“That’s not bloody true, I’m as Welsh as anybody”: The Continuum of Welshness and Basqueness and its Implications for the Development of a National Consciousness

Sophie Williams

Department of Political and Cultural Studies, Swansea University

Abstract

The contentious nature of national identity has been well-documented; the difficulties and challenges associated with self-understanding in a ‘stateless nation’ context having undergone profound scholarly exploration. Yet the accepted multiplicity of the same nominal identity often masks the hard truths: that it is plausible that certain nation members continue to rank each other on a continuum of national identity, whereby some people are considered more or less worthy of holding that identity than others. This paper explores this concept in relation to Wales and the Basque Country; having firstly situated this phenomenon within the relevant theoretical context, it subsequently explores the theoretical purchase of this concept through analysis of focus group discussion in both nations. Finally, it considers the consequences of such a sliding scale of identity for national unity, in particular its implications for the ongoing development of a coherent national consciousness.

Key Words: National Identity, Wales, the Basque Country, Political Sociology, Language

Introduction

The recent Scottish Referendum and Catalan almost-referendum commanded global attention, highlighting once again the persistence of contestation surrounding ‘stateless nations’\(^1\) and the conflicts between national identities. Indeed, such conflicts have arguably never been more apparent in either a British or Spanish context, as constitutional questions continue to dominate political debate.

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It is this context that frames the basis of the research of this paper. Drawing on new and original primary research, conducted through the use of qualitative interview and focus groups across Wales and the Basque Country, it explores firstly the pertinent theoretical context before evaluating the relevance of the concept of a continuum of national identity and its relationship to minority native languages, through analysis of focus group findings from both nations. It concludes with discussion on the potential applicability of this concept to other nations and its implications for the development of a coherent national consciousness and future nation-building projects.

**Theoretical Context**

Theorising on national identities, particularly in instances where the state is a contested concept, have prompted scholarly interest over a prolonged period of time, often in conjunction with academic consideration of the nature of group identities and the optimum method for enriching and enhancing understanding of their internal dynamics. Such discussions occur predominantly within a social constructivist epistemology; if identities are understood as social constructs, then the focus must be directed to understanding how such constructs are conceptualised by different people. Indeed, it may be further plausible to suggest that such conceptualisations may be highly varied in nature, as the same nominal identity may engender a large number of differing understandings.

Scholarly consideration of these ideas is widespread across multiple academic disciplines, with some of the more pertinent insights relevant to this paper originating in the fields of social anthropology and sociology. The seminal insights of Barth\(^2\) are greatly influential in this regard; through the adoption and instrumentalisation of a social interactionist approach, whereby, as identities are negotiated within and between groups through the processes of social interaction, they are best understood as fluid and processual, Barth argued that, to better understand the nature of identities, the focus must concentrate on the creation and maintenance of boundaries between groups, as opposed to consideration of their internal characteristics. Such a position complements the notion of the subjective nature of identities, whereby they are continuously constructed based on changing criteria and thus not essentialised or taken for granted. This position is further supported by the work of Cohen\(^3\) in relation to communities, which emphasised the subjective nature of identities whilst simultaneously highlighting their potential for multiplicity within the same nominal identity, whereby an identity may be a common symbol shared amongst nation-members, despite it being differently conceptualised.

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However, scholars from sociology caution against a sole focus on processes of boundary maintenance and creation, or on the relationship between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’, as a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of identity may be better achieved through the adoption of a dialectical approach. Indeed, as the concept of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ represents an inherent duality, Jenkins and McCrone highlight the consequent need to focus on both internal characteristics and the creation and maintenance of external boundaries. Such an understanding is complemented by an appreciation of the dual processes of self-identification (the process by which an individual confers an identity upon themselves) and external categorisation (whereby an identity is conferred upon an individual by others). Jenkins argues that these processes occur simultaneously and are inextricably inter-connected; indeed, such a conceptualisation is pertinent to understanding how an individual may self-identify, for example, as Welsh, but may be externally categorised by others as British, or, indeed, English. This dualistic method of theoretical understanding is further enriched by an appreciation of the parallel dialectic of similarity and difference; in line with Parekh’s multiculturalist approach, which seeks to mitigate an over-emphasis on the differences between groups, Jenkins suggests that it is as important to consider what group members hold in common as to consider what distinguishes them from others.

Thus a consistent theoretical direction within sociology emerges; given the inherent dualities of these processes, examining both aspects, rather than prioritising one over the other, may provide greater theoretical and conceptual purchase. Further, there are additional theoretical tools that complement this direction. Examination of national identities, (in this instance, Welshness and Basqueness), may be predicated on the understanding, highlighted by Jenkins and supported by Todd and McCrone, that it is possible for the same nominal identity, for instance Welsh or Basque, to engender multiple meanings, depending on different factors. What’s more, these conceptualisations may change over time; although, following ethno-symbolist theorising on the nation, identities may not be best understood as being in a permanent state of flux, rather they may be stable and durable once created, it is nevertheless possible for identities to become more or less salient under differing circumstances, thus demonstrating their situational and contextual nature. Further, identities may, perhaps paradoxically, simultaneously incite

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extreme passion and be generally ignored; Billig’s\textsuperscript{10} notion of ‘banal nationalism’ and Fearon and Laitin’s\textsuperscript{11} ‘everyday primordialism’ both indicate this capacity of identities both to be highly pertinent or largely unproblematic, depending on the personal conceptualisation of the individual and the context in which they find themselves.

The idea of the multifarious nature of identity is further highlighted in the widespread use of the Moreno Question, which was instrumental in highlighting the concept of multiple identities. Using the example of Welsh and British, respondents to this question would be asked to choose which statement best reflected their identity: Welsh Only, More Welsh than British, Equally Welsh and British, More British than Welsh or British Only. Crucially however, although able to expose the existence of multiple identities, the Moreno question does not permit analysis of what the individual identities, such as Welsh or British, signify for different identifiers; for example, how two Welsh identifiers could differ so significantly in their responses, with one indicating ‘Equally Welsh and British’ and another ‘Only Welsh’. That such a position implicitly suggests that identities such as ‘Welsh’ and ‘Basque’ are both static and have the same universal meaning is to neglect the sheer level of multiplicity associated with these phenomena; indeed, the idea of national identity as a static and universally understood concept is an arguably absurd notion, given that it may suggest that millions of people, who may be radically different in every other facet of their lives, should share a common understanding of the meaning of Welshness or Basqueness, or indeed any other identity.

It is important to bear this concept of the multifarious nature of the same nominal identity in mind when considering another interesting notion emerging from focus group discussion, that of a continuum of Welshness and Basqueness, whereby some people are considered (either externally or through self-identification) to be ‘more’ Welsh or Basque than others. This concept arose in both countries, as discussions on conceptualisations of identity were inevitably drawn to questions of the role of the native language in determining qualification for Welshness and Basqueness. The idea that a native first language Welsh or Basque speaker might represent what it means to be ‘true’ Welsh or Basque suggests that this is a notion that has permeated the popular consciousness; Welshness and Basqueness as concepts are not coherent, but plagued by internal differences and divisions. Consequently, it can be

\textsuperscript{10} Michael Billig, \textit{Banal Nationalism} (London: Sage Publications, 1995)

argued there is a popularly held spectrum of national identity, whereby people are considered, not only Welsh/Basque or not Welsh/Basque, but more or less Welsh or Basque, based on differing criteria.

On methodology, as mentioned above, this paper draws on insights from recent fieldwork conducted across Wales and the Basque Country. Following a broadly social constructivist interpretivist stance, the research adopted the ontological and epistemological position that, as knowledge is situational, the aim of research should be to endeavour to understand the subjective social reality as understood by societal members, and that such aims should be realised through interaction with people in line with a qualitative methodology. In so doing, it recognises that people’s experiences can only be constructed or reconstructed through qualitative mechanisms and do not represent a direct replication of reality. The research thus conducted a multi-method qualitative study, comprising the two methodological tools of focus groups with ordinary people, to examine nation members’ conceptualisations of national identity, and semi-structured qualitative interviews with political elites, to discuss elite framing and mobilisation of national identity for political aims as a second arm of the thesis.

Consequently, focus groups were arranged according to primarily geographical location following a literature review; where a geographical basis presents itself as a central and perhaps defining indicator with regard to focus group location. For Wales, Balsom’s ‘Three Wales Model’ which divides Wales into three areas- Y Fro Gymraeg, Welsh Wales and British Wales - was used as the basis for designating focus group locations. In the Basque Country, this was a slightly more contentious issue; the officially recognised boundaries of the Basque Country and those covered by the jurisdiction of the Basque

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14 British Wales designates the areas of Wales along the border with England and encompassing parts of west Pembrokeshire, which is predominantly English-speaking and British and Welsh identifying; Welsh Wales encompasses those areas of Wales, such as the South Wales Valleys, which are predominantly English-speaking but largely Welsh identifying; Y Fro Gymraeg refers to Welsh-speaking Welsh identifying Wales, mainly concentrated in West and North West areas.
15 These comprised Newport and Mold (British Wales), Swansea and Caerphilly (Welsh Wales), Tumble, Llanystumdwy, Caernarfon and Aberystwyth (Y Fro Gymraeg/Welsh Wales)
16 The Basque Country traditionally comprises seven areas: three (Bizkaia, Araba and Guipuzkoa) within the legally recognised Basque Autonomous Community (which is itself one of seventeen Spanish autonomous communities and one of three ‘historical nationalities’ within Spain, alongside Catalonia and Galicia) and three more in the French Basque Country, now French départements: Basse-Navarre, Labourd and Soule. The French Basque Country is known in Basque as Iparralde, the Spanish Basque Country as Euskal Herria, while Euskadi refers to the three areas within the officially recognised Basque Autonomous Community. For further information, see Stanley Payne, ‘Catalan and Basque Nationalism’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6.1, Nationalism and Separatism, (1971), 15-33, 35-51 and Ludger Mees, *Nationalism, Violence and Democracy: The Basque Clash of Identities* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)
Autonomous Community incorporate three regions: Alava, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa. However, the Basque Country historically encapsulated the neighbouring autonomous community of Navarre, as well as three areas that are now French départements: Basse-Navarre, Labourd and Soule (the latter two forming the Pyrénées Atlantiques), known in Basque as Iparralde. All five areas were covered by the research. Focus groups, although comprised of people from the same area, nevertheless included participants of different sexes and ages, with different language capabilities and coming from differing socio-economic backgrounds, in order to cut across a number of determinants.

With this theoretical and methodological discussion in mind, this paper now turns to an exploration of the applicability of such a continuum in Wales and the Basque Country, examining its nature, whether it can be applied to both nations and indeed whether or not it is accepted, if not condoned, as part of popular practice when thinking about national identity.

Wales

Turning firstly to Wales, generally speaking, although some participants were more comfortable with this notion than others (with some rejecting it as a method of classification), all participants had either experienced this concept personally or were aware of its existence in popular consciousness. For some participants, this was not a method of classification they employed personally:

(Aberystwyth) P1: I, personally…I think they’re Welsh, even if they don’t speak the language…I expect that there are people in the Valleys who find Welsh difficult, English is their…majority language, so, but, I don’t sense them as inferior, or anything, I think I treat them as equally as Welsh as me

This participant had nevertheless experienced a sense of classification, as they highlighted misconceptions they had experienced in South Wales about North Wales:

(Aberystwyth) P1: “Oh, you speak Welsh”…the language is a quite fascinating thing by them…some people in South Wales that I’ve met think that every part of North Wales speaks Welsh, that there’s a North-South thing, but that’s not true, really, because Welsh is spread…across the country…it’s more West than East sometimes…but I get a sense of that sometimes with them, because I come from North Wales, oh you’re a Welsh country bumpkin, or whatever

Other non-Welsh speaking participants had also experienced this:

(Swansea) P1: If you go to somewhere like in West Wales, and you go in and…obviously they are all speaking Welsh, and they know you don’t, and you can hear them all sort of
‘oh’ and they’re all turning round…sometimes I think, some areas that are, you know, very Welsh-speaking, they probably can seem a little bit as if they are a bit less welcoming, because you don’t speak Welsh…they think you should be able to speak Welsh if you’re Welsh

As had Welsh-speakers who had experienced being considered ‘very Welsh’ in internally Welsh situations with other Welsh people:

(Llanystumdwy) P6: I was once told that I was terribly Welsh, and some Irish people heard it and said sounds like a disease, so I said “Why am I terribly Welsh?” Because I went to the Eisteddfod, and wrote books in Welsh

(Mold) P1: Well, a neighbour of ours came round today, and our daughter showed them her clog dancing and the new Welsh harp, the triple harp that we’ve just bought…and she said “Oh I think it’s fantastic that you’re so Welsh!”

(Laughter)

P1: “You’re keeping everything Welsh alive”, so she obviously thought we were more Welsh than she was, even though she would say that she’s Welsh, but she doesn’t speak Welsh, so in her eyes, we were more Welsh

In fact, these experiences led one participant to suggest the idea of levels of Welshness, with Welsh-speaking Welsh people resting on another level to non-Welsh-speaking Welsh people:

(Swansea) P5: I think it’s another level, you can be a different type of Welshman, Welsh person…if you have the language as well, I think if you have the Welsh language in your armoury in Wales it’s an advantage…there’s a different shade there

However, other participants did not necessarily agree:

(Swansea) P3: I think there’s so many accidents about why people speak Welsh or not, usually to do with who their parents married…so I wouldn’t say that that’s the factor in how Welsh you are

P2: It doesn’t bother me that I don’t speak Welsh, I don’t have…a thing, like, oh I wish I did speak Welsh…I admire people who do speak Welsh, but I admire people who have a great command of any language

P3: We speak Welsh as a family for one reason and one reason only: all the boys went down to Llanelli to find a wife…and dragged her back over the river…we all socialised in Llanelli and that’s where we met our wives…if we’d gone to Swansea…it might have been different
For one group, it was an uncomfortable, yet nevertheless recognised, concept, related particularly to the language:

(Caerphilly) M: Do you think there’s a sense that there are people...like, speaking the Welsh language, being born in Wales, are there people who are more Welsh than other people?

P1: No I don’t think you have to be Welsh speaking to

P1 and P5: To be Welsh

P5 and P2: No

P3: But I think sometimes there is a perception there that you have to

P1: Have to, yeah

P4: I think sometimes, when you’re a non-Welsh speaker, you feel like a second-class citizen

P3: I think so

P4: Because, in some company

P3: I agree

P4: Because you do feel, you wouldn’t know that (to P1, a Welsh speaker), but...I’ve found that on a number of occasions

P2: They, they, they are wrong

P4: No, I agree with you there, but, um

P2: If they make you feel uncomfortable

P4: It does make you feel uncomfortable

P2: I think they’re at fault, really

P3: But it’s, it’s the fact that it does happen, doesn’t it

In Caerphilly, this led to somewhat of an upsetting discussion for some participants, who recognised in themselves that they may indeed feel, perhaps not less Welsh, but a certain emptiness, for not speaking the language, either because they’ve been purposefully made to feel that way, or because it is something that has simply happened:
(Caerphilly) P5: It came to me, we were watching...I was a rugby match with (name of son), on S4C, at half time...you had Gerald Davies, Gareth Edwards, and a host of other players on, at half time chatting away, and they were talking away in Welsh, and (name of son) turned to me and he said “That’s right, isn’t it, Dad?”, and I said well “I’m sorry, I don’t know”, I don’t know what they’re saying, it’s all babble Welsh and I can’t, it’s too fast for me, I can’t pick it up, I can pick up key words, but I can’t, I don’t know what an earth they’re saying

P1: No, it does happen

P4: And it makes you feel, it does make you feel as kind of a second-class citizen

P3 and P1: Yeah

P5: Yeah, I, I think that feeling I can understand, yeah, that I can understand

P4: I mean, a lot of my friends will translate for me and turn round and say...because I’ve got, (names of friends), and they’re both Welsh, both teachers, both Welsh-speaking, and they’ll speak to each other, and they’ll start speaking Welsh, and one will turn to me and speak in English, because, you know, I don’t understand, but I just wish I could be speaking with them, and feel, I do feel a little bit then, oh, perhaps I’m less Welsh than them, but I’m not really

P1: You’re not

P4: No, I know I’m not, but sometimes you do feel...

In Mold, there was a sense of the contextual quality of continuums alongside emphasis placed on its use as a method of classification between Welsh speakers to classify other Welsh speakers as not Welsh:

(Mold) P5: In different situations, I feel different, if I’m in, possibly in Church with a lot of elderly people, their standard of Welsh might be different to my standard of Welsh, I’ve grown up in an age where television has been very, um...

P4: Influential

P5: So, um, my Welsh might be quite diluted compared to elderly people, but in my work, I visit different areas and I encourage parents to pass on Welsh to their babies, and when I go to a clinic, I’m introduced as here’s (P5) the Welsh lady! So other people define me as very Welsh in other situations

P2: Um, well, we, I don’t know, like, we’re on the border, so I don’t think I really have a Welsh accent...not as much as other people, and then we have a friend that went to school in Ruthin, and they had a Welsh...well, our school is mixed with a lot of people
who don’t speak Welsh at home, so a lot of people don’t speak Welsh in the school, and she went somewhere that had the Welsh side and the English side, so the Welsh was richer there, people spoke it, and I think she’s, she’s, well, she kind of thinks that people who go to our school aren’t as Welsh as the people she’s gone to school with

P7: She’s kind of, like, urgh, what am I doing here

P2: Yeah, and she’s, and she thinks that people from, if you’re from Gwynedd or somewhere, she would think that they’re more Welsh than me, although, or something, and that really irritates me, because I’m very Welsh, I can’t help that I’m not born in Gwynedd, you know (laughs)

Another participant highlighted personal prejudices:

(Mold) P5: If buy petrol, I’ll use the numbers up to ten, and, oh, prejudice comes into your head then, because in Wrexham, I went to the Tesco Extra garage, went to the till, and said rhif naw plîs [number nine please] thinking oh my goodness, this person’s got a ring in her lip (laughter), and then I had a Welsh conversation with her, so you never know who can speak Welsh

Indeed, there was a keen sense of division:

(Mold) P5: There was a division between, I used to speak Welsh and I was known as one of the Welshies

P3: We were called Welshies

P5: Yes, and there was a bit of a division in school, does that still happen?

P2: Like when, when I was in year seven, obviously I wanted, I cared more about what people thought of me because I was young and stuff, and I wanted to fit in, and, like, a lot of people were like oh you speak Welsh, so you’re automatically just not cool, which is stupid

P1: And...being the Welshie group, we always felt inferior because we weren’t cool enough, but then speaking to people who weren’t in the Welshie group afterwards, after school, and they said that they always felt inferior because they didn’t feel Welsh enough, so it’s, everybody’s got hang ups and insecurities

P3: It’s, in a way, not sad, but, I mean, I really think, obviously, it’s so essential that we keep the culture and the language, but what you’ve said, like in Scotland, and in Ireland, it’s not as divisive, is it, and we have got a problem with that, because there’s nothing wrong with being a non-Welsh-speaking Welsh person

P2: And like, with people from Sir Fro and stuff, and, um, Bangor, and they’re like, they correct you speaking Welsh sometimes, it just infuriates me so much, and the thing it, it makes me, because if you go to (name of school)
P7: Yeah, I was accused, no, not accused, that’s horrible, but like, “Are you a learner?”, I was like, um, yeah, only for like eighteen years

These attitudes were then considered a negative phenomenon:

(Mold) P2: A lot of Welsh people make fun of people who are learning Welsh and look down on people who can’t speak Welsh properly

P6: That’s just terrible

P2: That’s just terrible, because the whole thing is, these are usually people who are nationalists and they want the language to grow

P7: But it’s just like they’re killing the language

P2: They are killing the language, by doing that, it just goes against itself

Although these positions in themselves were not without their contradictions:

(Mold) P2: But a lot of people who live in Wales also don’t know about the culture, that’s, that annoys me, I don’t, it shouldn’t really matter what other countries think, but it is annoying that a lot of Welsh people don’t know about it

There is then a clear sense that, for some participants, they either see themselves as less Welsh or feel that others see them as less Welsh, because they do not speak Welsh. These fears were borne out in another group; one participant was frank in the persistence of classification of learners as learners, no matter what their stage of fluency, by first language Welsh speakers, highlighting a perpetual sense of distinction:

(Aberystwyth) P2: I think...on this idea that you get people moving in and actually learning Welsh, and, you know, and the fact that they’re always labelled with the learner, he’s a Welsh learner, doesn’t matter to what extent they’ve actually learnt the language, if they’re basically fluent in it, they’re still labelled by the Welsh community with the learner tag, I think that’s, because you’re basically, for all your life, you’re always a learner, you’re never, sort of, it’s odd, isn’t it, you can never, it’s not like there’s, you’d think that you’d be a learner and then you’d learn and then you’d be fully Welsh, wouldn’t you, but you’re always a learner, aren’t you, you’re never, sort of, it’s odd like that

Indeed, this was considered a highly negative trait, one with potentially discriminatory consequences:
(Aberystwyth) P2: I think that’s down to, sort of, almost selfishness within the, sort of, Welsh community itself, sort of, this idea almost Harry Potter-esque, sort of, the idea of Mudblood and like that, and I think that’s quite interesting, yeah, I think that the Welsh community itself, like the proper Welsh speaking areas, especially, sort of, the older generation, perhaps, finds it harder to accept these learners, as you like, and it always strikes me that I know a lot of learners, and I myself am a bad one at doing this now, when they’re actually learning Welsh, I prefer actually speaking with them in English, and that’s, that’s bad, I admit it’s bad, but you sort of, you just do it

This continuum is therefore not limited to speaking and not speaking Welsh; within the Welsh-speaking community, there is also a sense of classification, with some participants feeling that their Welsh is not as good as that of other Welsh speakers, and, given that many conflated Welshness with speaking Welsh, were therefore intimating that they did not feel as Welsh as other Welsh speakers, or were less worthy of this label:

(Tumble) P1: Their Welsh [in Cardiganshire], to me, that’s the way I would like to speak Welsh

Younger participants admitted that they did not feel comfortable starting conversations in Welsh despite being fluent Welsh speakers; one participant admitted to being jealous of a colleague who:

(Tumble) P4: Even emails in Welsh…she does put me to shame a little bit

This led to a discussion as to whether those people these participants considered to speak a ‘purer’ form of Welsh were indeed ‘more’ Welsh than them:

(Tumble) P5: I don’t think they’re better than us

P1: It’s all different levels, isn’t it, and within Welsh, there are levels within Welsh

P1: Our Welsh is our Welsh, that’s what we brought up on

This was then linked to the idea of multiplicities of Welshness, with this sense of division keenly understood:

(Tumble) P2: For a small country it’s so different, in between the areas, like, if you go from Swansea to Llanelli, it’s so different, and from Llanelli to Carmarthen, it’s so different again

P1: I would think that’s a fantastic thing…that we’re not kind of all the same…we’re all unique and different...it’s not right or wrong, it’s just different
Further, this perception that people from North East Wales or Carmarthenshire are considered perhaps not as Welsh as North West Walian Welsh speakers was to some extent borne out in reality; a group in Caernarfon, all of whom were first language Welsh speakers, expressed a keen sense of difference between their Welshness and that of others:

(Caernarfon) P8: But we’re Welsh-speaking Welsh, aren’t we, so it’s a type of

P1: We’re lucky in this area, we can live in Welsh, completely

P2: Here, we know, we think, to speak Welsh [is] to be Welsh, but if you go down South, they think they’re Welsh, and they don’t speak Welsh, so that’s a very local question I think

P8: Well, my husband would say, who’s learning Welsh very, very slowly, but he’s so passionately Welsh, and he says when I was living in England, I used to get teased all the time for being Welsh, now I live in Caernarfon, everybody thinks I’m English, and it’s made me question my attitude as well

Indeed, the sense of antipathy towards a generalised mass of non-Welsh speaking people in the South was evident:

(Caernarfon) P1: Well, I was in the National Eisteddfod this year, where was it, I’ve forgotten?

M: Llanelli

All: Llanelli, yes

P1: Llanelli, well, do you know what, there was more English being spoken on that field than I’ve ever heard

P2: Yes, it’s true, they’re all speaking in English

P3: And some don’t know even that the Eisteddfod is on in their town!

P1: That’s right

(Laughter)

P3: Because they don’t know in Cardiff

P2: No, especially when it’s down South, no
This is not to suggest that all participants were happy with this situation:

(Caernarfon) P8: I think it’s very sad though, because like we’ve just said, we’re a very small nation, and yet, again, typical Welsh, we’ll, sort of, fight amongst ourselves, as if, oh I don’t, oh but they don’t do this, and I’m just thinking, oh my goodness

P1: Well, we all get on, but we are different

It was, nevertheless, exceedingly apparent; for example, despite an earlier discussion on the ability of people who learn Welsh to become ‘better’ Welsh than non-Welsh speaking Welsh people, it seemed that even Welsh learners would not be able to escape the external categorisation process, as they still would not be as Welsh as a first language Welsh speaker:

(Caernarfon) P3: And the Cardiff people speak far better Welsh than they ever did now

P2: But it’s not a natural Welsh, is it, it’s not a natural Welsh, it’s out of a book, our natural Welsh is better, Cymraeg naturiol yn gorau [Natural Welsh is best]

Indeed, even when challenged on their attitudes by other group participants, this could not dissuade some participants from believing their attitudes to be correct; despite initially expressing one view, when explored, another entirely came to the fore:

(Caernarfon) M: So do you think that, if there are all these different ways of being Welsh, do you think that some people are more Welsh than other people? Would you say that up here it’s more Welsh?

P1 and P2: No it’s not

M: Do you think it’s more Welsh up here than it is down South?

P2: Oh you can’t say that

P7: More Welsh-speaking, it’s more Welsh-speaking, it’s not more Welsh

P2: I was just thinking, you can’t, we’re supposed to be a nation, aren’t we, so it doesn’t matter where you are

P1: We do hear much more Welsh here than we do in most towns

P7: We’re more Welsh-speaking here, but not more Welsh particularly
P1: No

P8: But I think generally, for Welsh-speaking people though, we do consider if you speak Welsh, it makes you more Welsh

P1 and P2: Oh yes

P8: Because you will call, when somebody who’s Welsh but doesn’t speak Welsh as English, rather than non-Welsh-speaking Welsh, we do, generally

P8: But we did it earlier, when we were talking here about if somebody’s speaking Welsh, and if somebody English walks in, we mean English-speaking

P1: Oh yes, we do tend to change to English

P8: But that could be somebody Welsh who doesn’t speak Welsh

P6: But, you know, have you ever met an Englishman who doesn’t speak English?

P1 and P2: No, of course not

P6: Or a Frenchman who doesn’t speak French

(Pause)

P1: We’re not a very assertive nation, are we, we don’t assert ourselves everywhere a lot, do we

P2: No

P6: But you do meet, you do meet Welsh people who don’t speak Welsh

P2: Of course

P3: They call themselves Welsh, but they don’t speak the language

P1: There’s a saying, isn’t there, we’ve got to live our land, love our land and speak the language

P8: Yes, yes, yes, so, because if people don’t learn Welsh, then it will die

P1: It’s no excuse to lose your language, in my opinion, even if I lived over in England I’d still have my Welsh

P3: But some forget their Welshness when they’re, I remember when (name) was appointed sister in Liverpool there, and, uh, this nurse, well, she was a trainee nurse, three months she’d been in Liverpool, and um, and she said ‘o ble dach chi’n dod’, [where are you from] ‘three miles o Caernarfon’
Overall, there was real awareness of, if not comfort with, divisions within Welshness, which provoked confusing conversations:

(Caerphilly) M: Do you think there’s this idea that different areas are, you know, more Welsh than other areas?

P1: I don’t think so

P3: You do, people who live in the Valleys are proud of living in the Valleys, equally so, the people who live in North Wales are proud of the Welsh that they speak, you know

P5: Well, it’s only a different dialect, isn’t it

P2: It’s a different dialect, I don’t think they’re any different people, as opposed, no

All: No

P2: No, I don’t think so

P1: I don’t think it sort of matters, from what part of Wales you are, I think we’re all, I don’t think so, so, whether there’s some people who would consider themselves more Welsh than others, but I don’t

P3: Whether you’re from the North or the South, it would be interesting to see how they answer that question

P2: Yeah, I think some people would see themselves as more Welsh

P6: It’s just because of the land mass that they live in, but, but in saying that, I mean, does it make you, not more Welsh, but does it make you feel more Welsh, because you can speak it, it just opens up another doorway, I think that’s what it is, that’s the only thing it does, it gives you a different insight into life, a different people

P2: I’m learning the language, I don’t feel any less Welsh, as it were, or more Welsh, I, I always felt Welsh, truly Welsh, sort of thing, so I, the fact that I’m learning Welsh doesn’t make me feel more Welsh

P6: As you say, I do think we’re so different

P3: I don’t know, I think it makes you feel, I don’t know, aren’t you part of something?

P2: Part of something, yeah, but you’re still part of Wales irrespective of whether you speak the language

P5: Yeah
P3: But I think it creates a divide in Wales, you feel that, those who speak Welsh, and those who don’t

P2: In certain people, I think, it’s not general

P1: I find that difficult to answer really, because I, I don’t feel that, but then again, I can speak Welsh

P3: That’s right

P1: So perhaps I haven’t got...

P4: I feel very Welsh, I feel Welsh through and through, all my, I’ve done my family tree, all Welsh, so

P1: Like anybody else in the family is it, not the other side of the family

P4: Not the other side of the family, part of, anyway, I feel Welsh, and it doesn’t matter that I can’t speak the language

P2: No

P4: I just, feel Welsh, I wish I could, but I haven’t, I’ve been lazy and I haven’t learnt it

P6: I’ve been in a take-away in Cardiff…and, uh, the only people, well, there was nobody in there speaking English, the people behind the counter were speaking Chinese, there were people speaking a completely different language, Polish or something, behind us, and somebody walked in and called us ignorant because we were speaking Welsh, I was like, nobody else is speaking any other language that you understand, and that sort of thing, so, it is out there, and I don’t know, I dunno how you combat that either, but it was almost like, as if they don’t feel adequate because they don’t speak Welsh

It seems therefore reasonable to assert that the concept of a continuum of Welshness, whereby there are divisions between Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers and between Welsh speakers from different areas of Wales, seems not without its purchase in popular consciousness. Indeed, some participants were clear that they judged, rightly or wrongly, other Welsh people, based on their language ability or their attitude towards the language. Although its practicality as a system of classification may be somewhat questionable, due to the highly subjective and arbitrary way in which it is employed, the way in which participants either personally used this continuum to classify themselves or perceived others to use it to externally categorise them highlights its penetration into popular thinking on the subject. As such, although provoking different levels of acceptance and comfort with the
concept, it was nevertheless recognised by all participants and linked to the idea of divisions between the Welsh ‘Self’.

**The Basque Country**

However, even if the presence of such a continuum is recognised in the Welsh context, it could potentially be argued that it is an idiosyncratic symptom of the Welsh condition, a concept that encounters difficulty when applied to other nations. On the contrary; in focus group research, the same concept of the multiple nature of the same nominal identity was born out in the Basque arena, prompting the same question: if there are competing visions of what it means to be Basque, are there levels of Basqueness within Basque identifiers? For example, does speaking Basque make someone ‘more’ Basque than someone else, or is everyone equally Basque?

It was a question that promoted a significant amount of debate and a fair amount of discomfort. Some participants rejected the notion entirely:

(Bilbao) P3: No, igualmente vascos, no menos...en el sentido de lo que hemos dicho vascos...como personas, o ciudadanos o miembros de una comunidad...lo ideal sería que toda esa comunidad fuera bilingüe...al final es una cuestión de voluntad, y ser vaso es, sobre todo, un compromiso con la comunidad en la que vives [No, equally Basque, not less, going by the definition of Basque that we’ve suggested, as people or citizens or members of a community, the ideal would be if the whole community was bilingual, at the end of the day it’s a question of will, and being Basque is, above all, committing to the community in which you live]

However, there was also a fair amount of recognition of this notion as a popular reality, in Elizondo, for example, it was felt that they, as Basques from Northern Navarra, were considered the most ‘authentically’ Basque (arguably stated with no small amount of pride):

(Elizondo) P2: Sí que hay ese, ese, por ejemplo, en Vizcaya, y seguro en algunos sitios de Vizcaya, los baztanenses nos ven, como, súper-vascos, o sea súper-auténticos [It’s true that that exists, for example, in Vizcaya, definitely in certain places in Vizcaya, they see us Baztan people as super Basque, or super authentic]

(Risas) [(Laughter)]
P2: ¿No? Como súper-auténticos, como si ellos fueran más contaminados, sí, sí, así nos ven [Don’t they? As super authentic, as if they were more contaminated, no, that’s how they see us]

P1: Piensan que es como si nosotros fuéramos más auténticos, más… [They think that we’re more authentic, more…]

P3: Más tradicionales [More traditional]

P5: Sí, claro, hay toda una imagen de ahora mismo romántico y tal del País Vasco, y ellos tienen una estampa…que trabajamos en la agricultura, todos trabajadores, de no sé qué, como nunca ha existido este modelo como lo han planteado, pero bueno se ha creado una imagen y entonces la gente asocia eso, y como esta zona, más o menos, no ha sufrido ningún industrialización tan intensa, y todo, pues nos ven así como, un poco… [Yes, there’s that whole image of what is today a romantic idea of the Basque County, they have this picture of us as all working in the fields, all workers, as I don’t know what, when then picture that they have of us has never existed, but there we are, this image has been created and so people associate it with this area, more of less, because it hasn’t been though a significant amount of industrialisation, and everything, so they see us like, a bit…]

P4: Gente trabajadora y todo [Hard working people and everything]

Even those who outwardly rejected the concept nevertheless demonstrated evidence of it; in an exchange in Oñati, for example, initially stating that they considered all Basque equally Basque, they then went on to admit that they would judge other Basques on the basis of their commitment to a political cause:

(Oñati) P1: Si alguien me dice que es vasco, le voy a mirar como es vasco, voy a pensar que es vasco [If someone tells me they’re Basque, I’m going to see them as a Basque person, I’m going to think they’re Basque]

M: ¿Sin excepción? [No exceptions?]

P1: Sin excepción, otra cosa es que luego, lo critico sus querencias es otro [No exceptions, but then it’s different because I might criticise their level of attachment to Basqueness, that’s something else]

P4: Si eres vasco, por qué no haces eso, por qué no piensas eso [If you’re Basque, why don’t you do this, why don’t you think this?]

P1: Sí, le criticaré sus opciones, o sea, pues, a tus hijos, no les habla en euskera, joder, eso es, ¡vaya vasco eres tú! [Yes, I might criticise their choices, for example, you don’t speak to your children in Basque, bloody hell, some Basque person you are!]
It was then the connection with the language and attitudes towards it that seemed to condition judgements most significantly; as such, the idea of different ‘intensities’ of Basqueness was raised, whereby those Basques who spoke Basque and lived their lives through the constant prism of Basqueness felt themselves to be more ‘intensely’ Basque than others:

(Elizondo) P5: No, yo creo que, hay, algunos identificando que en un momento dado, pues, las identidades se refuerzan, se les da mucho, eh, y bueno la gente se auto-afirma, de ese modo a lo mejor por sus propias carencias, o por sus complejos, o, no sé, la intensidad de ser vasco, no sé, otra cosa es luego, políticamente como lo vives, en una situación de dificultad y de represión, es como, como te enfrentas a todo ello, no, cada uno, pues, estábamos hablando de otra, pero, eh, ser vasco más intensamente, en el sentido de qué, escuchar, música, bailar, comer, hablar más euskera [I don’t think there are, some people identify more at a given time, so identities can be reinforced, and then people reaffirm this automatically, or maybe it’s to do with your own deficiencies or complexes, no, the intensity of Basqueness, and then how you live it politically is another aspect, in times of difficulty and repression, how you react to all that, no, or, we were talking about being more intensely Basque, in terms of listening [to] music, dancing, eating, speaking more Basque]

(Oñati) P4: Sí, más te identificas [Yes, you can identify with it more]

P2: Sí, el nivel de identificación siempre es diferente [Yes, the level of identification is always different]

P5: Más, no quiero decir más, no, pero, sí [More, I don’t know about more, well, maybe, yeah]

P4: ¿Cuéntame los que son menos vascos? [Who would we say are less Basque?]

P1: Pues, hablar euskera, y te pones en la educación de la lengua, y, y vive en una comunidad determinada, etcétera, y participa en ella, pues, sí, yo diría que es, es, que es más, que pertenece más a su comunidad, definitivamente, ¿no? [ Well, speaking Basque and involving yourself in Basque language education and living in a specific community and participating in that community, I would say that’s being more, belonging more definitively to a community, isn’t it?]

M: ¿Es como niveles de vasquidad? [Is it like having levels of Basqueness?]

P1: Niveles.... [Levels...]

P3: No

P1: Yo no hablaría de niveles... [I don’t think I would say levels]

P2: Yo creo que es de intensidad o, no sé, o como lo vives [I think it’s more intensities, or something, or how you live it]

P5: Participación, vivencia... [Participation, experience]
The distinction between ‘levels’ and ‘intensities’ of Basqueness therefore appears to be a fine one; nevertheless, there is a clear understanding that some Basques live their Basqueness to a greater extent than other Basques, and this is clearly connected to speaking the language.

Overall, therefore, the notion of a popular continuum of Basqueness is not without its merit; participants clearly understood there to be different levels of Basqueness, whether or not explicitly defined as such, with Basques who speak and promote the language and those who experienced their lives through the frame of Basqueness on a continual basis being considered ‘more’ Basque, to whatever extent, than others. This concept may then be connected to both conceptualisations of what constitutes Basqueness and notions of what constitutes Spanishness, as an aversion to Spanishness and anger at the dominance of the Spanish language over euskera appears to significantly condition these understandings. It can further be linked to political understandings, as certain participants considered those Basques who do not desire independence to be either less Basque, or not Basque at all. The
notion of a continuum or spectrum of Basqueness, then, seems to be present in popular consciousness, with both positive and negative connotations.

**Conclusion**

In the Welsh and Basque cases, therefore, the concept that some people are more or less worthy of the title ‘Welsh’ or ‘Basque’ than others is widely recognised and substantially, although not exclusively, connected to the native languages. Although some participants ostensibly rejected the concept, perhaps fearing its exclusive or hierarchical nature, they often unconsciously perpetuated it, as evidenced in throw-away remarks where they have little difficulty identifying who is and who is not Welsh and in mildly (or, indeed, overtly) discriminatory comments directed towards language learners or those who do not identify with a particular political project.

The potential consequences of such continua are profound and wide-ranging. It must first be stated that it has been identified in only two cases, and therefore requires further testing to assess its applicability in other arenas. It may be that such ideas are common only to areas with minority languages and not to ‘stateless nations’ as a whole; does it, for example, pertain to Scotland- would someone who voted ‘No’ in the 2014 Scottish Referendum be considered ‘less’ Scottish than a ‘Yes’ voter, or even potentially not Scottish at all? How do such ideas feature in nations where the state is not (or arguably less) contested; is there such a phenomenon as ‘more’ or ‘less’ English, for example? While it may be asserted that someone is ‘un-American’ due to certain positions on controversial issues, does that indicate that there are people who are considered to be ‘more American’ than other Americans? And on what basis? Many participants struggled to come up with a fully comprehensive and unproblematic concept of their own identity, often shying away from identifying a clear set of criteria that require fulfilment if someone is to achieve Welsh or Basque status. This is in spite of the fact that there seemed to be an unconscious and un-problematised ‘feeling’ or who was and was not Welsh or Basque and that most participants were able to designate others, or themselves, accordingly.

Moreover, what does this idea of a conflicted multifarious ‘Self’ mean for nation-building projects going forward? It can be assumed that, in order for a nation-building project to be successful, there must be some evidence of common understanding of what constitutes that nation; indeed, in political terms, incoherent messages are arguably less likely to capture the public’s imagination and inspire them into support for the nation in the future than those which are clear and readily identified with. However, the
achievement of such coherence in the framing and development of a national consciousness seems to present significant challenges, as internal differences and divisions may prevent such a consciousness from forming.

However, in both the Welsh and Basque cases, the internal differences, which appear at first glance to be inherently exclusionary, appeared to pale into insignificance when faced with the ‘Other’ (although it must also be acknowledged that the concept of the ‘Other’ in the Welsh case was by no means straightforward, due to the different understandings of England and Britain, as was the case in the French Basque Country, where the picture was more nuanced than in its Spanish counterpart). Indeed, the fact that they were not English, or not Spanish, was often the only thing participants agreed on:

(Swansea) P1: I think it’s quite important when we go away...important when people say oh you’re English (shakes head), no, definitely not English...I think it’s important for people to know that we’re Welsh and not English

(Caerphilly) P4: If people say are you English, we get very offended

(Caernarfon) P7: I would never say I was English!

(Bilbao) P1: Para mí, ser español...actualmente, significa negar que haya una nación vasca, y ser francés también...no puedo compartir el sentimiento español [For me, being Spanish today means to deny the fact that the Basque nation exists, as does being French...I can’t share the feeling of Spanishness]

(Vitoria) P5: Yo soy vasca y nada más [I’m Basque and nothing else]

P4: No soy española...para nada [I’m not Spanish...no way]

As such, the much-debated notion of whether the ‘Self’ can only be defined in opposition to the ‘Other’ had some purchase in the Welsh and Basque instances; although the concept of the ‘Self’ may be multifarious, a shared common antipathy towards the ‘Other’ seemed to bind participants together despite their internal differences, highlighting the power of the ‘Other’ as a unifying force.

Consequently, when faced with both categorising people are Welsh/Basque or not, and then subsequently dividing within Welshness and Basqueness as to who was the ‘most’ Welsh or Basque, or ‘truly’ Welsh or Basque, the idea that these seemingly insurmountable differences within these two nominal identities may be overcome in favour of uniting behind a common nation-building goal seems debatable at best, considering the mutually exclusive conceptualisations of Welshness and Basqueness and the feelings directed towards, not outsiders, but those within these identities.
Overall, it can be argued that the concept of a continuum of Welshness and Basqueness, whereby some people are either externally categorised or self-identify as ‘more’ Welsh or Basque than other Welsh or Basque identifiers, is not without its theoretical purchase in the popular consciousness of nation-members. Indeed, it can be seen to command widespread use; all participants identified such a concept, some even confessed to using it themselves. Consequently, there is evidently a need to further explore the foundations of this phenomenon, potentially assessing its reliance on ‘stateless nation’ contexts and its applicability to other situations, as well as its potential for unforeseen implications, particularly its potential impact on the development of national cohesion and the progress of nation-building projects into the future.
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