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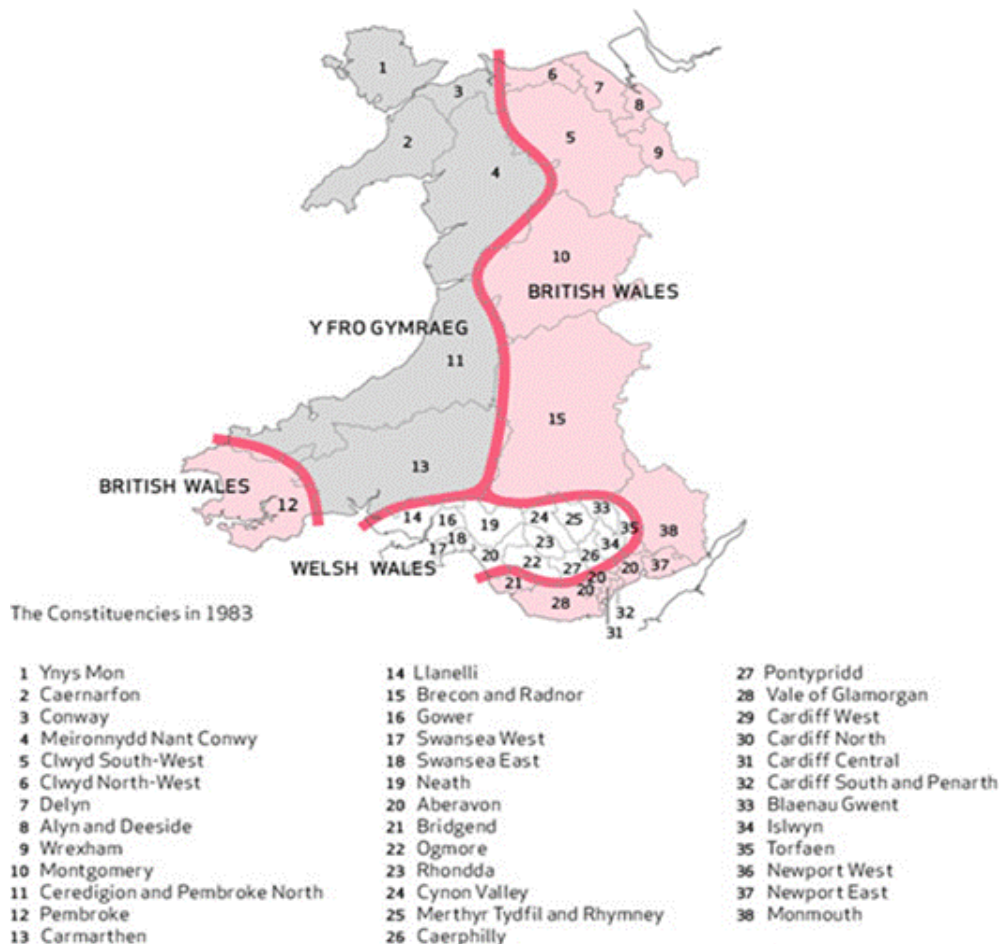
### **Welshness in 'British Wales': negotiating national identity at the margins.**

Nationalism and national identity are traditionally seen to be 'horizontal' or 'equalizing' concepts (Anderson, 1983). People from all corners of the nation are assumed to be joined together by their shared nationality and national characteristics (or the national 'habitus'- De Cillia et al, 1999). In reality, however, societies frequently draw hierarchical distinctions within the national polity between those who are 'most' 'national', or most 'authentic', and those who are 'least' national (Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002; Seol & Skrentny, 2009). Relatedly, within the discursive construction of the nation- an extensive process including among other things national politics, the education system, literature, pop culture and sport (De Cilia et al, 1999; Sutherland, 2005) - some places or regions are deemed 'more national' than others (Edensor, 2002). Some places, often due to their landscape or connections to the national history (sites of battles and so on), are iconic 'heartlands' which occupy special positions within the national imagination, whilst others which do not conform to this 'ideal type' are relegated to the periphery of the national narrative. Many studies of national identity, emphasizing the unifying nature of nationalism, are insensitive to the role of place and geographical variation within the nation (Paasi, 2004). In particular, little attention has been paid to the 'less-national' spaces and places within the nation. There is an urgent need to explore the "so-called weak or weaker manifestations" of national identity (Todorova, 2015:697). This article helps to address this lacuna by providing new empirical evidence from Wales. Whilst previous work on hierarchical nationhood focuses on how national hierarchies are institutionalised by the state, this article focuses on how people at the bottom of the national hierarchy actively negotiate their nationhood.

In discourse(s) about Wales there is a tradition of dividing the country into 'more Welsh' and 'less Welsh' regions (Gruffudd, 1995). The complex and uneven historic penetration of first, English colonialism (followed later by the equally uneven penetration of the British state) and later, industrialization, have helped produce a remarkable heterogeneity in such a small country (Evans, 2015). Industrialization was accompanied by waves of internal migration from the rural hinterland to the developing industrial regions, coupled with significant in-migration from England and abroad. This produced complex and varying patterns of acculturation as many towns and cities developed hybrid, Anglophone Welsh cultures- often rooted in distinct class practices- which both departed from and blended with 'traditional' Welsh culture, rooted in the Welsh language and religious nonconformity (Gruffudd, 1995). The development of Welsh infrastructure under conditions of dependency/colonialism, (as well as Wales' natural division by a central mountain range) have contributed to the resilience of internal regional boundaries: railways and roads in Wales overwhelmingly run West to East, reflecting the one way flow of resources and people from the periphery to the core. Consequently, people in the north of the country remain more connected to Lancashire and Cheshire than Cardiff, and people in the south are better connected to Bristol and London than to North Wales (Day, 2010). Moreover, as a 'stateless nation', Wales has not historically undergone the homogenizing process of unification that 'large' nations experience, whereby all corners of the nation are bound to the state. Since the 1536 Act of Union, whereby Wales was politically and legally incorporated into England (reflected in the enduring 'England and Wales' legal

jurisdiction), Wales has historically been far more closely assimilated into the English state than either Scotland or Northern Ireland. It has never had the unifying political resources of a distinct national civil society, press, a national educational system or a national military, to bind it together.

This persistent internal diversity has produced a concern with place which features not just in academic or intellectual circles but is also prominent in popular discourse. Regional variations manifest themselves in distinct accents and vocabularies (Coupland & Ball, 1989) which are widely understood proxies for class, linguistic competence and culture. As Evans (2007) notes, an informal awareness of regional distinctiveness forms part of a general ‘stock of knowledge’ that Welsh people have about Wales. Academic work in Wales has simultaneously reflected and reproduced these commonsensical understandings about Welsh regional cultural divisions. Very often these heuristic models have followed the borders of the uneven geographic distribution of the Welsh language in Wales (see Bowen, 1957; Bowen & Carter, 1975; Jenkins, 2000; Pryce, 2006; Evans, 2007). This tradition of regional cultural mapping is exemplified by Denis Balsom’s influential ‘Three Wales Model’[1] (1985- henceforth TWM) which looms large within Welsh political analysis. Set against the emergence of nationalism as an electoral force in Wales and the 1979 Welsh Devolution referendum, Balsom’s work attempted to map the complex relationship between place, identity, class, cultural attachment and political affiliation in Wales. Based on the 1979 Welsh Electoral Survey (WES)[2], Balsom’s model presented a tripartite version of Wales in which the strength or ‘intensity’ of Welsh identity varied between distinct geographic regions, which are each associated with particular socio-cultural groups and traits.



**Figure 1: The Three Wales Model**  
(Source: Day, 2010)

Balsom demonstrates that there are two areas where two-thirds of the population strongly identify as Welsh: the Welsh speaking areas of North and West of Wales; and the traditional south Wales mining area. Elsewhere, a British identity is prevalent though not necessarily dominant (1985:6). The latter region, 'British Wales', is not geographically coterminous but scattered, comprised of the enclave of South Pembrokeshire ('the little England beyond Wales'); the border counties of mid and North East Wales; and the coastal strip East of Bridgend.

The strength of Welsh identity, then, varies between social groups and between regions of Wales. Some places, and by extension some people, are said to be more or less Welsh<sup>[3]</sup>: a hierarchy of Welshness exists within Wales, and this hierarchy is also regional. Importantly, Welsh Wales and Y Fro Gymraeg are 'heartland' regions (dubbed 'the two truths of Wales' by Raymond Williams (1985), central to the Welsh public imagination. A tendency within Welsh historiography and sociology to narrowly prioritize the 'interior landscapes' of mountains and valleys, over exterior ones of coast and beach, has led to the neglect of the areas labelled 'British Wales', which do not correspond to any dominant and idealized notions of Wales (Borsay, 2008:104). As Evans (2015) notes, these non-heartland parts of Wales are often simply defined as 'the rest'. So although these 'outer fringes' of Wales are widely acknowledged to exist (e.g. Johnes, 2012), and of course help define the heartlands (without implicitly peripheral 'non-heartlands' you cannot have heartlands) their exact nature is unclear.

The purpose of this paper is to bring new empirical evidence to bear on the evolving relationship between people in the 'less Welsh' parts of Wales and Welshness. In doing so, it will interrogate the meaning and relevance of Balsom's 'British Wales' region. By looking more closely at the nature of 'British Wales<sup>[4]</sup>' it will also provide general insights about national identity within marginal, non-heartland regions and illuminate how place influences how people 'do' their national identity.

## **British Wales**

Balsom's work provides us with our starting point for understanding the British Wales region. Firstly, the demographics of the British Wales region mark it out from the rest of Wales. It possesses a population which is more middle class; has a higher ratio of males to females; has a relatively old population (something which is significant given the correlation between older Welsh people and British identity (Scully, 2012)); and a significant minority (47%) of the population born outside Wales, in contrast with the Welsh identifying groups (both Welsh speaking and non-Welsh speaking), the majority of whom were born in Wales and who have a more working class profile overall. The region is also distinguished by its tendency to vote Conservative and Liberal, although this is not to suggest a deep rooted political tradition, but rather that this region reflects UK wide voting patterns (1985:12-13).

So far, so different. Yet it is too easy to focus on these demographic differences and reduce this region to a caricature of a middle class, conservative, English born enclave. Much of this is down to the TWM itself: by utilising the exclusive categories of the WES to measure national identity, the TWM posits Welshness and Britishness as mutually exclusive categories. This necessarily obscures the fact that people possess multiple identities, and that in multinational states like the UK, identity is 'nested', with people having both 'national' and 'state' identities (Bechhofer et al, 1999: 518). In Wales, Welshness has been the 'national' or cultural identity, and Britishness has been the 'state' or political identity. The exclusive nature of these national categories in the TWM has contributed to a somewhat warped reading of Balsom's model. Most notably, the Welshness of British Wales is frequently overlooked: the TWM states that the British Wales region has a majority of Welsh identifiers, (50.5%) but is dubbed 'British Wales' because of a relatively higher percentage of British identifiers (43.0%), rather than a majority (figure 2). The name 'British Wales' is therefore unhelpful in that it obscures the 'Welshness' of the region and leads one to assume that this region is somehow 'unWelsh'[5]. Moreover, linking the particular regions to certain demographics means that the plurality of identities within the regions are obscured, for example the prevalence of British identifiers in YFG and Welsh Wales and the prevalence of Welsh speakers within British Wales; the significant political conservatism within YFG and the Labourist tradition within British Wales; the presence of middle class enclaves within Welsh Wales, the presence of working class enclaves within British Wales, and so on.

Furthermore, the 'British Wales' region cobbles together the odd bedfellows of working class urban regions (e.g., Wrexham, Newport, Milford Haven) with middle class rural areas (Monmouth, Radnorshire). It is unclear what, if anything, these places have in common with one another other than falling outside the 'classic' images of Wales. Indeed, it is worth recalling that the 'British Wales' region in the TWM was an amalgamation of the distinct 'NE & Mid Wales' and the 'Lower South Wales' regions put forward in the more detailed precursor to the TWM, (Balsom et al, 1984). Within this earlier model, 'Lower South Wales' recorded a similar percentage of 'Welsh speaking non-Welsh identifiers' (40%) to 'Upper South Wales' (later to become 'Welsh Wales') (48%); whilst 'NE & Mid Wales' significantly recorded the second highest number of 'Welsh speaking Welsh identifiers' (16%) (Balsom et al, 1984:165). Thus in the earlier models, in terms of 'Welshness', the Southern, coastal part of British Wales does not show up as significantly different from 'Welsh Wales', and the Northern sector of British Wales displayed a significant degree of linguistic Welshness. So some parts of British Wales may be 'more Welsh' than others, or indeed contain different many different 'strains' of Welshness. It may well be that of the three cultural regions, it is the British Wales region which is the least well served by the generalizations of the TWM.

**Figure 2. Breakdown of identity in each region (Source: The Three Wales Model, 1985)**

	<i>Welsh Wales</i>	<i>Y Fro Gymraeg</i>	<i>British Wales</i>
Welsh	63	62.1	50.5
British	30.7	31.8	43

Much has changed since Balsom's analysis, which was written nearly thirty years ago. The most obvious and profound change to occur within Welsh society has been the advent of Devolution. The 'Yes' vote in the 1997 Welsh devolution referendum and the establishment of the Welsh Assembly in 1999 was interpreted by many as a radical structural change to the UK state form (Bogdanor, 1999). The establishment of the Welsh Assembly was interpreted by some as both reflecting and catalyzing a heightened sense of Welsh identity and national confidence across Wales, (Morgan & Mungham, 2000; Edwards, 2007). Whilst voting patterns in 1997 seemed to confirm the persistence of the TWM (Andrews, 1999), the Welsh devolution settlement has since undergone incremental but significant changes, with the initially toothless Assembly gradually gaining new powers over a number of significant areas. Despite the persistence of regional cleavages during the early stages of devolution, post-devolution Wales is commonly understood to now be 'more Welsh' than it was when the TWM was written (Aull-Davies, 2006). Moreover, devolution brought with it a new vocal advocacy, at least by the media and political class in Wales, of a new, democratic and inclusive politics in Wales (Morgan & Mungham, 2000) which would be accompanied by a recalibration of Welshness itself, away from narrow, exclusionary forms towards a new, inclusive Welsh identity - which encompassed hitherto 'peripheral' experiences. In short, hierarchical Welshness was believed to have had its day: attention was finally to be paid to what Day & Suggett (1985:96) call the 'many ways of being Welsh' which exist within the country.

The advent of this 'more Welsh' Wales inevitably precipitated a re-engagement with the TWM and the whole notion of 'regionally constituted Welshness', with the British Wales region also receiving some belated attention- after all, within a 'more Welsh' Wales, a 'less Welsh' region becomes particularly aberrant. Underpinned by the aforementioned assumption that Wales has been blanketed by a new hegemonic Welshness, these engagements downplay the significance of place in determining cultural identity and attachment to the nation (Coupland et al, 2006; Bryant, 2006; Wyn Jones & Scully, 2011), arguing that post-devolution Wales is converging towards a 'more Welsh' state of affairs. Coupland et al (2006) argue that the proliferation of Welshness across post-devolution Wales means that the British Wales region is now 'just as Welsh' as the rest of Wales, and indeed effectively no longer exists as a distinct cultural region.

Yet the dismissal of the role of place within post-devolution Wales may be premature. First and foremost, there are significant problems with this 'optimistic' interpretation of devolution which underpins these engagements with the regional model and with British Wales. Emerging critical engagements with devolution (e.g., Jones et al, 2005; Evans, 2018) have emphasized the power relations at the centre of the devolution process, arguing that far from representing a significant process of state restructuring which triggered a concomitant forward march of Welshness, devolution was intended to shore up Labour hegemony within Wales and check the rise of Welsh nationalist sentiment. Far from triggering a radical change to Welsh society, the people of Wales have not engaged with the devolved institution [6]. Moreover, there is significant evidence which points to the persistence of regional cultural cleavages in post-devolution Wales. Firstly, in the 2011 census, places corresponding to British Wales- Flintshire, Conwy, Monmouth, Denbigh, Cardiff,

Wrexham, Pembrokeshire, Newport- all recorded low percentages on the 'Welsh Only' identity option, generally recording under 50%, whilst again recording the highest amounts of respondents with 'no Welsh identity'. Second, due to the constant flow of in-migration from England into Welsh speaking areas in post-devolution Wales, the narration of 'heartland' linguistic regions has in fact sharpened as a response to the unabated acculturation of this region (Jones & Fowler, 2007), which has since become less Welsh speaking and less Welsh identifying. Third, Wales, (like everywhere else) has been penetrated by the neo-liberal economic orthodoxy which states that regions are better frameworks for communication and co-operation than nation states (Terlouw, 2009). This logic informed the redrawing of Welsh regions in order to obtain EU Objective One funding (Gripaios & McVittie, 2003); and underpins the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Wales Spatial Plan' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008) which not only recognises demographic and topographical differences between regions, but actively endorses the notion of regional cultural distinctiveness and indeed ostensibly encourages the cultivation of place based identity. Finally, the restructuring of the Welsh economy during the twentieth century has resulted in stark regional inequalities developing within Wales (e.g. Rees & Rees, 1980; Day, 1980; Cooke, 1983) which, incidentally, correspond to the cultural boundaries laid out in the TWM. Crucially, the regions corresponding to British Wales have been the 'winners', and the former industrial regions corresponding to Welsh Wales have been the 'losers' (Morris & Wilkinson; 1995; Adamson, 1991; 1996; 2008). So far from cultural homogenization, the growing spatial inequality between the former industrial areas of Welsh Wales and the southern coastal plain corresponding to British Wales is also said to have led to a growing ideological and cultural divide between the two regions, symbolised by a growing conservative vote in British Wales (Adamson, 1991), although this picture is further complicated by the new forms of migration to this region from both the valleys (bringing with them a residual cultural attachment connection to a working class Welshness) and England (i.e., a potentially Anglicising element, moving the region further away from Welshness). Regardless of these patterns, it is somewhat bizarre that these stark- and increasing- regional class cleavages have been ignored by those who claim devolution has produced greater cultural homogeneity, given the historic correlation between a working class identity and a strong sense of Welshness (Balsom et al, 1983; 1984).

There are, in short, very different interpretations of the extent of regional cultural variations in post-devolution Wales, and we are not really any closer to arriving at an understanding of the British Wales region. The failure to properly illuminate the relevance of regionally constituted Welshness and to answer the question of why certain places may be more or less Welsh is in many ways a question of method. By relying on top down, largely quantitative analysis- the dominant approach within Welsh political analysis- to examine regional variations in national identity we can draw inferences about regional identity but not much more. We ultimately know very little about whether or not some groups of people may be disengaged from Welshness, let alone why or how this might occur. Nationhood is a 'dual phenomenon': constructed essentially 'from above', (discursively), by politicians, historians, the media and so on; yet can only be properly understood if also studied 'from below' (Hobsbawm, 1990:10-11). National identity is not something people simply 'have', but is rather a fluid and dynamic process of negotiation and renegotiation that people actively 'do' (Jenkins, 2011:12). In order to understand what they think and how they orient themselves to the nation, whether or not they belong, we have to 'observe them and ask them' (Becker, 1996), and examine 'everyday nationhood' (Brubaker et al, 2006; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008). And just as there is

no straightforward link between the 'top down' and 'everyday' understanding of the nation, there is also a difference between 'region', understood as a 'socio-spatial unit' or 'higher scale' heuristic concept, and 'place', understood as a "human spatial experience" or local 'structure of feeling' (Paasi, 1991: 248-9). Borders are substantiated less by the distribution of social and political characteristics than by their successful narration and internalization by individuals. 'Regional identity', a sense of difference, is learned, internalized and reproduced in everyday life (Evans, 2007:130). We must accordingly be sensitive to the inevitable disjuncture between heuristic top down regional models and the lived experience of 'place'.

Within Wales there have been a number of relatively recent ethnographic explorations into 'everyday Welshness' which have demonstrated the continuing influence of place on Anglo-Welsh identity, something overlooked by Coupland et al (Roberts, 1995; Day & Thompson, 1999; Aull Davies, 2005; Evans, 2007). Day and Thompson (1999) illustrate how understandings about the nation and what it is to be 'properly national' are frequently influenced by highly local social norms. They state that the locally situated nature of national identity manifests itself in a series of 'rules', 'categories' and a stock of 'common knowledge' regarding Welshness, which ultimately inform locals' perceptions about wider 'rules' regarding national identity. The rules of the national habitus may (we should not assume that this is automatic) be refracted and rearticulated by the rules of the local milieu. So how 'Welsh' one person appears to be may depend on the particular 'rules' or norms of the locality, e.g. someone who is 'unproblematically' perceived as 'strongly Welsh' in south Wales (because they possess a strong accent, for example) may not be perceived as Welsh in north West Wales because the markers and norms for 'authentic Welshness' are different.

Of particular significance here is an ethnography by Evans (2007), the only work to focus on the border region of NE Wales within the 'British Wales' area (this article is the first to focus on the Southern portion). Evans' work demonstrates how the 'peripherality' and 'anglicised' nature of the border region had been internalized by locals (i.e., they were aware that 'everyone else' in the nation felt they were not 'properly' national), particularly when defined against a local 'properly' Welsh heartland region, and who therefore had to 'work' a lot harder to place themselves within the nation, certainly when compared to respondents in the ethnographies conducted in straightforward areas. Conversely, it is also important to note that whilst an awareness of the 'unWelshness' of their 'Anglicised' local place complicated Welshness for many locals in Evans' study, the region emerged as highly 'conventional' in other respects, sharing the 'standard' identity work which occurs in all parts of Wales, including the mobilization of or 'raw materials' (McCrone et al, 2008) of individual nationhood such as birthplace, residence, heritage; the mobilization of Welsh language ability and a 'proprietary view' of the language 'proof of Welshness' (Spears, 2008); and finally a reliance on 'softer' markers of identity such as the 'social communalism' (Corrado, 1975) of supporting Welsh sports teams. In other words, certain elements of Welsh identity seem to remain fairly constant regardless of whether you come from a 'properly Welsh' or 'not very Welsh' place, lest we risk over-emphasizing or assuming a priori the centrality of place.



### Spotlight on Porthcawl- a 'British Wales' town.

The relevance of these everyday constructions of Welshness can be illuminated further by drawing on recent ethnographic research in Porthcawl [7], a coastal town of 16,000 situated in the southern portion of 'British Wales. Porthcawl is one of the three main towns in the county of Bridgend, and is nearly equidistant between Cardiff and Swansea (figure 3). Originally a coal port, the town evolved into a traditional seaside resort - complete with funfair and Europe's largest caravan park ('Trecco Bay') - and soon became central to the leisure activities of the working classes in the south Wales hinterland (Pincombe, 2011). Like so many other British seaside resorts, however, the decline of heavy industry in south Wales deprived Porthcawl of its core tourist demographic- a free spending working class. As its tourist side slipped into a spiral of decline, the town evolved into as a dormitory site: as the M4 corridor around 'British Wales' flourished, Porthcawl, with its attractive coastal setting and easy access to the M4, attracted managers and workers from the new industries. Embourgeoisement was inevitably accompanied by quest for a new 'social tone', and today a new image of Porthcawl as an affluent resort has largely displaced its old image as a working class cultural hub (although some parts of Porthcawl, clustered around the funfair and caravan park, retain a strong 'working classness'). Now closely linked to the Cardiff 'capital network', new restaurants, hotels and coffee shops adorn Porthcawl's Western promenade. Luxury apartments and retirement complexes have been built on the seafront, and the town's popularity as a golfing and surfing resort has grown.

Figure 3: Location of Porthcawl within south Wales. (Wikipedia)

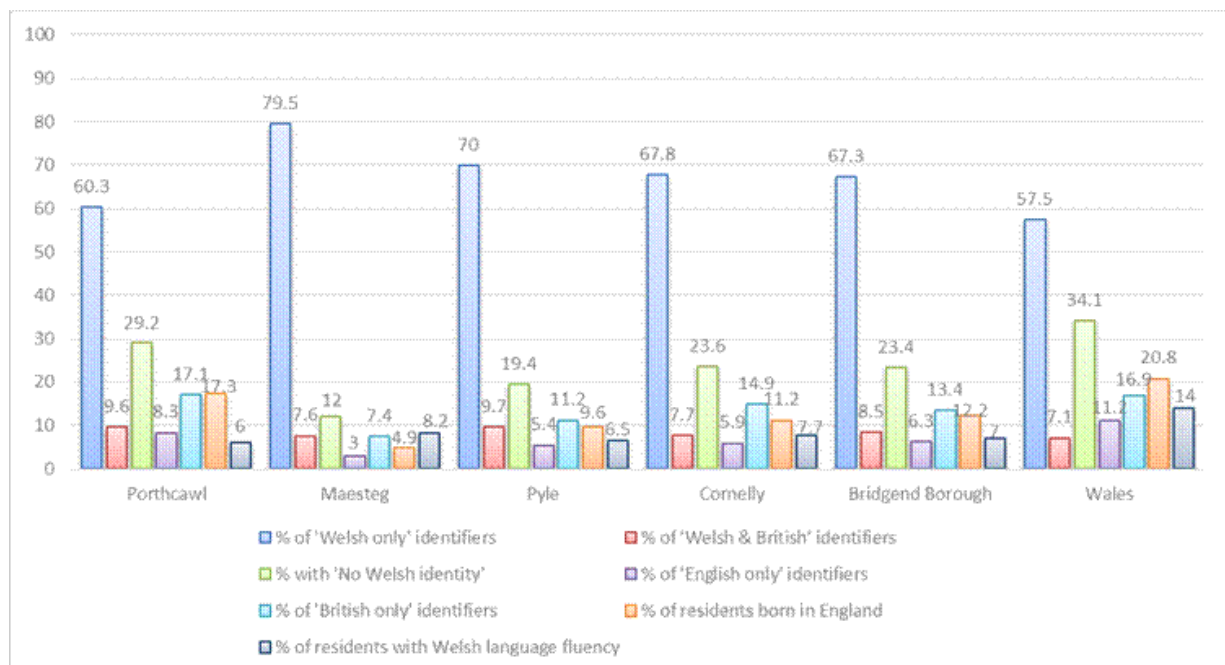


On paper, Porthcawl shares many of the basic demographic features of Balsom’s ‘British Wales’, establishing it an appropriate setting to explore Welsh identity in this region. Figures 4 & 5 contrast Porthcawl with neighbouring working class towns within Bridgend and with Wales itself. Porthcawl is distinguished from the surrounding areas by its relative affluence; relatively low levels of Welsh identity compared to Bridgend borough (although -affirming the need for exploration of Welsh identity in British Wales- a slightly higher average than Wales as a whole) and relatively high levels of British identity; relatively high percentage of residents with ‘no Welsh identity’; low levels of ability in the Welsh language, and a high percentage of residents born in England. The town also corresponds to the political traditions of British Wales, and has generally voted Conservative whilst the rest of Bridgend County has traditionally voted Labour.

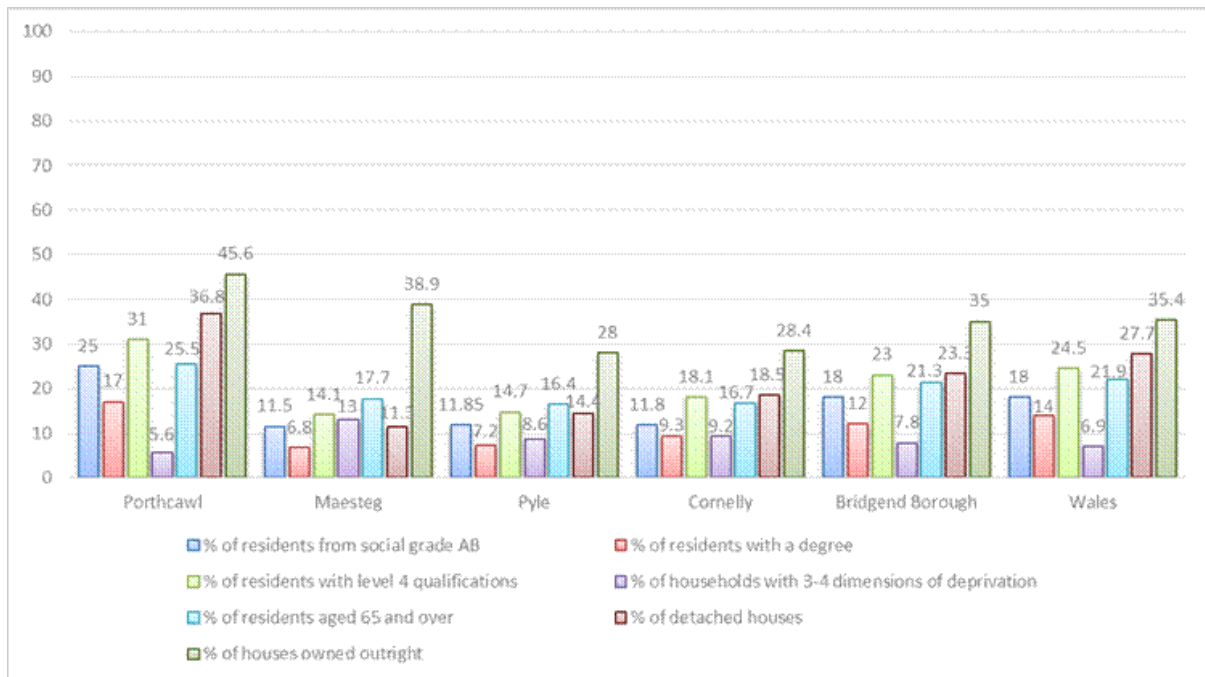
**Method.**

The data presented in this paper is drawn from a 5 year insider- ethnography (2009-2014), whereby the researcher- a local- lived and worked in Porthcawl. This period of participant observation included playing football for the local team, coaching local children, and working full time in a busy hotel. This immersion yielded a deep understanding of how the nation arose and was discussed within everyday life, as well as the unspoken, unreflexive elements of the national habitus. In addition to participant observation, the research involved 45 one on one recorded interviews with adults aged 18-90, drawn from all social classes; 3 focus group interviews (including one with town councillors); and 7 focus groups conducted in the local secondary school with students aged 11-18. Over 90 students participated in the school element.

**Figure 4: National identity in Porthcawl compared to Bridgend borough & Wales (ONS, 2011).**



**Figure 5: Socio-economic profile of Porthcawl compared to Bridgend borough & Wales(ONS, 2011).**



### Straightforward Welshness

On Welshness in British Wales, Bryant (2006) argued that people in ‘British Wales’ would either identify as ‘British’ or ‘keep their distance from Welshness’. In fact, something quite different was apparent in Porthcawl: the majority of locals felt very Welsh, articulating a strong sense of Welsh identity and claiming that their Welshness was extremely important to them. When Wales played rugby, Porthcawl turned red; when schoolchildren were shown images of the Welsh flag they began chanting ‘Wales! Wales!’ All this gives credence to Coupland et al’s claim that (2006) ‘all of Wales is the real Wales’, and that coming from a ‘less Welsh’ place does not necessarily preclude a strong sense of Welshness. Indeed, Porthcawl, although possessing the distinct imagery of a British seaside resort, in many ways actually fits the bill of a ‘traditional’ ‘Welsh Wales’ town (or at least, its working class parts do), possessing successful rugby and boxing clubs, a male voice choir, a Welsh speaking chapel, and so on. These parallels between this ‘British Wales’ place and the traditional image of south Wales hark back to the more detailed forerunners to the TWM (Balsom et al, 1983, 1984) which emphasized the similarities between the southern portion of British Wales and ‘Welsh Wales’, rather than the difference. This central finding serves to reinforce the ‘Welshness’ of this ‘unWelsh’ area, and the often strong similarities with the working class valleys areas, something which is frequently overlooked.

As in ‘unproblematic’ regions, the majority of locals in Porthcawl asserted their Welshness through what McCrone et al (1998) call the ‘raw materials of national identity’: birthplace, residence,

parental links, and so on (Fenton, 2007). Respondents mobilized their own markers- birthplace in particular- as a way of 'proving' Welshness- a 'trump card' that no-one could argue with. Clearly, the more markers one can mobilize, the better: being born in Wales is good, but having parents who were also born in Wales is even better- more 'proof', if needed, of a deeply anchored Welshness. Possessing these 'resources' perhaps becomes all the more important when one is from a 'less Welsh' area.

### **Struggling to belong**

Although locals demonstrated a 'taken for granted' sense of Welshness and a pre-reflexive understanding of the Welsh national habitus, once Welshness was 'problematized' through interviews, it became clear that the 'type' or 'strain' of Welshness articulated by locals was nonetheless also different, and that negotiating a Welsh identity was complicated for many locals in Porthcawl. Central to this negotiation of Welshness was a sense of place. Their perceptions of their own Welshness hinged on an understanding of Porthcawl's difference. Many locals in Porthcawl, as in Evans' (2007) study of the North East border region of British Wales, had internalized and reproduced the idea that Welshness was innately hierarchical, and that Porthcawl as a place was obviously 'not very Welsh' or at least 'not properly Welsh'.

Zoe (female, 18): I don't think Porthcawl is, apart from the name, I don't think it's very Welshy, I think that if you took Porthcawl and plonked it somewhere in England I don't think people would even notice! So no, I don't think it's very Welsh and the accent is different.

Michael (male, 50s): I think it's the least Welsh place I can think of! I'd put it alongside anglicized areas of Cardiff- Cyncoed and Roath, places like that!

As in Mann's (2011) account of the nation-ness of local place, the distinctiveness of Porthcawl as a place referred to both the embodied qualities of locals themselves and the characteristics of Porthcawl as a 'thing' in itself. In Porthcawl, locals were aware that their town, and by extension themselves as individuals, had certain distinct characteristics or traits which made their 'type' of Welshness 'different', in this case, Porthcawl's 'neutral' accent, which was a recurring theme. Second, Porthcawl's 'unWelshness' also referred to the town in a literal, material sense. Many locals pointed out that on top of the fact that locals lacked the 'embodied qualities' of Welshness, the 'ethno-symbolic geography' (Brubaker, 2006) of the town did not mark it out as obviously Welsh, for example the absence of Welsh language signage [8] and institutions, although Welshness was periodically 'heated' (Fox & Miller- Idriss, 2008) and became prominent in the town during rugby internationals through the displays of Welsh flags in public spaces.

Porthcawl was ultimately perceived as 'less Welsh' because of its distance from the two idealized images of Welshness: a rural, linguistic idea of Welshness on one hand, and an industrial, working class Welshness on the other.

Joan (female, seventies): No, we're not sort of, because we don't speak Welsh... we're not like the Valleys, you know, or like the West, the further West you go the more Welsh you hear spoken.

Locals' sense of Welshness and interaction with the nation was guided by a learned knowledge of the existing hierarchy of Welshness, which permeated local understandings of place and identity. Because Porthcawl was not like the two dominant images of Welshness, articulating a local version of Welsh identity outside of these 'two truths' became complicated.

### **The role of the Welsh language**

The Welsh language had a contradictory impact on locals' sense of Welshness. On the one hand, it emerged as the 'gold standard' of national authenticity which allowed locals to orient themselves towards Wales and Welshness through expressing a proprietary and positive view of the language and its post- devolution institutionalization (Spears, 2008). As in other ethnographies of Anglophone areas (Roberts, 1999; Aull Davies, 2006; Evans, 2007) language allowed locals to 'prove' their Welshness in a way which would overcome their peripherality. For many, the Welsh language was bound up with historical collective memory and served as a way of invoking a tangible link to the past and a way of defining a distinctive Welshness against Englishness; of positioning the Welsh as 'us', a nation defined by a collective injustice.

Elinor (female, 60's): well I think the language does play a part because it's precious to us, mainly I think because it was taken away from us, it isn't something which died out naturally you know: it was beaten out of us.

Paul (male, 20s): The only reason we don't speak it 'cos it was banned by an English king wasn't it!

As Roberts (1999) notes, this historical invocation of the language creates an emotional bond to an imagined (and in this case perhaps a mythologized) collective past, but also serves to anchor the individual, *regardless of where one comes from*, to this wider collective history. Welsh speaking roots

(typically elderly relatives) irrefutably placed locals in the nation, strengthened the claim making process and importantly, overcame place based ambivalence.

As well as expressing their pride in the language, locals often pointed to their own (overwhelmingly unsuccessful) attempts to learn Welsh, and many expressed their satisfaction that their younger relatives or offspring were enrolled in WM education (although not in Porthcawl, where controversially, there was no WM education[9]). If we accept that there is an implicit 'hierarchy of Welshness' within Wales, then 'choosing the nation' via WM education (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008: 542-3) may be seen as a form of conspicuous consumption related to how one is located within this hierarchy (McCrone, 2005). Yet the linguistic paradigm also simultaneously *undermined* locals' sense of Welshness by reminding them of the hierarchy of Welshness. The absence of the language within Porthcawl marked it as an 'Anglicised' place, which locals contrasted with the Welsh speaking 'West' and 'North'.

This Anglicization prompted complex responses. Many locals expressed a self-flagellating guilt or 'shame' about their own lack of linguistic competence as well as the invisibility of the language within the town: Porthcawl's 'unWelshness' was often something seen as regrettable or even shameful. Another facet of this schizoid view of the language was the internalization and reproduction of politicized narratives about the Welsh language and the Welsh speaking 'other' or 'nationalist bogeymen' (Brooks, 2006), particularly by many older members of the town.

Matt (male, 20s) If you go up North, they won't even speak English! Like, they literally look down on us!

Lloyd (male, 20s): and down West as well....

Derek (male, 50s): Although we don't speak Welsh we're very Welsh and we're not extremists, and most of south Wales would think pushing Welsh on people is extremism, burning bloody cottages down and things like that y'know.

This invocation of the Welsh speaking other in fact allowed locals to occasionally mobilise a 'positive' view of their 'unWelshness' or ambivalence (which was otherwise problematic). Constructing symbolic boundaries against the 'ethnic' Welsh speaking other, they sought refuge and took comfort in their own (highly classed) idea that Porthcawl's 'thin' Welshness represented a form of 'cosmopolitanism'.

### **'Proper Welshness': Welshness as a class habitus**

Whilst the linguistic version of 'authentic' or 'proper' Welshness did emerge as a pillar of authenticity, it was nonetheless an abstract thing. For the majority of locals, 'proper' Welshness- the thing they did not have- was the working class version, or 'valleys' Welshness. Welshness was therefore understood mainly as a set of embodied behaviours, synonymous with a working class habitus. This localized 'other' represented a more tangible idea of Welshness than the linguistic form, as locals encountered it frequently in everyday life, through the working class tourists who frequented the town, through their own families, etc. Moreover, this understanding of Welshness as a class habitus was mediated and reinforced by pop culture representations of Wales such as *Gavin and Stacey*, *Stella* and MTV's *The Valleys*. Locals were aware that Porthcawl possessed a middle class habitus which was actively learned, performed and cultivated by young and old alike. As Leach (2002) points out, places such as towns are a 'stage' which can become imbued with a particular character or features by the performative nature of identity (Butler, 1988). Porthcawl's distinctive class habitus was understood both in terms of embodied dispositions and lifestyle aesthetics. This clash between the middle class habitus of the locality and the awareness of a working class 'proper Welshness' created a complex process of negotiation with Welshness, as national categories intersected the everyday process of class distinction. Like the linguistic pillar of Welshness, the assumption that 'proper Welshness' equalled a working class habitus created a schizoid, ambivalent relationship with Welshness for locals. The understanding of the Welshness as essentially classed meant that the nation itself became infused with the positive and negative connotations of working classness. Consequently, locals both moved away from and towards this classed version of Welshness depending on context. Locals listed the positive connotations of this classed version of Welshness - warmth, friendliness, openness, collectivism- community. Against this working class idyll, Porthcawl's middle classness and 'poshness' was lamented as cold, unfriendly. Locals were ultimately felt to behave in an aloof and reserved 'unWelsh' way, Porthcawl was said to be 'less Welsh' (and 'more English') in its behaviours.

Jack (Male, 60's): it's not as Welsh here as it even is in Bridgend, it's certainly not as Welsh as it is in the valleys communities, especially when we used to go up to Pontycymer to see my wife's family- the change in the culture was drastic, completely, like a different world!

Interviewer: Do you mean in terms of accent?

Jack: Not only accent but the sort of community spirit that those places have: the towns and the villages there, everybody knows everybody. Now Porthcawl, because of the make- up of it and because of the type of people who have moved in, it doesn't have that close sort of community feel about it

Interviewer: What do you mean when you say someone is 'more Welsh' though? What does that mean in terms of the person?

Beth (female, 18): it's cos all the miners used to live there, and they just stuck around didn't they...just a nicer community, much closer

Yet just as the national category was sewn into class distinction, 'proper Welshness' was also understood negatively, again embodied by the 'Valleys' other and with class *disgust* (Skeggs, 2005).

Lauren (female, 18): it's just the accent is different, and the way we do stuff... we do the same kind of stuff but they're a lot more...forward about it...more in your face like!

In this **negative** sense, Welshness referred to being 'common' or 'rough'. It was a short step between 'friendliness' and 'warmth' to 'loudness', 'wildness' and so on. Locals often mocked the working class tourists from the valleys and their accents- 'Welshy' was frequently used as shorthand for common-ness.

Stacey (female, 40s): you've only gotta go down the high street and you think 'oh my God! They're huge some of these people!', so they're not sporty people are they, they're just munching on fish and chips! ... I would say the people that live in Porthcawl are fitter

Here, the iconography of the 'underclass' (Skeggs, 2005; Tyler, 2008) and 'chavviness'- Strongbow, obesity, single parenthood, large families- were also bound up with Welshness in certain contexts as surely as things like rugby, singing and sheep.

## **Indifference**

Whilst many locals did 'work hard' to place themselves in the nation, some completely disengaged from Welshness, their 'indifference' to nationhood mirroring the work of Fenton (2007). The assumption of 'unWelshness'- being lowly on the national hierarchy- produced a 'sitting on the fence' sort of identity amongst some of the locals in Porthcawl, again echoing Evans' study of NE Wales (2007) and Kiely et al's (2000) study of Berwick upon Tweed.



Melanie (female, 50s): I've never really felt Welsh I guess. Even if you go just 8 miles down the road to Port Talbot the accent is completely different, it's much stronger, but there's not really a very strong....Welsh culture thing here is there?

These locals had simply internalized and come to terms with their perceived 'peripherality'. Clearly, not everyone in liminal places will 'fight' to place themselves in the nation, and lacking the markers of national authenticity may mean some people do 'sidestep' the issue of national identity or adopt 'hybrid' or alternative identities as a way of dealing with their 'outsider' status.

Reinforcing the continuing relevance of place on national identity formation, the 'unWelshness' of Porthcawl directly influenced these locals' sense of nationhood.

These findings represent a stark contrast with the (generally) strong Welshness recorded in previous ethnographic studies (e.g., Roberts, 1999; Aull Davies et al, 2006). The presence of this indifference in Porthcawl dovetails with Bond's (2006) argument that whilst national identity is often thought of as something people actively work towards 'achieving', this can equally involve an individual process of 'self-exclusion', something which becomes more relevant in situations where nationhood is perceived to be hierarchical. Some people will therefore actively 'undo' their nationhood if they perceive themselves as lacking the proper markers of national authenticity. This self-limiting aspect to national identity can lead to this indifference, and helps explain why some places may remain less national, and why some people may 'sidestep' Welshness and adopt alternative identities which they may perceive as less exclusionary.

## **Discussion**

The empirical evidence presented above allows us to re-assess the relevance of the TWM within contemporary Wales, as well as furthering our understanding of the 'margins' of the nation. This article demonstrates that 'problematic' national identities are not restricted to the borderlands, or the diasporic, migrant or post-colonial experience. 'Marginal' identities do not just exist in 'extreme' case studies, but in places such as Wales (Todorova, 2015: 697). This article's data supports Seol & Skrentny's (2009) claim that hierarchical nationhood, far from being aberrant, is in fact commonplace, and should be incorporated into our understanding of nationhood.

The ethnographic data from Porthcawl suggests that the 'British Wales' title is outdated if not obsolete, given the relative strength of Welsh identity in this Southern part of the 'less Welsh' part of Wales. In many ways, this 'less Welsh' region shares much in common with 'unproblematic' parts of Wales which have also been studied from below. The Welshness of Porthcawl should hopefully re-

orient discussions and perceptions of this region away from preconceived ideas about its 'unWelshness'. As for the internal coherence of the British Wales region, the often problematic process of negotiating nationhood in a 'less Welsh' area in the South shares much in common with the equivalent in NE Wales studied by Evans (2007). But whilst this southern part of the 'less Welsh' swathe shares substantial similarities with the NE portion, there are also observable differences. The prominence of a classed understanding of authentic Welshness in Porthcawl contrasts with the prominence of a linguistic model in NE Wales, suggesting different 'strains' of Welshness within the 'less Welsh' swathe, i.e. that 'British Wales' is not a unified region, and that the understanding of Welshness within different parts of 'British Wales' may be inflected by the most immediate, locally tangible form. In terms of further commonalities and differences within 'British Wales', whilst locals were aware of other similar peripheral areas, I would caution against easy comparisons. Porthcawl's complex class composition and its residual links with the Valleys means it may have far more in common with Welsh Wales and working class parts of British Wales (for example Milford Haven, Haverford West) than with more straightforwardly middle class regions such as the Vale of Glamorgan or Monmouthshire. Further studies of the different parts of British Wales will be necessary to establish a better understanding of the different 'strains' of Welshness in these areas.

Whilst top down analyses suggest that the ill-defined 'British Wales' region is gradually dissolving, this paper demonstrates that place- here deeply inflected with class- remains salient as an ontological category in everyday life for many locals in Porthcawl, and continues to impact on how people negotiate their own nationhood. As in Evans' (2007) study of the northern portion of 'British Wales', locals in Porthcawl had internalised the notion that Welshness was hierarchical, and their own lowly position within the national hierarchy. They therefore had difficulties in placing themselves in the nation, as the 'unWelshness' of their town (and by extension themselves and their own 'habitus') clashed with their ideas of 'proper' Welshness. Ultimately, locals had to continuously reconcile their instinctive Welshness with the simultaneous awareness that they were not 'properly Welsh', based on a learned awareness of what 'proper' Welshness was and was not. Clearly, possessing contradictory or incongruous identity markers makes asserting one's place within the nation problematic, as locals were implicitly aware that fellow nationals would perhaps question the validity of their claims to be properly national (Kiely et al, 2000). So, for example, claiming to be Welsh but possessing neither a Welsh accent, Welsh 'behaviours' nor Welsh language ability makes such a claim harder to sustain.

Hall (2002) suggests that those who cannot see themselves reflected in the 'mirror of the nation' can never feel like they properly belong. In Porthcawl this was not strictly true. Although this 'peripherality' *did* sometimes produce an indifference to Welshness - which is in itself significant- for most locals the 'unWelshness' of local place did not *preclude* claiming a strong sense of Welshness. Instead, locals simply had to *work harder* to place themselves in the nation. They claimed a Welsh identity *in spite of where they were from* and their own distance from 'proper' Welshness. This supports Seol & Skrentny's (2009:151) assertion that what makes hierarchical nationhood distinct from other types of nationalism is a simultaneous recognition of sameness and difference.

The Welsh example is distinct because the hierarchy of Welshness has not been institutionalised by the state. Instead, the hierarchy is 'informal', and has been discursively constructed. It is this level that I shall conclude by reflecting on.

Even 'peripheral' members of the nation engage in an active process of 'becoming national' (Bond, 2006). Those (partially) excluded by hierarchical narratives need a way of 'getting in', or 'becoming national'. What was significant in Porthcawl was how difficult it was for locals to articulate a Welshness which did not conform to the two dominant images of Welshness. Not one person proffered anything which came close to a 'civic' idea of Welshness (i.e., one rooted in the shared values of a nascent political sphere), a nebulous idea lionised by the political and academic class in Wales (Brooks, 2009). A civic identity, of course, depends upon tangible political power and visibility to gain traction, and Wales' weak public sphere and state apparatus means this cannot emerge. In the absence of a civic identity, there seemingly remain very few ways of becoming Welsh for those who are not reflected in the 'mirror of the nation' - there is seemingly no chance of charting a 'third way' which circumnavigates the dominant linguistic and classed versions of Welshness. In contemporary Wales, as the life experiences of the majority of the population increasingly move away from these outdated images, there is a need for new, accessible, modern referents of Welshness to emerge. But as Haesly (2005) correctly points out, Welshness, or at least anglo-Welshness, lacks tangible, accessible markers for people to relate to. The findings from Porthcawl on the *non-emergence* of new forms of national identity support Haesly's claims about the narrowness of the anglo-Welsh cultural repertoire.

Porthcawl is not geographically at the margins of the nation but discursively. Certain places are not *inherently* less national, just as certain classes (or ethnic groups) are not inherently more national. Rather, as Mann (2012) and Edensor (2002) note, place and class are significant determinants of how people relate to the nation in Wales because of the way these features are discursively chained to 'authentic' Welshness. In order to understand hierarchical nationhood we must therefore be cognisant of the structures of power which produce our commonsensical views of the nation. Ultimately, "nationalism is not simply about 'imagined communities'; it is more fundamentally about a struggle for control over defining communities, and in particular, for control over the imagination about community" (Helbling, 2007). The nation, and *who* is 'properly national', is continually refined at the intellectual level, then disseminated and made commonsensical through education, politics and popular culture (Hall, 1986). The referents of the nation can evolve over time and be discursively anchored to new issues, values and markers. It is a continual process of reworking (De Cillia et al, 1999). In Wales, the persistence of hierarchical nationhood, the *non-emergence* of new ways of being Welsh, is as significant as if Welshness had actually evolved to encompass new forms. Future research must interrogate the structures of power within Wales, what Gramsci (1971) calls its 'moral and intellectual leadership', and the production of the Welsh national imagination in post-devolution Wales.

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[1] The TWM is a condensed and simplified version of his earlier works with Madgwick and Van Mechelen 'The Red and The Green: Patterns of Partisan Choice in Wales (1983) and 'The Political Consequences of Welsh Identity' (1984), and should ideally be read in tandem with these works. These precursors were detailed political studies also based on the 1979 Welsh Electoral Survey (WES), which attempted to tackle the complex relationships between identity, class, cultural attachment and political affiliation in Wales. The TWM imposed an explicit geographical framework on to the findings of these earlier works.

[2] Posing the question 'Do you normally consider yourself Welsh, British, English or something else?' the WES survey found that 57% of respondents in Wales said Welsh; 34% said British; 8% said English, and 1% said something else. In Balsom's usage, 'Welsh', and 'British' simply refer to the primary identity picked.

[3] Whilst the TWM makes no moral claim about a hierarchy of Welshness, many of the subsequent engagements with the TWM clearly believe that regional models implicitly endorse a normative hierarchy of Welshness. Coupland et al (2006) write about the 'unedifying' effects of 'geographical models' of Welshness, and assert that claiming that different types of Welshness exist in Wales has often been reframed as "a quest for the real Wales" (2006:2), and "a hierarchy of experience that is too easily readable in terms of cultural authenticity, and perhaps even in terms of intrinsic value, greater to lesser" (2006:24). Yet Balsom assiduously avoided making value judgements regarding a 'sliding scale of Welshness', and noted in his 1984 work with Madgwick & Van Mechelen that "whether consciously or not, the effect of such (geographic) strategies is to introduce an almost qualitative distinction between Welshmen from one area and another" (1984: 164) and that "Wales is not a natural geographic entity and some form of division is a useful analytic device. But the subdivision of Wales into four regions does not imply a judgement about their Welsh identity, for a widespread sense of Welsh identity is common to them all" ( 1984:165)

[4] My use of this 'region' simply refers to the various areas which fall into Balsom's 'British Wales' zone. I do not treat it as a homogenous unit.

[5] It is important to note that the focus of this paper is not exploring the British-Welsh continuum or the evolving, context specific relationship between Welshness and Britishness. Rather it is simply about exploring the nature of Welsh identity in this hitherto underexplored region.

[6] Whilst there is evidence that suggests Welsh people place more trust in the Welsh Assembly and Assembly politicians than in the British Government and MPs, the public legitimacy of the institution remains limited (Scully & Wyn Jones, 2015). Voter turnout in Assembly elections has never passed 50%. Turnout in the referendum for further powers for the Assembly in 2011- sometimes held up as evidence of a new 'settled will' or belated acceptance of devolution- was 35.2%.

[7] Welsh Government policy on the Welsh language states that the Welsh language must be used and displayed in all public offices and in documentation. This includes Government and Local Government buildings and documentation, and public road signs. Private businesses and signs do not have to include Welsh, however (Welsh Assembly Government, 2014).

[8] The Welsh Government's 'Welsh Medium Education Strategy' was launched in 2010 which required local authorities to systematically assess demand for Welsh Medium education and to provide access to it if needed (Welsh Assembly Government, 2016).