

IDENTITY, IMMIGRATION, AND ASSIMILATION: THE CASE OF THE WELSH SETTLEMENT IN PATAGONIA

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Abstract

Identity, migration, and assimilation are pressing and contentious issues in many contexts world-wide. In 1865 a Welsh Settlement was established in Patagonia, in what is now the Chubut Province of Argentina, and 150 years later, although no longer the dominant cultural force in that province, the Welsh heritage remains a significant aspect of life there in a number of ways, not least as regards language, traditions and tourism. This lecture gives an overview of the reasons for the establishment of the Settlement, its historical development, and the current situation. It also uses the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia as a case-study to explore considerations regarding identity and immigration which are of universal relevance.

I want to begin this lecture not in Patagonia, but in Wales, and with what is perhaps the most striking example of an ‘invention of tradition’ in Welsh-speaking cultural life.¹ I refer, as you may have guessed, to the most prominent of all Welsh-language cultural festivals, the National Eisteddfod of Wales, and in particular to the dramatic ceremonies held at that annual festival under the auspices of the Gorsedd (or ‘Assembly’) of Bards. Primary among them is the Chairing of the Bard, a ceremony whose origins go back at least 800 years. These ceremonies are colourful extravaganzas in which the members of the Gorsedd are dressed as druids in flowing white, blue and green robes, with the archdruid in golden regalia. However, contrary to popular belief, the Gorsedd of Bards, or to give it its full title, ‘Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain’ (‘The Assembly of the Bards of the Island of Britain’), is not a pagan institution stretching back to the time of the Ancient Druids, nor is it confined to poets; rather it was created in the late eighteenth century, at a time when there was a potent mix of Romanticism and druid-mania in the air, by that larger-than-life and wayward genius, Edward Williams (1747–1826), better-known by his bardic name, Iolo Morganwg (i.e. Ned of Glamorgan), a stonemason, a political radical, a polymath, a bigot, and a brilliant literary forger. He created the Gorsedd so as to give an exalted place in Welsh history and literature to his native Glamorgan and in order to provide an academy of learning for Wales. By now, in

1 This lecture was delivered to the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 25 November 2015, to mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia. The lecture was based in part on a talk entitled ‘Migration, Separation and Wales’, broadcast in BBC Radio Four’s ‘Four Thought’ series on 15 October 2014 and which is available as a podcast, <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04110k2>>; see also the accompanying article, ‘Viewpoint: The Argentines who speak Welsh’, published on-line in the BBC News Magazine, 16 October 2014, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-29611380>>.

addition to its ceremonial role in Wales's premiere cultural festival, the Gorsedd acts as an honours system, recognizing outstanding contributions by Welsh-speakers to all aspects of community and cultural life – including science, sport, music, politics, and charity work, and not just literature – by admitting such persons into its ranks in annual ceremonies held in the open air (weather permitting!) during the National Eisteddfod.

The Gorsedd is an example *par excellence* of 'the invention of tradition', and indeed of an invented tradition which has developed and adapted significantly over the years: for example, when Iolo held the first Gorsedd in 1792, on Primrose Hill in London, there were no robes; these would not begin to be worn until the Llangollen Eisteddfod of 1858 (partly as a result of the influence of ritualism on some Welsh Anglicans). But despite it being a fairly late romantic creation, and not historically 'accurate', the Gorsedd has over the years played an important symbolic role in the cultural life of Wales, with that importance depending not on whether it is 'true' or 'genuine', but on its contribution to the promotion of Welsh identity, the Welsh language, and Welsh culture. And as is true of all rites and ceremonies everywhere, while the Gorsedd pageantry is far removed from everyday 'reality' as regards attire, linguistic register, theatrical movements, and so forth, at the same time it tells us something of how the Welsh perceive and have perceived themselves, and how they want others to perceive them: as an ancient people, whose roots go back into the mists of time; as the original people of the 'Island of Britain' (the 'Cymmrodorion' – the 'Cyn-frodorion' or 'aborigines' – of that island), speaking a language descended from the Brythonic tongue of those 'aborigines'; as a creative people, who bestow the highest honours, not on military prowess – as is true of the ceremonial of so many nations – but on poetry and the arts; and as a peace-loving people, symbolized by the Gorsedd cry of 'Heddwch' ('peace') and the rule that the Grand Sword of the Gorsedd should never be fully unsheathed.

One member who was admitted to the Gorsedd in the year that the peripatetic National Eisteddfod was held in his home city of Cardiff in 2008 was the talented actor, Matthew Rhys, who has played prominent roles in the popular American television series, *Brothers & Sisters* and *The Americans*. In 2010 Matthew Rhys starred in a film entitled *Patagonia*, partly set in Chubut in Argentina, where there has been a Welsh settlement – usually referred to as 'Y Wladfa Gymreig', or simply as 'Y Wladfa' – for 150 years, and where perhaps as many as 5,000 people still speak Welsh – with a Spanish lilt! – or have at least some knowledge of the language. Although many members of the Settlement during its early years spoke only Welsh, those among their descendants who still speak the language are by now bilingual, Welsh and Spanish, and form a minority bilingual group within a mainly Spanish-speaking community. It is also important to note that there has been over recent decades a significant revival of interest in all things Welsh and a strong Welsh-learner movement among the fourth, fifth, and sixth generations of the original Welsh settlers and in the wider community – a movement promoted in particular by the 'Welsh Language Project in Chubut', run by the British Council in cooperation with the Welsh Government, the Wales-Argentina Society, the Welsh youth organization, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, and Cardiff University's Welsh for

Adults Centre, and also with the support of the provincial government in Chubut. Since 1997, the project has sent three Welsh Language Development Officers annually to the ‘Wladfa’, to teach Welsh there and to promote Welsh-language activities. Teaching Welsh to adults was the main focus of activity at the outset of the project, but recent years have seen significant developments in bilingual – Welsh and Spanish – education at nursery and primary school level.

The Matthew Rhys film is but one example of a fascination in Wales, and in the Welsh media in particular perhaps, with what is often perceived of and portrayed as a romantic, rather incongruous expression of Welshness – a Welsh ‘other’ some 7,000 miles from the homeland – and frequently embodied in the person of a Welsh-speaking gaucho, complete with *boleadora*. This media attention can be traced back at least to the novels of R. Bryn Williams, *Y March Coch* and *Bandit yr Andes*, broadcast by the BBC in the ‘Awr y Plant’ programme (the Welsh ‘Children’s Hour’) c. 1950, and it has reached a high point in recent years, especially in the context of the 150th anniversary of the Settlement in 2015 – indeed it feels at times as if a television crew or a journalist from Wales is in Patagonia almost every other week.

The Settlement began when about 160 Welsh-speakers – three-quarters of them under thirty years of age and from almost all corners of Wales and beyond, but with about a third of them coming from the Cynon and Taff Valleys – set sail from Liverpool in a converted tea-clipper called the *Mimosa* in May 1865, to what they thought would be a better life in South America. Their destination was the Chubut Valley in Patagonia, an area that was unpopulated by European settlers, but to which the government in Buenos Aires laid territorial claim. The aim of the settlers was to create a new Wales, Welsh-speaking and self-governing, founded on Christian and democratic principles. These Welsh settlers would take with them their cultural practices and institutions – Nonconformist chapel worship, *eisteddfodau*, and so forth – and 150 years on, Welsh cultural institutions and practices are still maintained there, for although it is important to emphasize that Welsh-speakers in Chubut now consider themselves as Argentinians of Welsh extraction, rather than as Welsh – and would, for example, support the Pumas rather than Wales in rugby – they still regard the ‘Old Country’ with much affection.

As has already been mentioned, despite the fact that Spanish is now the main community language in ‘Y Wladfa’, a number still speak Welsh regularly in various social contexts. Although many of the Nonconformist chapel services are now in Spanish, the Welsh chapels remain (both in the original Settlement in the Chubut Valley and in the smaller Welsh Settlement in the Andes which was established in the late 1880s), and some services are still held in Welsh or bilingually. Indeed those chapels, which are such a notable architectural feature of the Chubut Valley, receive substantial support from the Chubut provincial government towards their upkeep and are promoted as tourist attractions. This is indicative of the importance of the history and traditions of the Welsh settlers for the tourist and heritage industry of the area, as well as a sign of the respect and admiration which is afforded by now to the Welsh by the Chubut government and Argentinean society in general in recognition of their pioneering role in the development of Patagonia.

One prominent type of tourist attraction are the Welsh tea-rooms that have

mushroomed in Chubut, and in particular in the small town of Gaiman, where visitors are treated to plates piled full of bread and scones and jam and all manner of cakes, many of them very rich: not a feast for the faint-hearted or for those prone to high cholesterol. One of these tea-rooms, Tŷ Te Caerdydd (the Cardiff Tea House) – whose owners are of Spanish rather than Welsh descent – proudly advertises the fact that Diana, Princess of Wales, took tea there in 1995 (indeed the unwashed cup from which she drank, complete with dregs, is still on display in a glass case in the tea-room); and cruise ships which visit the nearby port of Puerto Madryn organize bus trips to visit Gaiman and partake of ‘Welsh teas’. This is an interesting example of an invention of tradition, in this case a Patagonian Welsh tradition, since there is no developed tradition of ‘Welsh teas’ in Wales itself, as in the case of Cornish cream teas, for example. Even the ubiquitous ‘Welsh’ fruitcake, *y deisen ddu*, the *torta negra Galesa*, is a Patagonian creation, not found in Wales. It would seem, rather, that such ‘Welsh teas’ are a marriage between the chapel teas exported to Patagonia from Nonconformist Wales and the Argentinian love of *dulce de leche* and other creamy and sugary desserts.

The eisteddfodic tradition also persists in Chubut, and indeed has flourished in recent years, even though many of the singing and literary competitions are by now through the medium of Spanish; and there is a Patagonian Gorsedd of Bards, complete with a Chaining of the Bard ceremony. However, members of the Patagonian Gorsedd wear blue ponchos rather than druidic robes, and the Gorsedd procession is led by gauchos on horseback; and there are other ways in which its ceremonies combine Argentinian and Welsh features – for example, the ‘flower dance’ which is performed during Gorsedd ceremonies in Wales is also part of the ceremonial in Patagonia, side-by-side with a performance of the tango. All in all, then, the Patagonian Gorsedd is a fascinating example of the way a Welsh tradition has developed in and adapted to a very different cultural context. And just as the ceremonial of the Welsh Gorsedd says something about how the Welsh perceive or have perceived themselves, and how they want others to perceive them, so the ceremonial of the Patagonian Gorsedd emphasizes that the Argentinians of Welsh descent see themselves as inheritors of a fusion of Welsh and Argentinian cultures.

In many ways, therefore, one has on a smaller scale in Chubut a mirror-image of the Wales of our day, a rather surreal ‘parallel universe’ where Welsh is still used, but now (as in Wales) by a minority rather than the majority of the population; where there is (as in Wales) a flourishing Welsh learner movement and a growth in bilingual education; and where you still have Nonconformist chapels and *eisteddfodau* and other elements of traditional Welsh culture, together with Welsh and bilingual place-names and personal names, Welsh-language community newspapers, and so on, but all in a very different geographical and cultural setting: a flat terrain, for the most part, with mile upon mile of dusty, brown, and fairly sterile steppes, as compared to Wales’s mountains and rain and greenery, and with Spanish rather than English as the dominant, all-pervasive language and culture. It is a place, as I have already said, where Welsh is spoken with a Spanish lilt, and where the guitar, the asado, the gaucho, and the siesta are part and parcel of Welsh Argentinean culture.

The obvious question is why does this Welsh outpost exist in Patagonia?

The nineteenth century saw over thirty million people emigrate from Europe to North America in search of a better life. However, emigration from Wales in the nineteenth century was comparatively small. In the mid-nineteenth century, when the population of Wales stood at around one million, it has been estimated that there were about 50,000 Welsh immigrants living in the USA, and by the end of that century, when the population of Wales had doubled to about two million, there were around 100,000 people living in the USA who had been born in Wales – concentrated mainly in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York State, and Wisconsin. The reason for these fairly small numbers of immigrants from Wales, as compared, say, to those from Ireland – more than four million in all during the nineteenth century – is that there was much internal migration within Wales itself, as people left the poorer rural areas and flocked to the new towns that were mushrooming in the developing industrial areas, and the iron, steel, and coal towns of south-east Wales in particular. Nevertheless, there was a steady flow of migration from Wales to the New World throughout the nineteenth century, especially in times of economic depression in the heavy industries, or at times of particular crisis in the rural economy, such as in the 1840s, the so-called ‘Hungry Forties’.

The main reasons that people emigrate are economic, but there are also other reasons, especially linked to the desire for political and religious freedoms, which in turn are closely linked to matters of identity, and that was true of many of the emigrants from Wales in the nineteenth century. Most of the population of Wales at the time were Welsh in language and Protestant Nonconformist in religion. This contrasted sharply with the ruling landlord and gentry classes, in rural Wales especially, who tended to be monoglot English speakers and members of the Established (Anglican) Church. The nineteenth century witnessed a significant growth in political radicalism in Wales, reflected in the growing support for the Liberal Party – which was the main ‘radical’ party in politics at that time – and there was also a growth in Welsh national consciousness as the nineteenth century progressed, especially as the influence of English language and culture grew in Wales. Such developments increased the tensions between the Welsh population in general and the ruling classes, who tended to be Conservative in politics and English in language and culture.

One of the most prominent among the more radical Nonconformist Welsh leaders in the second half of the nineteenth century was a man called Michael D. Jones (1822–98), principal of a theological college in Bala and a man of strong religious and political convictions. He was an evangelical Nonconformist and a radical democrat, who placed much emphasis on social justice, freedom of conscience, and the importance of nation and community. His parents before him had similarly strong convictions: indeed his mother was turned out of her tenancy in 1859 because of her and her son’s support for the radical Liberal Party in the parliamentary elections of that year, against the wishes of her Conservative landlord. A number of Michael D. Jones’s family had emigrated to America, and to Ohio in particular, and in the spring of 1848, immediately after finishing his theological training, he went to the USA, where he would stay until the following year, residing mainly in Cincinnati. One thing he noticed there was that Welsh immigrants assimilated rapidly into the English-speaking world around them,

gradually losing their language, customs, and religion; and he observed that this was true not only in Cincinnati, but wherever the Welsh settled in the populous parts of North America. Many were happy – indeed anxious – to put the old world behind them and to forge a new identity, but for others this loss of language, culture, and identity was a matter of tension and regret. There had already been a number of attempts to establish Welsh settlements in North America, but all had failed. Michael D. Jones became convinced that if Welsh immigrants were to retain their language, culture, and religion, Welsh emigration would have to be channelled to a specific Welsh settlement in a place remote from English-speaking influences, where the Welsh would be the formative, dominant element in that community.

Michael D. Jones subsequently became the leader of a group of like-minded people who attempted to realize this objective of creating a Welsh-speaking, self-governing, democratic, and Nonconformist Wales overseas. A number of locations were considered, including Oregon, Vancouver Island, Syria, and Palestine, but they eventually agreed upon the Chubut Valley in Patagonia, which was at the time a very remote area of South America, with no European settlements, only nomadic indigenous peoples, as a first step towards turning the whole of Patagonia, and not just the Chubut Valley, into a new Wales, where its language, customs, and religion would thrive. Michael D. Jones did not move there himself – he did not really approve of emigration; the better option, in his view, was to stand one's ground in Wales itself – but he accepted that emigration was a natural, universal phenomenon; and if emigration was inevitable, then he was strongly of the opinion that it should be channelled to create a new Wales overseas. He was therefore a strong supporter of the Patagonian venture throughout his life; indeed, he may be regarded as the spiritual father-figure of that venture, and it is certainly true that without his financial support – or more correctly, his wife's money – it is very unlikely that the first settlers would have sailed from Liverpool to Patagonia in 1865. He continued to promote the settlement throughout his life, and by his death in 1898 over 3,000 Welsh settlers and their children were living in the Chubut Valley, in a flourishing, mainly Welsh-speaking community.

That state of affairs was in stark contrast to the hardships facing the first Welsh settlers in Patagonia in 1865. To say that they had been misled would be an understatement. Some thought, mistakenly, that there had been an agreement with the government in Buenos Aires that Patagonia would become a self-governing Welsh-speaking province within the Argentinean republic. They were also led to believe that the Chubut Valley was a land flowing with milk and honey; but rather than finding themselves 'lying in green pastures', when they arrived those pioneer settlers found themselves sheltering on the windswept beach of New Bay (Puerto Madryn) during a Patagonian winter, facing a long trek of about forty miles across barren, uncharted steppes in order to reach the Chubut Valley, which was itself far from fertile.

Some left the valley as soon as possible, but others persisted against all odds. They only survived with the help of provisions from the government in Buenos Aires, which was anxious to see a settlement develop there in order to strengthen its territorial claim on Patagonia, and with the help of the nomadic indigenous population, who taught them to hunt and who traded with them. The Welsh had on

the whole a very harmonious, if rather paternalistic, relationship with the indigenous peoples of the area – a positive relationship which was in stark contrast to the harsh persecution those peoples would suffer later at the hands of the Argentine government, and about which treatment the Welsh protested vehemently. Some have pointed to the rather anomalous position of the Welsh in relation to the indigenous peoples, with the desire of the Welsh to preserve their own language and culture being juxtaposed with the dangers their settlement posed to the language and culture of the indigenous population. Some have also protested at attempts in contemporary discourse to avoid using the word ‘colony’ to describe the Welsh Settlement. However, if one defines ‘colonial’ as ‘imposing one’s language and culture on others’, then the distinction between ‘colony’ and ‘settlement’ is a useful one in the context of the Welsh in Patagonia, as in general they occupied a type of ‘third space’ in Chubut, neither ‘indigenous’ nor ‘colonial’, as indicated by the fact that the indigenous population refused to call the Welsh *cristianos*, the term they used for the descendants of European colonists, but insisted rather on calling them *amigos de los Indios* (the friends of the Indians).

The main leader of the expedition, Lewis Jones (1837–1904), soon left for Buenos Aires to escape the wrath of the settlers who accused him of misleading them, but he returned two years later in 1867, around the time the Welsh settlers began to create irrigation channels from the Chupat (or Chubut) river. With great diligence and much physical labour, they eventually created a network of canals throughout the Lower Chubut Valley, turning it into fertile land. So successful indeed were they that by the end of the century grain from the Chubut Valley was winning international prizes for its quality. The Welsh Settlement during the last quarter of the nineteenth century experienced something of a golden age, not only economically, but also as a place where Welsh flourished as the main language of the community. At that time Welsh was the language of education, religion, local government, commerce, and cultural life in general, and it looked as if the vision of a new Welsh-speaking Wales overseas would be realized. But with economic success came the seeds of failure. People from other parts of the Republic – people of Spanish and Italian extraction in particular – began to pour in from the mid-1890s onward, and by the First World War around two-thirds of the population of the Chubut Valley were of non-Welsh extraction. The Argentinean government began to involve itself increasingly in the life of the Settlement. For example, it took control of elementary education from the Welsh settlers, turning it by the end of the century from being Welsh to being Spanish-medium. Immigration from Wales had ceased to all intents and purposes by the First World War, and with no significant injection of new Welsh speakers from the ‘Old Country’, and with the great influx of non-Welsh speakers and the increasing emphasis by the Argentinean government on assimilation, the Welsh language and its culture went into steady decline in the mid-twentieth century, with the language becoming virtually excluded from public life and its use restricted to home and chapel. Things looked very bleak for the fortunes of the Welsh language in Chubut, and by the 1970s there was a common expectation that it was on its last legs.

However, the period since the Second World War has seen increasing contact between Wales and the Settlement, with the celebrations of the centenary of the

Settlement in 1965 proving an important turning-point in that relationship. Easier and cheaper means of transport and communication have been key factors, together with the development of social media in recent years. Changes in government policy in Argentina have led to less emphasis on assimilation and more on cultural diversity, and to a new appreciation of the role of the Welsh in the development of Patagonia. One important factor in this new recognition was the establishment of Chubut as a separate province in the 1950s, which has led to a more vigorous promotion of provincial identity in which both the Welsh and the indigenous peoples are afforded privileged pioneer positions. All this helped fuel the significant revival of interest in Welsh language and culture which has been experienced in Chubut from the 1990s onward, together with a heightened interest on the part of people in Wales itself in what is often perceived as a rather exotic, romantic expression of Welshness in the remote expanses of Patagonia. There are numerous visits from Wales to Chubut every year by now – ranging from young people travelling through South America on a gap year to television crews, and from groups of Welsh holidaymakers led by specialist tourist operators to academics – including myself, in my role as co-Director of the Cardiff Centre for Welsh American Studies.

The School of Welsh in Cardiff University, its Welsh for Adults Centre and its Centre for Welsh American Studies, have had a long-term involvement and research interest in the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia. That is not surprising given that the School has for many years had a particular focus on sociolinguistics and language planning, especially in the context of lesser-used languages, and on matters relating to identity – and the Welsh Settlement in Chubut abounds in interesting questions and case-studies relating to identity and provides much food for thought on some of the burning issues of the day. Since 2008, the generosity of Banco Santander through its ‘Santander Universities’ scheme has allowed the School of Welsh to develop a series of short exchange visits between academic staff and students in Cardiff and various educational establishments in Argentina, in order to strengthen academic networking and cooperation between the School of Welsh and the world of higher education in Argentina, with the aim of promoting the study of Welsh language and culture in general, and research into the Welsh Argentinean community in particular. It is an initiative in which I personally have been heavily involved and which reached a crescendo in July 2015 with a conference in Cardiff University entitled ‘The Welsh Settlement in Patagonia, 1865–2015’. One notable feature of that conference was that half of the speakers were born and raised in Argentina. This was the first time that so many experts from Wales and Argentina had been able to come together to discuss the ‘Wladfa’, and it provided an unrivalled opportunity to view the Settlement, past, present, and future, through the eyes of people from both sides of the Atlantic. (The papers delivered at the conference – 14 in all, on a wide range of topics – can be found on Cardiff University’s YouTube channel.)

One essential aspect of academic research is comparison, and case-studies are an important element in such comparative work. Case-studies allow us to test theories and hypotheses through comparison, and in so doing, they help to expand our knowledge, deepen our understanding, and recognize those elements in a particular case which may have universal application. Comparing, for example,

the experience of a Bangladeshi immigrant in England in the late twentieth century with that of a Welsh immigrant in Argentina in the mid-nineteenth century can help us understand which elements in those experiences are core to the human condition and which are more peripheral and circumstantial.

Let us, then, mention some themes relating to identity and assimilation which surface regularly when one studies the Welsh Argentinian experience in its various phases and which warrant comparison with other contexts.

Firstly, one can note the importance of identity in and of itself, together with the importance of language, religion, geography, history, and traditions in the creation and promotion of that identity – be those traditions or that history genuine or fabricated. After all, the preservation of their separate identity was of sufficient importance to many of the early Welsh settlers in Patagonia to make them not only venture 7,000 miles from their homeland to the uncertainties of an unfamiliar, undeveloped region, but also to suffer untold hardships in the early years of that new settlement.

It should also be noted that the Welsh Patagonian experience emphasizes that identity is a complex matter, which varies to a greater or lesser degree from individual to individual, and from generation to generation; indeed it varies within the same individual at different times and in different contexts. In other words, while identity is an essential part of our make-up as human beings, that identity is fluid, multi-layered, and multi-faceted. Identity is a construct: as individuals and communities we choose, consciously or unconsciously, what to foreground and what to push or let drift into the background.

That leads to another, related consideration, namely that assimilation and adaptation in some form or another, and to varying degrees, are an inevitable part of the immigrant experience. The aim of Michael D. Jones and the other founders of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia was to replicate Wales, its language, culture, and religion in South America. Ultimately that failed, in part because of the Argentinian government's policy of assimilation and because of the great influx of people of non-Welsh extraction and partly because the numbers of Welsh emigrants never reached the critical mass needed for the Settlement in Chubut to develop into a self-governing, Welsh-speaking province of the Argentine. But even if such a province had emerged, it would not have been an exact clone of Wales. Partly because of the tenacity with which some of the settlers and their descendants held on to the 'Patagonian dream' of the founders of the Settlement, the Welsh language and Welsh traditions have survived in Patagonia into the fifth and sixth generations, much longer than in the case of any other Welsh immigrant community. Yet, even during the early years of the Settlement, the culture, customs, and way of life of the settlers, and even the form of the Welsh language which they used in their daily lives, were beginning to diverge from those of the 'Old Country', as they affectionately called Wales, as a consequence of the very different social, cultural, and geographical context in which they now lived; and this divergence would accelerate in later generations (i.e. among those who were born in Argentina with no first-hand experience of the 'Old Country'). As in the case of immigration world-wide, the draw of the 'new country' is ultimately too great, even though the immigrants and their descendants may still retain much affection for the 'old

country'; and therefore what we see almost immediately among the Welsh settlers and their children is a Welsh Patagonian culture and identity developing, different from that of Wales, although similar in a number of ways. As the great Welsh short-story writer, Kate Roberts (1891–1985), could say of an encounter with the second-generation Welsh Patagonian author, Eluned Morgan (1870–1938) – daughter of Lewis Jones – in Cardiff in 1916, in a comment reminiscent of the assertion that 'England and America are two countries separated by the same language':

During the meals I had become more comfortable in her company, although not completely comfortable. Although she spoke Welsh like me, she was a woman who had been raised in a different country and in different circumstances, and naturally there was a certain distance between us. People from two different countries, although they speak the same language, cannot be at home in each other's company the first times they meet. [My translation.]

There are, of course, exceptions, and immigrants and their descendants can react against the 'new country' in a negative way that leads to a return to the 'old country', often with the zeal of a convert – and one can find examples of this in the case of Wales and Patagonia. However, the norm, it seems to me, is for a country to 'claim its own'. My own family is a case in point. My maternal grandmother moved from near Bristol to the south Wales valleys as a young bride during the First World War, and would remain as quintessentially English as could be until her death at the age of 100; and yet her children, born in those valleys, did not regard themselves as English, even though they were not Welsh-speaking and did not have a drop of 'Welsh' blood in their veins. Ironically, the long survival of the Welsh language in Chubut only serves to emphasize the inevitable draw of the 'new country', for (as has already been mentioned) those Welsh-speakers are emphatic that in terms of identity they are Argentinian and not Welsh; and yet it is also worth emphasizing that they bring to that 'new' identity a flavour of the 'old', and in so doing enrich the mosaic of Argentinian culture and identity.

Immigration and multiculturalism and globalization are high on the agenda in many countries in the world today, and concerns about assimilation and identity are pressing issues for many people. My own personal take on migration is that it is beneficial to society – to a certain level at least. To illustrate this, compare a stagnant pool with one through which a refreshing stream flows. To me, a society or community which does not experience any in-migration is in danger of becoming sterile, while conversely, a stream of immigration into a community provides creative stimulation and a widening of vistas. However, if that stream turns into a flood, it becomes a destructive force sweeping all in its path, as was the case so often in a literal sense in the Chubut Valley until 1963, when a dam began to control the flooding which had periodically destroyed the work of the Welsh settlers. Such a flood of non-Welsh immigration was experienced in the 'Wladfa' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and also in the industrial valleys of south-east Wales in the same period; and there are some interesting parallels between those south Wales valleys and the 'Wladfa' over a fairly similar period

– both experienced a significant influx of non-Welsh-speaking immigrants in the pre-First World War period; both saw a steep decline in the fortunes of the Welsh language and its culture for much of the twentieth century (with often little more than chapel and home to help sustain the language, and with women frequently playing a crucial role); and both have witnessed a burgeoning Welsh-learner movement and a significant growth in Welsh-medium education during recent decades. A similar flood now faces the former bastions of the Welsh language in north and west Wales, with about a quarter of the population of Wales by now born outside Wales. Politicians and others have been very reluctant to grasp that nettle for fear of accusations of being ‘racial’; but it is interesting to note that when levels of immigration are perceived to be affecting English language and culture, some politicians are more than ready to sound an alarm. To quote the then Home Secretary, Teresa May, in her speech to the Conservative Party Conference in October 2015: ‘When immigration is too high, when the pace of change is too fast, it’s impossible to build a cohesive society.’ But whatever the truth in Mrs May’s claims, what is true in the case of both the south Wales valleys and the Chubut Valley in Patagonia is the remarkable tenacity of older traditions despite the flood of immigrants, and the way in which, in both cases, Welshness has gradually percolated through the layers of sediment left by those immigrant floods, although of course it is an evolved and evolving Welshness, not identical with the old. And in that sense, both the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia and the new settlements in the south Wales valleys should be a lesson to all immigrants: however great the flood, it is impossible to replicate the old country in the new; change and adaptation, a fusion of old and new, is inevitable; and as with all changes, there are gains and losses, pluses and minuses.

2015 marks the end of a very full year of commemorating the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia – a venture which can be viewed at the same time as a bungled failure and as a remarkable achievement. In a recent article in the *Western Mail’s Weekend Magazine* (3 October 2015), Professor Chris Evans said of the Patagonian venture:

We are apt to overplay Patagonia, the subject of a good deal of starry-eyed commemoration in recent months. In reality, the Patagonian adventure was the work of a few oddballs who are irrelevant to the history of emigration from Wales and even more irrelevant to the history of immigration into Argentina.

Professor Evans is right to remind us that Welsh emigration is much more than just Patagonia and that there are other aspects of the Welsh experience overseas which well deserve our attention. He may also, in what is after all a popular article, be deliberately writing tongue-in-cheek. But his comments fall far short of the reality of the significance and relevance of the Patagonian venture. For one thing, those who are to him ‘a few oddballs’ may, from a different standpoint, be regarded as ‘visionaries’, albeit romantic dreamers whose feet were not as sound on the ground as they perhaps should have been. People like Michael D. Jones and others who espoused the ‘Patagonian dream’ were ‘prophets in the wilderness’ in the world

of social Darwinism and *laissez-faire* Liberalism that was Victorian Wales; but their concern for the preservation of the Welsh language and Welsh culture would prove an inspiration to future generations, including such crucial figures as O. M. Edwards and Saunders Lewis. Indeed, it is not too much to claim that without their intransigence and inspiration, it is questionable whether the Welsh language would have survived in Wales itself, let alone in Patagonia, and whether there would be a Senedd today in Cardiff Bay. Although the Settlement in Patagonia did not develop along the lines they had envisaged, the fact that the Welsh language has survived in Argentina into the fifth and sixth generations makes the Chubut settlement quite exceptional in the history of emigration, and is in part to be attributed to the ‘Patagonian dream’ espoused by the founders of the Settlement and maintained by some of their descendants – although it should be emphasized that there were also other factors at work, such as the comparative isolation of the Settlement and that fact that it developed in a Spanish-dominant culture and was not part of the British Empire. As regards the influence of the Welsh on the development of Argentina, one has only to look at an aerial photograph of the Chubut Valley, standing out from the surrounding sterile countryside, to appreciate the heroic achievement of the Welsh settlers in creating a fertile land in that desert area through a remarkably sophisticated irrigation system that has not been improved upon even today. And when one adds to that the fact that Patagonia was a disputed area between Argentina and Chile in the nineteenth century, far from being ‘irrelevant to the history of immigration into Argentina’, it is not too much to claim that were not it for the Welsh Settlements in the Chubut Valley and the Andes, the political map of South America might well have been very different today. All things considered, then, the Patagonian venture is by no means ‘irrelevant to the history of emigration’; on the contrary, it had far-reaching consequences both in Argentina and back in Wales and continues to raise a range of pertinent issues and considerations.

What will be the fate of Welsh identity, both in Wales and in Patagonia, between now and the 200th anniversary of the Welsh Settlement in Chubut in fifty years’ time? I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but one thing is certain: history tells us that in both countries and in both cultures, change of some sort is inevitable, and that in some way that change will be a fusion of the old and the new, and influenced strongly not only by demographic and cultural changes, but by the land itself; for to paraphrase the poet Ceiriog, *mae cenhedlaeth yn mynd a chenhedlaeth yn dod, ond aros mae’r mynyddoedd mawr* (‘generations come and generations go, but the great mountains remain’). Change is inexorable from generation to generation, and immigration and assimilation are often key agents in any social and cultural change. The new changes the old, but the old also changes the new; the new flavours the old, but the old also flavours the new; and out of that melting pot will come a new identity, together with the invention of new traditions and the adaptation of older ones.