

ZÁPADOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V PLZNI

FAKULTA PEDAGOGICKÁ

KATEDRA ANGLICKÉHO JAZYKA

Velšská identita v 21. století

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání

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Plzeň, 2024

UNIVERSITY OF WEST BOHEMIA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Wales and Welshness:

Welsh Identity in the 21st Century

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

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English Language in Education

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Plzeň, 2024

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně s
použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

V Plzni dne

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vlastnoruční podpis

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Bc. et Mgr. Andrew Tollet, M.Litt. for his valuable comments, guidance, help, and patience. Furthermore, I would like to express my appreciation to the friends and family who stood by my side during this challenging time.

ABSTRACT

Kilianová Sabina. University of West Bohemia June 2024. Wales and Welshness: Welsh Identity in the 21st Century.

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This thesis focuses on exploring Welsh national identity in the 21st century and analysing the impact individual events have had on its present form. The work is divided into three chapters.

The first chapter serves to define the ambiguous terminology essential for orientation in this thesis and its theme as well as establish the main components of national identity. The second chapter focuses on the characterisation of the different pillars of Welshness, describing the history, language, national symbols, and religiosity of Wales. The final chapter explores the causes of the formation of Welsh national identity in the 21st century and the consequences of the change. The notion of Welsh independence has gained support after Brexit, with approximately one-third of the population in favour. The advantages and disadvantages of this idea are being discussed and, alongside it, there is a growing interest in promoting Welsh culture. Efforts such as the Cymraeg 2050 plan and the enthusiasm of young Welsh people to preserve their linguistic heritage indicate a promising future for Welsh national identity.

Literature on Welsh themes and national identity has been researched simultaneously with online articles, mostly of government origins, documentaries, and reports.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the various aspects of development that have led to Welsh national identity in its contemporary form. The first part will discuss essential terms and their meaning, as national identity cannot be discussed without understanding what it actually is and where its origins lie.

The second part, and indeed what follows, is grounded in the scholarly view that national identity did not emerge simply for political motives but had a pre-political foundation. The history, language, and culture of Wales will be explored. The history of Wales, like that of any nation, is extensive; however, the main focus of the current work is not on the history of Wales itself and therefore will not go into all the finer details, but rather analyse primarily those events which are considered significant for the development of Welsh national identity.

The final part of the thesis is dedicated to the transformation of Welsh national identity in the 21st century and the way it has been shaped by significant national milestones, such as the 1997 devolution referendum, which served as a catalyst for the retrieval of Welsh self-awareness amid dissatisfaction with the centralised governance of Westminster. This revitalisation is evidenced by the coordinated efforts to rejuvenate the Welsh language, as exemplified by initiatives like the Cymraeg 2050 plan, thereby emphasising its crucial role as a cultural cornerstone. Post-Brexit conditions have intensified calls for independence, driven by economic disparities and a desire for self-determination.

1 Understanding National Identity

In order to comprehend the meaning of national identity, it is first necessary to understand some other concepts, such as when society started to discuss and represent national identities, and whether the term itself appeared with the establishment of the first nation-states and an awareness of one's own identity, or rather with contemporary multiculturalism.

1.1 Nation

The term 'nation' has been the subject of study by a considerable number of sociologists exploring whether a nation has its foundations in a political will or whether it requires the pre-political substance of identity, such as history, language, and culture as a basis for its emergence (Guérot, 2021, p. 23).

Those who base their definitions on political will believe that origin and the environment in which individuals grow up play no role in the formation of a nation. This view was held by the French writer Abbé Sieyès (1790, as cited in Guérot, 2021), who described a nation as a “collection of united individuals subject to a common law and represented by the same legislative assembly”.

On the other side, stands the definition of a nation which requires the pre-political substance of identity. One of the representatives of this theory is Montserrat Guibernau Berdún (1996), who defines a nation as “a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future and claiming the right to rule itself” (p. 47). Such a definition raises the question of whether all the people living under one government form a given nation when as a result of migration, national minorities are found in all countries.

Even though most of the immigrants will acquire citizenship in the new state, the question remains whether they will become part of the nation of their newly acquired

sanctuary or instead retain membership in their original nation (nationality).

If one were to follow the first definition of 'nation' mentioned in this chapter, the answer would be simple: immigrants would become part of the nation they immigrated to. However, in practice, this definition does not apply. When people move, they do not immediately become members of a nation but of a state, since a nation is a group of people who share the same history, traditions, culture, and, often, language (Nation, n.d., para. 1). Moving to another country does not necessarily mean adopting new traditions or embracing the unfamiliar history and culture of that nation.

After extensive consideration of why a nation cannot be defined only politically, but also culturally, it is necessary to focus on the second element of national identity, which is identity itself.

1.2 Personal Identity

The concept of personal identity raises philosophical questions that stem from the essence of humanity. Many people have pondered about who they are, what shapes them, where they will go when they die, and when they begin (*Personal Identity (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*, 2023, para. 1).

In the everyday world, outside of philosophy, personal identity can be expressed through the characteristics of personal qualities to which we relate. These properties subsequently shape "persona". Personal identity includes gender and national identity, which roughly consist of the gender and nation of which we consider ourselves to be a member, and the degree of importance placed on these affiliations (*Personal Identity (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*, 2023, sec. The Problems of Personal Identity).

The question of belonging arises from people's need to feel they belong somewhere. However, to find one's place of belonging, it is necessary to first understand one's own

identity, which begins when the body stops being controlled by basic human instincts. During this period of life, individuals start deciding what will become part of their identity and what will be excluded from it.

1.3 National Identity

National identity is a multifaceted and complex concept that has been the subject of extensive research and exploration in various contexts. From the construction of national identity in the schooling system to its implications in the legal and sociopolitical domains, the notion of national identity continues to be a significant area of study. This chapter delves into the intricate process of national identity construction, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of how individuals, communities, and nations form and define their sense of belonging and collective identity. By examining diverse perspectives and empirical evidence, this chapter seeks to shed light on the various factors that contribute to the formation of national identity and its impact on individuals and societies.

National identity belongs to the group of notions that occur to people once they leave their home country, usually for an extended period (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015, p. 6). This situation brings not only the abandonment of stability but the possibility of losing connection with one's mother tongue, customs, habits - and culture in general. If an individual's secure sense of national identity is not disrupted by their willingness, it may be thrown into confusion by national minorities or foreigners visiting a given country.

Canadian political philosopher Margaret Moore (2006, cited in Delanty & Kumar, 2006) brings these assumptions to life, considering nationalism and nations by stating that one's adoption to living in a new country can be facilitated by similarities in various aspects of life. It might involve language, traditions, or religion. Even though the adapting process will be simplified concerning daily functioning, the obstacle might occur in the field of self-

concept. For example, a Welsh person relocating to England, or vice versa, would not go through such a devastating dislocation as the person would be spared the hardships that come with learning a new language. In this instance, it will be significantly difficult for a Welsh person to acquire a new national identity.

Sceptics may argue that the sense of belonging to the place where the person was born and brought up and the fact that it provides a powerful sense of who the person is, is merely an emotional reaction resulting from early socialisation and that it has minimal effect on behaviour or attitudes. However, this view is difficult to support considering the available evidence (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015, p. 6).

Several scholars have already attempted to understand national identity through empirical research. From a sociological perspective, this was discussed by the Smith (1991), whose research establishes the fundamental elements of national identity, which include: a historical homeland or territory, shared myths and historical recollections, a widespread public culture, shared legal rights and obligations, and a common economy that allows for territorial mobility of its constituents. Yet Smith assumes that national identity is equivalent to the nation. National identity serves the purpose of providing a strong sense of community and shared history, which can help individuals avoid personal oblivion and restore collective faith. Identifying with a nation offers personal renewal and dignity through national regeneration, rather than just identifying with a cause or collectivity (Smith, 1991).

A participant of TEDx Talks (2023, 0:35), Max Kinlin - a 4th-year student of Global Politics, defines national identity as pertains to an individual's decision to associate with or experience a connection to one or multiple nations. Within this study, national identity consists of two key dimensions. The two key aspects of national identity are the sense of personal responsibility that individuals feel towards continuing the collective memory of people, places, and events, and the way in which important historical events are remembered,

such as those that are taught in schools. The future national identity of a country will be shaped by the government's choices in terms of what and how they choose to celebrate (TEDx Talks, 2023, 3:50). These factors are important to consider when examining national identity in the context of a particular country.

1.4 Nationalism

At first sight, it might seem that national identity and nationalism are two words implying the same meaning. The purpose of this section is to explain the difference between them. It is natural that the concepts overlap as the nationalism evolves from an awareness of one's national identity. This idea is held by Anthony Smith (1991) who claims that “nationalism...must be closely related to national identity, a multi-dimensional concept...”.

Kohn (2024) defines nationalism as “an ideology based on the premise that the individual's loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpass other individual or group interests”. In other words, this statement implies that when it comes to nationalism, national identity may be superior to other identities, such as personal identity, needs, and desires of individuals.

Kohn's definition of nationalism could be challenged by remarks about national identity, highlighted by David Miller (1995). Miller (1995) observes that the national identity of most people stays hidden away in the deeper recesses of the mind and it only comes to the surface of consciousness if faced with an emergency, or as Miller names it, a “dramatic event” (p. 18).

Another classical definition of ‘nation’ is stated in The Cambridge Dictionary (*Nationalism*, 2024): “the desire for political independence in a country that is controlled by or part of another country”. This statement could be considered as most relevant to the situation of Wales as well as Scotland.

2 The Main Pillars of Welsh National Identity

2.1 History

History is one of the foundation stones of national identity and it is essential to identify which historical events have had a significant impact on the development of the national identity of an individual or a nation. Therefore, this chapter examines the history of Wales and presents the most important milestones in Welsh history that have significantly influenced the form of Welsh national identity in the 21st century.

Every nation or individual, from time to time, reflects on the history of the society in which they were born or which they regard as their homeland. Answers can be found in the past, whether distant or near. The history of the entire world can be divided into prehistory, the period before written records, and history, the written trace of the past. In the case of Wales, the 1st century is the milestone, when the Romans brought the written word to Britain in AD 47 (*Prehistoric Wales* | Cadw, n.d.).

2.1.1 Prehistory

Events that fall in the prehistoric period are very significant for further development. During the Ice Age, approximately 1.7 million years ago to 11,000 years ago, Wales was geographically connected to the European continent. With the end of this inhospitable glacial period, the ice began to melt and the coastline we know today began to form.

There is evidence of human habitation in Wales from around 250,000 BC (Jones, 1990, p. 1). The oldest body found, however, dates to approximately 30,000 BC. The body was discovered by geologist William Buckland in 1823, who believed it to be the remains of a woman from the Roman period. It was smeared with red ochre and is therefore still known today as The 'Red Lady' of Paviland (History Is Ours - Documentary Channel, 2022, 01:45).

2.1.2 The Celts

During the following centuries, the population was divided into 4 tribes, also known as the Celtic tribes of ancient Britain. The Silures in southern Wales. The Dematea in the south-west. The Deceangli in the north and the Ordovices, in the centre of Wales. The Ordovices were led by the Druids of Anglesey (*Ancient Druids of Wales*, n.d.). Their death was described by the Roman author Tacitus, who documented the Roman conquest of Anglesey:

... Then, reassured by their general, and inciting each other never to flinch before a band of females and fanatics, they charged behind the standards, cut down all who met them, and enveloped the enemy in his own flames. The next step was to install a garrison among the conquered population, and to demolish the groves consecrated to their savage cults; for they considered it a pious duty to slake the altars with captive blood and to consult their deities by means of human entrails (*Ancient Druids of Wales*, n.d.).

These tribes had thousands of members each, their own royal family, and rituals. Despite some conflicts, they used a common language and knew each other's customs and gods. However, that did not last. In AD 43, a wave of Romans begins to roll over Britain, conquering it, and causing the inhabitants to lose dominion over their land for the first time.

2.1.3 Roman Occupation and the Arrival of Christianity

The strong resistance of the Celtic tribes did not defend Wales against the Roman conquest under the reign of Emperor Vespasian. Approximately at that time, the Romans began to construct roads, cities, and ports. A well-known example is Caerleon, a Roman city and major port, also known as the city upon the Usk. It was also the location of the Isca battle fortress, courtyard complex, marketplace, amphitheatre, and bathhouse. Caerleon represented a starting

point for future development, as the rural area at Caerleon alone had a population of around two thousand inhabitants.

The arrival and rule of the Romans brought unknown gods, language, ways of dressing, and thinking. This is demonstrated by the nearby Church of Caerwent, which might be the oldest Christian church in Wales. Here lies a stone tablet in Latin which establishes the foundation of the self-governing Council of the Silures. Only a generation after the battles, despite the great sacrifice of their ancestors, did the Silures decide to surrender to the Roman government and pay taxes for partial autonomy, which might be considered the first instance of devolution in the history of Wales (History Is Ours - Documentary Channel, 2022, 37:37).

The Roman administration did not benefit all individuals equally. Certain individuals were subjected to enslavement and transported to Rome to serve the local intellectuals and academics. Additionally, others were enslaved for labour in the mines, as the rich natural resources of Wales, including copper, lead, silver, and gold, were unearthed during the Roman occupation.

The exact date of the Romans' departure from Wales is not known, but it is generally believed to have been around AD 400 (Edwards, 2002; History Is Ours - Documentary Channel, 2022). Wales was left vulnerable to invasion and conquest by other groups, including the Anglo-Saxons, who gradually began to settle in the region and establish their kingdoms. After the departure of the Romans, Wales was divided into numerous small kingdoms ruled by dominant families (*Wales / History, Geography, Facts, & Points of Interest*, 2024b).

2.2 Significant Historical Events

The first notion of a Welsh unity presumably arose from the effects that the existence of Offa's Dyke had (History Is Ours - Documentary Channel, 2022b, 06:00). The first unity of Wales on

the question of law took place during the reign of Howel/ Hywel Dda the Good, who, together with experts from all over Wales, formulated a rather modern system of written laws (*Laws of Hywel Dda - National Library of Wales*, n.d.). Despite being subject to *The Laws of Howel*, the rulers of Wales in the 10th century were engaged in internal conflicts and were in a state of warfare with their Anglo-Saxon neighbours.

2.2.1 Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, the First and Last King of Wales

The Norman Conquest of England in 1066 is an exhaustively studied event in English history. However, the story of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, the last King of Wales, often remains overlooked. In 2013, the 1,000-year anniversary of his birth shed light on his crucial role in shaping Britain's political landscape (*Gruffudd Ap Llywelyn, the First and Last King of Wales - Historic UK*, 2023).

Gruffudd's rise to power began in 1039 when he became King of North Wales. He expanded his domain through strategic conquests, uniting Wales under his rule. Facing challenges from sea raiders and Anglo-Saxon forces, Gruffudd demonstrated military prowess and formed alliances with powerful figures like Earl Swegn Godwinsson (Davies, 1992, p. 106).

In 1055, Gruffudd forged an unlikely alliance with Ælfgar, the exiled Earl of East Anglia. Together, they defeated English forces, solidifying Gruffudd's dominance over the region. This alliance solidified Gruffudd's position as the paramount ruler of Wales. However, Ælfgar's death in 1062 weakened the alliance, allowing Harold Godwinsson to exploit divisions and ultimately defeat Gruffudd.

The fall of Gruffudd marked a turning point in Welsh history, paving the way for the Norman conquest of England in 1066. Harold's undermining of the Welsh-Mercian alliance weakened the resistance against the Norman invaders, leading to the subjugation of Wales and

Anglo-Saxon England under the Norman yoke (*Gruffudd Ap Llywelyn, the First and Last King of Wales - Historic UK*, 2023).

2.2.2 Prince of Wales

This title has been passed down through the royal family for hundreds of years, always to the next in order of succession. The formulation already implies a strong connection with Wales. The interrelation arising from the Treaty of Montgomery was concluded by Henry III and Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, 'Llywelyn the Last', who was subsequently appointed the first legitimate Prince of Wales in 1267 (*Kings and Princes of Wales*, 2023). His ambition to exert control over the territories of Wales resulted in substantial payments to England. This issue disappeared the moment Henry III had died, and Edward I took his place, which was Llywelyn ap Gruffydd's downfall (History Is Ours - Documentary Channel, 2022b, 43:20).

The next and last native Prince of Wales was Llywelyn ap Gruffydd's brother, Dafydd ap Gruffydd, who was accused of high treason and consequently hanged, drawn, and quartered. With his death the last independent Welsh kingdom fell, and the English gained control of Wales. This marks the end of independent Wales, which Edward I demonstrated by passing on the title of Prince of Wales to his heir, Edward II (*Kings and Princes of Wales*, 2023). In 1400, a spark of hope emerged for the Welsh. Owen Glendower claimed the title of Prince of Wales and led a revolt, which failed despite his determination and the temporary support of France. As a result, the Welsh were punished by being cut off from trade, causing poverty and starvation for the local population (History Is Ours - Documentary Channel, 2022b, 51:00).

2.2.3 Henry Tudor Becomes Henry VII

In the 15th century, the lands of Wales were in disrepair. Wales as well as England had become a battlefield for greedy noble families seeking more lands, power, and property. This resulted in a division of the people into two factions: the Red Rose Party, represented by the leading family known as the Lancasters, and the White Rose Party, represented by the York family (Edwards, 2002, p. 53).

Wales also was split by these brutal wars. The west of the country was ruled by the Lancastrians, while the east was under York rule. The Welsh barons took sides according to their interests. In February 1461, a crucial battle occurred at Mortimer's Cross, near Wigmore, between Welsh forces supporting the Yorkist claim to the English throne and those supporting the Lancastrian claim. The triumphant party was led by the youthful Duke of York, who would eventually ascend the throne under the name King Edward IV that same year. Notably, among the captives from this conflict was an elderly gentleman named Owen Tudor, the father of Jasper Tudor and grandfather to a future monarch, Henry VII (Edwards, 2002, pp. 53–54).

The Yorkist faction's grip on power, particularly evident in bustling urban centres such as London, encountered resistance from the nobility who were unwilling to surrender their authority gradually. Jasper Tudor rallied support from the Welsh, particularly in West Wales where a desire for self-rule persisted due to historical grievances dating back to the era of Owen Glendower. Despite numerous obstacles, the exiled Earl of Richmond successfully landed at Milford Haven on August 7, 1485. As he moved through the Teivy Valley, he was joined by South Welsh forces, later reinforced by North Welsh and English nobility. Meanwhile, Richard's army mobilised. The pivotal clash occurred at Bosworth on August 22, 1485, marking the culmination of the Wars of the Roses. Though Richard displayed bravery,

he was ultimately defeated and killed. Henry's subsequent coronation marked the end of Yorkist rule and the beginning of the Tudor era (Edwards, 2002, pp. 54–55).

Henry VII represented the hopes of Wales for the rise of the country and its people, as he was born in Wales and was a quarter Welshman. However, even though he carried the emblem of the red dragon on his standard, he did not bring Wales the independence and justice it desired and became the next King of England (History Is Ours - Documentary Channel, 2022c).

2.2.4 The Acts of Union

The Union of Wales with England was established by two Acts of Parliament which were passed in 1536 and 1543. The 1536 Act was a decisive step taken by Henry VIII's government to assert control over Wales. The principal distinction between this Act and the Statute of Wales from 1284 was that it did not merely annex Wales to the English Crown, but rather attempted to fulfil the King's wish to incorporate Wales into the Kingdom (*Wales*, 2024). By declaring Wales incorporated, united, and annexed to England, the Act aimed to establish uniformity in governance and administration throughout the region.

One of the most significant outcomes of these acts was the imposition of English law as the official legal system in 1536 Wales, superseding traditional Welsh laws. Moreover, the establishment of parliamentary representation for Welsh counties provided Welsh inhabitants with a voice in English legislative affairs.

Further developing the efficiency of legal administration in Wales, the Courts of Great Sessions was established by the 1543 Act. Twelve counties of Wales were divided into four judicial circuits, while the 13th, Monmouthshire, was attached to the Oxford circuit (*Wales | History, Geography, Facts, & Points of Interest*, 2024a).

Although the primary aim of the Acts of Union was not specifically directed at the Welsh language, their implementation did bring certain changes in its usage. While English was encouraged as the language of official proceedings and administration, the widespread knowledge of Welsh as the sole language in many regions, such as outside south Pembrokeshire, south Gower, parts of the Vale of Glamorgan, and border areas, prevented the complete exclusion of the Welsh language from the legal environment. Consequently, interpreters were often used to facilitate communication in Welsh-speaking communities, underlining the enduring importance of Welsh despite efforts to promote English as the dominant language (*BBC Wales - History - Themes - the 1536 Act of Union*, n.d.).

Henry VIII's ambition and intimate life were responsible for a profound religious shift, not only in Wales. His longing to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon sparked a conflict with the Pope and the Catholic Church in Rome. Henry VIII established and became the head of the Anglican Protestant Church in 1534. Consequently, monasteries throughout England and Wales, where monks preserve records of Welsh history and culture, were vandalised at the king's command.

2.2.5 Griffith Jones and his Circulating Schools

Griffith Jones, a native of Teifi Valley in Wales, was born in 1683 and embarked on a mission that had a profound impact on the spiritual and educational landscape of his homeland. After being ordained as a priest in 1707, Jones envisioned a revolutionary approach to education: temporary schools that taught in Welsh (D. Jones, 2023). Despite facing initial challenges, Jones's vision became a reality with the help of Bridget Bevan, a philanthropist who provided financial stability to the schools.

The establishment of circulating schools was a turning point in Welsh literacy and religious understanding. By the late 18th century, the majority of the Welsh population was

literate, which was a testament to the success of Jones and Bevan's efforts. Furthermore, the impact of the circulating schools went beyond education, as it intertwined with the Methodist Revival and fostered a sense of Welsh identity rooted in spirituality and linguistic pride (History Is Ours - Documentary Channel, 2022c, 54:30). Jones's deliberate focus on religious education for all, regardless of social status, reinforced the Welsh people's sense of communal identity. The Methodist Revival was a religious movement that occurred in the 18th century, characterized by the growth of Calvinistic Methodism, and leading to the formation of the Calvinistic Methodist Church also known as the Presbyterian Church of Wales (Feet, 2022).

2.2.6 Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru, founded in 1925 as a response to threats to the Welsh language and culture, evolved from a cultural and linguistic nationalist movement into a significant political force in Wales. During the 1960s, the party transformed and expanded its programme to include urgent social and economic issues alongside cultural objectives.

One of the key contributions of Plaid Cymru to Welsh national identity lies in its advocacy of the Welsh language. The party played a crucial role in the passage of legislative measures such as the Welsh Language Acts of 1967 and 1993, aimed at promoting and protecting the Welsh language and granting it equal legal status with English. These efforts underlined Plaid Cymru's commitment to preserving and nurturing Welsh linguistic heritage, a fundamental aspect of Welsh identity.

While the party has faced some challenges down the years in urban areas, its regional support in Welsh-speaking regions has been substantial. Plaid Cymru's representation in both UK Parliament and the National Assembly have empowered it to represent Welsh interests on various fronts.

As recent elections indicate, Plaid Cymru remains a prominent force in Welsh politics, continuing to advocate for self-government, the promotion of Welsh language and culture, and the advancement of Welsh interests on the national stage (Broughton, 2024).

2.2.7 Prince Charles's 1969 Investiture Speech in Welsh

In the summer of 1969, a pivotal moment in Welsh history took place inside the historic walls of Caernarfon Castle in Wales. Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, stood before a gathering of dignitaries and spectators to be inaugurated as Prince of Wales. This centuries-old ceremony aroused a sense of resentment among Welsh citizens, given that the ceremony is a commemoration of the conquest of Wales by an English monarch. For this reason, Plaid Cymru refused to participate in the event (Davies, 1992, p. 650).

The act of situating the investiture ceremony in Wales was a deliberate decision of the Royal Family, symbolising a concerted effort to bridge the gap between the monarchy and the Welsh nation.

What truly set this investiture apart, however, was Prince Charles's decision to deliver his speech not only in English but also in Welsh. This gesture was unprecedented and deeply meaningful, demonstrating a recognition of Wales's distinct linguistic and cultural identity. By addressing the nation in Welsh, Prince Charles affirmed the importance of the Welsh language and sought to connect with the Welsh people on a deeper level (Nicolaou, 2023).

For centuries, the Welsh language had been marginalised and suppressed, viewed by some as a relic of the past. Prince Charles's decision to speak Welsh on such a prominent occasion served to elevate the language and confirm its place as the cornerstone of Welsh identity.

2.2.8 The Government of Wales Act 1998

The Government of Wales Act 1998 introduced significant changes to the governance structure of Wales by establishing the National Assembly for Wales. This redefined the relationship between Wales and the United Kingdom, laying the foundation for a more decentralised governance model (*Government of Wales Act 1998 / Law Wales, 2021*). The Act introduced a hybrid electoral system combining first-past-the-post and proportional representation to ensure fair representation reflecting the diverse political landscape of Wales.

By July 31, 1998, the character of the assembly had been determined, with members elected through this hybrid system. This approach aimed to ensure representation commensurate with the popular vote share (Davies, 1992). The Act transferred executive functions from the UK Government to the National Assembly, granting autonomy over crucial areas such as agriculture, education, health, and local government.

Furthermore, the Government of Wales Act 1998 granted the National Assembly the authority to reorganise Welsh public bodies, streamlining administrative functions and reinforcing Wales's self-governance. This legislative framework facilitated greater autonomy and accountability in decision-making processes within Wales, marking a significant shift in the governance structure of the region (*Government of Wales Act 1998 / Law Wales, 2021*).

2.3 National Symbols

National symbols are integral to the identity and heritage of a nation, embodying its history, values, and aspirations. Wales, a country steeped in tradition and culture, boasts a range of symbols that reflect its unique identity and rich heritage.

One of the most recognisable symbols of Wales is its national flag, Y Ddraig Goch, or the Red Dragon. This iconic flag features a bold red dragon passant on a field of green and white. The origins of the red dragon as a symbol of Wales can be traced back to ancient

mythology and folklore, where it symbolised power, sovereignty, and protection (Gymreig, 2008, p. 124). As depicted in legends first referenced in the Mabinogion, the red dragon of Wales engages in a timeless conflict against an encroaching white dragon, often interpreted as symbolising England. This enduring struggle, culminating in victory for the red dragon, solidifies its enduring significance as a representation of Welsh identity and pride. Employed in various capacities as a symbol by Welsh military forces throughout history, it was officially adopted as the focal point of the Welsh national flag in 1959 (*National Symbols of Wales*, n.d.).

The leek, a root vegetable, has long been entrenched as a symbol of Welsh culture. Its association with Wales is so deeply rooted that the tradition of wearing a leek to signify Welsh heritage is described as an 'ancient tradition' in William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, first performed in the 16th century. According to legend, the 7th century king of Gwynedd, Cadwaladr, instructed his soldiers to affix a leek to their armor to facilitate easy identification in the midst of battle. This tale may have influenced the Tudor royal household, of Welsh origin, to mandate the wearing of leeks on St. David's Day, the National Day of Wales, further solidifying the practice (*National Symbols of Wales*, n.d.). The leek symbolises strength, resilience, and solidarity among the Welsh people (Jones, 2020, p. 45).

The national flower of Wales is the daffodil. Blooming in early spring, the vibrant yellow flowers of the daffodil symbolise renewal, hope, and the arrival of spring. The integration of the daffodil into Welsh culture, which occurred in the 19th century, remains somewhat mysterious. However, its elevated status was probably influenced by its Welsh name, *cenhinen Bedr*, meaning 'Peter's leek', as leeks had been a symbol of Wales since before the 16th century.

The national anthem of Wales is called "Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau" (Land of My Fathers), and celebrates the beauty, history, and spirit of the Welsh nation. The Welsh national anthem

was composed by a father and son duo in the 19th century. The father, Evan James, wrote the lyrics, and his son, James James, composed the melody. The anthem evokes a sense of patriotism and unity among the Welsh people, resonating with audiences at national events and gatherings.

Other national symbols include Welsh love spoons, male voice choirs, the red kite, the triple harp that originated from Italy, today known as the Welsh harp, and rugby union.

2.4 Welsh

The Welsh language, known as Cymraeg, is a Brythonic language, which means it has British Celtic origins and was spoken in Britain even before the Roman occupation. Its rich history dates back to 600 BC. Over time, the language evolved and developed its distinct characteristics. However, the language faced challenges in the 19th and 20th centuries, as English became the dominant language in Wales. This led to a decline in the use of Welsh, and by the mid-20th century, the language was in danger of dying out.

Efforts to revive the Welsh language began in the 1960s, with the establishment of the Welsh Language Society and the Welsh Language Board. These organisations worked to promote the use of Welsh in education, media, and public life (Jenkins, 2007). In 1993, the Welsh Language Act was passed, which gave Welsh official status in Wales and required public bodies to provide services in Welsh (*Welsh Language Act 1993 / Law Wales*, 2020).

Today, Welsh is spoken by approximately 30% of the population of Wales (*Welsh Language Data From the Annual Population Survey: October 2022 to September 2023 | GOV.WALES*, 2024). The language is taught in schools, and there are Welsh-medium schools where all subjects are taught in Welsh. There are also Welsh-language television and radio stations, and Welsh-language newspapers and magazines. In addition, there are initiatives to

promote the use of Welsh in public life, such as bilingual road signs and the use of Welsh in the National Assembly for Wales (Welsh Government).

The Welsh language is characterised by its distinct sound, with a variety of consonant sounds and a relatively simple system of vowels (Ball, 1984). Despite its challenges, Welsh remains an important part of Welsh national identity and cultural heritage.

2.5 Religion and The Church in Wales

The religious landscape of Wales has deep roots in ancient Celtic traditions, characterised by reverence for nature and animistic beliefs. The Celts, who inhabited Wales and other parts of the British Isles, held natural phenomena like rivers, mountains, and forests in high regard, believing them to be inhabited by spirits (Asher, 2023). However, the arrival of Christianity in Wales during the Roman period around the 4th century AD led to a gradual decline in these Celtic practices.

The origins of The Church in Wales can be traced back to the “Age of the Saints” in the 6th century where early Christian missionaries, such as Saint David, played a crucial role in spreading Christianity and establishing monastic communities throughout the country.

Saint David, also known as Dewi Sant in Welsh, is a significant figure in Welsh religious history. Born in the 6th century, he is revered as the patron saint of Wales and commemorated on March 1st, the day of his passing. Saint David's impact on the Welsh church was profound, as he founded several monasteries, including the renowned one in St. Davids. His monastic principles became a model for religious communities in Wales, emphasising simplicity, asceticism, and the pursuit of knowledge (*Who Is St David? / St Davids Cathedral*, n.d.).

Beyond his religious contributions, Saint David's legacy extends to the cultural heritage of Wales. He is a national symbol associated with miracles and acts of kindness.

Therefore, he also had a great influence on art, as he became the subject of many poems, songs, and stories, and his image is often depicted in Welsh art (Fulton & Wooding, n.d.). The Welsh bardic tradition dates to the time of St. David. The bards were poets and musicians who composed and performed works in Welsh, often in praise of Welsh heroes and legends (Sacks, 2011). St. David himself was allegedly a skilled harpist, and his love of music and poetry has been passed down through the generations as an important part of Welsh culture. His influence on Welsh culture is also evident in the annual St. David's Day celebrations, where people across Wales honour his memory and celebrate their national identity.

Despite the deeply rooted Christianity in Wales dating as far as the Roman colonization, the formal establishment of the Church in Wales as an independent office has occurred in relatively recent times. The disestablishment of the Church in Wales from the Church of England occurred in 1920 with the passage of the Welsh Church Act 1914, marking a significant milestone in the church's history. This legislative action severed the formal ties between the two institutions, granting the Church in Wales greater autonomy and enabling it to govern its affairs independently (*Ecclesiastical Law and the Church in Wales / Law Wales*, 2021).

The 2021 Census in Wales has revealed a significant change in religious beliefs. The majority of people aged 73 and under identify themselves as having 'No religion'. In addition to Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, and responses such as 'Other religion' or 'Not answered' also appeared in the survey (*Religion by Age and Sex in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics*, 2023).

This recent shift is part of a larger social change. The latest Census data showed that 'No religion' now outweighs 'Christian' as the main belief system. This shift has been seen by Wales Humanists as a move towards a more secular future, prompting calls for public institutions to adapt to the changing demographics. The Census question on religion is seen as

deceptive. Many identified as 'Christian' for cultural rather than religious reasons and yet, the overall result shows a decline in religious affiliation. This move towards secularism is also reflected in legislative changes in Wales, like humanism being included in education and fewer state-funded faith schools (*2021 Census: Most People in Wales Under 74 Tick 'No Religion,'* 2023).

3 Welsh Identity in the 21st Century

Applying the insights gained in the previous chapters, this chapter will discuss the definition of Welsh national identity in the 21st century.

In the Introduction, it was stated that this thesis will not address the concept of nation and therefore national identity as defined by Abbé Sieyès (1790, as cited in Guérot, 2021), who described a nation as a group of individuals united under shared laws and represented by a single legislative body. The current situation and opinions expressed by the Welsh people indicate that the definition does not apply in Wales. An additional point that invalidates the above-mentioned definition is the fact that Wales is a semi-autonomous country. The incorrectness of this definition may be demonstrated by opinions like: “Westminster is a shit show at the moment. If anyone out there thinks Westminster’s doing a great job, they must work at Westminster” that occur with increasing frequency and intensity in Wales (ABC News In-depth, 2023, 1:00).

3.1 The Question of Welsh Independence

Towards the conclusion of the 20th century, Welsh national identity underwent a profound transformation following the 1997 referendum on devolution. This crucial event led to the enactment of The Government of Wales Act 1998 and the formation of the Welsh Assembly (ABC News In-depth, 2023, 12:40). Notably, preceding these political milestones were impactful protests held over Bala, aimed at preserving the town from being flooded to create a reservoir for Liverpool. The town was flooded in 1965 despite all efforts. The flooding of the village triggered the partial self-governance of Wales and served as the inspiration behind the song *Yma O Hyd* (Ingen, 2021), now recognised as both the anthem of the national football team and a rallying cry for the contemporary push for independence (ABC News In-depth,

2023, 10:00). This historical event, often overlooked by outsiders, holds significant meaning for the Welsh populace, stirring a deep sense of national identity.

Despite the growth of nationalism triggered by these occurrences, journalist Betsan Powys (BBC News, 2023) made efforts to examine the myths surrounding the village and its destruction. After analysing the perspectives of involved parties, the journalist took the view that this was not an action-focused against a Welsh-speaking community but rather a crucial step taken by Liverpool in response to increasing water needs. The decision to inundate Capel Celyn (Bala) was viewed as essential for the greater benefit of providing a larger water supply, as local officials aimed to address housing issues and improve living conditions in the area.

However, a considerable number of people viewed it as another form of suppression of the Welsh language, regarding its decline began after The Acts of Union limited its use in official affairs, with subsequent measures further impacting its status (*The History of the Welsh Language*, n.d.). A notable example from recent history is The Welsh Not (ABC News In-depth, 2023, 8:25). It was a school punishment system from the 19th century. The practice involved a wooden board worn by schoolchildren to shame them for speaking Welsh, the aim of which was to deter the use of the Welsh language. The student wore the board until another child was caught speaking Welsh when the punishment was passed on. At the end of the day, the child with “The Welsh Not” would face beatings or other harsh penalties (Evans, 2022). These attempts to eliminate the Welsh language were repulsed by the previously mentioned Griffith Jones, the Plaid Cymru political party, or Prince Charles.

Over the past ten years, the youth in Wales have demonstrated a keen interest in safeguarding their native language. They gather at social gatherings to honour and promote their language. The national objective is to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Carwyn Jones, who served as the First Minister of Wales from 2008 to 2018, and Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, Alun Davies, acknowledge the importance of the Welsh language as a part of national identity, and with the support of the government, they fully approve the *Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers* plan. Their vision is to create a bilingual Wales where the Welsh language will be part of everyday life (“Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers,” 2017, pp. 2–3).

The plan of achieving a million speakers by 2050 consists of three main themes which are to resurrect the Welsh. The first theme aims to generally increase the number of Welsh speakers by utilising early-age education and by supporting language transmission in families (“Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers,” 2017, p. 31). The second theme then wants to further reinforce the speakers by making services, workplaces, and social places available in the Welsh language (“Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers,” 2017, p. 47). The last theme then discusses specific changes that need to be implemented and improved upon in contrast to the current system. Those vary from digital space, media, and education all the way to the economy itself (“Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers,” 2017, p. 61).

Williams (2017) highlights the ambitious nature of the plan to achieve one million Welsh speakers by 2050, acknowledging its inherent flaws and challenges. He critiques the government's lack of clarity regarding the definition of a Welsh speaker eligible to be counted towards the goal of one million Welsh speakers. The author also questions whether Welsh speakers residing in the UK will be included in this count. Additionally, he emphasises the complications associated with monitoring and tracking the progress, doubting the possibility of this task. Despite his sceptical stance, however, the author supports the initiative.

The current sense of pride in the Welsh language may stem from the influence of Michael D. Jones, a prominent figure in the 19th century who played a significant role in shaping Wales' national identity as it stands today. According to Tudur (2006), his

revolutionary views on the matter helped define and distinguish important parts of Welsh identity.

Jones did not regard race or ethnicity as defining features of one's national identity, believing it is to be defined by unique social features shared by society and, most importantly, by language. Between the years 1848 and 1849 Jones spent his time in the US city of Cincinnati which at its time held a great population of Welsh immigrants. He was able to observe the transformation of the national identity of the Welsh community and in his eyes also its decline. Jones saw the abandonment of the Welsh language from generation to generation. This phenomenon was also followed by decreasing numbers of religious people among the Welsh migrants – another trait that Jones viewed as an integral part of the nationality (Tudur, 2006).

Jones (2006) claimed that “The loss of our language will not only mean the loss of a language but also the loss of our religion and morality to a considerable degree” (p. 117).

Although Jones himself admitted that it would be more beneficial to abandon the Welsh language altogether in favour of English, he still advocated preserving this part of the national identity so that the Welshness may live on through the language instead of falling victim to anglicisation. He was met with opposition from those who viewed Welshness as incompatible with modernity or as a hindrance to social and economic progress. Despite these claims, his efforts led to reformed grammar and alphabet of the Welsh language. He participated in the creation of the Welsh political movement “Cymru Fydd” and also wrote articles for the Welsh “Y Celt” newspapers (Tudur, 2006).

3.2 The Post-Brexit Situation

In the post-Brexit and Covid-19 era, the Welsh populace increasingly realised that despite being granted certain powers to control their laws and government policies through Senedd

Cymru (the Welsh Parliament) and the Welsh Government, the administration of Welsh affairs still falls under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom (How Is Wales Governed?, n.d., sec. How is modern Wales governed?). This realisation came as the Welsh population started strongly to perceive a reality where the promises of a brighter future following their decision to leave the European Union had not materialised. On the contrary, some residents' quality of life has even declined to the extent that they must decide between eating and heating (ABC News In-depth, 2023, 0:45). And while poverty has been a long-term issue for Wales, it has never risen to such levels (ABC News In-depth, 2023, 14:35). Approximately 25% of the Welsh population resides in poverty, which is defined in this context as earning less than 60% of the average wage (*Poverty in Wales – Oxfam Cymru*, n.d.). Child poverty in Wales surpasses that of all other UK nations, standing at approximately 28%, equating to nearly one in every three children (*Child Poverty*, n.d.).

Brexit did not impact only urban areas but also agricultural regions like the Eidda Valley. Farmers in post-Brexit Wales are facing the brunt of the changes. While some farmers supported leaving the EU, others were aware of the significant economic consequences it would have on their livelihoods. One major outcome is restricted entry to the European market, previously a key destination for Welsh lamb exports. This development has resulted in a substantial decline in lamb prices, leading to a loss of income for local farmers (ABC News In-depth, 2023, 18:05).

This fluctuation has resulted in a powerful response from disgruntled Welsh citizens, who increasingly view independence as a viable solution to address longstanding socio-economic inequalities and political neglect. The growing support for Welsh independence reflects a broader reconsideration of the nation's identity in the 21st century, eager to resolve issues of governance, economic development, and social justice.

The failure of the current political system to address adequately Wales's needs has fuelled the emergence of a citizens' movement for greater autonomy. According to recent polls, more than 30% of the population supports an independent Wales, and debates surrounding the topic have evolved from being a fringe movement to a mainstream conversation, reflecting a deeper reimagining of Wales's place within the broader context of the United Kingdom and Europe (ABC News In-depth, 2023).

Hayward (2022) emphasises the significance of the independence debate in shaping Wales's future. Regardless of the eventual outcome, the conversation surrounding independence has initiated a process of redefinition of Welsh national identity, questioning deep-rooted notions and inspiring a newfound sense of solidarity. In this sense, the discussion on Welsh independence serves as a possible catalyst for broader societal transformation, paving the way for a Wales that is more assertive, inclusive, and resilient in navigating the complexities of the 21st century.

As Wales continues to navigate the uncertainties of post-Brexit and Covid-19 realities, the quest for independence is emerging not only as a political aspiration but also as a symbol of Welsh resilience, and determination to create a future that truly reflects its rich cultural heritage and aspirations for self-determination. The determination towards Welsh independence may be seen during the football matches of the Wrexham team which became a symbol for a whole nation, rallies organised to bring attention to Welsh culture, and social events such as marches organised by the Cambria Band (ABC News In-depth, 2023, 27:17).

However, in these considerations, it is important to acknowledge that for some of those who have embraced the idea of Welsh independence following Brexit, identity plays a secondary role. Their support rather stems from pragmatic concerns about their well-being and Wales's place within the United Kingdom (Hayward, 2022).

3.3 Census 2011 and 2021

The 2011 and 2021 censuses of England and Wales include sections on national identity as part of their data collection. The most recent census was conducted on March 21, 2021, following the May after Brexit and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One notable change revealed by Roskams (2022) is the slight decrease in the overall percentage of individuals identifying with at least one UK national identity. In 2011, this figure stood at 92.0%, but by 2021 it had declined to 90.3%. While seemingly marginal, this shift suggests a nuanced revaluation of national affiliations among the population.

The data from 2011 and 2021 in Wales notably differ. While 55.2% of individuals selected a "Welsh" only identity in 2021, representing a slight decrease from 57.5% in 2011, there was a notable increase in those identifying solely as "British," rising from 16.9% in 2011 to 18.5% in 2021 (Roskams, 2022).

Additionally, the proportion of individuals selecting both "Welsh" and "British" identities, with no other identities, increased from 7.1% in 2011 to 8.1% in 2021. This suggests a growing complexity in how individuals in Wales perceive their national identity, with some embracing a hybrid Welsh-British identity (Roskams, 2022). This premise may be considered disproved at this moment, in the light of public responses expressed by almost one-third of the Welsh population (ABC News In-depth, 2023). While there has been an increase in individuals identifying themselves as Welsh and British in 2021, it is likely that if the survey had been conducted in 2023 or 2024 the outcomes would have been rather distinct. Indeed, the increase in the number of individuals with multiple national identities may have been due to the strong influence of pro-Brexit policies and campaigns.

The decrease in individuals identifying solely as Welsh may be indicative of a broader trend towards a more inclusive understanding of identity, including both local and national affiliations. The increase in those identifying solely as British could be interpreted in various

ways. It may reflect a stronger sense of British identity among certain segments of the population, potentially influenced by factors such as political discourse, media representation, and socio-economic or geographical conditions (OpenAI, 2024). These shifts in national identity reflect the multifaceted nature of identity formation and its responsiveness to socio-political and cultural influences.

Conclusion

This thesis aims to describe and analyse the contemporary state of Welsh national identity. In order to attempt this, it was necessary to focus on understanding concepts related to national identity, and its main pillars through an exploration of the history and significant historical events, language, religion, national symbols, and the current political landscape. This thesis has sought to discover the extent to which Welsh people in the 21st century perceive their identity.

The outcome of my thesis is that over 30% of the population supports an independent Wales, and debates surrounding the topic. Welsh inhabitants value their rich history, traditions, and distinct language; however, a significant number of individuals who currently identify with the concept of an independent Wales seem to be motivated more by economic and political motives. Nevertheless, more than half of the population identifies with the "Welsh" only identity.

It currently appears that the future of Welsh national identity is closely tied to the preservation and promotion of the Welsh language, the celebration of cultural heritage, and the pursuit of greater self-determination. Initiatives such as the *Cymraeg 2050* plan, and the determination of Welsh youth to revitalise their linguistic heritage suggest a promising path for Welsh identity in the years ahead.

Czech Summary

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá velšskou národní identitou v 21. století a je rozdělena do 3 klíčových částí.

V první části se čtenář seznámí s obecnými pojmy, jako je národ a osobní identita a s odlišnými interpretacemi těchto termínů. Tato část se zároveň zaměřuje na definici národní identity a jejích klíčových prvků.

Část druhá obsahuje detailní popis jednotlivých prvků národní identity Walesu. Například si zde čtenář může projít řadu významných událostí pro formulování identity tohoto národa. Dále je čtenáři poskytnut popis velštiny a vývoje velšské religiozity.

Poslední část této práce je zaměřena na analýzu současné situace ve Walesu. Výrazně se zaměřuje na otázku osamostatnění Walesu, v rámci Velké Británie. Toto téma se stalo velmi aktuální s ekonomickými následky, které přinesla pandemie COVID-19 a vystoupení Velké Británie z Evropské unie. V neposlední řadě tato práce analyzuje výsledky sčítání lidu v letech 2011 a 2021, která se zaměřovala i na otázku národní identity. Záměrem je porovnání nalezených dat a následná úvaha nad zjištěnými hodnotami.

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