

**Sara Brennan
James Costa**

Celtic Commodified: The Role of Minority Languages in Scottish and Irish National Celebrations

*Introduction*¹

In this paper, we question the apparent contradiction between the stated desire of the Scottish and Irish governments to promote local minority languages and the marginalization of these languages in the national celebrations of self and of the diaspora taking place in Ireland in 2013 and in Scotland in 2014.

We thus present the first hypotheses and results of our current sociolinguistic investigations regarding the place of local minority languages in Ireland and Scotland in the construction of a new discourse about the nation in the context of an economic crisis, and the diminution of State powers related to the financialization of capitalism (HARVEY, 2005).

More specifically, we ask how, if at all, language and Celticness are tied to an image of the Nation as an independent and forward-looking entity, in light both of the current economic crisis that

¹ An earlier version of this text was presented at the international conference on managing minorities in 21st century Europe, University of Montpellier, January 2013.

undermines the power of the Irish government and the independence of the Republic, and of the upcoming referendum on independence in Scotland. This article will focus on institutional texts produced in the context of two nearly identical celebratory events: the Gathering 2013 in Ireland and the Homecoming 2014 in Scotland, the latter being a sequel to the Homecoming 2009 event. These two events are worth investigating in that they do not merely put forth a mundane touristic image: they entail a strong affective dimension and seek explicitly to reach the diaspora. The term “gathering” is traditionally used to refer to Irish or Scottish Clan reunions bringing together members scattered around the world, and “homecoming” evokes the specter of emigration in bygone times and the myth of a return to the homeland.

We start from the assumption that language has an important role to play in the staging of national pride and independence for two main reasons: first, because language (and minority languages do not escape this general trend) is traditionally associated with the construction of contemporary Nation-states as independent polities; and second, because this link is established by the government themselves in both Ireland and Scotland. In Ireland, Irish is still the only recognized national language, and it remains the first official language. In Scotland, to take but one example, the connection between staging the nation worldwide and language was explicitly formulated (albeit ambiguously) in Parliament in 2012.

Let us turn to this last example. Consider the following interaction in the Scottish Parliament (28 June 2012) between Jean Urquhart, SNP² Member of the Scottish Parliament, and Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet secretary for culture and external affairs in the SNP government:

Jean Urquhart (SNP, Highlands and Islands): How will the Scottish Government showcase the Gaelic language and culture for the year of homecoming 2014 and beyond?

Fiona Hyslop: I refer the member to the points in my earlier answer about this summer’s opportunities for bids. There will be a great opportunity to showcase Gaelic culture during the year of homecoming 2014, building on the momentum of some of the activity that we are already seeing. For example, the Tìree music festival, Fèis Canna, the Royal National Mod and the Blas festival are

² The Scottish National Party (SNP), currently in power, is the main pro-independence political party in Scotland.

all joining the celebration of the year of creative Scotland. We can build on that going forward to 2014.³

The role of language, although present, is, however, ambiguous. The connection is not a straightforward link between language and Scottishness, but a matter of staging and displaying aspects of the language, in order to satisfy certain expectations that tourists are assumed to have. In line with the recent work of DUCHÊNE and HELLER (2012) our hypothesis is therefore that the role of language in national celebrations is no longer one of pride, but a more complex one, which we propose to explore.

In this article, “Scotland” and “Ireland” are both products to be sold on international markets, including but not limited to tourist ones. As ambiguous as it may be, the question of nation remains central in these two contexts: the Irish State attempts to survive a situation of economic crisis, and Scotland prepares itself for a national independence referendum in 2014. How do questions of minority languages balance the need to sell a product on a competitive market and the persistence, even the encouragement, of a certain nationalist sentiment? Managing the linguistic issues at stake in these contexts is paramount: on the one hand, they enable the marketing of “the authentic”; and on the other, the question of minorities remains a sensitive one in the national context. In the eyes of the State, issues of linguistic minorities must thus be cared for, and managed.

We adopt as our theoretical framework a critical sociolinguistics (HELLER, 2002) that approaches linguistic practice as social practice, and the circulation of languages and the discourses about them in terms of social structuration and construction of unequal power relations. We must also specify that the languages studied here are those that Shandler (2006) calls “postvernacular languages”, a type of language distinguished from vernacular languages by its semiotic hierarchy. Unlike vernacular languages, the secondary, symbolic level of signification of a postvernacular language is always just as important, if not more so, than its primary level—that is, its communicative value. In other words, the fact that something is said or written in one of these languages is as meaningful, or even more meaningful, than the meaning of the words

³ Oral questions on Scottish culture, Scottish Parliament, Quoted by <http://www.scotslanguage.com/books/view/77/3130>

used, so that even though few might use Irish and Gaelic on an everyday basis, both languages can still carry strong symbolic meaning.

Within this theoretical framework, James Costa has conducted ethnographic fieldwork on Scots in Scotland since 2007, and Sara Brennan began ethnographic work in Ireland on Irish, a language that is seemingly more debated than it is spoken. Her doctoral research seeks to investigate how Irish is used not only as a patriotic resource for redefining a national identity, but also as a commodified good and more generally as a resource providing a strategic position on highly competitive economic markets.

Scotland, Ireland and renewed national legitimacy

Before analyzing several examples of the institutional texts mentioned above, we will briefly explain the relevance of a comparison of these two sites.

Ireland and Scotland are at least superficially comparable spaces in many respects, including population, demographics, and history. However, there is one especially salient difference: while Ireland gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1921, Scotland is still part of it. It has, however, independent systems of legislation and education since the Union with England in 1707 and acquired a significant statute of autonomy in 1999 that entailed the restoration of a Parliament and a national government. In both cases, the question of national independence in a globalized world is currently a pressing matter. In Ireland, doubt has been cast on the state of this independence after the recession made evident the power of the markets to destabilize the entire national economy to the point of generating a new wave of emigration. In Scotland, the question of the nation is posed by a center-left, nationalist government campaigning for a referendum on national independence in 2014, a year also commemorating the 700th anniversary of a historic victory over England at Bannockburn in 1314.

Linguistically, English may now dominate in both Scotland and Ireland, but Irish has remained the official language of Ireland since national independence and Gaelic gained this status in Scotland in 2005. Scots, a Germanic language closely related to English, is recognized by the United Kingdom under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. According to Ireland's national census of 2011, the Irish language is spoken by almost 1.8 million people, but only used daily

by 77,000 of them. In Scotland, the 2011 census reported 50,000 speakers of Gaelic, while a government survey from 2010 reveals that Scots is used by almost 80% of the population (TMS-BMRB, 2010). It is necessary to point out that speakers of Scots do not benefit from any specific legislation, and that the Scottish government assumes that every citizen has perfect mastery of Standard English.

It is also important to know that, to the extent that the Celtic languages are recognized in these two countries, they are recognized at the national level as pertaining to the entire population. “Linguistic minorities”, defined as groups distinguished by their language, thus do not theoretically exist. However, local legislation in Ireland attributes specific linguistic rights to the *Gaeltachtaí*⁴, while in Scotland the Highlands and islands are granted their own linguistic provisions. In this sense, there is indeed a differentiated administrative management of the linguistic question.

For the purpose of this paper, we will examine the Scottish case first before looking into Ireland.

The Scottish “Homecoming”: Celtic heritage beyond language?

Scotland has experience with such celebrations, having already organized a first Homecoming in 2009 centered on the poet Robert Burns, whose work was principally written in Scots. However, it would be unwise to believe that any particular attention was paid at the time to linguistic matters, beyond the language of the poems themselves.

For Scotland, 2014 is the opportunity to recreate a success that was above all financial. As Mike Cantlay, Chairman of VisitScotland, the National Tourist Board, put it:

In world tourism terms, Homecoming has been seen as a unique marketing tool by competing tourist destinations who would love the Diaspora that Scotland enjoys. The success of last year's Homecoming sparked huge interest in people all over the world, not

⁴ The *Gaeltachtaí* are the State-delimited zones, situated principally in western Ireland, in which Irish is still a community language (Note: *Gaeltacht* is the nominative singular, *Gaeltachtaí* is the nominative plural).

only those with ancestral links to Scotland, but those who simply love this country.⁵

On the Scottish government's website, the financial aspect is once again highlighted:

Research by economic and social development consultancy EKOS shows Homecoming Scotland 2009:

- generated £53.7 million in additional tourism revenue for Scotland, exceeding the £44 million target by 22 percent;
- attracted 95,000 additional visitors to Scotland;
- generated £154 million of positive global media coverage.⁶

Finally, the official aims of the Homecoming 2014 make the celebration's priorities quite clear:

The strategic aims of Homecoming Scotland 2014 are:

1. Generate additional tourism revenue as a direct result of Homecoming Scotland 2014 activities.
2. Develop Scotland's event portfolio and build capacity in the industry.
3. Engage, inspire and mobilise communities across Scotland.
4. Engage and mobilise Scottish business.
5. Enhance Scotland's profile on the International Stage.⁷

While the undertaking appears to be above all economic, the event is however officially presented as a celebration. With 2014 being a pivotal date for the construction of the Scottish nation, it would be simplistic to reduce the Homecoming a purely economic dimension.

In this article, we shall put forth the hypothesis that in the current politico-economic contexts of late capitalism, this "celebration" is playing a role similar to that which the invention of museums did at the time of Nation-state building during the 19th century. For Benedict ANDERSON (1983), the museum, an institution that emerged at the

⁵ Cited by the Scottish government website:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2010/05/25113855>

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Homecoming 2014, Funded Events Programme, Application Guidelines*, p.6, Available online: <http://www.eventscotland.org/assets/2796>.

same time as the map and the census, is an instrument of State control and a way of managing the population by reconstructing its past. Cultural heritage is thus today what the archaeological museum was in the 19th century, but the current celebration also allows a transformation of this cultural endeavor into a commercial one, with an added dimension of distinction on a global tourist market (see KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT, 1998). As an instrument of management, the celebration is furthermore a moment of definition of Self and Other, and consequently an attempt to create boundaries. In this case, and this is our main argument, the boundary must define who belongs to the group (the Scots) and distinguish them from those who do not — all while remaining porous enough to allow the ‘client’ targeted by the promotion of this celebration (the diaspora, tourists at large) to see themselves taking part in, and possibly identifying with, the group.

Let us then return to points 3 and 4 of the sales pitch mentioned above. The entirety of the text’s vocabulary is oriented towards action (“develop”, “promote”, etc.), and in both points, the businesses and the communities are described in almost exactly the same way. What, then, is the text telling us? The aim of the Homecoming is not only to generate something positive, as seen in the first point (i.e., revenue), but also to create a regime of action for both these entities, entrepreneurial or otherwise. In these instances, it is the vocabulary of business that is applied to the local communities in the context of a mobilization, or of a submission to the demands of the touristic profitability of the event. The communities are thus represented as the employers of businesses who need to be mobilized in pursuit of a common goal. The only difference between businesses and communities is that the latter need to be collectively “inspired”.

It is precisely here that language enters the picture (through song in particular, one may surmise from Fiona Hyslop’s answer in Parliament — see above). Not as an element of old-fashioned pride in a collective identity, but as an element of added value that contributes to the maximization of economic profits and client satisfaction.

In Scotland, as mentioned before, minority language advocates usually claim that there are two native languages, Scots and Gaelic. Yet since the 19th century, it is the Gaelic heritage (and the “Celticness” it indexes) that has been used to fabricate a national myth. However, the language could only begin to play this role once the Gaelic society of the

Highlands had been destroyed in 1746 after the Battle of Culloden.⁸ Once the Gaelic society destroyed, its symbols — songs, musical instruments, clans, traditional dress, etc. — became available for consensual appropriation by the burgeoning Romanticism.

And what do we find in the case of the Homecoming? Just that. Taking a look at the four images displayed on the site of the event⁹, one finds the landscape, the traditional dress, the music, the whisky and, even more interestingly, the stele of a clan on the grounds of Culloden. All are elements of Gaelic Scotland. The stele, however, shows only an English version of the name of a Gaelic clan (“Clan MacKintosh”).

These steles commemorate that defeat, and the one picture is uniquely in English even though all the fallen were speakers of Gaelic and mostly knew little or no English. The Scotland that is being ‘inspired’ into being by the Homecoming is thus, in a modernized form, the one found on shortbread boxes: the popular image of a Scotland first imagined by Walter Scott, and adopted by the Victorians — and later by the Scots themselves as badges of identity. But unlike what happens in Scott’s *Waverley*, the Gaelic language is no longer necessary to the construction of the romanticized Highlands. It can be reduced to the mere performance of song and poetry, to steles and romantic battlefields.

Language is thus no more but a second-rate onlooker. But it is precisely here that we have something of an illusionist’s act: what are we meant to see, and what should be left concealed? Two things. First of all, the depiction of a linguistically de-Gaelicized Gaelic Scotland allows, now as before, for the so-called Celtic cultural heritage to be applied to the entire country. Scotland is one of the Celtic nations, and the existence of any particularities hinting at a history in which the Scots were not one and united in their battle against the English can thus be ignored — but Nation building is after all traditionally a site of oblivion, that is a well-known fact (RENAN, 2007 [1882]). In this case, for the sake of the Scottish national myth, linguistic asperities must disappear so

⁸ This battle, often presented as the result of a war of independence, was above all the outcome of a dynastic conflict seeking to re-establish a Catholic monarchy.

⁹ This was especially salient on the pre-launch website, available until mid-2013. The images are still used, however, on the event website: <http://www.visitscotland.com/see-do/homecoming-scotland-2014/>

that all may celebrate the nation. The diaspora play an important role in this process, it would seem, as it is they who wield their economic force to ratify these choices and the ultimate museumification of a united nation free of social tensions.

Secondly, and more importantly perhaps, the focus on this simplified Gaelic Scotland then permits the question of Scots to be concealed, if not erased. Depending on one's definition of this language, it can be regarded as a collection of dialects of English, or as the language spoken by (almost) the entire population (see COSTA, 2009). Arguably however, Scotland, independent or not (and perhaps especially if independent) needs to present itself as a principally Anglophone nation. On the one hand, the romanticized Gaelic identity guarantees the country a privileged place on the tourist market. On the other, its Anglophone reputation ensures that the country presents an image of calm, controlled linguistic diversity, making it attractive to tourists and investors alike.¹⁰ One need only think of Wales, for example, where language policy is often presented in the press as an obstacle to business.

The Irish "Gathering": what is Irish for, and whose language is it?

Turning now to The Gathering 2013 in Ireland, we will attempt to show that the same illusionist mechanism is at work in this national celebration of Self. The effects of this mechanism are twofold: first, the Irish language is incorporated into the representation of an ancient, quirky, and welcoming Ireland that is promoted by the coordinators of The Gathering. This integration of Irish into the projected image of the nation then renders the language potentially available to everyone through the construction of a sense of universal ownership. It is no longer the language of a certain named and delimited community; rather, Irish, as the language of all Irishmen and Irishwomen, can be shared along with the other traditional cultural elements on display (dance, song, sports, etc.) with each and every tourist — and especially those of Irish descent.

¹⁰ Unger (2010) also notes that when it comes to Scots language policy, inaction seems to be the general rule. In that respect, Scots in Scotland can be seen as the elephant in the room.

According to the “About The Gathering Ireland 2013” page of the website¹¹, the Gathering Ireland 2013 is a national celebration of Self, a “spectacular, your-long celebration of all things Irish.” As the coordinators continue on to write,

throughout 2013, Ireland is opening its arms to hundreds of thousands of friends and family from all over the world, calling them home to gatherings in villages, towns and cities.

Ireland, however, is not the one doing the calling: as we saw happening in Scotland, there are recurring representations of the Irish people and communities as employees of Ireland Inc. who need to be mobilized in pursuit of the common goals of giving the Irish economy a boost and reinvigorating the Irish tourism industry. The coordinators of The Gathering indeed take the notion of mobilization a step further and appeal directly and repeatedly to the people of Ireland to do their part in attracting overseas visitors for the good of Ireland as a whole. Thus while The Gathering is ostensibly a celebration *of* the Irish, it is not a celebration *for* them — the beneficiaries are the visitors who enjoy the spectacle (and of course spend money whilst doing so) and the State of Ireland who enjoys a €170 million boost in revenue.

In a booklet entitled *Organising Your Gathering*¹², the coordinators of The Gathering provide a step-by-step guide to individuals looking to plan their own events. The first lines of the booklet describe the creative freedom that gathering organizers enjoy in the planning of their events: “There are so many ways you can showcase your community, business, club or association. No idea is too big, too small, or too quirky.” This liberty accorded to the Irish in celebrating their own culture is tempered, however, by a passage offset in large, bold, green font on the same page:

Whether you’re planning a school or family reunion, genealogy event or business gathering, remember the overall objective: encouraging overseas visitors to spend time here in 2013.

¹¹ See <http://www.thegatheringireland.com/About.aspx#.UZtGZJWZkVs>

¹² Available in digital form on the following website: <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/downloads.thegatheringireland.com/Pdfs/How-to-Organise-a-Gathering.pdf>

The individual gatherings are thus integrated into a larger collective undertaking, of which the “overall objective” is not the joyous celebration of Self but the persuasion of international tourists to spend time in Ireland. As such, the Irish must keep an eye to attracting people from abroad whilst planning their events.

This sense of nationwide mobilization is then heightened by the list of “Things to consider” discussed on the next page of the booklet. In addressing the issue of individuals’ gatherings having “what it takes to attract visitors from overseas”, the coordinators of the Gathering remind the Irish of the following: “Make sure though that your event isn’t conflicting with or overshadowing another: we’re all on the same team.” Thus Team Ireland, of which each and every Irishman and Irishwoman is a member, is asked to contribute to the (ultimately financial) success of The Gathering by not only planning events and convincing their international friends and family to take part, but also to do so in a strategic manner that maximizes the profitability of the overall initiative.

The coordinators of The Gathering must of course provide motivation for all the members of Team Ireland (or, to put it otherwise, all the employees of Ireland Inc.) to organize strategically planned, externally oriented gatherings. In a “Frequently Asked Questions” packet that was distributed at The Gathering information sessions in 2012, we find the argument that is echoed across the initiative’s promotion materials: bringing home the global diaspora for this unprecedented celebration, which “offers an opportunity for each and every one of us to play our part in Ireland’s renewal; to make a significant contribution to our journey of recovery” (The Gathering 2012: 3). Again, the all-encompassing nature of The Gathering and the national scope of its impact are emphasized. Every single Irish person (including coordinators and individuals alike, as the second person plural pronouns imply the ultimate inclusivity of involvement in this initiative) are asked to take advantage of this opportunity to contribute to the resuscitation of Ireland, in which “each and every one” of the Irish is implicated by this text.

Furthermore, the FAQ packet goes on to provide another argument for participation in The Gathering:

It will contribute to restoring Ireland’s image internationally as a welcoming country where visitors will receive the 100,000 welcomes

the people of Ireland are renowned for, delivering an authentic experience which differentiates Ireland from other destinations.

It is through this argument, it would seem, that the Irish language enters the picture: The Gathering promotes a certain image of Ireland — different, authentic, welcoming and ready for a good time — to its potential visitors. Irish, portrayed as the language of the entire nation, is used to enhance this representation. Reflecting the enduring presence of the Romantic interconnectedness of language and national character, Irish becomes the embodiment of the Ireland that The Gathering implores each and every Irishman to put on the international tourist market.

Concentrating only on texts written by the coordinators of The Gathering (and not, for example, on the pages created by individuals to promote their own gatherings), we find a focus on the Irish language on three pages of The Gathering's blog¹³. In an entry entitled "The Irish Revivalists"¹⁴ that describes British documentarian Stephen Fry's trip to Ireland to investigate the current state of the language, the minority status of Irish is in fact addressed, but is then subtly undercut. Taking up the discourse of 'endangered languages' that currently circulates worldwide, The Gathering cites the type of alarming figures usually associated with this discursive paradigm and then associates Irish with this phenomenon:

There are currently around 7,000 languages spoken on the planet and many more dialects. But experts predict that by the end of the century, that number will have dwindled to 1,000. Irish, or Gaelic as it is sometimes known, would be considered by many to be on the endangered list. Just 80,000 people speak the language and most of them live in isolated regions of Ireland known as Gaeltachts.

¹³ The by-line for these pages reads "By The Gathering Ireland."

¹⁴ <http://www.thegatheringireland.com/latest-stories/Blog/September-2012/Stephen-Fry>

The delimited Irish-speaking communities which traditionally could have claimed authority over the language, the “Gaeltachts”¹⁵, are thus made visible, which could potentially threaten the universalization of the ownership of Irish that contributes to Ireland’s authentic Celtic image. The categorization of Irish as an endangered, minority language relegated to a certain community, however, is somewhat attenuated by the wording of the phrase: rather than declaring that Irish is endangered, The Gathering writes that the language “would be considered by many” to be such, without mentioning who is doing the considering. The marginalization of Irish is then further refuted as the article continues:

It’s not all doom and gloom however when it comes to this ancient tongue, as Stephen Fry discovered when he visited Connemara for his 2011 documentary series *Babel*. In fact, Fry found the language flourishing everywhere from golf courses and fishing boats to classrooms and soap operas.

Rather than dying out with the 6,000 other languages marked for impending doom, Irish is not only flourishing, but flourishing in a variety of contexts ranging from the traditional (fishing boats) to the modern (soap operas, namely *Ros na Ríom*). No longer limited to the 80,000 isolated speakers, Irish is being passed on to future generations through Irish-language education and broadcast nationwide on television. The language is both ancient and vibrant, anchored in an immemorial past but carving out a lively role for itself in the contemporary world—much like the Ireland that The Gathering is selling to overseas visitors.

Stephen Fry’s observation of the current vivacity of Irish carries over into another of The Gathering’s blog entries, this one cheekily entitled “What the focal”¹⁶ – *focal* meaning ‘word’ or ‘expression’ in Irish. The entry starts off by firmly embedding Irish within the dynamics of contemporary life:

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that an anglicised plural of Gaeltacht is used here, as the Irish plural *Gaeltachtaí* is commonly employed in Ireland. This decision likely reflects the international target audience of The Gathering’s website.

¹⁶ <http://www.thegatheringireland.com/Latest-Stories/Blog/December/What-the-focal>

Thanks to the interweb, telecommunication technologies and reality TV, people are using words in new and innovative ways. As Gaeilge fans Des Bishop, Dara Ó Briain and the unlikely Stephen Fry can testify to, even our native tongue, like many other dialects, is changing.

Notable here is the description of Irish as “our native tongue”: whereas the previous entry suggested that the language extended beyond the traditional bastion of the Gaeltachtaí, here it is the native tongue of all the Irish. Ownership of the language is implied to be universal, thus minimizing the linguistic particularities of Ireland and contributing to its image as a Celtic land differentiated by its own native language (and yet still clearly Anglophone, given that only the ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ page of The Gathering website has an Irish translation).

For the remainder of the entry, the language itself serves as the backdrop for a display of the ‘quirky’ (to use a word oft employed by The Gathering) Irish sense of humor:

For example, a picture of a monkey in a jaunty little dress could induce a **GOA (gáire ós árd)** or a **LOL [laugh out loud]** as is said in **Béarla [English]**. Your best mate taking a tumble might end with you **RTUG (rolladh timpeall an urlair ag gáire)** or as the kids would say, **ROFL (rolling round the floor laughing)**.

Were the same friend to tumble head first into a chasm of tea-dress-wearing monkeys only to emerge wearing a miniature lady monkey as a hat, this undoubtedly would end with you declaring **OMD (Ó Mo Dhia) [OMG]** followed by the announcement that you’re **“ABMTAG (Ag briseadh mo thóin ag gáire).”** That’s **LMFAO (laughing my ass off)** for folks not in the know [bold in the original].

Combined with the play on words in the title of this blog entry, Irish is used here as a vehicle for conveying the unconventional humor that Ireland is supposed to be famous for, and which helps differentiate Ireland from other tourist destinations.¹⁷

¹⁷ A ‘typically Irish’ dry and irreverent sense of humour is employed throughout The Gathering website; the description of “What it means to be Irish”, for example, starts off in the following manner: “Somewhere between the UK and the US lies the 120th largest country in the world. This small nation of Ireland is home to just under five million of us and is the birthplace of 24 Olympic

Continuing in the same vein, one final blog entry about “Words of wisdom in Irish”¹⁸ uses the language to foreground the unique character of the Irish and to link people, territory, and language together in a way that harkens back to the construction of modern Nation-states. This Romantic notion of intrinsic interconnectivity imbues the first lines of the entry:

Some of the most culturally rich examples of Irish are found within the language’s proverbs. These simple phrases were repeated, grew in popularity and passed down through the generations. There are hundreds of examples of these little sayings, each speaking volumes of the little isle they originate.

The Irish language, in the form of proverbs old enough to have been “passed down through the generations”, is represented as a rich repository of Irish culture. Ancient as these proverbs are, they reveal the true character of the “little isle” they are said to have created. The island of Ireland is here a metonym for the Irish themselves, thus inextricably intertwining language, nation, and land.

The Gathering then characterizes these expressions that capture the essence of Irishness in the following way:

Though at times a little paradoxical and cryptic, they almost always express a truth based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. A communal thread of agriculture, friendship, alcohol, family, love, jealousy and self-preservation flows through almost all of them.

Here we have Ireland as The Gathering seeks to portray it: an ancient nation comprised of resilient, albeit imperfect, people connected with their land and full of love for friends, family, and of course drinking. By presenting Irish as the native language and embodiment of all the Irish themselves, The Gathering is able to use these proverbs to

medallists, 12 Oscar winners, seven Nobel Laureates and Jedward. It has also bore such life-changing innovations as the aircraft ejector seat, colour photography, the submarine and, most importantly chocolate milk. Perhaps for good reason, there is no other nation on this planet like the Irish.”

¹⁸ <http://www.thegatheringireland.com/latest-stories/Blog/March-2013/Words-of-wisdom-in-Irish>

index the welcoming, unique and fun-loving nation that potential tourists worldwide are invited to celebrate, to identify with, and to come visit in Ireland in 2013.

Considered together, the promotional materials produced by The Gathering reveal an initiative of collective mobilization and collective (re)branding, with the Irish language playing a delicately orchestrated role in the latter process. The coordinators call upon all of Ireland (as a nation, as teammates, as employees) to do their part in luring overseas visitors to the Emerald Isle, where their tourist dollars will provide a much-needed boost to the long-suffering Irish economy. Once redistributed to the whole of this mobilized nation, the Irish language is then used to apply the marketable cultural heritage of Ireland to each and every Irishman and Irishwoman. All of Ireland is irreverent and spirited and welcoming, and their ancient language reflects this: in defining “what it means to be Irish”, The Gathering notes that “we are renowned for our hospitality and love of having people visit. It’s no wonder that in Irish, welcome, *céad míle fáilte*, translates to ‘a hundred thousand welcomes’”.

By remaining present and vital, the Irish language ensures the continuity of the mythical Celtic past of Ireland and of the unique Irish culture. Though present, however, Irish is clearly not dominant: all of the material published by The Gathering on its website, which serves as the command center of the worldwide initiative, is almost exclusively in English, allowing for the exception of the bilingual ‘Frequently Asked Questions’. The Irish language is discussed and a very few representative words and phrases dot The Gathering’s webpages (*céad míle fáilte* and *craic* ‘fun’ are the only two Irish expressions to appear), but potential visitors do not risk being led to confuse contemporary Ireland with an Irish-speaking country. By explicitly reaffirming the vitality of Irish and the culture it indexes while implicitly reassuring potential visitors of the dominance of English, The Gathering is able to market an essentially “Celtic”, linguistically Anglophone Ireland. Thus combining national pride with a product that will appeal to the diaspora as well as to tourists from wider horizons — and turning the former into the latter.

Concluding remarks

We now reach the end of this short comparison. What, then, does it enable us to see? On the one hand, the decision of Scotland to

plan a second celebration and the revenue generated by the first event in 2009 suggest one type of explanation for the motivations of the Irish government in the context of the economic aftermath of the recession.

This economic crisis in the current period of late capitalism is also an opportunity to renegotiate what it means to be Scottish or Irish, and in such a context linguistic questions are always of utmost importance—we still live with the legacy of historical Modernity, and the link between language and nation remains central to our thinking. One way to handle the question of linguistic minorities is to ignore them, and this is partially the case in Scotland. Another is to marginalize them through folklorization. This latter option is the traditional choice in both Scotland and Ireland, and this continues through both manifestations.

What these two examples bring to the forefront is a policy for managing difference. The fundamental question is the following: how to profit from the positive image generated by the attachment of a Gaelic culture to the national territory without letting this link detract from the country's image on diverse international markets? How can one make this difference attractive and profitable? The answer, we believe, lies in the transformation of the entire country into a business, and of “Celticness” into a logo.

In such a context, speakers simply become employees, providers of services in which the language is on show, notably in the case of traditional song and music. The transformation of each and every social actor into a service provider, into an employee of Scotland Ltd. or Ireland Inc., enables the taming of the potentially disturbing image of linguistic diversity by idealizing it and restricting it to an expected and welcome role. Several films, *Rob Roy* for example, have contributed to the forging of this image of Gaelic as particularly suited for a vaguely mystical and nostalgic style of singing.

This controlled, narrow vision of the Celtic languages allows for the age-old processes of domination and elimination of their speakers in both Ireland and Scotland to be obscured by identifying them with a mournful demeanor: if they sing, it is not because of misery and exile, it is simply their nature. Furthermore, this exile itself is commodified and sold to the diaspora through the mechanism of universal ownership: the Gaelics of Scotland and Ireland belong to everyone, including those who don't speak them. In Scotland, notably, this is embodied through a new, emerging notion, endorsed by the organizers of the Homecoming, that

of the “Global Celt”: Celtic enough to be moved by the images that are being shown to them, global enough to buy them.

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Sara C. Brennan

Laboratoire ICAR, Université Lumière – Lyon 2

James Wilson Costa

Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, University of Oslo