Crafting Cultural Belonging: Normative Embodiment of Cape Breton's Scottish Traditional Music and Dance

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6x8272hx

Author
Alexander, Kathryn Rose

Publication Date
2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Crafting Cultural Belonging: Normative Embodiment of Cape Breton’s Scottish Traditional Music and Dance

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Kathryn Rose Alexander

June 2014

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Deborah Wong, Chairperson
Dr. Sally Ann Ness
Dr. Jonathan Ritter
Dr. Jane Ward
This Dissertation of Kathryn Rose Alexander is approved:


Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside
Acknowledgements

“Have a listen.” It all started with this phrase. And I have listened. This dissertation is the collected intensive listening of the last three years, all set in motion when I was first asked to “have a listen” almost fifteen years ago, sitting in a workshop with Natalie MacMaster. I have many people to thank for sharing their stories, without which this dissertation would not have been possible. I was fortunate to have the support of several people I have never met, who nonetheless were inspired by my project and allowed me to use their images to bring my text to life. Thanks go to Gary Pardy and Integrated Geomatics for the use of their map of Cape Breton Island. To Bill Hipwell of the Aboriginal Sustainability Network for the use of his map of Mi’kma’ki. To Michael Noonan at the Nova Scotia Office of Aboriginal Affairs for the use of the agency’s map of Nova Scotia’s Mi’kmaq First Nations. To Pamela Wamback, Hannah Crawford, and Nancy Jean MacIsaac at Nova Scotia Tourism Agency for their generous assistance in procuring permissions for use the of numerous tourism photographs. To Dan Coffin at Celtic Heart of North America Co-operative for allowing the use of the organizations logos. To Lynn Ledwidge at Destination Halifax for the use of promotional images. And to Corey Katz for the use of his beautiful images of the Cape Breton Mawio’mi concert.

I couldn’t have done this project without the generous financial support of the University of California, Riverside, the UCR Music Department, and the Gluck Program of the Arts. The numerous fellowships I received from the Gluck Foundation enabled me to stay enrolled at UCR, and the Music Department has been generous in awarding teaching positions that partly funded my fieldwork. I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to
the Graduate Division at UCR, from whom I received fieldwork funding in the form of the Graduate Research Mentorship Grant and the Humanities Research Grant.

A very special thank you to everyone who was interviewed for this project: Andrea Beaton, Joey Beaton, Margie Beaton, Kinnon Beaton, Donnie Campbell, Rodney Chaisson, Jenna Currie, Joella Foulds, Alice Freeman, Rodney MacDonald, Max MacDonald, Burton MacIntyre, Natalie MacMaster, Lisa Gallant MacNeil, Joyce Rankin, Peter Steele, and all the people who had conversations with me. Thanks are especially due to Heather Sparling and Chris MacDonald for their hospitality, generosity, and insightful late night discussions. Thank you also to those individuals who taught me to fiddle in the Cape Breton-style: Natalie MacMaster at the Mark O’Conner Fiddle Camp so many years ago; Buddy MacMaster, Brenda Stubbert, and J.P. Cormier at the Ceilidh Trail School in Inverness; and Dave MacIsaac, Wendy MacIsaac, and Shelly Campbell at the Gaelic College. I am not a great dancer, but my appreciation goes to those who began to teach me: Margie Beaton, Anna MacDonald, and Lisa Gallant. Thank you to the Gaelic instructors at the College: Shay MacMullin, Colin MacDonald, and Goiridh Domhnallah. Thank you also to Rita Matheson at the Gaelic College gift shop and Stacey MacLean, who always greeted me with smiles.

To my dancing partners, thank you for the experiences. Thank you to Kat, Carmen and Melanie at The Bear on the Lake Guesthouse, who made my first and last summers of fieldwork wonderful and memorable. Thanks to the August 2013 Hostel Crew, who joined me on a few final fieldwork adventures. I’m grateful for Phee, who
kept me company in my first weeks, and for the two cars (Little Red and Fi) that ensured the fieldwork could happen, and I could get home to tell the tale.

Getting personal. A special thank you to Hannah Schwadron, my partner in Queer Jewish at Home Productions, who read it first and is my inspiration in evocative writing. Thank you especially to my advisor, Deborah Wong, for her endless revisions, valuable advice, and enduring belief in my ability to do this project. It has been a pleasure working with you over the last five years. Thank you also to my committee members, Jonathan Ritter, Jane Ward, Sally Ness, for innumerable moments of insight in class and conversation. Thanks go to Josh Brown for the many conversations about the surprising links between flamenco and Cape Breton cultures. A warm and loving thank you to my partner Blake Summer, who saw me through this tremendous endeavor and kept encouraging me to take the next step.

Finally, thank you to my parents, Rick and Laura Alexander. Your support and love has meant everything to me. I wouldn’t be here without you, and neither would this project. Without further ado, here are a few stories from Cape Breton. Have a listen.
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Crafting Cultural Belonging: Normative Embodiment of Cape Breton’s Scottish Traditional Music and Dance

by

Kathryn Rose Alexander

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Music
University of California, Riverside, June 2014
Dr. Deborah Wong, Chairperson

I chart negotiations of local, particular, self, other, away-ness and cultural competency in Cape Breton’s traditional Scottish music and dance culture. Cape Breton’s traditional culture, always already being produced and enjoyed by locals, is now an attraction for visitors who are allowed to watch, enjoy and even participate…within certain boundaries. I show that culture turned into a tourism commodity, even a “salvation” island industry, does not result in cultural unraveling, upheaval, or inauthenticity. In such an environment, the matter of cultural ownership and belonging underlying the motivations of Cape Breton’s locals and tourists in all their efforts to define, live, and experience culture. Some organizations, like the Celtic Heart of North America Co-operative, curates cultural experiences offered by local institutions into easily commodified and consumed experiential packages for tourists. At the same time, practitioners and participants in Cape Breton’s communities, including culture brokers working at the local institutions that cater some events to tourists, ensure that myriad local events continue to evade packaging
and marketing efforts. Through various strategies, locals maintain barriers to participation at many cultural events, including some of the events that are ostensibly accessible to visitors from beyond the island, as well as those events considered most quintessentially local. Out of the way locations, lack of interpretation (or the presence of interpretation that is too detailed), social situations that are closed to non-locals, and other barriers are some of the strategies and circumstances that curtail how accessible, and thus commodifiable and touristic, these events can become. Through such strategies, locals subvert the ability of tourists to participate in the local traditional culture, and thus retain more ownership over the system of practices, embodiments, and social norms that collectively comprise the culture of Cape Breton’s traditional Scottish community. These normative practices delimit the performances and participation of locals and tourists, and I examine who can participate in Cape Breton’s traditional Scottish culture, and how. Questions about normativity guide me throughout: what is authentic/traditional embodiment? what are the rules for (in)correct/culturally (in)appropriate performance? who gets to participate because of their ethnic, gender and sexual identities, and who is left out.
Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Getting There, Getting Lost ................................................................. 1
Placing Cape Breton: An Economic and Social Background .................. 5
Past Lives, Present Futures ................................................................. 11
Experiencing Tourism .......................................................................... 17
Power in the Tourist Encounter .......................................................... 21
Social Culture ....................................................................................... 25
Cape Breton’s Tourism Before Cultural Tourism ............................... 29
Roadmap: Asking Directions, Setting Out the Itinerary ...................... 34
Getting the Keys ................................................................................... 43

Chapter 2 – “The Cape Breton Tinge:” Performing Cape Breton at Home and Away with Natalie MacMaster

Meeting Natalie ..................................................................................... 45
Setting the Stage: SuperFête at Fortress Louisbourg ............................ 47
Still a Local Girl ...................................................................................... 60
Talking Cape Breton: Sounds of Home ................................................ 61
Bringing it Home to the Square Dance ................................................. 65
All in the Family: Children’s Performance ......................................... 68
Beyond Tradition: Critiques of Natalie ............................................... 70
Filial Obligation ...................................................................................... 76
New Directions: Moving Towards Professionalism ............................... 80
Defining Traditionalism and Gender Roles: Natalie and Ashley ............ 83

Chapter 3 – “The Celtic Heart Beats Strong:” Crafting a Cultural Tourism Industry

Experiencing the Masterpiece ............................................................... 90
Nova Scotia’s Cultural Tourism Transformation .................................. 94
“Shaped by the Sea:” Traveling to Nova Scotia .................................... 99
Locating the Celtic Heart ..................................................................... 105
A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats: Tourism and Economic Development ...... 111
The Beginnings of Tourism .................................................................. 118
Transitioning to Grassroots Tourism ................................................... 128
“We Rise Again”: Scottish Cultural Ascendency in Tourism ................. 134
Locally Significant, Broadly Appealing .............................................. 139
Local Control: Retaining Cultural Ownership ..................................... 143

Chapter 4 – “(Not) Finding Yourself Out East”: Normalizing Heterosexism in Cape Breton’s Cultural Tourism

Queer Moments ...................................................................................... 151
Conclusion........................................................................................................352

Appendix A – Glossary of Terms........................................................................363

Appendix B – “Dancing in Inverness County” Tourism Brochures.........................367

Appendix C – Map of Cape Breton Island...............................................................371

Bibliography........................................................................................................372
List of Illustrations

Chapter 1 – Introduction
Figure 1.1 Driving the Cabot Trail.................................................................3
Figure 1.2 Back roads in Cape Breton.............................................................3
Figure 1.3 Cape Breton Exile License Plate....................................................15
Figure 1.4 Rachel Davis performs at the Red Shoe Pub.................................25
Figure 1.5 Cape Breton’s Scenic Driving Trails..............................................30

Chapter 2 – “The Cape Breton Tinge:” Performing Cape Breton at Home and Away with Natalie MacMaster
Figure 2.1 Fiddles for the Fête Concert...........................................................52
Figure 2.2 Author performing at Louisbourg during Fiddles for the Fête........57
Figure 2.3 Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy perform............................59
Figure 2.4 Natalie performs at the Red Shoe Pub...........................................68

Chapter 3 – “The Celtic Heart Beats Strong:” Crafting a Cultural Tourism Industry
Figure 3.1 Driving towards the Gaelic College on the Cabot Trail................91
Figure 3.2 The Ceilidh Trail near Dunvegan..................................................92
Figure 3.3 The Cabot Trail: Experience the Masterpiece road sign..............92
Figure 3.4 Celtic Heart Recommended Experience logo..............................94
Figure 3.5 Map of Nova Scotia Scenic Driving Routes.................................100
Figure 3.6 Celtic Heart of North America advertisement..........................103
Figure 3.7 Celtic Heart Co-op affiliated organizations.............................106
Figure 3.8 Mi’kmaq cultural interpreters.....................................................134
Figure 3.9 Screen captures from Celtic Heart promotional video.................136

Chapter 4 – “(Not) Finding Yourself Out East”: Normalizing Heterosexism in Cape Breton’s Cultural Tourism
Figure 4.1 Nova Scotia Cultures.................................................................159
Figure 4.2 “Our Culture”...........................................................................159
Figure 4.3 A young family on the Skyline Trail..........................................171
Figure 4.4 A couple on the Skyline Trail.....................................................171
Figure 4.5 Learning fiddle from a master practitioner.................................172
Figure 4.6 Interracial couple visits at the Highland Village.......................176
Figure 4.7 “Take Yourself There” with Destination Halifax.........................184
Figure 4.8 Rainbow Halifax promotion: gay men......................................186
Figure 4.9 Rainbow Halifax promotion: gay women.................................189
Figure 4.10 The archetypal soft-adventuring tourist couple........................201
Figure 4.11 Meet musicians at the Red Shoe Pub.........................................205
Figure 4.12 The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre......................................206
Figure 4.13 The Glenora Inn and Distillery................................................210
Figure 4.14 The Cabot Links Golf Course..................................................211
Figure 4.15 Strolling the boardwalk at Inverness.................................212
Figure 4.16 A Ceilidh at the Celtic Music Centre.................................214
Figure 4.17 A couple at Cap Rouge on the Cabot Trail..........................216
Figure 4.18 Enjoying music at the Gaelic College.................................217
Figure 4.19 Participating in a milling frolic [inset]................................219
Figure 4.20 Whisky tasting at the Glenora Distillery...............................220
Figure 4.21 A couple at the end of the Skyline Trail..............................222
Figure 4.22 A couple on the beach at Ingonish.................................222

Chapter 5 – Imagining Island Culture: Cultural Normativity at Celtic Colours
Figure 5.1 Tintamarre parade in Chéticamp.........................................233
Figure 5.2 L’église Saint-Pierre in Chéticamp........................................246
Figure 5.3 St. Joseph’s Parish in Glencoe Mills....................................246
Figure 5.4 Donna Marie DeWolfe at the Celtic Music Centre..................267
Figure 5.5 Rachel Davis at the Red Shoe Pub.......................................267
Figure 5.6 Christopher Poirier and Amélie Larade...............................277
Figure 5.7 The Kitpu Singers.................................................................278
Figure 5.8 Mooney Francis.................................................................280
Figure 5.9 Lawrence and Douglas Cameron.......................................280
Figure 5.10 The Asham Stompers..........................................................281
Figure 5.11 Les Zorvenants.................................................................283

Chapter 6 – “It’s All Gone to Sh*t Now!” Getting It Right and Doing It Wrong at the Square Dance
Figure 6.1 Brook Village Parish Hall....................................................287
Figure 6.2 Dancers inside at the Brook Village dance............................290
Figure 6.3 Betty Lou performing at the Red Shoe...................................303
Figure 6.4 Kinnon performing at the Red Shoe......................................303
Figure 6.5 Kinnon and Betty Lou Beaton at the Barn.............................312
Figure 6.6 Tourists documenting performance at the Red Shoe...............318
Figure 6.7 Bill Cameron calls the dance at the Normaway Inn...............342
Chapter 1 | Introduction

“You’ll go over the causeway, around the rotary, take a sharp left down route 19 and keep driving. You’ll eventually come to a sign that says Glencoe Mills. Take a right there and keep driving until the pavement ends. You’ll come to a fork in the road, take a right and go over the one lane bridge. Keep driving (it’ll be dark now). You’ll pass a house…keep driving. You’ll eventually see a light and a little hall and you’ll hear the music. Now you’ve reached the square dance at Glencoe.”

(Natalie MacMaster, from her CD *Natalie MacMaster Live 2002*)

Getting There, Getting Lost

I was driving again. Setting aside one cross-continent round-trip from Southern California to Cape Breton Island (and back), I accumulated many thousands of miles driving around the island over three fieldwork periods from 2011 to 2013. I drove the paved country highways and the graded dirt back roads to participate in square dances, concerts, ceilidhs, milling frolics, classes in Gaelic, fiddle and dance, and to get my mail, groceries, and haircuts.¹ Getting anywhere on Cape Breton requires a car and a keen eye, not just for the numerous animals large and small along the road – from bears to post-rainstorm profusions of toads – but for the small graded dirt roads themselves that branch abruptly off the narrow two lane highways and wind off into the trees. Paul Meagher, my landlord when I lived in Mabou in 2012 (population 1,207 in 2011) and a native of nearby Brook Village, told me he only ever took back roads, and never the main roads if he could help it. As a visitor from away, the back roads were a feature of my island life that I approached with great respect. They led me to concerts and dances, but they were

¹ Cape Breton is an irregularly shaped island of 10,311 square kilometers (3,981 square miles). It is the largest of Nova Scotia’s approximately 3,800 coastal islands. 15% of the provincial population lives on Cape Breton (approximately 136,000 people out of a total provincial population of 921,272), but 75% of these people live in industrialized Cape Breton County, mostly within the Cape Breton Metropolitan Region (CBRM); a second industrial area centered on a pulp- and paper-making industry and an oil refinery is emerging at Port Hawkesbury in the southeast corner of the island (Muise 2014; CBC 2012b).
also confusing and difficult to navigate. The opening description of how to get to Glencoe Mills seems detailed, but leaves out (for novices) important information like distances and a couple of critical turns.

After a dance at Glencoe Mills in early July 2011, I decided to return via a more direct route to the hostel at Whycocomagh using the back roads, rather than heading out the way I’d come in and meeting up with the main road. Leaving the grassy parking lot at a crossroads that includes a church and cemetery, the dance hall, and lots of trees, I went straight instead of left, following the signs for Whycocomagh. I ended up jolting through muddy potholes and thickening ground fog on a moonless night at 2 in the morning as the roads that narrowed with every turn. I gave up when the branches of the trees started screeching against the windows on both sides; I managed to turn around only after backing up a hundred yards to a spot wide enough to allow laborious, multi-point turn.

Driving on Cape Breton is an absolute necessity, whether the goal is to reach the community events located in towns or at crossroads off the main tourist routes, or to travel the five established tourist ‘trails’ that outline the island in significant routes. The necessity of driving could be a major impediment to tourism but instead has become a valuable tourist experience, a way of accessing the remote corners of the island. The island’s landscape is full of ethnic markers. Place names evoke former residents, sites in the Scottish Highlands, French kings, layers of colonial encounters. “Unamak’i” became “Île Royale,” which became Cape Breton. It is said that the rest of Canada joined Cape Breton (which was for a period in the 19th century a separate British colony) with the
completion of the Canso Causeway, a mile long road crossing the Strait of Canso that divides the island from mainland Nova Scotia.

Figure 1.1. Driving Cape Smokey on the Cape North side of the Cabot Trail. This is a well-paved section of the Cabot Trail, and the tourist couple is able to enjoy an open road and views. © Destination Cape Breton, used with permission.

Figure 1.2. Not all roads on Cape Breton are like that shown in the Figure 1.1. Many are graded back roads that lack detailed signage and are not lit at night. Here, a confusing moment on the way to the dance hall at Glencoe Mills. This is the fork mentioned in the directions that began this chapter. Photo by author.

“So where’ya from?” California. There’s a long pause, a look that travels away off into the beer taps, returns to me. “You’re a looong way from home.” Yes, sir, that’s a
“You must really like it up here.” And I do like it up here, on Cape Breton, but with more nuance and awareness than when I first heard of the music back in 1999. I was at a summer fiddle camp hosted by Mark O’Connor at a university in San Diego, and I decided to try a class from Natalie MacMaster. I didn’t really know who she was when I got in there, but I was captivated by her subtle humor and modesty and by the rolling, shifting rhythms of her tunes, simultaneously clear and crunchily complex, propelled by ever-evolving percussive footwork that sometimes brought Natalie to her feet, effortless and powerful movement and sound conjoined. I was hooked. I took a few years of lessons with her at that camp before she moved on to bigger things like opening her own summer music camp, and in the middle of those summers, I went to Cape Breton. At the Ceilidh Trail School in Inverness, I learned from Brenda Stubbert, a well-respected fiddler on the island who was partly responsible in the 1970s and 80s for initiating a recommitment to the traditional music as a valued and on-going tradition for new generations; and from Buddy MacMaster, a legendary dance fiddler and one of the first island tradition bearers who traveled to Scotland to “reintroduce” the heritage Scotland lost when the Highland Gaels were exiled to North America, especially Nova Scotia and Cape Breton. But after leaving the island, it became difficult to keep up with a cultural form practiced on the other side of the continent, particularly before YouTube; I fell away from direct involvement during high school and college but kept playing the tunes, and finally went back to Cape Breton in 2011 as a Ph.D. student in ethnomusicology.

I was interested in how Scottish Gaels on Cape Breton crafted locally-significant ethnic and gender identity through the performance and practice of Scottish Cape Breton-
style fiddle, piano, and dance (Cape Breton style for short). After many changes of direction, this dissertation has emerged. Questions about normativity guide me throughout: what is authentic/traditional embodiment? what are the rules for (in)correct/culturally (in)appropriate performance? who gets to participate because of their ethnic, gender and sexual identities, and who is left out? Following Urry (2002), I suggest a tourist ear and embodiment, as well a tourist gaze, and I show that culture turned into a tourism commodity, even a “salvation” island industry, does not result in cultural unraveling, upheaval, or inauthenticity.

Placing Cape Breton: An Economic and Social Background

“We Rise Again”
When the waves roll on over the waters
And the ocean cries
We look to our sons and daughters
To explain our lives
As if a child could tell us why
That as sure as the sunrise
As sure as the sea
As sure as the wind in the trees
We rise again in the faces of our children
We rise again in the voices of our song
We rise again in the waves out on the ocean
And then we rise again

---

2 “We Rise Again” was written by Sydney-born Cape Bretoner Leon Dubinsky. It was first performed on Cape Breton in 1984 during an economic downturn in a musical called The Rise and Follies of Cape Breton Island; though the song was originally written by Dubinsky, a Jew, to commemorate the Holocaust, it was used in the musical to signify triumph over economic adversity on Cape Breton. The song was recorded (1993) and performed most famously by the Mabou-based family group The Rankin Family with lead vocals by Raylene Rankin, who appears with a short bob haircut singing lead vocals in the official music video for The Rankin Family version (view the song here). The original meaning of the song references the family history of the composer, whose father was a holocaust survivor. This meaning is still preserved by Jewish Canadian students participating in the March of the Living; the students sing this song when entering the site of the Auschwitz Death Camp in Poland.
This song, from what I could tell, is one of Cape Breton’s two unofficial anthems (the other is the Gaelic-language “Òran do Cheap Bretainn (Song of Cape Breton),” sung every week in July and August at the beginning of the Inverness Ceilidh. Written by a Cape Bretoner, “Rise Again” has transcended its original ethnic, cultural, and religious affiliations to become rallying cry for Cape Breton’s Scottish Gaels; the song allows them to express optimistic faith in their ability to recover from every setback, whether economic, social, cultural, or personal.

Economic decline is an urgent matter in Cape Breton. In the 1990s, the island’s major extractive industries – coal mining, steel milling, and cod fishing – collapsed, and the resultant mass unemployment persists. In early April 2014, the Nova Scotia Department of Finance reported that although the Cape Breton region experienced a small increase in employment in 2014 from 2013, the current unemployment rate for the island is still high at 15.6%. Though this is down from 17.5% in 2013, it is still the highest of Nova Scotia’s five economic regions, and more than twice the national unemployment rate.\(^3\) Cape Breton is geographically and economically marginal within Canada, which has repercussions for its economic stability.

The commercial cod fishery in Atlantic Canada was shuttered between 1992 and 1994 by a federal moratorium. The moratorium was established in an attempt to mitigate the collapse of North Atlantic fish populations, especially cod, after decades of

---

\(^3\) The five regions and their 2014 YTD unemployment rates as % of the labor force are: Cape Breton (15.6%), North Shore (10.5%), Annapolis (10%), Southern (12.8%), and Halifax (6.6%). Nova Scotia’s overall unemployment rate rose to 9.3% in March 2014; Canada’s unemployment was 6.9% (Government of Nova Scotia 2014). Cape Breton’s unemployment rate is doubtless distributed unevenly across different ethnocultural communities within the counties and First Nations reserves.
commercial overfishing. In 1977, a 200-mile limit was established off the shores of Canada; for Newfoundland, this meant a chance to establish a viable economy around fishing, and for Nova Scotia, this meant vying with the New England states for control of a particularly rich fishing region (the Georges Banks), which is within 200 miles of both the U.S. and Canada (Kurlansky 1997:181). This initial measure was not a conservation measure; it was intended to protect a national fishery that was economically important for Atlantic Canada. Soon, however, inshore fishermen (who work close to shore) saw their catches declining, and attributed it to offshore boats dragging the bottom for fish and taking so many that the cod could not migrate inshore to spawn (1997:182). Offshore fleets were also using new radar technologies to locate and clear out remaining pockets of cod. In 1992, the decline in the fish population was so drastic that a federal moratorium was announced on the Newfoundland fishery: 30,000 people found themselves jobless (ibid., 186). In 1994, the moratorium was extended to all of Atlantic Canada except southwestern Nova Scotia, with strict quotas placed on other species. Cod was commercially extinct. Instituted to help protect the remaining cod and permit the species to recover, the moratorium essentially derailed the commercial fishing industry that had been a major economic generator for Cape Breton and the rest of Atlantic Canada.

Lobster fishing on Cape Breton continues but does not employ workers at anywhere near the same level as did cod fishing, partly because, like most work on Cape Breton, it is seasonal. Licenses and gear (including traps and boats) are expensive – often between $100,000 and $200,000; licenses are restricted in quantity and can only be bought from a fisherman who wants to sell (Romanowsky 2002). The federal Department
of Fisheries and Oceans is monitoring and enforcing seasons and quotas for this industry as well (Romanowsky 2002). However, fishing boats from other countries continue to harvest fish outside Canadian waters. Unsustainable fishing practices such as dragging the bottom with large nets harm the long-term viability of fish populations. Such practices destroy habitat, decimate populations, and damage non-commercial species, leading to a destabilization of the local ocean ecosystem. Global warming also affects the range and behavioral patterns of ocean species, contributing to the instability of the species’ recovery. It is unlikely that commercial cod fishing will be reinstated anytime soon, if ever.

Coal mining was Cape Breton’s other primary extractive industry. Vast seams of coal underlie Cape Breton Island, and from the mid-19th century onward, a significant coal industry was developed on the island. Contemporary industrialization in Western Europe and North America created a huge demand for steam-producing coal, and Cape Breton’s industry grew. In the second half of the 20th century, however, the industry settled into systematic decline culminating in the closure of the final coalmines and the steel mill in Sydney in 2001. Coal and steel were nationalized in the 1960s, with the goal of closing them by the 1980s, despite a brief resurgence in production during the 1970s due to rising world prices for oil following the oil embargo by OPEC nations. By the 1990s, environmental degradation and diminishing economic returns for Cape Breton’s bituminous coal necessitated the closing of the mines and mills in industrial Cape
Breton. The other counties of Cape Breton do not have the same industrial center as the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM). In Victoria County, for example, the school board and the gypsum mine are the largest employers; many in Inverness County are involved with forestry, an industry that mainly produces pulp, and small-scale agriculture.

Forestry, lobster fishing, and small-scale agriculture are seasonal occupations, as is tourism, and the long winter off-season necessitates having a diverse skill set that can be deployed for any and every season. Islanders in Gulf-fronting Inverness County vehemently oppose alternative resource development schemes like offshore oil fracking in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Local residents worry about earthquakes, contaminated water, and a seascape horizon ruined for tourism, one of the few island industries that is actually growing, by the presence of oil derricks. The perception that outsiders control and seek to exploit the island’s resources creates friction between rural residents and city residents on the island (which pits the CBRM and Cape Breton County against the other, more rural, counties), and between the island, the rest of the province, and nationalization schemes and development projects. Locals worry that outsiders (broadly and amorphously defined) will see them and their culture as rural, quaint, working class, or even backward and antiquated, which contributes to a reticence against opening up to people from away. This attitude sits uneasily with the need for a tourism infrastructure.

---

4 Bituminous coal is a relatively soft coal that contains bitumen, a tarlike substance. This kind of coal is usually used to generate steam in power and industrial plants, and it can be made into coke, an almost pure carbon useful for smelting iron ore. Because bituminous coal is not a particularly pure coal (it has a high sulfur content), it contributes to air and water pollution and acid rain (m-w.com; personal communication).
and workforce that must seem open, friendly, and entirely welcoming to visitors, especially if the tourism industry is to grow and develop.

Many rural Cape Bretoners share working class origins centered on similar experiences of work and trauma that come both from the work itself and from a common ethnic history and heritage as relocated Highland Gaels. Jennifer Pierce has discussed Cape Breton dance as being linked to the social trauma of the Highland Clearances as it plays out in memory. The stepdance is a mnemonic device for “fill[ing] this blacked out space [of ancestral trauma] where memory and language are impossible; the dance transmits memory of trauma” (Pierce 2008:44). For Pierce, Cape Breton’s dance (and I would argue the music as well) is “haunted by the past and present in equal measure each time it is invoked” because each performance by an individual is also a rehearsal of the steps and embodiments of other dancers that links the present to a “shared, painful past” (ibid., 44). Pierce, herself a ‘Caper’ in her words, argues that the possibility of transubstantiation within Catholicism exists within the dance as well: there is always the potential of the felt presence of the past becoming a real, living presence through the dancers’ bodies. And the past, whether encoded in music or dance, is ever present in stories, place names, and storytelling about the past. Margie Beaton, instructing three students and myself in a stepdancing class, produced a book with interviews of dozens of famous dancers. She turned the pages hunting for her grandmother’s profile for the story she wanted to tell us. Looking at the photograph of her grandmother dancing, Margie explained how, at the age of one, she’d jumped up as at a house ceilidh one night and started dancing, which cause quite a scene because she hadn’t yet walked. “I’d never seen
the like,” said Margie, reading her grandmother’s memory from the page, reliving something she didn’t herself remember, before teaching us the steps her grandmother taught her.

**Past Lives, Present Futures**

Life was hard in the period of pioneer settlement beginning in the late 18th century and continuing into the 19th century as the Highland Clearances (which Pierce calls “a hidden trauma site” 2008:46) propelled evicted Highland Scots to Nova Scotia where they formed communities on the mainland and Cape Breton. Chain migration led to Gaels settling in communities with the people they had lived near in Scotland, who were often fellow clan-members. Even into the 20th century, rural areas lacked public infrastructure like roads, electricity, hospitals, and plumbing. Men and women divided labor according to gender: men worked on the sea, in the coalmines and steel mills, or on farms until or unless there was better paying work away, whether at a mine on the island or one far away in Ontario or Western Canada. When men left to take work away from home, women took over managing the agricultural labor and animal care while continuing to provide the unpaid labor of maintaining a household, making goods and clothes, and producing and raising children. Families were large due to patriarchal cultural and Catholic norms and the necessities of farm labor, and rural poverty was widespread.

---

5 See Ronald Caplan’s *The Cape Breton Magazine* for numerous oral histories from men and women in the early to mid-20th century, and MacIsaac (2006) for a detailed history of female settlers in the 19th and early 20th century. Caplan has published selections from his magazine as books, including *Down North* (1980), *Cape Breton Book of the Night* (1991), and *Acadian Lives* (2004), all from Breton Books in Wreck Cove, NS.
Development of roads and other public services came late to rural areas, contributing to the persistent perception that Cape Bretoners must take care of their own needs, because no one else is likely to do so. Following the construction of the Canso Causeway connecting the island and mainland in 1955, increased vehicular traffic did mean the slow improvement of roads throughout the island, and laid the foundation for the development of a tourism industry based around the private automobile.

In the early twentieth century, many people went to the mines in Ontario, to the industrial centers around Windsor and Detroit, or to Boston, which during the Great Depression still had enough factory work to absorb unemployed workers from rural areas. Hence, stories about Cape Bretoners leaving to seek better employment elsewhere pervade personal histories: I attended a performance of a musical written by a local Mabou woman about her grandparents, both of whom had left the island to find work elsewhere, but returned to the island, and fallen in love at the Glencoe Mills square dance. Despite the temptations of economic security away, so the songs and stories go, all desired to return to their island home. But home wasn’t necessarily an idyllic refuge: the traumas of mining work are also woven through songs and oral histories: losing family members in mining accidents (gas explosions, tunnel collapses, machinery malfunctions, floods), early death from coal dust, and abiding absence of men, who often had to travel away from home, including off the island, for work. The dangers of mining were mirrored in the fishing industry: the sea is unpredictable, and fishermen often experienced accidents. Most Cape Breton men who are now over 50 worked in mining and fishing at some point in their lives, often starting as young men. Before both
industries folded at the end of the 20th century, young men could expect to follow their male relatives into the mines or onto the ocean. The people currently trying to chart a new future for the island through economic and community development and cultural revitalization are the children and grandchildren of these miners, fishermen, and the women left behind who raised their families. The uncertainty, loss, and trauma tied to these formative industries are so deeply pervasive that “disaster songs” (songs describing mining and fishing accidents), comprise an entire genre of Cape Breton songs.6

Each region of the island is differently affected by Cape Breton’s transition to a post-industrial service economy and the unemployment that followed the collapse of the big industries. Some areas still have industrial development, while others are adapting to a tourism service economy, but even before Cape Breton entered its current post-industrial period, many people cobbled together various employments in seasonal industries to make it through the year. The rural areas are especially hard hit by the marginal economy and lack of work, but each rural area experiences the economic climate in localized ways: the coastal town of Inverness, for example, had the option of developing a golf course and lodge which would both attract tourists and create jobs. The Celtic Music Centre in Judique also creates seasonal jobs and attracts tourists, but the Waycobah First Nation lacks these kinds of employment-generating development opportunities. The island’s three main ethnic groups, the Scottish Gaels, French Acadians and First Nations Mi’kmaq, experience the new economic climate differently. Success or failure to capitalize on tourism and federal and provincial development dollars is affected

6 Ethnomusicologist Heather Sparling of Cape Breton University is currently conducting research on this genre; her blog invites community contributions: http://disastersongs.ca/.
positively by local ingenuity in creating employment opportunities, but systemic social and economic barriers faced by the First Nations prevent their equal access to the development resources available to the island’s ethnic white populations. Eskasoni and Wagmatcook First Nations have established cultural centers; Membertou has a cultural center, a casino, and a convention center and hotel. The French Acadian community of Chéticamp capitalizes on its location at the gateway to Cape Breton Highlands National Park and to the routes of migrating whales in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, while Acadian regions in the eastern part of the island cultivate cottage industries in relaxation and heritage touring. But none of these ventures employ huge numbers of workers, and stable, large-scale, and long-term employment opportunities are still elusive.

Many people still leave Cape Breton to find work elsewhere. The federal Crown development corporation (Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation, or ECBC) set up to aid in the post-industrial transition couldn’t work fast enough to create or support industries to replace the volume of job-seeking islanders at incomes similar to what they received before the end of mining, steel milling, and fishing. ECBC funds community development and job creation programs proposed by communities and businesses throughout the island, but the rate of progress is unequal to the pressures unemployment. Despite the difficulty of carving out a life on the island, it occupies a central place in the Cape Breton imagination as a homeland. Scottish Cape Breton identity is located in Cape Breton, not Scotland, and those who live away never really leave.7 I met

---

7 Doherty (2006) puts it this way: “For [Scottish Cape Bretoners], there is an ongoing pride in their ancestry, in their Scottish roots, but now Cape Breton is their land” (103). Paul Basu (2005) has written
many people at summer dances and ceilidhs who were home visiting friends and family; this was often an annual trip repeated over decades or lifetimes until it was possible to move back.

![License plate expression of love for Cape Breton](image)

**Figure 1.3.** A license plate expressing the love for Cape Breton held by many of its residents and diasporic natives. Photo by author.

Within the Scottish Cape Bretoner community involved in the traditional culture of fiddle and piano music, Gaelic song, and community dances, many people worry about how to sustain that culture as out-migration continues to deplete communities. If people are leaving and unable to come back to raise their families, it becomes increasingly difficult to build community structures that sustain the tradition and traditional lifeways. Several people I interviewed in the course of my fieldwork spoke about this. Burton MacIntyre, a dancer and former teacher and principal from Whycocomagh, described the feedback loop created by out-migration, in which sustaining community culture (through teaching, performing, and participating) becomes increasingly difficult as fewer people stay around to participate in that culture.

---

about “roots-tourism,” tourism focused on genealogical research and experience, in which North Americans visit the Scottish Highlands and Islands.
Rodney MacDonald, former Premier of Nova Scotia and current CEO of the Gaelic College/Colaisde na Gàidhlig, told me that getting (Scottish) Cape Bretoners interested and invested in their culture and heritage is key to getting them invested in their communities. He believes that giving local people more to stay for by fostering deep connections to their communities and culture will mean that more people will be interested in remaining on the island. But some older folks on the island, who labored as ethnic (albeit white) others within a system dominated by English language and culture question the value of learning Gaelic for young people; one told me that French made sense, it was “something you could use beyond this…” [he gestured in a sweeping motion towards the window]. He meant that Gaelic is useful in that it allows a very small number of people to get jobs in local and even provincial government, education, and tourism sectors, but in terms of being a truly translatable and marketable skill “beyond this [island and the rural communities in which Gaelic is so socially, but not economically, valued],” Gaelic is lacking as a tool of economic prosperity.

The Scots, as well as the Mi’kmaq and the Acadians have dealt with institutional marginalization of their language, and thus cultural forms like song, dance, music, and religious celebrations, which has only recently been redressed through Gaelic instruction in public schools in Inverness County and the establishment of a French-language primary/secondary school in Chéticamp. The Mi’kmaq faced much more serious threats to their culture, language, and lifeways than the ethnic white communities.

---

8 Mi’kmaq children from throughout Nova Scotia were sent to the Shubenacadie residential Indian boarding school on the Nova Scotia mainland where they were forbidden to speak their own language, follow their religious and cultural customs, and dress in traditional ways. Abuse of all kinds was rampant,
Experiencing Tourism

“You’re not from here, are you.” It’s not a question. The older man – silver hair swept back, pressed white shirt tucked into black work pants – looks at me expectantly over his pint at the Red Shoe Pub, an epicenter of traditional Scottish music on Cape Breton. “I’m from California.” I say casually, as though California was just down the highway, hoping to avoid the reaction I know is coming, but the man reels back and exclaims, “My heavens! California!” He pauses: “Well, are you lost?”

Tourism is seen as a savior industry, but it does not represent a perfect solution to Cape Breton’s high unemployment and economic woes. Tourism is seasonal (July to mid-October), and infrastructure is still being developed to address tourist’s needs, and federal regulations on unemployment benefits do not adequately support a seasonal labor economy.9 Local attitudes and patterns of accommodating tourists are also under construction: not everyone is thrilled with the necessary shift towards a tourism economy, and tourists are not always as welcomed as the guidebooks and some residents intimate.

The vignette above would be, to some, an abrasive pseudo-welcome couched in too many

---

9 In 2012, the federal government proposed new requirements to reduce unemployment benefits for seasonal workers, who are frequent users of such benefits. This means that some workers will be unable to continue working in seasonal jobs (CBC News Webcast 2012; personal communication), and make it more difficult for people to claim unemployment benefits during the winter even if they work summers in, for example, new tourism sector jobs.
layers of regional humor, insecurities, and reserve to actually feel welcoming, or funny. Even with this sector’s growth, out-migration continues. Cape Bretoners are concerned that young people will lose their culture(s) if they move away, and that the Scottish culture and communities will deteriorate as a result. Margie Beaton, a 27-year-old professional dancer and fiddler who is also Director of Marketing at the Gaelic College, told me that a lot of young people can’t wait to reach legal adulthood and move away from the island. She, however, believes there is a lot to stay for, most importantly the community-oriented culture and the cohesiveness it brings (personal communication 2013). Having ties to a place makes it easier to stay, and a growing cultural tourism sector is making it more profitable for at least some young people to pursue their expressive cultural heritage and remain at home on the island.

Turning the culture into an on-island tourism commodity risks losing local control over the traditions, especially how the traditions are presented, in what contexts, and by what sorts of people. Cape Breton’s sounding Scottish culture is already transnational, most recently thanks to cultural ambassadors like world-famous fiddler and dancer Natalie MacMaster, who rose to prominence in the 1990s and 2000s as a young, beautiful face and powerful embodiment of the tradition. However, as long as Scottish Cape Bretoners have been migrating away in search of work (which is virtually as long as there have been Scottish Cape Bretoners), the Scottish culture of the island has had a transnational life that is always intersecting with the life and identity of the culture as it exists in communities on the island. In addition, fiddlers and stepdancers have been reintroducing the tradition to Scotland as teaching ambassadors over the last thirty years;
in Scotland, Cape Breton’s tradition is seen as more authentic and historically unchanged than the fiddle and dance that evolved in the homeland.\textsuperscript{10} Of course it isn’t this simple: Cape Breton square dances are heavily influenced by American square dancing forms, and jigs were not prominent in the repertoire until many Cape Bretoners started returning from Boston, where Irish jigs were more commonly heard (Dave MacIsaac and Margie Beaton personal communication 2012, 2013). The culture bearers who have share the culture at home and away maintain careful and subtle control over how they present the traditional forms to off-island audiences and learners from away on-island.

As it becomes increasingly clear that tourism is economically beneficial for the island, islanders are engaging in a lively internal conversation about how to manage the needs of tourists. Tourists want to consume traditional cultural experiences, and must be allowed to, but locals want to retain ownership over representations of their culture. Scottish Cape Bretoners worry that if too many people leave, and if the culture is not carefully curated by locals, it will cease to function as an integral and representational part of community life on the island and become a tourist product instead. But Cape Bretoners have consistently engaged in a pattern of out-migration and return, which posed a threat to the culture’s vitality, and the Gaelic language declined in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{10} Scholars such as Jonathan Dembling (2005) and Liz Doherty (2006) have both written on this phenomenon. Both chronicle how prominent Scottish musicians accessed Cape Breton’s Scottish culture in the 1980s to enervate Scotland’s “inauthentic” contemporary tradition with a “older” and “purer” forms. The stepdancing (Doherty) is especially prominent in this reintroduction because it disappeared almost entirely in Scotland.
century due to the perception it was holding people back from employment and socioeconomic advancement.\textsuperscript{11}

The Scottish culture of Cape Breton rose to the top as a commodifiable touristic opportunity partly due to the province’s history of promoting a Scottish Gaelic identity, as well as the presence of a Scottish majority on Cape Breton. Paradoxically, the privileging of a folklorized Scottishness on the part of provincial tourism development efforts led to the endangerment of Gaelic as a spoken language in communities. Through much of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Cape Breton was the center of a folklorized Scottishness that comprised the essential identity of Nova Scotia, a phenomena that McKay (1992, and with Bates 2010) has called “tartanism.”\textsuperscript{12} Tourism marketing from island and provincial sources supports the cultural dominance of Scottish culture on the island. Islanders, especially the Scots since their culture is most in the tourist eye, celebrate the cultural resurgence funded and prompted by tourist dollars while simultaneously worrying that a shortsighted attempt to capture limited tourist time, money, and attention will lead to cultural forms becoming icons, rather than the complex societal lifeways they are today.

\textsuperscript{11} Parents stopped speaking Gaelic with their children as a means of encouraging them to learn English, the language that young people needed to know in order to get ahead in Canada’s English-dominant society. The Scottish and Acadian generation now in their 20s and 30s are able to invest themselves in their culture as a valued identity and source of livelihood in a way that their forbears could not. These younger generations do not struggle with marginalization and don’t face significant barriers to economic advancement due to their language or culture. This is not just a result of the growing acceptance of their ethnic identities but also because successful performers like Natalie MacMaster, The Rankin Family, J.P. Cormier (who is Acadian), and many others have paved the way for them.

\textsuperscript{12} The Gaelic College/Colaisde na Gàidhlig, established in 1938, was the only significant place that was set up to welcome visitors who wished to experience it. In parallel, the Annapolis Valley was the center of French Acadian heritage in Nova Scotia. It was crafted around the imagined and picturesque colonial period depicted in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1847 poem \textit{Evangeline}, loosely based on the 17\textsuperscript{th} century Acadian Expulsion. A railway journey and various sites were developed for tourists to encounter Longfellow’s l’Acadie and the tragic heroine Evangeline. The Annapolis Valley was more developed for tourism during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and into the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century than was Cape Breton, which could only be reached by ship until the Canso Causeway was built in 1955 to link the island to the mainland.
(and have been for generations). To mitigate tourism’s potentially destructive influence, tourist dollars are poured into efforts to educate locals, especially children, in their own history, language, culture, customs, and praxes; such work is promoted as a necessary bulwark against cultural deterioration, whether instigated by tourism, out-migration, or modern life.

According to McKay, tourists visit the Scots, as well as the Acadians, of Cape Breton looking for an experiential connection with ethnicized white people. In the mid-20th century era of tartanism’s ascendance, increasing numbers of North American tourists took the opportunity to visit ethnically-other white people in nearby Nova Scotia. The ‘folk’ of Nova Scotia represented the idea of an idealized, rural, and timeless (read, stuck in the past) white people, but were more accessible than European ‘folk’ because they were in North America. Thus, they were also more closely connected to North American visitors, especially Americans, by virtue of a shared impulse towards self-reliance, hard work, and triumph over adversity. Visited then as now by primarily white tourists, the ethnicized white folk of Cape Breton posses a discernable and distinct culture in a way that urban white people in North America, engaged as they were in homogenizing modern life, cannot claim.

**Power in the Tourist Encounter**

Tourism based on Cape Breton’s Scottish culture as a unique cultural environment more authentic than Scotland and singular in North America creates reasons for natives to stay and helps develop the supporting networks and institutions to make it
possible. It is essentially self-serving, addressing the needs of locals while nominally offering up cultural experiences to visitors, and locals’ ability to determine the trajectory of their culture is a kind of “soft power.” In the early 1990s, the colonizing dynamic of imperialism and foreign policy was articulated as a third resource beyond economic and military clout that could, in the words of Joseph S. Nye (assistant secretary of defense under President Clinton) make “others want what you want” (in Merrill 2009:12). In Nye’s formulation, soft power consisted essentially of American values, but American values presented through seemingly passive and harmless mechanisms that would allow for the easy, covert, and profitable Americanization of foreign ‘targets’. Foreign consumers would be taught to covet American commodities; over time their demand would cause them to assist in their own Americanization. In exploring the United States’ use of soft power to expand its reach into Latin America, Merrill (2009) defines soft power more expansively as “an intrusive influence wielded wherever global and local cultures meet by agents that often operate outside the purview of the state” (2009:12). The travel industry is one of these agents that guide the meeting of cultures. Merrill argues that tourists’ soft power is not “monolithic or omnipotent” (since travelers also take home ideas gleaned from the host culture) and neither is it only coercive, since hosts in the destinations that tourists visit have negotiating room in which they can define and delimit the influence tourists have on the destination (ibid., 12,16). Dress Hosts and guests both have soft power, and in Cape Breton, the locals (or hosts, though I choose not to use

---

13 For a prime example, see Sweet on the Navajo’s management of tourism within their communities (in Gmelch 2010).
this term) have a well-articulated apparatus for controlling how much influence tourists have over their culture.\textsuperscript{14}

Visitors have many opportunities to experience the local Scottish culture at sites throughout the western half of the island, including institutions such as the Highland Village/An Clachan Gàidhealach, the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre, and the Gaelic College, as well as the all-island Celtic Colours International Festival. Many events out in the communities have become institutions through popularity and longevity. At some of these sites, music and dance culture is practiced and showcased in ways that are nominally traditional, but modified so it is more accessible for visitors.\textsuperscript{15} The conversation among culture brokers on the island focuses on managing a tourism market centered on culture so it is appealing and accessible to visitors in a way that ensures locals retain ownership of the traditions, and the traditions do not slip into “inauthentic” performances increasingly removed from community practice and meaning. Local practitioners, participants, and culture brokers have crafted hierarchies of events that are more or less closed to tourists’ participation; Sparling (2005) has also posited the relative exclusion of culturally un-knowledgeable visitors from certain cultural events like milling frolics. The level of touristic modification is connected to the perceived authenticity of

\textsuperscript{14} “Hosts” is used by many tourism scholars (see Gmelch 2010) to refer to those people who provide for tourists’ needs at the destination. Sally Ness uses “tourate” to describe a ‘local’ identified and constructed in relation to tourists (Ness 2003). I do not use “hosts” because it implies a welcoming attitude that may not accord with the actual reception of the touristed (which implies a passivity) by the tourists.

\textsuperscript{15} This includes standardizing the times and locations of events. Ceilidhs were formerly house parties that could happen at any time; now, they are most often held at a regular weekday and time in a community space open to the public. They are also advertised; a house party relied on people knowing the location was a “ceilidh house” and just dropping by to see if anyone else was there.
any cultural event, though as in any culture, cultural forms on Cape Breton are in a state of constant evolution.

The scenery of Cape Breton, the island’s first tourist commodity and still the main attraction, is being filled with sounding and moving culturally marked bodies in the contemporary age of experiential tourism in search of “authentic” cultural events that have not been produced specifically (and only) for touristic consumption: dancers executing precision percussive steps, locals whirling late into the night at square dances, fiddlers and pianists drivin’er at tunes in the pubs. Soft adventurers, tourists who seek non-strenuous outdoor and cultural activities and genteel dining and accommodation experiences, can interact with the local performers, and thus feel a part of a ‘real’ cultural experience. The authentically living culture tourists crave is a part of daily community life in the Scottish communities, though its manifestations in staged ceilidhs and concerts, and social square dances, which are always highly scripted by social ideology and cultural normativities, make easy distinctions between authentic and inauthentic practice and context difficult.

Summer tourism creates a huge surge of demand for cultural performances. Events overflow the July and August calendars; it is literally impossible to get to all of them. The summer effluence of culture has become an economic reason for locals to stay rather than leaving to find work off-island: someone needs to play at the dances and ceilidhs and suppertime music events. But cultural tourism offers another possible barrier to out-migration in the ties it creates to others, to communities, and to place. Performance of traditional and socially important music, dance, and song in semi-traditional formats
means that more locals, and not just tourists, get to see, hear, experience, and participate in their own culture more often. If not for tourist demand, the high volume of performances would be unnecessary, and funding would be insufficient to continue paying performers through the rest of the year to play dances, parties, weddings, and other events. Tourism thus benefits locals first and tourists second. The totality of Cape Breton’s embodied Scottish cultural forms, becomes a source of pride: it brings in money, the genuine interest of outsiders provides a validation of the tradition, and its frequent performance and embodiment creates fresh connection to the past.

Figure 1.4. Fiddler Rachel Davis performs at the Red Shoe Pub on a packed Friday night ceilidh. Photographs of other performers, local buildings, and Rankin ancestors (they own the pub) cover the walls. Photo by author.
Social Culture

Cape Breton style fiddle and dance are social traditions. A ‘ceilidh,’ which has come to mean any of a variety of musical performances, simply means “gathering” in Gaelic, and was foremost an occasion for socializing at someone’s home, during which there might be fiddle and piano, songs, stories, and stepdancing. The embodied culture was always about social cohesiveness, something around which a common community and cultural identity could be built. The demand for performances keeps up a demand for trained practitioners of the style, and the more they perform, the more the music and the dance stays active in communities and between generations. This means the ethnicity, gender, and sexuality of individuals and the normative embodiments of these identities in the larger social environment can still be built around and through it.

The Scots of Cape Breton have faced many decades of marginalization in Cape Breton. Their ancestors in Scotland suffered both the dissolution of their clannish social structure and later were forced off their lands with both economic and physical violence. This traumatic history of marginalization and cultural erasure (dire in the case of Scotland, less so in North America) places strong cultural value on independence and self-reliance. Many Cape Breton Scots are also cautious when dealing with people from away, and an aesthetic of modesty pervades all aspects of Scottish life on the island, from fashion to indirect speech, architecture, and a disinclination to discuss uncomfortable topics that Sparling calls a “politics of silence.” Performance of dance, fiddle and piano

---

16 Women of all ages tend to favor blouses that are cut high on the chest and reveal no cleavage, and the tank tops favored by young men in most of America and Canada during my fieldwork periods were absent from Cape Breton’s young men, who favored polo shirts. Houses and churches in the Scottish regions are
are likewise unaffected and stuck down; though adorned and ornamented in endlessly complex melodic and rhythmic ways, the performance sounds difficult but looks effortless. Despite the lively feel of the music, the performers rarely look lively, and infrequently visually engage each other or the audience. A performance and social aesthetic of modesty and humility ensures that no one grabs the spotlight and hangs on, or shows off. Performances at venues such as the Red Shoe or the Celtic Music Centre look as though the musicians and the locals in the crowd were trying to keep anyone from noticing there was a performance happening.

Despite the disaffected attitude, locals involved in the traditional culture are passionate about it, and there is a strong do-it-ourselves community ethos that has led to the creation of various ceilidhs to draw in tourists and give locals a venue in which to experience and learn/relive the stories of their music. Like the community ceilidhs at Inverness and Mabou, larger institutions such as the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre (which began as an interpretive table and fiddler available for tourists in the Judique Community Hall) were also established by groups of concerned locals who wanted to capitalize on tourism traffic along the Ceilidh Trail by creating events to attract tourists. Cultural events like the ceilidh emerged as a viable option: a ceilidh directly supports the public Scottish cultural identity of the Ceilidh Trail region of Inverness County, and to outsiders, looks like a traditional and uniquely local event (even though the very act of scheduling and staging a ceilidh in public undermines its usual place in community life as a haphazard, unplanned congregation of individuals in a private home or hall for social

---

simple in design and often subtle in color: square buildings with clapboard exteriors painted white; roofs consist of black asphalt roofing shingles.
encounters, food, and perhaps music, dance, and stories). Unlike other industries that were taken away or changed by forces external to the communities, a tourism industry founded on vibrant community-based cultural activities cannot be taken away or used in unauthorized ways unless practitioners and local culture brokers allow it. This results in ‘more’ culture, more students learning, and more opportunities to share the culture communally. It puts agency back into the hands of locals involved in the traditional music and dance community, whether practitioners or fans.

Tourists contribute to the transnationalization of Cape Breton’s Scottish culture when they take experiences of the culture home with them in the form of artifacts (especially recorded music) and memories of music and dance performances. Some tourists from away come specifically to learn how to play Cape Breton style fiddle and piano and dance the island’s unique stepdance tradition, and many return annually to add to their repertoire of steps and tunes. Others hear a performance of the Cape Breton style off-island and then make musical experiences part of their destination purpose.17 But locals control the flow of cultural knowledge, including what is shared and the manner in which it is shared. In the end, and always cited in discussions addressing how to market culture, is the fact that the money generated by cultural performance primarily benefits locals rather than tourists, and the ways in which the culture is produced for tourist accessibility is minimal. As Heather Sparling puts it, “locals may tolerate tourists, but they will not cater to them” (2005:263). Living culture thrives in a tourism market that is

17 Concerts off-island are another example of the culture’s mobility. It was in the 1990s that talented young fiddlers like Natalie MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac, Wendy MacIsaac, singers like Mary Jane Lamond, and performing family groups like The Rankin Family and the Barra MacNeils brought Cape Breton style to the world as part of mass of Celtic musics and dance that flooded the market during the so-called Celtic Boom.
geared towards experiential tourism in which the visitor chooses what to engage in and how deeply. A visitor can spend two weeks at the Gaelic College learning fiddle tunes, piano accompaniment, and stepdancing by day, and driving out late at night to attend community square dances; many people do this, and so did I for a week each in 2003 and 2012. Engagement can be the result of happenstance, rather than dedicated and directed engagement: a couple driving their RV onto the island stopped at the Celtic Music Centre in search of lunch and ended up taking in lunchtime ceilidh. But both experiences, in order to resonate with visitors, must seem authentic and engaging, and the seemingly open cultural experiences of Scottish Cape Breton culture, including the ceilidhs, the festivals, and the concerts, must be produced for and by locals in order to have the local presence that helps ensure the authenticity of a tourist’s experience.

**Cape Breton’s Tourism Before Cultural Tourism**

Before cultural tourism was actively developed, Cape Breton was already known as a scenic tourism destination. Cape Breton’s premier tourist attractions consist of Cape Breton Highlands National Park, the famous Cabot Trail, and the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site. Scenery and “living history” are the main attractions, as are low-intensity vacation experiences like golfing, scenic day hiking, and beach activities, all known in tourism marketing circles as “soft adventuring.”
Tourism is structured around the island’s five scenic trails that outline its cultural, heritage, and scenic attractions. Each trail has a specific identity as a destination: the Cabot Trail, which makes a loop through the National Park, the Margaree River Valley, and along the Bras d’Or and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, is primarily about the natural scenery that includes picturesque Acadian and Scottish towns on the coasts and river valleys. The Ceilidh Trail traverses the Scottish towns of Inverness County where
Scottish cultural production is densest. On the eastern coast, the Fleur-de-Lis Trail takes visitors through French heritage sites and Acadian regions before arriving at the French colonial Fortress of Louisbourg. In the island’s interior, the Bras d’Or Lake Scenic Drive circles the Bras d’Or, a huge salt water bay recently designated a UNESCO Biosphere that fills the island’s center and whose banks are peppered with Mi’kmaq and Scottish towns. The short Marconi Trail is a historical trail that takes visitors along the windswept Atlantic coast into industrial Glace Bay, where the Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi established the first commercial transatlantic wireless telegraphy system that linked North America to Europe.

Each Trail defines a region of the island and assigns it a dominant macro-personality that highlights specific cultures, sceneries, or historical events to create an identity that ranges from living Scottish culture (the Ceilidh Trail) to purely scenic (the Cabot Trail) to historical (the Marconi Trail). These regional personalities are created by drawing out and defining only certain features of the geocultural region as a whole. However, the tourism literature that creates the macropersonalites tourists come to expect essentializes each region’s personality by obscuring integral aspects of the region. Certain cultural, historical, and scenic narratives, as well as certain kinds of performing ethnic bodies become privileged over others. Each of the island’s regions takes on a primary identity easily promoted to visitors and, through actions of locals and expectations of visitors, becomes ever more concretized as that region’s identity; the profusion of ceilidhs engineered by locals along the Ceilidh Trail, for instance, works to define the Trail’s Scottish identity, which visitors then tour with the expectation of encountering
traditional living Scottish culture. The Ceilidh Trail was created to connect ceilidh-intense communities, but it has also synergistically prompted more (public) ceilidhs (Urry 2002 theorized the creation of expectations amongst tourists for what they’ll see and experience in a given destination as “the tourist gaze”).

Despite the fact that the average tourist spends most of their time traversing rural, culturally rich and economically marginal villages hugging waterways and coastlines, little economic development flows to these communities. Cape Bretoners living outside the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM), the island’s industrialized urban core centered on Sydney, feel that the CBRM and its citizens receive more development money than the rural regions. In Inverness County, for example, traditional culture in the form of recordings, oral histories, and artifacts are being shipped off to the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University in the CBRM (where they sit, inaccessible as they await digitization) rather than staying in their communities of origin. The Celtic Music Centre in Judique has created its own rival archive. Even though Inverness is the center of the Scottish culture that is most visible and available to tourists, development money is harder to attract. Cape Bretoners, marginalized out on the fringe of both Canada and Nova Scotia, have a rather ambivalent attitude to off-island authority. One way to gain more agency over their futures is by entering the halls of power, where the island’s organizations and regions fight over scarce resources dispensed from provincial and federal governments far removed from the island, who come in with promises of money and new regulations that are perceived to have little to do with the needs of the communities and people they purport to serve. Whenever someone from Cape Breton
achieves a position of power, that individual tries to win favors, funds, and influence for their own community first, and secondarily the island as a whole. Rodney MacDonald, for example, used his influence as Premier to realize a pet project, the creation of the Office of Gaelic Affairs, which promotes Gaelic culture in the province. But the location of the OGA’s three offices is suggestive: Halifax (the provincial capital) is expected, as is Antigonish (traditionally a Scottish Catholic bastion that is home the oldest highland games in North American). But the third is in Mabou, MacDonald’s hometown, and a major center of the Gaelic cultural region on the island. Mabou is also within the political jurisdiction from which MacDonald was first elected to public office, but it is suggestive that the office is not in a larger town on the island.

As a Mabou local put it to me, people over in the CBRM “think Cape Breton stops at the Seal Island Bridge…some of them think that’s the Causeway!”¹⁸ That is, Cape Breton consists mostly of Cape Breton County and the road south through Richmond County that leads off the island; western Cape Breton may as well not exist. Regionalism is critical to understanding what happens on Cape Breton, who does it, and why: the center of Gaelic revitalization must be in Mabou for reasons having to do with cultural pride, links between Catholicism and Highland identity, fear of losing the benefits of cultural development to the other side of the island, and the expectation that a community member who gets in power will return power to his community. In addition,

¹⁸ The Seal Island Bridge is located at the mouth of the Bras d’Or in the island’s center as its shorelines begin to widen out and its waters eventually join the Atlantic. Put simply, this bridge connects the two sides of Cape Breton. The Causeway connects Cape Breton to Nova Scotia. The point is that the rural western half of the island, is not especially connected to the more developed eastern half, which is seen by rural Cape Bretoners as unaware of their needs, and moreover, unconcerned with their welfare.
there are histories of judgment and oppression of Gaelic language and culture to contend with, some self-created, and others dictated by community outsiders.

**Roadmap: Asking directions, mapping the itinerary**

Music and dance are constant presences in the following chapters, but I attempt a new analysis of Cape Breton’s traditional Scottish sounding and moving culture that investigates the motivations behind traditional cultural engagement, rather than devoting myself entirely to the particulars of performance (although I give them lots of attention). This is not a dissertation about music so much as a dissertation about musicking, as Christopher Small (1998) defines the term. It is about music as an activity, and it is also concerned with dance. I investigate the movement of bodies on the dance floor and the immobility, or constrained mobility, of bodies on and off the dance floor and in the act of musicking. I have not written a dissertation about “the music itself” of Cape Breton because I felt that my ability to contribute best to the area studies on this small island and within the scholarship of the Celtic Atlantic lies in discussions of the context in which the music happens and in laying bare the social normativities and structures that inform musical practice, rather than discussing the particulars of notes, bowings, and repertoire.

Many scholars have investigated the Scottish culture of the island. Ethnomusicologist and folklorist Heather Sparling’s work explores Cape Breton’s Gaelic song forms, especially piurt-a-beul (2005) and disaster songs. She investigates the play of identity and authenticity in the songs of Mary Jane Lamond, a Gaelic-language singer and learner who resides on the island but is not from there (2007). It is from Sparling’s work
that I am inspired to take note of interactions between locals and visitors in and around cultural experiences, and also the implicit social requirements that delineate a performance’s degree of traditionalism and community investiture. Ethnochoreologist Mats Melin (2012) has a recently mapped out the visual, aural, and kinaesthetic processes through which Cape Breton’s percussive step dancing is taught and shared in the island’s communities. Thompson (2003, 2006) has written on the role of a locally-significant CBC documentary called *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* in the cultural rediscovery and reinvestment (though perhaps not revival) that began in the 1970s. Some have focused on how physical and geographic space are sites for the creation of social and cultural identity.\(^\text{19}\) Numerous oral history projects have collected life stories, descriptions of craft-making, and folktales from older Cape Bretoners of all cultures, but especially the Scots (see Feintuch 2010, Caplan 1980, 1988, 2006). Folklorist Helen Creighton (1932) was one of the first to collect folk songs in Atlantic Canada and Nova Scotia (suggestively, just as tartanism was becoming concretized as an official ideology) and more contemporary folklorists such as Shaw (2000, 2007) are collecting Gaelic folktales and songs. Scottish culture bearers’ familiarity with the presence and questions of researchers has led some to become weary of the process (a noted Cape Breton scholar warned me of the phenomenon, and which was soon confirmed by the reticence of a few hoped-for informants). I was told on several occasions that it was better if locals did these

\(^{19}\) Addison (2001) has explored Inverness county square dance halls; MacDonald (2013) explores traditions of Gaelic place naming in central Cape Breton, showing how information about settlement patterns, local oral traditions, and inhabitants is encoded in the names locals give to their significant places; Ivakhiv (2005) discusses how culture and identity are mapped onto the Cape Breton landscape through the Celtic Colours Festival.
projects rather than outsiders, because outsiders/people from away can never understand as completely locals can.\(^{20}\)

However, my identity as not only an outsider but also someone culturally other to the Scots permits me some insight. I explore lines of power that are hidden in cultural interactions not just amongst locals, but also between locals and people from away. Heteronormativity and (a certain kind of) white privilege underlie all cultural performances, from square dances to festival concerts, and influences who chooses to visit the island. Heteronormativity consists of the everyday ways in which heterosexual identity, behaviors, values, and expectations are normalized. Heteronormativity brings attention to the ideological hegemony of heterosexuality’s social construction as a normal, moral, and valued identity, which is supported by whole systems of institutions and practices. At the same time that heterosexuality (specifically monogamous and procreative heterosexuality) is privileged, other sexualities and relationship styles are denigrated (see Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1990). Jackson (2006, in Martin 2009) argues that heteronormativity “governs” both gender and sexuality and operates through multiple dimensions of social life (e.g., structure, meaning, everyday practice, and individual subjectivity). Scholars like Katz (1995) and D’Emilio (1983) have explored the historical invention of heterosexuality as an identity category distinct from and superior to homosexuality, and feminist theorist Rich (1980) has documented the compulsory nature of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality becomes mundane, unmarked, normalized, and

expected. Whiteness occupies a similar position of valued and hegemonic normalcy that renders it invisible: the tourists, and not only the locals, are white.

Celtic Studies has not significantly engaged with heterosexuality, heteronormativity, or especially the intersection of whiteness with heteronormativity. Slominski (2010) has written women back into the early decades of Irish public performance, and Sherry Johnson (2006) has chronicled the experiences of female Celtic musicians at fiddle contests in North America. Ray (2005) has written on heterosexual Scottish masculinity and homosociality amongst American men in the context of highland games in the American South, but without a critical engagement in the impact of the heteronormativity that must be present in such games. Celtic Studies scholar Michael Newton (2013) has examined how North American Scottish elites used popular literature and poetry to cast their ethnic Scottishness as white in an attempt to distance themselves from other Celtic peoples (including the Irish) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.21

I focus instead on the present-day construction of whiteness by ethnically-Scottish non-elites at the community level on Cape Breton. This dissertation is primarily a critical study of place-specific whiteness, and the intersection of this ethnic whiteness with heteronormativity. Heteronormative practices, as I show, are central to defining Scottish ethnicity in Cape Breton’s culturally-involved communities and community spaces; whiteness and heteronormativity are inextricable in locally-generated cultural performance on the island, and so, following Crenshaw (1993) and other intersectional

---

21 Vance (2005) has also written about the ascendance and triumph of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, specifically as it applies to race; Vance focuses on the impact of Scottishness on Afro-Nova Scotians.
engagements with gender and ethnicity within ethnomusicology, I engage them as intersectional facets of identity and sites of social control and performance.\textsuperscript{22}

In Cape Breton, heterosexuality is assumed in many interactions, including flirtation, social dancing between oppositely- and binary-gendered partners, and tourism set up for heterosexual, monogamous, and procreative couples and families. Cape Breton’s Scottish culture consists of ethnically-othered white people, whose Celtic culture is distinct but also legible within an existing aural and visual aesthetic of more widely known Celtic musics and cultures, especially the Irish tradition and culture of participatory pub music. Stokes and Bohlman (2003) have written about the creation of a pan-Celtic soundscape that draws on distinct regional and cultural musics. As part of the Celtic Atlantic and the transnational market for Celtic culture, Cape Breton is thoroughly enmeshed in this soundworld. People traveling to Cape Breton from away exercise control over the tradition through their expectations. Tourists who are not island natives have their own, often romanticized, notions of what a “living Celtic culture” will look and sound like; their “tourist gaze” and, following the implications of Urry’s term, their tourist ear have been predetermined through transnational encounters with Cape Breton’s culture and other Celtic cultures. But there is another highly influential class of tourists who return to Cape Breton from away, those Cape Bretoners who have migrated away from the island for work. These returnees bring back their own expectations for the island’s traditional culture and the social spaces of musical and dancing performance and participation: they expect it to look and sound as it did when they left the island. They

\textsuperscript{22} See for example Moisala and Diamond (2000), Hayes (2010), and Wong (2004).
return with their own nostalgic expectations of finding “home” as they left it, unchanged by the ongoing evolution of the tradition and the social environment. As Delaney and Rivera (2012) argue is the case for diasporic Tongans returning to the home islands for visits, these visitors direct the path of cultural change by encouraging stasis rather than growth and change. Native Cape Bretoners returning home from away reengage their Cape Bretonness and reaffirm their connection to their traditional and at times idealized perception of Cape Breton culture, partly by fitting themselves into traditional social roles and identities that include binary gender categories, heteronormativity, and a patriarchal gender hierarchy.

“In a metaphorical sense, the gift received [by Tongan tourists] is to become Tongan again, reauthenticating their legitimacy as Tongans and revalidating their place in Tongan society. From a larger perspective, then, the influence of Tongan tourists drives the perpetuation of traditional Tongan culture…the traditional idealized version of Tongan culture depends on Tongan tourists’ continued believe in a sense of being self-grounded in Tongan cultural attributes only available on the islands” (Delaney and Rivera 2012:162)

Though I utilize a constuctionist framework (following Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994) to investigate the particulars of local constructions of culture, I also examine Cape Breton as operating within many intersecting webs of influence that constantly connect the island and “local” cultural praxes on multiple vectors to transnational ideas and expectations brought to the island by visitors, mass media, and island natives and residents returning home.

As recordings and concert tours increase the transnational presence of the Cape Breton sound, consumers from away develop expectations for the nature of that sound, which doesn’t always match local expectations. Local spaces are always being influenced
by awayness, by the expectations and desires of visitors coming to the island whether are first-time tourists or returning natives. The construction of local “authenticity” is going on all the time, and so tourism does not represent an exceptional moment of constructed authenticity nor blatant inauthenticity. Awayness is always present, but not necessarily as an element of change. As people with different relationships to the island and its Scottish culture converge on the island, their multiple expectations and even their embodied identities and culturally (in)competent embodiments crash into each other in Cape Breton’s cultural spaces. The lives of Cape Breton’s music especially are multiple, generated on the island and at every point away where Cape Bretoners or consumers of Cape Breton music find themselves, and are always intersecting in a complex and organic network of expectations within cultural encounters at home on the island and away.

This dissertation is structured into five primary chapters, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. I have included numerous photographs and maps within each chapter to illustrate the text, and a glossary of terms follows the text (Appendix A). The chapters guide the reader through various levels of engagement with Cape Breton’s culture, following the trajectory a potential visitor might navigate from exciting first experiences Cape Breton music and dance performed on and off-island by one of its most celebrated ambassadors, through the distanced first glimpses into the destination via online and print promotional tourism media, to an on-island festival that draws international visitors, before ending up at a square dance. Throughout, I follow a narrative that tracks the creation of identity through specific kinds of valued embodiment,
as it applies to performance practice, social and cultural aesthetics, gender identity and performance, and displays of sexuality.

In Chapter 2, we go the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site of Canada. Fortress of Louisbourg is a reconstruction of an 18th century French fortress built on the east coast of Cape Breton as a bulwark against British incursions into France’s North American holdings during decades of colonial skirmishes that determined control over the land and resources of Atlantic Canada and New England. Despite the site’s distinctly non-Scottish heritage site, top-tier performers in the Scottish influenced Cape Breton-style dominated the 2013 summer celebrations of the 300th anniversary of Louisbourg’s construction. I focus in this chapter on Natalie MacMaster’s performance at one of the Fortress’ hottest concerts that capped a whole weekend of events in celebration of the Fête de Saint Louis. I compare Natalie’s performance strategies in this on-island concert to three concert performances I attended as part of her off-island 2012 Christmas in Cape Breton tour of various cities along the eastern seaboard of the United States to examine how Cape Breton identity is constructed at home and away, and show how Natalie performs her connection to home despite the seeming disjunction between her produced and professionalized performances and the comparatively low-tech and relaxed-seeming performance aesthetic experienced in most community events.

The next two chapters are paired; each examines the creation of a cultural tourism industry on Cape Breton. Chapter 3 begins with the Celtic Heart of North America Co-operative, the organization primarily responsible for collecting and collectively marketing the island’s various cultural institutions. I explain how Nova Scotia as a contemporary
destination emerges from former governmental constructions of Nova Scotia as a preeminently and essentially Scottish place to a new kind of tourism that emphasizes Nova Scotia’s overall multiculturalism while highlighting the enduring and vibrant Scottishness of Cape Breton. This tourism is experiential, and the Celtic Heart Co-op arises as a result of a new interest in culture as a tourism commodity. In Chapter 4, I examine how the actual marketing to tourists is subtly coded to attract very specific types of visitors who possess valued identities that I identify as white, heterosexual, procreative, and monogamously coupled. Backed by visitor statistics and strategic tourism plans, I show how visitors to Cape Breton (and Nova Scotia as a whole) are strategically marketed to before they arrive, and that the local Scottish culture they are stepping into mirrors their own identities. I, and the Nova Scotia Tourism Association’s Strategic Plan, identify the ideal tourist as a culturally interested couple who wants to experience culture after a day of hiking, driving, or whale watching (NSTA 2013). But I also identify the unmarked identity categories these tourists have, both in the promotional literature, and in the embodied fact of the people I encountered doing fieldwork in the island’s cultural spaces.

Chapter 5 enters the communities through an examination of the annual Celtic Colours International Festival. Over nine days in October, Celtic Colours combines high-caliber professional concerts with small community events that include activities as diverse as hiking, open stages, community meals, fiddle lessons, and square dances. The Festival, a “community-based festival with international appeal” (Mombourquette in Celtic Colours 2012:3) that contributes significantly to the local economy and is
primarily about using local culture to develop the island’s communities, including direct
financial benefit from extending the tourist season another month into October, but also
providing the opportunity for communities to update infrastructure that both supports the
festival and is beneficial for the community. While the festival celebrates the many
cultures of Cape Breton, the Scottish cultural forms dominate the festival line-ups, and
the structuring of the festivals main concerts are modeled on Scottish events. The festival
is coded Scottish in overt and covert ways.

Chapter 6 takes us from the realm of spectacle performance, however down-home
and localized, into the square dance, one of the most local and community-oriented
category of island events. People from away become scarce at these late night dances in
small community halls, where locals practice and enforce on themselves and visitors the
expectations for performance, embodiment, and identity that are appropriate for a
Scottish Cape Breton social and cultural context. I focus particularly on learning gender
roles with a defined male/female binary.

Getting the Keys

Throughout this narrative, I keep in sight key signposts that I use to unpack what
issues and stakes are woven into Cape Breton cultural encounters. Normativity is key.
Gender normativity on Cape Breton means cis-gendered bodies, that is, when a body’s
gender identity assigned at birth based on anatomy matches the gender identity its owner
feels. Heterosexuality is also normative, as are the roles assigned to the two binary and
opposing gender categories and roles of male and female. There are normative narratives
Cape Bretoners tell about themselves and told by others about them, and these narratives inform typical/authentic/normative ways of constructing a Scottish Cape Bretoner identity at home and away.
Meeting Natalie

“You have a good ear,” Natalie told me. I was a shy kid, unsure how to respond to her praise. It was Day Three of a weeklong class with Natalie in about 1999, and I was in heaven. Suzuki method ear training was paying off, and I was thriving under Natalie’s instruction because she taught only by ear: “have a listen,” she’d say, before playing the tune of the day through several times by herself so we could “get it in our ears,” and then going through the tune phrase by phrase, building one phrase into two and then three, endless repetition that may sound tedious, but allowed me at least to learn tunes quickly. Most of the others students complained bitterly about the lack of sheet music, begged Natalie for the music, but she just smiled and said, “on Cape Breton we learn ‘em all by ear. That’s the way of it.” Over the week, she taught us, by ear, a whole medley of five tunes: a march, two strathspeys, and two reels, a typical medley for listening.\(^{23}\) Once we’d progressed enough to stumble through a tune on our own, she moved to the piano to play the syncopated and chromatic piano accompaniment that immediately distinguishes Cape Breton style from any other Celtic music. Or sometimes she’d have us play while

---

\(^{23}\) Medleys come in different kinds. A medley that is just for listening combines many types of tunes, and may start out with a slow air (airs are only for listening, never for dancing). A medley for solo stepdancing starts out with one fast strathspey and then goes straight into reels; the fiddler keeps playing reels for as long as individuals want to come up and dance. Though there are many different ways to arrange a square dance, the Glencoe Set (originating at the Glencoe Mills dance) is the one most commonly danced in Inverness County. The fiddler starts out with a medley consisting entirely of jigs (jigs are never paired with other types of tunes). Following the jig set (which has a corresponding dance choreography), the fiddler will play two medleys of reels, one for the second set of the dance, and one for the third set. These medleys go on as long as the dancers want to dance, and since a fiddler would never repeat a tune, so they must have a vast repertoire.
she demonstrated how the stepdancing went along to the rhythm of the tune. She told us stories about her Uncle Buddy, how he’d given her a fiddle when she was young and taught her how to play it; she described the square dance at Glencoe. It was an immersive learning experience. I didn’t know it then, but her teaching style was virtually identical to experiences I would later have of learning Cape Breton style fiddle and dance from practitioners on the island itself.

***

Natalie’s return trips to Cape Breton are highly anticipated. Natalie MacMaster is a superstar fiddler of the Cape Breton Scottish tradition, part of the generation of talented young islanders who made Cape Breton-style part of the global Celtic cultural boom in the mid- to late-1990s. This boom included internationally renowned Celtic acts like Riverdance and Celtic Woman, and propelled purveyors of Celtic music who were known regionally or amongst connoisseurs, like Newfoundland’s Irish Descendants and The Chieftains from Ireland, to international prominence. Natalie is still riding the ebbing crest of this wave of interest throughout North America, where she tours constantly with varying combinations of her band members and different stage shows.24 She rarely returns home to Cape Breton from her farm in Douro, Ontario, where she lives ‘away’ with her husband and five children. An international touring schedule and a summer camp at her home in Ontario, as well as the scarcity of venues on the island large enough to meet the conditions of her contract, keep her away from the island for most of the year.

---

24 Not all the musicians of Natalie’s generation tour or perform in the same way as she does. Wendy MacIsaac, a contemporary of Natalie’s who maintains international touring careers, tours mainly to folk festivals and Celtic music festivals. Rodney MacDonald, by contrast, performs at island community venues and annually at Celtic Colours as a sidelight to his fulltime job as director of the Gaelic College.
But summertime is when Cape Bretoners in exile typically come home, and Natalie dutifully returned in summer 2013 with a special performance that used Scottish fiddling and dance to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the French colonial Fortress of Louisbourg. In this chapter, I discuss how Natalie, as an international performer and eternal Cape Breton Girl, constructs her own gendered, cultural, and locally appropriate Cape Breton identity in her performances for off-island audiences and audiences at home. Her identity, for both kinds of audiences, becomes the gold standard by which other performances of Cape Breton musical and cultural identity are measured.

**Setting the Stage: SuperFête at Fortress Louisbourg**

Operated by Parks Canada as a National Historic Site since its designation in 1920, the Fortress of Louisbourg is a jewel in the national parks system for the detail and historical accuracy of its reconstruction. It is one of the older parks, and many of the now-standard practices for historical reconstruction and animation within Parks Canada sites were developed and perfected at the site (anonymous personal communication). The Fortress sits on a low-lying, marshy peninsula sheltering a bay from the North Atlantic. Visitors take a bus from the visitor center a couple of kilometers out along the peninsula to the fisherman’s cottage, the first contact with the 18th century. Animators wait to greet guests and direct them down a gravel path to the imposing walls encircling the fortress. Here at Louisbourg, it’s always 1744, and France is about to go to war with England, one of several conflicts over control of North America’s resources. The cannons are fired.

---

25 The fortress of Louisbourg was designated a National Historic Site in 1928, and was redesignated a National Historic Park in 1940.
daily off the sturdy seawalls, armed soldiers train at the garrison building, the upper classes practice their ballroom dancing, and at the fisherman’s house outside the walls, long drying racks await the daily cod catch near the Dauphin Gate where visitors must meet the challenge of armed soldiers (English spies are everywhere) before being permitted to enter the fortification. ‘Animation’ refers to the sort of experience offered to visitors at the site, in which the past is brought to life (‘animated’) through the interpretation of costumed employees (called ‘animators’); the interpretive experience at Louisbourg is similar to that offered at Colonial Williamsburg in Williamsburg, Virginia.

In a “living history” environment such as this, animators reenact life at Louisbourg as it would have been in 1744, just before Britain and France resumed armed conflict: employees dressed in period costume depict soldiers, servants, a governor, inn keepers, musicians, and merchants, interpreting the site through the eyes and experience (gendered, classed, and raced) of their 18th century persona, often based on real historical inhabitants of the town.

The Fortress of Louisbourg is an artifact of France and Britain’s colonial skirmishes over control of resources and territory in North America, a hotly contested theatre of conflict for the two nations, who were at war almost continuously between 1689 and 1763 (Conrad and Hiller 2006:61).26 The French constructed a costly fortress at

26 Though the origins of these conflicts were situated in Europe and most of the fighting happened there, France and England’s North American holdings were bargaining chips in negotiations as well as sites for proxy battles between the European powers as they sought control over the territory and commodity resources of North America, including the fishing grounds and trading routes that passed near Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. The conflicts, in order, are as follows: War of the League of Augsburg (King William’s War) 1689-1697; War of the Spanish Succession (Queen Anne’s War) 1701-1714 concluded with the Treaty of Utrecht (1713); Father Rale’s War (1722-1725); War of the Austrian Succession (King George’s
Louisbourg on Île Royale (now Cape Breton Island) to serve as a military and economic base from which to counter growing British control in Atlantic Canada and Eastern North America; Louisbourg became the capital of Île Royale and the center of French interests in North America in the 1750s.\textsuperscript{27} The military base at Louisbourg was meant to “contain British power in North America” (Conrad and Hiller 2006:60); facing the Atlantic, it was designed and located to protect the entrance to the St. Lawrence River and the colonies of New France, and provide access to the rich fishing grounds located off the coast of Newfoundland (ibid., 2006:60).\textsuperscript{28} The First Nations in Atlantic Canada and New England, recognizing growing European control over their lands, established mutual protection and trading treaties with the European powers to minimize negative affects on their communities.\textsuperscript{29} Despite its cost, Louisbourg was an ineffective fortress: it was

---

\textsuperscript{27} Havre L’Anglois, the original settlement at Louisbourg, was founded in 1713. Construction of the fortified military base began in 1720 and ended in 1740, becoming the largest and most expensive European fortified settlement in North America. Two other French fortifications on Île Royale (Englishtown and St. Peter’s) helped secure French military and civilian presence in the Atlantic region and protected France’s seasonal fishing rights.

\textsuperscript{28} New France refers to all of France’s North American territory. It was comprised of five colonies: Canada, Acadia, Hudson Bay, Newfoundland (called Plaisance), and Louisiana. France’s colonial investment in North America began with Jacques Cartier’s 1534 exploration of the Saint Lawrence River and ended with cession of the remaining territories of New France to Spain and Great Britain under the 1763 Treaty of Paris. Canada and Acadia, in addition to being French colonies, were also bases from which to launch attacks on Britain’s New England colonies. Fishing was Louisbourg’s lucrative economic base. The settlement quickly grew into a commercial trading and fishing hub, the largest and most cosmopolitan community in Atlantic Canada (ibid., 2006:62); by 1744 it rivaled New York and Philadelphia in trade and commerce (Cross 2004).

\textsuperscript{29} The Native groups in Atlantic Canada (the Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, Penobscot, Passamoquody, and Abenaki) formed the Wabenaki Confederacy and allied with the French (Conrad and Hiller 2006:56); the Iroquois allied with the English. Like the French, the Wabenaki Confederacy opposed continued growth of Britain’s New England colonies, and were also in conflict with the Iroquois. The French cultivated the Aboriginal groups as allies through “subsidized trade, annual gift-giving, and missionary activity” (Conrad and Hiller 2006:64), and French Acadian settlers had coexisted in a peaceful climate maintained by limited French incursions into Native territory, shared Catholicism, mutually beneficial trade relationships, and frequent intermarriage.
captured in 1745 and again in 1758, first by New England colonists and then by British forces in the French and Indian War.\(^\text{30}\) It was unable to prevent the gradual unraveling and final dissolution of New France under the 1763 Treaty of Paris that ended the French and Indian War and brought the entire region under British jurisdiction.\(^\text{31}\) After 1763, the British systematically destroyed the site but kept it garrisoned until 1768 while solidifying their control over the region and subduing the Native and Acadian populations: the Acadians, who had repeatedly refused to pledge loyalty to England, were systematically deported between 1755 and 1762, their settlements and those of their Native allies were destroyed. New Englanders, Loyalists (after the American Revolution), and other Anglo immigrants replaced them.\(^\text{32}\) After the British garrison left, the Fortress of Louisbourg remained virtually untouched until second half of the twentieth century.

The reconstruction of the Fortress began in the 1960s. Though only one quarter of the original was rebuilt, it was the largest historical reconstruction project in North

\(^\text{30}\) France retained only the islands of St. Pierre et Miquelon (located 14 miles south of Newfoundland). In 1800, the Louisiana colony was returned to France, but Napoleon Bonaparte promptly sold it to the United States in 1803.

\(^\text{31}\) France lost several colonies in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht but retained Île Royale and Île Saint-Jean (Prince Edward Island). These islands as bases that protected the sea routes to the remainder of New France; France also hoped to use them to regain control over the region (Conrad and Hiller 2006:59). France and Britain disagreed over the boundaries of Acadia, vaguely defined in the treaty as “Acadia according to its ancient boundaries” (Canadian Encyclopedia 2012a). Understandably, the French though it referred to a smaller territory than that claimed by the English. After losing Acadia, France developed Île Saint-Jean and Île Royale, largely ignored until that time (Canadian Encyclopedia 2012b). Louisbourg was chosen as the new capital. Though they were now under English rule, the French Acadians showed no desire to move. During a period of relative calm between 1713 and 1744, the British did little to dislodge the Acadians, despite the Acadians’ refusal to swear an oath of unconditional loyalty to England (they agreed only to an oath of neutrality).

\(^\text{32}\) Acadians started returning to the region in 1764 after the treaty, but couldn’t resettle their original agricultural communities. Instead, they settled at several locations on New Brunswick and mainland Nova Scotia, as well as Île Madame and Chéticamp on Cape Breton; the poor soil encouraged them to develop their skills as fishermen.
America (Fortress Louisbourg 2013b) and is now the largest reconstructed 18th century French fortified town in North America (Parks Canada 2013). The reconstruction began as a government make-work project for unemployed coal miners, part of a number of alternative work projects designed to create jobs and increase Cape Breton’s attractiveness as a tourist destination. Projects like the reconstruction are part of a pattern of long-term economic and labor investment in Cape Breton, but these development operations were often too small-scale and short-term to absorb the huge numbers of Cape Breton’s unemployed industrial workers over the long-term (Conrad and Hiller 2006:198). The process was expensive and fraught with conflict between archaeologists and engineers, officials and local residents, none of whom seemed to agree on any aspect of the project. Eventually, almost all the buildings and fortifications at Louisbourg today were reconstructed on their original foundations according to their original plans (Cape Breton Post 2013a; Cross 2004). With the initial reconstruction completed in 1982, the site became “a major cultural tourism attraction in Atlantic Canada” (Johnson 2007), and as of 2004 hosts about 130,000 visitors annually (Cross 2004).

---

33 Planned for the 1967 centenary of Canada’s Confederation, the reconstruction was “declared as a centennial project” by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker in 1961” (Cape Breton Post 2013a). For a complete account, see T. MacLean (1995) Louisbourg Heritage: From Ruins to Reconstruction.

34 Some families now have multiple generations who have worked at the Fortress, whether on the construction, as animators, or as Parks Canada administrators.

35 In 2004, the site had 170 seasonal and 75 year-round employees, making it one of the larger employers in the area since the closure of modern Louisbourg’s fish plant (Cross 2004).

36 The French defenders of Louisbourg benefited from the European tradition of honorable warfare: all of the plans, correspondence, records, and maps housed at the Fortress were allowed to leave the site with the defenders, and were deposited safely in French archives. The excavation of the site was simplified by the fact that Louisbourg had never had a modern city built on top of its foundations; it is the only major colonial town in North America in this condition.
With a short operating season (May 20 to October 14) and lots to celebrate (the 300th anniversary of the founding of the fortress), the schedule for Louisbourg300 was packed with special events, including SuperFête, a whole weekend in August devoted to the celebration of the Fête de Saint-Louis. The festivities included two high profile concerts and a call for 300 fiddlers to participate in “Fiddles for the Fête,” which appeared as an open call for any and all fiddlers to assemble at the site for the second day of the festival. Posters, a preferred local publication method, all around the island advertised the spectacle, and more ads appeared on the Fortress website and the official tourism sites for both Cape Breton Tourism and Nova Scotia Tourism. Both the Saturday night and Sunday afternoon concerts featured Cape Breton-born musicians. On Saturday

---

37 Fête de Saint Louis is a French holiday held on August 25th that celebrates King Louis IX of France. He was canonized in 1297 for his extraordinary devotion to behaving “as God’s anointed,” which he demonstrated through maintaining peace, doing good works, serving the poor and infirm, and initiating governmental reforms (American Catholic 2012).
night, with the chilly wind whipping off the North Atlantic, parka-wearing concertgoers assembled their camp chairs in neat rows facing a temporary stage constructed on the Fortress’ waterfront. A boat bobbed in the harbor just beyond the sea wall, while J.P. Cormier and Matt Anderson took the stage in turn. Both Cape Bretoners, each have turned to other styles in their professional careers. Though he is Acadian, J.P. grew up playing Scottish tunes on the fiddle and accompanying other fiddlers on the guitar. He now composes songs and narrative ballads about love lost and gained that he sings in in an Appalachian old time style while accompanying himself on guitar, and sometimes banjo. Matt Anderson has a full band to back up his rolling electric blues style rooted in an American popular sound. This popular music concert was part of LouisRocks!, a concert series of popular music artists organized for the 300th anniversary. Other concerts in this series included performances by young island groups such as the Celtic-rock band Sprag Session, a Mi’kmaq group called Sons of Membertou, the traditional Scottish musicians Margie and Dawn Beaton, and Nicole LeBlanc, an Acadian fiddler from Chéticamp, and performers from beyond Cape Breton.

Most of the 300 fiddlers advertised so optimistically in the posters and on the Parks Canada Fortress of Louisbourg website were missing on Sunday, the second day of the Fête. As requested by the poster and the website, I showed up with my “fiddle that you can play,” claimed my guaranteed free admission and hopped on the bus for the ride out along the peninsula to the Fortress site. People eyed my fiddle as I walked along the waterfront and then flashed my pass to get behind the concert stage. A few people sat noodling on their fiddles inside the masonry building (the Bigot Theatre, as in the French
name) that served as a green room. I recognized a businesslike older woman I’d seen at
the Cape Breton Fiddlers’ Association Festival (hereafter, ‘the Association’) held at the
Gaelic College the week before; she brushed off my request for instructions and curtly
sent me to find someone else to ask. An example of subtle gatekeeping to prevent people
from away from accessing cultural spaces, she pretended as though I knew the other
woman I was supposed to find. Fortunately for me, since I had no idea who she was or
where to find her, the woman I was supposed to locate found me first.

She explained to me that most of fiddlers would be performing in the concert, and
that the lone fiddlers who showed up (like me) would be stationed throughout the
Fortress to play for the tourists. What fiddlers are in the concert? “Oh, the [Cape Breton]
Fiddlers’ Association, they’re playing a set before Natalie comes on.” You mean they’re
part of the concert, they have a set list? “Yes, although at the end of Natalie’s part of the
concert, all the fiddlers are invited up to play.” [Dawning realization...] Is there music
already planned for the big finale? “Yes, don’t you have it?” Um...no. Where was that
available? “You could register ahead of time and they’d send you the music.” In all the
preplanning I had done for the fieldwork month, I had not found any place to pre-register
for the SuperFête,38 so I just showed up. The music we played in the grand finale, which I
never saw, consisted of medleys that the Association regularly performs, meaning that

38 Here is the entire announcement: “August 25 - Fiddles for the Fête The Feast of Saint Louis will take a
traditional Cape Breton twist as the Fortress welcomes 300 fiddles for the Fête! Local musicians, along
with Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy, will fill the Fortress with fiddle music for an outdoor square
dance in the afternoon. 2 p.m. on the Fortress of Louisbourg waterfront. Free entrance to the Fortress with
a fiddle (that you can play!). For those without fiddles, admission to Fiddles for Fête is set at the regular
daily Parks Canada fee, which you can read more about here. Please note that advance tickets to this event
are not available. (“Special Events - Louisbourg300” 2013).
any non-Association fiddlers, especially those that were unfamiliar with the Cape Breton style, were effectively excluded from the concert. I surmise that the pre-registration was done informally within the Association too, since it was clearly not online. The somewhat-less-than-300 Fiddlers consisted of about 55 Association members, and 5 other people who faked their (our) performances as best we could in front of a concert audience of several hundred people. The two women who in fact had the music hadn’t memorized it, and so they excused themselves from performing. Stationed on the cleared area between the front of the stage and the metal fence keeping the well-behaved audience at bay, we made a semi-circle about five fiddlers deep. Natalie played onstage (she is an Association member and learned all these medleys years ago) and Association members would occasionally move forward out of the group to give a few steps for their own (and our) enjoyment to whoops of encouragement from the fiddlers and the audience. Fortunately, Natalie’s amplification was so loud that I suspect only the first few rows could actually hear our unamplified fiddles, let alone distinguish the frequent mistakes and air fiddling. The nod to the French identity of the Fortress in all of this Scottishness (and Ottawa Valley-style Irish fiddling, courtesy of Natalie’s husband Donnell Leahy) was in the military fife and drum band that opened the concert in 18th century military attire. Costumed animators circulated through the crowd and would occasionally be propelled by the music into giving a few steps, because like I said, it’s a big deal when Natalie comes home, and everyone wants to be part of it.

In addition to stumbling through the finale, I was told to play my fiddle on the Fortress site while the Association fiddlers were performing onstage. Once Natalie took
the stage, I was allowed to stop playing and enjoy the concert. That meant I had about an hour to fill with my own fiddling. I hung out in the Bigot Theatre building while the Association fiddlers practiced their concert repertoire in a big circle, led by different members – including Leanne Aucoin – who perform professionally around the island and within the region. As the Association members headed down the street towards the stage, a spritely Parks Canada employee came by to collect the non-Association fiddlers. She deposited a tourist family of fiddlers up by the onsite museum, and directed me to the central intersection. I found a spot in the sun (the breeze is always cold coming off the ocean) and started up. I played mostly Cape Breton tunes, although when I couldn’t remember any Cape Breton tunes, I kept in mind a comment the manager at the Glenora Distillery made to me: he’d asked me to play for an evening and I’d said, *I don’t have enough [Cape Breton] repertoire to perform for two hours, I’m not sure I’m good enough for the guests.* He waved his hand dismissively and replied, “[It doesn’t matter what you play], most of them don’t know what they’re hearing” (personal communication).

So I played any tune that occurred to me. I ended up in several tourist videos and still photographs, and enthralled several small children who stopped in front of me transfixed. Parks Canada employees kept coming by to listen. Street music is not a part of daily reenactment at the Fortress, but I became part of the festival and the touristic experience of authenticity at the Fortress that day. It didn’t matter that I wasn’t local (no one knew that), or that I was dressed anachronistically: I was local color, and judging by the effusive thanks, smiles, and documentation my performance elicited, I was effective
as such. The music usually featured at the site consists of French/Acadian music, the most authentic for the 18th century, but Louisbourg at that time was a city with a diverse population due to its status as a trading center for the Atlantic trade between the Caribbean and the North American colonies, the North Atlantic fishing grounds, and continental Europe. With many cultures interacting at Louisbourg, the music likely represented diverse cultures that included the sort of Scottish music that is currently heard on Cape Breton, “though not the way we did it for Super Fete [sic]” (anonymous personal communication). At least I have French heritage!

Up until recently, the Fortress of Louisbourg was committed to total historical accuracy in all aspects of its construction, operations, and programming. One employee who didn’t want to be on the record told me this:

---

39 At least one animator plays Acadian songs on a Baroque period guitar and sings in the pubs on-site.
40 And even further afield: blue and white Chinese porcelain was found during the excavation, and replacement pieces for the park were commissioned from workshops in China.
“There have been significant changes over the years, especially in the last five or so. Our dedication to authenticity has been the major change…the beginning of this would have been our female staff being part of the military. Authenticity was the law for fortress staff, and it is something we used to take very seriously. If you were on site, you would have only seen things that would have been seen there in the 18th century. For example, during the reconstruction, only 18th century materials and techniques were used for construction, even though cheaper and more effective materials may have been available. It wasn't good enough that something "looked" authentic on the outside, it had to "be" entirely authentic. Now, when we do things like replace roofs, they look authentic, but underneath modern techniques are used to ensure the construction is efficient and will last. This has been a difficult transition for many. Many of our staff have been working here for 25 plus years. It's very difficult to change the mindset that was drilled so incessantly into our brains. However, we are trying very hard to be self sustaining and efficient, so this means certain exceptions have to be made” (anonymous personal communication 2013).

The Fortress is trying to “reach different markets” by putting on new and varied kinds of events and programming. As this same anonymous employee-said,

“If the powers that be in the 60s, 70s, 80s, and even the 90s, heard that we were going to have a modern concert on the waterfront during the fete de saint louis [sic] with modern instruments, stage, and sound; they would have laughed hysterically and reassured everyone that this would NEVER happen. This is not how we are looking at things now. For those of us with a great love and passion for the site and its [sic] history, this means trying to move forward with these types of events while trying to maintain the original integrity of the site and its history. It's a delicate balance, to say the least” (anonymous personal communication 2013).

The sort of event that I witnessed and participated in may have been historically inaccurate and anachronistic, but it was hugely successful. Hundreds of people packed the waterfront: rows of people who’d brought camp chairs, and hundreds more standing behind them, craning their necks and standing on tiptoe for a glimpse of Natalie. Others sat along the raised grass and stone foundations of the quay-fronting buildings, militantly derailing the plans of anyone who tried to block their view. One man, shifting from foot to foot for a glimpse of the stage, informed his neighbor, “That’s the thing. When you go
to see Natalie, you don’t get to see Natalie.” Cellphones and cameras, however, had a better overhead angle, and recorded the event from countless vantage points and timestamped intervals. Natalie put on a great show with fiddles, drum kit, piano, and dancing. And she brought it all home to Cape Breton in strategic ways throughout the concert. In so doing, she showed that despite her fame and geographical distance, she’s still a Cape Breton girl.

Figure 2.3. Natalie MacMaster and husband Donnell Leahy (who is from Ontario) perform at Fiddles for the Fête with two members of Natalie’s touring band, including fellow Cape Bretoner Mac Morin on piano. August 25, 2013. © Parks Canada, used with permission.

41 Her popularity means that everyone who can comes out to her island concerts. Even knowing Natalie personally is no guarantee of a meeting, due to her layers of management and family responsibilities.
42 Cape Breton Girl is the name of her latest CD album, released in 2011. Recorded at Glenn Gould Studios in Toronto, ON. “Cape Breton Girl sees Natalie return to her roots with a traditionally based album which embodies the true Cape Breton sound. Natalie explains: "While there are other instruments on the recording, it's the piano and fiddle, the core instruments of Cape Breton music, that make up the bulk of the sound on this recording”” (“Recordings” nataliemacmaster.com). All the tunes on the track are traditional, and the album ends with “Our Father/Ar n-Athair (The Lord’s Prayer/An Phaidir).”
Still a Local Girl

Natalie plants herself firmly in Cape Breton soil and psyche by re-emplacing herself in the Cape Breton social sphere through several sonic and visual strategies. She does this not only through her well-documented comments, onstage and in interviews, about the island as home, but also through her normatively traditional bodily and sonic praxes and the restructuring of her usual concert stage show for SuperFête. She brought the performance home to Cape Breton by incorporating the reel figure from an Inverness-style square set and having locals dance the set, showcasing performances by three of her five children, and featuring other local musicians both professional and amateur. In addition, her ability to step out of the limelight and give the stage to local musicians, some professional, some accomplished, and others neither, demonstrated her humility and served to normalize her as a true Cape Bretoner, for whom modesty, humility, and the ability to share the stage gracefully are key. She arrived with her husband Donnell and their five children, which completed her image of traditional, normative, and procreative heterosexuality, femininity, and more subtly, Catholicism. In addition, two members of her regular touring band were present, and while they may not have been strategically selected for the performance, they certainly supported Natalie’s overall projected appearance of musical and performative traditionalism. Her pianist is Mac Morin, a Cape Bretoner who is one of the best and most innovative practitioners of the piano; he’s one of the few who records as a solo pianist in the Cape Breton style, and he is also an accomplished stepdancer: like many of the island’s traditional practitioners, he excels at more than one expressive aspect of the tradition. Natalie’s drummer Éric Breton
is from Québec and grew up steeped in the Québécois tradition of fiddling and percussive dancing, as well as Latin percussion instruments and styles.

**Talking Cape Breton: Sounds of Home**

Natalie took time to address the audience between sets at her SuperFête concert. Unlike many performances of traditional Scottish music on the island, where the audience is rarely if ever addressed, she frequently connected with the crowd in this way. Locals filled the audience; even Natalie’s parents were there. Dutiful Cape Breton girl that she is, Natalie performed familiar praise rhetoric about Cape Breton’s beauty and the idyllic community-focused society the island represents. She spoke about the island as home, and emphasized how she doesn’t often get to “come home to Cape Breton” anymore. The implication is a familiar one: though many native Cape Bretoners live away for most of the year, for years or an entire lifetime, it is expected that these people will want to, and will make every effort to, return to the island in the summer, when it is most beautiful and when there are the most events to attend. Failure to perform the duty of an annual pilgrimage home, or at least express heartfelt desire to do so, amounts to a betrayal of community, family, and filial obligation to the island and the Scottish culture.

She also mentioned how excited and honored she was to participate in the celebration of the island’s history by performing at the Fortress, something she’d never done before. She brought herself right down to ground by recalling her visits to the site as
a child, and made a gesture towards cultural inclusiveness when she called the Fortress a marker of the island’s (French) history and its many cultures.\footnote{A short blurb accompanying Figure 2.3 in the \textit{Cape Breton Post}, a daily newspaper published in Sydney, paraphrased Natalie as saying prior to the gig that “playing at home in Cape Breton and getting a chance to revisit a historic site she has fond memories of visiting as a child would be a dream” (Cape Breton Post 2013b).}

Sounds of home, specifically her regional accent and speech patterns, play two important roles in Natalie’s creation of her stage identities for different audiences. At home, her accent and her specific metaphors and language uses situate her immediately as a native local. She greets the audience as a whole as though she’d run into us at the co-op grocery: “well, how she goin’?” she said, and proceeded to tell us about her overnight flight from her gig in Québec and the police escort from the Sydney airport, the last aspect of which she relayed with a kind of bemused delivery as though to say, ‘I can’t believe they went to all this fuss for me.’\footnote{In an article about Donnell’s and Natalie’s home life, Donnell refers to Natalie as a “Canadian icon” to which Natalie replies “no [I’m not]” (Stanisci 2012).} Cape Bretoners, as I mentioned in the introduction and detail in Chapter 6, are loath to engage in self-aggrandizing behavior, self-praise, or even to accept praise from others without brushing it off with modest humility; humble modesty is a central social norm and performance praxis for Scottish Cape Bretoners.\footnote{When I interviewed Joey Beaton about the formation of the Mabou Ceilidh, he reiterated that it was his then-girlfriend (now ex-wife) Karen Beaton who had the idea for a weekly ceilidh in Mabou and encouraged him to start the ceilidh series. He credited her commitment to traditionalism and consistency as a core element that makes the ceilidhs successful: Karen is the constant, the fiddler who’s always there, she’s always learning new tunes and changing the repertoire and keeping it dynamic while providing consistency. It’s the only event on Rte. 19 that has had the same fiddler for the entire time. “That really says something. She wouldn’t like me to be saying that because it’s a form of praise...” he trailed off, but the implication was that it’s really due to Karen that the event is what it is.} Natalie scanned the crowd and asked “is anyone is from Troy?” her hometown, and immediately a chorus of shouts and whistles, and she’s shielding her eyes from the afternoon sun and calling out to those audience members (some by name) to see...
who they know that she knows, and within 30 seconds she’s established connections with a majority of the audience: they’re family, or friends, or they have a mutual friend, or they went to school together, or they’re the parents of someone she went to school with, or at least they’re fellow Cape Bretoners, and on and on. Cape Breton is a small place with an intensely loyal population (noted by many authors including Feintuch 2010, Miriam 1956, and Melin 2012) and this practice of performing connection and community-making is nearly universal amongst Scottish Cape Bretoners. Several of the people Feintuch interviewed performed their family histories in order to locate themselves in their communities and give context for themselves (2006), and I heard this done repeatedly in concert introductions and within explanations informants gave about practice. For example, in dance classes I took with Lisa Gallant and Margie Beaton, both situated their knowledge of dance in the context of where they’d learned their steps and from whom: the implication is that personally derived knowledge does not exist. Rather, one is the repository of collected community knowledge. Individual creativity in performance is essential to the continued evolution of the tradition, but it is always situated within a strict set of performative and social normativities that constrain divergence within narrow boundaries.

Humility is visible in explicit deference to other tradition bearers, who hold different knowledges of steps, ornaments, or tunes; generation only magnifies the deference some performers receive. Margie, a young woman, is always learning and paying homage to the people who taught her and from whom she still learns, even as she is teaching (whether that teaching is explicit in a class setting, or implicit through others
observing her perform). In rehearsing narratives of their community ties, individuals can remain distinct while also being modest by constantly performing attachment and relationship to others. No one is isolated, and the ability to connect to others in this way also serves as a means of monitoring behavior: you can check up on people who are not present through mutual friends, family members, or acquaintances. Natalie performs this same locating action in her off-island stage shows. At the three shows on her 2012 Christmas in Cape Breton (Xmas in CB) tour that I attended, she asked the audience if anyone was from Cape Breton, and each audience responded with isolated whoops and calls of ‘here!’ and even ‘Ciamar a tha sibh!’ which is Gaelic for ‘how are you?’ As she later did at Louisbourg, she engaged these Cape Bretoners living away and started to establish connections: “Beaton?? From Judique? We might be related!” and, “From Port Hood? Do you know so-and-so? You do? Oh, you’re neighbors?? That’s my cousin.” When I interviewed her at her Hampton, VA tour stop, she said that not every audience has Cape Bretoners in it, and she spends varying amounts of time on this part of her show at each venue. Sometimes she doesn’t ask the audience, but she told me she enjoys making the connections with people from Cape Breton on the road, and she thinks that the audience members who aren’t from Cape Breton enjoy seeing that connection happen too. It adds to her credibility and authenticity as a representative of Cape Breton. She is

---

46 One place this happened frequently was at the library in Margaree Forks. People would come in to get a book and spend awhile chatting with the librarian. I once overheard a conversation about several young people in their twenties (some of whom I knew from the Gaelic College) and who they were dating and how those relationships were going. Needless to say, all the relationships were heterosexual, and there was particular speculation devoted to who might be getting engaged soon.

47 I attended the show at Strathmore in Bethesda, MD (12.6.2012); the American Theatre in Phoebus, VA (12.11.2012); and, the Carolina Theatre in Durham, NC (12.12.2012). Each venue was differentiated by audience capacity, audience make-up, and the quality of live sound production by the venue staff. I was able to interview Natalie at the American Theatre tour stop.
demonstrating, night after night, her deep emplacement in the culture and the place. Besides her accent and her music (sonic signifiers) and her modesty (endearing and perhaps exotic to audiences untutored in Cape Breton culture, a mark of authenticity for those who do know), this very visible and seemingly genuine and enthusiastic desire to connect with the people of her home wherever she finds herself on tour establishes her commitment to staying within the tradition – both its musical praxes and social and behavioral norms – and tied to Cape Breton. In short, she “comes home,” constantly while on tour, aided by the presence of Cape Bretoners in the audience who enable Natalie to unequivocally ‘prove’ herself as a dutiful Cape Breton girl. Without the island as a referent, her performance is just entertainment, rather than also being identity. And for Cape Bretoners away, Natalie figures that by seeing her perform, and getting to participate in her performance by making a connection with her, those audience members have way of linking themselves to a home that is geographically and temporally distant (personal communication).

**Bringing It Home to the Square Dance**

When I spoke with square dance veteran Burton MacIntyre two weeks after SuperFête, he made sure to tell me that Natalie had personally asked him to organize and call a square set during her part of the concert at Louisbourg. Though he didn’t have advance knowledge of how much time would be allotted for the dance, he pulled off a flawless participatory spectacle of part of a square dance set. Judged by the whoops from the audience and dancers, the applause, and the visibly enthusiastic audience, it was the
highlight of the concert. Several people from the crowd came up to the cleared area in front of the stage, and members of the Association moved from the side street off stage left to join the growing body of dancers. Oppositely-gendered pairs formed up. I recognized some of the dancers as accomplished practitioners and even professional performers. The rest were unknown to me, but whether through their own skill or the combined expert skill of Burton’s calling and the direction of their knowledgeable dance partners, the whole group pulled off a fast-paced, tight, and apparently perfect showcase.

This exhibition dance of the reel figure of a typical Glencoe Mills square set was presentational, because it was in front of an audience, and also participatory: members of the audience could join in and a large portion of the audience could identify with the embodied experience of dancing a square set.

Each micro-region of the island used to have its own variation on the square set, but the square set as it is danced at the Glencoe Mills square dance is the one most commonly performed at Inverness County dances. Before decent roads allowed easy travel, each community had its own distinctive fiddle and piano style, and the dances at each community hall were slightly different. Now, dance choreography and praxis is more standardized. A Glencoe set consists of three figures, three different choreographies danced to three different medleys of tunes played live by a fiddler and a pianist. The first and second figures are always danced to jigs, but the choreographies for these two sets differ significantly; the third figure is danced to reels. The musicians take breaks between each figure. The dancers in the top set, the group of eight dancers/four couples closest to the musicians and the best dancers signal breaks between figures. These dancers will
finish a repetition of the choreography, stop dancing, and start clapping in time to the
music to let the fiddler know they are done and want the music to stop so they can rest
and then move on to the next figure. No one calls the regular dances; everyone knows
what to do, because they’ve been dancing the same figures in the same set pattern for
years. It is intensely local, only possible where at least eight knowledgeable dancers are
present; there are very few places beyond the island where Natalie could stage a dance.48

The dance can certainly be described as an exhibition, but it served to tie Natalie
inextricably to the community-level tradition from which she is always emerging and to
which she must necessarily return if her success and credibility is to mean anything to her
community back home and her audiences away. By playing for a dance, she shifted the
center of attention away from herself and back to the community members. She became
just a fiddler for a dance, and momentarily ceased to hold her position as an international
star.49 For the dancers at the concert, as for dancers at any other square dance event, a
large part of the pleasure of the dancing experience is the driving, propulsive playing of a
steady and accomplished dance player, which Natalie is. She rarely plays for square
dances any more, partly due to her almost constant absence from Cape Breton, and so
dancing to Natalie’s playing becomes a rare privilege, and a good story to tell. By playing
for this dance, even though it was a staged showcase, she reestablished her credibility as

48 The Canadian American Club in Boston is one such place. Boston has long been a diasporic site for
Cape Bretoners in search of gainful employment away.
49 Burton shared a story with me about a time when Natalie played for a dance at Glencoe, and a lot of
tourists showed up just to watch but not to dance. Burton said, “…and Natalie said, Burton, I want to play a
dance not a show! Can you get them dancing?” He didn’t say how it had turned out, but her foresight to
have Burton actually call the dance (which is rare) suggested that she feared people might eschew dancing
in favor of just watching her.
a strong dance player who can drive ’er and thus reinforced her social standing within the cultural hierarchy of fiddlers who are(n’t) asked to play for square dances.

As Buddy MacMaster’s successor and protégé, this is as close to dancing to the tradition as dancers in the present can achieve, now that Buddy has entirely ceased public performance due to his failing health. Natalie’s willingness to step back, to publicly display the modesty and humility so essential to normative performance of the Cape Breton tradition, re-placed her on the island and in the island’s tradition. It made it as though she had never left, so well did she reinhabit the traditional mode of social behavior.

Figure 2.4. In this promotional banner from Destination Cape Breton’s website, Natalie is shown playing a set with an unknown pianist at the Red Shoe Pub in Mabou. Such a sighting is very rare. © Destination Cape Breton, used with permission.

All in the Family: Children’s Performance

Though she makes plenty of self-effacing comments onstage during her Xmas in CB concert shows on tour and sometimes lets her band members stand out from the ensemble, Natalie tends to command the center of attention for most of her show. Her humility, however, was clearly and particularly visible in one part of her Xmas in CB concerts. Since 2007, Natalie has always incorporated a local children’s choir into every
**Xmas in CB** concert. For most of the approximately two hour show, Natalie and band perform instrumental medleys of Cape Breton fiddle tunes, with breaks for a dueling rhythms set between Natalie’s dancing and the drummer and a showcase of Mac Morin’s virtuosic Cape Breton piano playing. This is pretty standard for Natalie’s stage concerts throughout the year, but in the Christmas show, she adds a whole medley of instrumental, jazzy fiddle versions of Christmas classics such as “Jingle Bells” and “Sleigh Ride.” However, as she tells the audience, “these [carols] are meant to be sung,” at which point she brings a children’s choir out onstage to sing the carols while she and the band ornament the choir’s singing with additions of a quiet backbeat, unobtrusive chording, and Natalie’s melodic embellishments during the instrumental moments in the songs.

Each tour stop features a different children’s choir drawn from the local area, and many people in the audience are family members of the young performers. Hearing the carols sung certainly adds to the festive Christmas spirit, but the children sometimes save the show. At the American Theatre in Hampton, VA, the enthusiastic audience milling around in the foyer turned into an audience of crossed arms and very polite applause inside the hall. The contrast to the show in Bethesda, MD was palpable, where much of the crowd was by the end of the show leaning forward in their seats, or even standing to groove along with the last few tunes. The Hampton show was plagued with sound technology issues that seemed to put Natalie off her game initially, a mood that was only exacerbated by the apathetic audience. Having seen the show once before (and seeing it again the following night in Durham, NC), I noticed the stilted quality of her banter at the American Theatre, and the decreasing amount of time she spent talking to the audience.
between sets. This was a tough crowd, and Natalie was slogging through the ennui as best
she could, but it was a relief when the children, some of whom were the grandchildren of
those recalcitrant audience members, came out on stage. The audience perked up
immediately.

The audience sustained some of this enthusiasm through the intermission and into
the second half of the show, but just when it looked like it might be snuffed out again,
Natalie strategically deployed her own children to overhear whispers of “precious!” and
general exclamations of delight. It was brilliant strategy, and I will return to Natalie’s use
of her own children’s performances shortly. In the Bethesda and Durham shows, the
initially high enthusiasm of the audiences only intensified with the appearance of the
children’s choirs, and later Natalie’s three eldest children. The thunderous applause, the
standing ovation, and the cheering attest to those audiences’ intense excitement. In
Hampton though, the children’s performances may have saved the show. In all these
shows, both on tour and at Louisbourg, Natalie’s willingness to step back and
demonstrate humility made the shows both more diverse visually and sonically, but also
more enjoyable, and therefore successful, performances.

**Beyond Tradition: Critiques of Natalie**

In other ways, Natalie pushes the borders of traditional practice. One of the
primary complaints of younger fiddlers by older aficionados of the traditions is that they
play too fast, and though few mention Natalie by name, she is one of the speedier and
more innovative professional fiddlers working today. Joey Beaton, a self-described
traditionalist, chooses for his ceilidh in Mabou only those fiddlers who play in ways that uphold traditional practice, and the speed at which tunes are played is one of the things that most concerns Joey about the tradition’s future.

“Value, that’s what we’re losing among the younger players…not to be critical, but at times they play too fast. The timing has changed. We must maintain the true value of notes in order to maintain [the traditional music]. Old fiddlers generally were sensitive to this. Now it’s too fast to listen and dance to” (Joey Beaton, personal communication).

Some people attribute this increase in speed to loss of Gaelic as an everyday language; an established discourse links the cadence and rhythms of spoken and sung Gaelic to the rhythms heard in Cape Breton style fiddling and dancing. Rodney MacDonald, speaking to Feintuch, said, “I’m afraid…that if you lose the language, you’ll lose something in the music, and you’ll lose something in the dancing, and you’ll lose something in the communities” (2006:240). When I interviewed Rodney, he said, “You lose important information about the culture, Gaelic culture, without an understanding of aspects of the language” (interview). Losing Gaelic as a felt embodiment irrevocably changes the feeling of the music and dance. Whatever the cause (and it’s unlikely that loss of Gaelic is the singular cause), younger fiddlers don’t give notes “their true values.” Though “some people say [the music] has to change [i.e., speed up, get flashier, more ornamented, etc.] or young people won’t be interested,” Joey stresses that for 18 years at the Mabou Ceilidh, “we’ve maintained the crowd [at the ceilidhs]…that tells us something.” For Joey, “it’s proof” of the endurance of the traditional music done in a traditional way. Some cite the influence of recordings in changing the music, a point to which I return shortly. However, as numerous others articulate, the tradition has always
been changing and some of the fiddlers most revered as paragons of traditionalism (e.g., Buddy MacMaster and Winston “Scotty” Fitzgerald) in fact made substantial innovations to the tradition that are now accepted as the tradition’s new boundaries. Buddy himself says, “I guess I do sound a little different from the other players here. I suppose I have a combination of listening to different players. Through the years, I tried to be a dance player as well as playing for listening to at a concert or a house party” (in Feintuch 2010:96). Buddy understands the inevitability of change while not quite accepting it:

I think our Cape Breton music is unique, and people enjoy it. And if they’re going to change it too much, it won’t be Cape Breton music any more. We’re going to lose something. But I suppose music will always be changing through the years. There are some very good players coming up; they’re very talented, a lot of the young people. It’s just that some of us hate to see us lose the old music that was here. I think it was great. (Feintuch 2010:97).

Though preserving the tradition is a dearly held ambition, financial concerns delimit how much the “old music” can continue to exist ‘unchanged’; at some point, it needs to be making money. The Mabou ceilidh shuts down after August because “we can’t depend on the locals to [financially] support the ceilidh,” which “does need to be financially successful” (J. Beaton, interview). Part of Joey’s main mission in the ceilidhs is delivering education about the music rather than just providing the music as entertainment. He places great value on fiddlers telling audiences the names of the specific tunes they will be playing, the stories behind those tunes, and in general making each audience, every time, aware of the “inner worth” of the tunes, their quality, how tunes are skillfully constructed, and how fiddlers in the past were expert at connecting tunes into medleys. This deeply local knowledge can’t have the same meaning to tourists since they don’t have the same embodied cultural experience of immersion in this
knowledge base, and they don’t live, socialize, or die amongst the very fiddlers and pianists glorified from the stage of the Mabou Community Hall. Some tourists come to Cape Breton with a high degree of knowledge about the musical culture, gained from recordings and lessons with practitioners in various places throughout North America.

During early August, the Gaelic College holds an adult camp week that attracts enthusiasts from away. But most are on the island to drive the Cabot Trail, hike in the National Park, visit Louisbourg, and whale watch.\(^5^0\) Traditional culture is ancillary and regarded as local color, and even if information about who composed what is interesting and in some sense ‘worth knowing,’ the labor of teaching the tunes is unimportant without remembrance and the ability to pass along the information encoded in the notes and rhythms; being able to perform a tune is not enough if the performer cannot contextualize that tune and explain its importance to someone else. The tradition lives in that other information. Most tourists can’t do this because they are outside the Cape Breton social world: they have no history with the islanders, no daily-lived encounter, and perhaps no aim to return to the island. It is a great irony that Natalie, who is a colossal inspiration to a couple generations of young Cape Bretoners hoping to become her successor, never teaches Cape Breton children on the island; most Cape Bretoners who have taken a class with Natalie have done so someplace else, at her camp in Ontario, for instance. Mostly she teaches people from away who may never visit Cape Breton or

\(^{50}\) Tourists from Vermont I encountered at the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre one lunchtime ceilidh told me that they’d driven their RV Nova Scotia and extended their travels to Cape Breton because they’d heard it was beautiful. The list of places they wanted to go reads as a Top 5 tourism guidebook/website list: the National Park, the Bras d’Or, Louisbourg, Chéticamp, and Baddeck. They were only vaguely aware of the music, and were astounded that there was so much of it.
develop an investment in the culture or the tradition. The depth of what she can share about the tradition remains inaccessible for a majority of her students.

For Joey Beaton, maintaining the tradition is not about avoiding change for its own sake. He hopes “they” say of him that “he was a pure traditionalist” because he sees fidelity to the tradition as respect for the hardships and sacrifices the original Scottish pioneers endured in order to retain the living tradition. “Why not maintain continuity of what was handed down to me? I owe it to my family,” Joey said. “They had to struggle to create and maintain the tradition, they worked hard and had little or no money and were struggling to work many jobs to take care of nine kids. Respect[ing] what they handed down to us could never repay them” (J. Beaton, interview). For Joey, keeping the tradition traditional is about honoring not a generalized notion of the past, but about respecting and paying homage to a very specific and knowable past comprised of concrete actors in both the recent and distant past. It’s about his parents’ sacrifices as well as though of his distant ancestors who first migrated to Nova Scotia.

Natalie may play fast, but her “stylings” as Joey would say, are very distinctly hers. For Joey, and others like Margie Beaton, finding your own distinct way of doing the tradition is what keeps it alive. Margie said to me that since improvisation of new steps or incorporation of steps from other traditions isn’t technically appropriate in the dance, an individual crafts a personal style by arranging the steps of the existing Cape Breton repertoire. 51 Of course, Margie is one of the more successful at adding steps from teachers in other traditions into her choreography, but she fits it in so well and makes it

---

51 At least, it’s not acknowledged that borrowing steps and sequences of movement from other traditions and practitioners outside the Cape Breton style is an active part of the tradition.
look so in keeping with the Cape Breton repertoire, that she is not reproached for her inventions. Joey Beaton has a short list of criteria that a performer must adhere to in order to perform at the Mabou Ceilidh; recall that Beaton only asks ‘traditional’ performers to participate in his ceilidh. A musician has to play at the appropriate speed (jigs, reels and strathspeys at a speed suitable for dancing, and airs slow enough for the audience to appreciate their nuances), and must masterfully curate the tunes of the Cape Breton repertoire. This is an admittedly subjective quality, but for Joey, a performer who is traditional keeps older and less popular tunes in circulation, goes to the sheet music books and the old recordings to learn the older ways of playing tunes and build repertoire, and gives preference to the acknowledged titans of Cape Breton composition, such as Dan R. MacDonald and Kinnon Beaton. The very best also write their own tunes in the style of the older performers. Natalie composes her own tunes, and her sound (including her ornaments, some of the medleys she performs, her repertoire, and her bowing style) owes a great deal to the playing of her uncle Buddy, who is an extremely modest and traditional performer. However, he was also an innovator and it is his playing (from the 1930s into the early 2000s) that is the standard for generations of listeners, dancers, and musicians; for most people I spoke with, Buddy’s playing is the “the way it should be,” which actually means, “the way the tradition should sound, should be played, and should be embodied, including all the modesty and quiet charisma Buddy possesses.”
Filial Obligation

Natalie is very aware of her responsibility to honor her heritage, and she uses other mechanisms to show her indebtedness to all tradition bearers, including those in her own family. At Fiddles for the Fête, she pulled out the secret weapon that wins over even the most unenthused of audiences on her off-island tours: her children. Natalie tours with her five children, and as of December 2012, the oldest three were performing in her shows. Her eldest, Mary Frances Rose (7), and her next oldest, Michael Joseph Alexander (5), can step dance and play the fiddle, and the three year old (Julia Elizabeth) is a step dancing prodigy who maintains complex rhythms while bouncing excitedly onstage, waiting for her older siblings to get through their routine so she can go out and share her exuberant steps.

Throughout the Xmas in CB show, Natalie tells the audiences stories about her childhood memories of Christmas in Cape Breton, including “helping” her father and brothers cut down a tree in the woods (she watched), and attending softly lit midnight masses on snowy Christmas Eves surrounded by the warmth and connectedness of community and family. She also mentions the Christmas pageants that she participated in at school, which she credits as teaching her professionalism: being on time, appropriate attire and manners, commitment and hard work, learning personal responsibility, how to work with others and how to act in front of an audience. She tells her Xmas in CB audiences that since her children are home schooled while on tour, they don’t have the same opportunity for involvement in a school event and learn these important professional life skills, for which she compensates by having them perform in her stage.
show, at which point her children are gently ushered onstage by Mac Morin, who leads the youngest by the hand while the older two carefully grip their fiddles and bows. Mary Frances and Julia Elizabeth wear matching dresses, while Michael Alexander wears a matching tie. It is undeniably adorable, and the audience responds on cue with sighs and murmured praise.

When I interviewed Natalie, she told me she never forces her children to go out onstage. She said that every day is different, and many factors, including general morale and how much sleep everyone got, can influence whether it’s a good idea to have them perform. She doesn’t make the call until the show’s intermission. At Louisbourg, her three oldest children, veterans of the 2012 tour, appeared onstage in Cape Breton tartan outfits: the eldest was even better than she had been in December, her tempo more even and her stage presence more confident, which combined with her curly auburn hair suggests that she is becoming Natalie in miniature. After playing individually, the two transitioned into a medley they played together. Donnell and Natalie took over the tune while the children put down their fiddles in preparation to dance, which Natalie directed by counting them in to their solos. Julia Elizabeth appeared with her own dancing solo, and in a surprise cameo, two year old Claire Marie raced out onstage and jumped around to the reel. Though short on actual steps, she made it through the big finish as she and her siblings executed identical steps in a choreographed finale sequence; Julia Elizabeth sometimes missed the unison choreography, but she never missed a beat and improvised her own steps to fill in the gaps in true Cape Breton fashion. The audience went wild.

You can watch a video of the children’s performance here. A local fiddler who also participated in the square dance and the mass fiddle performance took the video.
In moments such as these, Natalie not only tells us she is teaching her children the tradition, she shows it and shares their progress over time. She’s right about performing in front of community members: it’s an established tradition on the island. Summer festivals and concerts throughout Inverness County, such as the Broad Cove Concert and the Glendale Ceilidh and the Kintyre Farm Scottish Concert, all feature seasoned performers in combination with children and young people who have widely varying skill levels in fiddling, piano playing, stepdancing and Highland dancing, and singing. At Highland Village Day 2013, I heard one small boy with a tiny violin squeak through the piece he had just learned, “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,” and a group of four sisters who all sang piurt-a-beul together in Gaelic, stepdanced, and fiddled while their mother played the piano. The community offers support for these local learners in the form of praise and criticism. The constant integration of individuals into the community and of individual performance into the larger whole of Cape Breton performance both present and past is of prime importance for maintaining the tradition and the communities as cohesive and mutually supportive institutions. And some parents of course are hoping their child becomes the next Natalie.

Natalie’s stage show offers off-island audiences windows on the Cape Breton community experience of Christmas, family, and tradition. The narrative Natalie weaves is marked by the nostalgia for home she experiences as a Cape Bretoner in exile, and as a mother trying to show her children the value of their heritage and suggest to them that the tradition and the island is theirs too, not just hers. She invariably includes a story about

---

53 Piurt-a-beul, also called ‘mouth music’, consist of non-lexical vocables sung to the melody of many fiddle and/or piping tunes. For a detailed discussion, see Sparling 2005.
her grandmother in her off-island stage show. Natalie’s grandmother was poor and from the rural working class, as virtually all Scottish Cape Bretoners were in the early 20th century. Her grandmother “had the Gaelic,” and though she had a great love for the music, her family was never able to afford a fiddle. So instead of playing tunes on the fiddle, she taught herself to “jig” the tunes, that is, sing non-linguistic syllables to the rhythm and cadence of fiddle tune melodies. She taught all her children, including Natalie’s mother, to stepdance by jigging tunes for them.

Natalie relates this story to both honor her grandmother’s sacrifice and commitment to the tradition and by demonstrate her knowledge of and respect for her family and their sacrifices. In every show I attended, she used the story to introduce her grandmother’s favorite strathspey. She took a seat, which she rarely does in the show, next to Mac Morin, the only other Cape Bretoner in Natalie’s band. It’s a profoundly different moment from the rest of the show: just the two of them, a fiddler and a pianist, sitting near to each other but not facing each other. It could be at the Red Shoe or the Glenora Distillery or at a square dance if Mac weren’t seated at a Yamaha baby grand.

Natalie throws all the dirt into her performance of this tune (and strathspeys are usually the crunchiest sounding of all the tune types), and at the transition to the next strathspey, she stands as the rest of the band (the drums, electric guitar, and cello) rejoins the

---

54 “Having the Gaelic” is a current colloquial expression meaning that someone can speak Gaelic. Onstage, Natalie reports her grandmother saying, “There’s nothing as near to heaven on god’s green earth as Scotch music. I think he must be playing it up there all the time.” To which Natalie replies to us, “I said, ‘Grandma that could be some people’s idea of hell!’”

55 Jigging includes a canon of specific types of sounds that closely approximate the sounds of fiddle or bagpipe ornamentations.

56 The practice of jigging tunes is now fading due to the availability of recording and playback technology, a higher level of socioeconomic achievement that means more people can afford instruments, and limited Gaelic fluency.
performance. It functions as a heritage moment, a phrase I use to mean a self-consciously constructed and performed action that ties the performer to their heritage and tradition in a staged and entertainment-based performance. The moment when Natalie stands after playing a tune with profound meaning for her family signals the transition that she herself represents: she is aware of the heritage and the tradition, and though she has moved in new directions, she’s still using the tradition as a guideline. She hasn’t forgotten where she’s from and the integral place the tradition has for her performances. It’s what Joey Beaton means when he talks about respecting the past. In Natalie’s show, it feels sincere.

### New Directions: Moving Towards Professionalism

Radio began to make an impact on Cape Breton in the 1930s, and even early on, well-known local dance fiddlers, such as Winston “Scotty” Fitzgerald, were playing traditional music on stations broadcasting from Sydney, Antigonish, and Halifax (Caplan 2006; Alice Freeman personal communication). Radio, by showcasing the tradition as played by some of its most valued practitioners, validated the kitchen and community hall-based tradition; it began expanding the audience for the Cape Breton style beyond its communities of origin and placed an economic value on exceptional traditional performance. Fitzgerald and other Inverness County contemporaries began making records in the 1930s (Cranford in Feintuch 2010:119), and the traditional music was recorded consistently throughout the twentieth century, including a landmark 1978 recording for Rounder Records called *The Beatons of Mabou*, featuring Donald Angus Beaton (fiddle), his wife Elizabeth on piano, and two of their children on fiddle and piano
(Kinnon Beaton and Joey Beaton, respectively). Cape Breton music experienced a resurgence during the Celtic cultural boom of the 1990s and early 2000s, when young artists like Natalie MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac, and Wendy MacIsaac started recording and touring. Older artists like fiddlers Buddy MacMaster, as well as stepdancers like Harvey Beaton, were also recording, touring, and teaching the traditional practice on Cape Breton and internationally. Buddy, speaking to Feintuch, commented that, “it used to be that when you’d leave Cape Breton people didn’t know about [the music] or hear it. Now they’re hearing it, and it seems to be well appreciated wherever it’s played” (2006:97). Before the mid-twentieth century improvements to Cape Breton’s roadways, regional music styles were incredibly distinct and locally-based: a fiddler from Mabou Coal Mines would sound very different from a fiddler in Mabou, located a few kilometers away. Better transportation brought the practitioners of these different, regional styles into closer proximity: they learned new ways of performing the repertoire and new ornamentation styles from each other. As time went on and more people started to learn tunes from amateur tapes recorded at house parties and dances and from professional recordings, the differences between the styles started to blur and resulted in a generalized Cape Breton sound.


58 Paul Cranford, speaking to Feintuch, also mentions the gradual loss of regionally distinct sounds over time (2006:119).
This change in the path of transmission from the closely embodied and local practice of watching and emulating to a practice that includes schizophrenic knowledge disseminated via recordings changed the tunes, repertoire, and the embodied practice. Some worry that the tradition has been irrevocably changed. Melin (2012) discusses changes in dance transmission due to public school instruction and teaching at institutions like the Gaelic College rather than in the home or at the dances. A paradox operates here, and Natalie is right at the center of it. She promotes the traditional music through her concert tours and recordings, and her recordings and popularity at home get Cape Breton children (as well as children and adults wherever she teaches and travels) interested in the music. Several people told me some variation on “everyone wants to be Natalie,” by which they mean talented, successful, and revered. But recordings cannot embody the entire repertoire; tours recycle a lot of album songs that audiences know and want to hear. Other artists often record these same popular tunes. For young fiddlers learning primarily from recordings, this means that the repertoire available to them is already limited, even more so if they are not from Cape Breton or cannot travel there to study. The functional repertoire diminishes. The popularity of recordings by the Rankin Family, the Barra MacNeils, and Natalie has created a contemporary Cape Breton sound even as it challenges the integrity of the oral body of knowledge. These artists also represent the first time practitioners have been able to craft professional careers solely through musical performance, recording, teaching, and touring.

Professionalism represents a profound change in the practice. Musicians like Buddy MacMaster, Donald Angus Beaton, Kinnon and Betty Lou Beaton, Elizabeth
Beaton, and Winston Fitzgerald all worked full-time jobs that provided their primary income. Performing was an afterhours supplementary job that was often poorly paid. Donald Angus drove a taxi for years to support his wife and nine children, Buddy was a telegraph operator for the railroad, Betty Lou was a schoolteacher, and Kinnon maintained a Beaton family tradition by operating a haberdashery. Musicians like Natalie were able to capitalize on the growing international popularity of Celtic music to support themselves entirely via a traditional music career. The next generation, including Kimberley Fraser (traditional) and Colin Grant (fusing tradition with rock), has extended this model.

Concertized performances of traditional tunes also alter what constitutes ‘traditional’ Cape Breton practice. As Natalie told the audience in Bethesda, “everything tonight will have the Cape Breton tinge,” which doesn’t mean that it will be entirely Cape Breton. Natalie uses non-traditional practices like standing during her stage shows rather than sitting, and adding drums, electric guitar, and cello to her arrangements. But she told me something that’s often said of Ashley MacIsaac’s modern stylings: if you strip away all the elements except the fiddle and piano, it is traditional Cape Breton style. “Having that core,” she told me, is what matters and what’s most important to her. But she’s also a professional musician, and in the end, she’s conscious of what sells.

**Defining Traditionalism and Gender Roles: Natalie and Ashley**

For all the critique that circulates about Natalie’s boundary pushing, when compared to Ashley MacIsaac, she seems almost conservative. Ashley is from Creignish,
minutes from Natalie’s hometown of Troy. They came of age together as talented young musicians, but took different directions in how they popularized the Cape Breton style. Natalie’s first album *Fit as a Fiddle* is all traditional music performed in its basic setting. Ashley’s first album was also a traditional album called *Close to the Floor*, which is as indicative of traditional performance praxes as possible. His second album, *Hi, How Are You Today?* takes the Cape Breton style in new directions. “MacDougall’s Pride,” is primarily an air played sweetly with expert ornamentation accompanied by an at-times oddly dissonant guitar (though there are self-consciously ‘arty’ parts that depart from the tradition to verge on atonal New Age). But “Beaton’s Delight,” is an extraordinary re-interpretation that takes dozens of evocative signifiers of the tradition and Cape Breton culture and filters it through a grungy punk aesthetic of pastiche. An electronically manipulated clip of tuning a fiddle is interrupted by an older male Cape Bretoner asking “check one, two, can you hear what I’m sayin’?” sections of a fiddle tune digitally pixelated into a pointillistic suggestion, a snatch of Gaelic conversation. Ashley’s Cape Breton-accented voice says “this is Ashley MacIsaac,” and the older male voice asks “Ciamar a tha sibh?” which Ashley repeats back as “Hi, how are you today?” before he breaks straight into a crunchy performance of a famous tune (“Beaton’s Delight”) subtly accompanied by shaker. At 0:55 the drums kick it into high gear, and half a minute later, there’s an expansive section of sliding around between keys before a return home to the tune. Throughout the two and a half minute recording, an entirely traditional and expert rendering of the tune is interrupted by musical events and interpretations external to
traditional practice. Ashley is one of the best and most accomplished traditional players, despite the fact that he usually doesn’t do that.

It is vogue to compare Natalie and Ashley because it seems obvious. She is the pure defender of the tradition and the embodiment of normative traditionalism in her every life choice and ornamentation, and he is the bête noir that wants to upend it all, mess with the tradition by performing his unusual stylings off-island in Doc Martens and kilts and with normativity itself by refusing to remain closeted as a queer man. But when Ashley performs in traditional contexts on the island, his self-presentation is culturally and musically normative in his choice of musical stylistics, performance practice, in his acceptably masculine clothing, and in his choices of repertoire. He hides signs of queerness that he makes more made visible, on and through his body, in performances off-island. He absents his musical and social differences, slipping out of the margins and back into the center, where he disappears as an embodiment of difference. Natalie, by contrast, plays up her feminine presentation, her heterosexuality, and her happy and monogamous marriage. She displays her commitment to normativity in both music and embodiment, while Ashley must revert to being as traditional and normative as possible. He followed *Hi, How Are You Today?* with *Fine, Thank You Very Much*, which was a solidly traditional album, as if he was trying to prove he had real talent and commitment to the tradition. During his meteoric rise as a popular musician with traditional regional roots, MacIsaac consistently had to balance his “image as a well-mannered ‘country boy’ and promoter of traditional music” with his “unpredictable behaviour and unanticipated disclosers…[including his] practice of swearing at audiences, adopting grunge styles of
dress, and drug use,” according to MacLeod (2002:20). Natalie, meanwhile, is praised as a paragon of virtue for her relative appearance of total social docility and normativity.

The island community came to Ashley’s defense and offered their support after he was publicly outed in 1995 (MacLeod 2002:20), and public criticisms of MacIsaac from within the island’s traditional music practitioners invariably focus on his musical decisions (namely his speed and unorthodox musical hybridizations) rather than his sexuality. Though he continued to win awards, fans “now began to express distaste or offence at his nonconformity” (ibid., 20). In an interview Caplan did with Ashley’s parents in July 1997 for Cape Breton’s Magazine, there is no mention of his sexuality, and no one who mentioned Ashley to me on the island brought up his sexuality either. In fact, his parents speak rather bemusedly about the teenage girls from away who drive up to the house hoping that Ashley is at home (2006:174-177). His parents’ descriptions of his modesty and humility at his success are threaded throughout the interview. So despite his departures from the tradition, he is still mostly accepted within the tradition, as long as the identities disidentifying him from it (like electronic additions and being queer) remain off-island.

Despite their comparable musical talents, Natalie emerges as more closely linked to the tradition that Ashley. She shows her traditionalism in ways that are simultaneously paraded onstage and covert. Both Natalie and her husband Donnell are Catholic, which partly explains their many children. Touring is important to both Natalie and Donnell, and they have separate careers as touring artists: Donnell tours with Leahy and Natalie

59 Born in Lakefield, Ontario, Donnell comes from a large family of eleven children, eight of whom have toured together since the early 1980s, first as The Leahy Family, and now simply as Leahy (Leahy 2007).
with her own band, but they’ve recently begun touring together, and are working on recording an album jointly (McDiarmid 2013). It is Natalie, however, who takes the couple’s children on tour. She began homeschooling her oldest and now homeschooled all her children while on tour and at home. “I wouldn’t be able to put [them] in school because we’re gone so much,” says MacMaster. “There’s no way I’m leaving them home and there’s no way I’m going to deny them the experience of touring” (McDiarmid 2013). Though she says the experience of home schooling and touring, and doing both at the same time, takes a lot out of her, “it gives a lot back too.” She makes sure to say that her choices are not for everyone. “I don’t have any solutions or rules that we follow other than we do take it tour by tour, show by show, child by child, month by month” (Stanisci 2012). But male musicians, including Donnell, aren’t expected to take their children on tour with them. This conservative lifestyle, still prevalent in Nova Scotia, clearly defines spheres of labor based on gender.60

In rural areas during the 20th century, women were confined to a handful of jobs outside the home, including primary school education, and most women were homemakers until the latter half of the 20th century. One female informant in her late forties (born in Judique) described to me the consternation her mother felt when her father took breaks from his work as a woodworker and go on “a toot” with fiddler friends.

60 Teresa MacIsaac (2006) describes what she portrays as a separate but equal gendered division of labor during the initial decades of Scottish settlement in the 19th century that continued well into the 20th, and Chapin, writing in 1956, describes a similar situation though she paints it in less glorifying terms: “[Women] are independent in their own sphere [the house], they shoulder heavy responsibilities, but the situation sets a clear line between men’s work and women’s work. The differences between the ways in which men and women regard the world, the expected submissiveness of women, have been perpetuated here by the fact that women do not share men’s work in ship or forest or mine. Few occupations are open to both men and women as are business and professional jobs in an industrial society” (1956:12).
of his. He would be gone for days or a week, drinking the money he’d made. Her mother, herself, and her siblings would be left at home without a car. She told me that there was a lot of resentment but no one questioned that system because it was common (anonymous, interview). In the 1960s, and even earlier, fiddlers were all men, “except for Theresa MacLellan and you notice she wasn’t married” (anonymous, interview). A review of interviews in Caplan’s 2006 collection from Cape Breton’s Magazine shows that while both men and women (and boys and girls) were playing music, it was men who were more often given the opportunity to perform (2006: 51). Even though everyone was encouraged to play, “the families that I’ve talked to that were large families, the girls were never relegated strictly to piano accompaniment, although some of them went in that direction all right, maybe because the men were more anxious to play the violin” (MacGillivray in Caplan 2006:97). Since the fiddle was a prestigious secondary income source throughout the middle of the twentieth century, it’s no surprise that men were eager to capitalize on this sort of paid work that also allowed them to travel and socialize. Theresa MacLellan, a legendary fiddler, was sometimes denied payment for gigs she was hired to play (informal conversation), something that didn’t happen to the male fiddlers.

By the 1980s and 90s, ideas about appropriate gender roles were starting to change in traditional music. 27-year old Margie Beaton never felt as though she’d experienced barriers to participation in the traditional culture, or limited access to learning music and dance, because of her gender (M. Beaton, interview). She is not only an accomplished performer who has toured and taught internationally and locally, she works to increase knowledge of the traditional culture through her administrative
marketing job at the Gaelic College, where she also teaches fiddle and step dancing
during the summer. Clearly, Natalie’s gender has not been a barrier to her advancement
in the traditional music field. Critiques of her departures from tradition could apply to
any musician regardless of gender. Still, gender impacts her performing career: if she
were male, she would not be expected to take the children on tour. As a mother, it is
expected that she put the care of her children at the forefront of her considera-
tions. But she has successfully navigated a narrow and fraught path between maternal success and
failure: rather than give up touring, she takes her children with her on tour. She engages
in paid labor outside the home, and simultaneously spends hours on the unpaid labor of
homeschooling, which she does not allow to impact her ability to perform at a
consistently high level of excellence.

***

Natalie MacMaster strategically performed her traditionality by stepping out of
the spotlight and into a supporting role for a local crowd of family, friends, professional
colleagues, and fellow tradition bearers at Louisbourg. She does this while touring off-

island too, carefully balancing the need to promote herself (she is, after all, the reason
audiences are buying the tickets) with acts of modest humility (featuring the children’s
choirs) that puts others in the spotlight while highlighting her maternal identity and a
particular kind of traditional femininity that is self-sacrificing and noble. For some, this
action doesn’t mitigate her questionable innovations to the tradition. But it does serve to
soften those critiques. She’s humble and she can drive ‘er. She’s still a Cape Breton girl.
Chapter 3 | “The Celtic Heart Beats Strong:” Crafting a Cultural Tourism Industry

Experiencing the Masterpiece

I first noticed the signs at the Gaelic College. I’d been driving north on Trans-Canada Highway 105, skipping the turnoff to Baddeck and climbing up along the forested ridge above the town. The Bras d’Or was a brilliant blue in the midday sun. Huge puffy white clouds hung suspended as I drove down the intervale approach to St. Ann’s Bay, past the few houses, church and community hall (the latter two both shuttered) that make up the community of South Haven. Just before the ascent up Kelly’s Mountain, where I would go to continue towards Sydney, I slowed to turn left at the St. Ann’s Church and the adjacent St. Ann’s Motel on the edge of the shimmering bay. To the north, the headlands around Englishtown were misty green in the distance nearer the open ocean. The narrower, less well-maintained road I was approaching slopes down towards a short causeway over the intervale and then winds up into the pines, but this seeming side road is famous.

Practically in the parking lot of the motel at this junction is an enormous sign, awash in blues within a golden frame that welcomed me to “The World Famous Cabot Trail.” The image on this sign is an update of the more classic signs seen all along the Cabot Trail: a simple white road sign, a foot-and-a-half by one, featuring a mountain with a stylized road and waves in black and blue. The other driving trails on Cape Breton and throughout Nova Scotia feature these same small signs, each with a distinctive logo identifying the Trail. Along the Ceilidh Trail (part of Route 19), which runs from
Chéticamp south along the western coastline to the Canso Causeway that links Cape Breton to mainland Nova Scotia, the sign features a kilted piper playing the Highland pipes, his foot planted on a rock next to the same blue waves underlying the mountain of the Cabot Trail signs (Figure 3.2).\textsuperscript{61}

Figure 3.1. Headed northwest towards the Gaelic College, at one end of the Cabot Trail. The Fiat, rented for my 2013 fieldwork, was essential to the successful execution of my fieldwork. I’m on my way up the Cabot Trail to the National Park, the Province-owned Keltic Lodge, and the small towns in between. Photo by author.

\textsuperscript{61} The Cabot Trail is named for the Italian explorer Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot), who is regarded as the first European to make contact (in 1497) with the North American continent since the Vikings landed in the 11th century. The only extant Viking settlement is at L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland. Whether Cabot landed at Cape Bonavista in Newfoundland, as is the official position of the Canadian government, or on Cape Breton, the official position of Cape Bretoners, is unknown.
Before I’d turned onto the Cabot Trail and encountered the sign in Figure 3.1, the sign for the exit on the highway had given me a lot of information about what I would experience along the Cabot Trail. On this other sign (Figure 3.3), a road winds along high green bluffs while massive clouds gather on the horizon of a bright blue sea, on which bobs a small red and white fishing boat of the type that used to bring in the cod that sustained a vital island industry.

Figure 3.2. Ceilidh Trail sign near Premier Angus L. Macdonald’s birthplace in Dunvegan, near Inverness. Photo by author.

Figure 3.3. This road sign appears before the Cabot Trail exit on the main highway. Via cabottrail.com.
Now, more likely that boat is taking tourists out to sea in search of whales and dolphins, but I am still invited by the sign to “Experience the Masterpiece” of the Cabot Trail, which meanders in a pot-hole, roughshod way through picturesque communities perched around bays, across rushing streams and up steep ascents into Cape Breton Highlands National Park. The road winds past the famous Keltic Lodge and the sand and pebble arc of the beach at Ingonish, and continues on up through a plateau of pine flats and bogs before descending on the sunset side of the island along the magnificent slopes of the Highlands. As the sun glints off the waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the road drops briefly into Pleasant Bay before ascending again and exiting the park at the French Acadian community of Chéticamp. The rest of the Cabot Trail meanders south through the Acadian region and then east, back into the island’s interior along the Margaree River Valley with its lush farmland and curving river to rejoin the Bras d’Or Scenic Drive, where I’d turn left and head north again to Baddeck and beyond to the original turnoff. But I was only going a mile down the Cabot Trail, to the Gaelic College.

I noticed it when I entered the Administrative building. A small white poster board sign propped up in the Craft Shop window, says “CelticHeart.ca Recommended Experience,” with an orange heart containing a Celtic knot (Figure 3.4). Of all the myriad signs of tourist packaging at Cape Breton’s cultural sites, including signs for “Cape Breton: The Creative Island,” “Taste of Nova Scotia,” ubiquitous “TripAdvisor” rating placards, and Destination Cape Breton’s “Experience the Masterpiece,” I hadn’t seen this
logo before. But after I saw it at the College, I started noticing it in many of the main
cultural institutions, including the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre, and in local
commercial ventures like the Glenora Distillery. It even showed up in the Celtic Colours
festival program that is published island-wide every year in mid-August 2013.

![Figure 3.4](image.png)

Figure 3.4. This logo appears on websites for Celtic Heart of North America Co-operative organizations and as a placard at the institutions themselves. This indicates that the institution is a member of the Celtic Heart Co-op, and thus can be recommended by the Co-op as a site of exemplary Gaelic-ness on Cape Breton Island. The Co-op is only active on Cape Breton. © Celtic Heart, used with permission

**Nova Scotia’s Cultural Tourism Transformation**

This particular initiative to package and market some of the most prominent
cultural sites, sounds, movements, and tastes of Cape Breton to tourists represents only
the very latest iteration of a government-sponsored engagement with tourism as an
industry of vital economic importance for the province of Nova Scotia. Government
sponsored cultural heritage tourism has historically succeeded by drawing on

---

62 I was unable to interview staff members at the Celtic Heart of North American Co-operative, despite repeated attempts. However, digital traces suggest that the Co-op’s online presence dates to fall 2009. Their first Tweet was posted October 8, 2009, just before that year’s Celtic Colours. Their Facebook page was founded in early 2010 (first post on January 7), and their first blog entry (celticheart.ca/blog) followed soon after on February 8, 2010. The YouTube channel has only six videos, the first uploaded October 7, 2011. When and why the various organizations decided to become members of a new Co-op remains unclear.
constructing Nova Scotia as a site of racialized heritage tourism. This heritage tourism disproportionately elevates the Scottish history, culture, and heritage of Nova Scotia above the other ethnocultural groups that have contributed to the province’s contested, complicated, and myriad historical narratives. The creation of Nova Scotia as preeminently Scottish only really began to take form in the 1920s, but over the ensuing decades, and particularly from the 1930s to 1950s, Nova Scotia’s essential nature became unquestionably Scottish through the assiduous work of the provincial government and interested individuals out in the communities that McKay and Bates call “organic intellectuals.” Ian McKay and Kevin Bates (2010) have extensively detailed the construction of Nova Scotia as the “Province of History” wherein the Scottish heritage and cultural artifacts of the province became the primary narrative and essence of Nova Scotia through a process they refer to as “tartanism.”

The man most responsible for naturalizing the Scottish nature of the province despite a historical narrative suggesting otherwise was Angus L. Macdonald, born in western Cape Breton, who served as Premier from 1933 to 1940, and again from 1945 until his death in 1954. By the time the Canso Causeway linking the island and mainland opened in 1955, an overt Scottishness permeated the island’s tourism literature and official proceedings to a degree unprecedented before Macdonald’s influence.

---

63 Tartanism is “a matrix of ideas about and images of nature, history, and race, all testifying to the Scottishness of Nova Scotia” (McKay and Bates 2010:254).

64 Events celebrating the opening of the Causeway, a federal project Macdonald strongly supported, were full of performative Scottishness, as seen in CBC footage of the event. CBC footage of the opening ceremony, held on August 13, 1955, can be found here. The text accompanying the video reads, “After hundreds of years accessing mainland Nova Scotia only by boat, Cape Bretoners finally have a road ‘linking the mainland to them.’ The Canso Causeway, a two kilometre ribbon of granite connecting Port Hastings, Cape Breton to the Nova Scotia mainland, opens on Aug. 13, 1955. Over 40,000 people are on
The provincial government, as well as individuals and ventures supported by the
government, developed Nova Scotia into a site of Scottish cultural and heritage tourism
in the mid-20th century. Nova Scotia became a destination in which visitors could
encounter a “quaint folk” living out their folklife along the province’s beautiful seacoasts.
Importantly, these folk were white, and were aggressively racialized as Scottish; other
quaint white folks, namely the Acadians on the mainland and Cape Breton and the
Germans around Lunenburg on the mainland’s South Shore, were also touristed, but they
received a much smaller share of tourist traffic. Nova Scotia became a site of
“tourism/history,” in which the “history” is a curated collection of abstracted cultural
elements of culture and simplified historical details designed to offer an appealing and
unproblematic tableau for the tourist gaze and experience. History becomes heritage
through this process of curation. By the mid-20th century, the province’s official
discursive identity was a made-for-tourists racially essentialized cultural heritage of a
group of Scots situated firmly in a simple pre-modern past and embellished by the
trappings of Scottishness, including kilts and bagpipes.

In the 21st century there has been a shift away from this kind of essential
Scottishness province-wide, especially in tourism, which now focuses on generalized
leisure and soft adventure travel (see chapter 3 of this dissertation); Scottishness has been
recentered on Cape Breton, and re-emphasized as a “living” culture, the culture as it is
and as it is becoming in the present day, rather than culture existing in a kind of eternal

hand to celebrate the opening of the only ‘road to the isle.’” Though soundless in the video, the kilted
pipers are in fact playing “The Road to the Isles” (Canso Causeway 50th Anniversary Society 2005).
The earlier era of tourism with a “see it before it’s gone” perspective on Nova Scotia’s, and especially Cape Breton’s, Gaelic culture, has passed (personal communication MacDonald 2012, Beaton 2013). While the rest of Nova Scotia is marketed as a destination for culinary tourism, seacoast and maritime exploration, golfing, and non-Scottish cultural and leisure tourism (collectively grouped under a marketing category called “soft adventuring”), Cape Breton is the epicenter, the heart, of living Gaelic (“Celtic”?) culture, not just in Nova Scotia, but in North America. Cape Breton’s “living Celtic culture” is now being heavily promoted as a tourism attraction in its own right by specialized cultural tourism organizations such as Celtic Heart, but also by mainstream regional tourism agencies, including Destination Cape Breton and the Nova Scotia Tourism Association, which coordinates tourism for the provincial government. From the mid-20th century, and arguably into the 1970s, the Scottish culture of Cape Breton was portrayed in official discourse as being in the twilight of its existence, but now tourists find a living, vital, and growing Scottish culture and myriad ways to experience it. But promoting a living culture that has frequently struggled for recognition and legitimacy is fraught with tension; cultural bearers and promoters must negotiate how to cultivate accessibility for tourists with the requirements that locals maintain ownership over the tradition and the spaces in which it occurs.

As history became heritage and heritage became tourism/history, interested parties in provincial and regional tourism, local business people, government employees

---

65 By “livingness,” I meant that traditional cultural forms – dance, musical performance, having social gatherings called ceilidhs and house parties where music, dance, song, and stories are often shared and learned – are actively being practiced, taught, and learned in communities. The culture is not a show for visitors but a vibrant cultural system in which meaning is constantly being made, contested, and negotiated.
and elected officials, and the managers of cultural institutions of all sizes worked to naturalize the essential Scottishness of Nova Scotia. Now, decades after Macdonald’s work to tartanize the official ideologies of the province and create sites around which Scottish heritage could accrue so that tourists might visit it, the naturalized Scottishness of Nova Scotia interacts in a nuanced way with the Scottishness of rural Cape Breton, which simultaneously benefits from the priority placed on Scottish culture and heritage and is compromised by the touristic interest in an accessible and uncomplicated version of this set of cultural practices, lifeways, and narratives that still comprise a vital social system in small communities. This chapter offers an extended examination of Nova Scotia’s tourism campaigns that target Cape Breton, a historically Scottish cultural region on the island, the very geography of which has at times been directly linked to Scottish racial identity, and the marketing and communities ideologies and motivations that underlie these campaigns. I lay out the progression of mass tourism in Nova Scotia, and chart what I see as the transition from government-directed tartanized tourism on Cape Breton to Scottish community-based living cultural tourism generated by Cape Bretoners.

Tartanism, as a racialized, ideological, and touristic construction imposed from the provincial level, provided the foundation for the contemporary, community-driven Scottish-based heritage and cultural tourism on Cape Breton. The essentializing nature of tartanism is being tempered by an active engagement by local communities in their own representations. Locals subvert easy touristic accessibility of very local events in order to maintain control over their own culture, while simultaneously creating consumable cultural opportunities, like Celtic Heart, to offer curated and accessible packages of
prominent cultural organizations and events. In the following chapter, I detail how the Scots, partly through the tourism campaigns detailed in this chapter and partly through the arrangement of large-scale events such as Celtic Colours, maintain a lock on the island’s cultural tourism at the expense of Cape Breton’s other ethnocultural groups. Further, in analyzing how tourism promotional literature markets to the ideal tourist, a person identified in Nova Scotia’s official tourism strategy as a “soft adventurer,” I show that this person is marked as white, older, affluent, heterosexual, and monogamously coupled, identities not explicitly delineated in official discourse. Most of these identities (excluding affluence) match the majority of local traditional culture participants in Cape Breton’s traditional Scottish cultural community. Not only does this feed a pattern of courting tourists whose identities and interests will support, rather than destabilize, established ways of doing, embodying, and thinking about local culture, it represents the fundamental intersection of Scottish ethnic whiteness and heteronormativity within Cape Breton society, an analysis with implications for the larger field of Celtic Studies.

“Shaped by the Sea:” Traveling to Nova Scotia

Tourists have a lot of options when it comes to planning a Nova Scotia vacation. The province is no longer merely “Canada’s Ocean Playground,” a tourism slogan created in 1935 that still adorns Nova Scotia license plates. Before visitors even arrive in Nova Scotia, where Visitor Information Centres (VICs) supply countless maps, brochures, pamphlets, and copies of the official provincial tourism book Doers’ and Dreamers’/Du Rêve à l’Aventure in both French and English, a simple internet search
reveals myriad official websites to help plan a vacation. Each interlinks with the others to create a seamless and comprehensive network of government and government-affiliated agencies that provide easy online access to the province’s attractions. There’s Taste of Nova Scotia for those interested in culinary hotspots (there’s even a Chowder Trail). In a brilliant branding strategy, Nova Scotia has turned the necessity of driving along small highways and byways to get anywhere into an economic advantage: the network of eleven Nova Scotia Scenic Travelways (Figure 3.5) encourage visitors to enjoy the journey along the seacoasts and through the picturesque small towns – which benefit tremendously from the tourist traffic – rather than rushing to their destination on the Trans-Canada Highway.

![Nova Scotia Scenic Routes Map](image)

**Figure 3.5.** Interactive map of the Nova Scotia Scenic Travelways (Chowder Trail not pictured). © Province of Nova Scotia, used with permission.

In addition to the seafood, Nova Scotia has a burgeoning wine country, where eighteen wineries supply 850 full-time jobs and contribute $200 million to the economy (“Nova Scotia Wines: Room to Grow”). Both the Taste of Nova Scotia and Wines of

---

66 *Doers’ and Dreamers’* is also available online as an interactive flipbook.
Nova Scotia (formed in 1989 and 2002, respectively) are joint marketing initiatives between the province’s private and public sectors. The government of Nova Scotia takes care of its own tourism via the government-funded and administered Nova Scotia Tourism Agency, which is managed by the provincial Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism (“Nova Scotia: Shaped by the Sea”). NSTA partners with many regional and specialized tourism industry organizations including Taste of Nova Scotia, the Winery Association of Nova Scotia, and the various tourism organizations representing geographic regions of the province. One such organization is Destination Cape Breton (“Cape Breton: Nova Scotia’s Masterpiece”), which assures visitors “Your Heart Will Never Leave” the island once they’ve visited and immersed themselves in its delights. Destination Cape Breton is run by an association of businesses on the island, and partly funded by a federal Crown corporation called ECBC (based in Sydney) that identifies local projects worthy of development and channels government money towards those efforts. On these sites, and on their companion social media sites, potential visitors can plan and save online itineraries for future reference before and during travel, chat with a live agent via an embedded instant messaging service,

67 ECBC funds many of the island’s cultural institutions as well. The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre in Judique received funding from ECBC in 2012 to hire a full-time Gaelic language specialist. Her presence on the staff allowed the Centre to develop more Gaelic programming, gave a full-time job to a local citizen, and ensured that the Centre could remain open year-round, which would increase its revenues and exposure, and provide a year-round venue for local musicians to play and local people to gather.

68 The Celtic Heart of North America is on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and there is also a smartphone app. Destination Cape Breton, Nova Scotia Tourism, and Taste of Nova Scotia are also heavily involved with social media, including Flickr, TripAdvisor, Pintrest, and Instagram. Social media sites allow visitors to interact with the official agency and with other visitors before, during, and after their trip, which personalizes the users’ experiences, and also gives the agencies new images and stories to use for promotional purposes. This engagement with social media is part of the livingness of the culture in that accessing new audiences is critical to the culture’s survival, not just as a tourist attraction but also as a continuing site of meaning for young Cape Bretoners.
communicate with other visitors about their experiences, check out promotional and amateur video and photographic content, and link to the websites of hotels, cultural institutions, restaurants, and special events throughout the province.\(^{69}\) The five-year Tourism Strategy initiated in 2013 emphasizes the development of online content, including “advertising [and] promotional material,” as an integral part of a marketing strategy to target first-time visitors as a “key growth market” (Strategy 2013:2).

Parks Canada opens up an additional panoply of options for visitors interested in historical and environmental experiences, some of which can be explored remotely thanks to a two-year collaboration between Parks Canada and Google launched in 2013. The Tourism Strategy indicates that “experiential tourism should be a key component of our [Nova Scotia’s] product. It will help connect various attractions, result in longer visits, and spread economic benefits across the province” (ibid., 2), and the initiative between Parks Canada and Google to create panoptic walkthroughs of various Parks Canada sites, including the Fortress of Louisbourg, takes experiential tourism to new heights of meta-travel.\(^{70}\)

Where’s the Celtic music and dance is in all this talk of chowder, hiking, wineries, and historic landmarks? Click the big graphic on Destination Cape Breton’s main page to head over to CelticHeart.ca, the official website of the Celtic Heart of North America Co-operative, where you can “Add a dash of Celtic to your Cape Breton

\(^{69}\) The websites are constantly updated: in the course of researching this chapter, the NSTA and DCB both rolled out their newly revamped websites for the 2014 tourism season, and Destination Halifax launches its website redesign May 1, 2014.

\(^{70}\) Google Street View® operators walked through the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site and the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve in British Columbia wearing “Trekker” Street View backpacks. The results allow visitors to literally walk the streets and into the buildings of Louisbourg, and along the trails of the Pacific Rim Reserve (“Explore” 2013). More such walk-throughs are planned.
vacation!” A young woman with a profusion of barely tamed red hair and a fiddle under her chin fixes the viewer with a smile: it’s Margie Beaton, accomplished fiddler, pianist, and stepdancer who is one half of The Beaton Sisters (a performing group that includes her sister Dawn). Margie, part of the rising tide of young Cape Bretoners invested in their tradition and its continued vitality, is also Director of Marketing for the Gaelic College.

According to CelticHeart.ca, “The Celtic Heart of North America represents the amazing Celtic and Gaelic cultural experience on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Canada. We celebrate and share the only living Celtic culture in North America. Whether it's dancing to lively fiddle tunes, learning a Gaelic milling song or tracing your roots, we'd love to share our Celtic culture with you. And you just might find it has the key to unlock your Celtic heart. Cuin’ a thig sibh air ceilidh [So when are you coming]?”

Figure 3.6. Hyperlink/advertisement for CelticHeart.ca on the Destination Cape Breton site. Margie Beaton, the fiddler in this image, is an accomplished performer of traditional Scottish fiddle and piano, a gifted stepdancer, and Director of Marketing for the Gaelic College. This advertisement represents an attempt to get visitors, who primarily come to Cape Breton for non-cultural reasons, interested and knowledgeable about Cape Breton’s cultural attractions. © Celtic Heart, used with permission.

71 Dawn works for Celtic Colours, where she recently advanced from Assistant Artistic Director in 2012 to Artistic Director in 2013. Joella Foulds, co-founder and former Artistic Director, is now the Executive Director of Celtic Colours.

72 Click around enough webpages and open enough tourism brochures and you start to see the same faces. This same image of Margie showed up on the map included in the 2012 Celtic Colours program. A similar photo from the same shoot, labeled “Celtic musician,” shows up in the 2013 official Nova Scotia tourism book, *Doers’ and Dreamers’. Other photographs recur throughout the tourism literature as well.
Cape Breton is now being actively marketed to potential visitors as “The Celtic Heart of North America,” the only place on the continent where a living Celtic culture still exists. Visitors are invited to connect with Celtic Heart via a Twitter feed, a YouTube channel, a Facebook page, and a smartphone app; through these access points, they can also share their own images, video, and stories of places they find “the Celtic heart beating strong” on the island. When Angus Macdonald was constructing Nova Scotia’s Scottish essence and identity beginning in the early 1930s, he emphasized the province, and Cape Breton especially, as a place where traditional Gaelic culture still lived, though he spoke about the province as “the last stand of the Gael in North America” (McKay and Bates 5, 286:2010). In Macdonald’s construction, the Gaelic culture was living, but it was a culture in stasis left over from an earlier pre-modern time, rather than a modern culture in touch with its traditions. The replacement of “Gaelic” with “Celtic” and the elision of cultures within this semantic move signals a calculated marketing decision that I will discuss in Chapter 4. As a preservationist, MacDonald portrayed the Gaelic culture of Cape Breton as threatened by modernity and fading into the twilight of its existence. Celtic Heart, however, insists that the “heartbeat is strong” in Cape Breton. Rather than fading, the culture is alive, evolving, and growing, despite remaining rooted in its history (discourses of historical and ancestral continuity permeate any discussion or teaching of Cape Breton traditional music, dance, song, and other cultural forms). As Celtic Heart puts in on their Facebook page: “Cape Breton Island - The Celtic Heart of North America. Where else in the world do dancers sing with their feet and fiddlers reignite history with their bows? On Cape Breton Island, this isn't just
something we do on stage, it's who we are.” In other words, the culture is not a show for tourists; it is authentic, real, and would be going on whether the tourists were there or not. In *Doers’ and Dreamers’,* the official tourism publication for the province published by the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism (discussed below), the four-page fold-out spread for Destination Cape Breton (DCB) refers visitors to Celtic Heart for “Celtic Culture,” the only ethnic culture explicitly promoted by DCB in the ad. Of Cape Breton Island itself, *Doers’ and Dreamers’* says there’s “no need to search for history here – you’ll find it around every corner,” and, in a gesture towards the deep connection of the present to the past, it is “a region of history [that] lives and breathes with echoes of whispers of ancestors” (2013:223). While this connection to a rich heritage and history is true of all the island’s various cultures, the Gaelic culture is the only one that is explicitly and visually tied to this legacy.

**Locating the Celtic Heart**

The Celtic Heart of North America Co-operative consists of seven of the largest and most established cultural institutions on the island (Figure 2.6). Two of these institutions are primarily festivals: Commun Fèis an Eilein and the Celtic Colours International Festival, held in August and October, respectively. Three are educational institutions that provide both a museum experience and cultural learning opportunities: Colaisde na Gàidhlig/The Gaelic College, The Highland Village/An Clachan

---

73 This appeals to the savvy postmodern tourist who knows that “real” and “authentic” are slippery terms that, when it comes to cultural performances in exotic destinations, often mean a constructed performance that bears little resemblance to the traditional performances it purports to represent.
Gàeihealach, and the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre; as part of its mandate, the Fèis an Eilein also offers workshops and classes, and some of Celtic Colours’ community partners offer classes and workshops during the festival. The final two members of the Co-operative are the most overtly commercial of the seven: the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design is a space for artists to display their work and also offers workshops and classes, and the Glenora Distillery, North America’s first and Canada’s only single malt whisky distillery; the Distillery also has an inn, restaurant, and pub, addressing the Co-op’s goal of partnering with (Scottish) culturally-minded accommodations.

![Figure 3.7. Via “Cape Breton – The Celtic Heart of North America” Facebook page. This graphic shows the seven member organizations within the Co-op. © Celtic Heart, used with permission.](image)

The Co-operative itself is financially, and doubtless ideologically, supported by four organizations, two of which are tourism organizations: Destination Cape Breton and
the Nova Scotia Tourism Agency (NSTA).74 Destination Cape Breton, a partner of NSTA, is the official Tourism Industry Association for Cape Breton Island. The other fiscal supporters are the Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation (ECBC), a federal Crown corporation that is a hybrid partnership between the public and private sector, and the Office of Gaelic Affairs, which is an office of the Government of Nova Scotia that deals with Gaelic community needs.75 Destination Cape Breton is dedicated to “enhancing the tourism industry” on the island by focusing on “marketing, tourism product development, [and] visitor information services” as part of a general strategy of “promotion and enhancement of Tourism on Cape Breton Island” (Destination Cape Breton 2013). Destination Cape Breton operates the extensive network of staffed Visitor Information Centres on the island that provide visitors with information via a vast array of publications about the island’s attractions. The provincial government operates the Nova Scotia Tourism Agency as part of the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism (ERDT). The ERDT is charged with implementing the provincial government’s economic growth strategy, which includes giving potential workers “the right skills for good jobs” and “growing the economy through innovation [and] helping businesses be more competitive globally.” Part of this “innovation” is clearly the...

---

74 According to a 2010 press release announcing the formation of the Co-operative, the organization is “supported by Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation and Nova Scotia Tourism, Culture and Heritage. As well, Nova Scotia’s Office of Gaelic Affairs and Destination Cape Breton serve as advisors to the Co-operative.” What these roles entail is left vague.

75 The province has other offices dedicated to supporting the interests of Nova Scotia’s main ethnocultural groups (often referred to as the founding cultures), including the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, the Office of Acadian Affairs, and the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs.
elevation in economic importance of cultural heritage tourism. Tourism is big business in Nova Scotia,” says the ERDT website: the province welcomes 8 million resident and non-resident visitors annually, and generates $1.3 billion CAD each year.

Cape Breton is a premier site for cultural heritage tourism, but even so, perhaps it is no surprise that Cape Breton is receiving more tourism attention in partnership with ERDT: the Minister in charge of the department comes from Richmond County, Cape Breton Island. Cape Breton was described to me by the head of one of the island’s significant cultural institutions as a “banana republic,” meaning that Cape Bretoners who get attain positions of political power try to send development money towards their part of the island.

ECBC/SECB Canada (Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation: “Inspire. Build. Succeed.”) is a federal Crown corporation that identifies worthy projects in need of development on Cape Breton and funnels government money towards those projects. Crown corporations, operated by the federal government of Canada, are part government agency and part business (Stastna 2012); they are primarily designed to advance public policy objectives, but some also “operate in a business capacity, meaning they have

---

76 The department’s mission is “to provide strategic leadership and advice, to enhance collaboration with our partners and stakeholders in economic and community development, tourism, and procurement, and to create a conducive environment for entrepreneurship and businesses to grow in a strong and prosperous economy” (Province of Nova Scotia 2013).

77 He first served as MLA for Richmond in Nova Scotia’s House of Assembly in 1988, and was reelected in 1999, 2003, 2006 and 2009, and 2013. He is currently the Government House leader; appointed by the Prime Minister to this cabinet level position, he organizes the schedule of the Nova Scotia Legislature House of Commons and works with the Opposition to advance the legislative agenda of the Government (Province of Nova Scotia 2014a). He is also the Minster of Acadian Affairs, and the Minister responsible for Nova Scotia Business Incorporated.

78 ECBC works in four areas of development: commercial development, community development, environmental stewardship, and property development.
commercial interests and competitive pressures to contend with that can, at times, conflict with their policy mandate” (ibid.). They exist in part to fulfill community needs that the private sector either cannot or will not meet because it is unprofitable, such as offering ferry services between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland (the ferry operator, Marine Atlantic, is a Crown corporation) or delivering mail to rural areas. Some are entirely government funded, while others are economically self-supporting for-profit enterprises.

ECBC has been involved in supporting Cape Breton’s culture and cultural institutions for quite some time. An initiative called the “Community Centre Program,” for example, identifies community centers and facilities in need of repair or upkeep that “have a direct relation with festivals and events.” ECBC

“work[s] with economic development stakeholders, community leaders, and organizations to identify and develop key infrastructure initiatives that strengthen and enhance the economic foundation of communities so that they are an attractive place to live and invest [because] it has been recognized by festivals and event organizers that as the facilities age, the declining physical condition of the infrastructure put the festivals and events at risk. The program is in response to providing matching dollars for upgrades to existing facilities, thereby capitalizing on the capacity, strength and opportunity present in communities across Cape Breton Island” (ECBC 2013).

Since decaying facilities are less able to offer the events that sustain both community life and touristic life on Cape Breton, government money is well spent in maintaining and upgrading these facilities so that the needs of the facilities’ users can be met. Joella Foulds, Executive Director of Celtic Colours, told me that the primary concern in selecting venue sites for the festival’s main concerts is the venue’s suitability to host an “international level” concert as determined by its audience capacity, sound capabilities, accessibility, and general state of repair. Some of the most locally- and
culturally-important venues, she said, aren’t chosen as sites for the major concerts because they don’t meet the requirements for a large and professionally-staged concert. They are still included in the festival, but as sites for community-generated events, which the festival advertises but does not fund. The Wagmatcook Community Centre on the Wagmatcook First Nation Reserve was able to host one of the main concerts in 2012 (A Cape Breton Mawio’mi, discussed in Chapter 5) because it has a hall that can hold several hundred people, enough chairs to seat everyone, acceptable lighting and sound for a professional stage show, a sizeable stage and parking lot, and is located on the island’s main highway. Glencoe Mills, by contrast, though famed as a dance hall and essential to the local culture and communities, is located on a graded dirt back road in the middle of forests and farmland. It has a small hall, a stage two musicians can squeeze into, no backstage area, and lacks adequate parking and seating. But in keeping with the inclusion of community events in Celtic Colours, the volunteer committee that organizes the summer season of dances at Glencoe Mills organized a special dance at the usual time on the Thursday that fell during the festival.

The final supporter of Celtic Heart is the Nova Scotia Office of Gaelic Affairs/Alba Nuadh Oifis Iomairtean na Gàidhlig. Rodney MacDonald established the OGA in 2006 through an Act of Parliament when he was Premier of Nova Scotia.

———

79 Joella Foulds, Executive Director of Celtic Colours: “The festival is really about community development through culture. I have degrees in social work and community development and I’ve always been involved with music, so I was interested in communities getting involved in the festival…and communities wanted/want to be involved and they seek out the festival to be included. They know it’ll bring tourists and economic benefit. But, well, what do you do if the community has a tiny hall that fits 50 people and a scratchy sound system? You can’t have an international concert there. So we decided to have these communities offer things that they were doing anyway: meals, dances, and crafts. And retain some small venues because they’re of special significance to the island culture.”
(Province of Nova Scotia 2014b); previously, he was Minister of the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, which now manages the OGA. The CCH “is responsible for contributing to the well-being and prosperity of Nova Scotia’s diverse and creative communities through the promotion, development, preservation and celebration of our culture, heritage, identity and languages; and, by providing leadership, expertise and innovation to our stakeholders (Province of Nova Scotia 2012). The mission of the OGA “is to work with Nova Scotians in the development and promotion of Gaelic language and culture in the Province” (“Statement of Mandate” 2010:5). The Mandate provides for a dedicated Minister of Gaelic Affairs to preside over the OGA through direct “supervision, direction and control of all offices and matters relating to the OGA” as well as “supervis[ing] the performance of the functions of the OGA” (ibid. 2010:5). The current minister, Randy Delorey, is from the densely Scottish Catholic city of Antigonish on the mainland, site of the oldest highland games in North America and St. Francis Xavier University, which has an established program of study in Gaelic and Atlantic Canadian area studies.

A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats: Tourism and Economic Development

Though seemingly far removed from the work of the tourist organizations and the development corporation, the Office of Gaelic Affairs is as much about attracting visitors and developing communities as its partners, hence its inclusion in the Department of

---

80 The Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage also encompasses Acadian Affairs and African Nova Scotian Affairs; it is the umbrella under which the Nova Scotia Museums (which includes Cape Breton’s Highland Village), the Nova Scotia Archives, the provincial libraries, and various heritage sites and monuments.
Communities, Culture and Heritage. According to a recent version of the OGA Statement of Mandate (2010), Gaelic language and culture contributes $23.5 million annually to the provincial economy.

“[Gaelic language and culture] brings repeat visitors back to Nova Scotia who are part of the community of Gaelic learners, musicians, singers and dancers. It is a well-spring for products and services. It is the glue that binds the generations and builds community in our urban and rural areas. Nova Scotia shares this wealth of language and culture with international partners in Scotland and Ireland, and with many of Gaelic heritage throughout North America” (Office of Gaelic Affairs 2010:3).

In other words, Gaelic language and culture, and moreover, something called “Gaelic heritage” attract tourists. Margie Beaton told me that culture is still not the primary reason people come to Nova Scotia; she cited culinary and environmental tourism as the big sectors of the tourism industry, and confirmed by the visitor statistics collected by the province (VES 2012). But the culture sector has the potential to develop into a key aspect of the tourism industry. It seems clear that these four organizations, three of which are directly connected to the government (two to the provincial and one to the federal), surmise that there are potentially more people interested in coming to Nova Scotia, and specifically Cape Breton, to engage in experiential tourism connected to Gaelic language, culture, and heritage than are currently visiting the province.

Tourism development is aided by an impressive quantity of tourism demographic information that the Nova Scotia Tourism Agency compiles and makes available online. Tourism, according to the NSTA’s 2013 Tourism Strategy, is about community development as well as economic growth at the community and provincial levels. Tourism contributes $2 billion CAD ($1.3 billion according to the ERDT) to the Nova
Scotia economy annually and supports over 24,000 jobs for Nova Scotians throughout the province. Tourism “helps define Nova Scotia, perhaps more than any other single sector of our economy,” and moreover, it is also “a key source of pride, helping to support our families and local economies, and build communities throughout Nova Scotia” (NSTA 2013:2). The current Tourism Strategy targets first-time visitors to Nova Scotia, who tend to travel more throughout the province and spend much more than repeat visitors (ibid., 3). People who have previously traveled to Nova Scotia tend to make return visits, making the targeting of travelers who have never visited a priority for growth. Gaelic language and culture, according to the OGA, bring repeat visitors back to the province, which any trip to the Gaelic College during early August, when the adult summer courses are offered, proves: the classes are filled with people, mostly women, in their fifties and sixties, many of whom have been coming to the College courses for years and have created entire social networks and friendships around the two week-long courses.

The NSTA is itself a new organization, a “special operating agency,” with a five-pillar plan for tourism development. While public, it is a collaboration between private industry and the government run by a CEO and advised by a private-sector board. It is designed to give the province a strategic advantage in marketing, especially to first-time visitors as part of a long-term tourism strategy to “encourage [visitors] to spend more and stay longer” (ibid., 3). Tourism is an export trade providing a direct influx of money into the province: the services provided are generated by Nova Scotians and consumed by

---

81 Tourism accounts for 2% of all economic activity in Nova Scotia (Strategy 2013:2).
82 The five pillars of this plan are: 1, leadership and collaboration; 2, inspiration and strategic marketing; 3, evidence-based decision making; 4, developing higher quality products and experiences; and 5, improving access to Nova Scotia and throughout the province.
people coming primarily from outside the province (ibid., 1). The NSTA Tourism Strategy focuses on technology as one key aspect of contemporary tourism; according to their figures, 65% of travelers research destinations online before deciding where to go and 85% use smartphones to research information while traveling (ibid., 2). The impressive depth and the seamlessly-networked nature of Nova Scotia tourist organizations’ online presence clearly seeks to capitalize on how prospective tourists research travel by aiding them in their planning at every turn. The Strategy identifies “a spectacular seacoast, incredible icons, and our legendary hospitality” as potential assets to tourism, while noting that some travelers have a limited awareness of what Nova Scotia has to offer (ibid., 2), making consistent branding and targeting marketing, as suggested in the Tourism Strategy, essential. The NSTA’s five year strategic plan specifically targets travelers rather than tourists – they identify travelers as more curious than tourists and more interested in immersive experiences – and seeks to develop Nova Scotia as a destination for “soft adventurers,” the “outdoor enthusiast…who appreciates local culture after a day spent hiking or whale watching” (ibid., 3). On the whole, Nova Scotia will be marketed as a destination in its entirety, rather than the former strategy of marketing geographic segments, specific events, or individual attractions (ibid., 3). Nova Scotia will be developed as systematized and recognizable brand in advertising throughout the province, online, and internationally, so that potential visitors, especially soft adventurers, will recognize it and be able to identify its attractions (ibid., 8).83

83 The measurable benefit sought over the 5-year arc of the strategic plan is to increase the number of overnight visitors by 1%, and non-resident visitor revenue by 4% annually (ibid., 12).
But this brand isn’t Scottish per se. Certain elements of the packaging are Scottish, especially in Cape Breton, but tourism in Nova Scotia as a whole, and even in Cape Breton with the major exception of the Celtic Heart Co-op, has taken a decided turn towards generalized leisure and soft adventure tourism within which cultural experiences are secondary. Celtic Heart, the sole self-identified Scottish cultural tourism resource, is clearly integrating many of the suggestions contained within the general provincial Tourism Strategy; it is playing up a unique facet of the province and promoting it to those “soft adventurers,” the ones who like to enjoy local culture after doing outdoor activities during the day, by offering the culture in tandem with culinary and scenic travel. Celtic Heart is also a resource primarily for first-time visitors coming to Cape Breton specifically for the culture.

In short, tourism is very actively and carefully controlled at the provincial governmental level as part of a large-scale and multi-faceted economic development plan that is exploring several industries that can collectively form a powerful and broadly appealing tourism package. There’s something, it seems for everyone. Inverness recently became home to the first authentic links golf course in Canada (Golf Cape Breton: “No it’s not Scotland. It’s right next door”).

There’s hiking in the national park followed by an elegant dining experience at the Keltic Lodge to the strains of Celtic fiddle, or whisky tasting at the Glenora Distillery while enjoying “local Celtic music” in the bar. Or visitors could attend a ceilidh in Mabou after a music filled supper at the Red Shoe Pub.

---

84 Links golf, developed in Scotland in the 19th century, is played on a course that is minimally altered so that the natural contours and vistas of the landscape are preserved.
The inclusion of tourism within a provincial government agency charged with developing the economy and the rural areas makes sense within the context of the province’s economic history. Nova Scotia experienced the collapse of most of its heavy industries during the 20th century. The industries that drove the provincial economy were also essential to Cape Breton’s economy, and so the island was especially hard-hit by end of the resource extraction industries. Forest-related industries were not seriously curtailed, but neither did these provide enough work or income to sustain the huge numbers of people out of work. Consequently, the province sought replacement industries that could ensure a future for the province and its citizenry.

Rural areas of Cape Breton were impoverished even when these heavy industries were active. Most of Cape Breton is still both rural and economically marginal. Many people relied on a seasonal combination of subsistence agriculture, fishing, work in the mines either at home or away, and some hired themselves out as laborers or domestics to their neighbors, making the goal of putting people to work in stable employment that much more important. One such make-work project that turned into a sustainable employment opportunity was the reconstruction of Fortress Louisbourg (Chapter 2 of this dissertation), but the tourism sector and the culture sector also provided opportunities for long-term employment.85 Tourism provided work only during the summer season (July and August), and many people still need a trade for every season. Tourism began to emerge as a viable economic generator during the post-World War I depression that

85 The concept of musicians making careers solely from performance is new, originating during the Celtic Boom of the 1990s, when Natalie MacMaster and Ashley MacIsaac became the first to do so. Generations of performers before them had steady day jobs, and played music for dances on the side out of necessity, because there was virtually no money in it.
afflicted Nova Scotia through the 1920s and into the 1930s. The government first got involved in tourism in 1923 with the establishment of the Tourist Association of Nova Scotia, and the government has been officially involved with cultivating the tourism industry ever since.

Tourism emerged as an appealing area of economic development in the context of economic and labor upheavals in northern Nova Scotia’s heavy industries (like steel and coal), increasing class conflict, and widespread out-migration of Nova Scotians searching for better-paying job opportunities (McKay and Bates 2010:270). Developing tourism as an industry made sense for two main reasons: it could benefit the economy by drawing in tourist money and creating jobs in the province, and had the potential to provide a cause around which Nova Scotians could unite and create cohesiveness in a time of social divisiveness and economic uncertainty (2010:128). Creating what amounted to a new nationalism around a common provincial identity could diffuse tensions surrounding the dire issues facing the province while offering a way to actually ameliorate them. In marketing Nova Scotia to tourists, emphasis shifted from portraying the industrial centers of Cape Breton and the province as sites of progress to focusing on the rural areas as sites of cultural strength, stability, and retention. That was where the real essence of Nova Scotia was found, and beginning in the 1930s, this essence ‘became’ rural, antiquated, and Scottish; the very heart of the culture, the Gaels themselves, in order to function as “folk” were by necessity incompatible with modern industry (McKay and Bates 2010:284).
The Beginnings of Tourism

Government-managed tourism is a central element of Nova Scotia’s development, and has been since the 1930s, but Nova Scotia developed slowly into the touristic powerhouse it is in the first quarter of the 21st century. Community-driven tourism development, always present, is becoming much stronger. In the 19th century, no one yet conceived that a streamlined historical narrative filtered through a heritage lens and commodified based on decontextualized elements of that heritage (which McKay and Bates call “tourism/history”) could provide the basis for a powerful tourism industry.

Greater numbers of tourists started traveling to Nova Scotia in the 1870s after the completion of a rail line that linked Halifax to New York City. Nova Scotians were already working to develop saleable commodities for these visitors (McKay and Bates 2010:16) that centered on experiencing the outdoors: sailing, fishing, and hunting were the main attractions; the province’s cities failed to provide any charms whatsoever (Benjamin 1878). Nova Scotians, rather than being attractive in their quaintness and rich in their folkways, as they would become under Macdonald’s influence, presented almost a barrier to tourism. Benjamin, a travel writer in the late 19th century, characterizes the Scots of Cape Breton, especially the men, as uncouth, slovenly, shiftless, and violent; he echoes Warner’s 1874 description of the Gaels as hospitable but often drunk and unpredictable. Dashwood (1872, cited in McKay and Bates 2010:54) calls them “lawless.” Benjamin, who wrote about the merits of a variety of Atlantic islands as health and pleasure resorts, even disparaged Cape Breton’s climate because of the shortness of its summer, dampness, and scarcity of decent accommodations; he did recommend it to
sportsmen and pleasure-seekers for its beautiful scenery and abundant wildlife. As more visitors started arriving, however, Nova Scotia’s characterization as a place of beautiful scenery and little else started changing as tourists began discovering its heritage.

The first instance of concentrated tourist traffic to Nova Scotia began in the 1850s in response to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s hugely popular 1847 poem *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*. Describing the Acadian expulsion in romanticized terms, the poem initiated what McKay and Bates call the Evangeline Phenomenon, in which thousands of people journeyed to Nova Scotia to experience Evangeline’s mythic 18th-century Acadia (2010:73). Instead of a young, industrializing, and forward-looking province (ibid., 76), tourists saw a colonial, pre-modern Acadia filled with peasants straight out of the Old World. Decontextualized images and stimuli of a mythologized Acadia peopled by quaint peasants enacting pre-modern lifeways as depicted in the poem enraptured readers/visitors. These visitors’ predetermined touristic gaze was unaffected by the disjunctions of coalmines, deforested landscapes, and the very railway line visitors rode through the Land of Evangeline. The version of history and landscape offered in *Evangeline* so captured the imaginations of readers and travelers that “it became more historically significant than the real thing” (ibid., 74).

These decontextualized elements constructed what McKay and Bates call a “mnemonic apparatus...a network of words and things that convey an impression of pastness, even if important elements of that represented past never actually existed”

---

86 Urry (2002) defines the tourist gaze as “the gaze with which we view sites.” It is socially organized and systematized. There is no singular tourist gaze; rather, it is culturally contingent and specific.

87 For an analysis of rail promotions during this period, see MacDonald 2005.
Longfellow’s romanticized version of the expulsion captured readers in a way that a factually accurate history could not. Visitors can still drive the Evangeline Trail, and even encounter Evangeline (as a statue and through animators) at Grand Pré, a significant Acadian town on the mainland. As part of the province “successfully rebranded itself as a Land of Evangeline, an Old World site peopled by quaint peasants” (ibid., 76), the Evangeline Phenomenon became the first “practical demonstration of tourism/history” that would be a model for later campaigns to capitalize on Nova Scotia’s cultural history in pursuit of tourists (ibid., 72). The still on-going Evangeline Phenomenon provided a powerful example of how the province could capitalize on its history – real, imagined, or constructed – in its attempts to attract tourists and initiate economic development (ibid., 271).

Mass tourism began in the interwar period. 49,000 tourists in 1922 became almost 323,000 in 1938, and increasing numbers of them were traveling to the province by car (McKay and Bates 2010:63). Tourist infrastructure, including roads, additional rail lines, accommodations, and historical sites were gradually developed in the first quarter of the 20th century.  

---

88 A French-language brochure called “Découvrir l’Acadie de la Nouvelle-Écosse: Sur la routes des festivals” (“Discover the Acadia of Nova Scotia: On the trail of the festivals”) has a young woman dressed in 18th century Acadian clothing. Clearly Evangeline, she strides towards the camera, while behind her stands a chapel and a statue of Evangeline constructed in 1920, during the period of heritage development.

89 McKay and Bates argue that Nova Scotia’s development as a pre-modern, historic, and picturesque zone of Old World communities and folk was related to the industrial capitalist revolution transforming the cities of New England and Central Canada (2010:77-78).

90 Before 1900, only a few areas of Cape Breton were developed for tourists. Tourist infrastructure existed around a rail line took visitors through the Land of Evangeline and the Annapolis Valley. Chester, located on the South Shore of the mainland, and Baddeck, on Cape Breton’s Bras d’Or, were set up as resorts for long-term summer visitors rather than providing for short-term tourists. Alexander Graham Bell and his family had a house at Baddeck. The Canadian National Railway built five hotels and resorts by 1930; the
McKay and Bates define tourism/history is the “commodification of decontextualized elements from the past.” Tourism/history emphasizes heritage, in which the historical facts of the past are less important than an objectified “history” (really, heritage) rendered as a series abstract sites, events, costumes, sounds, and tastes that were (and are) more easily consumed by visitors. As it gained momentum, tourism/history was eventually channeled through an aggressive official policy of “tartanism” promoted by Premier Angus L. Macdonald that enraptured Nova Scotians as well as tourists such that Nova Scotians believed in the essential Scottish nature of their province as much as the tourists did. Tartanism began to function on the level of state ideology and hegemonic shared cultural identity, even though it did not reflect the identities or heritage of the majority of the province’s citizens, and in fact excluded and exscripted other ethnocultural groups by subsumed them under a gloss of racialized, folklorized, and performative Scottishness. A casual Scottish identity pervades Nova Scotia’s signs and symbols and, McKay and Bates argue, Nova Scotians’ sense of themselves, whether they are of Scottish descent or not. While this may still appear true at an official level increasing Acadian and African Nova Scotian cultural visibility, the Native rights movement, and a turn towards generalized leisure tourism in most of the province through the latter 20th century to the present day challenges that assumption.91

rival Canadian Pacific Railway, under its subsidiary the Dominion Atlantic Railway, invested in several hotels in Nova Scotia including the Pines Hotel at Digby (built in 1929), which is now owned and operated by the Government of Nova Scotia. The province owns three hotels that are operated by the Department of Economic Development and Tourism: the Pines Resort Hotel at Digby (built in 1929), the Liscombe Lodge at Liscomb Mills on the eastern shore (built in 1905), and the Keltic Lodge at Ingonish (first opened in 1940) within the Cape Breton Highlands National Park. Collectively, “all three resorts are considered to be flagship properties promoting tourism and hospitality for Nova Scotia” (Keltic Lodge 2012). 91 Nova Scotia does have a provincial tartan, granted in 1955 during the height of tartanism.
Generalized leisure tourism, promoted to the “soft adventurer,” is distinct from the former policy of tartanized heritage tourism built around communing with a vanishing white race by consuming discrete elements of their culture. A look through the tourism literature in the early 2010s shows that Scottishness is downplayed, almost absent, in all but specifically Cape Breton tourism (an exception is the golfing materials, which compare the province’s courses to the famous courses of Scotland). Acadian culture is emphasized, and there is also an African Nova Scotian Cultural Tourism Guide; even so, generalized whiteness remains a significant presence in the literature. I suggest tartanism’s dominance is disappearing at the provincial level, although Scottishness is more ascendant than ever in Cape Breton, where other ethnic groups are still relegated to supporting roles (see Chapter 5).

Angus L. Macdonald was the main force organizing an iteration of tourism/history centered on racialized Scottishness. He helped foster a state apparatus to create and support the tartanized essence of Nova Scotia. Macdonald “championed a public history that re-described an ethno-racial group [the Scottish Gaels] and that group’s connection to Nova Scotia” (2010:254). Before the 1930s, Scottishness was not the dominant paradigm through which Nova Scotians viewed themselves and their province.
(ibid., 261), and due to various ethnic minority movements and a turn towards inclusivity in scholarship, this dominance is currently being troubled. Scottish elements were important to the lives of some people in the province, mostly in Cape Breton, but in the early 20th century, there was as yet no suggestion that these elements implied or distilled anything about the province and its people generally (ibid., 266). Tartanizing the province meant re-articulating these Scottish elements rather than creating them out of nothing and situating them in a “symbolic infrastructure” constructed and maintained by the state (ibid., 270). As with the Evangeline Phenomenon, history would be remade to fit the needs of the official Scottish-centered narrative (McKay and Bates 2010:16), which necessitated the marginalization and exclusion of the narratives, images, sounds, bodies, and communities of other ethnocultural groups. The official narrative also ignored inconveniently divisive historical actions, such as the Acadian expulsion in the 18th century and the contemporary genocidal atrocity of the province’s residential Indian school at Shubenacadie.93 The Scots became the only people in the province who were truly Nova Scotian; via tartanism’s “policy of whiteness…peoples of colour…could never count as true Nova Scotians in any foundational sense” (ibid., 256). Now, official government policy and tourism promotions speak of four “founding cultures” of Nova Scotia: Scottish Gaels, Acadians, Mi’kmaq, and African Nova Scotians. Tartanism suggested a multiculturalism that ranked ethnic identities in a hierarchy, which the white

93 The Shubenacadie Indian residential school (IRS) was open from 1929 to 1967. The only recognized IRS east of Quebec, it housed First Nations children from all over Atlantic Canada and parts of Quebec, including members of the Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, and other Nations. Approximately 2000 children were sent to this school over 38 years. This information comes from the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat (http://www.apcfnc.ca/).
‘races’ at the top, and used folkloric display as sanitized multiculturalism (ibid., 255). Scots were the true Nova Scotians, despite the fact that Scottish people had never accounted for more than 30% of the population and Scottish culture was not particularly visible in the provincial culture overall. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Nova Scotia’s deep Scottishness was developed and asserted as official state tourism policy, which allowed for the marginalization of other ethnic groups in tourism promotion and in the province’s conception of its own identity.

As an exercise in folklorization, tartanism required Nova Scotian Scots to perform their ethnicity in new ways.94 It “encouraged them to set aside their specific practical or symbolic interests in order to develop a stylized Scottishness easily marketed to tourists” (2010:66). Culture became a commodity rather than a lived reality, and redress for real issues faced by the community went unacknowledged by the state; these issues included loss of the Gaelic language due to its prohibition in schools and devaluing as a “backwards” language by parents who wanted children to learn English in order to succeed in Canada’s English-dominant society. Through the 1940s, the Gaelic College itself was essentially a craft shop and sometime-school for a handful of tourists to learn weaving rather than a site of Gaelic language and cultural effluence, as it is now in the 2010s. Between the 1930s and the 1950s, a newly affluent and private motorcar-equipped middle class with leisure time and disposable income were driving to Nova Scotia from

---

94 It wasn’t just Scottish Nova Scotians who had to subscribe to an overtly Scottish identity and set of symbols. Several of the most prominent official signs of the province reference an essential Scottishness: the province was the first political jurisdiction to have an official tartan (granted in 1955); the flag is the cross of St. Andrews (from the National Arms of Scotland) with colors reversed and a shield of arms that combines the National and Royal Arms of Scotland. This flag, granted in 1625 by royal charter, was the first flag granted in the British Commonwealth.
the United States and other parts of Canada.\textsuperscript{95} Interacting with the racially-marked white inhabitants was one of the principal reasons to travel to Nova Scotia: the Acadians certainly (Evangeline had cleansed them of their problematic relationship to whiteness, gained through intermarriage with the Mi’kmaw), but especially the Scots, who became a noble white race in tourism/history, suddenly responsible for most of the development of Nova Scotia past and present. The ethnic markers of Scottishness were folklorized and decontextualized for easier consumption: a bagpiper at the New Brunswick border crossing, tartans available for sale at the Gaelic College, and competitions in Highland dance at the College’s annual Mòd. Consumption of Gaelic cultural elements is ongoing, but this has not led to the permanent devaluing of the culture that McKay and Bates bemoan; rather, tourist dollars have led to a new vitality that is actively managed by culture bearers and brokers to maintain both touristic accessibility and local ownership.

The representations of history generated for tourism/history in Nova Scotia only approximately resembled complex regional history in which the province is enmeshed (ibid., 50). The creation of tourism/history sites reflected the impulse towards accessible and easily consumable historical narrative.\textsuperscript{96} At the Fortress of Louisbourg, the Government of Canada's decision to rebuild an entire corner of the long-vanished French colonial town as a sort of "Williamsburg North" gave the Fortress of Louisbourg a new

\textsuperscript{95} These US and Canada are still where the majority of tourists come from. A 2014 Visitor Origin report lists a total of 1,707,200 visitors for 2013, down from 2012. Of these visitors, 1,508,000 were from Canada: 1,067,000 of the Canadian visitors arrived by car. By contrast, only 136,900 total visitors came from the United States, and 62,300 visitors from the rest of the world. These figures include both air and vehicle arrivals.

\textsuperscript{96} Independent historian Johnston has noted this heritagization process with regard to the Fortress of Louisbourg "with the reconstruction of the Fortress of Louisbourg…the earlier symbolic associations [of the site] became less important" (2007; see Chapter 2 of this dissertation for the history of Louisbourg).
significance as the country's most ambitious example of a then-popular way of dealing with heritage by reconstructing a representative sample so that the public could experience it as “living history” (Johnson 2007). At Louisbourg, visitors learn more about the minutiae of daily life than the large historical movements that make Louisbourg relevant and explain its presence on the fringe of North America. Reconstructed Louisbourg presents a “sense of our 18th century past” that has now become the real thing (Cross 2004). The facsimile is so believable that many visitors take it for the real thing. In the last few years, the seeming “dedication to authenticity” has been changing. According to a Parks Canada employee,

“our dedication to authenticity has been the major change. I suppose the beginning of this would have been our female staff being part of the military. Authenticity was the law for fortress staff, and it is something we used to take very seriously. If you were on site, you would have only seen things that would have been seen there in the 18th century. For example, during the reconstruction, only 18th century materials and techniques were used for construction, even though cheaper and more effective materials may have been available. It wasn't good enough that something "looked" authentic on the outside, it had to "be" entirely authentic. Now, when we do things like replace roofs, they look authentic, but underneath modern techniques are used to ensure the construction is efficient and will last. This has been a difficult transition for many. Many of our staff have been working here for 25 plus years. It's very difficult to change the mindset that was drilled so incessantly into our brains. However, we are trying very hard to be self sustaining and efficient, so this means certain exceptions have to be made…. One of the other major changes has been to the way we deliver our programs. In the beginning, the main objective was education for the visitors, if they came they were going to learn about 18th century French life in Cape Breton. Now we are trying to provide a place where a visitor can come and have the type of experience they want to have at Louisbourg. However, we are a historic site trying very hard to remain relevant in a very modern world, which is not easy. [Eschewing modern events like the summer concerts during the Fete de St. Louis, as was done from the 1960s through the 1990s] is not how we are looking at things now. For those of us with a great love and passion for the site and it's [sic] history, this means trying to move forward with these types of events while trying to maintain the original integrity of the site and its history. It's a delicate balance, to say the least.” (anonymous personal communication, 2013).
McKay and Bates argue that the simplified and easily parsed narrative constructed by tourism/history has not proved flexible over time: “because investment in its sites of memory costs money, its direction is not readily reversed” (ibid., 50), but economic necessity and a new historiography and relationship to history seem to have changed the mindsets of cultural workers, who in the end control most of the visitor experience, even though tourism promotional literature emphasizes visitors’ choices and presents them with a wide array of options in tailoring their travel experiences.

In Nova Scotia, the past is represented and reordered to appeal to real or imagined tourists, whose expectations and desires are shaped by the tourism promotion, which is then constructed to meet tourists’ expectations (ibid., 15). While tourism/history in 20th century Nova Scotia confirmed the dominant narratives of white ethnic superiority (ibid., 19) and glorified an idealized past located in the 18th century colonial period (ibid., 35), late 20th and early 21st century provincial tourism is usually about a provincial multiethnic history, when it is about history and heritage at all and not general leisure. While many historical sites present 18th century history (including Louisbourg), other sites such as the Cape Breton Miners’ Museum, the Highland Village, the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre, and the Hall of the Clans at the Gaelic College, as well as dozens of other museums and heritage sites throughout the province, tell historical narratives of culture and industry from the 19th and 20th centuries as well, and Native sites offer a narrative that precedes the 18th century. Turning the past into a public history shared by all Nova Scotians politicized the past by “inventing traditions, imposing interpretations
that suit the ruling order, marginalizing alternative accounts, and highlighting the continuous national traditions that supposedly shaped every citizen” (ibid., 21).

Now, ethnic diversity is the watchword, and official provincial bodies must less explicitly privilege a Scottish narrative. Tartanism has been subsumed under an official provincial tourism campaign that emphasizes post-cultural leisure for the entire province. One story for Nova Scotia has become many, and at least in Cape Breton, locals and local activists are employing a “do it ourselves” initiative when it comes to community development. In Cape Breton, where people bemoan the inattention of Sydney, and Halifax, and Ottawa to local concerns, locals do not wait for aid, or tourism promotional initiatives, to come to them, The private/public Nova Scotia Tourism Agency (NSTA) gestures towards a new esteem for businesses and communities in decision making about their own economic growth and community development. But Cape Breton is distinguished, and distinguishes itself, as the home of a uniquely vibrant and dense cultural region centered on a Scottish Gaelic community deeply committed to its music, dance, language, and cultural forms. Celtic Heart offers visitors a seemingly open door to this world.

**Transitioning to Grassroots Tourism**

But how did a government-directed narrative of fading Gaelic magnificence become one in which the community directs the promotion of its own living culture? Two events in the early 1970s signal the beginnings of the shift. In 1972, the CBC released a documentary called *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*, which argued that the traditional
Scottish culture on the island was fading away: young people weren’t learning the fiddle or the dance, and none of the older players were teaching. A massive community outcry erupted in the film’s wake, and Scottish Cape Bretoners started talking about what could be done to save the culture, as well as arguing that the film got it wrong, and pronounced cultural death where there was still vitality. The film is widely credited with initiating the revival of the traditional culture that continues today (see Thompson 2003, 2006 for a detailed examination of the film and its impact). Whether the film was responsible or not, it certainly galvanized the community towards a goal of, as Thompson writes, “promot[ing] the traditional fiddling style within the community and to young people in particular” through the sponsorship of “a new performance style, regular fiddle classes and an increased awareness of the importance of this music amongst the general population” (2003:ii).

Burton MacIntyre was involved with the very beginnings of the public demonstration of the continued vitality of the tradition. As he told me, he and a group of others started the Cape Breton Fiddlers’ Association in 1973, a year after the film debuted, to “prove that the vanishing Cape Breton fiddler wasn’t vanishing. That first concert at Glendale in 1973 [which he helped organize and was one of the first large concerts on Cape Breton] we had 6-7,000 people, people were parked two miles in each direction on the side of the road. The police came and said, ‘you have to do something about this.’ So I took $500 out of the till and went across the road to the farm and asked the lady, ‘could I rent her field?’ She looked at the money and said yes, and that’s what we did.” They didn’t expect the success of the Fiddlers’ Association or the cultural
effluence it unleashed. It “took off with wings of its own.” “We did our job very well, and maybe we did it too well,” Burton said. “Many other [traditional cultural] events [exist] now, it won’t go back to the way it was” when the culture wasn’t in the public eye. Burton was unsure if the first Glendale concert would be successful, but dozens of fiddlers came out of the woodwork. Burton really wanted an even 100 because it would make a better statement, but by show time there were only 97. “We had 102 fiddlers that first time at Glendale, 97 onstage, and we were trying to figure out how to get 100 when [suddenly] five guys were coming down to the stage with fiddles. To this day we don’t know who they were.” He managed to get 202 at the 25th anniversary through a similar stroke of luck, but he doesn’t expect to have those crowds again. In 1973, and even 1998, the event was a “novelty.” Only a handful of big summer events (the sort tourists attend) were happening in 1960s prior to the documentary and the first Glendale concert, though the dances were strong throughout the 1950s and 60s.97

Burton proved to himself and others that the culture was still vibrant, and Celtic Heart is the current distillation of that vibrancy: seven organizations, five explicitly focused on teaching, promoting, and protecting the traditional Gaelic culture of Cape Breton. By promoting institutions that are locally-significant resources and centers of community knowledge and cultural practice, Celtic Heart respects the community and the work of cultural activists like Burton.

The Celtic Heart of North America Co-operative is, from all appearances, a community-generated attempt at increasing the flow of culture-seeking tourists to the

97 Those original big events were the Broad Cove concert (since 1957) and the Gaelic College Mòd (1939, though since modified to a non-competitive event).
island by capitalizing on the richness of Cape Breton’s living Scottish culture. Below, I explore some of the Celtic Heart member institutions and chart how cultural tourism on Cape Breton is shifting towards experiencing a vital living culture. I also question the continued dominance of tartanism and explore the different ways that culture, tradition, and heritage are showcased on the island. I suggest that locals who retain ownership over tradition by creating and marketing events that are accessible to tourists, while subtly creating barriers to tourists’ participation in other, more local events. Visitors, according to my observations, fall into two categories with regard to culture: some visit specifically to engage with the culture, often at deep and sustained levels, while others visit for non-cultural reasons but discover the culture while traveling. Celtic Heart is creating a culture market amongst the latter group, the “soft adventurer” interested in daytime outdoor activities and nighttime culture (non-immersive cultural experiences). The industry at the provincial level wants to attract more of these people. Celtic Heart offers both immersive and presentational experiences in an easily identifiable and consumable package, for these “soft adventurers” as well as more engaged cultural tourists.

Promotion for Cape Breton’s cultures appear online and in print media. Celtic Heart makes extensive use of social media, including a smartphone app, and links to other tourism agencies like Destination Cape Breton and the Nova Scotia Tourism, No similar organization, or at least a similarly well-publicized organization, exists to promote any other ethnocultural group on the island or in the province. Destination Cape Breton, though intended to represent the island as a whole, also focuses its cultural attention on the island’s Gaelic culture. DCB advertises cultural venues, events, and
experiences on its website, but all the concerts, festivals, and galleries promoted under the “Music, Arts and Entertainment” tab, nested under the vaguely evocative “Experiences,” skew towards a Celtic experience. Ten are explicitly Celtic traditional musical and/or cultural centres, including the Baddeck Ceilidh, the Distillery, the Fèis an Eilein, and the Three-Fiddler Concerts at the Normaway Inn in Margaree. No other ethnocultural group is represented; from this page, one would guess there are no Acadian or First Nation experiences. The only Native contributions to this page are Membertou First Nation Reserve’s Trade Convention Centre and Entertainment Centre (which advertises bingo). On the Cape Breton Musicians and Artists page, also under “Music, Arts and Entertainment,” the discursive dominance of Celtic sounds and bodies becomes explicit: “Our island is internationally known for our Celtic music…Across Cape Breton Island, there awaits a mix of styles and sounds - from traditional Acadian music in Chéticamp and Isle Madame to toe-tapping fiddle tunes during the annual Celtic Colours festival or a joyous rock and roll pulse vibrating within the Fortress of Louisbourg” (Destination Cape Breton 2014). The Mi’kmaq are completely removed from the “mix.”

While the Acadians and Mi’kmaq do not appear as musicking, artistic, or entertaining cultures, they do appear in “Culture and Heritage,” another tab under Destination Cape Breton’s “Experiences.” But historicization of the island’s people, the constant and subtle practice of locating them and their cultures in the past, renders their cultures static and works to slowly negate their importance as actors in modern living society. This page invites the visitor to “Explore an Island where history lives and breathes. Our entire Island echoes with the whispers of the generations that have come
before us…There’s no need to search for history here - we’ve put a bit of time-travel at each exit.”

This text clearly locates the Mi’kmaq as the site of heritage and culture, but if the Scots have the lock on the “living culture” rooted in history, then the Mi’kmaq must have a culture that is so rooted in history that it never experienced the cultural resurgence that put the Scottish culture on the map. In this “Culture and Heritage” category, there are three Mi’kmaq cultural centers listed, and one experience called “Two Stories and Cultural Journeys,” a collaboration between the Eskasoni First Nation and the Nova Scotia Highland Village that presents a “unique multi-cultural tour, Mi’kmaq and Gaelic [that] includes two different and distinct cultures re-enacting the parallels and common threads linking the cultures in history and present day.” The text suggests that the Mi’kmaq and Gaelic communities exist in a state of mutual exclusivity; while common experiences must inevitably arise in two groups living within miles of each other on the same small island, the historical and contemporary experiences faced by each community suggest surface similarities rather than true points of commonality. Still, even in a section that seems to focus on the Mi’kmaq, many of the experiences listed are heritage houses and museums that subtly focus attention on the Scottish history of the island. The Acadians are marginalized once again. Only three sites are specific to the Acadian heritage, not including Fortress Louisbourg, which was itself primarily a French

98 The full text reads: “Explore an Island where history lives and breathes. Our entire Island echoes with the whispers of the generations that have come before us Here before all of us, Mi’kmaq culture continues to thrive and inspire. The Eskasoni First Nation on the Bras d’Or Lake, is the world’s largest Mi’kmaq community. You’ll discover music, art, humour, cuisine and stories that have been passed down over hundreds of years. There’s no need to search for history here - we’ve put a bit of time-travel at each exit” (Destination Cape Breton 2014).

99 Even the mining museums aren’t neutral, since most of the men working in the mines and mills were white ethnic Irish and Gaels, as well as eastern Europeans.
imperial military installation rather than an Acadian community. The Acadians are more explicitly highlighted in the text accompanying “Culture of Our People,” but as a secondary companion to the “Celtic roots…heart…culture.” “Acadian fiddles also share the air with Celtic jigs here – and take centre stage in the picturesque Acadian settlements of Chéticamp and Isle-Madame.” But the organizations listed underneath still favor the Scots (nine), then the Mi’kmaq (three), and finally the Acadians (two).

“We Rise Again”: Scottish Cultural Ascendency in Tourism

The Scottish culture become ascendant not only due to a provincial history of tartanism, which damaged the living Scottish culture even as it promoted a folklorized version of it. The languages of both Gaels and Acadians were banned from school instruction for much of the 20th century. Neither does tartanism explain the sustained genocide against the Mi’kmaq, whose children were sent to the Shubenacadie Residential

---

100 The full text reads: “It’s no secret people visit our Island to touch base with their Celtic roots, and some new to the culture, discover they have a Celtic heart. The infectious nature of Celtic culture really isn’t so complicated – it’s all about the celebration of life. Acadian fiddles also share the air with Celtic jigs here – and take centre stage in the picturesque Acadian settlements of Chéticamp and Isle-Madame.”
Indian School in mainland Nova Scotia. The self-imposed refusal to speak Gaelic by an early-20th century generation of Scottish Cape Bretoners was in response to economic pressures to integrate, and banning Gaelic instruction was not accompanied by prohibitions on other aspects of the traditional culture at home or in the communities.

The 1990s Celtic Revival, however, is implicated in the dominance of Scottish culture. Cape Breton-style traditional music fits comfortably within the bounds of a generalized Celtic sound world: there are fiddles as there are in Irish and Scottish traditional music. The tune types are roughly the same, and the piano adds an unusual (but perhaps interesting and refreshing) syncopation and chromaticism. The percussive step dancing is more subdued than Irish stepdancing, but it is visually and sonically similar, and the visible whiteness of practitioners match what fans of Irish and Scottish traditional music had come to expect. But Cape Breton style is distinguished from mainstream Celtic music because it arises in a network of communities for whom the music and the dance are intertwined in everyday life, rather than solely decontextualized and commodified objects removed from daily praxis. You can see the Rankin Family on stage, buy their CDs, and then travel to Cape Breton and perhaps see them play at The Red Shoe Pub, which they own in their hometown of Mabou (“Home of the Rankins”).

Destination Cape Breton offers ways to experience all of this “authentic” (staged, scheduled, and widely publicized) “Celtic” culture, but Celtic Heart makes it far easier to

---

101 Rita Joe, a famous Mi’kmaq poet from Cape Breton’s Eskasoni Reserve, began living with foster families at age 5 after her mother died. Her father died when she was 10. At 12 she was sent to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, where she faced forced assimilation, religious conversion, sexual and physical abuse; she was forbidden to speak her language, or practice her culture. When she returned to Cape Breton, a nearly universal pattern amongst the island’s natives, she returned to the Eskasoni Reserve, a newly created community resulting from a government centralization campaign (Feintuch 2010:69).
find cultural events by offering more information about the nature of the cultural experience visitors can expect at the sites. Each member has an embedded official video that provides an evocative pre-experience for the potential visitor touring cultural sites on the Celtic Heart site. Two-thirds of visitors use videos to choose a destination (NSTA 2013), and these well-produced videos, narrated by local culture bearers connected to each site, peopled by locals and visitors having a great time to the local music, must positively influence at least some visitors to look into the culture while they’re on Cape Breton. In each video, the premise is the same: “The Celtic heartbeat is strong at [profiled institution].”

![Figure 3.9. Still images from the Celtic Heart promotional video for the Gaelic College (available here). © Celtic Heart, used with permission](image)

The video for The Gaelic College (“An Unparalleled Cultural Learning Experience”) is narrated by, and features, Angus MacLeod, a Gaelic language and song instructor at the College. He speaks of the College as a place that “enriches the lives of the people who come to it.” Though he says the “classes offered here have a worldwide effect,” somewhat less than the whole world is visually represented. Racial homogeneity is apparent in the whiteness of the students, made especially noticeable when he says that
“there are students from everywheres, every continent” while the camera zooms out from the sole Asian face in a crowd of otherwise white fiddlers. MacLeod, holding implied cultural legitimacy as the narrator, confers and establishes cultural authenticity for the College, its teachers, and the presumably local and authentic cultural experiences the College engenders. Lest we think that this is all part of a marketing ploy, MacLeod tells us that the teachers aren’t there for the money, they’re teaching because they love the culture and they want to pass it on, even, we must assume, to people from away.

Though the Gaels of Cape Breton are white, and most of the people who visit them are also white, these whitenesses are not equivalent. Gaels work constantly to distinguish themselves as an ethnocultural group with distinct and particular customs, traits, behaviors, and values. As MacLeod says in the video: “For the visitor, [something like a milling frolic is] a glimpse into the life… the music… the voices that you won’t hear anywheres [sic] else.” Cape Breton and its Gaelic culture are unique, and the College is a prime place to experience it directly, a place not just to watch it happen, as a visitor might at the Red Shoe or in the Distillery’s bar, but actively engage in it, learn it, and do it with locals and other visitors. It’s a hands-on, immersive cultural experience.

The College itself is a unique educational institution, the only one in North America to focus exclusively on Scottish Gaelic culture and traditions, an identity it’s in the process of promoting in a comprehensive and sustained manner. The 2013-2014 Strategic Plan, released for the College’s 75th anniversary last year, details the College’s process of branding itself as “the preeminent Nova Scotia Gaelic cultural facility” (Strategic Pan 2013:5), certainly to draw visitors but also, and more importantly, to serve
as a resource for its community. The “Gaelic policy” centrally engages the College’s mandate to “promote, preserve and perpetuate” the Gaelic language by encouraging the staff to become competent in Gaelic with the goal of “achieving annual progress on the path to having a more bilingual site with the ability to converse in Gaelic” (ibid., 1).

Colaiste na Gàidhlig’s Gaelic policy will create a stronger Gaelic environment, which will be an asset to learners who are looking for an immersion environment, and set an example to staff members, students and visitors by encouraging facility in Gaelic (Strategic Plan 2013:1). This is a big change for the College, part of a recent shift in direction towards deep engagement with the living traditions of the Cape Breton Gaels. In 2012, the College underwent a major personnel change: a new CEO and education director were hired, as well as new staff in key areas like marketing and museum director. CEO Rodney MacDonald and former education director Tracey Dares MacNeil (who has since left for personal reasons) are both Cape Bretoners and culture bearers of the traditional music and dance – Rodney is a fiddler, Tracey a pianist, and they are both stepdancers. Most of the staff are now traditional Cape Breton Scottish culture bearers as well (in piping, fiddling, piano, stepdancing, and the Gaelic language). When I spoke with Rodney in 2012, he cast the hiring decisions as steps towards a new role for the College: “The Gaelic College should be referred to in Gaelic. It’s about marking and respecting identity.” Increasing use of Gaelic on-site is “integral [because] it shows the connection between the language, piping, dancing, fiddling, weaving, all of it.” When I

102 The entire mandate statement reads: “…to promote, preserve and perpetuate through studies in all related area: the culture, music, language, arts, crafts, customs and traditions of immigrants from the Highlands of Scotland” (Strategic Plan 2013:1).
attended a Gaelic immersion weekend in September 2012, several staff members were attending the language classes, giving substance to the Gaelic policy’s implementation.

Most of the attendees, adults and children, were fellow Cape Bretoners rather than people from away, and there was a large contingent of older native speakers on hand as well.

These classes utilize an immersion model called Gàidhlig Aig Baile (Gaelic in the home) and are open to everyone. Older native Gaelic speakers, who faced years in which their language was marginalized find new roles as esteemed and valuable tradition bearers at these weekends, and the growing emphasis on creating a bilingual campus gestures towards the establishment of the College as a place for the Scottish community of Cape Breton to learn their own cultural traditions, their history (the Hall of the Clans Museum is being reorganized with new exhibits and historiographic aims), and create community around identity. CEO Rodney MacDonald told me that previously, “in Mabou, and elsewhere, the perception of the College was that it wasn’t seen as a grassroots place. It was more focused on piping, highland dance, and competition. It wasn’t addressing the local culture. They didn’t offer fiddle until the 1980s.”

**Locally Significant, Broadly Appealing**

So what of the cultural tourists who happen by the College while driving the Cabot Trail, or the dedicated cultural learners from away who return year after year to

---

103 I caused quite a stir when I first arrived for classes at the College in August 2012. I’d driven my own car from California for the fieldwork, knowing that traveling around Cape Breton is impossible without one. Florence MacAskill, who works in the College’s Craft Shop, stopped me one day and said, “Is it your car? The one from California?” when I said yes, she gushed, “Oh, we were all out there looking at it, thinking is it really from California, but there were no province tags, so it must be…”
learn more tunes? The Gaelic College, in addition to its clear goals of community cultural development is also a Celtic Heart member, and must appeal to visitors seeking a different, perhaps less sustained, cultural experience. On the average summer day, tourists from away stop by the College while driving the Cabot Trail to tour the Hall of the Clans Museum, take in the noontime ceilidh, or buy souvenir tartan items woven by the College’s weavers. Others return yearly to the College during the two weeks of adult summer instruction to deepen their knowledge of Gaelic cultural forms, especially fiddling and piano; when I attended a week of classes in August 2012, several of the mostly white women over 45 from the United States and Ontario in my classes had been learning fiddle in the Cape Breton style for years.

Technology and experience sometimes intersect strangely with the oral-based teaching employed by most instructors at the College. Though students come to the College to learn Cape Breton style music and dance, the method in which it is taught (watching, emulating, and constant repetition) is often challenging to students from away who are not used to learning in this manner. Wendy MacIsaac, an accomplished and respected recording artist, dance fiddler, and stepdancer, refused to give out sheet music in her class at the College, which was a major roadblock for the many students who come from classical violin backgrounds and rely on sheet music to learn new music. But the Cape Breton style is traditionally learned by ear from watching and listening to musicians perform, and since the mid-20th century, by listening to professional, home-made
recordings, and watching videos online. A long-time College attendee, who was particularly frustrated by the lack of sheet music, demanded the name of the tune.

Sometimes a teacher won’t know the tune’s name, but Wendy did, and the student typed the name into a traditional music app on her iPad (which she was using to record all the classes), and asked if it was the tune by so-and-so. Wendy smiled and said, no, that wasn’t it. “But that’s the name you said, and it says right here that it’s by so-and-so!” Wendy, re-arranged her feet a bit on the floor while examining the tip of her bow for stray hairs and said, “Well, the Internet’s wrong, because that’s the name and I wrote it.”

Cultural learners at the College must accommodate themselves to the local ways of doing things, including teaching style. They must be prepared to hear the stories of the tunes, the performance of cultural lineage (“I learned this step from my aunt, and she used to do it in this way but I do it a bit different, it looks like so…now let’s try it together…”), in short to learn in a manner that the Cape Bretoner instructors choose, which is usually they way they themselves learned. And yet the classroom environment is artificial, which is why carloads of students head far out into Inverness County each night, often two hours and more each way from the College, to attend the square dances at Brook Village, Glencoe Mills, and West Mabou. For the cultural visitors, it is a site of authentic learning, but they perceive the site as “inauthentic” when compared to the kitchens and community halls where they imagine the music happening as it has always

---

104 YouTube is taking its place in the ranks of educational venues for traditional musics like the Cape Breton style. In August 2013, back at the College for the annual Cape Breton Fiddlers’ Association Festival – which includes classes in music and stepdancing and a big concert – there was a big stir about a Russian man in his 30s. Though he was visiting Cape Breton for the first time, he was an accomplished fiddler in the style, which he had achieved entirely by watching YouTube videos of Cape Breton musicians.
happened. For the locals, places like the College are very important authentic sites, because the rich sites of culture that cultural tourists imagine are happening just behind the closed doors in people’s kitchens just aren’t happening like they used to. Rodney MacDonald grew up in Mabou, which is now considered a cultural epicenter of the traditional music. But as he told me, “Growing up in Mabou, there was little connection to the culture. It wasn’t a site where culture was visible.” That changed “in my early twenties, when I was invited to teach stepdancing at the College.” He knew of it because a culture bearer from Mabou took her kids to classes at the College, which gave it credibility for. For Rodney at least, teaching in the traditional way is part of a larger effort at presenting the culture as holistic and living. “You lose important information about the culture, Gaelic culture, without an understanding of aspects of the language.” Integrating the varied cultural aspects and elements makes the College “authentic.”

It is essential that the College be a “living, breathing place” that reflects the culture around it. Centralizing learning, in Rodney’s view, doesn’t need to mean uniformity and loss of distinction: for example, language instructors teach students regional variants of words. The College does have two audiences amongst cultural learners: “it’s an educational learning centre for locals and an educational learning centre for tourists. We need to have a greater emphasis on people on the island in order to stay real and authentic. And doing that makes the tent bigger for all who come to the College” (Rodney MacDonald, interview) Most important for him, though, is the motivation that underlies why cultural knowledge is important for Scottish Cape Bretoners: “The more

---

105 Sláinte (health): people from Iona would pronounce it ‘slan-chuh,’ and people from Mabou would pronounce it ‘swan-chuh’.
connected they feel, the more likely they are to make their home here [rather than migrate away].” It’s a cycle in which people stay, learn and teach, feel connected, and then stay.

But making the tent bigger, inviting in tourists and locals, requires constant management. Margie Beaton spoke with me about navigating the border between the mission of the College, which more than ever is about holistic language learning/teaching and developing the local Gaelic community through transmitting cultural knowledge to locals, especially young people:

“It’s always kind of evolving, I think now the College in 2013 is the most touristy I guess it’s been. And you always have to thread that fine line…there’s the tourist kind of presentation and the authenticity. So, you know, leadership like Rodney and past leadership – Rodney MacDonald, our CEO – has proven to provide travelers with people who are of the [local traditional music] industry. It’s not a staged thing. So when Colin MacDonald sits at the helm of our museum greeting guests, he can honestly speak to the dances and the music and the language…he’s authentically bilingual, so that helps our agenda [of cultural growth] while being open to tourists.” (M. Beaton, interview)

Not everyone agrees with the compromises. Some in the community criticize the Gaelic College for “bastardizing” the tradition by offering bodhrán, an Irish traditional instrument (private communication), or question the true value of teaching cultural visitors because “[they] come here and learn the fiddle pretty well, can play [the tunes] note for note and go home happy that they got their money’s worth. But unless they know the culture behind it, they’ll never truly get it” (anonymous personal communication).

Local Control: Retaining Cultural Ownership

Though a look at the Celtic culture as promoted by Destination Cape Breton and the Nova Scotia Tourism Agency appears as a neat and commodified package, the
individual cultural institutions being publicized evade essentializing commodification by maintaining their connection to the community in which they are located and the communities they serve. In the end, locals run places like the Gaelic College and the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre, and ensure that the organizations serve local needs first. Most of the other member organizations of Celtic Heart have missions similar to that of the College, and the negotiations of tourist and local needs is similar. The debate is ongoing about how to balance accessibility with authenticity and ownership: Joyce Rankin, former general manager of the Celtic Music Centre, criticized “the ceilidh atmosphere” at the Centre: in the musicians are onstage, as in a concert, and the audience sits and watches. “That’s not a ceilidh,” she said, though she later said that the setup of the performance space is designed to resemble what a “real ceilidh” would look like. She agrees with Rodney that “you preserve the culture by retaining the people in the place.” One way to do that is create institutions that provide jobs, provide a venue for local people to gather where the music, dance, and local histories are embodied, taught, and learned. But the Centre also generates economic growth because it’s a place where tourists stop to experience the uniqueness of the island’s Scottish traditional music.

A mix of locals, tourists, and returnees from away attend the daily ceilidh at the Celtic Music Centre. On Sundays though, the locals take over the ceilidh and shift it towards a primarily social encounter and informal square dance and away from its more typical concertized environment when tourists dominate the audience. On Sundays, the musicians play full square sets, and medleys for listening while the dancers are cooling off and having a drink. For visitors, this seems like a supremely authentic experience; it’s
at least more authentic than the usual ceilidh at the Centre. The Centre has become a fixture in the community, run by local culture bearers and advocates, with a growing archive that may soon rival the Beaton Institute’s control of the island’s history. The ceilidhs and the museum address the Centre’s mission to “collect, preserve and promote the traditional Celtic music of Cape Breton Island through Education, Research and Performance.” In 2013, the Legislature of Nova Scotia designated the Centre as the “Official Celtic Music Centre of Nova Scotia,” but this official designation has less to do with the growing archival clout of the Centre than with its location as the first prominent cultural stop heading north from the Causeway on the Ceilidh Trail. For locals, it’s a year-round place to socialize, hear and play their music, and dance. After Labour Day, and again after Celtic Colours, the Centre becomes one of only two weekly square dances in Inverness County; it is a significant site of local community building and maintenance.

The Sunday ceilidhs at The Red Shoe (not a Celtic Heart member) and the Centre, and many other occasions of music making throughout the week, are always busy because they draw both tourists and locals. Tourists, Rodney says, get a richer experience because of the locals, a perspective that is played up in the tourism promotions (Celtic Heart encourages visitors to “Come ceilidh with us!”). As Rodney put it, these places “aren’t just entertainment, they’re also sites of education and learning [that are] part of the community.”

---

106 Gaelic cultural advocates criticize the Beaton Archive for not making the sound archives available to users. It also suffers from its location in Sydney (at Cape Breton University) because of the widespread perception that resources, including cultural resources, flow towards Sydney but not to the rural areas from which those resources derive.
A co-operative venture like Celtic Heart ensures the continued growth of Cape Bretons’ Gaelic culture as part of an expanding tourism sector of the economy because it combines the resources and audiences of seven diverse institutions that capitalize on existing tourism sectors, including the culinary sector, the craft sector, and the cultural sector. At any of these Co-op partners, visitors can unwittingly encounter legendary practitioners: most visitors don’t realize that the lady who often leads the songs at the Highland Village milling frolics is local Gaelic singing legend Mary Jane Lamond, who is very involved with the Village and its project of providing access to recordings of native Gaelic speakers online.

The Féis an Eilein is another Celtic Heart partner organization that “strongly promotes the Gaelic language and culture” via an annual series of workshops, youth camps, concerts, ceilidhs, milling frolics and dances.¹⁰⁷ The Féis, and Celtic Colours (discussed in Chapter 5) are the ones that really connect the Cape Breton experience most readily to the global Scottish and Celtic environments, but each organization is always operating within the transnational environment of Cape Breton culture. The first Féis (Gaelic for “festival” or “fair”) was held on the Scottish island of Barra in 1981, as part of an effort to “halt the dramatic erosion of Gaelic cultural arts that ha[d] taken place since World War II” (McKean 1998:250). The goal of the Féis movement was “the regeneration of ‘the Gaelic arts’ through encouraging children to make their own music again, without any element of competition” (1998:251). In contrast, the Mòd, which was held at the Gaelic College for many years, was a competitive gathering showcasing

¹⁰⁷ A féis “is a community-based festival designed to promote the Gaelic language and culture of an area” (Féis 2013); Cape Breton’s Féis an Eilein is part of a larger Féis Movement that originated in Scotland.
traditional cultural forms like Highland dancing and piping.\textsuperscript{108} The Fèis Movement now includes thirty-six Féisean (community festivals) in Scotland and four in Cape Breton. Cape Breton’s first Fèis was held on Christmas Island in 1991. Fèis an Eilein’s mandate is “to promote and preserve Gaelic language and culture through means that are commensurate with the values of our community” (Fèis an Eilein 2013), which means no competition and the privileging of cultural forms that are particular to Cape Breton. The effort begins with the Fèis itself, which has an entirely bilingual website.

Five of the seven Celtic Heart organizations have explicit missions to prioritize the integrity of the traditional Gaelic culture on the island (the other two are frankly commercial though they do support the local economy in a vaguely “cultural” vein). However, they do this while being mindful of the economic necessity of allowing tourists to experience it as well. Celtic Colours International Festival welcomes the world to Cape Breton for a nine-day music and culture festival that “promotes and celebrates” the Celtic culture. Cape Breton artists share the stage with other high caliber musicians with a connection to their own music tradition, though rarely does the roster range much beyond acoustic and electric North American and European folk musics. Celtic Colours is a huge economic generator for the island, contributing somewhere between $6 and $8 million in direct revenue annually, and creating jobs and infrastructure development. Its mission is one of “community development through culture” in the words of its Executive Director Joella Foulds, and it is very much a “community-based festival with international appeal,” as Business Director Mary Pat Mombourquette wrote in the 2012 festival

\textsuperscript{108} An example of tartanism, the annual Mòd was introduced in the 1940s. Its competitive spirit, however, is not reflected in the traditional practice of Cape Breton Scottish cultural forms.
program. Though all festivalgoers are welcome at every event, even some of the main concerts limit the ability of non-locals or culturally-unknowledgeable visitors to fully appreciate what is happening.

One of the main concerts in 2011 was called “A Ceilidh for Alice,” which featured big names known off-island and some known only locally. It was theoretically appealing to a broad festivalgoer audience. But who was Alice? In 2012, a crowd of mostly locals came to the Celtic Colours concert featuring most of the Beaton family from Mabou, so I suspect the “Ceilidh for Alice” also drew of people who actually know Alice Freeman, who founded and runs the weekly summer ceilidh in Inverness. For the average festivalgoer, the concert was more about the big names than the woman being honored; but the lens was different for locals. Examples of extreme localism imbedded within Celtic Colours provide experiences that visitors can enjoy and appreciate, but which they cannot fully understand. It is a form of subtle gatekeeping that locals use to enforce boundaries around the tradition and the thus their enjoyment of it.

Exclusion of visitors also happens at community square dances, as I will discuss in Chapter 6. Ethnomusicologist Heather Sparling, writing about her experiences attending a tourist milling frolic as a knowledgeable participant from away, notes that she felt uncomfortable participating because she knew she didn’t know enough to participate fully (2005:259-262). Long-time cultural learners who study at the College’s summer instructional weeks know this too: while they do not hesitate to perform what they learned when they get home, sometimes even in semi-professional settings, they demure when amongst truly knowledgeable local culture bearers. Or they might get up to
stepdance or give a tune individually at the College, but would never do so at the Red Shoe or a community dance. This happened when I joined a milling frolic at the Highland Village: I knew I only had reasonable command of one milling song, but I’d been invited, a key variable that meant I had to demure and then participate. Mary Jane Lamond was leading. Even though there was room for others to join, the tourists who came in were content to watch, and film us performing ‘authentic’ culture (we weren’t milling that cloth, but no one stopped the song to explain that). Lamond, however, explained each song extensively to the Highland Village staff and myself; she led us through the debates of the Gaelic song community, the finer points of each song’s nuance and genre similarities between “men’s” and “women’s” songs, and bemoaned the tour bus crowds, who don’t really care about what they see at the Village. Because most of the people around the table were locals involved in the traditional culture, she felt it was worthwhile to pass on her knowledge: they could use it to educate others, take and give pride in their community and cultural heritage. The tourists would just take it away; telling them wouldn’t matter. Sparling, referring to the many frolics she attended and participated in, writes that “tourists are welcome to attend and participate, but the most long-standing and popular frolics tend to be those that are associated with efforts to strengthen or revitalize Gaelic culture, rather than as tourist attractions” (2005:262). At frolics where

---

109 The evasion of touristic ignorance takes on a pattern and sometimes becomes part of the event itself. At the 3-Fiddler Concerts (Wednesdays in July and August at the Barn at the Normaway Inn in Margaree), the tourists often stay after to try out a square set. The tourists don’t know what they’re doing, despite the instructions of the caller, and they don’t really care. From the smiles and laughter it’s evident they are having fun. But the locals always wait out the first set. The tourists, exhilarated and winded, head up the lane to their rooms at the Inn, and the locals stay for the real dance that happens afterwards.
“attendees were encouraged to participate in any way they wished[,] it is perhaps no coincidence…that few (if any) locals attended either [of these] frolics” (ibid., 262-263).

The traditional culture, always already being produced and enjoyed by locals, has become an attraction for visitors, who are allowed to watch and enjoy and even participate within certain boundaries. But as Sparling puts it, “locals may tolerate tourists, but they will not cater to them” (2005:263). Celtic Heart presents seven of the significant Gaelic institutions to tourists as authentic sites of traditional culture at which visitors can tailor their cultural experience. In the next chapter, I continue examining cultural tourism. I look at summer as a time of cultural effluence for locals and how this depends on tourist traffic. I examine the cultural campaigns of Destination Cape Breton, NSTA, and Celtic Heart for signs of heterosexism, cisgenderism, and racial privileging, tying these to visitor statistics. I Use the Celtic Colours International Festival in Chapter 5, and local Inverness County square dances in Chapter 6, as case studies to show how these values appear in traditional practice.
Chapter 4 | “(Not) Finding Yourself Out East”: Normalizing Heterosexism in Cape Breton’s Cultural Tourism

Queer Moments

It was almost refreshing being asked if I had a boyfriend. Back home in Southern California, the reality of a stranger assuming that I, visibly androgynous, am straight never happens (my hair and walk and how I sit is too masculine, my disinclination to flirt with men too obvious, my body’s curves too subtle even before I eschew revealing clothing). If I mention a partner, people guess my partner is female, that I’m gay, and that’s that. But in Cape Breton, sitting at the bar in the Red Shoe Pub with Anita MacDonald and Tyson Chen drivin’er at reels and strathspeys above the rumble of chatter and the muted clanging of pans in the kitchen, I’m being asked by a man in his seventies if I’m all the way out here by myself. I am, of course, and I say so, and his fast rejoinder is, “Well, where’s your boyfriend? Why isn’t he here with you?” Part of this I later discovered was merely fishing for my relationship status, but I immediately noticed the assumption (or perhaps hope) of my heterosexuality.

This chapter delves into this assumption of heterosexuality, the locals’, the tourists’, and mine. I use my own observations and extensive close readings of touristic promotional literature produced by the province of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton’s tourism marketers, texts to intervene in the discourse around Cape Breton cultural tourism and its operative constructions of normative sexuality and gender identity.

During the entirety of my fieldwork, I never outed myself as a queer-identified person for three very strategic reasons. First, I was concerned that my (for Cape Breton
society) non-normative identities might rest uncomfortably within the overarching conservative Catholic worldview of many of the people with whom I worked.\textsuperscript{110} I did not want to alienate them or make them uncomfortable, which I worried could result in my loss of status with them, and consequently my marginalization in social situations, which are the lifeblood of Cape Breton’s Scottish culture and essential to my fieldwork. Such a scenario would have undone the work I had invested building connections in the communities. Second, I am aware that the way I look can attract unwanted aggression from individuals who don’t approve or are perhaps threatened by my gender non-conformity; walking to the post office in Mabou, two buildings down from the Red Shoe, I was verbally harassed by a passing car full of young men that slowed down to make sure I heard them call me a “f***ing dyke.”

The third reason has to do with blending in, despite my clear status as someone from away. As I experienced and observed in Cape Breton, people don’t immediately offer information about themselves, but only after trust is gained gradually over time.\textsuperscript{111} George, one of my usual square dancing partners, is originally from St. Louis, and he told me that he and his wife have only gradually been integrated into the community by consistently going to events and coming back year after year. To share something so personal about myself right away would be unseemly and immodest because it could be perceived as an attempt to draw attention to myself by purposefully standing out from the

\textsuperscript{110} I am also Jewish, though I chose not to out myself as a Jew either.

\textsuperscript{111} I ran into Margie Beaton at the Highland Village one day. She asked me, “How she [sic] going?” and I replied that it was slow going trying to get to know people and make connections. She smiled knowingly, and nodding her head said, “Yes, well, that’s the way of it. People are slow to open up.” Cape Bretoners say of themselves that they are careful about letting outsiders in.
crowd. I stayed closeted primarily out of respect for a general sensibility about sharing personal details that knits communities together by discouraging immodest showmanship. But this modest sensibility also works to preclude easy sharing of difference – especially identity – so that alterity is masked by cultural and social propriety. Standing out from the crowd is seen as grandstanding, because this is immodest behavior, it is thus socially inappropriate. Though I managed to ‘pass’ through a combination of my own silence and a culture of heteronormativity so strong that even my “obvious” queerness could be denied, I couldn’t hide my status as a single traveler. This put me in a minority of travelers to Cape Breton (only 13% of travelers visit the island alone; 26% visit the rest of Nova Scotia alone), though I did start wearing a ring on my left ring finger to visibly tie myself to a physically absent partner in an attempt to discourage unwanted advances. My comparative whiteness at times allowed me to fit in more easily, but locals consistently commented upon my somewhat more olive skin and dark hair, my (in)visible Jewishness. Most Cape Breton Scots are much fairer than I am, and as part of ongoing attempts to find a family connection for me on the island, they tried to make how I looked legible by trying to link me to the Frasers, a local musical family who look more like I do than they look like their neighbors. I lack light eyes, fair skin and hair, so my whiteness was not quite the right kind of white. I was white, but I wasn’t the same white as them.

I also knew something about the culture – I knew the square dance figures, I could respond in kind to Gaelic greetings, and I was around at many cultural events over a long period of time and a few years – which made me something more familiar than a transient tourist; I had shared knowledge with the locals, and I knew how to behave in culturally
appropriate ways. Walking, listening, dancing, singing, and conversing with an awareness of the locals’ notice of my embodied and closeted differences made me hyperaware of tourists’ (lack of/partial/detailed) cultural knowledge, and what identities defined typical tourists. I spent time in many cultural institutions that are frequented by tourists, who are told in tourism materials and by locals that these are the places to experience authentic local culture. Over time, I started to notice the undeniable patterns in the identities that typical island tourists possessed.

Identifying the Typical Tourist

Cape Breton is branded to people seeking particular kinds of attractions: golfing, hiking, historical sightseeing, culinary experiences (from having a glass of Nova Scotia wine to touring a winery), and cultural tourism on a spectrum of relative engagement from minimal (having a drink with live music as a background) to intensive (taking a workshop with a master musician or craftsperson). Whatever the experience though, it’s being marketed to the same kinds of people, an archetypal tourist.

According to a recent visitor exit survey (2010) compiled by a marketing research agency for the Nova Scotia Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism – the governmental body that manages provincial tourism and coordinates regional tourism offshoots – the most likely visitor to Cape Breton has completed post-secondary education, is relatively affluent, speaks English, is over 45 years old, and is traveling as part of a couple (two people in a romantic/sexual relationship) or with their
immediate family (married spouses and children). These visitors are likely interested in non-extreme outdoor activities (like coastal sightseeing, hiking in wooded or coastal areas, beach exploration, nature observing, and whale watching), are visiting for pleasure (56%) rather than visiting friends and relatives, and will probably visit museums/historic sites and craft shops/studios during their stay.

Not only are these the very tourists that I encountered during three summers of fieldwork, they are modeled in the sumptuously gorgeous and well-composed photographs that fill Nova Scotia’s provincial, regional, and local tourism websites and promotional print literature. What the survey does not mention is that these couples and families are – according to the promotional literature and my own observations – overwhelmingly heteronormative, gender normative, and white, in addition to the identities made visible in the survey. In this chapter, I focus on the intersection of whiteness with cis-gendered heterosexuality, the identities possessed by the typical

---

112 55% of visitors are between 45 and 64 years old; 82% are over 35. 67% of Cape Breton visitors are 45 and older, but 58% of visitors to all of Nova Scotia are over 45. 72% have a college or university degree, and half have incomes of at least $80,000/year (85% make over $40,000/year). Most visitors originate in English-speaking countries, and English is the most common language used in daily interactions throughout Nova Scotia; this is especially true in Cape Breton. Only 6% visit Cape Breton from Quebec, and most overseas visitors originate in the UK and Germany rather than French-speaking countries.

However, tourism publications managed by the provincial government (mainly the Department of Economic and Rural development and Tourism and the Nova Scotia Tourism Association) must be printed in both of Canada’s official languages, meaning that there are French-language versions of some documents, and even publications specifically detailing the French heritage, history, and cultural options for French-speaking visitors (all statistics from VES 2012).

113 Websites are critical resources for reaching visitors and potential visitors – before, during, and after their visit. Novascotia.com, the ERDT’s online tourism mouthpiece, had almost 2.1 million year-to-date visits as of November 2013, up 16% from traffic in 2012 (“Indicators” 2013). Website traffic through 2013 followed a perfect bell curve, steadily increasing through the calendar year as people presumably researched summer trips, peaking during the summer tourist season itself, and then dropped off into the shoulder season of September and October (ibid.). This chart shows year-to-date visits/month (in ,000s) for novascotia.com in 2013; second row shows change in monthly traffic from 2012 (via “Indicators” 2013).
tourist to Cape Breton. The relative affluence of many travelers, especially as compared to locals, suggests that these identities – white, straight, cis-gendered, coupled, affluent – define lines of power in relationships between tourists and locals, and highlight systems of oppression that govern who visits and how these visitors are received in the local context. Locals too exhibit shared characteristics with the people who typically visit them: most of Cape Breton’s Scottish community appears straight, cis-gendered, coupled, procreative, and white. The prevalence of these identities amongst both locals and visitors suggests that these identities, obviously privileged in promotional literature and subtly enforced by the absence of visible racial or gender diversity in the Scottish communities, allow for the maintenance of normativity – of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity – in local communities and local music and dance practice. Local culture brokers and regional tourism groups enforce normative local identities and cultural practice by actively courting tourists who embody those same identities.

This chapter arises from my experiences transcending the identity of “tourist” and moving towards some other identity that marked me not (never) as a local, but as a person more invested in the culture and the island, meaning that I had knowledge of cultural practice, including fiddling, step and square dancing, and was conversant with the names and accomplishments of significant practitioners. These are knowledges that the average visitor would not have. The push at the local and regional levels to increase cultural tourism in Cape Breton has to find an audience. I identify this audience through a detailed analysis of the tourism literature itself, in combination with visitor statistics collected by the province, and my own observations of touristic identity during three
summers of fieldwork. I focus particularly on analyzing promotional photographs and the representations of ideal touristic identities and bodies contained therein; close readings of photographs and photographic narratives appear throughout this chapter. Lutz and Collins (1993) have argued that universalizing cultural messages and hegemonies are encoded and perpetuated in photographs (“cultural artifacts”) of other cultures and locations in the *National Geographic* magazine; “both text…and photographs call up and then reinforce or challenge shared understandings of cultural difference” (1993:2). *National Geographic* and its pictures constitute a kind of “soft power…[that] tells us how to see the world” (ibid.:2). I argue that promotional photographs perform a similar function in Cape Breton. Additionally, and I’ll explore this more in Chapter 6, locals also exercise a soft power that influences how other locals and visitors can participate as social actors defined by gendered, sexualized, and ethnicized identities.

There are a few agencies and institutions working collectively, though at different levels, to market Cape Breton as a cultural tourism destination. The Nova Scotia Tourism Association (NSTA) and the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism (hereafter, ERDT) coordinate tourism promotions and marketing strategies for the province as a whole, including the Cape Breton region. Cape Breton Island is also served by its own regional tourism agency, called Destination Cape Breton (DCB). In addition, different institutional cultural brokers on the island, including the Gaelic College, the Highland Village, and others, have their own marketing staffs that coordinate promotional material for the institution itself in a manner that is consistent with provincial and regional tourism objectives and strategies.
New Tourism Strategies: Courting the Visitor, Presenting the Province

My fieldwork occurred over a period of reevaluation for provincial and regional tourism strategies. These strategies are undergoing a directional shift, moving towards cultural tourism development on Cape Breton and crafting Nova Scotia as a destination in and of itself, rather than a collection of regions with distinct identities (see Chapter 2). At the provincial level, the NSTA is also working towards courting culturally-interested tourists, though the offerings are much more balanced between the province’s diversity of cultures than I found in tourism literature specifically for Cape Breton. Even as the ERDT appears to equally showcase the four main cultural groups (the Scottish Gaels, the French Acadians, the Mi’kmaq First Nations, and the African Nova Scotians) within the province, the Scottish community is still privileged as the culture that defines Nova Scotia. A prospective tourist can find information about the opportunities and sites to experience Nova Scotia’s different cultures scattered throughout the ERDT’s print publication *Doers’ and Dreamers*, but the companion website is the place to investigate the province’s cultural offerings. The “Our Culture” section links to individual pages for Acadian Culture, African Nova Scotia Culture, Mi’kmaq Culture, and Celtic and Gaelic Culture (Figure 3.1). Each of these pages offers a history of those communities and provides links to cultural activities and sites related to each culture, including artists’

---

114 This is in process, but not yet complete. The regions of the province, as I argue in this chapter, are still differentiated by distinct regional identities.

115 In the late 20th and early 21st century, the movement towards experiential tourism became increasingly visitor-centric and geared towards allowing the visitor to explore and choose their own travel itinerary. Ubiquitous online travel planning amongst relatively affluent and privileged travelers places control of experience in the hands of visitors, who can “explore” both the website and the destination free of official direction, despite the fact that all the information to which a potential visitor has access has already been curated by official hands.
studios, cultural centers, museums, heritage trails, and festivals. But appearances are deceiving: the section for Celtic and Gaelic culture has the most offerings and is the figurative (and literal) background against which all other provincial ethnocultural groups must be experienced (Figure 3.2).

Figure 4.1 and 4.2. Two views of “Our Culture” in Nova Scotia, as offered by the province’s tourism website. At top, the faces, bodies, aesthetics, and personalities of Nova Scotia’s four primary ethnic groups are on display. Below, however, there is a clear indication that “Our Culture” in Nova Scotia is always already fundamentally Scottish, despite an increasing emphasis on the province’s multicultural communities, heritage, and history. The image is an example of latter-day tartanism in the style of mid-20th century work by Premier MacDonald and others. © Nova Scotia Tourism Agency, used with permission.
Despite the official provincial and regional tourisms’ celebrations and promotions of the cultural diversity of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, the sorts of “visitors” depicted in these organizations’ promotions are not particularly diverse.\(^{116}\) Individual examples of diversity do appear in staged official tourism photographs – an interracial couple enjoys the Grand-Pré National Historic Site on the Evangeline Trail (Province of Nova Scotia 2013a:141), another hikes in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park (2013a:10-11), a third examines baked goods in a Halifax market (ibid., 51) – and in photographs from ethnocultural sites like the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia in Cherry Brook (ibid., 85) and the Membertou Heritage Park for Mi’kmaq culture in Membertou, Cape Breton Island (ibid., 281). However, the infrequency and contingent circumstances of their presence makes visible subtle lines of influence in the promotional literature that suggest an ideal and desired touristic body that is white. This white touristic body is presented as an unmarked default, disappearing by virtue of its very ubiquity. An analysis of the racialization of all of Nova Scotia’s tourism regions goes far beyond the confines of this chapter; instead, I focus on the creation in the tourism literature of an ideal touristic body to consume Cape Breton’s culture and landscape, and show that the bodies and relationships depicted in the literature are the same as those that travel in Cape Breton. Moreover, the whiteness of the visitors is reflected and supported by the ethnicized whiteness of the locals.

\(^{116}\) Each region of Nova Scotia has a different identity, a different set of cultures and activities that visitors can best experience in that region. The Yarmouth and Acadian Shores are promoted primarily as a site of Acadian heritage, while the Northumberland Shore is “the province’s beach destination” and the Eastern Shore is “an outdoor enthusiast’s paradise” (Doers’ and Dreamers’ 2013)
Like whiteness, cis-gendered heteronormativity is also unmarked in the literature. Nearly half (47%) of visitors to Cape Breton visit as a couple, and another third (27%) visit as part of a family, together accounting for three quarters of the total touristic presence on the island (VES 2010).\textsuperscript{117} The tourism literature is awash in heterosexual, cis-gendered white couples (and families to a lesser extent) hiking, whale watching, golfing, and touring historical sites. These identities are privileged in Cape Breton, and in mainstream society beyond the island as well. These dominant identities are tied to systems of power that govern who has the ability to travel, and constrains where such travelers will feel welcome. Even the non-white couples in the literature are heterosexual, cis-gendered, and often have one white partner. The tourists I encountered during my fieldwork are mirrored in photographs used in the 2012 to 2014 tourism campaigns and confirmed in the results of the 2010 Visitor Exit Survey: a huge majority of older, relatively affluent straight and cis-gendered couples between early forties and early seventies (with an additional subset in their late thirties) and young married couples with young children. The vast majority is white. These are the ideal visitors to Cape Breton.

\textbf{The Soft Adventurer}

The presence of these kinds of people in the literature and physically on the island isn’t coincidental. The identity markers visitors possess (ethnicity and skin color, family structure, age, sexuality, and gender identity) are specifically normalized through repetitive construction in the tourism literature. What visitors choose to do on the island

\textsuperscript{117} Visitors to Cape Breton were more likely than all province visitors to travel as a couple or a family. Only 57% of visitors to the rest of Nova Scotia will visit as part of a couple or family.
is also carefully managed by island and provincial agencies (in Chapter 3, I discussed this in relation to the Celtic Heart Co-op). Contemporary tourism promotional literature markets to the ideal tourist, a person identified in Nova Scotia’s 2013-2018 official tourism strategy as a “soft adventurer.” The soft adventurer engages in adventure travel that is non-intensive – golfing and beach walking instead of overnight backpacking.

Adventure travel is a growing tourism-marketing category, despite the lack of a stable and universally accepted definition of what adventure travel entails. The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) defines a trip as “adventure travel” if it involves two of these three elements (connection with nature, interaction with culture, a physical activity) with “the core of an adventure trip involving all three” (ATTA 2013:4). This organization, in partnership with George Washington University, released the Adventure Tourism Market Study (conducted most recently in 2013), a consumer report that provides figures on the growth and composition of the adventure travel industry. Other definitions of adventure travel include one provided by Addison (1999, in Swarbrooke et. al 2003) who defines adventure travel as being fundamentally connected to nature in an unfamiliar place, while Swarbrooke et. al focus on the uncertainty, challenges, and exploratory aspects of adventure travel. Swarbrooke et. al, despite never arriving at a concrete definition, do conclude that adventure is in the “state of mind and approach of the participant” (2003:13). Adventure travel is where you find it.

---

118 Swarbrooke et. al present a literature of academic scholarship on adventure tourism, with a variety of unwieldy and overly broad definitions. Addison defines adventure travel as “any activity trip close to nature that is undertaken by someone who departs from known surroundings to encounter unfamiliar places and people, with the purpose of exploration, study, business, communication, recreation, sport, or sightseeing and tourism” (1999:417 in Swarbrooke et. al 2003:6). For Swarbrooke et. al, the core characteristics of adventure travel include “uncertain outcomes, danger and risk, challenge, anticipated
Adventure tourism is subdivided into two binary categories: “soft adventure” and “hard adventure”. In a 1990 article for the Los Angeles Times, Adler reports on “soft adventure” and “ecotourism,” two then-new travel terms that were widely used in promotional materials but poorly understood by travelers themselves. He defines “soft adventure” as “a less strenuous form of adventure travel,” and draws on several definitions offered by travel promoters to define the boundaries of the marketing niche, all of which involve the possibility of deprivations – no hot water, rooming with strangers – that would not meet the standards of “soft adventure” as defined by the Nova Scotia Tourism Association, travel reporters writing in the late 1990s, nor perhaps the would-be soft adventurers themselves. The Travel Industry Association of America polled American travelers in 1998, and reported that 46% of those surveyed liked “soft adventures” while 16% enjoyed “hard” adventures (Miller 1998).119

While popular press writers do not provide solid definitions for these terms, preferring to list activities that fall under each category, the ATTA establishes concrete and binary definitions of “soft” and “hard” adventure (the ATTA has a third “non-adventure” category). The ATTA’s definitions of these terms are in line with the criteria used by the travel industry and the popular travel press.120 Adventure tourism itself is “a sector of tourism increasingly recognized for attracting environmentally and culturally

---

119 Soft adventures included “camping, hiking, biking, bird/animal watching and horseback riding;” hard adventures included “white-water rafting or kayaking, snorkeling and scuba diving, off-road or mountain biking, backpacking and rock/mountain climbing” (Miller 1998).

120 As the ATTA uses the terms, “soft adventure” refers to activities such as “hiking, kayaking, rafting, snorkeling, volunteer tourism, and archaeological expeditions.” “Hard adventures” include “caving, climbing, heli-skiing, kite surfing, trekking, and paragliding” (reported in Adventure Travel News 2013).
aware consumers and for its focus on responsible and sustainable development, a model designed to create economic opportunities for local people in rural and remote communities worldwide” (Adventure Travel News 2013). According to the ATTA’s 2013 Adventure Tourism Market Study, 69% of adventure tourists come from Europe and North and South America, meaning they share some similarities in socioeconomic class, ethnicity, religion, cultural subjectivity, and worldview. These subjectivities make visible the average Western tourist’s position of power when traveling, implicating them in always already (post-)colonial tourist encounters of adventure tourists with internally colonized Western ethnic others and colonized Southern and Eastern ethnic others. Tourism is implicated in the contemporary circumstances of uneven global flows of monetary, labor, and cultural capital, which overwhelmingly benefit Westerners, particularly from former and current colonizing nations.

Volunteer tourism (or, voluntourism) in which tourists seek volunteer work in exotic locations, has been discussed as a latter-day exercise in what English author Rudyard Kipling called “the white man’s burden,” in which white people take on the moral task of elevating the circumstances of disadvantaged brown people in far away (often postcolonial) locales. A burgeoning voluntourism industry caters to altruistic Westerners’ needs by providing foreign peoples in need of saving (Zakaria 2014). Tourists from the West, who due to systemic structural inequalities around race are often white, volunteer in foreign countries where the visible signs of inequality are disassociated from systemic problems and thus, as Zakaria (2014) notes, easier to

---

121 Kipling wrote “The White Man’s Burden” in 1899. His poem responds to the American takeover of the Philippines during the Spanish American War.
address. As such, tourists’ interventions often do not address the actual needs of the foreign peoples (orphans, environmental refugees), but seek to apply cosmetic aid in an attempt to feel powerful and mitigate white privilege.

Though both the NSTA and the ATTA define the soft adventurer as someone who is interested in culture, the ATTA classes most cultural encounters, including attending festivals and fairs, getting to know the locals, “cultural activities,” and visiting historical sites, as “non-adventure” activities (ATTA 2013:4). According to the NSTA, however, the soft adventurer is defined as an “outdoor enthusiast…who appreciates local culture after a day spent hiking or whale watching” (NSTA Tourism Strategy 2013:3), and it is this person Nova Scotia tourism wants to attract in greater quantities. Adventure travel is increasing overall, but soft adventuring is by far the largest share of the market. In 2009, in the Americas and Europe, 1.6% of travelers took a hard adventure trip, but 24.8% took a soft adventure trip. In 2011, 4.7% took hard adventures, and the number of travelers taking a soft adventure grew to over 32%. By the late 2000s, the terms “soft adventure” and “hard adventure” had entered the popular vocabulary, as evidenced by their casual, accurate, and descriptive use in travel news outlets such as the Los Angeles Times (Scott 2008, Theriault 2011, Burke 2013). Hughes (1991) and Ogintz (2002),

---

122 Between 2009 and 2011, the number of North Americans engaged in both soft and hard adventures decreased, likely due to the economic recession. This chart presents the data from the ATTA’s 2013 Adventure Tourism Market Study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Soft Adventure</th>
<th>Hard Adventure</th>
<th>Other Travel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

123 An example of “soft” and “hard” adventure as used by the popular travel press: “The emphasis here [at the Red Mountain Resort in Utah] is on adventure. Soft or hard is up to you. Sunset yoga or a climb up a
both write anecdotally in the *Los Angeles Times* that soft adventures are appealing for mature/older travelers (aged forties to seventies) because they allow for experiences that appeal to younger family members but are not too strenuous for older family members to attempt. Swarbrooke et. al suggest that the “growth in adventure tourism is partly a result of re-packaging existing activities and re-branding them as ‘adventure’” (2003:36). In Nova Scotia, re-branding and re-invention are underway in the tourism sector, with soft adventure (the kind of adventure that Nova Scotia is most equipped to provide) the most visibly ascendant in tourism offerings and official provincial tourism strategies.

In courting potential visitors, Nova Scotia tourism and independent travel writers have routinely depicted and suggested who would find Cape Breton’s offerings most attractive. Benjamin, writing in 1878, suggested that sportsmen and relatively healthy people seeking a vacation of leisurely sailing, sketching, and fishing would find in Cape Breton the perfect destination, while early 20th century promotional material for the Evangeline Rail Trail shows a delighted (heterosexual, white, cis-gendered) couple gazing on the landscape of l’Acadie while ordering a meal in the train’s luxurious dining car (Franklin Arbuckle c. 1950 in McKay and Bates 2010). Though multiculturalism is ascendant, and more ethnically and culturally diverse tourists are being welcomed to Nova Scotia, the myriad photos, videos, and narrative texts that fill today’s tourism literature subtly suggest an invitation to only certain classes of travelers. The ideal “soft adventurer” isn’t just anyone: it’s a person specifically marked as white, older, affluent, heteronormative, cis-gendered and coupled. Affluence is a prerequisite for travel to Cape

---

40-foot mountain wall? An easy hike or a thigh-burning mountain bike ride? A clippety-clop-paced horseback ride or rappelling over a 150-foot cliff?” (Burke 2013).
Breton, still a remote and hard to reach destination. Systems of oppression in western countries such as the United States and Canada – which account for the majority of visitors to the island – still ensure that affluence is tied to privileged identities like whiteness, heterosexuality, and cis-gendered identity, and that is a big reason why the people who can even journey to the island possess these identities.\textsuperscript{124} They are overwhelmingly present and visually codified in the tourism literature. Normalized heterosexuality pervades local culture as well. Locals embody similar standards for heterosexual performance, including monogamous couples, procreative families, and masculine dominance, which I will explore in the context of square dances in Chapter 5.

The soft adventurer is valued at the provincial level, but appears with more specified interests in the Cape Breton tourism context. The appeal of Cape Breton as a scenic destination is well established, but its culture remains a minor attraction for tourists. The Celtic Heart of North America Co-operative (discussed in Chapter 5) is a visitor-oriented organization invested in the project of developing visitors’ interest in the culture of Cape Breton, as well as its natural and picturesque built environments. Celtic Heart is specifically oriented towards increasing the appeal of local culture to the provincial “soft adventurer,” and directing them towards the cultural institutions and arbiters of the Celtic Heart Co-op, as well as the other non-affiliated Gaelic cultural sites and experiences of Cape Breton. As the organization states on their website, “Cape Breton’s Celtic and Gaelic heritage should be an integral part of any trip to our beautiful Island” (Celtic Heart 2014). The “soft adventurer” is identified by the Nova Scotia

\textsuperscript{124} Only affluence and an older age profile are made explicit in official tourism statistics.
Tourism Strategy as being interested in culture and local color, but despite this, there aren’t many photographs of tourists interacting with culture in the mainstream tourism publications: most photos show tourists doing the “soft adventuring” (the hiking, biking, etc.) but not the “culturing.” When culture is depicted, the visitor often is not, positioned instead as a voyeur watching locals do their culture in a space without touristic presence. This doubtless increases the perception of cultural authenticity because of the distance maintained between the culture and touristic influence/corruption. The visual absence of the visitor in the photographs suggests that the scene is being performed just for the person viewing the photograph. Urry (2002) has extensively theorized a “tourist gaze,” the visual perspective/expectation with which tourists consume a destination. Tourists travel to destinations after having seen representations of that destination (for example, pictures of Paris that foreground cafes, bikes with baskets full of baguettes, wine, and cheese, the Eiffel Tower, etc.). Those expected visual encounters and vignettes, he argues, structures a visitor’s experience (they want to have those experiences), and local tourism promoters seek to offer those visual tableaus and encounters that the visitor expects, creating a feedback loop of intensifying desire and visual codification. In Cape Breton, the fiddler has become a visual icon of the island’s Scottish culture, while the music comprises a companion tourist ear of sorts. The tradition in its localized setting and manifestation does not (can not) exist outside its mass mediated touristic and transnational identities, and visitors arrive with preconceived expectations about what the music will sound like, where it will happen, who will perform it, and so on. Voyeurism of Cape Breton’s communities is still imbricated with the perception of the island as
culturally and socially traditional, and part of the desire to visit is the opportunity to experience a simpler life uncomplicated by the ethnic, religious, political, and interpersonal identity-based conflict characteristic of urban modernity. The absence of other visitors in the photographs implies that Cape Breton remains remote and undiscovered, and consequently culturally authentic.

The Highland Village, the Gaelic College, and other cultural institutions do use photographs of visitors (couples and families) interacting with culture bearers and representatives, but these photos aren’t prominent in *Doers’ and Dreamers*, the province’s official tourism publication. What I did see in the literature was couples interacting with natural landscapes and cultural spaces; I found not a “soft adventurer” in the singular, but a soft adventuring couple. When I started looking for this culturally curious couple, I found the same couple over and over: participating in a milling frolic, interacting with musicians, sipping whisky, and square dancing. They were peppered throughout advertisements for Celtic Heart, and most of its key member organizations, including the Gaelic College, the Highland Village, the Glenora Distillery, and the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre. While Celtic Heart has adopted its own couple (really, two models presented as a couple) as a unifying visual image for its own promotions, the touristic archetype that singular couple represents is fulfilled by virtually every couple pictured in the island’s tourism literature. What this suggested was a coordinated effort at unifying the cultural product of Cape Breton’s Scottish culture into a consumable, flexible, recognizable, and easily experienced package. In the tourism literature, there are many different couples engaged in the adventuring and culturing parts of the “soft
adventurer’s” travel itinerary, but all these couples are interchangeable (age presents the only variation, but the age window is from mid-forties to late-sixties). Overwhelmingly white (or occasionally interracial with one white partner), and exclusively heterosexual and cis-gendered, with affluence visible in their clothes and choice of activities, these are the people engaging with Cape Breton’s culture.

I call the Cape Breton-specific edition of the more general soft adventurer category “the cultural couple”. The cultural couple possesses all the identities of the soft adventurer, but is shown interacting specifically with the island’s cultural attractions. The soft adventurer is a more general category pictured extensively in all tourism literature – usually focused on the enjoyment of outdoors activities. It is this cultural couple that the Celtic Heart Co-op specifically seeks to attract, and the organization uses one set of models to represent the cultural soft adventuring couple in its own advertisements, and in its own advertisements for its subsidiary members. While their specific interest in Scottish culture may distinguish them from most other tourists, the cultural couple still conforms to the majoritarian identity markers visible in mainstream tourism media (listed above). Tourism promotional media contributes to the growth of the cultural sector of the tourism industry on Cape Breton by actively showcasing and promoting the opportunities for cultural consumption, and directing this promotion towards a younger clientele.
Crafting the Tourism Market

Tourism initiatives for Cape Breton employ demographic information to direct marketing at those tourists considered most desirable. Cape Breton tourism presents a case of mostly white people traveling primarily to visit ethnically-othered white people. The Scots are prioritized as the most notable ethnic culture on the island; the Acadians are marginalized in these constructions, and the Mi’kmaq are relatively excluded. The traditional values of the Scottish communities are coded in the depictions not just of the couples, as I’ve already established, but also in representations of tourist families. In the literature, families are normative: heterosexual, cis-gendered, and white with masculine fathers, feminine mothers, and at least one child. Children often serve as a visual metonym for the entire family, letting the audience infer the presence of the touristic family by the presence of the child. In addition to sending a message to visitors about the stable, traditional family values of Cape Breton, photographs of children also send a coded cultural message to locals. Educating Cape Breton children in their Scottish Gaelic
heritage, history, and expressive culture is a major part of what organizations like the Highland Village and the Gaelic College do. Visually representing children engaged in cultural learning with animators and tradition bearers reminds locals that these sites are serving the local community, and have the needs and best interests of that community foremost in mind (Figure 3.6). The services that these organizations provide to the local community are their primary focus; creating experiences that only or primarily serve the needs of tourists is not on the agenda. Tourist dollars are essential to keep the institutions running, employ local workers, and generate economic growth, but the cultural vitality these dollars pay for benefits the community first, and only secondarily the tourist.

Figure 4.5. A young girl (who reappears in Figure 3.12) learns fiddle with local fiddler Kinnon Beaton at the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre. Teaching children and giving them space to perform is an important part of transmission of Cape Breton music, dance, and Gaelic culture and language. Discourse surrounding the performance of children from musical families prominently features the naturalizing trop that the music is “in the blood.” Teaching children and watching their progress over years comprises a form of community monitoring and approval both for the parents (for providing opportunities) and the children (for investing in their heritage). Kinnon’s wedding ring, unintentionally foregrounded catches the eye and suggests stability and fatherliness in his gestures. His knuckles direct the eye towards his face, which smiles directly out at us. The girl looks out at the viewer too, her bow bisecting the photograph to lend a triangular central stability to a picture whose subjects lean precariously to the left. Her white clothing suggests youth, purity, innocence, and her red hair and fair skin evoke Celtic heritage. The scene is versatile: either Kinnon is teaching a visitor or a local child, but either way, there is care and gentleness in his eyes and in the movement of his hand towards her fingers to help her learn to play. The tradition, the picture tells, us is living and in the caring hands of teachers and students. © Destination Cape Breton, used with permission.
Why does heterosexual whiteness make sense for Cape Breton? And how are these visitors being courted in tourism promotions? Nova Scotia on the whole is a homogeneous place. A 2006 census conducted by the federal government tabulated the “visible minority population” (individuals whose ethnic identity (their non-whiteness) is visible on their bodies) as only 4% of the provincial population (37,700 people out of a total provincial population of 903,100). Cape Breton, with a population of 136,000, accounts for about 15% of the total population of Nova Scotia, and like the rest of the province, is dominated by white ethnicities. First Nations, mostly Mi’kmaq, account for only 5.8% of the island’s population (7,940 people). Most of the remaining population is some variety of Euro-Canadian (French, Scottish, Irish, English, German, Ukrainian).

English is by far the primary language spoken at home by all Cape Bretoners: across the island’s four counties, an average of 91% of Cape Bretoners speak only English at home; an average of 5.2% speak only French. Less than half a percent speak both French and English, and other non-official languages, including Mi’kmaq, account for only 2.5%.

Aboriginals comprise an additional 15,695 people in Nova Scotia or 1.7% of the population; they are not included in this category (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2012).

This varies by county. Richmond and Inverness Counties both have substantial French Acadian populations, and higher percentages of people speaking French at home (10.3% and 10%, respectively). There is no figure on how many people speak Gaelic at home since only Canada’s official languages were surveyed in this census (Community Counts 2011), but it is likely a very small fraction. According to a recent evaluation conducted by McEwan-Fujita, Gaelic in Nova Scotia is undergoing a revitalization, but “language shift” – in which minority language use is gradually replaced by fluency and use of the dominant language – “is still advancing or already completed in most traditionally geographically bounded communities that were formerly Gaelic speaking” (2013:169). Speakers of Mi’kmaq have retained their language more than have the Gaels, due perhaps to 20th century centralization campaigns that moved Mi’kmaq speakers onto reserves. Though 63% of the population of Eskasoni (one of Cape Breton’s five reserves) speaks primarily Mi’kmaq at home, this is not generalizable for the communities of Cape Breton as a whole. Wagmatcook has a rate of 39%, and urban Membertou has a rate of only 5.5%; Potlotek and Waycobah were not surveyed. In Cape Breton County, the only county for which I could find detailed language demographics information, most of the non-official language speakers (65%) reported Mi’kmaq as their mother tongue, followed by Arabic and Chinese (Statistics Canada 2012). Gaelic did not make it
The island has a very small immigrant population, mostly concentrated in Sydney. As in Cape Breton’s resident population, English speaking white people predominate in its tourist population as well.

**Minority Travelers**

Identity makes a difference in touristic experience, and minority travelers have to take into consideration different factors when they travel than do white travelers. Farai Chideya (2014), writing in the *New York Times* about her experiences as an African American traveler, explains that part of her enjoyment of traveling overseas is that her skin color isn’t necessarily the first thing people notice about her as it often is in America. She notes that that bias, domestically and overseas, is very real, and attributes it to the travel patterns of people of color. African American travelers, for example are more likely than whites to travel in groups for safety and community. By taking familiarity with them, the discomfort of being the only person exhibiting visible difference is mitigated. In Cape Breton, I encountered very few visitors of color, and this combined with the infrequency of visitors of color in the literature that invites people to the island clearly, though subtly, suggests that non-white visitors are non-normative. Towards the end of my fieldwork in 2014, a young Afro-Nova Scotian woman told me that her friends (also Afro Nova-Scotians) thought she was crazy for wanting to go to

---

onto this list of most common non-official language mother tongues. It must be noted, though, that only 3,000 people in the county reported their mother tongue as Mi’kmaq, and this figure may be slightly higher than for the island as a whole: Cape Breton County contains 2 of the 5 Mi’kmaq reserves on the island – Eskasoni and Membertou (a combined population of 3,680, or 46% of the island’s total).
Cape Breton. “They were like, why would you go there?” she told me. When I asked why they held that view, she said, “I think it’s because it’s not very diverse and they [her friends] wouldn’t feel comfortable here. But I grew up in Halifax, so like, I want to see Nova Scotia.” She felt entitled to experience her home province, even if certain regions of it are relatively ethnically homogeneous and visitors of color stand out amongst both locals and other visitors.

For LGBT travelers, as for travelers of color, the experience of traveling while being visibly different can pose added challenges. According to Travel Gay Canada representative Anne Marie Shrouder, accommodations and businesses can show they are welcoming to LGBT travelers through subtle changes in the language and images used in tourist promotions that can indicate to LGBT travelers that a destination or establishment is welcoming, such as the use of gender neutral language (‘partner,’ instead of ‘wife’ or ‘husband’), and having promotional photographs of gay or lesbian couples. Interviewed on the CBC radio program Island Morning in Prince Edward Island (May 17, 2013), she noted that feeling safe is the most important consideration for LGBT travelers; this can mean feeling comfortable walking down the street or being discomfited by a raised eyebrow if a same-gender couple asks for a room with one bed. “Images say so much,” Shrouder says. “If I’m flipping through a magazine, and I see a lesbian couple or a gay couple I say, ‘Oh! Hey! It’s somebody like me.’ It gives me the sense that somebody’s

---

127 Nova Scotia has the oldest settled African-descended community in North America. The first significant influx occurred between 1782 and 1785 as Black Loyalists fled the newly independent United States for Nova Scotia following Britain’s defeat in the American Revolution. Another large group followed the War of 1812, refugees from American and British conflict. Approximately 15,000 Afro Nova Scotians live in the province today (African Nova Scotian Affairs 2014).

128 Travel Gay Canada is Canada’s gay tourism industry association. Shrouder was on PEI to train hotel owners and business managers to better address the needs of LGBT travelers to the province.
thought about me [as a gay traveler].” Seeing visual representation of people who look like you, even a single image, can make travelers feel that a particular destination will welcome them, be someplace they want to travel. In the course of writing this chapter in early 2014, the new promotional photographs and campaigns have replaced last year’s, and there are new photographs of families and couples who are more ethnically diverse. For example, the photograph below from the Highland Village, which I had not encountered before, features an interracial couple soft adventuring at a Scottish cultural institution on Cape Breton. But same-gender, queer, and homosexual couples are not yet featured in Cape Breton’s tourism media.

![Photo of an interracial couple] Figure 4.6. An interracial couple engages an animator while exploring the Highland Village, a living history site that chronicles the history of the Gaels’ settlement in Cape Breton. Interracial couples appear intermittently in Nova Scotia’s tourism promotion for all five tourism regions of the province; this one is from the Village’s website. People of color are virtually absent in the tourism literature used by Destination Cape Breton and local island institutions. I rarely saw people of color, usually as part of an interracial couple, in Cape Breton’s Scottish cultural spaces. The fence and wagon wheel tracks converge on the gleaming Bras d’Or, against which the barn’s roofline leads the eye up into the clouds, as does the horse’s neckline. The small group, the younger man directly in the center of the photograph, smiles, laughs, engages, the colors of their clothing drawing out the colors of their surroundings, given the suggestion of naturalness, fitting in, and belonging. © Nova Scotia Tourism Agency, used with permission.
Gay Travel: Niche Marketing

Scholarship and market research on LGBT travelers has tended to focus heavily on the experiences, needs, interests, and motivations of white gay men. There is little written on the travel of other marginalized sexualities, nor work that critically engages the intersection of ethnicity (or religion) with queerness and gender identity.\(^1\) The “LGBT travelers” catered to by guidebook companies and studied by anthropologists and market researchers alike are actually represented by a narrow category of gay male experience that is not at all representative of the larger LGBT community. This gay male traveler is relatively affluent and has a higher socioeconomic class (he has the disposable time and financial resources to travel); he is also often white and traveling from the Global West (usually North America and Europe). These identities – gay, cis-gendered male, white, relatively wealthy, Western – comprise a powerful arsenal of cultural capital that allows these travelers to, according to Waitt and Markwell (2006), more easily navigate specifically gay and homonormative tourist destinations like bars and pride festivals. But these identities also allow freer access to many other public spheres by providing insulation from, for example, gender-biased harm and treatment. In addition, the privilege accorded to this homonormative gay male identity in Western culture, especially in the United States, allows these individuals to more easily occupy a position of power in mainstream social systems that gives them benefits of access that others –

\(^{1}\) For example, Hughes purports to elucidate the intricacies of gay and lesbian holidaymaking, but does not include anything in his book about bisexual or transgender travelers “because of a lack of information about their holiday experiences” (2006:2). Despite calling attention to the privileging of gay men in travel research, his examination is also heavily weighted in favor of gay men, and he often assumes that lesbian travelers and gay male travelers have similar experiences.
gay and queer people of lower socioeconomic status, those who are non-homonormative, those who are of color, those who are female-assigned-at-birth – cannot attain. Despite the prevailing image of the normative gay traveler as white, male, affluent, and Western in the popular imagination and in tourism marketing promotions, this image is a construct that does not reflect the spectrum of queer travelers: “the homogenous, same-sex tourist categorized as ‘gay’ is not an empirical reality” (Waitt and Markwell 2006:6). Thus, the value of the marketing and scholarly data based on such an imagined category is limited and the assumptions and elisions in it are significant.

Marketers and scholars have explored why gay people (which usually means gay men) want to travel and what considerations influence their choice of destinations. Based on data from many gay travel writings, ethnographic studies of gay travel, and anecdotal/popular press writings, Waitt and Markwell posit that the aim of travel for many gay men is to find “a place to call home” (2006:1; see also Hughes 2006:50-53). Heteronormativity motivates this search for a home that cannot be found in the actual homes (broadly conceived) of gay men: the heterosexist environments of Western cities, governmental and social structures, and the very (heteronormative) households in which most gay men grew up and were socialized (2006:1-2). Waitt and Markwell suggest that the need to hide at home propels gay males to journey to travel destinations (“imagined homelands”) in which they can be openly themselves (ibid., 2). “Gay travel cultures [are born from] a social process whereby men seek out specific counterhegemonic places where they can discover or become themselves by their performativity of gender and sex roles” (ibid., 4). Travel, for gay men, can become a way of escaping the closet imposed
by their home environments (with the daily interactions with familiar places, people, and obligations) by traveling somewhere new where they are unknown and thus freer (2006:5). “Encountering different people and places opens up an in-between space in which to explore alternative sexual identities than those assumed in everyday lives and routines,” though destinations are not necessarily any more free than home if one is traveling to a traditional, heterosexist, and/or homophobic locale. Waitt and Markwell equate the journey of gay men towards uncloseted touristic selves with Graburn’s theorization of tourism as pilgrimage or “sacred journey” away from home and back again that results in transcendent experience and transformation (Graburn 1977).

These writers on gay tourists portray gay men as a group lacking privilege at home, which necessitates their compulsion to travel. Waitt and Markwell cite Connell (1995) to argue that “hegemonic masculinity” is a category unavailable to gay men because of heterosexism that renders homosexuality abject, however conventionally gay men may construct their masculine identity. Despite this assertion, gay men still benefit from male privilege, even if they fail to adequately perform hegemonic masculinity, and can deploy misogyny to elevate their own status relative to more effeminate gay men and women. Connell reevaluated her argument in 2005, and stated that “men who receive the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity” (2005:832). Gay men can fall under either or both of these categories of dominant masculinity.¹³⁰ Gay men can also be complicit in

¹³⁰ For more on masculinity, see Pascoe (2011) for an examination of the compulsive nature of heterosexual performance among boys, and Kimmel (1994), who shows the ways in which masculinity supports homophobia, heterosexism, and misogyny.
misogyny, and can benefit from the privilege of holding and enacting acceptably male identity and behavioral norms (see Guha 2014 on gay male misogyny).

Gay men do not only travel in order to find “home.” In addition to the desire for freedom, Pritchard et. al (2000) argue that safety and being amongst other gay people in non-heterosexist spaces were “key influences” on gay and lesbian travelers’ choice of holiday destination, considerations that Shrouder also cited as important in her interview with PEI’s Island Morning on the CBC (2013). Hughes also identifies gay-(un)friendliness, the presence/absence of gay spaces, and the presence/absence of homophobia as key factors for many gay travelers in choosing a destination (2006:71). Consideration of risk is always present in choosing a holiday destination or experience, and while the choices facing gay and straight travelers are “the same,” he argues that the risks faced by gay travelers are of a different nature, and may be higher than those faced by straight travelers. Gay travelers can face physical or emotional violence, or microaggressions that can include staring or negating a relationship by assuming a gay couple are just friends.131 “Although one may celebrate the ever greater choices available to lesbian and gay men, one must not lose sight of the fact that these are constrained choices” (Binnie 1997:240, in Hughes 2006:73). Gay travelers develop perceptions about a destination’s relative gay-friendliness or anti-gayness, and locals’ reactions to lesbian and gay tourists, through various methods including word of mouth, news outlets, travel

131 Some scholars, such as Brophy 2004, engage in victim-blaming to explain why gay men are attacked while on holiday; holding hands on the street, for example, is construed as rationale for why the men were assaulted.
guides, and whether the destination offers promotional marketing specifically directed at gay men and lesbians.

Waitt and Markwell (2006) argue that gay travelers add a layer of discourse to the identity to some destinations as a result of their patronage. Destinations seeking to attract gay tourists may play up these new associations to attract the gay niche market. Hawai‘i, for example, is perceived as the destination for true and romantic homosexual love, a honeymoon mecca rather than a place for hookups and single partying (2006:106). Hawaii’s perceived distance, geographically and culturally, from urban gay scenes and concerns works to normalize gayness in Hawaiian society in opposition to many mainland urban contexts in which gayness is exceptional. Cities like San Francisco, California or Sydney, Australia become exceptional sites of normalized gayness because of their very disjunction from most other cities in which gayness is, in fact, the exception. Greece has a different identity as a place of belonging and sexual freedom; Greece is associated with normalized – though very specifically culturally codified and restricted – homosexual interactions between men (this derives from normalized male homosexuality in Ancient Greece). Modern-day Greece, in particular the island of Mykonos, became “one of the pinnacles of contemporary Western metropolitan gay culture through the presence of the nightclub” in the 1990s and early 2000s (2006:116). San Francisco and Sydney, Australia are widely recognized by mainstream and queer culture as meccas for resident and visiting queer people to live openly with access to a wide array of daily community resources and occasional spectacular events.

132 See Katz (1995) and Foucault (1990) for theorization and explication of heterosexuality as invented and historically-determined.
Tourism scholarship is increasingly recognizing the diversity of tourist experiences, and the relevance of a traveler’s identity to their experience. Until recently though, gender and sexuality were often ignored as a factor in tourism and touristic experience. According to Hughes, most of the information on gays, lesbians, and their holidays comes from market research surveys conducted by commercial organizations trying to assess the potential for targeting a broadly conceived gay and lesbian niche market (Hughes 2006:3), even though most of this research has been conducted exclusively or primarily on gay men (Waitt and Markwell 2006:9). Since the 1990s, gay (male) tourists have been cast as economic saviors for cities (ibid., 2006:9) because the idea of the gay male tourist is (stereotypically) tied to affluence, higher socioeconomic status, and good (read, expensive) taste. Hughes, following Sender (2004), attributes the limited information about lesbians and their holiday-making experiences to the “more widespread lack of interest [in lesbian tourists] by market researchers…and their perception of lesbians as being a market that is less worth pursuing than…gay men” (2006:4). He argues that the limited scholarship on gay travelers stems from the influence of white, male heterosexuals in shaping tourism agendas and marketing strategies (2006:5), but the absence of market research – and scholarship – focused on lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered and queer individuals

133 Gmelch’s *Tourists and Tourism: A Reader* (2010), includes a few articles that demonstrate the growing presence of gender and sexuality-focused/aware tourism scholarship (see Pruitt and LaFont on the play of gender, race, and power in romance tourism in Jamaica; Tucker on gender relations between locals and tourists in Turkey; and, Brennan on sex tourism in the Dominican Republic). Johnston (2005) has written a monograph on queer tourism in the context of gay pride parades. 
134 “Niche tourism” is tourism targeted at any single special interest group.
suggests that male privilege also operates in a way that privileges gay male travelers, who are also often white and normative in their gender presentation.

There are several travel guide series targeted at lesbian and gay male audiences, but the blogosphere may be the more vital resource for sharing knowledge about destinations – where (not) to go, what (not) to do, risks and safety – especially for young queer people.\textsuperscript{135} The gay travel guidebook company Damron (“The first name and last word in lesbian and gay travel”) has published \textit{The Men’s Traveller}, a guide for gay men, since 1964; Damron added \textit{The Women’s Traveler} in 1989, but did not initially put “Damron” on the cover because of the company’s exclusive association with the gay male community. The first women-only guidebook was \textit{Gaia’s Guide}, published annually from the early 1970s to 1989 (Haggerty et. al 2000:733). Fodor, in 1996, was the first mainstream publisher to release a gay and lesbian travel guide, \textit{Gay Guide to the USA} (Haggerty et. al 2000:773). Now, most travel guides (including Lonely Planet and Rough Guides) include information for lesbian and gay travelers, though usually not for bisexual, transgender, queer, or gender non-conforming travelers. With this foundation of issues in gay travel, I now turn to gay tourism in Nova Scotia specifically.

\section*{Gay Travel in Nova Scotia}

Mainstream tourism works to minimize the presence of LGBT people as tourists throughout most of Nova Scotia. There are virtually no visibly queer couples among the many couples featured in both Nova Scotia and Cape Breton tourism literature, and when

\textsuperscript{135} Autostraddle, a website catering to queer female-identified and female-assigned-at-birth people, publishes an online series of \textit{Queer Girl City Guides} written both by staff and users.
it comes to marriage on Cape Breton, heterosexuality is depicted exclusively.\footnote{136} This is another way in which heterosexuality is normalized in Cape Breton tourism and local culture, working to subtly exclude non-heterosexual visitors from full participation, and even full recognition, in touristic opportunities. Halifax’s gay pride parade is mentioned in \textit{Doers’ and Dreamers’}, but only a single, rainbow flag-waving person, shown from behind, is pictured.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{destination_halifax.png}
\caption{Destination Halifax website banner from the main page, in which the city advertises itself as a place that accepts diversities that include sexual orientation and gender identity. Here, a person of color is shown holding aloft a large rainbow flag while marching in the Halifax Pride Parade. © Destination Halifax, used with permission.}
\end{figure}

The entirety of \textit{Doers’ and Dreamers’} and novascotia.com lack visibly queer couples; this is also true of the promotional materials for the province’s individual regions. Halifax stands as the sole exception.\footnote{137} Despite the absence of inclusivity in the Halifax Metro section of \textit{Doers’ and Dreamers’}, and in contrast to the rest of the province, Destination Halifax is very dedicated to creating a welcoming environment for

\begin{flushleft}
\footnote{136} Even within the Parks Canada brochure, published by a national government organization and notable for the number of groups – rather than exclusively couples – pictured, there is a photograph of newlyweds. Looking remarkably like Prince William and Kate Middleton, they stand lost in each other’s eyes on a deserted Ingonish Beach while a sunbathed Keltic Lodge gleams on the wooded peninsula in the background.
\footnote{137} Rainbow Halifax, Destination Halifax’s LGBT tourism wing, does have a video on its website of a man describing his “perfect gay honeymoon” in Nova Scotia (\url{http://destinationhalifax.com/rainbow}). “Nova Scotia” is somewhat misleading, as they spent their honeymoon in Halifax during Pride week, and ventured out only to go to Peggy’s Cove and take a wine tour in the Annapolis Valley.
\end{flushleft}
LGBT travelers. The organization, which is responsible for managing tourism in Halifax, has a tourism subset created in 2006 called Rainbow Halifax (“Find Yourself Out East”) devoted exclusively to the needs of LGBT travelers visiting the city. Destination Halifax employs a staff member whose duties encompass “niche marketing development” and development of LGBT tourism. Using promotional photographs of normative gay couples (all of whom are members of the Halifax LGBT community; Lynn Ledwidge, interview) and video testimonials of gay (male) travelers, Halifax presents itself as an ideal gay travel destination, a place where LGBT people and culture are integrally woven into the community, a city of “friendly and hospitable people, family focused activities, beloved gay bars, and hometown of [at the time of writing, newly-out] Ellen Page” (Rainbow Halifax 2014). Halifax hosts Canada’s largest Pride event east of Montreal each July, and comes up frequently as a top gay-friendly city in articles about LGBT travel in gay travel media outlets online and in print.

---

138 Rainbow Halifax includes listings for hotels, nightlife, restaurants, things to do, events, shops, and festivals. I interviewed Lynn Ledwidge, who coordinates Rainbow Halifax, at too late a date for inclusion in this dissertation.

139 For a detailed illustrated description of Rainbow Halifax’s development, media debut, and promotion, see http://gaybizreport.blogspot.com/2013/06/destination-marketing-techniques-update.html.
In gay travel resources, however, the friendliness of Halifax is extrapolated to the province as a whole. *Out Traveler’s* 2006 descriptions of “gay-friendly” Nova Scotia focuses on fine dining and gay (male) clubbing in Halifax, the picturesque mainland coastal towns with visible cultural identities like Lunenburg (German) and Peggy’s Cove (Scottish and generally maritime), and the Annapolis Valley and Bay of Fundy wine country and seacoasts (hotelclub.com; outrtraveler.com). For gay visitors seeking to tour within Nova Scotia, there are several sites online that show gay-friendly locations to visit and places to stay, most of which are in Halifax. Many of these accommodations appear on Purple Roofs, an organization that helps LGBT travelers find friendly places to stay.
worldwide.\textsuperscript{140} When I visited the site’s blog on 20 March 2014, they were advertising the results of a recent survey that proclaimed Canada the top international travel destination for American LGBTI travelers, despite the fact that no differentiation was made in the experiences of the individual and multiple gender and sexual identities represented by that acronym.\textsuperscript{141}

Though Canada has national gay marriage legislation, and the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act protects individuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, as well as many other identities and statuses (Human Rights Act 2013[1989]), these examples of official recognition and protections do not translate to equal acceptance for LGBT-identified individuals in Canadian and Nova Scotian society. Peter Steele, a native of North Sydney, Cape Breton and the primary organizer of Cape Breton Pride, told me that acceptance, if not understanding, of LGBT people is growing in Cape Breton, and more people feel safe in coming out (interview 2013). Despite this, during the last two years of my fieldwork, a prominent LGBT community activist was murdered outside a Halifax gay club in April 2012 (Morrow 2012), and a man was stabbed after leaving a gay dance in New Glasgow in October 2013 (Graham 2013). In April 2010, two men were assaulted after leaving a similar event in Sydney (Steele 2010). All the assaults were investigated by the police as hate crimes motivated by the male victims’ sexual orientation, but despite this show of

\textsuperscript{140} These accommodations are owned and/or operated by gay and lesbian individuals, or are straight-owned but classified as gay-friendly.

\textsuperscript{141} The survey was conducted by Community Marketing Inc., a marketing group specializing in LGBT “market intelligence, strategies, and training to corporate leaders” (CMI 2014).
support and community outcry, visibility of LGBT people remains marginal in mainstream Nova Scotian culture.

Purple Roofs promotes Nova Scotia as a (to North Americans) geographically-proximate, money saving travel destination that is “more than one of the top most gay-friendly destinations in the northern hemisphere” (Scott 2013). Though that assertion is unattributed, the Nova Scotia locations mentioned in the short article are geared towards relaxation and wine tasting along the seacoast of the Bay of Fundy, pastimes for a more affluent and older traveler (who is likely also coded gay, male, and homonormative).

Cape Breton has five of the fifty-one accommodations vetted by Purple Roofs for Nova Scotia; only one of these five accommodations is gay-owned (it is located in Sydney, the largest city on the island and the site of all of Cape Breton Pride’s events). This gay-owned lodging is the only one of the five whose description in Doers’ and Dreamers’ specifically mentions that the facility is “GLBT friendly.” The gay-friendliness of the other accommodations is not advertised in the official tourism information published by Destination Cape Breton or the province. Aside from these accommodations, Cape Breton’s spaces are not promoted as gay travel destinations, with the possible exception of the Pride week and monthly dances produced in Sydney by Cape Breton Pride (which are not widely advertised even around Sydney, let alone in tourism publications).

---

142 Only twelve of the fifty-one accommodations are gay-owned or operated. Only one other listing besides the facility in Sydney specifically states in its Doers’ and Dreamers’ description that it is “gay friendly.” Some of the Purple Roof accommodations are not in the publication at all.

143 In May 2013, Travel Gay Canada offered “gay friendly training” to hotel owners and managers on Cape Breton Island (CBC Radio, “Island Morning” May 17, 2013)
Sexual orientation is never mentioned, but it is shown, over and over, that the subtly desired sexual orientation of visitors and locals is heterosexual.

![Image](image-url)

Figure 4.9. “Find Yourself Out East: Open arms welcome you to Halifax, Nova Scotia, a breath of fresh air on Canada’s East Coast where vibrant LGBT culture is woven into every aspect of the city.” Rainbow Halifax, a subsection of Destination Halifax, addresses LGBT travelers as a niche market with specific needs. Drawing on the rise in commitment to attracting “pink tourism” dollars, this section offers information for LGBT travelers to the city. The women pictured, leaning into each other, arms around each other, physically affectionate, smiling and laughing, walk down a Halifax street past a brightly lit gallery. The sign behind them – “hen house” – refers to a kitchen renovation company. Combined with the gallery, and the women’s relative affluence as indicated by their attire and accessories, the photograph suggests stability, safety, and that Halifax is a good place to make a home. Both subjects are women of color, which also suggests that Halifax is welcoming of ethnic and racial diversity as well as diverse and sexual orientations. As with the gay male couple visiting the Citadel (Figure 4.8) the women are homonormative: their gender identities are both clearly feminine, though slightly more masculine than straight women going out on the town, and their affection is not overly sexual. They are, in other words, safe and non-threatening gay women. Both the gay male couple above and the gay female couple here are roughly the same age, which also implies Halifax’s identity as a trendy city geared towards a younger crowd than the sorts of couples pictured touring Cape Breton, for example. © Destination Halifax, used with permission.

**Rural/Urban Queer Divide**

What the tourism promotions highlight is the implicit issue of where queerness can exist and where it is welcome. In the popular imagination, and in most marketing and academic research, urban spaces are equated with queer presence, and rural spaces with queer absence. Ethnomusicological, anthropological, and dance research conducted in Western urban contexts dominates studies of queer identity, non-heteronormativity, and performance. Early work assumed a universal gay male experience cross-culturally,
which in practice meant within the Western world.¹⁴⁴ These studies attend to the politics and realities of queer urban lives, worlds, and world-making. More recent scholarship has addressed the cultural and geographical specificity of gay (or same-sex desiring, or otherwise queer) lives, embodiments, discourses, and desires as well as transnational and global queer formations, which link queer communities and individuals in various urban centers.¹⁴⁵ By focusing almost exclusively on urban contexts, these works and others imply that gay lives only exist in such places; the reality of rural queerness disappears. The slippages between terms like ‘gay’, ‘same-sex desiring’, and ‘queer’ likewise signal the uneasy relationship between modern terms originating in the West, and the lives and bodies of variously gendered individuals within and beyond the West. Terms arising from a Western worldview, subjectivity, and historical/social narrative, cannot be universally applied to the gender and sexual diversity of other times, cultures, and places. Spiller (2011) and Norton (2009) have examined queer subjects in non-Western rural contexts, but works such as these tend to treat the subjects as being internally-referential, and engage little with Western high theory. Dance scholars have likewise focused on queer embodiment and dance practice in urban spaces.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ See Manderson and Jolly 1997; Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002; Manalansan 2003).
¹⁴⁶ Dance scholars Bollen (2001) and Buckland (2002) have examined queer social dance practice in urban settings. Bollen analyzes the “kinesthesia of queer identifications and the choreography of queer desiring” (ibid.) within social dance performance at gay and lesbian parties in Sydney, Australia. Both Bollen and Buckland use their own experiences as social dancers in queer dance spaces to elucidate acts of queer world-making and embodied performance in space, situating the (gay) dance floor as a site of ideal and actual experience of gay and lesbian community. Dance scholar Marta Savigliano explores gendered interactions (1995) and queerness (2010) in Argentine tango. Ethnomusicologist Kaminsky (2011a) has looked at the presence and absence of queerness in heteronormative social dance spaces in Sweden.
Queer cultural theorists, including Judith Halberstam (2005) and Karen Tongson (2005, 2011), argue for investigations of queer rurality to redress the overwhelming emphasis on urban queer subjects. For both Halberstam and Tongson, focusing on urban spaces as the primary and preeminent site of queerness erases the existence of queer bodies, lives, cultures, and practices in rural and suburban spaces, respectively. This is especially true within the Global West and North, where queer culture is most visible in urban spaces but downplayed, exscripted, and rendered abject in suburban and rural environments. Halberstam (2005) shows the tendency of queer scholarship to situate urban and rural at opposite ends of a spectrum of diverging queer experiences of acceptance, community, visibility, activism, and appearance. This binary division, she writes, “occludes the lives of nonurban queers” (2005:15). The urbanized, modernized West, with its specific conceptions and ways of performing queerness, is set opposite the ‘proto’ queer identifications, practices, aesthetics, and performances found in the global South and East (ibid.:38), though she does not distinguish rural from urban in these non-Western contexts. The West, and experience within the West, remains undifferentiated, though scholars are now redressing this critical limitation.  

The essentializing links made between urban life and queerness (Halberstam 2005:32) must be troubled. “Rural and small-town queer life is generally mythologized by urban queers as sad and lonely, or else rural queers might be thought of as ‘stuck’ in a place that they would leave if they only could” (Halberstam 2005:36). Scott Herring (2007), discussing the development of “queer anti-urbanism,” locates the rural as a site of

---

temporary renewal for urban queers; the rural is a place for visiting, not dwelling.

Tongson has critiqued the very assumption of a urban/rural binary of queer existence by investigating the spaces between: the suburbs. She enjoins scholars engaged with queer academic discourse to “insist…on the importance of intricate intersections and encounters” (2005:194) rather than repetitively performing essentializing binaries, such as the urban/rural queer divide. Tongson argues,

“In our queer spatial imaginary about sexuality and race in the United States, we too have become attached to this paradigm that separates the rural and suburban from the urban…those of us lucky enough to live and work in urban hubs have become…too proud of our “safe” environs, too comfortable in our gentrified queer enclaves…to consider the coalitional possibilities, intellectual and activist, with queers inhabiting rural and suburban spaces” (2011:194-195).

The overwhelming (stuck in) placed-ness ascribed to rural queers is mirrored in other conceptions of queerness as a site of inescapable locality rooted in unalterable embodied identity, in addition to physical location. Gender theorist and sociologist Jane Ward has described the “tragic queer hypothesis,” an endlessly-rehearsed discourse that queers are unhappy with their immutable identities, and would erase their queerness (become ‘normal’) if given the opportunity (personal communication 2011). Queerness becomes dislocated from rurality, and so rural queers must escape the oppressive and dangerous tragedy of their backwoods hometowns and venture to the nearest big city where they can truly embody their queerness (this plays out between the Cape Breton and Halifax: many of Halifax’s most beloved and famous drag performers move from the comparatively small-town Cape Breton Regional Municipality to Halifax to explore their performing careers and offstage queer lives).
Though Halberstam urges a consideration of “the condition of “staying put” as part of the production of complex queer subjectivities” (ibid.:27), little research has been done on this phenomenon, least of all in Cape Breton. Many queer Cape Bretoners leave their small towns to travel to larger cities with more visible queer communities (Steele, interview; anonymous personal communication). Ashley MacIsaac is known for his punk stylings of Cape Breton style fiddling and his wry combinations of queer and Scottish signifiers off-island. Though the island community supports him personally even as they criticize the innovations he makes to the tradition, his queerness occupies a fraught place in the Cape Breton imagination; when he comes home, his queerness must disappear. He must embody normative social categories of masculinity, desexualization, dutiful son and Cape Bretoner. But MacIsaac chooses to live off-island, to operate in social scenes beyond the traditional music community and the rural communities within which the music and the dance is so intimately bound. His queerness and local norms about gender performance and expressions of sexuality seem mutually exclusive; queerness of the sort seen in urban spaces cannot exist in the rural spaces of Cape Breton.

For distinct and mutually supporting reasons, Nova Scotia and Halifax emerge as significant sites for queer Nova Scotians and queer visitors to the province. The rural hinterland of Nova Scotia is a place of temporary renewal for urban queers visiting on holiday. Even Halifax, as a small city, can offer a respite for queer travelers from larger

148 It is almost entirely absent in Celtic Studies scholarship. Dr. Christopher Frazer at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia is currently preparing research on drag performers in Halifax, many of whom are Cape Bretoners.

149 In summer 2011, I met a young genderqueer Cape Bretoner who had left their hometown of Troy for Halifax because they felt unable to live as a queer person in Troy (also Natalie MacMaster’s hometown).
cities: a smaller community that seems more close knit and friendly than the larger anonymous spaces of gay-friendly cities which, because of their welcoming and normalizing atmosphere, mean that the specialness of individual queer people and the cohesiveness of queer community is diffused. The specifically chosen environs within Nova Scotia, such as those advertised by Rainbow Halifax and the gay travel press, offer travelers a pleasant and manicured rural experience that is always sophisticated and civilized, even if it is not urbane and urban. B&Bs beckon and lobster suppers with crisp Nova Scotia wines tempt. There is the added appeal of traveling safely in rural places occupied by locals specifically and repeatedly constructed as “friendly,” who, the logic follows, would never engage in homophobic behavior even if they did not approve of homosexuality. Nova Scotia is a place for experiencing a pleasant rural atmosphere, rather than one of danger and antagonism. The friendly persona pervades the province and Halifax in a way that would not be true of journeys into certain parts of rural America. This perception is maintained by the efforts of tourism agencies, such as Destination Halifax, to curate their marketing of only specific places – already rendered safe – as open to gay tourists. Destination Cape Breton, by contrast, makes no such effort, and even though there is no blatant homophobia in the advertisements, neither are gay visitors specifically welcomed.

While the NSTA celebrates Scottishness as one of the integral cultures of the province, Cape Breton is the only region being marketed as primarily and fundamentally Scottish. Nova Scotia is changing its own self-image by moving away from a Scottish identity for the whole province, but the possibility of an encounter with a tartanized and
romanticized near-at-hand Scotland still emerges in the tourist imagination. As tourism opens up to new markets, such as the LGBT niche market, the tourist imagination changes, and sometimes does so in ways that undo gender expectations that subtly underlie the masculinist and patriarchal structures of the province’s Scottish culture.\textsuperscript{150} The gay travel magazine \textit{Out Traveler} describes Nova Scotia thus: “men in kilts, rolling green hills, and wild rapids may invoke thoughts of faraway Scotland, but savvy U.S. travelers have discovered that all this and more can be found in our very gay-friendly neighbor to the north” (Sparks 2006). It’s not necessary to travel all the way to Scotland, when a place just as authentically Scottish is located right here in North America. This is what Nova Scotia and Cape Breton tourism, and also Celtic Heart, are hoping the broad spectrum of potential visitors conclude. The added suggestion, for the gay male traveler, of a homoerotic encounter with the lusty and manly native (males) suggests possible fractures in the lines between the homosociality in events such as highland games that non-Scots perceive as preeminently Scottish, and homoerotic encounters in virile and manly spaces that prominently feature feats of strength and endurance performed by men in kilts, hopefully worn authentically (according to Ray 2005, with nothing underneath). This also suggests unequal sexual encounters between natives and tourists that echo colonialist structures of power that privilege the affluent and powerful white man over the less powerful native. Here again, not all whitenesses confer equal power and privilege. Highland games are not marketed to straight women in this eroticized way; this publicity is directed towards the gay male traveler specifically. And such a promotional

\textsuperscript{150} See Ray 2005 for a discussion of gender performance and masculinity in Scottish Highland games in the United States.
message, suggesting a visible comfort with sexuality, is antithetical to the Cape Breton social landscape, replete as it is with right-to-life signs along the Ceilidh Trail and innumerable crucifixes and wedding rings that adorn its population.

Cape Breton Tourism: Ethnic Authenticity Close to Home

Cultural tourism is a critical avenue through which authenticity is constructed in Cape Breton, and both Destination Cape Breton and the Celtic Heart Co-op diligently incorporate cultural tourism into their marketing. Destination Cape Breton is not primarily concerned with marketing culture, although cultural events and institutions are featured in their promotional media. Their focus is on marketing the island as an all-encompassing destination, of which culture is a central aspect. The Celtic Heart Co-op, by contrast, is exclusively focused on promoting cultural institutions on the island.

Cape Breton offers a geographically contained yet diverse experience of natural beauty and cultural authenticity that is easily accessible for North American travelers. Cape Breton’s prominence in the construction of Nova Scotia as an essentially Scottish province (a process McKay calls “tartanism,” see McKay 1994, McKay and Bates 2010) increases as the island becomes evermore suited to claim its emerging status as not only the most Scottish part of Nova Scotia, but also the most Celtic part of North America. Its landscape and its culture become those of Scotland itself, made real by the Cape Breton style practitioners who travel to Scotland to “reintroduce” the traditional community-based culture that Scotland has lost, and perpetuated through suggestion in the tourism literature. Golf Cape Breton’s campaign slogan “No it’s not Scotland. It’s right next
“door” explicitly equates Cape Breton’s courses with those of Scotland in beauty and caliber, and suggests that the island also has the other amenities that would make a golfing trip to Scotland complete, including beautiful seacoasts, quaint villages, and (Scotch) whisky. Cape Breton, however, is more desirable because of its location in North America, and thus easier and less expensive to reach for both Canadians and Americans, the primary points of origin for tourists to the island.

Cape Breton even has its very own single malt whisky distillery, and is home to the only true “links” course in Canada. Not only does Cape Breton approximate Scotland in golf and spirit(s), its culture is the authentic and vital music, dance, and song of the Highlands that Scotland lost and is now re-importing through the bodies of Cape Breton tradition bearers, whose strong link to a cultural past and present will enervate the culture of the “homeland.” Scotland’s ethnicized allure becomes equivalent Cape Breton’s, and the comparison to Scotland shores up Cape Breton’s Scottish credentials by displacing evocations of Scotland onto the North American island. The extreme locality of the tourist experience available for consumption suggests that Cape Breton and its people are uniquely in touch with their cultural identities, maintaining connection to a more local and community-focused time despite being geographically proximate to a disaffected of the modern world.

151 Links courses, the original style of golfing developed in Scotland in the 19th century, follow the natural landscape rather than leveling it, and golf connoisseurs tend to consider all non-links courses inferior play.

152 For most Cape Breton Gaels, Scotland is a place of heritage but not a homeland. Cape Breton has displaced Scotland as a homeland; it is the island to which Gaels want to return.

153 See McKay and Bates 2010 for a discussion of Nova Scotia’s early 20th century construction as a place where an authentic European folk – the Gaels – continued to live an appealingly “premodern” existence well into the 20th and even 21st centuries.
How does Destination Cape Breton market culture to visitors? And how does this intersect with the work that Celtic Heart is undertaking by attracting visitors to Cape Breton’s cultural institutions? Members of the Celtic Heart Co-operative “are working to provide an unforgettable vacation experience to a growing segment of travellers seeking authentic cultural and musical experiences. The group is developing strategic partnerships with a number of accommodation providers on the island who also strive to present Cape Breton’s Celtic culture” (Celtic Heart press release 2010). Right now, this secondary interest appears to consist solely of the Glenora Distillery, which operates an inn with rooms and chalets as well as a high-end restaurant, pub, and whisky distillery.

The cultural couple, a subset of the province-wide soft adventurer, represents the “growing segment of travelers seeking authentic cultural and musical experiences” (Celtic Heart 2010). Celtic Heart never explicitly states what identities these desired travelers have, their identities are visible in the tourism literature used to attract them.

The dominant marketing strategy for Nova Scotia has been to promote the province as a collection of tourism regions, but this began changing in the early 21st century. The 2013-2018 Tourism Strategy for Nova Scotia makes clear that those responsible for managing tourism in the province will be actively transitioning their presentation of Nova Scotia from a collection of specialized regional destinations to a destination in and of itself. The product under development via the visitor-centered five-year strategy is “Nova Scotia – one Nova Scotia, rather than geographic segments, events, or specific attractions” (NSTA 2013:3). Cape Breton adds the Scottish authenticity to the unified Nova Scotia product, meaning that Nova Scotia as a whole
need not be uniformly Scottish and can invest in promoting and increasing culturally- and experientially-diverse attractions and developing niche marketing directed at specific touristic interests and populations. Cape Breton, though, is unique in the tourism literature for two key reasons. Cape Breton, despite its own strongly multicultural history and present, remains overwhelmingly Scottish in its public construction for tourists. Additionally, it is the only tourism region within the province that is further divided into smaller tourism regions. The five regions of Cape Breton are based around the routes of five provincial scenic driving trails that weave along the island’s coastlines. In each of these regions, the tourist can experience a different aspect of Cape Breton because each is distinguished by its own specific and distinct touristic personality (see the Introduction for a description of each Trail).

Cape Breton as a whole is depicted in provincial tourism literature, island-specific regional tourism promotions, and in commercial travel magazines as foremost a destination of beautiful scenery in which a couple (almost never an individual) can get carried away in the majesty of “Nova Scotia’s Masterpiece” and each others’ presence. The gaze of the camera, which becomes the gaze of the prospective visitor, is carefully curated to present an appealing image not only of the scenery, but also of the visitors and locals/natives within the environment.\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Golf Getaways} featured Cape Breton in

---

\textsuperscript{154} Individuals are often posed looking at the camera or flirting with the gaze behind the camera, which gives the impression that their traveling companion, spouse, or romantic partner is the one taking the picture, and that the individual isn’t really traveling alone. Take for example the picture on the cover of the 2013 English language edition of \textit{Doers’ and Dreamers’:} a woman in a dress posing at an English-style phone booth in a vineyard that slopes down to the sea in the background. Her bike’s basket is filled with picnic provisions. Even if she is alone, her open body posture (but crossed legs) and bright smile suggest a friendly flirtatiousness and a chaste availability, and a homogeneous desexualized subject. The object of the gaze here is not the native woman, but the tourist woman.
December 2012 as part of its *Essential Destination Series*, and the photos in that feature emphasize foremost the landscape in which the subject can find peace and solitude. The cover and feature-spread photographs show virtually unpeopled panoramas of the Cabot Links Course at Inverness in the later afternoon. The sun lengthens the shadows on the course and saturates it with warm golden light. The sea and boardwalk are visible at the far left of the frame, extending the landscape beyond the confines of the page; four tiny golfers play the course on an open topography under a vast sky. A forested hill runs down towards the sea in the distance, but there’s no sign of town or civilization except the electrical poles running up the unseen road in the distance (The Cabot Trail, out of frame in the far right). The staging of this photograph is similar to many official tourism photos that show a couple, individual, or family in a mostly or entirely natural setting, though in the official photos, the frame is often tighter around the people, so we can see their expressions or divine something about their relationship, as well as visually experience the natural setting they are in. In the promotional photograph below, a heterosexual couple experiences the natural environment together.
Figure 4.10. An archetypal soft-adventuring couple enjoys the sunset on the beach at Inverness, Cape Breton. Older than the couples depicted in the photographs shown previously, their age is more typical for visitors to Cape Breton, who have an older age profile than visitors to the rest of Nova Scotia (67% of Cape Breton visitors are 45 and older, but 58% of visitors to all of Nova Scotia are over 45). Relatively affluent, probably retired or towards the end of their working careers, with plenty of disposable income to make the journey to Cape Breton. Smiling with arms around each other, they enjoy the scenery and each other’s company, dressed as if they’ve had a day of driving, non-strenuous exploration, or even golf. Soft adventuring is defined by its minimal physical demands – light day hiking, beach walking, golf, and fishing are examples – and by participants’ interest in experiencing culture, broadly defined, as well as the built and natural environments. © Destination Cape Breton, used with permission.

Of course, Cape Breton is about a particular kind of experiential consumption of the natural environment. The natural landscape, peopled by the touristic couple, is not lonely windswept coasts and imposing forested highlands. Instead, it is tamed and civilized, not only by the impeccably maintained trails in the National Park and the unevenly maintained driving trails/rural highways, but also by the picturesque nature of the built landscape: the neat white houses of the Scottish regions and the colorful houses in Chéticamp, red barns and green fields nestled between the forested hills of the narrow Margaree River Valley, piles of lobster traps, roads ascending steep highlands and traversing bucolic countryside. Official tourism literature and articles in the commercial tourism press showcase the many activities visitors can engage in and the amenities they
may enjoy. Smiling locals invite the viewer into their communities, workshops, and pubs, or offer services to visiting couples in the form of beverages, food, or laughs, but most images show the tourist couple alone, experiencing Cape Breton together. The Destination Cape Breton foldout in Doers’ and Dreamers’, the only such formatting extra in the book, marks Cape Breton as a destination of special importance in Nova Scotia, a scenic and cultural destination with a unique identity/product. Animators fire muskets and smith at Louisbourg. Couples dine on mussels, hike the Skyline Trail, and gaze out from atop a sunset-illuminated coastal headland while straddling bicycles. Moving from the promotional section into the Ceilidh Trail section, a fourth couple enjoys a private whisky tasting in the barrel room with a Glenora Distillery worker. The chef from the Red Shoe welcomes us. Margie Beaton, fiddle in hand, grins at us, and a group of female tourists show off the fabrics they’ve dyed with a local artist. There are children too, in an advertisement for the Louisbourg 300 celebration: a group of visiting children are lined up for soldierly-training at Louisbourg, while another group in costume participate in an education program for local school children, in which they learn about the Fortress’ history while simultaneously providing local color and unwittingly participating in the touristic authenticity of the experience.

The Cabot Trail presents a different view of the island: while the Ceilidh Trail is about culture, the Cabot Trail is about scenery and the outdoors. A single male walks the Cabot Links golf course in Inverness, another fly fishes in the Margaree River. A couple

---

155 They are able to do this partly because of the accessibility of Cape Breton and its culture: near at hand as a driving destination for Canadians and Americans, filled with English-speakers from a white ethnic culture that appears and is promoted as a more traditional version of the culture inhabited by many visitors.
bikes along the Cabot Trail, and a group of four rides horses past a lake in the National Park. Animals roam free and alone in natural landscapes. The Keltic Lodge gleams white and red amidst the dense greens of the forests and golf course and bright blue waters of its surroundings that stretch out on either side. Everyone is outside enjoying the scenery and fine summer weather, except one laughing couple inside at the Alexander Graham Bell Museum (the only couple of color in the entire Cape Breton section), but since they’re holding a bright rainbow kite the assumption is that they’ll soon go outside to fly it. Couples alternately dominate and become small in vast landscapes: a tiny (white) couple strolls a magnificent sunset beach, while another (white couple) looks out over the highlands of the National Park, and a third (interracial) couple crosses a broad river valley. Meanwhile, as on the Ceilidh Trail, (white) locals offer music, food, and crafts.

But though Chéticamp lies at the entrance to the National Park along the Cabot Trail, this vibrant community and its active Acadian cultural life are not pictured. A prospective visitor paging through the brochure might miss it entirely.

The Ceilidh Trail promotions, at least in this publication, obviously showcase the Gaelic culture of Inverness County, but the cultures (Gaelic and Acadian) of the Cabot Trail are not visually depicted as attractions for the visitor, as are the outdoors. The Ceilidh Trail becomes the cultural trail in the official provincial and regional materials. That’s where the Celtic heart beats strong, and where the Celtic Heart Co-op comes into the picture through its efforts to shore up the local cultural tourism. Its promotions are conducted more through candid images and videos of locals and real visitors, rather than
staged media with models. I will return to Celtic Heart shortly, after discussing the heteronormativity of Destination Cape Breton’s cultural and scenic tourism promotions.

**Finding the Tourists: A Close Reading**

In this section, I turn to a deep textual analysis of online media campaigns engineered by Destination Cape Breton that combine photographs and narrative text to promote different regions of the island. These narrative sequences guide perspective visitors through the island’s Trails before they arrive, helping them get a visual and experiential sense of what they might expect to do, what they will see, and who they will encounter.\(^{156}\) Potential travelers are invited to picture themselves in these images, but because of the exclusive presence of a narrow range of embodied identities, not every potential visitor can easily read themselves into the island environment.

These narratives build on the region’s personality and are peopled by typical soft adventuring tourists engaged in soft adventures. Even though narratives exist for all five of Cape Breton’s driving trails, I examine the online promotion only for the Ceilidh Trail and the Cabot Trail, both of which appear on Destination Cape Breton’s website, in order to show how culture is promoted in the culturally-rich Scottish areas of western and central Cape Breton; these promotions direct tourists with specific interests to certain on-island experiences defined by region. I have displayed the sequence of images and their accompanying text as they appear on the website; this text is distinguished by italics and

---

\(^{156}\) A recent update to the website (Spring 2014) changed the format from what I present here. In the new iteration, the images are collected at the top of the page like snapshots in a photo album, while the textual snippets, which formerly appeared between the images as I show here, are collected underneath the images. No changes were made to the text or the images.
appears centered in single-spaced format immediately above the pictures. The text between each narration/photographic pairing is my analysis of the image and its accompanying text, including why it is included and what additional messages it contains. My analytical textual interruptions are double-spaced to distinguish them from the narrative itself. It is in promotions like this that the heterosexism and whiteness of tourism campaigns for Cape Breton becomes visible (Figures 4.11 to 4.15; all copyrighted to Destination Cape Breton and used with permission).

“Listen - echoing off the hills, in the distance - the sound of a fiddle and a piano, some clapping and laughter.” (Figure 4.11)

We are drawn in immediately by the sounding culture that beckons to us from afar (through our computers and down Cape Breton’s roads) and tempts us with the prospect of enjoyment and fun. The laughter may be that of the warm and friendly locals initially, but the implication is that we will soon be laughing and enjoying ourselves alongside them. This photograph shows a female tourist “meet[ing] local musicians at the Red
Shoe Pub” (DCB 2014). She is conventionally feminine, and also clearly a tourist. Her hair is long, straightened, and highlighted. She wears a dress that is form-revealing yet modest, and her body conventionally feminine and gender normative. We recognize her as a tourist with limited knowledge of the music because she is holding the fiddler’s bow as if she’s never seen one before (which unintentionally and subtly eroticizes the otherwise chaste photograph); in addition, her fashion choices do not match those of local women her age, mostly because of the relative immodesty of the dress’s neckline and form-fitting design. A classic compositional structure leads the eye from the fiddler on the right, catches on the gaze of the other fiddler as he looks upwards towards the woman. The line of the bow reinforces this invisible line, as does the presence of the man seated out of focus by the window in the background. Perhaps she’s approaching the musicians after they have performed, a common occurrence in this pub. Though her encounter with authentic culture and practitioners is a flirtatious it is only chastely heterosexual (note the wedding rings on her hand on the musician’s hand).

“That’s the sound of a ceilidh (pronounced kay-lee) and that is the Cape Breton word for a having a rollicking good time. Celtic culture abounds – in fact, Gaelic is still taught in schools here. You will discover it at a Wednesday afternoon ceilidh at the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre in Judique; at the traditional square dance in Mabou and at the annual outdoor Scottish concert near Broad Cove.” (Figure 4.12)
And many other places besides, though those are some of the most accessible and famous (the Red Shoe, which we encountered in Figure 4.12, is also a musical epicenter for tourists and locals). Gaelic is glossed as equivalent to Celtic, a minor elision that most tourists won’t notice but which makes the primarily Scottish Gaelic culture more accessible and recognizable by equating it with more familiar Celtic cultural experiences, like the Irish pub and session and Riverdance. Donnie Campbell, Manager and Whisky Ambassador at the Glenora Distillery, spoke with me about the use of “Celtic” in local marketing, particularly when used in reference to music or culture: “It’s a more recognized term than, say, ‘Cape Breton’ [as in ‘Cape Breton music’]. People who come up for the music will know that ‘Celtic’ equals ‘Cape Breton’. But for non-knowledgeable visitors, ‘Celtic’ is more known. Glenora has a global market that respects the whisky; not all of these people know about Celtic music/culture/etc… ‘Cape Breton’ and ‘Celtic’ music, it’s what[ever] you think it is.” He added that the tendency to promote the local culture can become uncritical such that the meaning of the terms is lost:
“‘Celtic’ and ‘ceilidh’ are abused and misrepresented words. They’re overused, thrown in for…When I was growing up, a ceilidh was simply a social gathering. It didn’t necessarily involve music or dance or song. It was just social. Now it’s been redefined to involve music, always. And you don’t know peoples’ [visitors’] expectations of a ‘ceilidh’…[he related that guests write in their comments that they expected highland dancing at Glenora’s ceilidh because there is a highland dancer on their brochure]. We need to be careful as marketers to not oversell the product…and there are politics around [using] the terms.”

In this image, taken inside the museum at the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre in Judique, a young girl sits smiling at a pump organ staged to look like it’s in a living room (the performance venue inside the Centre is also staged to look like a kitchen in a Cape Breton home, where a ‘real’ or ‘traditional’ ceilidh would happen). The museum introduces visitors to the traditional musical culture of Scottish Cape Breton, especially of Inverness County. The Centre is located along the Ceilidh Trail, and is a convenient place for tour buses and independent tourists to stop in for lunch and live traditional music. It is also a place where locals gather to do exactly the same thing, which has the unintentional, but financially beneficial, affect of increasing the authenticity of the tourist experience. When a patron gets up to give a step, touristic visitors feel they are in the midst of a truly living and organic culture rather than one that is staged only for their benefit; the assumption is that the ceilidh would be happening whether the tourists were there or not, which is true in that some kind of ceilidh would be happening, but it would probably not be held as regularly as is this one, nor would the financial resources to build

157 Glenora was in a nine-year legal battle with the Scotch Whisky Association over the use of the word ‘glen’. The SWA has a copyright on ‘glen’ (and ‘highland’, ‘scotch’, and ‘terrier’) and sued Glenora for using ‘glen’ for their Glen Breton Rare Single Malt Whisky. Glenora eventually won the right to use “glen”, and in 2010 released a “Battle of the Glen” whisky to celebrate its victory (Donnie Campbell, personal communication; glenoradistillery.com/history).
and operate the Centre in which the ceilidh is housed be possible without an ongoing influx of tourism dollars.

This image is also an example of the locally-valued importance of teaching culture to (local) children. This girl appears in other promotional contexts, including the Ceilidh Trail Locals’ Favorites page on the Destination Cape Breton website, and its French-language brochure. Whether this girl is local or visiting is unclear, but previous generations of the island’s Scottish culture bearers literally watch over her shoulder as she learns the fiddle. In summer, touristic demand for traditional performers means that teachers are either performing or teaching tourists at the Gaelic College, rather than instructing locals. In the winter, when teachers have more time, there is more demand than available teaching hours. Rodney MacDonald lamented this fact to me, and said he hoped practitioners of his generation would start taking on students to increase local knowledge and competency in the living heritage and culture (interview).

“\textit{It is no surprise the stream that flows near the Glenora Distillery in Glenville is crystal clear and just the kind needed to craft Glen Breton, North America’s first single malt whisky. Uisge (oosh-ga), by the way, is the Gaelic word for ‘water’ and the root of ‘whisky’ – and as the saying goes – you can’t make good whisky without good oosh-ga.”} 

(Figure 4.13)
Cape Breton becomes naturally suited for its Scottish identity; even the water is already perfect for the creation of a “Scottish” cultural product. The land itself is ethnicized. Here at the Glenora Distillery, a man and woman sit close together on the lawn in front of a hedge shaped into a Celtic knot. They lean in towards each other, suggesting a flirtatious and intimate encounter. There is a moral undercurrent developing within this narrative’s images: first a chaste encounter between a woman and a musician, then a young prepubescent girl dressed in white, and this couple. In this photo, her body language is closed, suggesting chastity (legs together, knees drawn up, hands folded to her right, farthest from her companion). He leans towards her but makes no attempt to touch her. As in the images before, their gender identities are clearly marked and mutually exclusive. He is masculine, and she is feminine. Heteronormativity emerges as a guiding principle within the subjects, and monogamous, coupled heterosexuality is coded as morally superior, partly by the absence of other couples and bodies that suggest difference or even another option beyond what the images show. White subjects monopolize subjectivity in these images, which suggests that other racial identities are
unusual for this destination. The angles of this couples’ bodies draw the eye towards the starkly white building of the distillery itself (most building in the heavily-Scottish Inverness County are white, including the Catholic churches); the inn and pub are hidden from view behind the main building set close against the lush hillside. The presence of the distillery suggests a very clear tie to Scotland itself, which is for tourists the source of such quintessentially Scottish cultural products as golf (especially links golf) and whisky that are also found on Cape Breton, the North American proxy of Scotland in culture, experience, scenery, and authenticity.

“The Cabot Links Golf Course - called one of the two most important new courses in the world by Golf Digest, embodies the Scottish-made game, with spectacular ocean views from every hole.” (Figure 4.14)

Cabot Links, located in Inverness, is Canada’s only authentic links-style course. A local male employee (note the name tag and Cabot Links logo on his coat) in his fifties or early sixties looks off into the sunrise at the entrance to the course, the golf path leading towards the ocean to his left. A personification of a new post-industrial Cape Breton
masculinity, he is the welcoming host, literally standing on the reclaimed site of the former Inverness Coal Mine that extended deep under the ground and out under the ocean. He dominates the center of the photograph, the angles of the ship’s rigging and the golf path leading upwards towards his body to create a triangular composition. He seems comfortable, if not overly welcoming; his hands are stuffed into his pockets rather than extending outwards. Miners’ homes still line the streets of Inverness, and there are coal cinders in the beach sand. The golf course was under development for years, contested by those who feared it would destroy the seascape that was a primary touristic draw, favored by others who argued that the course would help the local economy more than would the view. One of five desirable courses on the island, this links-style course specifically ties Cape Breton to Scotland and allows it to transcend its industrial past and move into a post-industrial service-oriented period of hoped-for prosperity.

“Here, on the sunset side of the island, where sweeping mountains overlook the vast Gulf of St. Lawrence, there are warm breezes, gorgeous sunsets and the sound of laughter in the hills.” (Figure 4.15)
A final allusion to joyous natives, carefree and filled with music and dance. We are left with a man and woman, the couple from the photograph of the Distillery above (Figure 3.13), strolling down the boardwalk at Inverness. The golf course and beach envelope them in a natural though civilized tableau; fears of a ruined view appear unfounded. The swirls of the dunes and grasses lead our eye to the couple, along the boardwalk, back to the beach, up the ridgeline, back down to the couple and right towards the golf course and the visually-absent town of Inverness. The eye is swept up in the landscape that, devoid of crashing waves and craggy mountains, is warm, gentle and unobtrusively developed. The couple anchors the scene but do not dominate it. Holding hands, they look towards each other, utterly alone and connected in the landscape.

The Ceilidh Trail opens up to us in this narrative, but there’s even more in store. The Ceilidh Trail is the only driving trail with two additional pages of online content that delineate many specific activities visitors can engage in. Not only does this make the Ceilidh Trail into a burgeoning cultural natural and cultural experiential region, it helps visitors navigate these resources. Finding the cultural resources and navigating off the main highway along back roads to hidden beaches and hiking trails is difficult, and these pages attempt to aid the visitor.

The Ceilidh Trail is promoted as the overtly cultural Trail online and in print by Destination Cape Breton and by the NSTA. At cbisland.com, visitors can explore “Locals’ Favorites” (see Figure 3.17) and “Hidden Gems” which lists cultural hotspots like the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre, the Red Shoe, and the Glenora Distillery, niche interests like the Mabou Farmers Market and the Cabot Links Golf Course, and way at
the bottom, traditional Cape Breton dances and ceilidhs. “The Celtic Experience” section of the Celtic Heart website directs visitors to cultural opportunities not partnered with Celtic Heart, including Inverness County’s square dances, and the Mabou and Inverness Ceilidhs. Most of the cultural events advertised in brochures are located in the Scottish center of Inverness County along or near the Ceilidh Trail, the same core of the region advertised in the narrative and visual promotional sequence. The Ceilidh Trail region is obviously and repeatedly constructed as the authentic Scottish center of Cape Breton.

According to Urry (2002), as tourists consume these images from afar, they develop an expectation that Cape Breton will match the depictions in the promotional photographs; they develop, in advance, a particular way of seeing the island and its people and culture. They also, I suggest, develop an idea of what sort of people, defined by particular ethnic, affluence, gender identities and embodiments, they will encounter.

Figure 4.16. “This is how we celebrate [sic] in Cape Breton…” at the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre in Judique. This image comes from the “Locals’ Favorites” Ceilidh Trail page. Renowned dance performers Kinnon and Betty Lou Beaton provide the music. The audience members are locals, most of whom I recognize from attending numerous ceilidhs, square dances, and other local cultural events. Their gaze is
directed towards the center of the photograph, where local fiddler Mike Hall dances with a female tourist (one half of the “cultural couple”) who appears in other tourism photos of cultural experiences (in another image (not shown), she dances in a square set with a gentleman in the Hall of the Clans at the Gaelic College). Here, Her husband nowhere in sight. The audience’s gaze indicates not just their observation of the dancing bodies – and not the musicians – but also their evaluation of the dance performance they are witnessing. Mike Hall is a very good stepdancer, and this photo has caught him entirely off the floor in a moment of sonic rest in his interpretation of the tune’s rhythm and melody that he renders through his footwork. His partner, who looks towards him, is clearly a tourist unfamiliar with the dance practice. Her sandals lack the hard soles that create percussive sound, the audible “steps” in stepdancing. Nor do her shoes have heels, meaning they would likely fly off if she was really dancing seriously. In addition, her shirt is more revealing in its neckline than those usually worn by local women (compare to the woman seated behind her to the right, who is dressed typically for a local). Finally, it is highly unusual for two people to stepdance together at the same time in front of an audience; the only time this happens is in concert settings, and in that case, they certainly wouldn’t be holding hands. Though I cannot be absolutely sure, I believe this photograph depicts an interruption in a normally-scheduled ceilidh at the Celtic Music Centre rather than an event staged so this promotional photograph could be taken; the affect and normalcy of the participants – aside from the two dancers – suggests this, as does the fact that I have seen such promotion-minded interruptions happen elsewhere, including at the Red Shoe in 2011 when a media crew showed up during a regular ceilidh and asked the performer, Anita MacDonald, to teach them how to dance on camera. © Destination Cape Breton, used with permission.

What’s easily overlooked in the Ceilidh Trail narrative is that all the tourists enjoying it are heterosexual couples, and all the locals explicitly inviting us into the culture and the communities are male (the musicians in Figure 3.12, the employee in Figure 3.15, the dancer in Figure 3.17). We are entering a patriarchal, heteronormative, and white environment, and while it is possible for non-heteronormative tourists to code-switch these images to see themselves in the promotions, they are not explicitly catered to, nor invited. The Cabot Trail narrative at Destination Cape Breton emphasizes natural beauty instead of culture, but the heteronormative straight couples appear there as well (Figures 3.17 and 3.18, both copyrighted to Destination Cape Breton and used with permission). The only image of a cultural “event” is a pleasant-looking scene of intergenerational music making on the lawn at the Gaelic College, enjoyed by the heterosexual, heteronormative cultural couple (Figure 3.19). The description that appears above this photograph in the online narrative does describe some cultural activities as
attractions along the Cabot Trail, but the photographs emphasize scenic exploration. The many other traditional cultural events occur in communities along the Cabot Trail, including Scottish ceilidhs and dances, and Acadian food and music culture are not alluded to in the official tourism promotion. In fact, there’s no mention of the Acadian region in this description of the Cabot Trail at all; despite the seeming neutrality of the land, it becomes subtly and exclusively Scottish in this narrative through the appearance of the Cape Breton tartan (in theory representing the whole island but derived from only one ethnocultural group) and the visual and narrative depiction of only Scottish culture.

“The Cabot Trail is more than a magnificent world-renowned drive – it is an experience….One to delight in…one to be savoured.” (Figure 4.17)

An older couple soft adventures in Cape Breton Highlands National Park. Taking a break on a drive (they’re not hiking, to judge from their clothing choices), they look south along the bluffs, purple heather in the foreground. The man surveys the scene, while the woman follows his gaze with her arm around his shoulder, leaning into his body. Their gaze follows exactly the line of the road along the face of the highland, sweeping down towards the water with the curve of land and rising up again into the
unseen-sun that saturates the scene. The couple’s physical connection and their anonymity allows viewers to place themselves more easily into the frame to imagine personally experiencing the view while connecting with a partner. No one else invades this scene, nor any of the scenes previously shown in this chapter; the couple is blissfully alone, free of distractions, and thus able to experience Cape Breton on their own and in their own way.

“Oh, there is lots to do – hiking the Skyline Trail in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park, hearing soulful fiddle tunes that echo off the hills near Baddeck, dining on fresh seafood in Ingonish, attempting to speak Gaelic (a language that seems to have run out of vowels) at St. Ann’s and discovering artisans creating soul-filled art in roadside studios all along the way.” (Figure 4.18)

Dispelling myths perhaps that Cape Breton isn’t really that interesting, the audience is inundated with appealing points of interest. The hiking and seafood dining are pictured, and there’s an image of music making (at St. Ann’s, instead of Baddeck). But there’s no evidence of anyone sitting down for a language or fiddle class (most Cabot
Trailers don’t stay long enough for that). Nor are any artists’ studios shown. The emphasis is clearly on the visual, physical, and culinary experience rather than the cultural. In Figure 3.19, four fiddlers sit smiling and laughing in tartan-padded chairs on the Gaelic College campus. The middle-aged man and woman in the center play, while the other two fiddlers look on, but all the fiddlers look towards the man in the orange shirt, a solid masculine presence and source of knowledge and authenticity. The cultural couple, arms around each other, looks on happily. The musicians’ gazes indicate their engagement with each other, but not the tourists. The photo is clearly staged. I have never seen musicians drag chairs out onto the College’s green to play music (most either play inside MacKenzie Hall, which is behind us as we face this image, or at any of a number of benches already outside). The musicians are seated in an arc as though facing an unseen audience; this is an impractical staging if they were really playing together because it is harder to see what the others are doing. In addition, there is no accompanist, no guitar or piano to provide the syncopated, percussive, and chromatic chording so essential to Cape Breton style. The eye moves in from the outside fiddlers and upwards over the tourists’ shoulders to the main building of the College itself, behind which the Cabot Trail curves away into the forest before heading back to the coast. The triangular roofs of the dormers lead the eye subtly but distinctly towards a large cross visible in the turret window, a reminder of the Gaels’ deep religiosity and the sorts of community, family, and personal values a Catholic, or even conservatively Protestant, belief system and worldview implies.
The cultural couple appear throughout these visual narratives. White, normatively heterosexual, cis-gendered, relatively affluent, conventionally attractive, and between their mid-forties and mid-sixties, the cultural couple (actually a number of interchangeable models distinguished only by age) fills in the promotional photographs: they hike, and they ceilidh. They experience authentic culture up close and personal, and without a herd of other tourists diminishing the specialness of their experience (Figure 3.19 above). The couple in this image recur as models for many of the Celtic Heart Co-op member organizations: they appear, in the same outfits no less, in the main banner image for Celtic Heart’s online and print media presence, where they participate in a milling frolic in front of a roaring fire set in an old-fashioned brick kitchen.

Figure 4.19. The cultural couple, upper left, participates in a milling frolic. This small photo, embedded within a graphic for the Celtic Heart Co-operative partner organizations, brings them fully into the authentic experience of culture. They have heard music (but not played it) at the College, she has tried to dance at the Celtic Music Centre, they’ve tried a unique Cape Breton product at the Distillery, and now, they are participating in a milling frolic with locals. They may not be able to sing the Gaelic-language songs that maintain the rhythm of the frolic (a work party) and teach cultural values and stories, but they are having an experiential engagement with the local culture. © Celtic Heart, used with permission.
They appear as well in Destination Cape Breton’s print publication for Cape Breton Island, and the organization’s fold-out insert in *Doers’ and Dreamers*. They’re on the Ceilidh Trail, tasting whisky in front of the still at the Glenora Distillery (not pictured), and again on both the Taste of Nova Scotia website and in the Ceilidh Trail section of *Doers’ and Dreamers*, sampling whisky from the barrel.

![Figure 4.20. The cultural couple appears again at the Glenora Distillery sample whisky in the barrel room. He reaches around her in a protective/possessive gesture. The rareness and specialness of tasting whisky in this manner is clear. The elegant snifters and their fashion, clear skin, his maintained muscles and her jewelry all suggest their affluence and implies the gentility of the experience. © Nova Scotia Tourism Agency, used with permission.](image)

They’re not in the Destination Cape Breton Ceilidh Trail narrative, but they’re in the two accompanying webpages for the Ceilidh Trail, and Celtic Heart is using them extensively in combination with numerous staged and candid photographs of locals and real tourists interacting in cultural spaces. While the image this couple represents can be seen as an attempt to present a coherent and unified image of cultural tourists on Cape Breton, it also signifies the commonality of running into the same tourists at different cultural events. Those that travel to Cape Breton with the intention of experiencing

---

158 The 8.5” by 5.5” booklet is consistent in format and style to publications from all the other geographical regions of Nova Scotia, e.g., South Shore and Northumberland Shore, published by the Nova Scotia Tourism Association as regional subsets of the full-sized *Doers’ and Dreamers*. 

220
culture maximize their enjoyment by attending every ceilidh, concert, and dance they can. Tourists can feel part of the small-town localism as they start to encounter familiar faces at the Mabou ceilidh, the Red Shoe, and then the Mabou Freshmart, and up in Margaree at the Normaway Inn.

These photographic narratives suggest the possibility of reconnecting with a partner, but it is finally made explicit in the Cabot Trail narrative sequence:

“You will discover the winding turns in the road are here for a reason. Time slows. Listen and you will hear sounds that are normally lost in the clutter of everyday life – a bird singing. Its mate responds and a joyous conversation follows...In the distance, a soothing rumble as the ocean waves break on the shore. Closer now and you become aware of another rhythmic sound. Your heartbeat, steady and calm. You only really notice its meditative tone at magical times like this.”

Couples, alone together in inspiring natural landscapes and small towns where life is more traditional and people’s lives are intertwined, experience reconnection with each other and ground themselves as individuals. It is no accident that heteronormative couples dominated subtly by the male, traveling in a heteronormative culture that is also (still) structured by patriarchal systems of gender and sexual control, experience rejuvenation in the experience of their lives as normal and natural; there is no contest, no alternatives. Their dominance and naturalness is constantly mirrored back.
Figure 4.21 and 4.22. From one end of the Cabot Trail to the other. Left: a couple enjoys the view at the end of the Skyline Trail on the sunset side of the National Park. Right: another slightly younger couple enjoys a breezy sunset on the beach at Ingonish, near the Keltic Lodge. Both couples, heterosexual and subtly dominated by the male, are peacefully isolated together. The landscape, though rugged, is subtly civilized by the presence of the built environment (road, overlook, hotel) and the relaxed presence of the couples in the foreground. Though both scenes are landmark locations on the island, the Cape Breton tartan also identifies their location and signals their monetary engagement with island culture (they might have purchased this tartan at the Gaelic College, where master and apprentice weavers create cloth and clothing in the tartans of many clans. © Destination Cape Breton, used with permission.

Gender Assets: Touristic Normativity Mirroring Local Values

The gender normativity and heteronormativity of the archetypal soft adventuring cultural couple allows them easy passage through Cape Breton’s heteronormative spaces\textsuperscript{159} and helps them integrate into local cultural practice to the degree they choose to. Tourists, even those that come for the culture, usually don’t know how to dance a Cape Breton-style square set. But even if they don’t (or can’t) dance together due to lack of knowledge, the conventionally feminine woman will likely get asked to dance by local men. It is very unlikely that local women would pull the female tourist’s husband up to

\textsuperscript{159} By this, I mean that they are very unlikely to have homophobic or transphobic comments or violence directed at them, will not face exclusion based on their perceived sexual orientation, will not have to weigh the safety of dancing, dining, traveling, or getting a room together as a gender non-conforming or same-gender couple. In short, because they appear heteronormative and occupy distinct and acceptably normative gender categories, their vacation will not be burdened with concerns stemming from their sexual orientation and gender identities. In addition, their whiteness insulates them from being visually marked as other from both local culture and most other tourists based on their skin color.
dance; men overtly control the selection of partners (though women have more subtle mechanisms of influence over this process), and so the male tourist would have to ask them to dance. Since he doesn’t know the dance, however, this likely would not happen. In addition, a local dancer will have a group of partners they usually dance with; reaching out to include an outsider (particularly a tourist who is likely on the island for only a few days) is not necessary. On the other hand, some locals – like Burton MacIntyre – makes getting someone from away up on the dance floor a part of every dance he attends.

The photographs imply that mostly heterosexual couples (and a few families) are traveling the Trails, and based on my observations during fieldwork, this is in fact primarily who chooses to visit the island. Whiteness is the norm for visitors, who spend most of the time on-island visiting other white (though culturally ethnic) peoples. By selecting a specific touristic identity, tourism agencies and institutions that benefit from tourism are working to keep local conceptions of normativity in place. Advertising for queer tourists, whether the audience is the archetypal homonormative gay couple or otherwise, is absent in Cape Breton tourist marketing and promotions, but gay niche tourism is not something that is needed on the island. Halifax solidly anchors Nova Scotia in terms of such marketing, just as Cape Breton represents the Scottish cultural and scenic soft adventuring niche for the province. Gay tourism is not and cannot be a big deal because it is not congruent with the deep-set values of the local music and dance culture that support and help form local social norms that include appropriate embodiments of gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic whiteness. Allowing that kind of embodied otherness into traditionally and strictly structured cultural environments
destabilizes not just the events themselves but also interrupts the tourist perception of those environments. In such moments, authenticity is called into question and the romantic ideal unravels.

**Conclusion: Why Visit Cape Breton?**

By far the biggest single reason visitors reported for choosing to visit Cape Breton was because they “wanted to visit Atlantic Canada” (VES 2012:10): 29% of respondents offered this rationale (for comparison, only 17% of visitors to the rest of Nova Scotia were primarily interested in visiting Atlantic Canada. This high response suggests that visitors perceive Cape Breton as a destination that exemplifies the authentic experience of Atlantic Canada. Despite an uptick in marketing of expressive culture, the performing culture is still a minor attraction that draws only 6% of visitors. Though only a small percentage cited interest in the culture and heritage as a main reason for traveling to Cape Breton, many more actually attended live music events (22%), community festivals (14%), and pubs (25%) where there might be music during their stay on the island. Culture becomes visible to visitors once they arrive. Nova Scotia, long associated with the maritime heart of Atlantic Canada, is promoted as Canada’s Ocean Playground, and as being “Shaped by the Sea;” Nova Scotia’s cultures, histories, and physical geography result from interactions with the water bodies that almost entirely surround the huge peninsula and islands that comprise the province. If these things are true, or at least believed, of Nova Scotia, then Cape Breton becomes both officially and in public perception (as suggested by the statistic the essence of Nova Scotia. Cape Breton is
“Nova Scotia’s Masterpiece,” the identity, soul, and remaining Scottish heart of a province that has transcended 20th century tartanism on its way towards 21st century multiculturalism. The motto suggests that everything that is good and attractive about the province can be found and experienced most perfectly and most intensely in Cape Breton.

Since 2010, Cape Breton is becoming the Celtic Heart of North America. Not only is the island constructing itself as the most Atlantic Canadian part of Atlantic Canada, nor the most Nova Scotian place and peoples in Nova Scotia, but also the most Celtic place on the continent. The Scottish culture, with its socially conservative, pro-organized labor, rural, Catholic identity and traditional family structures and values all suggest a moral grounding that becomes implicitly part of the tourist experience. McKay and Bates (2011) have suggested the desire on the part of tourists to experience—in Nova Scotia—a more traditional rural place that evokes the simplicity of the past lost in modern efforts at multiculturalism, inclusivity, tolerance, and moral opprobrium for opponents of this post-modern project. Going to Cape Breton as a white, heterosexual, cis-gendered person means being amongst people who look like you and desire in ways similar to you. Many visitors incorporate genealogical research into their travels, and institutions like the Highland Village has specific resources set up to help this kind of traveler. Though not all white visitors to Cape Breton are of Scottish-descent, the chance to experience an authentic white ethnicized culture exists as a subconscious desire for white travelers who come from cities in which whiteness lacks defined culture and overt expressive elements. That this culture is also traditional in its value systems, structured as it is on heteronormativity, cis-genderism, patriarchal power structures, and even ethnic
hierarchies, only confirms the authenticity of Cape Breton’s Scottish culture as traditional and seemingly removed from the effects of a modernizing and liberalizing world.

Tourism promotion exists in a feedback loop: the sorts of people that appear in the promotional tourism literature reflect the demographics of visitors who travel to Cape Breton, which is designed to appeal to potential visitors by showing other “visitors” who look like them engaging in activities they themselves would choose and/or enjoy. Though tourism photographs province-wide, with the exception of Halifax, show exclusively heterosexual couples and families, something about Cape Breton especially suggests that it is an ideal place for such families to visit.

Cape Breton’s Scottish culture is structured on normalized heterosexuality and monogamy in dance environments, and marked by a long history of misogyny and patriarchal systems of oppression that, until my generation, kept men performing and women for the most part out of public performance roles. This is a moment when I struggle to balance what informants told me with what I observed. Young women are visible everywhere in the traditional culture: there are many talented fiddlers, pianists, and dancers in their teens, twenties, and early thirties performing widely and recording. They work in cultural curatorial roles that include marketing, teaching, and in the case of Dawn Beaton, serving as Artistic Director of Celtic Colours. Margie Beaton told me she never felt like she was being barred from opportunities to learn or perform because of her gender. When I pushed her a bit she mentioned that even in a square dance, which seems conservative, “really anyone can dance with anyone…two women, two men.” But you don’t see that a lot, I pressed. “No…I suppose not.” So while women do have more
opportunities to perform in public and create livelihoods for themselves, patriarchal systems of power still underlie expectations of performance practice and embodiment. Women fit seamlessly into the tradition because they aren’t trying to stand out. And how could they? To do so wouldn’t be respectful; in fact, it would be immodest and radical.

Despite these movements forward, and the narrative of progress, the traditional culture is founded on and shaped daily by a conservative religious belief system, worldview, and set of practices that emphasize distinct and complementary (or is it uneven?) roles, responsibilities, and hierarchies for stable and binary gender categories. The tourists invited to participate in this culture are those who can be inserted into it unproblematically: white heterosexual couples, families with children, and older couples, who fit comfortably with the aging demographic of the island’s resident population. Tourism photographs of cis-gendered straight couples getting married at the Gaelic College and the Keltic Lodge normalize heterosexuality, heteronormativity, cis-genderism, monogamy, and traditional family values for visitors to Cape Breton, and suggest that the local culture also supports and embodies these characteristics. Cis-gendered heterosexual couples are the people who can partake, participate, experience, and then leave without upsetting existing gender hierarchies. They “Experience the Masterpiece” most fully.
Chapter 5 | Imagining Island Culture: Cultural Normativity at Celtic Colours

Unpacking Cultural Control

In this chapter, I detail how arbiters and promoters of Cape Breton’s Scottish culture maintain the hegemonic Scottish identity of the island’s cultural tourism at the expense of Cape Breton’s other major ethnocultural groups, especially the Mi’kmaq and the Acadians. I use the Celtic Colours International Festival as a case study to examine how certain cultural performances are promoted more assiduously than others, and through repetition, become normalized as universalized “Cape Breton culture” rather than the culture of one of the island’s multiple ethnocultural communities. Celtic Colours is an authoritative institution that ensures Cape Breton’s culture is overwhelmingly perceived as Scottish. The festival is an example of an internal institution, a cultural arbiter based on the island, that supports the Scottishness of the local culture for both internal island audiences and external visiting audiences. The effort to retain and emphasize the Scottishness of the local culture is achieved through the intersectional and mutually supportive efforts of three kinds of culture arbiters: community grassroots practices, internal island institutions, and institutions external to Cape Breton. Community grassroots practices include square dances, which I turn to in Chapter 6, and ceilidhs, which I discuss briefly in this chapter.

160 In every conversation I had about “Cape Breton music/style” the word omitted but always implicit was “Scottish.” I have noticed this same tendency, in my efforts to capture the words of my informants and in reliving my memories of fieldwork, to tacitly write as though the Scottish culture of Cape Breton was the only culture there.
161 Celtic Colours is an internal island institution. Institutions external to Cape Breton include tourism campaigns managed at the provincial level.
**Summer Culture**

Cape Breton’s Scottish culture is accessible year round, but the density of events increases dramatically in the summer months, especially July and August. It spikes again at the end of the shoulder season, which extends through September to the nine-day Celtic Colours International Festival (early to mid-October). Though Cape Bretoners are in need of access to their own culture year-round, several factors account for a higher concentration of events during the tourist season. Children comprise the primary target participants of the cultural revitalization efforts of the Fèis Movement and Gàidhlig aig Baile immersion programs, and they are in school for most of the year. During the school year, the time they can devote to learning traditional Gaelic cultural forms is more limited than during the summer months when they are on holiday.

More time, however, does not necessarily mean more engagement with traditional culture; while some young people perform in ceilidhs for exposure, practice, and money, and others take classes in fiddle, dance, and piano, most do not take a strong interest in learning traditional cultural forms. During the school year, teachers and parents ensure that children can access programming such as the Gaelic Folklife Immersion Program that fosters and promotes Gaelic culture in Nova Scotia and required courses in Gaelic language and history. Schools also take advantage of two programs offered by the Highland Village: visits by Village staff to schools, and fieldtrips to the Village for on-site cultural learning events. On weekends throughout the year, the Gaelic College also offers language and cultural learning opportunities. Those children who study music, singing, or dance must be driven to lessons and performance engagements by their
parents, though many parents make time for this judging by the number of young people I encountered performing.

The most important factor accounting for the density of the summer season, however, is that summers in Cape Breton mean a huge influx of people, including tourists from away and natives returning home to visit. This plus the ease of travel for locals allows for larger potential audiences that can sustain a dense schedule of events by purchasing tickets and attending concerts, dances, ceilidhs, and festivals. Many people, especially locals and returning natives, plan trips around big summer events like the Fèis an Eilein, Highland Village Day, and the Broad Cove Concert. The presence of people traveling to Cape Breton from away generates the economic capital that helps make cultural organizations and institutions solvent throughout the rest of the year. Locals cannot fund these events on their own, nor generate the demand for the summer’s inundation of co-occurring and overlapping events that overbook the island’s cultural event calendar from Canada Day (July 1st) to Labour Day (MacIntyre, interview). At least thirty-nine events were happening in Inverness County alone during the week of August 5-11, 2013, including five square dances, one annual concert, and twenty-five “ceilidhs.” Adding the Gaelic College, the Highland Village, and the Baddeck Nightly Ceilidh, three prominent cultural venues located in neighboring Victoria County, significantly increases the number of events.\textsuperscript{162} There are so many events in different towns throughout the two

\textsuperscript{162} The Gaelic College offers daily ceilidhs, evening performances and a full month of weeklong, all-day instruction in Gaelic cultural forms for adults and children and the Highland Village offers all kinds of cultural opportunities including demonstrations in Gaelic milling (or waulking) songs. Baddeck hosts at least a ceilidh every night in July and August, and the Yacht Club has frequent music events.
counties that it is impossible to get to all of them, let alone attend the many events in other parts of the island.

The summer is thus dense with events, but why are the vast majority of these events occasions for performing and consuming Scottish culture? I suggested in Chapter 3 that the contemporary descendant of tartanism is a community-driven investment in development that is founded on Scottish culture’s visibility in Nova Scotia and especially Cape Breton. The contemporary grassroots development of Scottish culture succeeds as an integral piece of the tourism sector because it is already very visible to visitors from away and it has already been developed as a tourism sector. It comprises an integral part of the cultural landscape and soundscape tourists imagine for Cape Breton as they plan their trips and once they arrive.

The Acadian and Mi’kmaq summer event calendars are not as densely packed as the Scottish community calendar. Of course the Acadians have a vibrant traditional culture of their own, but much of the “Acadian” music heard publicly on Cape Breton is (Scottish) Cape Breton-style fiddle and piano with an Acadian accent. No one I asked could explain to me what this actually sounded like; most just said that it was “different.” What I heard as different was how Acadian fiddlers ‘pushed’ the bow to create slightly different emphases in the rhythm than a Scottish fiddler would. In addition, the Acadian sound was less crisply crunchy than the Scottish sound. To me, the clear progression of notes typical of the Scottish sound was less distinct and more blurred in Acadian fiddling. This may be because the Acadian fiddlers I heard played ever so slightly faster than the Scots and precision is harder at faster tempi.
Distinctly Acadian events like the Festival de l’Escaouette in Chéticamp (July 15 to August 15) are rather sparse in terms of concrete events that visitors can experience, but the celebration on August 15 that closes out the Festival is a full afternoon and evening of festivities. August 15th is National Acadian Day and also the Feast of Our Lady of the Assumption, the Acadians’ patron saint. I attended the festivities for National Acadian Day 2013 in Chéticamp, which included a Catholic mass at L’église Saint-Pierre conducted in Acadian French, followed by Tintamarre, a noise parade that descended from the steps of the church to the main street.\textsuperscript{163} I walked among a hundred or so other people wearing Cat in the Hat-type plush Acadian flag top hats, singing loudly while waving flags large and small and rattling noisemakers. With the Royal Canadian Mounted Police patrol car following the parade down the main road through town (also the Cabot Trail) we headed north through town in the golden late afternoon sunlight, clanging and banging and hooting, finally descending towards the waterfront and onto the Quai Mathieu where two teenaged Acadian girls were playing fast Scottish reels and strathspeys on a small permanent stage built on above the dock.

A couple hundred people were already there, some tourists but mostly locals judging by the French Acadian being spoken. Impromptu circle dancing and conga lines developed and many people circulated through the crowd in masks, costumes, and bright

\textsuperscript{163} Scholars have written about Acadian and diasporic Acadian/Cajun cultural celebrations, though much more has been written about the cultural practices of Louisiana Cajuns than the Acadians of Atlantic Canada. Tintamarre is under researched, but see André Gladu’s 2004 documentary on Tintamarre here (2004), which discusses the practice in several Acadian communities. See Sexton and Oster (2001) on Cajun and Creole Mardi Gras songs in Louisiana, and Marcia Gaudet and C. Paige Gutierrez (Gaudet and MacDonald 2003) on Cajun foodways, folk veneration, and holiday traditions in Louisiana. See Ware (2003) on Cajun Mardi Gras as public display and Lindahl and Ware (1997) on Cajun Mardi Gras masks.
plastic Mardi Gras bead necklaces. The crowd was a sea of blue, red, white, and yellow stars: the Acadian flag was everywhere.

As the celebration on the Quai was wrapping up, a big evening concert was getting underway up at the Arena at the north end of town. A local youth dance company called La Swing du Suète was performing, as well as a pop band from the Acadian region of Prince Edward Island. The word “Suète” immediately signals the company’s origins in this Acadian region of Cape Breton: Les Suêtes is an Acadian phrase that describes the very strong southeast winds that whip off the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and affect the...
northwestern coast of Cape Breton. Between late fall and early spring, Les Suêtes can exceed 150 miles per hour (Chéticamp 2008), which accounts for why all road signs (and some houses) in the region are heavily buttressed.164

La Swing du Suêtes, founded in 1997, is comprised of about thirty dancers between the ages of ten and seventeen who are students at the French-language École NDA in Chéticamp. In various combinations demarcated by age and ability, the dancers performed choreographed Acadian-style stepdance routines to Acadian folk melodies and Celtic tunes. The crowd loved it. There was one peculiar moment of cultural hybridity: eleven girls wearing Cape Breton tartan skirts performed a choreographed close to the floor Scottish-style stepdance routine to the opening music of Riverdance. As I was wondering if this signified agentive appropriation or not, they pulled out and started waving white flags. It was a strange moment for a performance by Acadians on National Acadian Day in one of the centers of Canada’s Acadian community. The white flags suggested their capitulation rather than agentive appropriation, and to what other than the dominance of Celtic culture? They were stepdancing in the local Scottish style to Irish traditional music written for a show that practically defines Celticness for many people. Since the very sounds of the original stepdancing from Riverdance dancers were preserved in the recording they used, it was usually impossible to even hear the Acadians’ footwork; they were sonically overmatched and obscured.

---

164 See a video of Les Suêtes in action [here](https://example.com) © 1999, Neal Livingston, Black River Productions Limited.
Showcasing Native and Acadian Cultures

I should note that finding out the schedule for Festival de l’Escaouette took some creativity. Most of the other events connected to the festival were only advertised on a brochure published by Inverness County and not in the most prominent tourism publications. Though the brochure was available as a .pdf online, I only found it after creative searching and because of my knowledge of what events to look for. This suggests to me that the primary audience for the events is locals, who could get this information directly from the organizers and in the local paper. Visitors, however, need to rely on the Internet in tracking down information, and hope that it’s online. As I discovered in my fieldwork, information publicized about events is usually incomplete and assumes a degree of insider (local) knowledge to figure out additional details like location, time, or even what might be happening. The primary tourism publications were relatively unhelpful for the events in which I was interested. I relied instead on local fliers posted and stacked up in the post offices, businesses, and Visitor Information Centres.

The Acadian culture of Cape Breton is relatively well-publicized in tourist publications, though Scottish events are given clear priority. One French-language publication specifically addresses Acadian events, communities, and Nova Scotia’s French history for Francophone visitors. Native culture, however, is even less represented in tourism publications. Though “A Heritage Strategy for Nova Scotia: 2008-2013,” published by the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, emphasizes a commitment to “facilitate the unique heritage springing from the provinces’ indigenous Mi’kmaw culture and other founding cultures such as Acadian, African Nova Scotia, and
Gaelic,” the impact of this goal on promotion of the culture to visitors, even as a means of community development, isn’t clear. Despite indistinct provincial investment, revitalization of traditional culture is beginning at the community level.

The Wagmatcook First Nations website claims a renewed interest in traditional dancing, drumming, and singing within the Native community as recently as 2012. In combination with a government commitment to “facilitating” heritage, partly through community development founded on tourism, Native culture may start to play a larger role in Cape Breton’s cultural landscape. The Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation (ECBC) funds “community centres with direct relation to festival and events,” which suggests an interest in the economic development of communities through culture, and on November 29, 2013, ECBC announced that the Government of Canada was investing significant capital in Cape Breton’s First Nations. Eskasoni received $484,000 to help develop a “unique tourism product that invites visitors to experience authentic Mi’kmaq culture in the community” by expanding the existing Eskasoni Cultural Journeys program. The Membertou Heritage Park, established in 2012, received almost $120,000 to develop a garden of medicinal and ceremonial plants, a heritage trail, an outdoor space for cultural events, and a Mi’kmaq village. The federal government, through ECBC, also invested in the Waycobah fishery, and helped fund a learning center in Wagmatcook in cooperation with Nova Scotia Community Colleges (ECBC 2013).

At the local level, Wagmatcook’s leadership reports on the community website that more young people are getting involved in and learning traditional cultural forms. While residents over age 30 are almost entirely fluent in the Mi’kmaq language, this isn’t
true among the youth, making their interest in the culture all the more notable (Wagmatcook 2013). Mawio’mi (gatherings) take place every summer across an unofficial Pow Wow Trail. On the Pow Wow Trail, “communities from all over the Atlantic Region and across Canada host traditional gatherings to honor and celebrate their culture, proudly, as we do as the first people of this land, the Mi’kmaw people” (Wagmatcook 2013c; see also Tulk 2012).

The gatherings, which are also held at other times of the year, bring families together from throughout Mi’kmaw’ki to participate in “drum and dance competitions, traditional foods, storytelling and sharing memories of exceptional traditional people that have made a difference in people’s lives” (ibid.). It connects the Mi’kmaq to each other and to the larger community of Native peoples in Canada. Though the powwow originates in the Plains region of North America, it has become a cultural and political phenomenon amongst the Mi’kmaq and throughout Native North America, made locally meaningful through various strategies of emplacement and signification.

Summer athletics are another means of gathering the communities together and sharing cultural knowledge and practice. Waycobah First Nation hosted the Nova Scotia Mi’kmaw Summer Games in August 2013, which welcomed 1400 athletes to the

165 Mi’kmaw’ki is the region of Atlantic Canada in which the Mi’kmaq are settled.
166 Ethnomusicologist Janice Tulk (e.g., 2012) has written extensively about Mi’kmaq powwows and the strategies used by participants to make an imported cultural event locally meaningful. First, performers can incorporate pre-existing Mi’kmaw song and dance genres into the structure of a Plains-style powwow song, which often means offering the form of the original local genre (2012:72-74). Second, localizing can be achieved by adding locally-meaningful elements like symbols on regalia, using local singing styles or language, and, in the powwow context, introductory discourse that emphasizes the continuity of powwow with local traditions (ibid.:76). Finally, “explicit references to or implicit performance of local histories” can localized “borrowed powwow traditions” (ibid.:82).
community from Atlantic Canada’s First Nations communities. Huge road signs at either end of Waycobah announced the community as the site of the Games. Event tents were set up on the school’s ball field, teepees appeared in backyards, and cars lined both sides of the road through town. The Games, which have competitions in running, softball, and arm wrestling, as well as canoe races and, a beauty contest are meant to

“inspire youth and young adults to believe in themselves, achieve their dreams and unite with all First Nation communities to share and learn Mi’kmaw culture and traditions. To be a stronger First Nation community whose spirit is raised by its passion for sport and the Mi’kmaw culture” (Wagmatcook 2013a).

One of the main goals of the Games is to promote health and wellness within all the communities year round, especially amongst youth (NS Summer Games 2014). The Games were initially held in the 1970s between the communities of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, but due to scheduling difficulties, Nova Scotia’s communities started hosting their own Indian Summer Games in 1977. Temporarily discontinued, the Games were revived in 2010. The mawio’mi and the Mi’kmaw Summer Games serve as forums to create pride in community, strengthen investment in ethnic identity, and build self-confidence among Native youth, primarily within the individual hosting community and Unama’ki, and secondarily within Mi’kmaw’ki. 

---

167 A different community hosts the Games every year. Membertou hosted in 2010 (1300 registered athletes and their families), Wagmatcook in 2011, and Eskasoni in 2012. In 2014, Potlotek will host the Games.

168 Unama’ki refers to the Mi’kmaq communities of Cape Breton Island. Mi’kmaw’ki describes the entire region in which the Mi’kmaw live.
On (Not) Catering to Tourists

October is a busy month, with Celtic Colours and the end of the tourism season, but October is also Mi’kmaw History Month. In both 2012 and 2013, Celtic Colours offered “organizational and financial support” for an Aboriginal Art Festival at Wagmatcook, which consisted of including the event in Celtic Colours’ online and print publicity. The Art Festival coincided with Celtic Colours and had its own opening ceremonies. Notable Mi’kmaq artists showed their work next to an art and poetry showcase of work by Aboriginal youth (Wagmatcook 2013b). The Festival was first held in 2010, and though it was promoted through Celtic Colours, it was also designed primarily for locals. This is the case for most Cape Breton cultural events, no matter which ethnic group is presenting itself. The Art Festival provided a platform for Wagmatcook to host a Mi’kmaw Cultural Celebration Day after the end of Celtic Colours. Only local school groups were invited to learn about Mi’kmaq history through song and dance. The timing, after the departure of most festivalgoers, as well as the explicit exclusion of tourists, makes clear that this event was not intended as a display of culture for tourists, but rather a moment of teaching for locals, and local children specifically. Visitors seek out experiences of traditional culture, and many are eager to learn. This event promised the very interpretive information frequently lacking in Scottish and Acadian ceilidhs, dances, and as I discuss later, Native cultural demonstrations and performances. These events are first and foremost for locals, who already have a significant knowledge base or like the children, are given opportunities to build their knowledge of local cultures because heritage and community investment is so
valued by their elders. Visitors’ ability to learn about traditional culture is thwarted through passive strategies that include providing incomplete information about events (as I mentioned earlier) and by presenting events that cater to the knowledge locals have but tourists lack. The three ethnic communities, especially the Scottish, have created classes of events that are more or less open to cultural outsiders.169

Frolics are just one cultural form classed according to their accessibility (ceilidhs and dances are hierarchical as well). Sparling (2005) has described some milling frolics as being more accessible to tourists; some of the frolics she participated in were specifically performed for tourists, though they still often lacked interpretation. During my fieldwork, I attended numerous frolics and had the opportunity to participate once. Every morning at the Gaelic College, the summer class schedule started with a milling frolic led by at least one Gaelic speaker who led the songs; cultural learners from away participated. In the frolic I was invited to join at the Highland Village Mary Jane Lamond led myself, my informant, and several Village animators in their twenties in song after song. When visitors stopped in the house to listen, she offered them her extensive knowledge of what we were doing and the significance, but none wanted to join in. As Sparling reports of a frolic she attended at the Fèis an Eilein, while “anyone” was invited to come up and join in, that newcomer was given no instruction on what to do and no song lyrics. The openness was an illusion.

169 This practice is similar to what Cooley (2005) describes of Gorale performers in Poland’s Tatras Mountains. He describes “front region” performances as being folklorized spectacles for visitors, and “back region” performances, including weddings and funerals, as being performances of self for self (Stokes 2006:807).
Native Culture: Uncertain Presence

Despite this seeming effluence of major Native cultural events suggested by the Pow Wow Trail, the Summer Games, frequent mawio’mi, and the Art Festival, the actual publicity for these and other events is slim. None of the events I wrote about above are publicized in Doers’ and Dreamers’, Nova Scotia tourism’s official publication. Of the 2013 Signature Events in Nova Scotia, Doers’ and Dreamers’ includes five ethnic culture events, including the Festival de l’Escaouette in Chéticamp, the Festival Acadien de Clare in Baie Sainte-Marie on the mainland’s Yarmouth and Acadian Shore, the Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival in the ethnically-German town of Lunenburg, and the RBC Multicultural Festival in Halifax. Only one event, the Antigonish Highland Games is Scottish, but no explicitly Native or Mi’kmaq events make it onto the list. No separate resource exists for Native tourists, nor anyone interested in Native culture, to utilize in traveling around Nova Scotia, as there is for French-speaking tourists interested in Nova Scotia’s Acadian culture.

In fact, the publication has a paucity of visibility or promotion of Mi’kmaq culture and bodies. Eskasoni’s annual PowWow, held in mid-June, is mentioned in the Cape Breton Travel Guide as part of an advertisement for the Eskasoni Gaming Centre, but it is held so early in the summer that few visitors would be able to attend it. The mid-July Whycocomagh Summer Festival is buried in the long list of “Festivals and Events” in the front of Doers and Dreamers’ (2013:29), and describes seemingly joint Scottish and

---

Mi’kmaw music events, but this is the only event that explicitly combines Mi’kmaw and Scottish cultures. That the Scottish town of Whycocomagh is immediately adjacent to Waycobah First Nation probably accounts for the joint cultural event, which isn’t mentioned in the Cape Breton Travel Guide, but is widely advertised online by Celtic Heart, Destination Cape Breton, and Inverness County. Widely advertised, that is, if one is specifically looking for it. Which raises the question of accessibility, and whether this is just one part of a systematic oppression of a marginalized ethnic minority by other ethnic groups, and by local, provincial, and federal governments, or if it is intentional and community-driven. Maybe the Mi’kmaw communities don’t want to tourists, and this misdirection and lack of direction is a strategy of avoidance. The Scottish and Acadians use this strategy in publicizing events.

After conversations with many Scottish Cape Bretoners, and only one Mi’kmaw individual, the majority were ambivalent about the benefits of tourism, and I can say that intentional avoidance of tourist traffic is part of the story. But centuries of systematic oppression is important to, and the playing field for the Mi’kmaw isn’t even with the white ethnics with whom they share Cape Breton; they certainly didn’t benefit from tartanism, which all but erased their presence in the imaginations of visitors. Destination Cape Breton’s official tour guide lists various “experiences” available to visitors, but Eskasoni Cultural Journeys is the only Native activity. No other Mi’kmaw cultural events receive write-ups or mention in the informative sections of the booklet.171

---

171 The only other places the Mi’kmaw are visible in the print publication is in advertisements, all of which are produced by the Mi’kmaw themselves. The Hampton Inn in Sydney offers a package deal for one night’s accommodation and a family pass to the Membertou Heritage Park to learn about the “culture of the
Defining Native Island Culture for Visitors

Of all the photographs of people in the 66-page Destination Cape Breton booklet, only five pictures show people of color; others in the booklet may have non-European heritage, but their ethnic identity is not visible on their bodies. Notably, none of these people of color shown are tourists; rather, these visibly ethnic others are locals. Four of the small images, mostly in the form of ads, show Mi’kmaq people in what look like ethnic clothing, all engaged in enacting or interpreting their culture. Two of these pictures combined take up less than a square inch within a quarter page ad for Eskasoni Cultural Journeys (“Pjilsa’si/Welcome…Come Experience Authentic Living History!”) underneath an ad for the Eskasoni Gaming Centre (“Our Eskasoni”). In this ad, one of the pictures portrays Mi’kmaq fiddler Mooney Frances playing his fiddle in an elaborate ribboned shirt, while the other shows two smiling women in traditional fringed dresses. In another photograph, a male drummer in a ribboned shirt similar to Mooney’s, gazes out at us from inside what looks like a drum-making workspace. In the final photograph, a Mi’kmaq individual dances outdoors in front of a crowd, his back to us to feature the elaborate feathered back piece of his powwow regalia. He’s being used in an ad for a hotel stay and family pass to the Membertou Heritage Centre. A similar photograph of a male dancer titled “powwow celebration” appears in the Bras d’Or section of Doers’ and Dreamers’ (2013:273), but none of the “Got-To-Be-There Festivals and Events” he

---

Mi’kmaq and their ancestors” (2013:36). Membertou is an urban Mi’kmaq Reserve within Sydney. Further information about the Heritage Park is found in the first third of a full-page ad for Membertou, along with ads for the gift shop and the gaming and entertainment center.

172 Due to centuries of intermarriage between Mi’kmaq and French Acadians, Mi’kmaq identity is not always clearly visible as skin color, and many Mi’kmaq do not look as though they are Métis, the widely used term for people whose heritage is both Native and European. Native identity isn’t always visible.
appears next to reference a powwow; the only hint is the Bras d’Or Lakes Festival which promises a “unique multi-cultural tour (Mi’kmaw and Gaelic cultures)” which refers to the Eskasoni Cultural Journeys tour. Since the Mi’kmaq make up only a tiny fraction of Cape Breton’s population, perhaps it makes sense that their culture is less publicized than more populous groups such as the Scottish. 173

In the fifth photograph, a model tourist couple that appears in many Louisbourg promotional photographs examines a cart on the Fortress’ main street with three animators, one of whom is Afro-Canadian. She wasn’t very noticeable, blocked almost entirely from view by the cart, while her 18th century bonnet covered most of her features. The picture that emerges from these two major official tourism publications is that the primary culture available for experiential consumption on Cape Breton is not the culture of people of color. The culture of white people is advertised much more prominently than the culture of the Mi’kmaq, or of Nova Scotia’s substantial Afro-Canadian minority (2%, the largest minority in the province). The Acadians, as a white ethnic group, receive a significantly greater amount of ink in the tourism publications;

173 According to a 2012 census, there are 60,928 Mi’kmaq in the Atlantic Region, 15,695 (25%) of whom reside in Nova Scotia. The following table shows the population of the five Cape Breton Nations. Cape Breton’s five Reserves collectively have 7,940 members. Of that number, 6,457 (81%) live on one of the Reserves; the other 1,033 live off Reserve, but I was unable to find a census figure that indicated whether they lived on Cape Breton, or elsewhere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>On Reserve</th>
<th>Off Reserve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eskasoni</td>
<td>4,151</td>
<td>3,549</td>
<td>602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membertou</td>
<td>1,369</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potlotek First Nation</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wagmatcook</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waycobah First Nation</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
their minority ethnicity isn’t visible on their bodies in the form of skin color. Their culture is visible in the signs announcing that drivers are entering Acadian cultural regions on Cape Breton Island and mainland Nova Scotia, in their language, and in the different set of aesthetics that show up in Acadian cultural performances, architecture and design, folk art, and festivals and celebrations.

White Ethnics

A narrow isthmus connects Isle Madame, one of Cape Breton’s two Acadian regions, to the rest of the island. Distinguished by a number of lighthouses, its Acadian culture, and its scenery, Isle Madame is also on the Fleur-de-Lis Trail which heads up the island’s southeastern coast, leading visitors through the island’s French, Acadian, and Basque history. Tourists interact with Chéticamp and the surrounding region while traveling the Cabot Trail or visiting Cape Breton Highlands National Park, of which Chéticamp is the western gateway. There are cultural museums where visitors can learn about Acadian history and culture, local crafts liked hooked rugs, and festivals like Mi-Carême, a carnival-like festival held during Lent in which neighbors disguise themselves and visit friends in an elaborate masquerade. Though the Acadians share Catholicism with many of Cape Breton’s Scots (especially in Inverness County) and most of the Mi’kmaq, the aesthetics of their religious architecture and practice are much more decorative and elaborate than Scottish religious architecture (e.g., Chéticamp’s L’église.

174 “Visible minorities” are defined by the Employment Equity Act as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Statistic Canada 2010).
175 Cape Breton’s Acadian regions are Région de Chéticamp (“Toujours Chantante”) and Isle Madame (“…on Isle Madame it’s our nature to share it with you!”).
Saint-Pierre compared to St. Mary’s Parish in Glencoe Mills, which is more spare and austere). Mi’kmaq churches are likewise fairly unadorned, but are more likely to have color on the exterior than Scottish churches.

As part of an effort to portray the culture of the island as primarily that of Euro-Canadians, tourism literature has limited its representation of people of color. The Acadians and the Gaels were both marginalized in the colonial power struggles of France and Britain in North America, and neither was considered the right kind of white for much of their history; practical Protestants disapproved of the Catholicism’s transubstantiation and other suspect practices, as well as the Gaels’ tendency to report
seeing fairies and forerunners, and claiming to have second sight.\footnote{\textsuperscript{176} Forerunners appear to individuals with second sight to warn them of an imminent death. Second sight is the ability to foretell disaster.} Throughout the colonial period, the Acadians were citizens of whichever European power happened to have taken control most recently. When Acadians uprooted by the 1760s deportation arrived in France, their “Frenchness” differed dramatically from their supposed countrymen. Through the 19\textsuperscript{th} and well into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Chéticamp region was relatively isolated from the rest of the island, Nova Scotia, and Canada.

While the Scottish people were subject to internal English imperialism in Scotland, Michael Kennedy notes that within the Scots’ identities as oppressed colonial subjects was reformulated in the Canadian context:

Within Canada’s “‘two founding nations’ model [France and English], a cultural group once considered nearly antithetical to North American “English” culture has been redefined as somehow inherently English. As an ethnic group, Scottish Gaels quite simply do not exist within the context of Canadian cultural history” (Kennedy 2002:28, in Newton 2013:6).

Discussing how the Scottish Highlanders became white in the North American context, Celtic scholar Michael Newton reviews 19\textsuperscript{th} century literature to show how certain Gaelic culture-brokers, such as newspaper publishers, introduced racialism into Gaelic culture. These elites used racialized language to publically claim affinity between the Highlanders and “Anglo-Saxon races” thus creating “distance from the peoples of Africa, Ireland and Indigenous America in an effort to clear the path to privilege fro themselves” (Newton 2013:284). He argues that the Scots were active participants in making themselves white, and convincing North American Anglo-Saxon-descended elites to treat them as such. The 20\textsuperscript{th} century influx of evermore Southern and Eastern...
Europeans and people from other parts of the world helped; in comparison to these immigrants, the Scots looked more familiarly white.

Cape Breton Gaels, however, actively construct themselves against the dominant Anglo culture. Some of my informants talk about the Gaelic culture of Cape Breton as entirely distinct from any ties to mainstream Euro-Canadian culture; they are different from mainstream white people. Cape Breton Gaels hold the English responsible for forcing their departure from Scotland. This historical trauma and associated anger at England resurfaced in December 2013, when the Gaelic College’s board of directors surprisingly announced that they were going to add “royal” to the school’s name, a special designation from Queen Elizabeth II. Inverness’ Legislative Assembly member Allan MacMaster called the name change inappropriate and insulting, adding that it was “offensive and hurtful given the history of the Crown trying to eradicate the Gaelic language and Gaelic culture. There was a concerted effort to break the Gaelic peoples of Scotland…It was a plan to ethnically cleanse the people” (M. MacDonald 2013). Like many Cape Breton Gaels, MacMaster distinguished between the culture, language, and dress of the Highlanders and the Lowland Scots, who collaborated with the English in defeating the Highlanders at the disastrous 1746 Battle of Culloden and were complicit in the gradual oppression of the Highlanders leading up to the Clearances (1780 to 1860). Tonya Lundrigan-Fry, vice-president of the Nova Scotia Gaelic Council, portrayed the decision as “almost like someone digging up the past and throwing it in your face. It was really insulting and offensive” (ibid); A board member of the College, which is responsible for “promoting, preserving, and perpetuating” the culture of “immigrants
from the Highlands of Scotland,” did admit that they’d “made a blunder” in seeking the designation. The episode underlies that Scottish Gaelic identity in Cape Breton has not been geared towards accepting English identity, even if they have accepted the privileges of whiteness (as Newton suggests 2013:284).

Though Kennedy argues correctly that the Scots, as a non-English and non-French white minority, are not included Canada’s “two founding nations” myth, Dunbar (2013) goes further by investigating the effects of Canada’s official multiculturalism policy on internal Celtic minorities such as the Scots. Before multiculturalism, a policy of “anglo-conformity” (Day 2000:122-125, in Dunbar ibid.) was in effect; until well into the 20th century, it compelled speakers of other languages, including Cape Breton’s Gaels and Acadians, to acquire English-language fluency. Gaelic and Acadian children went to schools in which their languages were neither taught nor permitted. This has changed in the 21st century, with more Gaelic being offered in public schools due to the work of Premier Rodney MacDonald and the newly-established Office of Gaelic Affairs. Richard Julien (1990) argues that the 1982 Canadian Charter initiated an “era of optimism for Canada’s English and French linguistic minorities. The Charter promised “the right of citizens of Canada…to have their children receive primary and secondary education in the language of the English and French linguistic minority population of a province…” where numbers were sufficient (Julien 1990:265). But not everyone in these linguistic minority communities was in favor of the change; Julien details the controversies, mixed reactions, and community divisions the attempts to increase French in local curricula initiated (see also Feintuch 2010 and MacLeod 2008).
Multiculturalism began in earnest in the 1960s in response to the growing feeling among non-British and non-French populations of Canada that the French-English duality ignored their experience and relegated them to second-class status (Julien 1990:125). Official multiculturalism initially provided more support for folkloric culture than language programs, but this is shifting towards language development as more programs in minority languages like French Acadian and Gaelic are offered in local community schools. As of 2010, though, the Cape Breton District Health Authority was still working to increase its services in French to adequately meet the needs of French Acadian-speaking Cape Bretoners (CBDHA 2010).

Though both groups are Euro-Canadians, there are real cultural differences between the Acadians and the Scottish Gaels, and these become opportunities for cultural tourism: their ethnicized whiteness renders them familiar to the primarily white visitors that travel to Cape Breton, but their attachment to a strong local culture, which many informants, including Margie Beaton, cited as a source of visitor enthusiasm, differentiates them from the often urban-based home cultures of their visitors. In the following section, I turn to the Celtic Colours International Festival as an institution that has assimilated all of these hegemonic ideas about ethnicity on Cape Breton and thus actively works in support of these hegemonies.

---

177 I could not find any statistics about visitor ethnicity that confirm this, but I am relying on my fieldwork experiences and using the high percentage of white faces portrayed in tourism literature as grounds for my assertion.
Celtic Colours: Staging Cape Breton

The Festival’s name suggests the hopes and realities it represents. Joella Foulds, Executive Director of the Celtic Colours International Festival and Festival co-founder, told me in an interview that performers from all over North America, Europe, and beyond contact her with their portfolios in the hopes of being included in the festival; she has no trouble keeping the Festival international, because the unsolicited requests grow annually, too numerous to include in the festival. Celtic Colours applies an established set of criteria to artists being considered for inclusion in the festival. As Joella told me,

“We’re looking for high quality musicianship tied closely to a traditional culture. Traditional music goes over better here, so you can’t go too far over the edge. Traditional mixed with tasteful innovation. We look for excellence, connection to a tradition, and a connection to Cape Breton...[as in,] what connection does a musician have or feel [to their tradition or traditional culture]? Why do they want to come here [to Cape Breton and Celtic Colours]?” 178 (Foulds, interview)

Max MacDonald, the other Festival co-founder and currently directing marketing at the Highland Village, confirmed that festival organizers seek artists who have a strong connection to their place and their tradition, but for him it’s important that the artists “can get onstage and share that and tell their story.” Traditional music, as Joella mentioned, is a key through line. At Celtic Colours, audiences can hear many traditions: old sea shanties and new urban folksongs from young Newfoundlanders, electric blues played by an Acadian from Chéticamp, and traditional Scottish Cape Breton fiddle and piano from a renowned Cape Breton group and their protégé, all in the same concert.

178 ‘Traditional music’ as used here refers not only to traditional Cape Breton music, but includes other acoustic and electric folk-based styles and artists from Cape Breton, Canada, and beyond.
Each year’s Festival has a theme; it was ‘music of islands’ when I attended in 2012. Many of the concerts that year highlighted the distinctiveness of Cape Breton as a unified yet multicultural island culture (Canada in microcosm). Featured artists came from other physical islands, such as Newfoundland, and also cultural islands, like the Red River Métis community in Manitoba. Each festival combines several different kinds of events. There are the main concerts, at least three nightly on different stages across the island. On October 9, for example, festivalgoers had to choose between six concerts all scheduled at 7:30 pm; as in summer, it is impossible to see every event. Beyond the concerts, there are community events held in many of Cape Breton’s communities: local restaurants provided daily pairings of food and live performances in Chéticamp, and communities near to one of that night’s concert venues would offer meals to the public; I noticed several offering fishcakes and beans, a local favorite. In Baddeck, visitors could visit exhibits of fiber arts by local artists and purchase the finely crafted quilts and tartans. Someone was leading hikes and sharing local regional lore near Sydney. And over in Judique, the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre was offering fiddle lessons with a different highly regarded Scottish artist from Cape Breton each day of Celtic Colours, and finishing the week with a big finale concert on the penultimate night of the festival.

In total, Foulds told me that there were 237 events planned for the week, most of them generated by the communities in which they were based. These events are

---

179 The choices included a dance showcase called “Close to the Floor; “Acadian Reunion” featuring artists with an Acadian connection; “A Touch of the Irish” that united practitioners of Cape Breton’s Northside Irish tradition with musicians from Ireland; “Songs of Work and Protest” presenting Cape Breton’s history of labor and mining struggles through song; “Orangedale Whistle,” evoking the train that used to run through that town, brought together artists from Cape Breton’s Acadian and Scottish traditions with a band from the Danish island of Fyn; and, “Cow Bay Ceilidh” featuring young artists from home and away.
advertised on the daily schedules in the substantial festival publication, but are not financially supported by the festival and the communities do not share their profits with the festival. Celtic Colours is at its heart about “community development through culture” (Foulds) and “a community-based festival with international appeal” in the words of Festival Business Director Mary Pat Mombourquette in the 2012 program. Having communities generate most of the festival’s events shifts ownership of the Festival to local Cape Bretoners, rather than any source external to the communities. Centering attention on the communities through locally-generated events increases direct revenues for the communities and their organizations and gives festivalgoers something to do during the day, as most of the big festival concerts are held in the evening.

Cape Bretoners say of themselves that they love to complain, and there have been many complaints about Celtic Colours over the Festival’s seventeen years. Most of these have been alleviated over time as the festival and its organizers have proven themselves competent, respectful, and knowledgeable custodians of Cape Breton’s traditional (especially Scottish) culture. But one of the chief and ongoing complaints concerns the Celticness of the festival. Some people are concerned that for a festival billed as ‘Celtic,’ there are too many performers and events that are not in the least Celtic.180 Burton MacIntyre, a former educator and square dancer from Whycocomagh, explained local perception of Celtic Colours’ Celticness to me this way:

---

180 Celtic culture is not a narrow category at all. Six regions have distinct Celtic languages (Ireland/Irish Gaelic; Scotland/Scottish Gaelic; Wales/Welsh; Cornwall/Cornish; Isle of Man/Manx; Brittany/Breton), and other regions of Europe, North America, and South America with Celtic influence and Celtic cultural diasporas, including Galicia, parts of Scandinavia, Argentina, many parts of Canada, and much of the United States including Appalachia and the American South.
“Here [in Cape Breton], Celtic means Scottish and Irish. People aren’t thinking broadly about what Celtic means...Scandinavia, Galicia. [Of some Celtic Colours events] people say to me, ‘Burton, that’s not Celtic!’ And they’re right it’s not. How far outside the box can Celtic Colours go?” (MacIntyre, interview)

The narrow local definition of “Celtic” limits the range of acceptable performers, but though a thorough, deep, and constant attention to the needs and perspectives of locals permeates the festival at every level, the festival organizers don’t seem to care too much that people disagree with their artist choices. Burton said he’d once told Joella that people were “complaining about it not being Celtic,” but Joella was dismissive of these complaints. As indicated above, the criteria for selecting artists for the festival in no way implies that the artists themselves must be Celtic or even play a Celtic music, only that they have a connection to their own tradition (whatever it is and wherever it comes from), a connection to Cape Breton, and a high level of musicianship. As long as there are Cape Breton Scots in the festival, after all, it will be Celtic.

Celtic Colours provoked a lot of tension when it came on the scene in 1996. In what was portrayed to me as an amazing coincidence, the Nova Scotia Tourism Agency declared 1996 the “Year of Music,” and Celtic Colours, still in its development stage and not yet promoted to officials in government, was emerging as a community development plan with a strong potential for real economic benefit that would remain in Cape Breton communities. The provincial government was interested in the potential of the festival to bring in tourism dollars, which is exactly what has happened. Celtic Colours was even recognized with the National Cultural Tourism Award in 2011, an annual competition hosted by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (founded in 1930). This award
“Recognizes a cultural organization that has demonstrated a commitment to the development and promotion of authentic, innovative and enriched cultural tourism visitor experiences, or a tourism organization that has demonstrated a commitment to culture as a key aspect of encouraging and promoting tourism growth in their region” (TIAC 2011).

Burton MacIntyre and Joella Foulds both independently explained to me that aside from the airfare, virtually every dollar a festivalgoer spends during Celtic Colours stays on Cape Breton and directly benefits the island. And the amount is significant: 20,000 people attended in 2012, and the average direct economic impact of the festival is around $8 million. Even so, many communities were slow to jump on the bandwagon and offer events in partnership with Celtic Colours during the festival period; many were suspicious that the festival’s office was located in Sydney, which is seen as quite removed from the rest of the island (see the introduction for a discussion of the island’s regionalism). Foulds and MacDonald were persistent in finding a role for small communities in the form of events, like meals and dances, that were part of community life anyway, and integrating them into what is essentially a string of high-profile concerts. Their actions eased minds that the festival was going to serve the communities and be responsive to their needs and interests.

New opposition emerged from the existing Gaelic cultural organizations leaders who were hurt that this new festival was getting government monies when they had never received that same kind of support. These organizations feared that the festival would cut
them out, take over the culture, and minimize or sideline the Gaelic language itself. As a nine-day festival, Foulds emphasized that Celtic Colours could only “promote and celebrate” the culture and language; in the festival format of concerts, “you can’t really teach anybody anything,” which is exactly what the existing Gaelic organizations do.

There’s room for everyone. To demonstrate its continued commitment to respectful promotion of Gaelic culture, Celtic Colours has a Gaelic speaker or culture bearer, usually from Cape Breton, serve as Artist in Residence each year. The festival works to serve as an asset to existing cultural organizations rather than co-opting their roles.

**Imagining Island Culture**

It’s easy to imagine that the festival is equally celebratory of all the island’s cultures; despite the Celtic appellation, the undefined “traditional music” and welcoming of artists from many cultures suggests inclusiveness. But this masks cultural erasures. Among the Scots, there is a feeling that all Cape Bretoners, because they are all islanders, have a similar island culture and experience the same sorts of hardships. Individual Cape Bretoners, especially the Scots, are used to speaking for their whole ethnic and geographical community partly because they are so touristed, and tourists want to hear about “the culture.” Differences in experience based on ethnicity, culture, and the political and social power these confer are conflated, resulting in a tourism-supported working discourse of one island and one experience, and creates in practice one dominant

---

181 In the last few years, Gaelic has emerged as the purview of the most dedicated Gaelic cultural activists and the cultural aspect through which the total culture, the holistic network of lifeways, of Cape Breton’s Scottish communities will be preserved and sustained.
culture that invites the other local cultures to participate on its terms. The arena of this imagined cultural equality, curated by Gaels and founded on Scottish cultural forms and aesthetics, privileges Cape Breton’s Celtic culture and ethnic identity. Though Cape Breton is a multi-ethnic island, the vast majority of the island’s population is and has been Scottish Gaels originally from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.\(^\text{182}\)

As McKay and Bates have shown, early cultural heritage tourism in the mid-twentieth century focused on promoting a folklorized Scottish culture. In the 21st century, cultural arbiters like Celtic Heart, Celtic Colours, the Gaelic College and others emphasize the experience of heritage and lived culture rather than folklorized culture, which is perceived as less authentic than the music found in pubs or even on Celtic Colours festival stages. For festivalgoers and the myriad people from away that descend on the Gaelic College for summer workshops and classes, the living culture and heritage is theirs to explore and own; belonging not just to a local ethnic other, tourists too can craft individual experiences within the cultural offerings made available to them.\(^\text{183}\)

Tourism to Nova Scotia and Cape Breton especially is still mostly oriented towards experiencing the island’s beautiful physical scenery. Until recently, the “experience” has been about nature, and deepening the engagement with the natural beauty of Cape Breton. Due to the festival’s scheduling in early to mid-October, visitors

\(^{182}\) Irish descendants form a secondary Celtic group.

\(^{183}\) Cape Breton’s Scottish music and dance is ‘lived culture’ in that it is performed, practiced, and passed on as a crucial piece of community, family, and personal identity. Before the professionalization of the tradition in the latter part of the 20th century, it was valued for its personal meaning and community function rather than its economic potential, which wasn’t even enough to allow fiddlers to pursue it as anything other than a community service. This living culture becomes folklorized through its refashioning as a commodity. It is both at the same time, existing on a sliding scale rather than jumping between binary poles.
can enjoy the often spectacular fall colors of the island’s forests through festival-affiliated hikes and bike rides, or by hiking in the National Park (where I chatted with a couple I’d met at a festival concert while standing in the middle of a boggy trail). Though at one time even the natural scenery of Cape Breton was actively tied to a tartanized Scottishness (at its most extreme, this involved importing heather), Celtic Colours affords visitors a chance to experience the *peopled* scenery of the island, the places, sounds, and bodies of ethnically-other white people.

All the major Scottish cultural institutions on the island have events during the festival period: the Highland Village holds milling frolics and ceilidhs so visitors can experience authentic aspects of the traditional culture, although it’s rare that any cloth is actually milled at frolics anymore. Festivalgoers can also tour the Glenora Distillery and sip Glen Breton whisky while enjoying the tale of how the plucky Cape Breton Scots defied the Scottish Whiskey Association.¹⁸⁴ Community events take place out in small communities hugging the seacoast, the very picture of Macdonald’s quaint tartanism. Aside from being staged and folklorized (modified so as to appeal more to tourists), the events planned to coincide with Celtic Colours aren’t very different from the events that happen throughout the summer and even during the winter.

As the “Celtic Heart of North America,” Cape Breton represents a community-controlled descendant of the tartanism McKay details in which visitors can experience a local Celtic culture and set of lifeways still being lived as everyday reality, rather than a quasi-historical and folklorized reenactment. The visitor needs the Highland Village to

¹⁸⁴ It’s a story that conveys ideas about Scottish personality, including perseverance, resolve, bravery, and pathos in a way that would make Premier Macdonald proud.
imagine Scottish life, culture, and bodies as they existed in the past, but the culture on
display when Rachel Davis sits down at the Red Shoe, plugs in and starts drivin’er is
Rachel’s real life, though it would be an impossible life without the tradition’s global
popularity and recognizability due to the efforts of many other musicians. She plays and
teaches the music of her ancestors, at home and away, as a career. Without a transnational
market for Celtic soundworlds due partly to folks like Natalie MacMaster, Rachel
probably wouldn’t have a job. As she sits there, eyes shut, swaying side to side, right
hand choked up a good eight inches on the bow, slamming her foot into the wooden
floorboards, she’s playing for the locals, but cannot help the consumption of the tourists,
though she does nothing to engage them, draw them in, except perform traditionally.
Which is its own kind of attraction.

The emphasis in tourism now is on living culture; rather than interacting with a
relic from the past unaffected by the present, visitors meet a living culture rooted in its
past but growing with its present. Some tourists express surprise when fiddlers plug into
sound systems for their pub performances, expecting something more ‘traditional.’
Tourism of marginal engagement and romanticism still exists on the Cabot Trail for
instance, where most visitors experience the local Acadian and Scottish cultures briefly
and incompletely, usually through encounters with industry service workers.\(^{185}\) The Nova
Scotia Tourism Association wants to attract tourists by offering them experiences that
they can choose; the NSTA wants to offer tourists the agency to choose their own

\(^{185}\) According to the staff at the Baddeck VIC, most people stop there seeking information about the
National Park and the Cabot Trail (it’s on the way to both). At the Inverness VIC, which has traditional
music playing, people want information about the local music.
experiences from a variety of options within the choices curated by the NSTA and other tourism and culture brokers.

A live performance is just one way to experience the Scottish culture. “Living” museums like the Highland Village and historical sites like Louisbourg (which admittedly isn’t about the Scots) are part of the experiential tourism phenomena, in which tourists participate in the culture rather than merely watching it performed by others. Even at the Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site in Baddeck, where Bell and his family spent their summers and Bell built many of his flying inventions, visitors can fly kites modeled on Bell’s designs on the lawn overlooking the Bras d’Or after viewing them in the exhibit portion of the museum. In short, the prevailing industry wisdom is that visitors want to feel they have control over their experience. Celtic Heart represents a shift towards emphasizing the experience of culture specifically, and what’s more, making sure that visitors schedule it into their travels rather than leaving it to chance that they happen upon it while in the midst of travel. It offers culture pre-packaged for visitors, but allows visitors to choose how much they want to experience and how deeply they want to immerse themselves. The Celtic Heart of North America initiative is the next logical step in the chain of tourism development chronicled by McKay and Bates.

Cape Bretoners are gaining agency and self-interest in their own tourism development, and turning those aspects of their own culture they consider most enjoyable and important (and thus most in need of financial support) into tourism commodities. The

---

186 According to a 2010 Visitor Exit Survey commissioned by the Nova Scotia Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, 6% of visitors to Cape Breton plan on experiencing culture, but almost 22% discover it during their trip (VES 2010).
square dance and the ceilidh become tourist attraction, while remaining sites where locals perform their culture. The presence of tourists and the commodification of local events, through staging, regular schedules, and events occurring more frequently outside the home than in it, do mean change and an ongoing conversation about how to maintain integrity and local ownership while being accessible to visitors.

**Ethnic Encounters at the Festival**

The privileged status accorded to the island’s Celtic cultures is evident in their dominant presence in Celtic Colours line-up and the way that the various artists, both Scottish Cape Bretoners and others, are racialized. White ethnic identities make up almost the entire artist roster: of the 172 performing individuals and groups at Celtic Colours in 2012, only four were non-white groups or individuals: a Jamaican steel drum band Pepeto Pinto, the Métis/Native dance group the Asham Stompers, the Mi’kmaq Kitpu Singers, and Mi’kmaq fiddler Mooney Francis accompanied by pianist Vincent Joe. Only the Asham Stompers and Mooney Frances are pictured in the program, and they are the only people of color visually represented in the entire 2012 program, including the advertisements. While the vast majority of the white performers were self-identified or identifiably Scottish, Acadians comprised a sizeable minority. Most of these artists, however, play the fiddle and piano or dance in the Scottish style, which makes their Acadianness more about accent than distinctly ethnicized culture.

In addition to their limited number, all four groups of color were scheduled into two concerts and this scheduling thus foreclosed their visibility. The Asham Stompers
appeared twice during the festival, and in their second appearance they performed alongside the Kitpu Singers, and fiddler Mooney Francis in *A Cape Breton Mawio’mi*, explicitly billed as a culturally diverse concert and held on the Wagmatcook Reserve.¹⁸⁷

In the 2013 festival program, the racial mix of the 155 performers looked slightly different. Again, a majority of Scottish Cape Breton performers were featured, but the festival theme “Nordic Links” meant a sizable number of artists from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland (D. Beaton, 2013). While diverse ethnicities were represented, the only person of color on the program was one appearance by pianist Tyson Chen, who lives in Inverness County. The two artists in residence, Kimberley Fraser and Harald Haugaard, represented this musical and cultural exploration: Fraser is a fiddler from the Irish-influenced Northside area near Sydney, while Haugaard is from Denmark. One of the Artists in Residence is always a Cape Bretoner, which in practice means an island native who represents the island’s Scottish traditions and is also a representative of the Gaelic language community.¹⁸⁸

The 2013 festival featured no Native people, from Cape Breton or elsewhere. The Mi’kmaq were included in the festival only in the locating of three concerts on their Reserves: one at Wagmatcook and two at Membertou. Wagmatcook also hosted its third annual Aboriginal Art Festival. But the exscription of the music, dance, and aural voices

¹⁸⁷ Many of the concert concepts are recycled in each annual festival: “Orangedale Whistle,” “Taste of the Festival,” “Cow Bay Ceilidh” and others, appeared in both 2012 and 2013, though with different performers. “A Cape Breton Mawio’mi” was not repeated in 2013. The only other specifically Native event was at Eskasoni: a community meal of either moose stew or salmon, alongside the opportunity to meet Mi’kmaq artisans displaying “traditional crafts” and participate in traditional games. This event, called Eskasoni Cultural Journeys, looks like a variant of the cultural tours usually offered by this organization.

¹⁸⁸ In 2012, for example, the Artists in Residence were John Doyle (Ireland) and Cyril MacPhee, from the Scottish-rich St. Peter’s area of Richmond County, Cape Breton.
of the Mi’kmaq was clear, solidifying Celtic Colours as a festival that is concerned primarily with the Scottish culture of Cape Breton.

The impact of only minimal inclusion of Native Canadians in Celtic Colours, and specifically native-to-Cape Breton Mi’kmaq, is more than just a cultural elision. It has real economic consequences for the Mi’kmaq communities of Unama’ki. Celtic Colours was designed with the express purpose of enhancing the economic development of Cape Breton’s communities through presenting the cultures of those communities. Its primary economic impact is not through ticket sales, which go to the festival and not the town, nor in renting a venue from a community, but by providing peripheral services to festivalgoers; these include accommodations; food services at restaurants, groceries and provincial liquor stores; festival-affiliated community meals and events; gas for rental cars; and ancillary cultural experiences like museums. But not all communities can offer all these services, and so the benefit is unequal. Combing through both the Cape Breton Travel Guide and the more comprehensive Doers’ and Dreamers’ revealed no accommodations listed for any of the five Reserves. While the Wagmatcook Heritage Centre is listed as an attraction, its museum is no longer extant: I tried to visit in August 2013, but the teenager minding the craft shop told me the museum had been removed to make way for an expansion of the Clean Wave Restaurant.189 It’s not in the tourism publications either. Waycobah and Wagmatcook, the two Reserves along the Trans Canada highway heading up the middle of the island towards Sydney and the Cabot Trail,

189 I assume the economic motive behind this was to make the restaurant, Clean Wave, more accessible for tour bus groups, but it is not in keeping with the trend towards emphasizing culture.
both do a brisk business at their gas stations, but that is the primary interaction that these communities seem to have with tourists.

The lack of infrastructure designed to provide services to visitors minimizes the impact that Celtic Colours, and general summer tourism, has on the communities of Unama’ki, and limits the potential for Native employment. The very high unemployment rate for the Aboriginal population likely correlates to the lack of seasonal employment opportunities in the tourism service sector on the Reserves. According to the Nova Scotia Office of Aboriginal Affairs’ 2006 census, the unemployment rate for people living on reserve was 24.6%, versus 9.1% for all Nova Scotians; the unemployment is at 15.6% for all Cape Bretoners. 15.5% of all people of Aboriginal identity in Nova Scotia are unemployed, making unemployment on reserves rates significantly higher. Only half of people living on reserve participated in the labor force, compared to 63% for all people of Aboriginal identity (OAA 2013). 190 Mi’kmaq living at Eskasoni make significantly less money than the average Nova Scotian family. 191 Though 98% know English, over half spoke primarily Mi’kmaq at home, and the fact that 83% of Eskasoni’s population listed Mi’kmaq as their mother language suggests something about the insularity of the Reserve (Statistics Canada 2007). 192

190 The off-reserve participation rate is the same as the rate for the general population.
191 The median income for all census families on Cape Breton’s Eskasoni, the largest Reserve in Nova Scotia, was $16,000, whereas the median income for all of Nova Scotian families was over $55,000, making Aboriginal people, on reserve at least, less economically stable than other Nova Scotians.
192 Of the 835 Eskasoni residents who worked since 2005 (total reserve population of 2,952), over half spoke Mi’kmaq at their place of work, not English, which indicates that they may be employed within Eskasoni, or on another Reserve (Statistics Canada 2007).
Maintaining employment on Cape Breton is difficult for many island residents, especially in the rural regions, since the collapse of the mining and fishing industries. The woman who tends bar at the Glenora Distillery, located in the middle of rural Inverness County, told me that she only has that job when the facility is open from May to late October. The rest of the year, she goes out fishing with her father to supplement her seasonal income to subsist through the winter months. Hers is not an isolated situation. When interviewed by Burt Feintuch, Inverness Oran reporter Frank MacDonald reported his friend’s comment that “you’ve got to have a skill for every season” on Cape Breton (Feintuch 2010:27). Frank noted that “it takes a lot more creativity and ingenuity to stay here that it does to leave,” although of course many people do leave in search of more gainful and stable employment.

**Traditional Performance Models**

Celtic Colours concerts follow an established format designed to present an approximation of the way live musical performances usually unfold on Cape Breton. During the initial planning stage, Foulds told me that, she and co-founder Max MacDonald wanted to “do something new, but keep true to the way things were done [on Cape Breton].” They wanted the festival to innovatively present and celebrate Cape Breton’s cultures, but also follow the established framework, aesthetics, and local expectations of how those cultures are presented in performance. Traditional performance in Cape Breton, as I discuss through this dissertation, is more participatory than presentational (Turino 2008); local Cape Breton audiences have a high level of cultural
knowledge and competency, which makes the lines between performers and audience fluid. Virtually anyone in the ‘audience’ could go ‘onstage’ to ‘perform.’

In most Scottish cultural events, people who have not been monetarily compensated for their performances get onstage to perform for others, or shift attention away from the “stage” by making their seat into a performance platform; some of these individuals are themselves professional musicians and dancers. ‘Onstage’ can be a literal stage (see Figure 5.4) or a demarcated area of floor space (see Figure 5.5). The kind of professionalized concerts Natalie MacMaster usually puts on, which are formally-staged and produced, professionally-lighted, and lacking audience performance, are uncommon in Cape Breton traditional performance.
Figure 5.4. Donna Marie DeWolfe performs at the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre for a solo stepdancer. She sits on a raised stage lit specifically for performance; the stage is set to look like a Cape Breton kitchen (note the stove with tea kettle). Unseen behind the black curtain is a tromp l’oeil mural that depicts a kitchen window looking out to Judique’s main street at an earlier point in time. Photo by author.

Figure 5.5. The Red Shoe Pub has a fixed area for performance but no raised stage. The performance area is demarcated by speakers bolted to the ceiling that form a ten-by-five foot space filled by an upright piano (the front panel removed to make it louder), and a sound box with mixing board and cables to hook up instruments. Rachel Davis performs at a Friday night ceilidh; the electric keyboard is an unusual sight. Photo by author.
The Inverness Ceilidh operates like a variety show: every week, a group of young local performers showcase their musical and dancerly talent in front of a mostly local audience. Organizer Alice Freeman pays the kids for their time, and makes sure the audience performs too by leading the crowd in a group sing of “Òran do Cheap Breatainn (Song of Cape Breton),” Scottish Cape Breton’s unofficial anthem, and inviting Gaelic singers and speakers in the audience to share stories and Gaelic songs. At the Red Shoe early evening entertainment called Suppertime Music features a local fiddler “and Friends” three days a week. “And Friends” leaves space for anyone else who might show up at the Red Shoe and want to perform, including the well-known pianist Tyson Chen, who performs all over Inverness County and is a frequent accompanist at the Red Shoe and the Glenora Distillery. Even the Red Shoe’s Friday and Sunday ceilidhs, seemingly more official with a cover and bigger names, the “and Friends” category is still implicit.

The participation of knowledgeable practitioners in the audience is implicitly required. It prevents a music event from turning into a concert by keeping the community involved and the atmosphere social. Someone always starts a square set in the narrow space between the performers and the tables on Sunday afternoons. Participation, the ability to participate, and the knowledge to do so competently is expected at these events. For visitors, this is exciting to watch even though it usually excludes them from participation. Margie and Burton, who both interact with visitors and teach dance in

193 Gaelic College employees Anna MacDonald and Colin MacDonald, and Jenni the weaving apprentice (now a Kiltmaker at the College), were gently coaxed into stepping up to stepdance the night Margie and Dawn Beaton were performing at the Red Shoe (September 7, 2012).
194 There’s always the chance that an older man will ask a female tourist to dance; I ran into the young woman Gerry asked to dance one evening, and she reported having had a lot of fun, even though she had no
different capacities, both independently noted that the thrill of seeing “just anyone stand up and jump in and give a step,” in Margie’s words, vastly increased the meaningfulness and authenticity of the experience for tourists.

Why the local praxis-based concert format? Joella explained that Cape Bretoners expect to have a lot of people onstage performing in a given event, so they replicated the model in Celtic Colours by building it into the structure of the concerts. “We wanted to have lots of people onstage and interacting in each concert. Because that’s what people expect in Cape Breton...if they don’t get lots of people they don’t feel like they got their money’s worth” (Foulds, interview). This quasi-variety show format also allows Celtic Colours to introduce new artists, including lesser known local musicians and musicians from away, to the audiences alongside established musicians as a way of “educating local audiences,” and expanding their tastes. Some newcomers, like Manitoba’s Asham Stompers and The Once from Newfoundland, have become repeat festival favorites.

Each concert features a finale when all the musicians from the show get onstage together and try to fit their sometimes extremely disparate traditions together in front of a live audience. This works better at events like the Inverness Ceilidh because such the talent consists of locals who are interacting through a shared medium of the Scottish Cape Breton sound, movement, and aesthetics.\(^\text{195}\)

\(^{195}\) Scottish Cape Bretoners playing in the Scottish style interact with Acadians playing Scottish tunes and dancing in the style, and even people originally from away who have learned the style as a second language (like Tyson Chen) fit right into the expected architecture of the performance.
Close Reading: A Cape Breton Mawio’mi

In this section, I examine the ways in which culture bearers from the island’s three ethnic groups variously marked as ethnic others or familiars within the context of a single Celtic Colours concert evade easy consumption by a mixed audience of tourists and locals. A Cape Breton Mawio’mi was held October 6, 2012 at the Wagmatcook Heritage Centre on the Wagmatcook Reserve. I settled in and scanned the audience: mostly white people between their fifties and seventies. There a requisite ‘where are you from?’ part of the concert; it mimics standard Cape Breton small talk with visitors but is also cleverly designed so that people voluntary give the festival their valuable demographic information in exchange for a chance at a prize. Most people in the audience were from Cape Breton, secondarily from the rest of Canada. The MC was a white man in his mid-60s from Ontario; he and his wife have been traveling to Cape Breton to volunteer at the festival for years.196 He assured the audience that they could keep part of the stub for their discount on the entry fee at the afterhours Festival Club, held in the Hall of the Clans at the Gaelic College where, as he put it, “the real action is!”197 The festival has been trying to even the ratio of Cape Bretoners to visitors at the...

---

196 The MC told us that 1,500 volunteers were working at 46 events during the 9 days of the festival. According to Foulds’ message in the 2013 program, over 2,000 volunteers “take ownership and pride in the festival and in our rich cultural heritage. They enthusiastically share it while spreading Cape Breton hospitality from one end of the island to the other.”

197 The Festival Club is a very popular nightly aspect of Celtic Colours. Held at the Gaelic College, the Festival Club “offer[s] an opportunity for artists to showcase in a more informal setting [and] get a session in with friends and colleagues from near and far” (Celtic Colours program 2013:11). It opens at 11pm, after the concerts have ended, and musicians play “by invitation only” for an audience of paying festivalgoers (tickets are half price with a ticket stub from a same-day Celtic Colours performance). That the schedule isn’t announced in advance adds to the anticipation, and the cash bar adds to the relaxed atmosphere. The appeal is that anyone can show up, even the biggest stars, and sit down to play with other festival artists in an intimate and more elite setting. Many seasoned festivalgoers hit the Club every night. Performers
Festival. After each festival, data from audience surveys and statistics-laden ticket stubs are compiled into a report that the festival organizers use for marketing and promotion, and also to send to the government agencies that partially fund Celtic Colours. As a non-profit, the festival needs to quantitatively demonstrate that it is contributing meaningfully to the local economy in order to continue receiving government funds. The majority of the visitors come from the rest of Canada, and after that from the U.S. Other nationalities, e.g., Europeans, are not well represented, which Foulds attributes to the closer proximity of other ‘authentic’ Celtic cultures in the British Isles, especially Ireland and Scotland.

Despite the hall’s location on a Native reserve and the presence of Mi’kmaq performers on the program, there were few Native people in the audience. Nor were they visible in technical assistance roles, though several younger Native people directed visitors towards available parking and provided security at the hall’s entrance. Celtic Colours hires its own technical staff that travels around the island to the different venues, but though the technical requirements for most Celtic Colours show do not appear onerous, the festival prides itself on its consistently high professionalism and production quality. Foulds told me that many venues on the island want to host a festival concert, but have been refused because even though the community venue may be of legendary

\footnotesize
usually stay at the College, and festivalgoers in the know stay in nearby Baddeck, for easiest access to the College and its central location and amenities.
\footnotesize
198 The festival used to attract mostly people from Cape Breton, but as of 2012, the audience split was about 45% from Cape Breton and 55% from away; Foulds’ goal is an even split between locals and people from away.
\footnotesize
199 Requirements consist mainly of having enough chairs, preparing appropriate microphones and audio capabilities based on the needs of the musicians, and creating a variable lighting plot that can provide a range of different lighting choices to create mood and differentiate between acts.
importance in the local communities, its sound capabilities, audience capacity, or remote location make it ill-suited to serve as a venue for a world-class concert. Providing a high degree of professionalism is a goal of the festival, and not every venue can provide that. To include these small venues and avoid the hostility of the communities who love them, the festival created a whole second division of community events that occur in these small venues across the island. The value of these small venues is in their role as places where communities gather to perform and enjoy their cultural forms together; at some level, they wouldn’t be appreciated by audiences from away, who might see a dark and old-fashioned barn-like structure in need of repair rather than a storied dance hall. But shutting out the very community spaces that produce the musicians and dancers, and the very music and dance that is the bedrock of the festival, amounts to a negation of the tradition as it exists in communities. This tradition gets subsumed under the transnational Cape Breton tradition that exists always in parallel, and sometimes in conflict, to the tradition as practiced at Glencoe Mills, Brook Village, and the Inverness Ceilidh. It’s not that it becomes inauthentic, but it does change, and the meaning it has for communities and the investment they are able to make in it lessens.

Despite the high degree of professionalism in production, the concerts are very close to community-based live performance in the Scottish tradition. They have a variety show feel, combine many performers, and heavily favor the performers the audiences really come to Cape Breton for: the Cape Breton Scottish performers. The MC’s job in the Mawio’mi concert was similar to that of the organizers at the Normaway Inn concerts and the Mabou and Inverness ceilidhs: he was supposed to transition between performers.
and engage the audience in friendly banter, which he did successfully. He could not, however, provide the vast compendium of knowledge on the performers and their traditions that Dave MacDonald, Joey Beaton, Alice Freemen can.\(^{200}\)

Most of the audience was seated inside the long hall inside the Wagmatcook Community Centre when I arrived. Some watched the shallow stage located across the south-facing end of the hall. Others smoked, chatted, and shivered on the outdoor porch spanning the entire length of the building, separated from the hall by an uninterrupted bank of French doors facing a beautiful quiet inlet in the Bras d’Or. Feet shuffled on the wooden floor; a mural of a great spreading tree interspersed with faces and sayings from Mi’kmaq elders and folktales adorned the wall next to a bingo board. The intricate Celtic knot that is Celtic Colours’ logo was projected onto the stage’s back curtain. Festival workers and members of the local press were stationed all around the hall; this was one of the concerts that would be streamed live on the Celtic Colours website.\(^{201}\)

*Mawio’mi* is a Mi’kmaq word meaning “gathering,” and perhaps the seeming similarity to the Scottish word *ceilidh* (which also means “gathering,” though with different connotations) led to the creation of this concert’s conceit: a gathering together of cultural representatives from the island’s three main ethnic groups, as well as one group that came from away. This concert, like all Celtic Colours concerts, was a collection of different artists from different, if related, ethnic traditions. But the attempt to

\(^{200}\) Dave MacDonald organizes and MC’s the Normaway Inn concerts (he also owns the Inn). Joey Beaton runs and MC’s the Mabou Ceilidh, and Alice Freeman organizes and MC’s the Inverness Ceilidh.

\(^{201}\) In 2012, a livestreamed concert available for free viewing each night of the festival. In 2013, five concerts were available in this format (www.celtic-colours.com). Celtic Colours is a huge event that is widely reported in the island’s news media, including the Inverness County *Oran*, the Victoria County *Standard*, and Sydney’s *Cape Breton Post*. 
tie these performers together was too heavy-handed; it didn’t work, the concert felt
disconnected in a way that other Celtic Colours concerts I attended did not. The acts
ranged widely across and beyond the island’s traditions. The disjunctions were magnified
by each performer’s mode of audience interaction: as I discuss, some talked to the
audience extensively and were quite engaging. Others never spoke at all and never looked
at the audience. Gathering the Acadians, Scots, and First Nations was frankly awkward.

In the first half of the concert, each group appeared onstage in sequence to
perform two songs/sets to introduce themselves to the audience; the groups began
performing together in various combinations right before intermission and continued
through the second half.

A group called Les Zorvenants from Chéticamp represented the Acadian
community. The group often performs in period costume at Fortress Louisbourg. Two
young Acadians also stepdanced to the music of Scottish Cape Breton musicians Douglas
and Lawrence Cameron. While not Celtic, Les Zorvenants’ Acadian songs fit neatly into
Celtic Colours’ “traditional music” framework. The powwow-style circle drumming and
singing of the first group onstage, the Mi’kmaw Kitpu Singers from Eskasoni, was also in
a sense “traditional,” but it was too far outside what the audience interpreted as
“traditional” in the context of Celtic Colours for the Kitpu Singers’ performance to
receive an enthusiastic response. Polite applause followed the Singers’ two song set, but
Les Zorvenants received louder applause and whoops, and the audience even clapped
along at points. This may also have to do with how the two groups engaged the audience.
The Kitpu Singers came onstage and seated themselves around their drum, already
illuminated at center stage, without looking at the audience or each other. They performed one song, and then another, and got up and exited the stage. They never spoke to the audience or each other, never looked up. Les Zorvenants’ lead singer, however, greeted the audience, explained who the French Acadians are and introduced both their songs. He bantered with the other two members of the group. In short, they put on a better show for the audience.

Gaelic speaker and Gaelic language educator Jeff MacDonald (known by his Gaelic name, Goiridh Dòmhnallach), Lawrence Cameron (piano), and Douglas Cameron (fiddle) represented the Scottish Gaelic tradition of Cape Breton in the concert. The Camerons didn’t speak to the audience at all and barely acknowledged the applause between the medleys of powerfully propulsive dance fiddling by Douglas and his father Lawrence’s peppy accompaniment. Their performance, aside from the Celtic Colours logo, could have been at any square dance or ceilidh in a traditional music venue: the standard Cape Breton tunes they played, the traditional instrumentation, the lack of verbal engagement or eye contact with the audience and lack of interaction with each other were all typical of community-based performance practice. Their modesty in acknowledging applause, or rather not acknowledging it, and the modest bashfulness with which Douglas answered a question from the MC, was also typical. Their movement aesthetic was familiar from community ceilidhs and dances: heels striking the stage in unison, eyes fixed on instruments, Lawrence sitting with his keyboard faced almost perpendicular to the front of the stage, and Douglas sitting so that the side of his instrument faced the audience, which makes for better sound projection but poor eye contact.
Goiridh’s engagement with the audience was entirely opposite to that offered by the Camerons. He spoke to the audience at length, explaining the two Gaelic laments he sang. Notably, he referenced the conceit of the concert as a meeting of Cape Breton’s cultures and explicitly thanked the Mi’kmaw for all that they did to help “our people,” the Scottish Gaels, during the difficult period of settlement on Cape Breton. The audience received this statement with warm and sincere applause, but the whole moment was odd because of the almost complete lack of interaction, cultural or social, between the Gaels and the Mi’kmaq in present Cape Breton society.

Dancers often get up and “give a step” when the music is really compelling. This usually spontaneous response praxis was approximated in the concert as a choreographed stepdance routine. Two young Acadian dancers, Christopher Poirier and Amélie Larade, came out onstage to perform unison and close to the floor choreography to one of the Cameron’s medleys. The choreography, of course, was made necessary by the concert.

---

202 The only example of direct contemporary cultural connection I have heard of is the “Two Stories Cultural Journeys: Music, Food, Folklore” which is a partnership between the Highland Village Museum and Eskasoni First Nation, which has a tourism experience of its own called “Eskasoni Cultural Journeys.” This offers tours that introduce visitors to Mi’kmaw culture but the “Two Stories” tour, available in 3 or 6-hour versions, “begin[s] at the Nova Scotia Highland Village with a presentation on the Gaelic culture and traditions, foods and performances by Gaelic interpreters. Visitors will then depart Iona by vessel for Eskasoni First Nations for the Mi’kmaq culture experience. Interpreters will tell stories of their people and the connection between the Gaels and the Mi’kmaq. There will be a feast of traditional foods and a cultural performance at the Sarah Denny Cultural Centre” (Highland Village 2014). But even this “experience of authentic living history,” which seems like an equal collaboration, retains the distance between the communities, which are presented sequentially rather than together. This unique multi-cultural tour of “two different and distinct cultures reflect[s] the parallels and common threads linking the cultures in history and the present day” (flier), but it is difficult to determine if the communities interact in meaningful ways, or merely faced similar issues while living on a small island in economically-marginal rural communities around the Grand Narrows region of central Cape Breton. The comparison between the Highland Village, a constructed outdoor living history museum where visitors travel through the eras of Scottish settlement by visiting structures from each period staffed by animators, and Eskasoni, a functional community on a government-established Reserve onto which Native people were centralized, ignores fundamental power imbalances between the tour sites. It calls into question how the Mi’kmaq and the Scots, who through this tour are both engaged in cultural representation, sell themselves and their culture to visitor while balances cultural and personal integrity.
format and the presence of two dancers together instead of one at a time. A dancer who
comes up to give a step will only dance for a couple minutes (a tune or two), before
ceding the floor to someone else, another expression of modesty in performance. The two
dancers, by contrast, danced for several minutes, making for an impressive show onstage.
Poirier and Larade danced in a Scottish style with neat steps close to the floor, but their
soft-soled shoes meant that the sounds of their steps were masked. Dancers usually wear
leather-soled shoes with a short square heel so the audible percussion of their steps
interacts sonically with the percussive syncopation of the piano and the driving fiddle.
Their shoes made the Acadian dancers’ contribution to the performance only visual. They
disappeared sonically, leaving the Scots to control the audible interpretation of the tunes.

Figure 5.6. Young Acadians Christopher Poirier and Amélie Larade dance along to tunes played by
Lawrence Cameron and Douglas Cameron at A Cape Breton Mawio’mi during Celtic Colours 2012. ©
Corey Katz, used with permission.
The Kitpu Singers, Mooney Frances (fiddler), and Vincent Joe (pianist), all from the Eskasoni, represented the Mi’kmaw at the *Mawio’mi*. Like the Scots, none of these performers addressed the audience verbally to offer welcome, banter, or interpretation, nor did they engage with the audience or one another through eye contact or open body posture. I wasn’t expected the Kitpu Singers to perform Plains-style powwow drumming and singing, complete with honor beats. Janice Tulk (2012) has written extensively about Mi’kmaw adoption of the powwow form (see Footnote 6 in this chapter), but since the Singers offered no interpretation, I don’t know which of the three strategies of localizing in the Mi’kmaw context (if any) they may have used in their performance.

![Figure 5.7. Kitpu Singers performing at *A Cape Breton Mawio’mi* during Celtic Colours 2012. © Corey Katz, used with permission.](image)

Mooney Frances ambled out onstage wearing a vibrantly teal shirt with ribbon designs in red, black, yellow, and white (colors significant to the Mi’kmaq). He settled into his seat onstage next to Vincent Joe at an electric keyboard, rested his partially-
immobile left arm on a stool, and launched into fast reels and jigs. With Vincent sweating along at the piano, Mooney poured out tunes long past when the MC began to appear hopefully onstage every time he finished a tune, his body language politely suggesting they needed to move on to the next group. Mooney’s renditions of Scottish Cape Breton tunes sounded just a bit different than a Scottish fiddler would interpret them, and he played fast, far too fast for stepdancing.203 Before this concert, I’d never heard of or seen him, or any other Native fiddler or pianist, performing at a Scottish venue, dance, or ceilidh. The music, musicians, dancing, and audiences, except in this one artificial festival concert environment, are usually separated. The forced interactions of traditions in the second half exposed not only the sutures of the event but the dominance of the Scottish sounds, embodiments, and movements; all interactions happened through a Scottish form, whether tune or step or song. Goiridh remained in charge of the cultural encounter when he sang a Gaelic tune with Les Zorvenants, who invented music to accompany but not overpower him; the seven-year old Métis girl from Asham Stompers attempted a choreographed Scottish Cape Breton style stepdance routine with the Acadian dancers, all of them working in a movement language other than their own. Vincent Joe gave up his seat at the only keyboard so that Lawrence Cameron could provide/control the syncopated accompaniment for the Douglas Cameron, Mooney Frances, and the fiddler from Les Zorvenants. Through the finale the Kitpu Singers stood

203 The piano accompaniment was chromatic in a different way than is typical for Scottish players, and the rhythm less swung and sounding more like the straight “oompah” of a polka.
silently in the back, drum nowhere in sight, unable to contribute to the Scottish dominated gathering.\footnote{While it isn’t uncommon to see more than one fiddler playing a tune together at the same time, it’s very unusual to have two pianos going simultaneously.}

None of the Mi’kmaq performers addressed the audience. The only Native person to address the audience in a language legible to the majority of the audience was Arnold Asham, the Métis founder of The Asham Stompers from Manitoba. The Asham Stompers is a dance group that performs a social partner dance called the Red River Jig that is particular to the Métis community in Manitoba; the group consists entirely of Native and Métis performers. Mr. Asham spoke extensively about the importance of giving Native and Métis people a voice and a presence in Canadian life, politics, and culture. He’s using his success as a businessman to fund various kinds of youth and community development.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figures/fig5_8_9.jpg}
\caption{Mooney Francis (at left) and Lawrence and Douglas Cameron (at right) play separately at A Cape Breton Mawio’mi during Celtic Colours 2012. © Corey Katz, used with permission.}
\end{figure}
programs, including the Asham Stompers, which he described in decidedly activist terms as preserving the heritage of the Métis in Manitoba.\footnote{This was their second appearance at Celtic Colours. They had been so popular with audiences in 2011 that the festival brought them back for a second year. In 2012, they performed at three different Celtic Colours concerts, including the opening concert.}

Figure 5.10. The Asham Stompers perform choreography in the Red River Jig style. Arnold Asham is facing away from the camera, second from the left. A Cape Breton Mawio’mi. 2012. © Corey Katz, used with permission.

**Finale**

As holes in the construct of the cultural gathering grew larger, it became clear that the whole “Mawio’mi” was in fact a ceilidh, at base a Scottish event conducted in a typical Scottish Cape Breton concert format, organized mostly by Scottish Cape Bretoners and a handful of Anglo-Canadians from away. The other ethnic groups were allowed their brief time onstage to display their culture as discrete units, but the lack of interpretation, especially of the Mi’kmaq performers, foreclosed the audience’s ability to engage with those othered cultures. The refusal of the Kitpu Singers and Mooney Francis
to interpret or interact with the audience may be a strategy to refuse the racialization of their performances, in Mooney’s case the explicit othering of his interpretations of “Scottish” tunes. The Mi’kmaq performers’ self-isolation from the concert audience, and their isolation into a single concert with the entirety of Celtic Colours limits the ability of the audience to know them at a more than a visual and at times sonically-foreign level.

Listening to the crowd after the show, it was clear that the favorites had been the Asham Stompers for their sheer joy, exuberance, and endurance, and the traditional Cape Breton style fiddle and piano. The older couples on either side of me, longtime festivalgoers from Ontario and first-timers from upstate New York, also loved seeing the children dance. But for these audience members, the other acts were too culturally distant from what they’d been expecting to hear. Longtime festivalgoers from away come back year after year primarily to hear the Scottish music of Cape Breton; the local festivalgoers, mainly Cape Breton Scots, also come to hear their own music, and perhaps some groups that are similar in a safe way (The Once’s Newfoundland folk songs, for instance, or Acadian J.P. Cormier’s bluesy narrative ballads). Les Zorvenants fit squarely into the traditional acoustic format that makes up the majority of Celtic Colours, but their French-language songs created just enough distance between them and a largely English-speaking audience that they were enjoyable but not captivating. Or maybe the majority of festivalgoers do in fact come to Celtic Colours just to hear show after show of Cape Breton’s finest Scottish singers, dancers, fiddlers, and pianists. Though Celtic Colours sells itself as an international festival, at heart it’s a regular Cape Breton concert like Highland Village Day, but on a massive scale.
Everything about Celtic Colours is very carefully considered. Its scheduling in early October capitalizes on a pre-existing fall color tourist surge and does not encroach on the established summer tourist season, or any other major events.\footnote{Labour Day marks the end of the summer. Tourist traffic from the United States and Canada, which account for the bulk of tourists to Cape Breton, slows down. The dense summer schedule of events wraps up at the end of August, and suddenly the island is much quieter: fewer people on the roads, quiet nights at the Red Shoe, and far fewer events, as well as a marked uptick in the availability of people for interviews.} In fact, Celtic Colours extends the season by weeks, resulting in huge economic benefits through direct and indirect revenue from the festival itself festivalgoers’ other expenditures while on the island (meals, accommodations, transportation, gifts and souvenirs). In 2010, direct audience expenditures at Celtic Colours totaled $6.2 million; the total economic impact was approximately $15 million annually (ECBC 2011). The festival creates jobs, increases revenue at tourism and travel related businesses, supports local artists and venues, and in total, brings in over $8 million CAD in annual expenditures (Program
Concerts in the evenings mean thousands of visitors have days to explore the island, patronize its businesses and attractions, and give money directly to local communities and church groups by attending community events. After Celtic Colours, the season truly is over: the Red Shoe, the Glenora Distillery, and most places of accommodation shut down until early May, or even June.

Celtic Colours won over locals and government officials to its community development mission. The government of Canada provided the Celtic Colours Festival Society with $900,000 over three years (2012-2015) “to assist with the operation of the festival” (ECBC 2011), in light of the festival’s contribution to “strengthen[ing] the tourism shoulder season and heighten[ing] national and international awareness of the arts and culture sectors of Cape Breton Island.” This heightened awareness will no doubt attract even more tourists. The huge economic impact generated by Celtic Colours has become too essential to the island’s economy to risk the festival running out of money, having to cut back its events, or compromise on quality. Though the festival’s mandate, in the words of Festival Society Chairperson Robert Sampson (ibid.:2011), is to “celebrate and sustain our [Cape Breton’s] living Celtic culture,” the festival is really “a major tourism attraction and economic generator” (ECBC 2011); the blank check represents the necessity that the festival continue in that role. Though other cultural institutions also “celebrate and sustain” the Gaelic culture, none have the financial and governmental support given to Celtic Colours.

Foulds told me the festival relies on federal and provincial subsidies to stay afloat and continue offering the high level of professionalism and the vast number of events to which festivalgoers have become accustomed. The adult dance at Brook Village barely pays for itself during its summer months of operation.
Celtic Colours is special to islanders; there’s a reason a majority of concert goers are locals. Cape Bretoners eagerly anticipate Celtic Colours, and some descend into a post-festival blues after it’s all over. Margie sighed wistfully when she talked about the festival ending: “at least, you know, there’s Christmas to look forward to after [the festival] but then…it’s just winter,” when cultural events become scarce. Brook Village, like the other local Inverness County square dances, organizes a final dance during Celtic Colours to take advantage of the crowds, their interest in experiencing authentic culture out in the communities, and the free publicity in the Celtic Colours program. But none of the money that goes to the festival will end up in the hands of the communities that offer community meals, dances, workshops, craft shows, and open mics during the duration of the festival.

Direct government subsidies perhaps pay for the thousands of printed programs containing plugs for the community events. But the agreement between the festival and the communities is that towns get free advertising in exchange for funding and producing the event entirely on their own, even though it is these very community events that are essential to Celtic Colours’ authenticity and its true connection to the folklife it celebrates nightly on-stage. The festival’s impact on communities comes through festivalgoers, but not all communities benefit equally from this arrangement because of differences in amount and kind of tourism-supporting infrastructure each town has, and whether a community has nearby peripheral attractions that invite visitors to pull off the highway. Communities without a strong Celtic connection occupy a peripheral position in the hierarchy of communities: Mabou, home of the famous Red Shoe Pub and the Rankin
Family, is a top destination for “authentic” Scottish culture on the island that is easily accessible, readily consumed, and experiential without requiring deep investment of time, physical exertion, or preexisting knowledge. It even has restaurants, a gas station, and a grocery store. Wagmatcook, by contrast, even though it hosts a concert and an art festival during the festival, remains peripheral, a place for visitors to drive through rather than a culturally-significant site.

Cultural arbiters on Cape Breton, such as Celtic Colours, help to craft the expectations tourists create for their cultural experiences on Cape Breton. When Celtic Colours selects and showcases Scottish Cape Bretoners, the festival meets and also creates the expectations visitors have of the island’s “Celtic” culture. Other cultural institutions and arbiters aid Celtic Colours by offering a consistent cultural vision, and thus construct similar visitor, and local, expectations for what the culture should look and sound like.
Every Monday in July and August

It was Monday night, so I was on my way to the dance at Brook Village. There’s a different dance almost every night of the week in July and August, but Mondays are at Brook Village, so after thirty quiet minutes of traversing the twisty rural routes through darkened farmland and drifts of ground fog, I arrived suddenly at the Parish Hall. Past the sign for the town and over a slight rise, cars appeared along the road, and up ahead next to the church, the unassuming white wooden building awaited; an orange sodium light glowed over the open door from which light, music, and chatter spilled out into the night.

Figure 6.1. Brook Village Parish Hall, site of the Brook Village square dance. The small annex on the side of the building (far left) is the entrance to the dance. Photo by author.

208 Monday: Brook Village; Tuesday: Scotsville; Wednesday: Normaway Inn; Thursday: Glencoe Mills; Friday: South West Margaree; Saturday: West Mabou; Sunday: informal dancing at the Celtic Music Centre and the Red Shoe.
Across the brook from the Parish Hall is St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Parish, and the land around the structures is cleared, the forest pushed back, space carved out to make room for a culturally meaningful place at which people can gather and interact and learn/remember what it means to be Scottish Cape Bretoners. I parked along the road, crossed the pavement and crunched over the gravel towards the sounds of fiddle and piano. Climbing a couple steps, I entered a small foyer where a volunteer sells the tickets from behind a small counter. Each dance is run by a different organization, whether the local Volunteer Fire Department’s Women’s Auxiliary or a volunteer committee, just one example of the extreme localism that governs Cape Breton culture.

Inverness County’s Recreation/Tourism Department publishes “Dancing Around Inverness County,” a cream-colored trifold flier that lists all the dances with their schedules, and until 2012 included an illegible mimeographed hand-drawn map that misleadingly suggests organization or standardization. By 2013 however, the flier was transformed into a useful tourism publication (see both fliers in Appendix B). Not only do separate organizations of volunteers or appointed church committees run the dances, there is no way for community outsiders to contact the organizers or the hall. Like many things in Cape Breton, advertising is a low-budget afterthought, a casualty of a modest culture that knows it needs tourism, but which through charmingly low-technology mechanisms, subverts the ability of tourists to participate in many of the most local

209 The Parish was founded in 1893, and is part of the Archdiocese of Antigonish, which is based on the Nova Scotia mainland in town of Antigonish. Brook Village also has a general store, and about 500 residents. The village’s economy relies on dairy farming and cutting trees to sell to the paper pulp mill.

210 A new map, the “Celtic Heart Recommended Experience” logo, and more complete information appeared in the new flier, redesigned by Tyson Chen, who is a graphic designer in addition to a strong piano accompanist.
cultural events. Though new tourism campaigns are making the island’s attractions more accessible to visitors, these efforts are still in progress.

At Brook Village, the ticket seller from the Ladies’ Church Auxiliary sold me a surprisingly expensive ticket (all dance admissions are $7 or $8), which I returned to another volunteer two feet away at the entrance to the large open dance hall. Each dance has its own identity, a distinct feel and personality, but all are alike in their structure and organization of time and space.

Brook Village is an adult dance: alcohol is available and no one under 19 is admitted. Adult dances are more financially successful than the alcohol-free family dances for two reasons: the alcohol generally improves the conviviality and liveliness of the social interactions, and sales helps fund the dance. The ubiquitous canteen sells chips in such peculiarly Canadian flavors as dill pickle and ketchup, and strong black tea and oatcakes, a local staple of social gatherings. Most of the pine board floor is clear for dancing, but chairs line the walls, and extra tables and chairs are arranged at the back of the hall by the bar window as well.

211 Ticket and concession sales just barely cover the musicians’ fee for three hours of almost continuous, driving music. That’s why adult dances, which also generate revenue from alcohol sales, are more financially successful than family dances.

212 The floor is often dusted with cornstarch before the dancing begins to reduce friction.
Settling in to a chair, leaning back and taking a sip of the Alexander Keith’s IPA I’d purchased, I scanned the room looking for familiar faces, and glance to the chest-high stage to see who the fiddler and pianist were (Kinnon and Betty Lou, drivin’er at jigs and reels) Cape Breton tartan curtains decorate the high windows; the white walls and pine wainscoting glow in the dim light. Being social is most of the point of the square dance, but between the shuffling of the dance steps, the amplified music, and the din of chatter, talking is impossible. It’s easier to hear whenever the dancers switch into swinging their partners, but audibility drops when they return to percussive step dancing.

Now I wait for someone to ask me to dance. This is a gendered social dance space in which men ask women to dance, and because I’m recognized as female in this space, I have to wait for a man to invite me to dance. I do what I can though: I scan the room, and leave my seat to carefully traverse the edge of the dance space, dodging circles of hand-
holding dancers that expand outwards with a whoop and then close ranks unexpectedly, to greet the men I recognize, knowing they will invite me to dance the next set, or the set after. That’s all the initiative I can take. Masculine agency rules this dance space, and patriarchal, gendered power underscores the norms and interactions of the dance.

While towns in Cape Breton close up almost entirely in the evenings, as visitors might expect of small rural villages, the action is far from over. Cape Breton’s rural nightlife is extensive: all the regular social events in the communities, including suppertime music and ceilidhs, happen in the evenings, and are well-attended by tourists and locals. Square dances though, the quintessentially local event, don’t start until 9:30 or 10 p.m. and the dancing doesn’t stop until 1 a.m. Locals, long-time visitors from away, and a handful of eager tourists head out for hours of intensive dancing and socializing at any one of the several community, parish, and fire halls scattered across the densely Scottish middle of Inverness County. While it is possible to go to dances five nights a week in July and August, few people manage that, not because of exhaustion but because the dances, while superficially uniform, are distinct events with different personalities, atmospheres, and regular crowds. People I spoke with have their favorite dances that they choose based on geography, the likelihood of seeing friends and dance partners (often related to geography), and the overall feeling of the place, which depends on the likelihood of seeing friends and the physical attributes of the hall itself. Participants show their emphasis on community in the strategic choices they make about which dances to attend, which are those dances at which they can feel most at home.
Regular attendees often drive considerable distances to the dances, and make the return trip in the small hours of the morning. One couple I spoke with drives an hour and a half each way to and from the dances at Brook Village and West Mabou each week.\footnote{That amounts to a total distance of about 218 miles and 5 hours 20 minutes of driving.} The roads to these dances are uniformly twisting, two lane affairs that wind through woods and farmland, past signs for settlements that may only have a few residents, or only remain as a name on a road sign. Most of the roads are paved, although the road to the famous dance at Glencoe Mills, located at a crossroads out in the middle of the forest, is notorious for its poor signage and maintenance, and locals like to joke about tourists who are still out there somewhere, lost on their way to the dance. Finding it, and finding your way out again, is widely acknowledged as a rite of passage.

**Dancing Social Norms into Being**

Square dances reinforce social connection and community membership for the geographically dispersed inhabitants of Inverness County. In this chapter, I focus on the creation of normative gender performances within square dances, and how the events enforce heteronormativity and heterosexism, and maintain patriarchal power structures and male privilege and dominance in the larger social environment beyond the dances. Dance spaces are actively maintained heteronormative spaces through the valorization of heterosexual relationships, bodies, and behaviors; non-normative gender performances and overt displays of non-heterosexual identity are failures of performance (Halberstam 2012) that lead to social disengagement by the participants at that dance. Becoming a non-participant at one event is significant because it impacts an individual’s ability to
have social connections in other local spaces that are frequented by the same social actors. Becoming a social non-actor is fatal in small communities where social events like the dance are the primary places to meet and form friendships with one’s community.

A slim range of acceptable embodiments of gender and ethnicity are visible in Cape Breton’s traditional culture spaces. Gender roles are organized in a binary framework, in which female and male gender performances operate a relatively narrow range of heteronormative performance options. This heteronormativity, which refers to the ideologically normalized and privileged status granted to heterosexual bodies, relationships, behaviors, and institutions is most obviously visible in the dance space in the form of opposite gender dance pairings, except in a few very specific cases. Patriarchal attitudes are implicit: Cape Breton’s Scottish music is feminized whether practiced by men or women: the commonplace phrase “drive ‘er,” which refers to compelling and propulsive dance playing, is a shortening of “drive her.” Men generally ask women to dance, but only certain women according to unstated but widely followed criteria.214 White people comprise the vast majority of cultural participants, even though other ethnic groups occupy the same small island, and sometimes the same communities. Gender and ethnic identity are critical to one’s experience of and in cultural spaces, and even determine which spaces individuals can inhabit. Within traditional Scottish music

214 Not always unstated. An informant from the hostel reported that one of her male partners at a dance said that he always checks the finger length of the person he’s asking to dance to make sure she’s actually a woman. According to him, and based on a 2000 UC Berkeley study of lesbian finger length, straight women’s index fingers are usually the same length as their ring fingers. For straight men, ring fingers are usually the longer digit. Lesbians tend to have fingers more similar in comparative length to straight men. When asked why that mattered, he just replied that “I want to be sure” (private communication 08.26.13).
and dance venues, I ask what these acceptable expressions of gender and ethnicity look like, and how they are enacted, formed, and enforced in dance spaces?

Square dance halls are culturally significant places where participants learn and practice the binary gender roles, heterosexist behaviors, and heteropatriarchal codes of conduct and interaction appropriate to Cape Breton Scottish identity and social interaction. In short, participants become Scottish Cape Bretoners through cultural performance in the square dance space. These cultural performances include square and step dancing specifically, but also the social behaviors and interactions particular to these cultural venues. Participation in socially oriented music and dance spaces conveys the criteria for culturally legible and ‘correct’ performances of music and dance, and also the right and wrong ways to behave, move, and do gender.\textsuperscript{215} I argue that the tradition remains traditional through the enacting, maintenance, and passing on of bodily and behavioral praxis: learning to dance correctly is about learning the repertoire of steps and finding one’s own personality as an improvising dancer as much as it is about learning how to interact with others as a gendered performer and social actor.\textsuperscript{216} The Scottish Cape Breton traditional music and dance community fosters culturally correct forms of behavioral and bodily praxis, and discourages unusual or inappropriate forms through

\textsuperscript{215} See Savigliano (1995) on tango’s construction as a heterosexist institution, and on tango’s reworking and appropriation as queer dance praxis (2010). Foster (1996) has written on the heteronormative narratives in European ballet.

\textsuperscript{216} Cape Breton’s social dancing is also covertly about heterosexual desire; well into the twentieth century, and even still to a lesser degree, one of the main functions of such dances was to find a spouse. Older single men still use the dance as a place to flirt with and try to pick up (usually younger) women. For desire in dancing, see again Savigliano (1995a/b) and Foster 1996.
constant surveillance and subtle social sanctioning in the dance space; in this way
Scottish Cape Bretoners create their world.\textsuperscript{217}

The square dance is a microcosm for the larger social environment, and so the
tools and skills learned in the square dance are directly applicable to other musical and
social environments on the island. Social behaviors learned at dances are important
because they are required for any social actor hoping to function successfully in any Cape
Breton Scottish social environment, and are necessary to maintaining the cohesiveness of
the small, rural communities these dances link. To show how participants learn
culturally-derived and culturally-meaningful gender roles and gendered performance in
social dance settings such as the square dance and other dance venues, I draw on
examples from three square dances held regularly through the summer tourist season: the
adult dance at Brook Village, and two family dance held at West Mabou and Glencoe
Mills. I will also speak briefly about other sites of dance including Colaisde na Gàidhlig
(the Gaelic College), the Red Shoe Pub, and the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre.

Locals and frequent participants understand and can enact appropriate
performance practice by ‘performing’ music and dance for and alongside their friends,
community members, and tourists in social music and dance settings. In these social
settings, lines between professional performer and ‘amateur’ performing community
members are vague and porous. By watching both professional (those paid to play or
dance) and non-professional (those not paid to play or dance) practitioners, community

\textsuperscript{217} Numerous dance scholars have written about worldmaking in dance, including queer worldmaking in
social dance settings at pride events (Bollen 2001) and queer urban dance clubs (Buckland 2002).
Kaminsky (2011a/b) has explored the possibility of egalitarian flirtation and the heteronormativity of
Swedish social folk dance.
members learn and are reminded of the correct and expected cultural performance praxis (see Melin 2012). As I discuss elsewhere in this dissertation, the lines between professional performer and performing community member are blurry because ‘performing’ for others is an expected part of social life. Late in the evening at every square dance, for example, there is an opportunity for step dancers in attendance to take the floor and display their best steps. Situations like this make the Cape Breton style participatory even when there is a stage, paid musicians, and a paying audience.

***

The floor was still clear following the end of the last figure, but no one was getting up to find partners for the next set. It was late in the evening, nearing the end of the dance. Mike Hall, the fiddler that evening, started noodling around in the key of the tune he’d play next, a minor-sounding modal tune that could only be a strathspey, and a shiver of quiet chatter shot through the hall. Hall started into the tune, and along with everyone else, I started glancing around to see who was going to step forward to dance solo. Strathspeys only appear once at a square, as the introduction for individual stepdancers to come forward and show off their steps to everyone assembled. The fiddler will play strathspeys until someone comes up, but this usually doesn’t take too long, and within a few moments, a tall older woman in her sixties stood neatly from her chair, walked with measured but quick steps to the middle of the dance floor, faced away from Hall, and started dancing to the tune. I’d seen her step nimbly through many square dance figures over the course of my fieldwork, but I’d never seen her dance solo: her steps were neat, close to the floor, balanced, she never repeated herself, she kept her gaze forward and just above the crowd’s heads. In short, she was perfectly within “the way it’s done,” and she didn’t dominate the stage, only staying onstage for the duration of one tune after Hall shifted from the strathspey into reels (the rest of the dancers who decided to come up would dance only to those reels, which Hall would play until no one else wanted to dance). Several more dancers came up to dance, and the crowd’s enthusiasm grew with each heel rock, ankle bend, shuffle, stomp, and heel brush.

***
**John Archie and Nellie Normalize Identity**

Inverness County resident Brenda MacLennan-Dunphy wrote *John Archie and Nellie: A Musical Set in Glencoe Mills* about her grandparents in 2012. It tells the true story of how these two young people met and fell in love during one evening at a 1915 Christmastime square dance at Glencoe Mills (Grant 2012). Here’s the story: John Archie’s link to Cape Breton is through his parents, who had to migrate to British Columbia for work. Nellie, dreaming of life beyond the island, left to seek work in Boston, Massachusetts. John Archie felt pulled back to the island to explore his heritage. Nellie returned to be near her kin after she became pregnant; they both see the island as ‘home’. These two people, a young man unknown to the community and a morally compromised local woman, meet under the watchful eyes of their community at the dance at Glencoe. And perhaps due to the “magic in the floor,” they fall in love.

There are many stories, like the story of John Archie and Nellie, told about couples meeting at dances, falling in love, marrying, and being productive and procreative members of their communities. The couples in these stories, valorized through retelling, are all heterosexual. Square dances have long been spaces where individuals can meet and socialize with members of the opposite sex, as well as with their friends and neighbors. These spaces are rendered safe for heterosexual socializing by the monitoring gaze of the community; the community members at the dance keep an eye on what happens in the dance space, and can intervene in situations that seem untoward. The
surveillance of the space by these trusted community members is a source of comfort and familiarity for many, and is a key part of what makes square dances feel like home.\textsuperscript{218}

Other kinds of dance pairings and relationships are impossible or unsanctioned, appearing neither on the dance floor, nor in the stories about successful relationships. Many people talk about meeting their spouses at square dances. Kay MacDonald told Feintuch that she returned from away in 1970 for a short visit and “met my husband out at Glencoe Mills, at the dance. I think it was Buddy who was playing that night” (2010:144). Square dancing at any occasion becomes an occasion for heterosexual flirtation, whether the dance is a formally organized square dance like Brook Village or a regular impromptu dance such as the Sunday dance/ceilidh at the Celtic Music Centre.

*John Archie and Nellie*, filled with songs of local significance to the local audience and performers, was very popular: it was reprised for another sold-out run only months after its two-show premier in April 2012. The story resonated with the audiences, the vast majority of whom were locals and returnees from away in July 2012 when I saw the production. The playwright was quoted in *The Cape Breton Post* as saying that, “[Audiences] were so happy to hear names of the community on the stage and names of people that they might know. They were just happy to see the community reflected on the stage I think” (Grant 2012). But more than that, the musical portrayed home not just through familiar names and places but also through its normalizing and valorizing depictions of Cape Breton social interactions. The musical was a teaching tool packed with locally-significant insider references and ‘common knowledge’ about Cape Breton

\textsuperscript{218} Dance halls are open halls that afford excellent sightlines of the entire space and all activities therein.
life and sociality. But it also covertly taught important lessons about family structure, gender roles, sexuality, and the patriarchal structure of Cape Breton’s rural Scottish traditional culture and community life.

*John Archie and Nellie* portrayed home through the mechanism of the square dance, the quintessential and most local Cape Breton event; in a sense, coming home to Glencoe meant coming home to Cape Breton itself, and I heard from at least two people in casual conversation who said that they didn’t really feel they were home until they’d gone to a dance (both are native Cape Bretoners who live away). Home was in the safety of familiar binary gender roles and covert drinking at the square dance, and the numerous songs of the musical that all evoked shared ideas and popular public narratives of Cape Breton, its social history, and the connection between the knowledgeable locals and returned-from-away in the audience. Part of being home is going to a square dance: it’s a place where people socialize together, often as groups of married heterosexual couples who meet up at the dance and sit together. But it’s also a space for homosocial interaction; gender-exclusive groups of men and women sit together and chat, and young people, many of who are in heterosexual dating or married relationships are also present. Single older men rove the floor, chatting with their friends and flirting with the women, and periodically, a group of men will take time for a drink out in the parking lot.\(^{219}\)

---

\(^{219}\) Some of Feintuch’s informants confirm this, and the amount of intoxication I saw at West Mabou (in theory an alcohol-free dance) suggests that alcohol appears even at dry dances. Jimmy MacInnis, organizer of the West Mabou dance, told Feintuch that Judique dance (no longer extant), “there was lots of liquor there, but they weren’t selling it” (quoted in Feintuch 2010:131). Even today, “well, there’s lots of liquor [at the West Mabou dance] but we don’t sell it. People have it the old fashioned way. They’ll have a little bottle in the car, but nobody cares about that.” (quoted in Feintuch 2010:132).
Square dances are where generations of Cape Bretoners have met their opposite-sex spouse. Before the more recent resurgence of square dances in the 1990s, Glencoe Mills was the only dance, and Buddy MacMaster was the fiddler keeping it going week after week. Buddy is credited with providing the context and occasion for many romantic meetings and marriages. Without the music there would be no dance, and for decades the dances were the primary place to meet, flirt, and get to know a potential romantic interest. By monitoring others in the dance, the community creates a social safe space in which flirtation can happen and people can meet. Many people enjoy this form of community, and find it safe. But the only people who get to meet in this public and monitored space are straight people seeking heterosexual encounters. Doubtless there are non-heterosexual encounters that occur beyond the surveillance of the community, but since they lack social sanction, they never appear in public at the dances.

**Social Glue**

Square dances are the social glue that keeps small, isolated, and rural communities cohesive and functional. Not just an opportunity for Cape Bretoners to consume their own culture by dancing to Cape Breton fiddle tunes, square dances are also places to socialize and maintain connections. As I detailed above, they are also places to meet new friends and future opposite sex spouses, a place of courtship and inegalitarian flirtation. Square dances also give knowledgeable community members and practitioners the opportunity to monitor the progress and adherence to traditionalism of other musicians and dancers as a way of stewarding the tradition. Radio show producer Bob
MacEachern told Feintuch that he sometimes worries local listeners might get tired of the tunes in heavy rotation on the radio and at ceilidhs and dances. However, “whereas you can’t in other formats, you can repeat yourself endlessly [in the traditional music] and they’ll still tune in, because they want to hear that. They want to hear how good the fiddler is; they want to be satisfied that their judgment was right. That he did play that tune right, and they want to hear it again played right” (MacEachern in Feintuch 2010:214-215). Joey Beaton told me that there is enjoyment in hearing the same tune interpreted by different fiddlers; each has their own “styling” as he put it, that makes their performance fresh and newly interesting. The same goes for dance performance; no dancer will repeat the choreography they improvise spontaneously in performance, and an individual dancer’s interpretation is also influenced by the interpretation of the fiddle tune by different fiddlers. It is these variables of performance that help keep the same tunes enjoyable.

Attendance at dances is in slow decline, and this has repercussions for community cohesiveness. Dances gain and lose popularity over time: when Feintuch (2000) spent his

---

220 There is a canon of Cape Breton repertoire, and parts of this canon go in and out of fashion. Tunes that a prominent fiddler has recently recorded on an album start showing up more frequently in performances at local ceilidhs and dances; this was true of some of the songs recorded by fiddler Wendy MacIsaac and Gaelic singer Mary Jane Lamond on their 2012 album Seinn. Tunes and sometimes whole medleys from Natalie MacMaster’s albums are often learned and performed, though someone who copies another fiddler’s medleys indicates their incomplete command of the repertoire and lack of skill or creativity in making their own medleys.

221 Joey isn’t the only person to use “styling” as a term to describe how a musician or dancers performs. Someone’s stylings are the combined particulars of their interpretation of a tune: the ornaments they use; how they place accents and emphases in their bowing (which is connected to how they hold the bow); which tunes they choose to connect together into a medley; and whether they play or dance “close to the floor” while simultaneously achieving “lift.” A musician or dancer is close to the floor if their bow or feet remain rooted to the strings or floor; it’s useful to think of this in contrast to the verticality in Irish stepdancing, which is not close to the floor because of the jumps and kicks. Lift is the ability to make the tune or dance sound light and effortless despite the effort at keeping it grounded.
first week on the Ceilidh Trail in 1997, the dance at Glencoe Mills was the place to be, and the small dance hall was packed with eager locals and tourists; I found a similar situation when I first danced at Glencoe in 2003. But those crowds were absent during my August to October 2012 fieldwork. Unlike what I’d seen in 2003, the dance floor was never full of square sets, and there was empty seating on the benches that ring the hall; the canteen was no longer selling souvenir shirts, another sign of changing times. A dozen or so regulars were always in attendance, but there was talk that Glencoe might not be able to make it through its scheduled season. The hairdresser in Mabou, part of the volunteer committee that runs the dance, attributed declining attendance at Glencoe and at other dances to competition from other events.

Only a few years ago, there wasn’t anywhere near the volume of events that are now on the summer calendar. Overlapping events in different parts of Inverness County mean that not every event will have good attendance. Tourists generally stay less than a week on the island, and they tend to follow the advice of locals they encounter or the staff at their place of accommodation when choosing which cultural events to sample. This means that places with nightly entertainment, like the Red Shoe and the Glenora Distillery, are more frequently patronized by tourists than weekly venues like the dances. These larger institutions are also easier to find and more accessible to unknowledgeable audience members: food and drink is available, and many tourists pair entertainment with

---

222 The square set is the standard dance format for an Inverness County square dance (as I discuss elsewhere, square dance formats vary by region). Four couples each made up of one man and one woman stand in a circle. Men always stand to their partner’s right. This group will stay together for all three figures of a full set (two sets of jigs, followed by a set of reels). Each set within the figure has its own choreographed dance. For the jig sets, the group of eight only interacts internally; they do not dance with any of the other sets of dancers on the floor. In the reel set, all the sets interact in a grand chain and promenade sequence that takes up the entire length of the hall.
dinner or after dinner drinks. For tourists, going out at 10 p.m. for a dance held in a small hall somewhere out on the back highways after a full day of driving, sightseeing, or hiking is less enticing than going to a restaurant that has traditional music. Paul Cranford, music publisher, musician, and lighthouse keeper, says, “The tourist venues [such as Glenora and the Red Shoe] are sort of local events. But it’s not the same in any way. It’s more impersonal, and of course the whole professional side of it changes the whole attitude to it. You start looking at your watch” (Cranford, quoted in Feintuch 2010:124).

Figures 6.3 (left) and 6.4 (right). Betty Lou and Kinnon Beaton performing at the Friday night ceilidh at Red Shoe Pub in Mabou. Photo by author.

Folklorist Burt Feintuch has been invested in Cape Breton since his first trip to the island in 1997 when he spent a week on the Ceilidh Trail visiting the dances and taking lessons at the Ceilidh Trail School in Inverness (the same place I took my lessons six years later). Feintuch developed a great empathy for the Gaels of Cape Breton, particularly the folk along the Ceilidh Trail, and his 2010 book In the Blood: Cape Breton Conversations on Culture is the result of his deep commitment to the island and its people; Feintuch writes, “[The Scottish] music drew me, and that led to romance, if deep affection for a place can be called romance…I went back the next summer, and the next,
and then the pace of my visits accelerated. I was smitten…” (2010:4-5). The book is all edited interviews with people involved with Cape Breton’s culture, and while he manages to represent most of Cape Breton’s ethnic groups, the Scottish traditional culture bearers and activists are Feintuch’s clear favorites.²²³ Feintuch was drawn in first by the island’s Scottish music and thus by its practitioners and participants, which led him to a general investment in the Scottish culture. His book is a love letter to the island, richly illustrated with Gary Samson’s photographs, and I use his informants’ words in this chapter in full knowledge of the valorizing and unevenly privileging setting in which they are presented.

While many of my informants enjoy heading to the Red Shoe to have a beer and listen to the music, they describe the square dances as places where the traditional culture is most alive and most Cape Breton. Margie Beaton directs her students at the College to square dances as places of particular cultural significance, and several people in informal conversation asked me if I’d gone to the dances at West Mabou or Brook Village yet, implying that I wasn’t really experiencing the culture until I’d gone to a square dance. Several of Feintuch’s interviewees offer the same perspective on square dances as especially traditional cultural spaces. Inverness Óran journalist Frank MacDonald, believes that getting people involved in the dance is crucial to getting them involved in the culture (in Feintuch 2010:22), and Gaelic educator Frances MacEachen, notes that

²²³ The book has twenty-two edited interviews. Of his editing process, Feintuch writes, “I envisioned this book as…between a traditional work of scholarship and an art book…I thought of these interviews as spoken art as I edited them…I edited the interviews for continuity and intelligibility…[and] I removed my voice so as to focus on their words” (2010:9, emphasis in the original). In total, fifteen of the interviewees are directly involved in the Scottish culture, even though not all of them are Scottish or even from Cape Breton. Of the two Acadians, one is deeply involved in Scottish culture in Inverness County. Only one Mi’kmaq individual, a poet, is interviewed. Singular individuals represent the island’s Irish, Afro-Caribbean, and Jewish communities.
dances are where local people get to enjoy and participate in their music and culture effortlessly: “What’s beautiful about that is that people know how to do a square dance. They enjoy it, and they understand the music…and all these little cultural nuances. So they’re able to have a great time in that environment and go through the sets and that sort of thing” (Feintuch 2010:165). For MacEachen, and for informants of mine like Joey Beaton, the danger of tourism is the possibility of, in MacEachen’s words, “losing the balance of local enjoyment and local involvement.” Enjoyment comes from not having to instruct or think about what to do but just doing and enjoying with other knowledgeable participants. “…If you’ve got a busload of people who don’t know, but they’re really keen and they just jump in there and they don’t know what’s going on; if it happens over a long time then these dances may not be sustainable” (ibid.:165). And I’ve seen this happen: a larger group of visitors from away entered the Glencoe square dance and jumped in, assuming they understood the dance; unfortunately, American contradancing is not like Cape Breton square dancing, and their participation made the dance unravel. Even the good dancers in their set could not keep them in line, and the better dancers in the top set simply sat down rather than trying to continue the dance.

**Learning Implicitly**

At square dances, the cultural norms governing behavior, musicality, dancerly skill, and social interaction are learned implicitly. Musicians are on display in live performance venues, but even when the music is background for some other activity, like
hav

having a meal or drinks, locals and connoisseurs of the music are still aware of what the musicians are doing. Rather than active watching and listening as in a concert, local audiences observe performance through occasional direct visual and aural engagement. But even if no one really seems like they’re watching the fiddler, they still are. For locals and the regular seasonal visitors to Cape Breton, eating and drinking is the vehicle for socializing with friends, neighbors, and family, and live music performance offers justification for getting together. As I’ve mentioned previously, visitors experience the pub (or pub-like) environment filled with people chatting and getting up for impromptu dancing to live music as an enticingly vital and authentic traditional culture. Touristic places like the Red Shoe, the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre, and the Glenora Distillery provide a necessary public venue for locals who live in geographically isolated small towns to socialize, reinforce community bonds, and enjoy their culture, even though the performances at these venues are more professionalized and impersonal than a house party. These public venues are also places where tourists can have a Cape Breton experience that is rendered all the more ‘authentic’ by the presence of locals chatting away and getting up to join the musicians or give a step.

This is the case for the Suppertime Music at the Red Shoe Pub, the twice-daily ceilidhs at the Glenora Inn and Distillery, and the Sunday Ceilidh at the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre. In a pub, the locals treat the fiddler with studied seemingly-indifferent casualness, unless the fiddler is an infrequent but well-respected visitor, such as Wendy MacIsaac or Andrea Beaton. The usual fiddlers who appear daily at the Red Shoe or the Glenora Distillery are very good musicians, but don’t receive much direct attention. The audience bestows occasional surveillance between the primary activities of eating, drinking, and socializing. Perhaps over years and countless performances, these musicians have over established a baseline of talent and reliability and thus no longer have as much to prove to their local audiences. Most of these performers are young: many are teens and 20s and are starting to hit their stride after years of scratching out tunes and steps at various concerts and festivals during their childhoods. It appeared to me that many young performers are on the way up the cultural performance pipeline.
I distinguish between explicit and implicit learning environments to illustrate the varied ways in which the Cape Breton style of music, dance, and behavioral praxis is learned. Locals and visitors can learn to perform the traditional music and dance implicitly by watching musicians perform in social community settings. Indirect observation is also traditionally how musicians have begun learning to play the music. Joey Beaton told me that “you can learn the things fiddlers are doing by watching them…you “get more tuned in to those technical elements and how they’re acquiring their sound” and “we need to delve into [these things]” as a community of engaged cultural learners (interview).

Ethnochoreologist Mats Melin’s dissertation (2012) explores Cape Breton’s percussive dance in extraordinary detail. He describes how dancers “pick up” steps from watching others perform, and his observations confirm my own on the subject. As a white heterosexual male, his engagement with the gendered social dance practice and expectations within a square dance are fundamentally different from my own; gender identity and performance also affect how an individual can learn from others. ‘Implicit’ denotes a learning experience not specifically described or thought of as such, including, ceilidhs, incidental music, square dances, and concerts. ‘Explicit’ learning occurs at the institutional level and is explicitly presented as a teaching experience, for instance schools, workshops, and any setting in which a group of students learns from an instructor. Formal instruction can happen in informal settings too: I experienced this frequently at square dances, where some of my more experienced dancing partners gave
me pointers and instruction on better dance practice while we were dancing; some also pointed out the bad dancing of others as examples of what I should not do.

More than formal instruction, most people learn to perform Cape Breton’s Scottish dance, music, and social behaviors through participation and observation in community music and dance events. As Joey suggests, watching fiddlers perform is enjoyable because it allows knowledgeable local audiences to judge their skill, monitor their progress, and test their own cultural knowledge. It is also a way of monitoring performances for adherence to culturally scripted norms of correctness that go beyond musical or dancerly skill and extend to both ‘onstage’ and ‘offstage’ performances.

Whenever I attended weekly concerts at the Normaway Inn, a resort located along the Cabot Trail, or went to the nightly Baddeck ceilidh, performers routinely addressed the audience to describe what they were playing and to interpret the Cape Breton style by offering information on tune types and the contexts in which they are usually found. Since the audiences at these two events consist primarily of tourists, this information and extensive interaction helps make the events successful by making the tourists feel included, respected, and catered to. The organizer of the Baddeck Ceilidh encourages her performers to interpret the music and the dance, which they do thoroughly and effectively, and she teaches audience members the Baddeck style square dance set too.

The experience at the Red Shoe and the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre is more typical of Cape Breton performance practice: the musicians rarely address the audience, usually speaking only to offer some words of welcome; musicians will, however, interact with touristic audience members that come up to them. In these settings, visitors are
mostly left to interpret on their own and enjoy the performance more like a concert. The tourists at these events experience a rich cultural environment that they do not fully understand because they are not given the tools to do so. At places like the Mabou Ceilidh, which have an audience that’s evenly split between locals and tourists, Joey Beaton makes sure to go into great detail about the tunes and their individual stories and authors because he feels the local community enjoys having that personal connection to the tunes and practitioners, and that information about the tradition must be shared as an integral companion to its sound.

**Tourist Expectations and Behavior**

Interactions between audience and performer are expected in popular music performances, but Cape Breton musicians often fail to meet this expectation by not addressing the audience at all, or only addressing them occasionally. At the Red Shoe and the Celtic Music Centre, the sound system is always set up for the musicians, who enter the space quietly, and unobtrusively pull out fiddles and guitars or just sit down at the piano. Displaying focused intention on getting ready rather than working the crowd, they often start playing with no preamble except a sudden slightly amplified arpeggiated scale or a tune fragment as they confer amongst themselves about what to start playing. Frequently, the musicians retreat into a self-focused performance in which they do not look at the audience, and barely look at each other. At the Red Shoe, the most famous venue on the island, the upright piano sits flush against the wall, meaning the pianist sits with their back to the crowd and has to glance over their shoulder at the fiddler. Playing
modestly in Cape Breton means that performance cannot distract from the music; the music is what drives social interactions by providing a context and a rationale, and it fuels the dance. But it is not about personal self-aggrandizement.

Performers use different kinds of specific embodied praxis to signal their removal from the audience: these include not looking directly at the audience or making eye contact with anyone, and sitting still in place rather than moving around, which would engage and draw the audience in through movement. To local eyes, reserved body language does not signal the musician’s self-removal from the social space or aloofness, but it can come across this way to some visitors. Other visitors are captivated by the music, and find ways to engage with it through movement strategies that include foot tapping, clapping, head bobbing, and irrepressible grinning, behaviors that contrast markedly with the musicians’ reserve. Natalie MacMaster’s stage practice of addressing individuals in the audience is uncommon in staged performances on the island, nor in less concertized performances. Musicians performing in the island’s community venues don’t normally stand to play, as Natalie typically does.

Musicians do not explicitly invite up knowledgeable audience members to perform. If the music is compelling, individuals who want to give a step will take the initiative themselves, sometimes after a period of encouraging heckling from friends in the audience. What looks like showmanship is actually very modest. As for dancers, musicians’ body language and performance practice is also ‘neat’, ‘tidy’, and ‘close to the floor.’ These are code for a traditional practice of music and dance: Buddy MacMaster titled his first landmark albums *Judique on the Floor* (1999). Named for a
local community festival of sports, barbeques, and traditional culture in Judique, it also implies that Judique’s practitioners, including Buddy, are traditional because they play ‘close to the floor.’

Tourists, however, are not versed in the performance practice and expectations that locals and performers know, and thus engage in the performance and with the performers via not-quite-right behaviors. Clapping along to the music is a common faux pas. The beat is driving, and in the context of popular North American music, audiences show their appreciation and engagement with the beat through clapping in time. In Cape Breton though, clapping over a musical performance is a cue used in social dances. Dancers start clapping to tell the musician when they are done dancing a particular set and want the performer to stop playing and move on to the next set of tunes. Such a small difference leads to attitudes among performers that range from resignation to exasperation. But since Inverness County needs the tourists and the economic benefits they bring, locals must accommodate tourists’ expectations for engaging performances and endure their modes of interacting with the music.

Some places and performers do this better than others. The Normaway effectively caters to tourists in the artists they choose to showcase, the physical arrangement and timing of the event, and the large quantity of interpretation offered from the stage by the manager or the musicians. The Normaway tends to feature performers who have name recognition beyond the island because of their recording, touring, and teaching.226 The

226 Such artists include Wendy MacIsaac, the Barra MacNeils, Brenda Stubbert, Dwayne Cote, and Kinnon and Betty Lou Beaton. Aficionados of Cape Breton music, as well as fans of acoustic folk music in the US, Canada, and beyond know these artists. All are recording artists, most tour at least within the region
concert is held in The Barn, a converted barn building on the property of the Normaway Inn, which was at one point a working farm. The floor area is filled with rows of plastic chairs facing a small stage featuring a life-size wooden carving of a former dance caller (now deceased) and an upright piano. Seats in the hayloft offer a unique perspective on the performance.

Figure 6.5. Kinnon and Betty Lou Beaton perform at the Barn. Tartans of Cape Breton’s Scottish families line the walls. The stage is raised less than a foot above the floor space where the audience sits in plastic lawn chairs. The electric Roland keyboard Betty Lou plays is concealed by a wooden podium built expressly for that purpose; hiding the electronics (though Kinnon’s fiddle is plugged in too) retains the acoustic feel, and thus the authenticity. A functional upright piano sits behind her; the sign says “The Barn.” Photo by author.

Due to the relative remoteness of the Inn from any towns, most of the audience members are invariably staying at the inn, though locals – especially teenagers – show up after 10 p.m. for the post-concert dance. For guests, it is an accessible (within walking distance) and carefully curated venue in which to experience the music. Inn-owner and

(Atlantic Canada and the Northeastern United States), and some are regarded as living legends for their participation in the 1970s public revival of the Cape Breton style.
stage manager Dave MacDonald orchestrates the event: he books the artists, runs the sound, and serves as MC. On August 7, 2013, Kinnon and Betty Lou Beaton and Dwayne Cote were on the bill at the Barn. Early in the show, when the sunlight still shone through the windows behind the stage, Dave asked Kinnon to explain “our music down here in Cape Breton” to the audience. Dave always engages the performers in banter designed to give the audiences of mostly tourists some insight into the local Cape Breton tradition, and hopefully draw them in enough to buy some albums. Kinnon, a renowned composer of tunes, is one of the most modest fiddlers around, and has a typically dry Cape Breton wit. Dave asked, “How many tunes you got to your credit Kinnon?” “[A long pause] Three. [A longer pause] 860 something.” Gasps of astonishment from the audience; and that’s the real figure too. Dave asks, “And how many albums?” “Three. [Pause] 8 albums, 9 of them are here.” Dave’s a smart businessman, never missing an opportunity to gather tourism demographic data from the audience. In the next section, I discuss how square dances are also impacted by the performances of both locals and tourists.

Why the Dance Works, and Why it Doesn’t

My last Brook Village dance on August 26th, 2013 was a wild affair, but was overall a success for at least some participants. At the end of the evening, with Tony and

---

227 A note on geographical discourse: Cape Breton is always geographically ‘down’ from anywhere else. People go ‘up to Boston’ and ‘down to Cape Breton.’ Locals traveling to the top of the island, known as Cape North, invariably say that they are going ‘down North’.

228 Even though these events are advertised on the Inn’s website and in posters around Inverness and Victoria Counties as ‘Three Fiddler Concerts,’ Dave always calls them ceilidhs. And so do the musicians. They are anything but.
Natalie (an acquaintance from the hostel) dancing the last set, I sat down with Joey Beaton, who was laughing as he watched the dance. It was chaotic. Some young guys were making up wild steps and being very free with the figures. Shay MacMullin, a Gaelic teacher, danced by with her female dance partner and called out to Joey, “It’s all gone to shit now!” Joey started laughing again and said, “It’s a good dance tonight…everyone is so joyful.” I asked him why he liked going to dances, and he said because he gets to see and visit with people and also, “It’s a chance to get some exercise.” Brook Village is Joey’s favorite dance because it is so joyful: “people feel like they can get up and join in.” Messing up isn’t always a bad thing: though a young man did weave unsteadily for the door and out into the night, and though most of the best dancers sat out the last wild set, others enjoy the rambunctiousness: as my 2013 dance partner Tony said, “I like it when people mess up, they’re having fun.”

On the other hand, dancers make strategic and conscious decisions in order to ensure that they have the most satisfactory dance experience. Tony had asked me to dance earlier in the evening, and as we moved towards the dance floor, his hand uncomfortably low and tight around my hip, he steered us away from one set and towards another. I asked why, and he replied, “We’ll have a better set here.” Why? “Fewer people.” He used his agency as a male lead to direct the dance experience we would share by strategically selecting a group that would allow us a better dance experience, as determined by his knowledge of the other participants’ dance skills. I witnessed a
significant moment of strategic exclusion, this time at Glencoe Mills.\textsuperscript{229} Despite low attendance that October 2012 night, eight locals engineered a successful dance experience for themselves by excluding other potential dancers. The four couples got up and arranged themselves in a square set right in front of the small stage; as the best dancers, they would occupy that position on any other night as well. Though enough additional people were present to make another set of eight, not enough had the knowledge to dance independently of expert instruction. The dancing locals did not engage the visitors, did not invite them to dance with them, and maintained physical distance in the dance space. These four couples were the only people to dance that night.

Locals can and will exclude resident and non-resident outsiders for social reasons or because their cultural competence is unknown, in order to achieve a successful dance experience (see Sparling 2005 and this dissertation). Despite my informants’ enjoyment of the busy summer season, which is busy because of the tourists and the events generated to attract them, they also looked forward to fall when life, including the dances, “went back to normal.”

There is an ongoing debate about square dances and how they ‘should’ be. Frances MacEachen, a Gaelic culture activist, remembers family debates during the return home from the dance at Glencoe about how many couples should be in a square set. She reports her father saying that more than four couples at a dance was “going to ruin it.” Further, MacEachen notes that “these standards [of how the dance should

\textsuperscript{229} Glencoe Mills was struggling in 2012. No one was coming to the dance, and everyone I spoke with, including one of the organizers, put it down to too many competing events. That made sense until I returned the next year, to find record crowds and an overflowing dance floor; no one could explain why.
be]…were inherent…and were understood by the community” (quoted in Feintuch 2010:166). The balance between making the dance accessible for visitors and keeping it a place where people can participate in and learn their culture is fraught and constantly negotiated. Margie Beaton told me that getting tourists involved in the square dances was a great way of introducing them to the vibrancy and uniqueness of the culture; that’s why “I always tell my students who come from away, ‘get out to the dance. Go to Glencoe” (interview). But the dances are changing, and have been for a long time. The standards are learned, rather than inherent, and change in new generations. Buddy MacMaster, renowned dance fiddler who played for the Glencoe Mills dance for decades, describes the evolution of the dance to Feintuch:

“When I started to play [in the 1930s], at first they’d dance four figures – two figures to jigs and two to reels. Today they dance three. The third figure was the longest, the most time to go through the figure. But the fourth figure – it wasn’t as long, but it seemed to have more life to it. you’d kind of save a little energy for the fourth figure. And they had four couples in the sets. They were very strict about keeping them to four figures. If a fifth couple tried to get into the set, they wouldn’t be welcomed at all. I think it was much nicer. They didn’t step dance as much. Today, I believe they try to stepdance a little too much. A lot of them can’t stepdance at all, and the sets get pretty wild, kind of rough. So it’s not as graceful as it used to be.” (quoted in Feintuch 2010:94).

What are the effects of com from aways’ expectations of flashy and engaged performance, which they come to expect after seeing people like Ashley MacIsaac and Natalie MacMaster perform in concert (read, non-community) settings? The Cape Breton style can be so modest and reserved that it comes across as almost shy or embarrassed for some audience members, including a group of hostel tourists I took to the Red Shoe in August 2013. Natalie Sanchez, a queer Cuban/Quebécois woman in her mid-thirties from Montreal, said she expected something more engaged like Canadian barn dancing or
American country or old time music. Unfamiliar with the aesthetics of the style, she said that for her, the musicians’ lack of engagement with the audience seemed to signal they felt embarrassment about their music, particularly that they wouldn’t acknowledge applause after each medley. The music performance did not meet my companions’ expectations for an engaged and lively performance. They were surprised that the performers didn’t stand up to play. Indeed, sitting, facing the audience obliquely so that the sound holes of the violin face out (a position rendered irrelevant with universal electronic amplification), with eyes closed or focused at some point in the middle distance off the scroll of the violin is not a particularly engaging or exciting performance to watch for non-africanos.

For those that love Cape Breton music, however, the affect and mannerisms of the musicians are part of the enjoyment: knowledgeable audience members expect a modest performance, and some tourists find the modesty refreshing or charming in its unaffected and anti-self-promotional ethos. I overheard tourists in the Red Shoe excitedly discussing how “authentic” the performance was in its anti-concertness. A place where anyone can participate in culturally meaningful ways in front of other people upsets ideas about performer and audience (see Turino 2008), and is exciting for tourists; all the cameras and smiles came out if someone stood up to dance at the Red Shoe.
The important part of any performance here is the music, not whatever someone has to say about it. For Scottish Cape Bretoners, especially in Inverness County, virtually all their historical, cultural, social, geographically, and familial references are shared or intersectional; there’s no need to explain in detail when operating within the community. Many things can be left unsaid but be clearly understood by locals. For the rest, some get caught up in the music and others find themselves unable to engage with it.

Performance Gaze

How did everyone know what to do? I was new to the dances, and was trying to learn how everything worked. Fortunately, I was so new that no one was asking me to dance (I’ll come back to this), and so I had lots of time to observe how gaze and visual surveillance is important in dances. In square dances, the fiddler is there for the dancers, and will visually check in on where dancers are in the figure for cues as to when the dancers might want to stop. At first it appears that the people actively dancing don’t look
at the fiddler and instead focusing their visual attention on the people in their circle, and
the other dancers on the floor. However, being within sight of the fiddler is important.

Jimmy and Margie MacInnis, the creators and operators of the West Mabou Square
Dance, told Feintuch in an interview about the time they decided to add speakers to the
West Mabou Hall’s back patio so that people could dance outside but still hear the music
clearly. They’d been receiving complaints that the interior of the hall was too crowded
and became too hot for comfort, but they soon found that no one was dancing on the back
patio. “The outside patio didn’t work because people couldn’t see the fiddler. They’d
rather be inside and complain about the heat” (Jimmy MacInnis in Feintuch 2010:135).

Being able to see the fiddler is, I suspect, more about feeling like you’re dancing to live
music than recorded music; the schizophonic experience of dancing on the back patio
misses the point of a social square dance with live music.

During my hours of sitting at square dances before I got to start dancing, I
observed the people sitting on the edges of the dance glance at the fiddler occasionally,
but rarely actively watch the fiddler as though they were at a concert. It is not a concert,
where the music is the main attraction: the point is to dance and socialize, and the fiddler
and pianist provide the backgrounded (but crucial) live music for the dance. As Joey
Beaton suggested to me, local consumers of traditional music are checking on the
fiddler’s performance to make sure it conforms to cultural expectations. Folks I sat next
to at dances and ceilidhs would make comments to themselves or lean over to share

---

230 Cape Bretoners frequently tell the tale on themselves that they as a people love to complain, often in a
backhanded way that is delivered with such a dry, deadpan manner that it takes awhile for a certain depth
of snarkiness to become apparent.
comments their neighbors, including me, about how well the fiddler or dancer was doing.

As Bob MacEachern noted earlier in his interview with Feintuch (2010), people enjoy hearing tunes they know and love played well, and they like hearing their opinions about a fiddler’s skill level confirmed. Listening and dancing to the music live is a treat; my former dancing partner Gerry Deveau goes out to as many live events as he can, including ceilidhs at Glenora and the Red Shoe, and dances at Brook Village and West Mabou. There was one local man in his nineties who attended every dance, drank great quantities of alcohol and socialized with his friends, but never danced because he was too infirm. Another woman I met at Glencoe doesn’t often dance, but she told me she loved coming out to the dances just to hear the music; “I just love the Scotch music,” she said.

If people on the sidelines of the dance are watching anything, they’re watching the dancers. Exceptional music is still critical to a successful dance. How well a fiddler can drive the tunes determines which fiddlers get asked to play at dances, which become legendary and highly regarded dance players, and which perform exclusively at ceilidhs. The ability to drive ‘er is not gendered per se: male and female fiddlers have equal access to this skill. In fact, several of the most accomplished dance fiddle rs presently are female, though males still hold a slim majority in fiddle performance. But not every fiddler has what it takes to become a revered dance player, and the role of the pianist is also critical in the success of the dance. The pianist is called an accompanist but is also responsible

231 Of Glencoe’s thirteen dances in 2013, five featured female fiddlers as the headliners. In two of these five, two women shared the role of dance fiddler, meaning they would trade off playing individually throughout the night. Betty Lou was the only female pianist listed by name. Most of the dances listed the fiddler but left the choice of accompanist up to the fiddler (e.g., “Rodney MacDonald & Guest” as verses “Kinnon & Betty Lou Beaton” or “Anita MacDonald and Tyson Chen”). Interestingly, most of the female fiddlers who headlined are successful touring and recording artists outside Cape Breton as well as on it; the male headliners were overall less well known and successful.
for the performance; if the pianist observes the audience struggling because the fiddler’s
tempo is too fast or slow or is rhythmically off, they can speed the fiddler up or slow
them down (Margie Beaton, personal communication). Playing for a dance requires a
huge knowledge of the repertoire, precision timing, humility, and a stoic resolve in
non-verbally negotiating tempo with the dancers and the pianist, and a driving style that
compels movement and which the dancers find lively. This last quality is the subtle
attribute that makes some fiddlers into the dance players and others into ceilidh players
has something to do with humility but steadfastness, a strength of character that allows
the fiddler to, in a sense, stand up to the dancers and subtly manipulate the tempo to fit
the perceived mood of the dancers.

Andrea Beaton, Kinnon and Betty Lou’s daughter, is a dynamic dance player, and
her technique for corralling dancers is unique: she carefully watches the dancers’
progress through the figure and wraps up the set when she comes to the end of a tune,
instead of allowing the dancers to cut her off awkwardly in the middle of a tune. All
fiddlers take their cue to stop playing from the dancers, but most will stop whenever the
dancers start clapping, regardless of whether the fiddler is at a good and natural sounding
stopping point in the tune; “stopping” entails creating a flourish in the key that sounds
like it could be an ending, but is not the actual end of the tune as it sounds when it is
played all the way through. Andrea, though, is herself a dancer and so as she watches the
dancers, she knows when they are coming to the end of a figure; if they’ve been dancing

---

232 Dances last three hours, and fiddlers rarely repeat tunes in a single evening. A sole fiddler and pianist
provide almost continuous music. Each tune is played through twice (about sixty seconds), and a single
figure might go on for eight to ten minutes. There are three figures in a set, each figure lasting longer than
the one previous. A fiddler needs about 145 tunes minimum to get through an entire dance.

for awhile and might be tiring of that figure, she will wait for the top set to approach the end of a figure and then play whatever tune she is on to its conclusion, regardless of whether the dancers start clapping at her to stop or not. It’s a subtle way she establishes her dominance in the dance setting. Dances that don’t have good drive don’t have good attendance, and playing for dances is a huge honor that reflects on a fiddler’s ability. Fiddlers are thus discerning about which dances they most enjoy playing for, just as dancers are particular about where they like to dance. Jimmy MacInnis attributes the popularity of his West Mabou hall to acoustics. As he told Feintuch, “the music sounds way better in our hall. [Fiddlers] love playing there because they can get it right back. They can feel it themselves. All the fiddlers love the sound in the hall, which might make them spark a little more, which makes the people spark a little more (2010:138). For several of my dancing informants, the community atmosphere within the hall was most important, followed secondarily by acoustics. A couple from Chéticamp told me they prefer to drive longer distances to West Mabou and Brook Village because of the “feeling.” I asked why they didn’t go to Southwest Margaree, which is much closer to Chéticamp, and the wife told me that “it’s dead there!” She felt the atmosphere wasn’t as social and the sound wasn’t as warm as in the smaller West Mabou and Brook Village halls. Gerry Deveau eschews the Scotsville dance because the “floor” is plywood boards over concrete (“terrible, just cold and terrible”) rather than a real dance floor.
Serious Fun

Social music and dance spaces are about fun and sociality, but in the context of a marginal (if popular) cultural tradition, the correct performance and transmission of the cultural forms takes on an added, subtle urgency. In these spaces, audience members (who at any moment can become performers) are watching the progress of young players as they perform over years, and can actively influence further progress by offering praise or critique.233 Knowledgeable Cape Breton audiences are never at a loss for opinions about the performers, their styles, and whether they are good dance players or not. At the Mabou Ceilidh, MC and pianist Joey Beaton takes care to invite and call up onstage only those performers, both young and old, who are keeping the tradition in various measurable ways (see Chapter 2’s discussion of critiques of Natalie’s style)234 and in intangible ways that are tied to the crafting of a personal style that is conscious of and respectful towards the tradition but also uses the innovations of the past as models for new “stylings” (Joey Beaton, interview). In our interview, Joey told me that the public ceilidhs are important to have in addition to dances because the ceilidhs address the needs of local people who just want to sit and listen to the music. It also provides a valuable

233 When young people go to events such as square dances and perform for audiences that include established culture bearers, they are encouraged in their cultural learning. They are groomed to enact and embody the Cape Breton tradition in a traditional. Culture bearers and arbiters I spoke with, including Mabou Ceilidh organizer and pianist Joey Beaton (who’s in his 50s) and dance, fiddle, and piano practitioner Margie Beaton (who’s in her 20s) both agreed that innovation can only come (is only appropriate) after the traditional way of doing things has been mastered; fiddler Buddy MacMaster, now in his 80s, said as much to Feintuch (2010). Through their performances, practitioners are demonstrating the right ways to embody Cape Breton music and dance by modeling correct behavior and critiquing and responding to the performances of others.

234 “Value, that’s what we’re losing among the younger players…not to be critical, but at times they play too fast. The timing has changed. We must maintain the true value of notes [in order to maintain the traditional music]. Old fiddlers generally were sensitive to this” (Joey Beaton, interview).
public venue for locals to learn and share knowledge about the music. “We’re providing a service to the community,” he said, and it “gives the older people a chance to be involved.” At the Mabou Ceilidh, “we keep focus on the tradition and tell the story of it and how it’s evolved” as a public service.

Being able to dance to the music is very important; if the music is too fast, dancers can’t execute the steps correctly and the stepdancing tradition becomes irrelevant. In addition, square dances provide a crucial social venue and site of cultural transmission; if the music is too fast, the dance becomes impossible. The dances are very consciously seen as mechanisms that hold the communities and the culture together.

Joyce Rankin, former director of the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre, told me that the failing communities on the island, the ones unraveling in the aftermath of church and school closures, are communities without dances, or communities that have lost their dances, and her sentiment was echoed in many other formal and informal conversations I had with islanders.

Modest Dancing

Acceptable embodiment of Scottish Cape Bretoner identity includes particular behaviors, styles of dress and speech, specific mannerisms, dancerly style, and performance practice. All of these are governed by a pervasive modesty, and these praxes can collectively be labeled an aesthetics of humility. The Scots, averse to standing out,

---

235 Interview August 23, 2012.
236 Dress and appearance is conservative and modest. Men favor slacks and short sleeve collared shirts. Women wear slacks or skirts and nice blouses, and shoes for both men and women are mainly flat soled
tend not to distinguish themselves as exceptional performers or individuals, or as expert about anything. Even performing, which may look like standing out, is a very modest activity, mere moments of distinction before the individual melts back into the crowd and cedes the stage or the floor to someone else. Even the praxis of the dance, being ‘neat’ and ‘tidy’ and staying ‘close to the floor while also having ‘lift,’ is all about self-expression in the most bodily constrained, time limited, and affectless manner possible.\textsuperscript{237}

The audience, many of who are also stepdancers, watch solo dance performances, monitoring for skill and adherence to standards of modest praxis.

All the movement action is from the waist down, and the majority of that movement begins in the knees. Arms aren’t held rigidly by the sides as in Irish step dancing, and are instead allowed to loosely shift with the rhythm of the body as the dancer shifts their weight between the feet. Some people, like Margie Beaton, “don’t do it right:” Margie acknowledges in her classes and in our interview that “Oh, I don’t do it right, I just can’t keep my arm down. I get goin’ and it just comes up!” Margie allows one of her arms to come up to a 90-degree angle in front of her torso, instead of keeping her without treads, which offer too much traction on wooden dance floors. Conventional femininity includes short hair in women over 50 and long hair in younger women. All are polite, modest, deferential, and relatively reserved in social situations, though like most Cape Breton Scots, they’re frank and always ready with dry quips. These behaviors are fairly uniform across generations.

\textsuperscript{237} A dancer is “neat” if they don’t take up a lot of floor space when dancing. An old guideline, derived from the days when logging and tree pulp were bigger industries, says that a dancer must be able to do all their dancing on the stump of a felled tree (an area at most 2 feet square). Today, this area is approximated to four linoleum tiles. “Tidy” refers to the action of the feet: a “tidy” dancer does not do a lot of traveling front to back or side to side. Steps aren’t extravagant or particularly flashy; rather, they are well-executed steps that can be performed and linked to other steps in a manner that appears effortless. A dancer is “close to the floor” if they don’t lift their feet much off the ground or do the sorts of high kicks and large movements common to competition and staged Irish step dancing or Scottish Highland dancing. Another adage derived from a time when Gaelic culture was suppressed suggests that a good dancer seen through a window from the waist up wouldn’t look like they were dancing because of how little their body would move up and down. Simultaneously, a dancer must have “lift,” meaning that for all that they must be rooted in the floor, they shouldn’t appear weighted down, but rather light.
arm at her side like she is “supposed to” according to traditional praxis. However, all the ways she dances correctly make up for this ‘error,’ and this isn’t really a serious breach of traditional practice. Step dancers never look at the audience, and tend to cultivate a calm yet sober facial expression that hides their decision making about their next steps or any effort they might be making.

The valued qualities of a good step dancer intersect in critical ways with the personal qualities valued in social praxis. Margie emphasizes that the dance tradition is profoundly humble, just like the people that practice it. She sees it as a microcosm of Cape Breton social interaction and personal and communal identity. The constrained motions of the dance itself, the lack of flashy steps, the limited and tightly controlled occasions for dancers to display their steps, and the care each dancer takes to minimize their time in the spotlight all support her theory of a humble, modest cultural ethos that is given form in the dance.

Locals theorize reasons for the pervasive drive towards not standing out as individuals in social interactions; this desire to modestly blend in accounts for some of the ethnic self-selection and conformity to gender roles and performances at square dances. Feintuch’s Scottish interlocutors attribute the community-orientation and awareness of others to Gaelic cultural norms. Frances MacEachen notes that “Gaelic brings people together in community. All the traditions are communal in a sense” and that “equality is in our arts and culture. It’s accessible to everyone” (in Feintuch 2010:160). One of my informants attributed it to the social negotiations needed for life in small and close knit communities. The former director of a cultural facility told me it was
difficult to get information for the museum because “no one would admit that they were 
experts in anything.” She thought this was a feature of the small community environment, 
where being perceived or “acting as though you were better than anyone else” was 
deplored and detrimental to community cohesion.

The square dance, because it is constantly being monitored for adherence to 
cultural norms becomes a place where normative social roles and behaviors are learned 
and enforced. Interest in the traditional music and dance culture is more relevant than 
generation in delineating attitudes towards normative behavior and traditionalism. Margie 
Beaton and other young traditional performers like Rachel Davis, Kenneth MacKenzie, 
David Rankin, and Anita MacDonald showed all have the same modesty, humility, and 
normativity in their behaviors and performances of the traditional music and dance as 
people three times their ages.

Learning Cultural Norms from Elders

In Cape Breton, everyone has an opinion about everything. Even if that opinion 
 isn’t made explicit, it’s surely there. One of the biggest complaints circulating in regard 
to square dances is that young people don’t come to the dances. This is an 
overgeneralization, as many children, teens, and young people their twenties and thirties 
do attend. But the perceived lack of young people can be partly attributed to the divide 
between adult dances and family dances. No alcohol is served at family dances, which in
no way means that these events are alcohol-free. Brook Village and South West Margaree are adult dances, while West Mabou, Glencoe Mills, and the Normaway Inn are family dances. The Gaelic College’s occasional dances seem to alternate between family and adult dances. Many people attribute the decline in young people attending dances to the fact that youth under nineteen years of age have fewer venues to choose from (only two a week instead of five). Tony, one of my dancing partners/informants, attributed the end of family dances to the rise of so-called Pig and Whistle dances in the 1970s. Pig and Whistles, named after a TV show, were events with alcohol; they were different than the square dances and even the rock-and-roll dances of the 1950s and 60s where local musicians would play popular music to mixed generation crowds. Square dances were officially dry events, and were thus less appealing as evening entertainment spots than the Pig and Whistles and rock dances, which served alcohol, especially for young people.

In John Archie and Nellie, there is a scene when the men all head outside to stand around the back of wagon and pass around a bottle of what we assume is moonshine. The women stay inside and sit together drinking tea. In modern times, “Well, there’s lots of liquor [at the West Mabou dance] but we don’t sell it. People have it the old fashioned way. They’ll have a little bottle in the car, but nobody cares about that” (Jim MacInnis in Feintuch 132). At the Judique dance (no longer extant), “there was lots of liquor there, but they weren’t selling it.” (ibid., 131)

There is square dancing at the Celtic Music Centre’s Sunday Ceilidh, but it is not properly a square dance. The Centre does sell alcohol, but because they also serve food, children and teens are welcome.

Jerry Holland, a great fiddler and composer since deceased, attributes the decreased interest in the dancing to the “drinking laws.” His opinion, as told to Feintuch was that “from the mid-70s to the early 80s, the [enthusiasm for the square dances] died out. The extreme interest in it died out. I find there’s a certain age of people that missed out a lot because of the drinking laws. They weren’t allowed in where there was drinking, and what dances always had survived with no alcohol died off because the interest was to be able to go to a dance where there was alcohol. So there’s a lot of our young people here that don’t have the experience of being able to go to a dance and take part in the square dancing” (2010:105). Nova Scotia prohibited the sale of alcohol entirely from 1921 to 1929 (Forbes 1971). It still remains illegal for most types of alcohol to be shipped across provincial borders under the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act of 1928. Wine was shipped nationally beginning in 2012, but beer and liquor remain restricted (Canada Revenue Agency 2012). In Nova Scotia, as in most provinces, government stores run by the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation (NSLC) are the only place to buy alcohol outside of licensed establishments.
Though the square dances declined in popularity, coinciding with other possible factors such as the rise of television, ease of travel, and a declining economic climate on the island, they never totally disappeared. For a while, the only dance was a family dance at Glencoe Mills, which always featured Buddy MacMaster on the fiddle. Many people at dances told me that they prefer family dances because all ages are welcome. Though virtually everyone lists Brook Village amongst their favorites, West Mabou often comes out on top because of its atmosphere. Many dancers told me they like its lively and neighborly feeling, and the feel of a place necessarily has to do with the sort of people who occupy it and make it a place. The desire to participate in culture with the whole community, which includes people of all ages, may partly explain the preference for family dances; it’s also easier for parents to go out to the dance late at night if they can take their kids. But dances that sell alcohol are more financially solvent than the dances that don’t. West Mabou benefits from being the only year-round dance: when the others stop in early September (with a brief curtain call during Celtic Colours), West Mabou keeps going. There’s not much going on in winter, so any event is a big deal, and West Mabou has a dance every Saturday year-round. Even so, the dance only just covers its costs. It’s likely that attendance is down at the dances because there are simply too many options when it comes to attending events. Kids especially, in modern life on Cape Breton, do schoolwork, hang out with friends, watch TV, or play hockey. Some young people are performing on the weekly summer ceilidh and concert circuit: one young woman, Haley LeFort from the Margaree Valley, performed weekly at the Inverness
ceilidh and was an eager step dancer at the Normaway Inn. But most are not engaged with the traditional culture, and sometimes those interests take precedence even over a parent’s job. I was once offered payment to play the evening ceilidh at the Glenora Distillery when the fiddler didn’t show up because she’d forgotten about the gig, and was at her child’s hockey game instead.

Having the option of a dance to attend in no way prioritizes the dance as a social event for young people. But some young people do attend, and youth engagement varies even within Inverness County. The dance at the Normaway, different from the others in that it’s only two hours (10 to midnight), has a caller, and follows a concert, is the one that has the largest teenaged crowd of any of the dances. In addition, the people in their twenties and early thirties who are working hard to revitalize the culture attend dances and music events, mostly the ones with alcohol but also the ones without.

Learning the Ropes

If square dances are an important place for learning cultural norms, then having dances young people cannot attend limits the opportunities they have to engage with their culture and learn social norms. Jimmy MacInnis told Feintuch that at school dances, which were set up as alternatives to the public adult dances, young men would get into fights because they “were never with older people to see how you’re supposed to act at a dance. They never got to socialize with older people” (2010:132). Whether the fighting was as big a problem as he suggests is unclear (I could find no confirmation of this story),

241 She was not usually part of the scheduled show. Rather, she would get up to step along with the final set given by the musicians.
but from my fieldwork observations, it is clear that older people were and are responsible for teaching young people appropriate behavior. MacInnis remembers older men disciplining him when he “acted up” at dances. “So you’re not going to act up. That’s basically how we grew up. You just always behave. You like the socializing of it.” (ibid., 132). That’s why he and his wife (who speaks very little in the interview) decided they wanted to create West Mabou as a family square dance, to give young people the chance to participate in their culture and with their community.

A secondary implication of MacInnis’ comments is that older men are in charge of the space. It is their job to control the behavior of others by adopting a teaching role. Older men still instruct younger men and women in correct dance behavior and sometimes force conformity to the sorts of social interactions they desire. The first time I met square dancer Burton MacIntyre at Glencoe, he mistook me for a young man and was very direct in telling me what to do: “You,” he said, clapping his hand on my shoulder. “You dance with this young lady here.” The teenager, on Cape Breton to visit her grandparents with her entire family, looked at me wordlessly. I turned the figure around in my head, trying to figure out which side I was supposed to stand on, and finally took her right hand and stepped into the circle. Burton nodded approvingly, but shoved me back my correct (male) spot in the circle (“No! You go over there!”) when I forgot which gender role I was supposed to embody.

Gendered dancing isn’t primarily learned in solo step dancing because men and women have access to the same repertoire of steps and adhere to the same requirements for bodily praxis. No steps in the repertoire are off-limits based on gender, nor are some
steps more likely to be performed by men or women. Individual expression and a high degree of command over the repertoire are the criteria by which a step dancer is evaluated. The best dancers are good improvisers who can take the steps of the repertoire and combine them fluidly and without any visible signs of effort in the moment of performance. Gender is less evident in individual performance than personality. How individuals express themselves through the repertoire is what is important, as is their adherence to the handful of guidelines governing appropriate dance performance. In his dissertation, Melin interviewed Anita MacDonald, a young local fiddler and step dancer, about whether there are gendered steps in the Cape Breton repertoire:

“Anita does not feel that there is such a thing as gendered ‘steps’ but that there is a personal preference of how the dancing is presented. Men and women hold themselves differently in Anita’s opinion. She refers in particular to the older men who grew up with it. They are extremely relaxed and their movements very loose from the knees down. Anita’s own goal is to imitate the style of these older men, people like her grandfather and Harvey Beaton. The main difference between women and men is that the men are more relaxed when they dance, she believes. She is always observing dancers, at concerts and Square dances, to see what she can ‘pick up’, and she watches all dancers, not just those who dance solo” (Melin 2012:286).

Men uniformly ask women to dance, though other socially sanctioned dance pairings are sometimes visible at community square dances. A community member informed me that two young men or two boys dancing together “could happen, I suppose, but it just wouldn’t, you know?” Girls and young women up to mid-teens often dance together, usually due to the absence of young male partners. I heard two 14-year-old girls dancing together at West Mabou discussing who “would be the boy?” suggesting that

---

242 Melin reports that more women than men are attending square dances, and notes that the gender balance in the transmission of the tradition, and the shift in gender balance, is a further line of inquiry. Gender is not his primary line of inquiry.
their dancing together was merely convenient and made necessary by the absence of young male partners, rather than desired as a same-gender experience. Gender performance is neatly divided into a conventionally feminine and conventionally masculine binary. Conventionally feminine young women, regardless of their dancing skill or whether they are known to the man asking them to dance, are more often asked to dance than someone like me, a female with non-normative gender presentation.\footnote{Though Sydney has a small but growing urban community, there’s little awareness in the rural areas of what queerness even looks like, signaling a basic lack of knowledge and experience that would make any visibility work that much harder. Fiddler Ashley MacIsaac seems like an exception because he is gay and everyone in Cape Breton knows it, but while his sexual orientation and sexuality may be non-normative, his gender identity is very traditionally masculine according to a Highlandist gender performance model found in North America (see Ray 2005).}

**Privilege: Who Dances, Who Doesn’t, and Who’s in Charge**

Though the narrative told of Cape Breton dances is that anyone is welcome, this doesn’t play out in practice. In this section I explore privilege: who has the privilege to participate in the dances, and how identity influences the manner and limits of an individual’s participation and role. The presence of outsiders in Cape Breton cultural spaces makes necessary the constant articulation of an individual’s cultural knowledge because it is by that knowledge that an individual is judged a knowledgeable insider or a peripheral visitor.

*Ethnicity*

White bodies dominate Scottish cultural spaces; most of these are Scottish, but the primarily white tourists blend in ethnically even if their command of performance praxis
gives them away as being from away. Seeing people of color at these dances is rare, as is the sort of ambiguous ‘white’ that might draw attention (recall my negotiations of my own visible ‘not quite white’ identity in the introduction). Scottish Cape Bretoners have a privileged whiteness; even though the Acadians are primarily white Europeans, they are less privileged in Cape Breton’s public culture because their culture is not as economically valuable as the Scottish culture. In addition, intermarriage in the colonial period between Acadians and First Nations Mi’kmaq make their whiteness less than assured. Acadian fiddlers, while welcomed in Scottish cultural spaces, are never more valued than Scottish fiddlers at supremely Scottish events like square dances, where I have yet to see an Acadian playing fiddle for a dance (though Acadian Joel Chaisson sometimes accompanies on piano).

Talented Cape Breton Mi’kmaq fiddler Lee Cremo never achieved the same acclaim as ethnically Scottish fiddlers during his life, nor has his status increased since his death; nor have other notable Mi’kmaq fiddlers of the Scottish style. Scottish fiddlers interact rarely with Mi’kmaq fiddlers (I saw it only once in a Celtic Colours concert, discussed in Chapter 4), though Scottish fiddlers do play more frequently with Acadian fiddlers and pianists. As I suggested in Chapter 5, Acadians and Mi’kmaq musicians play the Scottish style with an accent that renders their performances always foreign. Acadians can also dance and fiddle in the Scottish style, but most don’t attend Inverness County dances and ceilidhs, despite the proximity of the island’s Acadian region. Even when they do, their ethnicity disappears as they perform Scottish-normative dance and behavioral embodiments. The three major ethnic communities have little meaningful
contact outside of Celtic Colours concerts, but the Inverness ceilidh and the Normaway Inn are exceptions in that Acadian fiddlers routinely play onstage alongside Scottish fiddlers and pianists. Even amongst the Scottish fiddlers, some never achieve acceptance as dance fiddlers; a perfect sense of rhythmic timing is required, and not everyone has it. Scottish identity, deeply felt, is danced and musicked in the square dance, a place where locals can do their culture on their own terms, and choose precisely which fiddlers they want to dance to. Having cultural outsiders playing may undo some of the ownership and connection Scots feel to the practice.

Distance from the dance venue is not a significant factor in why Acadians and Mi’kmaq are infrequent participants at these Scottish dances. What is more significant is interest: the Scottish/Acadian couple who drove down from Chéticamp twice a week did so because they loved attending those dances, and others drive in significant distances from Margaree and Whycocomagh. But residents, Acadians, Scottish and Mi’kmaq, who live in closer proximity to the dances, choose not to attend. Having a good time and socializing with friends is an important consideration for participants, and if that isn’t going to happen at a certain dance, the personal incentive to attend is low. This partly discourages ethnic intermingling in Scottish cultural venues. The First Nation reserve of Waycobah is no farther from the dance at Glencoe Mills than the Scottish town of Whycocomagh, some residents of which are frequent participants at the Glencoe dance. People from Margaree and Chéticamp drive hours to attend the Brook Village and West

---

244 However, the Scots especially entertain the assumption that the issues facing their community (negotiation of tradition and tourism, economic marginality, lack of resources due to their geographic and cultural peripheralism) are equally experienced and experienced in the same way by the Mi’kmaq and the Acadians. I explore this in a later section.
Mabou dances. Driving time is not the only factor in attendance. Ethnic self-segregation is even seen in the tourists that come to Cape Breton: most are white, even those that do not have a heritage or familial connection to the island.

Most participants attend dances with a partner, or choose those dances where they are relatively sure of knowing someone with whom they can dance. A woman in her late seventies explained to me that she has a pool of known dance partners, and since none of them were present that evening, she did not expect to dance. The desire to know people and be comfortable at the event results in uniform and socially safe dance spaces that are ethnically homogeneous and have normatively gendered participants.

**Heteronormativity**

Social dance spaces are heteronormative. It is primarily at square dances that people learn how to be men and women, and the cultural forms that masculinity and femininity take in Cape Breton. Binary gender roles are learned through the male/female social couple dancing of the Cape Breton square set. Men are expected to lead, women to follow, and men ask women to dance. It sometimes happens that women ask men to dance, but only for very specific reasons such as a lack of competent male partners, if a woman is trying to avoid dancing with a particular man, or if she particularly wants to dance with a man she knows. This system is fundamentally heterosexist. Heterosexuality is compulsory at square dances, and locals learn how to interact within this hegemonically heteronormative environment that privileges heterosexual relationships, desires, and interactions, and casts as abject or erases alternate relationships (queer or
gay, or even unmarried heterosexual relationships not progressing towards marriage).

Locals, especially an older generation for whom dances were the only social outlet in rural Inverness County, learned flirtation and courting at square dances. There is a non-recognition of gender variance: no matter how little I embodied a Cape Breton youthful femininity through dress, mannerisms, and personal characteristics, I was immediately read as female and fit into that gender category with all the gender roles and subjection to heteropatriarchal control that entailed.245

Unlike Kaminsky’s (2011a) case of egalitarian flirtation in the Swedish social dance *polska*, flirtation and courting in Cape Breton social square dancing are patriarchal, and older men impose these behaviors on young women, and also young men. Older people are valorized and respected through Cape Breton culture, and young men, and many older men as well, are too courteous to stop inappropriate behavior towards women. Women likewise are not taught to set boundaries against these men, who are often their distant relatives or neighbors, and some emphasize that they are harmless (anonymous, interview). Another example of not standing out from the crowd or making a scene, it may also have to do, as folklorist and Cape Breton native Richard MacKinnon (folklorist) offered to Feintuch (2010:26) and Joyce Rankin offered to me, with the necessity of getting along with the people in small and tightknit communities.

245 During the entirety of my fieldwork, I was never once presumed by be gay: in fact, I was presumed to be heterosexual, romantically available, and interested. I was constantly asked if I had a boyfriend, where he might be, and whether I might be interested in the man asking me all these questions. My answer was uniformly and firmly ‘no’. I was usually at dances and bars by myself, and for the older generation, and even folks closer to my age, a young woman out by herself was unusual, and I think contributed to the presumption that I was sexually and romantically available to heterosexual, especially older, men. Why else would I be out by myself but to find a partner I could do more than dance with?
Though I was told on a couple of occasions that it wouldn’t really matter if two men or two women danced together, the fact remains that these sorts of dance pairings almost never happen. Women occasionally dance together for two main reasons: a lack of male partners and to avoid unwanted male attention. There were occasional gay couples at the Red Shoe, usually older lesbian tourists in their fifties or early sixties, but none were in evidence at the dances. Nor did I see anyone who was obviously seeking out a same-sex or same-gender partner. One Saturday in 2012, I met up with a friend at the West Mabou dance. My friend is lesbian-identified, and so was the friend she had brought along. I sat down with them, finally feeling as though I belonged at the dance because I knew people there. My friend introduced me to the two straight couples she’d come with; one of the women was from Mabou and had grown up going to this dance. Within five minutes of sitting down with them, the fiddler signaled the start of a new set. Local men appeared instantly at our table and scooped up all of the women to dance. Though there were three queer women at the table, none of us brought up the possibility of dancing together; I didn’t want to potentially out my friend, who was probably passing due to her more conventionally feminine appearance, but I also thought it inappropriate in the context of a square dance; it seemed like asking for attention. Instead, we all accepted offers to dance from normatively- and oppositely- gendered male partners.

The male partners were left alone, a little shell shocked at having been so quickly out-maneuvered by the rival males. In a dance culture where men ask women to dance, men who are shy, don’t know the steps, or don’t take the initiative find themselves sitting on the sidelines without partners, even if those men came with built-in dance partners, as
is the case here. The other women at our table were conventionally feminine according to Cape Breton standards, even my friend, so it’s not surprising that they were asked to dance. I got to dance that set because David Rankin was there, whom I knew from the College. David had seen me dance before, and knew I had good rhythm and new the figures; in short, I’d make a decent dance partner. We had a great time, but I wasn’t asked to dance again, not even by David. Good dancers like David are in high demand at dances: such dancers may not have any break at a square dance.

Gender theorist CJ Pascoe defines “compulsive heterosexuality” as the “constellation of sexualized practices, discourses, and interactions” through which the high school boys in Pascoe’s study affirmed dominance, heterosexuality, masculinity, and personhood (2011:86). Through sexualized interactions, these boys established themselves as active agents, and women as subjects of that action (ibid., 86). Pascoe situates the practices of compulsive heterosexuality as examples of what Butler (1995) calls “gender performativity” whereby “gender is ‘produced as a ritualized repetition of conventions, and…this ritual is socially compelled in part by the force of compulsory heterosexuality’ (Butler 1995:31, quoted in Pascoe 2011:86). Though blatantly sexual discourse and desire is downplayed at square dances, there are certainly interactions and practices that occur which involve direct displays of “the ability [of men and boys] to exercise mastery and dominance literally or figuratively over girls’ bodies (Wood 1984)” (Pascoe 2011:85).

Behaving in the right ways has real consequences for an individual’s ability to function as a social actor. Local men dance with gender conforming women and with
women who are known to be good dancers (whether local or from away). If a woman is non-gender conforming and isn’t known to be a good dancer, she will remain on the sidelines, as I did for the first couple of months of my fieldwork. Men never dance with other men, nor do boys dance with each other. Heterosexual couples who come to the dance together (whether local or from away) dance with each other: if local, they may exchange partners, if from away, the woman may get asked to dance by local men. Men from away, unless they’re brave enough to attempt the dance with their wives, don’t get to dance; it would be unusual for a local woman to ask him to dance. Young women may dance together up to mid-teens, but rarely do adult women dance together; I only saw two local women (both of whom are married to men) do so once, and the others who danced together were women from away studying at the college, which has many more female students and thus falls into the lack-of-acceptable (male)-partner category. In general, men have most of the control over who gets danced with, and when, and how.

People want to dance with those they know and those who are good dancers; they want to have fun. People will exclude those they see as inferior dancers or move to another circle to avoid them. Socializing with familiar people or potential romantic interests comes first, and for most it’s about fun and personal fulfillment.

Following the Rules

These cultural and behavioral rules are meant for locals, not for tourists. Tourists need to play by these rules to some extent, but they are not the intended students who need to learn these behavioral praxes in order to maintain social capital. Their stay is too
short for locals to waste time teaching them or for tourists to waste time learning; tourists also don’t tend to delve too deeply into gender politics on vacation. It’s sufficient if they get to dance and experience cultural “authenticity.” Those that return year after year and make their home part time on the island do learn these rules as a way to integrate into closed communities. George, one of my dance partners who with his wife spends summers in Cape Breton, perfectly embodied social dance norms. Men learn how to control social situations, and older men use their privilege and the respect younger men and all women show them to steer social situations according to their wishes. One of my former dance partners, in the process of hitting on me in both French and English at the Glenora Distillery one evening, bemoaned changing gender roles and the rising divorce rate as evolving cultural situations that were making things worse; really, he was regretting changes that threatened male control (his control) over women.

**Choosing Partners: Male Privilege and Heteropatriarchy**

Men literally control women’s bodies in the square dance by directing where they can dance and with who, and also through directional and possessive touch that is extraneous to the act of dancing but is a visible indicator to others (especially other men) that the man in question has claimed this woman, at least temporarily. That claim can extend indefinitely: once they’ve danced with a competent (and attractive) woman, the same male partners are very likely to ask her to dance again within the same evening, and at future dances. By choosing which square set to join, and sometimes which couples will be to either side in the circle, the male lead chooses whom he and his partner will dance
with. In the first figure, everyone dances with his or her corner partner (for women, the man to your right; for men, the woman to your left). This is an opportunity to meet new people, socialize, and size up potential dancing partners for later in the evening. I first met the men who would become my regular dancing partners by dancing with them as corner partners.

Figure 6.7 Bill Cameron calls the dance at the Normaway Inn (he’s at center holding the microphone. Kinnon and Betty Lou provide the music for the two-hour dance; they’ve already played a two-hour concert. Photo by author.

Most of the dances used to have a caller, a man who called out the next choreographed movements of the figure. Today, only the dance at the Normaway Inn features a caller, a man named Bill Cameron. Cameron faces a challenge at the Normaway Dance: in the first set, it’s mostly tourists, and they don’t have any idea what they’re doing. Some know how to contradance or are familiar with line dancing, but the Cape Breton square dance is a significantly different in structure and movement choreography, and consequently Cameron has a resigned, frustrated expression and tone
as he leans back in his straight-backed chair onstage, arms crossed, and issues directions
in a deadpan Cape Breton brogue. The tourists persist in doing whatever they think is
right, no matter what he says, and the locals stay well away until the often-delayed
second set, by which time the breathless and giddy tourists have had their fun and
wandered back to their cottages on the Inn’s property.

“Right hand to your partner…” he calls, “And promenade, promenade…” and
right there the dance becomes an exercise in male privilege and masculine agency/female
subjectivity: men dance to the left of their female partner. For the promenade in the reel
figure, the man offers his right hand to the woman, who gives him her left hand. He puts
his left arm around her. “Right hand to your partner…” he’s calling for the men. He’s
telling the men what to do, directing and controlling the actions of other men, as well as
women. Michael Kimmel, theorizing masculinity as homophobia, explains that men are
constantly “afraid of other men” (Kimmel 1994:103). Homophobia, he writes, is not the
fear of the homosexual man, but rather “the fear that other men will unmask us,
emasculate us, reveal to us and the world…that we are not real men” (ibid.:104). Men
constantly police their own gender performance and the gender performances of other
men by monitoring for hints of the feminine in their actions, movement, behaviors,
speech, and beliefs (ibid., 105). Kimmel argues that men feel powerless due to the actions
of other men, not women, minorities, homosexuals, and men make and enforce the rules
of gender, which exclude all but the “tiniest fraction of men” (ibid., 108). This “manhood
of racism, of sexism, of homophobia…is chronically insecure” (ibid., 108) because men
are constantly faced with the task of proving their adherence to proper masculinity and
masculine performance. In Cape Breton, gender roles are well-established, and men are mythologized as heroes: in the mines, on the sea, in tall tales about work. Men work hard, suffer in their work, and so deserve respect, admiration, and control.

A woman in her seventies from Mabou helped me gain insight into how partners are chosen one September evening at the Glencoe dance. She was from Mabou, and doesn’t get out to Glencoe as much as she used to because it’s out of the way (four miles down the unpaved back roads). She said that the folks at Glencoe aren’t really her people either. She prefers to go to West Mabou because there are more people she knows, and because it’s closer. Of course, there are more people she knows there because most of the people who go to West Mabou are from one of the geographically proximate Mabou communities (Mabou, Mabou Coal Mines, Mabou Harbour, West Mabou) or Judique. She said if she gets to dance that’s great, but even if she doesn’t, she still gets to hear the “Scotch music, and oh I just love Scotch music” and that’s enough to make her satisfied with her dance experience. I asked if she would dance, and she said “maybe, but probably not tonight.” Why not? “Well, I’ve looked around and I don’t think I’ll get asked.” How do you know? “There are people I usually dance with and I’ve looked around and only a couple of them are here tonight.” If she couldn’t dance with one of her regular dancers, who she knew were accomplished, she preferred not to dance. Participants often choose not to dance rather than dance with someone they aren’t acquainted with and whose dancing skill is unknown. This is complicated by gender. Since men have most of the agency in asking women to dance, a good female dancer will get asked to dance all night long by knowledgeable, usually local men who know she is a good dancer.
The next year, Burton confirmed what this woman had told me and added some detail. He elaborated three categories that potential dance partners fit into: people you usually dance with, people you know, and people you like to dance with (B. MacIntyre, interview). Men have most of the agency in choosing dance partners, but unknowledgeable men often don’t feel confident enough in the dance to ask women they don’t know to dance, and so they sit on the sidelines, effectively taking on a passive feminized role. Married heterosexual couples or heterosexual friend pairs will mutually agree to dance, but that’s about as egalitarian as the decision process gets. A woman can certainly refuse to dance with a man who has asked her, but if she’s seen dancing with another man, the spurned potential partner will certainly never ask her to dance again; this happened when a few nights after I rejected my dance partner’s advances. He asked me to dance and I refused; later, I accepted an offer to dance with George and the partner I’d spurned looked furious.

Male Privilege

“I really like your little friend,” said Tony to Natalie, my friend from the hostel. She’d asked to come with me to my final square dance of the season at Brook Village, and so here we were, 12:15am up at the corner of the stage near the canteen. Tony’s “little friend” was me, who he’d first danced with at Glencoe Mills almost a month ago. A few square sets later over the course of a handful of evenings, Tony felt friendly enough towards me to pull me flush against his torso as we danced, to slide his hand down to small of my back, and to keep ahold of my hand while we settled into position in
a square set. I was one of the people he danced with now, part of a stable of regular partners that square dancers acquire over time according to Burton’s principles I elaborated above. In practice, that means that if he saw me at a dance, there was no way to avoid a dancing interaction that was, for me, becoming uncomfortable in the presumption that my body, and my dancing body, would be given over to my temporary male partner. Despite the discomfort, objectively, Tony is an excellent dancer. As in 2012, when everyone’s favorite spoon player targeted me, I was unable to discourage the attention except by avoidance. Telling one of my dance partners that I didn’t want him to walk me out, that I didn’t want to follow him to his house, was not effective. What made me feel more ineffective was the fact that all of this was observed, and no one did anything. No one intervened to stop this harassment, not this time, nor any of the many times in any square dance that male privilege makes women into subordinate actors.

The pervasive surveillance by knowledgeable participants that occurs in square dances encompasses these acts of male presumption to physically control women’s bodies in a way that goes well beyond the necessities of social dancing, and also emotionally control by making women feel that rejecting a partner is the end of the possibilities of dancing with that person. People know that this is happening, and yet it’s hard to see that anything is done. What interventions into this behavior may be happening away from the dance are beyond my knowledge, but the fact that the behavior continues, and that a silence and inaction operates in the dance space itself, suggests that male privilege is unregulated. These issues came up in a discussion with long-time square dancer and former schoolteacher and principal Burton MacIntyre. Burton turned the
tables on me, and asked what I thought of the dances. I said that for two years I hadn’t been able to dance because my skills were unknown, and that was because I hadn’t danced with anyone. Once I was seen dancing, I had many more offers to dance, but now… *frankly, Burton, I’m a little uncomfortable.* He looked at me and said, “You’re not the first woman to tell me that. Occasionally, a woman will come to me and say, ‘Burton, I’m dancing with you the next set.’ And she’s trying to get away from someone.” *How often does that happen?* “It happens.” He said, “There are guys that are known to hold you too close,” which makes some women uncomfortable (interview).

Burton understands the huge power differential between men and women in the square dance. Burton avoids dancing with any woman, even women he knows who include former students, under a certain age “unless I know them very well.” In a classic moment of Cape Breton understatement and leaving things of common knowledge and experience, he left the reason for his choice unspoken. But he didn’t need to say it, because I had been to dances, and I knew exactly what he was talking about. Burton is aware of the ambivalent perception members of the community have of older local men from the community almost exclusively choosing young women who are pretty according to conventional standards of feminine beauty, and understands the potential threat an older man can pose to such a woman; that man has power to control and influence a situation that a younger female cannot counter because she holds less social power. Burton makes it a point to dance with someone new at every dance, whether it be a visitor he doesn’t know at all, or a friend of a friend who was brought to the dance; he considers himself (and is considered by others) a square dance ambassador in the sense that he
makes the dance available to people who, because they are new, likely wouldn’t get to
dance. But he does it with awareness that women can experience an unknown man as a
threat and as a site of potential threat.,

I asked if anything is done, since it’s clear that people in the community know
that “there are guys that are known to hold you too close.” And he said no, there’s
nothing to do. “Excuse me but this is the real world,” but he got visibly upset by the idea
that there was no solution to this male-privileging dance environment in which men have
the power of choosing partners, directing their partners’ bodies through the space, and try
to extend that control over their partners’ decisions and their bodies beyond the dance
floor. It certainly upends the egalitarian ethos that so many people ascribe to Cape Breton
culture246 and turns a space of pleasure and enjoyment into one of surveillance and threat.

Men, especially older men, with a lifetime of hard work behind them are very
respected in Cape Breton. They are more often interviewed about their lives than women,
and in the content of these oral history interviews and the photographs that accompany
them, such as those within Cape Breton’s Magazine, gendered spheres of labor are
created that bifurcate male and female experience of life, labor, and love; not only are
men shown in more photographs, they are shown outside working, while women are
usually shown inside in a passive role.247 In one instance, two men describe to Ronald

246 Frances MacEachen, Gaelic educator, notes that in Cape Breton, there is “equality in our culture and
arts. It’s accessible to everyone” (quoted in Feintuch 2010:162).
247 The exhibition catalogue for a 1992 retrospective exhibit of photographs from Cape Breton’s Magazine
in Halifax includes all forty photographs from the exhibit with captions. Most of the subjects in these
photographs are elderly, and most are men. Only four couples are shown, all older; notably one of the
couples is interracial (a white woman and a black man) and another is First Nations. Even when they are
not working, men are shown outside more often than women, suggesting that their gender roles are
naturally more active than women’s roles. Men appear in twenty-eight of the photos either alone, with other
Caplan, the a come-from-away American who created Cape Breton’s Magazine and is the sole interviewer, a no longer extant patriarchal Scottish practice of choosing brides called Reiteach. When women speak in the edited collections of stories from the magazine, as in Down North (1980), Another Night (1995), and Talking Cape Breton (2006), they often share domestic stories, stories about their men, and stories of their childhood. That is, when they are allowed to speak at all: in Another Night, women share their storytelling space with men (three men and two women talk about supernatural phenomena), and in Talking Cape Breton’s twelve interviews, only one is female.

Though women’s voices are “heard” in that collection, they are usually relayed through the voices and experiences of men.
Women have and continue to cater to men, to cope with their husbands’ absences for work and the many work-related accidents and deaths. Masculine sacrifice for family and community may serve as a rationale to excuse men for unwanted violations of space or domineering social behaviors. These are men known to local women (family, friends, neighbors) and that makes pushing back against unwelcome attention that much more difficult. An ethos of male entitlement combined with the scarcity of male partners delimits women’s ability to refuse offers to dance: once she refuses a man, he is unlikely to ask her to dance again, further limiting the pool of her potential partners. Most married men dance exclusively with their wives, and the single middle aged and older men (early sixties to eighties) cruising the sidelines for partners infrequently choose female partners in their own age group. This climate of scarcity and the judgments about dancerly fitness made based on age and conventional beauty subtly pits women against each other in the competition for male partners. Only through infrequent homosocial dancing between adult women, who are invariably straight and married, do some women temporarily evade the pressure to submit to male control.

**Conclusion**

Peter Steele is the voice of Cape Breton’s LGBT community. The tourism promoter, artist, and Cape Breton Pride director appears regularly on a radio show to offer information about the LGBT community on Cape Breton. He told me he frequently gets calls from older people on the island who are coming out and need advice or encouragement. He feels that the mainstream community’s knowledge of gay people is
growing, though how well they understand LGBT people and issues is uncertain. Despite Steele’s contention that more people are feeling able to come out and are finding acceptance, that visibility isn’t yet on the traditional square dance floor.\(^{249}\) Steele believes that “[The traditional music] brings people together in a way that any other music and dance situation doesn’t.” People are more likely to go around socializing when traditional music is being played, either live or on recordings. It’s “not the same social atmosphere [as other kinds of dancing]” (interview). However, at square dances out in the communities, there are no signs of LGBT presence. If the traditional square dance practice cannot include other sexual orientations and gender identities in its framework, people who claim non-normative identities cannot participate in traditional practice on their own terms, but must instead fit themselves uncomfortably into socialized (and socializing) gender roles that are not their own. Steele’s mission is to show LGBT people who left Cape Breton in order to live openly that the island has a place for them too. While he may be in some sense successful, that community welcome does not extend to traditional square dance culture

Appropriate social behavior in traditional cultural settings is rewarded with social success: requests to dance, engagement in small talk, and acknowledgment at future cultural events. Successful participants, usually knowledgeable locals and regular summer visitors, are treated as social actors rather than observers. The observer role is a failed social role punished by avoidance: if you’re not dancing, then you must not be a

\(^{249}\) The Cape Breton pride festival has been going on for 13 years. For the past 4 years Steele has been trying to do a traditional event in addition to the existing lineup of events. By 2015 he hopes to get a nationally renowned fiddler, specifically Ashley MacIsaac, to play for pride.
good dancer, and dancing with a bad dancer makes for a bad dance experience. But if no one gives you a chance to dance, and you’re not known in the community, your level of dancerly competence remains unknown and the cycle perpetuates. Ironically, being labeled an observer requires the active involvement of social actors to exclude preemptively for perceived or imagined social failures, as well as ‘actual’ failures of dress, behavior, and dancing. In Cape Breton, dances keep small and isolated rural communities together despite economic uncertainty and declining religious faith and affiliation. Being acknowledged and interacted with is a social necessity, and community is everything. Community is where people live, the reason they stay and come back, it’s what they romanticize, and it’s in communities that people come together to make, perpetuate, and contest their identities as Scottish Cape Bretoners.
Chapter 7 | Conclusion

Savigliano writes that “passion [in tango] is a performance, more of an ‘enacting’ than an ‘acting out,’ in which both actors and spectators are staged spectacularizing each other as entangled objects/subjects” (1995:214). For her, “it seems an impossible task to engage passion discursively without performing passionateness” (ibid., 214), but this task is far from impossible. The restrained gesture towards (hoped for, actively sought) future passion, the currents of desire within the square dancing and the sociality of the dance space and the pub, can never really be performed if that particular variety of heteronormative and patriarchal passion and desire is not yours to embody and enact. I can neither perform this passion nor write as though I can; for me, it is always ill-fitting parody. While Savigliano writes that she was patriarchally trained and initiated into tango’s passionate orbit, the training I received never permeated my body, my actions, or my thoughts to the level of initiation. I remained, and here I gesture to Srinivasan’s mapping of transnational dancing labor (2012), an unruly participant who played by the rules but constantly felt the ways in which they constrained my body and my performance. Parodying my roles as “actor” and “spectator,” I could not “spectaculariz[e other dancers and actors] as entangled objects/subjects” (Savigliano 1995:214). Though others wanted to entangle with me perhaps, my own passions and desires were absented. This was certainly my decision, and sometimes a fraught one because of the implications for my fieldwork as well as my body and selfhood, but the decision I arrived at rested between the narrow boundaries of modestly embodied and gender constrained performance.
My narrative has charted negotiations of local and particular, self and other, away-ness, cultural competency, ownership, and belonging in Cape Breton’s traditional Scottish music and dance culture. Throughout, I have been in and out of many cultural spaces and contexts, both an insider and an outsider at any moment, continuously embodying and disembodying a tradition that isn’t mine, even if I can perform (or parody) its structural forms. Here at the end, I return to the matter of cultural ownership and belonging – the underlying motivations in all the preceding efforts to define, live, and experience culture.

Cape Breton’s traditional culture, always already being produced and enjoyed by locals, is now an attraction for visitors who are permitted to watch, enjoy and even attempt to participate and embody as much as they are able, but these gestures towards belonging are always constrained by certain boundaries and rules that govern the role social, dancing, and musicking actors may assume. Over and over again, I witnessed Sparling’s observation that “locals may tolerate tourists, but they will not cater to them” (2005:263). Organizations like Celtic Heart and Celtic Colours attempt to elide the encounter between local and tourist by presenting the island’s (Gaelic) institutions and (primarily, tacitly Gaelic) communities to tourists as open and welcoming sites of authentic and living traditional culture. Locally vetted experiences await the visitor, and the seeming lack of external and profit-motivated mediation adds to the touristic apprehension of the experience as authentic. The monetization of the public side of the culture is equivocal; though most ceilidhs, dances, and local festivals have a cover charge, this is by no means ubiquitous, and the free music balances out the paid-for
entertainment. But no matter what the event is, whether easily located along the Ceilidh Trail at the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre or hidden in a maze of back roads at the Glencoe Mills Community Hall, there are expected rules and roles expected for all participants. It’s not just that tourists might get lost on the way to Glencoe, or not know how to dance when they get there; it’s also that the social and gendered roles they must perform in order to participate have been decided for them by a local cultural ideology that is bound inextricably to the praxes of the traditional Scottish cultural forms. Whether a visitor reads this ideology as old-fashioned and perhaps nostalgically appealing, as the “way things should be,” or as a hegemonic imposition on their lives is individually determined, but for locals and tourists who wish to participate, adherence to this social ideology is a prerequisite for active participation. Not knowing the rules, and a disinclination on the part of locals to teach the rules overtly, is one of the primary ways in which locals subvert the ability of tourists and local or visiting subalterns to participate in the local traditional culture. In so doing, they retain more ownership over the system of practices and social norms that collectively comprise the culture of Cape Breton’s traditional Scottish community.

Locals use their soft power as an agentive force through which they present and control “touristic” representations of their own culture, and themselves as ethnically-distinct white others. It is obvious that events are appreciated differently by each participant, and a tourist’s or local’s experience is contingent upon their differing connection to the other participants at an event (are they friends or strangers?), their knowledge of the event and its cultural contents (is this familiar or foreign?), and where
they call home (are they local or from away?): a tourist with no knowledge of the culture will apprehend less than a knowledgeable visitor from away, or a local practitioner. But more important than this are the ways locals subtly circumscribe the accessibility of the events themselves by constructing barriers to participation. Locals must do this in order to retain ownership, pride, and investment in shared cultural practices while also acknowledging the necessity of allowing visitors, in controlled and curtailed ways, to experience these practices too.

Heather Sparling argues that “Cape Breton Gaels are…finding ways to demonstrate the value and validity of their culture while they create resourceful and flexible ways of maintaining their culture in a context of quickly diminishing Gaelic speakers and increasingly diverse cultural contact. They have revisioned themselves from poor victims of the [Highland] Clearances [in 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century Scotland] to active agents in constructing their own destiny” (Sparling 2005:518). They certainly have publicly transformed themselves from victims to agents, but the trauma of the Clearances remains as cultural insecurity and protectionist attitudes; the Gaels are becoming adept, as Sparling concludes, at finding ways to maintain their culture despite internal and external threats to its survival and integrity. Tourism provides this “diverse cultural contact” from the outside, while internal factors – the scarcity of Gaelic speakers, out-migration, and only selective local interest in traditional culture – weaken the community’s cultural vitality from within.

The island’s traditional Scottish culture is increasingly commodified, marketed, and branded on the island, but it is still also transnational. While the Cape Breton style –
its distinctive crunch and syncopation, the (in the Celtic sound world) uncommon pairing of fiddle with piano, the aesthetically distinct close-to-the-floor stepdance style – is known amongst fans and aficionados of Celtic musics, it is still less famous than “traditional” Irish music. Despite this, the Celtic musics of Atlantic Canada were a strong part of the 1990s Celtic cultural boom; Atlantic Canada achieved its own celebrity as a Celtic region, even though the musics of the Irish and Scottish “homelands,” rather than these nations’ diasporas, took center stage. Irish music especially dominated the surge in sounding and moving Celtic culture, due to the mainstream accessibility of bands like Clannad and The Chieftains, and the world tours of the wildly successful multi-discipline stage show Riverdance (see Stokes and Bohlman 2003). Bands incorporating Celtic sounds, instruments, languages (or at least accents), and stylistics rose to fame as well, and a generalized Celticness took over more particular distinctions in sound and movement styles. The “Celtic” appellation itself became an umbrella term for a wide variety of different cultural forms that seemed similar because of shared characteristics like fiddles, stepdancing, modal scales, and tune forms. Cape Breton added its stylistic particularities to this transnational phenomenon, and the island is still benefiting from the style’s glossing as a “Celtic” music, similar enough to other Celtic musics that it is recognizable, but also distinct and thus marketable as a unique Celtic brand.

Scottish music is the most prominent of Cape Breton’s cultural offerings because of its ties to the transnational flow of recordings, videos, performers, and consumers, but the music is not (yet) a primary reason why people actually visit Cape Breton. They bring Cape Breton to them through recordings and sheet music, or by consuming the culture
from a Cape Breton artist on concert tours, at fiddle camps, and on YouTube. Only a self-selected few visit Cape Breton to find the music; Cape Breton, for many, exists as a point of origin and site of authenticity, but only in that it gives validity to those elements of the island culture that travel away from home. Among the island population, the world of traditional music is relatively insular: despite appearances in the tourism media, not everyone is involved in ceilidhs, square dances, summer concerts, the Gaelic language community, or intergenerational learning. Even among Scottish Cape Bretoners, locals have different levels of engagement with traditional practices. I saw so many familiar faces at the events I attended because the number of people interested in traditional culture is limited, and people will travel great distances to attend events in the company of others committed to those practices.

Community discussions circle endlessly around out-migration, the threat of cultural commodification, investment in the traditional culture, and waning interest amongst younger people. For older generations, the traditional music and dance was their popular entertainment, but this was less common for people who grew up in the 1950s and later. Though some younger people (in their teens, twenties and thirties) are deeply involved in the traditional music community, most are not. For the majority, it is not their popular music, and for youth who reach out to national or transnational youth cultural communities through the Internet, the necessity of fitting themselves into the social, gender, ethnic, sexual, and ideological roles required for traditional practice and community is lacking. Peter Steele, the primary organizer and founder of Cape Breton Pride, is a white gay man in his fifties from the ethnically-diverse, working class Whitney
Pier neighborhood of Sydney. He told me that he has always wanted a traditional square dance as part of Pride Week, but lack of interest from within the local LGBT community has prevented it. The concession: at every pride dance, the DJ will play three popular Rankin Family tunes and, as Steele put it, “that gets everyone up on the dance floor. If we do a traditional music event, more older people would show up and the younger people might be more hesitant.” How people actually dance to the Rankin Family tunes is unclear; I never witnessed this personally. For people under the age of forty, the traditional Scottish music, even in the form of the Rankin Family’s popularizing stylings, is the music of their parents’ generation. Pride dances are always held in Sydney and almost exclusively feature DJ’d set lists of EDM; though the crowd is generationally diverse and tends towards homonormative, the only people I ever saw dancing were people my age, and they weren’t square dancing. Pride dances represent a decided shift in both audience make-up and location from community square dances.

The Scottish traditional music is part of the culture of Cape Breton. This is so for Acadians and Mi’kmaq, local ethnic others who at times music and dance in their version of a Scottish style sometimes alongside and with the Scots themselves. And it is also so for local LGBTQ people whose lives, bodies, genders, and desires may not fit well in traditional spaces. Steele doesn’t think that traditional culture is off limits to anyone who calls Cape Breton home: “If you’re from Cape Breton you’ve grown up listening to traditional music. You do like it [even if you say you don’t]…there’s a feeling of safety and soul and when you’re older you feel comfortable with that.” For Steele, “it brings people together in a way that any other music and dance situation doesn’t and people are
more likely to go around socializing when traditional music is happening.” It’s “not the same social atmosphere” as a Pride dance with the sort of thudding EDM that you could dance to in any gay club in North America. The traditional culture is local, and particular, and it wouldn’t happen anywhere but on Cape Breton.

Whether the tradition will continue to have relevance for new local audiences is not just a question of how well it addresses young people’s the social needs and entertainment interests, or how well it provides some people with a livelihood. Expressive culture that is as normative and tightly structured as Cape Breton’s Scottish tradition risks limiting accessibility for new audiences, especially audiences at home. For tourists, part of the authenticity of the cultural encounter is the culture’s seeming ubiquity and timelessness, the fact that any music performance at the Red Shoe can be enhanced by a local patron standing up to offer a few steps or sit in for a set while the paid musicians socialize. Though they encounter them constantly, tourists don’t usually notice the rules governing their participation. The heteronormativity is pervasive on such a hegemonic and ideological level that it disappears; it’s only really visible (and felt) in the constraints on the body in social performance.

For locals, cultural ownership is largely about the ability to control what happens to their culture; fundamental changes that would allow more people to participate make visible and thus call into question deeply held cultural values and patterns of behavior supported by generations of social praxis and ideologies. Current policies of official multiculturalism at the national level in Canada exists in uneasy relation to Canada’s constituent cultural communities; how to allow distinctiveness without permitting
intergroup conflict or the dissolution of the nation only brought the issue of belonging and ownership more clearly into the national spotlight by officially sanctioning the articulation of ethnic and cultural differences. Whether multiculturalism, by maintaining and valuing the differences between Canada’s different linguistic and ethnocultural groups, brings Canadians together or keeps them apart is contested, not the least because multiculturalism still fundamentally ignores the existence of Canada’s First Nations and their rights to cultural autonomy and self-determination. Mandating cultural difference deploying resources to help maintain those differences, including money for locally-important language programs in public schools, also implicitly permits communities to maintain boundaries around membership. Not everyone has to belong or be welcome in every community because that might lead to a loss of cultural distinction or autonomy.

National recognition of the rights of specific identity groups within Canada, for example equal marriage opportunity for all regardless of sexual orientation, may undermine the official policy of multiculturalism if equal marriage opportunity goes against a community’s ethnocultural values.

***

I interviewed Margie Beaton on a flawless, breezy day in mid-August. The sky was deep azure, and huge white clouds drifted lazily overhead as we sat at a bench on the Gaelic College’s quad, the kilted bagpiper in the parking lot distantly but distinctly

---

250 See Regan (2010) for a discussion of the complicity and responsibility of white Canadians, even those that are or were oppressed cultural minorities, in permitting and perpetuating a settler mentality with regard to the country’s First Nations.
audible. She distilled, in her modest and matter-of-fact way, the essence if not the implications of the traditional culture:

“This music, this culture is humble. It’s born out of kitchens. It’s taken on a concert title but it really is something about sharing. A fiddler’s playing [at a show] and a dancer will come up, dance a few steps, take a couple of minutes, and then…let someone else take the lead. And it’s that sharing. That person won’t get back up and kind of try and one-up them. That was their turn. And then they’re done.”

How right she is: the implication of not following the ethos, the ideology, the fundamentality of sharing without complaint is social threat to the integrity of the tradition, which is the place where the sociality that binds communities together is taught and learned. It’s not just getting the dance wrong, it’s getting identity wrong on the level of the local and within the Celtic world itself, which seems to have little room for discussions of gender, whether normative or subaltern. Cape Breton musicians who play in the traditional style constantly negotiate identity performances. Transnationally, off-island audiences expect performances of local (Cape Breton) identities; at home, local performances of identity by these same musicians must be unchanged by their transnational encounters. Stasis is compelled, though quiet and modest subversions proliferate, and it has never happened any other way. Individuality and personal expressiveness is necessary for inspired music and dance performance, and so even within tightly bounded ideological structures of praxes, evolution and contestation will always exist so the tradition can keep living.
APPENDIX A – Glossary

Acadian – The Acadians are a French-speaking community present on Cape Breton Island and throughout Atlantic Canada. Acadian diasporas also exist in other parts of Canada and the United States.

Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design – Located in Sydney, the Centre combines studios, gallery, and retail space for island artists and artisans to make and sell work and teach classes. Though not specifically attached to the traditional Scottish culture (artists work in all media and are not necessarily crafting pieces connected to the tradition), it is a member of the Celtic Heart Co-op.

Cape Breton Fiddlers’ Association – The Fiddler’s Association, founded in 1973, is a group of interested fiddlers who gather frequently to learn tunes. The Association was formed as part of the effort to regenerate interest in the traditional culture following a crisis that was sparked in part by a documentary that claimed the Cape Breton traditional music was disappearing.

Ceilidh – (Gaelic) Literally, ‘ceilidh’ simply refers to a social gathering; it is currently used to describe any event at which people enjoy live traditional music. In the past, a ceilidh did not need to include music, and described any social gathering that might include music, dancing, storytelling, singing, conversation, eating, and drinking.

Celtic Colours International Festival – Celtic Colours is a highly-anticipated and much loved cultural festival held on Cape Breton every October that celebrates all the island’s cultures, but especially the Celtic culture forms.

Celtic Heart of North America Co-operative – This Co-op is an island-based marketing initiative that combines (as of this writing) seven prominent cultural organizations into a single branded entity and promotes the primarily traditional Scottish cultural experiences offered by the member organizations to tourists.

Celtic Music Interpretive Centre – The Celtic Music Centre is located in Judique. The institution combines a museum, archive, gift shop, restaurant and performance space that hosts frequent live music and informal Sunday dances throughout the year. It is a member of the Celtic Heart Co-op.

Colaisde na Gàidhlig (aka The Gaelic College) – located in St. Ann’s, the Gaelic College offers summer and year-long courses in Gaelic cultural topics, including music, dance, Gaelic language, Gaelic-language drama, and weaving for tourists and locals. The College is a member of the Celtic Heart Co-op.
Destination Cape Breton (DCB) – DCB is Cape Breton’s regional tourism agency that coordinates tourism marketing and promotion for the island.

Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism (ERDT) – ERDT is a Nova Scotia provincial department that coordinates tourism marketing and promotion for the province, and works with regional tourism agencies to standardize the province’s branded image.

Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation/Société d’expansion du Cap-Breton (ECBC) – ECBC is a federal crown corporation that distributes monies to island institutions and projects in need of development; crown corporations fill in where private business cannot due to economic feasibility by, for example, providing ferry service to remote islands and settlements.

Fèis – (Gaelic) This term refers to a community festival.

Fèis an Eilein – (Gaelic); Translated as ‘Island Festival,’ Cape Breton’s Fèis combines staged performance, displays of cultural activities, and showcases of talent. As a traditional Fèis, this event does not involve any competition amongst participants.

Gaelic College – see Colaisde na Gàidhlig.

Gàidhealtachd – This term refers to the entirety of a Gaelic-speaking and Gaelic cultural area, whether in Scotland or North America.

Glenora Distillery – North America’s first single malt whisky distillery is located along the Ceilidh Trail at Glenora Falls between Mabou and Inverness. Glenora also offers a hotel, pub, restaurant, and gift shop, and is a member of the Celtic Heart Co-op.

Highland Village (An Clachan Gàidhealach) – This “living history” museum, which chronicling the life of the Highland Gaels who settled in Cape Breton, is located near Iona on a headland overlooking the Grand Narrows in the center of Cape Breton.

Keltic Lodge – This upscale province-owned hotel and golf course is located on a peninsula just within the Cape Breton Highlands National Park near Ingonish.

Louisbourg, Fortress of – The Fortress of Louisbourg is located on a windswept peninsula near the modern town of Louisbourg on Cape Breton’s northeastern Atlantic Coast. at Louisbourg. Operated by Parks Canada as a federal National Historic Site of Canada, the Fortress of Louisbourg is a reconstruction of an French colonial fortress. As “living history” museum, the site employs costumed animators and flawless period reconstructions to depict 18th century life just prior to war with Britain.

Mawio’mi – (Mi’kmaw) This term describes a Mi’kmag cultural gathering.
Mi’kmaw/Mi’kmaq – Mi’kmaw refers to a single member of The People; Mi’kmaq refers to The People as a whole community.

Mi’kmaw’ki – (Mi’kmaw) This term refers to the entirety of the territory formerly and currently occupied by the Mi’kmaq. Mi’kmaw’ki stretches throughout Nova Scotia and over much of Atlantic Canada, which is also occupied by other First Nations peoples.

Milling frolic – A milling frolic is a work party at which women and men mill woolen cloth by hand. ‘Frolic’ is used to refer to any kind of work party; there can be wood chopping frolics or spinning frolics. Participants in a milling frolic all bring their own wool cloth and stitch it together in a long loop. Everyone sits around a table (often a door in earlier times) and pounds the loop of cloth on the table. Milling songs, which are also called waulking songs, keep the rhythm of the work. Adding water to the cloth and pounding it repeatedly on the table reduces the space between the weave, gradually turning the material into a dense and virtually waterproof fabric.

Nova Scotia Tourism Association (NSTA) – The NSTA is a hybrid organization, part governmental and part business, responsible for coordinating Nova Scotia’s new tourism strategies implemented between 2013 and 2018.

Office of Gaelic Affairs (Oifis Iomairtean na Gàidhlig) – The OGA has offices in Halifax, Antigonish, and Mabou. As a provincial office, the OGA is responsible for supporting Nova Scotians in accessing their Gaelic language and identity (the OGA Mission Statement uses the word “reclaiming”). This includes expanding the use of Gaelic through bilingual road signage, developing language instruction in public schools, and increasing the visibility of Gaelic culture in Nova Scotia. The OGA funds community groups that work in support of their mission.

Red Shoe Pub – The Red Shoe, as it is called, is located in Mabou on Cape Breton Island. It is an epicenter of Scottish night- (and afternoon-) life in Inverness County hosting daily live traditional music, and often spontaneous dance.

Reiteach – (Gaelic) A Reiteach is a Scottish engagement ritual in which the prospective groom engages in an elaborate exercise of asking for the hand of his hoped-for bride from her father. The prospective groom and father use metaphor to discuss the arrangement and never mention, nor consult, the woman who might be married off. No longer practiced, the last documented Reiteach was in 1923.

Tintamarre – (Acadian) Tintamarre is a noise parade that occurs in Acadian communities in Atlantic Canada as part of celebrations for National Acadian Day. Held on August 15th, this holiday coincides with the Feast of Our Lady of the Assumption; St. Mary of the Assumption is the Acadians’ patron saint.
Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC) – The TIAC was founded in 1930 and encompasses all aspects of Canada’s tourism industry. It represents tourism interests at the national level and engages in strategies to ensure the tourism sectors growth and development (TIAC 2014). TIAC supports tourism businesses and selects premier tourism campaigns, services, and events each year to receive awards.

Unama’ki – (Mi’kmaw) The name used by the Mi’kmaq to refer to Cape Breton Island.
ARTS/CULTURE CENTRES:
Inverness County’s cultural history is rich and diverse. A place of great creativity, it is home to writers, visual artists, musicians and artisans who are inspired by the natural beauty and traditions of western Cape Breton. There are five Arts/Culture Centres in Inverness County, each with its own focus, all well worth a visit. Many events take place throughout the year, especially in summer and fall. Check the contact numbers and websites for up-to-date information.

1. Fr. John A. Rankin Cultural Centre
348 Hoey 105, Glendale, 22 km from the Canso Causeway, Next to St. Mary of the Angels Church.
Contact: Marius MacLellan 625-2792 or 621-7232 or Mabel MacGillivray 625-4980 www.icnca.glenisle
The Glendale Gaelic and Historical Society archives are housed in this lovely, 140-year-old building along with a library and a gift shop featuring local traditional crafts. Tartans are on display and available for sale, weaving workshops are offered for locals and visitors and internet access is available at this location.

2. The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre
5471 Rte 19, Judique, next to the Judique Community Centre.
Contact: 781-7100 www.celticumnsite.com
The Celtic Music Centre is home to extensive music archives dating back to the 1940’s, a gift shop specializing in music and tune books and an interactive exhibit room where you can have an 8-minute fiddle lesson. Workshops and ceilidhs are a regular event at the Centre.

3. Strathearn Place
Allan J. MacEachen International Academic & Cultural Centre
11156 Rte 19, just south of Mabou.
Contact: 941-5353 www.strathearnplace.ca
Strathearn Place is a state-of-the-art performance centre with sophisticated sound and excellent acoustics. The stage is dedicated to John Morris Rankin in which you will see performances from ballet to jazz, to the best in Cape Breton traditional music.

4. The Inverness County Centre For The Arts
16080 Rte 19, Central Avenue, north end of Inverness
Contact: 254-3533 www.invernessarts.org
Here you can see wonderful art exhibits in the gallery, browse in the Third Meade Gallery Gift Shop, enjoy an evening of music in an intimate setting, learn art and craft techniques in the studio, or relax with a cocktail on the patio while watching the ocean.

5. La Place des Arts Perc Anselme Chaisson
NDA School, next to St. Pierre Church, Main Street, Chéticamp.
Contact: 224-1786 www.festivalinverness.ca
In the heart of the Acadian region, music and dance performances with a kitchen party atmosphere are held in this well equipped 153-seat theatre. There is also a gift shop, a small art gallery and a bar.

DANCING AROUND INVERNESS COUNTY
Discover the Magic of the Maritimes

EXPERIENCE the traditional dance/ceilidh culture of Western Cape Breton with this map as your guide

DANCES
The Cape Breton square dance and ceilidh traditions were brought over from Scotland by the early Scots settlers and are intrinsic to Cape Breton culture. An evening spent at any of Inverness County’s regular square dances is sure to be an unforgettable experience. Visitors are made welcome, and they will hear the music of some of Cape Breton’s best known musicians. Dances start at 7pm and run until 10pm or later.

1. WEST MABOU SQUARE DANCE
West Mabou Sports Club Hall, 2191 West Mabou Road.
2 6k along the West Mabou Road, which turns west off Route 19. 2.4k south of the Mabou Post Office.
Contact: Jimmie or Margie Macdonell 965-2813
Family (all ages) dances Saturday nights throughout the year. Contact on site. Adm.: $6
The West Mabou Dance is famous for its indoor and outdoor dance floors and the ever-growing collection of framed photographs donated by musicians over the years.

2. BROOK VILLAGE SQUARE DANCE
Brook Village Parish Hall, 6452 Rte 323, Brook Village (see enlarged map). Rte 352 turns east off Rte 19 at the north end of Mabou and meets Rte 395 just north of Weymouth. Contact: Della McTavish 750-2489
Adult (all ages) dances each Monday from the end of June through Labour Day weekend. Bar & canteen. Adm.: $7
The Brook Village Dance has been running since Buddy MacMaster first started playing dances.

3. SCOTSFIELD SQUARE DANCE
Lake Ailene YTV Community Hall, 4150 Rte 395
Rte 395 turns south onto Rte 19 at 19, not far from SW Maggie’s Bridge, and meets Hwy 105 at Weymouth.
Contact: Michael Gillis 750-2790 or Mike Gillis 750-2790
Adult (all ages) dances each Saturday, Tuesday and July and August. Bar & canteen. Adm.: $5

4. THE BARN AT THE NOHOMAWAN INN
The Barn, 895 Egypt Road, Margaree Valley (see enlarged map) At Margaree Forks turn the fork right, go east towards the Tintica Canada Hwy until you reach Egypt Road on the left near Lake O’Laws. Follow the signs to Nohomawan Barn 1.3km on Egypt Road. Contact: 488-9887 www.nohomawinn.com
3-holer concert/ceilidh/dances (all ages). Wednesdays through July and August. Fridays mid to end of June, and September through late October. Concert/ceilidh 8pm; Dance 10pm. Reserved adm.: $10; Door $8; Student $4

5. THE GLENCOE MILL’S SQUARE DANCE
Glenoe Mills Hall, across from St. Joseph’s Church. There are several ways to get here. See the enlarged map for the most travelled.
At Mabou, off Rte 19 follow Mabou Ridge Rd, from Brook Village via the Old Mill River Rd and from Judique. The Judique Interval Road turns back at Rte 19. 4 6k north of Judique Post Office. Contact: Elizabeth Brown 945-2407 or Ruby Campbell 945-2215. Cell for info on special dances. Family (all ages) dances each Thursday in July through Labour Day weekend. Contact: Adm.: $6
The Glenoe Mill’s dance has been running for decades, and for many years was Buddy MacMaster’s regular Thursday gig. A new fireproof floor was installed winter 2007/8 in the historic barn.

6. SOUTH WEST MARGAREE SQUARE DANCE
St. Joseph’s Parish Hall, 94588 Rte 19 South Side
Contact: Lawrence MacAulay, 248-2180
Adult (all ages) dances each Friday from end of June through Labour Day weekend. Bar & canteen. Adm.: $7. Some of the legendary Cape Breton fiddlers such as Angus Chisholm have played at this long running dance.

CEILIDHS
A ceilidh (Scots Gaelic word pronounced kay-leh) is a gathering for traditional music, dance, stories, and songs.

1. THE CELTIC MUSIC INTERPRETIVE CENTRE
For directions and contact info, see #1 in the ARTS/CULTURE CENTRES listing. Family (all ages) ceilidhs 3-5pm, Sundays throughout the year. Adm.: $7; Weekdays, 7-7pm July to mid-October. Adm.: $5; bar & food service; Jan., July & August, Monday-Saturday, 7-11pm, Luncheon Céilidh

2. MAUBOU COMMUNITY HALL
15334 Rte 39 Main Street Mabou, across from Red Shoe Pub. Contact: Karen Brunet 965-2367 Family (all ages) ceilidhs 7-7pm, Tuesdays from end of June through August. Adm.: $7

3. FATHER JOHN A. RANKIN CULTURAL CENTRE
For directions and contact info, see #1 in the ARTS/CULTURE CENTRES listing. Family (all ages) ceilidhs 7-7pm, every Sunday mid-June through mid-October (Celtic Column). Admission by donation.

4. INVERNESS FIRE HALL
15971 Rte 19 Central Avenue, Inverness, across from Royal Bank. Contact: Alice Freeman 258-2074 or at The Bear Paw. Family (all ages) ceilidhs 7-7pm, Thursdays, July through August. Adm.: $7

*Note: All events are subject to change without notice.

Listing coordinated by Inverness County Recreation/Tourism Department

Our visitor’s guide “The Sunset Side of Cape Breton Island” is available at all visitor information centres or by request at information@invernesscounty.ca

APPENDIX B – “Dancing Around Inverness County,” Brochures, 2011 and 2013
ARTS & CULTURAL CENTRES
Inverness County's cultural legacy is rich and diverse. A place of great creative energy, it is home to writers, visual artists, musicians and artisans who are inspired by the natural beauty and traditions of western Cape Breton. There are five Arts & Cultural Centres in Inverness County to work in one house, all welcome is a visit. Many events take place throughout the year, especially in summer and fall. Check the contact numbers and websites for up-to-date information.

Father John Angus Rankin Cultural Centre
2048 Highway 106, Glencoe
(902) 945-1725
Father John Rankin Cultural Centre houses the Glencoe Gaelic and Historical Society archives. As well you will find a gift shop featuring locally crafted crafts. This lovely 140-year-old building is surrounded by beautiful gardens. The Centre is operated by the Cape Breton Community Cooperative. Activities can be found on Facebook.

The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre
4671 Route 19, Judique
(902) 787-2108 www.celticmusicinterpretivecentre.com
The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre is home to extensive music archives dating back to the 1970s. You can find a gift shop specializing in music and tape books as well as an information exhibit and local artists and crafts. The Centre has a regular event calendar.

Strohpeppa Place
Man Rd. St. Mactiess International Academy & Cultural Centre
11560 Route 19, Baddeck
(902) 945-5300 www.strohpeppa.com
Strohpeppa Place is a site of an art performance centre with comfortable seating and excellent acoustics. The studio, dedicated to John Rankin, is where you will see performances from folk to jazz, to the best in Cape Breton traditional music.

The Inverness County Centre For The Arts
16000 Route 19, Centre Avenue, Inverness
(902) 787-5533 www.invernessarts.ca
Inverness County Centre for the Arts often something for everyone. Here you can view beautiful art on exhibit in the gallery, browse in the Third Meadow Gallery Gift Shop, enjoy a concert or music in an intimate setting, learn art and craft techniques in the studio, or relax with a cocktail on the patio while watching the sun go down over the ocean.

La Place Des Arts Père Arsenée Chiasson
11518 Caled Trail, Cheticamp
(902) 789-1874 www.cheticamp.ca
La Place Des Arts Père Arsenée Chiasson is the heart of the Acadian region offering music and dance performances with a kitchen party atmosphere in a well-equipped 207 seat theatre.

DANCING AROUND
Inverness County
Experience the traditional andceilidh culture of Western Cape Breton
SUNSET SIDE of Cape Breton
Free Visitor's Guide Available at Visitor Information Centres around the island or by request.

DANCING AROUND
Inverness County
Experience the traditional dance and ceilidh culture of Western Cape Breton
SUNSET SIDE of Cape Breton
Free Visitor's Guide Available at Visitor Information Centres around the island or by request.

WEST MABOU SQUARE DANCE
West Mabou Square Dance Hall, 2939 West Mabou Road, Mabou
SATURDAY 5-10 pm
Family Dance (all ages)
Admission $5
Contact: Rainbow Gardens (902) 945-2514

SOUTH WEST MABOU SQUARE DANCE
High School, 1907 Route 19, South West Mabou
FRIDAY 7-11 pm
Adult Dance (all ages)
Admission $5
Contact: Rainbow Gardens (902) 945-2514

CEILIDHS
A ceilidh (Scottish Gaelic word pronounced /key-lid/) is a gathering for traditional music, dance, stories, and songs.

SQUARE DANCES
The Cape Breton square dance and stepdancing traditions were brought over from Scotland by the early Scots settlers and are intrinsic to Cape Breton culture. An evening spent at any of Inverness County's many square dances is sure to be an unforgettable experience. Dancers are made welcome, and they will hear the music of some of Cape Breton's best known musicians.

West Mabou Square Dance
West Mabou Square Dance Hall, 2939 West Mabou Road, Mabou
- SATURDAY 7-10 pm
- Family Dance (all ages)
- Admission $5
The West Mabou Square Dance is famous for its indoor and outdoor dance fairs and the ever-growing collection of filmed photographs donated by Islanders over the years.
Contact: Jimmy & Margaret MacPhee (902) 945-2814

Brook Village Square Dance
Brook Village, 255 Route 352, Brook Village
- MONDAY 7-10 pm
- Adult Dance (all ages)
- Admission $7
- Bar and canteen
The Brook Village dance has been running since Buddy Maclean first started playing at dances.
Contact: Cyril Campbell (902) 945-2735

Scotsville Square Dance
Lake Aneak Volunteer Fire Department Community Hall, 4500 Route 206, Scotsville
- TUESDAY 7-10 pm
- Adult Dance (all ages)
- Admission $7
- Bar
Enjoy a night of lively music and dance with some of the county's best known musicians.
Contact: Ronnie Collins (902) 790-2790 or Mike Gillis (902) 790-2040

The Barn at the Nor' East Inn
The Barn, 891 Egbert Road, Margaree Valley
- WEDNESDAY 7-10 pm
- Adult Dance (all ages)
- Admission $5
Contact: Stu & Sherry Bell (902) 537-2332

The Glencoe Mills Square Dance
Glencoe Mills Hall, 624 Upper Glencoe Road, Glencoe Mills
THURSDAY 7-10 pm
- Adult Dance (all ages)
- Admission $5
Contact: Stu & Sherry Bell (902) 537-2332

The Glencoe Mills square dance has been running for decades and has many years been Buddy MacKenzie's regular Thursday gig.

CEILIDHS
A ceilidh (Scottish Gaelic word pronounced /key-lid/) is a gathering for traditional music, dance, stories, and songs.

The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre
See Arts & Cultural Centres directions and contact info.
- SUNDAY 3-6 pm
- WEDNESDAY 7:30 pm-9 pm

Father John Rankin Cultural Centre
See Arts & Cultural Centres directions and contact info.
- TUESDAY 7:30 pm-9 pm
- Thurday 8 pm

La Place Des Arts Père Arsenée Chiasson
See Arts & Cultural Centres directions and contact info.
- WEDNESDAY 7-10 pm
- Thurday 8 pm

Inverness Fire Hall
11560 Route 19, Central Avenue, Inverness
- THURSDAY 7-10 pm
- Adult Dance (all ages)
- Admission $5
Contact: Alice Freeman (902) 790-2534 or The Bear Paw Gift and Crafts Shop

The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre
See Arts & Cultural Centres directions and contact info.
- THURSDAY 7-10 pm
- Adult Dance (all ages)
- Admission $5
Contact: Alice Freeman (902) 790-2534 or The Bear Paw Gift and Crafts Shop

The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre
See Arts & Cultural Centres directions and contact info.
- TUESDAY 7-10 pm
- Adult Dance (all ages)
- Admission $5
Contact: Alice Freeman (902) 790-2534 or The Bear Paw Gift and Crafts Shop

The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre
See Arts & Cultural Centres directions and contact info.
- TUESDAY 7-10 pm
- Adult Dance (all ages)
- Admission $5
Contact: Alice Freeman (902) 790-2534 or The Bear Paw Gift and Crafts Shop
APPENDIX C – Map of Cape Breton Island

© Integral Geomatics. Used with permission.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Beaton, Margie. Interview with Kathryn Alexander. Recording. Gaelic College at St. Ann’s, NS, August 12, 2013.


Cape Breton District Health Authority. 2010. “The Cape Breton District Health Authority


Currie, Jenna. Interview with Kathryn Alexander. Email communication. Fortress of Louisbourg, NS/Riverside, CA, September 24, 2013.


Freeman, Alice. Interview with Kathryn Alexander. Notation. Inverness, NS, August 15, 2013.


Johnson, Sherry. 2006. “‘If You Want to Win, You've Got to Play it Like a Man’: Music, Gender, and Value in Ontario Fiddle Contests.” In *Play It Like It Is: Fiddle and Dance Studies from Around the North Atlantic*, edited by I. Russell and M.A. Alburger. Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen.


Rankin, Joyce. Interview with Kathryn Alexander. Notation. Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS, August 23, 2012.


_____.2012b. *Focus on Geography Series, 2011 Census*. Statistics Canada


g154972-i830Cape_Breton_Island_Nova_Scotia.html> (accessed 24 August 2013).


