

Gaelic Television: Building Bricks without Straw

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This article will look at BBC Alba's essential problem, their lack of parity with Welsh television, and consider the perception among Gaelic broadcasters that the language has not been valued in Scotland historically. It will further consider the attitude to Gaelic in Scotland, and ask whether Gaelic television has successfully 'rehabilitated' perceptions of the Gael across Scotland and normalised the language to the extent that the channel can be said to have changed what Murray calls 'the rejecters into apathetic...and the apathetic into valuers (2017)'. The article will consider the types of programmes that Gaelic television has broadcast, from the soap *Machair* (1992-1998), which changed the way Gaelic television was viewed, to the influential European current-affairs series *Eòrpa* (1993-present) and consider these programmes within the framing of Gaelic broadcasters' motivation to champion, and change perceptions of, the language and culture. Through key interviews, this piece offers first-hand accounts of the campaign for Gaelic broadcast funding, before considering some of the challenges ahead for the service that Ken MacQuarrie, BBC Head of Nations and Regions describes as a service that has finally righted the historic wrongs he and others believe were done to the Gaelic people, their language and culture.

This article is partly based on interviews conducted with Dòmhnall Caimbeul, Chief Executive, MG Alba; Maggie Cunningham, Head of BBC Alba; Neil Fraser, ex Head of BBC Radio Scotland 1987-1992; Professor Matthew MacIver CBE, ex-Chair of the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee; John Angus Mackay, ex-CEO of Comunn na Gàidhlig, and ex-Chair of the BBC's Gaelic Advisory Committee; Rhoda Macleod, ex-Head of Gaelic at STV; Ken MacQuarrie, BBC, Head of Regions and Nations; John Morrison, ex-Scotland Correspondent for BBC News; Margaret Mary Murray, Head of Gaelic Digital Service for Scotland and John Smith, BBC Scotland TV producer and director. These interviews were conducted by telephone or face-to-face meetings. Interviewing only Gaelic speakers allows this chapter to consider the rise of Gaelic television from their perspective. So, concerns about how Gaelic was viewed by the BBC tend to be unchallenged, as the value here is in better understanding the Gael's perception of bias and their response to it.

History of Gaelic Broadcasting

From being the national language of Scotland in the 12th century, Gaelic's usage has become limited with the language and people becoming more marginalised (Withers 1994; MacGregor 2012), and by the 16th century, Gaels were portrayed in literature and art as 'uncivilised natives' in contrast to the English-speaking, ergo civilised, residents of Scotland (McLeod 2014). The language and the culture were actively discouraged until the 1970s, which Smith (2000) describes as nothing less than a continuation of the proscription of the Gaelic language that began in the 17th century. This history of marginalisation is a recurring theme during the interviews, with interviewees articulating a current, or very recent, sense of disadvantage shown to the language and culture which interviews suggest has been an important element to programme-making, as will be discussed further in the chapter.

Before the signing of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992), which called for the protection of minority languages and provision of media in these languages, Gaelic had been considered one of Europe's more vulnerable languages (Dunbar 2010). However, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have seen seismic changes in Gaelic, beginning in the 1970s, with a growth in language activism and a nurturing of traditional culture. The campaign in Scotland never reached the levels of civil disobedience that Wales experienced from 1968 onwards, which has meant that although European and subsequently national laws in support of the language have accorded Gaelic national-language status (Gaelic Language [Scotland] Act [2005]), it was given the minimum protection possible under international law, unlike Welsh, which was ratified to the highest level. Dunn writes of the contrast between pro-Welsh activists' 'aggressive stance' (1986: 56) as opposed to what Ni Craith describes as the 'tame' approach taken by the Gaels, where they 'often seem to accept in silent submission the unfavourable position that is theirs' (Ni Craith 2007: 56).

Dòmhnall Caimbeul, Chief Executive of MG Alba, which runs the Gaelic-language channel BBC Alba, has since reflected that the lack of militancy in the Scottish approach in the 1970s led to the later discrepancies in funding between the Welsh-language channel S4C and BBC Alba. He describes this as 'discrimination...a value judgment was made right from the start by placing Gaelic second to Welsh' (2017). He recalls a speech by Tessa Jowell, then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, to the Celtic Media Festival in March 2007 in which she suggested

that had the Gaels been as militant as the Welsh, Gaelic might have received better provision.

Then, as now, Gaelic speakers were in a significant minority in Scotland. For comparison, the 1981 census showed only 1.6% of the Scottish population speaking Gaelic, as opposed to 18.9% of Welsh in Wales. This resulted in a contrast between the Gaels' approach to broadcasting and that taken by the Welsh and Irish. Advocates of Gaelic, until the early 1990s, sought funding to support programme-making on existing channels, whereas the Welsh and Irish campaigns always fought for a dedicated channel. Rhoda Macdonald, Head of Gaelic at STV from 1992-2001, argued in 1993 that Scotland, unlike Wales and Ireland did not at that time have enough Gaelic speakers to justify a channel, or, as she describes it, a 'ghetto channel' (14). This view was to shift over the decades.

The battle to secure funding for Gaelic broadcasting strengthened with the appointment of John Angus MacKay (MacLeod, 1993) who later went on to set up the Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig in 1990 (CTG, later the Gaelic Television Committee GTC). The campaign was taken to the heart of Westminster where he, and other activists, lobbied hard to build a consensus, not by making a cultural defence argument, but through an economic one (Ni Craith 2007), stressing the value of Gaelic broadcasting to the economy. As Dòmhnall Caimbeul says, 'if you talk about rights you get a sympathetic nod, but it's the economic argument that will write the cheque' (2017).

The campaigners who travelled to London gained the crucial support of then Secretary of State for Scotland (1979-1986), George Younger, in contrast to the opposition they felt they had encountered campaigning in Scotland:

People appreciated that we came down from Lewis. And people were sympathetic to us – much more sympathetic than the people in the central belt of Scotland (John Angus MacKay 2017).

The campaigning resulted in the Conservative government agreeing funding for £9.5 million a year to provide 200 hours of Gaelic programming, which has allowed the Conservative party to claim that it has supported Gaelic broadcasting more than any other party. Ni Craith (2007) argues that if the Gaels found the door half open to them, it had much to do with the work Welsh activists had done to establish the legitimacy of minority language television.

Unlike Welsh and Irish broadcasting, the Gaelic campaign was never aligned to a nationalist agenda, nor does it appear to be today. Hourigan (2001), McKee (1997), and McLeod (2014), evaluating the role of minority languages in nationalism, all conclude that there is no direct link between the Gaelic language and Scottish nationalism. This goes back to the differing approaches taken in the 1980s: Gaelic-language campaigning centered around language and cultural preservation, whereas in Wales or Ireland the campaigns were embedded within political activism and a nationalist agenda (Davies 1973; Stephens 1976; MacDonald 1993). Cormack (2000) also concludes that the link between Scottish nationalism and Gaelic is subtle and not relevant to any direct action, writing that:

For many people in Scotland, Gaelic is at least partly symbolic of the island communities...for others it is symbolic of the nation's past, with little obvious relevance to the present (2000: 390).

The idea of Gaelic as 'symbolic' is acknowledged by McLeod (2014), but the suggestion that it has little relevance is vehemently rejected by Ken MacQuarrie, BBC Head of Nations and Regions:

I think that Gaelic, in terms of literature, and culture, is one of the greatest cultural assets of the UK. Gaelic is as much a part of the cultural richness of these islands as a building, literature or any artefact (2017).

This vehemence is crucial to understanding the ongoing response of Gaelic broadcasters to the channel; seeking recognition for it across Scotland as a whole, they see Gaelic-language television as integral to bringing Gaelic into homes beyond the Gaelic-speaking communities. This agenda is evident from the programmes that were delivered to Gaelic speakers, and those that are currently broadcast.

The Programmes

Gaelic speakers received their first Gaelic-language transmission, a sermon, in December 1923, two years after the birth of the BBC. Output was sporadic, as is illustrated by the BBC Corporation's handbook of 1942, which stated that: 'For the Highlander there were the regular weekly broadcasts in his native tongue, the news

and a postscript in Gaelic' (BBC 1942: 31). Cormack describes it as 'a gift handed down, rather than something that the Gaels might have expected as a right' (2008: 214). Content tended towards music programmes in which most of the spoken word was in English. The approach was piecemeal and often unsuccessful. In October 1952, when Scotland broadcast from the Royal National Mòd, Gaelic's pre-eminent festival of language, culture and song, the response from the then BBC Controller of Programmes reflected bemusement at the output:

It might be television for Scotland. Surely it isn't for English? In fact I would say it isn't television at all. (Taken from a speech written for Donald MacKinnon in the 1970s).

Neil Fraser, who was integral to the campaign to increase Gaelic programmes whilst working at the BBC as a producer in the late 1970s, and later as Head of Radio Scotland, recalls the attitude of senior management towards the language:

There was a reluctance to allow Gaelic on television. You were given grace-and-favour provision. Every time you looked in the eyes of senior management you could see them thinking 'bloody Gaels. I hope they appreciate what we're doing for them'. They never had a philosophical understanding of the concept that Gaelic was part of Scotland (2017).

Gaelic broadcasters were not alone in feeling ignored during this period. Kenny writes that Irish campaigners too felt 'thwarted' in their efforts to persuade the general public of the merits' of Irish broadcasting (2009: 265).

Radio delivered a more sustained commitment to Gaelic, with the opening of Radio Highland in Inverness in 1976, Radio nan Eilean (Radio for the Islands) in 1979 and Radio nan Gàidheal (Radio for the Gaels) in 1985. The success of Radio nan Gàidheal, according to Neil Fraser (2017) persuaded senior BBC management to admit that there was an audience for more sustained Gaelic broadcasting. Television output throughout the 1970s continued to revolve around music and culture, catering for an ageing community mainly interested in religion and traditional music (Cormack 1993: 107), with An Comunn Gàidhealach (The Gaelic Association) writing critically to the Annan Committee of the mid-1970s accusing broadcasters of only addressing the older audience and of 'working to a concept of a "blueprint" Gael interested only in singing' (Home Office 1977: 411). Ken MacQuarrie, who was working in Gaelic

television at the BBC during this time, says that by the mid-70s it became obvious that the audience deserved 'culturally relevant programmes to give them status and a sense of equivalence' (2017). Equivalence (to English-language programmes) meant timeslots that would allow the programmes to reach their audience and redress complaints that the output was what Macleod described as 'meagre and unimaginative' (1993: 12). John Smith, who joined the BBC Gaelic department as a director in 1979, recalls that 'up until 1978 Gaelic broadcasting had been for insomniacs – broadcast when everyone else was asleep' (2017). In 1979 Gaelic programmes were given the equally problematic slot of opting out of *Pebble Mill at One* (a UK daytime lunchtime programme) every second Friday, to broadcast *Cearcal*, a 45-minute music, chat and current affairs programme. As Smith says: 'Gaelic speakers now had to stay at home if they wanted to watch. It felt like a punishment' (2017). It was, he says, the backlash from the English-speaking daytime audience in Scotland, angry at missing out on *Pebble Mill*, not the concerns of the Gaelic community, that finally led to Gaelic being given its own nighttime weekly slot.

Through the 1980s both Neil Fraser and Ken MacQuarrie began to broaden delivery beyond news, documentaries and music programmes in order to bring Gaelic provision more in line with English-language broadcasting. Central to this was the introduction of *Prosbaig*, an investigative current-affairs programme set up by MacQuarrie that 'made current affairs and journalism part of the Gaelic culture' (MacDonald 2017). In 1979 *Can Seo*, 'the most popular language course ever shown on television in Scotland' (Mackinnon 1991, 150) began. Both Fraser and MacQuarrie were aware that they had to ensure that Gaelic output was as good as, if not better than English-language equivalents. Fraser says that 'by dint of us doing something better than was on TV, or had been on TV before they (senior management) woke up to the relevance of Gaelic TV' (2017). The programmes still conformed to a public-service remit: children's, current affairs and news, with occasional forays into entertainment. This follows the pattern frequently taken by minority languages programmes: beginning with traditional programmes, then cultural and children's; only after these programmes have been delivered do they offer a full range of genres.

Prior to the passing of the Broadcasting Act of 1990, which provided for the creation of CTG (later the GTC), STV's Gaelic output was limited. Initially the BBC did not bid for any of the £9.5 million provided by the Act, leaving it to Grampian and STV to bid for funding. STV, who in 1991 had just paid a notional £2000 for their franchise with the promise of 1,000 hours of regional programming, was committed to

broadcasting two half-hour programmes in Gaelic in peak slots, 6.30pm Monday and Wednesday. Rhoda Macleod, then Head of Gaelic at STV, is clear that the Gaelic programming had to fit the channel; it had to be accessible and popular with Gaels and non-Gaels:

It was important for the language that whatever we made did not make people switch off and lead to a backlash. It had to be attractive, accessible and relevant and not about 'back then' and 'way up there' (Macleod 2017).

The result was cookery, fashion, travel and game shows, programming that had appeal to the channel's core audience. A significant part of the original CTG budget was spent on the Gaelic soap, *Machair* and *Speaking our Language* (1993-1996), a Gaelic learner programme. Cormack writes that STV's approach 'constituted a determined effort to avoid any kind of ghettoization, either by scheduling or by programme content' (1993: 109). Macleod argues that BBC Alba would not exist without the 'mass of talent we created by giving people their first break in STV in the 1990s' (2017). STV's approach – to broadcast Gaelic entertainment shows and drama during peak viewing – was the opposite of that previously taken by the BBC, and was instrumental in bringing Gaelic to a wider audience and making the BBC re-consider its scheduling. They achieved this by pledging to broadcast 90 hours of Gaelic TV programmes per year, including two flagship Gaelic television programmes: *Dè a-nis?* (1993-present), a children's programme, and *Eòrpa*.

However, the decision by the CTG to spend over £1 million on a Gaelic soap proved contentious. Initially reaching a 30% audience share and making it into the top ten of programmes viewed in Scotland, it was hailed as a success. But scheduling, which was to become a recurring difficulty in the 1990s, began to impact on viewing figures and it was subsequently dropped.

The Road to BBC Alba

In 1997, the Labour Government reduced the budget for Gaelic broadcasting by £500,000, having opted to invest more in Gaelic-Medium Education. Matthew MacIver calls that a 'retrograde step for Gaelic broadcasting, the Gaelic language and Gaelic culture,' recalling that, 'before then I had not seen a conflict between broadcasting and education – not until there was a realisation that the funds were finite.' (2017). By the late 1990s STV, under pressure from digital competition, was squeezing Gaelic out in

order to concentrate on growing revenue. Public service broadcasting was not immune to financial pressure either. Ken MacQuarrie recalls budget constraints led to hostility towards Gaelic and ‘a debate about the relevance of Gaelic – questions about it being a dying language, so why spend money on it’ (2017).

The MacPherson Report (2000), and shortly afterwards, the Milne Report (2000) both noted a significant lack of coherence in Gaelic broadcast delivery. Demand for a digital Gaelic channel grew, and in September 2008, BBC Alba was launched, which Dòmhnall Caimbeul describes as:

The most important moment of our TV history. It gives status to the language, raises awareness at the national level and helps to normalise the language (2017).

BBC Alba’s remit means that, by agreeing to meet audience figures far exceeding the number of Gaelic speakers, the channel needs to serve not only the Gaelic audience, but also a wider, non-Gaelic public, just as STV did in the 1990s. The channel achieved audience figures of 600,000 for the first months of BBC Alba’s broadcasting in 2008, but the figures have been contentious as they can only be achieved by attracting non-Gaelic speakers to the channel with sports coverage. The model is common to both the Irish language channel TG4 and the Welsh channel SC4, which, like BBC Alba aim to promote the language beyond native speakers. Margaret Mary Murray, Head of Gaelic Digital Services for Scotland is clear about the need to broaden the channel’s appeal. Her argument is based on research carried out prior to the launch of BBC Alba that broke the population into thirds (Market Research UK Ltd 2003). It showed that a third of Scots rejected Gaelic, a third were apathetic and a third valued the language. For Murray, BBC Alba’s role is therefore clear:

It’s about shifting the rejecters into apathetic and the apathetic into valuers. Even the Gaelic rejecters watch BBC Alba, and they watch it because they’re getting something they don’t get elsewhere (2017).

The Influence of Gaelic Broadcasting

The Gaelic campaign from the 1970s to raise awareness of the language and intervene in response to the catastrophic loss of Gaelic speakers, had a three-pronged approach that promoted Gaelic-Medium Education, Gaelic arts and Gaelic broadcasting. All the interviewees described the importance of broadcasting, the 'voice' in the corner, as a powerful tool for language maintenance and development. Allan MacDonald, chief executive of mneTV, a Gaelic sports and entertainment production company, argues for its importance in the 'creation of self-confidence in a community and that leads to cultural confidence, self-worth and value' (2017). John Angus MacKay, chair of the BBC's Gaelic Advisory Committee, describes it as 'cementing linguistic and cultural identity' (2017). Broadcasting has also been identified as a key element of 'normalising' Gaelic (Lang 2010; Dunbar 2010; Sproull & Chalmers 2006; MacLennan 2003). Sproull and Ashcroft's report, *Economics of Gaelic and Land Development* (1993), found that of all the initiatives to support Gaelic, watching Gaelic programmes was the most significant determinant of whether or not parents enrolled their children in Gaelic-Medium Education.

Though census figures do not currently give cause for optimism, with only 57,600 able to speak Gaelic (Census 2011), the economic arguments in favour of Gaelic broadcasting are borne out. A report by Chalmers and Danson (2009) found more than 8,000 jobs in Gaelic-related industry, with Gaelic media bringing £2.5 million into the economy. This mirrors the situation in Wales where the media sector is now a greater source of employment than the coal industry (O'Driscell 1995: 50).

BBC Scotland's Gaelic output has also had a significant role to play in what has been called the 'Gaelic Renaissance', with MacDonald (1999) arguing for its importance within a wider movement of 'ethno-nationalism' within Europe. Yet Gaelic still holds a paradoxical position, recognised as culturally important, but often dismissed as parochial and irrelevant (McLeod 2001; O'Hanlon et al. 2003). Murray argues for the role broadcasting has to demonstrate contemporary value at a time when there remains 'a stigma attached to speaking the language' (2017). This view has often been given credence in academic literature, with Mackinnon (2013) describing an overwhelming antipathy towards Gaelic. Dòmhnall Caimbeul also suggests that this antipathy is still evident today:

There is something in the psyche of people in Scotland that they reject Gaelic. It handicaps us as the consensus at the political level is not representative of what's on the ground, and that puts a glass ceiling on the amount of resources we are allocated (2017).

McLeod (2001) evidences the 'contemptuous attacks' against Gaelic through detailing numerous newspaper articles which contain 'abusive hostility' towards the Gaels, their language and culture. Articles range from Peter Clark asking 'Who needs the Gaelic?' (1995) to Allan Brown, in the *Sunday Times* (1998), describing how, in the Gaelic offices of BBC Scotland, 'you can barely hear the telephones for the clinking of tumblers....the Gael has a fathomless thirst for taxpayers' cash'. Wilson references articles from the *Sunday Mail*, *Scotland on Sunday* and more, although he does suggest that the anti-Gaelic sentiments appear lessened since devolution and the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

The perception of bias against Gaelic seems to be refuted by surveys investigating attitudes towards Gaelic in Scotland. Mackinnon (2004) contrasts three such surveys from 1981, 2003 and 2011, which all show support for the language, albeit 'moderate'. A further survey conducted by the Scottish Centre for Social Research in 2013 showed a positive view of the language, with 79% considering it to be important to the culture of Scotland, although, 26% of respondents still considered Gaelic to be irrelevant to Scotland. If there is a perception amongst Gaelic broadcasting of bias, this is also undermined by the prevalence of Gaelic speakers in the upper echelons of BBC Scotland, with Dunbar (2010: 410) noting that the journey towards Gaelic television has been 'facilitated' by this. John Angus MacKay and Ken MacQuarrie argue that the success of Gaelic speakers in broadcasting has been down to a talent for programme-making:

They were/are clever, good broadcasters and bilingual, so good at language and had an intuition about things that comes with being bilingual; you use parts of your brain that others don't use, so it gives you an advantage (Mackay 2017).

MacQuarrie describes growing up in Mull, where 'the quality of education was high, and the people, despite misconceptions, were sophisticated and clever who sailed the world four times round and were full of stories' (2017).

Programme Style

This discrepancy between the outward-looking perspective of islanders and the perception that they are insular is often mirrored in their depiction in Gaelic and Highland films. Petrie discusses the very particular view of the Gaelic speaker in film; the cheery 'teuchter' positioned within a landscape constructed 'as a liminal space within which fantasies can be played out, desires fulfilled, anxieties expressed' (2000: 42). The islander is often contextualised within the landscape in order to offer an idyllic pastoral notion of life. This extends to their language and culture. For Cormack, Gaelic appears:

as the most extreme signifier of difference...where lowlanders can indulge in their fantasies of rural life, and find their "true selves" against a background of beautiful scenery and eccentric (and frequently rather simple-minded) locals. (2004: 31-32)

The importance of allowing the Gaelic community to create its own representation, to have control over 'its fictional media representation' (Cormack 2004: 30), cannot therefore be overstated. In the 1970s John Smith consciously confounded people's expectations of Gaelic television. He understood the importance of making programmes which could not be perceived as parochial or have what he describes as a 'crofting tinge...they had to show Gaelic as a modern living language, spoken by modern people' (2017). Because of this, Gaelic television became more experimental than contemporary BBC Scotland programmes. Smith argues that Gaelic filmmakers were early adopters of hand-held cameras, taking their aesthetic lead from Janet Street-Porter's new 'Youth' programmes from 1987 onwards. Signature tunes were taken from OMD and Orange Juice and avoided fiddle or accordion music. Obscure cartoons from Eastern Europe were bought in to be revoiced in Gaelic in another example of working against a stereotype. This approach is still important. A 2001 report for Lèirsinn Research Centre (NicNèill 2001: 105) found that young Gaelic speakers still prefer to access global culture in English. May (2003) highlights the problem for the language as this demonstrates that majority languages are "vehicles" of modernity and minority languages "carriers" of identity.

There have been questions about Gaelic broadcasting's ability to 'duplicate' the range of programmes delivered by English-language broadcasters (Dunbar 2010). In

this BBC Alba is constrained by its need to hit ambitious audience figures. In order to meet these, a central part of BBC Alba's programming has always been sport, especially rugby and football, which uses up budget that could otherwise be spent on original programmes. This has not always pleased the core Gaelic audience - just as with *Machair* in the early 90s. Michael Fry summed up a prevailing mood (that still persists) when he described using sport to bring in the audience as 'cheating' (Docherty and Mills 2009). Caimbeul replies to this criticism in robust terms:

Some see sport as the domain of English language broadcasters. So the criticism is, it's OK to resource cultural programming like music, poetry, landscape, crofting, which sits nicely with the image of Gaelic broadcasting, but nothing else? (2017).

MacDonald's company, mneTV, held the contract to provide sport for BBC Alba for many years, and he argues for its importance not just in normalising the language but also in raising brand awareness and fostering a positive response to Gaelic from the non-Gaelic audience (2017). Sports, according to Caimbeul, demonstrates a "Gaelic" delivery that tells stories at a more local level without comment or editorial intrusion' (2017). Margaret Mary Murray also argues for the existence of a distinctive 'Gaelic' delivery, citing the 'clarity of purpose' in BBC Alba's work, and the need for a distinctiveness, which, she says, has resulted in the channel 'existing as a community' (2017). According to John Morrison, BBC's Scotland Correspondent from 2001-2006, this distinctiveness is typified by Gaelic news:

In the early days there was a reluctance to use English clips, so you generally sought the reaction from the people who were directly affected. Our stories do tend to be much closer to the audience, reflecting lives and seeking out responses from the croft level (2017).

Whilst news is delivered and sourced at the 'croft level', arguably one of the highlights of Gaelic broadcasting has been *Eòrpa*, a Gaelic European current-affairs programme which has been praised by politicians since its first broadcast in 1993, with the Scottish Broadcast Commission report of 2008 citing it as an example of ambitious and interesting journalism addressing the usually neglected field of European affairs. John Morrison, one of the original presenters on the programme, argues that the achievement of *Eòrpa* was to give Gaelic a European context, which 'made [Gaelic] a modern European language and took it out of the shadow of English' (2017). Ken

MacQarrie, whose idea it was, is clear on why Gaelic should be broadcasting about Europe:

I felt very early on that it was important to have a window out, and a window back in to other cultures in the spirit of opening and never getting too introspective. For fragile cultures, introspection is not good (2017).

The Challenges for Gaelic Television

The decision to focus a substantial amount of funding into broadcasting has had its critics, some of whom have questioned whether the focus on broadcasting has been detrimental to language growth. Central to this is research into the extent to which Gaelic broadcasting aids language development, and whether the large budgets spent on it could be better used elsewhere. Fishman, who introduced the concept of reversing language shift (1991) argues that language learning should begin at home; he doubts that broadcasting can deliver a measurable increase in Gaelic speakers. Milligan et al write: 'It is hoped, but insufficiently understood, that viewing BBC Alba will help viewers to increase their fluency in Gaelic' (2016: 352-353). Salaberry (2001) is optimistic that young people's vocabulary and grammar are improved by watching BBC Alba, but this is not the consensus view. Other academics warn of the danger of passive television viewing, as opposed to the increased benefits of interpersonal communication (Patterson 2002; Rice, Huston, Truglio & Wright 1990; Scarborough & Dobrich 1994), although a recent report by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic college, found that Gaelic television played a strong role in encouraging and cementing Gaelic language and culture. Matthew MacIver acknowledges that broadcasting cannot do everything, 'Broadcasting was never going to, and never will, save the language. It'll be part of the effort and an important element along with education and the arts' (2017). In addition, there is continuing concern that the perceived glamour of broadcast seduces teachers away from schools and adds to the problem of outward migration in the islands (Fishman 1991). Donalda MacKinnon, Head of BBC Scotland, and Maggie Cunningham, Head of BBC Alba were both teachers before going into broadcasting. Cunningham agrees that 'the pool of Gaelic speakers is relatively small, and broadcasting, whether it is more important or not, will always be sexier' (2017).

The latest census in 2011, showing another drop in the number of Gaelic speakers, is concerning. However, the figures form an hourglass shape, with a large

number of Gaelic speakers in the older demographics, fewer in the middle, but growth in the under-20s. Whilst this is potentially useful in terms of language sustainability, it presents significant issues for MG Alba, which will have to continue to provide content of interest to the ageing audience, the wider non-Gaelic audience and the younger Gaelic audience, whose viewing preferences are less well known. Their recent annual report (2016-2017) shows that, in line with national trends for public-service television, the channel has seen a decline in viewing figures particularly under the age of 45. Caimbeul considers this one of the most important challenges facing them, arguing 'there is a risk that lying ahead is a BBC Alba that's going to be old-fashioned, linear and tied to scheduling, so our key priorities are to keep programming relevant to our audiences' (2017).

BBC Alba needs to find creative solutions to deliver to their audience at a time when funding is being squeezed. John Angus MacKay's assessment is brutal:

Gaelic broadcasting is being asked to make bricks without straw. They deserve more money, because the channel cannot be sustained with the amount of repeat programming it is currently offering (2017).

For the present, the Scottish Government is maintaining financial support of £12.8 million per year, but the UK Government no longer provides an additional £1 million per annum. MG Alba admit that this level of funding is unlikely to sustain more ambitious programming and reduce the current over-reliance on repeats. (MG Alba Annual Report, 2016-17). Programme-makers often complain that budget limitations mean cheap programmes, with no significant studio-based delivery and less creativity. John Smith is concerned that this will erode the model successfully adopted by STV in the 1990s, which allowed for the fostering of talent, and he predicts difficulties in developing talent for the future. This is echoed by Neil Fraser:

BBC Alba is a success but is inadequately funded. The content needs reviewing and they need more money to attract people with ideas and vision to ensure a contemporary output (2017).

BBC Alba is not alone in facing budget cuts. S4C and BBC Scotland are also working to challenging budgets and being asked to find efficiencies. For BBC Alba to develop it needs to be able to give security to the independent companies it works with, which it typically does by offering volume deals with limited budgets. The much-lauded

success of BBC Alba in producing successful low cost programming may provide a clue as to how the new BBC Scotland channel (due to be launched in 2018) will function with its small budget of £30 million per annum. Describing BBC Alba's relationship with independent companies, Murray acknowledges that moving forward, *all* Scottish independents will have to work more efficiently:

Without the willing contribution of the (Gaelic) independent production sector to lean in, we wouldn't have achieved much of what we have done. The model was changed because of the tightness of budgets, which has resulted in a progressive way of working. So the independents from BBC Alba are now well placed to show the new channel how to deliver on leaner budgets (2017).

Ken MacQuarrie goes further:

Because we didn't have the budget, working in a minority language, we had to be innovative, committed and passionate. These are good preconditions for any creative enterprise and demonstrate an integrity of intent (2017).

Though audience satisfaction for BBC Alba is strong (MG Alba report 2016-17), the large amount of repeats currently on the channel (ibid) suggests that without additional funding, or a change to delivery, the current approach is unsustainable, irrespective of innovation and passion.

Conclusion

The historiography of the growth of Gaelic television suggests that it flourished because of a Gaelic movement that was fighting for recognition within a European context supportive of minority languages, at a time when Irish and Welsh activists were also active. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages provided for the protection and promotion of languages like Gaelic, but the interviews presented here suggest that much of the work undertaken by Gaelic producers has been to ensure that the content is 'tolerable' to non-Gaelic speakers – to ensure no English-speaking backlash. It is clear from the interviews that historically the people involved in Gaelic broadcasting were never simply providing a service to the Gaels, but were "rehabilitating" a language, people and culture they felt was regarded as peripheral to the narrative of Scottish identity. Programme-makers were therefore conscious of the need to make Gaelic look modern, and this has influenced

programme choice and delivery. BBC Alba continues to do some heavy lifting in the effort to normalise the language and build a more positive profile of Gaelic and Gaelic culture throughout Scotland, even whilst research shows that Gaelic is considered important to Scotland by the majority of people surveyed. It may even have helped with the 'Europization of Scotland' (Cormack 2008: 225) by making Scots aware of the multicultural and multilingual aspects of their country.

The interviews also suggest that BBC Alba was enabled by policies in STV that were predicated on wider strategies around franchise, which serendipitously brought Gaelic television onto prime-time television, and enabled a talent base to be built that formed a backbone of independents needed to support a full Gaelic channel. The challenging funding situation risks a lack of new talent as opportunities for development are more limited today.

Despite the considerable investment in promoting Gaelic, the language is still fragile and the role of Gaelic broadcasting in language growth yet to be decided. There is good news beyond the census figures in terms of the economic impact of Gaelic broadcasting in the Highlands and Islands and across Scotland. Output has also grown through the decades and, as John Smith says, 'Gaelic broadcasting is still there and when I think back to 45 minutes every fortnight, then of course it needs to be considered a success' (2017). BBC Alba's essential problem, their lack of parity with Welsh television and consequently reduced budgets, alongside the need to reach a wide audience, will continue to pose problems. But the practices current in BBC Alba, with low-cost programmes that gain high appreciation from the audience, may well show the way to the new BBC Scotland channel: a template that has been problematic for some Gaelic independent producers and may also prove so for independent producers across Scotland.

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