

Contemporary Wales



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Contents

Introduction	5
Learning Outcomes	6
1 Rugby – an introduction to contemporary Wales	7
1.1 Difference	11
1.2 Audio activities	16
1.3 Conclusion	18
2 Place and belonging	19
2.1 The regions of Wales	20
2.2 Conclusion	25
3 Work	27
3.1 Economy and work in contemporary Wales	27
3.2 Work, worklessness and poverty	30
3.3 Conclusion	32
4 Gender and ‘race’	34
4.1 Thinking about ‘race’ and Wales	34
4.2 Thinking about gender and Wales	39
4.3 Conclusion	42
5 Class	44
5.1 Conceptions of class in Wales	47
5.2 Conclusion	57
5.3 Audio activities	58
6 Nationalism and the Welsh language	60
6.1 Language and identity	61
6.2 Welsh language and nationalism	66
6.3 Nationalism	70
6.4 Conclusion	77
7 Labour traditions	79
7.1 Labour’s ‘Welsh’ values (Andrew Edwards)	80
7.2 Labour and devolution	83
7.3 Conclusion	89
8 Political representation	91

8.1 A history of political representation in Wales	91
8.2 Broadening engagement and participation in Welsh politics	101
8.3 Conclusion	106
9 Cultural representation	108
9.1 Cinema and Wales	108
9.2 Television 'fictions' and Wales	114
9.3 Conclusion	119
10 Course conclusion	121
Keep on learning	122
Glossary	122
References	124
Further reading	133
Acknowledgements	136

Introduction

This free course addresses both the differences that are found in Wales and the connections that are forged across these differences. It explores differences of place, gender, 'race', class and work; and the connections of nationalism and the Welsh language, Labour traditions, political representation and cultural representations that bridge these differences. Exploring difference and connection, the course provides an authoritative and up-to-date account of the economy, society, politics and culture of contemporary Wales, using a wide-range of engaging case studies.

You will learn about what is distinctive about Wales and Welsh identity; how the National Assembly has transformed the democratic system in Wales; the meaning of the 'clear red water' that separates Welsh Labour from Labour at Westminster; how the Welsh economy has been restructured following the closure of coal mining; the significance of the Welsh language today; whether Wales is classless compared with the rest of the UK; and how television programmes like *Dr Who* and *Gavin and Stacey* represent important dimensions of contemporary Wales.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of Level 1 study in [Sociology](#).

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand some key social sciences concepts, e.g. divisions, identities, representation, to provide a broad introduction to social science subjects
- understand core concepts of how post-war Wales is ordered, governed and subject to social change
- understand the diversity, inequalities and differences in Wales and their implications for political movements and identities
- use evidence and argument to compare and critique different approaches to understanding contemporary Wales
- understand how Social Science concepts and approaches can be used to deconstruct common sense understandings of issues concerning Wales.

1 Rugby – an introduction to contemporary Wales

Hugh Mackay

In recent years the distinctiveness of Wales, in terms of its institutions and culture, has grown considerably. In 1982 *Sianel Pedwar Cymru* (S4C), the Welsh fourth television channel, came into existence, the Millennium Stadium opened in 1999 and the Wales Millennium Centre (where the Welsh National Opera is based) in 2004, and the *Encyclopaedia of Wales* was published in 2007. Crucially, the first members of the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) were elected in 1999 – since when we have seen the development of a raft of Welsh policies and bodies, in both the government and civil society. These developments are both cause and effect of how people in Wales see themselves, of how they identify with the nation – and these contemporary features of Welsh culture also shape how others see Wales and its people. Traditionally, stereotypes of Wales held by those in England have been largely pejorative (Taffy as a thief, etc.) and people in Wales have commonly referred to themselves as lacking in confidence about their nation. Today, conceptions of Wales and its people are changing.

In many ways the old icons and stereotypes live on – miners and chapels are in decline, but sheep, choirs, leeks, daffodils and druids remain prominent. Representing more of a break with the past are the Stereophonics, Manic Street Preachers, Dafydd Thomas (the only gay in the village of Llanddewi Brefi in *Little Britain*), Catherine Zeta-Jones, Rhys Ifans, Ioan Gruffudd, Julien Macdonald, Stacey Shipman (from *Gavin and Stacey*), Russell T. Davies and Dr Who, who all provide a more modern image of Wales. Alongside the new, old icons, celebrities and institutions endure, but they take on new forms and meanings, they become accented in new ways. Shirley Bassey has appeared at Glastonbury and Tom Jones continues to reinvent himself. Rugby is another example of this; it takes place around the globe but has a very particular significance in Wales, where it has been the national game since before the start of the 20th century.

With this in mind, the aims of this section are to:

- introduce you to the subjects addressed in each of the following sections
- use the sport of rugby as a prism, or lens, to introduce these subjects.

Like Wales, and Cardiff especially, rugby has changed enormously in recent years. One journalist attributes to Gavin Henson, the charismatic player who made his international debut in 2001 and was the star of the team that beat England in 2005, a key role in transforming dominant images of rugby in Wales:

He has almost single-handedly ushered the Welsh game out of the age of scrubbed-scalp, gap-toothed boyos into the new one of Cool Cymru peopled by those such as pop group Super Furry Animals and divas Katherine Jenkins and Charlotte Church.

(Henderson, 2005)

Far from the consequence of one player, of course, there is much more to how rugby in Wales has changed in recent years. It has taken a new and distinctive form in becoming

professional, regional and based at the Millennium Stadium. The stadium, in the centre of Cardiff, the capital city, has become an icon of the cityscape and a symbol of the nation. By examining rugby, we can make sense of much about contemporary Wales.

Citizens commonly identify with their nation in the context of major sporting events: imagining the nation is easier when there is a national team playing another nation (Hobsbawm, 1990). Rugby in Wales is a particularly strong example of this phenomenon, being perhaps the main thing that unites people in Wales. In many ways rugby in Wales defines what Wales is and what people in Wales share. From outside Wales, too, it is the rugby that commonly defines the nation – with the sport providing both widespread interest and one of the few positive associations of outsiders' perceptions of Wales. Particularly for people in Wales, rugby is, and its star players are, seen as embodying the essential characteristics and values of the nation – egalitarianism, meritocracy, patriarchy and classlessness (Evans et al., 1999). It is often said that the mood or confidence of the people of Wales, and Wales as a nation, rises and falls with the fortunes of the national rugby team.

Perhaps remarkably, it is not the case that large numbers of people play, or even watch, rugby in Wales – except when the national squad is playing (especially in [the Six Nations championship](#)). Figure 1 shows the most popular sports activities in Wales – with no reference to rugby because the rugby figure is so low that it is off the bottom of the table. Rugby is played by 2.4 per cent of men in Wales, which means about 1.2 per cent of the population. Soccer and cycling are more than four times more popular, and about ten times as many people swim.

In a sense, though, these figures are misleading, in that we might distinguish between recreation or leisure activity (such as walking) from competitive sport, but to an extent the boundary is blurred. We can also consider spectating: about three times as many people watch Cardiff City play football as go to watch one of the four professional regional rugby teams (the Newport-Gwent Dragons, Cardiff Blues, Ospreys and Scarlets). However, if we add the television audience to this, we find more mass involvement in the game. (Undoubtedly, more opportunities to watch rugby on television has reduced the number of spectators at matches). But, notwithstanding the low levels of participation (and even spectating, below the international level), it is through supporting the national rugby team that people in Wales express their belonging to the nation and their pride in it. This does not happen in relation to other cultural events and phenomena, such as the language or music.

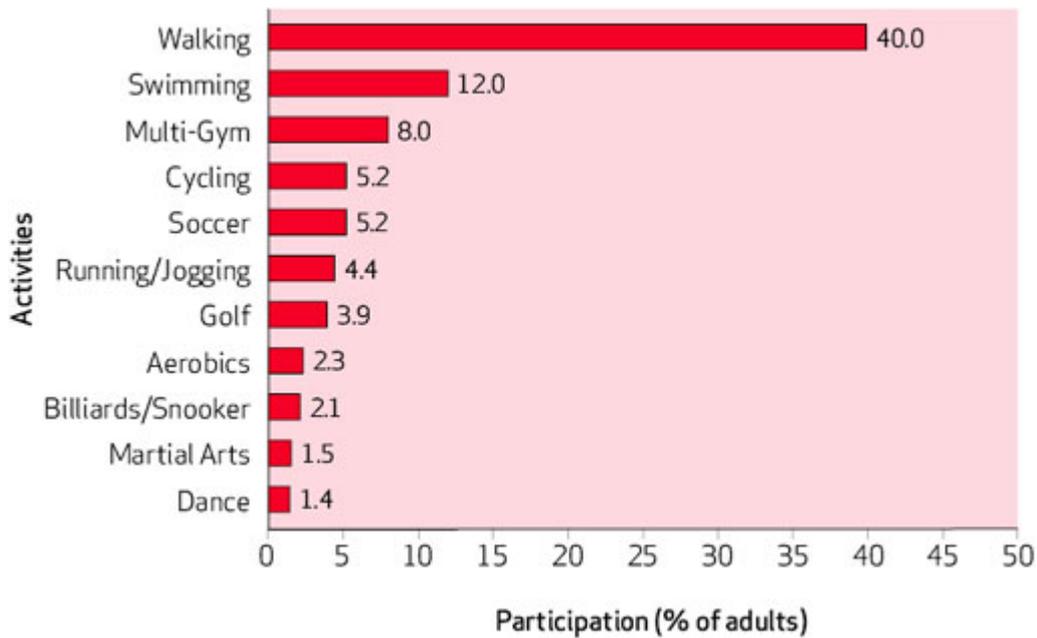


Figure 1 Most popular sports activities in Wales

Activity 1

Examine Figure 2, photographs taken at the Millennium Stadium on rugby international days. Note what these images tell us about the nature and role of rugby in Welsh society and culture.

- What do they tell us about identities and differences?
- What are other common images or representations of such occasions?



(i)



(ii)



(iii)

Figure 2 i) The then First Minister of Wales and other dignitaries at an international rugby match; ii) Women at an international rugby match with daffodil hats and emblematic face paint iii) Charlotte Church, Max Boyce and Katherine Jenkins singing at the Millennium

Stadium at start of an international rugby match.

I make no claims to be providing a definitive social science account of the phenomenon of rugby in Wales, but in this section I am using this sport as a way of introducing core aspects of difference and connection in contemporary Wales.

1.1 Difference

Communities are constructed by notions of insiders and outsiders; they both bind people together and also exclude them. Wales has always had to define itself in relation to England, its more powerful neighbour. This is one reason why (and certainly on match days) Wales might be seen as homogeneous, as made up of people sharing a core set of characteristics and values. Perhaps more significant than what people in Wales have in common, however, is the fragmentation, diversity or differences that are found in Wales. When we examine such differences we are left with a rather different, and certainly less cohesive, image of Wales. As Nicky Wire of the Manic Street Preachers explains:

You have to be wary of romanticism. Wales is a much more complex and divided place than some people think. It isn't this glowing ember of close-knit communities. There's animosity there too. Some North and West Walians resent us talking about Welshness because we can't speak Welsh.

(Wire, 1998)

This section addresses particular aspects of difference in contemporary Wales: place, work, gender and ['race'](#), and class.

1.1.1 Place

In the industrial era, communities in Wales grew up with and around their chapels, the union, the pit or quarry and, especially in south Wales, the rugby club. These institutions allowed forms of collective participation through which communities and even some sort of civic identity or citizenship have been constructed. And through local rugby clubs, players and supporters continue to express their commitment, loyalty and pride to their town or locality. This commitment to locality remains powerful. It involves processes of exclusion (defining those who are outsiders) as well as inclusion – as Gavin Henson illustrates:

People in Swansea view Llanelli folk as foreigners, even though they're only 15 miles away. It was certainly like that when I was at Swansea. Neath people were considered almost normal, but people from Llanelli were weird. They spoke funny and had a different outlook. As a Swansea player there was a rivalry with Neath. With Llanelli it was more of a hatred.

(Henson, 2005a, p. 130)

A commitment to locality, in rugby as generally in Wales remains very strong. The biography of Shane Williams (who made his international debut in 1999), for example, makes frequent reference to his strong attachment to the Aman Valley (Williams and Parfitt, 2008). Such feeling of belonging is a process of imagination.

Considering the differences in Wales, imagining the nation is not straightforward, especially given the differences between north and south. In north Wales there has been less engagement with rugby; soccer is more prevalent. Like so many things in Wales – the population distribution, economic activity and the location of national organisations and institutions – rugby is more concentrated in the south. Nonetheless, there have been a few key players from north Wales in the national squad, notably Dewi Bebb from Bangor in the 1960s and more recently Robin McBryde and Eifion Lewis-Roberts. The north–south divide was exacerbated with the move to the regional structure in Welsh rugby in 2003, since all of the regions are in south Wales. Yet there are an estimated 700 debenture holders in north Wales, the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) distributes nearly 3,000 tickets to clubs in north Wales and, of course, many travel down with tickets that have been sold privately or as part of hospitality or sponsorship packages (personal communication, WRU, 16 October 2009). So, despite the constraints of geography and the different histories of north and south Wales, there is a significant level of support in the north for the national team, albeit less than in the south.

The shift to professionalism in 1995 and to the regional structure in 2003 has meant that players are increasingly dislocated from traditional notions of a place to which they belong – they are contracted by any club, regardless of birthplace or residence. Subsequently there has been a clear increase in the number of non-Welsh players and coaches in Wales. Though the game has strong continuities with its historical roots, rugby clubs and players no longer represent communities in the way that they used to. Interestingly, while reducing local identification, the move to regionalism has coincided with enhanced rugby supporters' identification with the national team (Roderique-Davies et al., 2008).

Regionalism and professionalisation arrived at around the time as the other great change in Welsh rugby in recent years: the opening of the Millennium Stadium. This structure in Cardiff city centre, with its dome and massive legs, 74,500 seats and an opening roof, is visible from all of the arterial roads into the city. It quickly became a symbolic, indeed iconic, image of not just the city but the nation, displacing images of castles, sheep, landscapes and beaches as the dominant iconography of Wales (Pritchard and Morgan, 2003). Holding the FA Cup final at the Millennium Stadium for the six years when Wembley was being rebuilt (2001–06) added to the visibility of the city and nation, as does its use for pop concerts and similar events – contributing significantly to perceptions of Cardiff as a modern, cosmopolitan and capital city. The new stadium connects Wales more closely with England and with global culture. It not only makes Wales more visible, but also provides a *different* (and new) representation of the country.

The capital city plays a particularly prominent role in defining the national culture, so perceptions of Cardiff as the core of Wales marginalise alternative understandings of Wales. Although not far away, in cultural and economic terms Cardiff seems a world apart from some Valleys communities, let alone more distant places in Wales.

1.1.2 Work

The ebbs and flows of Welsh rugby can be seen as reflecting the state of the Welsh economy. Rugby arrived with the rapid industrialisation and immigration that took place in south Wales in the second half of the nineteenth century. The rules and controlled competitiveness of rugby were consonant with the needs and interests of industrial society: rugby was seen as an improving sort of activity and an alternative to the beer hall and gin palace, a way of protecting members of the working class from the excesses of their own culture (Smith and Williams, 1980). Welsh rugby enjoyed its first golden era around the first decade of the twentieth century, the time of the peak of the economy of

south Wales. It declined dramatically in the inter-war years, when Wales lost about half a million of its population. Many rugby teams dissolved in the economic depression of the 1930s and many players, including almost the entire Pontypool pack, went to work for rugby league clubs in the north of England (Morgan, 1980, p. 230). The second golden era for Welsh rugby, the 1970s, coincided with the modernisation of the Welsh economy and the arrival of newer industries. Players around this time were teachers (especially in the London Welsh team), business executives, finance advisers, industrial consultants, sports shop owners and sales representatives (Smith and Williams, 1980). No longer miners or steelworkers themselves, many, including Barry John and Gareth Edwards, were the sons of miners. It is commonly said that the decline of Welsh rugby in the 1980s was because it had lost its roots, lying as these did in an economy characterised by heavy manual work. With heavy industry in decline, more traditional notions of masculinity held less sway.

As well as drawing on and reflecting transformations in the economy, rugby is itself an area of work. Although an ostensibly amateur game until 1995, from before the dawn of the twentieth century it was characterised by forms of [shamateurism](#) starting before 1897 when the legendary Arthur J. Gould, controversially, was bought a detached house in Newport. After that the game was supported by ‘boot money’ and other forms of shamateurism to keep players involved and to discourage their defection to English rugby league clubs, after playing for which players became ineligible to play amateur rugby in or for Wales. With a blind eye apparently turned by the Inland Revenue, for 100 years cash ‘from the car park’ and sinecures (paid jobs which involve little work) in the public and private sectors supported the players.

This was accompanied by the growing commercialisation of the game, drawing in more money. This involved the increase in merchandising (magazines, memorabilia, media coverage) and sponsorship (as brands sought to associate themselves with the game and the faces), culminating in professionalisation in 1995. Shane Williams describes his amazement (though it is commonplace) at being offered a Toyota convertible sports car, to be updated every six months (Williams and Parfitt, 2008). Professionalism and commercialisation alter some of the meanings of the game and also the lifestyle of its players.

A part of this transformation is that rugby has become *work* for the stars, not simply something undertaken for local or national pride. Clearly, the pride in representing Wales remains absolutely central, but the rewards and lifestyle that are associated with the game at this level have changed beyond recognition. Shane Williams, for example, refers to owning plots of land and ten properties (Williams and Parfitt, 2008). The work, of course, is rather different from what it was: it is gruelling, six days a week during the season, with an enhanced focus on fitness and nutrition, and negotiated agreements about the number of matches a player plays per season and having a block of time off in the summer. Discipline is tight and players are expected by their employers to present themselves in particular ways and to speak in public and to the press. So professionalisation has changed not only the organisation of the game and the remuneration of the players, but also the experience of the job of player, which is both more disciplined and no longer confined to behaviour on the pitch.

1.1.3 Gender and ‘race’

Popular images of Wales and Welshness have been profoundly male (with the exception of the Welsh ‘Mam’, a representation of motherhood and nurturing) (see Beddoe, 2000) – reflecting patriarchy generally but, more specifically for Wales, the nature of employment

(men in coal and steel), the politics and the rugby. Since its construction in the later Victorian era, Welsh national identity has been very male, and sport generally in many ways remains the 'last bastion' of traditional masculine values (Messner, 1987). In Wales rugby constitutes something of an extreme version of such values, given the nature of the masculinity which lies at the heart of rugby (the strength and aggression that it involves) and the sport's centrality to the nation.

Excluded from the national sport until fairly recently, women have also been largely absent from sporting representations of the nation – which are so important in defining the nature of the nation (Andrews, 1996). Rugby is quite an extreme case of this, rooted as it is in a very distinctive form of masculinity, in which toughness is central and highly prized. With it goes a deep-rooted masculine drinking culture. Autobiographies by Welsh squad players, even in the era of professionalism, paint a picture of a culture of drinking games, drinking through the night, being sick on buses, being carried home legless and getting wrecked (Henson, 2005a; Williams and Parfitt, 2008).

To some extent the masculinity of rugby (as masculinity more generally) has changed and is changing. As late as the mid 1990s, the players' bar at the Arms Park, the old national stadium, was for men only, with the only woman present the barmaid; there was a separate bar for wives and girlfriends (personal communication, Eric Bowers, 22 October 2009). In the 1970s women supported rugby in the sense of providing the tea after a game, but didn't go to watch matches much. Broader changes in society – such as more women going to work and enjoying greater independence – have led to a stronger presence of women at rugby matches. This coincides with the rise of celebrity culture.

As well as becoming more prominent as supporters, women are now more involved as players. Women's rugby has been played in Wales since the 1970s, though the Welsh Women's Rugby Union affiliated to the WRU only in 1994, the women's Six Nations Championship began in 2003, and women's rugby was fully integrated into the WRU only in 2007. Women's rugby is now one of the fastest growing form of the game, but the hyper-masculinity of rugby makes feminine play problematic; hence its remarkably low profile and the very little media coverage of women's rugby. Thus women remain marginalised here as in other areas of life in Wales.

At the same time, new masculinities and femininities are emerging. The 'laddette culture' (smoking, drinking, swearing and fighting) is one aspect of this. And Henson represents another strand of these changes. As he says, 'It takes two hours to get ready – hot bath, shave my legs and face, moisturise, put fake tan on and do my hair – which takes a bit of time' (Henson, 2005b). Although an exception, Henson challenges hypermasculinised images of players. Gareth Thomas, Wales's most-capped player (100 times) and former Wales and Lions captain, came out as gay in December 2009. He remains the only rugby star to have come out as gay, something quite remarkable given the masculinity of rugby culture. As Thomas said:

'It is the toughest, most macho of male sports ... In many ways, it's barbaric ... It's pretty tough for me being the only international rugby player prepared to break the taboo ... I'm not aware of any other gay player in the game'.

(BBC, 2009)

Black and ethnic minorities are to be found in low numbers throughout Wales, with the exception of Cardiff and particularly Butetown, the area otherwise known as the docks, the bay or Tiger Bay. It is from this area that one of Wales's best-known black rugby players emerged. Billy Boston started his career playing for Cardiff International Athletic

Club (the CIACs), and went on to play rugby league in Wigan in the 1950s and 1960s. More recently there have been a few other prominent black Welsh players, notably Glen Webbe, Nigel Walker and Colin Charvis.

The CIACs has been a truly multicultural team. The club was formed in 1946 by returning black servicemen on the basis of an explicit belief in a multi-racial society and religious tolerance, embracing all 'races' and religions and reflecting the diversity of the local population. The CIAC badge incorporates clasping black and white hands and the club motto *Unus et idem*, 'One and the same'. 'The name Cardiff Internationals came up because there were so many different nationalities. But sometimes the opposition thought we were actually international players from the Cardiff City team' (CIACs, 2009). The CIACs were among the residents of Butetown who were active in the anti-apartheid movement in Cardiff from the late 1960s. They joined one of the earliest anti-apartheid demonstrations, carrying a banner depicting a black hand on a rugby ball on the try line and the slogan 'Don't deny their right to try'.

The CIACs were almost the only rugby players who actively opposed apartheid prior to the few years before the end of apartheid when almost everyone was against it. (The London Welsh player John Taylor was another of the extremely few players to take a stand.) Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the WRU was quite happy to repeatedly play South African teams, despite the protests of students, churches and trade unions, and even though South Africa was banned from the Olympic movement and was subject to a Commonwealth ban on sporting and cultural contact. In the belief that politics should be kept out of sport, the WRU and its players were among the more influential bodies to add credibility to the increasingly isolated apartheid regime, in stark contrast with the politics of the CIACs.

More recently there have been occasional allegations of racism in Welsh rugby, for example by the crowd in relation to Colin Charvis and Aled Brew at an away game against Ulster in 2007, and by a Munster player in the European Rugby Cup in 2005 who was alleged to have called the Ospreys' centre, the Samoan Elvis Seveali, a 'f*cking black c*nt'. Although the allegation was not confirmed, as Henson reports:

'Racist remarks do fly around, it does go on. You hear it in some games. You even get it during training sessions'

(Henson, 2005a, p. 160).

This exposes the myth that racism isn't an issue in Wales. Having said that, the issue is recognised by the WRU.

In 2013, Show Racism the Red Card (SRtRC) partnered with the Welsh Rugby Union to produce a joint anti racism team poster, which was launched during the Six Nations tournament. Jason Webber, SRtRC Campaign Worker, was reported as saying:

"The regional rugby clubs already back the campaign and we believed that through the power of rugby we can really tackle racism in society."

(Show Racism the Red Card, 2013)

1.1.4 Class

In Wales rugby is often discussed, promoted and understood as a classless game, in contrast with England where it is associated with public schools. The reality is perhaps

slightly less clear-cut: in Wales rugby grew out of an alliance between the working classes and the elite classes.

The origins of rugby in Wales lie in the English public schools, from where it was introduced in the 1850s to Llandovery College, Christ College Brecon and Monmouth School (Smith and Williams, 1980). Rugby clubs in south Wales were founded mostly by old boys of these schools, those in the growing class of solicitors, doctors, clerks and engineers. The sport's leadership, especially in the early years, was dominated by people from public schools.

And many famous players have come from public schools. In 1935 the entire Welsh back division against the New Zealand All Blacks was university-trained, many via the public schools of Llandovery or Rydal (Morgan, 1980).

Although it has an English and elite background, rugby in Wales has been one way in which social classes have connected. David Smith and Gareth Williams report how the gentlemanly fiction that any breach of rules was unintentional, and that it was impolite to assume otherwise, became replaced by referees; how penalties and free kicks had to be introduced for foul play, obstruction and being offside; and how the public school vocabulary of collaring, sneaking, rouges and squashes became replaced by the terms tackling, offside, touch-downs and scrums (Smith and Williams, 1980). And historically, Wales has been a major force opposing the amateur status of the game, arguing that it had to be open to all, not just to those who had no need to worry about earning a living.

So the game has been transformed and re-accented as it has become Welsh and a symbol of the Welsh nation and its classlessness. The myth, in which there is considerable truth, is that rugby in Wales is something of a democracy, where the doctor scrums alongside the miner. And, indeed, precisely this has happened on numerous occasions, for example with the doctors Teddy Morgan in the team that defeated the All Blacks in 1905 and J. P. R. Williams among the stars of the 1970s.

There has, however, been some change in who goes to international matches. Cardiff on match days is more for the affluent, the crachach, the Taffia, or the establishment, than it used to be. Ordinary working class people are less in evidence than they were. This fits with broader ways in which Cardiff and its image are being constructed and promoted as more middle-class. The higher price of seats for international matches means less involvement on the part of poorer sections of the community; and the growth of corporate hospitality has worked against participation by ordinary people. Like debenture tickets, sponsorship and corporate hospitality have replaced much of the distribution of tickets via clubs. Because they are more expensive, fewer tickets go to the grassroots. Most rugby club tickets are sold on the open market or used to generate sponsorship, with relatively few being distributed to club members at cost price. One typical club in north Wales is allocated 120 tickets by the WRU. It puts twenty tickets into a draw for members, with the remainder sold as sponsorship (personal communication, WRU, 16 October 2009). Thus the nature of the crowd has changed, with the working classes somewhat marginalised. However, the meaning of the 'working class' has changed considerably, with the decline of the culture and economy of coal and steel and the rise of a consumer society. Gavin Henson's sports car and celebrity lifestyle are a far cry from the game in its amateur days, when class in Wales was somehow much more straightforward.

1.2 Audio activities

Listen to the audio below and then complete the activity.

Audio 1 (Rugby in contemporary Wales)

In Audio 1 (below), Hugh Mackay interviews Gareth Williams, Professor of History in the Centre for Modern and Contemporary Wales at the University of Glamorgan, about rugby in Wales. He is an enthusiastic scholar and supporter of the national sport, as well as being a co-author of the official history of the WRU, *Fields of Praise* (University of Wales Press, 1980). Listen to the audio now.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 1 \(Rugby in contemporary Wales\)](#)

Activity 2

Consider and take notes on the questions below. When you have finished, compare your notes with the discussion below.

1. How has rugby become the major focus for national identification in Wales?
2. Who is involved in rugby and who is excluded or marginalised?
3. How are changes in the game changing popular forms of engagement with rugby in Wales?

Discussion

1. As discussed in Section 1 and Audio 1, the process is substantially historical. Rugby was introduced to Wales in the mid-nineteenth century and was taken up by the expanding and substantially immigrant population of south Wales at a time of rapid industrialisation. Although it arrived in Wales via the public-school system, by the time of the 1905 victory against the All Blacks it had become the national sport. It has successfully accommodated north and south Wales, rural as well as urban, and as the nation has grown (in terms of its national institutions and identification of the people of Wales with the nation) so too has the role of rugby as a unifying sport and cultural activity.
2. As you read in Section 1, Welsh rugby is very much about exclusion as well as inclusion, and it is when Wales play against England that the most fervour is felt. As the Stereophonics sing: 'As long as we beat the English we don't care.' But even within Wales, there are some who are relatively excluded: for example, there is less support for the game in the north than the south. There are also profound gender divisions, though there has been a considerable growth in the numbers of women supporters and players in recent years. In the not-too-distant past (the South African apartheid era) the record of Welsh rugby on matters of 'race' has not been good. And the sport can be seen as particularly macho and rooted in heterosexuality (Gareth Thomas's coming out as gay notwithstanding). Most people in Wales, of course, neither play nor watch rugby except on International days, and even then numbers represent a minority of the population.
3. This clip argues that rugby is no longer a community-based game. But at a local level, the game is very much alive, and there is now much more televised rugby and many people watch this. The onset of professionalism and the regional structure, which has reduced the status of some local teams, has also led to greater identification with the national team.

1.3 Conclusion

- A strong sense of belonging to a particular town or locality in Wales is reflected in attachments to local rugby teams.
- As the employment profile in Wales has changed, so too has the way that rugby is organised, especially with the advent of professionalisation and increasing commercialisation.
- The involvement of women and people from black and ethnic minorities in rugby reflects their position in Welsh society as a whole, and also how this has changed.
- Although rugby in Wales is seen as rooted in the industrial working class, the reality is more complex – it bridges classes, and in any case notions of class have become less straightforward.

Wales isn't just a place but a nation characterised by a particular set of political and moral values. Whatever the differences between groups and individuals, these values provide connections that, together, make Welsh society what it is. The nation engenders feelings of belonging and solidarity, with rugby continuing to bind people together as does no other cultural activity or phenomenon. Contested and transforming over time, core attributes of the nation are embodied in the national game, in its players, institutions and supporters. Despite its transformation from an amateur game to one that is more marketised and mediated, rugby continues to be prominent in representations of Wales and as a focus for identification with the nation.

2 Place and belonging

Graham Day

Writing this section led me to make several train journeys from Bangor in north Wales to the capital city, Cardiff. The trip takes a few hours, travelling to begin with along the north Wales coast within touching distance of the very different seaside resorts of Llandudno, Rhyl and Prestatyn. Much of the rest of the time the route follows the Welsh/English border, via a string of historic English and Welsh market towns, through splendid country scenery and landscapes. Eventually you arrive in the large south Wales cities of Newport and then Cardiff. Almost invariably when I talk to people in Cardiff about the journey I have just made, they comment that they themselves have rarely or never actually been to the north of the country. Crossing Wales like this, a comparatively short distance of around 230 miles, means encountering some major variations in the histories, conditions and experiences of different places and people. Depending on where it is viewed from, Wales can look a very different place.

Although a small country, Wales is diverse, and at times divided by its social, cultural and political, as well as geographical, differences.

This section examines some of the main regional variations in Wales.

Activity 3

Think about what you already know about Wales, and how it is divided up into different kinds of places and communities.

- What key differences come to mind?
- How far does your own familiarity with Wales stretch – are there parts of Wales you know and understand very well?
- Are there other parts you don't know much about, which fall outside your 'mental map'?
- Why is this?

Discussion

My own answer would include the fact that some parts of Wales are strongly Welsh-speaking, while elsewhere the English language is far more dominant. There are also some noticeable regional variations in speech and accent. Much of Wales is rural and thinly populated, with areas of near wilderness and great natural beauty. But there are also places with a remarkable history of industrial development, as well as decline. There are pockets of considerable prosperity, with investment in some exciting new architectural and environmental developments, along with well-known black spots of deprivation, poverty and neglect. There are historic town centres, and places well-known for aspects of Welsh heritage, but also many new housing and industrial estates, shopping centres, and places apparently without much character at all. Having spent most of my life living in rural north and west Wales, personally I am less familiar with industrial south Wales and the Valleys, which may influence the way I see the country as a whole.

Although a small country, Wales displays considerable diversity, in terms of:

- geographical and physical variation
- social and historical development
- differences of relative prosperity and deprivation.

In this section you will consider how the sense of 'being Welsh' may differ across the various regions of Wales.

2.1 The regions of Wales

2.1.1 One Wales or many?

Attachment to place and a strong sense of local belonging are said to be among the distinctive characteristics of Welsh people. This is because although Wales has the qualities of smallness and intimacy, it has developed in ways which foster variety and uniqueness. It has a population of almost 3 million people, a large proportion of whom continue to live in small towns and villages. It is divided and separated both geographically, by hills and mountains which even today hinder communication between all parts of the country, and by historical developments which created marked divisions between rural and industrial Wales, and between those parts of Wales that were Welsh-speaking, or more anglicised. Although with [globalisation](#) and integration these differences are fading, they leave a legacy of ideas and thought which help us to understand contemporary life, and provide an influential backdrop to a good deal of recent policy and decision making.

Eminent writers as different in their attitudes towards Wales and Welshness as the novelist and critic Raymond Williams and the poet R. S. Thomas agree in giving importance to people rooted in their local landscape, and its history, and in the social relationships they have with the others who live around them. Williams has written of the neighbourly environment in which he was formed as a child, which gave him his lifelong concern with the possibilities of human warmth and association in the small community, where people are familiar with and grow to really know one another. Thomas has captured the closeness of Welsh country people to the land and its natural environment, and to the culture and way of life with which it is identified. Social scientists writing about Wales have shared this fascination with the exceptional importance of locality and community, and the sense of belonging to a particular place.

2.1.2 Regional differentiation in Wales

Despite the country's compact size, scholars of modern Wales have frequently stressed the depth of its internal divisions and differences, which mean that people living in different parts of the country face a range of contrasting conditions and experiences. Consequently it has been suggested that there are some fundamental differences of perception and interest which tend to divide rather than connect the people of Wales. An influential attempt to capture these variations is Denis Balsom's three-Wales model (1985), which distinguishes between Welsh Wales, British Wales and y Fro Gymraeg (see Figure 3).

Basing his analysis on answers to survey questions, Balsom focused on two key measures: whether or not a person spoke Welsh, and whether or not he or she identified as 'Welsh', 'British', or something else. By combining these indicators he was able to

divide Wales into three distinct types of area, which had different cultural and political characteristics associated with distinct social groupings. According to Balsom:

The Welsh-speaking, Welsh identifying group is perhaps most distinctive and largely centred upon the north and west of Wales. This area is designated *y Fro Gymraeg*. The Welsh-identifying, non-Welsh-speaking group is most prevalent in the traditional south Wales area and labelled Welsh Wales. The British identifying non- Welsh speaking group dominates the remainder of Wales, described therefore as British Wales.

(Balsom, 1985, p. 6)

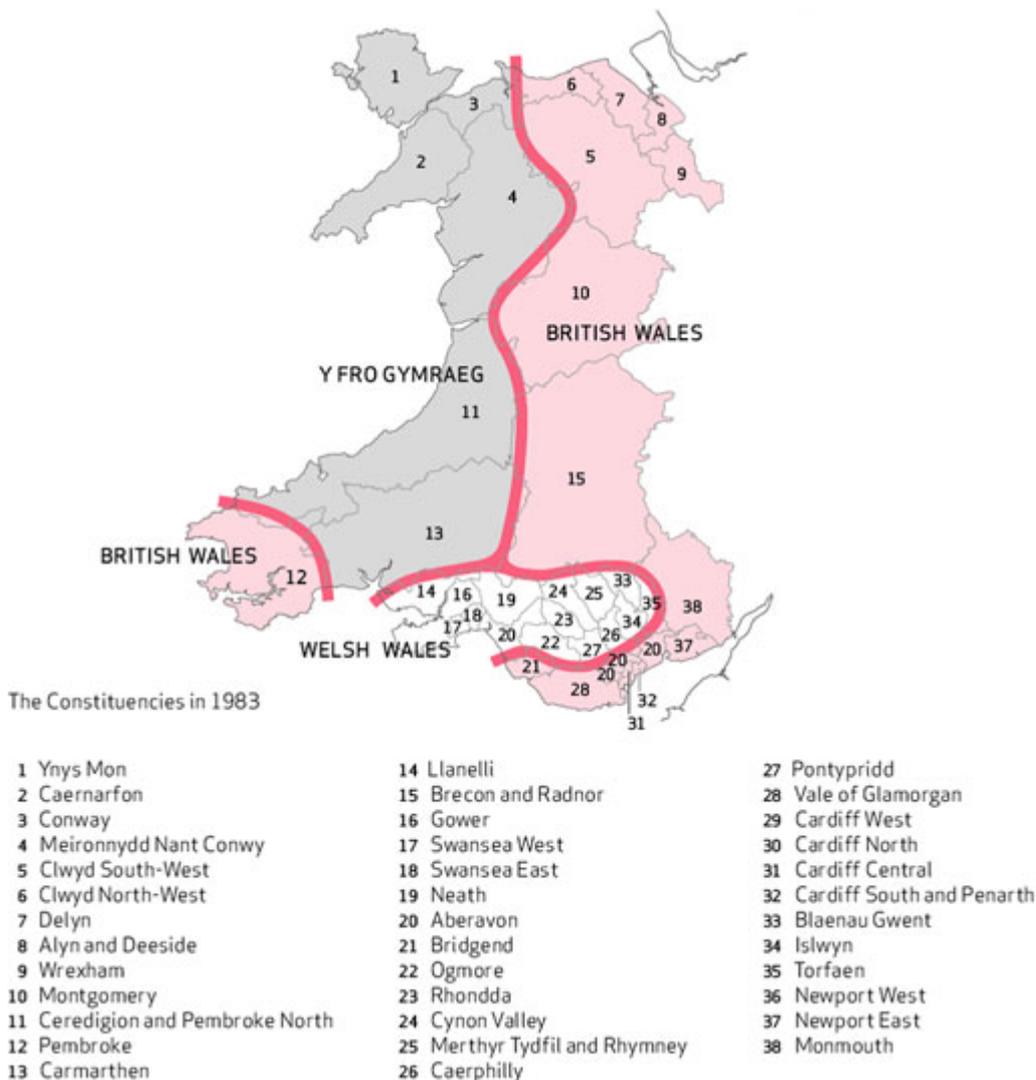


Figure 3 Balsom's 'three Wales' model

Balsom's main purpose in devising these categories was to predict and explain variations in patterns of party political voting. He suggested that these regions were already undergoing significant change at the time he was writing. New patterns of work and industry and changing population profiles were undermining old images of a 'Celtic Fringe' based on rural, agricultural Wales, and a Labour stronghold rooted in the coal industry. Balsom was especially concerned that changes affecting what he called the 'traditional south Wales area' (his 'Welsh Wales') would throw into question a form of Welsh identity

developed and expressed in the English language. He said that this made it hard to imagine a future sense of Welshness that was not anchored in the Welsh language. In other words, he was predicting the likely disappearance of Welsh Wales as it merged more and more into British Wales. On the other hand, he acknowledged that Wales was still held together by a widely shared sense of being Welsh, and indeed there was evidence that this was being strengthened by the development of Welsh political institutions. From our perspective now, a quarter of a century later, we can judge the accuracy of these predictions.

Activity 4

Looking back over your own lifetime:

- How far do you feel that Balsom's prediction of the weakening of any sense of Welshness that is not linked to the Welsh language was correct?
- Do more people now feel Welsh than did around twenty-five years ago?
- On what grounds other than language might people consider themselves to be Welsh?

Discussion

Although speaking Welsh is an extremely important aspect of Welshness, there are many other grounds on which people can feel themselves to be Welsh. These can include loyalty to their place of birth and origin, a sense of family and community connection to Wales, enthusiasm for Welsh artistic and sporting achievements, or engagement with political processes and voluntary activities in Wales. Each of these can produce a sense of Welsh identity. Whilst one might expect devolution to have enhanced senses of being Welsh, there is little evidence for this. (Curtice 2013, p.17; Welsh Government 2014).

It can be questioned whether the areas Balsom defined were ever really so neatly self-contained and distinctive as Figure 3 might suggest; in reality, the boundaries between them were probably much less clear-cut. For instance, many of those who peopled the area known as 'Welsh Wales' were drawn from the more rural parts of *y Fro Gymraeg*, and for a long time afterwards they maintained real, or sentimental, connections to it. Nevertheless, it is not unusual for Wales to be partitioned or subdivided in this kind of way, into distinct areas such as rural Wales; *y Fro Gymraeg*, sometimes referred to as the Welsh 'heartland'; the Valleys; the cities, or urban Wales (Cardiff, Swansea, Newport, Wrexham) and so on. Often these areas or zones are said to possess different sets of attributes, with associated meanings, or regional cultures, reflecting not only the size and distribution of their population, but also differences of class, occupation and lifestyle, which present their inhabitants with contrasting problems and opportunities.

Such areas have their advocates, and political representatives, and are represented in particular kinds of policy response and direction. For instance, there have been many policies and strategies for rural Wales, and others aimed at achieving urban regeneration. For several years there was a government-led Programme for the Valleys, designed to improve economic and social opportunities in a deprived part of south Wales. Since 2000 the whole of west Wales has received European (Objective 1, Convergence and then for the period 2014-2020, Structural) funding, on the grounds that its GDP per capita is under 75% of the EU average. Making the case for this European support required the map of

Wales to be redrawn to highlight east–west divisions, emphasising the common problems faced by rural Wales and the de-industrialising Valleys of the south rather than the differences between (rural) north and (industrial) south that figure so often in Welsh political debates.

A more recent attempt to dissect Wales into its various parts is *People, Places, Futures: the Wales Spatial Plan* (2004; updated 2008), prepared on behalf of the Welsh Government. This partitions Wales into a number of distinct ‘regions’ or areas with contrasting characteristics, and is intended to help in making appropriate decisions for development over the next twenty years. According to this analysis, Wales has six significant ‘sub-regions’: north-east Wales; north-west Wales; central Wales; south-east Wales; Swansea Bay and the Western Valleys; and Pembrokeshire and the Milford Haven waterway.

The boundaries between these areas are not intended to be hard-and fast; they are ‘fuzzy’, because there are many cross-border connections and linkages in daily activities. However, on the basis of key statistical information and data about economic, social and environmental conditions, an impression is given of the different ‘social geographies’ found in present-day Wales. We learn, for example, that north-west Wales ‘has a very strong sense of identity, linked to the Welsh language, an outstanding landscape and coastline’ (Welsh Government., 2004, p. 38) whereas north-east Wales is described as ‘a key driver of the Welsh economy’ (p. 41). The ‘capital network’ of south-east Wales, centred on Cardiff, is referred to as an ‘interdependent but unplanned urban network’ (p. 49) that contains some major economic and social disparities. Central Wales consists of a ‘mosaic of relatively small settlements’ (p. 45) which are proving to be very attractive for their quality of life and environment.

The Spatial Plan provides a framework enabling local planning to be brought together with national aspirations and strategies. The assumption is that the people who live in a given area typically will enjoy different rewards, or face different problems, from those experienced elsewhere, and therefore require different kinds of policies and treatments. For instance, distance and access to services like health and education present more of a problem for those living in the Welsh countryside, where population is scattered and transport limited, than in the cities. It is even more of a problem for those who lack the financial and other resources to overcome distance – such as ownership of or access to a car. But it is important not to oversimplify, since there are groups and individuals living in more urban contexts who face comparable deprivation and marginalisation.

These distinctions are not just a matter of material provisions and inequalities – the ‘[life chances](#)’ people encounter – but extend to how people think about where they live, and its positive and negative features. This can translate into differences of social and political attitude and concerns.

Thus Wales is officially a bilingual country, and all public bodies (and imminently private bodies such as utilities) are required to give the two languages equal status. But because use of the Welsh language is not distributed evenly throughout Wales, the politics of the language and the implementation of language policies vary from area to area. The language has a more prominent role in debates and discussions in Gwynedd or Ceredigion than it does in Pembrokeshire, simply because many fewer people speak Welsh, or attach such importance to it, in Pembrokeshire. Similarly, debates about open access to the countryside, or the legitimacy of hunting, get a different reception in rural areas, especially from groups connected to farming and agriculture, than they do from those who live in the cities, who naturally have more ‘urban’ interests. Different areas

contain different populations, who to some degree engage in different activities and so develop different interests.

2.1.3 Perceptions of regional differences in 'Welsh character'

The kinds of officially defined, large-scale or 'macro' distinctions we have been considering provide only a broad interpretation of variations within Wales, and are not likely to coincide precisely with the impressions formed by ordinary people, who often see things from a more detailed, local or 'micro' perspective, formed 'on the ground'. Rather than objective and systematic scientific research based on statistical evidence, their views are more likely to rely upon everyday commonsense knowledge of the sort that 'everybody knows'. Similarly, people do not always use sociological or academic language when talking about these topics, yet in their own way they do show great interest in and sensitivity towards them. For example, in Brian Roberts' account of his research into attitudes towards Welshness in a south Wales valley he tells us that an informant referred to differences of 'character' between those living in different places. Contrasting residents of a nearby agricultural district with the inhabitants of his own exmining valley, he said, 'In my opinion there's a difference in the people there and in the Valleys. A different character you know' (quoted in Roberts, 1999, p. 121). Another of those interviewed expanded on this suggestion, using similar words:

There's a Valleys' character. If you went to West Wales, you'd find the Welshman is different, it's a land-working Welshman. Here you have the industrial, south Welshman who is totally different to the north. There is a division between north and south and mid Wales.

(quoted in Roberts, 1999, p. 121)

As used here, 'character' is very like the term 'identity', which is widely used in recent social sciences research. As in these quotations, individuals and groups can form a sense of their own identity by comparing themselves to others, seeing who they are like and who they differ from. In making these distinctions, they draw upon their everyday experiences, in the places where they live, work, and enjoy themselves. A wealth of information and understanding is hidden behind comments like those just cited, and it is striking how important geographical differences of place seem to be in organising these perceptions of social difference. They imply that the individuals concerned possess a map of social variations, arranged according to the points of the compass, that can be summarised in the comparisons they make between different areas like 'west Wales' and 'the Valleys'.

Activity 5

Take stock of what you have read so far.

- To what extent would you agree that different Welsh 'characters' are to be found in different parts of Wales?
- Why might this be the case?
- If you could discuss the question with Brian Roberts's interviewees, how do you think your views might differ from theirs?

Discussion

Both the informants cited above happen to be men aged 60 or more. They emphasise the type of work (industrial or agricultural) which they believe goes into forming the

character of 'Welshmen' in particular. Would the same apply to Welsh women? Or to those younger than themselves? When you think about it, it is unlikely that (as suggested) people in south Wales will be 'totally different' from those living in the north. Indeed, they are bound to have much in common. Whether you stress the differences or the similarities depends on your frame of reference: people outside Wales might not notice differences of the kind highlighted by these comments. Yet there are some genuinely interesting and significant differences between places in north and south Wales, arising from what has occurred there in the past and from features of the contemporary situation, and it is quite possible that this has a bearing on how the people living in them think and behave.

These local variations, connected to place, have given rise to a rich tradition of local studies carried out by social scientists in Wales (for example, Alwyn Rees (1950) on Llanfihangel-yng-Ngwynfa; Ronald Frankenberg (1957) on Glynceiriog; and Isabel Emmett (1964) on Llanfrothen). These studies explore themes of identity and belonging, and the nature of Welshness, in a variety of different contexts. This tradition of social science research has ensured that Welsh social scientists, and Welsh places, have influenced how these issues have been thought about more generally. There is also a vein of important literary writing about Welsh places and communities which parallels the academic work in capturing what is special and distinctive about different places.

2.2 Conclusion

- In social research, for official purposes and in ordinary speech, Wales is often divided into distinct parts or areas, which are assumed to have differing characteristics.
- These social and geographical differences provide a basis on which it can be argued that there are different kinds of Welsh people, or different kinds of Welshness, made visible in attitudes and behaviour.
- However, the boundaries between these regions are not firm, or fixed, and the social map of Wales can be drawn in different ways, for different purposes.

The themes considered in this section come together in a comment made by two academics, reflecting on the continuing importance of community and language in Welsh political life, and therefore on the sort of response a movement like Cymuned, the anti-colonialist Welsh communities pressure group, can inspire. From our point of view, what is noteworthy is the way it unites elements of the physical and the social ('land' and 'community') with references to language, culture and identity, to present a statement about Wales in terms of its 'beating heart'. Like several of the views we have explored, it also implies an argument about what it is to be truly ('authentically') Welsh:

In Wales, 'heartland communities' ... provide a powerful focus for policy initiatives developed in their name. The phrase appeals to a hierarchy of presumed cultural authenticity, distinguishing a set of favoured enclaves where the 'heart' of Wales beats loudest. These communities are rooted most deeply in the 'land' of Wales, building on a productive association between supposed national distinctiveness or identity and images of gwlad –, as in *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, of the Welsh national anthem. Phrases like 'Welsh-speaking communities' or even the innocent-sounding 'small communities' tap into a

familiar ideological seam of meaning which predisposes us to find intense cultural value in communities, often with the idea of the Welsh language embedded in this idea.

(Coupland and Bishop, 2006, p. 36)

This brief survey of the social significance of some of the distinctions of place and belonging which exist within Wales suggests that rather than a single answer to the question 'Where can one be authentically Welsh?', or even a neatly ordered hierarchy from 'more to less Welsh' places, several versions of Welshness compete for space with one another. All of them are subject to change, and this makes it hard to define fixed or sharply drawn boundaries between them.

There are some major social processes at work, such as the ever-growing rate of mobility, which tend to undermine the distinctiveness of place and weaken the identity of communities. One way in which people react to these forces is to insist, sometimes more strongly than ever, on the need to protect and defend their existing communities and social relationships, and what they stand for. In Wales, we can see many examples of people defending ideas of community and identity that seem to be under threat, such as Cymuned.

During the last half century or so, Wales has witnessed some staggering social and economic changes. Yet this should not blind us to the existence of certain continuities as well. In a rare example of a return to an earlier study, researchers from Swansea have repeated some of the work done by Rosser and Harris (1965) and discovered that substantial numbers of people (59 per cent of the sample studied) continue to live the greater part of their lives in the town (Charles and Davies, 2005). Among these, it was still possible to find strong family connections and shared experiences; for example, people who had been to school together, worked together and lived in the same neighbourhoods. This high level of residential stability enabled the formation of some closeknit locally based networks. Membership of this kind of network is often felt to be a particularly Welsh characteristic and makes people feel especially Welsh. In other words, 'community' lives on in the experience of many Swansea people. However, undoubtedly there are also very many Welsh people who experience nothing like this degree of stability and closeness, because their lives are far more mobile and changeable. Our understanding of modern Wales has to be able to take into account both of these kinds of experience, and the contrasting perceptions of Welshness they create.

Finally, it should be noted how at various points in this section you have come up against the gap between communities as they really are, and as they are thought to be. The respondents to Cloke et al.'s (1997) rural research, for instance, who sought to regulate the type of cars, curtains or gardens their neighbours had, to conform with an idea of what a proper Welsh community should be like, are drawing lines around what they feel is acceptable in order to belong. This tells us a great deal about how they imagine their community should be, but not always much about how it actually is. After all, it is not only 'foreign' or English incomers who don't feel it is necessary to go to chapel, or to avoid cleaning their cars on a Sunday; most of their Welsh neighbours feel exactly the same. The person who complained about the lack of proper Sunday observance seems to have in mind a form of Welshness appropriate to the time of the classic community studies, but which vanished long ago as a reflection of how most Welsh people actually live. A hard-won lesson of research on questions of place, community and belonging is the need to take care not to allow nostalgic or romanticised impressions of life in the past to hide the real character and quality of life found in places and communities today.

3 Work

Dave Adamson

This section examines the world of work in Wales. Its key objective is to develop an understanding of the relationship between economic change in Wales and the patterns of work and employment which have emerged in the period since the Second World War. The Welsh economy has evolved rapidly during this period and working life has changed with it. Industries and activities which once dominated the Welsh economy have virtually disappeared and [economic globalisation](#) and technological innovation have brought new patterns of work and employment. Major changes have occurred in the structure of the workforce and in the working conditions that people experience.

This section considers the shape and nature of the contemporary economy in Wales and the patterns of work that emerge from it. An understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the Welsh economy is essential in order to make sense of much of the social, cultural and political life in Wales. One of the primary tasks of the Welsh Government is to provide a strong economic footing for the achievement of many of its social and cultural objectives. However, there are key structural weaknesses in the Welsh economy that present major challenges to Wales achieving affluence and prosperity comparable to the wider UK experience.

3.1 Economy and work in contemporary Wales

This section provides a review of the current Welsh economy and world of work.

Activity 6

Take a moment to reflect on what images you might already have of work in Wales.

- What are the representations of working lives in Wales that you've encountered in film and literature.
- How is the Welsh economy presented in the mass media.
- Note three dominant images you associate with work and employment in Wales.

Discussion

I can say with almost certainty that one of your images will be of a miner with helmet and Davy lamp, or perhaps black-faced and cloth-capped. A second image might be that of a steelworker, silhouetted against the glow of a furnace and sparks of molten steel. A third might be that of a solitary sheep farmer, carving a meagre existence high in the hills of north Wales. Did you also think of a Welsh 'Mam', perhaps picturing her in sepia brown, leaning in the doorway of her 'little palace', whose work in the domestic realm underpins the more visible labour of her men folk?

In many ways these have become stereotypical images of Wales, replicated in literature, art, film, photography and television. However, the modern Welsh economy is a diverse and complex mix of activities which range from heavy industrial production to industries characterised by innovative uses of high technology. Wales remains one of the UK regions with the highest dependence on manufacturing industry and, although the

significance of steel manufacturing and heavy fabrication has declined, other forms of industrial manufacturing have taken their place. Some of the high-profile modern activities include the manufacture of European Airbus aircraft wings at Broughton in north Wales and the production of car engines at Bridgend in south Wales. The policy of attracting inward investment to Wales has ensured the presence of the manufacture of textiles, electronics, automotive components and consumer goods. Consequently, for many people in Wales the experience of work centres on a factory, with 10 per cent of the workforce employed in manufacturing processes in 2012.

Whilst the number and proportion of workers in manufacturing has been falling, the growth has been in the service sector – which encompasses the public services (e.g. health and education), wholesale, retailing, distribution and transport, banking and finance and leisure. In 2012, about 86% of the jobs in Wales are in the service sector. Table 1 shows the distribution (in 2012) of employment in the different industrial sectors in Wales.

Table 1 Workforce employment in Wales by industry, 2012

Industrial sector	Number	Percent
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	35,600	2.7
Mining and quarrying	2,200	0.2
Manufacturing	130,300	9.9
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	6,600	0.5
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	12,500	0.9
Construction	89,700	6.8
Wholesale, retail, transport, hotels and food	342,000	25.9
Information and communication	25,900	2.0
Finance and insurance activities	30,900	2.3
Real estate activities	18,500	1.4
Professional, scientific and technical activities; administrative and support service activities	136,400	10.3
Public administration and defence, compulsory social security	87,600	6.6
Education	129,100	9.8
Human health and social work activities	200,600	15.2
Other service activities – arts, entertainment and recreation	39,400	3.0
Other service activities – other industries	32,200	2.4
	1,319,500	100

Welsh Assembly Government (2013)

Three key problems facing the contemporary Welsh economy can be identified (Bryan and Roche, 2009). The first of these is Wales's consistent underperformance in comparison with the majority of other UK regions. The economic output of a region is usually measured in terms of its [gross value added \(GVA\)](#).

Wales produces goods and services at only 72 per cent of the GVA for the UK (in 2013), with the Isle of Anglesey and the Gwent Valleys measuring lowest at 49 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively. This gap is also gradually widening despite the major European Union (EU) investment of structural funds. Qualification for these funds relies on gross

domestic product (GDP) in Wales being below 75 per cent of the UK average. This has been described as 'a badge of failure' (Hill, 2000, p. 1); it marks Wales as one of the poorest regions in Europe prior to the recent addition of the eastern European accession states. Regrettably, the use of this initial round of European funding did not significantly change the level of GDP in Wales and a new round of funding was allocated in 2008. Now referred to as 'convergence funding', this is being deployed more strategically than the Objective 1 programme. With convergence funding, the Welsh Government plays a central role in how the money is used, in contrast to the more devolved model that saw local government and third-sector organisations heavily involved.

However, despite such interventions the economic performance in Wales remains poor. A key reason for this is the second major problem in the contemporary Welsh economy: the low employment rate. This figure is distinct from the unemployment rate, which simply measures the numbers of people seeking work. Instead, the employment rate measures those in work as a proportion of the full population of working age. The employment rate informs us about all forms of economic inactivity, including unemployment, premature retirement and those prevented from working by illness or incapacity. Wales consistently has the lowest employment rate in the UK, with the exception of the north-east of England. This simply means that more people of working age in Wales are economically inactive and are not currently seeking. This is a critical weakness in the Welsh economy and prevents improvements in output. The social consequences of high rates of economic inactivity are explored later in this section.

The final key problem in the Welsh economy is the general prevalence of lower wage levels than elsewhere in the UK (see Figure 4). Although there is variation between different sectors of the economy, the overall pattern is that average earnings in Wales reach only 87 per cent of the UK level. In the UK in April 2013, average gross weekly earnings were £620 in comparison with the Welsh average of £539 and this demonstrates a slight widening of the gap, in recent years. Low wages have become the primary cause of poverty in Wales, rather than unemployment – which triggered poverty for the majority of people in the 1990s. However, the effects of the recession that began in 2007, and the impact of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition government's austerity measures are seeing unemployment returning as a major cause of poverty.



Figure 4 Low-paid work in the Welsh service industry

Jason Bye/Rex Features

To return to our images of Wales and the pattern of work, we can see that the economy of Wales is now far more complex than we might have imagined and that there are core structural problems in the Welsh economy which present major challenges for the government in Wales, but most critically for the people who experience worklessness and low wages. The images of miners, steelworkers and farmers no longer adequately describe the contemporary world of work and employment in Wales. The image of the Welsh 'Mam' also belongs in the past, as the economic activity rates of women continue to rise. In order to fully understand the transformations which have taken place it is necessary to trace the major changes in economic activity in Wales since the Second World War. The economy we experience today and the patterns of work we observe are the legacy of major processes of economic and social change. These are considered in the next section of this course.

3.2 Work, worklessness and poverty

This section outlines the relationship between the Welsh economy and patterns of work and work experience in Wales. Regrettably, one of the more negative outcomes of the Welsh economy is the existence of high levels of poverty. In recent years this has been measured largely in relation to [child poverty](#):

'The child poverty rate in Wales is 32 per cent, currently the highest in the UK where the average is 31 per cent. In comparison, Scotland and Northern Ireland have child poverty rates of 25 per cent'.

(Kenway et al., 2008)

Subsequent research puts the figure at 29% and about constant over the past decade (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2013)

There are two ways in which the pattern of economic activity influences the level of poverty in Wales. The first of these is the way in which low wages depress family incomes. To be employed in Wales is no guarantee against poverty. In 2010, 23 per cent of men and 19 per cent of women in full-time work in Wales earned less than £7 per hour, leading to the conclusion that 'Wales remains a low-pay economy' (Kenway et al., 2007, p. 4). There are also spatial patterns associated with the distribution of low wages, with rural areas experiencing a higher incidence of low-wage occupations. The second influence the economy has on the extent of poverty is through the consequences of high levels of economic inactivity.

In this respect Wales reflects a wider experience of worklessness in areas previously dominated by mining, steel production and heavy industry. The period of collapse of the industrial base in Wales in the early 1980s was marked by rapidly rising levels of unemployment and economic inactivity. This latter term is more useful to employ as it includes many more categories of worklessness than simple unemployment. For example, it covers all those of working age who are not in work, including people with long-term sickness and disability and those who have retired prematurely as well as those who are currently seeking work. A clear pattern that emerged in the 1980s was the large number of people who were assigned to either Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disability Allowance. Figure 5 shows the rates of economic inactivity in Wales since 1984 and the contradictory gradual rise for men and fall for women. This is in part explained by increasing employment opportunities for women as employment in retail and services (traditionally employing more women than men) has increased in significance in Wales. However, the large numbers of Incapacity Benefit claimants in Wales is a major cause for concern and an increasing focus of government policy.

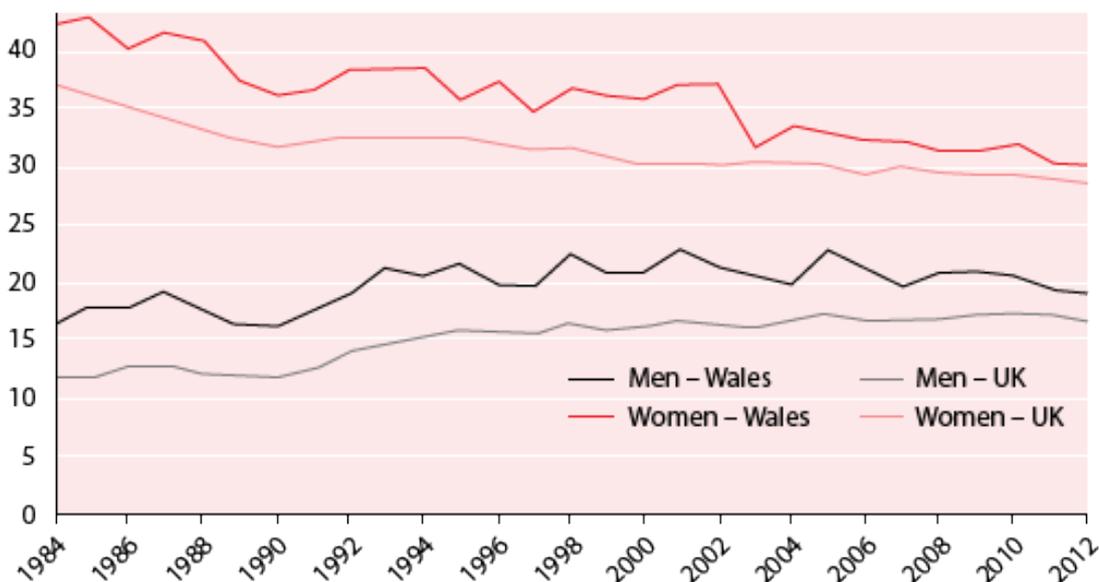


Figure 5 Economic inactivity in Wales, 2007 (updated with Statistics Wales (2013) SB 112/2013))

Activity 7

Examine Figure 5, which is drawn from a Welsh Government. statistical bulletin about economic activity. As you do so:

- Compare the rates of activity for men and women.
- Remember some of the processes you have read about in this section and note why the rate of economic inactivity continues to fall for women.

Discussion

This graph shows the simple numerical measurement of economic inactivity. You will have noticed that the rate of inactivity for men continues to rise, while for women there is a gradual fall in inactivity rates. This is a consequence of the feminisation of work. While it is important to understand statistically the levels of economic inactivity, it is also important to understand the social impact of high levels of long-term worklessness. In many communities in Wales three generations of economically inactive individuals can be found within single families.

Critically, worklessness and low wages can become concentrated in particular communities and families. The consequences for the individual, the family and community can be considerable. Additionally, in localities where low wages and economic inactivity are the dominant experience, a major cultural shift can occur which disconnects the community from the wider cultural values that underpin a commitment to work. Low levels of economic opportunity can create a fatalistic attitude which accepts a future of worklessness as the norm. Moreover, economic inactivity can become a rational choice in circumstances where low wages are coupled with precarious patterns of employment and a predominance of part-time and casual work. In such areas young people in the education system often lose motivation and a culture can emerge which rejects the academic values of the school and undermines educational performance. Peer pressures to conform to worklessness can develop and a general collapse of aspiration and confidence can dominate the local social experience.

These social and psychological adjustments to worklessness and low wages overlie the structural causes of underemployment in such localities. Intractable barriers to employment include geographical distance and isolation from places of work, poor transport links and, fundamentally, the low skills base of the population. To this can be added individual and communal values which reject travelling to places of work and which develop an acceptance of a lifestyle of poverty as normal and even satisfactory.

Just as the world of work has influenced Welsh culture in the past, the world of worklessness exerts a corrosive influence on engagement and participation in the wider community. Communities characterised by worklessness can become isolated and culturally marginalised, a process usually referred to as [social exclusion](#). The social horizons of people living in such communities can become confined to the immediate area and the boundaries of the estate or community become the furthest social horizon for residents. Local cultural experience can become compressed and whole communities can lose their social and cultural links to the economy and the world of work.

3.3 Conclusion

- Low wages are one cause of poverty, especially in rural areas of Wales.
- Worklessness rates are particularly high in areas where mining, steel production and heavy industry used to be dominant.
- Rates of economic inactivity are rising among men, but falling among women.

- One consequence of economic inactivity is the marginalisation of the individuals and communities affected.

In this section you have examined the major features of the contemporary Welsh economy and the work patterns that emerge from it. Profound social changes have occurred in response to changing economic patterns, notably the increased role for women in the workplace and the experience of worklessness. Both of these have impacted on family and social life; indeed the social and cultural experience of living in Wales has changed. Taking the Welsh economy forward into a more prosperous future presents major challenges to the Welsh Government. As well as overcoming some of the structural weaknesses in the economy, policy will have to successfully challenge the social and cultural impact of both low wages and long-term economic inactivity if Wales is to reach standards of living for all its citizens which compare favourably with the rest of the UK.

4 Gender and 'race'

Sandra Betts and Charlotte Williams

The main focus of this section is on racial and gender differences in contemporary Wales, but it is important to set that discussion within a historical context. To this end, this section looks at some of the ways in which 'race' and gender have been thought about, represented and theorised over the course of the 20th century and up to the present day.

4.1 Thinking about 'race' and Wales

Race relations literature and policy have tended to focus on areas of ethnic minority concentration in the UK. For a number of reasons Wales has been largely off the race relations map of Britain. This is curious, because Wales is home to one of the oldest black, or more appropriately multicultural, communities in Europe (see Figure 6).



Figure 6 Images of 1950s Butetown from *Down the Bay*, photographs by Bert Hardy insert Bert Hardy/Getty Images

In the 1940s Kenneth Little studied 'the coloured people of Cardiff' and thus opened up a social science of race relations in Wales (Little, 1948). The somewhat 'exotic' reputation of the area of Cardiff known in the early 20th century as Tiger Bay that was the focus of Little's study had been well established even before the turn of the century. Accounts by novelists, newspaper columnists, social workers, civil servants, social reformers and others had contributed to the rather ambivalent representation of the area as dirty, diseased, violent and immoral, but at the same time fascinating and a world-leading example of harmonious race relations.

Against this backdrop, Little set about conducting a meticulous social survey that captured the socio-economic circumstances of some of Wales's earliest 'coloured' (a post-war term) immigrants:

We can proceed to consider the coloured community itself. The main elements consist of Arab, West African and West Indian seamen, but it has been estimated that altogether in this Loudoun Square quarter [in Butetown] some fifty different nationalities are to be found. ... The square itself serves as a convenient centre. Here the density of the coloured population is greatest – with perhaps eight out of every ten persons.

(Little, 1948, p. 68)

Summarising the employment situation in the area at the outbreak of the Second World War, Little comments that 'the community may be expected to undergo further vagaries of economic hardship' (1948, p. 75), and in reviewing the state of race relations between the coloured community and the majority white population at the time he notes that 'the community is segregated with some considerable degree of rigidity from the rest of the city in the geographical, social and psychological senses; in the last respect the existence of strong patterns of colour prejudice among residents of the town is the main causal factor' (1948, p. 183).

Migration to Wales and the consequent ethnic diversity it produced need to be seen in historical context. The mid-19th-century boom in the coal industry and merchant shipping attracted black seamen from Africa, America and the West Indies. By the time of the Second World War this community was well established; there was considerable intermarriage and a clear presence of second- or third-generation 'mixed race' people. Wales did not experience the West Indian immigration of the *Windrushers* so characteristic of a number of cities in England (Evans, 2002). Little's study identifies four important issues surrounding 'race' in Wales. This settlement represents something quite different from other parts of the UK, where pre-war settlement in major towns such as London, Bristol and Liverpool was largely a product of the economics of shipping and the business of transporting slaves. Second, and significant for understanding contemporary racial divisions, Little's study illustrates the geographic containment of the issue of 'race' in Wales to an area a little short of one square mile in the dockland area of Cardiff. Third, the work documents the nature of discriminations, racisms and exclusions faced by these individuals and their descendants that has had an enduring impact to the present day. Fourth, and of particular interest, the study raises the question of whether there is something distinct or different about Wales in terms of an understanding of 'race' and racism.

In the historical encounter between the majority Welsh population and black and ethnic minority settlers to the country there is evidence of both amicable race relations and trenchant ethnic conflict, and yet a predominant myth of Welsh national identity portrays Wales as a tolerant nation, particularly in comparison with its neighbour, England. In any reading of Welsh race relations history it will be clear that the fate of the Welsh themselves as an ethnic minority within the wider context of Britain is a significant factor in understanding this popular myth of Welsh tolerance.

Wales, Scotland and Ireland were the first (internal) colonies of the great imperial project of Britain. This has led to an ongoing sense of national oppression. For example, the experience of cultural domination by the English in which self-rule was lost, the language and culture of Wales were subjugated and the Welsh themselves were racialised, has led to a pervasive and continuing sense of national oppression. The politics of self-rule and

the reassertion of the Welsh language and culture in public life have been a key focus of the politics of ethnic conflict in Wales. It is this form of ethnic conflict, between the Welsh and the English, that has been foregrounded and this has served to displace any focus on other racialised divisions.

A widely held, but perhaps misplaced belief is that this historical experience has produced a strong empathy and sense of tolerance towards other racialised minorities. The argument runs that as an oppressed people themselves the Welsh are more understanding of the oppression of others, including the oppression of black people. In this sense the Welsh national character is portrayed as anti-imperial, tolerant and internationalist, by contrast with the English, who are perceived as colonialist and racist. This is, of course, a part of national myth making and cannot be supported by available historical or contemporary evidence. However, it is a deeply held and powerful belief. This type of thinking has been mobilised in varying degrees in contemporary Wales to cast the Welsh as a non-racist nation. One consequence of this myth is to view 'race' issues and racism as a non-issue for Wales. The idea that 'race' is 'no problem here' has provided a powerful discourse even in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary.

The legacy of this set of ideas meant that prior to devolution 'race' was not considered to be an issue for public policy interventions. There were, of course, many UK public policies on race (e.g. the Race Relations Act, 1976) that applied to Wales. The assumption was that the relatively low numbers of people from ethnic minorities meant there was little need for such policy. In the absence of perceived need, racism was not recognised by government, and complacency on the part of civil servants and policy makers meant that little or no attention was directed towards 'race' issues. The idea of Wales as a multicultural society was barely acknowledged in public life.

At the same time, lack of political clout among minorities led to an inability to push their concerns onto the political agenda. The black and ethnic minority population is very diverse, dispersed and isolated and this has militated against their establishing any kind of strong collective political identity able to forge change. What grassroots activity existed was poorly coordinated and organised more around social support than political lobbying. Effectively, minorities across Wales remained largely disenfranchised, powerless and hidden. The idea of multicultural Wales was associated only with a tiny area of Cardiff and the lack of interethnic conflict in this small area of Wales contributed to the myth of harmonious race relations.

Access to identification and membership of the national community is important to the exercise of citizenship rights and to equality. If you feel that you belong, then you may also feel entitled to some of the opportunities of that society. This feeling has been frustrated for the majority of people from black and ethnic minority groups in Wales. The sense of belonging to the national community is signalled in a number of ways and communicated through ideas about 'Welshness': who is and who is not considered Welsh. The marginalised position of ethnic minorities has been compounded by dominant constructions of Welsh national identity that figure in the popular imagining and political discourse. The way in which a nation tells its story via its cultural representations, how it presents who is seen as Welsh and who isn't, can operate to exclude. There is inevitably some tension between the aspirations of a country wishing to advance itself as a distinct nation and one that wishes to portray the image of a country welcoming and accepting of all ethnicities.

Activity 10 explores this tension: how at one and the same time to build a sense of the national collective and a distinct national identity and also to incorporate an increasingly

ethnically diverse population. These are issues that have much concerned politicians and scholars particularly in post-devolution Wales.

Activity 8

The extract below, 'Can we live together? Wales and the multicultural question', comes from a public lecture to the Honourable Royal Society of Cymmrodorion, in London, by Charlotte Williams, one of the authors of this section.

As you read, consider the following questions:

- What is meant by the 'paradox' of how to square diversity with national integrity?
- Why is this a contemporary dilemma?

Extract 1 Can we live together? Wales and the multicultural question

Addressing a multicultural audience at the Global Britons Conference in Cardiff, the then First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, spoke of the 'ultimate paradox of a country'. On the one hand, there is the recognition of huge diversity and long standing diversity as a product of Wales' industrialised and globalised past. On the other hand, he referred to the 'Celtic nature of Wales' – the Celtic essence, Wales' cultural integrity 'as maintained through its language' (Morgan, 2003). This is the paradox: how to square diversity and national integrity.

The then First Minister is, of course, correct in his acknowledgement of long standing diversity. Cultural diversity is not a new phenomenon to Wales. Wales has always been in one sense multi-cultural. ... However, it is the era of modern globalisation coinciding with the emergence of the nation state that brings a more complex encounter with difference to Wales. It is no longer reasonable to think of nation states as ethnically homogenous entities. Economic expansion, technological and information advance and increased migrations mean that modern nations are increasingly and consciously diverse. However, as the world is opened up to us, so we feel insecure and try to shrink it back to size. Thus, the potential for ethnic conflict increases as the assertion of who we are becomes all the more important ...

The idea of multiculturalism is nevertheless popular. Most people would argue that multiculturalism is a good thing. But what if it isn't?

When the then First Minister spoke about the paradox of nation he raised the core elements of the multicultural question – how to reconcile increasing diversity with national identity. National identity is of course a construction and his construction of nation was by reference to something called 'The Celtic Essence'. What is clear is that these indices of identity as presently constituted are proving rather too inaccessible or meaningless for the majority of ethnic minorities. I would argue that instead of formulating the paradox in this way, that is, how to fit together two potentially incompatible forces, we need to consider how we are constructing these notions. Is not, for example, diversity/migration, movement and change, a fundamental element of the Celtic essence and integral to it? Some commentators would

argue that we need to dispense with the idea of nation altogether because in an era of globalisation the idea of nation becomes more and more anachronistic. The discourse of nationality itself creates barriers, antagonisms and renders marginal those who do not fit the predominant constructions of national identity.

(Williams, 2005, pp. 216–30)

Wales is changing both within and because of pressures beyond it. It is increasingly diverse as a result of the ebbs and flows of inward and outward migrations. Ideas of nation and national identity that cling to narrow, traditional and exclusive definitions of who is Welsh and who is not Welsh are increasingly being challenged. To link national belonging to membership of a distinct ethnic group will always act to exclude people and limit the project of nation building. The paradox is how not to lose the distinctiveness of Wales as a nation, its history, culture and traditions, while at the same time recognising and embracing its ethnic diversity.

To be genuinely inclusive, the 'integrity' of the nation must be built on factors that cut across ethnic boundaries. In post-devolution Wales, politicians, popular culture and minority peoples themselves are contributing to redefining national identity, asserting a variety of national identities and claiming belonging based on a more inclusive rights-based citizenship.

4.2 Thinking about gender and Wales

If thinking about 'race' in Wales has been characterised by notions of 'no problem here', then thinking about gender has been influenced and characterised by women's gradual emergence 'out of the shadows' and by perceived shifts in gender roles.

Thinking about gender, and particularly about women, has changed since the start of the twentieth century. For much of that century, thinking was dominated by the doctrine and practice of 'separate spheres':

Separate spheres meant separate worlds for men and women. Man's sphere was the public domain of work and politics; woman's sphere was the private world of home and family. Man's duty was to provide financially for his wife and family through money earned in the outside world. Woman's duty was to be a wife and mother and to create a home which was a refuge from the forces of darkness outside its walls: under her care home would be a centre of Christian virtue, moral purity and sobriety.

(Beddoe, 2000, p. 12)

This doctrine dominated the early years of the century, an era in which 'women wore long skirts and large hats, travelled in horse drawn vehicles, worked as live-in domestic servants (or employed them) and were denied the basic rights of citizenship' (Beddoe, 2000, p. 13), and it retained much of its power and significance through the course of two world wars. The period 1914–39 saw little fundamental change to gender roles. The First World War did see gender barriers in employment break down a little, but the role of women was still fundamentally in the home. Cardiff-born Ivor Novello's wartime song

urged women to 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' and after the war women were expected to resume their roles as wives, mothers and dutiful daughters.

The period of the Second World War again saw women come out of the home and into work – both 'war work' and civilian jobs vacated by men – but this war too 'did little more than superficially dent the notion of separate spheres' (Beddoe, 2000, p. 133). In post-war Wales, women remained custodians of the home and family, and men remained the breadwinners.

This picture of gender roles in the early years of the 20th century is arguably one that could apply to many western societies, and certainly to other parts of Britain. But is there a Welsh dimension to the account?



Figure 7 Young women at a cookery class at the Juvenile Unemployment Centre in Cardiff, September 1937

Fox Photos/Getty Images

Activity 9

- Can you think of anything about Wales and Welsh culture that might explain why separate spheres, ideas and practices were so well entrenched in Welsh society for much of the twentieth century? Make a note of your ideas.
- Then read Extract 2 by Deirdre Beddoe below, and compare your ideas with what she writes.

Extract 2

Clearly the lives of women in Wales have been shaped by a distinctive Welsh culture, which has largely been defined by Nonconformity ... ministers of religion, politicians and other male public figures zealously promoted the

domestic ideology and the role of women as a civilizing force within the home. This, in turn, imposed on women in Wales a whole set of prescriptive rules: they were to be 'respectable', with all that word entails. The chapel policed their behaviour: women were cast out of chapels as late as ... the 1960's for becoming pregnant while unmarried or on reports of adulterous behaviour. ... In terms of women's paid employment there has also been a distinctive Welsh dimension ... the nature of industrialisation in Wales meant that there was very little paid work for women in the mining valleys before 1939 ... the war identified factory work as women's work and post-war opportunities meant that women began to enter the workforce in increasing numbers, despite a great deal of male hostility. ... It can be argued too that Welsh women were subjected to a particularly 'virulent strain' of patriarchy. The nature of men's work in Wales, in heavy, dirty and dangerous jobs ... meant not only that women's unpaid work was essential in the home, but that in Wales, work itself was defined in exclusively macho terms: only men's work was real work. ... In Wales there was a particular male pride in being able to support a 'nonworking' wife. The legacy of the nineteenth-century notion of separate spheres lingered longer in Wales, keeping women, with few exceptions, out of the public sphere.

(Beddoe, 2000, pp. 180–1)

Discussion

In this passage, Beddoe identifies four factors in Welsh culture and society that shaped the lives and experiences of women:

- a strong Nonconformist culture
- the role of the chapel
- the nature of industrialisation
- a virulent strain of patriarchy.

Such factors lie behind the 'Welsh Mam' representation of Welsh women as hardworking, pious and clean: responsible for the home and the well-being of her family, she was immortalised in Richard Llewellyn's novel *How Green Was My Valley* (1939).

But women's wartime experiences had enhanced their confidence and raised their expectations, and the period from 1945 onwards was to witness much tension and unease as women sought to reconcile notions of supposed freedom and equality with experiences of oppression, unease and frustration. Yet it was not until the 1970s that these 'feelings' found expression and new ways of 'thinking' about gender emerged. As Beddoe puts it: 'a growing feminist consciousness and influences from the USA, together with a rising tide of anger about equal pay, would turn vague stirrings of discontent into a new mass feminist movement in the 1970's' (2000, p. 158).

The last decades of the twentieth century saw many changes in the lives of women in Wales. Women became more visible, in work, in education, in organised religion, in social movements and eventually in politics. The new Welsh post-industrial economy with its expanding service sector provided the conditions for women's increased participation in the labour market. The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) brought attention to the oppressed position of women and campaigned tirelessly for change on a wide range of

issues. Strongest in the urbanised southeast, there were WLM groups throughout Wales, particularly in university towns. Thinking about women and the particularities of women's experiences came to assume an academic profile. Courses in women's studies developed in all of the higher education institutions in Wales in the 1980s and 1990s. Research was undertaken and new publications appeared with the aim of filling the huge gaps in knowledge and playing a part in the ongoing struggle to change attitudes and improve opportunities for women in Wales.

One such text was *Our Sister's Land* (Aaron et al., 1994), which highlighted the tension between the old images and stereotypes of gender roles and the transformations that were currently occurring. The editors suggest the book shows that:

Welsh women are ... to a greater or lesser extent, in the process of change ... in both the private and public sphere, a growing diversity of patterns of women's lives and identities challenges popular images of women in Wales; at the same time, structures which perpetuate gender divisions at home and work remain stable.

(Aaron et al., 1994, p. 8)

This recognition of both change and continuity at the end of the twentieth century is endorsed by Beddoe, who writes: 'there can be no doubt that the last thirty years have seen substantial gains for women, but on the other hand, in the year 2000 it is certainly premature to talk of equality between the sexes in Wales. The old gender hierarchy remains – with men on top' (2000, p. 178).

So what of the 21st century? What progress has been made; what remains to be done? Has our thinking about gender and gender divisions changed?

4.3 Conclusion

- Despite the fact that Wales is home to one of the oldest multicultural communities in Europe, 'race' has not been considered an issue for public policy.
- Thinking about 'race' in Wales has been dominated by the idea that 'there is no problem here'.
- Thinking about gender in Wales has been characterised by an understanding of changing gender roles and women's gradual emergence 'out of the shadows'.
- A distinctive Welsh culture with a strong emphasis on the 'separate spheres' ideology meant that women in Wales were firmly located in the domestic sphere for much of the twentieth century.
- The last decades of the 20th century saw many changes in the lives of women. Barriers were dismantled and women became more visible in public spheres.

Wales has a long way to go towards achieving multiculturalism, 'race' equality or gender equality. Some progress has been made. Women are more visible in public, political and economic life and there is a more visible celebration of difference in the representation of the nation and in national identity. Some would argue that these changes are superficial rather than signalling real change and that much remains to be done.

The UK Equality Act (2010) led to the Welsh Government's single equality scheme which lays out its intentions and operating processes for a decade. Questions remain about

whether the Government has laid the foundation for sustainable work on equalities, or whether the progress to date will be halted or reversed by future changes in government.

5 Class

Class is not something which crops up very often in polite conversation. Most people would not ask someone they had just met what their social class was. It would be seen as rude and an obstruction to getting to know the person as an individual. But sociologists and historians commonly use the word and most of us understand generally what it means. It helps us to think about the general pattern of our society and how we place ourselves within it. Class is certainly something which is often asked about in social surveys, and market researchers like to place people in groups according to what they are likely to buy and consume. Interviewers have some licence to ask impertinent questions!



Figure 8 Self-identification of social class in Great Britain by area.

wales.gov.uk/splash?orig=/firstminister/reports/futures/SOCIETY-e.pdf

Activity 10

First, answer these questions:

1. What social class do you think you belong to?
 - upper class
 - middle class
 - working class
 - I don't think classes exist any more
2. Why did you give that answer?
Now look at Figure 8, which provides answers (gathered from the various regions of Britain) to the first question.
3. What is distinctive about the answers given in Wales compared with other parts of Britain?

Discussion

In this survey, reported in 2008, 54 per cent of people in Wales identified themselves as working-class and 32 per cent as middle-class. The remaining 14 per cent either refused to answer (it's a rude question!) or identified themselves as belonging to

another class. Wales has one of the highest percentages in Britain of people identifying as working-class; in south-east England and London around 50 per cent of people think they are middle-class and less than 40 per cent see themselves as working-class – more or less reversing the percentages in Wales. Only Scotland and the far north of England have a greater percentage of people who identify themselves as working-class: around 60 per cent.

So most people in Wales can place themselves in a class and think of themselves as working-class.

Answering the second question in Activity 10 is much more difficult; and we don't know why the people in Wales who were surveyed answered the way they did. But we do have the answers which some people in Swansea gave to interviewers around 2002.

A female headteacher from Morriston, aged 58, identified herself as middle-class but added:

I was obviously born working class. I obviously have, if you are thinking in more, sort of, social categories, typical of the Welsh working class, aspired to be a teacher and so on ... I'm not a fan of class. It's one thing I don't like really.

(quoted in Charles et al., 2008, p. 86)

Behind the simple answer to a question lies a very complex personal history, which is often the case. Like many people, the respondent is uncomfortable with the idea of class in some ways. A 31-year-old woman from a deprived area of social housing said this:

I wouldn't think I'm better than anybody else, you know, if somebody is, you know, better off than me, or hasn't got as much or whatever, I wouldn't say, "Look I've got more than you so I'm better than you." No, I wouldn't have thought so.

(quoted in Charles et al., 2008, p. 87)

Many of us call ourselves working-class or middle-class because both are seen as 'ordinary' categories rather than placing ourselves in a superior position to others (Savage, 2000). This is exactly what this woman is doing.

Why might so many people in Wales opt to call themselves working class, rather than middle-class– especially compared with people in the south-east of England? Here is a possible clue from a study of redundant steelworkers in the 1980s:

Southern English middle-class readers, like the present writer, may have difficulty in grasping that to be working class (at any rate in South Wales) is not to ... lack ... the 'badges of achievement' which all others possess, but is, rather, to occupy an honourable status which gives you dignity and entitles you to respect. As one of our respondents who had been out of work for over a year put it: 'I used to be working class, but I can't claim that any more. I've fallen below that.'

(Harris et al., 1987, p. 15)

This is similar to the answer given by a 34-year-old woman from a deprived estate in Swansea almost twenty years later: 'Not working class any more, common' (quoted in

Charles et al., 2008, p. 87). By becoming unemployed she thought she had lost her social standing. A couple in their late 60s living in Oystermouth (which most people would see as a solid middle-class area) and in comfortable circumstances saw no reason to reject the label of working-class:

Wife: I wouldn't like to say I'm not working class because we come from strong Labour working class backgrounds. ... My father was a miner. Leighton's [her husband's] father was a red.

(quoted in Charles et al., 2008, p. 86)

How we see ourselves in terms of class is influenced by our past lives as well as by our current circumstances. While some people may revel in feeling 'superior', others will be uncomfortable with the idea. We may be generally uncertain about where we stand in society and don't like to place our very individual lives in little boxes made by others. The idea of class involves a sense of hierarchy. The term 'social stratification', another way to refer to class, is borrowed from geology where each stratum of rock is laid over another.

How would I answer the questions posed in Activity 13? I'm middle class, I suppose. Why do I say that? I had a professional job which was paid at a level comfortably above the average wage. I had much freedom within it; I was trusted to do it without detailed supervision. That put me in what some sociologists call the 'service class'; that is, I was paid quite well, could look forward to annual rises in my salary and promotion, and was expected, in return, to not limit myself to simply being in work at fixed times but in some ways to invest much of my life in it (i.e. to serve). My working conditions were pleasant and safe. To get a job like that I needed two university degrees. Now I'm retired, I have a reasonable pension. Most of my close friends are in a similar position and our children have both got good degrees and achieved similar social positions. My wife's father was a university professor. We live in a fairly large house and have some savings. I listen to Radio 3 and Radio 4, like classical music and jazz and read what are usually regarded as serious books, not to mention *The Guardian* and *The Observer*.

In placing myself like this, I'm drawing on the kinds of criteria which social scientists use to assess class. Education is usually a critical factor in this, as is your job and the networks of people which you're part of. Class is also related to culture; Radio 4 is often seen as the middle-class (and middle-aged!) station. We've had advantages which have been passed on to our children. Less often raised in talking about class is the fact that I'm a man. Certainly in the past class was seen as a status which male 'heads of household' conferred on the whole family. Despite the gains achieved by feminism and equal opportunities legislation, men still tend to have advantages over women in gaining opportunities.

So if I can place myself in a social position in this way, why did I add that grudging 'I suppose' at the end of my answer? My reasons are very much like those of the interviewees from Swansea quoted above. To say you're middle-class, at least in Wales, might seem pompous and pretentious. I was trying to be honest and realistic – and to use what I know about the way in which sociologists discuss class.

More important, I grew up in the south Wales Valleys where everybody seemed to be working-class; my father was a coach driver for part of his working life. That meant long hours, low wages and no occupational pension. In jobs like that people tend to leave work behind them once they are at home; they do a fixed amount of work for a

fixed wage and often don't have prospects of advancement. They are expected to earn but not really to serve. I was the first in my family to go to university; and in the village I come from, education and 'getting on' were valued at the very least because (as many miners told me) they could save you from going down a hole in the ground every day of your working life. But I grew up with comics rather than books, the old Light Programme (effectively Radio 2), pop music, ITV and Cardiff City football club. I still like lots of those things, too. Indeed, it is much too simple to imagine that our class positions equate with whether we like so-called 'high' or 'low' culture. Many of us appreciate mixtures of the two.

So they might have taken the boy out of the Valleys but they haven't taken the Valleys out of the man. If I'd grown up in a middle-class home I would probably have had advantages from that background, such as accent, connections, books, musical education: things referred to as [social capital](#) and [cultural capital](#). These ideas are associated with the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), whose work explored the cultural dimensions of class in particular. As he stressed, social and cultural capital can be passed on through the generations and clearly give advantages; my children have had these to a greater extent than I had.

So my life – like those of the people whose interviews were quoted above – raises issues about *social mobility*; that is, that people might end up in a social class different from the one in which they started. Usually we mean moving up in the social scale when we talk about this, but it is important to know that people can go down as well as up. Moving up in society often means moving to another place. A study of middle-class people conducted in the 1960s opened by observing: '[Swansea's] role in social and geographical mobility is that although it may appear in the first chapters of the autobiographies, it rarely appears in the last. Provincial Britain is somewhere to get away from ...' (Bell, 1968, p. 10). This alerts us to an important facet of Welsh society: many people have moved out of Wales in order to advance their careers and opportunities. Far fewer have moved in to do so.

5.1 Conceptions of class in Wales

When we talk about class we are placing ourselves in relation to others in society. All our individual cases are complex and none of us are identical. But we usually have some idea of where we fit in and some sense of the overall shape of our society: its class structure. So how does the idea of class help us to understand Wales? What is the overall shape of Welsh society?

Activity 11

What do you think of when you think about class in Wales?

- Wales is a place where people engage in militant class conflict; class means the picket line, solidarity.
- Wales – unlike England – is classless.
- Wales is run by the English upper class – white settlers – who take all the best jobs.
- Wales is run by a Welsh-speaking middle class: the Taffia.

I want to discuss each of these responses in turn to see what, if any, truth there is in them.

5.1.1 Class as organisation and conflict

Class conflict provides a powerful image of Wales. It has been projected across the world. The most read book and most seen film about Wales, ever, is Richard Llewellyn's 1939 *How Green Was My Valley?* John Ford directed a film of it in 1941, winning five Oscars (see Figure 9). It contains many scenes of industrial conflict and its strongly projected images endure. Of course it is an image which is most associated with the mining valleys of south Wales, but a hundred years ago south-east Wales contained three-quarters of the population of Wales and mining was the largest occupation there by far. In the rest of Wales there were small pockets which were similar, like the slate-quarrying communities of Gwynedd and the mining and other industrial communities in Clwyd, which also had a sometimes bitter industrial history.

You have already seen that being working-class in Wales has often been regarded as a positive identity and that this may have something to do with why so many people tend to identify themselves as working-class. Our images of class in Wales start in the era when large-scale and usually heavy industries were the dominant form of employment and tended to shape the nature of the communities around them. A hundred years ago the vast majority of the population of Wales was engaged in manual labour, and that was seen as a positive thing because civilisation was regarded as resting upon this work. Moreover, working people achieved respectable lifestyles for themselves through their creation of chapels, trade unions, choirs and many other organisations. They created communities, social and cultural capital, for themselves and were proud of the achievement. Many people were also proud of having a tradition of standing up for their rights; being radical is a way that many people think of themselves as Welsh.



Figure 9 Miners come out on strike in John Ford's *How Green was My Valley?*

Ronald Grant Archive

An important aspect of class has been the creation of organisations which recruit mainly from one class and may be in opposition to others. Trade unions are very different from the craft guilds which preceded them, as guilds were run by master craftsmen (they were almost always men) but included the people they employed as well. Trade unions were formed on a class basis; those who were employed organised around their common interests and this meant not including the boss. The Labour Party, unlike similar European parties, identifies itself with a class rather than with a political viewpoint. The equivalent party in Germany calls itself the Social Democratic Party. The Labour Party owes its origins to the trade unions, though it now seeks votes far beyond the working class and claims to represent the people in general rather than one class in particular, but its name looks back to a time when the idea of class was central.

Strikes and massive industrial conflict have been rare in Wales since the mid-1980s. Like many images of places, it is a rather dated one. Indeed, it has been seen as dated for a long time. When social scientists began to take a strong interest in the nature of working-class communities and culture in the 1950s and 1960s they already talked about a 'traditional' working class. Miners, railway workers, dockers and steelworkers, the groups which dominated the working class in Wales at the time, were central to this group. They lived in communities side by side with other miners, railway workers, dockers and steelworkers. But there was also talk of a 'new' working class: workers in new mass production industries like car and white goods manufacture who faced assembly lines in their daily working lives. Their lifestyles were seen as being much more influenced by the boom in consumer goods in the period, and they were much less likely to live alongside others who worked in the same industry and to share their leisure time with workmates than were the 'traditional' working class. Both groups now seem rather like a vision from the past.

Being working-class was in many ways a masculine identity. To stand up to the boss was to be a *man*. Boys entered manhood by entering the work of work. In *How Green Was My Valley*, the central character, Huw, goes to a grammar school but ultimately rejects the office job he might have had in order to go down the pit with his father and brother. Women were much more confined to the home than they had been since the Second World War. Men were seen as being heads of household and so as giving the whole family its class position. Women, of course, did take part in strikes and politics, but often as supporters of men in their disputes. Most recently this was the case in the miners' strike of 1984–5, but such support was a feature of many areas of Wales throughout the twentieth century.

Do any of these attitudes still influence our view of the world now? Does the strength of Labour voting in Wales suggest something about this? What about trade unions? To what extent do Welsh people still join them and is there anything distinctive in their support for them?

In 2010 one third of all employees in Wales were members of trade unions. This represents a considerable decline compared with the past, when heavy industry dominated the Welsh economy. But it is the highest level of any region or nation in the UK. It is also rising slightly, while the trend over the whole of the UK is for a slight decline. In the south-east of England, only about one in five employees are in trade unions, while the Welsh figure is slightly above the level of the old industrial regions of England, like the north-east and north-west. Trade union membership in Wales totals almost half a million and these days the new recruits are more likely to be women than men.

Generally, trade union membership is concentrated among people who work in the public sector and tends to be higher for managerial, professional and technical employees and lowest in sales and customer service occupations (Barratt, 2009). Much has changed in the trade union movement from the days when it had the image of men in flat caps and on picket lines. In the summer of 2009 the website of the Wales Trades Union Congress showed the changes. There were no references to strikes, but there was a welcome for a proposed government measure to promote equal rights for women and concern about the impact of the recession on women's jobs. The same website in 2014 showed a major concern with poverty, equality and fair pay. But those who join trade unions probably think their interests are different from those of their employers.

So seeing class as being rooted in particular kinds of organisations has been important – and this view persists. Those who grew up in the era when such matters were more central to people's lives (and there are a lot of them, because of the high birth rate

immediately after the war) may find it difficult to adjust their perceptions, and family traditions affect behaviour. But this view is bound to be affected by changes in the nature of society, especially by the far greater numbers and proportion of women who leave the home in order to work. The old view of class resonates far more if we think of men working underground than if we think of women working in offices.

5.1.2 Classlessness

This seems like a direct contradiction of the first image of class in Wales, but perhaps it is not as flatly opposed to it when we consider it more deeply. Seeing Wales as essentially working-class means starting our analysis with the ordinary people and stressing what they have in common. By contrast, in England people often refer to the class system as being a central feature. By this they generally mean that some people are born with major advantages and they hold onto them through going to the right school and mixing with people who have power and money – acquiring social and cultural capital. Class often, in this case, means snobbery and it starts our story at the top of society. When we say Wales is classless we mean that people have many values and attitudes in common, and come from similar kinds of small communities. We see Wales as ‘a community of communities’. In some ways it is another way of saying that we are all working-class.

Activity 12

Read the following passage.

What does it claim to be the nature of Welsh society, and what makes this different from English society?

It had often been remarked that class divisions between those living in Wales are less marked than in parts of England – in terms of the origin of income (most of the owners of land and capital are resident outside Wales), the distribution of income, and the differences of life-style. There is also a stress on locality – where one comes from – which masks status differences between wage workers and the few professional and managerial families in the ‘urban villages’. ... Even in towns as big as Swansea who you are (i.e. your place in the kin network) is often as important as what you are. In local affairs this leads to (what outsiders regard as) nepotism and a preference for locals.

(Leonard, 1980, p. 26)

Discussion

Part of what is being said here is that there are relatively few rich people in Wales; Wales is controlled by people who live in England, so Wales can be relatively classless *and* have a history of social conflict. The ‘enemy’ of the ‘classless’ Welsh is seen as living outside Wales. Nepotism (‘jobs for the boys’ – and it usually was boys) is based on kin and locality rather than institutions (‘the old school tie’).

But this argument of classlessness is most often used about the rural areas of Wales, rather than the industrial ones. An influential account of the Aberporth area after the Second World War argues that local people did not think in terms of upper, middle and lower classes but of ‘people of the chapel’ and ‘people of the pub’:

The distinctive characteristics of each group are its *buchedd*. ... The Welsh term *buchedd* (plural *bucheddau*) denotes behaviour, either actual or ideal, and thus corresponds broadly to the English term 'way of life'. The same overall pattern of social life is found within each *buchedd* group. ... The two groups have a great deal in common ... The significance of the family and kindred is the same for both groups; ... Many members of both groups have the same occupations, the same working conditions, the same wages, leaving their houses at the same time in the morning and returning at the same time in the evening.

(Jenkins, 1960, pp. 13–14)

David Jenkins's point is that local understanding of the society is based on moral criteria and lifestyle and has little or nothing to do with people's occupation and income. Respectability is the key. However, this argument is not supported by the evidence of his own survey or of other studies of Welsh society (Day and Fitton, 1975). The respected people, the leaders of the chapel and the community in general, tended to be the better-off and more established residents. Indeed, one reason for the decline in religious observance in twentieth-century Wales was that the middle classes took such positions of power and prestige and were seen as forming an exclusive group.

The idea that the rural areas were classless probably arises from the fact that Nonconformity was once a mass religion and the basis of politics. The social distinctions within the countryside were overlain with a widespread adherence to the Liberal Party, and subsequently in many cases to Labour. The owners of large estates, from which farmers rented their land, stood outside this. They were identified as English in culture, Anglicans in religion and Conservatives in politics. There was an alliance of the other classes against them and for many people what they had in common seemed more important than what divided them. But there were still differences in income, farmers employed labourers, and there was a middle class of teachers and professional people. There are other ways of assessing classlessness. One measure of class is income. There are very large differences in incomes between the best-off and the worst-off in Wales – it is far from classless. Differences of income on this scale mean that some people are able to afford very lavish lifestyles, often involving forms of conspicuous consumption (the display of wealth and standing through material goods). Their culture is bound to be different from that of people on the lower levels of income, who will often struggle to afford necessities and for whom all that is conspicuous about their consumption is the lack of it. However, the scale of income inequality is a little less in Wales than it is in the rest of Britain. The poorest tenth of the population has, between it, around 1½% of Wales' total income; by contrast, the richest tenth have 25-30% of Wales' income. The overall distribution of income has not changed much in the past decade, bar the recent sharp rise in the proportion of total income going to the richest tenth of the population (Department of Work and Pensions, 2011). The gap is very large, and we would surely notice the differences of income, culture and status if we saw the two groups side by side. As you will see, we don't observe the differences as we don't often see the two together.

Why is the share of income of the richest groups in Wales less than that of their equivalents in England? The answer is related to the *class structure* of Wales – that is, the numbers of people in the various social groups into which people are divided by census takers and sociologists. In Wales there tends to be a smaller proportion of the population

in the better-off groups than is the case in England, and a higher proportion in the less well-off groups. This has been so for some time, at least going back to the 1960s.

Activity 13

Figure 10 is a cartogram. A cartogram is a map on which statistical information is presented in diagrammatic form. Although this cartogram has roughly the same proportions of Great Britain as a map would, it's really just a geometrical design to visualize the distribution of social classes in Britain: population differences distort the geographical shape, but you can still recognise the three distinct countries and their capitals. As each hexagon represents 100,000 people, no one area will be entirely one social class – but in each area one social class is in the majority. The numbers in the key refer to the social classes used in the census to categorise people. Earlier letters in the alphabet and lower numbers mean higher social classes.

- What does this tell us about the structure of classes in Wales in comparison with the rest of Britain?

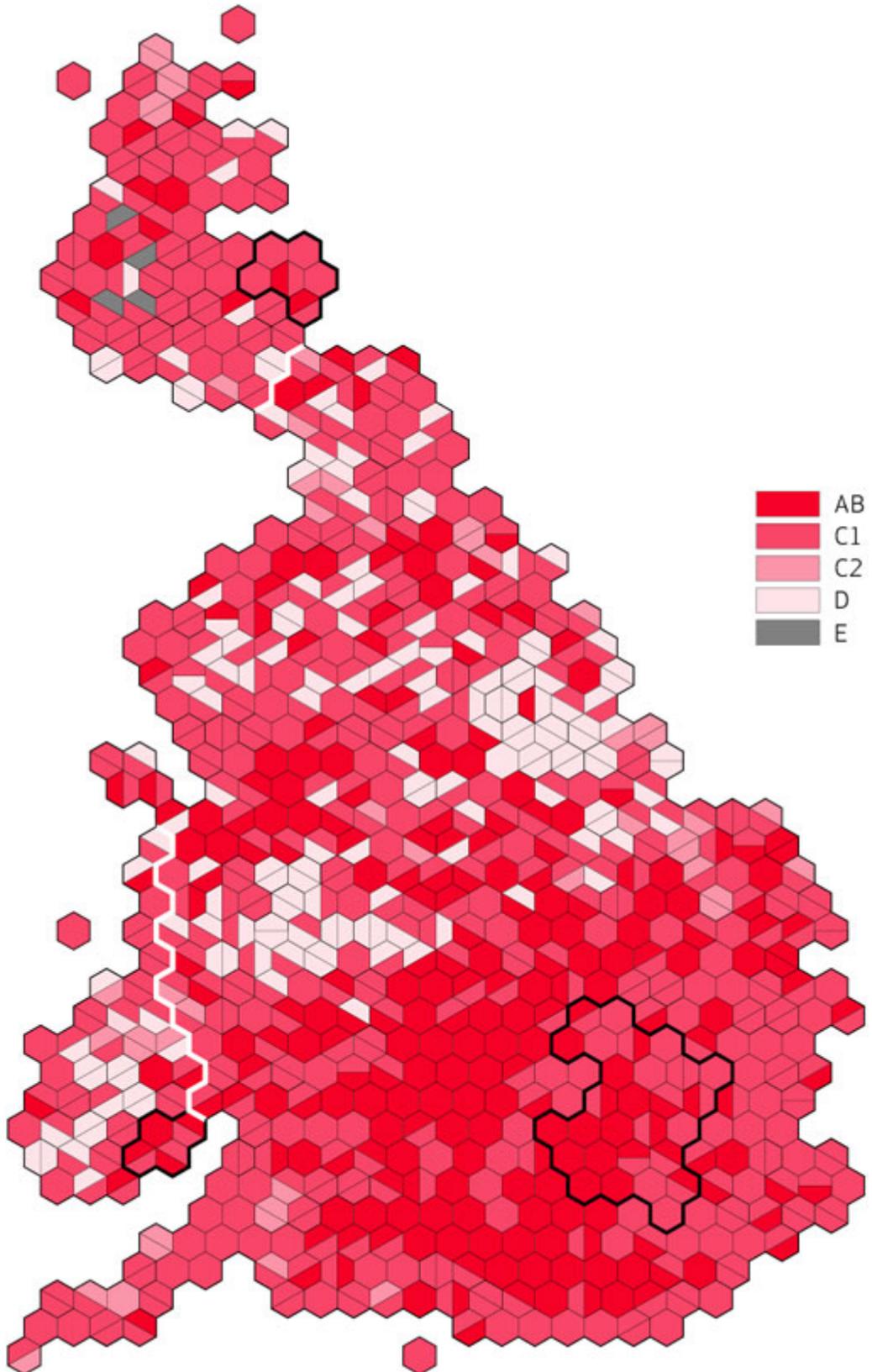


Figure 10 Cartogram of Britain by the dominant social class of people aged 25–39 in 2005
NGCA (2009), p. 54.

Discussion

Figure 10 shows how small the concentrations of people in the higher social classes are in Wales – especially when we compare the situation in the south-east of England. There are also significant differences between areas of England. Some areas, like the north-east, are quite similar to parts of Wales. It might be misleading to compare England as a whole with Wales. We may need to think more about the divisions within England.

But there are very significant differences between social classes in Wales. So far we have concentrated on the average of Welsh society. What do we know about the small, well-off and powerful groups? The next two sections address these issues.

5.1.3 White settlers

You have already come across the idea that much of the wealth and power in Wales is possessed by people who live elsewhere. The key financial institutions in Britain are in London. New York and Tokyo are the other major financial centres in the world. Many of the companies which employ people in Wales are multinational and have their headquarters outside Wales. But what about English people who live in Wales? Do they form an elite? Do they take most of the top jobs? Is there [a cultural division of labour](#)? Might being English provide an advantage of some kind? At one time, in some political discussions in Wales these people were referred to as ‘white settlers’ – that is, they were compared with the European elites in African countries who ruled over native populations. This is, of course, an inflammatory way of expressing the idea.

About one in five of the population of Wales was born in England. They cannot all hold elite positions – there are simply too many of them – but do they take a disproportionate number of the best paid and most powerful positions? The short answer is that we don’t really know. An English (Geordie) sociologist explains one reason for this: ‘Social science has been, rightly, accused of adopting a posture of palms up to the rich for the receipt of funding and eyes down to the poor as part of the surveillance necessary for their control’ (Byrne, 2005, p. 5).

As you will see, there is a good deal of research in Wales on the poor. Studies of the rich and powerful are much harder to come by and are not very conclusive on this issue. What evidence there is suggests there is some advantage for those who are not Welsh by birth. From data in the 1991 census it can be shown that 6.2 per cent of those born outside Wales are employed in professions, compared with 2.2 per cent of non-Welsh-speaking people born in Wales and 3.5 per cent of Welsh speakers. That is, they are almost three times more likely to be in the top jobs than Welsh people who do not speak Welsh, and almost twice as likely to be so than Welsh speakers (Aitchison and Carter, 2000, pp. 123–7). However, the 2011 census shows that Welsh speakers and those who do not speak Welsh are represented in identical proportions (7.6%) in ‘higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations’; and that 23% of Welsh speakers and only 18.7% of those who cannot speak Welsh are found in the next category down, ‘lower managerial administrative and professional occupations’. At the other end of the socio-economic table the converse is found, with those who cannot speak Welsh are better represented among the ‘semi routine occupations’, ‘routine occupations’ and among the ‘never worked and long-term unemployed’ (Statistics for Wales 2012, Table 4). So there is some truth in the view that there is an incoming elite. But this data also reveals significant differences between Welsh people according to whether or not they speak

Welsh, with census data suggesting a higher representation of those who cannot speak Welsh on the lower socio-economic job categories.

5.1.4 The 'Taffia'

The idea of English domination tends to be stressed by people of a nationalist persuasion. Those who are opposed to nationalism and devolution in Wales often think that the country is run by a tiny group of Welsh speakers, sometimes known as the Taffia: a loaded term suggesting there are Godfathers everywhere. Again there is little actual evidence of this, though there are frequent assertions:

The Welsh-language scene itself at that time [in the early 1990s] was a tightknit community with everyone knowing everyone else. If you went regularly to gigs at Cardiff's Welsh club, Clwb Ifor Bach, then you would inevitably see the same faces, and it didn't take long to get to know them.

... many ... were artists or ... worked in the arts or ... were employed at S4C or ... were involved at the local media. HTV and the BBC in Wales are notoriously populated by the Taffia – an exclusive clique of Welsh speakers whose backgrounds in Welsh-speaking schools and Welsh universities, coupled with their ability to speak the language, has led to the sort of nepotism notorious amongst Oxford and Cambridge graduates in London media circles.

(Owens, 2000, pp. 33–4)

More considered analysis finds some basis for this argument. Cardiff has developed a Welsh-speaking community since the Second World War, prompted by the growth of national institutions which are located in the city. The Welsh Office was created in 1964, there are other institutions like the National Museum of Wales and the former Welsh Folk Museum at St Fagans (now the National History Museum), and media production is concentrated in the city, with the BBC, ITV and S4C all having facilities there. One study has found evidence of a renewal of the Welsh-speaking middle class of teachers, preachers and writers through broadcasting and argues that a tightly knit group has used language issues as an avenue of social advancement (Bevan, 1984). Meanwhile, devolution has meant that civil service jobs which were once in London have been moved to Cardiff, so Welsh people may need only to move within Wales and not out of Wales to advance themselves. The London Welsh community has suffered considerable decline because of devolved government. And many of these positions require a fluency in the Welsh language, which gives Welsh speakers certain advantages in some areas.

The Welsh-speaking population of Cardiff tends to cluster in particular areas:

the majority of Welsh speakers have settled either in the traditional middle to high status residential districts of the city (e.g., Llandaff) or in select suburban and rural fringe areas (e.g., St Fagans, Radyr). ... the Welsh-speaking population of the city is largely composed of young to early middle-aged families. Not surprisingly, having established themselves in Cardiff, such families have sought to ensure that ample facilities would be available for children to pursue their education through the medium of Welsh ... [there has been] ... a highly significant growth in the number of bilingual schools in the region.

(Aitchison and Carter, 1987, p. 490)

You have seen already that Welsh speakers are well represented in the upper reaches of Welsh society, though not at the very top level. Welsh speakers and the non-Welsh are both over-represented in the better-off groups; non-Welsh-speaking Welsh people have the least effective social and cultural capital. There are some interesting variations in this, according to region. In the areas which were once seen as the heartland of the Welsh language, Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, the non-Welsh are over-represented at the top. In the more economically dynamic areas of south-east Wales, Welsh speakers are over-represented in elite positions compared with the non-Welsh.

This shows the effectiveness of the formation of a Welsh-speaking middle class in urban south Wales and reveals something about the patterns of migration within Wales. This is linked to the quality of education in Welsh-medium schools, which have been a clear success story in post-war Wales. The commitment of parents, pupils and teachers to the cause of language renewal has ensured that they produce well-qualified pupils. The children benefit from effectively having two first languages and from a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Better cultural capital is especially important when, in general, schools in Wales have not performed particularly well; whether there are benefits from the social capital of the networks of the Taffia is less clear (Reynolds and Bellin, 1996).

Welsh-medium schools are open to the children of non-Welsh speakers and now educate some 20 per cent of children. This does not make them especially exclusive.

5.2 Conclusion

- People in Wales are more likely to identify themselves as working class than those in most other parts of the UK.
- This self-identification is influenced by people's pasts as well as by the positions they find themselves in now (people can move from one class to another over their lifetimes).
- A history of class conflict means that many people in Wales are proud to describe themselves as working-class.
- Wales is often perceived as classless, in comparison with many other parts of Britain, in the sense of people holding similar values and coming from similar communities.
- People born outside Wales are more likely to have jobs in the professions than those who are Welsh born, but there are also differences between Welsh-born people according to whether or not they speak Welsh.

There is a widespread view that Welsh speakers dominate the most influential tiers of society.

Class can seem like an old-fashioned thing. Many of the images that it brings to mind are old ones, whether they are of miners or top-hatted aristocrats. Some social scientists claim that class is fading and lacks the centrality in people's lives that it once had; that it no longer helps us understand society today. Certainly the forms it assumes have changed, but we should be wary of dismissing its significance.

There are four particular arguments for the continuing relevance of class in Wales which emerge from this unit:

- First, there is no evidence that social patterns, divisions of income, desirability of housing, of culture and consumption are declining. Wealth still provides people with

status, prestige and power, while poverty carries a deep stigma. Not only have social divisions not declined, some of them have grown. Class in the form of social and cultural capital has a clear influence on people's life chances.

- Second, we are influenced by the past. Much of the population of Wales was born and grew up in a time when the older stereotypes of class were still very much apparent. In any society there is not just the here and now and the new but a persisting influence of the past. The strength of the Labour Party in Wales, however much its position has been eroded, reflects that past and so perhaps does the relative enthusiasm with which Welsh people join trade unions. The people quoted at the beginning of this section thought of themselves as working-class because of their past, not their present. The living are haunted by ghosts of the past. Outsiders' images often adjust even more slowly to changing realities.
- Third, class is one of the things which make Wales distinctive, in the sense of a pattern of social relationships which are significantly different from those in England – or at least London and the southeast of England. Think of the balance of rich and poor in Wales, the rate at which Welsh people join trade unions, and the ways in which the Welsh think about class. The pattern of class is very much a part of what makes Wales distinctive, part of what makes its inhabitants Welsh.
- Finally, class is something which gets into our very being. It is part of our make-up and something we carry around with us. 'Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being' (Annette Kuhn quoted in Sayer, 2005, p. 22). This is why to ask about class is a rude question. It is intensely personal.

5.3 Audio activities

Listen to the audio below and then complete the activity.

Audio 2 (Round table discussion)

In this audio, four authors (Graham Day, Sandra Betts, Neil Evans and Andrew Edwards) discuss difference in contemporary Wales with Hugh Mackay.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 2 \(Round table discussion\)](#)

Activity 14

Listen to the audio all the way through once, then listen to it again and note the areas of difference that are discussed. When you have done this, compare your notes with the discussion below.

Discussion

Areas discussed include:

- differences from England (including different government policies that offer more state provision in Wales)
- north–south differences

- differences between Cardiff and the rest of Wales
- very local differences, e.g. rivalries between different valleys and even different villages in the same valley
- differences in the same geographical space
- differences (rather than similarities) in patterns of mass-media consumption.
- differences over time, e.g. use of Welsh language or employment patterns
- differences that we are comfortable with versus those that mean opposition or conflict.

6 Nationalism and the Welsh language

Charlotte Aull Davies

In the late 1960s and 1970s, an upsurge of organised ethnic activity in the developed countries of the West came as a complete surprise to most social commentators, whether from the academic world, journalism or politics. This activity appeared in different guises, depending in large measure on the nature of the state in which it occurred. In the United States, white ethnic groups increasingly sought greater recognition for their distinctive cultural identities in a conscious rejection of the ideology of the 'melting pot'. Elsewhere, French speakers in Quebec and New Brunswick made use of the federal structure of the Canadian state to build movements that campaigned for official support for the French language by means of increased political autonomy.

Most long-established European states, including France, Spain and Great Britain, contain culturally distinct regions, which were absorbed by these states via conquest or other means between the late middle ages and the eighteenth century. Often called stateless nations today, these regions gave rise to movements for cultural and political recognition that waxed and waned from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. During the 1970s, most of these ethnic nationalist movements – so called because they based their appeal for political autonomy on their cultural distinctiveness – among them the Welsh nationalist movement, also experienced a significant resurgence.

This resurgence is what first brought me – an anthropologist interested in the study of ethnic nationalism, with its intertwining of politics and culture – to Wales, and so began my intellectual and personal involvement with Welsh culture, identity and politics that has now spanned over three decades. When I first arrived in Wales in 1976, both cultural and political aspects of the nationalist movement were at a high ebb. The campaign for official recognition of the Welsh language, spearheaded by *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg*, had begun to have an effect with bilingual road signs increasingly to be seen and official forms beginning to be made available in Welsh. *Plaid Cymru*, the political party with Welsh self-government as its central aim, had three members of parliament elected in 1974, out of 36 Welsh MPs, and had made important advances in local government.

However, by the end of the decade, political nationalism was in a steep decline following a decisive 'No' vote in the 1979 referendum for devolution of political powers to Wales and Scotland, a decline from which it only began to recover toward the end of the 1980s. The Welsh language movement did not follow quite the same trajectory and achieved some important successes in the 1980s and 1990s, in particular the establishment in 1982 of S4C, the Welsh-language television service, and the passage of the 1993 Welsh Language Act.

The Welsh nationalist movement has been transformed because of the remarkable turnaround that produced a 'Yes' vote in the 1997 referenda to establish an elected assembly in Wales and a parliament in Scotland. *Plaid Cymru*, which continues to provide the main political expression of nationalist ideals, received a much higher percentage of the vote in the first National Assembly election in 1999 than it had ever done before in UK-wide elections and became the second largest party after Labour. As a consequence of the 2007 election results, *Plaid Cymru* became a party of government in coalition with the Labour Party until the 2011 election in a period when the powers of the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) were being extended.

But you will begin not with politics in the conventional sense but with culture and especially language. You will look first at the relationship between language, identity and

nationalism and then at the role the Welsh language has played in Welsh national identity and in the nationalist movement.

6.1 Language and identity

I arrived in Wales in 1976 to carry out fieldwork on the Welsh nationalist movement. I was aware that Welsh was the first language of just over one fifth of the people of Wales and the main language of many of its communities. But I had also been assured that learning Welsh was not a formal requirement for my research since virtually the entire adult population also spoke English. Nevertheless, as an anthropologist, I was conscious of the importance of language for understanding other cultures, and so for some months prior to my departure, I tried to teach myself something of the language, including the words of the national anthem, '*Hen Wlad fy Nhadau*'. I also enrolled in a Welsh-language summer course upon arrival. My intention at the outset was to acquire at least a basic competence in Welsh, in order to promote goodwill and facilitate access to certain factions and individuals.

In practice, I did not maintain this detachment for long but quickly became fully committed to acquiring fluency in Welsh. I came to realise that my immersion in the Welsh language was necessary for my research, not in the technical sense that Welsh-speaking informants would be less forthcoming if interviewed in English, but because learning Welsh gave me a deeper understanding and more immediate access to the complex relationships between language and identity.

An illustration of this occurred in an interview with one individual, a nationalist, who, as a product of a non-Welsh-speaking home and area, had for years promoted the perspectives and advancement of non-Welsh speakers in Plaid Cymru. He had been very successful in this regard, but eventually decided to learn Welsh himself. Reflecting on the experience, he remarked, 'I still identify with the non-Welsh-speaking Welshman. But as a speaker you do begin to take on some of the political overtones of the linguistic nationalists.' From his testimony, as well as my own experiences as a Welsh learner, I felt sure that he was not referring to a change in his perception of where his interests lay politically but to a very basic shift in standpoint, an ability to see issues from a different perspective entirely.

6.1.1 Language and personal identity

Language and identity are tied together at many levels. In an article written in the first half of the twentieth century, the American linguist Edward Sapir discussed this relationship and foresaw much subsequent research on language and identity. As you read the following excerpt from this essay, try to identify the two levels at which language and identity are connected.

Language is a great force of socialisation, probably the greatest that exists. By this is meant not merely the obvious fact that significant social intercourse is hardly possible without language but that the mere fact of a common speech serves as a peculiarly potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language. ... [A]t the same time [language is] the most potent single known factor for the growth of individuality. The fundamental quality of one's voice, the phonetic patterns of speech, the speed and relative smoothness of articulation, the length and build of the sentences, the character and range of the

vocabulary ... the readiness with which words respond to the requirements of the social environment, in particular the suitability of one's language to the language habits of the persons addressed – all these are so many complex indicators of the personality.

Sapir, 1970 (1933), pp. 15–16, 19

Sapir is telling us in this excerpt that language is an important means by which we establish collective identity and belonging and, at one and the same time, it is a powerful expression of our individuality. Now consider the following illustration of how much we infer about the identities of others from their use of language.

Imagine, if you will, a group of strangers waiting at a taxi stand. An empty taxi drives past without stopping, and the following remarks ensue:

A Outrageous.

B I say.

C F*ckin hell.

Quite likely, you have pictured in your mind what A, B and C look like. You can probably tell me something about how they are dressed, their background, what they do, what they are like, and whether you would like them or not.

(Joseph, 2004, p. 4)

The reason you are likely to have formed these surprisingly specific images of the three speakers above from such brief utterances lies in how we are socialised into language use. As we develop our linguistic competence throughout our lives from earliest childhood onwards, we learn to communicate in ways that are appropriate to the various groups with which we are associated. These groups may be as small and personal as a family unit or as large and relatively impersonal as a social class. Sociolinguists have shown that ways of communicating vary with a huge variety of social statuses, including gender, age, ethnicity, 'race', social class, profession and nationality, to name but a few.

Just as we make inferences about others' identities from how they speak, we also use language to establish and project our own identities to others. Our identities have multiple facets, and we are all adept at communicating in ways that emphasise some aspects, or downplay or attempt to hide others, depending on context. That is, we can all speak in different registers, changing our manner of communicating (accent, choice of vocabulary, use of grammar, and so on) to suit the occasion. We do not normally speak to our best friend and our boss in the same way, nor use similar language at a funeral as at a football match.

Activity 15

Think about how you communicate in several different contexts, for example, with family, at work, in a single-sex group, in a committee meeting. How does your choice of vocabulary, grammar and speaking style vary? What influences the choices that you make? If you are fluent in more than one language, how do you go about deciding which language to use?

6.1.2 Language and national identity

Making ourselves more aware of how we use language reveals its powerful role in establishing personal identities and in supporting feelings of solidarity and difference with various social groups. This is the case even among speakers of the same language. When there is a difference of language linked to another social identity, such as nationality, the effect is enhanced greatly. Few sociolinguists believe language difference in itself causes social conflict, but it is often implicated in conflict. As you read Extract 3, from Sapir, consider how and when, according to Sapir, language and national identity came to be so closely linked. What circumstances may lead to language-based conflict?

Extract 3

While language differences have always been important symbols of cultural difference, it is only in comparatively recent times, with the exaggerated development of the ideal of the sovereign nation ..., that language differences have taken on an implication of antagonism. In ancient Rome and all through mediaeval Europe there were plenty of cultural differences running side by side with linguistic ones, and the political status of Roman citizen or the fact of adherence to the Roman Catholic church was of vastly greater significance as a symbol of the individual's place in the world than the language or dialect he happened to speak. It is probably altogether incorrect to maintain that language differences are responsible for national antagonisms. It would seem to be much more reasonable to suppose that a political and national unit, once definitely formed, uses a prevailing language as a symbol of its identity ...

Sapir, 1970 (1933), pp. 40–2

Here, Sapir maintains that the close association of language and national identity is a product of modern times. We will return to this when we look at the origins of the ideology of nationalism. He also points to the repression of minority languages as a potential source of conflict. Although he was certainly incorrect to suggest – even in the 1930s – that such repression was limited to Europe, it has certainly been a feature of state building there. Indeed, the Welsh language experienced centuries of repression: Henry VIII banned Welsh from all official usage in Wales with the Act of Union in 1536. In subsequent centuries, the language was systematically stigmatised, most famously in the 1847 *Report into the State of Education in Wales*, which pronounced the language a 'great evil', holding it responsible for the supposed economic and moral degeneracy of the Welsh people (Roberts, 1998). This report, also referred to as '*Brad y Llyfrau Gleision*' or 'The Treachery of the Blue Books', was prepared by three English barristers, none of whom could speak or understand Welsh. Possibly the most devastating action against the Welsh language was forbidding its use in schools, a prohibition that continued into the early twentieth century.

Although the centralising activities of the English state successfully eliminated virtually all the administrative, legal and other institutional differences between England and Wales, the Welsh language remained the language of the majority of the population of Wales and most of its communities through the nineteenth century. However, as Figure 11 shows, the percentage of people speaking Welsh declined steadily through the twentieth century. The reasons for the decline are complex, but can be linked to the economic and social position of Wales within an increasingly powerful British state.

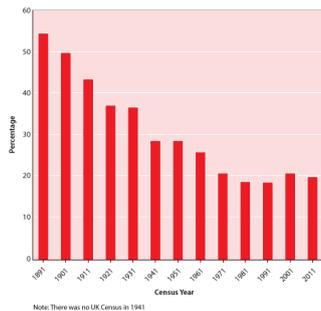


Figure 11 Percentage of Welsh population able to speak Welsh, 1891–2011

6.1.3 The Welsh language and political nationalism

Thus, in 1925 when a small group of nationalists – none of whom were professional politicians – established Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru/the Welsh Nationalist Party, one of its main aims was the promotion of the Welsh language and culture. The founders of this new political party were mainly middle-class professionals – teachers, ministers and lecturers – and the Welsh language was central to both their personal and working lives. The party aimed to secure Welsh self-government, including (by 1932) membership for Wales in the League of Nations, and to promote Welsh culture and the Welsh language. Although the party was fully bilingual in its publications from the 1930s onwards, it was almost entirely Welsh speaking in its internal organisation and membership (Davies, 1983, pp. 179–86). Most of the members were inspired primarily by their concern for the Welsh language and its preservation in the face of the external factors that were undermining it, deriving from Wales's lack of autonomy within the British state.

The Welsh Nationalist Party had little electoral impact in its first two decades and could be characterised as more of an intellectual and cultural movement than a political party. However, its character began to alter dramatically from the mid-1940s as Plaid Cymru (the Party of Wales) began its transformation into a political party, contesting both parliamentary and local elections across Wales with the intention of gaining political power as the means to its goal of full Welsh self-government.

As Plaid Cymru became more embedded in mainstream political activity, the promotion of the Welsh language, while remaining a central tenet, became less predominant in party concerns. Nevertheless, the language continued to be a major source of inspiration for many party activists. One individual I interviewed in 1977, a prospective parliamentary candidate for Plaid Cymru and mainly active as a political – rather than a cultural and linguistic – nationalist, told me: 'Without the language, the mainspring would go out of my motivation. Welsh freedom would still be worth working for, but I would not be as passionate about it' (Davies, 1989, p. 44).

The deep connections between language and identity mean that language can be an important source of inspiration and means of recruitment of nationalists if the achievement of political autonomy is seen as necessary for the protection, indeed the survival, of the language. Furthermore, the Welsh case suggests that this is not limited to speakers of the language. Many non-Welsh speakers have also embraced the nationalist cause primarily because of the language issue, arguing that they were deprived of the language themselves as a result of the linguistic oppression of Wales by the British state. They may try to reclaim the language – for themselves, through learning it as adults; for their children, through their support for the Welsh-schools movement; and/or for their nation, through political activism to achieve Welsh self-government

Activity 16

The following two excerpts illuminate what the Welsh language has come to mean to some who are not first-language Welsh speakers. Extract 4 is by the Anglo-Welsh poet and Welsh nationalist, Harri Webb, who was raised in Swansea and learned Welsh as an adult, adopting the Gwentian dialect he had heard while working as a librarian in Dowlais. Extract 5 is from an essay, 'Coming home', by the academic Sylvia Prys Jones, who was born in England and moved with her family to Cardiff when she was ten. Regarding each extract, what are the author's reasons for learning Welsh? How does each of them connect language with personal and national identity?

Extract 4

The Old Language

They called us, shyly at first, those words
 That were and were not ours.
 They whispered in names whose meaning
 We did not know, a strange murmur
 Like leaves in a light wind you hardly feel
 Stirring the autumn wood of memories
 That were and were not ours.
 We did not stop to heed, nor pause to wonder.
 But we could not escape them, they were always
 Around us, whispering. Did they croon
 A crazed witless song, a bad spell,
 Voices crying out of an old dark wood?
 Some shuddered, fled, stumbled.
 Others listened.
 Suddenly we knew, understood
 Whose voices these were, knew
 What they had been telling us all the time:
 Our true name;
 And the dead leaves turned into a shower of gold.

Webb, 1995 [1963], p. 60

Extract 5 'Coming home'

At secondary school I studied Welsh, French, Latin and Greek ...
 But it was Welsh which captured my interest, for it represented not just a language but an identity. I was a shy, diffident teenager: ... The Welsh language gave me roots and a sense of direction, and also set me apart from the crowd.

I became a fervent Welsh nationalist. ...

The strange aspect of this Welshness was that it was almost entirely an inward experience, a strange romantic notion in my imagination. ...

My Welsh nationalism ... had no political content. I had little grasp of political matters, and even less interest. ...

Looking back at that period of fervent nationalism makes me blush, bearing, as it did, little relation to the Wales of reality. I knew little of the geography of Wales ... I knew less of the people, of their struggle for survival and the preservation of their language. My Welshness was largely 'psychological': less of a response to the real, historical Wales than to a dim unperceived need within myself. ... But even now, as I wince in memory, I wonder whether it was such a bad thing.

... Is it a crime to want to belong, to be a part, to have roots? And if, in the process, we chance upon something of such immeasurable worth and beauty as the Welsh heritage, so much the better.

Source: Jones, 1992, pp. 6–7

6.2 Welsh language and nationalism

Important as the Welsh language has been as a source of inspiration for nationalists, this is far from being the only contribution the language has made to the nationalist movement. Although the percentage of Welsh speakers declined through most of the twentieth century, the language became an ever more important basis for the movement. The actions of the British state, as it expanded and consolidated its hold over its territory, resulted in Wales entering the modern period with no institutional distinctiveness from England. All administrative, legal, educational and other differences between Wales and England had been eliminated. Welsh identity was based virtually entirely on cultural differences, most obviously the Welsh language.

6.2.1 Welsh language activism

Beginning in the late 1940s, the Welsh Nationalist Party undertook a gradual transformation from acting primarily as a cultural movement to behaving like a conventional political party. Under the leadership of Gwynfor Evans, Plaid Cymru (as it was known from the 1950s) devoted itself to contesting elections for the Westminster parliament and for local government, with the goal of eventually winning self-government by constitutional means. However, progress was slow and by the early 1960s many members were disillusioned by their lack of success.

Then in February 1962, Saunders Lewis, one of the party's founders and its president from 1926 to 1939, gave a radio address, '*Tynged yr Iaith*', that was to have a profound effect on the nationalist movement. In his lecture, he reversed his earlier position that achieving self-government was the first priority and called for direct action and civil disobedience to win official recognition for the Welsh language in Wales.

This speech was an attempt to move Plaid Cymru away from what seemed at the time to be its completely futile electioneering. However, the effect was not to sway the party but rather to inspire a group of younger members to establish a new campaigning organisation, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society). The Society's

first campaign was to establish the right to court summonses in Welsh, and they began their activities in February 1963 with a sit-down demonstration blocking Trefechan Bridge leading into Aberystwyth. The intent was to elicit summonses that could be refused for being in English. However, none were forthcoming, and it was not until 1966 that a member was arrested for refusing to display an English-only motor vehicle tax disc.

The Society's major campaign in the late 1960s and 1970s was for bilingual road signs. This campaign, in which Cymdeithas members first painted out English-only signs, then later began to remove them entirely, attracted a great deal of negative publicity and also produced a large number of arrests over many years. Even so, as you will see, if judged by either government response or by its impact on Welsh society, it was a very successful campaign.

Prior to the appearance of this form of language activism – non-violent direct action against property – there had been no response by government to decades of more conventional political activism.

The only significant legislation on the language had been the Welsh Courts Act 1942, which had allowed Welsh speakers to give evidence in Welsh if they considered they were at a disadvantage using English. However, shortly after the Trefechan bridge demonstration, the government appointed the Hughes Parry Committee to enquire into the language's legal status. The committee's report resulted in the passage of the 1967 Welsh Language Act, which provided 'equal validity' for the Welsh language, basically that things done in Welsh in Wales had the same legal status as things done in English.

While it was an important step forward in terms of official recognition of the Welsh language, the Act was limited in its applicability and had no mechanism to compel adherence to the principle of equal validity. Nevertheless, the Bowen Committee, which was set up early in the 1970s to consider the issue of bilingual road signs, cited equal validity as the primary reason for recommending bilingual road signs (with Welsh given priority) throughout Wales. The subsequent appearance of Welsh/English road signs, albeit gradual and often disputed, gave official recognition, publicly displayed, not only to the Welsh language but also to the existence of a distinctive Welsh identity.

Many non-Welsh speakers also regarded this public display of the Welsh language as an affirmation of their Welsh identity. Recent research into changes in family life in Swansea between the 1960s and the start of the twenty-first century found many instances of a greater self-confidence in assertions of Welsh identity, and two interviewees made explicit references to Welsh road signs (Davies et al., 2006, p. 46). One said: 'When I come over the Severn Bridge and I see the signs in Welsh, I'm happy.' And another told us:

I'm Welsh and I'm proud that I'm Welsh. When I go over to England, because I mean I do travel around the country, when I go across to England, I say uh, that's England, but as soon as I come to it, I say yes I'm home. As soon as you see that Welsh sign you're home. Yeah. Very important that I'm Welsh. I mean I don't speak Welsh.

The focus of Cymdeithas yr Iaith campaigns changed as different issues gained prominence. In the 1970s they concentrated on acquiring a Welsh-language television service using techniques such as climbing television masts to prevent broadcasting. This campaign was the only one in which they were joined officially by Plaid Cymru, which orchestrated a campaign of civil disobedience in 1980 when nearly two thousand people refused to pay their television license fee and Gwynfor Evans announced his intention to fast to the death unless the fourth channel, which was being set up at that time, was made a Welsh language channel in Wales.

During the 1980s and into the 1990s, Cymdeithas yr Iaith concentrated on two areas: (i) the perceived threat to Welsh-speaking communities from the conversion of housing stock to holiday homes and second homes; and (ii) the need for a new Welsh Language Act. We will return to the first of these a bit later.

For the quarter of a century following the passage of the 1967 Welsh Language Act campaigners worked to realise the promise of equal validity in a variety of contexts, such as provision of bilingual road-signs and official forms in Welsh and recognition of the right of individuals to correspond with public bodies in Welsh. As the Act's shortcomings became all too apparent, demands for a new Act increased. The Act that was eventually forthcoming, the 1993 Welsh Language Act, provided that Welsh and English should be treated 'on a basis of equality' in the judicial system and in public administration, although the meaning of this 'basis of equality' was not fully clarified and was subject to considerations of practicality. The Act did not declare Welsh to be an official language in Wales despite the support for such a measure. But it did establish a mechanism to ensure that its provisions were carried out: the advisory Welsh Language Board became a statutory body with powers to oversee the development by public bodies of required Welsh language schemes to treat Welsh and English on a basis of equality. The Welsh Language Board was abolished in 2012 and its duties divided between the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Welsh Government.

6.2.2 The Welsh language and Welsh institutions

As we think about the activities and accomplishments of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg and other language campaigners over the past decades, we can see that the language played a much more extensive role in the nationalist movement than simply as an inspiration for activists, important as this may be. The Welsh language provided an officially sanctioned recognition of Welsh distinctiveness for the first time since the sixteenth century. Furthermore, it became one basis for creating an institutional infrastructure within Wales, again something that had not existed for centuries.

One area in which the language was particularly useful in stimulating the development of distinctive Welsh institutions was education. In the years immediately after the Second World War, parents in several areas in Wales began to pressurise local authorities to set up Welsh-medium primary schools. Initially, these schools were intended to provide for children from Welsh-speaking homes in areas of Wales where the predominant language was English. However, comparatively quickly, parents who did not speak Welsh began to request that their children also be admitted to these Welsh-medium schools. Thus, although at first led by a Welsh-speaking, middle class, the movement soon drew support from non-Welsh-speaking and working-class parents. They were attracted by the demonstrated educational successes of the schools, the opportunity to restore to their children the Welsh linguistic heritage of which they felt deprived, and, from the 1980s, the lure of high-status jobs with a Welsh-language requirement in the media and in the constantly expanding government bureaucracy in and around the Welsh Office.

By the early 1980s, many Welsh-medium schools had a majority of pupils from non-Welsh-speaking homes, and the class composition of the intake was representative of the areas in which the schools were located. In 2012, 33 per cent of maintained primary schools in Wales used Welsh as the main medium of instruction, and about 40 per cent of all pupils were fluent in Welsh at age 15. Since over one third of all children who were Welsh speaking came from homes where neither parent spoke Welsh, primary schools have played a major role in maintaining the Welsh language (Welsh Language Board,

1999, p. 2). Census figures for percentages of Welsh speakers in different age groups over the second half of the twentieth century show this clearly.

Activity 17

Figure 12 shows the percentage of Welsh speakers in different age groups from 1951 to 2011. If you look at age group 65+, you will see that the percentage of Welsh speakers has declined steadily from over 40 per cent in 1951 to under 20 per cent in 2011. Now look at each of the other age groups. For which groups has the decline been arrested? For each of these groups, when did the change to increasing percentages occur?

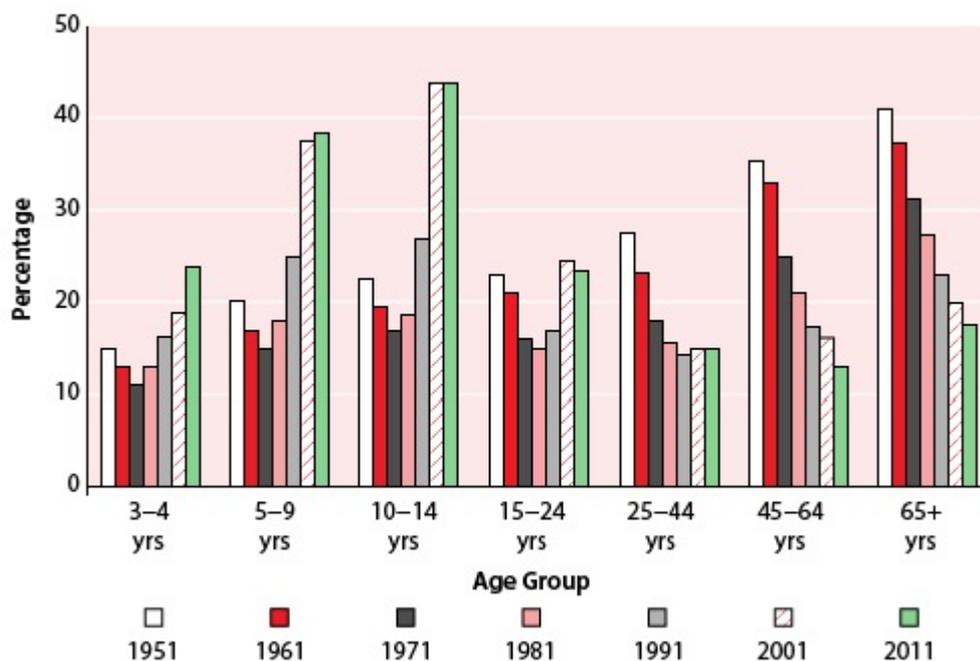


Figure 12 Percentage of Welsh population able to speak Welsh in different age groups, 1951 to 2011

Discussion

The three youngest age groups first showed increases over the previous census figure in 1981, the 15–24 age group in 1991, and the percentage of Welsh speakers in the 25–44 age group increased for the first time in 2001 (from 14.5 per cent to 15.1 per cent). The timing of these increases across age groups suggests that the development of Welsh-medium education over the past half century has changed the demographic profile of the Welsh language, from being concentrated among older age groups to experiencing most growth among younger age groups.

The Welsh Office was given control over primary and secondary education in Wales in 1970, and this enabled the growth of a professional elite of Welsh educationalists. Thus, when the Education Reform Act 1988 was introduced, this Welsh educational infrastructure exerted considerable influence on the new national curriculum being created by the Act. The strongest argument for special treatment for Wales under the Act was the special circumstances of Welsh-medium schools. However, Welsh educationalists had a broader remit than the Welsh-medium sector, and they secured a Welsh

dimension to the curriculum in the form of two requirements unique to Wales – the Curriculum Cymreig (Welsh Curriculum), designed to incorporate teaching about the culture of Wales throughout the curriculum; and the study of Welsh as a first or second language in all schools in Wales. Looking again at Figure 12, you can observe the particularly large increases between 1991 and 2011 for groups containing individuals of school age (5–15). This is very likely an effect of ‘the place given to Welsh in the National Curriculum, especially as a foundation subject in English-medium schools’ (Welsh Language Board, 2003, p. 2).

6.3 Nationalism

Nationalism is an ideology whose origins can be found in the processes of state building in Europe from the eighteenth century onwards. This ideology sees the world as naturally and rightly divided into nations, whose members share a national identity by virtue of such attributes as common history, language, religion and other cultural characteristics. Nationalism proclaims the right of every nation to its own political institutions, that is, each state ideally should contain only one national grouping.

Why did nationalism appear when and where it did in human history? And how did national cultures and a consciousness of national identities arise? Most who have tried to answer these questions have seen nations not as something natural about human society, simply waiting to be discovered. Instead, they were created as the response to a specific set of requirements, the needs of emerging industrial capitalism for a homogeneous and mobile labour force. Ernest Gellner (1983) argued that states introduced mass education to produce such a labour force. The content of this education was created by building on an arbitrarily selected local ‘folk’ culture. This became the national ‘high’ culture and the basis of national identity, and in the process it displaced the variety of different ‘folk’ cultures that existed within the state’s boundaries. Thus, as Gellner (1983, p. 55) remarked, ‘It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round’.

6.3.1 Varieties of nationalism

Although nationalism arose at a particular time and place in response to a specific set of historic circumstances, it has proven to be highly adaptable and effective as the basis for popular political mobilisation in many different contexts. Gellner’s ideas are better at explaining the origin of nationalism than they are at accounting for the impetus behind the many varieties of nationalism that have since emerged. Thus, his portrayal of national cultures as artificial inventions is contradicted by the perpetuation of a distinctive Welsh identity, which became the basis for a nationalist political movement, centuries after Wales’s incorporation into a British state that was hostile to Welsh culture.

Although the many varieties of nationalist movements that have arisen appeal to the same ideology, there are large differences between them, reflecting the different contexts in which these movements developed.

Activity 18

Read the following extract by James Kellas about different forms of nationalism. Notice where he places Welsh nationalism in his typology. As you read about the

characteristics of different nationalist movements, make a list of them and of the ways in which these movements differ from one another.

Extract 6 Classical European nationalism

[T]he ideology of nationalism seems to have originated in Europe. ... But this nationalism, even within Europe, was divided into a 'western' and an 'eastern' form. The 'western' nationalism was ethnically 'inclusive' in that it was based on a 'social nation' which could encompass more than one ethnic group. It was essentially about the cultural homogeneity of the state, and the common citizenship of those sharing that culture. 'Eastern' European nationalism, on the other hand, was ethnically 'exclusive' and was focused on the nation as a community of common descent, language, and religion. ...

The forms taken by nationalist movements in Europe set the pattern for nationalisms throughout the world. The inclusive nationalisms were more liberal and democratic, and did not engage in genocide, transfers of population, etc. The exclusive nationalisms were intolerant and often led to authoritarianism. ...

Unification movements

The unification of the German nation and of the Italian nation in the late nineteenth century was accomplished through war and conquest of existing states. ... This type of nationalism is also called

'Risorgimento' (rebirth) nationalism ... and it combined the aim of national unification with liberal ideals of democracy and freedom from oppression ...

National secession movements

In most cases, nationalism led to the break-up of existing states, not their joining together in one large 'nation-state'. So nationalist movements in Ireland, Greece, Poland, Serbia, and Norway, for example, achieved independence for their nations by breaking away from Britain, the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, the Austrian Empire, and Sweden, respectively. Today, national secession movements are still active in Europe: in Scotland, Wales, the Basque country, Corsica ...

Integral nationalism

Integral nationalism differs from 'risorgimento' nationalism in its belief that one's nation is superior to all others, and may even be the result of biological natural selection. ...

Integral nationalism is an absolutist ideology (the absolute loyalty to the nation is demanded), and in politics is clearly linked to totalitarian, Fascist, and Nazi forms of government.

Colonial nationalism

In the European colonial empires ..., a nationalism developed among the European settlers, which led to the independence of the colonies from the mother country. ...

Anti-colonial nationalism

... The emergence of indigenous 'national liberation' and anti-colonial movements in the British Empire corresponded with the spread of nationalist ideology from Europe ...

Given the existing colonial state structure at independence, the nationalists of the new 'nation-states' had to preserve boundaries which reflected the boundaries of colonial power rather than cultural or national divisions. Thus 'nation-building', irredentisms [nationalisms that make claims on the territory of other states], and secessions were permanently on the agenda of nearly all these new states. Now nationalism did not usually mean anti-colonialism ... Instead it meant interethnic disputes, communalism, and sometimes genocide.

Kellas, 1991, pp. 73–7

6.3.2 The nature of Welsh nationalism

Kellas begins by making a distinction between 'western' and 'eastern' forms of nationalism. His 'western' form of nationalism is essentially the same as what we have referred to as 'civic' nationalism, an inclusive social movement with national 'belonging' based in citizenship. Both Plaid Cymru and Cymdeithas yr Iaith advocate this type of nationalism. 'Civic' nationalism can be contrasted with [ethnic nationalism](#), where 'belonging' is understood in terms of some form of common descent, which may be genetic or may simply mean a shared history. Cymuned is usually taken to advocate a form of 'ethnic' nationalism.

As with all typologies, there is often a degree of overlap between categories. For example, shared culture is important for both civic and ethnic nationalism but is treated differently by them. For Cymuned, the Welsh language is the defining characteristic of the Welsh nation, to the extent that if the Welsh-speaking communities were to disappear, so too would the Welsh people 'cease to exist', an outcome Cymuned regards as 'ethnocide' (Cymuned, 2003, p. 5). Cymuned has rejected charges of racism and welcomed immigrants, 'who learn Cymraeg [Welsh] and become part of the community ... from all nations (including England) and all races', seeing them as 'enriching a multi-racial Welsh-speaking society' (Cymuned, 2003, p. 7). Nevertheless, there is an exclusivist element in the suggestion that only Welsh speakers can truly claim Welsh identity, and this underlies much of Plaid Cymru's disavowal of the group's position.

In the previous extract you saw that Kellas characterises Welsh nationalism as being a type of 'national secession' movement, an inclusive movement in that 'the existing citizens of a territory were acceptable as members of the nation' (Kellas, 1991, p. 73) and one example of many such movements that have arisen within a liberal democratic tradition. However, other types of nationalism – and in particular what Kellas calls 'integral nationalism' – have different characteristics: illiberal; autocratic; intolerant; racist. Thus, Welsh nationalists have had to face accusations from political opponents of 'narrow nationalism', and even 'racism' and 'fascism', which largely stem from a failure to acknowledge the very broad range of movements coming under the nationalist label.

We now turn to an examination of some aspects of Plaid Cymru's political philosophy and policies in order to characterise more fully the nationalist movement in Wales.

Nationalism and internationalism

Welsh nationalism was a product of the radical politics and socialist ideals that developed in Wales during the early decades of the twentieth century. The political importance of Welsh identity was an integral part of this context – Keir Hardie, the first independent Labour member of parliament from Wales, was a supporter of Welsh national identity and campaigned for Welsh home rule. In the years just prior to the First World War, several prominent members of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) tried to create a separate Welsh ILP, and although unsuccessful, continued to advocate a union of nationalist and decentralist socialist ideals (Davies, 1983). Some of them would become members of the Welsh Nationalist Party after its establishment in 1925.

The distinctiveness of the Welsh Nationalist Party lay in its emphasis on the Welsh language and culture, and in its independence from any British political party. But the party could not be accused of being ‘narrow nationalist’ in outlook. At the first of their annual summer schools in 1926, party president Saunders Lewis addressed directly the issue of nationalism versus internationalism. In his lecture entitled ‘*Egwyddorion Cenedlaetholdeb*’ he maintained that ‘the thing that destroyed the civilization of Wales and ruined Welsh culture, that brought about the dire plight of Wales today, was – nationalism’ (Lewis, 1975, p. 5). His argument was that the concept of nationalism that arose during the period of European state formation was materialist and based entirely on force. He advocated that Welsh nationalism should be inspired by an earlier principle, when an acceptance of an international authority, that of the Christian Church, across Europe was combined with respect for a diversity of cultures. Lewis then proceeded to argue that the recently established League of Nations was ‘an attempt to loosen the hard chains of material nationalism’ (Lewis, 1975, p. 9) and advocated that one of the conditions of Welsh self-government be a seat in the League of Nations.

Nationalism and socialism

There was a socialist element among Welsh Nationalist Party members from its foundation, although they were less prominent among the leadership. Kate Roberts, a member from 1926 onwards and a close associate of Saunders Lewis, explained her initial refusal to join: ‘as I am a Socialist I really cannot reconcile myself with his [Lewis] ideas. Personally, I see no difference between doffing one’s cap to an English merchant and doffing one’s cap to our old Welsh princes’ (Davies, 1983, p. 124).

In the 1938 party conference, a group of university students from Bangor challenged Saunders Lewis’s proposed social programme, arguing that the party’s philosophy was in essence socialist and that this should be acknowledged in order to win over Welsh socialists for the goal of Welsh self-government. The rejection of their motion in favour of Lewis’s concept of *perchentyaeth* may have been less a rejection of socialism than a reflection of the great personal respect for Lewis among the membership (Davies, 1983, pp. 104–5). Regardless of this rejection of the label socialist, the party’s primary spokesperson on economics during their first two decades, Dr D.J. Davies, was a former member of the Independent Labour Party and developed party economic policy based on his socialist vision.

Plaid Cymru began to move toward an explicit socialist position in the 1960s when an infusion of a new type of member began to affect the party. These new members were products of the educational opportunities created by the post-Second World War welfare state for working-class people; many were young, non-Welsh speaking and from the

industrial areas of south Wales. Although most came from families and communities that were traditionally loyal to the Labour Party, they rejected Labour for what they regarded as its betrayal of socialism. One party member from a Valleys constituency, interviewed in 1977, said he had joined Plaid Cymru as a teenager in the mid-1960s.

My generation began to realise that all this tremendous loyalty to Labour had got us nowhere in our area and had got Wales nowhere as a whole ... We suspected Labour not just on practical grounds, that they had not delivered on their promises, but also on ideological grounds that they were not a true socialist party ... We chose nationalism as the best way to pursue socialist ideals.

(Davies, 1989, p. 72)

By the early 1970s the socialist direction, not just of Plaid Cymru but also of the language movement, was beginning to be acknowledged by some intellectuals on the left.

Activity 19

Read the following extract by Raymond Williams from his review of Ned Thomas's book, *The Welsh Extremist*, on the Welsh language and the language movement, published in 1971. What do you think were Williams's reasons for changing his view of Welsh nationalism as parochial and conservative to seeing it as a part of 'a cause better than national and more than international ... a very general human and social movement' (Williams, 2003 [1971], p. 3)?

Extract 7

I used to think that born into a Border country at once physical, economic, and cultural, my own relationship to the idea of Wales was especially problematic. But I now see, from Ned Thomas, among others, that it was characteristic. I remember focusing first on the powerful political culture of industrial South Wales: in the first half of this century one of the major centres of socialist consciousness anywhere in the world. But the necessary movement from that kind of centre was into a larger society. ...

But there was always another idea of Wales: the more enclosed, mainly rural, more Welsh-speaking west and north. For me, in the beginning, that was much more remote. ... In the last decade especially ... another idea of Wales, drawn from its alternative source, has come through in the campaigns of Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Language Society.

The relation between these two phases has been especially difficult. Many English Socialists, and many Welsh Labour Party people, have seen the later phase as a marginal or romantic irrelevance, or as worse. 'Nationalism means Fascism', somebody said to me angrily. He is especially the kind of man who should read Ned Thomas's book. For the strange thing is this: that through its radical emphasis on identity and community, and in its turn to popular campaigning, to demonstrations and to direct action, this new Welsh movement ... has come through as part of the new socialism and the new thinking about culture ...

... [I]t seems to be true that in late capitalist societies some of the most powerful campaigns begin from specific unabsorbed (and therefore necessarily marginal) experiences and situations. Black Power in the United States, civil rights in Ulster, the language in Wales ...

Williams, 2003 (1971), pp. 3–4

Discussion

Williams's intellectual journey illustrates the difficulties that Welsh nationalism faced as a consequence of the wide variety of movements that have been labelled 'nationalist'. It also points to changes in the understanding of socialism, in particular a growing acceptance of the importance of 'local' experiences and cultural meanings that have moved the two ideologies closer together.

In the early 1980s, Plaid Cymru officially incorporated socialism into the party's aims, while still rejecting the state socialism it associated with the Labour Party. A Commission of Inquiry into the future of the party defined its political stance as 'decentralist socialist'. However, some in the party remained concerned about the contradictions between decentralism and socialism and, in a minority report, Phil Williams argued that government functions should be conducted at as low a level as feasible without undermining 'the basic equality of individuals and communities within society'. Thus, socialism and decentralism could be combined, 'but when the two principles contradict it is to socialism that we should give our highest priority' (Plaid Cymru, 1981, p. 111).

Green nationalism

Phil Williams's minority report was grappling with an issue similar to that raised by Raymond Williams – the relationship between different levels of social organisation and their associated cultural meanings. Raymond Williams identified with a new form of socialism, the New Left, composed of broad social movements (the women's movement, Black Power, the Welsh language) yet rooted in the particularities of locality and common interest. Another social movement, the ecological movement, became increasingly prominent from the 1980s, advocating a similar blend of global awareness and local action.

Phil Williams, who had been one of the young 'non-traditional' recruits to nationalism in the early 1960s and whose ideas had a major influence on Plaid policy over four decades, was among the first to press the party for action on green issues. He persuaded the 1983 Conference to establish a working party on ecological and environmental issues. This policy area came to be particularly closely associated with west Wales as a result of the agreement between Plaid Cymru and the Green Party to field a joint candidate for the constituency of Ceredigion and Pembroke North in the 1992 general election. This decision produced a victory for Cynog Dafis, who became the fourth Plaid MP and the first Green MP at Westminster. The agreement with the Green Party held until 1995 and was instrumental in getting some environmental measures through parliament.

After his election to the National Assembly in 1999, Phil Williams continued his work on the problem of climate change, arguing that Wales could contribute significantly to action to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. In a speech to the National Assembly in May 2000, he described climate change as 'the overriding imperative of global politics and ... the most important single issue since the 1980s'. As a professional physicist, he felt

obliged to convey the 'sense of reasoned, responsible panic' of key environmental scientists. At the same time, he detailed actions by the National Assembly for Wales that, he maintained, would make a genuine contribution to addressing the crisis. Speaking as a nationalist, yet recognising the necessity of international cooperation, he concluded:

[A] though no single parliament has the power to solve the problem globally, this Assembly, with the exception of the climate change levy, has all the necessary powers to ensure that Wales plays not only its full role but perhaps a leading role. That is my dream.

(Williams, 2004, p. 62)

6.3.3 Nationalism under devolution

Plaid Cymru's agreement in the 1990s with the Green Party confirmed the party's ability to appeal to a constituency with a high proportion of incomers and non-Welsh speakers, not regarded as their natural supporters. It also signalled Plaid's willingness to work with other political parties to achieve common goals. Both factors were instrumental in the party's establishing itself as a 'civic' nationalist movement, and contributed to its finally achieving a degree of political power in a Welsh government under devolution.

The establishment of the National Assembly for Wales has had two major effects on the nationalist movement. In the area of political nationalism, Plaid Cymru moved from being a tiny minority at Westminster to the second largest party in the National Assembly in the first elections in 1999. This signified a substantially altered position for nationalism within Welsh political life. And indeed the subsequent decade was marked with the movement of all political parties in Wales toward more 'nationalist' positions, including even the Conservative Party in Wales, which came to support the extension of the powers of the National Assembly to include legislative powers. Furthermore, after the 2007 elections, all other parties engaged in negotiations with Plaid Cymru as a potential coalition partner in government, and a coalition was eventually agreed with the Labour Party which lasted until the Assembly elections in 2011. This set of events, legitimising the role of the 'nationalists', demonstrated that Plaid Cymru had finally achieved acceptance within the mainstream of Welsh politics.

In terms of Welsh national identity, the creation of a democratically elected representative body provided a historically new basis for Welsh identity. The National Assembly for Wales strengthened Welsh identity in a number of ways: it became an important focus for lobbying and protest, being more accessible than Westminster and (in spite of the limitations on its powers) more relevant to the concerns of Welsh people. It also encouraged the development of civil society in Wales, making explicit provisions – even setting up umbrella organisations – to establish channels of communication with Third Sector (i.e. non-profit, voluntary and non-governmental) organisations.



Figure 13 Cymdeithas yr Iaith poster, showing the then First Minister Rhodri Morgan. It is promoting a 2005 rally for a new language act ('Language Act Rally – This is the Opportunity'), which was convened outside the Welsh Assembly Government headquarters in Cathays Park, Cardiff.

Welsh Language Society

These considerations bring us back to the relationship of language and national identity with which we began. What effect has the establishment of the National Assembly had on the Welsh language as a marker of Welsh identity? In 2003 the Welsh Government published its detailed Welsh language policy, *Iaith Pawb: A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales*. This was the strongest commitment ever by government to the Welsh language with the ultimate goal of creating 'a truly bilingual nation ... where people can choose to live their lives through the medium of either Welsh or English and where the presence of the two languages is a visible and audible source of pride and strength to us all' (Welsh Government, 2003, p. 11). However, the practical implications for the language remained disputed as serious reservations were expressed about the adequacy of provision for specific mechanisms and additional resources to enable implementation.

6.4 Conclusion

- Language and identity are closely associated. We use language to express individual personal identity and establish collective identities and solidarities.
- A distinctive national language can contribute to a nationalist movement as the main inspiration for activists – even those who choose to concentrate their activities in a more conventional political arena rather than in language campaigns.

- Nationalist movements vary widely from liberal democratic to intolerant autocratic. Most Welsh nationalist organisations (Plaid Cymru, Cymdeithas yr Iaith) advocate an inclusive 'civic' nationalism.
- A few organisations (e.g. Cymuned) reject civic nationalism, while still maintaining an anti-racist position.
- Plaid Cymru's political philosophy has incorporated internationalism; socialism; and green nationalism.
- Post-devolution, Plaid Cymru became a mainstream political party and eventually a party of government. Other Welsh political parties moved closer to a 'nationalist' perspective. National identity was strengthened and legitimised, and the Welsh Government made a strong commitment to the Welsh language, but doubts remained about practical provisions for implementation.

Language is intimately connected with the processes by which we establish and maintain our personal identities, as well as collective identities. National identity is one such collective identity for which language and language differences are important.

The Welsh language has been important for Welsh national identity and for the Welsh nationalist movement in many ways. It has provided an inspiration for activists in the movement. Welsh has also been used to win official recognition for the Welsh nation by means of its public display (e.g. on signs) and use (e.g. by public services). And the language has been a basis for the establishment of specifically Welsh institutions (e.g. Welsh-medium schools).

However, the Welsh language is under pressure from a range of social and economic processes, and disagreements about the appropriate way to respond to these pressures have led to conflict within the nationalist movement and to attacks from outside.

Although there are many varieties of nationalism, and some of them are autocratic and intolerant, Welsh nationalism derives from a radical democratic socialist tradition within Wales and displays the concern with liberal democracy and egalitarianism characteristic of this tradition. The Welsh nationalist movement can be characterised as a democratic and inclusive form of 'civic' nationalism with a political stance that encompasses internationalism, socialism, and environmentalism.

7 Labour traditions

Very little that happens in Wales is predictable – certainly not the weather, the fortunes of the national sports teams or the economy. However, over the past hundred years or so, there has been one exception. If you were born any time after the First World War, you might not be able to plan a barbeque, place a safe bet on the outcome of a Welsh football match, or make predictions over the prospects of the Welsh economy, but you could, with some confidence, predict that Labour would win the majority of Welsh seats in any general election.

From the 1920s onwards, the Labour Party dominated Welsh politics, winning the majority of parliamentary seats for the first time in 1923 and thumping its rivals with consummate ease on numerous other occasions (especially, as we shall see, in 1966 when the party won 32 out of 36 seats and again in 1997 when it won 34 out of 40).

Unsurprisingly, historians, political commentators and sociologists, from inside and outside Wales, have become used to seeing Welsh politics through the red lens of 'Labour Wales'. In popular discourse, 'Labour Wales' is associated with industrial south Wales, chapels, coal mines, terraced houses, working-men's clubs, male voice choirs and the proud traditions of an industrial working class. The fact that many people in Wales did not vote Labour – around a fifth of Welsh voters regularly voted Conservative after 1918 – escapes the attention of many. So too has the fact that the image of 'Labour Wales' outlined above is misleading: Labour, and the Labour tradition, did exist (and enjoyed success) away from south Wales, in rural areas, and in 'Welsh-speaking' Wales.

However, in 2009, 'Labour Wales' no longer seemed secure. Election results and public opinion suggest that the Labour tradition is on the wane. In the 2009 European elections, Labour captured just 20 per cent of the vote, following a disappointing performance in the 2007 Welsh Assembly elections when it captured only 32 per cent of the vote. In 2009, an opinion poll suggested that Labour could be on course to receive just 26 per cent of the Welsh vote in a general election, trailing behind the Conservatives (30 per cent) for the first time in the democratic era (Kettle, 2009).

The problems facing Labour were summed up by the journalist Martin Kettle in *The Guardian*:

Let's not mince words. If those figures are even approximately right, Wales would experience a political and existential earthquake ... it would massively challenge aspects of the way that many in Wales see themselves and their nation ... in the twentieth century, the electoral geography of Wales was predictable. Labour held the heavily populated old industrial south from Newport across to Llanelli and through the mining valleys ... but it is all to change now...

(Kettle, 2009)

In practice Kettle was wrong: Labour received 36% of the vote in Wales in the 2010 general election, against the Conservative Party's 26%. In the European elections in 2014, however, Labour's share of the vote fell to 28% - with the Conservatives at 17% but also UKIP at 27.5%.

7.1 Labour's 'Welsh' values (Andrew Edwards)

7.1.1 Labour values and Welsh values

A consequence of Labour's domination of Welsh politics over the twentieth century and beyond is that, in popular political discourse, Wales is considered to be 'Labour-land'. In attempting to explain Labour's popularity, some have suggested that the Welsh have 'Labour' in their DNA. A great deal of Labour propaganda over the years has alluded to the 'fact' that the Welsh were, in some way, inherently socialist and had a particular set of values which made them receptive to Labour's message and appeal, and to socialism. It is often assumed that the Welsh are more democratic, more liberal, more tolerant, more classless than people from many other areas of Britain.

Activity 20

Pause a moment to think about 'Labour' values and different forms of Welsh identity and what some consider to be 'Welsh' values. Write down the answers to the following questions:

1. Are there elements of the Welsh national character that help us to understand attachment in Wales to Labour and 'Labour' values?
2. Is the Labour tradition better explained by understanding Wales's social and economic experience?
3. What are 'Labour values'?

Discussion

If I was answering Question 3, I'd start with the easy ones – that Labour stands for radicalism, collectivism and equality. If I was answering thirty years ago, I would probably have said socialism, but I'm not so sure that I would today. So, we need to think of values that are not necessarily static.

7.1.2 The Labour tradition in the 1980s and 1990s

The conditions which had helped mould the Labour tradition in Wales in the 1920s and 1930s almost disappeared in the last three decades of the twentieth century. The old Welsh industries which had helped sustain that tradition started to disappear. In the north, the slate industry fell into terminal decline in the late 1960s, devastating many local communities. In the south, coal mines and steel mills closed down with equally catastrophic social and economic consequences in the 1970s and 1980s. Unemployment in Wales reached 10 per cent in 1989 and peaked at 14 per cent in 1986. Of course, these are averages, with the picture much worse in many towns. Clearly, major political events in the 1980s – notably the 1984–1985 miners' strike – had a devastating impact on 'Labour' communities but, ironically, these were not the constituencies that deserted Labour in the early 1980s.

Steel and mining areas, as we have seen, were symbols of Labour strength and values. The occupations which once supported the Labour Party in vast numbers all but vanished. Economic change was matched by challenges to old ideas and social structures and by

the appearance of new injustices and inequalities, as well as new expectations. In many parts of Wales, the Labour tradition was threatened by competition from a cultural and political nationalism and from a popular brand of conservatism. At British level, the party was torn apart by bitter disagreements over policy.

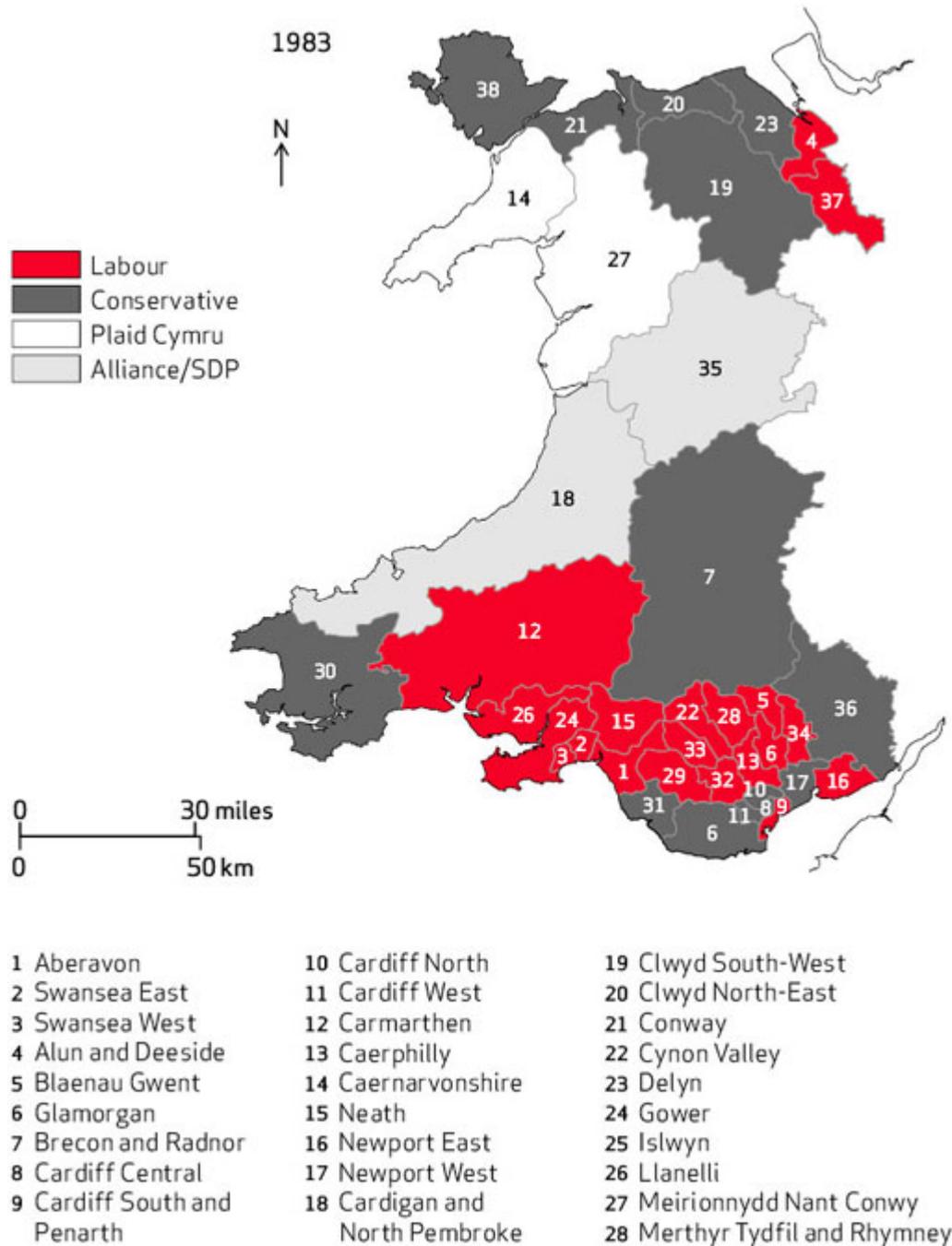


Figure 14 Electoral map of Wales, 1983

Jones, 1999, p. 176

The crisis facing Labour in Wales was highlighted in the 1983 general election when the party's Welsh vote fell to under 40 per cent for the first time in a generation. Figure 16 is a map of Wales following the 1983 general election.

Activity 21

Compare Figure 14 above with Figure 15, below, showing Wales after the 1966 general election. Consider the reasons for the erosion of Labour's support.

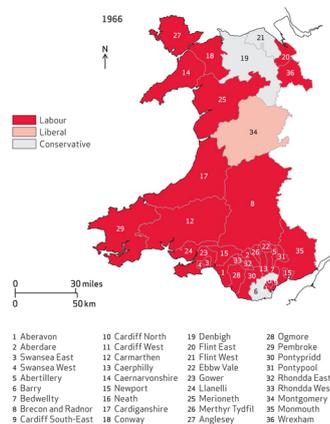


Figure 15 Electoral map of Wales, 1966

Jones, 1999, p.175

Discussion

By 1987, Labour had lost three general elections in a row (1979, 1983 and 1987) and the social and economic problems facing Wales (outlined above) were forcing many pro and anti-devolutionists to think again. 'Thatcherism' had three negative consequences for Welsh democracy: (i) centralisation of power at Westminster; (ii) emasculatation of local government by stripping powers away from many democratically elected (often Labour-controlled) councils; (iii) an increase in the number of (undemocratic) quasi-autonomous, non-governmental organisations (quangos).

Equally powerful in highlighting the crisis of a 'democratic deficit' in Wales was the Conservative Party's performance in Wales during its years in power at Westminster (1979–1997). In the 1979 general election, the Conservative Party won 11 seats in Wales. In 1983, its best performance for more than a generation, it won 16. However, in 1987 and 1992, it won 8 and 6 seats respectively. In 1997, it failed to win a single seat, a 'feat' which the party also repeated in 2001.

So, the Conservatives ruled Wales on the back of English (and to a lesser extent) Scottish votes: the party did not enjoy majority support for Wales. This was one reason that some of those who opposed devolution in 1979 changed their minds in the 1990s. The realisation that the people of Wales consistently voted Labour, but were governed by the Conservative Party, started to sink in by the early 1990s. One convert to devolution was Ron Davies, Labour MP for Caerphilly and later secretary of state for Wales in the 1997 New Labour government. Read the extract below, which is from Davies's evidence to the Richard Commission in 2002. This will help you understand why Davies saw the form the government that was operating before devolution as unsatisfactory.

Extract 8

I think that the point is worth making that the form of government we have now is infinitely better than we had before 1997 and in that sense I am proud of it.

But that doesn't mean it couldn't be better. So the question is in what ways? I think we have improved governance in Wales ... there are a number of reasons why we had devolution, one of those clearly was the idea of the democratic deficit. There were others relating to the performance of public services and indeed the national question: identity and image and nation building. But the question that really resonated with the public during the 1990s was the question of the democratic deficit, the issue of the quangos, the issue of the Secretary of State, the issue of legislation going through Parliament. I think we have done that, I think that we do have a form of government now that, despite its imperfections, despite the sense of isolation that comes from its distant geography, I think we have opened up Wales.

Davies, 2002, p. 3

It is important to stress that Davies was not alone in being won over to the positives of devolution.

A commitment to devolution had been included in Labour's 1992 election manifesto. When New Labour under Tony Blair won a landslide election victory in May 1997, devolution was again a manifesto commitment. Later in the same year Welsh voters were given the opportunity to claim devolution. In the referendum of September 1997, 50.3 per cent voted in favour. The margin of victory was hardly a ringing endorsement of the executive form of devolution on offer, but it was a substantial increase in the 'Yes' vote compared to 1979. The 1997 referendum campaign took place in a very different political atmosphere to that of 1979. While there were still many anti-devolutionists in Labour's ranks in Wales, few spoke out against the measure, not least because they did not want to undermine the status and reputation of the first Labour government for eighteen years and to risk the wrath of those who had suffered during this long period of Conservative rule. The transformation in opinions over devolution were not due to a single reason, but to a variety of social, economic, cultural and political concerns. In the next section you will look at the development of the Labour tradition following the arrival of devolution.

7.2 Labour and devolution

7.2.1 The Labour tradition and devolution

The arrival of devolution in 1999 opened a new chapter in the history of Welsh Labour. Contrary to the fears of many nationalists, Labour has not ended up dominating the Welsh Assembly. The Assembly has 60 seats, some of which are allocated on a traditional 'first past the post' constituency basis, and others on a regional, 'proportional representation' basis. In the first three elections for the Welsh Assembly in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 Labour won 27, 30, 24 and 30 seats respectively. Labour has thus failed, to date, to establish an overall majority in Cardiff. One of the defining features of the Welsh Assembly has been the advent of coalition government. In 2000 Labour secured control of the Assembly through coalition with the Liberal Democrats and, in 2007, a most unlikely (given the antipathy between the parties for most of the previous century) coalition with Plaid Cymru. From 2011 it has governed with no overall majority. As results for the first three Assembly elections demonstrate, other 'radical' parties have also performed well and, for the first time in over a century, the Conservative Party is responding to the challenges of contemporary Wales with a voice and a mandate which has a distinctively

Welsh feel and with an agenda that is not unsympathetic to some 'radical' concerns (especially the need to preserve, and even extend, Welsh self-government).

It is clear that devolution and coalition government have posed challenges for Labour. Among the positives for Labour (and, indeed, the other parties) in the first ten years of devolution has been the attempt to address the gender imbalance in Welsh politics. As a result of a policy that some call 'positive discrimination', Labour selection processes included all-women shortlists in many constituencies prior to the 1999 Assembly election. Partly as a consequence of this, in the first Welsh Assembly, 46 per cent of the seats were held by women; in 2003, this rose to 50 per cent. Before the 2007 election, the Welsh Assembly had 29 male Assembly Members (AMs) and 31 female. In 2003, the Welsh cabinet also had a female majority (5 out of 9 ministers). In May 2007, 47 per cent of AMs are women. In June 2014, one third of the Cabinet were women and 44 per cent of AMs – so there has been a decline in the representation of women in recent years. However, at Westminster 19.5 per cent of MPs are women and 20 per cent of Welsh MPs are women. Another benefit has been the continuance of a Welsh Labour tradition in attempts to construct a Labour agenda that is distinctively Welsh. When I think back to Morgan's analogy of 'red dragons' and 'red flags' (the division of Labour Wales into de-centralist and centralist camps), I think it's safe to say that the spirit of both has been awakened in Cardiff Bay. In the first couple of years of devolution, Welsh Labour struggled to break free from the shackles of the party's London leaders. This was highlighted by the controversy surrounding Alun Michael's term as First Minister between 1999 and 2001, when Michael was seen by media commentators, the party's opponents and even some Welsh Labour members like Paul Flynn as Tony Blair's 'groupie', or 'poodle' in Cardiff (Flynn, 1999, p. 44). Michael was also unpopular among many prodevolutionists because he had a record of being, at best, lukewarm on the question of devolution. However, after Michael's resignation in 2001, his successor, Rhodri Morgan, attempted to mould a Labour agenda for Wales that is different to that in London. The whole point of devolution was that Wales could, if it wanted, develop policies that were different to those in other parts of the UK. The need for this approach was famously summed up by Morgan in December 2002 in what has since become known as the 'clear red water' speech. This highlighted a desire for Wales not only to be different, but also for Labour to draw on strands of its heritage and tradition. The extract below is an excerpt on the subject from a speech delivered in Cardiff in March 2003.

Extract 9

The key point is that we organise ourselves and the values that we hold are shaped by this experience of living in relatively small settlements and medium sized villages, towns, valley agglomerates and cities. The consumerist approach to choice in public services that stresses differentiation may fit best the practicalities and the experience of those metropolitan settlements of a million or several million people that are a feature of counties that are urbanised in a different way to Wales. As an Assembly Government, we have given higher priority to the provision of high quality, community based, comprehensive secondary schools than we have to the development of a choice of specialist schools. This does not mean we are against choice and diversity ... it seems to me that our values and our geography lead us to stress the community basis of our schools ... involving parents, families and community groups in the life of the schools.

Morgan, March 2003

Activity 22

Consider and note other areas of policy where the difference between English needs and values may be different to traditional Labour and Welsh values. For example, you could consider how policies on tourism in the rest of the UK may not always be conducive to Welsh needs.

So we have red dragons, red flags, and now red water as a means of defining what the Labour tradition is all about. We could actually portray Rhodri Morgan as a red dragon, someone who comes from the same sort of background as James Griffiths, a Welsh speaker, with sympathies for the culture and language of Wales, but also with clear socialist beliefs and tendencies and an unequivocal supporter of Welsh self-government.

7.2.2 The Labour tradition in twenty-first century Wales

Earlier I talked about Labour identities and Welsh identities. One consequence of the Welsh Assembly is that discussions of 'Welsh' values and 'Welsh' political priorities have blossomed. In numerous political statements and speeches, the NHS and the assumed principles behind it have been ascribed a prominent role in an apparently distinct 'Welsh way'. This assumed trajectory includes commitment to more communitarian and collective policies than in many other parts of the UK (Tanner and Michael, 2007, p. 38). Read Extract 10, from an article written by Duncan Tanner and Pam Michael, which builds on Activity 22 on Labour values and Welsh values. Consider how this extract corresponds with your own ideas.

Extract 10

Few people can detect a neat transition from 'English' to 'Welsh' values upon entering Wales. Nevertheless, references to 'Welsh values' within policy circles and political debate are now common. During the campaign for devolution and since the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales, politicians have frequently appealed to 'Welsh values' as a distinctive marker and as a justification for policy deviation. Indeed, an appeal to 'Welsh values' has almost become a hallmark of true 'Welshness'. It is much used by politicians seeking to establish their credentials as representatives of Welsh opinion and by central government ministers charged with managing Welsh affairs – perhaps especially where their own policies are not particularly distinctive or are tied by the policies of a UK-wide party. Thus on 26 November 2002 Peter Hain, newly appointed Secretary of State for Wales in the Labour government, duly assessed the National Assembly for Wales, declaring the need to protect 'our very own and very special values in Wales ... Welsh values of community. Welsh values of caring. Welsh values of family life. Welsh values of mutual co-operation and mutual respect. Welsh values of democracy. Welsh values of internationalism. Welsh values of multi-racialism' ... The innumerable references to Aneurin Bevan in political speeches ... and to the NHS, is part of a process through which populist history has become a powerful contemporary influence. For example, in 1998, Alun Michael, then Secretary of State for Wales, enunciated Wales' special commitment to the principles of the NHS and adherence to the values articulated in the NHS in the preface to the policy document *Putting Patients First*: 'None of the values enshrined in the NHS when Aneurin Bevan created it will be lost. The NHS in Wales will continue to

be a truly national service available to all on the basis of need'... Swearing allegiance to Bevan's legacy is an important political gesture in Wales. In an online opinion poll in 2005 to find the top 100 Welsh heroes, Aneurin Bevan beat allcomers, ahead of the charismatic 15th-century hero of Welsh resistance to English rule, Owain Glyndwr, the singer Tom Jones, and the 'Welsh wizard' and architect of state pensions, David Lloyd George.

Tanner and Michael, 2007, pp. 39–40

So, reference to tradition and history is an important mechanism for allowing the current crop of Labour politicians to develop a message that has resonance, allowing them to communicate ideas and values that ordinary people can engage with and understand.

Labour has tapped into its heritage and traditions in other ways. Under the coalition agreement with the Liberal Democrats in 2000, policy priorities included the abolition of prescription charges and dental charges for over-60s, free school milk, free travel for pensioners and educational reforms. It is no exaggeration to suggest that these policies are not far removed from the priorities of radical political parties in Wales a hundred years ago. When Wales became the first and only country in the UK to have free prescriptions in 2007, this was another example of radical attempts to pursue a distinctive socialist agenda in Wales and one with long-standing resonance.

Of course, developing policies around devolution has presented numerous problems and challenges. As has always been the case, the merits and demerits of devolution have continued to divide opinion in Labour's ranks. As I suggested earlier, the establishment of a Labour/Plaid Cymru coalition government, marked by the publication of the *One Wales* policy document in 2007 was a major achievement and a landmark in the history of the radical/Labour tradition in Wales (especially as this was an alliance unthinkable in the 1970s and unlikely in the 1980s and 1990s). Across the political spectrum in Wales there are people determined to see devolution succeed, and determined that it does so in a way that does justice to the history, traditions and cultures of Wales. But there are still those who (like Bevan sixty years ago and Kinnock in the 1970s) see devolution as a waste of time and a waste of money. When, in 2003, the Richard Commission was looking into the possibility of extending the powers of the Welsh Assembly, it took evidence from a number of individuals and bodies in Wales. Among the individuals was the Labour MP Llew Smith, one of the few no campaigners in 1997 to receive significant media attention. Extract 11 comes from Smith's evidence to the Commission. Read the extract and note why Smith remained reticent about the value of the Welsh Assembly.

Extract 11

Are we, for example, to accept that the NHS in Wales is run more efficiently than in England, since many of the powers have been devolved to Cardiff. Do we accept that Wales is any less a quango state since the establishment of the Welsh Assembly? No. Is there anything fair about an Assembly continuing to subsidise one of the richest areas in Wales, in Cardiff Bay, at the expense of some of the poorest communities? Has the Assembly benefitted those deprived communities in a way which a Labour government would have failed to do so? No ... To save any further embarrassment for the Welsh Assembly, I will refrain from providing any other examples, but there are many ... other than a 'bonfire of the quangos', the other claim made by Ron Davies and supported by the 'Yes' campaign was (that) £20 million would amply fund a democratically elected and accountable Welsh Assembly and with a lot to spare. This money

... will obviously not be sufficient ... the ridiculous claim that £20 million would fund the Welsh Assembly was highlighted by Jim Pickard in the Financial Times (8/3/02) when he revealed that 'government officials have admitted that the annual running costs of the Welsh Assembly are now £148 million, more than double the £72 million spent in the last year of the Welsh Office ... The revelation makes a mockery of New Labour's claim in 1997 that Welsh devolution would only cost an extra £15 – £20 million each year'.

Smith, 2003, pp. 4–5

As had been the case in the 1970s, the costs of running an Assembly and its alleged failure in bringing democratic accountability are at the forefront of Smith's concerns.

For many, Labour's disappointing performance in the 2007 Assembly elections was used as a rallying point to awaken Labour to the importance of its history and traditions. The emergence of movements and focus groups such as 'Wales 20:20' (a 'think tank' intended to prompt socialist debate) were formed to renew the Labour movement across Wales, remould Labour as a policy-driven organisation and help facilitate a wide-ranging and inclusive debate under what it calls the 'democratic socialist' banner in Wales. Among the most prominent activities of Wales 20:20 was the campaign to eradicate child poverty in Wales.

Through such groups and movements, new Labour figures have emerged who see the Welsh Assembly as a mechanism for improving the lives of ordinary people living in Wales. One who fits this category is Huw Lewis, Labour's Assembly Member for Merthyr, and Minister for Education and Skills. Lewis was active in Wales 20:20, reviewed the Welsh Government's flagship anti-poverty programme 'Communities First' and wrote the Welsh Government's plan to eliminate child poverty. Making what many saw as a bid for the leadership of Welsh Labour in 2009, Lewis talked of the need to rekindle the bonds which have always been part of the Labour tradition. Extract 12 is from a pamphlet published by Lewis and 'Wales 20:20' in 2009. You will notice that he argues for a rekindling of the bonds that have always been part of the radical Welsh Labour tradition.

Extract 12

The Labour Party was created to represent the interests of progressive people organised in the workplace. In this respect little has changed – it is that group of people for whom we try to effect most change and who make up our most valuable resource in terms of members, thinkers and supporters. However, a growing dislocation between different branches of the Labour movement in Wales risks not just a weakening of these ties, but schism. There is something profoundly disturbing about the current relationship between the Labour Party in Wales and what should be its most natural of brethren – the Trade Unions and the cooperative movement. The latter have become the undervalued pair in the progressive triumvirate needed to drive Wales forward. Elsewhere in Europe, Trade Unions are the vanguard of policy creation in areas like health and safety and work/life balance – we need the same action and support in Wales. Genuine social partnership must be the cornerstone of a renewed Welsh Labour. Historically, co-operatives and the Unions have not just helped, or followed Labour in Wales, they have led on the policy agenda, and quietly through successful stand alone projects they continue to do fantastic work, but we have stopped recognising that and no longer progress common values from a common platform. This goes for all affiliates who make up the Labour family –

Young Labour and Labour Students in Wales for example should be, as it once was, the training ground for new leaders and great Trade unionists of the future – these organisations are now undervalued, underused and underfunded.

Lewis, 2009, pp. 14–15

You will probably have noted that the key feature of this extract is that Lewis sees a future for the traditional Labour Party/trade union alliance. You may also have made note of the way that he refers to the existence of a ‘Labour family’ in Wales.

Other prominent Welsh Labour figures have been making similar calls for a revival of a Labour tradition which seemed to have disappeared. Among these has been Peter Hain, Labour’s MP for Neath, who was Secretary of State for Wales from 2002 and to 2008. Extract 13 is from a paper written by Hain. As you read, you will note how he views the Labour tradition, its values, and the changes that have occurred since the 1980s.

Extract 13

Wales is a very different place compared with when I first came to live here 18 years ago, and has developed at a pace since Labour came to office in 1997, accelerating even further since the assembly began work in 1999 ...

The communities in which the roots of Labour’s support and bases of activism were bred and sustained for generations are disappearing, increasingly fragmented with neighbours more strangers than family friends. The caring values which have for generations epitomised many Welsh neighbourhoods – especially in the valleys – can no longer be taken for granted. The large workplaces that were the heart of the old labour movement in Wales as elsewhere have all but disappeared. Trade unions – the bedrock of the old Welsh Labour – have steadily declined. Even under Labour, trade union membership in the workforce fell sharply by 13 per cent between 1998 and 2006 ... significantly greater than almost every part of Britain: four times greater than Scotland and three times the north-east. While public sector membership is high (68 per cent), private sector membership is very low (22 per cent). Just a third of all Welsh workers are trade union members today – though high by European standards, sharply down on the past. Solidarity and class have been eroded as the key voting determinants. The Labour vote traditionally passed down from parents and grandparents to children and grandchildren is no longer the binding glue of the Labour party’s electorate. Typically, young people encountered on the doorstep ‘don’t know’ or ‘don’t care’ or ‘won’t vote’.

In traditional Labour areas in Wales where the older vote can be rock solid, the younger people are less likely to vote Labour or to vote at all. In the 2007 assembly elections fully 80 per cent of registered 18–34-year-olds did not vote; half of 18-24-year-olds knew nothing about the Assembly.

Hain, 2008

The challenges Labour faces as it seeks to rekindle its traditional appeal in Wales are numerous. In the following extract, also from Hain’s paper, he notes that Labour’s traditional appeal will need to be remoulded to fit contemporary needs and aspirations.

Extract 14

Alongside party renewal there are four ideological challenges facing Welsh Labour. First and above all, Welsh Labour must be the party for an aspirational Wales, and this means appealing both to ‘middle Wales’ as well as motivating our ‘traditional Welsh Wales’ vote to turn out in a way it has been increasingly reluctant to do. These constituencies are not at all incompatible: on the contrary, appealing to both simultaneously holds the key to a Labour revival, as was the case in 1997. Second, we have to win the argument for deepening devolution within Britain rather than as a bridgehead to separatism outside Britain. Third, we must not allow the nationalists to claim the Welsh language as their fiefdom: we must advance a positive vision for the language with a distinctive global perspective rather than the parochial one of Plaid and too many of their fellow travellers in Welsh public life. Where their instinct is to make Welsh speaking almost obligatory, ours is to ensure choice for all, Welsh and non-Welsh speakers alike. Fourth, we must claim authorship of a proud Welsh patriotism that is simultaneously British, European and internationalist, rather than separatist. Devolution for Labour was never about creating an inward looking, parochial Wales, or about satisfying that strand in Welsh society which is basically so insecure that it seeks to huddle with its back to the outside world ... Our citizens have quite different aspirations from 1997. The issues are no longer mass unemployment and collapsing public services. The modern Wales majority has different aspirations and different pressures. People now rightly expect to have not just any job, but a decent job with opportunity to progress; not just any school for their children but a high-achieving one; not just low hospital waiting times but high-quality personalised care; not just a roof over their heads but affordable housing to buy or rent; not just more police but better neighbourhood policing; not just reduced crime but reduced violence, reduced antisocial behaviour and more respect. And they are right to demand this of Welsh Labour.

Hain, 2008

In the wake of Rhodri Morgan’s decision to step down as Welsh Labour leader and First Minister in 2009, the battle for the leadership of the party encapsulated the need for labour to re-ignite and rediscover its traditional appeal in Wales. The victor of that contest was Carwyn Jones, Labour’s AM for Bridgend. He promised that Labour would fight back to restore its electoral fortunes in Wales, renewing its traditional appeal in Wales through a commitment to public services and to ‘putting ordinary working people first’ (Jones, 2009). So, the challenges facing Labour in Wales are numerous. As Hain acknowledged, Wales has changed considerably from the one identified with the Labour tradition in the 1920s and 1930s. It is different, even, from the one that existed before devolution a decade ago. Labour needs to respond to the new challenges and new aspirations if the tradition is to survive.

7.3 Conclusion

- Some believe that symmetry exists between ‘Labour’ and ‘Welsh’ values.
- The harsh economic conditions of the 1980s, and the prolonged period of Conservative rule, re-kindled the devolution debate.

- Some politicians who had opposed devolution in the 1970s changed their minds over the issue around this time.
- Following Labour's return to power in 1997, devolution was approved, but by a very small majority.
- In Welsh Assembly elections, Labour's domination of Welsh politics has been secure.
- Since 2001, Labour has attempted to re-define its values, to meet distinctive Welsh needs.
- It is widely accepted that the Labour tradition has to adapt and change to meet the aspirations of twenty-first century Wales.

In the course of this section, we have looked at the origins and development of a political tradition that has shaped Welsh politics and society for nearly a century. As we have seen, there was much more to the Labour tradition than simply the politics of the coalfield. The Labour tradition – a radical tradition – cut deep into the Welsh psyche, representing social, cultural, linguistic and political aspirations that often cut across boundaries based on social class. At times, as we have seen, Labour values and Welsh values were indistinguishable from one another, blurring contested notions of identity in different parts of Wales.

I want to finish where we started, with the Martin Kettle article in *The Guardian* in September 2009. Kettle concluded his article by arguing:

Maybe this scenario is cast too dramatically ... any claim that Wales is a Conservative nation now – especially based on the support of fewer than one voter in three – is ridiculous. But the idea that it is still a Labour nation is increasingly ridiculous too. As Labour prepares to choose a successor to Rhodri Morgan, its admirable Welsh leader who is 70 this month, Welsh politics is changing fast. Land of my fathers no more.

(Kettle, 2009)

The scenario need not seem so pessimistic. Labour representatives are alive to the challenges ahead. The party needs the personalities and the policies to re-invent or re-shape the tradition, to rekindle its relevance to ordinary people living in north and south, Welsh-speaking and anglicised, Wales. If it can do this, as optimists suggest, we may still be debating the merits of the Labour tradition in another half-century.

8 Political representation

Anwen Elias

Political representation is a core feature of any modern democratic system, organised around the core principle of *rule by the people*. This is because we periodically elect representatives who take political decisions, and implement policies, on our behalf. But political representation is also a very contentious issue. Political scientists and politicians disagree on key questions relating to the basic notion of political representation, such as *who* should be represented, *who* should *do* the representing, and *what kind* of representation is desirable.

This section examines how some of these questions about political representation have been addressed in Wales. In particular, we will examine how concerns with the *quality* of political representation in Wales by the mid-1990s led to a major programme of constitutional reform – devolution – and the creation of a new democratically elected body, the National Assembly for Wales (NAW). Champions of devolution during the mid-1990s saw this as a process that would bring about a new form of politics in Wales, one that would be characterised first and foremost by its inclusivity. This section examines whether Welsh politics has in fact become more inclusive since then, and the degree to which devolution has enhanced the quality of political representation in Wales.

8.1 A history of political representation in Wales

In this section, you will begin by looking at how Wales has been historically represented within British politics, and why such a system of political representation was considered to be unacceptable by some groups in Wales. This will lead onto an examination of the growing demand for devolution for Wales during the 1960s and 1970s, and then again in the mid-1990s. The section concludes by examining the devolution plans put forward by New Labour in 1997, and the structure and powers of NAW created soon after.

8.1.1 Political representation in pre-devolution Wales

Historical overviews of political representation in Wales often make reference to an entry in the index of an early edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, where it was stated ‘for Wales, see England’. That Wales was referred to in such terms reflected the country’s thorough incorporation into the institutional, legal and administrative apparatus of the English state through legislation in 1536 and 1543 (the Acts of Union). The Wales and Berwick Act of 1546 stated that ‘in all cases where the Kingdom of England, or that part of Great Britain called England, hath been or shall be mentioned in any Act of Parliament, the same has been and shall henceforth be deemed and taken to comprehend and include the Dominion of Wales’ (Bogdanor, 1999, p. 144). This Act remained in force until 1967.

In practice, however, Welsh interests have not been as completely subsumed under ‘England’ as is sometimes asserted. Of course, Wales has always sent representatives to sit in the House of Commons. But in addition to this, since the beginnings of the twentieth century successive governments in Westminster have recognised the necessity of treating Wales differently in certain policy areas. Areas including education, the Welsh language and agriculture, several Wales-specific bodies were established to tailor policies

to specific Welsh needs, and to oversee their implementation in Wales. This amounted to a process of administrative devolution. By the 1950s no fewer than seventeen government departments had established administrative units in Wales. Henry Brooke was appointed the first Minister for Welsh Affairs in 1957, and a Welsh Office (headed by a Secretary of State for Wales) was established in 1964 in order to 'express the voice of Wales' in central government policy making (Bogdanor, 1999, p. 160).

However, administrative devolution did not satisfy everyone. Since the late nineteenth century, certain groups and political parties have argued that this form of political representation is inadequate and insufficient. Let's look in more details at some of these concerns with the quality of political representation in Wales.

8.1.2 Contesting political representation in Wales

Historically, several different groups have contested the system of political representation in Wales. For example, in 1925, Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru (later to be known as Plaid Cymru,) was established in defence of the Welsh language and to demand 'freedom' for Wales to decide on its own political affairs. Plaid Cymru, along with its Scottish counterpart, the Scottish National Party (SNP), played an important role in putting the issue of devolution onto the UK political agenda in the 1960s and 1970s. Partly in response to the growing electoral threat of Welsh and Scottish nationalism, the British Labour Party committed itself to a programme of devolution for new democratically elected bodies in Scotland and Wales. These plans were presented to Scottish and Welsh voters in a referendum in 1979.

Why you should VOTE NO

1	By voting 'NO' you will be stopping the start of the slide down the slippery slope to the break-up of the United Kingdom.....	<i>Your Country!</i>
2	Full independence is Plaid Cymru's main aim	<i>Your Country!</i>
3	At present Government expenditure is over £167 per head higher in Wales than in England – do you want to lose this advantage...	<i>Your Money!</i>
4	The Assembly would cost £6½ million to set up.....	<i>Your Money!</i>
5	The Assembly would cost £12½ million, and possibly more, to run.....	<i>Your Money!</i>
6	The Assemblymen would be able to fix their own salaries, pensions and gratuities.....	<i>Your Money!</i>
7	The Assemblymen would be able to appoint as many officers as they like	<i>Your Money!</i>
8	The Assemblymen would need at least another 1,150 Civil Servants	<i>Your Money!</i>
9	The Assembly would mean yet another tier of Government – more money.....	<i>Your Money!</i>
10	Welsh M.P.s will no longer have the power to decide on matters of education, housing and health.....	<i>Your Interests!</i>

**Keep Britain united by voting 'NO'
on Thursday 1st March.**

Printed by Qualitex Printing Ltd., Cardiff and published by A. J. Mackay, 9 Cowbridge Road East, Cardiff.

Figure 16 'Why you should vote NO in the referendum': the 1979 pamphlet Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/The National Library of Wales

Activity 23

Figure 16 is a facsimile of a pamphlet summarising some of the main arguments put forward by opponents to devolution in the 1979 referendum on Welsh devolution. As you read it, consider how persuasive these arguments are, and what kind of arguments supporters of devolution might have made in response to these claims.

Discussion

You may agree or disagree with these arguments against devolution to Wales. But in 1979, those plans were firmly defeated. These results, and the election of a new Conservative government in 1979 which had little interest in such issues, meant the issue of devolution was off the British political agenda for several years. And yet, it was during the eighteen-year reign of the Conservative Party – from 1979 to 1997 – that concerns about the *legitimacy* of political representation in Wales grew to such levels that by the mid-1990s, there were renewed demands for devolving power to a democratically elected Welsh Assembly.

The concept of legitimacy is an extremely important term in politics, but it can be difficult to agree on a single definition of the term. One way of thinking about it is in terms of ‘rightfulness’ (Heywood, 2000, p. 29). So, for example, if we wanted to assess the legitimacy of a political system, we would want to know to what extent people living in that system think that the ways in which political decisions are taken are ‘right’. If a political system produces *fair* policy outcomes that are accepted and (in the case of laws) obeyed by the people living in the system, then we would say that this is a legitimate political system. This is because the members of the political community accept to be governed in a particular way, and obey the political decisions made by those that govern. A political system which lacks legitimacy would be one where there is a feeling that those in power *do not have a right* to take political decisions on behalf of people living in that community. In order to help you think about the legitimacy of a system of political representation, it is helpful to think in terms of the ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ of any process of political representation (Judge, 1999, p. 21).

- The ‘inputs’ refer to elections, and here we are interested in the ‘rightfulness’ of the way in which representatives are elected (e.g. are the elections fair, open and transparent?), the degree to which representatives reflect the policy preferences of voters, and who the representatives are.
- The ‘outputs’ refer to what representatives do once they have been elected; here we are interested in whether or not our representatives have acted responsibly and in a way which corresponds to our preferences.

In Wales by the mid-1990s, it is arguable that political representation suffered from problems of both *input* and *output* legitimacy. With regard to input legitimacy, there were two main issues of concern. The first related to the political preferences of Welsh voters, and how these were reflected (or not) in the government that ruled in Westminster.

Table 2 provides the general elections results for Wales between 1979 and 1997. If you look in particular at the row for ‘Conservatives’, you will notice what happens to the party’s electoral results between 1979 and 1997. Compare this then to the row for ‘Labour’ and you will notice that the biggest difference in the electoral performance of these two parties is that the Conservative Party has never had an electoral majority in Wales.

Table 2 General election results in Wales, 1979–1997

Party	1979		1983		1987		1992		1997	
	%	Seats								
Labour	47.0	22	37.5	20	45.1	24	49.5	27	54.7	34
Conservative	32.2	11	31.0	14	29.5	8	28.6	6	19.6	0

Liberal Democrats	10.6	1	23.2	2	17.9	3	17.9	1	12.4	2
Plaid Cymru	8.1	2	7.8	2	7.3	3	8.8	4	9.9	4
Others	2.2	0	0.4	0	0.2	0	0.7	0	3.4	0
Total	100	36	100	38	100	38	100	38	100	40

Thrasher and Rallings, 2007, p. 223.

The Conservative Party's levels of electoral support declined from 1983–1997. This is in contrast to the Labour Party, which strengthened its dominant position in Welsh politics over the same period of time. So, Wales was being governed by a political party that did not enjoy the support of Welsh voters. The growing frustration caused by this situation was expressed clearly by Ron Davies, Labour Party MP for Caerphilly and one of the main architects of Welsh devolution:

In 1987 and again in 1992 I clearly remember the sense of despair not only at the return of a Conservative government but the consequences of Wales having so clearly turned its face against the Tories yet still facing the prospect of a Tory government, a Tory Secretary of State and Tory policies imposed on us in Wales. I vividly recall the anguish expressed by an eloquent graffiti artist who painted on a prominent bridge in my constituency, overnight after the 1987 defeat, the slogan 'we voted Labour and we got Thatcher'.

(Davies, 1999, pp. 4–5)

This feeling of being governed by an 'unelected' political party was aggravated by the fact that many secretaries of state appointed to the Welsh Office – and therefore affecting the substance and style of policy making affecting Wales – were MPs from English constituencies. Only one of the six Conservative Welsh Secretaries between 1979 and 1997 held a seat in Wales.

As far as output legitimacy is concerned, the Conservative Party's policy decisions were frequently felt to be imposed on Wales against the will of the Welsh voters. This was aggravated by the fact that the Welsh Office was at times under the leadership of individuals – notably John Redwood – with pronounced Thatcherite views that were manifestly at odds with Welsh political values. Other policy decisions taken by the central government – including the poll tax and the privatisation of heavy industries such as coal – were also deeply unpopular. Conservative Party rule also oversaw the growth of so-called 'quangos' in Wales (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations). These are independent bodies under the leadership of government appointees and responsible for regulating newly privatised industries, overseeing cultural and scientific activities and advising the government on policy. In Wales, this included bodies such as the Welsh Development Agency, the Welsh Language Board, the Welsh Tourism Board, and various regional Health Authorities. The growth of the quangos exacerbated the feeling that Wales was increasingly being governed by an 'unelected state' (Morgan and Mungham, 2000, pp. 45–67).

Add to these concerns about input and output legitimacy the fact that the Labour Party had been in opposition in the House of Commons for almost two decades, and it is not difficult to understand why this party committed itself to a programme of devolution if it were elected to power. This happened in 1997. Once in office, Tony Blair's New Labour began a significant and wide-ranging programme of constitutional change, one outcome

of which was the creation of the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) in 1999. The next section outlines how these changes came about, and provides an overview of the main powers of the National Assembly for Wales.

8.1.3 New Labour and the Welsh devolution settlement

New Labour, under the leadership of Tony Blair, promoted devolution on the grounds that 'it will bring government closer to the people, make our politics more *inclusive* and put power in the hands of the people where it belongs' (quoted in Chaney and Fevre, 2001, pp. 22–3; *emphasis added*). These ambitious plans to create a new inclusive politics were put to the Welsh electorate in a referendum on 18 September 1997.

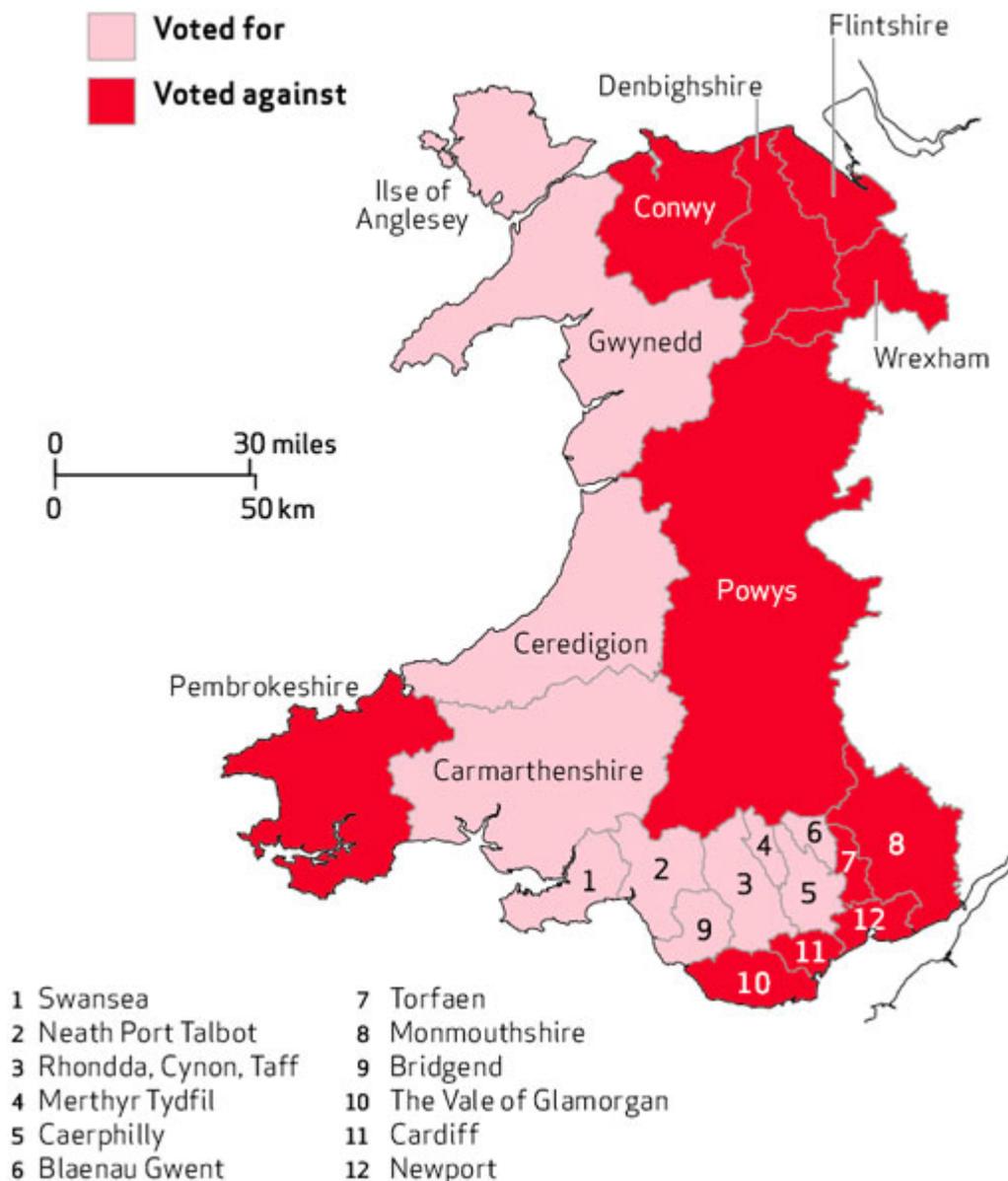


Figure 17 How the vote divided Wales

A week previously, Scottish voters had voted to establish a Scottish parliament, with 74.3 per cent in favour compared to 25.7 per cent against. In Wales, only half of the Welsh electorate – 50.1 per cent to be precise – turned out to vote in the referendum. The result could not have been closer: asked whether they agreed that there should be a Welsh

Assembly or not, 50.3 per cent of voters said 'Yes', with 49.7 per cent saying No. Figure 17 shows how support and opposition to devolution was geographically distributed across Wales; while the predominantly Welsh-speaking rural areas of north-west and south-west Wales voted in favour of devolution, the more anglicised industrial communities of north-east and south-east Wales voted to reject these proposals.

So by a mere 6,721 votes, the Welsh electorate said 'Yes' to devolution. This was hardly a ringing endorsement of the devolution project. The closeness of the result could be seen as a sign that the new National Assembly *lacked legitimacy*, given that less than half of Welsh voters voted at all, and that half of those that did didn't want such a body to be established. This is ironic, given that devolution was meant to resolve a perceived lack of legitimacy in Welsh politics.

Activity 24

Despite the closeness of the referendum result in 1997, it was nevertheless a result which showed that attitudes towards devolution had changed in important ways since the 1979 referendum. As you read the following, note five important factors that help explain why such a change in opinion had taken place.

Extract 15 Why was 1997 different?

The timing of the Welsh referendum of 1997 could not have been better in terms of securing a 'yes' vote. The new Labour government was still enjoying its honeymoon period, little opportunity had existed for left-wing discontent to grow, and the Scots had already a week earlier voted resoundingly for the establishment of a parliament in Edinburgh. Furthermore, the speedy pre-legislative referendum ensured that there was little time for the deficiencies of the government's devolution proposals to be examined. The 'no' campaign was a damp squib. In contrast, the political context of the referendum in 1979 was hostile indeed for the then Labour government. It had lost its majority during 1976 and was reliant on the Liberals and other smaller parties to ensure success for its legislative programme. The referendum took place shortly after the 'winter of discontent' and amidst the resurgence of the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher ... These different political contexts in 1979 and 1997 can be seen to have influenced electors' behaviour; to have changed the pattern of support and opposition to devolution; and in the final instance, to have undermined the turnout among 'no' voters sufficiently for a 'yes' result to have crept in under the wire ...

This is not to deny that, although the increase in the proportion of the population of Wales affirming a Welsh identity between 1979 and 1997 was small, Welsh national identity increased in political salience ... [T]wo notable developments have occurred. People with a Welsh national identity have become more pro-devolution. And Plaid Cymru, the nationalist party, has become markedly more acceptable to the mass of the population in Wales ... As there was no marked social change that might account for why a Welsh identity became more politically salient, it is likely to be a political creation. Perhaps the Labour government should thank Plaid Cymru for its

work in this area, for without the politicisation of Welsh identity, the swing from 1979 to 1997 would not have been enough.

Evans and Trystan, 1999, pp. 113–14

Discussion

Some of the factors that you might have identified as having contributed to a 'Yes' vote in the referendum are:

- the popularity of the newly elected Labour government
- the 'yes' vote in Scotland a week previously
- the speed at which the legislation for holding a referendum was passed through the Houses of Parliament
- a badly organised 'no' campaign
- the increased salience of Welsh identity.

The result of the referendum led to the creation of a National Assembly for Wales. According to the Government of Wales Act 1998, this new body would be characterised as follows:

- Sixty Assembly Members (AMs), elected by an alternative member system (see Box 1).
- The National Assembly would take over the powers previously exercised by the Secretary of State for Wales and the Welsh Office. These areas of responsibility include agriculture; culture; economic development; education and training; the environment; health; sport; economic development; education and student loans; the environment; health; local government and housing; sport; social services; transport and the Welsh language.
- In these policy areas, the National Assembly would have secondary legislative powers. This meant that all laws (primary legislation) would still be made in Westminster; however, the National Assembly would be able to specify rules and regulations that adapt the legislation to the specific Welsh context.
- The National Assembly was designed as a 'corporate' body; this meant that, in contrast to the distinction made in most political systems between the executive (the government) and the legislature (the parliament), the National Assembly as a whole would be responsible for proposing, passing and scrutinising policy decisions. This model of governance was designed to promote consensus and cooperation between political parties.

The first National Assembly elections were held on 6 May 1999. Table 3 provides the results from these and subsequent elections in 2003, 2007 and 2011. The difference between 1st and 2nd votes in these elections is explained in Box 1.

Box 1 The basics: first-past-the-post versus proportional representation electoral systems

In the United Kingdom, representatives to the House of Commons are elected using the 'first-past-the-post' (FPTP) electoral system. In each constituency, voters are presented with a list of candidates representing different political parties. The voter votes for the

candidate he or she prefers, and the candidate with the most votes in the constituency wins. The 'winner takes all' in FPTP elections; there's no reward for candidates that come in second or third place. So, for example, if Candidate A wins 40 per cent of the vote, and Candidate B wins 39 per cent of the vote, Candidate A will be elected because he/she has won most of the votes. FPTP electoral systems are also used in Canada, the USA and India.

'Proportional representation' (PR) electoral systems are different because they try to achieve as close a match as possible between a party's share of the vote and its share of the parliamentary seats. Let's imagine that a PR system was used to elect representatives to the House of Commons. In principle, if party A wins 40 per cent of all votes cast in the United Kingdom, it will have 40 per cent of the representatives in the House of Commons; Party B, which wins 30 per cent of all votes cast, will get 30 per cent of seats, and so on. So we can say that a party's number of representatives is *proportional* to the number of votes it has. Examples of PR systems can be found in Germany and Australia (although several different forms of PR systems exist).

The electoral system used for electing representatives to the National Assembly for Wales can best be described as being *semi-proportional*, since it combines elements of both the FPTP and PR systems. Known as the 'additional member system', 40 of the National Assembly's members are elected using FPTP, while the remaining 20 are elected using PR. This means that in National Assembly elections each voter will have two votes. The *first vote* is cast for a single candidate representing a specific constituency, in the same way that representatives are elected to the House of Commons (by putting an X next to the name of the candidate that he/she prefers on the ballot sheet). The *second vote* is used to elect the *additional* members that represent one of five regions within Wales. Instead of voting for an individual candidate, the vote will be cast for a political party; these *additional seats* will be allocated in such a way that corrects for any unfairness in the allocation of the FPTP constituency seats (there is a very complex formula that calculates how many alternative seats each political parties should be allocated!). Alternative member systems have also been used widely around the world, including in New Zealand.

Table 3 National Assembly for Wales election results, 1999–2011

Party	1999			2003			2007			2011		
	1st vote (%)	2nd vote (%)	Total seats	1st vote (%)	2nd vote (%)	Total seats	1st vote (%)	2nd vote (%)	Total seats	1st vote (%)	2nd vote (%)	Total seats
Labour	37.6	35.5	28	40.0	36.6	30	32.2	29.6	26	42.3	36.9	30
Conservative	15.8	16.5	9	19.9	19.2	11	22.4	21.5	12	25	22.5	14
Liberal Democrat	13.5	12.5	6	14.1	12.7	6	14.8	11.7	6	10.6	8	5
Plaid Cymru	28.4	30.6	17	21.2	19.7	12	22.4	21.0	15	19.3	17.9	11
Others	4.7	4.9	0	4.8	11.8	1	8.3	16.3	1	2.8	14.7	0
Total	100.0	100.0	60	100.0	100.0	60	100.0	100.0	60	100	100	60

Wyn Jones and Scully (2004), p. 194; Scully and Elias (2008), p. 105; updated with 2011 results



Figure 18 Inside the National Assembly for Wales

Jeff Morgan/Alamy

It was always expected by prominent Labour party politicians that devolution to Wales would be a 'process not an event' (Davies, 1999), and that there was scope for change and adaptation over the years. However, the need for change and adaptation arose much sooner than had originally been anticipated. It didn't take long for the drawbacks of this constitutional settlement to become apparent: within a year of its creation, there were calls for the National Assembly's institutional set-up and powers to be revisited. The Richard Commission, chaired by the Labour peer Lord Ivor Richard, began its deliberations in 2002 and gathered extensive evidence on how different groups and interests perceived the National Assembly to be working. The Commission's final report, delivered in March 2004, proposed a radical revision of the original devolution settlement. Some of these recommendations were included in a new Government of Wales Act 2006, which contained the following key provisions:

- the abandonment of the idea of the 'corporate body', with a clearer separation being made instead between the role of the executive (i.e. the Government, responsible for proposing and implementing policy) and the legislature (the Assembly responsible for scrutinising the activities of the Government)
- new powers for the Assembly to request the right for primary legislation to be delegated from Westminster.

Further debate about the future of devolution in Wales was initiated with the creation of an All Wales Convention in 2008 to consider the prospect of further expanding the powers of the National Assembly. The setting-up of such a convention was one of the commitments made by Labour and Plaid Cymru in June 2007 when they agreed to enter into government together. One of the main objectives of the All Wales Convention was to assess the extent of public support for moving towards full law-making powers for the National Assembly. This would give the institution primary legislative powers in the full range of devolved policy areas, although a new referendum would be required in order for this to happen. As part of its work, the All Wales Convention held a series of public

meetings across Wales in order to gather the views of the Welsh public on the issue of further powers for the Welsh Assembly. The Convention's recommendations were presented to the Welsh Assembly in November 2009. The evidence gathered suggested that if a referendum on further powers were to be held, a Yes vote was deemed to be possible although not guaranteed (All Wales Convention, 2009).



Figure 19 A Question Time style event organised by the All Wales Convention, Cardiff 2009

The All Wales Convention

8.2 Broadening engagement and participation in Welsh politics

The term 'inclusive' acquired a second meaning in debates leading up to, and during the earliest years of, devolution, namely 'a concern for fostering wider citizen participation in government and engagement with different social groupings' (Chaney and Fevre, 2001, p. 26). In this sense, inclusive politics means empowering and involving groups of people that have previously been marginalised or excluded from the political process.

In Scotland, devolution was, in part, a response to demands from such disempowered groups for a greater participation in government. In contrast, there were few such demands in Wales. Given the lack of enthusiasm for such a broadening of democratic involvement, the challenge for the National Assembly was to create new opportunities for mass engagement and participation in the political process. We consider the extent to which this has been achieved in the rest of this section. The focus in particular is on the extent to which devolution has created a vibrant civil society in Wales where one did not previously exist. Let's begin by defining this key term.

8.2.1 Defining civil society

The notion of civil society is much talked about and debated in politics and it is often used by academics and politicians to mean very different things. I use civil society to mean the following:

- Civil society represents a distinct sphere that is separate from the 'state' (political institutions, political parties and other political organisations) and the 'market' (organisations of production and distribution, such as firms and businesses).
- Civil society provides a space for individuals and organisations to discuss, exchange views, and form opinions on matters that are important for society as a whole. Civil society is composed of organisations such as charities, non-governmental organisations, community and environmental groups, women's organisations, faith-based and consumer organisations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, business associations and advocacy groups.
- Most importantly, these voices and opinions emerging from civil society scrutinise, critique and counter-balance the otherwise overbearing influence of political society (the state) and economic society (the market). Civil society is thus a check – a form of control – on state power. For this reason, a vibrant civil society is often considered to be a vital element for a democratic society.

8.2.2 Inclusive politics through a vibrant civil society

There is broad agreement among scholars of Welsh politics that devolution has created new opportunities for civil society actors to interact with government structures in Wales, and to influence policy decisions made by the National Assembly. The legal framework of the newly devolved administration required the National Assembly to place the principle of equality of opportunity for all of Wales's citizens at the heart of its political agenda. The Government responded to this duty by implementing a range of initiatives in order to establish new relationships with marginalised and minority groups in Wales. The 'equality' networks that have been set up, for example, comprise voluntary organisations that represent the interests of marginalised groups. These include Disability Wales and Stonewall Cymru. These organisations have been given funding by the Government to pay for new staff to support and expand their activities, expand their membership, and feed into discussions on different policies being developed by the Government. The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Division is responsible for giving advice and support to the Government in the development of policies, for maintaining dialogue with minority communities and with disseminating best practice.

The creation of a new sphere of political decision making in Wales has also prompted some civil society groups to develop new organisational structures and strategies in order to maximise their political influence. Oxfam, for example, has re-branded itself as 'Oxfam Cymru' and has dedicated new staffing and financial resources to lobbying the Government (Royles, 2007, pp. 109–10). In addition, civil society groups and individuals have tried to make the most of the opportunities to interact with AMs and civil servants. One group that has been highly effective in influencing policy making in the Wales has been Friends of the Earth Cymru; the various ways in which this has been achieved are summarised in Case Study 8.2. Other groups have been just as active in trying to influence policy making in post-devolution Wales:

Women's and disabled people's groups have submitted written responses to key policy initiatives covering the breadth of the Welsh Government's work. They have presented papers to Assembly committees that have formed the basis of discussions between the group's representatives, AMs, committee advisors and officials [and] have been invited to join task groups to develop policies and implement strategies.

(Betts et al., 2001, p. 70)

The evidence considered so far suggests that devolution has indeed succeeded in creating a new form of inclusive politics in Wales. Equality issues are more central to policy making in Wales, and there is more active involvement by minority groups and other civil society actors in the political process.

However, studies of civil society in post-devolution Wales also reveal less positive developments. Some civil society organisations enjoy closer and more exclusive relations with the Welsh Government than others. This is due, in part, to the differences between civil society organisations themselves. While some groups, such as Oxfam Cymru and Friends of the Earth Cymru, are well resourced, others are not and therefore find it considerably more difficult to engage with the Welsh Government. As far as the relationship between the Welsh Government and groups representing women and minority ethnic groups are concerned, these have been dominated by a narrow elite of middle-class professionals. Most of the members of these organisations are for the large part ignorant of the concerns and activities of the National Assembly and the Welsh Government (Betts and Chaney, 2004; Williams, 2004). Faith groups outside the Christian mainstream have also found it difficult to get a fair hearing from those in the Assembly and the Welsh Government (Day, 2006, p. 650). All of these examples point to major inequalities in power and influence between civil society organisations. Smaller, less experienced and more marginal groups find themselves excluded from interactions between civil society and the Assembly and Government.

Friends of the Earth Cymru

Friends of the Earth is a large international organisation that works to mobilise people to resist socially and environmentally damaging projects and policies. It is composed of a network of organisations that are active in different national and regional contexts. In the UK, Friends of the Earth is a very visible and influential environmental campaign group.

Friends of the Earth Cymru was set up in 1984 to campaign on environmental issues in Wales. The establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 provided a new focus for the organisation's activities, especially because this new body would be responsible for developing Wales-specific policies in key areas of interest to Friends of the Earth (such as the environment, economic development, agriculture and transport). Since 1999, the organisation has been highly efficient in feeding into, and influencing, devolved policy making in Wales in several ways:

- preparing policy papers on various issues (such as renewable energy and climate change)
- submitting reports and evidence to the different policy committees within the National Assembly (for example, on carbon reduction in transport)

- presenting draft policies to the National Assembly for discussion (for example, a policy restricting the planting of genetically modified [GM] crops in Wales passed in 2000 was based on an original proposal submitted by Friends of the Earth)
- writing directly to, and meeting with, relevant government ministers in order to put their case forward
- mobilising broad coalitions in public support of different campaigns (such as an open letter signed by a wide range of prominent individuals and AMs from all parties in support of a no-GM policy for Wales)
- commissioning highly visible publicity campaigns to mobilise support for particular issues (see Figure 20).



Figure 20 Friends of the Earth Cymru poster outside the Senedd.

Friends of the Earth Cymru

It could also be argued that the National Assembly and the Welsh Government have made existing inequalities worse by developing more exclusive relations with some organisations and not others. For example, some people deemed *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* – a pressure group for the Welsh language – to be too controversial, and therefore unacceptable, as a partner in policy discussions; as a result, the group only had very limited access to key decision makers within the Welsh Government (Royles, 2007, p. 95, p. 149).

There is also evidence of stronger ties between the Welsh Government and civil society organisations that receive Government funding; these organisations have been shown to have stronger contacts with Government ministers and civil servants (Royles, 2007). Such relationships have been described as neo-corporatist by Royles. [Neo-corporatism](#) is not good for democracy, for several reasons. First, a group with privileged contacts with

politicians may not be representative of wider civil society. Second, the exclusivity of the neo-corporatist relationship can lead to the further marginalisation and exclusion of other civil society groups. This has been experienced by minority ethnic groups, as is shown in the statement from AWEMA in Extract 16 below. Third, the fact that privileged organisations do not want to endanger their relationship with those in power means they will hold back from scrutinising, and being critical of, the actions of the government and elected representatives. This may be especially true for organisations or networks that are funded by the Welsh Government, and who do not want to risk losing out financially. This scrutiny function is a core requirement for a well-functioning democracy.

8.2.3 New opportunities for civil society participation post-2006?

Thus far in this section, most of the evidence for inclusivity in civil society - Welsh Government relations we've considered focuses on the early years of devolution. However, as you already know, dissatisfaction with the functioning of devolution led to a new Government of Wales Act in 2006; this saw the Assembly's mode of operation being modified, and an extension of its powers to make laws in new policy areas (subject to the agreement of the Houses of Parliament in Westminster).

This Act created new opportunities for civil society organisations to interact with, and influence, politics in Wales in two important ways. First, the Act contained a provision for a new petitions procedure to be created. This gives members of the public the right to petition the National Assembly – either in writing or using an online e-petitions system – and ask for action to be taken in those areas of policy for which the Assembly is responsible. The first group to submit such a petition was the Kidney Wales Foundation; they asked the National Assembly to fund an organ-donor campaign and an inquiry into presumed consent for organ donation. This petition was successful in securing money for an organ-donation campaign, and prompted the Welsh Government to undertake a review of organ-transplantation procedures in Wales. This is a good example of how the new petitions system can enable a civil society group to draw attention to, and prompt political action on, specific issues.

Second, the fact that the National Assembly has the chance to make its own laws creates further opportunities for civil society actors to lobby elected representatives in order to legislate in different policy areas. For example, the National Assembly has considered requesting new powers to make laws in areas such as mental health and the rights of carers. These are clearly policy areas where there is scope for civil society groups to try and influence the nature and scope of the new powers requested. In order to make the most of these new decision-shaping opportunities, new initiatives have been established, such as the Voices for Change Wales project. Financed by a grant from the National Lottery and sponsored by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WVCA), Voices for Change Wales aims to help voluntary organisations understand how decision-making processes work in Wales, develop skills and confidence to influence policies and legislation, and share and learn about best practice in developing relationships with the Welsh Government.

And yet, there remain important limitations in meeting the goal of inclusivity. A 2009 survey of civil society organisations by Voices for Change Wales revealed that while there is a consensus that devolution has increased access to Welsh decision makers, the majority of those questioned still do not have a thorough knowledge of how to engage with the Welsh Government successfully or efficiently. For example, less than 50 per cent of organisations were aware of the petitions process, with a similar number unclear about how to submit evidence to the National Assembly when proposals for new legislative

powers are being drafted (Bradbury and Matheron, 2009). So there is still a long way to go before there is a truly inclusive partnership between civil society and the Welsh Government.

8.3 Conclusion

- While Wales was thoroughly incorporated into England in the sixteenth century, from the early twentieth century onwards new administrative bodies were established to make and implement Wales-specific policies.
- Demands for a fairer system of political representation for Wales led to an unsuccessful referendum on devolution in 1979, but dissatisfaction with the legitimacy of administrative devolution grew throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.
- A successful referendum on devolution in 1997 led to the creation of a National Assembly for Wales, amid promises of the emergence of a new inclusive politics in Wales.
- Devolution has been a process rather than an event. Thus, since 1999 there have been important changes in the way in which the National Assembly and the Welsh Government work and their powers; these debates are ongoing.
- Devolution has had some positive democratic effects in Wales. New structures have been created for bringing previously marginalised groups into the political process. The Government of Wales Act 2006 contributed to further developing such opportunities for civil society involvement in decision making.
- Civil society groups have also developed new lobbying strategies in order to influence policy making by the Welsh Government.
- However, devolution has also had some potentially negative democratic implications. Some civil society groups are better resourced, while others have enjoyed a privileged relationship with the Welsh Government.
- These patterns of interaction risk reinforcing exclusion and marginalisation within civil society, jeopardise the inclusiveness of politics in post-devolution Wales, and risk undermining the scrutiny function of civil society vis-à-vis the Welsh Government.
- Although devolution has led to policy divergence between Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom, these policies have been perceived to have led to very limited improvements in areas such as health, education and standards of living.
- Devolution as a system of governance, in contrast, enjoys increasing levels of support among Welsh voters.

Any legitimate system of political representation should try to ensure that the voices of all citizens – regardless of their age, skin colour, gender, sexual preferences or language – are heard equally, and are listened to by elected representatives that take political decisions on our behalf. A legitimate system of political representation should also be one that leads to good decisions with desirable effects on a political community.

But as you have seen in this course, achieving good political representation can be extremely difficult. In Wales, concerns about the exclusion of certain voices from the political process led to demands for devolution in the 1960s and 1970s, and again by the mid-1990s. Such demands were also based on the perception that the needs and interests of the Welsh people were largely being overlooked by successive London-based

governments. In contrast, New Labour's devolution plans were justified on the grounds that they would replace political exclusion with a new inclusive form of politics, where previously marginalised individuals and groups would be given new opportunities to participate in, and inform, the political process in Wales. The creation of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 provided the framework for creating such an inclusive politics, and for establishing a system of good governance.

We have examined the extent to which devolution has been successful in meeting this goal. On the one hand, positive action by Welsh political parties means that Wales is a world leader in terms of the representation of women. The National Assembly has also taken its commitment to 'equality of opportunity' seriously and has created new structures to make it easier for civil society organisations to feed into debates on policy and legislation. Civil society organisations have responded to these new opportunities by developing new strategies for influencing the Welsh Government and Assembly Members.

On the other hand, less has been done to ensure that other minority groups are represented within the National Assembly, and a partially PR electoral system has not resulted in a broader spectrum of political groups being elected. In this respect, devolution has fallen far short of creating a system of descriptive representation. The involvement of civil society in post-devolution policy making has also been unequal; less well-resourced groups have found it harder to be effective policy lobbyists, while Welsh policy makers have also been more ready to listen to some groups more than others. The policy-making process in Wales also remains highly complex.

We have also examined the legitimacy of the devolution settlement from the perspective of output legitimacy. Here again we see a mixed-picture emerging. In spite of the fact that policy making in Wales has differed in significant ways from other parts of the UK as a result of decisions taken by the National Assembly, there is a widespread perception that these policies have not made a major impact on the economy and society in Wales. At the same time as Welsh voters remain unimpressed with what the National Assembly and the Welsh Government does, they nevertheless support devolution as a better system of governance for Wales.

Some might conclude from these observations that devolution has not resulted in a better system of political representation in Wales. They could argue, in support of this position, that the National Assembly has fallen short of creating a truly inclusive politics and of improving the economic and social well-being of Welsh voters. My own conclusions would be less negative. Like devolution, the task of ensuring a better and more legitimate system of political representation broadening is a process not an event. Important steps have already been taken to broaden and deepen participation in the democratic process in Wales, while devolution has also come to be widely accepted as the appropriate political expression of how people in Wales wish to be governed. There is still work to be done to further enhance the inclusiveness and impact of the Welsh Government's 'made in Wales' policies. But devolution has set Wales on the right path towards achieving a more legitimate system of political representation.

9 Cultural representation

In this section we examine some of the important ways that Wales has been represented or portrayed, in cinema and on television, in recent times. We look at the impact that this has had on the life of the country and the way that Wales is 'imagined', both within and outside of Wales.

As a starting point, one way of thinking about the representation of any nation is through the idea of 'imagining' a nation into being. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) is a book that has played a key role in efforts to explain the idea of 'nationalism' in general and the role of culture in making a nation in particular. Anderson's ideas are of central importance to the way that we look at the representation of Wales in this section. This idea of 'imagining' our community is arguably of particular interest to people living in places where the formation (or partial formation) of a nation has only very recently taken place through the process of devolution, but where the 'idea' of a nation has existed for much longer and in ways that have helped shape the lives of those that live there in profound ways.

9.1 Cinema and Wales

For many people the way that Wales has been represented in cinema will always be linked in some way to the 1941 Hollywood adaptation of Richard Llewellyn's novel *How Green Was My Valley* (director John Ford), which won the Academy Award for best picture. For Kate Woodward, 'Ford's film spawned a million clichés about terraced streets and black faced miners, singing on their way home from the pit ... Ford's Welsh valley, created in the San Fernando Valley in Malibu, was sanitized of all traces of dust and dirt, and Hollywoodized beyond all recognition' (Woodward, 2006, pp. 54–5).

However, during the 1990s and in the period since devolution there have been powerful attempts in both the Welsh and English languages to create a contemporary cinema culture in Wales that avoided such clichés and attempted to engage with a more diverse sense of the nation and its evolving place in the world.

9.1.1 Wales at the Oscars

In terms of Welsh language cinema, it is perhaps less well known than it might be that two films made in the Welsh language were nominated for Academy Awards in the Best Foreign Language category during the 1990s. These were *Hedd Wyn* (dir. Paul Turner, 1992) and *Solomon and Gaenor* (dir. Paul Morrison, 1998). In some ways the very fact of the two films receiving the global attention that comes with 'Oscar' nomination is a significant moment for the representation of Wales internationally. It not only signalled the existence of a significant and distinct filmmaking culture in Wales, but also drew attention to the Welsh-language as not only alive, but thriving and being used in contemporary art forms.

Both films also used language and its divisive potential as part of their subject. In *Hedd Wyn*, the central character, the Welsh poet Elis Evans (Huw Garmon) is conscripted into the British army to fight in the First World War. During his basic training, Evans's use of his native Welsh is the subject of scorn and abuse by English officers and NCOs, something which the film turns to powerful ironic effect as the young poet dies in the service of the

British Empire at Pilken Ridge in Belgium in 1918. *Solomon and Gaenor's* use of language is even more complex, especially as two versions were made 'back-to-back' – one predominantly in English, one mainly in Welsh, though the complexity is further compounded by the use of Yiddish in both versions as the film is set at the times of anti-Semitic-related civil disturbance in the South Wales Valleys. The film has resonance not only for a bi-lingual Wales, but for a UK that struggles with the many different ethnicities and languages that make up its population.

It is possible to argue then that both these films made contributions to how both Wales and the Welsh language were seen internationally, though their relatively limited distribution in the UK restricted this effect.

9.1.2 A Welsh film revival?

For English language cinema in Wales, 1997 looked as though it would be a watershed year. It saw the release of three fairly high-profile feature films by young directors and seemed to offer the promise of a developing film culture that would steadily increase the presence of Wales on international cinema screens. *House of America* (dir. Marc Evans), *Twin Town* (dir. Kevin Allen) and *Darklands* (dir. Julian Richards) were all very different in tone and subject matter, but they all sought to 're-read' some of the traditional ways of seeing Wales exemplified by the tradition of *How Green Was My Valley*.

Of the three, *Twin Town* (Figure 21) reached the largest commercial audience and its brand of irreverent humour has ensured that its subsequent DVD sales remain strong. However, its view of Wales and the Welsh did not find universal approval, and its online trailer gives a sense of its approach to any traditional idea of Welsh culture:

Rugby. Tom Jones. Male Voice Choirs. Shirley Bassey.

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch.

Snowdonia. Prince of Wales. Anthony Hopkins. Daffodils. Sheep.

Sheep Lovers. Coal. Slate quarries. The Blaenau Ffestiniog Dinkey-

Doo Miniature Railway. Now if that's your idea of thousands of years of Welsh culture, you can't blame us for trying to liven the place up a little can you?

(*Twin Town*, 1997)



Figure 21 Poster for *Twin Town* (dir. Kevin Allen, 1997)

Ronald Grant Archive

It is fairly obviously then that the film takes an irreverent look at the traditional elements of Welsh representation, something that attracted the displeasure of a range of people, including clergymen and the Wales Tourist Board (Morris, 1998, p. 27).

To set against these criticisms, others argued that *Twin Town* marked a new cultural maturity as Wales gained the confidence to laugh more freely at the parodying of its own cultural icons in a similar vein to the representation of the Irish in the television drama series *Father Ted* (Perrins, 2000).

House of America was a much more subtle approach to a changing sense of Welsh identity. Adapted by Ed Thomas from his stage play of the same name, the film again used some of the staple clichés of the representation of Wales – family, mining community,

matriarch – and subjected them to poetic scrutiny through the filter of the leading character's obsession with key aspects of American culture. Again, an older Wales is seen as passing away and a struggle to imagine a new one into being is taking place, this time a struggle that takes place against the backdrop of an all-pervasive American culture that surrounds us all.

The director of *House of America*, Marc Evans, said that 'In some ways *House of America* and *Twin Town* were not the first of a new generation of films but the last of the old' (Evans, 2002, pp. 290–1) in that they were still preoccupied with the stereotypes of an older Wales, even as they were undermining them. With this in mind then perhaps we can see a slighter later film, Justin Kerrigan's *Human Traffic* (1999), as the first Welsh feature film to offer a true break with the past and provide a new way to imagine being young and Welsh as we approached the millennium. This break with a traditional representational past was picked up in one of the film's early reviews:

Just as *Trainspotting* makes a clean break with the traditional Scotland of tartanry and kailyard, of Scott and Barrie, so *Human Traffic* turns its back on the Wales of male voice choirs and the whimsical humour of *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill But Came Down a Mountain ...* it seems more like an American picture than a British one ...

(French, 1999)

Human Traffic is hardly preoccupied in any obvious way with representing national identity. It shows a group of young friends in dead-end jobs as they live for the weekends spent in the hedonistic club scene that characterised the late 1990s. The fact that it is set in Cardiff rather than London, Birmingham or Manchester seems to offer the idea that Wales is emerging from a preoccupation with an older essentialist identity and instead its young people can feel connected to a wider international culture.

In some ways the period at the end of the nineties was a slightly false dawn in that the number of subsequent feature films to have emerged from Wales has not increased in the way that was once hoped. Nonetheless, there were important examples of films that did try to look again at life in Wales in ways that were a significant contribution to the way that the country saw itself in the context of its new political power. We will finish this section by looking at one of these because of the particular way in which this film sought to open up the question of Welsh identity.

9.1.3 *A Way of Life* and 'new' Welsh identities

A Way of Life is a rare example of a fictional narrative that scrutinises Welsh identity in relation to the nation's ethnic populations. Released in 2004, the film was made by Amma Asante, a woman raised in Streatham in south London by parents who were born in Ghana. Asante's connection to Wales came through her brother's marriage to a Welsh woman and their children who, in Asante's own words, were 'half of everything you could possibly imagine' (Blandford, 2004, p. 15).

The complex ethnic and racial identities of her niece and nephew were part of Asante's motivation to make a film that is explicitly concerned with the interaction between ethnicity and national identity. Another part came from her initial sense of Wales, particularly Cardiff, as a place of greater racial harmony than the rest of the UK because of the length of its history of multiculturalism, only to be disabused of the fact as she got to know it better (Blandford, 2004).

The film's plot revolves around the murder of a man in a South Wales community by a group of teenagers, including a young, single mother, Leanne (Stephanie Williams) who becomes the film's leading character. The murdered man is of Turkish origin and has lived in Wales for thirty years. The film is unflinching about the brutality of the murder and the casual racist attitudes on the part of the young people that contribute to it, but its daring is to have us also feel for the difficulty of the lives that the perpetrators lead.

This is frequently a painful film to watch and it represents those parts of South Wales still badly affected by de-industrialisation as very difficult places to grow up. On the other hand, it is a film that is brave enough to look at the origins of racism in an honest and unflinching way. That it is set in Wales, with financial support from the Lottery via the Welsh Arts Council, is arguably a positive signal of a healthy culture that is able to examine its problems from within rather than relying on outmoded myths to sustain itself.

Activity 26

Pause and consider how many times you have seen non-white characters on screen that are Welsh. Can you think of examples in other arts forms, for example in literature?

Discussion

One of the complex things about discussing the representation of any nation is the point where the representation of, in this case Wales, meets the representation of another aspect of identity. The idea of being both black and Welsh is obviously perfectly normal, but it a dimension to the representation of Wales that is still somewhat neglected.

Now read this piece by Martin McLoone who has often written about cinema in Ireland, but who here applies the same kind of thinking to all the Celtic countries. He suggests that cinema from Wales (and the other Celtic nations) is 'on the cutting edge of contemporary cultural debate about identity'. As you read Extract 17, consider how far you agree with this suggestion with regard to what you know about cinema from Wales.

Extract 17

Like *Divorcing Jack*, Kevin Allen's Swansea-set *Twin Town* (1997) elects to tackle stereotypes and cinematic clichés directly. As its already bizarre plot rushes towards a climax of melodramatic excess and bad taste, central icons and cultural markers of Welsh identity (rugby, community and male-voice choirs) are lampooned into absurdity. *Twin Town* – anarchic, populist, youth orientated – contrasts with the more meditatively inclined group of Welsh language films. At the centre of the films is the place of the Welsh language itself and indeed, the most impressive aspect of the Welsh language films in general has been the total confidence they demonstrate in the contemporary relevance of the ancient tongue.

In Endaf Emlyn's *Un Nos Ola' Lewad/One Full Moon* (1991) the relationship between the English and Welsh language is a factor in the crisis of identity that faces the film's protagonist, an unnamed boy (Tudor Roberts). In the village school, the children speak English and are encouraged to associate English with access to power and influence – the Welsh speaking children are clearly seen as objects of exploitation and in the case of one young girl, of sexual

exploitation as well. The boy is asked to read a passage of English by the school master and the local Anglican canon. He performs the task well enough in a halting, cautious manner but pronounces the word 'society' according to Welsh phonetics. This reduces his superiors to laughter. Society, the film suggests, just like community, culture and history, is recognised through the language that describes it.

It would be wrong though to see Welsh language cinema as an unthinking nationalist response to dominant English culture or one that collapses the complexities of identity into dubious essentialist categories. *Un Nos Ola' Lewad* is as critical of the oppressive aspects of Welshness as it is of English superiority and is especially scathing about the negative impact Welsh fundamentalist religion has had on women and the young. (In this it dovetails with a tendency in recent Irish cinema which similarly attacks the abuses of religion, especially as those were visited on the young and on women). In his next film, *Gadael Lenin/Leaving Lenin* (1994), Emlyn considerably lightens the mood. Here, he explores contemporary Welsh identity through the device of removing the Welsh characters from Wales itself to post-Soviet Russia. A group of Welsh speaking sixth formers go on an educational visit to Saint Petersburg, accompanied by their art teacher Eileen (Sharon Morgan) and the old style Welsh Communist husband Mostyn (Wyn Bowen Harries) the deputy headmaster Mervyn (Ifan Huw Dafydd) with whom Eileen had a weekend affair once before, who also travels hoping that as the marriage seems to be unravelling, the affair can be resuscitated. The mix-up on the train between Moscow and St Petersburg splits teachers from students and the film contrasts the two groups' adventures in parallel narratives. The dialogue is in Welsh, Russian and English and this is one aspect of the film's audacity and ambition.

Here the minority language, which has such a low profile internationally that the Academy doubted its very existence, is vying for public space with two of the great imperialist languages of the world, engaging at the same time with themes and issues of global as well as of local importance.

The foreign location adds an extra dimension to the underlying theme of Welsh identity and the film explores this to great effect through the sense of loss and disillusionment that Mostyn feels at the collapse of the Soviet Union. Perhaps the most poignant theme of all, reflecting early 1990s concerns, is the confusion and dilemmas that face today's young people, whether the youth of St Petersburg adrift in a post-Soviet Russia or those struggling to adulthood in post-Thatcherite Wales. The film proposes a need for new beginnings – whether personal, political or artistic. The irony of the film's message is that at least Mostyn in his youth had political ideals that allowed him to imagine and work towards a new beginning.

This is a privilege, the film suggests, which today's young don't have and must work for.

In this way, the Welsh films resemble some aspects of recent Irish cinema. As the traditional belief systems wither away, religion, patriotism, political beliefs – the loss of something to believe in, especially the loss of political hope – is particularly debilitating.

This sense of loss is evident in Paul Morrison's *Soloman and Gaenor* (1998), which returns to the pre-World War One Wales of both *Hedd Wyn* (1992) and

The Englishman Who Went up a Hill But Came down a Mountain. This is a complex historical moment for Wales. At the beginning of the 20th century, it still carried its identity as an industrial force of nineteenth century British expansion but was also about to assume a central role in the radical and progressive labour politics of the 20th century. Within this complex, the film plays out a Romeo and Juliet scenario – the Jewish Saloman hiding his identity behind an English facade to woo Gaenor from a fundamentalist Christian community. In the tragedy that unfolds, the film is again scathing about the impact the fundamentalist religion has on the lives of young people in particular (in this case, both orthodox Jewish as well as Protestant Christian).

But this is more than just a Welsh cry of ‘a plague on both your houses’.

In identifying some aspects of the cinema from the Celtic fringes, we are identifying a cinema that has a double focus. These films are concerned to explode myths and move beyond the regimes of representation that have tended to romanticise and to marginalise the Celtic fringe. Dominant cinema portrayed the Celtic countries as regressive and primitive and if this portrayal was sometimes amiable and sometimes hostile, it was always patronising. However, a second focus of this cinema has been inwards, exploiting the rationalist responses to the representation of the centre. This has meant that the films reflect an uncertainty, an exploration that is as conscious of internal contradiction as it is of larger external realities. Above all, this is a cinema that refuses to operate on the margins. These are cultures that are no longer content to be the peripheral and exploited partners in a strict cultural division of labour. In fact this new cinema has pushed peripherality in to the centre and now operates on the cutting edge of a contemporary cultural debate about identity.

McLoone, 2009, pp. 354–6

Martin McLoone’s arguments apply specifically to the kind of cinema where writers and directors have a degree of freedom to experiment and present viewpoints. In the next section, covering television, we look at the representations of Wales in an industry that tends to constrain those that work in it a little further, though as we will see there also emerge important contributions to an evolving sense of Wales.

9.2 Television ‘fictions’ and Wales

In terms of the numbers of people that have access to them, it is representations of Wales on television that have by far the greatest significance and probable impact. In this section we will look specifically at the way fictional programmes are significant in the representation of Wales.

At the start of the decade it was a common complaint in Wales that the nation was seen on British television far too rarely, even in comparison to Scotland and Northern Ireland (see Blandford, 2005). There was (and in some quarters still is) a long-standing sense that Wales as a nation, and therefore as a producer of broadcast television, is treated in the centres of power with rather more suspicion and mistrust than the other nations and regions of the UK.

The case of Welsh-language drama is different because it is produced largely in Wales, for Welsh audiences, but it is fair to say that therein a different problem existed. At the end

of the 1990s, S4C's representations of Wales were commonly seen as outdated and narrow (see, for example, Gramich, 1997, p. 106).

While it would be a distortion to say that the entire picture has changed over a decade, it is certainly now possible to claim that both the range and quantity of representations of Wales in television in both languages have increased and are likely to increase further.

9.2.1 An S4C drama revival

Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C), the television channel set up in Wales in 1982 to provide a service in the Welsh language has commissioned several drama series in the last decade that have, at the very least, opened up the range of ways in which drama represents life in which Welsh is the dominant language.

Among the most prominent drama productions on S4C that have fundamentally altered many people's perception of the channel's image are: *Fondue*, *Sex and Dinosaurs* (2002–3), *Caerdydd* (2004), *Con Passionate* (2005–8) and *Y Pris* (2008–9). Though they are all very different, the common thread running through these and a number of other series is the sense of newly confident and, predominantly, young Wales.

Conversely, one of S4C's most successful dramas of the period – *Con Passionate*– used a central idea that has frequently been associated with Wales in the past and has changed in significance for the representation of Wales in the present. An interview with the writer of the programme indicates this when she says 'I was eager to take an iconic image of Wales, such as a male voice choir and use it as a backdrop to say something about contemporary Wales' (*Con Passionate*, 2009).

Though less formally inventive than *Con Passionate*, *Caerdydd's* four series have foregrounded the way that the Welsh capital has changed and become home to a class of young flat-dwellers with lifestyles associated with Europe's growing city culture. While the programme has not been to all tastes, in terms of the representation of Welsh-speaking Wales, it is a fundamental change to see a long-running drama set amongst the flats, bars and nightclubs of Cardiff rather than predominantly in rural Wales.

Y Pris, dubbed '*The Sopranos* by the seaside' is in some ways a familiar tale of organised crime, but the twist is that it is set in Carmarthenshire. Like the other series discussed here, its use of Welsh within a highly contemporary fictional structure contributes to an extension of the way that this dimension of contemporary Welsh life is re-imagined.

What these S4C dramas have to say individually is possibly less significant than the fact that they signal the capacity of the Welsh language to be used in highly contemporary dramatic contexts. In turn, they represent Wales as a bi-lingual country with many different identities rather than the outmoded idea that the Welsh language is the province of the rural north and west.

If by far and away the longest running drama on S4C remains *Pobol y Cwm* (which began in 1974), the drama of rural village life made by BBC Cymru Wales for S4C, the channel can now claim with some conviction to have commissioned a range of work that suggests that Welsh is no longer confined to its former heartlands.

9.2.2 *Dr Who* and *Torchwood*– BBC Cymru Wales and network success

In 2004, one of BBC's flagship programmes, *Dr Who*, was revived. More significantly for our purposes, it was decided that responsibility for producing the series would be given to BBC Cymru Wales in Cardiff. This was part of the BBC's overall decision to spend more of

its commissioning budget in the UK 'nations and regions'. In this section we consider the significance for the representation of Wales of two related science-fiction series, *Dr Who* and *Torchwood*, which mainly use Welsh locations.

The following quotation from the BBC director general, Mark Thompson in an interview in the *Western Mail* provides a useful starting point: 'We wondered whether Wales could be portrayed as modern and forward looking and Torchwood is the answer. It's obviously Welsh and it's sexy, modern and fantastic' (Price, 2007).



Figure 22 Star of *Torchwood* John Barrowman outside the *Torchwood* hub in Cardiff Bay
BBC

Though Thompson is talking about just one programme, his remarks have a clear significance for the whole question of the representation of Wales, particularly in the global sense. Thompson appears to start from the position that Wales is not a place that is easily associated with modernity, particularly of the kind that sells 'sexy' television

programmes. For him at least, the delivery of very high-profile success through *Dr Who* and *Torchwood* in particular has changed that.

In case such casual remarks are dismissed as flimsy evidence, it is worth stating here that, at the time of writing, Cardiff is the proposed site of a BBC 'drama village' as a base for a significant amount of the BBC's network drama production. The BBC has already moved one more of its flagship series, the long-running medical drama *Casualty*, to Cardiff as well as commissioning more *Dr Who*, *Torchwood* and a number of new drama projects that are in development.

Not everybody in Wales of course is convinced. High profile though *Dr Who* and *Torchwood* undoubtedly are, inevitably they only represent certain dimensions of Welsh life which means that others are excluded. It could also be argued that although the programmes are made in Wales they do not represent Welsh life or disseminate any sense of Welsh identity to a wider audience.

On the other hand, as a recent study (Mills, 2008) set out to investigate, there are other ways in which the making of a high-profile programme in a particular location can contribute to an evolving sense of identity. The pleasures we experience when we see the place in which we live shown on television are explored in Brett Mills's article 'My house was on *Torchwood*: media, place and identity'. There is a sense, however small, that life where you live has been given significance and value in a world dominated by mediated images. With one or two reservations, then, we can see that recent high-profile success in television drama has increased the profile of Wales, particularly the city of Cardiff. In so doing, it has altered the range of ways in which Wales can be seen from both inside and outside the country.

9.2.3 *Gavin and Stacey*

Although not made in Wales, the BBC comedy series *Gavin and Stacey* (2007) offers one representation of Wales and the Welsh that has reached the highest possible profile. Rob Brydon, one of the show's leading actors said of *Gavin and Stacey*, 'What it's done is create a version of Wales that's palatable to everyone, something which I don't think anyone's managed before' (Jewell, 2009, p. 62).

Brydon's comments probably stem from what most have seen as the unusual warmth and generosity of a show within a genre that has grown increasingly cynical and dependent on aggressive satire. If that makes *Gavin and Stacey* seem a little anodyne, it is worth also considering this view of perhaps the best known of the show's Welsh characters:

Large and masculine, sexual and feminine, Nessa's Welshness is overt and tangible, with her upper arm decorated with a tattoo of a Welsh dragon. It can be reasonably argued that Nessa is a breakthrough character in British situation comedy history – here is a woman who is unconventionally attractive, sexually voracious and clearly independent of any male influence.

(Jewell, 2009, p. 63)

In some ways, the creation of Nessa (Ruth Jones) typifies *Gavin and Stacey's* ability to subvert expectations. If conventional situation comedy has traditionally used larger women exclusively as objects of derision, then *Gavin and Stacey* places one at the controlling heart of the action. Arguably perhaps, Nessa's Welshness is secondary to what she has to say about gender, but the fact that the overtly Welsh Ruth Jones not only plays the character but is the co-writer of the series makes a powerful contribution to

changing perceptions not only of the range of possibilities for women in situation comedy, but for Welsh identity as well.

Gavin and Stacey offers a vision of Wales through the vehicle of a spectacularly successful comedy that takes many traditional features of Wales – strong local community, close family ties and so on. Indeed, the characters in *Gavin and Stacey* offer representations of Welsh life that are by turns warm, generous and outrageously subversive.



Figure 23 Ruth Jones, Rob Brydon, and Joanna Page in a photograph for Comic Relief 2009. This event featured a cover version of 'Islands in the Stream', retitled '(Barry) Islands in the Stream', by Brydon and Jones after its appearance in *Gavin and Stacey*, further increasing the profile of the comedy hit.

Doug Peters/Empics Entertainment/Press Association Images

9.3 Conclusion

- Contemporary film makers have tended to work explicitly against some of the older cinematic representations in Wales, typified by *How Green Was My Valley*.
- Welsh language cinema has played a role in representing Wales as a bilingual culture through its small successes internationally.
- Cinema has been part of a process of representing Wales and Welsh life as part of an international urban culture.
- Cinema has a kind of freedom to explore some of the more uncomfortable dimensions to contemporary society, such as the role of racism in Wales.
- Television has the power to circulate widely representations of a culture or community. It can therefore be said to have particular significance in any discussion of the representation of a small nation such as Wales.

- The ways that television portrays Wales has broadened significantly during the period since devolution.
- Welsh-language drama on S4C has been particularly noteworthy for the range of its responses to the changing face of contemporary Wales.
- The high-profile international success of key television programmes made by the BBC in Wales has probably resulted in some changes in the way that the country is seen not only by the television industry, but by the wider audience.

You have seen that the idea of representation can be especially important to a small nation such as Wales that struggles to get its voice heard in the world. For many, Wales is invisible underneath the more general idea of the UK or 'Britain'.

The circulation of images and narratives of Wales in the arts and popular cultural forms can be a vital part of creating a sense that the devolved nation has a part to play in the world. This in turn can be part of creating a sense of national confidence that a Welsh identity has genuine significance.

This is very much in tune with contemporary thinkers who use concepts such as the 'imagined nation' to convey the idea that a national identity is not something fixed and needing to be continuously re-asserted but, rather, something that evolves and is shaped. Part of this process of re-imagining is done by artists, but also by the audiences who engage with work that has elements that can contribute to a nation's sense of itself. The process is therefore not passive, but dynamic and something in which we all participate, however unconsciously.

You have also seen that a nation's identity and culture is frequently and most eloquently expressed through the 'banal', that is, the ordinary things that make up the rituals of our existence.

In the decade since devolution, there have been significant changes to the way that Wales is represented. Some of these have been the result of artists and companies re-imagining the country, sometimes inspired by the idea of a measure of political independence and what some refer to as Wales's 'postcolonial' status.

Some changes have been the result of the evolution or creation of 'national' institutions, part of whose job it actually is to represent Wales as a separate nation with a distinct identity. These include the National Museum of Wales, the BBC and the Arts Council of Wales.

The significance of some changes to the way that Wales is seen in the wider world will however always remain open to debate. The international success of *Dr Who* and *Torchwood* is for many a watershed in the shifting identity of Wales, which will ensure that Wales is seen as a place in which contemporary forms of creativity can flourish. For others, these programmes have little to do with the lives of most people in Wales.

Similarly, the establishment of national theatres in both languages is for many an important step in broadening the 'national conversation' and offering opportunities for artists to remain in Wales and play a part in its construction. Others see it as Wales repeating outmoded ideas about what a 'nation' is by creating outdated institutions.

What can be claimed is that there is now a much greater variety to the ways that Wales is represented to a wider world. The tired national stereotypes to which Ed Thomas referred may not be quite dead, but they now must compete with the idea that Wales is a place in which there are vibrant cityscapes as well as threatened rural communities, dancers and performance artists as well as brilliant rugby players and, above all, a sense of re-imagining the nation even if the economics of 21st-century media mean that there will always be a struggle for voices to be heard.

10 Course conclusion

Hugh Mackay

During this course, you have explored many subjects, each of which going some way to demonstrating the qualities that have made Wales the nation it is today.

You will have discovered:

- how the game of rugby is the major focus of national identification
- why being Welsh is far more than a simple matter of geography – the culture, the language and other factors all play their part too
- how the Welsh economy has adapted and evolved as industries thrive, die and are replaced
- how race and gender are important dimensions of difference in Wales, how policies have addressed them, and the limitations of these policies
- some key ways in which the Welsh language both unites and divides
- how the Welsh nationalist movement has played a key role not just in relation to the language and Plaid Cymru politics, but in shaping the Labour Party
- how labour traditions are deeply ingrained in the politics and culture of Wales
- how people in Wales, and in the Labour Party, have seen Westminster in different ways, but devolution and the formation of the Welsh National Assembly and its government in 1999 was a major step on the path of a new and transforming relationship
- the growth in film and television production in Wales, with the S4/C television channel and programmes such as *Doctor Who* showing the nation in a new, modern light to viewers around the world.

Wales as a nation has become more prominent and its people more confident in their national identification in recent years, particularly with the advent of devolution. However, as you will have read, there are many issues which need to be addressed in order to achieve the ambitions of its leaders. It may be a small part of the United Kingdom, but Wales is a nation with a distinct identity and – literally, with the language - its own voice.

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Glossary

Administrative devolution

Refers to a transfer of responsibility for policy areas with a specific Welsh dimension from Whitehall to Wales-specific bodies.

Child poverty

is measured by the proportion of children living in families with a household income of less than 60 per cent of the national average household income. This is usually measured after housing costs are deducted.

Cultural capital

means the knowledge, skills and education which individuals have.

A cultural division of labour

means that people's jobs are related to their ethnic or national origins.

Democracy

Comes from the Greek demos (the people) and kratos (rule).

Devolution

Is a process whereby political authority is transferred from central government to a lower (regional) level of government.

Ethnic nationalism

is national belonging defined in terms of culture and common descent, although not necessarily genetic descent.

Economic globalisation

is a process in which local and national economies become integrated into a global system of exchange and trade)

Gender roles

Are the patterns of behaviour that society expects from a man or woman

Globalisation

refers to the increasing extent to which the world is becoming integrated, so that many places are felt to be losing their distinctive qualities and growing more alike.

Gross value added (GVA)

represents the value of the goods and services produced per head in a region before taxes and subsidies are considered. When the latter are added, the total is referred to as gross domestic product (GDP).

'Life chances'

is a term associated with the sociologist Max Weber. It refers to the typical expectation of rewards, opportunities and deprivations that a person may have over the course of a lifetime. Comparison of life chances provides a way of assessing inequalities between different kinds of individuals and groups.

Neo-corporatism

Refers to a privileged relationship between political actors (especially those in government) and a narrow group of actors representing a specific set of interests.

Race

signifies the division of humans according to physical characteristics (notably skin colour) into different racial groups. Racism is the attribution of characteristics of superiority or inferiority to a population sharing certain physically inherited characteristics.

Racism

Is the attribution of characteristics of superiority or inferiority to a population sharing certain physically inherited characteristics.

Shamateurism

refers to the sham of financial rewards being offered to players by clubs in the era (before 1995) when rugby was ostensibly amateur

Social exclusion

refers to the economic, cultural and social marginalisation of individuals, families and communities. It describes the long-term consequences of poverty where people experiencing poverty suffer poor educational attainment, poor health outcomes and low housing quality.

Social capital

means the networks to which people belong which produce resources for achieving their ends.

The Six Nations Championship

(or RBS 6 Nations for sponsorship reasons) An annual international rugby union competition between England, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland and Wales

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Further reading

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There is remarkably little in the way of cultural studies or sociology on Welsh rugby. The exception is the work of John Harris, including: Harris, J. (2009) 'Outside the fields of praise: women's rugby in Wales' *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*. Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 167–182.

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There is a revealing account of how the map of Wales was redrawn so as to qualify for European assistance in Kevin Morgan's article 'How objective 1 arrived in Wales: the political origins of a coup,' *Contemporary Wales*, vol. 15, 2002, pp. 20–30. This includes some discussion of how people use mental maps.

Together with Adam Price, Morgan sets out the case for west Wales in *The Other Wales*, Cardiff, Institute of Welsh Affairs, 1998.

Harold Carter's 'Foreword' to the 1996 reissue of Alwyn D. Rees, *Life in a Welsh Countryside* (listed in the References) discusses both the context for the original study and subsequent developments in community studies and how they reflect key social changes.

Michael Sullivan discusses the importance of community for people in south Wales in his chapter on 'Communities and social policy' in R. Jenkins and A. Edwards (eds), *One Step Forward? South and West Wales towards the Year 2000*, Llandysul, Gomer, 1990.

Paul Cloke et al.'s *Rural Wales: Community and Marginalization* (listed in the References) pp. 16ff deals with ideas of Welsh identity and in-migration; pp. 156ff. discuss the idea of community and how people interpret it.

Contemporary Wales University of Wales Press, Cardiff. This annually published journal always includes a chapter examining the contemporary Welsh economy. It provides an update of the key features of economic activity in Wales derived from the most recently available statistics.

For an excellent overview of the key sectors of the Welsh economy as it entered the 21st century, see Bryan, J. and Jones, C. (eds) (2000) *Wales in the 21st Century: an Economic Future*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Business.

Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Wales. Joseph Rowntree Foundation is a series of reports on the conditions of poverty in Wales. First published in 2005, it has been updated regularly, most recently in 2013 and provides the most recent statistics of key indicators of poverty in Wales.

Dave Adamson's 2009 article 'Still living on Edge?' (in *Contemporary Wales*, 21, pp.47–66) reviews the current primary causes of poverty in Wales.

For a historical account of the black presence in Wales, see Alan Llwyd (2005) *Cymru Ddu/Black Wales: a History*, Cardiff, Butetown History and Arts Centre. For a literary account, read the memoir: Charlotte Williams (2002) *Sugar and Slate*, Aberystwyth, Planet Books.

There are a number of books published by Butetown History and Arts Centre that tell the story of Butetown in the post-war period. See, for example, Neil Sinclair (2003) *The Tiger Bay Story*, Cardiff, Dragon and Tiger Enterprises.

Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees, Sandra Betts and Moira Vincentelli (eds) (1994) *Our Sisters' Land*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press provides a collection of accounts on the changing identities of women in Wales.

For a detailed account of gender and employment in Wales, see: Teresa Rees (1999) *Women and Work: 25 years of Gender Equality in Wales*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press.

For a recent albeit gloomy update, see Brooks, S and Gareth, Owen ap (2013) *Welsh Power Report. Women in Public Life*. Electoral Reform Society Cymru.

Davies, J. (1993) *The Welsh Language*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press provides a good introduction to the development of the Welsh language and to Welsh-language culture.

An accessible introduction to theoretical discussions about nationalism is Guiberneau, M. (1996) *Nationalisms: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

McAllister, L. (2001) *Plaid Cymru: The Emergence of a Political Party*, Bridgend, Wales, Seren, is a study of the party in the second half of the twentieth century.

The following two books provide perspectives from within the language movement and political nationalism:

Thomas, N. (1991 [1971]) *The Welsh Extremist*, Talybont, Wales, Y Lolfa.

Williams, P. (1981) *Voice from the Valleys*, Aberystwyth, Wales, Plaid Cymru.

For more on the why Labour was so popular in industrial south Wales in the 1920s and 1930s, an excellent starting point is Chapter 9 ('The frontier years') of Williams, G.A. (1985) *When was Wales?*, London, Penguin.

Both chapter 8, 'Wales's locust years', of Morgan, K.O. (1981) *Wales: Rebirth of a Nation, 1880–1980*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, or Chapter 5, 'The pattern of Labour politics, 1918–1939', in Tanner, D., Williams, C. and Hopkin, D. (2000) *The Labour Party in Wales, 1900–2000*, Cardiff, provide more material on establishment in the 1920s and 1930s.

For more on the formative 1951–64 period, Chapter 8, 'The structure of power in Labour Wales, 1951–1964', in Tanner et al., *Labour Party in Wales*, provides an excellent overview of developments in north and south Wales.

Chapter 10, 'Labour and the nation' in Tanner, D. et al., *Labour Party in Wales*, pp. 241–64 provides an evaluation of Labour's dilemmas over devolution.

Finally, for an in-depth view of Labour and devolution, some of Evans, J.G. (2008) *Devolution in Wales*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, are useful.

Bogdanor, V. (1999) *Devolution in the United Kingdom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, provides an excellent historical account of devolution debates in the United Kingdom. It also considers Welsh devolution as part of a broader programme of constitutional change.

Mitchell, J. (2009) *Devolution in the UK* Manchester University Press, updates the situation and debate.

For an analysis and explanation of changes in party politics in post-devolution Wales, especially the decline of the hegemonic Labour Party, see Wyn Jones, R. and Scully, R. 'The end of one-partyism? Party politics in Wales in the second decade of devolution', *Contemporary Wales*, vol. 21, pp. 207–17.

The best study of how devolution has impacted on civil society in Wales, drawing on detailed case studies of different civil society organisations, is Royles, E. (2007) *Revitalising Democracy? Devolution and Civil Society in Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff.

To further explore the idea of Wales as a 'postcolonial' nation and the impact of that on representation, see J. Aaron and Chris Williams (eds.) (2005) *Postcolonial Wales*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press.

For a detailed historical account of the role of cinema in the life of Wales, see David Berry (1994) *Wales and Cinema, The First Hundred Years*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press.

David Barlow, Philip Mitchell and Tom O'Malley (eds) (2005) *Media in Wales: Voices of a Small Nation*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press presents an overview of the role of media in Wales.

For a discussion of the future of television in Wales, see Geraint Talfan Davies (ed.) (2009) *English is a Welsh Language, Television's Crisis in Wales*, Cardiff, Institute of Welsh Affairs.

To examine the important role of popular music in the way that Wales has been represented, see Sarah Hill (2007) *Blerwytirhwng: The Place of Welsh Pop Music*, Aldershot, Ashgate.

The *Journal of Studies in Theatre and Performance* published a special edition on Welsh theatre and performance in 2004, vol. 24, p. 3.

The following is a selection of theatre plays, films and television programmes that might be useful in relation to the ideas discussed in this chapter.

Films

A Way of Life (dir. Amma Asante, 2004)

Beautiful Mistake (dir. Marc Evans, 2001)

House of America (dir. Marc Evans, 1997)

Solomon and Gaenor (dir. Paul Morrison, 1998)

Twin Town (dir. Kevin Allen, 1997)

Television

Caerdydd (not currently available on DVD, but sometimes available to watch on the S4C website)

Dr Who (Series 1, Episode 11, 'Boom Town', available from BBC Worldwide) Gavin and Stacey (Series 1 and 2 available from BBC Worldwide)

Torchwood (Series 1, Episode 1 available from BBC Worldwide)

Plays

Owen, G. (2005) Plays: 1, London, Methuen.

Teare, J. (ed.) New Welsh Drama, Volume 2, Cardiff, Parthian.

Thomas, E. (2002) Selected Work 95–98, Cardiff, Parthian

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