in 1999. *Goenkale* was launched in 1994 on a five-day-a-week seasonal basis, and is still running to this day, having now clocked up well over a thousand episodes. Following a brief outing in 1992, *Ros na Rún* started in earnest as a genuine soap opera in 1996 on a twice-a-week basis, and is also still continuing. Of the three, *Machair* had by far the highest production values and, with its extensive location shooting on Harris, was also by a large margin the most expensive to produce (see below). The main focus of this article wi

day basis (hence the particular appropriateness of such an approach to the study of soaps). It is necessary first, therefore, briefly to consider the three countries studied—Ireland, Scotland and the Basque country—as polities. In the following sections, I will be dealing with such concepts as the nation and the state, and indeed what is often called "national identity." My use of these terms does not, of course, imply any acceptance of "nations" or "national identity" as something which unequivocally exists in any material or taken-for-granted way, let alone in any kind of essentialist fashion. Though the concept of "national identity" is a deep-rooted and indeed powerful one in contemporary societies in both political and cultural practice, it emerges from and is sustained by a complex set of both discourses and practices by which it is overdetermined and which are fundamentally contingent in nature. They—and the "national identity" which they sustain (and which, therefore, certainly "exists" to that extent)—are, like all discourses and practices, sites of ongoing negotiation and contestation, and are therefore the bearers of multiple and often conflicting meanings, and are susceptible to change.[6]

The Political Situation

The Republic of Ireland has, of course, been an independent state since 1922 (a situation which has not, however, prevented the continuation of strong economic and cultural influences from the UK, above all England). Despite having achieved and consolidated its own statehood on a political level, discourses of uncompleted nationhood—of nationhood as an unfinished product—still circulate reasonably widely (if now mostly informally). These mainly take the form of irredentist claims on the Six Counties

1997. There is no sense of national “amputation” in Scottish culture, no feeling that any

Party which, despite considerable efforts to unseat it by the main all-Spain parties, has been in power ever since. Following the Linguistic Normalisation Act of 1982 a Standard Basque has been established (euskara batua), and a process of "euskaldunisation"—of gradual extension of the Basque-speaking population, "euskaldun" being the Basque term for a speaker of "euskara"—is underway with strong governmental support, particularly via the Basque-medium schools known as "ikastolak." Despite considerable reluctance and lack of enthusiasm among many young Basques, there has been some increase in the numbers of those able to understand and speak Basque.

As in the case of Ireland, English is likewise the absolutely dominant language in Scotland, with Gaelic—having by optimistic estimates around sixty-five thousand native speakers[16]—spoken by just over one per cent of the population, Gaelic-speaking communities being located mostly on the Western Isles (though the official boundaries of

The Media Framework

As an independent state, Ireland has, of course, its own press, though this is overwhelmingly in English. The public service Irish-language radio station Radió na Gaeltachta (RnaG) was set up in 1972, and is listened to—though with different levels of frequency—by both native and non-native speakers of Irish amounting to around fifteen per cent of the population.[18] As is only to be expected, Ireland also has its own television channels: the public service channels RTÉ1, launched in 1961, and Network 2, launched in 1978—in terms of British cultural influence it is worthwhile bearing in mind that before Network 2 was set up there was a referendum as to w,c4 .,c4 .,cubl has t1frr5 Tc 0 Tpublic7.1(nt (a)2 96,(w)26.4(h)-1.6ich(chagv)13.4(e)17.1d, itsna me to (l)-9.9(he(co)138(am)82(am)82(he)17.58.6().9ca channe t16(. T)20.3VN3a (998())109(.. T)20.3(h)-10.(e)178t ((a-9.3((e1575l)3bo)bl-)1117(a-9.3(ca-9.3(hn)-3(bl-)1117 or for t)-)1117hn)-3((e1575 1)]TJ 109.045 0 TD -0.3

is a shareholder) was a major talking point in the early part of 2001. Although *Ros na Rún* did not face direct competition from the other two domestic Irish soap operas, *Glenroe* and *Fair City*, which went out at different times, it did face a certain amount of competition from the UK soaps , some of which have reasonably large followings in Ireland.

Though the Basque Country has its own "regional" press—almost entirely in Castilian—there is also a strong presence of the Spanish "national" press. Since the early eighties it has also had its own TV channels, the public service ETB1 (launched in 1982) and ETB2 (1986), both of which are subsidized by the Basque parliament (Eusko Jauralitza). ETB1 is an entirely Basque-language channel, with even initially Castilian advertisements voiced over in Basque despite the visual presence of Castilian on the screen, while ETB2 broadcasts exclusively in Castilian. These two channels face strong competition from the five "national" all-Spanish channels: La Primera, La Dos, Antena 3, Canal +, Telecinco, whose programmes are frequently the most popular or among the most popular in the Basque Country. As well as the two television channels, the public service broadcaster also provides a number of Basque-language radio stations, the most important of which, Euskadi Irratia, broadcasts twenty-four hours a day.[21] *Goenkale* entered a virgin landscape as far as domestically-produced soap opera was concerned, the only possible competition, the Latin American *telenovelas*, being shown in the late afternoon, while *Goenkale* itself goes out at ten o'clock at night.

While Scotland has its own highly successful press[22]—written almost entirely in English, the (very) occasional Gaelic article in the *Scotsman* or the *Inverness Courier*

electors of the Western Isles, the Thatcher government announced that it would allocate £8 million (later increased to £9.5 million) within the framework of its forthcoming Broadcasting Act to set up a Gaelic Television Fund whose aim would be to increase the amount of Gaelic-language television in Scotland from one hundred to three hundred hours per year, starting in 1993. The fund was to be administered by the Gaelic Television Committee, or CTG (Comataidh Telebhise

not just relevant to Gaelic speakers. As an advertisement for the programme in the *Glasgow Herald* put it, "Adultery, loneliness, revenge. Some things do translate. *Machair*, 7.30 tonight, on Scottish." [26]

Machair was, in its first season, by any standards the most successful Gaelic-language programme ever to be screened in Scotland. Given the near-total absence of Gaelic from the written press and its relatively poor levels of penetration on radio, these large television viewing figures caused great euphoria among Gaelic-language activists, particularly those working in television. As Rhoda Macdonald, Scottish's Head of Gaelic Programmes, put it in 1993, "Drama is the most popular form of television and it has a spectral appeal. People aged 5 or 85 will watch drama. 'Machair' makes Gaelic viable."[27] Despite these extraordinary viewing figures and the accompanying euphoria, however, *Machair* was unable to maintain its appeal. By the end of the 1996 season its viewing figures had fallen to 165,000, around one third of its viewers three years earlier. Survival

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originally Latin-American format usually running for around six months and clocking up around 170-180 episodes.[28] When *Goenkale* was la

Ros na Rún

Ros na Rún in fact made its first appearance not on TnaG, but on RTÉ1 at Christmas 1992 achieving 381,000 viewers.[32] It now goes out twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8.30 p.m. Though reliable viewing figures are difficult to come by, press reports suggest that it appears to attract around 400,000 viewers per episode, around fourteen per cent of the total available audience. Like *Machair* in Scotland, it was seen from the outset as TnaG's flagship programme. As the Head of TnaG put it:

> But we're clear about one thing. We, the staff and the authority, believe

Peripheral visions, peripheral fissions?

A significant feature of all three productions outlined above is a wide-ranging attempt to reconcile geographical peripherality with cultural centrality. The locations are all non-metropolitan. *Machair* originally centred on the Bradan Mòr Further Education College in a fairly remote location on Harris—based on the real Sabhal Mòr college on Skye—with breakouts to Stornoway (itself a smallish town) relatively infrequent, and visits to the mainland very rare, particularly after the first season. *Goenkale* is not set in Bilbao or any other large Basque town, but in a small fishing town (location shooting being carried out in the actual fishing town of Getaria). *Ros na Rún* is likewise not set in Galway town, but in a small village in the Connemara Gaeltacht, with inside scenes being shot in state-of-the-art production studios in Spiddal. In all three, city life seems very far away. In fact, the notion of a flight from the city is stated explicitly in *Machair*'s theme song:[34]

> It's long since I went to the city
> I had to make my living there
> But the machair always drew me
> Seed of marram, my people's bloom
> Field of my hopes, yours the triumph
> As fertile gem as is in the world
> Here's the place where I will settle
> With all I need of wealth and love

Indeed remoteness is, to a greater or lesser extent, a structural part of the lives of all the characters in all three productions. Thus in *Machair* things not available in local shops have to be obtained by mail order, while the youngsters try to combat the endemic

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But it is above all in the uses to which they put their language that they resist notions of peripherality or unmodernity. All of these languages in different ways and at different times, in very much the same way as Welsh, Galician or Catalan, have been accused of being inadequate to the needs of the modern world: the former Spanish Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez once famously claimed that nuclear physics, for example, could not be taught in Catalan,[35] while Basque has also been characterised as "incapable of representing the modern cultural and scientific world."[36] There is no question of this here. Although *Machair* was always bilingual—a certain amount of English was spoken in every episode—in the college, in particular, Gaelic was seen as the medium through which the students learned and acquired skills in business studies and computing, speculated on the stock market, did market analyses, drew up business plans, and produced brochures using pagemaking software on their Apple Macs. As Rhoda Macdonald, Scottish's Head of Gaelic Programmes, put it in a lecture given in the Sabhal Mòr college:

> What *Machair* did and still does is make Gaelic look viable and alive.... It shows the language being used by young people for whom it is a vital part of the future and not, as has been the case, only about the past.[37]

In *Machair* Gaelic was seen as fully integrated in, and equal to the demands of, contemporary Scottish life, nothing, no matter how sophisticated or technical, being beyond its purview. Likewise for Basque and Irish in *Goenkale* and *Ros na Rún*, where, for example, all the technicalities of running the local radio-stations are handled in

Basque and Irish. As in soap operas everywhere the characters in these three productions are involved in storylines revolving around a whole range of contemporary issues such as drugs, teenage pregnancies, homosexuality, AIDS, all handled effortlessly in their relative languages. Indeed, numerous references can be found in the press of both Ireland

maintenance and promotion as a spoken language—completely lacks, unlike Basque or Irish, the status of a political project. The fact—whether sad or not—is that for the bulk of English-speaking Scots the survival of Gaelic has come to be seen as largely

either singly or in groups, to the accompaniment of cheerful and energetic music. With its views of fishermen mending their nets and its final shot of a large group of townsfolk coming over the breast of a hill, the first conveys a clear sense of organic community, while *Ros na Rún*, with its shots of dolphins playing in the sea, presents an unpolluted "Atlantic seaboard" imagery which seems somewhat touristy in its overall appeal. *Machair*'s lengthy closing sequence, on the other hand (this production did not really have an opening sequence), resorts to the well-established discourse of the Celtic Twilight—essentially a discourse of the *past*—with its crepuscular, static mountain scenes devoid of human life and its mournful song sung in an ancient and what was, for the bulk of its viewers, impenetrable language.[38] *Machair*'s theme song is sung by the well-known Scottish group Capercallie, and in fact uses the same melody—but not the words—as the song "Breisleach" from their 1992 Album "Delirium." However, it is not just the words which have changed. The tempo of the song has been slowed down very considerably, by about as much as a third. In concrete terms, while one verse of "Breisleach" takes thirty-six seconds to complete, the single verse of *Machair*'s theme tune takes forty-seven seconds: a very significant deceleration. Also, in "Breisleach," the vocals and the music come to an end at the same time. In the *Machair* theme song the music continues for no less than eighteen seconds after the end of the words: a plaintive, elegiac, mournful melody played out over brooding Hebridean landscapes. These differences highlight the extent to which this new version of the melody has been absorbed into the Celtic Twilight discourse.

This is not to say that the eighties and the nineties witnessed no "national project"

in Scotland. Nothing, in fact, could be further from the truth, and this phenomenon has been the subject of considerable academic analysis within Scotland.[39] The redefinition of Scottish national identity that gathered pace throughout the eighties and the nineties emerged largely in opposition to Thatcherism, and took place as much (if not more) outside official politics as within it. The language it used to emphasise national difference was not, however, Gaelic, but, at least on a popular level, Scots (whether we define this technically as a language or a dialect). Scots is, by any reasonable standard, the preferred mode of communication, for everyday purposes, of a significant majority of the Scottish population. From being almost entirely absent in the Scottish media (barring caricatural forms such as Harry Lauder-type pseudo-Scots), this language or group of dialects has now colonised areas of the Scottish media to an astonishing degree. The trailblazer was, without any doubt, Rab C. Nesbitt, whose Glasgow Govan dialect was crucial to his particular take on life—a kind of defeated yet still defiant Clydeside-ism[40]—but Scots has also won an important place for itself on, for example, football phone-ins such as *Saturday Super Scoreboard* and in particular *Off the Ball* on radio, the latter being carried out almost entirely in dialect.[41] More recent runaway successes for this kind of programming have included *Chewing the Fat* on television—some of whose catchphrases (most significantly "gonnae no dae that") have become something of a phenomenon in Scotland and have entered everyday speech, and the recently launched *Taxi for Cowan*, based around one of the presenters of *Off the Ball*. Scots has even penetrated television advertising. A recent advertisement for an internet job site shows a young man turning up for an interview at Lavé Enterprises only to find himself later

wandering around Glasgow dressed as a toilet. Two young boys shout at him from a bridge, "Haw lavvy heid, you're gettin it"—something unthinkable in an advertisement fifteen or even ten years ago.

Given these multiple constraints and counterbalances, *Machair*'s chances of appealing to a broader Scottish constituency in the longer term were very poor indeed. From this point of view, it is surely no coincidence that the initiative which eventually led to *Machair* came not from Scotland, but from a highly unpopular London government pursuing what was, in Scottish terms, an essentially external agenda, and in opposition to which the redefinition of Scottish identity was to a large extent taking place. No amount of money, and no level of production values, can counter forces such as these. Failure was inevitable, and the conditions of possibility no longer seem to exist (if they ever did) for a successful Gaelic-language programme aimed at an all-Scottish audience.

Notes

[1] Mike Cormack, "Problems of Minority Language Broadcasting: Gaelic in Scotland", in *European Journal of Communication*, 1993, 8, 103.
[2] David Atkinson, "Attitudes Towards Language Use in Catalonia: Politics or Sociolinguistics?" in *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 1996, 10.1, 9.
[3] See Alison Griffiths, "National and Cultural Identity in a Welsh-Language Soap Opera," in Robert C. Allen, ed., *To Be Continued... Soap Operas around the World* (London: Routledge, 1985).
[4] See Hugh O'Donnell, "Media Pleasures: Reading the Telenovela," in Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas, eds., *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000).
[5] Hugh O'Donnell, *Good Times, Bad Times: Soap Operas and Society in Western Europe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999).

[6] See Philip Schlesinger, "On National Identity: Some Conceptions and Misconceptions Criticized," in *Social Science Information*, 1987, 26, 2 and "Media, the Political Order and National Identity," in *Media, Culture and Society*, 1991, 13.3, 13.
[7] See, for example, T. K. Oommen, *Citizenship, Nationality and Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 19.
[8] Christopher Ross, *C*

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