

DESCENDED FROM THE DARK FAIRY

TRANSFORMATIONS & CONTINUITIES IN
SCOTTISH HIGHLAND CLANS



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Bachelor of Arts (Psychology), Majoring in Anthropology

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Degree

Deakin University
Faculty of Arts and Education



October 2020

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Memorandum

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Date: 11 June, 2020

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I would like to thank the Clan Macfie participants who shared their time and thoughts with me, and helped me feel less alone in my feelings and experiences of visiting Colonsay. I hope this project is an interesting resource for you.

Thank you to my grandfather, Graeme McPhee, for teaching me about the Clan.

Finally, to my most beloved humans: Jos, Yeshnaya, Georgie, and Jess. Thank you for your patience with my absence through the process of writing this, and for always supporting and believing in me.

DEDICATION

'To the fairies we are the dead and they are the immortals.'

– John MacInnes

I dedicate this thesis to my ancestors

The Macfies of Colonsay and the Pijao de Tolima

May you always be remembered and your stories always be told.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| ABSTRACT..... | viii |
| DISPOSITION OF THESIS..... | ix |
| GLOSSARY OF GAELIC TERMS..... | x |
| PREFACE | xi |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| | |
| 1. A HISTORY OF THE COLLECTIVE ARRANGEMENT OF THE SCOTTISH HIGHLAND CLANS..... | 4 |
| The Rise of the Highland Clan System..... | 5 |
| The Collective Organisation of the Highland Clans..... | 6 |
| The Role of Exchange in Cohering the Clan..... | 8 |
| The Reformation and The Statutes of Iona..... | 10 |
| The Decline of the Clans..... | 13 |
| | |
| 2. SEALS ARE PEOPLE TOO..... | 17 |
| Fictive Kinship with the Nonhuman in Clan Macfie..... | 18 |
| Analysis of Highland Relations with Nonhumans..... | 19 |
| The Decline of the Fairies..... | 23 |
| | |
| 3. RE-COLLECTING THE PAST..... | 27 |
| A Historical Narrative of Clan Macfie..... | 28 |
| Continuities and Transformations..... | 31 |
| Belonging and Connection..... | 34 |
| | |
| CONCLUSION | 39 |
| | |
| REFERENCES..... | 41 |
| | |
| APPENDICES..... | 46 |
| Appendix A: The Seal Wife Tale..... | 46 |
| Appendix B: A Comparison of Selkie & Tsunki Wife Tales | 48 |


FORM C – ABSTRACT

Summary of thesis submitted for the degree of: Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

Please give a brief summary of the contents of the thesis to be submitted for examination (200 words):

This thesis investigates the collective arrangement of historical and contemporary Highland clans, and their relationships with nonhumans. Analysis of historical sources, folklore, ethnography, and primary data related to the Highland clans indicates that the clans feature holistic, animist, and individualist aspects, challenging assumptions of homogeneity in both Western and nonmodern societies. Human-human and human-nonhuman sociality is explored in light of Dumont's and Descola's analyses of social organisation and structure. This thesis is concerned with the factors that transformed a clan-focused society into an individual-focused one, and how this transformation contributed to the disassembly of the Highland clan system and animist relations with nonhumans who were tied to place. The effects of mass displacement and alienation from people, place, and the nonhuman reverberate through time. As clans re-gathered in the form of Clan Societies within modern individualized societies, some traits of the old Highland clans have endured, and others have not. Today's clansfolk in the Scottish diaspora have not maintained relations with nonhumans. However, reconnecting with other historical aspects of the Highland clans allows present-day members of the Macfie Clan Society of Australia to find a sense of belonging and connection that they feel is lacking in the wider individualistic culture.

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GLOSSARY OF GAELIC TERMS

Ceanncath: Clan commander and head of the clan when a clan has no chief.

Cèilidh: Highland communal social gatherings.

Clachans: Extended kinship-based farming hamlets.

Dùthchas: Inviolable unwritten Gaelic right of communal territorial possession of clan lands.

Fir-tacsa: Highland clan gentry usually related to the chief.

Mansren* or *manred: Written contacts to safeguard against the chief acting arbitrarily.

Runrig: Collective, rotational form of farming practiced in Highland clan communities.

Selkie: Supernatural seal-folk who could transform from seal to human.

***Sìth/shìth* (pronounced shee), or *sìthichean* (*plural*, pronounced sheechun):** Highland fairies.

Sorning: Gaelic custom of offering meals and lodging to travellers, particularly to chiefs.

Tanist: The heir apparent to the clan chief.

Tanistry: The Gaelic system of law used for the succession to clan chief.

Toradh: The benefit, profit, or fruit of a thing.

Wadset: Feudal loan.

A NOTE ON SPELLING

The inconsistent Anglicisation of Gaelic clan names and lack of English spelling conventions for centuries has resulted in each Highland clan having numerous spellings. Clan Macfie has 43 variations (Clan Macfie 2019), some closer to the original Gaelic MacDhubhShith (McDuffy), and others closer to the official Clan spelling taken from the first clan members to register a coat of arms (MacPhee 1975). When referring to the Clan throughout the thesis, I will use the official clan spelling, Macfie, unless I am quoting a text in which case I will use the same spelling as the source. Individuals will be referred to with the variation of the Clan name they are recorded as having.

PREFACE

My mother is a Macfie, and I grew up with the understanding that being a Macfie meant more than just having a particular surname. It meant that I was part of a group known as a clan. Traces of this lineage has left its mark on memories throughout my life: my grandfather sharing snippets of the Clan's history with me, going to my uncle's wedding with pipers and the Clan tartan, and feeling emotional, for reasons unknown to me, whenever I would hear bagpipes. While I look like my Colombian father and have lived in Australia since I was four, being a part of this Scottish clan was something that was always in the background of my being, despite being rarely found in the culture around me. I felt as much a Macfie as I did Latina, and both of these things gave me comfort living in a country in which I had never experienced a sense of home or belonging.

The inspiration for this thesis was two experiences I had while visiting Scotland in 2019. For many years I had dreamt of visiting Colonsay and Oronsay, the tiny Hebridean islands that were the ancestral homeland of the Clan. But nothing prepared me for the profound experience I had when I arrived. I wrote in my journal at the time:

I took a two-hour ferry from Oban, going through these beautiful, wild-looking, intense green islands, asking myself why the hell did my ancestors choose to live out here. Even though I know the Hebrides have been inhabited throughout history and are inhabited now, this place doesn't look friendly to humans. I fell asleep on the ferry, and I woke up suddenly, not knowing how long I had been asleep or where I was. The first thing I saw was this island. This island that was so welcoming and gentle and soft, and I knew straight away in my heart without any doubt: that's the island, that's Colonsay. Even though I have never seen pictures, I knew. Now I get why my ancestors chose this island as their home. It feels like home, the home I've been missing. It's like a paradise.

I had not expected to experience such a strong sense of recognition and belonging. While the island was undoubtedly beautiful, when I was there, I had a feeling far beyond the ordinary, bordering on mystical. Happy coincidences, good luck, and strange synchronicities followed me for the week I stayed there. I was always in the right place, at the right time, meeting the right people to make my experience as perfect as it could be. I wondered if this kind of experience was isolated to my own eccentricities or if other people who felt connected to a clan had similar encounters.

One thing that had particularly interested me about Clan Macfie was its connection to the supernatural nonhuman realm. I had read that the name meant ‘son of the dark fairy’ and was always fascinated by that concept. I also read that the Clan claimed descent from a magical shapeshifting seal woman known as a selkie. Reading Scottish folklore was an interest, but interactions with fairies and selkies were phenomena that I had relegated to the past. The second experience in Scotland that motivated the themes I explore in this thesis challenged my assumptions. From my journal:

On the way to Colonsay, we visited Aberfoyle and the famous Doon Hill, a place that the locals say the fairy folk still live. The woman at the info centre adamantly assured us that the fairies are very real and shared her experiences with them. The locals had been devastated when the council had recently cleared away years of offerings or ‘clouties’ from the tree without community consultation, and she was nearly in tears as she told us this. She suggested that raspberries were the best offering to leave for them because they were biodegradable and, most importantly, the fairies loved them. It was a perfect Scottish summer’s day, drizzling and overcast as we walked up the forested hill, dotted with colourful little houses and doors built into the base of trees that served as fairy altars. The peak of the hill was crowned by a large Scots Pine tree in the centre of a grove. It was covered in all manner of offerings to the fairies, but mostly colourful strips of fabric tied to the tree. After leaving raspberries around the base of the tree, I felt a sudden very strange and strong sense that I should leave my treasured silver ring with the Sanskrit word ‘*shanti*’ on it. Somewhat perplexed but going with the flow, I put it in a hole at the base of the tree, wishing for the fairies continued existence and for humans to never forget them.

Later that day on Colonsay, fortune favoured me by putting me in the path of a prominent Clan Macfie member who was also visiting the island for a few days. He had a wealth of knowledge he shared with me, and at some point, we had an in-depth discussion about the etymology of the Gaelic form of the Clan name, which I had never looked into before. *Shìth*, the Gaelic word for fairy, actually means peace and the fairies are given that name because of their unearthly silence. *Shanti*, the word on the ring that I left for the fairies, also means peace. Never one to ignore a coincidence, I stopped thinking of fairies in terms of the past that day. I wanted to understand human relationships with them, and how these relationships have, or have not, persisted to this day.



Doon Hill, Aberfoyle, Scotland (Wildwood 2012).

INTRODUCTION

In some ways, the fairies have gone; this thesis seeks to understand how and why, and to examine the social organisation of the humans that interacted with them. This thesis is an exploration of the collective arrangement of historical and contemporary Highland clans and their relations with the nonhuman: what held them together, disassembled or transformed them, and helped them endure so that they could come together again in modern, individualist societies. Some of the ideas presented in this thesis challenge assumptions that all Western societies can be thought of in a homogenous way in terms of individualism, or that all nonmodern societies might be operating according to a holist structure. Placed within a certain literature on social organisation and structure, the collective arrangements of Scottish Highland clans present an opportunity for further exploration: while they were not individualistic in the sense of modern techno-capitalist societies, they were also not holistic in the same way as Dumont's (1980) analysis of Hindu caste society. This thesis explores how an assumed Western community incorporated relations with the nonhuman, demonstrated characteristics of holist collective arrangements, yet at the same time, incorporated aspects of the value of the 'individual' in its historical structure. Using an investigation of the journey of a specific clan, Clan Macfie, this thesis also seeks to understand how the Clans's collective arrangements have changed over time, and to understand the re-gathering of the Clan in the form of Clan Societies in the diaspora. Within the thesis, the ideas of holism and individualism will be referred to, and will not be done uncritically. Kapferer (2010) demonstrates that holism has multiple meanings and literature associated with it, and the notion of individualism is the same. I will be using several registers of these terms: sometimes informed by Louis Dumont, Phillipe Descola, Crawford Brough Macpherson, Paul Basu, and others, and sometimes by common use.

Fictive kinship, gift exchange, and mutual obligations between the clansfolk and the chief were the basis of the Highland clan system. The Highland clans had different language, dress, customs, social structure, and economic system to the Lowlands. These differences contributed to a more holistic collective arrangement within the Highland clans. As Lowland culture began to dominate all of Scotland by way of Crown laws targeting the Highlands and the introduction of feudalism and a market economy, the individualist configuration (Dumont 1983) became dominant in the clan chiefdom. The seeds of individualism did exist in the Highland clans in the form of renunciate priests in the Celtic Christian order, and even earlier

in the form of the Celtic hero tradition (Dumont 1983, Henderson & Cowan 2001) however, the unfamiliar social and market forces greatly amplified the individualist tendency. Clan leaders acquired all the available land through feudal loan practices, leaving the ordinary clansfolk with nothing but their labour to sell, and transformed their ancient kinship bonds into a landlord-tenant relationship. Many chiefs then removed clansfolk from their once communally possessed ancestral lands, sending them off to newly formed colonies on the other side of the world during the Highland Clearances. By this time, the clan chiefs were demonstrating MacPherson's (cited in Breakey 2015) 'ultimate possessive individualism' having little social responsibility, accumulating without limit, and dispossessing and disenfranchising the clansfolk they had once treated as kin.

A discussion of Highland clan social formation that omits the important relations with nonhumans cannot fully describe their society. Investigating one particular clan, Clan Macfie, and its relationship with the nonhuman beings known as fairies and selkies is a means of further exploring the collective arrangements of the Highland clans. Clan Macfie's origin myth regarding descent from a shapeshifting seal woman and their relationships with the dangerous supernatural Highland fairy folk indicates that in the Highlands, certain nonhuman beings were related to as beings with shared mental and emotional capabilities, social norms, and culture. These features of human-nonhuman relations in the Highlands have the structure and characteristics of Descola's (2010) animist collectives. Moving away from a Dumontian analysis, Highland relations with nonhumans are interpreted within the framework of Descola's (2013) animist ontology, which offers a specific analysis of the relations between people and things. As the more collective tribal structure and social norms of the clans could not survive the changes brought on by the social and economic transformation of the Highlands, the modes of communication they once shared with the other tribe-species could no longer be relied upon. The shift from an animist to a naturalist ontology stripped the nonhuman of their personhood and culture, and human-nonhuman relations soon disintegrated. The specificity of place also shaped human relations with fairies and selkies, and removal from those places during the Clearances critically altered the relationships and the existence thereafter of those beings.

After the disassembly of the traditional Highland human-human, and human-nonhuman social relations, clansfolk assimilated to their new home countries. A movement was born to reclaim the official Clan status of Clan Macfie 350 years after it became broken due to the murder of the last chief. Clan Macfie re-gathered in the form of multiple modern Clan

Societies within modern individualised societies across the world. Based on primary data taken from anonymous online surveys and phone interviews with members of the Macfie Clan Society of Australia, the thesis describes the history of the Clan, the structure of the Clan today, the historic features that have carried through, and the ways that Macfies experience belonging in a clan in the context of outmigration and diaspora. While relations with the nonhuman have not been maintained, other historical aspects of the Highland clans endure and keep members bonded to each other. A focus on kinship, pride in genealogy and clan history, and responsibilities to the Clan has helped sustain strong social ties within its current form. The strongest feelings of connection to the Clan are often experienced during ancestral pilgrimages to sites of historical importance to the Clan or a clan member's family. The clans have undoubtedly transformed, yet they still provide care, comfort, and security to their members by offering a greater sense of connection and belonging than is the norm in societies that value the individual above the collective.

CHAPTER ONE

A HISTORY OF THE COLLECTIVE ARRANGEMENT OF THE SCOTTISH HIGHLAND CLANS

*Thine own great clan will be with thee,
in every peril thou incurrest...
there's many a warrior in his armour,
who would be ready to rise
when thou wouldst proclaim...
— Duncan Ban MacIntyre (1748)*

This chapter offers a historical description of the Highland clans to give insight into the collective arrangements that characterised them. The Scottish Highland clans were one of the last tribal societies to exist in Northern Europe (Calloway 2008, Clifford-Vaughn 1974, Ommer 1986) and were organised differently from Lowland and English communities. The Highland clans functioned more interdependently and collectively than their Southern neighbours, demonstrating that even in so-called Western society, important differences in social organisation and structure existed until relatively recently. Fundamental to Highland clan organisation were kinship – literal and fictive – and military bonds. By analysing historical sources describing the Highland clans, this chapter suggests that, at one level, the clan could be viewed as a holistic society in that the clan was given a higher ideological value than the individual. Nevertheless, even though the Highland clans did have an open expression of hierarchy, this hierarchy was not ordered by an encompassing value that defined what was included and excluded (Kapferer 2010). The caste system had the value of purity, which both enclosed and ordered the society (Dumont 1980). No such value was found in the clan system. This chapter also discusses the individualistic features that existed in the clan before an important event – the Statutes of Iona and ensuing feudalistic economic changes – pushed the clans further into individualistic ways of relating and organising, eventually uprooting many clansfolk from their homeland and scattering them across the world.

THE RISE OF THE HIGHLAND CLAN SYSTEM

The Scottish clan system emerged in Scotland during the Norse occupation of the Highlands between the 11th and 14th centuries in the form of extended tribal kinship groups with mutual obligations between tribal leaders and members (McPhee 2006). Clans were ‘non-lineal or cognatic systems with the formation of kindreds or kin groups linked by tracing common descent through any common ancestor’ (Godelier 1979, p. 24). The earlier Irish Gaelic word for clan was *cinel*, meaning kindred, and the later Scottish Gaelic term *clann* means children, indicating that notions of kinship were essential to the clans (Basu 2005, MacDonald 1995). Many different clans arose from each of the different ethnic groups in both Highland and Lowland Scotland at the time, principally the Celtic Scots, the Norse, and the Normans (McPhee 2006). There was initially little difference between Highland and Lowland culture until 1058 CE when King Malcolm III married an Anglo-Saxon Noble, and Scottish Monarchs based in the Lowlands became more culturally and linguistically aligned with their English Anglo-Saxon counterparts (McPhee 2006, Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967). This cultural divide grew with the introduction of feudalism into the Lowlands by David I in the 12th century (Barrow 1956). Although there is no universal Highland clan system, some generalisations can be made. Tribal leaders distributed a level of autonomous authority to sons and close male relatives, as well as rights to land within the tribal territory in exchange for military services and loyalty, keeping extended kinship ties strong (McPhee 2006, Stewart 2016). Alliances and strategic intermarriage were practised with men marrying exogamously and women endogamously allowing clans to ‘grow down’ into a territory (Basu 2005). The clans came to be based on military and fictive kinship bonds, and the power of a clan was dependent on how many men a chief could call to war (Clifford-Vaughan 1974).

Highland clans may have started as literal kinship groups with members related to each other, but they were ultimately dynamic, changing as needed, and responding to socioeconomic factors (Basu 2005). By the middle ages, clans had long since converted from a kinship group to a group in which the members that supported a particular chief militarily often took the name of that chief (McPhee 2006). This change made it essential for clans to maintain an ‘ideology of kinship’ (Basu 2005, p. 128) as a way of cohering the collective. Fictive kinship became the basis of the clan bond as outsiders – from smaller clans or outside the clan system altogether – joined larger clans for various reasons, seeking the protection of a clan chief. In return, they often took the chief’s name and offered the chief their loyalty, military service,

and their best livestock (McPhee 2006). Clan chiefs typically practised the ‘flattering of clan members’ (Stewart 2016) by recognizing them all as his kin as a means to foster the bonds of fictive kinship.

COLLECTIVE ORGANISATION OF THE HIGHLAND CLANS

In general, Highland clans had a patriarchal, hierarchical structure. The clan chief was the military leader, judicial authority, and symbolic father of the clan (McPhee 2006). Older Gaelic terms for clan chief are *toiseach* and *ceann-cineal* (Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967). Clans had their own form of gentry, made up of chieftains and important members of the clan known as the *fir-tacsa* who maintained the clan loyalty solidarity behind the chief and governed matters concerning clan lands (Stewart 2016). Ordinary clansfolk made up the general body of the clan and the majority of a chief’s military force (McPhee 2006, Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967). The power of the chief was subject to checks and balances within the clan, and chiefs were not allowed to be despots. Clan chiefs shared the decision-making process with the clan elders, no matter how distantly related, and the clan elders could elect and dismiss chiefs. Written contracts known as *mansren* or *manred* existed to safeguard against the chief acting arbitrarily, and the clan had the power to act against the chief, which happened on occasion (Clifford-Vaughan 1974, Ommer 1986). The clan hierarchy, based on military leadership with a counterbalance of power in the council of clan elders, was similar to the Amerindian tribal tradition of a war chief (Clastres 1977), albeit a hereditary and permanent one due to the almost constant state of inter-clan warfare in the Highlands. Clansfolk were not ‘slaves to the caprice and power of their chiefs... the latter were obliged to pay court, and yield to the will and independent spirit of their clans’ (Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967, p. 24). The clan system had an overarching principle that ‘the clan is higher than the chief’ (MacDonald 1995, p. 13). This principle indicates that the clans were a more holistic, certainly when compared with the more individualistic societies of the Feudal Lowlands and England. Dumont (1983) identified societies as holistic when the group or the whole society is the highest value. The fact that the clan (society) was seen to have a higher value than the chief (individual) points to a holistic element at the heart of the Highland clan system. However, there was no encompassing value ordering the social scale in the same way as found in a holistic Dumontian hierarchy (Dumont 1980).

The higher value placed on the clan over the chief is also evident in succession practices and ideas of justice within the clan. The Gaelic Law of *Tanistry* was the system used for the succession to clan chief. The *Tanist* was the heir apparent to the chief and was an agnate within a clan from two closely-related central families who was the adult son of the chief, or the most respected close male relative. Chiefs were selected based on their ability to lead their people effectively (McPhee 2006). Because there was no private ownership of property in the Highlands (MacDonald 1995) – another example of holism that will be discussed later – a chief inherited responsibility and representation for his clan rather than land or estates like European nobility. Chiefs were responsible for the continuation of clan culture and customs, as well as dispensing justice within the clan. For this reason, the chiefdom could not be passed to a child (McPhee 2006) who would be unable to take the responsibility needed to secure the wellbeing of the whole clan. This system ensured the clan interests as a whole were represented in the selected clan chief, rather than the interests of an individual being fulfilled in the more direct order of succession in the Feudal Lowlands and England. Collective, rather than individual, responsibility was the axiom that governed the idea of justice for the clans. An individual clansman was not perceived as being isolated from the clan he belonged to, but instead, the whole clan existed within each clan member. So, if he were to wrong a member of a different clan, his entire clan was seen as responsible, and revenge could be fulfilled by targeting anyone in his clan. This specific example of the holism found in the clan system led to long-lasting feuds between clans and the continual warfare typical of the Highlands (McPhee 2006).

Duty, danger, and communal celebrations also enhanced the social bonds within the clan. The Celtic system of morality contributed to the coherence of the group by bonding the clan chief with his clansfolk. Many ordinary clansfolk were, however distantly, related to the clan progenitor, assuring them of protection from famine and a share in ancestral lands from a clan chief (Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967). Intermarriage with outsiders who had joined the clan was so commonplace that everyone was eventually perceived to be a clan member (Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967) and received the protection of the chief. The dangers of the outside world also kept the clan together. Those who dared to leave the familiarity and safety of the clan and wander into the wild alone often faced terrifying encounters with supernatural beings of the fairy realm (Henderson & Cowan 2001), which I will cover in more detail in chapter two. Clans bonded socially in gatherings known as *cèilidhs*, where the whole community shared music, dance, song, storytelling, and family history (McPhee 2006). The

pride in genealogy and maintaining strong social bonds with family remained a feature of the clans (McPhee 2006) and has survived even to this day, as I will discuss in chapter three.

THE ROLE OF EXCHANGE IN COHERING THE CLAN

The shared hereditary possession of clan lands, the collective interests of all clan members, and the military obligations of the chief and his clansmen were the foundation of the clan system. It was the duty of the chief to provide for his people, and it was the people's duty to offer their loyalty and military service to the chief (Clifford-Vaughan 1974). There was a mutual obligation between the clan chief and his Clan as well as the sharing of hereditary possession of the clan lands won through military expansion or marital alliances (Ommer 1986). The Highland clans had a pre-capitalist, gift economy with shared ancestral access to land known as *dùthchas* (Basu 2005, Gow 2009, Ommer 1986). Private ownership of property other than movable assets did not originally exist in the clan system (MacDonald 1995). *Dùthchas* was the inviolable and – significantly – unwritten Gaelic right of territorial possession and it gave all clansfolk, regardless of the size of the land they lived on, ‘a permanent stake in the territories pertaining to their clan’ (Gow 2009, p. 28).

In contrast to the Lowlands, England, and most of Europe at the time, the clans were not feudal (Clifford-Vaughn 1974, McPhee 2006, Ommer 1986, Stewart 2016), but instead had a gift economy in which goods and social ties were entangled. This demonstrates that for the Highlands clans, relations to goods and things were subordinated to the social relations within the clan (Dumont 2013). Some Highland clan chiefs were Normans that had adopted the Gaelic way of life after settling in Scotland. They only married other Normans, and it was these Norman chiefs who would introduce feudalism to the Highland clan system (Stewart 2016). Other clans eventually followed. The two systems functioned alongside each other for a while with clansfolk paying rent to Feudal Lords while their loyalty was to the clan chief (Ommer 1986). The impact of feudalism is discussed in the next section. Mauss (1990) defined gift economies as those where goods and services are not traded on the market or bartered but are instead given in gift form with the implicit understanding that reciprocity is delayed to the future. Gift economies create social ties. When goods and services are immediately paid for or exchanged, social connection is not necessary. However, when a gift is expected in return at some unknown future date, a social bond is woven. The Highland clan gift economy manifested in several ways. While the clans lived a mostly subsistence-based

existence, any surplus generated was not sold, but rather redistributed throughout the clan in the form of charity to the needy, gifts, and clan feasts (Ommer 1986). In earlier clan systems, rent was sometimes paid in the form of feasts being held when the chief visited homes of clan members, which occurred regularly to maintain strong social bonds between a chief and his clan (McPhee 2006). In the fictive kinship imaginary of the clans, all members were considered family, and it was the duty of the chief to be accessible, kind, charitable, and hospitable, and clansfolk had a right of access to their chief (McPhee 2006, Stewart 2016). Clan chiefs fostered out their children to be raised by ordinary clansfolk until they came of age. Fostering was considered a great honour and enhanced feelings of community within the clan and strengthened the bonds of fictive kinship between the chiefs and clansfolk (McPhee 2006, Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967).

The Highland clans practised a collective, intracommunal, rotational form of farming known as the *runrig* system where each tenant in a township was allocated different strips of land each year so that no family could have exclusive access to the most fertile land (Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967). The equitable structure of the *runrig* system is another example of the more holistic functioning of the clans. The need for mutual aid in farming the harsh environment of the Highlands ensured that equality was more prevalent in the clans than the rest of Scotland and England (Godelier 1979). Much like the Amazonian Achuar described in Descola's (1994) *In the Society of Nature*, Highland communities were autonomous in terms of production and therefore did not need to maintain harmonious relations with neighbouring clans for trade purposes. The *clachans* (extended kinship-based farming hamlets) and townships in which the Highland clans typically dwelt were autarkic, producing enough in the way of crops and livestock to feed the community, communally gathering peat to heat their homes, milling their grain at communal facilities, as well as building their own houses, making their own clothes, shoes, and pottery, and having important skilled individuals such as blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers, and armourers in every community (McPhee 2006, McPhee 2020, Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967).

In many ways, the clans display features of what Dumont calls a traditional or holistic society, containing 'both inequality and some security for lower orders' (Dumont 1983, p. 103). In the clan system, the hierarchy favoured the chiefs and *fir-tacsa*, granting them a higher rank and guaranteed military support. However, clansfolk also received protection from famine and a share of the ancestral land. The chief was expected to provide land and material assistance to his clansfolk, with pensions and support in the form of livestock and

housing being provided for widows, the elderly, poor, and disabled (Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967). In return, all clansfolk honoured their chief, giving him fealty, and the clansmen were expected to provide military service if the chief needed to go to war to expand the clan territory, take revenge on behalf of a dishonoured clan member, or protect the clan's interests.

THE REFORMATION AND THE STATUTES OF IONA

Two key historical events in the Scottish Highlands sowed the seeds of individualism in the Highland clan system. The Reformation and the Statutes of Iona enabled subsequent Crown policies to further push the clans away from a more holistic society towards a more individualistic one. The stirrings of modern individualism, albeit in a different form, can be found in the Christian doctrine, but it took 1700 years of Christian domination for it to fully take hold (Dumont 1983). Saint Columba and his monks introduced Celtic Christianity to Scotland and eventually converted all the groups residing in Scotland to Christianity by the middle of the 7th century (Clarkson 2012). Catholicism followed. In India's holistic caste society, the way to liberation is to become a *Sannyasin* – to step outside of society and renounce it. This tradition eliminates the social interdependence found in holistic societies (Dumont 1980). This religious institution is similar to the path of worldly renunciation taken by Christian monks. Dumont posits that the Christian monk institution is the beginning of the type of individualism – individual as value – that we see in the modern West. The individual as value is apart from and beyond the social and political world (Dumont 1983). However, this tradition of stepping outside of one's society and the interdependent relations therein existed in Celtic culture before Christianity was introduced in the form of the Celtic hero tradition. The Celtic hero was marked as separate from his society with certain taboos placed on the use of his name. The Celtic hero was the 'eternal solitary' who would set out on a quest filled with perils to fulfil his territorial guardian purpose before returning home to his community (Sjoestedt 2000). The salvation of the community depended on the hero individuating and stepping outside of society. Consequentially, the seeds of individualism in Celtic societies may actually stretch further back than Christian monastic traditions.

After the Reformation swept through England and Scotland and Catholicism was outlawed in 1560, the Calvinist Presbyterian religion gained a stronger foothold in Scotland than Protestantism (MacDonald 1995, Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967). The effect of this was the embracing of Calvin's doctrine, which lacked the mystical and emotional aspects of

Christianity. For Calvin, God represented will and was only accessible through reason rather than love. Calvin identified the individual will with the will of God, meaning that the exertion of one's personal will was in pure accordance with God and God's will on earth (Dumont 1983). Calvin's theory unified the antagonistic worldly and renunciate elements in Christianity: 'the individual is now in the world, and the individualist value rules without restriction or limitation' (Dumont 1983, p. 19). The popularity of Presbyterianism in the Highlands may have further fostered the growth of the individualist revolution wherein the major value shifts from society as a whole to the individual, who is seen to be representative of all of humanity (Dumont 1970).

The unification of the Scottish and English Crowns in 1603 under James VI, with its Scottish centre of power in the Lowlands, gave the Crown the means to finally wipe out clan feuding in the Lowland area. However, it did little to help the culturally distinct Highlanders because the Scottish nobility was not Gaelic. The Highlanders, with their own language, regular inter-clan battles and cattle raiding, disregard for the State's laws, and refusal to place Monarchical authority above that of the clan chief were seen as 'utterly barbarous' by James VI (McPhee 2006, Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967) and he intended to bring the Highlands under his control. To this end, in 1608, he had twelve powerful clan chiefs from the Western Islands summoned for a meeting and then abducted, separated, and imprisoned for ten months until they agreed to the Crown's terms. They were taken to Iona where they submitted to the Crown's authority, swore fealty, and signed the Statutes of Iona in 1609 with the purpose of civilising the Highlanders. Donald McPhie, the Prior of Oronsay and a member of Clan Macfie – the clan I will discuss in more detail in later chapters – was one of the individuals forced to sign the document and disrupt the ancient Highland way of life (McPhee 2006, Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967).

The Statutes of Iona were introduced to give the Crown authority over Highland chiefs and eradicate Gaelic culture and tradition. The terms of the Statutes were:

- a. Church to be maintained and ecclesiastical discipline established;
- b. Inns to be established;
- c. Military retinues to be limited;
- d. Sorning — the exaction of free maintenance by those retinues — to be abolished;
- d. The sale of wine and whisky to be banned;
- e. Chiefs and leading clansmen to educate their eldest sons in the Lowlands;
- f. Carrying of firearms to be suppressed;

- g. Gaelic bards to be suppressed; and
- h. All this to be enforced by chiefs arresting offenders and handing them over to the authorities. (Stewart 2016, pp. 14-15)

When reading the terms, it becomes clear that the Statutes were an attempt to strike at the heart of Highland culture and the collective nature of the clan system. Educating clan leaders' sons away from the clan in the Lowlands disrupted the social familiarity between clan leaders and ordinary clansfolk that was so shocking to the English and Lowland aristocracy (Clifford-Vaughn 1974). Heirs to the chiefdom would spend extended periods away from the clan they would eventually represent the interests of, and began assimilating to the aristocratic distance of the Lowlands. Gaelic Bards were part of an ancient Celtic tradition of poets and musicians who transmitted clan histories, genealogies, and military deeds via song, verse, and poem. Their actions were banned and punishable after the Statutes of Iona were introduced, meaning many clan histories were lost as they were transmitted orally and not written down (McPhee 2006), just as the *dùthchas* were unwritten. The abolishment of *sorning*, the Gaelic custom of offering meals and lodging to travellers, particularly chiefs, in favour of forcing landowners to set up inns turned the sociality inherent in the hospitality of their gift economy into an asocial commercial transaction. Further laws introduced in 1616 forced clan chiefs to regularly attend Privy Council in the Lowlands and consequently spend more time away from their clan. All heirs to the chief and clan leaders had to learn and speak English if their title was to be recognised as legitimate in the eyes of the Crown (Stewart 2016), seeding a social and cultural divide between clan leaders and clansfolk. The Crown also began granting titles for the private ownership of land that traditionally belonged to rebellious clans, to clans who were loyal to the Crown (McPhee 2006).

Economic changes within Scotland had the effect of further disassembling the sociality that held Highland clans together, and the clan gentry began acting from a place of possessive individualism (Calloway 2008). Possessive individualism describes the more market-oriented, accumulative, individualistic, and reason-based way of thinking with a greater focus on property rights and a lowered sense of responsibility for others (Breakey 2015). In line with ancient Celtic tradition, cattle could be privately owned by individuals and were the true indication of wealth and prestige for Highland clans (Clarkson 2012, Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967, Ommer 1986). In the 17th century, Clan *fir-tacsa* began to be exposed to Lowland markets where they could sell their excess cattle and accrue capital. This allowed *fir-tacsa* to lend money in the form of a *wadset* loan to clan members who would in return, give tenure of

the land that was theirs by right of *dùthchas* to the lender as a form of collateral. After 99 years, the *wadset* could be renewed or converted to legal ownership. Until this point, land could not be bought or sold by a chief due to the nature of the hereditary communal possession of clan territory (Gow 2009, Ommer 1986). *Wadset* allowed *fir-tacsas* to convert the relationship to land from one of the communal access of *dùthchas* to a feudal, state-sanctioned, individually owned commodity. The effect was that ‘certain lineages were transformed into a dominant aristocracy by gradually gaining control over other groups’ access to communal resources and... came to control the management of these resources’ (Godelier 1979, p. 24). The more holistic functioning of the clan was altered into a rank system based on wealth, relations between clan leaders and clansfolk were transformed in a legal landlord-tenant relationship, and greater class differentiation followed. The practice of *wadset* ultimately increased the individualistic tendency in clan leaders and disrupted the ancient social bonds within the clans: ‘limited though they were, these individualistic tendencies came into conflict with the communalistic ideals of the old clan system, and became the Achilles heel of the system’ (Ommer 1986, p 130).

THE DECLINE OF THE CLANS

*Yesterday I was on the moor,
and grave reflections haunted me:
that absent were the well-loved friends
who used to roam the waste with me;
since the mountain, which I little thought
would suffer transformation,
has now become a sheep-run,
the world, indeed, has cheated me.*

— Duncan Ban MacIntyre (1802)

The process of cultural and economic integration with the Lowlands essentially transformed the clan Chieftdom into a Norman feudal aristocracy (Stewart 2016), and broke the social bonds within the clans. Although in the eyes of the Crown, these new laws gave more power and legitimate land ownership to the chiefs, they also had the effect of burdening the chiefs financially who then began to think of their clansfolk as tenants rather than kin. Lawyers with no deep sense of kinship to clansfolk were left to manage estates and draw up tenancies,

leading to evictions, and a deeper rupture in the social connection between the chief and the clan (Stewart 2016). Such a transformation was inevitable after the shift towards possessive individualism as ‘utility-maximizers holding capital in a class-divided society will endorse and comply with a sovereign that enforces market rules’ (Breakey 2015, p. 7). Inter-clan violence began to decrease as chiefs became more concerned with national rather than clan issues (Stewart 2016). The practice of fosterage of the clan chief’s children to ordinary clansfolk that enhanced feelings of community slowly changed into a more symbolic one in which only important clansfolk were given the honour of providing some financial assistance to the fostered child, without raising them as their own (Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967). While the social changes within the clans had slowly become the norm, many Highland chiefs remained unhappy about the political changes.

In a final act of defiance against England, a group of powerful Highland chiefs hoped to reinstate the Stuart line to the English throne, perhaps naively hoping Scotland would fare better under a King with historical ties to their country. These Jacobite rebellions culminated in the disastrous Battle of Culloden in 1746 and were the death knell for most clans as they finally lost their ‘ancient autonomy’ (Stewart 2016). McPhee (2020) describes the ruinous aftermath for the clans: leaders were executed for treason and survivors, as well as innocent women and children, were hunted down and killed. The rest were imprisoned or sent to the British colonies as indentured servants. Farms and houses were burned. The Crown seized the land and estates of the clan chiefs who participated and the proceeds from the estates sold were used to civilise the Highlanders. Three laws were passed in response to Culloden in 1747 and were a devastating blow to an already weakening clan system. The Act of Proscription, or ‘Black Act’, was aimed at finally eradicating Highland culture. It outlawed the wearing of Tartan, gatherings like traditional Highland games, and suppressed teaching the Gaelic language. The Disarming Act of the same year made owning weapons of any kind illegal in some regions of the Highlands. The Heritable Jurisdictions Act abolished the ancient Scottish hereditary judiciary powers. It forced the Scots to yield to the legal authority of the English courts giving clan chiefs no legal power over their own clansfolk, rendering the clan system functionally redundant (McPhee 2020).

Changes to the modes of production in the 18th century also affected the social bonds of the clans. As agriculture in the Highlands became commercialised and industrialised, it became necessary to reorganise the individually owned land, which led to the relocation of people (Calloway 2008). The traditionally unfenced and communally distributed open fields of the

runrig system were demarcated into bounded, fenced holdings in the enclosure movement (McPhee 2020). The Crofting system was introduced and divided communities, clans and *clachans* into small individual family plots, a traumatic and marginalising experience for people who had been encultured for generations into a communal way of life with each member, from the chief to the beggars, having an integral role in the holistic functioning of the clan (Ommer 1986). Landlords forced tenants onto smaller blocks of land and encouraged them to grow potatoes instead of their traditional crops, leading to the catastrophic potato famines of 1846 and 1847 (McPhee 2006). As the social kinship bond between the chief and his clansfolk had already converted into a mere landlord and tenant relationship, the chief's ancient yet disintegrating obligations to the overpopulated, poverty-stricken, and starving clansfolk became a financial liability (Clifford-Vaughn 1974). That which MacPherson (cited in Breakey 2015) predicted as the inexorable result of possessive individualism came to pass. By the time of the Highland Clearances, most clan leaders were demonstrating ultimate possessive individualism. They had become extreme utility maximisers who had acquired all of the available clan lands through *wadset* loans, leaving the ordinary clansfolk with nothing but their labour to sell (Breakey 2015). Chiefs who still felt responsible for the wellbeing of their tenants and tried to protect them from the famine and poverty that was devastating the Highlands did not fare well. Norman McLeod, the Chief of Clan McLeod, vowed to protect his clansfolk/tenants, created employment opportunities on his estate, and spent £13,000 on famine relief. For his kindness he was rewarded with bankruptcy and a £3 a week salary as a clerk in London (McPhee 2020). The new economic system rewarded possessive individualists and had little room for those who held onto the old collective responsibility of the clans. When it became more profitable to keep the land for grazing sheep, mass evictions of many chiefs' former kinsfolk from their ancestrally shared lands inevitably followed (McPhee 2020).

The less fortunate clansfolk were faced with the devastating choice to face further marginalisation and poverty or to emigrate to the USA, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand. Having lost their community, their *dùthchas*, and the close kinship bonds between the chief and the clan, many chose the latter. The Clearances obliterated what was left of clan culture and could only have occurred in the context of the destruction of the more holistic social ties between the chief and his clansfolk (Ommer 1986, Stewart 2016). By the late 18th century, the changes had created the effect the Crown had long desired:

‘The clans retain little now of their original character, their ferocity of temper is softened, their military ardor is extinguished, their dignity of independence is depressed, their contempt of government subdued, and the reverence for chiefs abated. Of what they had before the last conquest of their country, there remain only their language and their poverty. Their language is attacked on every side.’ (Johnson 1810, pp. 93-94)

The clan’s collective arrangement, once based on fictive kinship, mutual aid, gift exchange, military obligations, shared access to lands, and the idea that the clan was above the chief, did not survive the changes brought on by Crown policies, new individualistic market forces, and mass migration. The factors contributing to the decline of the clans ultimately led to the break up of their holistic society, might seem to have transformed it into an individualistic one. In synchrony with these transformations within the clan, another social bond that, for centuries, was intimately tied to the daily lives of Highland folk also diminished; these relationships were with the nonhuman selkies and fairies. While most Highland clansfolk had experiences with these supernatural beings, Clan Macfie’s fairy related etymology and origin myth claiming descent from a selkie make this clan a special case with which to examine the relations between Scottish Highland clans and the nonhuman, and offer further insight into the collective arrangement of the Highland clans.

CHAPTER TWO

SEALS ARE PEOPLE TOO

'Look, Iain, that's a queer creature. That's a queer kind of woman,' he said, 'I hope you're no thinkin that mebbe you and she can get together, because her opinions is not the same as mine... She loves those creatures that destroys everything we fought for, destroys wir nets and wir things.'
'But Angus,' he said, 'the seals are people just like you and me, they need tae live, they need tae eat!'

- An oral selkie tale from the West Coast of Scotland (Williamson 1992, p. 52)

Social relations in the Highlands were not limited to the human sphere, making it necessary to examine relations with the nonhuman to better understand the collective arrangement of the Highland clans and the factors that eventually transformed those arrangements. For this reason, this chapter examines Highland human relations with the nonhuman beings known as fairies (Gaelic: singular – *sìth*, plural – *sìthichean*) and selkies, who were races of supernatural beings intimately tied with the daily life of Highland people for centuries. Historically, fairies first appear in the lore and poetry of Scottish Bard and Prophet Thomas the Rhymer in the late 13th century (Henderson & Cowan 2001). Fairies in various forms are found throughout Celtic cultures yet the Highland *sìthichean* were considered the most dangerous and terrifying, and human relations with fairies lingered longest in the Highlands (Campbell 1900, Evans-Wentz 1911, Henderson & Cowan 2001). Selkies, or the seal-folk, were another type of supernatural being more commonly found in the West coast and Islands of Scotland (Thomson 2010, Williamson 1992). To the inhabitants of pre-industrial Scotland, the existence of *sìthichean* and selkies was a certainty (Kirk 2007). Knowledge about nonhuman *sìthichean* and selkies was transmitted through personal interactions with the beings and through folklore that was shared at *cèilidhs* and other communal social gatherings (Henderson & Cowan 2001). Folklore is one of the primary means through which cohesive group identity is formed, symbols are transmitted, the stability of culture maintained, and it contains vital cultural information about behaviour, belief, morality, relationships, the environment, and the supernatural world (Dundes 1984, Henderson & Cowan 2001). As such, it is an important source to delve into, being one of the elements that held the collective arrangement of the Highland clans together. The Scottish Highlands have a rich tradition of oral folklore, often focused on the supernatural, especially about selkies and *sìthichean*.

FICTIVE KINSHIP WITH THE NONHUMAN IN CLAN MACFIE

This thesis takes as its focus a specific example of a Highland clan: Clan Macfie. Clan Macfie is one of the most ancient clans and had a social and material existence typical of the Highland clans described in the previous chapter (MacPhee 1975). Clan Macfie has long been thought to have closer ties to the nonhuman, through the clan's origin stories and folklore, and the Clan name. Clan Macfie is one of the several Highland clans that claim descent from a nonhuman selkie (MacPhee 1975) as part of the imaginary of its origins. Selkies are therianthrope supernatural beings that can change from seal to human with the aid of their magical sealskin (Heddle 2016). Selkies are native to the Scottish Highland coastal areas and islands, and they are more benevolent than the *sithichean*. Selkie tales were orally transmitted, and these encounters were never presented as myths, but as anecdotal true encounters, told in the context of real people and places bringing them closer to everyday life (Møllegaard 2014). Human-selkie interactions would take place when selkies took human form and came onto the land, or when humans came into contact with seals in the sea. Many of these encounters would involve a kin or affine relationship forming: an orphaned selkie raised by a human family, an adult selkie repaying kindness by looking after lonely human elders without family, a human spending time with selkies and is adopted into the seal society, or a selkie becoming a lover, spouse, and co-parent with a human partner (Thomson 2010, Williamson 1992).

Macfie's selkie origins are exemplified through the seal-wife story and an example of fictive kinship with the nonhuman (Le Couteur 2015). In the Clan's selkie origin story, the clan progenitor comes across a selkie naked in her human form, and he falls in love with her. He steals her sealskin so that she is unable to transform back into a seal and return to the sea where, in older tales, her seal husband and children live. He marries her, has children with her, and she is a good wife and mother. However, her longing for the sea and her original family never disappears. One day, by accident, she finds the hiding place of her sealskin. The moment she finds it, she puts it on and returns to the sea without any hesitation, despite her love for her human children. This human-selkie pairing and their offspring is the beginning of the Clan (Heddle 2016, Le Couteur 2015, McEntire 2010, MacPhee 1975, Møllegaard 2014, Stephens 2015, Thomson 2010, Williamson 1992). For a complete version of the story, please see Appendix A. For Clan Macfie, the selkie origin myth is a nexus where human, nonhuman, gender, and kinship meet and interact (Le Couteur 2015). A common motif found in selkie tales was a kind person telling someone being cruel to seals that seals are people too

and they need to eat and live just like humans (Williamson 1992). These animal spouse type myths were often sex-segregated in traditional tellings. Men would share seal the wife stories, and women told selkie husband tales, demonstrating the importance of these folktales in their role in mirroring and maintaining the social gender roles of the Island cultures (Heddle 2016, Le Couteur 2015, Møllegaard 2014). Selkie tales like the seal-wife taught the receiver to be mindful of their interaction with the nonhuman world because of the social interconnectedness and shared possession of souls that tied human and selkie together (McEntire 2010). This is an important detail that I will address further in the next section.

The Clan's ambiguous etymology further indicates that the nonhuman fairies or *sìthichean* were incorporated into their collective arrangement in the form of ancestors. The origins of the Gaelic form of the name, MacDhubhShìth, go 'far away beyond those even of our old names' (Gillies 1906, p. 82). *Sìth* means peace, but is also used in Gaelic for anything related to the supernatural, especially fairies (Campbell 1900). Due to the double meaning of the word *sìth*, the name translates to either 'son of the black (one of) peace' or 'son of the black fairy' (Black 1943, Gillies 1906, MacDonald 1995, MacPhee 1975). A family with a variant of the name in North Uist in 1900 was recorded as having the name as 'an indication of their familiarity with the fairies in their fairy flights and secret migrations' (Black 1943, p. 493), which lends more weight to the latter translation. Dun Eibhinn, the Iron Age (200-500 CE) hill fort on Colonsay and seat of the Clan Macfie Chiefs for centuries, was long associated with fairies. Sources in 1695 believed it to have been the dwelling place of a smaller race of humans (Henderson & Cowan 2001). Taking Clan Macfie as an example, nonhumans were prominently included in the collective arrangement of the clan. These relations could take affinal or ancestral form and demonstrate that sociality in the Highlands was never solely human-human. To understand the nature of these relations beyond the imaginary of clan fictive kinship and how it was possible for Highlanders engage in relations with nonhuman beings, it is necessary to explore the details of Highland human-nonhuman relations by delving into the general *sìth* and selkie folklore.

ANALYSIS OF HIGHLAND RELATIONS WITH NONHUMANS

In chapter one, I established that the clans were not holistic in a strictly Dumontian sense due to the absence of an encompassing value that ordered their society. In a Dumontian interpretation of social relations, nonhumans are classified as things. Human-human sociality

is the encompassing value for Dumont, and as such, human-human relations order the way that human-thing or human-nonhuman relations are to be understood. The Highland clans – especially Clan Macfie – incorporated the nonhuman in their collective arrangements in a prominent way that suggests nonhuman relations were not encompassed within human-human relations. To build on the observations established thus far in the thesis, while paying attention to the ethnographic examples of Highlander relations with nonhumans in folklore materials, it is necessary to think with a framework that more explicitly integrates nonhuman relations. To do this, it has been useful to refer to Descola's (2013) four different ontologies based on how a particular group perceives the duality of interiority (mind/soul/consciousness) and physicality (body/movement/behaviour) in both human and nonhuman beings. The ontology of a human group influences how humans and nonhumans form collectives and interact. Each ontology favours certain collective configurations unique to each group (Descola 2010). A modern, Western culture fits into the ontology of naturalism. It perceives physicality to be the same as all the matter in the universe: combinations of atoms, molecules and compounds that are the building blocks of all life, human and nonhuman. In contrast, it is interiority that differentiates. Only humans are thought to have minds, souls, self-awareness, and culture. In this configuration, it is difficult to interact with the nonhuman because we do not share that which makes it possible to communicate. The animist ontology is the inverse of this interiority/physicality configuration. In animism, interiority is shared and physicality is what separates us (Descola 2013). In animist collectives (Descola 2010), there are certain classes of nonhuman and supernatural beings that have the same interiority or personhood as humans and are related to with cultural and social norms shared by all the groups. These collectives of beings are distinguished from each other through their physical form and behaviour. Each collective is a tribe-species that relates to the other tribe-species with the same social rules that govern the human collective. Interactions and relations between tribe-species depend on the communication of signs that are based on common institutions and understood by all (Descola 2010). An exploration of sources describing Highland relations with *sìthichean* and selkies indicate that the clans functioned as animist collectives with humans being one tribe-species, *sìthichean* another, and selkies yet another. Evans-Wentz's (1911) early 20th ethnographic study of the Celtic fairy faith classed the fairy phenomenon as animist.

The different physicality of humans and nonhumans in the Highlands separated them into distinct tribe-species. Physically, *sìthichean* are subtler than humans, being ethereal in

structure, at times invisible, and silent. The Highland *sithichean* could change their size as they wished but often appeared at about 4ft, or the same size as humans. The *sithichean* could be distinguished from humans by their unearthly silence of movement, wearing of green, and single nostril (Campbell 1900 Henderson & Cowan 2001, Kirk 2007). *Sith* behaviour also distinguished them from the human tribe-species. They lived in small hillocks under the ground and traveled in eddies of wind. *Sithichean* did not follow the Christian faith, but were instead pagans who would flee at the mention of the Lord's name (Henderson & Cowan 2001, Kirk 2007). The cattle and source of milk for the *sith* folk were the Red Deer rather than cows (Campbell 1900). Selkies also differed from humans in terms of form and behaviour. Beyond the obvious differences in their seal bodies, when they took human form they were identifiable by their dark hair (often very long for female selkies), dark eyes, and wearing of different types of clothes: long dark fur coats and, for the women, unusual tight-fitting dresses. They lived on skerries and in great caverns under the sea, and made their medicines from seaweed (Williamson 1992). Like the *sithichean*, selkies followed the pagan religion of Odin (McEntire 2010).

In congruence with Descola's (2010) descriptions of animist collectives, shared interiority and cultural and social conventions allowed humans and fairies to understand each other and communicate to the point where affinal relations were sometimes established (Campbell 1900, Henderson & Cowan 2001). Selkies and *sithichean* have parallel social and political structures, appearances, and activities to humanity. They had tribes, chiefs, kings, marriages, funerals, a division of labour, and cattle (Campbell 1900, Henderson & Cowan 2001, Kirk 2007, Williamson 1992). Human-selkie relations described in folklore like the seal-wife tale show us that humans and selkies shared certain cultural and gender norms related to marriage and children (Møllegaard 2014). When a human male has a relationship with a female selkie, she must live with the man who captures her, indicating that patrilocal residence was a social norm shared by humans and nonhumans in the Highlands. Male selkies who have a human female lover however, are free to come and go as they please, merely leaving money occasionally for the upkeep of their offspring. When she returns to the ocean, a female selkie's children must stay with their human father, and a male selkie's children with a human female must return to the sea with him. For both humans and selkies, descent is reckoned patrilineally. For a comparison of the selkie tale with a similar tale about human-nonhuman relations from another animist collective culture from Ecuador, please see Appendix B. The shared interiority of humans and nonhumans in the Highlands meant that

participating in the sociality of another tribe-species was possible. As the seal-wife tale demonstrates, for a time, the unnamed selkie woman becomes a part of human society. There are also many tales of humans that loved the seals so much they joined them and lived with them (Williamson 1992). The *sithichean* were also known to take humans into their society by force.

The *sithichean* were a tribe-species that had a predatory relationship with Highland humans and the things they relied on for subsistence. The few doomed relationships between human men and *sith* wives often inverted human gender roles with the female *sith* as the pursuing and violent partner, beating her human mate every night (Campbell 1900). The *sithichean* frequently kidnapped humans, especially nursing women and infants that they famously replaced with ageing fairies known as changelings (Campbell 1900, Henderson & Cowan 2001). The food source of the *sithichean* was the *toradh* (fruit, benefit, profit) of a thing, which they took for their sustenance, while its physical aspect remained, leaving land unproductive, crops unable to bear fruit, and cows that laid down and gave no milk (Campbell 1900). However, it was also said that the *sithichean* ‘only take away what men deserve to lose’ (Campbell 1900, p. 33). When humans complained about what they had or tried to make a secret of their abundance so that they did not have to share it, the *sithichean* would punish the ungrateful soul by taking the *toradh* of their excesses (Campbell 1900). Such a sentiment fits squarely into the more holistic values of the clans discussed in the previous chapter, where sharing and mutual aid was essential for the group to survive the harsh environment. Akin to the practice in several North American Indigenous tribes of not referring to the powerful predatory bear tribe-species by their name, instead opting for gratifying euphemisms like ‘Fine Young Chief,’ ‘Grandfather/Grandmother,’ or ‘Honey-Paws’ (Rockwell 1991), the powerful *sithichean* were not referred by their common name. Instead, the *sithichean* were given pleasing names like *sluagh-maith* – the good folk – in order to placate them. As they were silent and invisible, they could be anywhere at any time, and so it was necessary to speak well of them lest they take offence and exact revenge (Kirk 2007). Human-selkie relations were an inversion of the human-fairy relationship dynamic. For the selkies, humans were the predatory tribe-species, and the selkies were the prey who were hunted for meat, blubber, skins, and wives.

The customs around the gift and exchange discussed in chapter one that shaped the social relations within Highland clans, also affected clan relations with the nonhuman, further demonstrating the shared interiority found in human-nonhuman animist collectives. Though

sìthichean often bestowed favours, skills, and gifts upon the humans they took a shining to, they were dangerous, capricious, cruel, and had magical powers that made it dangerous for humans to associate with them. Highland humans generally avoided *sìthichean* at all costs. This avoidance was especially true for *sìth* gifts as the Gaelic saying ‘*theid an toradh nan cuirp fhein*’ warns us: ‘the fruit of it goes into their own bodies’ (Campbell 1900), meaning that the *sìth* will always receive the ultimate benefit. If accepting gifts within the clan kept clansfolk socially close, rejecting gifts from *sìthichean* ensured a safe distance by not forming social connections with a tribe-species that was so feared. Relationships and marriages sometimes formed between humans and *sìthichean*, though they rarely turned out well for the human involved (Campbell 1900, Henderson & Cowan 2001). The *sìthichean* also wished to avoid becoming indebted and socially tied to humans and would be significantly offended if a favour was repaid to them with more than was due (Campbell 1900). The fear of gifts is not a theme in selkie folklore, perhaps because selkies were generally only dangerous if humans were cruel to seals in some way. But any kindness or service from a human to a seal was always repaid by the selkies, an indication that reciprocity also governed their relations. It is evident that certain conventions associated with a shared interiority that governed the social ties within the Highland clans, also did the same for relations with nonhumans. The changes that came from the Statutes of Iona, Crown policies implemented after Culloden, and new individualist market forces that transformed Highland clan society would also transform relations between humans and nonhumans.

THE DECLINE OF THE FAIRIES

*No more shall they be found,
 Travel all the country round,
 Over hill, through dale, up river:
 They are all underground,
 And hidden from the sound
 Of our voices, should we call on them forever.’*

– D. W. Yair, Orkney Minister (Henderson & Cowan 2001, p. 25)

When Thomson (2010) toured the Highlands and Islands in the 1940s and collected oral selkie tales, he found the rich oral tradition of the Highlands – one of the last vestiges of a pre-Christian culture – waning, and a region on the brink of complete transformation and

modernisation. He noted a growing cultural divide in attitude towards selkies between the elders and the children he met. The selkie stories once held to be undoubtedly true were, by that time, seen as backwards and superstitious. The elders felt shame in sharing the stories, especially in front of children or outsiders, and the stories and other skills that had once played an essential role in Highland culture were no longer being passed down to the younger generations. Along with these changes, he noticed that the Highlanders' infamous pride in genealogy was weakening. These changes did not only affect human-selkie relations. Fairies became a phenomenon associated with the past between the 18th and early 20th century (Henderson & Cowan 2001). By the turn of the 20th century, many people believed fairies had previously existed but were no longer seen by humans. Others thought that fairies could interfere only in death and birth, no longer having the power to be a part of everyday life (Campbell 1900, Henderson & Cowan 2001). These changes in Highland traditions and relations with the nonhuman were an outcome of the social and economic transformation of Highland land and culture and the mass displacement of people who related with the supernatural tribe-species that were tied to specific landscapes.

Animist collective intertribe-species relations depend on shared modes of communication and social norms and the alteration of these affected human-nonhuman relations. As people began lamenting the loss of connection with fairy folk in the 18th and 19th centuries, many theories were put forward for their disappearance. Some believed that the eradication of the Gaelic language in favour of English drove the fairies away. Both selkies and *sithichean* were known to speak mostly Gaelic (Campbell 1900, Henderson & Cowan 2001, Williamson 1992). While the Statutes of Iona targeted Gaelic in the clan gentry, after Culloden the teaching of Gaelic was heavily suppressed in all speakers, with children beaten into speaking English at school only 100 years ago (Scott 2003). If the interactions and relationships in animist collectives rely on communication that is understood by all tribe-species, the decline of the Gaelic language surely contributed to the diminishing of those relations. Others thought that the Reformation was to blame: the retreat of the Roman faith causing the fairies to desert the fields of Scotland (Henderson & Cowan 2001). However, this seems unlikely because differences in religion – Christianity versus paganism – had always been one of the traits that separated humans from selkies and fairies. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the introduction of feudal and capitalist market economy practices disrupted the more holistic social structure of the clans. Since intra-clan human relations were transformed

by these economic changes, it is possible that the relationships between human-nonhuman relations – also tied together with gift and exchange practices – were likewise affected.

The Enlightenment and rise of the age of reason put scientific thinking in the spotlight, and sought to drive out superstition wherever it was found. Science was accused of having disenchanted the landscape after its light ‘shone upon every green mound and dispossessed it of its fairy inhabitants’ (Henderson & Cowan 2001, p. 24). Commenters at the time did not describe exactly how science was culpable but when considered in light of Descola’s ontology of social forms, their explanation holds true. Scientific knowledge fits squarely into the naturalist ontology of unified physicality and disparate interiority between humans and nonhumans. As the scientific worldview – with ontology of naturalism at its core – accompanied modernisation efforts and began to dominate in the Highlands after cultural integration with the Lowlands and England, the animist collective ontology – and the human-nonhuman interactions made possible by it – began to recede. Highlanders were long considered backwards and superstitious by the English, and relations with fairies lasted the longest in those regions. In the new, ‘enlightened’ Scotland, science and reason were prioritized over ignorance and superstition, and the written word gained dominance over oral traditions through which knowledge about fairies was transmitted, leading to a loss of understanding about such relationships (Henderson & Cowan 2001).

The out-migration of humans from the ancestral landscapes they shared with the nonhuman was perhaps the most detrimental change to affect human-nonhumans relations in the Highlands. Both selkies and *sìthichean* were tied to specific places. Selkies were found in the coastal areas that seals lived and *sìthichean* were most likely found in the remotest wildernesses (Henderson & Cowan 2001). The *sìthichean* were so intimately tied to the land that the severity of the Scottish landscape was often the reason given for why the Highland *sìth* was so much more dangerous than their counterparts in the rest of the British Isles and Ireland (Campbell 1900, Henderson & Cowan 2001). The change to a market economy necessitated the selling of labour to survive and the Highland humans became too busy to visit and look after those wild places, and the *sìthichean* began to disappear (Campbell 1900). The economic changes and ensuing poverty in the Highlands discussed in the previous chapter drove many clansfolk away from their traditional communities to cities like Glasgow in search of employment (McPhee 2006). The mass uprooting of ordinary clansfolk from their ancient territories during the Highland Clearances also separated the humans from the *sìth* dwelling places. With a distance of half a world or more away from the home of the

sìthichean, far away from those wild places and the ocean, encounters with *sìthichean* and selkies could no longer occur, and relations vanished.

The transformations in the Scottish Highlands irrevocably altered the more holistic human clan system, but it also altered the type of human that made up the clan. In John MacInnes' study of Gaelic folklore, he asked his informants whether they believed in fairies. They would answer that 'they do not see them any more because they, rather than the fairies, have changed' (Bateman 2009, p. 150). The combination of the loss of the Gaelic language, the adoption of a naturalist ontology, and the movement of humans away from the domains of the *sìthichean* and selkies was too disruptive for the animist Highland clan collectives to remain intact. The metamorphosis of the Highland human disassembled the animist collectives. Clansfolk's relations with the fairies and selkies had 'existed in mutual dependence and the loss of one signalled the un-becoming of the other' (Tan 2020, p. 154). In spite of all of these changes and the fracturing of social ties, and as my experience at Doon Hill described in the Preface indicates, some form of relationship with *sìthichean* continues to exist in parts of the Highlands. Maybe not in the same form or with the same intensity, but something of the old Highland collective way of relating to the world endured. What else has survived in the clans through the long years of change and over the distance of thousands of miles? To understand the nature of the collective arrangement of the Highland clans in the diaspora today, I will now turn to the Macfie Clan Society of Australia.

CHAPTER THREE

RE-COLLECTING THE PAST

'Sweep through the heather like deer in the glen

Carry me back to the days I knew then.'

– McCartney & Laine (1977)

Following the migration of Highlanders away from traditional lands and the disassembly of the more holistic collective arrangement of the clan system, Highland clans began re-cohering in modern, individualised societies in the form of Highland Clan Societies. This chapter describes this new instantiation of collective arrangements, embodied by The Macfie Clan Society of Australia, and explores what it means to members. For both practical and ideological reasons, the connections found in this modern Clan Society are not the same as the holistic and animist collective tendencies displayed in the clan system of the past. Being a member of the Clan Society offers people the chance to connect to their ancestry, cultural traditions, and each other while visiting ancestral homelands gives some clansfolk an experience of connection or belonging that they had not experienced before.

When Scottish migrants first arrived in the new colonies, many attempted to maintain aspects of the clan system (Ommer 1986). Clan kin groups that had travelled together to Canada set up communal tenure farms, continued the territorially strategic exogamous and endogamous marriage practices that were discussed in the first chapter, and practised mutual aid, sharing tools and labour (Ommer 1986). These arrangements did not last and clansfolk began to assimilate to the norms of their host countries while the social ties between clansfolk gradually weakened or disappeared. After a few generations of assimilation, descendants of migrants began to want to re-establish or maintain ties with their ethnic identity. This is an example of symbolic ethnicity: 'a nostalgic allegiance to an ancestral homeland, a love and pride in a tradition that can be felt, without being incorporated into everyday behaviour' (Leith & Sim 2016). Expressions of symbolic ethnicity can only really occur in the context of assimilation because individuals finally feel naturalised enough to safely claim another ethnicity without being othered or excluded by the dominant culture (Leith & Sim 2016). Such expressions support the idea that migration as a major characteristic of the making of the modern, globalized world motivates people who feel a sense of rootlessness and territorial

detachment to embark on personal quests to discover their origins (Basu 2005, Basu 2007, Leith & Sim 2016).

The popularity of Clan Societies is a diaspora phenomenon, with native Scots rarely joining at the same rate as their settler descended counterparts around the world (Leith & Sim 2016). Unlike those in Scotland who are surrounded by a culture and traditions that reflect their ethnic identity back to them, diaspora communities experience nostalgia for a sense of cultural coherence and continuity that they imagine can be found in the times and territories of their ancestors (Basu 2007). Previous research into modern clans has indicated that joining clan associations are a way for people to feel kinship with other clansfolk, connect to their ancestry, and find a sense of belonging (Basu 2005, Basu 2007, Leith & Sim 2016). Participating in clan association activities and Highland gatherings are ways that people in the Scottish diaspora can perform their clan identity (Basu 2005). The interviews and surveys that were used to gather primary data for this chapter aimed to explore the features of the Macfie Clan Society of Australia that aid in holding this group together, and whether – and how – the more historical aspects of clan relationships exist today, namely the more clan/society-focused nature of the collective, their relationships with the nonhuman, and the importance of the ancestral homeland.

A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF CLAN MACFIE

Clan Macfie was marginal in size and power in relation to other clans, perhaps limited by the small size of their Island home, with clansfolk numbering around the 300 (MacPhee 1975). Like most of the older clans, the precise origins of Clan Macfie remain mysterious. What the history records do indicate, is that Clan Macfie were part of the large group of Scots known as Siol Alpin. Siol Alpin is a group of seven Scottish clans who trace their ancestry to Cináed mac Ailpín, the last Pictish King and first King of the Scots (McIan 1980, McPhee 2006). In Earle Douglas MacPhee's research into the Clan's origins, he describes many potential origins of Clan Macfie, the oldest dating back to a Celtic leader on the island of Colonsay in 500BC. However, he believes that the Clan is most likely Scots Gaelic and came to the Western Highlands and Islands from Ireland in small numbers until the 12th to 13th centuries when they settled in more significant numbers on Colonsay and Oronsay in the Inner Hebrides, the ancestral home of the Clan (MacPhee 1975).

Figure 1. Map of Colonsay, Oronsay, and the Highlands (Google Maps 2020)



Clan Macfie lived on Colonsay for hundreds of years under the protection of the Norse-Gaelic lords who would become the powerful Clan MacDonald and the Lords of the Isles (McPhee 2006). The oldest written records of the Clan mention individuals with the Gaelic form of the name in the 12th century. In 1164 a Dubside was the *ferleiginn* of Iona, the famous monastery set up by Saint Columba (Black 1943). The *ferleiginn* was a scribe, lector, or ‘man of learning’ whose role was to teach, transcribe manuscripts, and copy deeds (Kerr 1913, Skene 1876) The Clan continued their ecclesiastical presence in the Celtic Christian church, providing many priors for the chapel on Oronsay from 1400-1600 CE (MacPhee 1975, MCPhee 2006). Colonsay remained the centre of power for the Clan because the chief always made it his home. While many Macfies lived on Colonsay, they never held any legal ownership of the land – as was Gaelic custom – but were recognised as having the right of ‘immemorial occupation’ or *dùthchas* discussed in chapter one, and as being the Island’s permanent tenants by the Lord of the Isles (McPhee 2006).

Despite their small size, Clan Macfie held an esteemed position of influence under the Lordship of the Isles: the Macfies were the hereditary ‘keepers of the records’ for the parliaments held between The Lord of the Isles and the twelve subordinate clans of the region he ruled and that were loyal to him. This position likely arose due to the literacy skills of the Macfie monks on the priory at Oronsay (McPhee 2006). The strength and influence of the Lord of the Isles, a kingdom in its own right at the height of its power, rendered Crown

Authority practically powerless in the Highlands and Islands (Clifford-Vaughn 1974, Stewart 2016). After James IV abolished the title of Lord of the Isles in 1493, and the Crown revoked charters that recognised local clans as the owners of the land, the right of ‘immemorial possession’ of Colonsay for the Macfies became dependent on the whims of the Crown. Many Macfies came to live in the Lochaber area from the 16th century, living under the protection of Clan Cameron in return for the provision of military services when necessary. However, the Macfies maintained their independent clan identity rather than becoming a sept (branch) of the larger Clan Cameron. (McPhee 2006) They were renowned and respected for their bravery in battle, loyalty, and cattle raiding skills (McIan 1980). Like most Highland clans, the Macfies and the clans near them were regularly in conflict, especially with the neighbouring Clan MacNeil. From 1610 the Campbells came to live on Colonsay, and Clan Macfie lost their traditional right of *dùthchas* but remained tenants (McPhee 2006).

Malcolm IV, 22nd Clan Chief of the Macfies, was the last chief. The circumstances of his death are filled with a series of intrigues and betrayal that left him living in hiding on Colonsay from MacDonald Clan Chief, Coll Ciotach, for some years. In 1623 he was found and captured with two of his sons and two companions, tied against an ancient standing stone and shot along with his four men. His widow and young son left for Islay (McPhee 2006). With the death of the Chief and his two adult sons, the Clan became 'broken', that is, when it has lost either its chief, its homeland, or its independence. The Clan began to disperse from its ancestral home, famously becoming known as a race of tinkers, or *ceàrdannan* – Indigenous Highland Travelers (Douglas 2006, Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967). Clan Macfie found itself caught up in the social changes that were taking place in the Highlands and many destitute or opportunity-seeking clansfolk left for the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in the Highland Clearances. In the 1960s only one family of Macfie crofters were living on Colonsay (Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967), and by 1975, Colonsay and Oronsay had no Macfie residents with ‘only a memory of those persons who, for upwards of four centuries, were “the protecting, firm, hardy, well-enduring Macfies”’ (MacPhee 1975 p. 4).

After four centuries of existing as an obscure, broken clan, and over a hundred years away from their ancestral homes in Scotland, a movement began stirring in the Scottish diaspora of the Clan. In 1968, a Canadian national Dr Earle MacPhee began his worldwide quest to have Clan Macfie officially recognised by the Court of the Lord Lyon (Scotland’s heraldry regulating body) and to restore the Clan Chieftom. This involved creating a global network of clan societies with armigerous (arms-bearing) members that could strengthen the case for

the Clan's recognition. In 1975, Dr Earle MacPhee compiled a comprehensive history of the Clan and its migrations after the clearances. Today, Clan Macfie takes the collective form of formal organisations, known as Clan Societies, around the world with paid membership. The Macfie Clan Society of Australia was founded in 1974 when Sandy McPhie went through the phone books and contacted every McPhee that was listed, asking them to join the Clan society to help with the cause. Its constitution was created in 1977. On the 27th of May, 1981, the Lyon Court recognised Clan Macfie as an active clan. In November of the same year, Dr Earle MacPhee was appointed the Clan's first *Ceanncath*, a Gaelic military term meaning the battle commander. As the chieftom is a hereditary position, and Clan Macfie does not have a chief, the *ceanncath* is the highest authority in the Clan. Earle passed away less than a year later and was succeeded by Sandy McPhie of Australia. After 19 years of service, Sandy retired and Iain Morris McFie, keeper of the Clan Macfie records, was elected in a parliament of armigerous clan members from around the world (Clan Macfie 2019). Iain remains the Clan *Ceanncath* to this day.

There are currently 175 members in the Macfie Clan Society of Australia, most being of retirement age. Of the participants in this study, most were over 70 and only one was under 50. Membership in the Macfie Clan Society of Australia is based on an annual fee, which is the norm for all the Macfie Clan Societies around the world. The membership fee supports the organisation of the Clan Society, the popular and informative tri-annual newsletter, meetings, Highland Games stalls, and genealogical and historical resources for members. The Clan holds biannual meetings, an annual church service, and occasional events on an informal state-by-state basis. There is also a quadrennial international Clan parliament held in Scotland for deciding on matters of importance to the Clan. This parliament is open to all Clan members, and is often attended by the armigerous Clan members from around the world. The last Clan Parliament was held in Stirling in 2017 and 63 Scottish and international members attended (Clan Macfie 2019).

CONTINUITIES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Clan Macfie member's motivations for involvement with the Clan Society belie an inclination towards greater connection and might seem somewhat at odds with possessive individualist values. Today's Clan Macfie members have a desire to find their place in a larger social network that incorporates – and as some members expressed has responsibilities

to – past ancestors, themselves, and future generations. The idea of kinship is still very relevant for people who claim a clan identity (Leith & Sim 2016). The desire to be part of a larger social collective than is found in the nuclear family units of modern societies was expressed through ideas of kinship, the same value that tied the Highland clans of the past together. Every participant used the word ‘family’ when defining what a clan means to them and most described Clan Macfie as a ‘large international family’ with whom they could ‘connect’ and ‘feel a sense of belonging’. Participants spoke of being ‘tied together’, ‘links to a wider range of people’, ‘belonging to a team’ and ‘a sense of community bigger than ourselves as individuals’. Maintaining the feeling of kinship and respectful intra-clan relations were also seen as important for Clan members. Many respondents noted that whether the kinship in the clan was ‘actual or perceived,’ it was necessary to accept it, celebrate it, and show loyalty and respect to the Clan and fellow members in order to enhance a ‘feeling of togetherness and belonging.’ The ‘ideology of kinship’ (Basu 2005) that was so important in maintaining the social ties within clans of the past is still an essential aspect of cohering this particular collective in the 21st century albeit in altered contexts.

This focus on kinship and connection makes it unsurprising that the one thing every participant had in common was a deep interest in genealogy. As discussed in chapter 1, genealogy was a vital aspect of the oral Gaelic culture, so much so that the Statutes of Iona specifically targeted the activities of Gaelic Bards who would study, memorise and recite clan histories and genealogies at social gatherings. In chapter two, Thompson (2010) noted that by the 1940s, knowledge of, and pride in genealogy had disappeared from younger generations in the Highlands. Separated from the homeland culture, the study of – and pride in – genealogy continues in the Scottish diaspora. The traditional love of the Clan’s history also retained importance for its members today, with every phone interviewee having extensive knowledge about the Clan’s and Scotland’s history. One of the participants had a mother who was a Macfie by marriage who could, like a bard of old, memorise immense amounts of genealogical information about the clan. At Clan Macfie gatherings members would come to her, name an ancestor and she could tell anyone on which boat they had arrived in Australia, and with whom they were related. Genealogy research assistance is one of the major services that Clan Societies in the Diaspora provide (Leith & Sim 2016), keeping extensive records available for clan members.

I demonstrated that the clans as collectives functioned more holistically than modern, post-industrialised, capitalist societies. While strong-willed and independent as individuals, and

with the seeds of individualism evident in the Celtic hero tradition and Christian monastic practices, ultimately the Clan (society) was above the Chief (individual). Some of the more collective aspects of the clan were the historical responsibilities of loyalty, mutual aid, and notions of collective justice where any clan member was representative of the whole clan. My primary data indicate that some of the more collective sentiments had been incorporated into the new form of Clan Macfie. When asked about their responsibilities as Clan Macfie members, all respondents believed that such responsibilities exist, including 1) to support the clan in whatever way one can, 2) to not reflect poorly on the clan, and 3) to maintain history, genealogy, and traditions for future generations. Participants said that members had a duty to support the Clan Macfie Society of Australia organisers by maintaining membership and engaging with the Clan. Clan membership is not seen as something passive but as a contributive role. Despite changes to the Clan's structure through the centuries, the sense of loyalty, respect, and desire to support the Macfie Clan Society of Australia leadership still exists. Many participants expressed a sense of 'personal responsibility for the reputation of the Clan' as a whole, echoing the notions of collective justice from the old clan system. They believed that individual Clan members had a duty to be a good citizen, bring credit to the name, and not act in a way that would tarnish the Clan name so that people can be proud of it because the actions of one Macfie 'reflects on the name, the whole group of people.' Preserving the history, culture, and traditions of the Clan was also described as a responsibility for Clan members. Participants felt a sense of needing to pass something down to children and future generations that drove them to become more involved in the Clan Society and research. Some felt a responsibility to deceased parents and grandparents who had carried Clan histories and genealogies, not wanting their knowledge to be lost. Others thought that maintaining Highland cultural traditions like wearing the Clan tartan and participating in Highland games was also necessary.

The mass migration that occurred in the Clearances preserved some aspects of Clan Macfie's historical culture, while other characteristics of the Highland clan have disappeared. As discussed in the first chapter, most of the migration occurred over a hundred year period from the mid 18th – 19th centuries. This allowed certain traditions – like the pride in genealogy – to continue in diaspora populations who were separated from the cultural changes Thomson (2010) observed in the early 20th century Highlands. Immigrant communities who, cut off from the social developments in their country of origin, can sometimes appear to hold onto tradition and be more conservative than their counterparts in the homeland. However, the

inverse is true for relations with the nonhumans who were so tied to specific places and landscapes in the Highlands. The experience of meeting Scottish people still interacting with fairies that I described in the Preface did not have an equivalent in Macfie Clan Society of Australia members, indicating that place is an important factor in maintaining the human-nonhuman relations. The inter tribe-species relationships the Clan had with the nonhuman that were discussed in chapter two have not been maintained. Most participants had heard of the selkie and fairy tales but a handful had never heard anything about them. A few had heard but were uninterested. Over half of the respondents found these old relationships interesting in a more conceptual way, liking and enjoying this feature of the Clan's past as part of history. Participants described Scottish clansfolk of the past as 'superstitious' as a way to explain the kind of folklore and relations with the nonhuman described in chapter two. Other participants were more open-minded about these mystical aspects of Highland culture, even being 'quite taken with the selkie stories' and the fairy related etymology of the Clan name:

They are interesting because they are part of our subconscious folk memory too. The way our ancestors saw the world was so different to contemporary Western society yet, it can still be a part of us as human beings and as the recipients of our clan's myths and legends. Superstition has very little place in a scientific, technological world and yet...

The movement of Macfies away from the landscapes they shared with the nonhuman was too great a rupture for the relations with the nonhumans to endure. Yet, returning to the landscapes of ancestors can offer experiences that are enigmatic and beyond the ordinary, as the next section shows.

BELONGING & CONNECTION

The Macfie Clan Society offers its members something more meaningful in a society where feeling a sense of belonging may be temporary and transient. The two words that came up most in interview and survey questions about Clan Macfie today were 'family' and 'belonging'. The urge to find a sense of belonging often occurs in the context of individuals belonging to a diaspora who feel separated from a particular culture and place (Basu 2007). Belonging and alienation exist in binary opposition and the experience of one cannot exist without an understanding of the other. For Scottish nationals who have never left or felt

alienated from their homeland, and who join Clan Societies less frequently than their diaspora counterparts, the notion of belonging likely has little relevance to their lives. For Basu (2007), this wish for a type of demodernised belonging is often an attempt to counteract the sense of alienation that comes with modern individualism and he notes that modern diaspora identities often contain an ambivalent desire for both the freedom of individualism and the safety of a collective identity. Modern Clan Societies as collectives existing in individualised societies can offer members a chance to fulfil both, helping Clan Society members feel ‘comforted’, ‘safe’, ‘a sense of security going back through time’, ‘connected’, ‘part of a community’, and ‘belonging to a team’. The sense of uprootedness and alienation was articulated in some responses to why it was important for the Clan Society to exist and continue:

Clans are a worthy thing to keep going because they keep heritage and history alive and forge bonds between people. People can know their origins and a sense of belonging. This is important because belonging is harder to find these days. People are transient and move around a lot to places away from their families. Clans are a way to preserve that.

The nature of society today means there is not a lot for young people to hold onto, but involvement with the clans could be something that gives them a sense of security going back centuries. Clans have an important role for young people in the future because a lot of people lack that sense of pride and belonging that Clan members feel, and I feel. People are more fixed on capitalist lifestyles and material gain.

Notwithstanding that membership in a Clan Society helps members feel connected to a culture and family, visiting Scotland and the landscapes and sites associated with their ancestors helps them feel connected to a place.

The concept of diaspora cannot exist without the idea of the homeland (Basu 2007). The special relationship to place – the ancestral homelands – retains its significance for clansfolk in the Scottish diaspora today. While Highland Gatherings and clan societies have been established in the diaspora since the Scots first created communities abroad, the 20th century saw a rise in genealogy tourism (Leith & Sim 2013). Basu (2005, 2007) states that genealogical tourism allows clans members to connect to their clan’s history, ancestral homelands, and by extension, to themselves. As the tourists travel through the landscape, they learn about and remember past events of significance to the clan. Later, they will

remember the journey itself. In an almost de-individualising process, this entangles the collective and historical clan identity with individual identity, transforming many sites in the Highlands into places of personal & historical importance (Basu 2005). This nostalgia for a homeland is often mingled with a sense of loss for a past where tradition and communities were stronger (Basu 2007). Not all participants had visited Colonsay, but almost all had visited the Highlands areas from which their families originated. Participants that had visited Colonsay found it a moving experience and felt a deeper sense of connection to their heritage:

My first experience of getting off the ferry and I started to shiver. There was something about it. I knew I was coming home, I got that feeling and I don't know why, whether it was just because I'd thought that in my head beforehand.

After 19 years as world treasurer it had an almost religious emotion.

I loved being there, I felt a connection to the place and in a way I felt I needed to visit, like a pilgrimage in a way, to be a whole person.

Visiting Scotland felt like I was home, it was very moving. I had no sense of alienation or difficulty there. I was very comfortable there. I went on a bus trip through the Highlands and the bus stopped and we got out and there was a piper playing and he was wearing Macfie tartan. It was a wonderful experience. Visiting Colonsay felt like coming home and a sense of belonging there even though it's thousands of kilometres away. I felt it in Glasgow too. I didn't feel it in England or the rest of Europe on my trip, only in Scotland. I walked to the Macfie standing stone where the last chief was killed. I'm getting goosebumps thinking about it. It was a point of connection to the Clan going back centuries. It gave me a really strong sense of connection to the Clan.

[It was] emotional to put feet on the island and see the two islands and wander around. Spending time at the stones where Malcolm fell.

Others that had visited other parts of the Highlands connected to their ancestors also had experiences that were meaningful to them.

Before I visited Scotland, people were names and dates on pieces of paper. Then you visit the places and get more info and the people become more alive, more meaningful and real. Going to the places makes time disappear, it brings you into the

reality of the simplicity of life – we still need food, shelter, water. And we still need family.

Visiting Scotland was fantastic, it was absolutely magical. I didn't get to Colonsay but I felt drawn to it. Culloden was very moving.

I spent a lot of time at Culloden but didn't make it to Colonsay. It was a strange feeling to be where my ancestors were. An eerie feeling.



The author standing atop Dùn Eibhinn fort, the ancient home of the Macfie Chiefs on Colonsay.

The responses assured me that my own experiences, expressed in the Preface of this thesis, were not singular. When reading Basu's (2007) ethnographic work on genealogy tourism *Highland Homecomings* months after I returned, I discovered these feelings were even more common. Many pilgrims to the Highlands had felt something so profoundly emotional and beyond rational on their journey that they did not feel they could adequately put the experience and its meaning into words, or that anyone else could understand it. When individuals identified parts of Scotland or Scotland as a whole as an ancestral home, their experiences visiting there were powerful and 'many roots tourists report having mystical experiences during their journeys, particularly senses of being guided in their quests by their ancestors' (Basu 2007, p. 47).

Following the near total loss of Gaelic identity and culture, and assimilation with the nations of their ancestor's adoption, participation in Clan Societies has given members a chance to express their Scottish heritage and find a sense of community and belonging. While the historical clan levels of group cohesion have been loosened over time, participant responses

in this chapter point to a greater sense of collective unity and responsibility than is expected in techno-capitalist individualist societies. However, the distinctive kind of collectivity found in the Clan Society occurs in the context of diaspora and outmigration. There is a desire for a return to aspects of the past, especially when it comes to notions of family and belonging, but the greater societal individualist tendency is still the dominant force in their daily lives. The Clan has found a way to survive as a collective in modern society by repurposing certain features of the past Highland clan system, while other aspects of the clan – like relations with nonhumans – have not found fertile ground in which to grow again. The Clan has adapted to the socioeconomic changes much as it has throughout history: by fostering the ties of fictive kinship to expand the sense of community and responsibility beyond traditional ideas of family.

CONCLUSION

Societies and cultures, and the structures and practices that make up and inform such collectives, have a way of transforming and re-emerging in similar and different ways over time. This thesis has explored this process with the specific example of Scottish Highland clans and how they formed, cohered, disassembled, and came together again. Like many tribal societies, the Highland clans had an open hierarchy, a non-market economy based on gift exchange, and a value system where the whole collective was more important than the individual. Life in the Highlands was undoubtedly difficult but with the clan system's strong social bonds and mutual aid, the clansfolk had what they needed for 'a living and a sustenance' (Gow 2009). All of this was held together through the ties of fictive kinship. Kin was reckoned beyond blood and was based on loyalty to a leader who would in turn protect clansfolk from starvation and destitution. This fictive kinship extended even beyond the human with nonhumans being incorporated into some clans as affines and ancestors. The animist ontology of the Highland folk meant that souls and social norms were shared with certain nonhumans like selkies and fairies. The Highlands were occupied by human and nonhuman tribe-species, separated not by their essence but by their bodies and behaviour. Sharing an interiority meant that communication could occur beyond species lines, and beings from each of the tribe-species could join another tribe-species through marriage, kidnapping, or choice.

Social and economic transformations affected the collective bonds within the human clans by advancing the individualist tendency in the chieftdom, eventually leading to the collapse of one of the last tribal societies in Western Europe. These changes also disrupted bonds with the nonhuman. Cultural integration with the Lowlands and England meant the abandonment of an animist ontology for a naturalist one, and mass displacement from the places that fairies and selkies were so intimately tied to, resulted in a fracture in human nonhuman relations in the Highland clans. The fairies and selkies were no longer encountered, and social world of Highland folk became purely human-human. Scotland joined the ranks of those considered 'civilised', 'enlightened', and 'modern'. The State replaced the paternal role of the clan chief, but it was a poor and impersonal substitute (Clifford-Vaughn 1974, Stewart 2016). The cost of the project of modernizing the Highlands echoes the effects we see in colonized countries the world over: large disparities in economic, health, and social outcomes in the Highlands compared to the rest of Scotland and England (Clifford-Vaughn 1974). The loss of the deep

and ancient sense of belonging on land and in a community is one that is still being felt by clan members in the Scottish diaspora today.

Much like the clans of old, adapting and transforming as needed in response to social and economic factors (Basu 2005), Clan Macfie has re-formed and reconfigured as a collective in the form of a Clan Society. While we ‘descendants of the dark fairy’ may not have the same type of collective arrangement as our ancestors or commune and interact with the supernatural beings of the Highlands anymore, the structure of the Clan Society has managed to preserve some sense of connection to a larger social network than is the norm. Through passionate dedication to history and genealogy, and a desire to connect with other clansfolk, Clans Societies like the Macfie Clan Society of Australia provide a source of kinship, connection, and belonging that is harder to find in the wider hyper-individualist society. The Clan is an undoubtedly positive force in participant’s lives, as it has been in my own, fostering a sense of knowing my ‘place’ in the world and through time. What was expressed by participants and felt by me throughout my life has been a desire to re-cohere with others of the clan as best as we can in an individualised society. That longing, combined with the notions of fictive kinship that has survived through the centuries helps hold the collective together against many odds. Even though much is lost and living together on communal kinship based farms and *cèilidh*-ing our way through the winters is an impossibility in a modern techno-capitalist society, clansfolk have created new forms of meaningful relationships based on ideas of connection and belonging:

Being part of a clan is like belonging to a family. All relatives tied together in one loving crew. You don’t always get on with everyone but you are family, an extension of my own family. It’s nice feeling that comfort. Clans are still important to know your bones and where you came from. Not just your parents but right back through the centuries. The Macfie Clan is part of the old world and the old way of seeing things.

In mingling this old way with the new, the collective arrangement of the clan may have been radically changed, but its adaptations have allowed clansfolk to continue to create ties based on kinship, care, and inclusion in a globally fragmented, and solely human society.

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APPENDIX A

THE SEAL WIFE

The following is my telling of the seal wife tale based on multiple sources (Heddle 2016, Le Couteur 2015, McEntire 2010, MacPhee 1975, Møllegaard 2014, Stephens 2015, Thomson 2010, Williamson 1992), as well as hearing and reading many versions since childhood.

Macfie of Colonsay was a lonely fisherman without a wife or children. One day he came to the seashore at dusk and saw nine of the most beautiful women he had ever laid eyes upon, all with beautiful long dark hair and dark brown eyes. They were dancing on the shore naked. He hid behind a rock to watch them, enchanted by their unearthly beauty and the grace of their movements. He noticed several bundles nearby and carefully crept towards them to see what they may be. He picked one up and it was the softest and silkiest fur he had ever felt. He took it and bundled it under his coat, then quietly returned to his hiding place. As it began to get darker, the women came towards the bundles, each of them picking one up, throwing it over their shoulders, and then diving into the sea in the form of seals. One of the women remained, searching anxiously along the shore for her sealskin. When he was sure that all of the other selkies were in the sea, Macfie stood up from behind his rock, startling the selkie woman. She tried to cover herself.

‘Come home with me lassie. I’ll look after you.’ He said.

She looked desperately towards the sea.

‘I can’t come. My home and people are in the sea.’

‘But you’re beautiful and I love you. I will marry you and look after you and make you happy.’

He held out her sealskin.

‘I’ve got this so there’s nae use fighting it, you have tae come with me.’

She began sobbing and pleading with him but he would not be moved. Finally, she took one last look at the sea. She saw a large male seal and a young seal pup with their heads bobbing out of the water watching her. She turned away and allowed Macfie to put his coat around her naked body and she followed him home.

Macfie married his seal wife and they had children. She was a kind and loving mother and wife, and he looked after his family and treated her well. For many years they lived together as husband and wife, but she would spend hours each day looking out of the window of their little stone house towards the sea, a single tear sometimes falling down her beautiful cheek.

One day, her youngest child asked her what it was that her father sometimes took out from behind a stone in the fireplace and stroked and held. The seal wife urgently asked her child what it looked like.

‘Like a fur coat.’ The child said.

‘And where was it he took this coat from?’

The child showed her the spot. With trembling hands she moved the stone, reached into the hole, and touched her sealskin for the first time in many, many years. With one last sad look at her children she threw the skin over her and ran straight out the door towards the sea. The large male seal and now adult seal were waiting for her.

Macfie was devastated when he returned home from fishing to find his seal wife gone. But for many years when the children would walk along the beach, they would find fresh fish waiting on the shore for them and a seal watching them from the water.

Macfie of Colonsay was the first Macfie man and from him and the seal wife the clan was born.

APPENDIX B

A COMPARISON OF SELKIE & TSUNKI WIFE TALES

In order to further demonstrate the animist collective indicated by selkie stories, a comparison with similar tales told by the Achuar of Ecuador as described by Descola (1994) is helpful. *Tsunki* are Achuar water spirits and there are many striking parallels to the tales told of the selkies in the Highlands. There are also differences. Where the tales diverge and we find inversions are where there are differences in cultural practices and values between the Achuar and the Highlanders. However, both the humans and nonhumans in each culture share the social norms. It is important to note that in both cultures, the encounters are never presented as myths, but as anecdotal true encounters with the supernatural nonhuman world.

Table 1. Comparison of selkie and *tsunki* stories

| SELKIE STORY | TSUNKI STORY |
|--|---|
| Told in the first person or happened to a known person. | Told in the first person. |
| Selkies shapeshift from human to seal. | <i>Tsunki</i> can shapeshift and often take the form of otters. |
| Selkie has a soul, subjectivity, can be communicated with, and is subject to the same cultural laws as humans. | <i>Tsunki</i> has a soul, subjectivity, can be communicated with, and is subject to the same cultural laws as humans. |
| Seals are semi-aquatic animals, traversing two different environments and existing in a liminal space between the realm of the ocean and the land. | Otters are semi-aquatic animals, traversing two different environments and existing in a liminal space between the realm of the river and the land. |
| In Scottish Highland folklore, water is a representation of anxiety about boundaries: between familiar and foreign, human and nature, life and death (Harris | For the Achuar, water is a place where both conjunction and disjunction of genders occur. It creates boundaries while simultaneously being a place where the boundaries set in other environments |

| | |
|---|--|
| 2009). | dissolve (Descola 1994). |
| <p>Selkie emerges out of the ocean and a man kidnaps her to have sex against her will by stealing her magical sealskin.</p> <p>OR a human woman trapped with a husband who is a poor lover cries 7 tears into the ocean and a selkie man emerges from the ocean and sexually satisfies her (Møllegaard 2014).</p> | <p><i>Tsunki</i> maiden emerges out of the river and invites a man to have consensual sex.</p> |
| <p>The Highland man marries the selkie and takes her to his home.</p> <p>PATRILOCAL RESIDENCE</p> | <p>The Achuar man then falls in love with the <i>tsunki</i> and travels underwater to meet her father, who wants the human to live with the <i>tsunki</i> as his wife.</p> <p>MATRILOCAL RESIDENCE</p> |
| <p>The Highland man has children with the selkie. The nonhuman is incorporated into the kinship structure.</p> | <p>The Achuar man has children with the <i>tsunki</i>. The nonhuman is incorporated into the kinship structure.</p> |
| <p>The Highland man spends all of his time on the land and the selkie is forbidden from returning to the ocean and to her seal husband and children.</p> <p>MONOGAMY</p> | <p>The Achuar man spends time between the underwater <i>tsunki</i> world and in his house with his human wife.</p> <p>POLYGyny</p> |
| <p>The selkie bride lives a double life; always longing for the sea and her husband and children she was taken from. When she finds her sealskin and returns to the ocean, she has to leave her children on the land with their human father. In the male selkie tales, a selkie man visits</p> | <p>The Achuar man lives a double life, hiding his <i>tsunki</i> wife from his human wife. His <i>tsunki</i> children stay in the river with their mother.</p> <p>MATRILINEAL SOCIETY</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>sometimes to give financial support for his offspring but he eventually returns to take his children back to the ocean with him where they belong (Le Couteur 2015).</p> <p>PATRILINEAL SOCIETY</p> | |
| <p>After the selkie has returned to the ocean, she sometimes visits her human children on the seashore disguised as a seal.</p> | <p>When the Achuar husband returns to the land to spend time with his other wives, the <i>tsunki</i> sometimes meets him on the riverbank disguised as an otter.</p> |