Celtic Magazine*, viii (1883), 282-5.

<sup>149</sup> *Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands*, iv. 2697.

<sup>150</sup> see, e.g., Cameron, *Land*; Shaw, 'Land, people'.

<sup>151</sup> *Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands*, iv. 2697.

<sup>152</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, ii (1877).

As Dewey has demonstrated, the historicist construction of the Highlands was vital to the passage of legislation as Gladstone viewed the 'land question' across Britain in terms of an expression of the peoples' historical rights to the land.<sup>153</sup> He wrote to Harcourt that

[...] it is after all this historical fact that constitutes the Crofters' title to demand the interference of Parliament. It is not because they are poor, or because there are too many of them, or because they want more land to support their families; but because those whom they represent had rights of which they have been surreptitiously deprived to the injury of the community.<sup>154</sup>

Gladstone advocated specific geographical boundaries where the legislation would begin and end,<sup>155</sup> implicitly recognising the Highland nation and explicitly declaring the 'crofter-parishes are entitled to a different system based on their history', and that such a system had existed for centuries, revealing historicism to be central to his understanding of the issue.<sup>156</sup>

Consideration of historicism by the Commission and the government shows the extent to which the Highland intellectuals were successful in tethering Celtic issues to the 'land question': they had become one and the same. The cultural nationalist movement rooted itself in a discourse dependent on the land and its traditions, at the same time as reformers relied on that discourse for legitimacy in the eyes of those in power. The Liberal government passed the *Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act* in 1886, making clearances impossible and granting

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<sup>153</sup> Cameron, *Land*, p. 35.

<sup>154</sup> Letter to Sir W. Harcourt, *Gladstone Diaries*, xi. 279.

<sup>155</sup> There was considerable disagreement over these boundaries, with the Duke of Argyll urging Gladstone to create a new constituency for the Hebrides, in the hope that the crofter protests would be kept there and not contaminate the mainland with a 'Scotch Parnellite Party', *Duke of Argyll letter to W.E. Gladstone*, reprinted in MacPhail, 252.

<sup>156</sup> *Gladstone Diaries*, xi. 278-9.

security of tenure, compensation for improvements, and a land court to solve disputes. It was modelled on the *Land Law (Ireland) Act* of 1881, which was also based on a historicist understanding of the land.<sup>157</sup> Although the act did not please the Highlanders initially, and was opposed by the ‘crofter MPs’ at every stage of planning,<sup>158</sup> it should nevertheless be recognised as a significant achievement of the Celtic cultural nationalist movement, which fused the dual aims of Celtic revival and Highland land reform, making the two causes inextricable. By framing the debate over land in a historicist framework reliant upon Celtic culture and traditions the intellectual leaders of the cultural nationalist movement ensured that a victory for the cause of the crofters would mean a victory for Celtic culture as a whole.

### **The politics of Celticism**

The combination of the Celtic cultural revival and the crofting agitation witnessed an ascendant cultural nationalist movement that peaked with the passage of the 1886 Crofters’ Act. Although the cultural movement was not ‘political’ in and of itself, it managed to secure a political solution to the Highland situation and in the process helped to spawn a variety of new political associations. One of the main effects of the cultural nationalist movement was therefore the role it played in catalysing new ways of political thinking in Scotland. The Celtic ideas underpinning the movement were transformed into new political identities, including the Scottish Home Rule Association, the Scottish Labour Party and even Liberal-Unionism. However, the labelling of these groups and their members should not be considered too strictly; as Colin Kidd has pointed out, in Scottish historiography labelling has perhaps

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<sup>157</sup> *Crofters’ Holdings (Scotland) Act, 1886*; Cameron, *Land*, pp. 35-8; Devine, *Scottish Nation*, p. 431; Cameron, ‘Setting the heather on fire: The land question in Scotland, 1850-1914’, in *Land Question*, ed. Cragoe and Readman, p. 114.

<sup>158</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, p. 163.

obscured more than it has revealed about Scottish political identities,<sup>159</sup> and elements of the various political movements overlapped considerably. There was a crucial similarity between the Highland cultural nationalist movement and the various groups that spun off from it: they all existed in tandem with a wider loyalty to Scotland and the Union.

Initially, the cultural nationalist movement had aimed to be apolitical. In the early stages of the 'land war', societies based in the Highlands grew wary of the urban-based agitation in the Lowlands due to their being 'too political'.<sup>160</sup> It was for this reason that Alexander Mackenzie pushed for the Gaelic Society of Inverness to leave the Federation of Celtic Societies in 1881, because it became 'essentially a Glasgow association' and too closely tied to the Liberal party.<sup>161</sup> Murdoch had demonstrated the opposite opinion, calling on the Federation to move from cultural to political issues, which probably did nothing to alleviate the tension existent between him and Mackenzie.<sup>162</sup> However, Mackenzie's desire for apoliticism reflected merely his worries that the cultural nationalist movement would lose its identity by affiliating with the Liberals; he called for a Highland Party that would hold 'an independent position in the House of Commons'.<sup>163</sup> In any case the Federation heeded Murdoch's advice and adopted franchise reform as one of its goals in January 1882, recognising that it would empower the crofters.<sup>164</sup> The extension of the franchise allowed Highlanders to exercise their new voting rights in time to return five 'Crofter MPs',<sup>165</sup> who transformed the cultural and social ideals of

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<sup>159</sup> C. Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500-2000* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 257-8.

<sup>160</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 28.

<sup>161</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, vi (1881), 103.

<sup>162</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 34.

<sup>163</sup> Hunter, 'Politics', 61.

<sup>164</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, vii (1882).

<sup>165</sup> Cameron, *Land*, p. 36.

the Celtic movement into concrete political, economic and social programmes specifically for the Highlands. The 1886 Act made the abstract vision of the Highland nation more concrete through recognition of the special historicist case of the Highlands and the geographical boundaries outlined for the nation. The HLLRA candidates further reinforced a national sentiment because they formed, essentially, a national political coalition – in that the ‘Crofters’ party’ existed specifically to address Highland issues.

John Murdoch came closest to expressing the concept of the Highland nation when he described Celtic culture as ‘fragments of an ancient polity – traditions of an older time – hanging about us’.<sup>166</sup> It has been suggested that Murdoch viewed the ‘land question’ as part of a wider crisis of Scottish self-confidence.<sup>167</sup> Whatever his broader intentions for Scotland, Murdoch was clearly desirous of an organised Highland movement capable of generating positive change in favour of the Highlands and crofters, and he was not alone. Charles Fraser Mackintosh expressed similar ideas for a Highland nationalism in the eighteen-seventies.<sup>168</sup> A founder of the Gaelic Society of Inverness and its ‘Chief’ for the first five years of its existence, Fraser Mackintosh advocated turning the society into an association focused on Highland land reform: ‘It would be right, here in the capital of the Highlands, a society which should emanate a desire for the collection of much that is interesting from a glorious past, and for furthering and fostering efforts for the amelioration of the present’.<sup>169</sup> Fraser Mackintosh was the descendant of Jacobites and understood the importance of historical identity to the present.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> *Highlander*, 16 May 1873.

<sup>167</sup> Shaw, ‘Land, people’, pp. 308-9.

<sup>168</sup> E. A. Cameron, ‘Mackintosh, Charles Fraser- (1828-1901)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58140>> [accessed 6 Sept 2012].

<sup>169</sup> Shaw, p. 320.

<sup>170</sup> Cameron, *Fraser Mackintosh*, p. 9.

He made a point of addressing his rural constituents in Gaelic, and during his 1882 campaign Mary MacPherson – a Gaelic poet from Skye more commonly known as Màiri Mhór nan Oran (Big Mary of the Songs) – toured with him.<sup>171</sup> Unsurprisingly, in 1885 the ‘MP for the Highlands’ was one of the first “crofters’ party” candidates to be elected.<sup>172</sup> With several Celtic connections, many would perhaps find it a mystery as to why Fraser Mackintosh became a Liberal-Unionist in 1886.<sup>173</sup> However, Fraser Mackintosh was a Highland nationalist and only possessed radical views that pertained to the Highlands. Unlike those who went on to join the Labour Party, he was not motivated by concern for oppressed labourers; he did not care for the Lowlands; and, he was openly hostile to the Irish, whom he viewed as a felonious breed compared to the noble Highlanders.<sup>174</sup>

Following the passage of the Crofters’ Act, the focus in Scottish politics switched quickly from land reform to the issue of home rule. The cultural nationalist movement, having just achieved a legislative solution – albeit one that did not wholly satisfy anyone – began to splinter.

Though the movement had aimed to be apolitical, the rapid transformation in Scottish politics made this impossible. The strength of the cultural nationalist movement drew together a large group of disparate individuals, with diverse interests, who united over the common causes of Celtic revival and land reform. But the personal politics of Highland cultural nationalists were often ambiguous and mattered little to the movement as a whole. J.S. Blackie flirted with Conservatism in mid-life before returning to the left, but his politics remained abstruse.<sup>175</sup>

Fraser Mackintosh supported Liberal-Unionism and was accused of being a Tory in

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<sup>171</sup> Shaw, p. 318.

<sup>172</sup> Cameron, *Fraser Mackintosh*, p. 4.

<sup>173</sup> Cameron, *Fraser Mackintosh*, p. 4.

<sup>174</sup> Cameron, *Fraser Mackintosh*, p. 91.

<sup>175</sup> Shaw, p. 315.



disguise.<sup>176</sup> W.S. Bright-MacLaren, MP for Crewe, is more remembered for his work on womens' suffrage than as a land reformer.<sup>177</sup> Dr G.B. Clark, a 'crofter candidate' for Caithness, was a left-wing radical who had been a member of Marx's International in 1872, and was the only crofter candidate who became involved in the labour movement; his political career imploded when he supported the Boers in 1900.<sup>178</sup> But these and other figures eventually allied with the Liberal party and the Parnellites in order to push for crofting legislation, so rather than being 'apolitical' per se, the movement meant to stay free of entrenched party politics. In reality, there was always a political edge to the Highland cultural nationalist movement, which manifested itself by entwining the Celtic revival with the crofting controversy and working to secure favourable legislation for the Highlands. It was therefore political only in matters which concerned the Highlands.

Eugenio Biagini has argued that the Liberals adopted historicist claims in order to placate Scottish proto-nationalists before they could start a separatist party.<sup>179</sup> However, this interpretation overlooks the fact that the Highland cultural nationalist movement peaked in 1886 and disintegrated into various factions as the emphasis in Scottish politics switched to home rule; the momentum of the historicist movement was not stalled but re-directed. Following the meeting of the HLLRA at Bonar Bridge in 1886 – a meeting at which the various branches of the group were amalgamated and named the Highland Land League – the movement rapidly began to split.<sup>180</sup> Blackie left the group, while Fraser Mackintosh was dislodged due to his support for Unionism; Alexander Mackenzie and G.B. Clark were ousted

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<sup>176</sup> Cameron, *Fraser Mackintosh*, p. 52.

<sup>177</sup> MacPhail, p. 157.

<sup>178</sup> Harvie, p.20; Ewen A. Cameron, 'Clark, Gavin Brown (1846–1930)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47107>, accessed 28 Feb 2014].

<sup>179</sup> E. Biagini, 'Introduction', in *Citizenship*, ed. Biagini, p. 15.

<sup>180</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 145.

within several years.<sup>181</sup> The Scottish Home Rule Association (SHRA) was founded just a few weeks after Gladstone introduced his Irish home rule bill in 1886, an indication of the lead it took from the Irish movement. Nonetheless, the major figures of the Celtic cultural nationalist movement were also intimately involved in the home rule movement.<sup>182</sup> G.B. Clark was a founding member in 1886 and chaired the London Branch of the association, while Charles Fraser Mackintosh was an honorary vice president, and Blackie was chair of the Glasgow branch.

A variety of other groups emerged over the course of the 1880s. The Scottish Land Restoration League (SLRL), a land-restoration party inspired by Henry George's radicalism, was founded in 1884 in opposition to the HLLRA, which it accused of compromising with landlords.<sup>183</sup> The SLRL fielded candidates at the elections in the mid-eighteen-eighties, including John Murdoch, who received about 1% of the votes in Partick. Members of this organisation went on to compose much of the Scottish Labour Party, assembled by Keir Hardie in 1888.<sup>184</sup> The Scottish Land and Labour League also arose in 1884, and supported land reform in order to foster a better impression of socialism amongst Highlanders and other Scots.<sup>185</sup> The Scottish Land Restoration Union was formed in 1889 as an amalgamation of the SLRL and two smaller groups.<sup>186</sup> These were largely lowland-based societies, which had always been more concerned with labour questions than those of land reform, let alone Celtic solidarity, but the fact that they arose during this period is reflective of the catalytic effect that

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<sup>181</sup> Hunter, 'Politics', 58-63.

<sup>182</sup> *The Scottish Home Rule Debate of 19th and 20th February, 1890*, (Edinburgh, 1890), p. 5.

<sup>183</sup> Hunter, 'Politics', 67.

<sup>184</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, pp. 122-3.

<sup>185</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 99.

<sup>186</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 173.

the Highland cultural nationalist movement had upon Scottish politics.<sup>187</sup> That prominent Highland cultural nationalists were represented in these groups is a further indication of the way in which Highland politics had helped to reignite independent Scottish politics.

Curiously, the spin-off groups as well as the Highland cultural nationalist movement itself fitted comfortably within a wider loyalty to the Union and the Empire, reflecting a 'Unionist-nationalist' identity. Scots had been preoccupied since 1707 with asserting their individuality and stressing their equality within the Union. The cult of William Wallace provides a popular example, in which Unionists twisted the Wallace myth in such a way as to claim that his struggle allowed the preservation of Scottish identity and made an equal union possible.<sup>188</sup> Though the Highlands had what amounted to a quasi-political party for a short time in the 'crofters' party', it was a Highland *cultural* nationalist party, not a *political* nationalist party. The difference is crucial: cultural nationalists merely seek the regeneration of a community, while political nationalists pursue political autonomy. Therefore, though a Highland quasi-nationalist party existed, it did not provide a challenge to the legitimacy of the Union and helped to strengthen broader Scottish identities.

*The Celtic Magazine* exhibited Unionist-nationalism throughout its lifespan, with Mackenzie urging Highlanders to be proud of their British identity in the very first issue.<sup>189</sup> Queen Victoria was celebrated as a descendant of the Stuarts and the translation of her book, *More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands*, into Gaelic was welcomed eagerly by the *Celtic Magazine*.<sup>190</sup> In the book Victoria acknowledged Highland admiration, declaring: 'Stuart

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<sup>187</sup> Newby, *Ireland*, p. 183.

<sup>188</sup> G. Morton, 'The most efficacious patriot: the heritage of William Wallace in nineteenth-century Scotland', *Scottish Historical Review*, lxxvii (1998), 231.

<sup>189</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, i (1876), 72.

<sup>190</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, i (1876), 161.

blood is in my veins, and I am now their representative, and the people are as devoted and loyal to me as they were to that unhappy race'.<sup>191</sup> Victoria's affection for the Highlands manifested itself in various ways and her extensive travel endeared her to the Highlanders; however, the respect was mutual, as she proved by donating £200 to J.S. Blackie's fund to establish the Celtic Chair at Edinburgh University.<sup>192</sup> The magazine contains further examples of the Queen being honoured in Gaelic; the saga of building a Gaelic monument in Inverness to commemorate her Jubilee; the Gaelic translation of the national anthem to be sung on Jubilee Day; and finally, several accounts of special dinners where the Queen was toasted in Gaelic.<sup>193</sup> These examples provide an important window into how Highlanders reconciled their Celtic pride with their loyalty to the monarchy and the Union. Through Celtic traditions and the Gaelic language, the Highlanders could symbolically assert their distinctiveness whilst literally pledging their allegiance to the Queen and the Union.

The Empire was looked upon favourably in the magazine, which featured correspondence from Celts around the globe. Contributions to the magazine came from Celtic societies and enthusiasts in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland, as well as France, Germany and the United States. There were fifteen listed newsagents in Canada that sold copies of the periodical,<sup>194</sup> and monetary assistance filtered into *The Celtic Magazine* from these societies in order to assist with the crofting controversy.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Queen Victoria, *More Leaves from the journal of a life in the Highlands, from 1862 to 1882* (London, 1884), p. 255.

<sup>192</sup> This in contrast to the Irish Celts, who Victoria regarded in terms of a racial problem, McNeil, 207; Wallace, p. 274.

<sup>193</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, vi (1881), 159; *Celtic Magazine*, xi (1886), 568-9; *Celtic Magazine*, xii (1887), 239, 432.

<sup>194</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, v (1880), 168.

<sup>195</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, ix (1884), 177-8; *Celtic Magazine*, x (1884), 435.

The views of Fraser Mackintosh are an especially revealing example of how Highland nationalism was sourced into a unionist loyalty. Regularly described as an imperialist, Fraser Mackintosh was the only crofter candidate to adopt Liberal Unionism in 1886.<sup>196</sup> There was a certain inevitability to this, given his espousal of the view that the Gaelic revival could be used 'as a vehicle for establishing the respectability and *British* identity of the Highlander'.<sup>197</sup> In 1880 he urged Highlanders to become valuable subjects of the empire:

While I desire to see the fire always alight in the Highland home...I wish that others should go out into the world, into the army or navy...the professions...engage in commerce, and after a life of industry...return...and become a source of wealth and happiness to their locality.<sup>198</sup>

Fraser Mackintosh felt his allegiances were to both the Highlands and the Empire, and his example demonstrates that the two identities could be mutually reinforcing. He sought the improvement of Highlanders and pursued it through his involvement with the cultural nationalist movement, believing that a stronger Highland nation would be better for the Empire. In finding the Irish agitation repugnant, though it was based on principles nearly identical to the Highland movement, Fraser Mackintosh revealed his view to be founded on a conception of Highland exceptionalism.<sup>199</sup> By supporting Liberal Unionism, which according to Kidd was advocated mainly by those fearful of what the implications of Irish Home Rule would be for the Empire, Fraser Mackintosh confirmed his Unionist-nationalism.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Cameron, *Fraser Mackintosh*, p. 52.

<sup>197</sup> Cameron, *Fraser Mackintosh*, p. 67 [emphasis added].

<sup>198</sup> Cameron, *Fraser Mackintosh*, p. 97.

<sup>199</sup> Cameron, *Fraser Mackintosh*, p. 4, p. 91.

<sup>200</sup> C. Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500-2000* (Cambridge, 2008) p. 13.

Home rule groups did not rely directly on Celtic ideas during the period being examined in this article, but in the eighteen-nineties certain individuals fundamental to the emergence of the Scottish National Party, such as Theodore Napier and Ruaridh Erskine, called for Celtic revival and ‘ [sic] the restoration of Scotland of her Celtic system of Government and her Celtic culture’.<sup>201</sup> By 1901, the second generation of Celtic revivalists had matured and pan-Celticism was being advocated.<sup>202</sup> Such ideas and intentions could not have existed without the pioneering work of the Celtic cultural nationalist movement of the eighteen-seventies and eighties, which set the stage for more explicitly separatist Scottish groups to emerge.

The major political groups and associations in late nineteenth century Scotland all relied on Celtic ideas to varying extents, which could be used in a variety of ways as political figures saw fit. Kidd has contended that both unionist and ‘separatist’ nationalist groups were not interested in Scottish independence, but in winning more respect for Scotland within Britain.<sup>203</sup> The Celtic identity and ideas cultivated by the cultural nationalist movement and agents such as *The Celtic Magazine* support this argument, as they provided a source of pride and distinctiveness for Scots at the same time as being docile enough to easily exist within the Anglo-Scottish Union.

### **Conclusion**

The history of the Highlands during the eighteen-seventies and eighties is not simply the story of a cultural revival, nor is it the story of a land war; the two were inextricably entwined, and this article has posited that they should be seen as comprising a broader cultural nationalist movement. With the 1886 Act, the government once again interfered with the Highlands, but

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<sup>201</sup> M.G.H. Pittock, *Scottish Nationality* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 97-8.

<sup>202</sup> Pittock, p. 97.

<sup>203</sup> Kidd, *Union and Unionisms*, pp. 261-2.

in a way that indirectly preserved Celtic culture, rather than attempting to snuff it out, in an acknowledgement of the peculiar position of the Highland nation. Though there were momentous pieces of legislation to come, including the 1919 *Land Settlement (Scotland) Act*, which authorised compulsory purchase orders in the Highlands, the 1886 Act has stood as the bedrock upon which all crofter legislation has been based, and was dubbed the ‘Magna Carta’ of the Highlands.<sup>204</sup> As the crofting controversy peaked, Alexander Mackenzie retired from editing *The Celtic Magazine*, which ceased publication in 1888. The magazine had served as a pillar of the Celtic revival for thirteen years, and it left the Highland nation in a much stronger position than when it entered onto the stage.

The regeneration of the Highland community by the Celtic cultural nationalist movement was concurrent with the rise of invented ethno-Celtic narratives across Britain. Native language revivals and the construction of historical memory occurred in Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man and England.<sup>205</sup> At a time when the empire was expanding, nations looked to their own native histories for continuity. As Linda Colley has astutely observed, ‘Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do wear several at a time’.<sup>206</sup> Thus, as seen in the Highlands, national identity could co-exist peacefully with loyalty to the Union and the Empire. With the Highland nation came the development of a Highland nationalism; it was neither a political nationalist movement, nor was it a ‘proto-nationalist’ as Biagini suggested.<sup>207</sup> Rather, it was a cultural nationalist movement whose aims did not include either Highland or Scottish

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<sup>204</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, p. 206; *Celtic Monthly: A Magazine for Highlanders*, xiv (1906), 147.

<sup>205</sup> Hutchinson, *Dynamics*; M. Cragoe, *Culture, Politics, and National Identity in Wales 1832-1886* (Oxford, 2004); B. Deacon, *Cornwall: A Concise History* (Cardiff, 2007); Belchem; P. Readman, ‘The place of the past in English culture, c. 1890-1914’, *Past and Present*, liii (2005), 147-99.

<sup>206</sup> L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992), p. 6.

<sup>207</sup> Biagini, ‘Introduction’, p. 15.

separatism, but a stronger Highland nation rooted in Celtic history that commanded respect, not derision, from the Lowlands, England and the rest of the Union.