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# CROSSING BOUNDARIES AND EARLY GLEANINGS OF CULTURAL REPLACEMENT IN IRISH PERIODICAL CULTURE

Regina Uí Chollatáin

THE FIRST IRISH LANGUAGE PERIODICAL, *Bolg an tSolair*, was published in Belfast in 1795 although journalism in a modern context through the medium of Irish did not begin to flourish until the early years of the twentieth century. The ‘Gaelic column’ in English newspapers; Philip Barron’s Waterford-based *Ancient Ireland – A Weekly Magazine* (1835); Richard Dalton’s Tipperary journal *Fíor-Éirionnach* (1862); alongside some occasional periodicals with material relating to the Irish language, ensured that the Irish language featured as an element of a modern journalistic print culture (Nic Pháidín, 1987: 71–2).

Central to a reassessment of Irish language newspapers and periodicals in an historical context are two important elements. First, the linguistic and cultural boundaries within which Irish language media evolved and existed, and second, the role and status of the journalist in contemporary society, assessed in the context of traditional, long established Irish writing practices. Study of these practices by Irish language scholars suggests that English newspaper material was used as a source for Irish language manuscript material, crossing written and print boundaries in an emerging print culture through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Buttimer, 1994: 63–101; Ní Úrdail, 1997: 233–4). The overlap between the role and function of the learned highly trained file, the scribe, and that of the untrained journalist within the societies in which they functioned, is also significant in the concept of cultural replacement. By the time that the Irish language journalistic forum was used as a vehicle for communication within the Irish language community in the early twentieth century, linguistic boundaries were also unclear. This necessitated a dual-language approach in the public sphere – ensuring the use of Irish in an English language journalistic forum, while also securing the use of English in an Irish language forum.

This paper will examine the initial stages of Irish language periodical culture within this historical framework, focusing on the initial identity projections, alongside the survival of this branch of journalism as an instrument in the replacement of a culture which was perceived to have been displaced for two centuries at this point. This cultural replacement transcended traditional cultural boundaries and writing practices.

## Periodical Culture, Language and Identity

### *Periodical Culture*

The foundation of the periodical *Bolg an tSolair*, in September 1795, marks the official starting point of Irish language periodical culture and journalism (de Hae and Ní Dhonnchadha, 1938; Uí Chollatáin, 2004; Morash, 2010).

In August 1795, the *Northern Star* newspaper (founded in Belfast in January 1792), announced:

On Monday next will be published the first edition of *Bolg an tSolair* or Gaelic Magazine containing Laoi na Sealga or the Famous Fenian Poem, called The Chase with a collection of choice Irish Songs translated by Miss Brooke to which is prefixed an abridgement of Irish Grammar, a vocabulary and familiar dialogues... (24-27 August 1795).

The main aim of the periodical was described thus:

It is chiefly with a view to prevent in some measure the total neglect, and to diffuse the beauties of this ancient and once-admired language, that the following compilation is offered to the public; hoping to afford a pleasing retrospect to every Irishman, who respects the traditions, or considers the language and compositions of our early ancestors, as a matter of curiosity or importance. (Preface, *Bolg an tSolair*, 1 September 1795)

This statement outlines clearly the importance that was afforded to the ‘ancient and once-admired language’ respecting the ‘traditions’ of ‘our ancestors’. The aim of the periodical was not therefore one of communication, but one of cultural preservation. This is not totally at variance with the sentiment of a period in which many newspapers proclaimed a role in the quest for national identity. The progression of the concept of nation and nation-building was the result of the political climate in European nations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the initial Irish language periodical culture was closely linked to the understanding of identity and nation. The *Northern Star* newspaper echoed this thinking, as did *The Nation* – ‘Like the *Northern Star*, *The Nation* was published not simply to inform, but to forge a national identity’ (Morash, 2010: 82). The national identity portrayed by *Bolg an tSolair* embraced the fact that the ‘Irish language and culture could not be preserved by one class, culture or religion’, as observed by Máire Ní Aodha and Tarlach Mac Giolla Bhríde in February 1995, in the limited edition reprint of *Bolg an tSolair*.<sup>1</sup> This belief was subsequently echoed in the journalistic writings of prominent revivalists in the national Irish language newspaper, *An Claidheamh Soluis agus Fáinne an Lae*: ‘Gaelicism is the birthright of us all: of Protestant as of Catholic, of Unionist as of Nationalist, of non-native speaker as of native speaker, as of North as of South’ (‘Ulster’, *An Claidheamh Soluis agus Fáinne an Lae*, 24 December 1904).

*Bolg an tSolair* was rooted in the Irish language community and its editor, Patrick Lynch, a well known Irish language teacher in the Belfast Academy, hailed from a

<sup>1</sup> Translation by author. ‘Ba léir i 1795 narbh fhéidir teanga nó cultúr áirithe a chaomhnú ag aicme nó creideamh amháin, agus is léir gur amhlaidh sin do ghluaiseacht na Gaeilge sa lá atá inniu ann’ (Limited Edition, Réamhrá, *Bolg an tSolair*, 1995: 3).

native Irish speaking family with an all-Irish school in County Down (Ó Buachalla, 1968: 37–9; Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú, 1999: 57–8). Most of the journal had specific Irish language and literary content, combining Irish grammar with a collection of Irish songs translated by Charlotte Brooke. The inclusion of Brooke's work confirms the scholarly approach, being hailed by R.A. Breathnach as producing 'the first work of Irish literary scholarship' (Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú, 1999: 22). The combination of Patrick Lynch's editorship with the work of a remarkable female Irish scholar, who was the daughter of an upper class Protestant landlord and literary writer, attests to the boundaries crossed through the forum for Irish language journalism, projecting an egalitarian, inclusive approach. Patrick Lynch's projection of identity was culturally driven and the framework being created was one which he hoped would redress 'the total neglect' of the language. The scholarly approach, alongside the revival of the 'grammatical and critical knowledge' of the Irish language as referred to the previous April in the *Northern Star* (Ó Buachalla, 1968: 30), would be central to the projected cultural identity.

Although *Bolg an tSolair* was published by a newspaper office which promoted the United Irishmen movement, it is interesting that the chosen format was the periodical rather than the newspaper, given that the *Northern Star* already had a significant readership. Clearly the periodical publication was in itself a statement of cultural replacement, which correlates with Ballin's theory on periodical production highlighting 'the relations between literary form and social change' (2008: 2). Ballin also notes that, 'For the reader "taking" a periodical is often a conscious act of affiliation, a decision about cultural placement or aspiration' (2008: 2). From a literary viewpoint therefore, *Bolg an tSolair* may well have created the blueprint for Irish journalism which would have a strong periodical element with a particular emphasis on historical and literary content:

In order to render the work more useful to the public it shall be continued in numbers, at a low price, and as this first is partly taken up with Grammar, in all future numbers, historical comments and a variety of poems, songs shall be given. (Ó Buachalla, 1968: 33)

Despite the hope for the continuance of *Bolg an tSolair* however, the September issue of 1795 appears to be the only one printed. A booklet issued by *Cuideachta Gaelic Uladh* entitled *Bolg an tSolair* appeared in Belfast in 1837, but there is no evidence to connect the two publications. The fact that the first issue included the words 'Gaelic Magazine' in the title allows it to fall within the genre of periodical publications, whereas the second issue appears to have been in booklet form.

The chronological classification of journalistic writings proves a significant starting point for a study of Irish language journalism in both print and broadcast media, but:

Its analysis is not merely chronological, but is grounded in the belief that the relationship between the media and the communities they serve is a complex and subtle one, symbiotic and mutually revelatory. The media inform social and political change as well as reflecting it. (Horgan, 2001: 2)

The foundation of *Bolg an tSolair* is one of the instances that attests to this ‘complex’ relationship between media and community, which was one of mutual dependence in this instance. Thus, while acknowledging that boundaries existed, this periodical did not strictly adhere to traditional demarcations, preferring to use this journalistic forum for cultural preservation. As such, a study of its background and material may well be one of the sources which provides present day students of Irish language journalism with insights into the social, cultural and linguistic changes which were emerging. In order to fully explore these changes however, it is important to understand the linguistic background from which *Bolg an tSolair* and subsequent nineteenth century Irish language periodicals and newspapers emerged.

### *Language and Identity*

When discussing the ‘functional perspective on media use’, Tom Moring states that through the process of normalisation ‘speakers of the language if they so choose, can live their life in and through the language without having to resort to other languages, at least within the confines of everyday matters in their community’ (2007: 18). In a journalistic context, the process of normalisation in the Irish language did not begin until the Revival had taken hold in the urban environment of Irish speakers, if at all. The first Irish language newspaper which would provide a public forum for speakers of the language to engage with ‘everyday matters in their community’, did not emerge until 1898, more than a hundred years after *Bolg an tSolair* (Nic Pháidín, 1998: 51–3). Clearly, therefore, the formulation of Irish identity and the ‘decision’ regarding cultural placement needed to be established prior to this ‘normalisation’ process.

Although *Bolg an tSolair* is the first ‘official’ record of a journal with Irish language content, the Irish language was already in a state of metamorphosis prior to this. By the middle of the eighteenth century:

The shift from Irish to English as a community language was gathering momentum, especially in Leinster and Ulster. This new situation was a communication challenge at a time when the native public had a wide range of ability in both Irish and English ... the diverse handling and the artistic cultivation of both languages shows how deep and extensive the understanding spread on the creative possibilities that were associated with the public’s ability in both languages. (Mac Mathúna, 2007: 184–5)<sup>2</sup>

This language milieu was the forerunner to the founding of *Bolg an tSolair*. If the periodical was, as Ballin states, seeking ‘to project an identity’ (2008: 2), the community which *Bolg an tSolair* served was complex, but also seeking political change through the projection of a new identity. The *Northern Star* was a Nationalist newspaper but:

<sup>2</sup> Translation by author. ‘Bhí an t-athrú ó Ghacilge go Béarla mar theanga phobail ag bailiú luais, go háirithe i gCúige Laighean agus i gCúige Uladh. Dúshlán cumarsáide a bhí sa staid nua seo, nuair a bhí réimse leathan cumais sa Ghacilge agus sa Bhéarla araon ag an bpobal dúchasach. ... Léiríonn an láimhseáil ilghnéitheach agus an saothrú ealaíonta a deineadh ar an dá theanga a dhoimhne agus a fhorleithne a leath an tuiscint ar na féidearthachtaí cruthaitheacha a ghabh le cumas an phobail sa dá theanga (Mac Mathúna, 2007: 184–5).

Samuel Nielson, the proprietor of the *Northern Star*, and Arthur O'Connor, editor of *The Press*, were attempting to create a public sphere whose boundaries were not limited by the island of Ireland, but which extended to Paris, London, Washington and beyond. (Morash, 2010: 59)

The eighteenth century was a transitional period in language evolution in Ireland and this 'communication challenge' created a confusion of identity and a displacement of culture. Increasingly, however, in a cultural context, evidence from periodical culture would appear to suggest that the boundary between east and west is as significant as that between north and south through this period. Paradoxically, initial steps in cultural replacement through the medium of print in Irish language periodical culture came to the fore earlier in the urban-bases of the east of Ireland – primarily a non-native-Irish speaking language milieu. It was important therefore to explore the 'creative possibilities' that were associated with the 'public's ability in both languages', as referred to by Mac Mathúna. One of the initial chosen avenues for these creative possibilities was to be found in the periodical culture of the era. In a public sphere with unlimited international boundaries – as envisaged by Nielson – a knowledge of English was essential to ensure that this 'creativity' was exploited to its fullest.

With a gap of almost ninety years between the first Irish language periodical and the literary periodical, *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*, in 1882, the projection of identity, while still important, was not to the fore. *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* was founded by The Gaelic Union, an offshoot of The Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, which embraced all creeds and nationalities. The first edition of the journal also included articles in Welsh, French and Scottish Gaelic (Ní Mhuiríosa, 1978: 23). Clearly, though not consciously, and indeed perhaps as a consequence of literary revival above all else, a 'decision' had been made which would help to ensure cultural placement for the twentieth century. A reassessment of newspaper and periodical culture confirms that this 'decision' in the form of a literary periodical was hailed by Douglas Hyde as the foundation stone of the Irish language revival (Ní Mhuiríosa, 1978: 24). Noting Ballin's theory on 'taking' a periodical as a 'decision about cultural placement', as referred to earlier, (Ballin, 2008: 2), the 'taking' of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* by the Irish-language public through the forum it provided for literary debate suggests that this decision was being taken by the learned Irish language community.

This is very evident in the first article in the first issue of the journal in November 1882. In this article, the author, John Fleming (Seán Pléimeann), discusses at length the links between Irish and other languages. He places particular emphasis on the fact that renowned scholars from other European nations respect the Irish language literary tradition to such an extent that many of them are taking it upon themselves to come to Ireland to learn it. In a further demonstration of crossing boundaries within the context of cultural placement, the writer invites the readers to give these scholars, who are prepared to assert ownership of the language, a helping hand to revive it. He concludes this section by saying that this is the reason why *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* was founded ('An Ghaedhilg ins an naomhadh aois déag', *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*, November 1882). If scholars from other nations and countries were ready to take ownership of the Irish language, this periodical would be instrumental in helping them to work alongside the Irish language community in

order to ensure the replacement of a culture that had been displaced for centuries. This echoes Nielson's approach: creating an unlimited public sphere regardless of linguistic or other boundaries.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a cultural milieu was evolving in which Irish language journalism would play a pivotal role for the next fifty years. The periodical culture would be central to this 'cultural affiliation' and the subsequent status of the Irish language:

When Marx (1999, 44–5) describes commodities as being converted through exchange value into 'social hieroglyphics', he might be writing of the way in which periodicals are acquired not merely for their contents but because of their potency in signifying cultural affiliation or social status. (Ballin, 2008: 2)

This concept correlates with Hyde's linking the founding of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* to the start of language revival and progression. Due to the lack of research into Irish language journalism until the late twentieth century, it was not possible for Hyde to link *Bolg an tSolair* with the onset of an ideology of identity which could be acclaimed as the cornerstone of scholarly Irish language revival. More importantly, in light of Hyde's theorising, however, is the 'potency in signifying cultural affiliation or social status' (Ballin, 2008: 2), which was an important element in the publication of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*. The fact that *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* was affiliated to a particular Irish language organisation, The Gaelic Union, allowed it additional status in replacing a diminished oral Irish language culture with a modern literary one. The cultural affiliation associated with *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* was important in that it was one of the instruments which symbolised the replacement of this culture for the Irish language community.

One of the main features of Irish language journalism during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth is the focus on literature – a core feature of the Irish periodical. McNair defines journalism as, 'Any *authored* text, in written, audio or visual form which *claims* to be (i.e., is presented to its audience as) a *truthful* statement about, or record of, some *hitherto* unknown (new) feature of the *actual, social world*' (1998: 4). With the initial strands of Irish language journalism rooted firmly in a literary-based periodical culture, how does this type of journalism concur with McNair's definition? As a result of the European influence on these writers, it is normal to assume that they were presenting a truthful statement of the 'actual social world' in their cultural and literary commentary, but they were also using the journalistic platform as a forum for promoting literature. The literary element correlates more precisely with a European strand of journalism than with the anglophone journalistic environment in which Irish journalism existed. Mancini links these literary roots, stating that:

The existence of strong links with literature constitutes another important feature of journalism in many European countries, [this type of journalism being] very much oriented towards commentary and interpretation ... and judgement, and pays more attention to 'literary' writing than to the simple and terse telling of the facts that constitutes the essential prerogative of journalism in the modern sense of the term. (Mancini, 2005: 83)

McNair's theory on culture control throws some light on the significance of the political and literary journalists of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish language journalism, and their dominance in Irish society. The defining of these writers – 'political essayists', 'chroniclers', 'satirical observers', and 'public officials' – within the framework of 'the functions of the modern journalist' in an Irish language context by Bergin, raised the status of these journalists, in theory, to one that was comparable at least to that of the ancient file or bard (Greene and Kelly, 2003: 4). Contrary to popular belief therefore, it is highly unlikely that Irish language journalism was viewed solely as a forum for the cause ('*ar son na cúise*'), but was in fact another method of dignifying the cultural control necessary for developing Irish society as this 'dominant elite' saw it. This in some way explains the literary trend directed at, and in tune with a more learned readership which linked the journalist to the role of the file (Bergin) or scribe (Ó Buachalla, 1991–2: 38). Attracting this reading public, combined with the notion of the function of the modern journalist being similar to that of the file or bard, the cultural control exercised by the vision of the ancient bardic system could be re-established albeit in a modern format. Cultural replacement would therefore be nurtured to the highest standard. By crossing the boundaries of language, class, creed and writing genre through the passage of journalistic freedom, they allowed the Gaelic culture to 'exist' and rejuvenate.

Bergin's comparison of the function of the file or bard to the modern-day journalist may be simplistic in terms of journalistic criticism in a contemporary context. Referring to the style of writing used by the Dublin based scribe Tadhg Ó Neachtain in the early 1700s, Ó Buachalla asserts that Ó Neachtain describes the events and happenings which he writes about indifferently; reporting objectively, as a professional journalist would do (Ó Buachalla, 1991–2: 38).<sup>3</sup> This is probably more in tune with the communicative as opposed to the interpretative model of journalism. The combination of applying McNair's and Mancini's journalistic theories to traditional and modern writing practices, alongside Bergin and Ó Buachalla's literary and linguistic theories on the function of the journalist, is an interesting insight into the crossing of boundaries between manuscript and print culture, and perhaps more importantly, between the learned bard and untrained journalist.

### The Story

Central to the Irish psyche, particularly with regard to the Irish native speaker, is the telling of the story, which is also the core element of journalism. With the foundation of *Bolg an tSolair*, the journalistic forum was recognised as a progressive transitional instrument to enliven a culture perceived as near dead in 1795. Aitchison's statement that 'the oral traditions of previous millennia may be the direct ancestors of modern journalism' (2007: 12) suggests that the oral transmission of the story and the journalistic element are intertwined. It is important therefore to examine briefly the main elements of the story within the confines of the Irish language tradition and journalistic conventions. An in-depth study of this kind is not within the scope of this paper, but a brief look at the basic elements is helpful in examining the concept

<sup>3</sup> Is go fuarchúiseach, de ghnáth, a chuireann Ó Neachtain síos ar na tarlaingí is imeachtaí a bhfuil trácht á dhéanamh aige orthu; tuairisciú oibiachtúil, mar a dhéanfadh iriseoir gairmiúil (Ó Buachalla 1991–2, 38).



of crossing boundaries and cultural replacement within a historical and linguistic framework. Allowing that the main forums used were the Gaelic column and the periodical in the initial ‘restructuring’ and ‘replacement of culture stages’, the periodical had a pivotal role in the type of journalism that was being practised, carrying literary stories rather than factual news events.

Geographical boundaries are also important, Ireland being an island on the edge of Europe, and housing the language of a people who are marginalised in a geographical sense, while at the same time showing a distinct leaning towards a European literary practice – as is evidenced from the journalistic writings of over a century (Uí Chollatáin, 2008: 12–92). The significance of the traditional understanding of the ‘story’, combined with the ‘story’ within the framework of journalistic conventions, provide a possible basis for the continuum of a public sphere for Irish culture and identity. In examining journalistic conventions, Schudson states that, ‘We turn nature to culture as we talk and write and narrate it’ (1995: 52). If we turn nature to culture as we talk and write and narrate it, it is difficult to ignore the underlying implication that Irish culture did not just ‘exist’ in its representation and transmission, but was indeed alive through its reception during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries despite the dearth of published material in the Irish language. The links between the role of the file, the scribe, the oral storyteller, and the journalist, while relatively new as a concept, reveal important insights into Irish oral, written and print cultures. The style and structure used to tell the story differentiate between the transmission of these cultures, demonstrating structural challenges. The language and content are more relevant to the intellectual challenge. Both of these structural and intellectual review strategies are directly related and central to journalistic review and assessment (Glasser and Marken, 2005: 264). This crossover and creative manipulation of language, as discussed previously in terms of the necessary creativity in the Irish-English communication challenge, is central to the direction that Irish language journalism would eventually take. Indeed, the bilingual newspaper approach may have proved to be too much of a communication challenge as the journalistic form took hold, creating complex structural and intellectual challenges for both language communities. In the earlier period, therefore, the literary periodical format was possibly more conducive to cultural replacement. The newspaper format and forum needed to redefine its purpose, a purpose which would not focus entirely on cultural placement and the formulation of identity, but on communication and journalistic principles.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the communicative approach was to the fore. The establishment of contact with all members of the community was paramount, be it a real or imaginary contact. Long before McLuhan’s ‘global village’ (1964), and Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ (1983), the aspirations of AE, George William Russell (as editor of the *Irish Homestead* (1905–23), and then at the *Irish Statesman* (1923–30)), best describe this concept of community in the context of the nation’s identity. Robert Davis tells us that George Russell ‘aimed to define the nation as “an imagination common to millions of people”’; he ‘wanted to create a popular culture that would replace the rifle of revolutionary days with books and the arts’ (Ballin, 2008: 92). He opened his first editorial on 15 September 1923 with the the statement that the *Irish Homestead* would be ‘a journal which will be national in this sense, that it would regard all living in Ireland, North or South, and strive to bring about unity through mutual

understanding and friendship' (Ballin, 2008: 92); an ideology already referred to in the context of the *Northern Star* and *An Claidheamh Soluis*.

A review of historical writing practices and the onset of periodical culture shows that the story changed from one which was heard and written to one which was seen and read. However, 'the language that is learned by the eye is never living', as was stated in *Fáinne an Lae* in 1899 (18 November 1899). Modern journalistic theory contests this viewpoint, as the very nature of journalistic practice being live and ongoing, as previously discussed in the context of Schudson's theories, provides a forum for a living language. These developments were therefore either poorly exploited, or were not relevant enough in the 'real actual world' (McNair), of the Irish speaker to be availed of and utilised to the maximum. This highlights the structural and intellectual challenge of journalism within a linguistic communication challenge. Perhaps the overemphasis on vocabulary and terminology building, instead of intergenerational transfer through 'live' communication, detracted somewhat from the full exploitation of the journalistic forum, disregarding the creative possibilities which it presented:

Do not let the Irish of the old folks die with them. ... These old people possess priceless jewels of language that will not be found in any book, and the value of which, if only found in books or writings, can never be rightly understood. Moreover the language that is learned by the eye is never living. A living language is learned by ear alone. What we want to preserve is not a mere vocabulary of Irish to be put together anyhow, such Irish will always be more English than Irish. We want to preserve the speech and mode of thought of our forefathers and to understand it as they understood it, and this can only be done by making the old Irish-speaking men and women hand over to us their beautiful, expressive and dignified modes of speech. ('A few words in season', *Fáinne an Lae*, 18 November 1899)

More than one hundred years on, with a prolific Irish language print media in the public forum, but with no definite result in a full Irish language revival, was it ever or is it ever going to be prudent to look to print media as a tool for language revival in a communicative context, while ignoring the possibilities it presents for intergenerational transfer in a living language?

The periodical culture allowed for the development not of a new story to be told, but rather the restructuring or reorganisation of the story as described by Aitchison. In the struggle to find answers for oral language revival this achievement is often overlooked. This is partly as a result of an east west boundary which, although acknowledged in the seventeenth century, was neither crossed nor acknowledged officially in the process through which the replacement of Irish culture took place.

### **From Periodical to Newspaper: *Bolg an tSolair* to *Fáinne an Lae* and *An Claidheamh Soluis***

The dearth of Irish language journalistic material in the form of periodical and newspaper titles in the nineteenth century is indicative of a public with a diminished voice or story to tell. Despite the early efforts of the *Northern Star* newspa-

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per in Belfast with the issuing of Patrick Lynch's *Bolg an tSolair*, the publication of Irish language newspapers and periodicals was sporadic and sparse until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, barring the efforts referred to at the beginning of this article. Major historical events were, to some extent, responsible for the lack of economic support for such ventures, but the significance of the founding of *Bolg an tSolair* cannot be underestimated as the conceptual cornerstone of Irish language journalism and as such, a significant step in the creation of an emerging ideology of national Irish identity for future generations. *Bolg an tSolair* was very much language and literary based and clearly the language itself was central to the ideology presented. From a journalistic standpoint, it is clear that the voice or story for the Irish language community in this public forum would have a scholarly focus. The language was to be the unifying force primarily in a scholarly and intellectual context. A 'grammatical and critical knowledge' of it was the focus of a revival, while language usage and communication were viewed as secondary, with knowledge of the language being acquired apparently in three to four months (Ó Buachalla, 1968: 30).

In the context of current theory on periodical culture therefore, what was the projected identity of this periodical and what precedent did it set for subsequent Irish language print culture? The most important fact here is that this publication had initiated the process of periodical culture in the Irish language, suggesting that initial steps were being taken to 'project an identity', an identity which would be instrumental in the representation of cultural replacement over the next two centuries.

Almost ninety years on, the scholarly 'revival' took root. The ownership or 'taking' of the periodical *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* by the primarily Dublin-based Irish-reading public in 1882 'highlights the *relations* between literary form and social change' (Ballin, 2008: 2) as opposed to highlighting the differences. This suggests that the Irish language community at which *Bolg an tSolair* was directed (and not the United Irishmen movement alone), had built upon and progressed from the notion of seeking to project an identity in 1795 with the issuing of *Bolg an tSolair*, to making 'a decision about cultural placement or aspiration' (Ballin, 2008: 2). By the beginning of the twentieth century, another shift in ideology was apparent with the founding in 1898 of the first bilingual language newspaper, *Fáinne an Lae* (amalgamated with *An Claidheamh Soluis* in 1900). This was to secure the presentation of Irish language in a communicative, journalistic forum on the understanding that it would be accessible to all language users, not merely scholars and poets:

Henceforward, current news in Irish will be the outstanding feature of our Irish department. Our news columns will be written by a staff of competent and representative Irish writers. Home affairs will naturally occupy the place of honour. Foreign events will be treated in due perspective, and will always, of course, be approached from the Irish side. Our ideal is to place in the hands of the Irish speaker in Glenties or Aran a newspaper giving him, in vivid idiomatic Irish, a consecutive and adequate record of the home and foreign history of the week. ('Sinn Féin' (editorial), *An Claidheamh Soluis agus Fáinne an Lae*, 14 March 1903)

The timing of the publication of *Fáinne an Lae* coincides with the beginning of new understandings of communication and the concept of the ‘professional communicator’, as outlined by Daniel Hallin (Glaser and Marken, 2005: 267). This process viewed journalists as:

... brokers in symbols who mediated between audiences and institutions, particularly but not exclusively government. In this role they lost their independence and became part of the process of news transmission. In this role they principally use not intellectual skills as critics, interpreters, and contemporary historians, but technical skills such as writing, a capacity to translate the specialized language and purpose of government, science, art, medicine, finance, into an idiom that could be understood by a broader, more amorphous, less educated audience. (Carey, 1969: 137)

Theoretically, to some extent at least, a new understanding of Irish-language-associated identity had emerged in the urban public sphere and the periodical culture preceding *Fáinne an Lae* ensured that the concept of the use of Irish in the public sphere was well founded.

Ideally journalistic practice should not be reliant on language usage as an instrument for assessing performance, quality and communication. News content, the impact of the story and subsequent public discourse suffice to do this, and these benchmarks take precedence over the language used, and the culture or society from which the story emerges:

Journalism and journalists face two sets of challenges, one intellectual and one structural ... Whatever the urgency to provide answers to questions about the practice of journalism and the performance of the press, these answers need to be checked by and grounded in a larger intellectual framework that deals with journalism in overtly normative terms. In other words, it makes some sense to assign a priority to intellectual issues, particularly ones having to do with basic questions of quality and value, because the treatment of these issues will impose very real limits on the treatment of structural issues. (Glaser and Marken, 2005: 264)

Irish language journalism, functioning as a minority concept despite the language having national status, is an interesting example of a complex intellectual framework dealing with journalism in overtly normative terms. This is particularly relevant in light of conflicting current linguistic theories which neither condone nor condemn conclusively the effect of media on cultural issues, one of these being language. Some of this can at least be partly explained in Daniel Hallin’s understanding of ‘the scientization of journalism’, a process which began in the early 1900s. The Irish language at this time was in the early stages of revival and it was envisaged that the journalistic forum would be utilised in its fullest capacity to revive the language. If, however, journalists were viewed as mere ‘brokers in symbols who mediated between audiences and institutions’, then, paradoxically, the role of the language itself was in fact diminished. The fifty years of revival journalism subsequent to the founding of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* were pivotal in building a public sphere in which the urban and rural Irish language community would find a new voice. Perhaps as a result of

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literacy issues in the Irish language, this revival journalism did not succeed in providing a voice or effective public sphere for the Gaeltacht Irish speaker. Although subsequent efforts through the twentieth century were important in maintaining the language in a journalistic platform, the usage of the language was reduced mainly to an educational forum which ironically created a new communication challenge. What public discourse remained for Irish language journalists in a national language that was rooted primarily in the scholarly and cultural domain?

The challenge lay, therefore, in combining the 'professional communicator' with the independent language revivalist. The theories put forward by Carey and discussed earlier are very insightful in understanding the combination of these roles (1969: 137). If the Irish language public sphere was to accommodate this shift in the role of the 'writer' from the traditional role of 'critic' and 'public chronicler' to that of 'professional communicator' a new communication forum needed to be created within the confines of new approaches to writing practice in the public forum. It was on this more general communicative as opposed to language based forum that *Fáinne an Lae* laid its foundation. At this point, the use of bilingualism in a newspaper format was important in this new communicative approach.

Leerssen contends that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, 'Ireland was atomized into many separate small-scale communities without the wherewithal to form a society, without the joint continuum of a public sphere' (2002: 37). In the absence of a public sphere for this period, however, English newspaper material and oral tradition in the Irish language, alongside ancient traditional writing practices, provided the cultural background which paved the way for the general use of Irish in a journalistic forum. This went some way to providing an avenue for the replacement of a displaced culture in the Irish language. That is not to say that the Irish culture did not exist through the period of change, as has been discussed by Ó Ciosáin (2005: 139), merely that it did not exist in a formal, journalistic context, 'as the historically conditioned social space where information, ideas and debate can circulate in society, and where political opinion can be formed' (Dahlgren, 1995).

Scholarly research asserts that scholars and poets were to the fore in discharging the functions of a modern journalist. Nonetheless, in the absence of a public sphere, in the context of current theories on journalistic culture and form, it is difficult to concur conclusively that the 'modern journalist' as a 'professional communicator' fully correlates with the function of a modern journalist according to the criteria laid out by Bergin and more recently by Ó Buachalla. More relevant perhaps is the use of newspapers as sources for manuscript material referred to earlier, suggesting that the English language journalistic forum was preparing the way for a new bilingual public space, which supports the trend towards a more communicative approach than one of cultural conservation alone.

The presence of the Gaelic column in nineteenth century newspapers also supports the concept of a bilingual public space (Uí Chollatáin 2008). In Irish language journalism, this space fulfilled the communicative and literary role, as opposed to the critical role of the journalist. Looking at projection of identity and cultural placement as elements of periodical culture therefore, and the initial glimmers of revival in this forum, long before the onset of the revival period, suggest a conceptual scholarly language revival. Subsequently, the twentieth century newspaper form was to promote Irish as a national language which would ensure its survival in the public domain, but

would not necessarily guarantee the quality of the language or the journalism. The focus would be on communication and language usage, as opposed to language and journalistic standard and content, which in time created the juxtaposition of a national language as a minority concept in the public sphere.

### Conclusion

Leerssen's thesis of early twentieth century print culture as being 'the "sattelzeit"' which saw the first stage of Irish independence, 'the reconquista and de-anglicization of Ireland's public sphere' (2002: 39) is valid in this context. However, not unlike Hyde's understanding of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*'s contribution to the revival, this too disregards the projection of identity within the boundaries of the Northern Ireland Irish language community through the publication of the first Irish language periodical, *Bolg an tSolair*.

The communication challenge of Irish language print journalism was to give English to the native Irish speaker and Irish to the English speaker, as opposed to providing the 'constituency' referred to by Leerssen for the Irish speaker (2002: 39). Although the story had been restructured to allow it to be told through the nineteenth century and subsequently through the twentieth century, print journalism failed to give that 'constituency' to the Irish language community, but did provide other avenues for telling and restructuring their story. One of the more successful of these avenues was the periodical culture.

It was not until the mid-twentieth century, and indeed the twenty-first century that the native Gaeltacht voice re-established itself as a central element of Irish culture. The result is that today it is that native voice that has repossessed or replaced the total anglophone environment in which print culture was first fostered, allowing a new public space for both voices. McNair explores the possibilities presented in the globalised news culture in the context of the emergence of print culture:

But history is also repeating in the politically more significant sense that the democratising consequences of the emergence of print culture in early modern Europe may be viewed as an analogue of what is happening now with the internet and real-time satellite TV on a planetary scale. If, as is accepted by most media historians, the invention of print facilitated the great bourgeois revolutions in the United Kingdom, America and France, and was central to the process of democratisation set in motion by those revolutions, it is neither naïve nor utopian to speculate that the recent expansion of global news culture, delivered through the proliferation of channels provided by the internet and satellite television, can facilitate democratic progress at the global level. (McNair, 2006: 17)

Modern theories on journalistic practice bring new facts to light in the story of Irish language journalism. This cornerstone of 'national identity' through the medium of periodical culture in 1795, with the publication of *Bolg an tSolair*; alongside the progression to a conscious decision about cultural placement by the Irish language movement through the founding of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*, may well have mapped the coordinates for a new era in Irish language and culture. The Irish language journalism that followed provides valuable insights into the Ireland of the twentieth century.

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The founding of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* in 1882 – preceding the founding of the Gaelic League by eleven years and surviving until 1909 – tells its own story. This was preceded by a scant periodical tradition and a lone Irish language periodical publication in Belfast, which may well be one of the catalysts responsible for the setting in motion of a new Irish public sphere. The milieu from which this periodical emerged would nurture a new Irish identity and pave the way for cultural replacement, with that milieu being hailed as the cultural and social centre for Irish music revival, and, as such ‘the precursor by a century of the Irish Revival’ (Ó Buachalla, 1968: 34). In the context of Irish language journalism, while literary research is a core element in the concept of nation and revival, clearly it is prudent to include Irish language journalism as a central focus for cultural studies, nationalism and identity.

### AUTHOR

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