CHAPTER TWENTY

Women and Gender in the Early Modern Western Gàidhealtachd

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TO DATE the history of women – to say nothing of social history – has been marginal in Gàidhealtachd\(^1\) historiography; however, Gaelic literary criticism has been somewhat more favourable. This paper will give a brief impression of the variety of women’s lives during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the constraints under which they lived, and how some were able to negotiate and even circumvent these according to individual circumstances. Where expedient I have used evidence from literature and oral tradition, though not to the extent of privileging them above or even as equal to more traditional sources. Finally, one hardly needs to point out that there is no generic ‘Gàidhealtachd woman’ for this or any other period of history.

Even more so than in Ireland, the culture of the early modern Scottish Gàidhealtachd was imbued with a strong patriarchal ideology. Classical or vernacular, male or female, secular Gaelic poetry was underpinned by the authoritative norms of the panegyric code, ‘a coherent system of rhetoric of great resonance and evocative power’. This system was predicated upon notions of an assertive masculine independence based upon physical prowess and violence, heavily influenced by concepts of honour and shame, and above all intended to praise the hunter-warrior chief as defender of the clan.\(^2\) It is highly likely that such an ideology was primarily indebted to the hybrid Norse-Gaelic culture of the Kingdom of the Isles. This was further strengthened as a result of the siege mentality engendered in the Gaels during the late medieval period, when the Lordship of the Isles strove to maintain an independent identity against successive Lowland encroachments.\(^3\) The warrior hero became even more crucial to Gaelic society during Linn nan Creach (the Age of the Forays), that confused and violent era of bloodfeud resulting from the final collapse and balkanisation of the Lordship, with the apparent total disruption of the church throughout the western Gàidhealtachd, and the general economic crisis affecting Scotland as a whole by the mid-sixteenth century.\(^4\)

By way of contrast, we might consider the remarkable absence of courtly love poetry – with one major exception\(^5\) – from contemporary Scottish Gaelic classical literature, even from the seemingly representative collection of the Book of the Dean of Lismore, an early-sixteenth century
compilation containing anti- and non-courtly literature aplenty. By contrast in Gaelic Ireland bilingual and multilingual poets from the Old English population served as a conduit for new love poetry deriving from continental and English models. Such innovations found indigenous echoes in the ancient Irish poetic convention of the bride of the high king, and the cult of the Virgin. Grace Neville has stressed that dánta grádh (classical Irish love poems), are, in their objectification of the female subject, and indeed in their reflection of the assumptions of a male audience, necessarily permeated with patriarchal values. Nevertheless, they do offer an outlet, however compromised or condescending, for the praise of women. Revealingly, it appears that courtly conventions enjoyed considerably less popularity in the literature of the Scottish Gàidhealtachd.

Patriarchy in the early seventeenth-century Scottish Gàidhealtachd was paradoxically stronger, firstly, because of the absence of theological underpinnings in the wake of the collapse of the church at a popular level following the Reformation and secondly, in the absence of detailed and widely-known physiological justifications caused by the steady waning of continentally-derived medieval Gaelic medical traditions. Such a culture had little need of constant policing of the boundaries of patriarchy; there is no evidence as yet of the ‘acutely felt anxiety . . . about how women could best be governed and controlled’ which some historians have discerned in early modern England. Indeed, so well entrenched was the ideology that it can make little sense to speak of a prescriptive patriarchy in relation to the Gàidhealtachd of this period. Within the boundaries of the culture, it seemed natural and incontrovertible. In fact women at all levels of Gàidhealtachd society enjoyed considerably more freedom, or at any rate suffered somewhat less subordination, than we might be led to expect from prevailing cultural norms.

The overwhelming majority of the people of the early modern Gàidhealtachd lived at near-subsistence level, either as peasant farmers in bailtean (multiple-tenant farms), or as sгалagan (agricultural labourers or servants). We should be somewhat wary of arguing for ‘separate spheres’ of men and women’s labour. Ploughing and peat-cutting, for instance, counted as men’s work, but women toiled beside them at the harrow and during harvest time. Again, the onerous labour of carrying peats, seaweed and manure was at the very least as much female labour as male. Certain tasks, however, were classed as women’s work, unworthy of men: weeding crops, making and stooking sheaves, grinding corn, tending goats, sheep (including shearing), poultry, and milking cows, especially during the summer months at pasture in upland shielings. Above all, the wife was responsible for the domestic sphere, cooking food, dyeing, preparing and weaving cloth, washing and mending clothes, and,
most importantly, caring for the children.\textsuperscript{12} As Olwen Hufton has commented, the lower a family’s position on the social scale, the more crucial the woman’s role was to the household.\textsuperscript{13} This must have been the case in the often famine-ravaged, epidemic-stricken western Gàidhealtachd.

From the early eighteenth century, young Gaels, including women, mainly but not exclusively from Argyllshire and the southern periphery of the Gàidhealtachd, found seasonal employment in reaping and shearing bands in the Lowlands. This development led to major changes in the yearly pattern of work in these areas.\textsuperscript{14} For the great majority of women in the western Gàidhealtachd, however, life must have altered very little until the years following the Forty-Five rising, when the development of the flax industry offered a new source of income.\textsuperscript{15} The subsequent rise of illegal whisky distilling, and the kelp industry, involved men and women alike. The growth of the herring fisheries on the west coast, as well as increased recruitment for the army, inevitably meant that the burden of agricultural work fell disproportionately upon women in the absence of their menfolk. The early modern period, then, was certainly no golden age for peasant women in the Gàidhealtachd. The drudgery, incessant toil and sheer strain of existing from year to year in a subsistence economy, not to mention recurring illnesses and above all the agonies of childbirth, come through clearly in later observers’ accounts — haggard, worn out and prematurely aged by their exhausting labours.\textsuperscript{16}

As one might expect, the importance of marriage alliances — and the concomitant exchange of property — to the upper classes and clan gentry can scarcely be overestimated, especially during an era of rivalry and occasional outright war between neighbouring clans. An important study of the genealogy of the gentry of the MacPhersons of Badenoch during the early modern period seems to suggest that, whereas men might be more likely to marry outside the clan, women tended to endogamy. By ensuring, therefore, that dowries were paid within the clan, this pattern would work towards preserving and expanding clan resources and power.\textsuperscript{17} However, for a woman to live among her own kith and kin might be beneficial not only to clan finances, but also for the woman herself. In 1714, Greenock merchant Patrick Campbell desired that his daughter go home to Argyll ‘and marry among her relations as other[s] do for I see many inconvenience’s in women’s going abroad’.\textsuperscript{18} An extreme example of such ‘inconvenience’ might be the tragic fate of Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Coinneach Mackenzie of Coul, who emigrated to Ireland, disappeared, and in 1696 turned up, to the intense embarrassment of her family, wandering the streets of London quite out of her mind.\textsuperscript{19}

As in Lowland Scotland, most daughters of the fine (clan élite), tended to marry young, apparently by the age of fifteen.\textsuperscript{20} Some faint traditions
survive, incidentally, that the chief once had the right to arrange such marriages. Among clan gentry, some forty or sixty cows were the usual tochradh (dowry), brought into the household, a number similar to contemporary Ireland. However, there was a gradual shift to money dowries during the seventeenth century, especially at the level of clan nobility. This development, taken with the large jointures legally due to the widow, caused problems with family finances.

What apparently distinguishes the western Gàidhealtachd from the rest of the country — and indeed from much of Europe — was the young marital age across society, possibly as low as eighteen for women. It may be noted, however, that the evidence is overwhelmingly literary and impressionistic in character, and may be vulnerable to later statistical research. Many cases relate to small islands where delayed marriage might well have caused a great deal of unwanted competitiveness and strife among the young males. The extreme case in this regard is tiny St Kilda, isolated for all but three months of the year, where girls married at twelve, or possibly even earlier. The custom of the new couple stocking their household by thigging faoighe gifts from their neighbours suggests that, unlike in England, young people did not spend years saving money from service or apprenticeship in order to set up home together. John Ramsay of Ochtertyre commented that love-matches were more common than ‘in commercial countries’ and that many of them began whilst at the summer shielings, a supposition strengthened by a number of illegitimacy cases recorded in church session registers.

Serial or trial marriage, the consequence of easy divorce permitted under Gaelic brehon laws combined with a somewhat cynical approach to the canonical marriage rules of the church, was not unknown, particularly among chiefs and clan gentry at the beginning of the early modern period. The most notorious example is the five-times married Raghnall MacDonald of Benbecula (d.1636), described by the historian Niall MacMhuirich as ‘duine maith do reir na haimsire ina ttarrla se’ (a good man according to his times). Increased state and ecclesiastical control during the early seventeenth century, however, and the accompanying stress now laid upon legitimacy and primogeniture as the criteria of inheritance, meant that the custom rapidly became untenable for the clan élite. This is clearly demonstrated by the attempt of Domhnall MacDonald of Clan Ranald Domhnall Dubh na Cuthaige (d.1685), to divorce his wife Mòr, on the perfectly accurate grounds that she had borne a son to Norman MacLeod. In a grisly case replete with accusations of torture and imprisonment, which scandalised the entire country, Mòr was able to parry her husband by claiming that he was merely trying to ‘palliat and cover his unjust deserting of her’. Some evidence, however, suggests that the custom of irregular marriage may have continued among
the rest of the Gàidhealtachd population even into the nineteenth cen-
tury.30

Elite women at the beginning of the early modern period were poten-
tially vulnerable both under Gaelic and Lowland law. Perhaps the most
extreme case is the wretched Màiri (c.1542—c.1602), heiress to the
MacLeods of Harris. Rejected and exiled by her own people in favour
of her cousin Iain a’Chuíl Bhàin, she spent her youth as a ward being
shuttled around various predatory noble families before finally being
married off to Dùghall Campbell of Auchinbreck.31 One might also note
the fate of disgraced noblewomen who bore illegitimate children, such as
Anna MacDonald, daughter of Iain Muireartach and sister of Domhnall
Dubh na Cuthaige, or Seònaid, sister of Iain Garbh MacLeod of Raasay,
both of whom composed songs to justify their case, and who appear to
have been subsequently quietly married off to minor gentry.32

Other evidence, however, suggests that, once married, far from being
mere chattels, many wives of gentry status and above enjoyed a con-
siderable amount of independence and power. Under customary Gaelic
law a divorced or widowed woman was entitled to reclaim the dowry she
had brought to the marriage.33 The extreme cases here are the redoubt-
able Lady Agnes Campbell and her daughter, Fionuala MacDonald, the
‘Inghean Dubh’ (‘Dark-haired Maiden’). The control these women could
exert over their military dowries, together with their superior standard of
education, allowed them to play a crucial rôle as brokers in Ulster politics
during the late sixteenth century.34 The part wives played in the day-to-
day running of household and estate is less visible in the sources. Oral
tradition attributes considerable power to the one-eyed Maighread
MacLeod, wife of Domhnall Gorm Mór MacDonald of Sleat and sister
to his great rival Ruairidh Mór of Harris, even to the extent of having the
chief’s poet, Niall Mór, of the great MacMhuirich bardic family, exiled
for his insolence towards her.35 Domhnall Gorm Mór’s idiosyncratic
method of divorcing her – sending her back to her brother on a one-eyed
horse led by a one-eyed groom with a one-eyed dog – should perhaps be
read as an oblique comment upon the miserable dowry she had brought
into his household.36

The assistance that well-connected wives could give their husbands is
suggested by Ruairidh Mór’s own wife Iseabail Mhór MacDonald, whose
apparent experience as a maid of honour to Anna of Denmark, wife of
James VI, was surely one of the reasons why the wily chief was able to win
the king’s approval, and indeed a knighthood.37 Again, the odium excited
by the wife of Sir Domhnall Gorm Óg MacDonald of Sleat, Seònaid
Mackenzie, might indicate that she was no mere marriage pawn of her
family. Seònaid was actively involved in supporting Mackenzie interests
and helping reorganise her husband’s estate along commercial lines. This
impression is strengthened by her attempts in 1639 to rally her relatives to
defend the Sleat estates against a possible attack by Gilleasbaig Campbell
seventh earl of Argyll, Gilleasbaig Fiar-Shùileach.\textsuperscript{38} Later in the century,
again in Skye, Seònaid MacLeod, daughter of Alexander of Greshornish,
appears to have been the driving force in her marriages to two of the most
powerful men in the island, firstly to John MacLeod of Talisker, then to
James MacDonald of Oronsay, who eventually succeeded to the Sleat
estates as sixth baronet.\textsuperscript{39}

Despite the lack of early modern female diaries, autobiographies or
funeral sermons, surviving letters can give us some insight into how
upper-class women lived, thought and felt, especially during the latter half
of the period. Although no such sources exist for women of the \textit{tuath}
(peasantry), we are lucky to have the \textit{luinneagan} (choral work songs).
Most of these have survived to the present in the form of waulking songs
to keep time for fulling cloth. Although they were at one time sung
throughout the Gàidhealtachd,\textsuperscript{40} the surviving corpus is concentrated in
the Uists and Barra, and among the descendants of emigrants from these
islands in the Maritime region of Canada, especially Cape Breton. In John
MacInnes' words, 'the choral songs are essentially the women's contribu-
tion to Gaelic literature, and in this poetry we view through their eyes the
order of society'.\textsuperscript{41} At best, these songs, despite their ostensibly formulaic
composition, are intensely personal, possessed of a passionate beauty and
power quite without parallel in Scottish, or even British, literature. What
makes them interesting to a social historian, however, is that they were
composed in a space forbidden to men.\textsuperscript{42} To women, a waulking was not
only a focus for private recreation, but an opportunity to create and voice
a 'female public opinion' on neighbourhood matters and beyond.\textsuperscript{43}

As we might expect, many songs are taken up with themes of the
panegyric code, although the praise is transformed and personalised
through the erotic strain which pervades the genre.\textsuperscript{44} A surprisingly
common theme is nostalgia for a distant – or even not so distant –
birthplace, and the anguish of being separated from one's kindred.\textsuperscript{45}
Again, waulking songs can function as artistic gossip, for example in
defending sexual reputation. One early seventeenth-century song, possi-
ibly from Morar, goes further: the singer, in tradition one Nighean
Aonghas Bhàin 'ic Dhomhnaill Òig, complains to the aforementioned
Raghnall MacDonald of Benbecula, that she has been raped by a
MacMhuirich and demands justice.\textsuperscript{46} It is noteworthy, however, that
other songs quite clearly imply that no shame was attached to hearing a
nobleman's child, a fact also mentioned by later travellers such as the
morally scandalous Rev. John Lane Buchanan.\textsuperscript{47}

The \textit{luinneagan} do not just deal with neighbourhood matters alone. As
well as inter-clan flyting, certain of the songs deal with more overtly
political matters, particularly those composed during the chaotic years following the 1609 Statutes of Iona when the clans of the western seaboard were riven between those, usually of the chief's party, who recommended accommodation with the Edinburgh authorities, and others, often brothers, younger sons, and minor gentry, who advocated outright resistance. A song from the Clan Ranald territories seems tacitly to support the rebellious Raghnall MacDonald of Benbecula against his nephew the young chief Iain Mòideartach.48 On the contrary, another song from the estates of MacDonald of Sleat appears to back Domhnall Gorm Òg in his attempt to reach an understanding with central government.49 Such examples demonstrate that some women, at that particular time and in these areas, were involved to some extent in public debates and in shaping political opinions among their people.

Finally, in dealing with family relations in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd, one might note the vast number of lullabies surviving in the tradition and the universal popularity of stories about tàcharan-sithe (changelings), indicating a widespread anxiety over the loss of children which transcends purely economic reasons for grief. In the absence of any ecclesiastical framework in the western Gàidhealtachd for much of the early modern era, parents were determined to have their children baptised, even if only by godparents.50 It thus seems somewhat unlikely that a 'low-affect' society, typified by parental severity and psychological coolness towards children, was the norm at any level of Scottish Gàidhealtachd society during this period.

In general, Raymond Gillespie's comments upon women and crime in contemporary Ireland hold true for the Scottish Gàidhealtachd as well.51 Although the area underwent extraordinary socio-economic changes during the early modern period, cohesion within community and clan, suspicion of outsiders – many of who were only too ready to criminalise the whole society – and, above all, the lack of powerful independent centralised ecclesiastical and legislative power structures meant that, unlike in England, the tensions resulting from the transformation did not generate a culture of litigation, or full-scale witch hunts.52 In the records of heritable jurisdictions, there are none of the depositions, testimonies and petitions that are so enlightening for English historians of the period. Social control, through community norms, was informal and evidently effective.53 Surviving criminal evidence is sparse, suggesting that women were prosecuted, as might be expected, mainly for theft of small, though not necessarily cheap, goods, for receivership of stolen property, and, occasionally, for violence against other women and infanticide.54

The spiritual side of women's life – of which witchcraft is an extreme manifestation – must not be overlooked. For example, the vast majority
of the myriad charms and prayers recorded by Alexander Carmichael were collected from women. Women’s involvement with the spiritual is perhaps epitomised by the bean-tuirim (professional mourning woman), apparently kept by the township for keening the coronach at local burials.

The devotional books filling the library of Lilias Murray, Lady Grant, or Lachlann MacKinnon of Coire Chatachain’s request to an Edinburgh friend on behalf of his wife, who was ‘curious to have Thomas a Kempis’, testify that, as elsewhere, personal piety was an area of activity in which many women of the clan élite found emotional fulfilment and spiritual satisfaction. It was in actively aiding and sustaining Roman Catholicism, however, that women in the Gàidhealtachd achieved most prominence. Indeed, for much of the seventeenth century chiefs’ wives had a crucial part to play in supporting a faith that would be extremely unwise for their husbands to support openly. This was especially the case with noblewomen who had married into the region, whose faith had been forged in staunch, and wealthy, English recusant or even continental backgrounds. Such women were able to exert a profound influence behind the scenes over their household and husbands. Lady Anna Cornwallis, wife of Gilleasbaig Campbell, Gilleasbaig Fiar-shuileach, seventh earl of Argyll, was surely instrumental in the astonishing conversion of her husband to Catholicism in 1618. Lady Katherine Villiers, widow of George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, was to a large extent the power behind her second husband Raghnall MacDonnell, second earl of Antrim. Early in the following century, Lady Francis Herbert, daughter of the marquess of Powys and widow of Coinneach MacKenzie, Coinneach Mór, fourth earl of Seaforth, virtually ran the estate herself, sending her son Uilleam Dubh to be educated in France rather than be brought up a Protestant at home. The exotic Penelope, daughter of Colin MacKenzie governor of Tangiers, and wife of Ailean MacDonald of Clan Ranald, Ailean Dearg, controlled the family interest after her husband’s death at Sheriffmuir, and was instrumental in having the forfeited estate restored to the MacDonalds in 1727. The support and protection given by the Clan Ranald estate under her leadership to the Catholic clergy was vital in sustaining the faith in the western Gàidhealtachd.

Women of all classes played a crucial rôle in aiding the Irish Franciscan missionaries from the early seventeenth century onwards, when Catholicism remained a ‘fortress faith’ sustained by sporadic, badly-funded missions, or even by individual priests. In such straits, the protection and patronage of noblewomen, especially widows, proved of fundamental importance. Widows in Kintyre sheltered Cornelius Ward and Paul O’Neill when they arrived from Ulster in 1624; the following year, visions
reported by local women were instrumental in converting many in Uist and Barra, which was to be the heartland of Catholicism in the area. In the mid-1650s, the strongly Catholic and by then extremely aged Iseabail Mhór, widow of Ruairídh Mór MacLeod of Harris, effectively starved the Protestant minister out of Glenelg, by refusing to pay his stipend—much to the disgust of the Synod of Argyll. The synod’s excommunication of Anna nic Dhomhnaill of Kintyre earlier in the same decade suggests that they may have been using her as a scapegoat to intimidate other Catholics. This is undoubtedly the case with the dogged persecution of Iseabail Robertson of Kinmylies by the Presbytery of Inverness during the 1670s. Iseabail was a servant of Robert Byers of Coats, the Catholic governor of Inverness Castle, and his wife Lilias Grant. In venting their spleen on her, the local ministers were prosecuting a long vendetta against His Majesty’s representative in the north.

Perhaps the most immediately effective of the series of measures forced upon the chiefs of the western Gàidhealtachd in 1609 and 1616 by the Edinburgh authorities, was the requirement that eldest sons of the clan élite, or, failing that, daughters, be educated in the Lowlands. It is clear from the conduct of a new generation of chiefs that this upbringing involved not only the inculcation of an alien culture and ideology, but also Protestantism. In this connection, it is rather interesting to see how, during the 1630s, the Catholic Sir Domhnall Gorm Òg MacDonald of Sleat apparently tried to circumvent this state of affairs by hiring the classical Gaelic poet Cathal MacMhuirich to tutor his daughters Catriona and Seònaid, and probably his younger son Gilleasbaig as well. Catriona, married to Coinneach MacKenzie of Gairloch, died young; Cathal’s elegy Leasg leinn gabhàil gu Gairloch commemorates her great learning. The religion of Seònaid, later wife of Aonghas Òg MacDonald, Lord Glengarry and Àros, and Gilleasbaig, better known as the poet Èan Ciaran Mabach, suggest that counter-reformation Catholicism which Cathal had imbued during his own bardic education in Ireland was transmitted to his pupils as well. Possibly Iain Mùideartach II, Captain of Clan Ranald, was following Domhnall Gorm Òg’s example in having one of the MacMhuirichs—it is unclear which one—educate his own daughter Anna, probably in the following decade.

Even after the general relaxation of persecution in the early eighteenth century women still played an important rôle in promoting Catholicism, none more so than Jacobite poet Sileas na Ceapaich (c.1660—c.1729), daughter of Gilleasbaig MacDonald of Keppoch and wife of Alexander Gordon of Camdell in Gaelic Banffshire. Sileas was probably taught her craft by her father, himself a poet of some distinction. Her non-political songs constitute a valuable source for women’s social history: for example, in Comhairle air na Nìgheanan Óga (Advice to Young Girls),
seemingly based on contemporary conduct-book literature, her listeners are warned through a series of vignettes to avoid the wiles of young men trying to entrap them. This, and the song *An Aghaidh na h-Obair Nodha* (Against the New Work), appear to have been composed in reaction to the rise in openly risqué Gaelic poetry during this time.

In oral tradition, however, it is Sileas’ hymns that are her most popular work, revealing a depth of piety strengthened by her isolation from her kindred in Lochaber. This was precipitated by a lengthy and debilitating illness, and tested to the limits by the death of her husband and daughter in the space of one week. Intriguingly, a church report in 1714 for Glenlivet and Strathavon parishes states that women were instructed by priests, who ‘send them through the Country to propagat their delusions’. It is likely that their teaching involved Sileas’ poems, such as *S e do bheatha, Mhoire Mhaighdean* (Hail to thee, Virgin Mary), a versified life of Christ.

It is probable that women played just as vital a rôle in supporting early evangelical Protestantism in the Gàidhealtachd. Barbara MacKay, wife of John, second Lord Reay, appears to have influenced his toleration of Presbyterians after the Restoration, a crucial development in the forging of a Gaelic Protestantism in Dùthaich MhicAoidh (Mackay country). Also notable is the petition by Margaret MacDonald, Lady Clan Ranald, and Lady Boisdale to the Presbytery of Long Island, asking for a Protestant minister to be sent to Catholic South Uist, apparently immediately after the death of the Catholic Penelope MacKenzie.

During the latter half of the seventeenth century, ecclesiastical authority was being asserted across all levels of society in the Gàidhealtachd. The success of the Episcopalian ministry is most visible in the marked decline in illegitimacy rates following the Restoration, a trend which continued until the 1690s, a decade of social, not to mention clerical, dislocation and famine throughout the region. The outlawing of trial marriages certainly benefited women of the clan elite. This strengthened their legal position as they were now entitled to a secure jointure after their husband’s death. Widows such as Lady Francis Herbert and Penelope Mackenzie were thus able to exert influence over their property by ensuring strict payment of their settlement, though the law caused considerable financial problems for their heirs. However, Lowland women rarely married into Gaelic nobility or gentry at this time, probably because of the comparative niggardliness of Highland jointures, and the isolation of the country.

In addition to contemporary socio-economic and religious developments in the Gàidhealtachd, new cultural mores were spreading from the south. By the end of the seventeenth century women had largely abandoned the traditional *earasaid* (female plaid), in favour of garments of the
Lowland pattern. In songs of the period by both men and women there is a new emphasis upon consumer goods, especially fashionable clothes as tokens of status, as objects of praise, or satire. The increasing number of letters written by women attests to growing female literacy in Lowland Scots and in English. A new emphasis on female education — not to mention the increased privacy afforded by rebuilt mansions — is also suggested by a series of notorious scandals at the end of the seventeenth century resulting from illicit liaisons between noblewomen and their tutors.

Family histories suggest that more freedom was being allowed to young people of the clan élites in choosing their husbands. The era of the great clan marriage networks was over. Perhaps an extreme example of women’s freedom is seen by the scandalous behaviour of two, or maybe three, daughters of Domhnall Breac MacDonald of Sleat, who eloped and bore their lovers’ children. According to their brother, Domhnall a’Chogaidh, ‘it seems god has determin’d that the last generation of daughters in this house should give their family little (if any) contentment’; these misfortunes must have been behind the almost obsessive care he took over the upbringing of his own children in Edinburgh. Martin Martin was doubtless alluding to these and other scandals with his dry comment that ‘women were anciently denied the use of writing in the islands to prevent love-intrigues’.

Central to the new cultural mores introduced from the south was the strongly gendered concept of civility, being ideal codes of behaviour for men and women based upon supposed psycho perceptual differences between them. Of course, it is very much to be doubted whether male paradigms of innate feminine sentimentality, domesticity and submissiveness had much direct effect on Gaelic women outwith the clan élite. Nevertheless, socio-economic circumstances inevitably led to their increasing exclusion from public life. If women’s horizons expanded during the early eighteenth century, men’s broadened considerably more. Male clan gentry and peasantry alike were able to participate in and profit from the new educational, commercial and professional opportunities offered by the British state at home and abroad. Even among the tuath, between two and three times as many boys as girls learnt English — the most important tool in the new commercialism — in the SSPCK charity schools. Certainly, some younger, unmarried women were able to take advantage of new freedoms: the shearing bands from the Small Isles whose spending-power so scandalised the local minister serve as a good example. Nevertheless, new cultural and economic barriers stood between most women in the western Gàidhealtacht, no matter how resourceful, and participation in the driving forces then transforming their culture and society.
NOTES

1. ‘The Gàidhealtachd' is preferred to ‘the Highlands' for the Gaelic-speaking area of Scotland for the late medieval period until the twentieth century, insofar as the former term, used by the inhabitants themselves, is not merely geographic, but highlights the linguistic and cultural unity of the region.


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32. School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh, D. J. MacDonald MSS, i, 31–8; D. I. MacDhomhnaill, Uibhist-a-Deas (Stornoway, 1981), 37; ÓBMA, 287; Morrison, The MacLeods, iv, 36.


34. K. Simms, ‘Women in Gaelic Society during the Age of Transition’ in MacCurtain & O’Dowd, eds. Women in Early Modern Ireland, 35, 38–9; C. Brady, ‘Political Women and Reform in Tudor Ireland’ in ibid. 78–9.

35. Edinburgh University Library, Carmichael Watson Papers 112, fos 89v.–90.


45. HF, iii, 19.

46. Ibid. i, ll.678–746; cf. iii, 22.


48. HF, i, ll.568–96.

49. NLS, MS 14876 fo 32v; cf. ÓBMA 412, 433; HF, ii, ll.525–92

50. NLS, MS 1389 fo 66; Scottish Catholic Archives [SCA], BL 1/99/1; Burt, Letters i, 130–1; cf. MacTavish, Synod of Argyll, ii, 28; A. Buchan, A Description of St. Kilda, the Most remote Western Isle of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1727), 34–5.

52. Ibid. 45–7. For witches in the Gàidhealtachd, see Alan Bruford, ‘Scottish Gaelic Witch Stories: A Provisional Type-List’, *Scottish Studies*, 11 (1967), 149–92.

53. OSA xx, 174; also 123–4, 275–6, 314–15, 322.


62. NLS, MS 1303 fos 81–126. SRO GD 201/1/98 & 219. See also K. van den Steinen in this volume.


68. RPC, x, 777–8.


71. Cf. note 32.

73. Ibid. 76-82, 165-8, 253-4. See also the paper by A. Frater in this volume.


77. SRO, CH 1/2/72 fo 23; 1/2/73 fos 259, 268, 274, 275.


84. Clan Donald Centre, Skye, MacDonald of Sleat Papers, 5288/7. NLS MS 1307 fo 245; MacDonald & MacDonald, Clan Donald, iii, 255; see also, although possibly a mistake for a daughter of MacLeod of Dunvegan, D. MacLeod, Memoirs of the life and gallant exploits of the Old Highlander, Donald MacLeod (London, 1791), 3-7.

85. NLS, MS 1307 fo 158. J. Dunlop, ‘A Chief and his Lawyer’, TGSI, 45 (1967-68), 268-70.

86. Martin, Description, 176.

87. In this respect, one might look forward to the signal, and occasionally violent, role they played in resisting clearance in various crofting riots and deforcements throughout the nineteenth century.

88. Withers, Gaelic Scotland, 130, 135.

89. OSA, xx, 251-2.