The invention of the crofting community: Scottish historiography's elision of indigenous identity, ideology and agency in accounts of land struggle in the modern Gaidhealtachd

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ABSTRACT

This article examines and contests Scottish historiography's current assessment of the identity and concomitant ideology that formed a basis and motivation for collective political action taken by the indigenous population of the west Highlands and Islands during the second half of the nineteenth century in response to their territorial marginalisation and expulsion in the late modern period.

Over the last forty years historians and historical geographers of the modern Highlands and Islands have accepted and developed James Hunter's argument that in the second half of the nineteenth century a 'crofting class' emerged in the area which, based on an underlying feeling of being in 'community' as crofters, understood its identity in class-based terms. Furthermore, this historiography takes the view that the members of this community, recognising themselves collectively as crofters, began to engage in acts of resistance to the law on the basis of their shared experience and identity as 'the crofting community'. This article demonstrates that there is almost no basis in the historical record to sustain claims that the fact of being crofters was ideologically significant in motivating those involved in the land risings. It concludes that, rather than

being a class-based 'crofter' insurgency, the land risings of the late nineteenth century were the rising of a people in an insurgency whose ideological framework should properly be described in ethnic or in national terms.

Over the last forty years it has become a central aspect—perhaps the central aspect—of the historiography of the modern Highlands and Islands that something called 'the crofting community' emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century and began to take the actions by which it was ultimately able to win rights in the land. This argument was introduced by James Hunter in his 1976 book *The Making of the Crofting Community* and was based on his view that a distinct 'crofting community'—which he described as 'a social and cultural entity' based on 'a feeling of community among crofters'—came into being throughout the north-west Highlands and Islands of Scotland from the 1850s onwards.[1] Moreover, he argued that by the century's second last decade 'class struggle' had come to define the area's social relations to the extent that it was a collective crofting identity that formed the ideological and organisational basis of the land risings.

By the mid-1880s, in short, the crofting community had emerged as a coherent political—as well as social—entity, and, in consequence, crofters had at last begun to take control of their own destinies.

Furthermore, in Hunter's interpretation of events, in order to take control of its destiny the crofting community had been compelled to engage in a cultural revolution against its own past by engaging in the 'task of overthrowing the immense corpus of practice

and belief inherited from a society with a continuous existence of at least a thousand years'. This was necessary, Hunter concluded, because the corpus constituted an inherited 'folklore' which had a 'stultifying' influence on 'crofting society's' ability to respond to its marginalisation and expulsion from land under the conditions of capitalism.[2]

Hunter's outstanding account of the oppressions inflicted upon the indigenous population of the Highlands and Islands in the course of major changes in land use during nineteenth century challenged the prevailing historiography of the area, much to the discomfort of some historians whose accounts had tended to disregard the exploitation that was central to these changes. However, his account has not gone unchallenged. Most of the historians mentioned in the following literature review have critiqued *The Making of the Crofting Community* for a variety of perceived deficiencies.[3] This article will investigate how the people directly involved in the land risings understood and described themselves in terms of their collective identity, and will describe the criticisms of Hunter's account insofar as they relate to the fundamental issue of identity on which the article focuses. Careful consideration of the collective self-understanding of those involved in the risings is important because virtually all the historians and historical geographers who have produced major works on the land risings since publication of *The Making of the Crofting Community* have, to some degree, accepted and developed Hunter's belief that a class-based 'crofting community' of attitude and action emerged during the nineteenth century—even those researchers who substantially disagree with other aspects of Hunter's account of the period.

For instance, in the introduction to his *A Century of the Scottish People*, published in 1987, T. C. Smout described Hunter's work as 'one-sided' and also gave a lengthy critique of what he considered to be the failings of Marxist class-based analyses of

Scottish economic history. However, this critique focused solely on industrialised society in urban Lowland Scotland in the nineteenth century and did not touch on conditions in the north. Moreover, Smout had previously given a positive assessment of the suitability of Marxist analysis to the history of the modern Highlands. In an article written in the early 1970s—before publication of *The Making of the Crofting Community*—Smout described what he called a distinct 'ideology ... of the inarticulate crofters' pitted against 'the ideology of the strong' landlords, and argued that Marx had 'excellent reasons to dwell on the Highland Clearances to support his broad thesis of exploitation and class conflict'. This assessment may help to explain why Smout, in his 1988 review of *The Making of the Crofting Community* for the *American Historical Review*, could, while continuing to criticise what he considered Hunter's unbalanced treatment of clearances in the first half of the nineteenth century, describe as 'more original and ... less assailable' the explanation given by Hunter of 'how the "crofting community" attained a sense of its own identity and fought to obtain the privileges of security of tenure and arbitrated rents' in the second half of the century.[4]

Eric Richards, who has written extensively on the nineteenth-century Highlands and Islands, also appears to have accepted, to some degree, Hunter's class-based analysis. In his major work *The Highland Clearances*, Richards used a variety of different oppositional terms to describe antagonistic social relations in the area during the nineteenth century. Drawing on the work of Donald Meek, he acknowledged that Gaelic poetry describing clearances in Lochaber in the 1820s defined them as 'a conflict between the *Gaidheal* and the *Gall*—that is, "between the indigenous person and the economically motivated outsider"'. At another point in the book he rather unconvincingly argued for 'the existence of … two nations that inhabited the Highlands and Islands', conceiving of these as, on the one hand, 'the sporting magnates' and, on

the other, 'the crofters and cottars'—although neither of these identities can credibly be described as 'national'. However, when he came to discuss the period of the land risings Richards generally used class terms to describe the identity of the agents of agitation. In his view, it was through the agitation of the 1880s that 'the crofting community eventually roused itself to unprecedented agitation against the landlords' to demand an answer to 'The Crofter question'. He described the Crofters Act of 1886 as 'a decisive and unambiguous piece of class legislation' produced as a result of a 'crofters' movement' which had changed 'the entire atmosphere of landlord-crofter relations'.[5]

Following the arguments of Hunter and of Charles Withers, Richards wrote that an important aspect of the emergence of 'the crofting community' took place in relation to the disruption of the church of Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century, a view also held by David Paton and Allan MacColl in their studies focusing on the role of the clergy in relation to land issues in that century. Richards argued that the social role of ministers of the new free church in the 1850s was to 'reinforce the separation of the crofting community from the influence of established authority' and to create a parallel society 'better able to maintain its own values'.[6]

T. M. Devine is one of several scholars who reject the idea that the origins of 'the crofting community' can be found in the Disruption.[7] He believes it is unconvincing to posit a direct link between the creation of the free church in the 1840s and the land risings nearly half a century later, and proposes a perspective that downplays the importance of the people's direct resistance. Instead, echoing the views of Rosalind Mitchison, he places great stress on the development of external, city-based support structures for land reform agitation that were already in place before the large-scale direct protests of the 1880s, as well as highlighting the role of the press in eliciting sympathy for the plight of people in the crofting areas.[8] However, Devine did

acknowledge that the 'new confidence' among the people in the 1880s cannot be attributed to external agency alone. On the one hand, he offered an age-related argument for this new confidence. His view was that the sustained protests of the 1880s may be explained by 'the growth of a new generation' which had grown up in the 'more secure and prosperous' 1860s and 1870s and had not suffered the 'demoralising' anguish of famine, adding that 'all commentators stressed that it was young adult men and women who formed the backbone of the protest', with older people in townships said to be 'timid and meek'.[9] Although it is true that some commentators remarked on the importance of the younger generation to the risings, Devine's conclusion paints, at best, an incomplete picture of the influence of age-dynamics in the risings. For instance, analysis of the seventeen crofter delegates to the Napier Commission in Kilmuir and Glendale, two areas on Skye which were at the centre of the risings, reveals that the average age of the witnesses in both localities was greater than fifty-three—this is hardly a youthful delegation, and the majority of its members had lived through at least one period of famine. Two of the main leaders of the agitation on Skye, Norman Stewart of Valtos and John MacPherson of Glendale were both old enough to have lived through the famines of the 1830s and 1840s. Mary MacPherson, whose poetry, as we shall see, did so much to incite and propel the risings, was older than both these men. This suggests a rather broader age-basis for activity in the risings than Devine proposes; direct memory of famine may have sharpened, rather than blunted, resistance in some instances.[10] Indeed, while we might expect the younger generation to have been to the fore in physical acts of resistance, it is clear that older heads were also willing and able to give their support in other important ways. On the other hand, it can be argued that Devine perhaps goes further than any other historian in developing Hunter's class analysis by drawing on the work of the Marxist anthropologist Eric Wolf to try to

understand how a 'peasant rebellion' could take root in the 1880s, given that protests prior to that decade had proved ephemeral. Indeed, as a result of this analysis, not only does Devine appear to accept the existence of an ideological 'crofting community' in the 1880s, he goes so far as to describe it a 'crofters' movement'.[11]

Other historians developed Hunter's belief that the land agitation of the 1880s resulted from 'the crofting community' becoming politically empowered. Ewen Cameron argued that the land agitation of that decade had come about because the large-scale evictions of much earlier in the century 'were embedded in the mind of the crofting community' and agreed with Devine's assessment that the land risings should be considered as the product of a 'Crofters' movement'. Relatedly, Annie Tindley argued that the Sutherland estates, as well as the Macdonald, Macleod and Kilmuir estates on Skye, in the 1880s were 'unpopular and vilified by the crofting community' as it began to act to take control of its own destiny. In her view, 'the crofting community' had condemned these estates for the extent of their evictions and because of their treatment of crofting tenants up to and during the land risings.[12] Meanwhile, Andrew Newby has remarked on the involvement of radical 'proto-socialist' organisations from outside the Highlands and Islands in supporting land agitation in the 1880s, but argued that these organisations eventually lost interest in the issue because they 'became frustrated by what they perceived to be the innate conservatism of the crofting community'.[13]

Historical geographers have taken a special interest in the class aspect of Hunter's research. Charles Withers believed that it could be developed to show the replacement of a unified Gaelic cultural identity with a 'Highland ... regional class consciousness' in the second half of the nineteenth century. Another historical geographer, Iain Robertson, has taken a more critical approach to the historiography. Although he

accepts the reality of 'the crofting community' as a historical concept, he has emphasised social tension between crofters and cottars in the early twentieth century. Robertson contended that 'the historiography of Highland protest shares with the Celtic literature more generally, a reductionist, undifferentiated view of the crofting community'. His analysis focused on perceived conflict between crofters and cottars within 'the crofting community'. However, in an aside to his discussion Robertson suggests the beginnings of an analytical intervention in the direction taken here, raising questions about the 'efficacy of the class model as a whole to the comprehension and explanation of Highland protest'.[14]

Some accounts have employed a different model of comprehension, suggesting that the risings may have been influenced by particular ethnic, or even national, feelings among Gaels. Allan MacColl discusses developments in what he calls 'Highland "peoplehood"' in the late nineteenth century, but seems to reduce this sense of peoplehood to belonging to just one segment of Gaelic society when he concludes that spiritual as well as cultural influences had helped in 'shaping crofters' self-perception as a distinct people'. MacColl's narrow claim of a 'crofter peoplehood' appears to have been influenced by John Shaw who wrote that the new cultural assertiveness of the late nineteenth century 'implicitly narrowed ... the linguistic and cultural nation of the Gaels to the lower classes, that is the crofters and cottars, and was set against an intrusive Anglophone elite'. However, given that Shaw also believed that the Gaelic and Celtic societies formed in the late nineteenth century were the primary vehicles for this new assertiveness, and given that these societies were largely made up of more affluent Gaels who were neither crofters nor cottars but were nevertheless describing themselves as part of a single Gaelic nation, it seems unlikely that the limits of the emerging sense of Gael nationhood were as restricted as Shaw claims.[15]

It is rare to find work that suggests decentralising crofting and the land struggle in the history of the modern Highlands and Islands in favour of a broader ethnic or national analysis. One such argument has been made by Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, for whom the land question is encompassed by and inseparable from much broader questions of identity as part of what he calls the 'unsatisfactory present' of late nineteenth-century Gaels:

> The 1870s saw increasing stress on the Highland land question, itself part of a broader 'Gaelic question',[16] a topic subsuming economic, political, cultural, educational and religious issues: what was to be the position of Gaels within Scotland, and within the wider British state? How could, and should Gaels engage with the English speaking world outwith the Gàidhealtachd?[17]

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This review of the literature discloses that underlying the wide range of criticisms that Scottish historians have made of James Hunter's important work on the modern Highlands and Islands, the great majority of them have accepted and developed his argument that in the second half of the nineteenth century a crofting class emerged there which, based on an underlying feeling of being in 'community' as crofters, understood and expressed its identity in class-based terms as 'the crofting community'. This is understood as a self-generated process of class identity formation. Furthermore, this historiography takes the view that the members of this community, having recognised their shared social experiences and cultural identity as crofters, then acted on this shared

experience and identity in a class struggle against landlords in order to win greater rights to land.

It is a fundamental tenet of historiography that claims of this sort should be founded in evidence from the historical record. Indeed, Edward Thompson, the Marxist social historian quoted by Hunter to justify a focus on class antagonism between 'crofters' and 'landlords', argued that class is 'a historical phenomenon ... which … can be shown to have happened'. For Thompson, class is a historical relationship that 'happens when some men … on the basis of their common experience, *feel and articulate the identity* of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men'. These common experiences manifest culturally as a 'class-consciousness' 'embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms'.[18] Thompson's claim thus placed an onus on Hunter and the historians who have followed his lead to prove that being part of 'the crofting community'—or failing that some related Gaelic term describing a social class—was *felt and articulated* as the primary *identity* that represented the consciousness, self-understanding and interests of those involved in the land agitation of the nineteenth century. This requirement not only rests upon Hunter, who consciously employed elements derived from Marxist analysis in *The Making of the Crofting Community*. It also rests upon all those historians who, as we have seen, have consciously or unconsciously accepted and developed the terminology and perspective of social class to describe as 'the crofting community' the collective identity of the people whose history they were writing about.

In *The Making of the Crofting Community* James Hunter did not provide such an argument. Instead, at the outset of the book he put forward two unrelated reasons to justify his use of the term 'the crofting community' to define the collective whose feelings and actions, he believed, constituted the land risings of the west Highlands and

Islands in the nineteenth century. First, he believed that the term could be used to comprehend 'all the people whose history is being investigated'—including cottars and landless people. Second, and more pertinent to the present investigation, he believed that 'the crofting community' could be deployed as a term of historical analysis 'because it is in common usage'. He did not make it clear whether the period of the term's 'common usage' referred to the period of 1800 to 1930 covered by the book's historical account, or whether he was continuing the perspective of the book's introductory sentences which described crofting conditions in the 1970s, when the book was written. However, the lack of general use of the term in the nineteenth century suggests that he meant the latter.[19] The same lack of definitional clarity exists in the work of historians who have since adopted and developed the term and its perspective. This means that at the origin of the use of 'the crofting community' by contemporary historiography as a general descriptor for those involved in the risings there rests an unexamined assumption which must be tested; before a historian can justifiably write of the feelings and actions of a single and united nineteenth-century 'crofting community' of attitude and action they must provide their readers with three related forms of evidence which Hunter did not provide.

First, the historian must provide evidence that the relevant group *considered themselves* socially and culturally to be 'crofters'; second, the historian must provide evidence of a sense of community among this group that *they themselves expressed* in terms of the group being socially and culturally 'crofters'; and third, the historian must provide evidence that the collective identity based on this feeling or sense of community was consistently invoked *by members of the group themselves* in their descriptions of their struggle and the actions they were undertaking. In fact, if the historian is to constellate their historical account around 'the crofting community' as the collective

identity of the agentive group in the land risings, they must demonstrate that this was the term of self-representation that was most often articulated by them to describe the sense of self-understanding that helped to galvanise and justify the people's feelings of solidarity and actions of resistance. The approach being advocated here is not dissimilar to that taken in the 1980s by Gareth Stedman Jones when he claimed that the accounts of Marxist social historians, including Edward Thompson, of class consciousness start from 'an essentialist conception of class' as 'a putative experiential reality'. On this basis those historians could then 'infer class as a political force from class as a structural position within productive relations'. At that time Stedman Jones used aspects of French structuralist thought, in particular a non-referential understanding of language, to make a case that class was less central to nineteenth-century Chartism than some social historians had claimed. His use of structuralism was strongly criticised by Marxist scholars for, in their view, oversimplifying the complex relationship between language, consciousness and social practice. Today, as Alex Callinicos pointed out, Stedman Jones has shifted his methodology towards that of the 'Cambridge school' of intellectual history which pays particularly close attention to the political and philosophical contexts in which the texts being analysed were originally produced.[20]

Following a quantitative analysis of the identities expressed in a corpus of Gaelic poems produced in response to the risings, this article will employ the Cambridge school's approach. It will consider the Gaelic poems as political interventions in the risings and situate some of the poems' ideological contents in their wider political and cultural contexts. It will do so in order to bring into question a class-based essentialism that underlies Hunter's account, an essentialist picture which seems to have been adopted by many of his critics. The necessity of attending carefully to the meaning of expressions made by historical agents in relation to their own wider political and

cultural milieu has been particularly emphasised by one of the founders of the Cambridge school, the Anglo-Scottish historian of political thought Quentin Skinner, who has made it a central requirement for the historian to focus on the language actually used by the people whose lives are being studied if the historian wishes to identify their beliefs and recover those people's point of view, and to whose important ideas on the writing of history this article will return.

> [H]istorians have no option but to begin by assuming that what people actually talk about provides us with the most reliable guide to their beliefs. To begin by insisting that they must really be talking about something else is to run the highest risk of supplying them with beliefs instead of identifying what they believed. [21]

In particular, Skinner has argued that the central task for historians should 'be conceived as that of trying so far as possible to think as our ancestors thought and to see things their way'.[22]

It was, presumably, an account of this kind that James Hunter had in mind when he wrote that his narrative was aimed at 'putting the crofter at the centre of his (*sic*) own history' and would refer to the 'culture, tradition and experience' of the people.[23] This article will take both Skinner and Hunter at their word and investigate the late nineteenth-century historical record for the three forms of evidence previously outlined. This evidence will be used to assess whether 'our ancestors' involved in the land risings held a crofting social, cultural and political identity as part of their point of view. This assessment will then enable us to justify or to dismiss the legitimacy of the present day

use by historians of the term 'the crofting community' to describe their collective identity.

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In his introduction to the second edition of *The Making of the Crofting Community* James Hunter noted that his work had been criticised by historians who suggested that 'the dearth of direct primary sources' for evidence about the lives of the inhabitants of the Highlands and Islands presents a challenge, perhaps insurmountable, in trying to understand the people's feelings and their motivations for protest. He added that he had been taken to task on this point by Eric Richards who wrote of the

> danger that, in the full flood of sympathy for the underdog, the historian will interpolate thoughts and emotions for people of whom there is no direct knowledge. Dr Hunter has by no means solved this problem ….

Hunter refuted the claim of such a dearth of evidence 'for what crofters thought, said and did at various points in the nineteenth century' by pointing to a variety of sources, primarily 'Gaelic poetry and song' and 'the testimony given by crofters to royal commissions and tribunals'.[24] This article will focus on the first of these two sources. The second source is useful for information and opinions on a range of practical land governance and social issues in the late nineteenth-century. However, it is of limited use in respect to the current topic. Although Ewen Cameron has claimed that the Napier Commission testimonies are 'excellent evidence of the collective state of mind of the crofting community in 1883'—further evidence of his commitment to a class-based reading of the risings—the collective consciousness to which he refers is generally not

directly available to the historian.[25] It is typically modulated by virtue of the fact that the evidence in these reports is usually an English translation of what had first been said in Gaelic, and we do not have access to either the reasoning the translator used for choosing one particular term over another—such as 'croft', 'lot' or 'holding'—or to what nuance in meaning may have been lost (or created) in the process of translation. Moreover, the content of statements given by witnesses may have been constrained by the terms by which the commissions and tribunals had been set. This is particularly the case for the major inquiry of the period, commonly known as the Napier commission, which the Government established on the terms that it would examine 'the condition of the crofters and cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland'. Furthermore, and relatedly, the evidence in these reports are essentially reactive statements made in response to externally mandated enquiries.[26]

In Gaelic song and poetry, on the other hand, we have direct access to source materials in Gaelic which were not only widely read but, particularly in the case of Neil MacLeod and Mary MacPherson, hugely popular and often sung and shared at social gatherings. We therefore have direct access to popular indigenous expressions, rather than having to guess or speculate a way through translations. Additionally, we have a body of evidence composed by men and women who, according to Donald Meek in *Tuath is Tighearna*, his ground-breaking anthology of Gaelic poetry of social and political protest from the clearances to the land agitation, were spokespersons on behalf of their communities. Most of them were members of those communities, 'were affected by the various processes of social dislocation which afflicted the Highlands, and, later in the century, some were participants in the fight for Highland land rights'. Although the bards may have represented a range of views about the land risings—and may have had a range of interests in stating those views—they can at least be expected

to have held a clear sense of the collective identity of those who took part and articulated that in their work. If a 'feeling of community' and collective subjectivity existed among crofters of the time, then it is in the work of these bards that we might expect to find it.[27]

The method employed here to determine whether 'the crofting community' existed as a collective subjectivity in the second half of the nineteenth century is to make a lexical analysis of a corpus of Gaelic poetry of the land risings looking for instances of the Gaelic words *croit*, *croitear* and *croitearachd*.[28] The works that have been chosen for this analysis are the 1891 edition of the work of Mary MacPherson, *Dain agus Orain Gaidhlig,* featuring 90 poems and songs; the final edition of *Clarsach an Doire*, the collected poetry of the extremely popular late-nineteenth century Skye bard Neil MacLeod; and the anthology *Tuath is Tighearna,* excluding from this work any poems of MacLeod's or MacPherson's which also appear in the aforementioned compilations.[29]

The analysis also includes a search for instances of the words *Gàidheal* and *Gàidheil*[30] as well as searching for members of the *tuath* lexical family as a term of identity in use at the time. A detailed analysis of *tuath*—a word which can describe both a place as well as that place's inhabitants—and its deployment ideologically during the risings will form part of future work on this topic. However, for this article the number of occurrences of members of the 'crofter' and 'Gael' lexical families as markers of identity are compared to assess whether historians can properly describe the collective agency of those engaged in the land struggle as members of 'the crofting community' or whether those involved were describing themselves instead in ethnic or national terms as 'Gaels'.

The first body of work analysed was that of the poet Neil MacLeod. He was born in Glendale on Skye, a community and island at the centre of the land risings, but lived most of his life in Edinburgh. His collection, *Clarsach an Doire*, featured a range of poems on the struggle for land and culture in the late nineteenth century and was first published in 1883. By the middle of that decade his work was already well known and immensely popular among Gaels. At the time he was writing, he was the only secular Gaelic writer to have one of their books run to four editions in their own lifetime.[31] The word 'crofter' and its derivations are entirely absent from his entire oeuvre of around 4,350 lines of poetry and three short prose pieces. This absence is true even for his songs titled *Na Croitearean Sgitheanach*[32] and *Oran nan Croitearan*[33]. While *croitear* does appear in the songs' titles, there is not a single mention of *croitear,* or any of its derivations, in either of the poems themselves.[34]

The second work examined is that of Mary MacPherson—more commonly known as *Màiri Mhòr nan Oran*[35]—described by Sorley Maclean as 'par excellence the poet of the Land League'.[36] Her work extolled the participants in the land risings and excoriated their opponents. The whole of her published work amounts to around 6,500 lines of poetry. In this body of work the word *croitear* and its variants appears just once and this usage is in relation to a specific event, which may be said to justify its inclusion. The term *croitear* appears in her song commemorating the decision of the crofters' commission in 1887 to return the right of crofters in Braes on Skye to graze their animals on *Beinn Lì*. Although MacPherson refers to *chroitearan ionmhainn*[37] in this poem, in the same work she also refers to the *tuathanaich Bhaltos*[38]—who had been, according to Donald Meek in his commentary on *Orain Beinn Lì,* 'the first crofters in Skye to refuse to pay increased rents for their crofts'. In his commentary Meek puts quotation marks around the 'farmers' of Valtos, perhaps to emphasise what he

considered an unusual fact; namely, that MacPherson was using a word other than 'crofters' to describe the people who had taken action in Valtos. A systematic lexical analysis of her work discloses that this apparently unusual fact is, in fact, the norm—the term *croitear*, which MacPherson 'ought' to be using ('ought' from a perspective conditioned by the assumptions of 'the crofting community' historiography of the last forty years), is almost entirely absent from her published oeuvre. 'Crofter' does make one other appearance in MacPherson's work and in this it is similar to its use by Neil MacLeod in that it appears in the title of the poem *Coinneamh nan Croitearean*[39] but nowhere in the body of the poem. According to Donald Meek's research this song was composed after a meeting on Skye on 13 May 1884 which was held specifically to discuss the report of the Napier commission.[40]

In both of the only two instances where the term 'crofter' does appear in MacPherson's published work, we can see that she has a particular reason to refer to 'crofters', and that these references are specific rather than generic.[41] In one instance the reference is in relation to a legal decision in 1887 over land that the court had decided should be part of the crofting tenure system created in the previous year. In the other it is in relation to a meeting on the island in 1884 to discuss the report of the Napier commission into 'the condition of the crofters and cottars in the Highlands and Islands' which had visited the island the previous year.

Lexical analysis of the anthology *Tuath is Tighearna* discloses that 'crofter' is not only almost wholly absent from the work of Mary MacPherson and Neil MacLeod but that it is in fact generally absent from the Gaelic protest poetry of the nineteenth century. Seven poems in the collection—numbers 16, 26, 27, 28, 33, 39 and 41—refer to 'crofters' in their title. However, in a development which parallels that of MacLeod's *Na Croitearean Sgitheanach* and MacPherson's *Coinneamh nan Croitearean*, in only

one of these seven poems—number 27—is the word 'crofter' used in the poem itself. Aside from *Na Croitearean Sgitheanach*, all of these poems in which 'crofter' or a derivative is used in the title but not in the poem itself were first published in the *Oban Times* newspaper and it seems likely that the titles were given to them by the editor of this paper, rather than by the bards who had made them.[42] The poems and songs presented in *Tuath is Tighearna* contain just three references to the term 'crofter' in the poems themselves. One of these is from the previously mentioned *Orain Beinn Lì* and is excluded from the analysis because it has already been included in Mary MacPherson's own anthology. A second use comes in a poem which describes Dr Roderick MacDonald, one of the 'Crofter MPs' elected in 1885, as 'a crofter's son'. Donald Meek attributes this particular use of 'crofter' as a response to accusations in *The Scotsman* newspaper that Dr MacDonald was a 'carpet bagger', emphasising that, although he was a doctor in the south of England, his parents belonged to the Isle of Skye. The third, and the only usage in which 'crofter' is clearly being employed by the poet as a generic term of identity, is in a poem called 'The Crofters' Banner' written by a Gael living in Greenock. Additionally, the book contains one use of the word *croit* in a poem by a Skye bard welcoming the arrival of the Napier commission.[43]

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Having established the relative absence of terms in the 'crofter' lexical family in the poetry of the land risings, the analysis will now examine the same corpus for instances of the 'Gael' lexical family. Neil MacLeod's poetry contains twenty-three uses of members of the 'Gael' family.[44] As previously noted, neither of his poems in which the word 'crofter' appears in the title contain the word 'crofter' in the poem itself. They do not envisage a 'crofting' future. Instead both poems refer hopefully to the prospect for

'Gaels', with one looking forward to a time when there will be 'Gaels without number in the land of the mountains'. The discrepancy between the identity given in the titles and the actual object of the poems' sentiments is striking. This focus on 'Gaels' also occurs in Mary MacPherson's work where members of the 'Gael' lexical family appear 43 times—not including use in poem titles (where they appear seven times) or repetitions of song choruses.[45] MacPherson's exhortation to her fellow islanders in the poem *Eilean a Cheo* underscores the argument that she was concerned with supporting the bearers of an identity that we should primarily conceive of in ethnic or national terms:

> *Ach cuimhnichibh gur sluagh sibh,*
>
> *Is cumaibh suas ur còir*[46]

The anthology *Tuath is Tighearna* contains 30 uses of members of the 'Gael' lexical family, appearing in 19 different poems. This includes one use in the poem in praise of Dr MacDonald ('the crofter's son') where it is said in general terms that he *a fhuair urram mòr nan Gàidheal*.[47]

TABLE 1: *Relative numbers of instances of members of the lexical families 'crofter' and 'Gael' found in a corpus of poetry of the 19th century land risings*

Name of Work/Author	Instances of the 'crofter' lexical family in the text of the poems	Instances of the 'Gael' lexical family in the text of the poems	Lines of poetry analysed	Lines per instance of 'crofter'	Lines per instance of 'Gael'
Poems and Songs by	1	43	c.6,640	1 per 6,636 lines of	1 per 154 lines of

				poetry	poetry
Mary MacPherson*					
Clarsach an Doire by Neil Macleod**	0	23	c.4,350	No instances	1 per 189 lines of poetry
Tuath is Tighearna***	3	30	2,384	1 per 795 lines of poetry	1 per 80 lines of poetry
Entire Corpus	4	96	13,374	1 per 3,343 lines of poetry	1 per 139 lines of poetry

*including two songs from Donald Meek's collection which did not appear in the 1891 edition of Mary MacPherson's work. (Meek, *Taghadh*, poems 38 & 39)
**including one song from Meg Batemen's selection which did not appear in *Clarsach an Doire*. (Bateman, *Bàird Ghleann Dail*, poem 10)
***excluding one poem of Mary MacPherson and one of Neil Macleod which were already included in their own anthologies (MacPherson's *Oran Cumha an Ibhrich* is included in this analysis as it does not appear in the 1891 edition of her work. (Meek *Tuath is Tighearna*, poem 38).

This corpus analysis has sought instances of words from lexical families that indicate the collective self-understanding invoked ideologically by those involved in the risings. The analysis discloses that members of the 'Gael' lexical family are common throughout the corpus—they appear in work from the beginning until the end of the nineteenth century, and they appear in the work of a wide range of bards. By contrast, in more than 13,000 lines of poetry related to the land struggle there are only four instances of words from the 'crofter' lexical family, and these are generally deployed in response to specific events which had already been externally defined as relating to the condition of crofters or to crofting tenure.

Three qualifying remarks are in order. Although 'Gael' is the term of ethnic or national identity used most commonly by the bards, a sense of Britishness and other forms of identity are also discernible in the corpus. *Breatann*[48] is invoked in several songs which display a sense of grievance that the loyalty of Gaels to the British Empire and their active service in imperial armies is not being rewarded at home, and *Alba*[49] is

recognised—and in Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn's work criticised—as a territorial entity. However, there appears to be no reference to *Albannaich* or *Breatannaich*[50] as a 'national' sense of identity in the corpus.[51]

Secondly, one contributory factor to the comparative difference in usage of these terms of identity may be internal to the poetry itself, rather than ideological or ontological. Gaelic poetry is highly metrical and contains an internal rhyming system, such that in some cases the bards may have found one term of identity easier technically to work with than the other in putting their work together. However, there are around twenty-five times the number of references to 'Gaels' as to 'crofters' in the poetry, and such is the scale of the difference, and its consistency throughout the corpus, that this consideration cannot be considered sufficient to refute the conclusion that follows.[52] A third qualifying remark relates to another important source of evidence for analysing the identities and ideologies expressed by those involved in the risings, and by their supporters. These are *comhraidhean*, which were didactic dialogues on topical issues, generally between a 'learned' person and a less learned person, which appeared in Gaelic journals and newspapers during the nineteenth century. They were pioneered in the 1830s by the influential minister, Rev. Norman MacLeod, who included them in his Gaelic publications as a means of providing practical and moral instruction to Gaels. Sheila Kidd's volume of *comhraidhean* for the *Scottish Gaelic Texts Society* is a substantial anthology of these dialogues. A lexical analysis of these shows that while members of the 'Gael' family appear more often than those of the 'crofter' family in the dialogues, there is not the same disparity as in the poems. For instance, in the anthology's selection relating to land issues 'Gael' appears 12 times and 'crofter' six times, and in those dialogues relating to electioneering in the 1880s 'Gael' appears nine times and 'crofter' seven. However, it is not possible to identify authors for many of the

comhraidhean. Moreover, the format is associated with moral and religious instruction and many of its best known proponents were clergymen. Indeed, there is no evidence that any *comhraidhean* were written by those directly involved in the land risings. Kidd's work demonstrates that the 'crofter' had become an active political character in some *comhraidhean* composed before the early 1880s. However, these political expressions do not appear to have come from those directly involved in the risings.[53]

Lexical analysis of the poetry of the land risings, therefore, can provide an answer to the question of whether it is legitimate for historians to use the term 'the crofting community' to describe the collective self-understanding of participants in the land struggle. The almost complete absence of words from the 'crofter' lexical family in the poetry makes it impossible to maintain the view that the sense of being 'crofters' who belonged to a collective 'crofting community' was of any significance to the bards who chronicled, helped to inspire and participated in the land risings, acting as spokespersons for their people. Historical accounts which focus primarily on describing the feelings and actions of 'crofters' and of 'the crofting community' in the nineteenth century are therefore untenable. Not only is 'crofting' an insignificant part of indigenous expressions of identity as represented in the poetry of the risings, but there also does exist throughout that body of work an identity which clearly *is* the primary identity invoked ideologically. If historians are accurately to identify and describe the identity, ideology and actions of those involved in the land struggle, then it is in ethnic and national terms as a rising of Gaels that they must do so.

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One potential criticism of the approach taken in this article, and a *post hoc* defence of James Hunter's argument, is that while the people involved in the land risings may not

have used the terms of the 'crofter' family to identify themselves, they can nevertheless be shown by historians to have been systematically behaving in a manner that marks them as a 'class' participating in an anti-landlord class struggle and that, therefore, 'the crofting community' is a convenient term by which to describe them collectively. To adapt the more general methodological argument posited by Quentin Skinner, historians studying the land risings might wish not only to identify the identity and actions of the group involved, but also to comment on the place of that identity and those actions within a larger historical pattern or narrative. [54] A consequence of an analysis of this sort might be to disclose attitudes and actions that exemplify what Hunter's account called the 'essential truth' of 'class conflict' in the west Highlands and Islands following the evangelical revival of the nineteenth century, a conflict that manifested itself in what he described as 'anti-landlord' behaviour. Moreover, proponents of this defence could at least point to the repeated use in the 1880s of the term 'the crofting class' by external commentators to describe the identity of those involved in the risings. The validity of such a defence will depend on the evidence supplied by the historian for 'class conflict' and 'anti-landlord' behaviour among the people concerned. However, a difficulty in assessing the merit of such arguments is that their proponents at times proceed by scrupulously gathering as much evidence as possible that confirms the ideologically pre-determined 'essential truth' of 'class conflict', while at the same time playing down or excluding evidence to the contrary. In such accounts, the weight of evidence given for 'class conflict' (such as a visiting reporter claiming, on the basis of a short tour to the west Highlands and Islands in the mid-nineteenth century, that its society was divided into two opposed classes) or for 'anti-landlordism' (such as a government report warning about the newspaper reading habits of 'the crofting class' in the late nineteenth century) may not be properly balanced with evidence which suggests that there was

significantly more going on than simplistic 'class conflict' and 'anti-landlord' explanations allow for.[55]

Hunter exemplified what he called 'the beginnings of an effective anti-landlordism by crofters' through drawing on the poem *Spiorad a' Charthannais*[56] written in the 1870s by the Lewisman Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn. He argued that the poem was 'one of the most penetrating condemnations of what was done to Highlanders by their former chiefs'.[57] However, while *Spiorad a' Charthannais* is certainly trenchant in its criticisms of the actions of landlords, the context of the poem suggests it is highly unlikely that it was intended as a condemnation of the 'former chiefs'. Indeed, it is debatable whether it is accurate to describe this work, or Mac a' Ghobhainn's poetry more generally, as promulgating either 'class conflict' or the overthrow of landlordism. If we adopt the perspective called for by both Hunter and Skinner, to work from within the 'culture, tradition and experience' of the people and to seek to 'see things their way', what is disclosed is that it is much more likely that Mac a' Ghobhainn was drawing upon a traditional political resource of Gaelic bards, that of the power of praise and dispraise, in order to seek restoration of the old order and the proper character of the leaders of indigenous society.[58]

Donald Meek states that Mac a' Ghobhainn's poem was composed shortly after the unrest in Bernera in Lewis in 1874. The only immediately recognisable allusions to contemporary events in the poem are remarks against Donald Munro, the unpopular chamberlain of the then landlord of Lewis, Sir James Matheson, and an implied reference to Matheson himself, who made his money in the Chinese opium trade. The language of the work is highly theological—theologically-based argument, and with it a clear sense of a Christian religious identification, played a significant part in the argumentation of several poets of the clearances and risings—and it critiques stridently

the morality and psychology of the times. Mac a' Ghobhainn declaims against the contemporary order of things: 'O World you have gone far off course'. This bad course has set up a discordant and unnatural order full of 'treacherous lusts' and 'fiery mad desires' which 'take us from the proper path and make us stray aside'. In such a world gone wrong, the work of 'the spirit of charity' is to

> …extinguish the fire of enmity
>
> In the eye of wildest gaze;
>
> You would pacify and quieten
>
> The dark and brutal brow;
>
> You would remove the look of wickedness
>
> From the barbaric tyrant's face,
>
> Take their greed of wealth from them
>
> And cast treachery from its place.[59]

Perhaps the most succinct expression of the virtue of charity is expressed near the outset of the poem; charity would 'replace the frown of injustice with the beauteous sheen of grace'. Cumulatively, what is being invoked here appears to be less the call for revolutionary change in the social order, such as the expulsion of the landed class and an end to landlordism. Instead, it seems more an extended cry for spiritual transformation and the moral redemption—rather than the overthrow—of the traditional social elite to their proper behaviour and calling.[60]

That this latter aim was Mac a' Ghobhainn's intention receives support from another of his surviving works, *Oran Luchd an Spòrs*.[61] In it he argues that 'the men with a right to the land' have been displaced by 'old men with money'. He then

explicitly contrasts the '*Gàidheil nan euchd*'[62] who have been displaced with

'*ruinnsearan Sasannach*',[63] 'wretches who are in the place of those who once were

ruling the Highlands of Scotland'. In fact, far from condemning 'the former chiefs' he

laments the passing of *ceannardan uasal*,[64] characterising them as *suairc agus fìrinn*;[65]

he condemns their replacement by what he calls *luchd-fuadain*, which can mean

'imposters' but may also carry connotations (through the term *fuadan*) of rootlessness,

friendlessness, and even, perhaps, a reference to people being removed, unwillingly,

from their land—which is certainly historically true in Matheson's case. It is clear from

this poem that Smith is not thinking in class terms by calling for an end to landlordism;

instead he is imploring for the restoration of an indigenous Gael society in which the

social elite returns to its traditional responsibilities and values.[66] This is a call that can

be found consistently in the essentially conservative native political ideology being

expressed in the poetry and prose of the risings. In addition to being repeated in the

Gaelic poetry it can also be found in the English language columns of newspapers such

as the *Inverness Courier* and the *Highlander*. Crucially, it features prominently in the

important essay contributed to the Napier commission by the folklorist Alexander

Carmichael. Indeed, it seems likely that some of the claims connected to this native

political ideology were central to Lord Napier's proposal of the township as the central

unit of organisation to support a rebalancing of the relationship between tenant and

landlord. Landlords opposed this plan as a breach of proprietorial rights and the idea of

township organisation was ignored legislatively until 1891 when it was deemed

necessary for the management of common grazing land. Some recent historians have

drawn attention to this strand of political advocacy (focusing on its deployment in

'secular poetry') in order to ridicule it as uselessly invoking a 'mythical golden age' of

the clans. Their accounts emphasise instead the importance of biblical sources of

protest. However, while scripture was used, not only by Gaelic bards but also by land reformers such as John Murdoch, to provide a powerful critical perspective on the land issue, some answers to the land question offered by the Bible seem considerably less realistic, politically, than some of the alternative political visions emerging from secular poetry and prose. The heroes in the native ideology were the collective *tuath* or *tuath-cheatharna* rather than individual crofters. The *tuath-cheatherna* can be fairly literally translated as 'country champions'. It is an ideologically affirmative word for the people of a locality and is derived from the term *tuath*.[67]

The call to reconstellate native society call did not preclude strong criticism of native leaders. Michael Newton's work has demonstrated how threat and invective could be used against traditional leaders by bards as a means to seek change in the wayward leader's behaviour. From an indigenous perspective, Mac a' Ghobhainn and the other bards who also distinguished between redeemable native landowners and irredeemable non-native ones were not engaging in 'anti-landlordism', but in a form of critical discursive practice to achieve political change that was customary to them, which they understood implicitly, and which they were able to deploy in the debates that inspired and were inspired by the risings. Not only, then, were the people rising as 'Gaels' rather than as 'crofters', but it also seems that their bards, far from (as Hunter put it) 'overthrowing the immense corpus of practice and belief' which they had inherited from at least a thousand years of continuous existence on their lands, were instead utilising those practices and beliefs as a means of resistance. Rather than 'stultifying' the people, indigenous traditions appear in fact to have been used to incite them.[68]

The different conclusions that Hunter and this article have drawn about the 'meaning' or 'intention' of Mac a' Ghobhainn's poem may be understood as a

consequence of the respective analyses proceeding on the basis of two different senses of the word 'meaning'. In a discussion on methods for recovering the meaning of historical texts Quentin Skinner delineates three different senses of the word 'meaning' when applied to a text. The first refers to the 'sense' and 'reference' of the words that constitute the text, which cumulatively would be analysed to form part of a supposedly 'objective' reading of the text—he calls this *meaning1*. This method for analysing the meaning of a text is focused on trying to establish the 'meaning' of the text itself and pays little or no attention to the context in which it was produced. As Skinner notes, there now exists a significant body of scholarship that casts radically into doubt the idea that *meaning1* can be achieved in relation to any text. The second sense of 'meaning' is reader oriented, asking for explication of the question 'what does this text mean to me' as its reader? Skinner calls this *meaning2*. In terms of understanding the text in the historical context of its production this 'subjective' sense of meaning, which focuses on multiple contemporary receptions of the text in different contexts rather than on the context in which, and out of which, the text was created, is limited. A third sense of 'meaning'—*meaning3*— delineated by Skinner is to ask about the meaning that was intended by the text's author in creating it. This is what J. L. Austin called the 'illocutionary force' of the text as an utterance. Skinner, building on speech act theory and the hermeneutics of Gadamer and others, is concerned with 'meaning' in this third sense as an attempt to recover authorial intention—what the author was 'doing' in creating their text. In contrast to the first and second senses of meaning, the third sense of meaning demands a focus on the text's original context by 'placing the text to be interpreted within a field of assumptions and conventions to which it contributes and from which it derives its distinctively meaningful character'.[69]

In claiming a 'meaning' for Mac a' Ghobhainn's poem in terms of 'anti-landlordism' and the 'condemnation … of former chiefs', Hunter appears to have operated on the basis of *meaning2* in which he gave primacy to a view of the poem's meaning based on the assumptions and conventions of the class-based method of which he was making use. In contrast, by addressing *meaning3* and marrying evidence from the texts of both the poems with insights from the field of cultural assumptions and conventions within which Mac a' Ghobhainn produced his work, we can come to identify that his general ideological concern is with 'ethnic' or 'national' matters. Specifically, in terms of what Mac a' Ghobhainn is doing (the illocutionary force of the two poems), Donald Meek has argued that the bard does three things: he '*diagnoses* the problem in broadly theological terms', and in *Oran Luchd an Spòrs* he '*assesses* and *denounces* the new breed of landlords who have converted large tracts of the Highlands into sportsmen's playgrounds'. Given the ethnic term that Mac a' Ghobhainn uses to describe the new type of landlord that he is assessing— as well as his use of an ethnic term to describe those being displaced (and his non-use of the term 'crofter')—it seems clear that his mode of thinking was not class-based, and that his message was intended as an argument towards the restoration of native society rather than as a contribution to 'class struggle'.[70]

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In addition to the poetic evidence Hunter sought to demonstrate his thesis of class struggle by focusing on events in particular communities centrally involved in the land risings. One area on which Hunter concentrated was the estates of Glendale and Husabost in north-west Skye which were at the heart of the risings in the 1880s. If class struggle can be found anywhere, then it should surely be in this locality. In the course of

his argument Hunter asserted that Dr Nicol Martin, who was until his death in 1885 the

landlord of Husabost Estate, was 'held in very little esteem by his tenants'. Although

there may be a case for this assertion, Hunter provided no evidence for it in his book. It

is clear from Dr Martin's testimony to the Napier commissioners that he had come to a

low opinion of his tenants, but it is not so clear that this was reciprocated. Several

witnesses emphasised instead the aggressive conduct of one of Martin's employees, one

testifying that 'the factor … was worse, for me, than the doctor'.[71]

Hunter's use of Dr Nicol Martin to exemplify his thesis of class conflict becomes

more problematic in light of accounts of the landlord's funeral in 1885. According to

the *Glasgow Herald*,

> Fully a thousand people from all parts of the islands, and from some distant
>
> places of the mainland, were present. The whole of the tenantry of the Glendale
>
> and adjoining estates turned out to a man to pay a last tribute of respect to their
>
> late landlord.[72]

Another report, while acknowledging that 'the land agitation … somewhat disturbed the

friendly relations subsisting between' Martin and his tenants, stated that the funeral was

'the largest seen on the island since that of Flora MacDonald' and that 'His own tenants

turned out to a man'.[73] Two years later, the conservative newspaper the *Aberdeen*

Weekly Journal described the funeral of Dr Martin's brother, the Reverend Angus

Martin who had been a minister on Skye for around forty years. Angus Martin's son,

also called Nicol Martin, had inherited Dr Martin's estate and Angus Martin had lived at

Husabost with his son in his retirement. Of Angus Martin's funeral the *Aberdeen*

Weekly Journal wrote:

So earnest were the people in their desire to do honour to the memory of the deceased gentleman that they at first proposed to carry the coffin all the way to the place of interment, a distance of about thirty miles, the Snizort people offering to go all the way to Glendale for the purpose.[74]

While not seeking to deny the real tensions that existed at the time on estates throughout Skye, and the complaints made by tenants about their situation, this analysis suggests that social relations between landlords and tenants may have been warmer, and certainly far more complex, than analyses which assume with certainty the 'essential truth' of 'class struggle' have managed to convey. The integrity of the class-based perspective is further undermined by some of the poetry written during the risings that refers specifically to the Glendale area. Mary MacPherson, that 'poet par excellence of the land league', wrote a glowing elegy for Dr Nicol Martin on his death. This was not the only latenineteenth-century praise poem for the laird of Husabost. It appears that Iain *Dubh* MacLeod, the brother of the Glendale poet Neil MacLeod and himself a well known bard, also wrote a poem in praise of the new landlord, the younger Nicol Martin—although the fact that two different Nicol Martins were landlords of Husabost in the late 1800s makes it difficult to be certain to which of them Iain *Dubh's* poem is dedicated.[75]

The other character identified by Hunter as a major figure of oppression in north-west Skye was Donald Macdonald, generally known as *Torra-mhòr* after the area in Sleat in south Skye to which his family belonged. *Torra-mhòr* had for many years been factor to the Glendale estate and was a first cousin of its landlord, Sir John Macpherson MacLeod, who died in 1881. The year following the landlord's death the tenants of one Glendale township described *Torra-mhòr* as their 'despotic factor' in a petition to the

trustees of MacPherson MacLeod's estate and outlined a series of complaints against him. Yet while the Napier commissioners subsequently heard accounts from Glendale of *Torra-mhòr's* greed and tyranny, attitudes towards him from that part of Skye to which he was native were in stark contrast. A letter sent to the commissioners from around seventy crofters in Sleat deplored the 'base and false statements' that had been made against *Torra-mhòr* and contended that he had always been considered 'the people's best friend'. His obituary in the *Oban Times* in 1912 affirmed this view, saying that 'he was looked upon by the crofters as a friend and advisor', adding that 'all the crofters of Sleat' were among those who met his funeral cortege in Isleornsay and that the Sleat people 'carried the remains from there to its last resting place' at the church of Kilmore, some five miles away. He was also the subject of praise poetry. The poet was from Camuscross in Sleat, where *Torra-Mhòr's* grandfather had been the last tacksman before it was broken up into individual lots as a crofting township in the early nineteenth century.[76] These differences in attitude seem to have a geographical—or perhaps 'territorial' would be more apposite—basis and to be related to ideas about consanguinity rather than class. *Torra-Mhòr* was a Macdonald controlling traditionally Macleod-held lands in Glendale, but who belonged to traditionally Macdonald-held lands in Sleat.

Hunter believed that the existence of a 'sense of unity among crofters as a whole' in the north-west Highlands and Islands is what marked the creation of 'the crofting community' in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, the obvious differences in attitude expressed by crofters in north and south Skye towards *Torra-mhòr* is strong evidence against such a sense of unity existing in class terms during the 1880s, and thereafter, in the island that was an epicentre of the risings at that time.[77]

Land rising leaders also at times fail to display the proper antagonistic attitude towards those they were in conflict with. Not only did Mary MacPherson appear to let down the cause by praising Dr Nicol Martin, but also the prominent land reformer Alexander Mackenzie dedicated his 1889 book on the history of clan Macleod to the Skye landlord Lachlan Macdonald who was a MacLeod on his mother's side. In the 1880s Macdonald repeatedly spoke out on behalf of the tenantry and, moreover, not only did he pay for publication of the collected poems of land league bard Mary MacPherson, he also provided her with a home rent-free. Mackenzie's dedication reads simply: 'The best landlord in the Highlands.'[78]

Six years before extolling Macdonald as a landlord, Alexander Mackenzie was expressing a quite different attitude towards proprietors. In his contemporary account of the rising on Skye he used the actions of *Torra-mhòr* and of Nicol Martin to claim that tenants in the north west of the island were engaged in a 'battle against landlordism'. However, given his later comment on Lachlan Macdonald we cannot take such a view at face value. Evidence that the Glendale tenants may not have considered themselves as battling landlordism *per se* can be found in the same petition in which some had called *Torra-mhòr* a 'despot'. In the petition they described their deceased landlord, Sir John Macpherson MacLeod, as 'our late good and famous proprietor' and particularly praised 'the benefits he bestowed on the people of St Kilda'. St Kilda had also been part of his estate and he had been regarded as a benevolent landlord there until his decision to sell the islands to MacLeod of Dunvegan in 1871. The tenants' sentiments in this petition are not couched in the language of 'anti-landlordism' and suggest that Mackenzie's claim of 'anti-landlordism', rather than a significant ideology being promulgated by the people of Glendale might instead have been a polemical invention

being used by Mackenzie as a ploy to gain support from 'friends of the Gael in the large towns of the south' to whom he was explicitly addressing his argument.[79]

Andrew Newby's observation, mentioned at the outset of this article, that 'proto-socialist' organisations, presumably promulgating class consciousness, received short shrift in the west Highlands and Islands from those involved in the risings is itself evidence against the idea that crofters were thinking and acting, or even willing to think, in 'class' terms. Indeed, Hunter himself appeared to recognise this at one point during his analysis in *The Making of the Crofting Community*, in a section of the book in which he acknowledged that the ideas of social reformers such as Henry George and Joseph Chamberlain had 'little impact on the crofters' movement'. Instead, in an interesting four-page discursion at the heart of the book,[80] he described the movement as a 'distinctively Highland creation', arguing that the beliefs employed by the people to justify their resistance lay, in his view, in 'the more or less remote past of the Celtic peoples'. However, the argumentative thrust of this discursion, which could have served as a point of entry to the indigenous ontological and ideological framework that inspired and sustained the risings, is quite at odds with Hunter's statement earlier in the book—derived from the 'stages' view of history shared by Marxist and Whig histories—that the people's 'immense corpus of practice and belief inherited from a society with a continuous existence of at least a thousand years', was a 'folklore' which had a 'stultifying' influence and needed to be overthrown before meaningful resistance to landlord power could begin. In the face of this tension the indigenous ideological framework remained largely undeveloped and played no significant or consistent role in Hunter's analysis thereafter. Instead, the structuring confines of the Marxist framework immediately and ineluctably led him back to the assumption that the risings were occurring because the people had learned to behave as a 'class' and that 'by the 1880s

… the crofting community had emerged as a coherent political— as well as social and cultural—entity'. Given such methodological constraints, it is hardly surprising that the idea that an indigenous cultural or ethnic identity and ideology was inspiring the resistance disappeared under a class-based descriptor: in the 1976 edition it was described as a 'philosophy' of 'the crofting community'; by the 2000 edition it had transmuted into an 'ideology' stemming from within 'the crofting population itself'.[81]

The analysis presented in this section does not deny that evidence exists which can be used to argue for the beginnings of a collective self-understanding as crofters during the risings. For instance, the Sutherland crofters association was set up in the years immediately following the Napier commission enquiry. Indeed, the nature of the Napier commission's remit to report on 'the conditions of crofters and cottars' is almost certainly the single most important generator of that new sense of subjectivity, such as it was at that time.[82] However, the analysis has demonstrated that the historical record for the island at the epicentre of the land risings in the late nineteenth century discloses: significant evidence of the lack of a sense of class unity; significant evidence of the lack of a sustained ideology of class struggle; and significant evidence that anti-landlordism *per se* was not the intention of those who were involved in the risings. There is, therefore, good reason to refute the claim that the people involved displayed systematic patterns of expression and action that would mark them ideologically as a class. Instead the evidence repeatedly draws attention to the apparent connection between, on the one hand, degrees of consanguinity and local association and, on the other, lines of political opposition and alliance during the land risings on Skye. A credible account of the risings cannot be made without seeking to understand and account for these factors far more comprehensively than the historiography has thus far achieved. This response to potential criticism of the findings of the lexical analysis—namely, that class attitudes

can be discerned among those involved in the risings, even in the absence of their linguistic use of a class-based form of identity—further undermines the integrity of a class-based narrative of the risings by disclosing some of the range of historical evidence which contradicts it.[83]

Indeed, there is scope to take the argument here further, and to suggest that some Gaelic speaking leaders during the risings seemed reluctant even to use 'crofter' as a general descriptive term for the people involved. For some this may have been because of the word's unfamiliarity. In 1892 Myles MacInnes, at that time secretary to the Skye branch of the Highland Land League and a man who had grown up in south Skye in the 1860s, addressed a royal commission charged with reporting on whether land used for sport or grazing in the Highlands could be used by crofters and small tenants. MacInnes told commissioners 'the word croft is a new name altogether … it was unknown to me in my younger days; I never heard of it until after growing up. It was always "tenants"'.[84]

For others, 'crofter' appears to have been avoided because it was considered disparaging and a mark of the social impoverishment of the Highlands. This attitude appears to be discernible in an important paper entitled 'The Clearance of the Highland Glens' given to the Gaelic Society of Inverness by Colin Chisholm of Namur in 1877. Chisholm, who had been president of the Gaelic Society of London and would, in 1882, become an honorary chieftain of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, presented a trenchant criticism of the land laws and the behaviour of landlords, advocating reform along the lines previously undertaken in Ireland. When it came to identifying the people being cleared, Chisholm recalled an evidence session on game laws at the British Parliament which was addressed by the Liberal MP and Highland landlord Edward Ellice. Chisholm said that Ellice had spoken most favourably about Highland people and 'not a

word escaped his lips that could be construed into slight and disrespect for them'. Chisholm then added:

> It is quite true that Mr Ellice spoke of them as 'Crofters'. This was the lingo in which Highlanders were generally spoken of at the Game Law Committee. But the Earl of Chatham dignified them on a former occasion with the name of 'Mountaineers.' [85]

At face value, Chisholm's remark suggests he considered the term 'crofter' strange and, perhaps, undignified and disrespectful.

The association of crofting with degradation comes across strongly in Alexander MacKenzie's influential 1877 article 'The Prose and Poetry of a Highland Croft' which garnered responses from the Duke of Argyll, Charles Fraser Mackintosh, and Gladstone.[86] Certainly, in English language political writing that accompanied the risings the term 'crofter' was often preceded by the adjective 'poor' which suggests that at that time it served the discursive function of signalling poverty and destitution rather than empowerment. Another indication of the weakness of crofting as a political identity at the time of the risings can be found in *Oran nan Lotaichean*,[87] a song by a village bard in Benbecula, which refers to plans in either the late 1870s or the early 1880s to turn the outrun land of some crofting townships into new crofts on the Uist estate of Lady Gordon Cathcart. The bard ridicules the proposal by conjuring up a utopian state of affairs once the crofts have been laid out, and then concludes by advocating emigration for those who are seeking crofts—a proposal many are said to have taken up.[88]

For some of those closely involved in the risings, 'crofter' does not seem to have

been a term pregnant with an ideology of empowerment and resistance; instead it seems

to have been considered an enduring symbol of poverty, squalor and disparagement.

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[1] Hunter excluded the legislative crofting areas of the eastern Highlands, Argyll, Caithness and the islands of Orkney and Shetland from his definition of 'the crofting community' whose 'heartland' area he described in 1976 as the north-west Highlands and the Hebrides, 'the last bastion of Scottish Gaelic and the culture associated with it'. In a later edition of the book Hunter acknowledged that crofting legislation also covers those areas excluded by him in his historical argument. Although there were some related disturbances in the north-east of Scotland in that decade, the focus of political struggle over land in that decade was overwhelmingly in the Gaelic west, so that for the purpose of an argument on the creation and development of a collective sense of identity based around crofting tenure, his decision to focus on communities of the north-west Highlands and Islands seems reasonable. The argument in this article is that, despite acknowledging the cultural rootedness of the so-called nineteenth-century 'crofting community' at the outset of his work, Hunter's choice of analytical framework led him, and the historians who have followed his analysis, to marginalise the cultural ideological basis for indigenous political resistance in favour of the less well-founded claim that resistance was organised upon the lines and ideology of 'class'. James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 1976), 3; James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 2000), 24. For related disturbances in north-east Scotland see Andrew Newby, *Ireland, Radicalism and the Scottish Highlands c.1879–1912* (Edinburgh, 2007), 60, 61.

[2] Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 4, 87, 91, 94, 160, 216.

[3] Reviews of critical commentary on Hunter's book can be found in Ewen Cameron, *Land for the People? The British government and the Scottish Highlands, c. 1880–1925* (East Linton, 1996), 1–15; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 2nd edn, 1–36.

[4] T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People* (London, 1987), 2–5; T. C. Smout, 'Review of *The Making of the Crofting Community*', in *American Historical Review* 93 (1988) 1060, 1061; T. C. Smout, 'An Ideological Struggle: The Highland clearances', in *Scottish International Review* 5 (1972) 13–16, at 14.

[5] Eric Richards, *The Highland Clearances: People, landlords and rural turmoil* (Edinburgh, 2013), 358, 371, 375, 377, 379, 385, 386, 407.

[6] Eric Richards, *Debating the Highland Clearances: Debates and documents in Highland history* (Edinburgh, 2007), 77; David Paton, *The Clergy and the Clearances: The church and the Highland crisis 1790–1850* (Edinburgh, 2006), 173; Allan MacColl, *Land, Faith and the Crofting Community: Christianity and social criticism in the Highlands of Scotland 1843–1893* (Edinburgh, 2006), 214. For Hunter's and Withers's arguments on the relationship between the free church and the land risings see Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 94–106, at 105, 106; C. W. J. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: The transformation of a culture region* (London, 1988), 119. Hunter first presented his argument about the relationship between the Disruption and the emergence of the crofting community in an article for *Scottish Studies* in 1973. The contents of that article were republished in chapters six and nine of *The Making of the Crofting Community*. The contents of others of his early articles also feature in the book.

[7] T. M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War: The social transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester, 1994), 217. For other critical perspectives on the link between the Disruption and the risings see D. B. A. Ansdell, 'The 1843 Disruption of the Church of Scotland in the Isle of Lewis', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* xxiv (1991) 181–197; Douglas Ansdell, *The People of the Great Faith: The Highland church 1690–1900* (Stornoway, 1998); Ewen Cameron, 'Embracing the past: The Highlands in the nineteenth century', in Dauvit Broun, R. J. Finlay, and Michael Lynch (eds), *Image and Identity: The making and remaking of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1998), 195–219, at 197–200. Allan Macinnes, 'Evangelical Protestantism in the Nineteenth-Century Highlands', in Graham Walker and Tom

Gallagher (eds), *Sermons and Battle Hymns: Protestant popular culture in modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1991), 43–69, at 58.

[8] Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War*, 222–5; Rosalind Mitchison, *A History of Scotland*, 3rd edn (Abingdon, 2002), 305. Although Hunter also mentioned the role of external supporters, he did so with much less emphasis: Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 136, 137, 143–5.

[9] Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War,* 217, 222, 223. Devine's argument seems somewhat confused here, as he had earlier written that 'the majority of the inhabitants [of the Hebrides] continued to endure an existence of poverty and insecurity after 1860'. Ibid., 207

[10] See also Roger Hutchinson's perceptive comments on the relationship between famine and the risings, in Roger Hutchinson, *Martyrs: Glendale and the revolution on Skye* (Edinburgh, 2015), 43, 44.

[11] Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War*, 212, 226, 230.

[12] Cameron, *Land for the People?* 4; Ewen Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle: Scotland since 1880* (Edinburgh, 2010), 68; Annie Tindley, *The Sutherland Estate, 1850–1920: Aristocratic decline, estate management and land reform* (Edinburgh, 2010), 7. See also the class assumption underlying Tindley's important analysis of the effect on Highland estate factors after the 1870s 'as the crofting community, and its urban, press and governmental supporters, found its voice', in Annie Tindley, '"They sow the wind, they reap the whirlwind": Estate management in the post-clearance Highlands, *c*.1815–*c*.1900' in *Northern Scotland* 3 (2012) 66–85 at 72–6, 78, 79 (quotation).

[13] Andrew Newby, 'Land and the Crofter Question in Nineteenth-Century Scotland', in *International Review of Scottish Studies* 35 (2010) 7–36, at 24. See also Newby, *Ireland, Radicalism and the Scottish Highlands,* 189–93.

[14] Withers, *Gaelic Scotland,* 415; Iain Robertson, '"Their Families had Gone Back in Time Hundreds of Years at the Same Place": Attitudes to land and landscape in the Scottish Highlands after 1914', in D. C. Harvey, Rhys Jones, Neil McInroy and Christine Milligan (eds), *Celtic Geographies: Old culture, new times* (London, 2002), 37–52, at 38, 40, 50. See also the useful discussion in Robertson's *Landscapes of Protest in the Scottish Highlands after 1914: The later Highland land wars* (London, 2016), 50–4.

[15] MacColl, *Land, Faith and the Crofting Community*, 58, 94; John Shaw, 'Land, people and nation: Historicist voices in the Highland land campaign 1850–1883', in E. F. Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, radicals and collective identities in the British Isles, 1865–1931* (Cambridge, 1996), 305–24, at 319. See also I. B. Stewart, 'Of Crofters, Celts and Claymore: The Celtic magazine and the Highland cultural nationalist movement, 1875–1888', in *Historical Research* 89 (2016) 88–113. There are many instances of Gael politicians and activists of all stripes invoking a sense of their nationhood at the time of the risings. For examples of the Liberal MP, Charles Fraser-MacKintosh, and the Conservative MP, Cameron of Locheil, see *Celtic Magazine*, Apr. 1878, Aug. 1881.

[16] Although Stiùbhart uses the term 'Gaelic question', it is clear from his writing that he is primarily referring to issues concerning the collective identity of those who spoke the language, rather than to the language itself.

[17] D. U. Stiùbhart, 'Alexander Carmichael and *Carmina Gadelica*', in Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart (ed.), *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael* (Lewis, 2008), 15.

[18] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963), 9, 11 (my emphasis) – in part cited in Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 4.

[19] Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 1, 3, 4. See also the claim on p. 87 of Hunter's book that asserts the existence of 'the crofting community' in the mid-nineteenth century. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine in detail the context in which Hunter wrote his own account. Ewen Cameron has argued that the period before publication of Hunter's work in the 1970s had been politically and historiographically hostile to crofting and that *'The Making of the Crofting Community* did much to rehabilitate the crofter historically and politically'. Cameron, *Land for the People?* 3; Ewen Cameron, 'Review of *The Making of the Crofting Community*', in *SHR*, 75 (1996) 262–4.

[20] G. Stedman Jones. *The Languages of Class: Studies in English working-class history* (Cambridge, 1983), 2, 21. Alex Callinicos, 'Marx deflated', *International Socialism* 152 (2016), 167–72, http://isj.org.uk/marx-deflated/ [accessed 10th January 2019]. For sample criticisms of Stedman Jones's early position, see B.D. Palmer, 'The Poverty of Theory Revisited. Or, critical theory, historical materialism, and the ostensible end of Marxism', in *Left History* 1 (1993) 67–101, at 79–82; Neville Kirk, 'In Defence of Class: A critique of recent revisionist writing upon the nineteenth-century English working class', *International Review of Social History* 32 (1987) 2–47.

[21] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), *passim*, at 51. The development of a method to consider political ideas as 'speech acts' belonging to specific historical contexts, and to 'establish a methodological similarity between the history of ideas and the history of other human activities', has been a major debate among late twentieth-century historians of political thought.

For a summary, see, R. Tuck, 'History of political thought', in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2001), 218–232, at 227. This sort of contextual and interpretative approach has also been advocated more widely in the humanities, such as in the philosophical scholarship of Charles Taylor and the anthropology of Clifford Geertz. C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Harvard, 1995), especially the chapter entitled 'Comparison, history, truth'; C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).

[22] Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, i. 47.

[23] Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 5, 90.

[24] Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 2nd edn, 16. Hunter also emphasises the importance of poetry as a source for historians in J. Hunter, *Set Adrift Upon the World: The Sutherland clearances* (Edinburgh, 2015), 362, 363.

[25] Cameron, *Land for the People?* 14.

[26] *Evidence taken by Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (London, 1884) [henceforth *Napier Commission Evidence*].

[27] D.E. Meek (ed.), *Tuath is Tighearna - Tenants and Landlords: An anthology of Gaelic poetry of social and political protest from the clearances to the land agitation* (Edinburgh, 1995), 10. For further details on the bards' relationship to community see Michael Newton, *Warriors of the Word: The world of the Scottish highlanders* (Edinburgh, 2009), 96; Thomas McKean, 'A Gaelic songmaker's response to an English-speaking nation', *Oral Tradition* 7 (1992) 3–27.

[28] 'croft', 'crofter' and 'crofting' respectively.

[29] Mairi Nic-A-Phearsoin, *Dain agus Orain Gaidhlig* (Inverness, 1891); Niall Macleoid, *Clarsach an Doire*, 6th edn (Glasgow, 1975); Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna*. The corpus of Mary MacPherson's poetry is supplemented by two poems which are not in *Dain agus Orain Gaidhlig* but which appear in Donald Meek's more recent anthology of MacPherson's work—poem numbers 38 and 39 in Meek's anthology. D.E. Meek (ed.), *Màiri Mhòr nan Oran, Taghadh de a h-òrain le eachdraidh a beatha is notaichean* (Glasgow, 1998). The corpus of Neil MacLeod's work is supplemented by an additional poem which is not in *Clarsach an Doire* but which has been published in Meg Bateman's recent selection of MacLeod's work. Bateman's edition also includes poems written by Neil's brother, John, and Donald, their father. The brother and father's poems do not relate to the risings or to larger concerns of cultural politics and are not included in this analysis. Meg Bateman with Anne Loughran (eds), *Bàird Ghleann Dail—The Glendale Bards* (Edinburgh, 2014). This corpus is limited to poems which are available in collected published form and is not based on primary research. Although the corpus is not an exhaustive record of the available poems relating to the risings, it is based on collections of MacPherson and MacLeod's poems compiled during their lifetimes, and on the well-regarded scholarship of Donald Meek, Meg Bateman and Anne Loughran. The two bards whose work is particularly examined are widely considered to be two of the major poets of the land risings, albeit in very different ways. For discussion see Donald Meek, 'Gaelic poets of the land agitation', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 49 (1979) 309–76; Bateman, *Bàird Ghleann Dail*, xvii–xxx.

[30] 'Gael' and 'Gaels' respectively.

[31] D.E. Meek (ed.), *Caran an t-Saoghail—Wiles of the World* (Edinburgh, 2003), 482; Bateman, *Bàird Ghleann Dail*, xxx.

[32] 'The Skye Crofters'.

[33] 'The Crofters' Song'.

[34] Macleoid, *Clarsach*, 39, 131.

[35] 'Big Mary of the Songs'.

[36] Sorley Maclean, *Ris a Bhruthaich. The criticism and prose writing of Sorley Maclean*, ed. W. Gillies (Stornoway, 1985), 70.

[37] 'dear crofters'.

[38] 'the farmers of Valtos'.

[39] 'The Crofters' Meeting'

[40] Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna*, 163–6; Meek, *Màiri Mhòr nan Oran,* 181. It is worth noting that the *tuathanaich* of '*tuathanaich Bhaltos*' is also a derivation of the word *tuath*.

[41] Nic-A-Phearsoin, *Dain agus Orain Gaidhlig,* 113, 153.

[42] Duncan Cameron, the editor of the *Oban Times* at the time of the risings, was a prominent land reformer. It is possible that the choice of titles—all of them dating from 1885 or later—may have been a political decision on his part. Sheila Kidd has suggested that the title of Mary MacPherson's poem *Coinneamh nan Croitearean* may also be the work of her editor, rather than a title given by the bard herself. MacPherson could not write in Gaelic and her poems were taken down by John Whyte who was a

colleague of John Murdoch at *The Highlander* newspaper and was also active in the land agitation. The same pattern can also be found in a very forceful song on the land risings, with the same name as one of Neil MacLeod's poems, *Oran nan Croitearan*, which is not included in the texts selected for this corpus but which appears in an early twentieth-century collection of poems and songs from the island of Lewis. In this case too *croitearean* appears in the title but not in the text, while the text itself contains two uses of members of the 'Gael' family, and explicitly states that the land struggle is for the *còraichean* ['rights'] of *Gàidheil*. I.N. MacLeoid, *Bardachd Leodhais* (Steòrnabhagh, 1998), 262, 263.

[43] Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna,* 124, 140, 165, 320. The word *croitear* also appears in two late nineteenth-century songs in the collection *Na Baird Thirisdeach*. In one the term appears alongside 'cobbler', 'sailor' and other terms for occupations in a comic song about the new year. In the other the bard is contrasting the good condition of the crofters on Tiree with their new legal rights and herds on the hills with cottars who were still very impoverished. The works both previous and following this poem in the collection are by the same poet and refer to the land struggle more generally. Both contextualise the struggle as concerning the condition and rights of *Gàidheil*. Members of the 'croft' lexical family do are not appear in either of them. E. Camshron (ed.), *Na Baird Thirisdeach* (Stirling, 1932), 191, 320–3.

[44] The instances are as follows: Macleoid, *Clarsach*, 25, 42, 52, 53, 62, 99, 104 (twice), 111, 134, 151, 162, 163, 179, 189 (twice), 256, 268 (twice), 274. Bateman, *Bàird Ghleann Dail* 60, 61, 62. In addition to these usages, but not counted here, members of the 'Gael' family appear in titles of MacLeod's poems, and he uses the term *clann nan Gàidheal* in the forewords to the first, third and fourth editions. I have also excluded ten emphatic repetitions of the word *Gàidheil* at the end of each verse in the poem *Na Gàidheil*.

[45] Nic-A-Phearsoin, *Dain agus Orain Gaidhlig*, 1 (twice), 10, 13, 15, 32, 33, 35 (twice), 36, 37, 40, 71, 72, 75, 87, 108, 109 (twice), 113, 121, 125, 128, 134, 143, 145 (twice), 148, 150, 166, 209, 214, 250 (twice), 257, 259, 262, 274, 280, 289, 300, 302, 317.

[46] Professor Meek translates this couplet as: 'Remember that you are a people and stand up for your rights'. Meek, *Caran an t-Saoghail*, 372, 373.

[47] 'won the great esteem of Gaels'. Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna,* 47, 66, 71, 83, 84 (twice), 85, 95, 98, 99, 109 (three times), 113, 127, 130, 131, 134, 140, 143, 144 (twice), 147, 153, 156 (twice), 158, 159, 170, 180.

[48] 'Britain'.

[49] 'Scotland'.

[50] 'Scottish' or 'British'.

[51] I am grateful to Martin MacGregor for his observations on the multiple identifications that are found in the poetry.

[52] I am grateful to Sheila Kidd for a general discussion of the metre and rhyming patterns of Gaelic poetry.

[53] This section has been informed by discussions with Sheila Kidd about the history of the *comhraidhean*. I am also grateful to Dr Kidd for allowing me pre-publication sight of a manuscript of her *Scottish Gaelic Texts Society* volume and for guiding my analysis of the texts. S. Kidd, *Còmhraidhean nan Cnoc: The nineteenth-century Gaelic prose dialogue* (Edinburgh, 2017).

[54] For a careful outline of this historiographic approach, and of its limits see Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, i. 49–51.

[55] As part of his critique of the class essentialism of some social historians, Gareth Stedman Jones argued that, in practice, in studies that focus on the experience of a class 'tacit assumptions are made about what is to count as experience, about its meaningfulness, and about its cumulative collective character'. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, 20. For the visiting reporter's claim and the alleged reading habits of 'the crofting class', see Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 104, 129.

[56] 'The Spirit of Charity'.

[57] Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 90–2.

[58] John MacInnes' classic account of the panegyric code of praise and dispraise in Gaelic poetry can be found in Michael Newton (ed.), *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal: Selected essays of John MacInnes* (Edinburgh, 2006), 265–320. For the panegyric code see also, Ronald Black (ed.), *An Lasair: Anthology of eighteenth-century Scottish Gaelic verse* (Edinburgh, 2001), xix–xxxix.

[59] Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna,* 214.

[60] Ibid., 90–7, 213–20.

[61] 'The Sportsman's Song'.

[62] 'heroic Gaels'.

[63] 'English rascals'. This translation, given in *Tuath is Tighearna*, is questionable. In the nineteenth century *Sasannach* had a much broader semantic range than merely identifying 'Englishness'. Some of the new elite were Lowland and Highland Scots, including Sir James Matheson on Lewis, and these could be *Sassanaich* too.

[64] 'noble chiefs'.

[65] 'generous and righteous'.

[66] Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna*, 98, 99, 221, 222.

[67] For articulations of the native ideology in newspapers and secular poetry see, *Inverness Courier*, 1 Oct. 1885; *Highlander*, 13 Jan. 1877; MacLeod, *Clarsach*, 134. For a commentary that ridicules the very idea that an appeal to the norms of traditional Gaelic society could have been a useful political technology in the risings see, Macinnes, *Evangelical protestantism*, 60. For some politically unlikely demands based on scripture see, J. Murdoch, *Iubile nan Gaidheal: Fuasgladh an fhearainn a reir a Bhiobuill* (Glasgow, 1883), 2, 7. See also J. MacLeod, *Highland Heroes of the Land Reform Movement* (Inverness, 1917), 7–9. For uses of the *tuath-cheatherna* see Nic-A-Phearsoin, *Dain agus Orain Gaidhlig,* 91, 112, 177.

[68] Newton, *Warriors of the Word*, 136, 137. See also discussion at n.3 above.

[69] This analysis draws on Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, i. 90–102. The direct quote is from Quentin Skinner, 'Hermeneutics and the role of history,' *New Literary History* 7 (1975) 209–32, at 210. The interpretative method outlined here draws attention to the need for historians to consider that the difference between their own inherited conceptual framework, and that of the historical agents that they study, may be a critical obstacle to understanding the meaning of those agents' reported acts (including their speech acts). For further discussion, see Charles Taylor, 'Reply and rearticulation', in James Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The philosophy of Charles Taylor in question* (Cambridge, 1994), 213–57, at 219–22; and for a most useful and succinct elucidation of this methodology, and of the shortcomings of the 'Whig' approaches to history that it contests, see James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in contexts* (Cambridge, 1993), 98–9.

[70] Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna*, 26, 27.

[71] Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 91; *Napier Commission Evidence*, 415, 429, 434, 435.

[72] *Glasgow Herald*, 7 Oct. 1885.

[73] *Otago Witness*, 9 Jan. 1886

[74] *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 28 Oct. 1887. See also N. Macdonald and C. Maclean, *The Great Book of Skye. From the island to a world – people and place on a Scottish island* (Portree, 2014), 351. For the Aberdeen newspaper's politics see, Ewen. Cameron, 'Journalism in the Late Victorian Scottish Highlands: John Murdoch, Duncan Campbell and the "Northern Chronicle"', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 40 (2007) 281–306, at 283.

[75] Bateman, *Bàird Ghleann Dail,* 171, 217–21; Meek, *Màiri Mhòr nan Oran*, 142, 143.

[76] A. Mackenzie, *The Isle of Skye in 1882–83* (Inverness, 1883), 19; *Napier Commission Evidence*, i. 80, 386, 607; *Oban Times*, 24 Aug. 1912. The praise poem for *Torra-mhòr* is part of an archival collection of work by the Camuscross bard John Martin held by Neil MacGillivray and which he is currently preparing for publication in collaboration with Rody Gorman and Donnie MacKinnon.

[77] Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 91.

[78] Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 91, 102, 103; A. Mackenzie, *History of the Macleods With Genealogies of the Principal Families of the Name* (Inverness, 1889); Macdonald and Maclean, *Great Book of Skye*, 189, 190.

[79] Mackenzie, *The Isle of Skye*, 19, 24. On the other hand, it is clear that Glendale was the one area in the soon-to-be crofting counties that not only demanded complete severance of the relationship between landlord and tenant, but achieved that demand. See, Hutchinson, *Martyrs,* 141, 179–82. The leader of the agitation in Glendale, John MacPherson, said in his testimony to Napier that if the landlord would not sell the land to people willingly then 'he should be compelled by Government to do it', although it would appear such views may not have had the support of all the Glendale crofters at that point in time. *Napier Commission Evidence*, 364, 366, 367, 372, 377, 383, at 384, John MacPherson.

[80] Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 156–60.

[81] Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 136, 137, 160; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 2nd edn, 223. In the foreword to the 2000 edition Hunter claimed he had resolved the deficiency of the work's lack of an account of the indigenous ideology by including this in his description of the risings in his history of the Highlands and Islands, *The Last of the Free*. However, it is not immediately apparent that *The Last of the Free* achieved this claim. Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 2nd edn, 24.

[82] I am grateful to Aonghas MacCoinnich for emphasising to me this important point.

[83] This analysis has focused on Skye, an area on which Hunter focussed both in *The Making of the Crofting Community* and also in subsequent work. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine in-depth other areas involved in the risings, such as Sutherland, Tiree and Lewis. However, the poetry from Lewis and Tiree suggests that similar social dynamics to Skye may also have existed there. For some of Hunter's subsequent work on Skye see, Hunter, J. and Maclean, C. *Skye: The Island* (Edinburgh, 1986). For analysis of the Tiree and Lewis poetry see discussion at n.42 and n.43 in this article, as well as the section on Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn.

[84] *Report of the Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands, 1892)* (Edinburgh, 1895), 188.

[85] *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 6 (1876–77) 180. An indication of the contemporary importance attached to Chisholm's paper is that it was reprinted twice almost immediately on first publication; it appeared in the August 1878 edition of the *Celtic Magazine*, and as a standalone pamphlet by John Murdoch.

[86] *Celtic Magazine* Sep. 1877. The responses appeared in the November edition.

[87] 'The song of the lots'.

[88] A Macdonald and A Macdonald, *The Macdonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry* (Inverness, 1911), lxviii, 397–9. A similar lack of regard for crofting is apparent in the words of Malcolm Macleod, the Berneray delegate to the Napier Commission, who appears also to have been secretary of the HLLRA branch on Berneray. The text of a Gaelic letter written by Macleod in 1884 to the prominent land reformer John Stuart Blackie is currently being prepared for publication by Dr Andrew Wiseman and the present author. The Gaelic original of this important text will appear alongside a translation and an analysis which, among other points, takes up the issue raised here.