

## **Heritage, ideology and contrasting Gaelic identities in Scotland and Nova Scotia**

Stuart S. Dunmore

British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow

University of Edinburgh

One notable legacy of the Clearances and mass migration of Highlanders to Maritime Canada in the 18th and 19th centuries is the continued presence of a Gaelic-speaking minority in the province of Nova Scotia. In this paper I will discuss the role of ‘new’ speakers in Gaelic revitalisation initiatives in the divergent contexts of Scotland and Nova Scotia. The concept of the ‘new speaker’ has gained currency in the sociolinguistics of minority languages in the past decade, referring to individuals who have acquired an additional language outside of the home setting and make frequent use of it in the course of their daily lives. In addition to Scotland’s 57,602 Gaelic speakers, the 2011 census recorded 1,275 Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia (amounting to just over 0.1% of the total population). Of that number, only 300 individuals reported Gaelic as their ‘mother tongue’, with the remainder likely to have acquired Gaelic through educational programmes in adolescence or adulthood. Policymakers and language advocates in both Scotland and Canada make frequent reference to the role that new speakers may play in the future of the Gaelic language on both sides of the Atlantic. The present-day Nova Scotia Gaelic community is thus substantially smaller than that of Scotland, having experienced a decline of over 99% in the last hundred years, from over 80,000 in the early 20th century. As a response to rapid language shift in both Scotland and Nova Scotia, Gaelic language teaching has been prioritised by policymakers as a mechanism for revitalising the language. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork speakers in Scotland and Canada, this paper will examine reflexes of this policy in the two countries, juxtaposing the ongoing fragility of Gaelic communities with new speakers’ ideologies around heritage, identity, and their own language learning motivations. In particular, I consider how Nova Scotian new speakers foreground and emphasise their sense of identity as ‘Gaels’, an ethnonym largely avoided or problematised by new speakers in Scotland.