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Thomson, Alexander Malcolm

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Scottish Independence and Shetland Sovereignty:

An Investigation into Micro-Nationalism and the Logic of the Nation-State

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Anthropology

by

Alexander Malcolm Thomson

2015

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Scottish Independence and Shetland Sovereignty:

An Investigation into Micro-Nationalism and the Logic of the Nation-State

by

Alexander Malcolm Thomson

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Paul V. Kroskrity, Co-Chair

Associate Professor Christopher J. Throop, Co-Chair

In this thesis, I demonstrate that the logic of the nation-state is predicated upon a fragile and frangible autology, which is constantly being de-stabilized by an auto-de-construction that moves across fractal levels. Using ethnographic data collected during the summer of 2014, I show that the same line of argumentation pursued by proponents of Scottish Independence was used by some segments of Shetland society (*e.g.* the Referendum on the Islands [ROTI] Petition and Stuart Hill's "Yes Shetland" Campaign) to argue for Shetland Independence. I further show that these minoritarian movements drew upon locally-hegemonic mytho-historical narratives and

elements of the romantic nationalist ideology (*e.g.* ethno-tellurism, linguistic nationalism, etc) to bolster their claims that Shetlanders were a “nation” deserving of a state structure. These mytho-historical narratives were also present among the larger population, which is to say individuals not pursuing an autonomist agenda for Shetland (*e.g.* individuals seeking re-unification with Norway and some formally-affiliated members of the Better Together crowd). Finally, I consider the possibility that the Referendum on the Islands (ROTI) Movement was an ironic ploy by the Better Together campaign, which – precisely by virtue of its irony – exposes an always already existing fault within the logic of the nation-state (*viz.* a politico-economically interested autological auto-de-construction). While the ROTI petition as a politico-theatrical *reduction ad absurdum* may have been intended to guarantee the continued existence of the United Kingdom (*qua* Nation State), this gesture constitutes a gambit inasmuch as it requires the (temporary) suspension of the warrants of the nation-state in general (*i.e.* its metanarrative). Thus, for a moment, we can see that the logic of the nation-state rests upon something outside itself – that its center is decentered.

The Thesis of Alexander Thomson is approved.

Sherry B. Ortner

Paul V. Kroskrity, Committee Co-Chair

Christopher J. Throop, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

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Exergue : “Alex Salmond should always have expected it. Once you stir the nationalist pot, you can never know where it will lead. Residents of Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles are petitioning the Scottish parliament at Holyrood for the right to hold their own referendum on independence, but this time from Scotland rather than the UK.” (Moss 2014)

Avant Propos

One of the problems that this thesis must confront – both thematically and stylistically – is the problem of re-presentation¹. This study's ethnographic object, namely, the ‘Shetland Isles’ as contextualized by the Scottish Independence Debate, could be treated as both an object in

itself and an object for others. For the practicing anthropologist, the choice between these ‘two’ possible ethnographic objects would amount to a decision between investigating the Shetland Isles (*in ipse*) as a site for political debates and the Shetland Isles



as a figure in political debates. Among other things, the former would involve a description and analysis of the numerous poorly-attended townhall meetings organized by the Better Together (anti-Independence) and Yes Shetland (pro-Independence) campaigns; the ‘realignment of imaginative powers’ and sense of social revitalization (*communitas*) that accompanied the National Collective ‘Street Party’²; and

Illustration 1: A cartoon by the local artist ‘smirk’, which parodies the poor turn out at Tavish Scott’s ‘Ferry to the Referendum’ meetings.

1 Darstellung, Vertretung, and Vergegenwärtigung

2 Cf. Graeber 2009:532-533.

the frequent visits that high profile politicians made to the Shetland Isles during the summer of 2014 (*sc.* the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, and the then Deputy First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, both visited Shetland during the course of my fieldwork). The latter, by contrast, would focus predominantly upon the representations of Shetland in local, national and international media. For instance, the way in which the frictious historical relationship between Scotland and Shetland was strategically invoked by Shetlanders to take stance on the Scottish Independence Referendum and/or the way that the Shetland Isles were treated as a nation-state *in posse* by the international media. Enrico Franceschini could thus write an article on Shetland for the Italian newspaper, *Il Venerdì*, called “La catena dei secessionisti: le isole piccole lasciano la Scozia?” (“the chain of secessionists: will this little island leave Scotland?”); an article which unsurprisingly argued against Scottish Independence on the grounds that it would give rise to a “matrioska sindrome”. Although this thesis will mainly focus upon the Shetland Isles as a discursive figure and the way in which the Shetland Isles were often treated as a nation-state *in posse* during the referendum debate – especially by the national and international media, which tended to lend credence and credibility to the locally-disparaged Referendum on the Islands (ROTI) movement, it would be impossible to write this document without engaging with the “ethnographic context” proper. The two objects mentioned above are allegorically related: an investigation into ‘politics in the Shetland Isles’ would be a waste of time if there were no potential for re-presentation (whether ethnographic, journalistic or democratic-declarative), while the figuration of the Shetland Isles in such narratives would be equally inane if no one believed that such an object existed in the first place.

I. Figuring Out the Ethnographic Context:

The Shetland Isles are a group of islands situated in the North Sea region. The archipelago comprises over a hundred islands – fifteen of which are current sites of year-round occupation. The largest of these islands, aptly called “the Mainland,” lies approximately 340 km north-east of Aberdeen (Scotland) and 360 km west of Bergen (Norway). The central geographic position of these islands have led to a long history of contact and colonization. In terms of the former, it is a well-known fact that Dutch fishermen have been fishing in Shetland waters since the middle of the fifteenth century and that Shetlanders were engaged in trade with the Dutch (*esp.* the trade of knitwear) (Irvine 1985:5-6; O'Dell 1933:505). In terms of the second, the Shetland Isles have been settled repeatedly: first by the Picts, then by the Scandinavians, and finally by the Scots. While the Shetland Isles supported a population of 10,000 to 12,000 people during the pre-modern period (Coull 1967), the population today is much higher numbering 23,200 individuals (Shetland Isles Council 2014). Close to seven thousand of those residents live in the city of Lerwick alone, making it by far the largest settlement. For comparison, the settlements of Tingwall and Scalloway have populations of 1,477 and 1,479 respectively (SIC 2014). Due to the fact that the city of Lerwick is both highly populated and the capital of the Shetland Isles (since 1708), it seemed like a logical site for my fieldwork.

As alluded to above, the Shetland Isles were settled by the Norwegians during the eighth and ninth centuries (O'Dell 1933:503). Although the Shetland Isles were transferred from Norwegian to Scottish control over five hundred years ago (in 1469), Shetlanders tend to view themselves as being more Scandinavian than Scottish. Cohen (1987:92) noted perspicaciously that this identification should not be regarded as merely a “romantic exercise in atavistic rhetoric

and mythology,” but rather a reaction to the reality of their political and economic disenfranchisement from the rest of the United Kingdom during the first three quarters of the twentieth century (Cohen 1987:6-7). That is to say, it was an instrumentalization of the past – perhaps an artificial past (Nihtinen 2011) – for the purposes of combatting current struggles. Unsurprisingly then this pro-Norse / anti-Scottish sentiment has manifested itself several times during Scotland's recent history of constitutional reform. During the 1970s, for instance, a large majority of Shetlanders voted against the establishment of the Scottish Assembly in a post-legislative referendum on the Scotland Act (1978). The percentage of Shetlanders who voted against this measure (*viz.* 72% percent of voters) represented the highest rate of opposition encountered anywhere in Scotland (Nihtinen 2011:128). Similarly, the Shetland Isles also had relatively high rate of opposition during Scottish Independence referendum with 63.7% of votes cast being “no votes”. Perhaps it was this history of Shetland exceptionalism that caused Danus Skene, a parliamentary candidate for the SNP (Scottish National Party) and one of the key figures in the Yes Shetland campaign, to emphasize the importance of “get[ting] Shetland as near [to] the national average as we possibly can” during Yes Shetland's final townhall meeting on September 16th (*i.e.* two days before the Scottish Independence Referendum). At that time, he said that it was vital that they get a good vote in Shetland in order to dispel the myth that Shetlanders go about “with horns coming out of [their] heads” (*i.e.* wearing Viking helmets all the time) and that “Shetland is so different that we're not really in Scotland here” (*i.e.* that Shetland is not really part of Scotland). Danus also stated that a good vote was needed to put an end to “this Isle of Man nonsense, Captain Calamity and all the rest of it” (09/16/14) – a reference, I presume, to the various minoritarian positions in Shetland advocating for the

Independence of the Islands (e.g. Stuart Hill's [*i.e.* Captain Calamity's] one-man-campaign to prove that the Shetland Isles were never formally / legally incorporated into the Scottish Crown).

Given the local importance of the pro-Norse / anti-Scottish sentiment in Shetland, I initially hypothesized that the political discourse there would differ substantially from that practiced elsewhere in Scotland. Specifically, I hypothesized that anti-Independence Shetlanders would strategically invoke the figure of the “grasping Scots” and the history of Scottish Oppression to cast doubts on the soundness of Scottish Independence and the trustworthiness of the Yes Campaign. Although these hypotheses were not entirely borne out during the course of my research, there were a fair number of instances where my consultants invoked the Saxbyean mytho-historical narrative (*vide infra*). I intend to analyze some of these instances in the following pages. That said, the discourse that I observed during my fieldwork mirrored the national discourse for the most part. Issues of concern for Shetlanders – as for Scots – included the currency, the economic viability and the military capabilities of an Independent Scottish State. While it is possible that the centrality of these national discourses in my data corpus may be the result of certain sampling biases, particularly those biases that result from focusing primarily upon communities of politically-engaged individuals (Lave and Wenger 1991), casual conversations with non-participating Shetlanders centered upon the same topics. This supports my view that the mirroring phenomenon that I observed was not merely a product of my methodological decisions, but rather representative of phenomena in the world. As always, however, there are limitations to my data since I myself as an embodied individual was the instrument of data collection. There certainly were political conversations to which I was not privy and which may countervail against this view.

My research involved two months of ethnographic fieldwork and was primarily centered upon the city of Lerwick – although I did go to other parts of Shetland to attend agricultural shows and political events (*e.g.* Cunningsburgh, Hillswick, Voe, Whalsay, Yell). Most of my consultants were actively campaigning either for or against Scottish Independence. That is to say, the majority of my consultants were involved in Better Together Campaign, the Yes Campaign, or other affiliated campaigns (*e.g.* National Collective Shetland, Women for Independence Shetland, etc). I did not enjoy equitable access to both campaigns. While I was initially invited to attend the No campaign meetings following a fortuitous encounter with some Better Together members at the “Scotland’s Future Debate” on July 15th (2014), some of the delegates were opposed to my attendance at these meetings including the chair. Consequently, this offer was withdrawn on July 23rd – before I had a chance to attend any of these meetings. As such, my ethnographic work with the ‘no campaign’ most resembled interface ethnography (Ortner 2010:218). My access to the Yes campaign was much more open due – in part – due to the fact that they had a stable storefront presence on Harbour Street. As soon as it was opened on August 27th (2014), I started visiting the store nearly everyday. Additionally, the fact that I was without a vehicle or reliable transport meant that members of both campaigns provided me with rides to and from distant townhall meetings. In addition to ensuring that I was able to attend the meetings in question, this also allowed me to discuss politics with members of both campaigns in a more informal context.

Members of both these groups were known to each other and my attempt to navigate both groups impartially was only partially successful. As mentioned previously, I was not granted access to the planning meetings for the No Campaign. I was also told that they initially thought

that I might have been a spy for the Yes campaign (*sc.* I was the only person not affiliated with Better Together to attend Tavish Scott's first 'Ferry to the Referendum' meeting in Sandwick). This limited access to the Better Together campaign may have been the result of my own biases and subject position. While I tried to maintain an aura of impartiality in my dealings with both groups, I probably betrayed my personal desire for a Yes vote inadvertently at certain junctures during my fieldwork. For example, during the 'Ferry to the Referendum' meeting at the Tingwall townhall, I described the Scottish Independence Referendum as an "exciting" and "once-in-a-lifetime" event – terms which carried affective connotations which misaligned entirely with those of my interlocutor from the No campaign (*sc.* this interlocutor told me frankly during his next turn-at-talk that the referendum was "the worst thing to happen in [his] lifetime"). Both the Better Together campaign and the No Campaign were largely dominated by retired, white men. The core of Shetland's Better Together Campaign was comprised of two women and four men by my count. The Yes Campaign had a board solely comprised of men with two very active female participants. Men routinely outnumbered women in townhall meetings, which again were largely attended by supporters. There was a mildly successful 'Women for Independence' group in Lerwick that organized one meeting during my time in Shetland. I interviewed the leader of this movement, Jen Stout, and was told that it was designed to promote alternative spaces for women to engage in politics because the traditional style of politics – described as men in suits shouting at each other – was perceived as off-putting by women.

While I am not able to provide a comprehensive account of political life in the Shetland Isles during this period, one remarkable – and remarked upon – difference between the Independence Campaign as waged in the Shetland Isles versus the Mainland can be seen in the

fact that the Yes Campaign chose not to canvass (*i.e.* knock on doors and discuss politics with residents). According to the head of the Yes Campaign, Brian Nugget, this was due to the fact that Shetlanders will either “tell you what they think you want to hear or they will tell you nothing at all” – thus limiting its ability to work as a tool for “voter identification”. This view would seem to coincide with those expressed by researchers of the Shetland Isles in the past. Thus, Anthony Cohen wrote in his ethnography of the island of Whalsay that: “Whalsay people are reticent in the expression of their deep convictions. By and large, they tend not to display emotion, nor to divulge personal feelings which may set them at odds with others.” (Cohen 1987:64). Similarly, Goffman's dramaturgical model was developed on the basis of his fieldwork in the Shetland Isles (pseudonymously referred to as Bergand in his dissertation). He observed therein that islanders tended to construct a ‘working consensus’ (Goffman 1953:358) whereby interactional tensions and disharmonies were avoided by paying “official lip-service [...] to the fiction that all present are behaving properly, that all are in agreement on matters of significance, and that all respect one another” (Goffman 1953:358). Whether this model still holds true in the Shetland Isles today, I cannot say with certainty. I can attest that while canvassing briefly with Ian Hudghton (Member of the European Parliament [MEP]) in Whalsay (08/11/14), I witnessed a fisherman openly criticize the European Union and the Common Fisheries Policy such that Mr. Hudghton felt the need to tell his colleagues after the fact that the interaction had been “hard-going”. Additionally, I witnessed impromptu political debates between members of the Yestival roadcrew and Shetlanders outside of the Lounge Bar, impassioned political debates during the National Collective ‘Street Party’, and antagonistic comments during a few of Tavish Scott's better attended meetings. Based on my personal experiences, I would not be inclined to argue

that a reticence to express one's deep-seated convictions is still a feature of Shetland society – at least not when talking with outsiders or “acquaintances” in Lerwick.

II. The Scottish Referendum:

A referendum is a political device, which refers an issue to the electorate for consideration. Referendums tend to supervene and subvert party politics inasmuch as the electorate is asked to vote upon a single issue – usually a constitutional, territorial or moral matter (*see* Butler and Ranney 1978:3). Even though referendums tend to be overdetermined by the state structure – for example, through the determination of a voting franchise, the appointment of counting officers, the designation of polling stations, and the apparatus of alienation known as the “voting booth” (Graeber 2009:528-30; Derrida 2011:21) – they are widely regarded to be a close approximation of direct democracy and are consequently used to make decisions that might otherwise lack legitimacy. Such decisions include: establishing a new constitution, annexing a new territory, dissolving an existing political union, entering into or withdrawing from certain international organizations, etc. In this work, I shall concern myself with the connection between Scottish Independence Referendum and the requests made by certain parties in Shetland, Orkney and the Northern Isles for their own independence referendum(s). I will also examine how both referendums exemplify the logic of the nation-state; that is to say, how both referendums derive from the romantic nationalist narrative as contextualized by our current era of global capitalism and supranational jurisdiction.

The Scottish Independence Referendum had its proximate origin in the 2011 Scottish Parliament General Election. During this election, the Scottish National Party (SNP) won an

unexpected majority of parliamentary seats, allowing them to implement their campaign promise of holding a referendum on Scottish Independence (SNP 2011:28; Mullen 2014:631). While Her Majesty's Government (also known as the British Government) acknowledged that the people of Scotland were entitled to such a referendum on principle, there was an initial disagreement over whether the Scottish Government could legally authorize and legislate such a referendum on its own. This disagreement was resolved on the 15th of October 2012, when representatives of the Scottish and British Governments (*incl.* both the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, and the First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond) convened at St. Andrews House in Edinburgh to sign a memorandum of agreement. This agreement (*viz.* the *Edinburgh Agreement*) allowed for “a single-question referendum on Scottish Independence to be held before the end of 2014” by Order of Council under § 30 of the Scotland Act (1998). It also “put it beyond doubt that the Scottish Parliament can legislate for that referendum,” effectively resolving the problem of *vires* (powers). Subsequent unto this agreement, the Scottish Government used their new-found powers to legislate for the referendum, determining such matters as the ballot question, the electoral franchise, the appointment of referendum agents, and the campaign rules through the *Scottish Independence Referendum Bill*. The date of the referendum was scheduled for September 18th (2014).

While the Scottish Nationalism and the Scottish Independence Movement are interesting phenomena in their own right, my familiarity with the Shetland Isles – an oil-rich archipelagic region in the North Sea – made me particularly curious about the way in which these ideologies would be received³ within a Shetland context. Specifically, I anticipated that the local branches

3 By reception, I mean both the *transformation* that these ideologies and praxologies underwent as they entered into a new context (*i.e.* Shetland) and the *reaction(s)* that these ideologies / praxologies engendered within this

for both sides of the debate (*viz.* the pro-independence ‘Yes’ campaign and the anti-independence ‘No’ campaign) would be forced to contend with the legacy of Scottish colonization and oppression, inscribed as they are in the Shetland psyche. While these narratives ultimately proved *not* to be as ubiquitous as I initially imagined, they did appear at certain junctures during the debate and should be considered etiologically important inasmuch as they form the basis of Shetland's ethnic identity (*cf.* Grydehøj 2011). For the most part, however, the local campaigns mirrored the national campaign with the same issues (*e.g.* the currency question, austerity measures, the possible defunding of the NHS, doubts about the viability of an Independent Scottish State, etc) being discussed in Shetland as in Scotland. One noteworthy difference was the presence of minority positions advocating for the independence of the Shetland Isles.

As far as I know, there were two main movements supporting “Shetland Independence”. The first was led by the long-time activist, Stuart Hill, and could be referred to as the “Yes Shetland!” movement⁴. The second was the Referendum on the Islands (ROTI) movement. It was supposedly led by Malcolm Lamont (Shetland) and Catriona Murray (Lewis). These two movements differed in a number of respects including praxis, ideology, and (potentially) sincerity. The former believed that the Shetland Isles had never been legally integrated into Scotland (or the UK for that matter) and advocated that the residents of Shetland should exercise

context.

4 A certain amount of caution is required when using the name “Yes Shetland,” since it may refer to either Stuart Hill's campaign for Shetland Independence or to the Shetland branch of the Scottish Independence Movement (Yes Scotland). The potential for confusion can be illustrated by the fact that the URLs chosen for the two campaigns were nearly identical – with the former using www.yesshetland.org and the latter using www.yesshetland.info. Although it might not be wise to speculate, it is possible that Mr. Hill chose to name his campaign, “Yes Shetland”, to engender a certain amount of confusion.

their sovereignty by participating in an unofficial digital referendum on Stuart Hill's website. My conversations with Mr. Hill convinced me that he was sincere about Shetland Independence – whatever one may think about his agenda. The latter movement, by contrast, argued that while the Shetland Isles legally belong to Scotland and the United Kingdom, the residents of these islands should have the right to renegotiate their constitutional status on the basis of their cultural and historical distinction from the rest of the country. In terms of praxis, this movement was known for submitting a petition to the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee (PPC). There were and continue to be questions about the sincerity of the ROTI movement (*vide infra*). One thing that both of these movements had in common was that even an assiduous researcher found it difficult to find much support for them “on the ground”. Despite the underwhelming amount of support received by these movements, their existence and discourses are theoretically interesting insofar as they attest to the continuation – and perhaps even re-valorization – of the romantic nationalist narrative under conditions of globalized capitalism (this relationship between continuity and change reminds one of Alphonse Karr's famous epigram, « Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. »).

For the sake of concision, I will restrict my focus here to the ROTI petition, making only the occasional reference to Mr. Hill's campaign (*sc.* it is my position that these two movements are causally and logically identical). The ROTI movement formally began on April 29th, 2014 when Malcolm Lamont filed a petition with the Scottish Government's Public Petitions Committee (PPC). This petition (*viz.* “PE01516”) requested that the Scottish Government hold three separate referendums in Shetland, Orkney, and the Western Isles, the purpose of which would have been to seek a consensus from island residents on whether they would like for their

particular island chain to “become an independent country,” or would instead prefer that it remain part of Scotland. The petition also contained the provision that in the event of a Yes vote on the Scottish Independence Referendum, there should be a ballot option for them to “leave Scotland and stay in the remainder of the UK.” Since the Edinburgh Agreement stipulated that no other polls (or referendums) could be held on the same day as the Scottish Independence Referendum, the chief petitioner requested that the islands' referenda be held exactly one week after the nation-wide referendum on Thursday September 25th (2014). Mr. Lamont rationalized his request for the referenda on the grounds that “[this] part of the world was once in Norway and has its own traditions and culture which set it apart from the rest of what is now Scotland.”

When the Public Petition Committee met on May 20th to consider the ROTI petition, they promptly deemed the petition to be admissible but took some time to decide on a course of action. Initially, there was the question of whether they should invite the petitioner, Malcolm Lamont, to present his case before the committee as was common for many petitions. This line of inquiry was abandoned when the clerk informed the convener, David Stewart (MSP), that Mr. Lamont was “away on holiday”. In the end, the committee resolved to solicit the views of the Scottish Government, while reserving the right to have Mr. Lamont appear before them at a later date⁵. During this meeting, Chic Brodie (Minister of the Scottish Parliament [MSP]) asked how many signatures the petition had garnered. The estimate provided at the time was “over two thousand” – a figure which incidentally is somewhat discrepant from the figure listed on the Scottish Parliament's website (*sc.* the website claims that there were 1312 signatures; 1177 of which were submitted digitally, while another 135 were submitted in physical form).

5 A representative of the Public Petitions Committee (PPC) confirmed with me that the committee decided not to extend an invitation to Mr. Lamont to appear before them on August 5th.

The Head of the Elections and Referendum Team, Steve Sadler, responded on behalf of the Scottish Government on June 27th (2014). In his response, he expressed the view that “Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles are much valued parts of Scotland and have been for many centuries, including prior to the Treaty of Union in 1707.” Then, stepping into the future, he added the succinct sentence: “That would continue in the event of Independence.” Elsewhere in the document, he summarized the positive work done by the working group, “Our Islands, Our Future” and detailed the timeline involved in organizing the Scottish Independence Referendum (presumably as a point of reference for any other referenda). While his letter actually said very little about the ROTI petition or its objectives, his response produced the general impression that the Scottish Government did not favor holding a second referendum on the constitutional position of the islands. Thus, on August 5th (2014), the convener of the Public Petitions Committee (*viz.* David Stewart) could claim with some justification that the “government has made it quite clear what its position is and it doesn't support the petition” before suggesting that the committee close the petition.

As mentioned previously, the petition enjoyed very little support “on the ground”. When I asked locals about the ROTI campaign, I was often told that they were a “shadowy” and “anonymous” organization that appeared to only exist online. They refused to be contacted by telephone, declined or ignored requests for in-person interviews (including my own), and only corresponded with the press through a hushmail account⁶. The shroud of secrecy surrounding the group led many to suspect that it might be a front for the Better Together campaign or a diversion tactic intent on lampooning the nationalist logic (a sort of politico-theatrical *reductio*

6 Hushmail is a “privacy-oriented email service,” which offers PGP-encryption and vanity domain services.

ad absurdum). The group denied these accusations in its correspondences with Jonathan Brown of *The Independent* in March (2014), but doubts persist into the present. Indeed, these doubts have been exacerbated in the wake of Aurora News' investigative reporting on the matter. In early October (2014), mere days after the referendum, the alternative news website published an article chronicling the problems that it had encountered while trying to locate the campaign's notoriously reclusive leaders. Among other things, they reported that the chief petitioner, Malcolm Lamont, is not listed on the electoral rolls housed at the Shetland Library⁷ despite claiming to be from Lerwick (Shetland). Nor were they able to discover any other documents that would substantiate his claims of residency. Likewise, every attempt to locate the group's press officer, Catriona Murray of Lewis, has met with failure. All three of the Lewis residents bearing that name “strongly denied being linked to the group.”

As tempting as it may be to focus on the nebulous circumstances that surround the ROTI group – or, and this option is not entirely opposed to the first – to quickly dispel this nebulosity by concluding that it was little more than a media stunt – I would prefer not to speculate unduly about its leaders' motives, but instead to take it seriously as a movement. Specifically, I would like to examine how the islands referenda petition (PE01516) and the newspaper articles written on it fall within a tradition of thought and praxis that I am calling “the logic of the nation-state”. Phrased differently, we could say that I would like to take it seriously by determining its conditions of possibility. The logic of the nation-state forms an open-system composed of philosophical, ideological and pragmatic elements – which is to say, it contains elements of contradiction. As I hope to make clear, these elements of contradiction are not static and have not

⁷ I can independently confirm Aurora News' findings, since I examined the electoral rolls for myself during the course of my fieldwork.

reached an impasse. They are instead dynamic: it is a logic on the move, if only strategically so.

III. The Logic of the Nation-State:

Romantic Nationalism and Herder's Philosophy

In stating that this logic is philosophical, I mean to say that we can trace the arguments used by Malcolm Lamont and other “proponents” of island independence back to the romantic nationalism of the 18th century. It was at this time that writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried von Herder began to associate political sovereignty with ethnic distinction (which is to say, a people sharing in common a culture, language and territory⁸). While this gesture can be read in many ways, including from a historical materialist perspective, I would assert that on the level of ideas, the increased focus on ethnic identities – and the stipulation of ethnic identity as prerequisite for political autonomy – should be regarded as a sociological project and a narrative of legitimation. In the case of Herder, for instance, the quasi-mystical notion of *das Volk* was part of a sociological project that sought to establish a unit of analysis – indeed, a historical agent – above that of the individual. It also legitimized his political aspirations of German Unification. Starting from the point of immanency, Herder argued that Nature – as instantiated through geological and ecological conditions (e.g. “Mountains, Seas, Streams and Deserts”⁹) – impressed each ethnic group with a unique national character. This

8 One instance of this narrative can be seen in Herder's assertion that there was no more noble task than that of awakening a feeling of fraternity among a nation in dissent (*viz.* Germany). As he wrote in his *Humanitätsbriefe*, “Alle Waffen der Überzeugung und Ironie ... sollte man gebrauchen, um jene Provinzialgötzen zu Dan und Bethel, den Wahn und [Selbst=]dünkel abzutun, und in *Allem das grosse Gefühl emporzubringen, dass wir Ein Volk seyn, Eines Vaterlandes, Einer Sprache.*” (emphasis added) | “One should use ... all weapons of persuasion and irony, in order to Dan and Bethel those provincial idols, to dispel the madness and (self-)benightedness, and to raise up the great feeling in everyone, that we are One People, of One Fatherland, of One Language.” (trans. mine)

9 Herder (1818:324) writes in his *Humanitätsbriefe* that „Die Natur hat Völker durch Sprache, Sitten, Gebräuche,

national character constituted each people as a natural entity capable of governing itself autonomously. In fact, such entities were *required* to govern themselves, since they could only attain perfection¹⁰ (*i.e.* maturity) when freed from the aggressive incursions of other nations (*i.e.* heteronomy). Herder's romantic nationalism thus served as a means of theoretically justifying the workability of democratic ideals (*e.g.* political consensus and popular sovereignty)¹¹. This democratic orientation placed Herder's model at loggerheads with that of Kant, which – starting from the postulate of an atomistic, rational human subject¹² – culminates in either political

oft durch Berge, Meere, Ströme und Wüsten getrennt; sie that gleichsam alles, damit sie lange von einander gesondert blieben, und in sich selbst bekleibten.“ (“Nature has separated people through languages, customs and practices, oft through mountains, seas, streams and deserts; she seems to have done everything possible, so that they remain separated from each other, and stick to themselves” [trans. mine]) Elsewhere, in the second volume of *Ideen*, he enumerates a similar list of ecological, geological and cultural elements responsible for dividing peoples: „Wunderbar theilte sie [Vorsehung] die Völker, nicht nur durch Wälder und Berge, durch Meere und Wüsten, durch Ströme und Klimate, sondern insonderheit durch Sprachen, Neigungen, und Charaktere...“ (1786:246) (“It is wonderful that [Providence] divided the peoples not only through forests and mountains, through seas and deserts, through streams and climates, but in each case through languages, tendencies, and characters...” [trans. mine])

- 10 “Da nun aber unser spezifische Charakter eben darinn liegt, daß wir, beinah ohne Instinkt gebohren, nur durch eine Lebenslange Uebung zur Menschheit gebildet worden, und sowohl die Perfectibilität als Corruptibilität unsers Geschlechts hierauf beruht: so wird eben damit auch die Geschichte der Menschheit notwendig ein Ganzes, d.i. eine kette der Geselligkeit und bildenden Tradition vom Ersten bis zum letzten Gliede.“ (Herder 1786:254) | “However, since our specific character rests in the fact that we, who are bore nearly without instinct, only through a lifelong exercise are formed to humanity, and that both the perfectibility and corruptibility of our species / race / lineage / generation rests on this: so will the History of Humanity necessarily form a whole, that is a chain of sociality and cultivating tradition from the first to the last link.”
- 11 Herder contrasts the *Volk* with the *Staatsmaschine*. While the Volk are guided by their shared Volksgeist, the Staatsmaschine is a “senseless” (*widersinnig*) jumble of peoples that cannot effectively govern themselves because they lack Sympathy for each other. As Herder (1828:372) says: „Nichts scheint also dem Zweck der Regierungen so offenbar entgegen, als die unnatürliche Vergrößerung der Staaten, die wilde Vermischung der Menschengattungen und Nationen unter einen Scepter. Der Menschenscepter ist viel zu schwach und klein, daß so widersinnige Theile in ihn eingepfht werden könnten; zusammengeleimt werden sie so als in eine brechliche Maschine, die mann Staatsmaschine nennt, ohne inneres Leben und Sympathie der Theile gegen einander.“ (“Thus nothing seems so patently opposed to the aims of government as the unnatural enlargement of states, the wild confusion of human races and nations under one scepter. The Human Scepter is much too weak and small, that such antithetical pieces can be installed in him; for they would be limed together in a breakable machine, which man calls the State-Machine, without inner life or sympathy on the part of one piece for another.” (trans. mine)
- 12 The Kantian subject that I have in mind here is the one proposed in the opening lines of Kant's famous essay, *Was ist Aufklärung*. There he says, „AUFKLÄRUNG ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbst-verschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines andern zu

dissension or despotic repression¹³. Through an ethno-telluric dialectic, a mutual trust between a people and their homeland, Herder was able to imagine ethnic groups (*Völker*) that were themselves *sinnlich* (sensitive)¹⁴ and *vernunftsfähig* (capable of reason or perception), themselves caught up in a teleological project of *Aufklärung* (Malsch 1990:82). In brief, the *Volk* is for Herder what the rational human subject is for Kant. This point can be demonstrated by looking at the following passage from Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*:

„Ein böser Arzt ists, der seine Unmündigen erzieht, damit sie Zeitlebens unmündig bleiben. Der beste Regent ist der, der, so viel er kann, dazu beiträgt, daß Regenten dem Menschengeschlecht einmal (wenn wird es seyn?) völlig unnütz werden: denn falsch und verführend ist die Behauptung, daß der Mensch als Mensch einen Herrn brauche. *Das Volk braucht einen Herrn, so lange es keine eigne Vernunft hat: je mehr es diese bekommt und sich selbst zu regieren weiß, desto mehr muß sich die Regierung mildern oder zuletzt verschwinden.* Der edelste Zweck derselben ist also, daß sie entbehrlich werde und jeder sich selbst regiere.“¹⁵ (SWS 13, S. 456, emphasis added)

The parallels between this passage and the opening paragraphs of Kant's famous essay, *Was ist Aufklärung*, are striking. Both Kant and Herder use the metaphor of maturity and

bedienen. *Sapere aude!* Habe Mut, dich deines *eigenen* Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung.“ | “Enlightenment is man's exit out of his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's reason without the guidance of another. Self-incurred is this immaturity, if the cause thereof lies not with a lack of reason, but rather a lack of resolve and bravery to make use of it without the guidance of another. *Sapere aude!* Have courage to make use of your *own* reason! is therefore the motto of the Enlightenment.” (trans. mine)

13 „Nur ein einziger Herr in der Welt sagt: *räsonniert*, soviel ihr wollt und worüber ihr wollt, *aber gehorcht!*“ (Kant 2004:6, *Was ist Aufklärung*). | “Only one single earthly ruler says: *reason* as much as you want and concerning whatever you want, but *obey!*” (trans. mine)

14 See *Ideen*, vol. 2, bk. 8.

15 “It is an evil doctor, who raises his charges, so that they will remain immature for their whole lives. The best regent is the one who, as much as he can, attempts to ensure that regents will one day (when will it be?) become entirely unnecessary for the human race: for it is a false and misleading assertion that man (*qua* man) needs a ruler. A people needs a ruler only as long as it has no reason of its own; the more it acquires this and learns how to govern itself, the more the government must mild or at last disappear. Its most noble aim therefore is that it should become expendable and that every one should rule himself.” (trans. mine)

immaturity when discussing the subject of enlightenment (Aufklärung). In Kant's essay, the phrase “enlightenment” (Aufklärung) carries a somewhat individualistic connotation, since it is defined as the „Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit“¹⁶. Still, both thinkers associate this exit from immaturity – that is, Enlightenment – with an increase of reason. Kant can thus define immaturity as the „Unvermögen sich seines Verstandes ohne die Leitung eines andern zu bedienen“¹⁷, while Herder can describe it as a temporary state of conservatorship that will eventually disappear once a people (Volk) has grown sufficiently reasonable (vernünftig). Another parallel is that both Kant and Herder are troubled by the fact that “one” may persist in an artificial state of immaturity for the entirety of one's existence (*sc.* they both use the phrase „...zeitlebens unmündig bleiben...“). This tendency to set up minders for oneself (Vormündern aufzuwerfen) long after one has reached the age of majority appeared to both as a lamentable aspect of the human condition; one which was made all the more distressing due to the fact that leaders routinely exploited this weakness to ensure the continuation of their unchallenged control. Thus, each writer criticized rulers, who – instead of fostering a reasoned independence among their subjects – did everything they could to keep them as dumb (*dumm*) as cattle. The point where Herder and Kant differ is that the former regards the proper subject of Enlightenment to be the *Volk*, while the latter believed it to be a public (*Publikum*) composed of individuals. Thus, in the sentence that I emphasized above, we see that the *Volk* is in caught up in a process of development or maturation, where it becomes ever more vernünftig (rational). Although it may appear to be a subtle shift, this alteration has profound repercussions for the types of government that Kant and Herder respectively advocate. From the outset, Kant's account

16 “...man's exit out of his self-incurred immaturity...”

17 “...the inability to make use of one's reason without the guidance of another.”

is menaced by the possibility that this arbitrary collection of individuals (*i.e.* das Publikum), all of whom are pursuing their own trains of thought, will descend into chaos and dissension instead of arriving at true knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). Or, another terrifying possibility, that the majority will forcibly silence the minority¹⁸. To immunize himself against these social maladies, he advocated for a benevolent monarchy, which would preserve societal hierarchies while safeguarding certain public fora for scientific discussion (*i.e.* “the public uses of reason”).

Notably, these problems are not problems for Herder. Herder does not need to make recourse to a monarchy, because he guarantees the coherence of the *Volk* from the outset with his hypothesis of ethno-telluric dialectics. Having thus forestalled the most troubling of Kant's sequelæ (*viz.* consummate dissension and/or the dictatorship of the many over the few), he is free to take his thought on government in other directions. Specifically, he comes to the conclusion that each nation – as an autonomous and automobile historical agent, pursuing its own ends *ex sua sponte* – has the right and capacity to freely impose upon itself the form of government most suited to its current stage of historical and material development. The only exception to this rule occurs in situations where the belligerence of expansionist nations has given rise to the unfortunate and maladventurous form of government known as “hereditary monarchies”. When left to its own devices, though, a nation is destined to grow in wisdom. This wisdom, in turn, translates into ever more mild forms of government. Eventually, each member (*qua* member) of the *Volk* may take to governing him- or herself („jeder sich selbst regiere“) with no ill-effects, since they are

18 „Unter den drei Staatsformen ist die der Demokratie im eigentlichen Verstande des Wortes notwendig ein Despotism, weil sie eine exekutive Gewalt gründet, da alle über und allenfalls auch wider einen (der also nicht mit einstimmt), mithin alle, die doch nicht alle sind, beschließen...“ (Kant 2012:14) | “Among the three state forms, democracy is necessarily a despotism (*sensu stricto*), because it grounds an executive power (force). Here the All decides over and frequently also against the One (who therefore does not join in the consensus), consequently the All, who are not in fact All...” (trans. mine)

essentially the same¹⁹.

The Ideological Function of the Romantic Nationalist Narrative

Taking a step back from Herder's philosophical system, we can now examine how the romantic nationalist narratives function ideologically. Because romantic nationalism grounds political sovereignty in ethno-telluric distinction, anyone attempting to use this narrative to legitimize a specific political project – for example, Scottish Independence or Island Independence – must demonstrate that the peoples and territories seeking a state structure are indeed distinct from their neighbors as evinced through diacritic markers (*e.g.* culture, language, religion, etc). The danger inherent to this line of thinking – that is, the romantic nationalist narrative itself – is that cultural differences can always be adduced or subtracted, highlighted or downplayed, when material interests demand. Thus, the *logic* of the nation-state is built upon shaky ground and every actually-existing nation-state (*qua* state) must make use of the ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and the semiotically-inflected processes of ideological manipulation that lie at its disposal if it intends to reproduce its relations of production²⁰, which – in this case – includes its economic, political and territorial integrity. Without delving too deeply into the question of the ontological primacy of either difference or identity, it is safe to say that all existing nation-states were required to engage in a great deal of ideological work before they could imagine themselves in the first place and that, even so, it is rare that the object of their labor should ever become so uniform that all possibilities for cultural differentiation are

19 The French anthropologist Louis Dumont (1970:33) could have been describing Herder's thought when he told us that: “[The Nation] is in principle two things at once: a *collection of individuals* and a *collective individual*.”

20 « Tous les appareils idéologique d'État, quels qu'ils soient, concourent tous au même résultat : la reproduction des rapports de production c'est-à-dire des rapports d'exploitation capitalistes. » (Althusser 1995:290) | “All the ideological state apparatuses, whatever they may be, lead to the same result: the reproduction of relations of production, that is to say relations of capitalist exploitation.” (trans. mine)

permanently foreclosed (as Althusser says, « il y a donc *du divers dans la matérialité des idéologies*, et un divers qui, n'ayant pu être unifié totalement dans l'ancienne idéologie dominante, ne peut non plus être entièrement résorbé dans l'unité de la nouvelle idéologie dominante. »²¹ [2014 :238]). Even within the context of Herder's tidy philosophical system, the internal heterogeneity of the German people was so patently obvious that he was forced to make room for the *Volk der Gelehrsamkeit* (*i.e.* intellectuals) in his model, entrusting them with the sacred task of developing the cultural and educational institutions needed to foster a national consciousness (*see* Bauman and Briggs 2003:184; Eggel 2005:71).

To better understand the semiotic processes whereby nation-states construct themselves ideologically, I would like to introduce three concepts borrowed from Irvine and Gal's (2000) article (2000), "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation." These are *iconicization*, *erasure* and *fractal recursivity*. The first semiotic process refers to the transformation of a sign relationship existing between linguistic or cultural phenomena and certain sociopolitical categories (Irvine and Gal 2000:37). This semiotic transformation usually involves "downgrading" an indexical relationship (*i.e.* a mediated semiotic relationship based on spatio-temporal contiguity) to an iconic relationship (*i.e.* a semiotic relationship that feels immediate, sensuous or emotional). The effect of which is that the phenomenon in question is believed to provide a window onto the "essence" of the sociopolitical entity that it is associated with. The second term (*viz.* erasure) refers to the process whereby sociocultural and sociolinguistic facts that run contrary to the dominant ideological scheme are suppressed or otherwise rendered

21 "There is thus some diversity in the materiality of ideologies, a diversity which – having been impossible to unify totally in the ancient dominant ideology – can be anymore resorbed in the unity of the new dominant ideology." (trans. mine)

invisible. As Irvine and Gal make clear, this form of erasure does not “necessarily mean [the] actual eradication of the awkward element” (*e.g.* genocide or deportation) (2000:38), which is liable to occur only when all other attempts to act directly upon ideology have failed. The final term (*viz.* fractal recursivity) refers to “the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level.” For example, the recurrence of the distinction between “us and them” on the international level, the national level, and the intranational level.

States operating with(in) the nation-state logic use all three of these semiotic processes to construct ideological screens for themselves. For example, a nation-state may choose to make one of the languages (or language varieties) spoken within its borders the official or standard language by using it systematically across all of its state apparatuses (*e.g.* the educational system, the police force, the legislature, the state-controlled media, etc). Even in cases where the government in question decides to pursue a monolingualist agenda *primarily* on pragmatic grounds, which is to say out of a desire to make the aforementioned (repressive) state apparatuses run more efficiently, the act of choosing an official language cannot help but produce effects on the level of ideology. As Althusser (1995:283) noted, « ...tout Appareil d'État, qu'il soit répressif ou idéologique, < fonctionne > à fois à la violence et à l'idéologie... »²². The ideological ramifications of this decision, then, are that the standard language gradually becomes associated with the nation at home and abroad, while all other languages spoken within its borders are “erased” from the national imaginary. It may even come to pass that competence in the standard language becomes iconic of the ideal citizen-subject and that those who refuse to speak it are either benignly excluded from the public sphere or, more perniciously, persecuted

22 “...every state apparatus, be it repressive or ideological, ‘functions’ at once with violence and with ideology...”
(trans. mine)

under suspicion of harboring unpatriotic sentiments as was the case for teutophonic Americans during the World Wars. In both cases, linguistic competence becomes misrecognized (méconnu) as being *iconic* of one's national allegiances to such an extent that one's "linguistic citizenship" trumps one's actual citizenship status.

The foregoing example should not mislead the reader to imagine that the national imaginary is constructed entirely by accident. As many Marxist theorists, including Althusser and Hobsbawm, have made clear, the ideological self-portraits drawn by nation-states are not an unintentional by-product of power so much as a means of ensuring power – that is to say, a means of legitimizing the existence of specific nation-states on the international stage and ensuring the willful consent of the populations located within their borders²³. Hobsbawm (1977:3) thus advances a conservative Marxist perspective when he tells us that nineteenth century nationalism served as a “convenient form of emotional cement or civic religion to weld together the citizens of such states, divided by class and in other ways (patriotism).” In other words, nineteenth century nationalism contributed to the success of modern capitalism by replacing an awareness of the antagonistic relationship between classes (*i.e.* a relation of exploitation) with an ideology of *familiarity* and *nationality* (*sc.* the foregoing noun pair is

23 « Tout se passe comme si la classe qui s'empare du pouvoir d'État, et devient dominante, avait besoin, outre l'usage des appareils répressif d'État (armée, police, tribunaux), qui < fonctionnent avant tout à la violence physique >, de l'usage d'un autre type d'appareils, *fonctionnant avant tout* < à l'idéologie >, c'est-à-dire à la persuasion ou à l'inculcation des idées de la classe dominante, au < consensus >. Et il ne s'agit pas là d'une fantaisie, d'un luxe de la classe dominante, qui voudrait dominer non seulement par la force, mais aussi par le luxe d'un supplément gratuit : persuasion, consensus, consentement. » (Althusser 2014:235) | “Everything happens as though the class which seizes hold of state power, becoming thereby the dominant class, were required to make use, beyond the repressive state apparatuses (*e.g.* armies, police, tribunals), which ‘function primarily through physical violence’, of another type of apparatus, functioning in the first instance on ideology, which is to say through the persuasion or inculcation of the ideas of the dominant class, through ‘consensus’. And this does not mean that it is a fantasy, a surplus of the class dominant, which would like to dominate not only by force, but also by the luxury of a gratuitous supplement: persuasion, consensus, and consent.” (trans. mine)

slightly tautological inasmuch as the concept of the *nation* is inherently familial, predicated as it is upon a myth of *isogony* or shared birth; indeed, the word *nation* is etymologically derived from the latin verb *nascor* [*i.e.* to be born]). By projecting this “underived private” affect of familiarity onto nation-state (Spivak 2009:79), modern capitalism was able to ensure that proletarians remained loyal to their national bourgeois class – viewing them as compatriots – rather than members of their own class abroad (Hardt and Negri 2000:42).

It is here that we should mention that while the state – and the dominant classes that control it – exercise a great deal of influence over the ideological realm, other parties are also capable of making their own interventions. One of the primary points of access used by these subaltern players is the disjuncture between ideology and reality. By paying attention to how the sociocultural and/or sociolinguistic landscape appears from below (or at least “from elsewhere”), subaltern groups are able to reintroduce suppressed facts into the popular discourse and disturb the national imaginary. Effectively, the phenomena erased from the national psychē come back like Freud's famous, *Wiederkehr des Verdrängten* (Return of the Repressed), to disturb the nation's dreams of homogeneity. Of course, this reintroduction of difference only becomes truly problematic for an existing nation-state when it is combined with a demand for sovereignty.

Heretofore we have primarily concerned ourselves with the semiotic processes of *erasure* and *iconicization*. Now we must say a few words about the role that *fractal recursivity* plays in the logic of the nation-state. First, though, it is necessary to formally introduce a concept that we have been using all along, albeit under a variety of circumlocutory and pseudonymous guises: namely, autology. Even though this term is something of a neologism, we should guard ourselves against the naïve assumption that neologisms can represent a single and unambiguous authorial

intention anymore than the other words that comprise our linguistic patrimony. The word ‘autology’ can at the very least refer to two things: 1) the problematic of selfhood in general²⁴, and 2) the state of being a (particular) self among other selves. As we have already seen, the logic of the nation-state requires that every social group profess itself to be a “self” – which is to say, a natural entity inspired by a common spirit (*i.e.* Volksgeist), embodied within a bounded territory, and marked by the same cultural diacritics – if it is to receive international recognition from other nation-states²⁵ and gain the governmental powers that are the concomitants of this coveted status (*e.g.* territorial sovereignty, governmental autonomy, diplomatic powers, etc) (Hardt and Negri 2000:108). This act of self-declaration, enacted as it is against the backdrop of selfhood in general, is an indispensable performative gesture for any would-be nation-state – whether in the case of Scotland decrying Westminster’s heteronomy or Shetland decrying Holyrood’s heteronomy. Our previous discussion of Herder’s philosophy served to demonstrate precisely this point: autonomy is established upon an autological field. The problem, of course, is that every autological project (*sensu secundo*) is undermined in advance by an auto-deconstructive movement. The same processes of discrimination used to construct a self – namely, the play of identity and difference – threaten to deconstruct it at every turn. Thus, difference renders a nation-state infinitely dissoluble, while identity renders it infinitely consolidable. This ascent and descent across autological scales is called fractal recursivity.

It is a peculiar fact of our current era that one side of this geminal structure, namely, the descending-dissolving aspect, *appears to be* preponderant. I can identify two reasons for this: the

24 This usage is especially common when the adjectival form of the word (*viz.* autological) is used to qualify terms such as “battleground,” “field of contest,” “field of play,” etc.

25 Michel Rolph-Trouillot (2003:2) noted that the modern state system is a totalizing vision, since “the existence of any single state rest[s] on the recognition of that system as a whole.”

first is that supranational entities such as the EU and UN – entities, which, it should be noted, occupy a higher rung on our autological scale – have subtly redefined the state structure by rendering many of its traditional functions and obligations optional (*e.g.* international trade negotiations, the issuance of currency, the need for a strong military, etc). By alleviating their members of these burdens, these supranational entities have made “sovereignty” look more attractive to stateless nations (or inchoate ethnogenetic groups), who can now imagine the benefits of “sovereignty” without the attendant drawbacks. Foremost among these benefits are the ability to control lucrative natural resources²⁶ and to participate in the international community as a full-fledged member²⁷. Indeed, both of these benefits were proposed by independentists – both Scottish and Shetlandic – as reasons for secession. In reference to the viability of Hebridean, Orcadian and/or Shetlandic Independence, the press officer for the ROTI group, Catriona Murray, told John Brown of *The Independent* that: “Monaco, Lichtenstein and San Marino all thrive within the United Nations. Any of the three island groups currently in Scotland [*viz.* The Hebrides, Orkney, and Shetland] could easily fit onto a list including those countries. Not as rich as the first two, but with more resources than the third.” Although her allusion to the United Nations in the first line was not explicitly an appeal for international recognition, it is clear that the United Nations functions as both a ground and project within her

26 Hobsbawm (1977:6) made precisely this point when he stated – perhaps a bit hyperbolically – that “any speck in the Pacific [*exempli causa*] can look forward to independence and a good time for its president, if it happens to possess a location for a naval base for which more solvent states will compete, a lucky gift of nature such as manganese, or merely enough beaches and pretty girls to become a tourist paradise.”

27 Hobsbawm (1977:7) emphasized the allure of international recognition and representation in bodies such as the UN when he said that: “If the Seychelles can have a vote in the UN as good as Japan’s, and Kuwaitis can, by dint of oil power, be treated like the English milords of old, then surely only the sky is the limit for the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands (to name two candidates whose case for independence is, by current standards, better than most) or the Canaries and Corsica (whose separatist movements are, no doubt, being supported somewhere or other on grounds of Marxist theory).”

discourse. On the one hand, the United Nations potentiates the existence of small states such as Monaco and possibly Shetland. On the other, full participation in the United Nations is an incentive and objective for small would-be states. Murray also mentioned the resources of these island groups.

According to this analysis, the disaggregation that we are currently witnessing in Europe (*esp.* in Catalonia, Brittany, and Scotland) can be traced back to the play of autological consolidation and dissolution. Even if this analysis is correct, however, we are still left with an enigma: namely, why do micro-national separatist movements hold our attention so much more forcefully than the supranational confederations, which supposedly give rise to them in the first place (*see* Moss' comments below). I am thus obligated to introduce a sub-hypothesis (forgive the pleonasm) to account for this *selective attention*. It is my position that the answer to this enigma can be found in our previous discussion of national ideological schemes. On the one hand, supranational confederations are obliged to tread carefully, disrupting their members' national imaginaries as little as possible, so that they may maintain the illusion among their members that they are still sovereign nations entering into an international agreement voluntarily and capable of leaving *ad libitum* (*cf.* Hardt and Negri 2000:4-5). On the other, micro-nationalist movements must directly challenge the legitimacy of existing nation-states by showing that the romantic nationalist narrative never really applied to them. They do this by asserting that these states' national imaginaries are “false” or “counterfeit,” having been constructed through the iconicization of certain cultural elements and the erasure of others (*e.g.* the language and culture of the plaintive party). This is the *modus operandi* of micronationalist separatism.

The second reason for the apparent preponderance of autological dissolution today can be

traced back to the twentieth century's anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles. Not only did these movements leave half the globe full of “small territories (or large territories with small populations) that could not or would not be combined into larger units or federations” (Hobsbawm 1979:6). They also provided an inexhaustible source of inspiration for subsequent nationalist movements. Indeed, these historical struggles even serve as rhetorical touchstones for groups located at the heart of former colonial powers²⁸. In a Heideggerian idiom, we could say that contemporary micro-nationalist movements reach back into the past to find existential possibilities to serve as models for future action („... [es gibt] einen Rückgang in den Möglichkeiten des dagewesenen Daseins ... “), effectively making themselves heirs [ererbten] to these anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles through a process of one-sided *affiliation* (cf. Heidegger 1927:385). Notably, these two possibilities are not mutually-exclusive. One could imagine that the transformation of sovereignty effectuated by the global market and supranational entities (e.g. the UN) encourages intranational groups to adopt anti-colonial and anti-imperial interpretative models. During my fieldwork in Shetland, I encountered many references to the British Empire and the proliferation of nation-states that followed its dissolution. Below I will provide two examples to demonstrate the importance of this discourse.

One example documented in my fieldnotes occurred at the Lounge Bar in Lerwick on the night of July 23rd (2014). Following the “Yestival: Summer of Independence” Festival at the Mareel Cinema and Cultural Center, I accompanied several of the performers and organizers to the Lounge, where we drank and listened to live music. One of the topics under discussion that evening was the opening ceremony for the British Commonwealth Games. The Yestival crew all

28 Iain Macwhirter

seemed to agree that the opening ceremony for the “Empire Games”²⁹ had been politicized by the No campaign. As they said, it had been draped in “tartan and union jacks.”³⁰ My consultants also made the point that these symbols served as a form of mystification in that they allowed people to go on believing that they lived in a “great nation” even though the economic disparities between the rich and the poor continued to grow. Finally, it was implied that the British Government's desire to hold onto Scotland was a continuation of the old imperial mindset – a “hangover from imperialism” (fieldnotes 07/24/14). This rationalization effectively allowed my consultants to read their own struggle within the context of earlier anti-colonial movements.

Another lengthier example of this sort of anti-imperial repetition (*wiederholung* in the Heideggerian sense) can be seen in the remarks made by then deputy first minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, during her visit to the Shetland Isles. Nicola Sturgeon held a Question and Answers (Q&A) Session in the auditorium of the Shetland Museum and Archives on the evening of August 27th (2014). Her Q&A Session followed on the heels of an hour-long debate organized by BBC Radio Shetland, meaning that many of the same people stayed for both events. Below I will reproduce some of the deputy first minister's comments before providing a brief analysis:

“I'm here to make the case for Scotland being a normal independent country ... I use the word ‘normal’ and I use it deliberately, because although we're engaged in something right now in Scotland that is very special for all the reasons I've just talked about – and actually

29 During this conversation, one of my consultants referred to the Commonwealth Games as the “Empire Games”. I believe that this choice of nomenclature was intended to recall the history of the games and the role that these athletic competitions formerly played in the imperial imagination (*sc.* the competition was called the “British Empire Games” from 1930-1950).

30 It is important to note that this is not merely a charge of tokenism or cooptation. It is also a charge of cultural heteronomy. Mairi McFayden, a writer for the National Collective website, expressed much the same view when she wrote: “the so-called ‘cultural cringe’ that many experienced fairly forcefully [while] watching the Opening Ceremony [of the Commonwealth Games] is undoubtedly the result of [having] our diverse and plural culture reduced to a single narrative and seen through another’s gaze, whether that be the British lens or authorised by Hollywood. Culture is all-too-often something that happens ‘at’ us and not something we ourselves create.”

quite unusual, not many countries get the opportunity to choose to be independent entirely peacefully and democratically without having to fight anybody or having to see a single drop of blood shed – but although that's quite unusual, countries becoming independent is not unusual at all. Back around the end of the second world war, there were round about fifty independent countries in the world. Today there's round about two hundred independent countries in the world. So in that intervening period round about a hundred and fifty countries across the world have decided to do – often in very very different circumstances to ours – but nevertheless have decided to do what we are contemplating now, becoming an independent country. And to the best of my knowledge not a single one of these countries ... thinks they made a mistake in becoming independent. Becoming independent is not unusual; it is normal. And being independent is the normal state of affairs for countries the world over. It's actually being a nation that is not independent that is the unusual thing.” (Sturgeon 08/27/14)

In the above transcript, the deputy first minister argues that Scotland should become a “normal independent country”. To do this, she weaves a maturational narrative according to which: 1) it is normal for nations to *become* independent, and 2) the anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles of the twentieth century can be read off as examples of this general, transhistorical process. Although Nicola Sturgeon concedes that these countries' decisions to pursue independence involved – or were involved by – “very very different circumstances to ours,” her discourse makes clear that these concessions should not be taken too seriously. The circumstances are merely circumstantial. The essential point is the nomological principle subtending all these various events: namely, the fact that it is normal – perhaps even natural – for nations to become independent. As she said, “Becoming independent is not unusual; it is normal. And being independent is the normal state of affairs for countries the world over. It's actually being a nation that is not independent that is the unusual thing.” In other words, independence is the stepping out of an unnatural and temporary state of affairs – the natural disruption of an

anterior disruption of the natural order. This is another point of rapprochement between Herder and Sturgeon, since both seem to regard empires as being fragile constructs destined to break down into their constituent parts. Thus, Herder remarks that the *Menschenscepter* (a common symbol of empire) is “viel zu schwach und klein, daß so widersinnige Theile in ihm eingeeimpft werden könnten.”³¹

This strong focus on dissolution can also be seen in the commentary surrounding the ROTI petition, where commentators such as Stephen Moss used the islands' petition as a justification for rejecting Scottish Independence *tout court*. These commentators viewed the petition as an example of the sort of *interminable dissolution*, which is to be expected once one starts to entertain the requests of micro-nationalist groups. Writing for the Guardian Newspaper, Stephen Moss accuses the Scottish First Minister of a blind and reckless pragmatism, stating that: “Alec Salmond should always have expected it. Once you stir the nationalist pot you never know where it will lead. Residents of Orkney, Shetland, and the Western Isles are petitioning the Scottish parliament at Holyrood for the right to hold their own referendum on independence, but this time from Scotland rather than the UK.” Effectively, Moss condemns Scottish Nationalism by accusing its proponents (*incl.* the first minister) of using the logic of the nation-state in a naïve and facile manner; that is, without either recognizing or understanding the way in which autological assertions and autonomous demands tend recur (downward) across levels. After identifying and labelling the inherent instability of all nations as a “problem,” Moss goes on to lampoon the logic of the nation-state by hypothesizing that the island of Sanday – an island with 550 residents – might like to establish *two* governments since one half of the island has a

³¹ “...much too weak and small that such antithetical pieces can be installed in it.”

different accent than the other (*nota bene*: this hyperbole is predicated upon a form of attributional autology in which linguistic distinction can be brought forward as evidence of autological distinction [*c.f.* Herder's argument above]). Of course, one problem with Moss' criticism is his implicit originism: he condemns Scottish Nationalism for opening Pandora's box ("stirring the nationalist pot") rather than viewing this autological de-construction as *always already* underway. Phrased differently, one could say that he considers the British State as a neutral or neutralized state of affairs and any departure thence as 'beckoning chaos'. To avoid a situation in which the "UN runs into thousands of members," Moss suggests that we judge a country by how it treats its people and the legitimacy of any given nationalist project on whether it is inspired by oppression – a view which sidesteps issues of political autonomy and democracy by moving to a model of political subjecthood (*i.e.* how the state or monarch treats its subjects). The political theorist, Eric Hobsbawm (1979), gave a more nuanced view – one that recognized both aspects of this auto-de-construction – when he wrote that: "Whatever the assessment of the general historical tendency, the argument for the formation of any independent nation-state must always be an *ad hoc* argument, which undermines the case for *universal* self-determination by separatism. The irony of nationalism is that the argument for the separation of Scotland from England is exactly analogous to the argument for the separation of the Shetlands from Scotland; and so are the arguments against both separations" (Hobsbawm 1977:13).

In the case of both Scotland and Shetland, historical circumstances have favored the formation and preservation of strong regional identities – identities, which, one should note in passing, are more easily viewed "from below" than "from above," since every socio-political unit has a vested interest in downplaying those cultural differences that exist within it (*vide*

supra). While Shetlanders are liable to claim a Scottish identity under certain circumstances³², they are equally likely to oppose their regional identity to Scottishness in other situations. This autological opposition (“Shetlandic” versus “Scottish”) derives in equal measure from their history as an internal colony and from the refiguration of this history in the Saxbyean mytho-historical narrative (*see* Grydehøj 2011). This narrative, which I have heard repeated countless times during my fieldwork, claims that the Shetland Isles bear more affinity with Scandinavian countries (*e.g.* Norway), because they were originally peopled by Vikings and belonged to the Kingdom of Norway and Denmark until 1469 when King Christian I transferred them to the Scottish Crown as part of his daughter, princess Margaret's wedding dowry (*see* Nihtinen 2011:73). In addition to this strong historical consciousness, Shetlanders also have a distinct language variety (*viz.* Shetland Dialect) and a plethora of cultural practices that are not performed in other parts of the country (*e.g.* Shetland fiddle music, Fair Isle knitting, a winter fire festival called Up-Helly-Aa, etc).

During the Scottish Independence Debate, proponents of Shetland Independence and members of the Better Together campaign deployed these cultural, linguistic and historical resources strategically to juxtapose their local identity to mainland “Scottishness” and to cast doubt on the ability of an Independent Scotland to represent their interests impartially. Put another way, these individuals attempted to restrict the scope of the deictic sign “I” (or “we”) to exclude Scots (and to concomitantly exempt themselves from Scottishness) so as to construe Scotland's claim to the Shetland Isles and their resources as an instance of “heteronomy” (*i.e.*

32 To provide one example of this, we can look at the claim made by Tavish Scott – the MSP (Minister of the Scottish Parliament) for Shetland and Orkney – during his “Ferry to the Referendum” circuit, namely, that he is “a Shetlander first, a Scot second and a Brit third”.

rule-by-another). In the pages that follow, I will illustrate this type of autological contraction using three ethnographic examples drawn from my data corpus.

IV. Case Studies in Autological Restriction

The Politics of Linguistic Clusivity

The first example involves a statement made by Tavish Scott (MSP) in March of 2013. Responding to the “Oil and Gas Analytic Bulletin” released by the Scottish Government that month and its projected estimate of £48 billion in oil-and-gas-derived tax revenues³³, Tavish Scott commented that: “An oil boom in the North Sea and west of Shetland would be great news for the community in whom these reserves exist – Shetland”. He then proceeded to direct a jab at the First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond, by adding: “On this there can be no doubt – it's no your oil, Alex. It's wirs.” While the Shetland Dialect does not exhibit first-person clusivity on the morphosyntactic level anymore than English or Scots do, Tavish Scott was nonetheless able to exclude the addressee (*viz.* Alex Salmond) from the deictic center – and the socio-political group(s) built around it – through a combination of code-switching and semantics. That said, it is difficult to make out the contours of the implied socio-political entities, since the first and the second sections of Tavish Scott's riposte (*viz.* “It's no your oil, Alex. It's wirs.”) appear to spin off in different interpretative directions.

33 This estimate was made for a six year period, starting in 2012-13 and ending in 2017-18.

If we focus on the apostrophe, for instance, we could read the statement as excluding not only Alex Salmond in his person, but also the Scottish Government and the Scottish National Party (SNP) inasmuch as he stood in a metonymic relation to both of these entities (sc. Alex Salmond was both the First Minister of Scotland and the leader of the Scottish



Illustration 2: A picture posted on the Anti-Scottish Independence Facebook Group "United Against Separatism"

National Party at the time). I am personally inclined to read this part of the utterance by triangulating between the aforementioned three poles (viz. Alex Salmond, the Scottish Government, and the SNP) so that it would constitute a negation of an *Independent Scotland's* right to the North Sea oil reserves – or, in other words, a denial or withholding of mineralogical rights from a Scottish Government guided by Alex Salmond and the political aspirations of the SNP (i.e. a Scotland tending toward independence). It goes without saying that this interpretation is something of a reduction and is guided by my understanding of Tavish Scott's political beliefs.

Turning to the possessive pronoun *wirs*, the matter becomes more complicated. On one hand, we could consider the possessive pronoun *wirs* from a purely (intra-)linguistic viewpoint as being anaphoric of the “community in whom these reserves exist – Shetland”. On the other, we could consider it metapragmatically as indexing the language variety and linguistic community that it presupposes, namely, everyone who could join Mr. Scott in pronouncing this

shibboleth. Although these two communities overlap, they are not completely coextensive. To make them so one would have to produce an ideological representation of the Shetland Isles, wherein the local significance of the Shetland Dialect is exaggerated through a process of *iconicization*, while the significance of Scottish Standard English (SSE) is minimized through one of *erasure*. The risk, of course, is that the socio-ideological self created through this semiotic legerdemain – that is, the “we” of Mr. Scott's statement – will be plagued down the road all the little not-me's that it incorporated into itself.

Aside from potentially “tweaking the First Minister's tail” by using a version of the romantic nationalist narrative against him, it is difficult to tell what Tavish Scott intended by these two simple sentences – much less what the sentences themselves say. The socio-political groups constructed behind the negativity of the first sentence and the positivity of the second sentence seem fluid and undefinable. Nor is it a straightforward task to read one sentence off the other. The second sentence, for instance, would not only exclude an Independent Scotland from claiming ownership over the North Sea oil reserves, but also every other geopolitical entity outside of Shetland (*e.g.* the rest of the United Kingdom). As Tavish Scott is a Liberal Democrat (Lib Dem) parliamentarian and was the *de facto* leader of Shetland's Better Together campaign during the referendum debate, it is unlikely that he was in fact opposed to the HMRC's³⁴ continued collection of tax revenue from the North Sea oil and gas industry on behalf of the British Government. It is less clear whether he believed that Shetland's proximity to these resources might allow them to renegotiate their constitutional status and/or to receive a portion of the tax revenue derived from such sources (*sc.* the Shetland Isles no longer receive a dividend

34 Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

from the oil revenue as all sections of the initial Disturbance Agreement [1974] brokered between the Zetland County Council and the oil companies have since expired [Grydehøj 2013]). Certainly, Tavish Scott and Liam McArthur proposed numerous possibilities for the constitutional future of the Northern Isles in their response to the UK Government's Independence Consultation in March (2012).

Peopling Chronotopes: the Autology of Pronominal Deixis and Rhetorical Figures

A second example of the ways in which Shetland's cultural and linguistic patrimony were deployed to strategically reinforce socio-ideological entities during the Independence Debate can be seen in the poem “Hit's up ta wis”³⁵ by James Sinclair. This poem is something of an exception in my data corpus, constituting one of the few instances where the Saxbyean mytho-historical narrative was invoked for political ends. Still I argue that it deserves our attention because it was written *and* published³⁶ with an eye toward influencing the vote. In other words, both the poet and the publisher thought that this mode of rhetorical appeal might succeed in convincing Shetlanders to vote against Scottish Independence where issue-oriented arguments had failed (cf. Silverstein and Lempert 2012). To understand the rhetorical force of the Saxbyean narrative, encompassing as it does both the chronotope of Scottish Oppression and the figure of the Scottish Oppressors, I must first describe it. According to the folklorist Adam Grydehøj (2011:133), the little-known and largely-forgotten author Jessie M.E. Saxby (1842-1940) can be regarded as the source of the pro-Norse / anti-Scottish historical narrative that dominates

35 The title can be translated as “It's up to us”.

36 I believe that it is safe to say that the *Shetland Times* intended to influence the vote with ... since the *Shetland Times* revealed their thoughts on Scottish Independence in an editorial published the week prior [September 5th 2014], stating that “it is the view of this paper that the positive option is to say yes to the advantages of the union ... and to vote no to the nationalist agenda.”)

Shetlanders' historical imaginary. This narrative romanticizes Shetland's Norse past, considering the period between the eighth and fifteenth centuries to be a golden age when Shetlanders' viking forebears prospered under a system of udal³⁷ law (*i.e.* a form of land-tenure where individual land-owners maintain absolute, sovereign control over their properties). This age of freedom and prosperity – so the story goes – was cut short by the arrival of Scottish carpetbaggers during the sixteenth century (*cf.* Graham 1989:xiii). After this point, Shetland transitioned into a feudalistic system controlled by Scottish landlords and clerics. Much like the Herder's romantic nationalism, this narrative treats Shetlanders as a culturally and spiritually-distinct people – united through their Norse ancestry (Grydehøj 2009:54-7) – and laments the misfortunes that arise when one people tries to govern another.

Following the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, I prefer to call this narrative “mytho-historical” (rather than merely “historical”) because it has passed through so many mouths that it cannot properly speaking be attributed to any one author regardless of its literary origins (*sc.* Grydehøj would be the first to tell us that Saxby's works are “now more or less forgotten in Shetland as well as elsewhere in the UK” [2009:56]). For example, one could encounter the same narrative in the introduction to John Graham's dictionary of the Shetland Dialect (*viz.* The Shetland Dictionary) that one could encounter in a poem by Rhoda Butler (*viz.* *Da Clearances*)³⁸. As Lévi-Strauss said in *Le Cru et le Cuit* :« Les mythes n'ont pas d'auteur : dès l'instant qu'ils sont perçus comme mythes, et quelles qu'ait été leur origine réelle, ils n'existent qu'incarnés dans une tradition. Quand un mythe est raconté, les auditeurs individuels reçoivent

37 Another name for this system of land-tenure is “allodial law”.

38 In this poem, Butler (1998:152) vividly describes seeing “aa da fok hirded oot afore da landloard's men / an aa da bits a things dey hed, fired ower da briggy-stane”.

un message qui ne vient, à proprement parler, de nulle part... »³⁹ (1960 :26). In the same way, Sinclair's poem resonates with his readership, because it can be situated within an interdiscursive tradition (*sc.* it indexically presupposes a whole chain of previous sign-events [Silverstein 1993]). By letting the myths think through him, to paraphrase Lévi-Strauss⁴⁰, Sinclair is able to write a poem which stems from and flows back into the doxa. Below I will reproduce the poem (left) alongside my own translation (right) before providing an analysis.

Why sood we geng along wi dem?

1. Why sood we geng along wi dem.
2. Da sam eens dat claimed wir grund as dir ain,
3. da sam eens dat cleared wir fock
4. fae da laand dey'd med dir hame.
5. Cast dem oot ta da fower coarners o da globe.
6. An da eens dat bed, pit ta wark i da parks o Scottish landloards wha hed nae tow't o charity.
7. Sent dem aff ta da Far Haaf in open boats
8. ta haul codlin an olick wi dir bare haands in aa wadders
9. dan med dem pay fur da privilege in ta da bargain.
10. Women's haands chappit fae herd graft apo da croft
11. wi wir sock i dir löf, makkin day in an day oot
12. fur tokens fae da laird's shop. Wha bound
13. dir labours ta his purse strings wi unbrackable debt.
14. Wha wrocht his trained sheepdug, da ministry
15. ta caa dem in ta da crö o da kirk an neutar dem wi da wirds o da loard.
16. Noo dat wir med something o wirsels
17. an proodly wrocht ta mak a better rodd

Why should we go along with them?

1. Why should we go along with them.
2. The same ones that claimed our ground as their own,
3. the same ones that cleared our folk
4. from the land they'd made their home.
5. Cast them out to the four corners of the globe.
6. And the ones that stayed, put to work in the parks of Scottish landlords, who had no thought of charity.
7. Sent them off to distant fishing grounds in open boats
8. to haul cod and ling with their bare hands in all waters
9. then made them pay for the privilege into the bargain.
10. Women's hands cracked from hard work⁴¹ upon the croft
11. with our knit in their palm, knitting day in and day out
12. for tokens from the lord's shop. Who bound their
13. labors to his purse strings with unbreakable debt.
14. Who caused his trained sheepdog, the minister
15. to call them into the nave of the church and neuter them with the words of the lord.
16. Now that we've made something of ourselves

39 “Myths don't have an author: from the instant that they are perceived as myths, whatever their real origin may have been, they exist only as incarnated within a tradition. When a myth is recounted, the individual listeners receive a message which comes, properly speaking, from nowhere...”

40 « Nous ne prétendons donc pas montrer comment les hommes pensent dans les mythes, mais comment les mythes se pensent dans les hommes, et à leur insu » (Lévi-Strauss 1964:20). | “We do not then intend to show how men think in myths, but how myths think themselves in men – and often unbeknownst to them” (trans. mine)

41 While the word “graft” is not listed in J. Graham's Dictionary of the Shetland Dialect, one can arrive at an approximation of its meaning on the basis of its etymology and word family. Thus, the Oxford English Dictionary traces its origins back to the proto-Germantic word *graftu-z and provides a number of meanings for “graft” including 1) a ditch or a moat, 2) the depth of earth that may be thrown up at once with a spade, and 3) work, *esp.* hard work. Similarly, the Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache lists “gruft” as a substantive of the verb “graben” (to dig), albeit one that became inflected with the semantic resonance of the Greek word “crypt”.

18. ta geng doon wi da licht o hope shinin at da end,
19. ir we willin ta gee up whit wis so herd fowt fur
20. an tak a chance wi fock dat doesna ken wis
21. an hae nae idea o whaur wi bide.

17. and proudly worked to make a better road
18. to go down with the light of hope shining at the end
19. are we willing to give up what was so hard fought for
20. and take a chance with people that don't know us
21. and have no idea where we stay

The first thing a casual reader is likely to notice about this poem is that it is written in Shetland Dialect. While it is not unusual for poems to be written in Shetland Dialect – and indeed, while poetry is one of the main linguistic functions (*cf.* Ferguson 1959) reserved for the Shetland Dialect within the local language economy – it is not mandatory that poetry be written in this variety. Most Shetland poets are able and willing to write in Standard English if they feel that the poem calls for it. Thus, the author's code-choice becomes a real question. In the case of Sinclair's poem, we must ask ourselves how his code-choice contributes to the poem's form and helps the author achieve his goal, namely persuading the reader not to ‘take a chance with folk that don't know us and [who] have no idea where we stay’. Three answers immediately come to mind. The first is that the code-choice re-presents the schematic distinction between Scots and Shetlanders, since languages tend to function diacritically as an emblem of “ethnic distinction” (*see* Barth 1979:14; Nihtinen 2011). This diacritic function – essentially, the elevation of certain sign-vehicles to criterial importance inasmuch as they allow knowledgeable persons to judge and separate individuals into distinct groups in cases where indistinction might otherwise prevail (Barth 1979:14) – allows the linguistic difference between Shetlanders (speaking Shetland Dialect) and Scots (speaking either Scots, Scottish Gaelic, or Scottish Standard English [SSE]) to become interpreted as mark of “ethnic distinction”⁴². A second possible explanation for Sinclair's

42 These associations – while true to some degree – obviously depend upon the same process of *erasure* that we discussed during our analysis of Tavish Scott's statements.

code-choice might be that the Shetland Dialect helps to enregister a sense of *pastness*, since urbanization and language shift have combined to render more robust forms of the dialect obsolescent or moribund (Smith and Durham 2012; Silverstein 2005:17-18). Finally, a third option is that since the Shetland Dialect – characterized by linguists as “a conservative variety of Lowland Scots with a substantial Norn substratum” (Van Leyden 2006) – is the causatum of ethno-linguistic contact, it points back to the type of events that Sinclair's poem seeks to refigure in his narrative. To use Ricœur's theory of mimesis (1984:46), we could say that the history congealed within the language (mimesis₁) provides the poem and its chronotopes (mimesis₂) with a sense of verisimilitude. Eventually, the artistic creation may even eclipse the reality of the past, becoming the interpretive frame through which Shetlanders come to understand the origins of their language (mimesis₃). I would ultimately argue that all three of these answers factor into Sinclair's code-choice. The first helps to hypostasize the perduring, cross-temporal difference between Scots and Shetlanders, while the second and third allow Sinclair to construct the chronotope of Scottish feudal oppression.

This explanation depends in part upon M.M. Bakhtin's notion of the “chronotope”. In his original formulation, Bakhtin used the compound noun *chronotope* (literally: *time-place*) to bring to language the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (1981:84). It is difficult to describe this “intrinsic connectedness” abstractly, because chronotopes have a superorganic quality that affects how they function in their narrative context (*see* Bakhtin 1981:95-6). For example, Bakhtin tells us that the Greek romances are characterized by the adventure-time chronotope. This chronotope is comprised of a series of fateful events, each of which demands a spontaneous reaction from the hero. The hero's

reaction in turn propels him from one situation to another and from one exotic locale to another until the fates ultimately decide to end the “game” that they are playing with him. At that moment, he is allowed to return to his life none the worse for wear (*sc.* Bakhtin tells us that adventure-time lies outside of biographical time, constituting an “extratemporal hiatus between two moments” [1981:90]. As he says, “it changes nothing in the life of the heroes and introduces nothing into their life” [ibid.]). Bakhtin's description of adventure-time shows us that this particular chronotope is intimately connected to the movement of the plot: if the temporal logic were different, if there were not a constant irruption of challenging events, then there would be no plot at all (1981:92).

By contrast, the idyllic chronotope does not contribute directly to the development of the plot. Instead, it recedes into the background, forming part of the characters' lifeworld. The explanation for this temporal recession lies with the fact that the idyll functions as a cosmos; that is to say, a self-sufficient and isolated place, containing within itself everything that is needed for the generation and sustenance of life (Bakhtin 1981:225). This quasi-cosmic character produces three temporal consequences: Firstly, the characters experience the landscape as a monument to their past and future, as the place where “the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's children and their children will live” (1981:225). Secondly, the bond between the people and the land (*i.e.* ethno-tellurism), effectuated through the medium of agricultural labor, ensures that both parties operate according to the same rhythmic cycles⁴³ (1981:227-229). Thirdly, everyday events (*e.g.* birth, death, marriage, labor, etc) become central to the narrative, since there is no

43 One quote that is illustrative of this point: “In the provincial novel, as in the idyll, all temporal boundaries are blurred and the rhythm of human life is in harmony with the rhythm of nature.” (1981:229)

possibility of venturing beyond the cosmic confines of the idyll (1981:225). All of this means that the idyllic chronotope bears upon individual characters but lightly. In contrast to Greek romances, which progress by subjecting the characters to an unrelenting stream of peripetias (περιπετής), placing them in a perpetual state of passivity, the idyllic chronotope involves a predictable and calendrical form of temporality. The dependability of the idyllic chronotope allows it to function as a backdrop for the characters' actions, who are foregrounded as sovereign agents. Of course, this same languor and dependability allows the idyllic chronotope to transcend individual lifetimes – that is, the lifespans of individual characters – so as to operate on an intergenerational timescale. Thus, it “weakens and renders less distinct all the temporal boundaries between individual lives and between various phases of one and the same life” (Bakhtin 1981:225).

It is clear from Sinclair's poem that he is using a variant of the *idyllic chronotope*. In line with the *idyllic* formula, Sinclair employs nautical and agricultural motifs (lines 7 and 10) to manifest the connection between man and nature. The difference, however, is that his poem has a postlapsarian character. In other words, all the scenes depicted in the poem occur after the ethno-telluric bond between Shetlanders and their homeland had been sundered. The cause of this rupture is named explicitly in second line (*viz.* the ingression of Scottish carpetbaggers and their subsequent confiscation of Shetland lands). Effectively, the ethno-telluric dialectic is interrupted through the interposition of a third term: human relations. In addition to producing a form of proto-capitalistic labor alienation (line 6, 7-9, 10-13), the abrogation of allodial law and institution of feudalism introduced a more profound alienation between Shetlanders and their natural environment. No longer were Shetlanders able to regard their environment as a dyadic

partner – a providential entity, who cared for them in exchange for their stewardship. The exigencies of the human realm (*viz.* heteronomy and debt peonage) demanded that they treat nature as an *object* or *resource* to be exploited for export. In this way, romantic idealism – present in the poem by virtue of its absence – gave way to materialism. The rhythms and cycles ordained by nature became impediments to productivity and Shetlanders' attempts to surmount these impediments engendered a deep antagonism between the natural world and themselves. Sinclair can thus write that: “[Scottish Landlords] sent dem [Shetlanders] aff ta da Far Haaf in open boats ta haul codlin an olick wi dir bare haands in aa wadders...”. Rather than cooperating with nature through a patient attention to its seasonal rhythms, Shetlanders were obliged to risk their lives by fishing under inclement conditions (“in aa wadders”). Ironically, this attempt to master nature by treating it as a mere object transforms subjects into objects as natural forces remind them of their own facticity (*sc.* nothing is able to evoke a feeling of powerlessness quite as acutely as the experience of “tossed about like a ship on the ocean”). In the end, we see a total demagification (*entzauberung*) occur: the spirit of the world has been exorcized.

Heretofore, our discussion of chronotopy in Sinclair's poem has restricted itself to an orthodox Bakhtinian understanding of the chronotope; that is to say, an understanding of the chronotope which treats it as a “formally constitutive category of literature” largely removed from the real world and the sphere of culture (Bakhtin 1981:84). Without leaving Sinclair's poem entirely, I would like to broaden our scope to include the way in which Sinclair's poem brings the world of the text and the world of the reader into alignment. To this end, I will turn to the discipline of linguistic anthropology, where researchers and theorists have reworked some of Bakhtin's foundational concepts for use in ethnographic analysis.

One of the earliest applications of the “chronotopic” model within the field of linguistic anthropology was effectuated by Keith Basso in his ethnographic account of Western Apache storytelling. In *Stalking with Stories: Names, Places and Moral Narratives among the Western Apache*, Basso examined the way in which the landscape functioned as a moral mnemotechnology for Apaches. In particular, he looked at the way the landscape was able to exert moral authority over the Apache – reminding them of how to “live right” (1996:126-7) – through its dual presence as a referent in the world and a “figure” in historical narratives. The landscape served as a conduit, allowing for the moral wisdom acquired under specific historical circumstances to “travel” forward in time to a present where it could provide guidance for analogous situations. An important aspect of Basso's notion of chronotope then is the way chronotopes “stand as monuments to the community itself, as a symbol of it, as forces operating to shape its members’ images of themselves” – to quote a sentence that Basso attributed to Bakhtin (Basso 1996:128). Although the historical past is clearly important to Shetlanders, so much so that some Shetlanders are able to regale visitors with extemporaneous and polyphonous accounts of the Norwegian pawning of Shetland, I have seen no evidence indicating that Shetlanders anchor moral narratives to particular geographical sites in the way that the Western Apache in Basso’s study did. The Saxbyean mytho-historical narrative is not localized to any particular site in Shetland but rather spreads across the whole island-chain indiscriminately. That said, it is conceivable that the prominence of the landscape in Sinclair’s poem (*e.g.* crofts, byres, fishing grounds, etc) could serve to produce a communication between the world of the text and the world of the reader. For example, the numerous abandoned croft-houses scattered across the landscape could be taken as monuments to the Scottish land-tenure system and a testament to the

cruelty of Scots – quite apart from their actual date of construction or reasons for abandonment.

Another anthropological engagement with Bakhtin's notion of chronotopy can be seen in Michael Silverstein's article, *Axes of Eval: Token versus Type Interdiscursivity* (2005). There Silverstein reworks the concept of chronotopy for use in discursive analysis. Essentially, he argues that discursive semiosis – or the process whereby a discursive unit takes on significance – depends on the “chronotopic” relationship between one unit of discourse and another discursive unit, which is either indexically-presupposed or entailed by the first unit. Silverstein calls the former relationship “token interdiscursivity” and the latter relationship “type interdiscursivity” (Silverstein 2005:9). Similar to Basso's notion of chronotopy, Silverstein implicitly treats chronotopes as a “spatiotemporal envelope” tasked with drawing two events into alignment. As such, it departs significantly from the Bakhtinian chronotope, which – as we have already shown – forms a complex *tissage* of literary locales, temporal motifs, rhetorical devices, and plot movements. Effectively, Silverstein's re-theorization of the chronotope restricts its scope to micro-level discursive processes and occults the different forms of temporal experience and synthesis described by Bakhtin (*e.g.* the imprevisibility and inconsequentiality of adventure-time versus the rhythmic and cyclical time of the idyllic chronotope). Nonetheless, these micro-level discursive practices do have the ability to affect how individuals see themselves in the world. Two ethnographies that illustrate this point are Eisenlohr's account of “ancestral time” in Mauritius (2004:94) and Wirtz's description of the mythic/transcendent and ancestral/historical chronotopes in Santería rituals (2007).

In Sinclair's poem, I can identify at least two separate but related instances of cross-chronotopic alignment (or “calibration” [Silverstein 1993]). The first type of chronotopic

alignment is based upon a pronominal system and the practice of relational centering (Hanks 1992). This pronominal system is responsible for the construction of the “characters” or “selves” that populate the text and the reader's progression through the text more generally (*i.e.* the readability of the text [*lisibilité du texte*]). Specifically, it draws the present moment of decision – the decision that prompts the question, “Why sood we geng along wi dem” in line 1 – into relation with the chronotope of Scottish Oppression (lines 2-15) and the more recent past where Shetlanders have “built a better rodd ta geng doon wi da licht o hope shinin at da end” (lines 16-17). It does this by constructing selves who are capable of receiving either praise or blame – that is to say, who are capable of bearing pronouns and answering the charge of “who?” – before stretching them across the ages of the poem. This is what Ricœur (1991) means by identity-as-ipseity. By tracking the pronouns, we form a schematic distinction between two entities – Shetlanders and Scots (‘wis’ and ‘dem’) – who perdure throughout all the figured ages. The reader travels back (analepsis) and forth (prolepsis) through time as s/he makes the connection between the qualification, “da sam eens” in the second line (“Da sam eens dat claimed wir grund as dir ain”) to the third person plural dative pronoun, “dem” in the first line (“Why sood we geng along wi dem”). This sort of pronominal tracking can be regarded as chronotopic in the Silversteinian sense since it involves the apparent movement of discursive particles between two moments of discourse (Silverstein 2005:6). Of course, Sinclair wants us to make the leap from identity-as-ipse to identity-as-idem. He does not want to read his poem and conclude that the Scots are a people who committed certain misdeeds in the past, but who are ultimately capable of character development (*Bildung*) through time. Rather, he wants us to see Scots as being essentially the same across the ages of the poem – a single, incorrigible, transhistorical

intentionality that can be predicted to act in accordance with its past actions. The reader is only able to hear the opening question as a “rhetorical question” - that is, as containing a negative assertion which renders it answerable in advance – by hypostasizing the entities and ethnies involved. As Grydehøj notes, Jessie M.E. Saxby and those influenced by her do not regard the antagonism between Scots and Shetlanders as a historical fact, but rather a semipternal reality playing out anew each moment: “The old cycle is unbroken, and as far as local identity is concerned, the suffering of Shetlanders and the grasping of Scots continues still, though the battleground may be new.” (Grydehøj 2009:175)

The second, which I mentioned earlier, involves the use of the Shetland Dialect to enregister a sense of *localism* and *historical continuity* (sc. ‘enregisterment’ is one of Agha’s *termini technici*; it refers to the dialectical process according to which a semiotic register – that is, “a repertoire of performable signs linked to stereotypic pragmatic effects” – is constituted and reconstituted through an on-going sociohistorical process of register use [Agha 2007:80-1]). While Sinclair does not entextualize a plethora of social voices into his poem (Bakhtin 1984:259), owing in part to the eschewal of characterological figures in favor of homogenous ethnological figures, I would assert that the authorial choice to use Shetland Dialect as the language of narration can and should be viewed as a form of “enregisterment,” since 1) the Shetland Dialect is already perceived as a repertoire of signs distinct from Scottish Standard English (SSE) and 2) this linguistic distinction is mapped onto the entities figured in the poem. This second point could once again be reformulated as a transition from identity-as-ipse to identity-as-idem, or as a movement from a bare autology to an autology with attributes. The self that is reconstructed through this enregisterment is one that speaks Shetland Dialect. As a

Shetland speaker (or reader), the reader is supposed to see himself / herself as included in the “we” or “wir fock” detailed in lines 1-5, 11, or 16-21 and concomitantly excluded from the “dey” that speaks SSE (lines 1-2, 6, 20). This enregisterment then is meant to drive a diachronic wedge between an otherwise indistinct synchronic people.

Another functions that this enregisterment may fulfill include: “authentically” representing the post-idyllic state of agriculture during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries so that the atrocities ascribed to Scots are rendered believable (6-10). The success (or felicity) of this representation of Scottish Oppression is based partially upon the entextualization of lexical items such as “Far Haaf” (7), “codlin and olick” (8), “graft” (10), “sock” and “makkin” (11), and “crö” (15). All of these Dialect words are associated with either agriculture or nauticism. The fact that words for these specific practices exist in the Shetland Dialect speaks to the historical importance of these pursuits within the Shetland context and the need to segment reality along these lines. It also lends credibility to Sinclair’s claim that Shetlanders’ engagement in these activities (*e.g.* fishing, digging, knitting, shepherding, etc) were the result of Scottish coercion (lines 6-7).

Finally, it is also important to understand the role that the figure of *archeo-teleology* plays in Sinclair's rhetorical appeal (Derrida 1967:272). The chronotope that we have been discussing, namely the chronotope of feudalistic oppression, can only be read as the catastrophe (καταστροφή) that Sinclair intends when it is compared to an anterior or posterior state of parousiological plenitude; that is to say, a state in which Shetlanders would exist as an unalienated people at one with themselves and their environment (*see* our foregoing discussion of Herder's philosophy and the concept of autology). Although Sinclair does not describe Shetland as it existed before the pawning, the Saxbyean mytho-historical would have us believe

that Shetland was in the midst of a golden age. Specifically, we are told that the valiant vikings – here equated with modern Shetlanders – spent their time cultivating the land, fending back the Pictish indigenes, and participating in a legal system based upon the sovereignty and equality of all landowners (*viz.* an assembly known as a “thing” [*þing*]). It is also important to note that pre-1469 Shetlanders are imagined as being culturally and linguistically authentic, since their traditions had not yet been broken under the influence of Scots (Saxby 1932:93-4; Graham 1989:xiv-xv; Barnes 1996:9-11). Thus, we have an autonomous and autological population, who were unaffected by internal dissension and who lived in harmony with nature. The perfection of this initial state is what makes the Scottish ingression seem so egregious. Even granting that this initial state wasn't *quite* perfect, we still have a people whose common spiritual development (*i.e.* processual perfection) was foreclosed by an accident of history; we have a path forever not taken. At this late date, the best that can be hoped for is a return to the beginning, a partial recuperation of that part of the loss which is known. As Derrida (1967:163) says, « Comme toujours, cette archéologie est aussi une téléologie et une eschatologie; rêve d'une présence pleine et immédiate fermant l'histoire, transparence et indivision d'une parousie, suppression de la contradiction et de la différence. »⁴⁴ Paul Fleming expresses a similar point when he tells us that Jean Paul's theory of childhood – in contradistinction to that of Goethe – is marked by an ‘enfolded potentiality,’ the perfection of which will be ruined as soon as any possibilities are realized: “What is of lasting significance in childhood and what we remember is not what was, but what could have been, what was pre-flected and projected into an infinite future but never

44 “As always, this archaeology is also a teleology and an eschatology; the dream of a full and immediate presence closing history, the transparency and indivisibility of a parousia, the suppression of contradiction and difference.” (trans. mine)

brought to fruition.” (Fleming 2006).

Romantic Nationalism and the Saxbyean Narrative in Popular Discourse

For our third and final example of autological restriction, I would like to return to the ROTI petition and some comments that were made about it during an interview with one of my consultants. As mentioned previously, the ROTI petition did not enjoy much support “on the ground” in Shetland despite receiving a great deal of attention in the national and international media⁴⁵. I was only able to find one local person who claimed to support the petition during the course of my fieldwork and this individual was not formally affiliated with the campaign. Indeed, he told me during our interview that he had stumbled upon it while browsing the internet, meaning that his knowledge about the ROTI campaign was on par with my own. Additionally, he seemed expressed a certain ambivalence about the petition during our interview. It was his opinion that this petition, while worthwhile, should have been brought forth by some sort of official body (e.g. the Shetland Isles Council [SIC]). As it was, he noted that it seemed to “come out of nowhere.” My consultant's distance from the petition can also be witnessed in the fact that the ROTI petition did not strictly align with his own views concerning the sovereign status and political future of Shetland. He did not express a desire to stay part of Britain in the event of Scottish Independence and was not in favor of Shetland Independence *per se*. Instead, he emphasized the ethnic connection between Shetlanders and Norwegians, the illegality of Scotland's incorporation of Shetland, and his desire to see Shetland returned to Norway. To provide a brief biographical sketch of this individual, he is a forty-one-year-old male Shetlander,

45 One noteworthy example of the type of attention that this petition garnered internationally can be seen in the news piece that Enrico Franceschini's wrote for *Il Venerdì di Repubblica* in May 2014 (*viz.* “La catena dei secessionisti: le isole piccole lasciano la Scozia?”).

who has resided in Lerwick for most of his life. According to his own account, he comes from a long line of Shetlanders. Here I will designate this informant using the pseudonym, “Fredrick”.

1. [00:08:44.24] So you talked a little bit about loss. How Shetland has lost something compared to Faroe. Could you maybe talk about that a little bit?
2. [00:09:00.00] I- I (.) I personally feel that Shetland's roots are Scandinavian
3. [00:09:04.25] I know that we've technically been superseded by Scotland for (2.0) four to five hundred years now,
4. [00:09:15.00] but (3.0) I think there's a lot of Shetland's history that we're not told. You know
5. [00:09:21.29] I think what we're not told is that everybody even the official archivists seem to think that when this treaty was done, when this agreement was done in 1469 that was just the cut off point we went from Norway to Scotland, that an you know it's kinda black and white. I don't think that's true.
6. [00:09:43.29] I- I think that ehm (.) you heard about Stuart Hill?
7. [00:09:48.29] **Alex:** Uh not so much
8. [00:09:51.16] No. Well he's kinda looked in- It's a man who's looked into the history you know
9. [00:09:54.00] And ehm I think that actually there's a lot more (3.0) I think that there was a lot of links and trading and interaction wi Norway for centuries after the pawning as it's called.
10. [00:10:13.00] And I think that da roots are still dere. You know. And I think dat (.) geographically because where Shetland is y'know I tend feel that geographically and ehm in terms of the lifestyle we have. The long winters and the short summers.
11. [00:10:36.27] I think that basically we'r (3.0) a Scandinavian country despite the fact that we're ruled by Scotland.
12. [00:10:46.03] I think that the history where we ir you ken geographically ehm I think that basically we're kind of a Scandinavian province
13. [00:10:57.17] So I think and I think that (2.0) because of that and our history our roots are still Scandinavian but unfortunately we've- we've we're ruled by Scotland we're technically part of Scotland
14. [00:11:17.19] And so there's a kind of drip drip drip onta da y'know it's like water dripping onto a stone. The Scottish drip on the stone.
15. [00:11:26.17] And so I think what's happened is thet we've suffered from is just a drip of (2.0) the kinda (2.0) traditional (.) Shetland's traditional identity y'know this kind of Scandinavian Nordic identity has (.) kind of been eroded by the British and Scottish influence
16. [00:11:50.00] What I find well no funny but ... I think thet ... how could you word it
17. [00:11:58.23] I think that we'll never be fully British, we'll never be fully Scottish becuz o where we ir
18. [00:12:07.21] Like I said a minute ago the history that we have and the geographical location y'know we're always going to be different y'know so it's -
19. [00:12:22.12] I've sometimes likened what's happened in Shetland to a slow painful death.
20. [00:12:27.16] So it's going to be interesting to see what happens with the Scottish referendum.
[00:12:35.22] I think that Scottish devolution (2.0) I think most folk would feel that it's been a big- at the least it has been a big disappointment and at worst a disaster for Shetland
21. [00:12:54.01] I think that Shetland voted for the Scottish devolution because dey thought that more powers would y'know that it wouldna stop at Edinburgh that the devolution power would
22. [00:13:24.04] We have very little control over what happens in Shetland. So ... you know even with the referendum that's coming up. It's been handled so poorly it's unbelievable.
23. [00:13:47.14] What they should have been doing is saying right the referendum's coming up this is what's in it for Shetland.
24. [00:15:22.24] If you question or disagree with the Yes camp they're quite aggressive about it.
25. [00:16:30.02] Nasty nationalism there
26. [00:24:13.22] It [NOTE: the ROTI Petition] was a commendable idea by the people that lodged the petition you know that registered it but it was too vague.
27. [00:24:24.08] And (2.0) yeah it was just a referendum for full independence you know and (3.0) although I

am not against that the whole thing where (4.0) where (.) you know it kind o came oot o naewhaur, came out o nowhere. I signed the petition but it was whole it was all a bit 'okay where's this come from? And what's this about' It was a bit vague.

28. [00:25:01.28] That kind of proposal needs to come from the Shetland Isles Council. It should be them who's spearheading a referendum for Independence or whatever.
29. [00:25:15.07] Although I signed it I felt it's something the Shetland Isles Council should be doing.
30. [00:25:23.02] **Alex:** How did you hear about it?
31. [00:25:28.12] I think I just saw it on the Shetland News

32. [00:25:41.20] Well Goodness we're nearly just two month away from the Scottish Referendum.
33. [00:25:49.19] And it's (.) I don't know what way it's gonna go. Ehm I fear for Shetland if it is a yes vote because I think (.) I think (.) that Edinburgh is just going to have all the power it wants. Instead of the kind of half and half, you know London and Edinburgh at the moment with devolution. All the power is going to go into the wrong hands. It's just not a good feeling. Scotland doesn't have a good record of how it deals with Shetland.
34. [00:26:42.00] And devolution hasn't been the success for Shetland that it should have been.
35. [00:26:46.17] And yet if Scotland votes for independence, even if Shetland votes no and Scotland votes yes. Then we're gonna get sucked inta new territory.
36. [00:27:06.09] Based on the history and even under devolution the relation between Shetland and Edinburgh's been very strained. The omens are not good. I think the omens are not good.
37. [00:27:20.09] **Alex:** You said that Scotland doesn't have a good track record when it comes to dealing with Shetland. What did you mean? Sorry.
38. [00:27:30.06] If you have the time I would strongly advise you to look into the history, Shetland's history with Scotland.
39. [00:27:43.03] A lot of people say oh but dat y'know that was centuries ago then.
40. [00:27:50.07] When the pawning arrangement was set up between Denmark and Scotland for Shetland what unfolded is that the Scottish political class saw that y'know Shetland (2.0) was basically a treasure chest for land and so (.) what happened is a wave of the political and legal class started y'know getting their hands on Shetland. And uh (.) they started ta ... They basically prised the land fae the existing land owners y'know what I mean. It was very oppressive and very cruel. I don't know. The way I understand it, Denmark tried no less than 5 times ... it was supposed ta be a pawning. Y'know da agreement was a pawn. As far as I understand the agreement was that it would be redeemed. You know at any time. So it was either five or seven times that the king of Denmark sent a delegation to Scotland y'know to spik aboot bringing Shetland back to Denmark. It was just avoided.
41. [00:29:20.20] The Scottish hierarchy just avoided the issue. They knew that the delegation from Denmark had limited time and limited funds for their trip.
42. [00:29:42.18] So we just slowly fell into Scotlands hands, but it became very oppressive. There was what's called the clearances. I think that that kind of uneasy, that very frictious relation has continued to this day. It still seems to be the same. (2.0) You're basically dealing with two separate countries. You're trying to gel oil and water, shetland and scotland, the two canna mix. For whatever reason there's just an unheal- unheal ... it's very str- (.) it's hard to put into words.

While there are assuredly many things that one could emphasize in the foregoing data sample, it is important to note that Fredrick adduced many of the romantic nationalist arguments that we discussed previously in conjunction with Herder's philosophy. In lines 10-12, for instance, Fredrick seems to make a Herderian argument about the importance of climate and

geography in the formation of a people and their national character (*i.e.* ethno-tellurism). Thus, he makes the argument that Shetland should be returned to Norway because they are “basically ... a kind of Scandinavian province” (line 12) already. Phrased another way, one could say that he believed that the Norwegians could look after Shetland and its interests better than the Scots, because an identical set of climatic and geographical conditions had endowed both groups with a common national character (or ethos). As he said, they shared the “long winters and short summers.” This Scandinavian ethos also helps to explain the conflict between Shetlanders and Scots, because they are – at base – two separate peoples guided by different national spirits they cannot help but have different values and political interests. In Fredrick's words, any attempt to reconcile them is like trying to “gel oil and water. Shetland and Scotland, the two canna mix.” Of course, Fredrick did note that some aspects of Shetlanders’ “Scandinavian Nordic identity” (line 15) had broken down under the influence of Scottish heteronomy. Among the metaphors that Fredrick used to describe this relationship of heteronomy and its deleterious effects on Shetlandic culture include: 1) the metaphor of Shetland as a plant (line 10) where he observes that “da roots are still dere” – that is to say, while most of the plant has been destroyed there is still a radical and ineradicable Scandinavian essence that survives, 2) the metaphor of Shetland-as-a-stone which has been worn down (eroded) under the influence of a “Scottish drip” (lines 14-15), and 3) the metaphor of Shetland-as-a-moribund-person suffering a “slow and painful death” (line 19). All of these metaphors accord with Herder's autonomist and anti-imperialist sentiments inasmuch as they treat external political influences (heteronomy) as ruinous.

Another interesting aspect of Fredrick's thought is his statement that the “very frictious relation [*i.e.* the Scottish oppression of Shetlanders] has continued to this day” and that “it still

seems to be the same.” This idea that the same conflicts are playing out perpetually under different guises aligns with Grydehøj's claim concerning Saxby's suspicion toward Scottish oil exploration. While Saxby “lived to see the tides turn” with the discovery of oil and was undoubtedly pleased that the oil revenue transformed Shetland from a disenfranchised and underserviced backwater into a wealthy and prosperous region, she also suspected that the same forms of oppression and suffering that occurred immediately after the pawning were simply being transposed into new domains (*e.g.* oil). For Fredrick, this also seems to be the case, albeit with more of a political than economic focus. According to his statement in lines 21 and 22, devolution (*i.e.* the establishment of a Scottish Parliament during the late 1970s and early 1980s) was essentially a catastrophe for Shetlanders since it caused more and more power to be redirected to Edinburgh (*i.e.* the central belt). Likewise, he predicted that Scottish Independence would place even more power in Scottish hands, allowing them to treat Shetland with impunity and arrogate its resources (line 33).

One final aspect worth highlight in Fredrick's statement is his stance toward the ROTI petition. While he had signed the petition and agreed to be interviewed by me as a “supporter” of the petition, it rapidly became clear that he did not agree with their goal of outright Independence for Shetland – or at least, felt that such a position would require support from the Shetland Isles Council. Like many of the other people with whom I spoke during the course of my fieldwork, Fredrick felt that the petition “kinda came oot o naewhaur” (line 27). That said, he still ended up signing the petition. I cannot help but find it strange that he did not join the Better Together camp given the strong critique that he lodged against Scotland during our interview and the fact that no faction was advocating the return of Shetland to Norway. If I were to advance a reason

for his choice to support minoritarian positions such as the ROTI petition, I would suggest that it was likely an attempt to distinguish himself and his position from other family members who were involved in the No Campaign.

V. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to achieve two separate but related tasks: On the one hand, I have striven to expose and explain the logic of the nation-state, including its philosophical, ideological and pragmatic components. On the other, I have attempted to situate the Referendum on the Islands (ROTI) campaign with respect to this logic. The achievement of this latter objective has necessitated that I analyze a heterogeneous data set, which includes newspaper commentaries, statements made by ROTI officials (of which there are few), statements made by politicians such as Tavish Scott (MSP), ethnographic interviews conducted during my fieldwork, and examples of local poetry (*e.g.* a poem by Alistair Sinclair). At this point, I think it is fitting to return to a possibility that I alluded to at the outset; namely, that irrespective of its ability to cast light on the logic of the nation-state, whereof it is undeniably a part, the ROTI petition was actually intended to be a politico-theatrical *reductio ad absurdum*. *Reductio ad absurdum* is a technique in logic, which seeks to demonstrate that certain first principles should be discarded, because they lead to an untenable conclusion. Although the ROTI campaign would – according to this interpretation – have been an attack on the axioms and axiology of the nation-state (*viz.* ethno-tellurism), it would *ironically* not have been an attack on the existence of “nation-states” such as the United Kingdom. In this way, it could be seen as a gambit – an attempt to sabotage the logic of the nation-state so that certain nation-states could survive without logic or

metanarratives (Lyotard 1984), as though a pure and solipsistic injustice. The last thing that the ROTI petitioners – whoever they may have been – would have wanted then would be for individuals to take up their cause. And yet, it is an irony of irony that one can take it seriously, that when confronted with the permanent parabasis, the unsuturable rupture between the said (dire) and the intent (vouloir-dire), one can take the statement at face value. This is why Schlegel cautioned his readers not to play with irony in his famous essay, *Über die Unverständlichkeit*: „Mit der Ironie ist durchaus nicht zu scherzen. Sie kann unglaublich lange nachwirken.“⁴⁶

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46 “Irony is not to be played with under any circumstance. It can produce repercussions for an unbelievable amount of time.”

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