

DARK MOUNTAIN

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When the Ferries Fail to Sail

Resilience on the Isle of Lewis in the 1966 strike of the National Union of Seamen

There was a weekend in the autumn of 2008 when two of Britain's largest banks came within hours of shutting their doors and switching off their cash machines. In late night meetings with bankers and ministers, the Financial Services Authority struggled to avoid having to order Royal Bank of Scotland and HBOS not to reopen on Monday morning.¹ Had such an instruction been issued, business lines of credit that lubricate the wheels of trade would have frozen up. The consequences would have been akin to a sudden loss of engine oil in a juggernaut speeding down the motorway. The closure of two of the country's main high street banks would likely have started a run on other banks as people panicked to get their money out. With confidence gone, the British banking system would have seriously faltered and might have collapsed. Had this not been checked, the implications for the supply chain that ensures food and energy security could have been catastrophic. Fear and panic buying might rapidly have fractured the social order. Capitalism could have been left to fall on its own sword, of course, but the weak would surely have been the most cut up.

The sense of how close we came to such a sequence of events is hard to hold onto: the speed with which something resembling normality reasserts itself, the fact that it does so, make the moments of real panic seem like a bad dream. Yet such scenarios are by no means a fringe preoccupation: the futures industry, whose horizon-scanning activities are taken seriously (and largely funded) by governments and corporations, recognises a range of potential 'strategic catastrophes'² and it is acknowledged that cities, dependent on very long, homogeneous chains of supply, are only days from hunger.³

Several recent events in the UK offer glimpses of how brittle our systems are. In May 2009, facing the possibility of a swine flu pandemic, food retailers stockpiled nearly a tenth of their annual requirements of bottled water. 'Supermarkets, keen to avoid any hint of encouraging panic buying, denied they had ordered any extra supplies, but privately

they admitted they were working on contingency plans'.⁴ When parts of southern England were hit by floods in the summer of 2007, police guarded supermarkets where panicking customers had fought in check-out queues.⁵ During the fuel protests of September 2000, when road hauliers jammed motorways and customers stockpiled groceries, the CEO of Sainsbury's wrote to Tony Blair to warn that food would run out in 'days rather than weeks'.⁶

Attempts to describe and think about this kind of brittleness tend to be anchored, today, around the concept of 'resilience'. As a term, it may not be exactly a household word, but it has spread from its technical origins to become a keyword in all kinds of fields, and like any term that does this, it deserves some second thoughts. Borrowed from Latin into English, its roots suggest the ability to 'bounce back'. Its first technical usage was in the early 19th century, in the beginnings of civil engineering, as a term to refer to the varying strength of different types of timber. From here, it made the leap in the 1970s to the study of ecology, as part of a new conceptual vocabulary that sought to describe the living world in terms of its interconnectedness, rather than through isolating and dissecting its parts. Then, in the first decade of the 21st century, it spread rapidly from academia into the vocabulary of policymakers and practitioners across an array of fields. For example, 'the UK government has rewritten its civil contingencies law, doctrine and plans around the concept of resilience'.⁷

The rise of resilience as a concept reflects not only a growing awareness of the threats we face, but also of the limitations of our attempts at prevention or preparation.⁸ In this sense, it is a sign of a darkening realism among those inside institutions about threats such as climate change. At the same time, the goal of resilience has been challenged for its inherent focus on a return to preexisting conditions following a crisis: even where this is possible, it may not be desirable, particularly where the crisis is likely to be recurring, as for example in the coastal regions of the United States most vulnerable to tropical storms.⁹ Its usefulness as a keyword in work with local communities has also been questioned: 'If we wish the qualities that we may associate with resilience to take root in the places where we live, we would do well to look for [other] concepts and stories which embody those qualities' without the 'aura of expert detachment' which tends to accompany the term.¹⁰

In the spirit of looking for such stories, grounding the conversation about the resilience or brittleness of our ways of living in the experience of people's lives, we wanted to explore the lessons to be found in one

corner of the world where the networked complexity of the advanced capitalist market economy on which we depend is regularly tested by the forces of wind and wave – and where, within memory, though in a time when our dependence on such networks was not yet so total, people have lived through the reality of a prolonged disconnection.

The Isle of Lewis is situated some 30 miles off the northwest Scottish mainland. Until the 20th century, Hebridean communities lived almost entirely by a subsistence lifestyle. Under the crofting system of agrarian tenure, people worked the land and sea, usually communally and integrally with a culture of story, song and prayer. There was a ‘vital social bond to which each member of the community contributed for the greater benefit’;¹¹ the main crops were potatoes, oats and barley, and ‘every croft on the island was tilled right up to the door’.¹²

This changed radically around the time of the Second World War. Mutuality in local production yielded more and more to the cash economy with its imported foodstuffs.

By 1966, Lewis was at the pivot between the old socioeconomic system and the new.¹³ The world at large had reached a pivotal year in a pivotal decade. It was the year the Beatles released ‘Eleanor Rigby’ and ‘Yellow Submarine’, while Bob Dylan was shouted down in Edinburgh¹⁴ and jeered as ‘Judas’ in Manchester because he ‘went electric’. And, somewhere overhead, Neil Armstrong piloted the first docking of a spacecraft.

In Stornoway, though, the biggest news was the strike by the National Union of Seamen which began on May 16th and lasted until July 1st. The union’s first national strike since 1911, its principal demand was a cut in the working week from 56 to 40 hours, and its effects were felt around the UK. Ten days into it, the Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson declared a national emergency. For the people of Lewis, the strike meant the interruption of both merchant and passenger shipping, paralysing island trade.

We wanted to know what happened and how people coped, and how this compares to what happens today when bad weather, breakdowns or industrial action lead to shorter stoppages. In the stories of Lewis and the voices of its people, we found a microcosm that might allow us to reflect on changes within our wider socioeconomic macrocosm in the past half century or so. This began as a thesis project undertaken by Lauren in the summer of 2009 and followed an academic research method, drawing on

two primary sources: the review of issues of *The Stornoway Gazette* for May and June 1966 and a series of semi-structured interviews with 30 key informants. Nearly all of these were indigenous islanders who could remember the strike and were in a position to have a good overview of the island's socioeconomic functioning. Using a technique known as 'snowballing' from 'grounded theory', where one respondent opens doorways to others, we asked two questions: 'How did the Isle of Lewis cope when cut off during the six-week-long National Union of Seamen's strike of 1966?' And, in contrast, 'What happens today when the ferries fail to sail?'

In the account assembled from their answers, the respondents are described by their role or position, rather than by name. These are the voices of people who, at the time, were striking seamen or their family members, a strike union leader, fishermen, crofter wives, locally-based shipping managers, taxi drivers, journalists, medical professionals, shopkeepers, a meteorological officer who later became the council convenor, as well as cultural and historical experts, present-day supermarket managers, the present Risk and Emergency Planning Manager, the former Provost of Stornoway, and the Chair (at the time of interviewing) of the Scottish Crofting Federation. Their words have been arranged using a technique in which 'indicative statements'¹⁵ – quotations that convey meaning and energy – were identified and coded according to emerging themes, and these themes provide the structure for the narrative that follows.

'The strike didn't affect us at all,' a taxi driver told us. 'No-one went without,' agreed a seaman. And for many of those we spoke to, this was the starting point. Here is a local midwife:

People behaved wisely back then. Milk was produced on the island. We baked our own bread and we all had our own hens for eggs. I can't remember any hardships. I can't make a big story of it at all.

This theme of self-reliance thanks to the diversity of local food production dominates the stories we heard. 'We had our own fish, meat and potatoes,' reported a shipyard worker. 'We were self-sufficient.' The current Chair of the Crofting Federation said, 'Herring was in abundance back then. If you had a few barrels of salted herring, potatoes and

oatmeal, you would get by.’ A doctor’s wife from England recalled that, ‘As a family we were very self-sufficient. I did all my own baking, made my own bread.’ Speaking of how it was in the countryside, a representative of the Stornoway Historical Society told us, ‘There was always something to eat. You could go to the shore for shellfish or trap a rabbit or poach a salmon. But the choice was not as great as today.’

These memories were put into context by the former provost, Alexander Matheson, who noted that expectations were lower: ‘We weren’t into the market of fresh imported foods.’ In response to an early draft of this article, he also questioned the rosy memories of some of our other respondents, suggesting that they may have been shaded by ‘post-trauma amnesia ... even romantic recall’ of what was also, in the town more than in the countryside, a ‘tense, angry, panic-inclined atmosphere.’ He points out, for instance, that while parts of the countryside were self-sufficient in milk, the town of Stornoway was not. It was served by two dairy farms, but their volume was low, and when not strikebound their output was supplemented by a tanker that came over from the mainland each night on the mail boat.*

Even with that caveat in mind, the picture that emerges is of a world far removed from today’s just-in-time supply chains. A medical secretary told us that people shopped irregularly and bought certain essentials, like flour and oatmeal, by the sackful. With sharing between neighbours, this provided several weeks’ worth of buffer. On the other hand, for some, as a crofter’s wife said (echoing Matheson’s caution), ‘The milk, the flour, the lard for baking was scare.’ Country folk sent crowdie, cream and butter to their ‘city’ relatives in Stornoway – though one might need to test how far the country informants’ memory of their generosity squares with that of the urban recipients. Where shortages really bit, people adapted.

* Alexander Matheson is the former Provost of Stornoway (first elected 1971) and a pharmacist by profession, now retired, but still serving in the viceregal honorary role of Lord Lieutenant of the Isles. We refer to him as ‘the former provost’ where quotes are taken from Lauren’s original interview with him, while his comments to Alastair on an earlier draft of this article are ‘Matheson, Alexander (2011). Pers. com’. The authors are especially grateful for his extensive help. After making various points that have now been assimilated into the text, his concluding remark was: ‘I *enjoyed* reading this paper. As a one-time retailer and now having time to reflect I support the fundamental theme, and the logic of the dissertation is/was compelling. I endorse the conclusion.’

As a Woolworths assistant told us:

We were rationed at the shop to one bag of sugar per week ... I don't know why, because there was sugar to be had in the stores. But I stopped taking sugar in my tea because of this.

Different people remember different items running short, according to their own situation. One woman said, 'The only thing I remember being affected ... was the mail, as we bought all of our clothing from mail order catalogues.' But this was an era when the spinning wheel, knitting, crochet, darning and weaving were still commonplace around the croft hearth. Television – and with it, fashion – was only just getting a foothold. One crofter's wife described how she 'used to knit a lot of my children's clothes, and if there was a hole in a jumper then I would unravel it and clean the wool and dry it and make a new sweater out of it.' The doctor's wife concurred:

It really was an end of an era, a time when the old world was fading and the new world was coming in. Today you will find very few girls who can knit and sew, but in those days everybody could knit, everybody could bake.

Another woman remembered two ways in which she had been affected: first, there was the shortage of washing up liquid; then, when her father died, she had to go by fishing boat over to the Isle of Skye and back for his funeral.

If there was one commodity that rankled for its scarcity, it appears to have been alcohol. A number of the men we spoke to told us, 'I only remember that the pubs were a bit short of beer at the time.' One recalled emergency supplies being brought over on fishing boats. Another reported:

The real memory I had is the outcry that the pubs ran out of beer and because of this we had to drink spirits. This is the real thing that affected the common working man. They had to switch to spirits, and in those days spirits were a lot more expensive.

Such was the outcry, one wag wrote in the local paper:¹⁶

The meat has all been eaten,
our belts are getting tight,
the beer is just a trickle—
the end is now in sight.

The Compton Mackenzie movie script didn't stop there:

I remember my husband who was a doctor saying that nine months after the strike there were more babies born ... People here are very private and they would be reluctant to go into the local chemist and ask for the contraception, which were condoms in those days. And they used to send for them by post in plain packages, and so during the strike, the joke was that they were not getting their 'supplies'.

As we shall see, real hardship was felt not amongst those with crofting connections, but amongst those most dependent on the import-export based cash economy.

In 1966, many a village on Lewis would have just three cars, compared with the three that might be parked outside many a house today. Most people used buses, hitchhiking or walking. As supplies of motor fuel ran low, though, the island prioritised its use for doctors and nurses.¹⁷

Stornoway had its gas plant by the outer harbour at Newton, manufacturing town gas from coal that was imported twice yearly by coaster. The main oil-fired electricity generating plant also held reserve stocks which never got down to a critical level.¹⁸

Our informants reported little hardship over domestic fuel. Not only were town houses mostly heated by gas or electricity, but rural ones relied primarily on cutting peat from the moors. Stacks of peat would even grace urban homes in Stornoway, especially those on lower incomes. It was cultural as well as practical. A seaman, home during the strike, reported:

The two weeks I was at home, I was in the peats every day. Those days, you worked the peat fields and your neighbours [too], and helped each other taking the peats home.

As with alcohol, fuel was one of those high-value areas eased by strike-breaking. A seaman confirmed what several informants told us: 'During the strike, I was on leave and came over on a wee fishing boat which was bringing across basic supplies like oil and diesel fuel, and other things like flour, vegetables and pepper.' Pharmaceuticals were also brought in by fishing boat.¹⁹

Not only were land and sea still highly productive in 1966, but community spirit fulfilled the dictum that 'what goes around comes around.' The Woolworths employee told us, 'A community boat would go out for fishing and catch enough to feed the whole village,' while the crofting official testified:

Crofting has always been about people working together, whether it be fishing, cutting peat or gathering stock. The whole thing is very communal, this is a very important aspect of it. However, today people have tractors and, well, there is not a lot of fishing anymore.

The factor of the Stornoway Trust – a long-established community land trust – expanded on the ethos of sharing:

The people who didn't have cows had hens, and if you had a surplus of milk you exchanged this for eggs, or for mutton, or for fish. You had a way of life where you were dependent on what you could produce, and if you couldn't produce it, somebody else would, and through a barter system and how the community worked together people, either within families or within neighbours, supported each other.

Such mutuality ran right across the social structure. As more than one respondent pointed out, it was nourished precisely by the deficit of mod-cons:

My husband was a doctor here for 26 years; during those 26 years, I never bought an egg. Everybody had their own hens and everybody gave the doctor eggs, fish, and home baking: scones, pancakes, nothing elaborate. We would get cuts of meat given. Lots

of salmon given, there was a lot of salmon back then. Again, there were no deep freezers, so you had to get rid of it right away. You could put it down in salt, but only herring was put down in salt. Everything they had was used immediately.

The *Stornoway Gazette*'s head journalist considered that the communitarian values described here were, at their deepest, spiritually grounded:

In 1966, everyone in the community was cared for. For example, people would ensure they visited old spinsters in the country to deliver their surplus supply of milk. These acts were founded on Christian generosity. Today, it is every man for himself.

This would be a widely-held view on the island. Old people alive on Lewis today still remember times when, as Alexander Carmichael expressed it to the Napier Commission in 1883, work was punctuated with prayer and sacred song: 'as the music floats on the air, and echoes among the rocks, hills, and glens, and is wafted over fresh-water lakes and sea-lochs, the effect is very striking'.²⁰

Given the congruence of the voices we have heard so far, can the seaman's strike really have been such plain sailing? Or was it more of a 'confused sea', where the wind and the groundswell come from different directions? The former provost offered three insights.

First, he maintains that the island had more mainstream economic resilience in hand than most people might have been aware of. 'Even petrol and fuel for electricity were stored for months and months ahead, and still are. So there would have been substantial stocks.'

Second, the mores of the outside world were locally moderated to maintain community cohesion; thus, even before the emergency powers were passed by parliament, arrangements to mitigate the effects of the strike had been made. 'Local fishermen agreed with the strikers to be hired to take certain agreed commodities across. They tried to make the difference between strikebreaking and keeping an isolated community alive. They were not allowed to take passengers. Beer was considered an essential commodity.'

Finally, some of those in waged work dependent on trade with the

mainland did experience silent misery, especially men thwarted in their role as providers:

I saw people who had been thrown out of work, like the dockers made unemployed. For the first time in a long, long time men who had been sober for years were drunk in the pub. For a short time I remember being quite distressed – people turning to traditional comforts of drink. It clarified the problems of unemployment.

This squeezing of the cash economy was corroborated by another informant:

I can remember, as my father was a Stornoway docker, quite a bit of hardship. [He was] put out of work due to a lack of shipping, therefore received little or no wages during the strike. So we were short of money.

The motor trade was hit, with new cars stranded on the mainland. A student at the time reported:

I remember it was hard to get builder's supplies, wood, slates and glass in at the time ... Some construction firms had to let people go ... The strike affected the tourist industry because people were not able to come across. It affected landlords [because] the tourist industry was just getting started ... When the wool supplies ran out, the mills shut down [and] the Harris Tweed was not able to get away.

What was striking in our interviews, though, is that nearly everyone, including those whose lives connected them to a wide cross-section of the community, made relatively light of the strike. The former provost got to the bottom of it, perhaps, in the final remarks of his interview:

Back then, we knew the outside world, but had not adopted the outside world's attitude and impatience. The strike never became serious because there were different expectations and people were a lot more patient.

The second of our research questions can be dispatched more briefly: where stands the island's present-day resilience? Everyone we spoke to told us that, when the ferry doesn't sail due to industrial action, weather, or mechanical problems, there is panic buying and within hours many of the supermarket shelves are empty. In the following passage, we have brought together multiple voices, a kind of islanders' chorus:

[The strike] was [in] the days before processed food so we were not so dependent on ferries... Lifestyle has changed with the [time pressures of the] working week [and] now people depend on take-aways and packaged food... Today, when the ship doesn't sail, people panic buy. By 4pm there is no food on the shelves. The first products to go are milk, bread, fruit and veg... If we hear there is going to be bad weather now, everyone just pours down to the supermarket and all the shelves are bare... It is almost as if people are hoarding it for the winter, like people feel that the ship will never sail again... Everyone is buying bread and milk, stuff that people were producing themselves 40 years ago.

One native islander suggested that panic buying was a trend started by incomers who feel 'isolated and marooned: we are on an island and the ship doesn't sail, so we are going to starve.' But then,

We [the native islanders also] run out and stock up because [the incomers] do it, and before you know where you are everybody does it, and rather than taking half a dozen rolls you take a dozen, and rather than taking a pint of milk you take two, and so it goes [sour because] people don't know what to do with it [whereas] in the past it would have been recycled into baking. So every time the ferry doesn't sail, the landfill suffers.

The store manager at Tesco in Stornoway told us that every time the ferry fails it costs them £8,000 in lost sales, slack employee productivity, extra wages paid to restock when backlogged supplies arrive, and discounting surplus 'late shipment stock'. From his perspective, the main problem is the just-in-time stocking system at the end of a long and fragile chain of supply:

The idea on the island is everyone is panic buying, but that is not

true. We don't carry three days worth of stock. We only carry 24 hours worth of stock. Our bread stock replenishes every 24 hours and we don't carry any extra stock.

His counterpart at the Co-op confirmed this short-order cycle:

For perishable items, in the winter, we tend to keep a two-days' supply. For veg, we just keep a day's worth, [except for] veg like carrots and turnips [where] we have a couple of days' backup stock. Because of this, today we would not be able as a community to cope with a prolonged cessation in our shipping, unless we were pre-warned.

As supermarket shopping has become the norm, the diversity of local provisioning has declined and, with it, the quantity of stocks held on the island. 'Today we don't have the wholesalers here anymore. In the old days, we had two that supplied everything from flour to soap.' In the villages, 'back then every little shop would have had a good supply of its own essentials.' Meanwhile, most modern homes no longer hold bulk stores. This is a domestic security vulnerability – an impression strengthened by the island's Risk and Emergency Planning Manager, who acknowledged that:

If lifeline services were cut off for seven days or more, this would be a problem for the resilience of the community ... [But] the community is responsible for their own welfare. Our responsibility is only to communicate requirements of what to do in case of emergency.

As one woman said, 'Supermarkets are here now and that's that.' And another, looking back on the strike, 'If it happened now, we would be absolutely stumped.'

This has been a story of the transition from a resilient relationship with land and sea to a brittle dependency on distant supply lines, with two supermarkets and a central heating oil depot. What has driven this change? Among the voices we heard, four answers come to the fore.

First, there are new expectations of ease: it was widely felt that people today have gone soft. No-one we spoke to would wish back 'the hard-

ships of the past'. Yet there was regret that comfort had squeezed out conviviality. As the chair of the Scottish Crofting Federation said, 'I have seen harder times. Today, people are so comfortable, it is the end of the world to go one day without milk in their tea.'

The Woolworths shop assistant told us, 'Nowadays people are too lazy to cut peats.' On this point, at least, however, resilience is returning. Just before the financial crisis in 2008, oil prices passed \$140 a barrel. The UK press took much delight in the fact that Calum 'Steallag', the Stornoway blacksmith, experienced a 600% increase in orders for new *tarasgeirs*, peat cutting irons, at the start of the 2008 season.²¹ The island's Risk and Emergency Planning Manager confirmed this: 'The cost of fuel ... is forcing people to return to traditional fuel sources like peat.'

A second element in the loss of resilience is cultural deskilling. 'When I was growing up,' one crofter told us, 'we would get some very bad snows and be cut off for three weeks to a month at a time and we would survive by trapping rabbits and killing sheep.' Many people we spoke to remarked that it was their traditional skills and 'vernacular values'²² that got them through the strike. 'We didn't starve,' said another crofter. 'We would kill our own animals and use every part ... the intestines would be made into black puddings.'

Today, however, this has become severely attenuated. The shipping clerk said, 'A lot of the skills of 20 to 30 years ago are getting lost [such as] cutting peats or planting potatoes. If you asked a young person of sixteen how to do this, they would be lost.' A German incomer married to a native islander recalled an incident in the mid-1980s that showed her how little indigenous knowledge was getting passed down to the next generation:

One Christmas, due to a huge snowfall, the island's electricity was cut off. For my family, this wasn't a problem as our oven ran on oil ... We had a great Christmas and turkey dinner. However, when I went back to work, everyone labelled it the worst Christmas ever. They were unable to cook their turkey, [unable to keep it frozen] and had to throw it out. I couldn't understand this. It didn't make sense to me why people didn't store the turkey in the snow.

A third element in the story is the destruction of ecosystems. One respondent remarked that the skylarks that once serenaded peat cutters have declined, but the main complaint was the destruction of inshore fisheries.

A seaman echoed several other informants in saying, 'Fishing has gone down a lot. It's absolutely criminal. The only reason is sheer greed. These used to be the best fishing waters in the world.' Today, much of the fish caught around the island is landed on the mainland and then imported back on refrigerated lorries. Blame is laid at the feet of highly-capitalised east coast boats intruding into traditional west coast family-fishing banks,²³ the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy letting in the Spaniards, and the outright killing power of modern fishing gear.²⁴ As a builder and ex-fisherman by trade said:

In the 1980s the government handed out fishing licenses to all the fishermen. Big business bought out all of the local licenses. Most people had to sell their licenses to pay off debt. Today, there are mega-ships that use radar to detect fishing pools; this system just kills all the fish. Today, it is impossible to compete with the big companies ... Lewis has become an island of fishermen who can't fish.

In consequence, were something like the seamen's strike to be repeated, there would no longer be the sizeable local fleet to run emergency supplies and passengers as in 1966.

Finally, there is the question of bureaucracy and legislation. The Crofters' Federation chair was amongst several voices expressing exasperation. 'It is impossible for a small crofter to adapt to the demands of recent EU regulation, for example that all sheep need to have electric chips.' The shipping clerk told us:

At one time crofts were focused on sheep, but with all the regulation and filling in forms people have moved away from this, so now people are keeping cattle. However, even this is difficult as today there is too much regulation, so they don't allow you to kill your own cattle.

A crofter told us that regulations prevented them selling their cheese at the weekly farmer's market. What is galling to artisanal producers is that many of these regulations have been imposed to ensure health and animal welfare standards at the industrial level. Their unintended consequence – hopefully 'unintended' – is to reduce local food security and, thereby, further reduce resilience.

Nearly half of the usual imports and exports to the Isle of Lewis were curtailed during the six weeks of the 1966 seaman's strike, yet the islanders came through this relatively unscathed. Their ability to do so was grounded in the high levels of traditional social and ecological resilience. Within a couple of generations, this has declined radically. Today, the islanders depend to a potentially perilous degree on a just-in-time, globally-linked food and energy supply chain. We started from the question of what might happen, if an event such as the 2008 financial crisis had not been contained and supply lines had, temporarily at least, become gridlocked. In conclusion, we can only recall the words of the woman who said, 'we would be absolutely stumped'. This might be an understatement.

Globally, the loss of local resilience is driven by the competitive economics of comparative advantage under free trade. This has increased overall wealth, but it has also increased what financial markets think of as the 'Beta' or systemic risk – the risk intrinsic to generic system norms.²⁵ We are generally far better off and safer, but if social cohesion were radically lost, the effects could be more catastrophic than with a less efficient but more diversified system.

On another level, the attempt to satisfy the fullness of fundamental human needs has been subsumed under the logic of monetary values.²⁶ To use a word that Hebrideans are fond of, 'providence' (*provide-ence*) rooted in the land and sea has been subsumed by mere shopping for provisions.

These are issues that touch deeper into the human condition than we can go in these few pages. We will close with some general considerations.

For those involved in decision-making within government and institutions, at all levels, we would urge: the need to extend the concept of 'security' beyond military uses, towards the social and environmental fabric that sustains the diversity of life; the need for policies that place a premium on local food and energy production, so that we do not take all our eggs from one basket; the need to recognise, teach and honour 'the implicit meaning of local practices',²⁷ the principle that vernacular values and skills underpin community integrity in ways that can never be fully seen through the lens of money; and the need to restore relationships of beauty between people and place, including overlapping (usufructuary) rights of usage and reciprocal responsibility.²⁸ These cannot pretend to be

‘the solution’ to the problems raised, but they may go some way towards counterpointing the downsides of advanced modernity.

We also see implications here for community, for environmental education and for human ecology which could apply not only to the Scottish islands, but in general. These suggest a need to explore and teach three pillars of resilience: the need to recover and sustain the *resilience of ecosystems*, such as fisheries, soil condition and locally-suited plant and animal breeding stock; the need to recover, test and propagate *resilience of knowledge* about options for coping, if mainstream life support systems falter or fail; and the need to develop *resilience of spirit*, so that the inner strengths, competences and empathy are in place to be able to look out for one another when times get difficult.

We explored one example of how these might be taught in an integrated way with the Association of Teacher Education Centres Ireland in Dublin in October 2011. How, for example, school pupils could be taught to prepare soil by making compost, to select and grow differing varieties of potato, to make a storage pit, to open it up at the end of winter; and, if they have survived, throw a potato party for the whole community. It was not felt necessary to discuss whether some might be fermented and distilled into *poteen*, but hope must never be forsaken. Such is ‘resilience of spirit’.

Endnotes

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Additional Note from Alastair McIntosh

When I make use of this research that Lauren and I undertook the main lesson that I draw is about the 3 resiliences – of ecosystems, knowledge and spirit – that emerge from the pattern of her full set of interview data (as found in her thesis). In the course of writing this paper we had to trim a couple of thousand words off to fit Dark Mountain’s format, and this meant losing some rich material. One item that I’d like to recover in this addendum (because I use it in my talks to illustrate resilience of knowledge) is from the medical secretary, who said:

In those days we would have had enough potatoes to last the whole year. We would have made a hollow in the ground placed the potatoes in it and covered it with hay and then turf on top of that. Today the youth wouldn’t know where to begin with something like that.

That informant won’t mind my saying that she was my late father’s practice manager in the North Lochs (now Langabhat) surgery, Agnus MacIennan of Achmore. Agnus is now in her eighties and I was intrigued when last visiting her (in late 2013) that, as I left, she said to me: “Keep thinking about the stories that I tell you.” She intuited their wider relevance to our times, and perhaps, the deeper levels of meaning that can emerge from such sharings in the course of sustained reflection.

Lauren lives in Canada and her by-line, which was printed at the back of the journal, read: “**Lauren Eden** specialises in the research and application of restoring socio-ecological resiliency to our communities and spaces. To learn more please visit her website at www.growingwhole.ca.” My most relevant work in this capacity includes the books [Soil and Soul](#), [Rekindling Community](#) and [Radical Human Ecology](#) as well as papers at www.alastairmcintosh.com. For the website for Dark Mountain journal [click here](#) and do consider subscribing. It carries a lot of very diverse and creative material. Lastly, the image below has photocopied a couple of the headlines that Lauren culled from the Stornoway Gazette but which were of too poor quality to use in the journal. They contribute to the reality that, yes, this really happened.

