Chapter 2

Anglophone Literature of Civilization and the Hybridized Gaelic Subject

Martin Martin’s Travel Writings

Many discursive trends outlined in chapter 1 are also reflected in two central texts chosen for more detailed analysis in the present chapter: Martin’s *A Late Voyage to St. Kilda* (SK; written ca. 1697, published 1698) and *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (WI; probably mainly written in the 1690s, published 1703). These two pieces of travel writing and geographical description cover a wide range of subjects, including topography, botany, zoology, ethnography, economy, history, archaeological remains, and other sights such as special features of church design, personal anecdotes, folklore, and traditional medicine. While this broad scope is in line with other work in European geography at that time, it is also tempting to compare Martin’s wide-ranging works to the early modern colonial encyclopedias discussed by Walter Mignolo in a Latin American context. Again, the modern nation-state’s efforts to extend its knowledge and control of its own territory—even its most remote internal fringes—employ discursive and practical strategies which resemble those of overseas colonial conquest and knowledge production.

Martin’s books are two of the earliest sustained descriptions of the Hebrides which found their way into print. They are also among the most influential. For instance, Martin’s writings helped to increase scholarly interest in Gaelic, and accompanied the English intellectual Samuel Johnson and his friend, the Lowland Scottish writer James Boswell, on their own famous Hebridean journey (1773), which likewise became immortalized in book form. Martin has also been a key reference point for many later authors on Hebridean travel, history, and traditions. He remains well known today, though surprisingly neglected by literary scholars. Another factor that makes his works particularly relevant to the present study is their ambivalent perspective which reflects key colonial and postcolonial themes. Like many later texts about the Gaidhealtachd, they often speak from the viewpoint of a “learnèd gentleman of the world,” in English and to an anglophone audience.
presumably located mainly in the Lowlands or England. However, unlike many other accounts, Martin’s were written by a native Hebridean and Gaelic speaker. As such, Martin could offer an inside perspective, while at the same time his education, class, and experience of living in non-Gaelic regions set him apart from many of his fellow Gaels. This results in a thoroughly hybridized perspective on Scotland’s western periphery. Martin’s work is central to a postcolonial history of Scottish identity and literature, as a powerful reminder that simplistic binarisms between colonizers and colonized (problematic anywhere) are particularly unsuited to the complexities of the Scottish situation, even at this relatively early date. The interstitial position of Martin’s works as Hebridean self-representations partially influenced by, but also in critical dialogue with, metropolitan discourse, and aimed at a mainly metropolitan audience, makes them noteworthy examples of what Mary Louise Pratt has termed “autoethnography.”

Martin is aware of his own hybrid position. Issues of border-crossing, cultural translation, and liminality surface in various forms. Often he consciously embraces the position of a cultural mediator, explaining and vindicating merits of Gaelic life to an anglophone mainstream audience at a time when this mainstream was generally rather hostile toward Gaeldom. This vindication occasionally resembles anti- or post-colonial “writing back” strategies, but other aspects of his work are more similar to (pro)colonial discourse. For instance, he perceives himself as standing not only on a cultural, but also on a historical threshold: he subscribes to a universalist, hierarchical concept of progress and civilization which takes the anglophone mainstream as the norm, judges deviant models of social organization as deficient and primitive, and believes that the “primitives” should follow the mainstream’s lead on the path to progress. Thus, Martin—despite his sympathy with Gaelic otherness—also supports the margin’s assimilation and integration into the national collective. Although he was writing before the Union of 1707, his review of previous national integration measures is not limited to intra-Scottish initiatives, but takes in England as well: due to the dynastic Union of 1603, his discussion of crown policies already has a pan-British dimension; and he also discusses private investors from both sides of the border. This pan-British outlook and some of the measures he suggests for future modernization in the Isles already anticipate the intensification of assimilating endeavors that set in after 1707.

The integration of Gaeldom into the national mainstream appears as a civilizing mission, an impression reinforced by Martin’s occasional tendency to read concepts from Caesar, Tacitus, and modern overseas colonial discourse into his own Gaelic culture. Sometimes Martin seems remarkably ahead of his time: several ideas he uses did not become prominent in mainstream discourse until several decades later. For instance, his recycling of classical antiquity’s concept of a universal ladder of progress anticipates ideas popularized by the Scottish Enlightenment in the mid-eighteenth century; and his
use of the “noble savage” trope anticipates romanticism. Thus, on the one hand, Martin’s works are integral parts of an anglophone, colonizing canon of texts on Gaelic “barbarity,” while on the other hand these particular colonizing texts were written by a son of the colonized culture. As a result of this liminality, the boundaries between self and Other, as well as the value judgments set up within the text, constantly fluctuate and frequently appear on the brink of breaking down altogether.

Martin was born in the 1660s on the Isle of Skye, apparently into a family of good social standing. Surviving biographical information is limited. He attended Edinburgh University and from about 1681 to 1692 worked as a tutor for the island’s aristocracy. Subsequently, he apparently spent time in Scotland’s Western and Northern Isles, Edinburgh, London, and Continental Europe. He was involved with various members of Britain’s scientific establishment for whom he acted as a “geographical field agent . . . , directly observing and reporting upon things and transmitting specimens and facts about unknown parts of Britain.” One of the scientific hubs with which Martin was involved in this manner was the Royal Society, to whom he presented two papers. Martin’s services as a field agent were also used by the geographer royal, Sir Robert Sibbald, who was working on a Scottish atlas. Some of Martin’s travels were made in the employ of the Lowland-born geographer John Adair, who was engaged in a major mapmaking project to chart the Scottish coasts, sanctioned by the Scottish Parliament and funded by the state. At the inception of the project in 1686, an avowed parliamentary motive was to provide added security and stimulus to incoming foreign traders. This applied to all of Scotland, but with regard to its Gaelic western periphery it also meant opening up the region to the new capitalist system and integrating the area more closely into the nation-state and its international economic interests. In 1695, a second parliamentary act on Adair’s project makes special mention of the Western and Northern Isles. Adair’s 1698 expedition to those islands also aimed to collect other information on the region, for instance on botany, and was accompanied by native guides whose local knowledge was to help with navigation and the Gaelic language. Martin was one of those native informants, and also received a direct payment from the state in recognition of his services on Adair’s expedition. This involved Martin directly in the process of “internal colonial” exploration, economic “civilizing missions,” and national integration even before he published his own writings on these subjects. Moreover, Martin evidently used some of the observations he made during the Adair expedition as a basis for his own publications. Later, Martin apparently did further work as a tutor between 1704 and 1710, and studied medicine at the universities of Leiden and Rheims. He seems to have spent most of his final years in the London area, practicing as a doctor and styling himself a “gentleman.” He died in 1718.

This biographical background goes some way toward explaining why Martin’s attitude to metropolitan influences was less hostile than that
of many other Gaelic-speaking authors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who often retained a rather conservative and partly even nativist outlook. Martin’s personal experiences of travel, migration, and state employment made the center’s cultural perspective partially his own. Another crucial factor is literary genre: while many nativist Gaelic poets were steeped in highly conservative values and genre conventions inherited from medieval traditions, Martin wrote in a different genre which did not consign him to conservatism. His social position was different as well: his legal and medical training gave him the progressive outlook of the newly ascendant Scottish professional middle class. He was an islander who had profited from a metropolitan education, a hybridized subject whose own achievements induced him to think that hybridization would prove similarly beneficial to the rest of Gaeldom, even those of lower rank. Nonetheless, Martin’s position ultimately eludes fixture, constantly oscillating between the perspective of a sympathetic Gaelic insider on the one hand, and that of an outsider from a “civilized” and “civilizing” anglophone mainstream on the other. This flexible self-positioning also makes clear that the underlying categories (“pre-modern Gaelic margin” vs. “civilized anglophone center”) are themselves unstable: the binary opposition between them is a social construct, not the result of innate essential properties. Martin’s hybridity can thus contribute to a postcolonial deconstruction of the essentialism and othering which so frequently characterizes colonial discourse.

Narrative Perspective: Inside/Outside

Martin’s narrative perspective is itself ambivalent. The preface to A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland deliberately positions him as a bearer of local knowledge and native viewpoints when he complains that, although some previous accounts exist, the Western Isles “have never been described till now by any man that was a native of the country or had travelled them.” Martin further emphasises his indigeneity when expressing his hope that readers will forgive

what defects may be found in my style . . . : for there is a wantonness in language . . . to which my countrymen of the Isles are as much strangers as to other excesses which are too frequent in many parts of Europe. We study things there more than words, though those that understand our native language must own that we have enough of the latter to inform the judgment and work upon the affections in as pathetic a manner as any other languages. (WI 62, italics mine)

The first-person pronouns imply identification with the inhabitants of the Western Isles. However, adopting the pose of a “simple islander” need not
necessarily reflect a complete ethnic alignment, but may refer to literary style alone—and even that appears rather coquettish, a display of modesty not entirely sincere, for Martin’s writing style is literary and educated, though free from excessive rhetorical flourishes. Casting himself in the role of a native informant may also be a marketing strategy: it presents Martin’s account as different from previous texts and as particularly well-informed.14

Once this position has been established by the preface, the main text continues in a slightly different vein, placing more emphasis on the distinction between the author and the locals. For instance, when Martin cites a Gaelic expression from Lewis in literal English translation, he adds: “For so it signifies in their language” (WI 88) instead of “. . . our language.” In this particular case, it might be argued that the third-person pronoun need not imply that Martin poses as a non-Gael. Instead, it might merely refer to an intra-Gaelic dialect difference between Martin the Skye man and the Lewis people. Elsewhere, however, Martin’s posing as a non-Gaelic outsider is unmistakable, for instance when he refers to Gaelic as “their language” (WI 168–69). Similarly, he often refers to all kinds of islanders, even those from his own island, as “the natives” instead of “we.” The shift between the first-person pronouns of the preface and third-person pronouns here illustrates again how hybridity highlights the instability of “us”/“them” categories. This is, however, not merely a matter of cultural difference and Martin’s partial assimilation to the non-Gaelic mainstream. It is also a matter of class: Martin as a university-educated “man of the world” stands apart from the uneducated “rustics,” and when he speaks of local society he mainly refers to the lower ranks. Although middle-class individuals like stewards and clergymen are also frequently mentioned, they mainly appear as witnesses corroborating information given by lower-class people, lending the latter additional credibility (e.g., WI 146; SK 424–25). The middle class’s own lifestyle and outlook is not usually mentioned, or at least not distinguished from that of the masses. Aristocratic life is not described in any detail either, apart from a few references to medieval feudal traditions, most of which have already disappeared, and to aristocratic patronage of poets. Most references to aristocrats are limited to half-sentences explaining who owns which tract of land.15 Hence, Martin’s focus is clearly on the lower social orders.

The way in which Martin presents Gaelic traditions might try to play on the expectations of his intended audience, for instance concerning the exotic and the “curious”: both books explicitly aim to cater to the contemporary appetite for travel narratives and other descriptions of remote, strange, or unknown places (WI, preface, 62; SK, preface, 397), which accords with the establishment and expansion of British colonies. The texts Martin identifies as fashionable include those on overseas territories: for example, in St. Kilda he mentions “the Indies” (SK 397). Western Islands does not give a regional specification—he may again think of the colonies, but probably not exclusively, as the allusion might also extend to growing
interest in intra-European travel. Sometimes Martin deliberately exotizes the Western Isles, for instance by drawing attention to things which his readers might find “curious,” that is, new, strange, or Other. Already the title page—which in typical eighteenth-century fashion gives an extensive list of the main contents—promises this when referring to “Curiosities of Art and Nature.” Similar references to “curiosities” occur on pp. 83 and 370 (W1). The same logic dominates Martin’s account of how inhabitants of smaller and remoter islands reacted when first traveling to the bigger islands, the mainland, or even Glasgow (W1 317–19, SK 462–64): their naturally slightly bewildered perspective is labeled as “strange”—already in the table of contents (W1 81; also see p. 462 of SK’s main text). Thus, the city-dweller’s perspective is established as normal, while the diverging viewpoint of the country bumpkin is “strange.” Similarly, the main text of St. Kilda comments: “their opinion of foreign objects is . . . remote from the ordinary sentiments of other mankind” (SK 464). Martin even makes fun of those inexperienced travelers, exposing their views for the metropolitan reader’s amusement and for a laugh at the islanders’ expense (SK 462–64).

The text takes the perspective of its intended audience: the metropolitan is “normal,” the Western Isles are marked as “Other” alias “curious.” On the one hand, the intended readers have been invited to trust Martin’s discursive authority precisely because he is a “native.” On the other hand, in order to make things intelligible, enjoyable, and interesting to his readers, Martin must “other” his native culture and describe it at least to a certain degree in terms laid out and expected by his audience. This may partly be just a tactical move and partly represent Martin’s own beliefs, the latter perhaps influenced by his mainstream education and socialization. Martin’s (self-)marketing as a native informant, albeit a metropolitanized and thus intelligible one, is comparable to the packaging of contemporary diasporic or otherwise westernized post-colonial authors for the Western metropolitan market. Such marketing issues have also become an object of postcolonial critical analysis, for instance by Graham Huggan, Sarah Brouillette, and Sandra Ponzanesi. Divergences between their approaches notwithstanding, all three critics highlight that commodification and cliché, despite their problems, can also be handled strategically and subversively, for instance when authors play on their hybrid status as both insider and outsider, or when they expose the stereotypes and power relations which underlie their position in the global market. Similar things can be said of Martin’s hybrid self-positioning between primitive otherness and civilized metropolitan authority, and his use of the returned gaze to expose the limits of metropolitan self-righteousness. Thus, despite his occasional pandering to mainstream prejudices, Martin also counters them by presenting a more positive and sympathetic account of the Gaelic world than was usual in anglophone texts of his time. He explains his mediating intentions as follows:
I am not ignorant that foreigners, sailing through the Western Isles, have been tempted from the sight of so many wild hills that seem to be covered all over with heath . . . to imagine that the inhabitants, as well as the places of their residence, are barbarous; and to this opinion, their habit, as well as their language, have contributed. The like is supposed by many that live in the south of Scotland, who know no more of the Western Isles than the natives of Italy, but the lion is not so fierce as he is painted, neither are the people . . . so barbarous as the world imagines. (WI 356)

One way to enforce this point was to counter assumptions of spatial otherness: mainstream assertions of the Western Isles’ remoteness, strangeness, and primitiveness, to which Martin partly subscribes himself, are tempered by hints that the Isles are not entirely cut off from the world. Even the particularly remote island of St. Kilda, with its sometimes exotic and archaic measurements, calculates at least the years and months in the same way as the rest of Britain does (SK 462). Thus, othering is complemented by same-ing. The other Western Isles are shown to have even more links and parallels to the rest of the world: a second instance of same-ing occurs when Martin notes a custom which is observed similarly in Uist and Aberdeenshire (WI 136). He also acknowledges economic links to the mainland (though still too few; see below) and even to the overseas colonies. He mentions the wool trade between most of the Western Isles, Moray, and Aberdeen (WI 354–55); as well as the fact that “beef is transported to Glasgow, . . . and from thence . . . to the Indies” (WI 139). He also refers to four islanders who spent time in Barbados (WI 347). Thus, Martin partially reintegrates the supposedly remote and alien Western Isles into the national and international space by reporting their connections to the outside world.

Martin also counters the mainstream’s anti-Gaelic prejudices by displaying respect for the islanders’ intelligence, discursive authority, social organization, and cultural achievements.

Respect for Native Voices and Achievements

Contrary to colonial images of Gaels as ignoble savages, several passages in Martin’s books portray the islanders as very intelligent, though somewhat uneducated. The author makes clear that, considering the limited resources at their disposal, it is amazing how much they make of them. With remarkable skill and invention they can tell their nautical position from the flight of seabirds as precisely as the visitors’ compass (SK 405). Similarly, they calculate the time by watching tides and sky (SK 460–61). Martin also praises their good memory (SK 438). He asserts that they are “reputed very cunning” (SK 438) and that “there is scarce any circumventing of them in traffic and
Chapter 2

bartering” (SK 438). Already the contents pages contain hints like “natives sagacious” (WI 76), “ingenuity” (WI 81), and “capable of acquiring all arts” (WI 82). Likewise, the main text of Western Islands asserts that “the natives are generally ingenious and quick of apprehension; they have a mechanical genius” (WI 95) as well as “a genius for all callings and employments” (WI 260). “They are generally a very sagacious people, quick of apprehension, and even the vulgar exceed all those of their rank and education I ever yet saw in any other country” (WI 240). The latter passage even asserts the islanders’ superiority over the inhabitants of other regions.

Martin’s respect for native intelligence and native voices is reflected in his use of language. An important feature of cultural imperialism—whether ancient Roman or modern anglophone British, whether in the “Celtic fringe” or overseas—is the power of naming. Renaming in the colonizer’s or mainstream’s language and the marginalization or utter silencing of indigenous terms have also affected the Scottish Gaidhealtachd, where Ordnance Survey maps and road signs with anglicized place-names have carried this problem forward into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Martin has a more ambiguous approach to the names of places, people, animals, things, and techniques: some names are given in the established English version. Some are directly translated from Gaelic, for instance in his remarks on “Seapork” (from muc-mhara, meaning “whale” or “porpoise,” WI 88), or the English/Latinate rendering of Bearnaraidh Beag and Bearnaraidh Mór into “Bernera Minor” and “Bernera Major” (WI 96). Other names appear only in Gaelic, though occasionally in anglicised spellings like “Timiy” (WI 86). Yet other names are given in both languages. Now and then he translates only half of a name, as when he gives “Eilean Mór” (eilean = “island,” mór = “big”) as “Island-More” (WI 98). Martin’s linguistic syncretism and his awareness of onomastic variations highlight gaps between cultures and languages.

Here he places Highland and Lowland systems next to each other, without privileging either. This underlines the bilingual, hybrid nature of both the author and the society he writes about. This effect might be unintentional—although it may be legitimate for modern audiences to read the text this way, and although readings against the grain can prove highly fruitful, assuming consciously subversive intentions on the part of the author might go too far in projecting postmodern agendas onto an early modern consciousness. But even if the effect of highlighting gaps is unintentional in Martin’s text, it nonetheless exists as a revealing intra-textual fissure which illustrates the deeply hybrid and ambiguous nature of the Highland “colonial” experience.

Martin’s respect for the Gaelic language is further expressed by the inclusion of rationalizations and etymologies for Gaelic names, for example, for places like Skye (WI 190), Arran (WI 154), and Iona (WI 286). The following passage is especially revealing:
Anglophone Literature and the Gaelic Subject

The Island of Lewis is so called from Leog, which in the Irish language signifies water, lying on the surface of the ground; which is very proper to this island, because of the . . . fresh-water lakes that abound in it. . . . It is . . . distinguished by . . . several names: by the islanders it is commonly called, the Long Island, being from south to north 100 miles in length. (WI 85)

Here the linguistic gaps and variations acknowledged concern not only differences between Gaelic- and English-speaking people, but also differences within Gaelic discourse, as Martin discusses two Gaelic names: Leòdhas (or “Leog”) and An t-Eilean Fada (the Long Island). He asserts that indigenous names are rational, not only by giving their etymology, but also by emphasizing that the toponyms reflect the nature of the object they name. This emphasis on Gaelic rationality sets Martin’s text apart from many other anglophone writings which portray Gaelic as primitive, irrational, inappropriate, ugly, and intrinsically unintelligible gibberish. Martin’s insistence on the appropriateness of local names could also be read as a more general defense of the rationality of indigenous voices, while many other descriptions of marginalized cultures assume that rationality belongs exclusively to the center or colonizer.

Another feature of Martin’s text which highlights the bilingual character of Scottish society, as well as the linguistic gaps which impede cross-cultural understanding, is a subchapter that reproduces a complete Gaelic prayer in the original language over one and a half pages, followed by an English translation (WI 186–89). The full inclusion of the original expresses Martin’s respect for the Gaelic language and shows that the intended audience is not an exclusively anglophone one: “I have set down the original for the satisfaction of such readers as understand it” (WI 186). Bilingual textual elements, and the envisioning of a target audience comprising both metropolitan outsiders and educated, part-metropolitanized “natives,” are further characteristics of autoethnographic texts.

Respect for indigenous voices also surfaces in Martin’s comments on the role of native informants for his own research. The precedence of local voices over those of outsiders is affirmed not only in the prefaces, where he poses as a native informant himself, using authenticity as a marketing tactic, but also in the main text, which abounds in phrases like “the natives assure me that . . .” (WI 87) or “I was told by the natives . . .” (WI 88, 116, 174). Martin frequently affirms his informants’ general integrity and, more particularly, their discursive reliability (WI 126, 135, 173, 180, 227, 332).

Sometimes, Martin also assures his readers that local accounts have been confirmed by his own observations (e.g., WI 63; SK 427). At first, this seems to imply a hierarchization of discursive authority, since Gaelic accounts, mostly from “ordinary” lower-class people, need a stamp of approval from
a more authoritative observer, in this case Martin himself as an educated, part-anglicized middle-class man. Similarly, he sometimes makes class-based distinctions among local informers when he has ordinary people's accounts confirmed by middle- or upper-class residents such as ministers (e.g., WI 342) or landowners (e.g., WI 118). However, such apparent hierarchizations of reliability should not be overemphasised because the more illustrious witnesses usually concur with folk opinion—which thus turns out to be just as reliable as higher-class voices. Moreover, Martin’s invocation of more educated or better-placed witnesses need not mean that he is prejudiced against folk culture or lower-class people himself: he might merely make concessions to prejudices held by some members of his intended audience—prejudices he may be trying to refute.29

It is also noteworthy that Martin believes in aspects of folk tradition which many outsiders from the mainstream would probably have despised as superstition. For instance, he reports that certain nuts are believed to have talismanic powers against witchcraft and change color as a warning. Martin affirms this to be “true by my own observation,” though he “cannot be positive as to the cause of it” (WI 116), and he even admits to owning such a nut himself.

Respect for folk tradition also informs his remarks on the “second sight.” How important this subject is to him can be seen from its appearance on the title page, and from the fact that he devotes an entire chapter to it (WI 321–48). Martin believes the second sight to be very “common” (WI, title page) among the people of the Western Isles, though apparently less common elsewhere. Thus, to most of Martin’s intended audience the phenomenon would appear as an alien curiosity. This can also be inferred from the fact that Martin’s chapter starts by defining what second sight is, which would be unnecessary if all readers could be expected to know (WI 321). He does not give explicit reasons for this regional difference in supernatural sensitivity, but it might be inferred that a difference in “civilizational stages” plays a part. As also suggested by his use of the “noble savage” trope (see below), he seems to think that the relatively “primitive” people of the Western Isles enjoy a close relationship with nature which their more “advanced” Lowland and English compatriots have lost. This closeness might be extended from the natural to the supernatural world, so that second sight appears more at home in a society which is relatively unadvanced in rational science. This accords with Martin’s assertion that in recent years the second sight has somewhat declined (WI 330, 348). Though he does not give an explicit reason, it can be plausibly assumed that the reason lies in the onset of modernity and centralization, which Martin elsewhere names as recent phenomena in island life that have weakened other folk traditions. In addition to Scotland’s Western Isles, he mentions three other places where the second sight remains relatively common, and two of these are likewise “backward” inner-British peripheries: Wales and the Isle of Man.30 Although he seems to consider progress and
second sight to be in mutual opposition, Martin does not take the side of “progress”: he staunchly defends his belief in the second sight against rational skepticism and Protestant clerical objections (WI, e.g., 65, 326–28, 344).

In this context, he even privileges local oral accounts over the canonized written reports of historians—a remarkable feature in an educated author of his time, considering that many anglophone mainstream intellectuals tended to despise oral cultures:

Such as deny those visions [second sight] give their assent to . . . strange passages in history upon the authority . . . of historians that lived . . . centuries before our time, and yet they deny the people of this generation the liberty to believe their intimate friends and acquaintance, men of probity and unquestionable reputation, and of whose veracity they have greater certainty than we can have of any ancient historian. (WI 328)

This leads us to another important trope in Martin’s work: history. Colonial discourse about “primitive” cultures (whether the latter are ancient or modern, colonial or noncolonial, “noble” or “ignoble”) often perceives indigenous populations as living not only out of space, remote from the centers of the world, but also out of time, as people who have no history or progress of their own, or at least none which is worth mentioning—not before they came into contact with the dynamic culture of the colonizer/center, at any rate. Martin, however, deems local history significant enough to be mentioned in his books, though parts of this history had little to do with Scottish, English, or European “centers.” The historical sources he quotes include not only written ones such as inscriptions (WI 287, 289–91) or the works of Bede (WI 292–93), but also local oral traditions—for instance about the neolithic standing stones of Calanais: “I enquired of the inhabitants what tradition they had from their ancestors concerning these stones; and they told me” (WI 91).

It seems strikingly modern that he frequently even provides his informants’ names, sometimes along with additional data such as occupation, place of residence, and even the time when his information was collected. Perhaps he merely meant to bolster the credibility of his account, as if to say: “if you don’t believe me, go there and ask for yourself.” However, this feature might also be read as a respectful recognition of the way oral tradition works, for instance as regards subjectivity, multivocality, and the possibility to modify an account with each retelling to reflect shifting perspectives or the requirements of different occasions and audiences. This kind of individuation extends not only to Martin’s direct informants, but also to other locals he writes about: while many other texts about “primitive” and/or colonized populations use sweeping generalizations about “the natives” which reduce or entirely ignore internal differences of class, time, gender, individual interest, and so on, Martin’s account of “native” customs and experiences often emphasizes the
specificity of each case, for instance concerning illnesses, omens, and second sight. And again, he frequently personalizes by name and address.\textsuperscript{34}

Past events which Martin considers worth mentioning despite their “merely” local significance include an earthquake (SK 423), shipwrecks (WI 171), agricultural misfortunes (WI 104), inter-clan feuds (WI 340), religious conversions, and heresy (WI 108, 312). He also devotes considerable space to the history of Iona Abbey (WI 286–93) and makes a few references to the medieval Lordship of the Isles (WI 155, 273, 288). Here, the more common anglophone title “Lord of the Isles” is used alongside the epithet “king” which alludes to the Gaelic title \textit{rìgh nan eilean}, thus again suggesting respect for indigenous traditions.

Many authors interpret other cultures’ divergence from their own society’s rules as a complete absence of rules and logic of any sort.\textsuperscript{35} Martin, however, is at pains to demonstrate that local customs follow a very elaborate set of indigenous rules and have an internal logic of their own. For instance, he does not think that Anglo-British modernity invented law and order after a dark, chaotic medieval quagmire. He recognizes that medieval Gaelic feudal society likewise saw a need for order and devised means for achieving it—he calls certain medieval customs “necessary to prevent disorder and contention” (WI 170) and stresses a high degree of regularity in the appointment of officers, hereditary positions, the organization of meetings (WI 166–71), and feudal duties (WI 175–76). His comments on cattle raiding are especially remarkable. Many anglophone onlookers had, ever since the Middle Ages, perceived cattle raiding as the epitome of Highland lawlessness and disorder because in the eyes of Lowlanders (who had different socioeconomic practices) it looked like theft and a perpetual threat of military action or upheaval. By contrast, Martin knows that, within the internal logic of Highland society, cattle raiding made perfect sense and was not lawless or chaotic at all. He sympathetically explains that the mutuality of raiding maintained balance and order: “This custom being reciprocally used . . . , was not reputed robbery; for the damage which one tribe sustained . . . was repaired when their chieftain came in his turn to make his specimen” (WI 165).\textsuperscript{36}

Martin’s respect for local forms of knowledge and organization also extends to contemporaneous island law—another largely oral tradition. He is far from considering a society as lawless just because its rules are not codified in writing. Describing how leases are contracted without a written document, through the ceremonial passing of straw and a stick between lord and tenant, Martin asserts: “then both parties are as much obliged to perform their respective conditions as if they had signed a . . . deed” (WI 184). This emphasis on law-abiding and regularity even extends to elements of local life which are pre- or noncapitalist, such as disregard for high profits—although Martin would probably prefer a capitalist system (see below): “they covet no wealth . . . ; though . . . they are very precise in the matter of property among themselves; for none of them will . . . allow his neighbour to fish
within his property; and every one must exactly observe not to make any encroachment on his neighbour” (WI 102). Regularity is also observed in the scrupulous and punctual delivery of dues and payments (e.g., WI 163; SK 408, 447). St. Kilda seems to be especially punctilious (WI 314; SK 416, 422, 424, 438, 443–44, 451–53, 458–59), although in this case regularity also has its drawbacks, as it can lead to undue inflexibility:

“there is not a parcel of men in the world more scrupulously . . . punctilious in maintaining their liberties and properties than these . . . , being most religiously fond of their ancient laws . . .; nor will they by any means consent to alter their first (though unreasonable) constitution.”

Another sphere of achievement is agriculture: although island agriculture leaves much to be desired in efficiency (see below), Martin does not consider the local farmers entirely devoid of merit. In Lewis he even notes a very efficient local method of working fields which “produces a greater increase than digging or ploughing otherwise” (WI 86).

He also remarks on native art, music, orature/literature, and learning, noting not only achievements already made (e.g., WI 241) but also additional ones attainable with some extra help. Already the table of contents identifies the islanders as “lovers of music” (WI 76), and the main text elaborates by mentioning “men who could play on the violin pretty well without being taught” (WI 95, also see 240–41). Martin also notes that the Gaelic language is just as expressive as other European languages (see the passage from WI 62, quoted above).

His respect for Gaelic eloquence does not, however, extend to traditional court poetry: “they furnish . . . a style . . . understood by very few . . . and if they purchase a couple of horses as the reward . . . they think they have done a great matter” (WI 177). If “understand” is taken to mean the poets’ ability to master the complex and difficult Classical Gaelic meters, the passage might be read as a statement of admiration. But “understand” might also refer to the audience’s ability to comprehend the contents of such poems, and in this light Martin appears to criticize the remoteness of the traditional Classical Gaelic literary language from the modern Scottish Gaelic vernacular. This interpretation is corroborated by Martin’s assertion that the poets “think they have done a great matter” (italics mine), which suggests that he considers their self-satisfaction to be unfounded. Elsewhere, an account of the traditionally high prestige of Gaelic poets concludes: “but these gentlemen becoming insolent lost ever since both the profit and esteem which was formerly due to their character” (WI 176). Martin apparently thinks that the poets’ behavior was above their proper station—an opinion which had already been expressed by another anglophone Scottish author over 200 years earlier, that is, Richard Holland in The Buke of the Howlat.

Martin lays all the blame for the decline of the bardic order on the poets themselves; the role of wider social changes is not mentioned. Nonetheless, Martin’s lack of admiration does not necessarily stem from a Lowland, anti-Gaelic, or colonizing attitude. For
instance, he never suggests that his dislike of Gaelic court poetry is founded in its “primitiveness.” Neither does he claim that the poets’ “unreasonable” demands reflect a general unreasonableness of Gaelic society. Rather than reading Martin’s critique of these poets as an outsider’s colonial contempt for Gaelic culture as a whole, we may read it as an insider’s critique of just one particular aspect of a culture which he nonetheless considers very much as his own. And why should such criticism not be legitimate, without immediately forfeiting the critic’s membership in the society he criticizes?

Martin’s continuing identification with, and appreciation of, Gaelic culture, is also evident in the fact that his reservations about court poetry do not extend to folk poetry. Quite the contrary: contents pages and main text stress the islanders’ “genius for poetry.” Martin writes: “Several . . . have a gift of poesy, and are able to form a satire or panegyric ex tempore” (WI 95, italics in original). In addition to his respect for the predominantly oral genre of folk poetry, Martin acknowledges the existence of a learned Gaelic manuscript tradition (e.g., WI 292) and even its awareness of the mainstream European canon: “Fergus Beaton hath the following ancient Irish manuscripts in the Irish character; . . . Avicenna, Averroes, Joannes de Vigo, Bernardus Gordinus, and several volumes of Hippocrates” (WI 155).

Martin’s vindication of local culture and local knowledge displays various features commonly associated with anticolonial discourse. But this is not the whole story: his perspective shifts back and forth between a Hebridean insider’s and a metropolitan outsider’s view, as well as between respect and condescension.

The Metropolitan View and Colonial Discourse Patterns

Historical Stasis

In spite of Martin’s partial respect for local history, he sometimes betrays a more colonial viewpoint, for example when local history, though of interest, is presented as having been rather static for a very long time until the recent encroachment of the anglophone center. Martin’s belief in stasis is so strong that he discerns historical continuities between the medieval or even early seventeenth-century Western Isles and Caesar’s Gaul, for example, concerning inauguration ceremonies for clan chiefs (WI 166–69). It seems that Celtic society during those long, slow centuries did not produce many noteworthy historical changes, nor does it seem to have had much contact with the dynamics of the wider world outside, at least not before the seventeenth century. Martin’s anecdotes on local history include only one pre-1600 event which formed a link between the Western Isles and “major” European history, that is, the destruction of a ship of the Spanish Armada near Mull in 1588 (WI 283–84). Such wider contacts are presented as having increased
rather suddenly during the seventeenth century through the growing impact of central government authority and the Reformation. It is to such external impact that Martin attributes the gradual crumbling of ancient static Celtic traditions and their replacement by dynamics and progress. If indigenously generated progress is mentioned at all, it appears to have been but slight, as the Western Isles seem to need catalyst energy from outside to realize their full potential. Thus, Martin’s description of Eriskay notes that “the natives begin to manage it better, but not to that advantage it is capable of” (WI 154).

While Martin also shows an interest in historical events of more limited, local significance, now that the Isles are touched by national and international developments he deems those wider connections especially noteworthy—thus coming closer to a colonial view of indigenous history which assumes that proper history can only be brought to the periphery from outside, by the colonizer/center. Events in which national and local history are intertwined include the destruction of Stornoway Castle by Cromwell’s army (WI 90) and the wreck of a Cromwellian ship “sent there to subdue the natives” (WI 152). Other examples are English investments in herring fisheries (WI 128–29) and an omen about the death of a local at the battle of Killiecrankie which had been fought between Hanoverian and Jacobite troops in 1689 (WI 209).

Martin implies that the Gaidhealtachd only began its proper integration into history and progressive dynamics in the seventeenth century. He devotes an entire chapter to “The Ancient and Modern Customs of the Inhabitants of the Western Islands of Scotland,” in which he often juxtaposes traditions and recent developments. In this view of island history, change appears to be a very recent phenomenon whose arrival is dated varyingly between within the last thirteen years and within the last sixty years. Sometimes Martin also refrains from explicit datings, instead merely noting that many traditions are only maintained by the old (e.g., WI 154, 179), or preserved in old people’s memories of yet earlier—and already dead—generations. Customs which Martin reports to have “been laid aside of late” include cattle raiding (WI 166), heavy drinking (WI 169), some aristocratic household rituals (WI 170), the building of a special kind of cairn (WI 205), Catholic customs in now reformed areas (WI 106), and a number of folk “superstitions.” For instance, he mentions the “ancient custom . . . to hang a he-goat to the boat’s mast . . . to procure a favourable wind; . . . not practised at present; though . . . it hath been done once by some of the vulgar within these 13 years last past” (WI 171). As usual, Martin envisages change as emanating from the middle or higher strata of society, while the lower classes are considered as more conservative. Another superstition—already gone completely, even among the “vulgar”—is the custom of consulting a certain oracle which “was . . . practised in the night, and may literally be called the works of darkness.” Martin also notes the demise of certain feudal duties (WI 175–76), though others are shown to have survived into his own time, so that in this field the juxtaposition between past and present is not strictly binary. It is also noteworthy that
some dynamics have even reached the particularly remote and “static” island of St. Kilda, where they have occasioned changes in local government (SK 450–51) and dress (SK 455).

Noble Savagery

Another colonial discourse pattern in Martin’s work is the motif of the noble savage living closer to nature and displaying greater moral virtue than his metropolitan contemporaries. Martin might have imbibed and internalized this trope in the course of a classicist education which exposed him to Roman discourse on both Celtic and non-Celtic “barbarians.” This may be inferred not only from implicit parallels between Martin’s works and such classical texts, but even from explicit references, for instance to Caesar’s writings on Gaul: “Every great family in the isles had a chief Druid. . . . Caesar says they worshipped a deity under the name of Taramis, or Taran, which in Welsh signifies Thunder; and in the ancient language of the Highlanders, Torin signifies Thunder also” (WI 168). As Caesar never seems to have written about the Western Isles of Scotland, Martin appears to be one of the first modern authors to assume pan-Celtic cultural links between those islands and ancient Gaul. References to Livy’s work on Gaul and to Tacitus’s report on the Germans occur on page 168. An additional, though implicit, echo of Tacitus might be discerned in Martin’s account of an incident when the steward of St. Kilda, who came from another island, demanded new taxes in addition to what was traditionally his due, but was repealed by armed resistance from locals. This outcome seems to find Martin’s approval: “by this stout resistance they preserved their freedom from such imposition” (WI 313)—a remark which recalls Tacitus’s praise of noble savages’ readiness to defend their ancient freedom by force of arms. Additional sources for Martin’s use of the “noble savage” trope may have been modern European texts on overseas exploration and colonized populations.

Despite the general antiquity and wide popularity of the “noble savage” trope, its application to Scottish Gaels is unusual for Martin’s time, as anglophone discourse between the Middle Ages and the mid-eighteenth century usually preferred to treat them as ignoble savages. Martin’s early readers might have expected the description of a Gaelic Other, and they received one, but this was probably not the kind of Other they expected: Martin writes back against the derogatory type of othering, only to replace it with another (though more idealistic) one. He anticipates the general European romantic revival of the “noble savage” trope, as well as its development into the dominant way of seeing Gaels, by several decades. Although Martin might have resented the application of the term “savage” or “barbarian” to the Western Isles (as the above quotation from WI 356 suggests), the attributes associated with this concept do pertain to his description of the area. The purest form of Hebridean noble savagery is located on Rona and St. Kilda, and is, for
instance, reflected in the inhabitants’ lack of materialism: the people of St. Kilda “have neither gold nor silver, but barter . . . for what they want” (WI 313). The same scenario is given for Rona:

They . . . live a harmless life, being perfectly ignorant of most of the vices that abound in the world. They know nothing of money or gold, having no occasion for either; they neither sell nor buy, but only barter for such little things as they want: they covet no wealth, being fully content . . . with food and raiment . . . They concern not themselves about the rest of mankind . . . They take their surname from the colour of the sky, rain-bow, and clouds. (WI 102)

As Martin had not visited Rona in person, his account is based on information given by Lewis people who have done so, especially the minister. Thus, it is not entirely clear whether the opinion quoted is entirely Martin’s own or someone else’s. Nonetheless, the fact that Martin leaves it uncommented suggests that he finds it plausible. The islanders are so “primarily” at one with nature that even their names reflect natural phenomena. They have not yet come to live in opposition to their natural environment or to “primitive” moral virtues— unlike the more “advanced,” but also more “decadent” metropolitan. Thus, the natives of St. Kilda are described as honest and chaste (SK 438, 445, 471), a virtuousness allegedly based on ignorance. Native self-sufficiency and indigenous life in general appear rather idyllic, for instance when Martin states that St. Kilda folk “live contentedly together” (WI 313). This recalls the Arcadian bliss of classical texts, as well as modern ideas of a tropical paradise overseas— in the Pacific, for example. What sets the Hebrides apart from these is their rough non-Arcadian climate, but this rougher variant of “noble savage” life likewise has classical precedents: Tacitus, for instance, also described a rough climate as a begetter of virtue, for example, in the case of the Germans.

While the purest forms of “noble savagery” are found on the particularly remote isles of Rona and St. Kilda, at least some elements of noble savagery also pertain to Martin’s description of other Western Isles. But with regard to the latter, the “noble savage” trope is less consistent: there, Martin is more ready to concede that the inhabitants have already left the state of nature— see the agricultural metaphor in WI 63–64, cited below, which portrays them as active, progressive cultivators of nature, not as passive and integral parts of nature. For Martin, the level of development on smaller and more remote islands differs from the level reached by bigger and more accessible ones. Instead of a simplistic dichotomy between a monolithically constructed western Scottish island world and an anglophone center, he envisages a continuum of marginality and civilization.

St. Kilda not only represents the most genuine type of noble savagery in the Hebrides, but even worldwide: “people so plain, and so little inclined to
impose upon mankind, that perhaps no place in the world at this day, knows such . . . true primitive honour and simplicity, a people who abhor lying tricks and artifices” (SK 398). This claim that St. Kilda represents the very superlative of noble savagery may again be an advertising tactic, especially as it occurs in a preface, a part of the paratext likely to contain marketing arguments. Advertising often uses superlatives to outstrip competitors, and Martin’s claim that St. Kilda represents the most extreme primitiveness may be an attempt to outstrip competing texts about “primitives” who live further away, that is, in the overseas colonies.

The idea that St. Kilda’s primitiveness exceeded even that of remote overseas cultures might have seemed implausible to some readers, considering that the Hebrides were so much closer to the “centers” of world civilization. To counter such skepticism, Martin repeatedly stresses how very inaccessible St. Kilda is. This contrasts with his comments on many other Western Islands of Scotland, where he emphasizes accessibility because he wants to attract investors for “improvement” (see below). But he seems to envisage no such improvement for St. Kilda, whose description seems exclusively geared to satisfying the audience’s taste for exotic otherness. This island appears very evasive from the outset, through Martin’s emphasis on his difficulties of reaching it because of bad weather (SK 404–7). Once there, he again stresses the general inaccessibility of St. Kilda and the surrounding rocks (SK, 410–11, 423). Moreover, there are special places on the island which only the “natives” can reach while strangers cannot (SK 414, 421). Despite its inaccessibility, the place is not seen as generally hostile or depressing: Martin praises its simple assets such as good spring water (SK 414–15, 423), good soil (SK 416), and abundance of fish (SK 419). It should also be noted that the island’s inaccessibility is merely blamed on its difficult weather and topography, not on any hostility from the “natives”:

There is a little old ruinous fort. . . . It is evident from what hath been already said that this place can be reckoned among the strongest forts . . . in the world; Nature has provided the place with store of ammunition for acting on the defensive; that is, a heap of loose stones . . . directly above the landing-place; it is very easy to discharge volleys of this ammunition directly upon the place of landing, and . . . this I myself had occasion to demonstrate, having for my diversion put it in practice, to the great satisfaction of the inhabitants, to whom this defence never ocurr’d hitherto.44 They are resolved to make use of this for the future, to keep off the Lowlanders, against whom of late they have conceived prejudices. (SK 411–12)

This is ironic in several ways: first, the “natives” are originally not as hostile as their surroundings, as this military option has never occurred to themselves. However, this might not only be owed to the natural peaceableness
of these “noble savages,” but also to the fact that their island is so poor in resources that no stranger ever thought conquest worthwhile. A second moment of irony arises from the fact that it is Martin, an outsider (though no Lowlander, but a Gael from a different island and with a Lowland education) who shows them a defense against other outsiders, that is, proper Lowlanders. Third, this advice—given by an outsider who lives in a more warlike, less “noble” world, and who is equipped with a sense of civilizing mission—“corrupts” their natural peaceableness, and thus their virtue, to some extent. Fourth, the “natives” in their local patriotism suddenly believe that someone would consider their island worth attacking, so that they now do begin to think of military defense—while of course it is still unlikely that outsiders would deem an invasion of St. Kilda worth the effort. Thus, readers are possibly invited to smile at the locals’ naiveté.

Nonetheless, again in line with classical concepts, the metropolis also has a moral lesson to learn: its decadence, artificiality, superfluous luxuries, and moral decay are juxtaposed against the honest and simple virtues of “primitive” life. Martin contrasts the stately buildings, new trends, and “painted beauties” of fashionable foreign travel destinations with the Western Isles, which “afford no such entertainment” as “the inhabitants . . . prefer conveniency to ornament both in their houses and apparel, and they rather satisfy than oppress nature in their ways of eating and drinking; and not a few among them have a natural beauty, which excels any that has been drawn by the finest Apelles” (WI 62–63).

In addition, Martin recounts a St. Kilda man’s first reactions to Glasgow. Though his naiveté is mostly exposed as funny, his views are also cited as an implicit critique of lazy and affluent city-dwellers: “He thought it foolish in women to wear thin silks, as being a very improper habit for such as pretended to any sort of employment” (WI 319). Other passages express similar attitudes:

The garb in fashion [does not] qualify him that wears it to be virtuous. The inhabitants have humanity, and use strangers hospitably. . . . I could bring several instances of barbarity and theft committed by stranger seamen in the isles, but . . . not one instance of any injury offered by the islanders to any seamen or strangers. (WI 356)

The inhabitants of these islands do for the most part labour under the want of knowledge of letters and other useful arts and sciences; notwithstanding which defect, they seem . . . better versed in the book of nature than many that have greater opportunities of improvement. This will appear plain upon a view of the practice of the islanders in the preservation of their health, above what the generality of mankind enjoys, . . . merely by temperance and the prudent use of simples. (WI, preface, 63)
Or, to return to St. Kilda: “there is not one instance, or the least suspicion of perjury among them... They never swear or steal, neither do they take God’s name in vain...; they are free from whoredom and adultery, and... other immoralities that abound... everywhere else” (WI 311). The islanders’ simplicity also extends to religion: their Christianity is “much of the primitive temper,” which keeps them from perjury and popish vices (SK 442). On the other hand, their naiveté once led them to follow a profit- and power-seeking heretic religious impostor (SK 466–75), a false prophet who “had no true mission” (SK 471). But Martin does not blame them too heavily, laying the main responsibility at the door of the man who uncharitably abused the locals’ credulity: “The impostor continued... to delude these poor innocent well-meaning people” (SK 471). Presumably, one of the factors which made Martin so ready to absolve these credulous natives from the sin of heresy is the promptness with which they resubmitted to mainstream authority: after a strict but benevolent rebuttal, they soon saw the errors of their ways and again became good, orthodox members of the fold.

We reproved the credulous people for complying implicitly with such follies and delusions...; and all of them with one voice answered that what they did was unaccountable; but seeing one of their own number and stamp... endued, as they fancied, with a powerful faculty of preaching so fluently and frequently... they were induced to believe his mission from heaven. (SK 475)

The combination of strictness and benevolence casts Martin and the accompanying minister into the role of firm but loving parents, while the locals appear to act like children—a trope which, as noted above, is also common in overseas colonial discourse. Martin also implies that the natives themselves believe that they are ignorant—so much so that none of them is thought capable of eloquence without divine help. But all’s well that ends well, and order is restored: “They are now overjoyed to find themselves undeceived, and the light of the Gospel restored to them... We... delivered him [the impostor] to the steward’s servants in... Harries, where he remains still in custody in order to his trial” (SK 476).

Another passage which shows the locals in awe of outsiders’ learning, while unable to trust their own native capacities, runs as follows:

[They] have a great inclination to novelty; and... anything... different.... A parcel of them were always attending the minister and me, admiring our habit, behaviour; and... all that we did or said was wonderful in their esteem; but above all, writing was the most astonishing to them; they cannot conceive how it is possible for any mortal to express the conceptions of his mind... upon... paper. After they had with admiration argued upon this subject, I told them,
that within . . . two years or less, . . . they might easily be taught to read and write, but they were not of the opinion that either . . . could be obtained, at least by them, in an age. \( SK 461–62 \)

Again, Martin has more confidence in the abilities of these “noble savages” than they have themselves.

**Ignoble Savagery**

So far, it has been shown that Martin often displays considerable respect for local traditions, either because he does not think them uncivilized or irrational at all, or because he perceives certain moral virtues in their “uncivilized” state. But there are also local customs which receive a less respectful treatment. One example is Martin’s comment on the tradition of marriage on trial, which entailed the right to reject a wife and send her back to her parents during the first year: “this unreasonable custom was long ago brought into disuse” \( WI 175 \). Most of the local beliefs and customs he criticizes are related to—or at least blamed upon—Catholicism (e.g., \( WI 205 \)). Although the popish connection is not explicitly specified for each individual superstition, the preface contains a general statement which implicitly pertains to the individual cases outlined elsewhere:

There are several instances of heathenism and pagan superstition . . . , but I would not have the reader to think those practices are chargeable upon the generality of the present inhabitants, since only a few of the oldest and most ignorant of the vulgar are guilty of them. These practices are only to be found where the reformed religion has not prevailed; for it is to the progress of that alone that the banishment of evil spirits, as well as of evil customs, is owing, when all other methods proved ineffectual. . . . The islanders in general . . . in religion and virtue . . . excel many thousands of others who have greater advantages of daily improvement. \( WI 65 \)

Martin assumes the mainstream position of a member of a sober Protestant church which distances itself from all sorts of heathenism. But the dividing lines between Self and Other are drawn in a way that differs from many other contemporary mainstream texts about Gaels: while many construct binary juxtapositions of civilized Lowlands and barbarous Highlands, Martin redraws the dividing lines to let them run within the Gaidhealtachd itself. Intra-Gaelic divisions could already be discerned in Martin’s juxtaposition of remote and nobly savage Rona and St. Kilda against other, more accessible islands. Further intra-Gaelic differences are reflected in his distinction between the true and the wrong faith: he ranks the Protestant and already partly enlightened majority of Gaels among the civilized, presumably
alongside the Protestant rest of the nation, including the anglophones. Only a small and dwindling old, popish, and lower-class segment of the Gaelic populace remains in primitive ignorance.46

This, at least, is Martin’s opinion of the Gaels of his own time. However, his comments about the onset of progress in the seventeenth century suggest that barbarism has only very recently started to recede from the Gaidhealtachd. In other regions—such as, presumably, the Lowlands or England—barbarism belongs to a much more remote past. This echoes the trope of the contemporary ancestor, but in the case of religion the Gaidhealtachd is not lumped together with other geographical peripheries, such as non-European colonies, and juxtaposed to a more “advanced” geographical center. Instead, the “quasi-pagan” Catholic Other, the contemporary ancestor, is envisaged as populating Europe’s metropoles as well: the complaint that Catholicism retains too many heathen survivals, and the denunciation of both popery and paganism as superstitions, are part of the standard repertory of Protestant discourse, from whose perspective any Catholic, not just a Gaelic one, is a contemporary ancestor whose mind ought to be colonized and civilised by implantation of the only true faith, that is, Protestantism.

Martin hardly ever forgets to mention which islands are Catholic and which are Protestant, and scrupulously notes the exact size of religious minorities. But sometimes he has to admit that clear-cut dichotomies cannot be maintained. For example, he records an instance of confessional hybridity where Protestant women celebrate a festival of the Holy Virgin (WI 280). However, with regard to religion the author always makes clear where his own sympathies lie: they lie with the Protestant ministers. With regard to second sight, Martin contradicts the ministers, but when it comes to more exclusively Catholic “superstitions” and pagan survivals in folk religion he rigorously and self-righteously adheres to orthodox Protestant doctrines. This is illustrated by his description of a Hallowtide ceremony in honor of a sea god which entails almost orgiastic revelry, from which the author distances himself by ironically labeling the drunken rout as “solemn.”47 Martin shares the disapproval shown by the local ministers, who “spent several years before they could persuade the vulgar natives to abandon this ridiculous piece of superstition; which is quite abolished for these 32 years past” (WI 107–8).

Protestantism is clearly recognized to have a civilizing mission in the Western Isles. Usually, Martin leaves the role of religious missionary to others, without aspiring to being one himself, or at least without making the fight against superstition the main objective of his travels. But sometimes he cannot resist trying his luck as a civilizer himself. His personal sense of civilizing mission is not purely religious, but that of an enlightened, educated, scientific, rational man of the world fighting against (selected) superstitions or even against ignorance in general. For instance, in one place he encounters the rule that men must be buried in one chapel and women in another, or else the corpses might return above ground. “I told them this was a most ridiculous
fancy which they might soon perceive by experience if they would but put it to a trial.” Martin secures the help of a more enlightened local who shares his views, “to undeceive the credulous vulgar.” The undeceivers have the next corpse buried in the “wrong” spot, “contrary to the ancient custom . . . , but his corpse is still in the grave. . . . This . . . has delivered the credulous natives from this unreasonable fancy” (WI 123–24). Similarly, the first two times that Martin takes a boat from Jura to Colonsay, the superstitious boatmen row sunways (clockwise) to ensure a safe passage—a practice which runs contrary to Martin’s wishes and convictions: “I forbade them to do it” (WI 179). The rowers’ superstitious actions are shown to be of no avail: “by a contrary wind the boat and those in it were forced back” (WI 179). Martin’s “enlightened” approach is more successful:

I took boat again a third time . . . and forbade them to row about their boat, which they obeyed, and then we landed safely . . . , which some of the crew did not believe possible, for want of the round; but this . . . hath convinced them of the vanity of this superstitious ceremony. (WI 179)

Again, Martin seems rather proud of his achievement. The reasons for the change of weather are not specified. He might wish to imply that there is no connection whatsoever between the ceremony and the weather (or supernatural benevolence)—meaning that the first two times the wind was unfavorable despite the ceremony, and good the third time although there was no ceremony. Alternatively, Martin may wish to imply that God himself interfered, that is, that the weather first was bad because the ceremony took place (and incurred God’s displeasure), and later improved because there was no longer a ceremony (i.e., God was pleased about this defeat of unchristian superstition).

A third instance where Martin missionizes against superstition, though this time unsuccessfully, is his report on a folk belief that supernatural presences in a local glen must be asked for protection:

I told the natives that this was a piece of silly credulity as ever was imposed upon the most ignorant ages, and that their imaginary protectors deserved no such invocation. . . . They answered that there had happened a late instance of a woman who went into that glen without resigning herself to the conduct of these . . . [supernatural beings], and . . . became mad, which confirmed them in their unreasonable fancy. (WI 153)

The regional, that is, spatial, specificity of a custom is reinterpreted to fit into a linear, universalist vision of history by being recast as the equivalent of a different time (“age”) in civilizational development—a trope which is
familiar from many colonial contexts. Again, the island Martin describes is dominated by Catholicism, a factor which seems to lie at the root of the Protestant author’s incredulity and condescension.

His missionizing pose also entails economic aspects: he aims to spread more wealth among the locals. A small-scale example is Martin’s account of how the only inhabitant of St. Kilda to own steel and flint for kindling fire charged all his neighbors for using this crucial resource, until Martin showed them that certain easily available local stones fulfill the same purpose (WI 315; SK 458). The author claims that the natives then started “accusing themselves of their own ignorance” (SK 458), and again seems proud of his philanthropic interference (WI 315). The most important aspect of Martin’s economic mission is infinitely more ambitious: he hopes to secure outside investors and patrons for the large-scale “improvement” of the Western Isles’ economy and the latter’s integration into mainstream capitalism.48

The Road to the Future: Extraneous “Modernization” as an Economic Mission

Despite his considerable sympathy with Gaelic island culture and indigenous perspectives, Martin’s ultimate vision for the future of the Isles is one of externally induced “improvement.” Here as well, his perspective resembles colonial discourse. But how does this resemblance to colonial projects fit in with his sympathy for native culture, and with the fact that, unlike many later descriptions of non-European colonies, Martin’s landscape is not emptied of people?49 It might be argued that he, too, discursively empties the landscape of its native inhabitants by compartmentalizing the latter in a separate “manners and customs” chapter; but this would overlook that other chapters likewise contain much information on people, folk beliefs, oral history, and so on, so that Martin’s landscape is clearly animated throughout. The type of improvement scheme he envisages is compatible with the animation of the margin’s landscape and a certain respect for the local population. Complete belittling of the “natives,” or their discursive removal from the landscape, makes sense if the colonial project is genocide or at least very thorough geographical and economic marginalization of indigenous populations (for instance, removing them to less valuable ground or crowded reserves) and the resettlement of their original territory by a large incoming population of settlers from the colonial center. But this is not what Martin plans: he does not want to supplant the natives but, under the guidance of just a few outsiders, “improve” and hybridize/assimilate them into profiting and profitable subjects of the centralized British monarchy. Apart from the few incomers needed to initiate and supervise the modernization process, he also envisages the influx of a more numerous labor force from the opposite Highland mainland and from the north. But even these are not supposed to replace or marginalize native labor. Martin expects an economic boom great enough to
satisfactorily employ all the natives and incoming laborers (WI 353). This particular type of “colonial improvement” scheme does accord with his belief in local virtues.

In fact, one reason why he stresses the merits of the indigenous population so emphatically might be his desire to convince his readership—which includes potential investors and patrons—that improvement schemes are both possible and desirable. They are possible because the locals already provide a sound basis of virtues and achievements to start from, and desirable because such decent people with such great potential could form a valuable pool of human resources for the crown (see below). Sometimes he even implies that only “improvement” can help the natives to realize their natural morality most fully. For instance, he stresses their hospitality, but notes that it has now declined because of poverty (WI 95)—a poverty whose removal through economic civilizing missions is envisaged elsewhere in his book. Martin’s belief in improvement without large-scale resettlement, as well as his conviction that the natives are incapable of implementing the desired progressive policies without paternalistic help and instruction from outside, become clear from the following passages:

Those places need not to be planted with a new colony, but only furnished with proper materials, and a few expert hands, to join with the natives to . . . advance . . . fishery. (WI 353)

If the natives were taught and encouraged to . . . improve their corn and hay, to plant, enclose, and manure their ground, drain lakes, sow wheat and peas, and plant orchards and kitchen-gardens, &c., they might have as great plenty . . . for the sustenance of mankind as any other people in Europe. (WI 350)

Michael Newton has plausibly suggested that Martin’s emphasis on the Gaels’ virtues and their amenability to civilizing missions might have been motivated by a conviction that some form of colonization was unavoidable, and that he wanted to cushion the effects of colonization by at least avoiding its worst forms, such as large-scale expropriations of locals and their replacement by “plantation” settlers from outside. Martin may have believed that Gaelic self-marketing as tractable and profitable was a lesser evil than an otherwise inescapable dispossession or extermination.

The paternalist ideology which Martin employs to sell the idea of civilizing the Gaels is again obvious when he describes the farming methods of the Western Isles as an “infant state of agriculture” (WI 350). Once more, this asserts a linear view of historical development, and the colonial-style childhood metaphor casts indigenous populations as inferior to the mature center which is responsible for the margin’s education. The benefit of this hierarchial relationship is, however, envisaged to be mutual: both outsiders’
and local opinion is invoked to confirm the desirability of “improvements” (*WI* 358–59).

The north-west isles are . . . most capable of improvement . . . ; yet by reason of their distance from trading towns, and because of their language, which is Irish, the inhabitants have never had any opportunity to trade at home or abroad, or to acquire mechanical arts and other sciences; so that they are still left to act by the force of their natural genius and what they could learn by observation. They have not yet arrived to a competent knowledge in agriculture, . . . Tracts of rich ground lie neglected, or . . . but meanly improved in proportion to what they might be. This is the more to be regretted because the people are as capable to acquire arts or sciences as any other in Europe. If two or more persons skilled in agriculture were sent from the lowlands, to each parish in the isles, they would soon enable the natives to furnish themselves with such plenty of corn as could maintain all their poor and idle people; many of which, for want of subsistence at home, are forced to seek their livelihood in foreign countries, to the great loss, as well as dishonour of the nation. This would enable them also to furnish the opposite barren parts of the continent with bread. (*WI* 349)

The Gaelic language was widely considered a main reason for the Gaidhealtachd’s “backwardness.” Martin partly shares this opinion, but unlike many of his contemporaries he does not ascribe this to an intrinsic inferiority of Gaelic language and culture—as shown above, he considers Gaelic to be very expressive and on a par with any other language. Instead, Martin presents the problem as a merely practical matter, that is, the difficulty of communicating with potential trading partners. He states that the islanders would do wisely to acquire English. The table of contents promises the “language of the inhabitants” to be “no obstacle” to improvement (*WI* 82), but the relevant chapter reveals that the reason why it is no obstacle is the Gaels’ capacity for learning English in future (*WI* 353–54). Some change in this direction is already acknowledged: Stornoway’s school teaches Latin and English (*WI* 109). Martin also notes that anglicization is partly a matter of class (*WI* 275, 285). Although English is recommended more on pragmatic grounds than out of disregard for Gaelic, a slight cultural cringe may underlie even Martin’s perspective, as he never suggests that the same interest in mutual communication might induce outside improvers to learn Gaelic in return. Such mutuality does not even seem to occur to him, which suggests a slight bias in favor of English.

If Martin’s reference to those who “seek their livelihood in foreign countries, to the great loss, as well as dishonour of the nation” is to be taken as an allusion to overseas colonialism rather than intra-British or intra-European migration, the passage suggests that the author is opposed to overseas colonialism in
favor of domestic development, for instance as regards the European herring industry. This accords with the following passage: “If the Dutch . . . call their fishery a golden mine, and . . . affirm that it yields them more profit than the Indies do to Spain, we have very great reason to begin to work upon those rich mines, not only in the isles, but on all our coast” (WI 359). Though Martin recommends foreign trade in general, the main partners advocated here are not overseas colonies but the geographically proximate regions of Britain, Ireland, and Europe (WI 352). His critique of overseas ventures is not based on solidarity with foreign colonized populations, but on economic motivations: intra-European trade seems more profitable to him. There is also a sense of inter-peripheral competition: he might feel that investments are drawn away from domestic peripheries like Gaelic Scotland, to favor economic and civilizing schemes in overseas colonialism; and as a Hebridean who believes in the beneficial potential of such investments, Martin wants to redirect these benefits away from the overseas colonies to use them back home.

Attracting investors and other supporters for “improvement” schemes seems to have been one of Martin’s main motivations for writing his Description of the Western Islands. The title page promises “A Brief Hint of Improving Trade in That Country,” and an entire chapter is dedicated to “The Advantages the Isles Afford by Sea and Land, and Particularly for a Fishing Trade” (WI 349–59). A third hint in this direction is the dedication to Queen Anne’s husband, Prince George of Denmark. The dedication more or less claims to speak in the islanders’ name. At first, one might assume that Martin’s shifting persona here leans toward the insider role, speaking as one of the locals. However, it seems more plausible that he means to speak for the “natives,” like an ombudsman standing between the parties involved, without a personal stake in the matter. His own economic welfare is not as dependent on improvement schemes as that of, say, local fishermen. Martin, as an educated English-speaking member of the middle class, is more mobile and can seek employment elsewhere if necessary. That he sees himself more as a mediator than a native petitioner is also suggested by his use of the pronoun “they” instead of “we”:

The islanders . . . presume that it is owing to their great distance from the imperial seat, rather than their want of native worth, that their islands have been so little regarded; which by improvement might render a considerable accession of strength and riches to the Crown, as appears by a scheme annexed to the following treatise. They have suffered hitherto under the want of a powerful and affectionate patron.

A person who may become such a patron has now been found: Prince George. “Providence seems to have given [the islanders] a natural claim” on him, apparently because of their historical links to Scandinavia: “They . . . now . . .
pay their duty to a Danish Prince, to whose predecessors all of them formerly belonged. They . . . are honoured with the sepulchres of eight Kings of Norway” (WI 59). In earlier centuries, this Scandinavian connection would have been a source of political and cultural otherness rather than an argument for closer integration into a British polity.\textsuperscript{55} It had given the Western Isles alternative options for alliances, which local magnates tried to exploit for their own interests, for instance playing the Scottish and Norwegian crowns against each other. By Martin’s time, the Isles were subject to political authorities in Edinburgh and London, and a Danish prince consort served the British crown. Martin thus reinterprets the history of the connections between Scandinavia and the Scottish Islands: instead of regional autonomy, they signify the Islands’ loyalty to their overlord at the “center”—the Scottish (and through personal union with England also British) crown. Martin seems to hope that the prince consort might secure additional patronage from Queen Anne herself: “protection . . . they hope for from two princes” (WI 59–60). That Martin’s reinterpretation jars with earlier history shines through when he states that the islanders’ respect to a Danish prince can “now” be paid “without suspicion of infidelity to the Queen of England” (WI 59), implying that formerly things were different.

Martin’s commendation of “native worth” seems slightly at odds with another passage which says that patronage is prayed for “though it be almost presumption for so sinful a nation to hope for so great a blessing” (WI 59). Sins against God might include the persistence of Catholicism and “pagan” superstition in parts of the Isles. In addition, the passage may allude to political sins: the “disloyalty” which parts of the Gaelic community had, at various points in history, shown to the crown.

To alert future patrons and improvers to the Western Isles’ good potential, Martin praises not only the inhabitants, but also the natural resources: he gives detailed accounts of soils, products, and fisheries, thus informing investors about tradeable goods and their profitability—he always stresses the fruitfulness of the soil and the abundance of fish.\textsuperscript{56} Even St. Kilda is noted to possess “plenty of cod and ling of a great size . . . , the improvement of which might be of great advantage” (WI 308). One reason why Martin discusses climate and soil conditions is their relevance to the question of which crops—and thus, trade goods—could be grown.\textsuperscript{57} Martin also stresses that native produce is not inferior to that of other regions (e.g., WI 92). Already the contents pages (especially 82) announce the exploitability of the Isles with regard to soil fertility, costs of living, trade and fishing prospects, and minerals, for instance from the lead mine “recently discovered” on Islay which, however, “has not turned to any account as yet” (WI 272). Elsewhere, his assessment of profitability is more modest, but even there he advises investors to give it a try:

I shall not . . . assert that there are mines of gold or silver . . . , from any resemblance they may bear to other parts that afford mines, but
the natives affirm that gold dust has been found. . . . There is a good lead mine, having a mixture of silver in it, . . . and . . . Lismore affords lead; and . . . Islay. . . . If search were made . . . , it is not improbable that some good mines might be discovered. (WI 351–52)

Prospective improvers of the Western Isles also receive practical information on how to get there: Martin includes detailed shipping information, for example concerning anchoring places. This valuable practical information is already announced on the title page, at the very top of the list: “Full Account of Their [the Western Isles’] Situation, Extent, Soils, Product, Harbours, Bays, Tides, Anchoring Places, and Fisheries.” Both books also contain maps, drawn by Martin himself. In Western Islands the map is also advertised on the title page, as a means to describe “the Harbours, Anchoring Places, and dangerous Rocks, for the benefit of Sailers.” Presumably, this is aimed primarily at sailors from outside the Isles, since local ones would know these things from experience, even without the new map. Mapping the Isles is an act of symbolic and material incorporation into the Scottish or British nation. There had been a strong correlation between centralization and Scottish mapmaking since the sixteenth century. Communicating detailed local information to a nonlocal audience helps to integrate the mapped area into the imagination of the national community; moreover, it promotes material integration by facilitating trade.

Martin’s storehouse of practical information also includes outlines of previous attempts at modernization and external investment which now lie abandoned but may be revived. For instance, he describes a loch which “hath been famous for the great quantity of herrings yearly taken in it within these fifty years last past” (WI 128):

There had been 400 sail loaded in it with herrings at one season; but it is not now frequented for fishing, though the herrings do still abound in it; . . . natives sit angling on the rocks . . . it is strange that in all this island there is not one herring net to be had; but if the natives saw any encouragement, they could soon provide them.

Similar remnants are found in another place nearby:

There is still . . . the foundation of a house, built by the English, for a magazine to keep their casks, salt, etc., for carrying on a great fishery which was then begun there. . . . King Charles the First had a share in it. This lake . . . is certainly capable of great improvement; much of the ground about the bay is capable of cultivation. (WI 128)

More general comments on the archipelago and the fishing industry follow later:
The advantage that might be reaped from the improvement of the fish trade in these isles, prevailed among considering people in former times to attempt it. The first . . . was by King Charles the First, in conjunction with a company of merchants; but it miscarried because of the civil wars. . . . The next attempt was by King Charles the Second, who also joined with some merchants; and this succeeded well for a time. . . . The fish caught by that company . . . were reputed the best in Europe of their kind . . . ; but this design was ruined thus: the king having occasion for money, was advised to withdraw that which was employed at the fishery; at which the merchants . . . also withdrew their money. (WI 352–53)

The latter passage may be read as an implicit plea to the crown for renewed investment. Apart from suggesting the revival of old improvement schemes, Martin also suggests new ones, such as administrative reform. He advocates the creation of a new, separate sheriffdom in the Western Isles because they are too remote to be controlled from Inverness (WI 358). He also suggests the creation of new centers for industries, a new royal borough, and a free port—and recommends his native Skye as the best location (WI 355, 358).

Martin’s book on the Western Isles also contains a chapter on the Northern Isles, Orkney and Shetland—culturally different from the Gaelic Western Isles, but similar in their peripheral, “underdeveloped” economic status. However, the north seems slightly ahead in development, thus being a model for what can be done in the west. Orkney’s herring industry is as derelict as that of the Western Isles, but at least Orkney already exports some other goods (WI 365). The forefront of peripheral development is Shetland:

Shetland is much more populous now, than it was thirty years ago; . . . owing to the trade, and particularly . . . their fishery, so much followed every year by the Hollanders, Hamburgers, and others. The . . . people at Lerwick is . . . increased to about three hundred families: and . . . few . . . were natives of Shetland, but came from several parts of Scotland. . . . The fishery in Shetland is the foundation both of their trade and wealth; and though it be of late . . . less than before, yet the inhabitants by their industry . . . make a greater profit of it than formerly. (WI 385, also see 386)

This fishing-trade is very beneficial to the inhabitants, who have provisions and necessaries imported . . . ; and employment for all their people, who by . . . selling . . . products . . . , bring in a considerable sum of money. . . . The proprietors of the ground are considerable gainers also, by letting their houses . . . as shops to the seamen, during their residence. (WI 387)
An envoi at the end of the book incites people to improve Shetland further, which may be read as an implicit call for similar initiatives in the other isles: “The great number of foreign ships which repair hither yearly upon the account of fishing, ought to excite the people of Scotland to a speedy improvement of that profitable trade; which they may carry on with more ease and profit in their own seas, than any foreigners” (WI 391).

Martin’s advocacy of improvement schemes and his frequent display of a colonizing outlook place him, to some extent, alongside other texts which present the anglophone mainstream as the center of civilization. But for Martin the inhabitants of the peripheries are not merely passive objects, recipients, or imitators of the center’s discoveries. Instead, he emphasizes mutuality.

**Mutuality and the Returned Gaze**

Martin greatly admires traditional Gaelic folk medicine. Even the title page of *Western Islands* highlights the locals’ “Admirable . . . way of Curing most Diseases by Simples of their own Product.” These medical methods, described in great detail, are clearly meant to set an example for imitation by non-islanders. Civilization is perceived as a two-way process: while Martin wants the center to bring trade and education to the Western Isles, the human genius of the islanders also has something to teach the center—it even contributes to what is often considered the very motor of Western modernity and progress, and an exclusive domain of the metropolitan center, that is, natural science.

Human industry has of late advanced useful and experimental philosophy very much. Women and illiterate persons have in some measure contributed . . . by the discovery of some useful cures. The field of nature is large, and much of it wants still to be cultivated by an ingenious . . . application; and the curious, by their observations, might daily make further advances in the history of nature. (WI 63–64)

At first, cultivation seems more than a general agricultural metaphor: it is reminiscent of colonial texts assigning the task of cultivation exclusively to people from the hegemonic center, while the natural resources to be cultivated include not only plants, soil, and animals, but also indigenous human populations that are envisaged as parts of nature, not as cultivators in their own right who are able and entitled to master both nature and their own destiny. However, on closer inspection it seems implausible that this particular passage should be read in such a colonial sense: his references to native discoveries imply that, here at least, he does not categorize the islanders as a mere part of nature. Instead, he sees them as part of a wider human community of cultivators who in mutual cooperation advance a common stock of learning and exploit nature (in this case the local flora and fauna which
natives use, that is, “cultivate,” for making medicines) for the general benefit of mankind.\(^6\)

Mutuality is also significant in Martin’s descriptions of cross-cultural communication. As already shown, several passages proclaim local discursive authority, while other passages imply the superiority of the anglophone mainstream. But his work also contains sections where islanders and non-islanders are portrayed as being strange to each other, without either side being privileged. Sometimes, mutuality takes the unproblematic form of reciprocal admiration, as when the natives of St. Kilda admire Martin and his companions for crossing the sea in unfavorable weather, while Martin in turn admires the locals’ nimbleness and courage in moving about on a dangerous cliff (SK 406). Other descriptions of mutuality and “returned gaze” demonstrate a clear awareness of the potential problems and conflicts that cross-cultural communication entails. His awareness of, and interest in, these issues may well be intensified by his own hybrid position. Martin tells of a stranded English seaman whose incomprehension and misinterpretation of life on Boreray is offered as a target for ridicule. This reverses the perspective presented in other passages, which ridicule the islanders’ reactions to Glasgow. In the chapter that returns this gaze toward the “center,” the English sailor finds it difficult to understand certain activities of Hebridean women:

[The women] were employed (as he supposed) in a strange manner, viz., their arms and legs were bare, being five [women] on a side; and between them lay a board, upon which they had laid a piece of cloth, and were thickening . . . it with their hands and feet, and singing all the while. The Englishman presently concluded it to be a little bedlam, which he did not expect in so remote a corner; and this he told to Mr. John Maclean who possesses the island. Mr. Maclean answered he never saw any mad people in those islands; but this would not satisfy him, till they both went to the place where the women were at work, and then Mr. Maclean having told him that it was their common way of thickening cloth, he was convinced, though surprised at the manner of it. (WI 129–30)

This thickening process, accompanied by rhythmical work songs, is known as “waulking.” Martin’s account of this intercultural encounter shows incomprehension and bewilderment to be mutual: islanders wonder at the (to them) unusual sights of Glasgow, and the Englishman wonders at island customs, finding them “strange.” The sailor tries to overcome his bewilderment and make sense of the scene. In itself, the urge to make sense of the world is a basic, ubiquitous human need not restricted to colonial or cross-cultural encounters. It is likewise unavoidable that humans interpret new experiences against the background of their previous knowledge, which can limit their conclusions, and that they supplement gaps in their knowledge by conjecture,
which might mislead them. But the particular way in which Martin’s Englishman deals with such cognitive insecurities does show features which might be characterized as symptoms of a colonial consciousness: the seafaring Saxon jumps to his conclusions very quickly, without retaining any insecurities about the correctness of his interpretation. The self-assurance with which he assumes discursive authority is reminiscent of the thought processes Edward Said identified in *Orientalism*.

Martin, by relating this anecdote, exposes and ridicules such metropolitan complacency. His use of the word “presently” might be an ironic sidesweep at the rashness with which such presumptions are made. The only rationalization the English stranger can think of is that there is none: he concludes that all the women must be *irrational*, that is, mad. This recalls the frequent use of epithets of irrationality in cross-cultural contacts in general, but also more particularly in modern overseas colonial discourse, for instance in Orientalist texts labeling Eastern religions as less rational and more mystic than Western ones, or in Joseph Conrad’s description of Africa in his novella *Heart of Darkness*. However, Martin questions self-assured assumptions of hegemonic discursive authority: he shows that the center is by no means able to fully comprehend the margin and to explain it better than the natives can. The Englishman’s urge to diagnose madness reflects his need to reestablish the security of his authority to understand and explain even those things which his limited experience has not yet taught him to comprehend. This urge is so powerful that it even overrides the doubts emanating from his own common sense: even to him it appears unlikely that such a remote place would have a bedlam. But if he accepted this objection, he would be left without any explanation—unless he condescended to ask the women themselves, something that does not occur to him, either because he does not expect them to speak anything other than Gaelic, or because they appear too lowly in ethnicity, rank, or gender. Later the Englishman talks to Mr. Maclean, the tacksman, but even he cannot be trusted at first, presumably because he is still a native, albeit an upper-class one. Since the sailor apparently cannot bear the existence of anything he is unable to accommodate within his own sense of rationality, he prefers the bedlam hypothesis. That such diagnoses of irrationality and madness are based on the outsider’s incomprehension is highlighted by Martin’s account of Maclean’s answer, that is, that no cases of madness are known.

Both Martin and Maclean are islanders themselves, and thus know the internal logic and rationality of local codes. Even when Maclean provides the answer to the riddle, the Englishman is unwilling to give a local voice precedence over his own uninformed conjectures. It is only later that he accepts this new item of knowledge and succumbs once more to wonder.

Readers might feel invited to smile at the Englishman’s misconceptions, but the way in which Martin presents this invitation is significant: he does not explain the women’s activity before he relates the anecdote—instead,
readers experience it mostly through the Englishman’s eyes. Most members of Martin’s target audience would likewise have been strangers to the island, and might have reacted in a similarly uncomprehending way. No solution to the riddle is given at the outset—the only clue that there might be an underlying logic to this “strange” and perhaps “mad” sight is the phrase “as he supposed.” Initially left rather clueless, readers are invited to either walk into the same logical trap as the Englishman in the story, or to keep wondering or make conjectures of their own. The readers’ knowledge would not be superior to that of the Englishman (apart from that one subtle clue), which might make them aware of their own ignorance. When the riddle is finally solved, they might smile not only at the Englishman, but also at themselves—and hopefully become more wary of the problems of cross-cultural understanding, and of the pitfalls which metropolitan assumptions of discursive authority can entail.

Another story about mutual communication problems tells how a “foreign priest” happened to arrive in Barra on the anniversary of the local patron saint (Saint Barr), about whom he was asked to preach, “according to the ancient custom of the place” (WI 163):

The priest was surprised, . . . never having heard of Saint Barr before . . . ; and therefore . . . could say nothing concerning him: but told them that if a sermon to the honour of St. Paul or St. Peter could please them, they might have it instantly. This answer . . . was so disagreeable to them, that they . . . told him he could be no true priest, if he had not heard of St. Barr, for the Pope himself had heard of him; but this would not persuade the priest, so that they parted much dissatisfied with one another. (WI 163–64)

It is not entirely obvious what Martin’s own opinion is. One possibility is that he recounts the story merely to emphasize the remoteness of the place from all mainstreams, as the natives reject the central saints Peter and Paul in favor of a local saint who is so peripheral that he is unheard of elsewhere. Another possibility is that Martin’s intentions are less neutral in this case, insinuating mild censure and mockery of the islanders’ parochialism. However, though not necessarily intentionally, his report again betrays the limits of metropolitan self-centeredness: metropolitans may believe that the rest of the world looks to them for guidance in all things, but the episode shows that this is not true. Although the islanders still recognize the authority of the pope, they place themselves at the center of their theological views, and look down upon the ignorant visitor who has not even heard of the crucial Saint Barr. Moreover, the displeasure is noted to be mutual.

Sometimes the returned gaze is even discernible in passages where Martin’s own disapproval of the locals is explicit—for instance when he explains local taboos: although he calls them “superstitious,” he acknowledges them
to be based on an intricate system of norms, rather than on random chaos (SK 498–99). Elsewhere, a faint indigenous counter-voice against his disapproval can be heard in his remark on taboo-breaking which “they reckon a great barbarity, and directly contrary to ancient custom” (WI 98). The choice of the word “barbarity” for the periphery’s disapproval of the center might show momentary awareness that all societies perceive divergences from their own rules as barbaric—as if the natives now return the colonizing gaze to the outsiders, or to incredulous half-insiders like Martin, and throw the label “barbaric” back at them. The same happens in Martin’s account of French and Spanish ships coming to St. Kilda in 1686: “Both seamen and inhabitants were barbarians one to another, the inhabitants speaking only the Irish tongue, to which the French and the Spaniards were altogether strangers” (SK 444). The word “barbarian” is apparently not used in an exclusively linguistic sense, but also extends to behavior, as a few sentences later Martin records the natives’ astonishment and resolute interference when they saw the foreigners work on a Sunday (SK 444–45). A third example refers to the more recent landing of another ship:

They told me of a ship . . . and that the Lowlanders aboard her were not Christians. . . . They said . . . they knew this by their practices: . . . working upon Sunday, . . . taking away some of their cows without any return for them, except a few Irish copper pieces; and . . . the attempt . . . to ravish their women. (SK 445)

Here, Martin’s sympathies obviously lie with the locals. Other passages likewise show awareness that not all visiting outsiders are benevolent: he notes further cases where incoming seamen attempted cattle theft (WI 104) or otherwise abused the trust, hospitality, and generosity of islanders (e.g., WI 146, 356; SK 464). He even records an attack and rape carried out by government troops on Eigg (WI 346)—although the attack is reported in a rather neutral voice, Martin more clearly disapproves of the rape.

Occasionally these negative experiences have led the islanders to become suspicious of strangers, and sometimes this distrust even turns against Martin himself, for instance when the local constable does not grant him a sightseeing tour of Kismul Castle: “the constable was very apprehensive of some design I might have in viewing the fort, and thereby to expose it to the conquest of a foreign power, of which I supposed there was no great cause of fear” (WI 157). While this anxiety may indeed have been unfounded, the following fears in the same Catholic area were not (as evident from Martin’s “enlightened” lecturing to Catholics on other occasions):

The natives have St. Barr’s wooden image standing on the altar. . . . I came . . . with an intention to see this image, but was disappointed; for the natives prevented me by carrying it away, lest I might take
occasion to ridicule their superstition, as some Protestants have done formerly; and when I was gone it was again exposed on the altar. (WI 158)

A third example relates to a “superstitious” custom already in decline (a fire ritual connected to childbirth): “I inquired their reason for this custom, which I told them was altogether unlawful; this disobliged them mightily, insomuch that they would give me no satisfaction.65 But others, that were of a more agreeable temper, told me” (WI 177–78). Again, the text notes the evasiveness of indigenous tradition as the locals try to shield it from Martin’s eyes, which lets an indigenous counter-perspective shine through and allows it to comment on Martin’s arrogance.

These instances of mutuality and returned gaze are among the most noteworthy aspects of Martin’s work, and of special relevance for postcolonial readings. His writings also reflect other themes which are familiar from anti- and postcolonial contexts, such as the “writing back” paradigm. But, significantly, Martin is also deeply implicated in procolonial thinking, at times reflecting common seventeenth-century preoccupations, but also anticipating ideas which became dominant later in the eighteenth century, such as Enlightened optimism about the feasibility of fully integrating the Gaidhealtachd into the nation, or the romantic application of the “noble savage” trope to the Gaels. Of course, Martin was not the only author from the Gaidhealtachd who responded to the social, cultural, and ideological developments of this period. Further responses, sometimes equally ambivalent, can be found in the poetry produced in the Gaelic language itself.66 The Gaels’ complex responses to the nation-state and its colonizing endeavors at home and overseas highlight that Britain’s “internally colonized” Highlanders and Islanders were, despite their marginality, also an integral and integrated part of the British nation—not only an Other, but also part of the nation’s Self. This integration intensified in the second half of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth. The implications of these developments for the representation of the Gaidhealtachd in anglophone writing are discussed in the next two chapters.