THE IRISH LANGUAGE AND TELEVISION:
NATIONAL IDENTITY, PRESERVATION, RESTORATION AND MINORITY RIGHTS.

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ABSTRACT.

This paper examines the new Irish language television channel, Teilifís na Gaeilge. The politico-ideological and economic environments are assessed as factors influencing the formulation of the policies in which Irish language television is and has been placed. It is argued that the aims of the restoration and preservation of Irish, which are related to the building of the nation, are unacceptable ideologically in the current environment and that the economic arena of competition, in which RTE television operates, hinders it from providing a public service for the Irish speaking minority. It is argued that the new channel must be separate from RTE and founded on a minority rights policy.

INTRODUCTION.

This paper presents a foray into the field of Irish language broadcasting and the proposed Irish language television channel (Teilifís na Gaeilge (TnG)) and consists of five distinguishable sections. Firstly, a deliberation of Government policies associated with Irish since independence (in 1922): involving the restoration of Irish, primarily utilizing the education system; and its preservation in the Gaeltacht (the Irish speaking communities of the west of Ireland), principally employing industrialization as an economic response (to a sociolinguistic issue). In this section the pertinence of Irish to national identity is also determined. Secondly, the utilization of broadcasting in contributing to the support of Irish is considered. Pertaining to this, the question of national identity is resurrected and compared with the concept of minority rights. A critique of the use of television to restore or even preserve the language is presented, grounded in Joshua Fishman's theoretical model (GIDS: Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale). Thirdly, consideration is given to the question of whether or not a separate Irish language television channel is warranted. Fourthly, the process of creating a separate channel is traced from the demands of the late sixties, seventies and eighties and the events of the immediate past. Finally, the concept of Irish as an element of nationalism is considered and the impact of ideological change on broadcasting through Irish is assessed.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE.

All the member-states of the EU (except Portugal) contain at least one autochthonous (regional/minority/minorized) language and there are, moreover, several official languages. However, there is a distinct difference between languages such as French, German or English and languages such as Irish, Welsh, Basque or Catalan in that the former languages do not require 'support' and 'protection'. The European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages claims that there are certain domains within which these languages must be provided for if they are to 'survive', these include education, public administration, mass media and social and economic life (Carrel 1994: 2). There is one apparent dissimilarity between Irish (and Luxembourgish) and the other minority languages: that Irish has an independent state to 'support' and 'protect' it, while some states such as France and Greece are determined to ignore their minority languages (although the situation in France has begun to improve). Nevertheless, one '... often find[s] that independence is not enough to guarantee ethnocultural and ethnolinguistic distinctiveness and find it necessary, therefore, to institute "cultural policies" and "language policies"...' (Fishman 1991: 27-8) and, in the case of Ireland, even these are sometimes insufficient.

Approximately thirty per cent of the population of Ireland returned themselves as Irish speakers in recent censes, however, other studies suggest that fourteen per cent (or thereabouts) of the population are fluent Irish speakers. A recent survey by The Linguistics Institute of Ireland (ó Riagáin and ó Gliasáin 1994) found two per cent of the population to be native speakers and a further nine per cent with fluent or near-fluent ability.

The Gaeltacht is an appellation employed to describe certain geographical areas containing a diverse group of communities which are predominantly Irish-speaking. These communities are mainly in the West of Ireland. The Gaeltacht population contains over two per cent of the entire population of the country. There are approximately eighty thousand people living in the Gaeltacht and approximately sixty thousand of them are Irish-speakers.

It may be claimed that 'when the Irish state was established in 1922... its two principal cultural aims were to revive Irish in English-speaking Ireland and to "save the Gaeltacht"' (Fennell 1980: 33).1 Following from this, one can discern several motives for the institution of language policies in Ireland since independence. The most self-evident is the link which has been perceived to exist between national identity and Irish, perhaps comparable, to some degree, with the situation of the early 1980s in Catalunya and the Basque country. As Tovey et al. claim: 'it is the widespread use of our own language that provides the most effective basis for any valid claims to membership of a distinctive peoplehood' (1989: iii). This argument was regarded as a principle of the overall independence philosophy. This is established by the CLAR (Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research) survey (1975) which found that Irish people locate the Irish language in the position of 'validator of our cultural distinctiveness' (The Advisory Planning Committee 1986: 61).

To most Irish people the mere existence of the Irish language is a sufficient marker of distinctiveness. For them, the maintenance of the language in the Gaeltacht and its symbolic use by the State is enough. In so far as a majority of Irish people are not averse to the creation of a bilingual society (ó Riagáin and ó Gliasáin 1994, 8-10), and claim that they would speak Irish if they could (this is what Peillon calls 'wishful thinking' (1982: 102)), there is support for the restoration policy of the State. Slightly less than forty per cent support the preservation of Irish as a symbolic marker of distinctiveness, while roughly forty-six per cent support the preservation of the language in the State as a whole as a means of everyday communications (ó Riagáin and ó Gliasáin 1994, 8-10).

However, there is more to Irish national identity than the Irish language. Identity in essence is plural, each individual has a sense of identity composed of many distinct aspects of his or her life. Similarly, it is national identity's diverse nature which lends it distinctiveness. In the case of Ireland, Catholicism is one of the central features of national identity, as Brown illustrates with the claim that 'the Church... offered to most Irishmen and women in the period a way to be Irish which set them apart from the rest of the inhabitants of the British Isles, meeting the needs thereby of a nascent Irish nationalism at a time when the Irish language and the Gaelic culture of the past was enduring a protracted decline' (1985: 28). Nevertheless, Catholicism was well established (especially since the Catholic Emancipation 1829 and the opening of the Civil Service and second and third level education to Catholics in 1870, 1878 and 1879 respectively) and was an accepted component of national identity. But language is a more apparent marker of distinctiveness and Irish was in need of 'saving'. It was the resultant Irish language movement (supported by secular and religious, Protestant and Catholic) which led the nationalist movement and bequeathed the policy of language revival to the new State.

The language policy which was adopted by the Government in the early 1920s was to assign Irish to a significant position in the new school curricula. Since independence, the language policy of the Government has been mainly located in the restoration of the language through the education system, which, according to Tovey et al., has meant that 'we have left the really important elements of our identity in the hands of elites and experts, and they have returned them to us as doctrines externally imposed' (1989: 21).

Nevertheless, it seems that within a few years of leaving school most people have established an attachment to the language, as was evinced by the CLAR survey carried out in 1973 and by the ITÉ (Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann - Linguistic Institute of Ireland) follow-up surveys in 1983 and 1993, which found that for most respondents Irish occupies a central role in national identity.

The language policy which introduced compulsory Irish to the education system was primarily a policy of restoration, in so far as it was an attempt to expand the Irish-speaking population. This effort has worked to maintain and to some extent increase the number of Irish-speakers in the Galltacht (the rest of Ireland: outside the Gaeltacht Irish-speaking communities). Unfortunately, this reproduction of Irish-speakers depends primarily on the school system rather than on family or community and 'were it not for the fact that the schools continue to produce a small but committed percentage of bilinguals, the maintenance of this small minority of Irish-speakers would long since have failed' (ó Riagáin 1988: 7), therefore, changes in the educational system may affect this reproduction.

Another part of the language policy of the Government has been the preservation of the language in the traditionally Irish-speaking Gaeltacht. One of the main causes of decrease in the numbers of Irish-speakers in these areas is demographic. Both inward and outward migration can have a detrimental effect on a language. In the case of the Gaeltacht, the decrease in the number of Irish-speakers was primarily seen as the product of emigration, thus the policy for the Gaeltacht was to stem the tide of emigration through economic policies. As the Minister for the Gaeltacht said in 1975: 'No jobs, no people; no people, no Gaeltacht; no Gaeltacht, no language' (quoted in Commins 1988: 14). As a policy for reversing the decline of the Gaeltacht population it worked adequately: in 1971 the population of the Gaeltacht was 70,568 and this rose to 79,502 by 1981 (The Advisory Planning Committee 1986: 1-2). However, as a language policy it had drastic consequences, because these figures conceal the continuing trend of emigration among the young Gaeltacht population. As the increased employment in the secondary and tertiary sector caused immigration of better qualified non-Gaeltacht or returning emigrants (often with a non-Gaeltacht spouse), the young people from the Gaeltacht still emigrated. The result was that although the population increased, the proportion of Irish-speakers in the Gaeltacht decreased. A decrease in the proportion of Irish-speakers can cause an acceleration in the rate of decline in the number of Irish-speakers, if such exists. (The presence of even one non Irish-speaker in a group of conversing Irish-speakers compels the *bilingual* Irish-speakers to speak English therefore the more non Irish-speakers in the community the less opportunity there is to speak Irish and consequently less incentive and support to raise children through Irish). A reduction in the ratio of Irish-speakers to non Irish-speakers in a predominantly Irish-speaking community, which has a stable percentage of Irish-speakers, can introduce decline. This has added significance when one considers that 'the [CLAR] report postulated that a critical mass of at least 80% of the people of a community with high ability levels was necessary to maintain a stable diglossic situation' (Commins 1988: 23). This implies that a community containing an Irish-speaking population of more than eighty per cent whose Irish-speakers are replaced by non Irish-speaking workers and families results in a decrease of the percentage of Irish speakers in the community to less than eighty per cent and the consequent a destabilising of the diglossic condition. The percentage of Irish-speakers in the Gaeltacht declined from 82.9 to 77.4 between 1971 and 1981 (Fishman 1991: 124).

The policies of restoration and preservation were manifested in the education system and in the industrialization of the Gaeltacht respectively and have been a general and unfocused approach. Fishman2 (one of the foremost sociolinguists in the world) claims that 'there has been a surfeit of Governmental bureaucracy and monopolization of support or control, but... local voluntary efforts are often in a better position to achieve breakthroughs than are ponderous, costly, centrally controlled, nationwide efforts' (1991: 142). He also favours 'initiative at the "lower level", so to speak, before seriously pursuing such "higher level" arenas' (1991: 4). In *Reversing Language Shift* Fishman proposes a 'Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale'3, in which he sets out eight stages for reversing language shift4. The achievement of each stage rests upon the accomplishments of the previous stage(s). According to this scale the intergenerational transmission of the language (stage six) is crucial and has not been adequately achieved in Ireland; while the reproduction of the language through the education system, which manifests a certain measure of achievement, is dependent on the state.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE ON TELEVISION.

To many the perpetuation of Irish is fundamental to the survival of the concept of national identity, and the existence of the Gaeltacht is perceived as crucial to the survival of Irish itself, according to the CLAR and ITÉ surveys. Therefore, one could argue that the Government policies on Irish (in terms of its restoration through the education system and in terms of its preservation in the Gaeltacht through industrialization) were, initially at least, attempts to create and maintain a cohesive independent national identity.

Alternatively, one could argue that the language policies of the Government were endeavouring to provide a minority with particular rights, as is the approach in the EU. Silvia Carrel, from *The European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages* explains that 'The principle involved is to move closer to the citizen by satisfying his demands and respecting his rights, even from a linguistic point of view' (1994: 16). However, neither the inclusion of compulsory Irish in the curriculum nor the desperate attempts to stem the tide of emigration from the Gaeltacht areas could be conceived of as a 'minority rights' policy. Nevertheless, Irish policies have been following a trend towards providing the minority Irish-speakers with rights. This trend may display a move away from the view of Irish-speakers as keepers of Irish identity5.

As mass media in general, and television in particular, are viewed as having the dual ability to both threaten and defend a 'culture', the Irish Government, soon after independence, attempted to use radio to defend the new 'Irish identity'. There was quite a similar situation with the first Basque Government, 'This first government included as one of its essential targets "the creation of a Basque infrastructure of mass media," for furthering the double objective of the "cultural promotion" of citizenship and the strengthening of Basque national identity, based on *Euskara*' (Mezo-Aranzibia 1990: 3).

It has been argued by Barbrook (1992: 205) that it was cultural nationalism that shaped the Irish public broadcasting service. He goes on to claim that in the last thirty years this version of public broadcasting has been abandoned in favour of a version which places democratic rights ahead of national self-determination aims (1992: 222-5).

In Scotland, progress over the past decade has seemed to observe the minority rights approach. In the 1980s, the BBC began broadcasting short programmes in Gàidhlig, followed by STV and Grampion. In 1990 a broadcasting act provided nine and a half million pounds to increase Gàidhlig programmes on all the channels from one hundred to three hundred hours per year from 1993 and established Comhataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig to be responsible for the funds.

It could be argued that it was during the emergence of television in Ireland (early nineteen-sixties) that the initial shift away from using the public broadcasting service to create and defend the concept of a nation-state arose. According to Maurice Gorham (Director of Broadcasting 1953-60), the politicians and 'practical men' did not value Radio Éireann's work for the national culture and would have preferred high listening figures from continuous mass entertainment. Also in relation to the period of the early 1960s when the Authority took over he said: 'Such guidance as came down from above was to the effect that Radio Éireann programmes ought to be brightened and popularized; Irish-language broadcasts and "long-haired music" were understood not to be highly valued' (Gorham 1967: 315). The first Director General of RTÉ, an American, Edward Roth, was appointed in November 1960, to serve for a period of two years. In mid-November 1960 Roth gave a press conference at which he maintained that viewership figures would determine which programmes should be broadcast. Therefore, from the establishment of RTÉ the aim of promoting and protecting a national identity was subordinate.

However, it still appeared to many, even in Government and in RTÉ, that broadcasting through Irish should be cherished. One example is the 1960 Broadcasting Authority Act, Article 17: 'In performing its functions, the Authority shall bear constantly in mind the national aims of restoring the Irish language and preserving and developing the national culture and shall endeavour to promote the attainment of these aims'. There was from the outset, however, a conflict between viewership figures and the promotion and protection of national identity. Even as recently as the early 1980s ó Murchú (a presenter of bilingual programmes on RTÉ) felt that 'all the talk and argument about the place of Irish within the programme schedule is about... an elemental struggle for the very soul of the nation' (1981: 58). Nevertheless, RTÉ gradually abandoned the Irish version of public service broadcasting in favour of advertising revenue, therefore, 'the need to win mass audiences marginalized previously revered types of programmes, such as broadcasts in the Irish language' (Barbrook 1992: 209-10).

The Working Group on Irish Language Television Broadcasting, set up by the Ministers for the Gaeltacht and Communications in March 1986, argued that it is necessary to establish the reasons for broadcasting programmes in Irish:

'*In a plurilingual state the right to personal freedom - a right accepted by most societies - assumes the right to a language choice at the level of the individual person. This in turn assumes a full range of public services in the language of the individual's choice...
*Approximately 84% of the population favours bilingualism as a national objective...' (1987: 9)

The arguments being addressed here could be classified as minority rights issues. One could argue that as it is RTÉ that is being addressed, the arguments are not only phrased in the acceptable language of minority rights but are also strengthened by appealing to the 'popularity' of the language (i.e. popularity implies viewership).

On the other hand, the arguments addressed to the Government (by the Irish speaking public in *Working Group on Irish Language Television Broadcasting* 1987: 13) focus more on the preservation and the restoration of the language than on minority rights. However, the Government seems to be gradually shifting from the original aim of restoration towards a minority rights aim, which seems more appropriate in the EU and in the evolving attitudes and political environment of Ireland6.

However, returning to Fishman's GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale), he claims that 'education, work sphere, mass media and governmental operations at higher and nationwide levels' (1991: 395) are the last stage (of eight) in reversing language shift, while the third and most important stage of 'the intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighborhood: the basis of mother tongue transmission' (1991: 395) remains incomplete. Therefore, Fishman's GIDS would regard the use of television to reverse language shift as superfluous and futile at this stage.

A SEPARATE IRISH LANGUAGE CHANNEL.

The necessity of having Irish television programmes is accepted by many, but the necessity of a separate Irish channel is debated even within the Irish language movement. For some there is the fear of 'ghettoizing' the language if it is confined to a separate channel. They suggest that there is a 'piggy-back' audience (Quill 1995: 14) who watch

a few minutes at the end of a programme in Irish *before* the programme they intend watching commences and a 'follow-through audience' who watch programmes in Irish *after* the English language programme they had 'tuned-in' to watch.

It is clear from the 1960 Broadcasting Authority Act that it has been RTÉ's responsibility to 'bear constantly in mind' the restoration of the language. The need for a separate channel is clear from a summary of RTÉ's dereliction in this respect.

Doolan et al., who refer to the situation in RTÉ during the first six or seven years of broadcasting, claimed that 'because of the neglect from which Irish language programmes have suffered for years, Irish-speaking directors in the station do not wish to be associated with them. Whoever is in charge of an Irish programme understands that it will be broadcast at an unfavourable time and that the facilities and finances available to a comparable English language programme will not be made available to it...' (my translation from Irish) (1969: 295).

In 1979 The Advisory Committee on the Irish Language submitted its proposals to RTÉ. The Committee's central proposition is that RTÉ should provide a full and varied range of programmes in Irish (this document has not been published). Their recommendations were not implemented by RTÉ.

The Working Group on Irish Language Television Broadcasting (1987) made similar recommendations which were presented as a 'graduated approach towards improving Irish language programmes on television', accompanied by completion dates. A full range of Irish language programmes, according to the Group, would comprise of news and current affairs; magazine programmes; films and soundtracks in Irish; sport; bilingual programmes; educational programmes; learners' programmes; features; drama; and religion. Although children's programmes are not mentioned in this range, the Group does emphasize their importance and includes them in their 'graduated approach'.

The autumn schedule usually incorporates a larger percentage of home produced programmes (including Irish programmes) than other seasons. An examination of a typical week in the Autumn of 1991 (fig. 2) shows no real increase on the autumn 1987 figures (fig. 1). The range of programmes was still the same and programmes through Irish consisted of only five hours, rather than the fourteen hours they had suggested.

The total increase (1987-91) is thirty-five minutes, within this figure there is a slight shift from RTÉ1 to Network2 (Irish programmes on RTÉ1 increased by five minutes while the programmes on Network2 increased by half an hour). Programmes in Irish were originally broadcast on RTÉ1, but 'with the advent of RTÉ2 it was feared by certain groups that Irish language programmes might be relegated to the less popular second channel' (O'Connor 1983: 5) which had been set up to broadcast mainly foreign programmes. During the 1980s there was a gradual transfer to RTÉ2/Network2. This transfer of Irish language programmes to the less popular channel has been regarded as causing a decline in the audience of these programmes.

Primarily, the options that were open to Irish language television broadcasting were: firstly that RTÉ assign a definite block of time on one channel for broadcasting through Irish; secondly, more Irish programmes could be assimilated into RTÉ's schedule and spread across both channels; the final option would be to establish a separate Irish language channel. However, RTÉ did not support any of these suggestions. The Working Group was also not in favour of a separate Irish language channel for fear of ghettoizing the language and felt it would be better to improve the state of Irish on RTÉ[8]. However, it is clear that their attempts and the attempts of their predecessors[9] have been ineffective.

While relocating Irish programmes from RTÉ1 to the less popular Network2 leads to a decrease in audience one could argue that some if not many of the viewers are a 'piggy-back'/'follow-through' audience and that a switch to a separate Irish language channel would likewise result in a decrease. However, this argument is not premised on a 'minority rights' aim and may belong, instead, to the arena of restoration. When aiming to provide a service for Irish-speakers viewership-ratings should be less relevant. As the restoration aim seeks a large audience RTÉ is capable of refuting arguments phrased in such terms. However, the only response that RTÉ can give to the minority rights argument is in terms of cost and although the majority of people support the broadcasting of programmes in Irish on television[10], cost can be a contentious issue. Peillon argues that 'the rift between appearance and reality, between wishful thinking and meaningful action, between thought and deed... constitutes a strategy in a sort of dialectical balancing act in which the particular (Irish culture) and the universal (Anglo-Saxon culture) are set off against each other and the claims of both partially satisfied' (1982: 102-3)[11]. The 'wishful thinking' lies in the support *declared* for Irish, whereas the 'reality' is that this support results in little 'meaningful action'. However, in the commercial environment of RTÉ's 'public broadcasting service' the claim of the universal is more than partially satisfied while the claim of the particular is neglected.

In the final analysis Irish language broadcasting is left with Hobson's choice. Most efforts are shown to be futile when depending on RTÉ, whose apparent disregard for Irish language broadcasting has hindered its progress. The only option left for improvement is a separate channel. Also, the fear of ghettoising the language on a separate channel, is premised on the restoration philosophy (in so far as there is an implicit aspiration to attract non Irish-speakers), and is invalid in minority rights terms. However, if the minority, for which the programmes are intended, is also reluctant to switch channels, the proposed channel would be abolished returning Irish language broadcasting to its previous impasse.

For RTÉ to appeal to a wider audience it would be necessary to concentrate on particular types of programmes such as learners' programmes, bilingual programmes, children's programmes and especially drama. O'Connor argues that 'drama has an advantage over actuality material in a situation where many people have some knowledge of Irish in that understanding is facilitated by the dramatic action, whereas in current affairs etc., people are solely dependent on linguistic ability'. (1983: 10). However, if TnG broadcast learners', bilingual programmes etc. they would not be attractive to fluent Irish-speakers and might fail to provide a full service to the minority and could conceivably be *perceived* as failing in its role of preserving that minority. It would be self-defeating to make use of television to attempt to increase the number of Irish-speakers if there is not also a full television service to cater for 'the converted'. Nevertheless, the danger[12] is that as RTÉ will be obliged to provide TnG with one hour of material every day they might rebroadcast the same material to fulfil their statutory obligation[13].

TEILIFíS NA GAEILGE.

According to The Advisory Planning Committee 'some 30 organisations can be identified for which the promotion of Irish is a declared priority..' (1986: 53), they go on to say that, although some of these organizations are over fifty years old, about half of them were established since the mid-1960s; more than a third of them cater for young people, while very few cater for areas such as older age groups, occupational groups, special interest or services through Irish; about one sixth of the organizations are inactive compared to six or seven which are growing and vigorous. Although the major aims of most of these groups do not include the demand for a separate channel through Irish, most local and national organizations became part of FNT (Feachtas Náisiunta Teilifíse: an Irish language pressure group demanding a separate Irish language television channel).

The demands for a separate Irish language television channel have been made regularly and range back as far as the establishment of RTÉ in the early 1960s, when Gael Linn[14] volunteered to establish and operate Ireland's television channel. By the end of the sixties Doolan, Dowling and Quinn (1969), who had been working in RTÉ, suggested having a Gaeltacht television channel. Bord na Gaeilge[15] published a plan for improving the situation of Irish in which they recommended that an Irish language television service for the Gaeltacht be established (Bord na Gaeilge 1983: 5). The recommendation to establish a separate channel does not imply a preference for such, but rather implies that it is viewed as the only available choice under the circumstances.

In 1980 'Coiste ar son Teilifís Gaeltas' was instituted by Irish language activists. They started by setting up a pirate station, but unfortunately a technician died suddenly and the project ended. Subsequently, in 1987, 'Meitheal oibre ar son Teilifís Gaeltachta' was set up, which involved people from the Gaeltacht. The group broadcast illegally from Ros Muc, County Galway in November 1987 and in December 1988. FNT was set up early in 1989 as an umbrella pressure group. They demanded that a station be set up for the Gaeltacht and all the country.

'The impetus for the new station' according to Uinsionn Mac Dubhghaill, Irish language editor for *The Irish Times* (22 November 1993: 2), 'comes from a widespread recognition across Europe that the minority or lesser-used languages will not survive long in the "television era" if they are denied the lifeblood access to the mass media, especially television.' Mezo-Aranzibia affirms this moreover, but in relation to the Basque language: 'The existence of such a radio and television service was held to be a necessary condition for the survival of any language in the late 20th century' (1990: 2).

Responsibility for the establishment of TnG rests with the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht who appointed the Coiste Bunaithe (Establishing Committee) during the summer of 1993. This committee advised that the station broadcast three hours a day: one hour from RTÉ, one from independent producers in the Gaeltacht and one from abroad (to be dubbed or subtitled).

The cost has been a contentious issue amongst the general public. On the fourth of November 1993 the Minister declared that the costs would be: seventeen million three hundred and fifty thousand punts capital costs and annual running costs of twenty one million punts. The running costs would be lower for TnG because RTÉ would be obliged to provide some programmes and other services and resources free of charge, reducing the running costs to sixteen million punts per annum. This compares with the Basque Government's annual expenditure on ETB of almost fifty million punts in 1991 (and almost nine million punts during the first year of broadcasting, in 1982), where '..certain social groups and the non-nationalist parties...claimed that it was financed out of public revenues but it only benefited a part of the population' (Mezo-Aranzibia 1990: 6).

FROM NATION BUILDING TO MINORITY RIGHTS.

As mentioned above the State has used public broadcasting to promote a national identity. Kelly argues that 'since the establishment of the state, the national broadcasting service has been important in symbolically elaborating Irish national identity and cultural difference' (Kelly 1992: 79). This aim has been altered in recent years in favour of a more democratic approach according to Barbrook (1992: 225). Kelly concludes that the primary cause of change, with regard to RTÉ, has been commercial factors (1992: 82). This is an argument which is readily acceptable to those acquainted with the significance which RTÉ places on earnings, as evinced by their emphasis on viewership figures and the consequent advertising revenue. However, it must also be asked what causal impact political changes may have had on the control of RTÉ's 'media logic'.

Liam O'Dowd (1992) presents an argument within which one may seek a political perspective on the changes in Irish language broadcasting. He argues that there has been a shift in the intelligentsia[16]. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, according to O'Dowd, the intelligentsia was dominated by clerical and church-affiliated intellectuals who were attempting to construct a social order with nationalist goals. However, by the 1950s their aspirations had reached a crisis point in so far as these goals had not been achieved. In the light of this 'failure' a small number of leading civil servants, politicians and academics launched a political and ideological offensive to end economic protectionism, encourage free-trade, multinational investment and an increased role for the state in economic planning. These policies were immediately successful, primarily because they were the right policies for the particular international economic conditions of the time. These policies were originally offered as alternative methods for accomplishing the traditional objectives, while the model of 'catholic corporatist order' was promptly rejected and the revival of the language de-emphasized. The new policies emphasized industrialization and the need to deal with the problem of emigration and was even proposed as a way of reducing the significance of Partition as a result of increased economic harmony and cross-border cooperation as was evidenced by the collaboration between

Seán Lemass and Terence O'Neill in the mid-1960s. Also, the establishment of RTÉ television in 1962 and a series of new professional publications offered new fora for the transmission of the new ideology.

The outbreak of the conflict in the North threatened the new ideology in the sense that the question of national identity and its associated elements might re-emerge. Later in the 1970s and more evidently in the 1980s the economic situation began to worsen. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s problems associated with both the economy and Northern Ireland re-emerged. 'As the Northern conflict has persisted however, the Southern intelligentsia began to change orientation to national identity. Whereas in the 1960s, questions of national identity and sovereignty were set aside in favour of other national goals, in the 1970s and 80s, there has been a concerted attack on "nationalism"...' (O'Dowd 1992: 35). It is probable that this attack on nationalism has been focused rather generally, on all issues relating to it, and may even regard Irish as one of these. The result has been more of a redefinition of national identity than a rejection of it. This redefinition of national identity contains some elements which are sometimes contradictory:

> '- an indefinite postponement of Irish re-unification and a containment of violence and the "national question" within the borders of Northern Ireland
> - a Europeanism which is concerned with the furthering of Irish interests within the EC. This perspective might agree that the Irish national question is unresolved but it tends to see the matter as irrelevant now in any case in a Europe where the nation-state has lost much of its centrality.
> -an economic and social consensus which favours an Irish version of neo-conservativism economics aimed at austerity programmes to limit or reduce the national debt, cutback public expenditure and encourage new forms of multi-national finance and manufacturing investment. This conservative view is shared by over 80 percent of members of parliament covering the three largest political parties' (O'Dowd 1992: 35).

This attempt by the national intelligentsia to reconstruct a new national consensus is anti-nationalist for fear of fuelling the IRA campaign, 'many leaders of Irish opinion, who, horrified by the violence of events in the North of Ireland, have turned to the condemnation of nationalism per se' (Tovey et al 1989: 25). Although they may not be openly in direct opposition to Irish they may feel that it is part of the nationalism which they condemn.

In this paper O'Dowd's claim that the intelligentsia has made an attack against nationalism is expanded to include the proposition that this attack is rather general and has resulted in Irish being opposed as well. This proposition seems to be reflected in the 1976 Amendment of the 1960 Broadcasting Authority Act. In the 1960 Act there is a focus on restoring the language and on the national culture (as quoted above), however, the Broadcasting Authority (Amendment) Act, 1976, Article 13 (a) states that 'The Authority shall: Be responsive to the interests and concerns of the whole community, be mindful of the needs for understanding and peace within the whole island of Ireland, ensure that programmes reflect the varied elements which make up the culture of the people of the whole island of Ireland, and have special regard for the elements which distinguish that culture and in particular the Irish language'. Against the background of the violence in Northern Ireland, which had started roughly seven years earlier, it seems interesting to note that the 1976 Act mentioned 'peace' and Irish together as if to suggest that Irish had some relevance to the conflict in the North. This Amendment reflected the political situation in Ireland and as such must be taken in this context.

As broadcasting became more commercial public broadcasting priorities such as Irish, which did not provide high viewership and promote advertising revenue, were neglected. During the sixties, in the political and ideological environment, the language was being neglected. However, the violence of the seventies brought to the fore an aspect of the 'national question' which would clearly cause condemnation amongst the intellectual and political leaders of the time, who, until then, had managed to exclude the national question from their national aims. The result was opposition to nationalism in general rather than the violence specifically.

It would have clearly been injudicious for political leaders to oppose Irish when bearing in mind its popular support as a core element of Irish national identity (see CLAR and ITÉ surveys) yet it seemed inappropriate to continue with the restoration of the language in the current political and ideological environment. Therefore, one could postulate that the gradual shift towards minority rights is the only possible solution: it is the accepted view in the EU and international circles[17] and being founded on democratic principles it is an acceptable alternative in the current environment.

If the minority rights philosophy presents an acceptable foundation for language policy the establishment of TnG may be the start of positive action by the State in this field (after decades of vacillation and negligence). However, although the minority rights policy appears to provide for a minority, regardless of consumer-type issues such as viewership ratings etc., it also appears to have some market-oriented elements i.e. providing an alternative choice for consumers. If the current requirements of the education in respect of Irish are altered to suit the shift in approach there may be drastic consequences for the reproduction of the language in the Galltacht. This is especially true in the current politico-ideological environment of rapprochement in Northern Ireland (one example is the recommendations made by the Irish National Teachers Organisation that there should be schools with Irish as the medium of instruction, schools with Irish as a compulsory subject and also a new type of school in which Irish would be an optional subject).

Nevertheless, if the State was to provide Irish speakers with rights (such as third level education and State services through Irish, a Bill of Rights and the proposed television channel) it may create an image of Irish as a serious communicative medium and encourage a heightened awareness, solidarity and determination amongst Irish speakers. Such positive action on the part of the State could also strengthen public awareness of the language and reinforce its position as a core element in national identity.

Alternatively, the adoption of a minority rights philosophy could provide an opportunity for the State to classify language policies in an arena exclusive of national identity. One possible outcome would be that Irish become increasingly dissociated from national identity as has been happening to religious identity in recent years. However, this is unlikely in the light of its popular support as a symbolic or practical marker of distinctiveness.

The Gaeltacht, having been perceived and treated as a separate minority, was provided with its own radio station (Raidio na Gaeltachta or R na G) in the early seventies, which has managed to create a cohesive identity within the Gaeltacht. R na G itself was the result of a civil rights movement in the Gaeltacht. It seems that, in

general, people in the Gaeltacht prefer a minority rights philosophy (to preserve the language in the Gaeltacht) rather than a restoration philosophy which has not been so relevant in these regions where Irish speakers are in the majority.

In conclusion, changes in Irish language broadcasting, one may argue, have been caused by a shift in the intelligentsia of the country influenced by both political and economic circumstances. The political environment demanded a new approach to Irish, unrelated to and dissociated from nationalism; the economic arena in which RTÉ competes was held to be the cause of the inability to fulfil the statutory obligations as regards Irish language television broadcasting; the result was the need to establish a separate channel set up to provide a service to a minority.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

Government policies on Irish (in terms of its restoration through the education system and in terms of its preservation in the Gaeltacht through industrialisation) were, initially at least, attempts to create and maintain a cohesive independent national identity. Until the 1960s one of the main statutory duties of RÉ (Raidio Éireann) was to defend the new 'Irish identity'. However, by the late 1950s the aims of re-unification, the creation of a rural-based society and revival of the language had not been achieved and were gradually replaced by a new ideology with priority given to economics rather than national identity.

From the establishment of television in Ireland there have been demands for a separate channel. However, it was more acceptable, both in economic terms and in terms of gaining a larger audience, to include Irish language programmes on RTÉ. Nevertheless, it was acceptable in theory only, as the reality was that Irish language television programmes on RTÉ were lacking in quantity and variety. Moreover, when bearing in mind the economic environment that has existed since the late sixties, with RTÉ involved in the commercial arena of television broadcasting, it becomes clear that perhaps RTÉ is not the best medium for broadcasting Irish language programmes.

Even in the environment of the past few decades when nationalism, and whatever was perceived to be associated with nationalism, has been rejected, Irish has maintained its position as a core 'prop' of Irish national identity. The number of Irish-speakers has continued to rise and the positive attitude of the general public towards Irish has remained strong. Although there has been a recent trend of politicians learning to speak Irish and there are many others with a positive attitude towards the language, nevertheless it could be argued that the political circumstances and the ideological environment which produced the 1976 Act, as well as the economic conditions which emphasized high audience ratings, were behind the neglect of Irish language television broadcasting. Within this perspective the provision of a separate Irish language television channel can only be understood if it is premised on an acceptable ideological framework. In other words the establishment of a separate Irish language channel and its associated costs would seem to be antithetic in the ideological environment of recent decades. However, the tension which has existed between the two policy aims of minority rights and restoration seem to be shifting in favour of the minority rights policy. The ideology, within which the establishment of TnG is acceptable, is that of providing a service to a minority: justifiable in the European context.

It would appear that ideologically an Irish language television channel founded on minority rights policy is most acceptable. The alternative, of the channel being based on a restoration policy would not only be ideologically inappropriate but would be theoretically (according to Fishman 1991) unsound and wasteful. If the new channel is to succeed in its aim, its aim must be, primarily, to serve the minority.

Iarfhlaith Watson,
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NOTES

1. Current responsibility of the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht in respect of Irish is 'the promotion of the cultural, social and economic welfare of the Gaeltacht and the preservation and extension of the use of Irish as a vernacular language' (Department of Finance 1993: 50).

2. Joshua A. Fishman 'has been a seminal thinker in not one but several fields of inquiry' (Cooper and Spolsky 1991: 1),

3. <u>Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale.</u>
'STAGES OF REVERSING LANGUAGE SHIFT:
SEVERITY OF INTERGENERATIONAL DISLOCATION.
(read from the bottom up)

i. Education, work sphere, mass media and governmental operations at higher and nationwide levels.

ii. Local/regional mass media and governmental services.

iii. The local/regional (i.e. non-neighborhood) work sphere, both among Xmen and among Ymen.

ivb. Public schools for Xish children, offering some instruction via Xish, but substantially under Yish curricular and staffing control.

iva. Schools in lieu of compulsory education and substantially under Xish curricular and staffing control.

II. *RLS to transcend diglossia, subsequent to its attainment*

v. Schools for literacy acquisition, for the old and for the young, and not in lieu of compulsory education.

vi. The intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighborhood: the basis of mother tongue transmission

vii. Cultural interaction in Xish primarily involving the community-based older generation.

viii. Reconstructing Xish and adult acquisition of XSL.

I. *RLS to attain diglossia (assuming prior ideological clarification)*. ' (Fishman 1991: 395).

Note: 'X' represents the minority and 'Y' represents the majority.

4. For the sake of simplicity 'reversal of language shift' incorporates, to some degree, both restoration and preservation of the language.

5. Certain groups have stressed the civil rights element in certain contexts e.g. *Conradh na Gaeilge*'s appeal for the introduction of a Bill of Rights for Irish-speakers and, also, the civil rights movement in the Gaeltacht in the sixties *Gluaiseacht Cearta Sibhialta na Gaeltachta* - predate the official shift towards minority rights.

6. Some indicators of the shift in Government aims are, for example: relaxing of compulsory Irish in school and in entry requirements for third level education and the civil service.

7. RTÉ2 was renamed Network2 in 1988.

8. The Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht is also not in favour of having a block of time on one channel allocated to Irish language broadcasting (*The Irish Times* 22 December 1993: 11).

9. Even before the Working Group on Irish Language Television Broadcasting made its contribution there had been many demands and recommendations made by the various organizations involved in the Irish language movement, from RTÉ staff (e.g. Doolan et al. 1969) and even from an Advisory Committee employed by RTÉ.

10. This support is given in answer to survey questions but does not convert into support through viewership.

11. In this case Peillon refers to the State and RTÉ is part of the State.

12. The 'danger' is that if RTÉ and TNG cater to two different audiences most of RTÉ's programmes would be unsuitable for TNG. However, it is quite likely that the Irish language movement will favour a choice of viewing between RTÉ and TnG.

13. Presumably RTÉ will still be bound by the Broadcasting Authority (Amendment) Act, 1976, Article 13 (a) '...have special regard for the elements which distinguish that culture and in particular the Irish language'.

14. Gael Linn is a national organization which has the restoration of Irish as one of its main objectives.

15. The State agency charged with the coordination of the language efforts.

16. 'The term 'intelligentsia' is used in a broad sense here... defined as 'mental' or non-manual workers with high levels of education whose work is based on specialized knowledge' (O'Dowd 1992: 40).

17. For example *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (November 1992: European Treaty Series, 148) and UNESCO Declaration of Linguistic Rights.

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Fig 1. Typical week of Irish programmes on RTÉ, Autumn 1987.

	RTÉ 1	RTÉ2	Type
Monday			
1705-1715	Baile Beag		Children's
2000-2010		Nuacht	News
2010-2040		Súil Thart	Current Affairs
Tuesday			
1630-1640	Dilín ó Deamhas		Children's
2000-2010		Nuacht	News
2010-2040		Cúrsaí	Current Affairs
Wednesday			
2000-2010		Nuacht	News
2010-2040		Cúrsaí	Current Affairs
Thursday			
1630-1640	Dilín ó Deamhas (Repeat)		Children's
2000-2010		Nuacht	News
2010-2035		Cúrsaí	Current Affairs
Friday			
2000-2010		Nuacht	News
2010-2040		Cúrsaí	Current Affairs
Saturday			
2000-2005		Nuacht	News
Sunday			
1845-1910	Iris 88		Current Affairs
2000-2005		Nuacht	News
	Total: 55 min	Total: 3 hr 35 min	TOTAL:4 HR 30 MIN

Fig 2. A Typical Week of Programmes in Irish on RTÉ, Autumn 1991.

	RTÉ1	Network2[7]	Type
Monday			
1505-1510		Bouli	Children's
1900-1908		Nuacht	News
1908-1930		Cúrsaí	Current Affairs
Tuesday			
1900-1908		Nuacht	News
1908-1930		Cúrsaí	Current Affairs
1930-2000		Musicology	Teenage
Wednesday			
1530-1550		Mise & Pangur Bán	Children's
1900-1908		Nuacht	News
1908-1930		Cúrsaí	Current Affairs
Thursday			
1900-1908		Nuacht	News
1908-1930		Cúrsaí	Current Affairs
Friday			
1505-1510		Bouli	Children's
1900-1908		Nuacht	News
1908-1930		Cúrsaí	Current Affairs
Saturday			
1730-1800	Eureka		Children's
1830-1855		Seachtain	Current Affairs
1855-1900		Nuacht	News
Sunday			
1830-1900	Scaoil Amach an Bobailín		Teenager's
1855-1900		Nuacht	News
	Total: 1 hr	Total 4 hr 5 min	TOTAL: 5 HR 5 MIN