Where is Wales? Narrating the territories and borders of the Welsh linguistic nation

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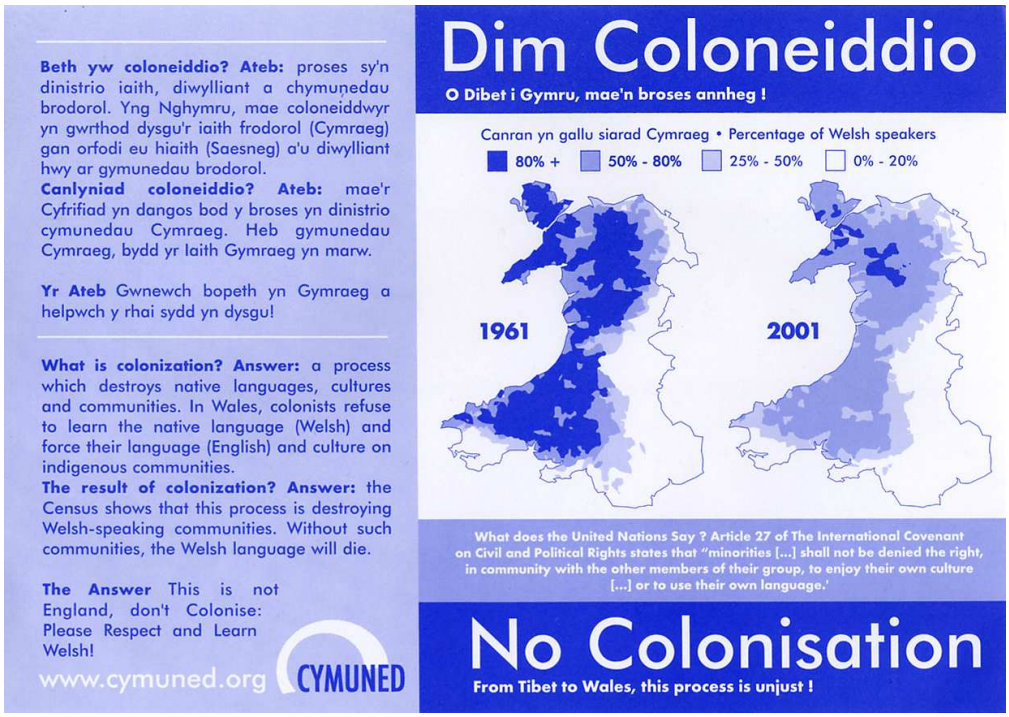

FIGURE 1 THE PROCESSES OF COLONIALISM SAID BY CYMUNED TO BE AFFECTING THE WELSH HEARTLAND
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Abstract

The paper shows how different organizations in the post-devolution period have erected internal borders within Wales, which reflect Welsh linguistic geographies and differing constructions of the 'true' extent of the Wales linguistic nation. Key to this debate has been the formation of the pressure group Cymuned. Cymuned's formation has led to numerous political and territorial tensions with the discourses promoted by established linguistic and political movements within Wales. Theoretically, the paper illustrates the importance of viewing borders and territories as spatial entities that are narrated in character. Empirically, it sheds light on the complexity of borders in post-devolution Wales.

Key words: Borders, territories, Wales, culture region, Cymuned, devolution

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Introduction

In what can be regarded as one of the most insightful and accomplished examples of its genre of geographical research, BOWEN (1959) sought to delineate 'Le Pays de Galles' or, in other words, the geographic extent of Wales, drawing on a variety of linguistic, historic, geomorphic and climatic themes. The paper was based upon Bowen's Presidential Address to the Institute of British Geographers during the same year and attempted to illustrate the contested geographic character of Wales as a political and cultural entity. At one level, Wales was a straightforward political entity or functional region, delineated by the boundaries with which we are familiar today. And yet Wales was also constituted as a 'pays' or a region characterized by specific 'physical or cultural endowments' (BOWEN, 1959: 1). The main signifier of the Welsh pays for Bowen was the particular cultural endownment of the Welsh language. Issues to do with language, culture and identity, therefore, were intimately intertwined in his definition of the culture region of Wales. Throughout, BOWEN (1959: 23) showed how the 'pays' of Wales 'should be looked upon as something quite distinct from the larger political unit of the same name'. His paper comprised a perceptive yet, in today's terms, traditional take on the regional geography of Wales, especially with regard to its focus on a cultural 'heartland' in the north and west. At the same time, we argue that his arguments have much to say concerning two interrelated issues that are of conceptual and empirical importance. At one level, his work examined the *territorial* extent of Wales as a nation and culture region but, by implication, it also had much to say concerning the production of real and imagined

borders within Wales.

The current paper builds on this tradition by showing how different organizations in recent years have sought, through their policies, strategies and more general discourses, to 'narrate' (NEWMAN and PAASI, 1998) borders and territories within Wales, which reflect not only Welsh linguistic geographies but also, we maintain, differing constructions of the 'true' extent of the Wales linguistic nation. Specifically, the paper elaborates on the contested construction of linguistic borders and territories in some quarters of the Welsh nationalist movement in the period post-devolution. Key to this whole debate has been the formation of the Welsh language pressure group Cymuned in 1999. Cymuned's emphasis on a new set of policy proposals and strategies has led to numerous political tensions with the discourses promoted by the more established linguistic and political movements of Cymdeithas yr Iaith and Plaid Cymru (FOWLER, 2004a). Importantly, this political debate concerning the role of the Welsh language in contemporary Wales has had territorial implications: key questions have centred on the 'true' territorial extent of the Welsh linguistic nation and, relatedly, on the need to rethink the linguistic and identity borders within Wales.

In a theoretical context, therefore, the paper illustrates the importance of examining the role of borders and territories in shaping group identities, as well as showing them to be narrated – and, therefore, inherently produced and contested – spatial concepts (VAN HOUTUM and VAN NAERSSEN, 2002: 126). In addition, it demonstrates the multiple 'voices' that are involved in this process of territorial narration. On a more empirical level, we shed light on the complexity of borders and territories, both real and perceived, existing in post-devolution Wales. The following section

contextualizes the empirical themes through a discussion of the produced and contested character of territories and borders. An empirical section then follows, which discusses the contested construction of Welsh linguistic territories and borders within a post-devolution Wales. Brief conclusions seek to draw out the broader implications of the empirical discussion for our understanding of cultural and linguistic territories and borders.

Rethinking (cultural) territories and borders

The two geographical concepts of territories and borders are intimately linked (NEWMAN and PAASI, 1998: 187). As SACK (1986: 32) has rightly shown, territories exist through the delineation of borders. Conversely, we cannot think about borders without considering that which is being defined, namely a territory. ANDERSON and O'DOWD (1999: 593), in this vein, have argued that the significance of borders derives from the use of 'territoriality as a general organizing principle of political and social life'. Despite this commonsense understanding of the mutual interdependence of territories and borders, recent work has sought to problematise the two concepts, as well as explicating more systematically the relationship that exists between them.

Firstly, we need to think through the way in which territories and boundaries are produced, rather than being spatial concepts that are pre-given or merely exist. In general terms, MURPHY (1996; see also LEFEBVRE, 1991) has shown how 'territory' should not be viewed as a constant or given concept, specifically by illustrating the changing meaning and significance of state territories and territoriality over time. More significant in the context of this paper are the arguments that have

been made regarding the need to conceive of the territories of the nation as ones which are produced in both material and discursive senses (see WILLIAMS and SMITH's, 1983 discussion of the national infrastructure). The connection between a nation and a territory does not simply exist: it has to be forged and continuously re-emphasised – or flagged – often in mundane and banal ways (BILLIG, 1995; EDENSOR, 2002) if it is to enter the popular lexicon. In many ways, such sentiments echo PAASI's (1991; 1996) work regarding the need to view regions or nations as territorial concepts that are continually 'becoming' through varied processes of 'institutionalisation'. Key to this 'becoming' are the interlinked processes of differentiation and integration (PAASI, 1996; see also SLETTO, 2002). Nations and/or regions are differentiated from others through the promotion of a discourse of difference, whereas they are simultaneously subject to a discourse of integration, which highlights their internal homogeneity (see also DALBY, 1988; VAN HOUTUM and VAN NAERSSEN, 2002). Similar themes emerge in the context of recent attempts to theorise boundaries. NEWMAN and PAASI (1998: 189) maintain that although 'boundary studies have had a long, descriptive and nontheoretical history in geography' (e.g., PRESCOTT, 1965), they have in recent years undergone a conceptual renaissance. Part of this project has revolved around the need to view borders and boundaries as geographical concepts that are produced in nature. Geographers have drawn inspiration from social and cultural theory to show how boundaries should be viewed as contingent processes in motion (e.g. GREGORY and URRY, 1985) or, as VAN HOUTUM and VAN NAERSSEN (2002: 126) put it, 'a social practice of spatial differentiation', while those engaged in critical geopolitics have illustrated the various discourses that help to shape political and popular understandings of boundaries. In this latter context, work by DALBY (1999), for

instance, has demonstrated that boundaries are produced by territorialized discourses of power and knowledge. This academic endeavour has enlivened more traditional understandings of boundaries as fixed and relatively unproblematic geographical features. In addition to this conceptual challenge to the fixity of territories and boundaries, it is clear that recent empirical developments have encouraged academics to re-evaluate the significance of these spatial categories. As KEATING (2004: xi) has noted, the whole of Western Europe, in particular, has experienced a sustained and far-reaching process of regionalisation – as a result of a mixture of economic, cultural and political influences – which has called into question the fixity of territories and boundaries (see also AMIN 1999). The UK – and Wales within it – has not been immune from these developments. As a result of the creation of a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh, Northern Irish and London Assembly, and the devolution of power to various regional bodies in England, there has been a substantial refocusing of governance within the UK in both functional and territorial contexts (see M JONES *et al.*, 2005; GOODWIN *et al.* 2005). Once again, these developments illustrate the contingency of territories and boundaries within contemporary political economy.

Secondly, we need to appreciate the fact that state organizations are not the only producers of territories and borders. As NEWMAN and PAASI (1998: 187) have indicated, there has been a tendency for geographers and political scientists to equate territories and borders with the territoriality of the state. This is a reflection of the existence of a state system that structures the lives of people and, consequently, provides the political and social conditioning that influences the work conducted by academics. The focus on the role of the state does not merely represent an academic myopia since similar themes appear in the world of politics. In Europe, for instance,

the processes whereby new regional territories and borders have been produced have tended to be directed by states and other official bureaucratic organizations, while 'ordinary people and their regional identities have on many occasions remained marginal' (PAASI, 2002: 138). There is a growing recognition, nonetheless, particularly within the academic fields of sociology, anthropology and aspects of cultural geography of the multiple territories and borders that help to shape social and spatial life. Part of the impetus for this work has derived from a focus on issues of identity within certain strands of academic research, and especially notions of identity politics (KEATING, 1998). Arguments here have emphasised how different aspects of individual and group identity help to shape a variety of formal and informal politics (see AGNEW, 1997: 249). Key to this identity politics is a stress on the existence of multiple sociospatial identities and the manifold borders or boundaries that give form to these identities (see BARTH, 1969; BOURDIEU, 1991; KNIPPENBERG 2002). Identities, and their related borders and spaces or 'territories', in this sense, can be local or transnational in character and can conceivably exist with little reference to state boundaries and territories (see COHEN, 1982; EISENSTADT and GIESEN, 1995). Similarly, work in critical geopolitics has shown how different actors are involved in the reproduction of both territories and boundaries. SLETTO's (2002) study of the delineation of Nariva Swamp in Trinidad as a conservation area, for instance, shows how a variety of different actors were involved in negotiating the status, as well as the territory and boundaries of the space of conservation.

The danger, in this respect, is that we adopt an either/or mentality in which academics either seek to show how state territories and boundaries still play a crucial role in shaping group identities or how these formal territories and borders are irrelevant to

the development of alternative forms of identity politics. As NEWMAN and PAASI (1998: 200) note, there is a tendency for these different types of identities, territories and boundaries to be studied 'from alternative perspectives and disciplines, with little attempt to link them into a more holistic approach'. One aim of this paper is to show how an appreciation of the associations between state-driven and 'society' based territories and boundaries provides a more rounded understanding of the reproduction of contemporary linguistic national identity within Wales (in a related context, see SLETTO, 2002). In doing so, the paper echoes PAASI's (1996: 11) attempt to reconcile the relationship between a socio-spatial consciousness – centred on the activities of the state's agents and existing at the national scale – and a social representation – which lies within the domain of more ordinary people within localities – within the production of borders and regions.

One way of taking forward these debates concerning the production of territories and borders is to draw upon recent work in the social sciences that has sought to emphasise the way in which socio-spatial identities are 'narrated' or 'scripted'. NEWMAN and PAASI (1998), in particular, have maintained that an examination of the way in which boundaries are narrated can prove a useful conceptual and methodological tool, which can enhance our understanding of the contested process of becoming that affects them. Work of this type has been undertaken with regard to a variety of geographical concepts (e.g., with regard to place, see ENTRIKIN, 1991), but we would suggest, following NEWMAN and PAASI (1998; see also SLETTO, 2002) that there in considerable scope to engage in empirical studies of the way in which territories and borders are narrated by a variety of actors. Such a focus marries two distinct elements. At one level, a focus on narration shows how social life is

'storied' or, in other words, how identities are scripted by individuals and groups (SOMERS, 1994). Individuals and groups tell stories concerning themselves and their past. Of course, such themes have been examined in great detail in the context of group identities, especially nationalism (BHABHA 1990; GELLNER, 1983; SMITH, 1986; HOBSBAWM and RANGER, 1983). In another important and, perhaps, more geographical context, a focus on narration should illustrate the significance of places, territories and boundaries for the scripting of individual and group identities. Despite the rhetoric of hyperglobalisers (O'BRIEN, 1992; OHMAE, 1992), place and space still matter, not least in the context of the reproduction of individual and group identities (e.g., MANN, 1997; TAYLOR, 1995; JONES and JONES, 2004).

Newman and Paasi, in their discussion of the role of boundaries within contemporary political geography, allude to DUCHACEK's (1970) concept of territorial socialization when discussing the role of territory within a 'wider socialization narrative' (NEWMAN and PAASI, 1998: 196). While their discussion of the role of narrative within a process of territorial socialization is useful, we contend that their sole focus on 'top-down', state-driven mechanisms of spatial pedagogy is unwarranted. To an extent, Newman and Paasi's exclusive focus on the role of school textbooks, national media and so on in scripting state territorial narratives is explained when they maintain that the main aim within their paper is to examine the narration of state boundaries and territories. But it can be explained only up to a point. As we have argued above, the narration of territories and boundaries takes place at a number of different scales and in numerous contexts other than those that are purely structured by state organizations (see SLETTO, 2002). Even in situations where official and

bureaucratic state boundaries, territories and identities are the object of enquiry, we would contend that other, important narratives are still recounted and should be heard. What we advocate, in this regard, is a more nuanced interpretation of the scripting of state boundaries, territories and related identities. In one context, this could examine the active role played by state personnel in narrating, or making sense of, processes of state reproduction and restructuring. This theme has received attention with regard to the current territorial and organizational restructuring of the British state under devolution (see JONES *et al.*, 2004; 2005). In another important context, it can refer to alternative narrations of the geographies of state borders, territories and identities. In some instances, these alternative narrations may exist 'beyond the pale' or, in other words, may only be relevant to certain marginal individuals and groups within civil society (JONES and MACLEOD, 2004). Alternatively, sometimes there will be scope for engagement between these alternative scriptings of boundaries, territories and identities, and those promoted by state organizations (SLETTO, 2002). The empirical case study that we discuss in the following section shows how two narrations of the Welsh culture region – the one emanating from civil society, the other from the newly-devolved Welsh Assembly – can become enmeshed with one another.

Language, political identity and the narration of a Welsh culture region

In this section, we detail the contested narration of a Welsh region within Welsh contemporary politics. In this respect, the process of regionalisation has had far-reaching effects in Wales over recent years. The creation of the National Assembly for Wales – brought about as a result of political, cultural and economic demands – has helped to reify the Welsh region or territory as a meaningful governmental entity.

But Wales itself is also internally divided into different regions. Important divisions exist with regard to economic disparities between different regions of Wales. Recent research has shown how real and perceived economic inequalities between north and south Wales, in particular, have led to internal tensions within the country. In this sense, many public figures from north Wales have been keen to narrate a Welsh territory that is economically fragmented (see JONES *et al*. 2005). In some measure, such narrations have been based on economic fact. As Table 1 illustrates, there are considerable economic disparities between the different regions, which may be comtributing to internal divisions within the Welsh territory.[1] Much of Welsh economic success is located in the south and east of the country, especially in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, whereas areas in the west and north remain in a deprived state.

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But although these regional narratives can sometimes draw on themes relating to a Welsh economy, the recurring and dominant theme within this discourse relates to the Welsh language. As such, it is instructive to outline briefly the role of the Welsh language within recent cultural and political life in Wales. The Welsh language, after a high point at the beginning of the twentieth century, has experienced a period of sustained decline, both in terms of its total speakers and in terms of the percentage of the population of Wales that claim a mastery of the language (COLE and WILLIAMS 2004: 559). It has been demonstrated by BOWEN (1959) and others (see especially AITCHISON and CARTER, 1994; 2004; COLE and WILLIAMS 2004: 560-1) that the linguistic decline has possessed a geographical manifestation. The retrenchment of the language into broadly speaking rural areas located in the west of Wales has led

to the formation of a so-called 'heartland' of the Welsh language. Not surprisingly, this linguistic decline has fuelled much of Welsh nationalist sentiment during the twentieth century. Plaid Cymru, during its early years, for instance, was far more concerned with securing the linguistic and moral future of the Welsh nation (see GRUFFUDD, 1994; McALLISTER, 2001) than it was with electoral success or political independence for Wales. In addition, the creation of Cymdeithas yr Iaith, a pressure group especially tasked with promoting the status of the Welsh language, once again draws attention to the politicisation of language within Wales. Similarly, the main aim of Cymuned – as is witnessed in the following paragraphs – is to secure the future of Welsh as a community language, since it is only this living language, they argue, that can testify to Wales' distinctiveness as a nation. Taken together, the aims of these various organisations illustrates the extent to which the Welsh language is viewed as a crucial badge of Welsh identity.

The empirical discussion in this section is structured around four interrelated themes: the conflicting interpretations within Welsh civil society of the geographical extent of the Welsh heartland; the political rhetoric that has been applied to the Welsh heartland by various organizations in Welsh civil society; the arguments made by these groups concerning the relationship that should exist between the Welsh heartland and the rest of Wales; and the implications of these various debates within Welsh civil society for the governance of language within Wales, particularly within the Welsh heartland. These themes draw our attention to the debates surrounding the narration of a Welsh-speaking heartland and, in a related context, to the alternative ethnic and civil conceptions of the Welsh nation (see FOWLER, 2004a). Our main sources of evidence for explicating the various narrations of cultural and linguistic boundaries,

territories and identities within contemporary Wales are documentary sources relating to the Welsh nationalist organizations that have been involved in contemporary (linguistic) politics in Wales and fifty-five semi-structured interviews conducted with the leaders or 'intellegentsia' of the Welsh nationalist movement (for theoretical and methodological accounts of the use of interviews in charting social and spatial change, see BRYMAN, 2001; KITCHIN and TATE, 1999; LAYDER, 1998; MASON, 2002; SILVERMAN, 2001).[2]

Defining the Welsh heartland

Although much academic work, particularly by geographers (e.g. BOWEN, 1959; AITCHISON and CARTER, 1994; 2004), has alluded to the existence of a so-called 'Fro Gymraeg' or Welsh-speaking heartland – located in the west and the north of the country – there has been little agreement concerning its exact geographical delineation. In other words, there been little consensus concerning the territorial shape of the 'heartland' region (PAASI, 1991). Our interviews with various key actors in Cymuned, in particular, would seem to indicate a serious attempt to grapple with a difficult process, namely an effort to define the territorial extent and borders of the Welsh heartland. One of the key strategists within Cymuned, for instance, argued as follows:

> We're working on this at the moment…The problem of course with defining the Fro Gymraeg is because so many people have migrated to the Fro Gymraeg, and are colonizing in the sense that they are not learning the language, and using it, that there are areas which are Welsh-speaking areas in the sense...that Welsh is the language of the natives...yet, that the percentage of the whole population that speaks Welsh has dropped down low. So there is a problem about defining the Fro Gymraeg.

There is obviously a recognition in this context that the 'Fro Gymraeg', the key

geographical context within which Cymuned propagates much of its political and cultural rhetoric, is not a pre-given territory with defined boundaries. Rather, it is a territorial construct whose exact definition is subject to political debate, and one which can be affected by social and spatial change. This fact has not stopped members of Cymuned, in particular, to attempt to develop quasi-scientific and nuanced interpretations of the territories and boundaries of the 'Fro Gymraeg'. The same respondent outlined a relatively sophisticated 'two-tier' model for mapping the extent of the heartland:

> There are several possible models at the moment...I think that two levels of Fro Gymraeg are required. Two classes of areas in a way, because there is so much variance. So the core areas, a core Fro Gymraeg, will be something like, that at least 80% of the people who have been born in Wales, speak Welsh...also that over half of the total population speak Welsh. Those are the core areas. The wider Fro Gymraeg will be areas where at least half of the population who have been born in Wales speak Welsh. And at least one third of the total population.

This attempt to articulate a two-tier Welsh heartland, we would argue, is highly significant, since it reflects two admissions, one explicit, the second more implicit. Firstly, and most clearly, that certain parts of Welsh heartland have experienced an in-migration of English speakers and an out-migration of Welsh speakers and have, therefore, suffered a reduction in the proportion of the population with a mastery of the Welsh language. Such a process of in-migration into the Welsh 'heartland' is the main *raison d'être* for Cymuned as an organization (see below) and echoes the more general claims that have been made concerning the impact of migration and processes of globalization on territories and regions (see ANDERSON and O'DOWD, 1999; PAASI, 2002). Secondly, and perhaps more contentiously, we would argue that it also reflects an implicit admission that the construction of a 'Fro Gymraeg' as a

heartland in which the Welsh language is a key part of the fabric of community life is merely that: a construction. The 'Fro Gymraeg', *contra* the more bald statements made by various political organizations and commentators in contemporary Wales, is not a homogeneous territory in which the Welsh language acts as the sole or, in some case, even the main means of societal communication and reproduction. To put it simply, the term 'y Fro Gymraeg' masks the existence of a highly variegated culturally-defined territory.

It is significant that Cymuned have been aware of the conflict between the actuality of a highly-variegated linguistic space within the 'Fro Gymraeg' and the need to portray it as a united linguistic territory. One of our respondents alluded to an interesting debate that took place in Cymuned's annual conference in 2004:

> We had quite a discussion, and a healthy discussion to be honest, in the Cymuned conference this year about the exact term that we were to use. We wanted leadership from the membership. Was it the term 'Fro Gymraeg' [Welsh-speaking area], or 'Y Broydd Cymraeg' [Welsh-speaking areas] in the plural which they favoured?Well, we had a fairly decisive vote in the end in favour of the term 'Y Fro Gymraeg'.

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Clearly, the need to portray a united and potentially homogeneous Welsh linguistic territory took precedence in this case over a more nuanced and, perhaps more honest, admission of the existence of a multiplicity of different Welsh-speaking communities within the north and west of Wales. It might have been valuable, we would contend, to offer a more honest appraisal of the character of the 'Fro Gymraeg', one which acceded to notions of unity *and* difference within regard to the linguistic geography of the heartland. Efforts to narrate the extent of the territories and the boundaries of the Welsh culture region have not been simple in any sense. There has been little

consensus regarding the exact methods or criteria that should be used to narrate the extent of the Welsh heartland, leading to difficulties in scripting the heartland as an integrated region and, in a related context, in differentiating the heartland from the remaining regions of Wales (PAASI, 1996).

Valuing and protecting the 'Fro Gymraeg'

The importance of the 'Fro Gymraeg' for the Welsh language and, to an extent, the Welsh nation have been the source of much academic and popular debate over a number of years. In academic contexts, the work of geographers such as BOWEN (1959) and AITCHISON and CARTER (1994; 2004), and sociologists such as REES (1950; see also DAVIES and REES, 1960), has alluded to the significance of the Welsh heartland as a territorial foundation from which the Welsh language and culture can survive and potentially thrive. However, it is within Welsh nationalist circles that the concept of a heartland has been most hotly contested. Saunders Lewis, the first president of Plaid Cymru, stressed an organic link between identity, language and rurality. Lewis favoured the deindustrialisation of the south Wales coalfield and argued that 'agriculture should be the chief industry of Wales and the basis of its civilisation' (cited in MCALLISTER, 2001: 53). Plaid Cymru came to adopt a more pragmatic, urban and economically-oriented stance during the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, a perennial strategic tension exists to this day within Plaid Cymru, between the relative merits of targeting resources on their half a dozen 'heartland' constituencies, or otherwise casting the net more widely (and thinly) across the south Wales valleys and even into so-called 'British Wales' constituencies (BALSOM, 1985).

The clearest manifestation of the character and importance of the Welsh heartland has appeared, however, in the rhetoric of Cymuned (see MCGUINNESS, 2002; 2003). The Cymuned pressure group was formed in 2001 as a reaction to the increasing focus within Welsh nationalist politics on civic issues and a belief in a related lack of attention paid to the perceived ethnic and linguistic core values of the Welsh nation. As part of this development, the leadership of Cymuned developed a series of ideological dichotomies which conceptually delineated 'ethnic' from 'civic' Welsh nationalists (JOBBINS, 2001; BROOKS, 2001); 'Welsh speaking' from 'English-speaking' 'ethno-linguistic groups' (BROOKS, 2001); and 'Y Fro Gymraeg' from the rest of Wales in terms of domestic policy priorities (CYMUNED, 2001b; see also JONES, 1986; LLYWELYN, 1986). Shortly thereafter, 'colonisation' and 'colonialism' became key words in Cymuned's ideological lexicon (WEBB, 2001), applied specifically to the processes of unsustainable in-migration that were said to be affecting the Welsh heartland (see Figure 1).[3] These ideas justified both the formation of Cymuned and its ideological stance, as was explained to us by a leading Cymuned activist:

> The main reason for founding Cymuned was the pitiful situation of Welsh speaking communities. The decline that was happening because of the in-migration, and because of the out-migration of young people. And I saw communities dying in front of my eyes to be honest, on a very, very fast scale. I saw that because I went away from this area in '70 and came back in the nineties. And had an incredible eye-opener of seeing what had happened in those twenty years. And it was happening faster and faster still.

****FIGURE 1 THE PROCESSES OF COLONIALISM SAID BY CYMUNED TO BE AFFECTING THE WELSH HEARTLAND****

It would be unwise, however, to portray Cymuned's rhetoric with too broad a brush. Their attitude towards the issue of in-migration, for instance, is highly variable. Officially, Cymuned welcomes in-migration but deplores an unsympathetic and unsustainable 'colonisation' of rural Welsh-speaking Wales, but certain individuals have displayed a more combative attitude towards in-migration in general. It is the attitudes of these individuals, in particular, which has in certain instances led to criticism of Cymuned by members of Cymdeithas yr Iaith and Plaid Cymru.

Whatever the character of the processes that are said to undermine Welsh-speaking communities within the 'Fro Gymraeg', there is a strong assertion that these communities will play an important role in the continued reproduction of the Welsh language and the Welsh nation. This is a theme that unites all three of the main political and linguistic groups in contemporary Wales: Plaid Cymru, Cymdeithas yr Iaith and Cymuned. The main argument propounded, in this regard, is that the Welsh language, in order to survive and thrive, must be rooted in some way in particular communities where it is spoken as a 'natural' language. The vast majority of our respondents – as representatives of these three organizations – were sympathetic to the need to support Welsh-speaking communities within the heartland in particular and to protect them with regard to housing, employment and linguistic issues. Not surprisingly, however, these sentiments were articulated most clearly in the context of Cymuned. One Cymuned member argued:

> I think that it's neccesary for us to try to keep the Fro Gymraeg...unless there are communities and areas where Welsh is the natural language of the community, I don't feel that there is a future for Welsh...that is, it will become a minority language in all areas and in the end it won't be very different from the Cornish, for example. That is, a hobby for people who have an interest in

> cultural and linguistic things, but a minority hobby, in the same way that Latin was a hobby until fairly recently for an educated minority, if you like.

Such an argument is acceptable, at one level, since it emphasises the importance of attempting to preserve certain communities where the Welsh language is spoken on a day-to-day basis. More contentiously, it seems to position those individuals who speak the Welsh language outside the borders of the 'Fro Gymraeg' as ones for whom the language is not 'natural' or for whom the Welsh language is merely a passing interest or hobby.

Cymuned's language draws heavily on the narration of borders and territories: ones which can enable Welsh-speaking communities both to withstand the threat arising from in-migration and, in time, to expand outwards into the rest of Wales. Such narratives of exclusion, particularly with regard to in-migration, have increasingly characterized much of contemporary political debate (see VAN HOUTUM and VAN NAERSSEN, 2002). Of course, there is a danger that the process of narrating internal borders within Wales – or, in other words, of defining a Welsh heartland in a strict manner – will lead to problematic conceptions of the relationship between the heartland and rest of Wales. At one level, this is a social tension between Welsh speakers within and outwith the 'Fro Gymraeg' but it is also an explicitly geographical tension between culturally-narrated territory and a more politically-narrated national territory. These relationships and tensions between the heartland and the remaining Welsh territory and peoples are discussed in the following section.

The 'Fro Gymraeg' and the political territory of Wales: narrating the relationship

The most straighforward tensions that arise, in this context, are those between the

narratives of Cymuned, which centre explicitly on the linguistic significance of the 'Fro Gymraeg' and the narratives of Cymdeithas yr Iaith and Plaid Cymru, which are more predominantly based on the political boundary between Wales and England. Indeed, for many in Cymdeithas yr Iaith and Plaid Cymru, the attempt to focus attention on the Welsh heartland is deemed to be detrimental to the Welsh language, culture and nation. A young member of Cymdeithas yr Iaith maintained as follows:

> I see it as problematic when people compartmentalise Wales, and say that this is a more Welsh area, and this area isn't. For example, the Eisteddfod is in Newport [in south-east Wales] this year, isn't it. And I know for a fact that Cymuned aren't holding gigs there, because of the idea perhaps that the area isn't Welsh enough. And I just think "well, how do you define a Welsh area?" And to what extent can you tie it down to one small, restricted area. I understand that there are differences. But I believe that what we mustn't do is alienate ourselves from the non-Welsh speaking Welsh people to start, an industrial area where there is massive potential for us to expand on Welshness. Yes, it will be totally different from the Welshness of Bethesda [in north-west Wales], for example. But I believe you have to, like, embrace it as a country.

More stinging and explicit criticisms of the alleged territorial exclusiveness of Cymuned's conception of the importance of the Welsh heartland came from one prominent member of Plaid Cymru:

> Certainly, that is part of [their] philosophy, where [they try] to say that it's a territorial matter for the west. And [they] said in a public meeting in Merthyr Tydfil, to people who have learnt Welsh, and who have fought to establish Welsh-medium schools, said that their fight wasn't relevant to the language at all. I don't understand that at all, aside from being an insult towards people who are restoring the Welsh language in the valleys.

In defining Welshness and the Welsh linguistic territory in such narrow terms, there is a danger, according to some activists, that Welsh cultural identity will only be

meaningful category when ascribed to relatively small groups of individuals living in a few rural communities in the north and west of Wales or, as one long-time language activist put it, 'i lond dwrn o bentrefi ym Mhenllyn a Penllyn, cefn gwlad Ceredigion ac yn y blaen/to a handful of villages in the Llyn Peninsula, Penllyn [the area around Bala], rural Ceredigion and so on' (see also BOWIE, 1993). Importantly, too, it runs the risk of alienating the significant efforts made by Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers in south-east Wales to promote the Welsh language, either through supporting Welsh-medium education or through attending language classes.

More complicated narratives do arise, however, in this context. There is a strong sense in which Cymuned themselves are trying to grapple with this potential territorial tension between the 'Fro Gymraeg' and the remaining parts of Wales. There is a fundamental tension that exists between Cymuned's official rhetoric and the views that have been expressed by certain individuals within the organizations. Officially, Cymuned seeks to promote the Welsh language throughout the whole of Wales or, as one member put it, 'bod y Gymraeg yn iaith i Gymru gyfan/that Welsh is a language for the whole of Wales'. At another level, it is clear that vast majority of its popular support has been derived, not surprisingly, from north and west Wales. Similarly, as was noted above, it has made clear time and time again that its main commitment as an organization is to the Welsh-speaking communities that lie within this region. This sense of detachment from the linguistic circumstances of, and problems facing, other areas of Wales was justified as follows by one Cymuned member:

> Someone who is campaigning for the natives in the United States, and is concentrating on the pro-Indian linguistic rights in Montana. Well, gosh, you don't discuss the politics of the United States as a whole. No, they have one aim, don't they, and that is campaigning

for those particular minority rights.

In this sense, a focus on the more culturally-defined territory of the Welsh heartland is justified, given the specific problems that are alleged to be facing Welsh-speaking communities within it. Of course, one aspect that the above quote fails to mention is that the Welsh language is an official language throughout the whole of Wales. The comparison with the situation of native American speakers in Montana is, therefore, somewhat misleading since a succession of political narratives have ensured that issues relating to the Welsh language have been rescaled to the Welsh national scale.

More posivitely, other individuals within Cymuned sought to move the debate forward from the exclusive discussion on a Welsh culture region. In a series of policy submissions and presentations, Cymuned has developed the concept of an elected 'Welsh Heartlands Authority' in order to promote the administrative unity of Welsh speaking areas that are currently divided by local authority boundaries (CYMUNED, 2001a, 2001b, 2003). Under Cymuned's proposals, the Welsh Heartlands Authority would 'take over all executive, representative and advisory responsibilities, at local government level, in the fields of planning, housing, economic development, education and communications' in the territory of jurisdiction, defined in the first instance by percentages of Welsh-speakers (CYMUNED, 2003: no page). Interestingly, Cymuned state that a Welsh Heartlands Authority need not neccesarily be a territorially contiguous area, as the authority would adopt 'any other administrative community that may decide in due course, by a two-thirds majority in a local referendum of the electors in that community, that it wishes to come within the jurisdiction of the Welsh Heartlands Authority.' (CYMUNED, 2003: no page). A new form of politics, and political territory, is therefore being narrated by Cymuned as a

way of enabling a more positive engagement with the threat to Welsh-speaking communities. The distribution of the Welsh heartland throughout a number of different local authority areas was seen as something that hampered purposive and practical efforts to remedy the problems facing these communities. The emphasis on administrative reform as a means of tackling the problems facing Welsh-speaking communities is novel and may indicated a more sophisticated and formal approach to the narration of the Welsh culture region than has hitherto been attempted.

Narrating new state borders and territories in Wales

A key significance of what we have discussed above is that its import has extended well beyond civil society and has influenced the continuing state narrations of borders and territories of, and within, Wales. Part of the reasoning behind the formation of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 was to bring forms of governance closer to the people of Wales and it is clear that various political and pressure groups within Wales have sought to make full use of this new space of citizenship (e.g. CHANEY *et al.*, 2001; JONES and OSMOND, 2002; MORGAN and MUNGHAM, 2000; TAYLOR and THOMSON, 1999). Furthermore, it is possible to argue that the National Assembly for Wales has acted in a relatively receptive way to the new demands being placed upon it by these various actors in civil society. This claim is especially pertinent in the context of language policy. The increasing role played by groups from civil society in helping to define a potential new region within Wales, we believe, enables us to qualify PAASI's (2002: 138) claims regarding the lack of voice given to 'ordinary people' in the processes of regionalization taking place within Europe.

Our interviews with protagonists within the language field, especially Cymuned, indicated a sustained effort to influence the evolution of the linguistic policy agendum. A number of Cymuned's members, for instance, attended meetings and public consultations held at the NAfW. Moreover, one key figure within the organization believed that Cymuned had been successful in its attempt to shape political attitudes towards the Welsh language:

> Cymuned succeeded in placing the future of the language as a community language on the political agenda, there's no doubt about that. And it was very successful. *Iaith Pawb* makes it totally clear that the continuation of Welsh as a community language is important, and I don't think that would have been as true to the degree that it is true in the document...but for the general atmosphere that Cymuned created in 2001 and 2002.

The above quote draws our attention to the key influence brought to bear on the NAfW's attitude towards language policy, most especially by Cymuned. The NAfW has published a number of documents in recent years, which have sought to outline specific policies and strategies that can enable Wales to remain a bilingual country. Most significantly for our paper, a key consideration within these strategies and policies is the need to deal with the preservation of Welsh as a community language within the so-called heartland. We can consider firstly a policy statement made by the Welsh Assembly Government, entitled *Dyfodol Dwyieithog/A Bilingual Future*, and published in July 2002 (WAG, 2002). The purpose of this document, as the title indicates, is to outline the Assembly's role in 'revitalizing the Welsh language and creating a bilingual Wales (IBID: 1). A key strand within the policy statement is to invigorate Welsh as a *community language*. It is accepted at the outset that 'the reduction in the number of primarily Welsh-speaking communities is clearly one of the most serious threats to the future of the Welsh language' (IBID: 11). Two main

policy solutions are advocated in order to address this threat. This first is to create economically and socially sustainable communities. This will enable individuals living in these communities to continue to live and work there if they wish. The second policy solution is to encourage planning and housing policies and decisions to take account of the linguistic character of communities.

Further documents reiterate the same commitment to preserving Welsh as a community language within the Welsh-speaking 'Fro Gymraeg'. *Iaith Pawb*, the Action Plan for the Welsh language, also published by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG, 2003), elaborates on the need for policies that are able to target the particular issues faced by the Welsh-speaking heartland. The policy review of the Welsh language, *Our Language: Its Future*, conducted by the Culture Committee and the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee of the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW, 2002), too, emphasises the same need to develop a raft of policies that can address the specific issues facing Welsh-speaking communities within the Welsh heartland. The substantive success of such policy reviews will depend on political will. In our view, there exists an entrenched hostility among Labour's 'British' or 'materialist' wing towards intervention on behalf of the language. This hostility has its roots in the intensity of the competition for political space in yet another Welsh identity 'heartland' – the south Wales valleys – between Labour and Plaid Cymru (FOWLER, 2004b). Labour backbench antipathy towards the very notion of a Welsh-speaking 'heartland' is likely to be a serious, informal impediment to the Welsh Assembly Government's formal language policy aspirations.

Instead, we would argue that the significance of NAfW policy documents is the way

in which they have begun to officially narrate new borders and territories within Wales. There now exists a set of strategic narratives, in the field of economic development, housing and planning in particular, that are beginning to 'institutionalise' the existence of a new linguistic border and territory within Wales. Interestingly, efforts have been made within governmental circles to define the precise extent of the 'Fro Gymraeg'. Quoting academic research, *Our Language: Its Future* (NAfW, 2002) states that in 1961 279 communities in Wales (out of a total of 993) recorded that at least 80% of their community could speak Welsh. By 1991, only thirty-two of those communities remained. According to the report, 'this percentage of eighty per cent is extremely important to the future prospects of the Welsh language since it denotes the threshold required by any language to survive as a thriving community language' (NAfW, 2002: 24). On the basis of such concerns, *Our Language: Its Future* also recommended that only limited in-migration of non-Welsh speakers into the Welsh-speaking heartland should be allowed. This recommendation led to some controversy within Welsh devolved politics, as COLE and WILLIAMS (2004: 565) have shown. In advocating the need for such a policy of restrained in-migration to the Welsh heartland, the report further narrated the existence of the Fro Gymraeg as a specific culture region within Wales.

But in addition to this one form of governmental narration of new borders within Wales, there is also a further set of language policies that seek to promote the use of the Welsh language throughout the whole of Wales – the most notable being the Language Act of 1993 (HM GOVERNMENT, 1993; COLE and WILLIAMS 2004: 562-3). This Act enabled the Welsh language to be considered as a language of equal status to English within the public sphere throughout the whole of Wales. There is, of

course, the potential for somewhat of a tension between these two priorities. At one level, there is a clear emphasis on developing a national policy framework that can lead to an increased status for the Welsh language throughout Wales. At the same time, there is specific regard paid to those Welsh-speaking communities – within the 'Fro Gymraeg' – that require special attention. The danger, in this respect, is that these communities will be in receipt of a series of policies and strategies that will place them in a relatively favourable position, when compared with other (often Welsh-speaking) communities lying outside the heartland. There is no doubt that such a development could lead to a certain divisiveness within the Welsh-speaking population of Wales, which would be a reflection of the more specific divisions that characterise the relationships between various factions of the Welsh nationalist and linguistic movement. In addition, we believe the emphasis on a territorially-delimited interpretation of a Welsh-speaking Wales could lead to the re-emergence of age-old ideas concerning the necessary association between the Welsh language and nation and its more rural areas (see GRUFFUDD, 1994; 1995).

What we have witnessed, therefore, are plural narrations of Welsh linguistic borders and territories at a governmental level, ones which mirror the equally contested narrations of Welsh linguistic borders and territories that have emerged in Welsh civil society. Moreover, it is an examination of the evolving relationships between these two sets of narrations that will prove more instructive, we argue, over coming years.

Conclusions

The paper has focused on the way in which linguistic borders have been continually narrated in Wales in recent years by a variety of individuals, groups and

organizations. We have demonstrated how such linguistic borders and territories could become the object of contestation between different groups within different political and cultural priorities. The geographies of these contested narratives were significant in that they also impacted on the evolution of language policy within the nascent National Assembly for Wales. Indeed, we would contend that this is a key significance of the paper. In broader, contexts, unofficial narratives concerning borders and territories, which are based in civil society, do not exist in isolation from more official state-based narratives. Despite their seemingly alternative visions of the qualities of the nation –in terms of its geography and its ethnic and/or civic character for instance – there is a potential for considerable official and unoffical dialogue between the two. This suggests the need to develop a more all-embracing understanding of the narration of borders and territories, one which encompasses both the small-scale borders of social life and the broader, large-scale narratives of the state, and the mutifarious relationships that exist between the two (NEWMAN and PAASI, 1998). Rather than separating out these different narrations of territories and borders into distinct categories (see, for instance, JONES and MACLEOD, 2004), we need to appreciate how they impact on each other in complex ways.[4]

We began the paper by revisiting BOWEN's (1959) famous work on 'Le Pays de Galles' and we believe it important to revisit it in the light of the conceptual and empirical discussion. Bowen's main aim was to determine the actual location of the 'land of the Welsh'. It would be difficult to ask, let alone answer, such a politically-loaded question with regard to contemporary Wales. The most satisfactory answer, we would argue, is that the 'land of the Welsh' is located in those places where individuals, groups and organizations are able to successfully narrate its location. It is

significant, and to some extent suprising, that certain groups in post-devolution Wales have been able in a relatively short period of time to make acceptable – in public and political circles – the existence of such a territory, and of the need to preserve it at all costs. The danger, as we have already mentioned above, is that such sentiments become accepted more generally as a reflection of the 'true' or 'real' location of the Welsh nation. This would the potential to lead to unwelcome divisions within the Welsh population, which would only exacerbate the linguistic differences that exist at present (WILLIAMS, 2003).

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[1] Information gained from http://www.statswales.wales.gov.uk/, accessed 17 January 2006.

[2] The interviews were analysed through the use of a mixture of emic (internal and interviewee derived) and etic (external and researcher derived) codes. The vast majority of our interviews were conducted through the medium of Welsh. The interview material quoted in this paper have been translated into English. We realise the loss of meaning that can happen through the process of translation but we have chosen to omit the Welsh-medium quotes in order to reduce the overall word length of the paper. The interview respondents were identified from documentary and published sources and through a subsequent process of 'snowballing'. We sought to identify a range a different people and organizations involved in linguistic politics in Wales and, as such, we adopted a theoretical sampling method within the project. Respondents were interviewed, in the main, from the main political and social movements concerned with linguistic and cultural issues in contemporary Wales: Cymuned; Plaid Cymru and Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg. Wherever possible, we have attempted to triangulate interviews with other interview material and documentary and published sources.

[3] Processes of in-migration have affected Wales over recent years as a result of a variety of factors. In many cases, too, the process of in-migration is at its most acute in the Welsh 'heartland', through a combination of low house prices and attractive scenery. We would argue, nonetheless, that the reality

of in-migration is not as important for certain language activists that its perceived or imagined effect on the linguistic constitution of the Welsh 'heartland'.

[4] An additional 'blurring' of the boundary between state and civil narrations of borders and territories lies in the fact that certain political actors in Wales have occupied different political roles between the 1960s and the current period, changing their status from activists to respectable politicans.

Table 1 Economic disparities in Wales in 2003 (sub-regional gross value added)

Area	**£ million**	**£ per head**	**Index (UK = 100)**
Wales	37,359	12,716	79
West Wales and the Valleys	19,757	10,578	66
Gwynedd	1,389	11,820	73
Conwy and Denbighshire	2,072	10,071	62
South West Wales	3,568	9,659	60
East Wales	17,602	16,446	102
Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan	8,201	18,794	116
Monmouthshire and Newport	3,496	15,503	96