

SETTLER COLONIALISM AND WELSH PATAGONIA: WHY WE NEED A MORE COMPLEX VIEW

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Abstract

This article aims to encourage a more complex interpretation of a well-worn story, that of the Welsh colony in Patagonia, Y Wladfa. It applies insights from settler colonial theory and Indigenous scholarship to ask fresh questions, focusing on two dimensions: Welsh relationships to the Indigenous Peoples of Patagonia; and Welsh embedment in the dominant colonial, racial and capitalist dynamics which shaped global relations in the nineteenth century – and continue to impact today. It draws on archival evidence to explore critically Welsh-Indigenous relations, and Welsh relationships with the Argentine government and its settler colonial strategy. The article does not seek to condemn the Welsh settlers for their colonial actions – they simply reflected the conventions of their time – but argues that we can and should reappraise how we tell the story of Y Wladfa today in order to challenge stereotypes and build a more meaningful multicultural Wales tomorrow.

The story of Y Wladfa – the Welsh colony in Patagonia – is very well known in Wales. Indeed, it is a touchstone of the national story and continues to occupy a central role in the pantheon of events and personalities which shape Welsh identity. Children learn about Y Wladfa in primary school, travel books are written, a wealth of TV programmes are produced, and many Welsh people aspire to take a trip to Patagonia to visit the tea-rooms, chapels and historic sites of the colony's early years.¹ The centrality of Y Wladfa to Welsh cultural life and identity is undoubted, but like many iconic cultural 'moments', it has taken on a veneer of caricature and the same stories are told in the same way. There is a good reason for this: Y Wladfa is a story of Welsh success, a tale of heroism in the face of hardship, of endurance despite the odds, and of moral courage. Given the history of exclusion and hardship, political domination, economic exploitation and cultural erosion, celebrating Y Wladfa has always been an act of political resistance and a source of cultural energy. As such it is celebrated as a great achievement, generating pride and confidence.

¹ School materials include: Sioned Hughes, *Patagonia* (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Astudiaethau Addysg, Prifysgol Aberystwyth, 2010); Sioned Lewis, *The Right Answer: A family seeks a better life in Patagonia* (Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2006). Travel books include Jon Gower, *Gwalia Patagonia* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 2015); Chris Moss, *Patagonia: a Cultural History* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2008). TV programmes include *Patagonia: Dyddiadur Matthew Rhys, O'r Môr i'r Mynydd* (2006); *Patagonia with Huw Edwards* (2015).

My aim in this article is not to undermine the colonists' achievements, nor to disregard Y Wladfa's inspirational role in Welsh culture, but rather to encourage a more complex interpretation of the well-worn story. This complexity has two dimensions: embracing Wales' complex position as both colonized and colonizer, linked especially to their relationship with Indigenous Peoples; and locating Y Wladfa within global politics to expand our perspective.² Both of these dimensions question the rather romantic and quite superficial narrative and invite us to embrace a more ambiguous position, one that speaks to a modern, multicultural Wales that is increasingly confident of its own position in the world.

Unpacking the story of Y Wladfa

In May 1865, 158 people – children, women and men – left Liverpool on a ship called the *Mimosa*. They arrived on a lonely beach in Patagonia, later the site of the large town Puerto Madryn, and journeyed to the Chubut Valley where they eventually established three towns: Trelew, Gaiman and Rawson. Migrants arrived from Wales in batches right up until 1895 and this expanding population led them to seek new allotments of land in the Andes, founding Esquel and Trevelin in 1906.³ The 'Welsh feat' is celebrated in Wales (and Patagonia too) because it demonstrates fine qualities: tenacity (they stuck at it, despite enduring real hardship); ingenuity (they devised a complex irrigation system, for example); courage (they faced hunger and floods, fear and persecution). More than anything, Y Wladfa is celebrated because it placed Welsh culture, language and way of life at the centre of its enterprise in a deliberate strategy of defiance against English oppression. It engendered hope in the future of Welshness. Despite only numbering, at most, 3,750 people in 1895, then, it has earned its iconic status in Welsh popular culture because it embodies the spirit of Dafydd Iwan's famous phrase 'Ry'n ni yma o hyd' ('We're still here').⁴

As valuable – and cherished – as this interpretation is, some commentators in Wales are moving the discussion onwards to reappraise colonialism and slavery.⁵ For example, the Welsh government has declared an aim to build an anti-racist Wales, led by Race Council Cymru, and has begun assessing its holdings and exhibitions in museums and art galleries.⁶ Similarly, the new Black Curriculum is being rolled out in Welsh schools, not to mention discussions over the Picton Monument and efforts by the Penrhyn Estate to recognize the way that their wealth

² I will develop these themes in my forthcoming book *Global Politics of Welsh Patagonia* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2024).

³ The best general history of the settlement to date is Glyn Williams, *The Desert and the Dream: A Study of Welsh Colonization in Chubut, 1865–1915* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975).

⁴ R. Bryn Williams, *Y Wladfa* (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1962), p. 321.

⁵ See Chris Evans' excellent book, *Slave Wales: The Welsh and Atlantic Slavery* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010).

⁶ Llywodraeth Cymru, *Anti-racist Wales Action Plan*, Anti-racist Wales Action Plan | GOV.WALES (accessed 27 March 2023).

is linked to Caribbean slavery.⁷ Much of this effort has, with good reason, been focused on Wales' relation with African heritage and is highly valuable, yet relatively little attention has been paid in the public discussion to Welsh participation in the British imperial machine, or as settlers in Australia, North America, South Africa or Patagonia, which is also part of the story.⁸ This is perhaps more difficult to face. Slavery is so utterly condemnable that it is a simpler starting point – and, of course, facing Welsh complicity in the trade and plantations is a vital issue, not least in the continuing climate of racial violence against people of African heritage. Yet settler colonialism is more ambiguous: settler colonies were seen as legitimate entities and indeed continue to enjoy legitimacy; migration to colonies was popular and commonplace in the nineteenth century; and most settlers were fleeing poverty and exploitation back home, so it seemed an act of courage and resistance. Yet it is precisely because we need to work harder to see settler colonialism's pernicious effects that we should start looking below the surface. This is particularly important in Y Wladfa because it is the Welsh colonists' relationship to the original Indigenous people there which forms the cornerstone of its claim to legitimacy – indeed to moral goodness.⁹

Settler colonial theory (SCT) and Indigenous scholarship can perhaps help us to begin a sensitive yet critical rethinking of Y Wladfa. SCT is a large and complex body of thought that develops concepts and interpretations of history drawn from analysis of settler scenarios – most commonly, north America, Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand as well as Palestine/Israel.¹⁰ It is informed by the experiences

⁷ Llywodraeth Cymru 'Learning of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories included in new Welsh Curriculum' <<https://www.gov.wales/learning-black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-histories-included-new-welsh-curriculum>> (accessed 27 March 2023); 'Carmarthen's Thomas Picton monument to stay but with new sign referencing slavery links' <<https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2020-12-22/carmarthens-thomas-picton-monument-to-stay-unchanged-but-with-new-sign-referencing-slavery-links>> (accessed 27 March 2023); National Trust 'Penrhyn Castle and Slave Trade History' <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wales/penrhyn-castle-and-garden/penrhyn-castle-and-slave-trade-history>> (accessed 27 March 2023).

⁸ See Neil Evans, 'Writing Wales into the Empire: Rhetoric, Fragments – and beyond?', in *Wales and the British Overseas Empire* ed. by H. V. Bowen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 15–39. Examples include: Aled Jones and Bill Jones 'The Welsh World and the British Empire c.1851–1939: An Exploration', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 31 (2010), pp. 57–81; Donald MacRaild and Philip Payton, 'The Welsh Diaspora', in Tanja Buelmann et al. (ed.), *British and Irish Diasporas: Societies, Cultures and Ideologies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 244–279.

⁹ Indigenous Patagonians are mobilizing to reclaim their histories. See, amongst a wealth of Spanish language sources, Monica Carrasco, *Los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas en Argentina* (Amsterdam: IWGIA & Asociación de Comunidades Indígenas de Argentina, 2000); Sebastián Valverde 'De la invisibilización a la construcción como sujetos sociales: el pueblo indígena Mapuche y sus movimientos en Patagonia, Argentina' *Anuario Antropológico* (2013), pp. 139–166.

¹⁰ See articles in the journal *Settler Colonial Studies* and for example Taiiaki Alfred and Jeff Cornthassel 'Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism', *Government and Opposition*, 40 (2005), pp. 597–614; Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Settler Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2017); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2014); Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonial Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).

of both Indigenous and settler scholars who reflect on the ideas, prejudices and privileges at work in the settler scenario, and reveals the techniques used to maintain white, masculine, settler powerfulness, as well as Indigenous strategies of dignity and resistance. I will be developing a theoretical toolkit in my forthcoming book *Global Politics of Welsh Patagonia*, but for now let me foreground two ways in which settler colonial theory can disturb the usual settler story.

Firstly, settler colonial theory and Indigenous scholarship asks us to take Indigenous experience seriously and invites us to look at colonialism from the point of view of the colonized, the invaded, those dispossessed of land and racially persecuted.¹¹ Usually, this entails cataloguing the violent and oppressive policies meted out by the colonizers; the resulting analysis is horrifying, but morally straightforward and easy to condemn. The case of Y Wladfa, though, is more ambiguous because the Welsh developed (largely) cooperative relationships based on trade and intermittent social encounters between the two groups who each lived parallel lives, according to their own customs and way of life. Indeed, the relationship of ‘friendship’ is celebrated in the Welsh archive and continues to have an empowering impact today by engendering pride.¹² To help us unpack and critique this scenario we can consider the kinds of questions that SCT and Indigenous scholarship might inspire, such as: why are Indigenous people made visible in the Welsh archive and how are they portrayed? Who speaks about Indigenous life? And, who is served by this portrayal?

Secondly, settler colonial theory takes a global view which sees colonization, including Y Wladfa, within the sweep of global processes. It foregrounds the shifting dynamics of global capitalism and modernity which were accelerated with the ‘discovery’ of the Americas in 1492, as well as the spread of migration and settling (and Indigenous subjugation) during the nineteenth century. This challenges one of the key characteristics of writing about Welsh Patagonia which imagines Y Wladfa to be somehow separate to the metaprocesses of colonialism, capitalist exploitation and racialised assumptions of European supremacy that reigned in the mid-nineteenth century. The archive of memoirs, lectures, letters etc – and even contemporary films or TV programmes – tend to jump between Wales and Y Wladfa, from one location of Welshness to another, as if transported along a glass corridor.¹³ The Welsh observe the land-theft, exploitation, racism and violence on their journey but at a distance. The durable transparent walls, shaped by ideas of Welsh exceptionalism, sustain the fallacy that the age of colonialism was (is) nothing to do with Welshness, allowing the *gwladychwyr* or Welsh colonists to remain untainted by these global realities. Yet they were, and are, in and of this world. Simply insisting on embedding both Wales and Y Wladfa in global politics, then,

¹¹ A great example is: Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

¹² Lucy Taylor ‘Welsh-Indigenous Relationships in Nineteenth Century Patagonia: ‘Friendship’ and the Coloniality of Power’ *Journal of Latin American Studies* 49 (2017), pp. 143–168.

¹³ I take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks to the staff of the National Library of Wales, the Archive at Bangor University Library, the Museo Histórico Regional Gaiman and the Museo Regional Trevelin for all their hard work in helping me with my research.

shakes up our assumptions and opens space to begin recognising Welsh entanglement in colonialism, global capitalism and racial hierarchies. This perspective again suggests a number of questions that might take our thinking forwards: How did global colonial dynamics shape Y Wladfa? What role did Y Wladfa play in Argentina's settler strategy – and Indigenous dispossession? And, were the Welsh themselves subject to cultural assimilation in Argentina?

Disturbing the Welsh-Indigenous 'friendship'

How should we characterise the relationship between the Indigenous and Welsh communities? The Tehuelche, Pampa and Mapuche Peoples who lived in the region interacted with the Welsh in order to trade. They claimed as their homelands large, overlapping tracts of land stretching from the coast to the Andes. These homelands and hunting grounds were regulated by complex social norms, political alliances (or rivalries) and economic connections to create a loose but coherent network of communities.¹⁴ People traversed their territories in groups with their horses in seasonal patterns (sometimes settling, sometimes moving onwards) following game and harvesting fruits, but also to trade with other Indigenous groups or at Argentine outposts. Here, they sold guanaco skins (a kind of small llama) and reha feathers in return for foodstuffs, metal goods, clothing etc., and were integrated with the Argentine – and global – capitalist economy.¹⁵ Some had entered treaties, ceding land to the Argentine government, some used these connections in power struggles with rival Indigenous leaders, and some were in correspondence with the various Ministers of the Interior and even Presidents of the Republic.¹⁶ At this point (the 1860s and 1870s) the Indigenous communities of Patagonia were still autonomous but they were not isolated from Argentine politics and the broader dynamics of capitalism. They regarded settler colonialism as a disagreeable fact of life but one that could offer advantages if they played an astute political game. Their autonomy was wiped away, though, during the early 1880s by the genocidal logic of the Conquest of the Desert in which the army swept through Patagonia, dispossessing Indigenous communities of their homelands, killing those who resisted and imprisoning people in internment camps, just for being Tehuelche, Mapuche, or Pampa.¹⁷

¹⁴ Irma Bernal and Mario Sánchez Proaño, *Los Tehuelche y otros Cazadores Australes* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2007).

¹⁵ Marcelo Gavirati, *El Contacto entre Galeses, Pampas y Tehuelches: la Conformación de un Modelo de Convivencia Pacífica en la Patagonia Central (1865–1885)* (Universidad del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, Doctorado Interuniversitario en Historia, 2012); Glyn Williams, 'Welsh Settlers and Native Americans in Patagonia,' *Journal of Latin American Studies* 11 (1979), pp. 41–66.

¹⁶ Jorge Pávez Ojeda (ed.), *Cartas Mapuches: siglo XIX* (Santiago de Chile: CoLibris & Ocho Libros, 2008).

¹⁷ Claudia Briones and Walter Delrio 'The "Conquest of the Desert" as a Trope and Enactment of Argentina's Manifest Destiny' ed. by David Maybury-Lewis, Theodore Macdonald and Bjorn Maybury-Lewis *Manifest Destinies and Indigenous Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 51–83; Alexis Papazian and Mariano Nagy 'Prácticas de disciplinamiento Indígena en la Isla Martín García hacia fines del siglo XIX', *Revista TEFROS* 8 (2010).

In the early days of Y Wladfa, then, Indigenous groups effectively controlled large tracts Patagonia. According to a letter written by Cacique (Leader) Antonio, the Indigenous communities around the Chubut Valley were aware that the Welsh were settling and were pleased: this new colony was much more convenient to travel to, and the Welsh were much less aggressive than the Argentines.¹⁸ However, there is little evidence from Indigenous or independent sources that they saw this as friendship. Certainly, one English traveller George Musters (who spent nine months with the ‘Indians’) reported that Cacique Hinchel’s people remarked: ‘the honest Welsh colonists were much pleasanter and safer to deal with than ‘the Christians’ [Argentines] of Rio Negro...’ and ‘[Cacique] Jackechan often expatiated on the liberality of the colonists and the goodness of their bread’.¹⁹ True, their few letters to the Welsh do call the Welsh ‘My Friends’, but they also use this term strategically when writing to Presidents and Generals (who were certainly not their friends) in order to ask a favour or even veil a threat.²⁰ There is little doubt that some personal friendships were forged: Jonathan Ceredig Davies speaks warmly of Cacique Kingel, while John Daniel Evans expresses sincere distress at finding his childhood friend captured in an Argentine internment camp and being unable to help him before he died there.²¹ However, there is also evidence (scarce and overlooked in the literature) of animosity, fear and disdain. We have a copy of one diary (the original having recently mysteriously disappeared) written by a young man who arrived in 1872 bringing guns to sell, who records that suspicion, fright and casual racism were also everyday occurrences.²²

What, then, are the foundations for the myth of friendship? As is well known, the Welsh were ill-equipped to live on the *paith* (plains) which were dry, wind-swept and a far cry from the damp mountains, soft hills and verdant valleys of Wales. In order to keep their Welsh trading post, Marcello Gavirati suggests that several Indigenous leaders, especially Cacique Francisco, decided to help them adjust to their new environment.²³ They taught them to ride horses and hunt guanacos, hares and rheas using ‘Indian’ techniques and their sure-footed horses and dogs. They also taught them where to find water, how to follow Indian Tracks and about the plants and creatures of the *paith*. This enabled the Welsh to flourish in the Chubut Valley and make it their home. For the first twenty years, the two communities lived alongside one another in parallel, sometimes intersecting, lives.²⁴ The Welsh did not seek to dominate nor impose government, language, customs or religion, and a fairly

¹⁸ Taylor, ‘Welsh-Indigenous Relationships’.

¹⁹ George C. Musters, *At Home with the Patagonians* (Stroud: Nonsuch, 2005 [1871]), p. 97.

²⁰ Ojeda, *Cartas Mapuches*.

²¹ Jonathan Ceredig Davies, ‘Deunydd a defnyddiwyd gan Jonathan Ceredig Davies yn ei ‘Patagonia: a description of the country’ (National Library of Wales, MS8545–8B, n.d., circa 1890), pp. 274–5; Cery A. Evans (ed), *John Daniel Evans ‘El Molinero’* (Esquel: Gráfica Alfa, 1994), pp. 92–3. I explore this at length in Taylor, ‘Welsh-Indigenous Relationships’.

²² T. G. Pritchard (1875) ‘Hanes fy nhaith o Pittsburgh Pa i Patagonia’ (copy – original lost) Museo Regional Gaiman.

²³ Gavirati, *El contacto entre Galeses*.

²⁴ Lucy Taylor, ‘The Welsh Way of Colonisation in Patagonia: The International Politics of Moral Superiority’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 47 (2019), pp. 1073–1099.

peaceable relationship was established, based on the mutual desire for trade. Indigenous merchants brought skins and feathers to the Welsh trading post in exchange for food and commodities. The Welsh then shipped these to Buenos Aires where they sold them for money which could be used to buy building materials, goods, livestock and machinery, which in turn built the community's farmsteads, chapels and schools – its Welsh-speaking community.

The Welsh explicitly adopted this strategy of friendship.²⁵ It was embedded in the ideological thrust of the movement, led by Michael D. Jones who stated in his 1856 article in *Yr Anybynwyr*: 'I am completely opposed to taking land, unless the principles of fair trade allow it'.²⁶ This was echoed too in the handbook of the Welsh settlement where Hugh Hughes Cadfan asserts that 'We cannot disregard the rights of the Indians of the land but ... we should attempt to make friends of them, giving them whatever is honest, whatever is just'.²⁷ It also reflected the strong Nonconformist values of the settlers whose emphasis on Christian love, manifested through charity, mercy, compassion and pity, provided the moral force behind the settlement.²⁸ This, as Fernando Williams explains, allowed them to understand Y Wladfa as their productive but also spiritual Garden of Eden.²⁹ Lastly, it was surely a pragmatic move – the Welsh colony consisted of just a few, poorly armed families whose main concern was food and shelter, rather than confrontation.

What concerns us here is not so much the truth about amity or animosity in the Chubut Valley from 1865 to 1885, but rather what the myth of friendship *does* – how it shapes our view of Y Wladfa, and of Welshness, today. The central myth expresses the idea that the 'Welsh way of colonization', which reflects the 'Welsh way of being', is morally virtuous. This is based on their founding policy 'to treat the Indians exactly as we treat each other and even to extend to them, as we do to children, the leniency due to ignorance'.³⁰ As I have argued elsewhere, this combines a sense of Christian brotherhood ('exactly as we treat each other') with a paternalistic portrayal which infantilises the 'Indians' who must be indulged with Christian tolerance and controlled tempers, like children. This benign paternalism is contrasted to the policy of violence adopted by other colonizers, noting particularly the heartlessness of 'English' and 'Spaniard'. For example, and reflecting on the army's oppression of the Indigenous groups, memoirist and lecturer W. Casnodyn Rhys asserts:

²⁵ The moment of encounter is analysed in: Taylor, 'Welsh-Indigenous Relationships'.

²⁶ Dafydd Tudur, 'The Life, Work and thought of Michael D. Jones' (PhD Thesis, University of Wales Bangor, 2006), p. 208.

²⁷ Hugh Hughes 'Cadfan', *Llawlyfr y Wladychfa Gymreig* (Llynlleifiad, Lewis Jones, 1862), p. 19. All translations into English from Welsh and Spanish sources are by the author.

²⁸ Taylor, 'The Welsh Way of Colonisation'.

²⁹ Fernando Williams, *Entre el Desierto y el Jardín: Viaje Literatura y Paisaje en la colonia Galesa de la Patagonia* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2010).

³⁰ W. Casnodyn Rhys, 'Articles by B.Q in the Gowertonian' (NLW, MS20549E: April 1920): p. 2, handwritten notes, p. 12.

The wrong done to the savage population ... is one of the blackest blots on modern civilization. I would not fasten this blot on any one nation it belongs to the white man whatever his tongue or flag. The Spaniard mal-treats him abominably but so does the north American whose name for Indians is 'varmient'. So also do the British in South Africa. Can we forget the clearing of Rhodesia and the remorseless hunting down of Lobengula?³¹

The Welsh policy, though, should be proclaimed from the rooftops and adopted by all civilized colonizers: 'This [policy] is a decision worthy of record; let it be written in the history of colonization in letters of gold. Is there anywhere an instance of a nobler levelling up? Even the Quaker settlement of Pennsylvania did not surpass this'.³² To understand this statement we need to ask when he spoke (thirty years after the fact) to whom (to an audience of Welsh Londoners, in English) and in what context (after a punishing World War and pandemic, yet at the height of British colonial possession). He was reporting a cherished recollection of a romanticized past in order to engender cultural pride and strength in his Welsh Londoner audience, differentiating them from 'English' values. This Welsh moral superiority is politically empowering too, because it implies that although the Welsh nation is not powerful, wealthy, or internationally influential (like 'England'), the Cymry are global leaders in a moral sense, able to take the high ground of virtue and be ethically outstanding on the world stage.

One oft-cited event which seems to substantiate this claim is the Welsh defence of the Indigenous in the face of the brutal Conquest of the Desert led by the Argentine Army. Lewis Jones reprints a letter that Cacique Saihueke sent to him, asking him to intercede by writing to General Vinnter and to beg, on Saihueke's behalf, that he cease persecuting his people.³³ Jones also reprints the letter they sent to the Campaign leader:

We, the inhabitants of Chubut plead for your clemency and in this way express our strong feelings in favour of some of the 'aborigines' of these regions, known to us ... We desire that you might, as well as fulfilling your military obligations, and according to your own judgement, leave our old indigenous neighbours in their homes, whilst they remain so peaceful and harmless as they have up to today. (Signed in the name of all, 20 July 1883).³⁴

³¹ Rhys, "Articles by B.Q", p. 27.

³² Rhys, "Articles by B.Q.", p. 12.

³³ Lewis Jones, *Hanes y Wladva Gymreig yn Ne Amerig* (Caerffon, W. Gwenlyn Evans), p. 114. For English translation see Williams, 'Welsh Settlers and Native Americans', p. 58–9.

³⁴ Jones *Hanes y Wladva Gymreig*, p. 115; English translation in Williams, 'Welsh Settlers', p. 60.

We might return to our theoretical questions here to help us interpret this event anew: when and why are the Indigenous made visible, who speaks for them, and who does their visibility serve? While the Indigenous leader Cacique Saihueke is made visible as an agent within Patagonian politics, it is only through his letter to Lewis Jones, who then chooses to reproduce Saihueke's letter in his book. Within the official paper archive, then, his agency depends on Lewis Jones who gate-keeps his words. Moreover, this scenario limits Saihueke's agency to a capacity to plead with the Welsh for their help, a position of weakness which portrays them as pitiable. When the Welsh speak on Saihueke's behalf, in contrast, this serves to elevate the Welsh and empowers them politically but also morally, for they exercise pity, charity and Christian love. Whilst Welsh actions are praiseworthy (and certainly better than persecution), the Welsh gain from this encounter – and its retelling.

However, we should not apportion some kind of blame to the Welsh for reinforcing the hierarchies which ruled Welsh Patagonia during the 1880s according to the prevalent norms, nor should we think it a little thing that the *gwladychwyr* tried to protect Saihueke's People. But we can take care with how we retell this story today. Do we still reiterate the same hierarchies? Do we still regard them as child-like and in need of protection? Do we still gain kudos for defending them without also asking what we gained? Rather than criticising, we might more fruitfully revisit incidents such as the letter to Vintter in search of fresh interpretations: we could ask who Saihueke was, why he chose this strategy, whether he called Lewis Jones 'Amigo' for reasons of affection, strategy or protocol; we can ask how the archive is skewed to preserve the memories and letters of some whilst casting those of others to oblivion, why Indigenous words are only ever recorded indirectly by white European men (in European languages) who have the power to keep or discard them; we can ask who wins what by making Indigenous people present and by critically considering whether this reinforces racialised stereotypes about Indigenous people or challenges them. If we leave the story unpacked, we leave the stereotypes intact.

Disturbing the glass corridor

The second set of questions we can ask place Y Wladfa – and Wales – at the heart of capitalist modernity, colonialism and racial thinking, breaking through the 'glass corridor'. Once again, though, this move should not be taken as a license to condemn the *gwladychwyr* simply for reflecting the everyday assumptions of this hyper-colonial, racializing time – one which racialised and subordinated them too, though in different and far less violent ways. Indeed, a common problem which besets discussions about colonialism is that it is imagined as a binary – the colonizer and the colonized, oppressor or oppressed. This sets up hurtful antagonisms and frankly simplistic critiques that do not get us much beyond blame and victimhood when the lives of all protagonists were much more complex. This is most obvious in the Welsh case, as the *gwladychwyr* sat ambiguously, and simultaneously, in both camps. This is not to say that Wales in the mid-nineteenth century was a colony of England in the same way as India or Australia (or Patagonia) – the history and relations are more complicated than that. Yet many aspects of Wales' relationship

to England echoed colonial relations. They reflected a steep political hierarchy and entailed a racialised disdain for Welsh culture, society and language, and were thus characterised by both domination and the drive to assimilate the Welsh within English culture.³⁵

Certainly, those who dreamed of and created Y Wladfa, including Michael D. Jones and Lewis Jones, the colony's leader, understood Wales to have a colonial relationship with England, and it was this that initially drove the colonial enterprise.³⁶ Other colonial settlements around the world – and most settlers – went to seek their future, pushed by the poverty and injustices of 'back home' and lured by the personal freedoms and possible fortunes to be made in the New World. These settlers (including many Welsh people) desired nothing more when they arrived than to settle their plot and fit into the new society, supportive of the new state that was forming.³⁷ The Patagonian Welsh, though, aimed to create a new Welsh homeland. In the words of preacher and pivotal leader of the first settlers, Abraham Matthews, they wanted to settle:

in an empty country, without being under a state government ... where the Welsh could settle and rule themselves and ensure the continuation of their national habits ... and establish the kernel of a Welsh Government ... [with] a Welsh population, Welsh schools and complete enough possession of the country so that they would not be swallowed up by other nations round about.³⁸

This enterprise was not just an exercise in resistance to political and cultural assimilation but also reflected a nationalist strategy which aimed to empower Welsh culture and promote political confidence. The leading advocate of this position was Michael D. Jones, preacher, writer and campaigner. He had noted that settlers in the USA rapidly abandoned their Welsh customs and language and were assimilated within the Anglophone world, but:

If there were a Welsh colony, the Welsh migrants would feel more at home; and if they felt that the foundations of a Welsh land had been laid, where there was a Welsh parliament, and the law was conducted in Welsh, they would be more courageous and more public spirited in carrying out patriotic plans.³⁹

³⁵ Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: Wales University Press, 2004); Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books: Wales and Colonial Prejudice* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press (1998).

³⁶ R. Tudur Jones 'Michael D. Jones a Thynged y Genedl', in E. Wyn James and Bill Jones (eds.), *Michael D. Jones a'i Wladfa Gymreig* (Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2009), pp. 60–83.

³⁷ Bill Jones, "'Raising the Wind": Emigrating from Wales to the USA in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries' (Annual Public Lecture, Ysgol y Gymraeg, Prifysgol Caerdydd, 2004).

³⁸ Abraham Matthews, *Hanes y Wladfa Gymreig yn Patagonia* (Aberdar: Mills ac Evans, 1894), p. 4.

³⁹ Michael D. Jones, *Gwladychfa Gymreig* (Liverpool: J. Lloyd, 1860), pp. 5–7.

For the Welsh architects of Y Wladfa, cultural and political autonomy was their paramount objective yet in reality they were swapping one site of assimilation for another. For the Argentine government aimed to plant settlers who could become Argentine citizens and join the new nation. This strategy of settler population was set out in its first constitution of 1853, conferring citizenship rights ‘to all men of the world who wish to dwell on Argentine soil’, coupled with policies that offered financial incentives and free land.⁴⁰ Already when the Welsh arrived in 1865, thirteen per cent of the population was foreign born and migration accelerated rapidly; during the period 1870–1914, 5.9 million immigrants arrived to set up home in Argentina.⁴¹ Like citizens of other settler states such as the USA (the inspiration for Argentina’s strategy), they should pledge allegiance to its state and flag, and keep their different languages and cultures for home and holidays.

Mostly the migrants arrived to escape the slums of Southern Europe (especially Italy and Spain) or the pogroms in East and Central Europe, though these were not deemed the most desirable Europeans, being poor and marked as Other. Racial ideology shaped thinking about immigration, and the ‘ideal settler’ imagined by Argentine elites was Northern European – people understood to be more civilized and industrious, educated and white. Thus the great ideologue of Argentine immigration, Domingo Sarmiento, longed to promote:

German or Scotch colonies ... [where] the cottages are painted, the front yards always neatly kept ... the furniture simple but complete; copper or tin utensils always bright and clean; nicely curtained beds; and the occupants of the dwelling always industriously at work.⁴²

Ideas about ‘civilization’ (and barbarism) and the desirable immigrant were racialised in way that favoured the Welsh. This was ironic, because back home the Welsh were labelled as savage, uncouth, ill-educated and were blackened in the eyes of English elites.⁴³

The Welsh had requested land remote from all settlements in order to encourage political and cultural independence. This location suited the aims of the Argentine government for the opposite reason; they were to act as a vanguard colony in territory which belonged to Argentina on the map but was effectively governed by Indigenous people. They were to be pioneers, helping to secure the territory for the Argentine government in this ambiguous land ruled by ‘savages’ who stood in the

⁴⁰ Natalio Botano & Ezequiel Gallo, ‘Introduction’ in Natalio Botano & Ezequiel Gallo (eds.), *Liberal Thought in Argentina, 1837–1940* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2013), pp. 236–244, p. 236.

⁴¹ Julia Albarracín, *Making Immigrants in Modern Argentina* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2020), pp. 28, 32.

⁴² Domingo Sarmiento, *Facundo or, Civilization and Barbarism* (London: Penguin, 1998 [1845]), p. 17.

⁴³ Kirsti Bohata, ‘Apes and cannibals in Cambria: literary representations of the racial and gendered other’ in Charlotte Williams, Neil Evans and Paul O’Leary (eds.), *A Tolerant Nation? Revisiting Ethnic Diversity in a Devolved Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), pp. 85–105.

way of ‘progress’ – and in which Chile also had an interest.⁴⁴ They wanted to create loyal Argentine settlements, not independent-minded ethnic enclaves. This is made obvious in a letter written by Guillermo Rawson (Minister of the Interior) to Lewis Jones just a few months after the Welsh arrived which reveals that the government was worried about Welsh autonomy. He said:

I have made you understand that the government wants the population of its territories to become Argentine citizens according to the law of the country ... without consenting to the formation of isolated groups of just one nationality, to the exclusion of others ... [He has previously explained this] in terms that do not allow for the smallest doubt, and I hope that you in turn have communicated these principles, as is your duty, to your leadership who need to know them in order to correct their behaviour.⁴⁵

Clearly, there had already been some wilful misunderstanding on the part of the Welsh and Rawson stipulated in his letter, once more, that ‘the colony remains subject to the country’s authorities and the corresponding legislation’ and ‘the law grants this extension of lands individually to each family and not to a colonization company’.⁴⁶

Yet despite these clashes, and Welsh-Argentine antagonism, their very presence acted as a vanguard for capitalism and modernity, enabling further settlement even though this was not their explicit intention. The Welsh were elements within wider processes of capitalist development and land-grabbing around the globe, the expansion of modern state formations and the creeping hegemony of Eurocentric life-ways and values. Although the Conquest of the Desert would probably have occurred without them, and Patagonia would have been claimed by the Argentine state, the Welsh did enable settlement. They created homesteads and profitable farms, watered by their irrigation system; they developed trading posts, railroads and mining companies; they founded towns which became home to settlers from Spain and Italy, and later Russia and Poland, Lebanon and Syria; they explored, gathered information and shared this knowledge with Argentine explorers and military men. While the Welsh were pursuing their own dream, then, they were entangled in far larger processes, both national and global, which enabled settler colonialism in Patagonia.

Settler colonial states require that those arriving comply with the rules and assimilate within the new society. Yet the Welsh wanted autonomy and over a period of twenty years (1875–1895) they fought against the Argentine drive to assimilate – but lost. At first, though, this wider dimension was not apparent, and for ten years

⁴⁴ Williams, ‘Desert and the Dream’.

⁴⁵ Guillermo Rawson (1865) ‘Carta a Lewis Jones 16 Septiembre, 1865’ (NLW Facs 402), pp. 15–17, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Rawson, ‘Carta a Lewis Jones’, p. 15.

the Welsh enjoyed de facto self-rule, until 1875.⁴⁷ Even though the cohort of settlers was tiny (around 300) they sought to institutionalise government in Y Wladfa by issuing a ‘constitution’ and passing two ‘laws’ about elections and the judicial system.⁴⁸ This registered alarm in Buenos Aires. The Argentine government had been preoccupied with other pressing matters (policy-making, ideological struggles, internal strife, border tensions) but eventually sent a permanent state representative in 1875, Comisario Antonio Oneto, to bring the Welsh within Argentina’s nation-building project with gentle persuasion.⁴⁹ He was followed by Harbourmaster Vivanco who, by contrast, arrived with ‘a supply of arms, for the purpose of imposing respect on the authorities of the Welsh Colony’ and complained that the Welsh ‘display a very unruly character’.⁵⁰ Lewis Jones comments in his memoirs that ‘this was the beginning of the military oppression that would be a long nightmare for Y Wladfa’⁵¹ and heralded the start of severe tensions between the Welsh leadership and the local state representatives for the next twenty-five years.

Power struggles came to a head with the appointment in 1881 of Comisario Juan Finoquetto who was determined to bring the Welsh to heel and to set the settler colonial project back on track.⁵² The battleground was the annual census return. The previous year, Finoquetto had filed census details which implied that most Welsh children were illiterate (he had included babies and toddlers) which was interpreted as a slur on the Welsh medium schools. It caused arguments in the streets of Rawson and a spat in the letters’ columns of national newspapers.⁵³ The following year Lewis Jones, leader of the Welsh Council, refused to provide his data in protest, and was promptly arrested. Another prominent leader, Richard Jones Berwyn, then gathered a crowd of supporters and marched to the police station to complain about Jones’ arrest – and was himself arrested. The Harbourmaster ordered the local militia of Argentine soldiers to ‘take up arms to defend the Argentine flag’ and dispersed the crowd in a show of force.⁵⁴ Lewis Jones and Richard Jones Berwyn were then taken by ship to Buenos Aires where they were incarcerated for sedition. Although they were released after a day or so, the point had been made – the Welsh must be obedient to the state and must assimilate and join the national project. Similarly, the Welsh colonists back home were ordered to sign a pledge of citizenship: ‘to respect and follow the national authorities in the Wladfa, represented by the Comisario [Finoquetto]’ in a move which sought to impose Argentine state authority and impress on the Welsh that they were settlers, like any other.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Taylor, ‘Welsh-Indigenous Relationships’.

⁴⁸ Clemente Dumrauf, *La Colonial Galesa del Chubut: su lucha por el gobierno propio* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken, 2008), pp. 144–159.

⁴⁹ Abraham Matthews, *Hanes y Wladfa Gymreig yn Patagonia* (Aberdar: Mills ac Evans, 1894), p. 78.

⁵⁰ Lewis Jones, *Y Wladva Gymreig yn Ne Amerig* (Caerfon: W. Gwenlyn Evans, 1898), p. 97.

⁵¹ Jones, *Y Wladva Gymreig*, p. 96.

⁵² Jones, *Y Wladva Gymreig*, pp. 129–138.

⁵³ Lewis Jones, ‘Y carcharariaid a’i ganlyniadau, Rhagfyr 10/82 – Mawrth 21/83’ (NLW MS 12200A, 1882–3).

⁵⁴ Jones, *Y Wladva Gymreig*, p. 134.

⁵⁵ Jones, *Y Wladva Gymreig*, p. 135.

Despite being taught a lesson, the Welsh leadership continued to resist Argentine authority, questioning the efficiency and competence of the local Argentine officials (and army) whom they seemed to regard as volatile, aggressive, and corrupt. This precipitated a final confrontation in 1896 over Sunday drilling. Antagonisms had been brewing between Argentina and Chile, so in response all young male Argentines between eighteen and thirty were obliged to form militias and to drill on Sundays.⁵⁶ However, while the Welsh said they were willing to defend *La Patria*, they refused to drill on a Sunday, saying that the Sabbath was a day of worship for them. Additionally, though, they expressed their refusal with disdain for the Argentine military, using clear racialised overtones. The leadership wrote a letter asserting the superiority of the special Welsh ‘ideals of purity in respect of their ethnic group [raza] and way of life’, and argued that they were more civilized, saying that they did not want their young people to ‘live alongside troops made up of *mestizos*, Indians, negros and the dregs of Argentine prisons’.⁵⁷ They lobbied the Minister of the Interior and the President requesting their full attention, even though the Welsh contingent only numbered 3,750 people at its height, a mere drop in the ocean of the 5.9 million migrants that had arrived in the previous twenty years.⁵⁸ In doing so, they were asserting their racial/civilizational superiority and laying claim to powerfulness based on their Welsh heritage, echoing the racialization of relations between north and south Europe that the Argentine state itself had deployed in its rhetoric.

Yet all was not so black and white: it seems that, while the Welsh leadership were continuing to confront the Argentine state, the ordinary people were more open to assimilation and embraced the settler-citizen identity. Two interesting and contradictory events then occurred, more or less at the same time, which exposed this contradiction. Firstly, President Roca (the man who ordered the Conquest of the Desert which the Welsh had previously condemned) arrived in the Chubut Valley to great acclaim.⁵⁹ He was on his way to negotiate with the Chilean President in south Patagonia, so this was a huge honour, and he clearly aimed to draw the Welsh in with friendship and flattery, quieting their anger with amicable assimilation techniques. It worked: *Y Drafod* reported that: ‘he shook the large, calloused hands of the Welsh farmers and said to his companions that these were the hands that would bring triumph to the Republic’.⁶⁰ He visited Trelew which was ‘covered in flags... [and] fireworks hung from the streets which exploded with a tremendous noise. Later, to the sound of music from the band... His Excellency appeared [and]

⁵⁶ Geraint Owen, *Crisis in Chubut: a Chapter in the History of the Welsh Colony in Patagonia* (Swansea: C. Davies, 1997), pp. 43–60.

⁵⁷ Dumrauf, *La Colonia Galesa*, pp. 61, 62.

⁵⁸ Dumrauf, *La Colonia Galesa*, p. 62.

⁵⁹ ‘Visita la Colonia el Presidente de la Republica’ *Y Drafod* Viernes 3 de Febrero, 1899, in República Argentina, *Roca y los Galeses* (Buenos Aires: Publicaciones del Museo Roca, 1965), pp. 14–25.

⁶⁰ William Meloch Hughes, *Ar Lannau'r Gamwy ym Mhatagonia* (Lerpwl: Gwasg y Brython, 1927), p. 172.

a unanimous ‘Viva! Viva!’ exploded all around’.⁶¹ Roca proposed that they choose another day for the drilling and thus the matter was settled, especially for the ordinary Welsh settlers who seemed happy to be Argentine citizens – cherished as special pioneers for the Argentine nation in Patagonia. This is the moment when the Welsh become Argentine.

For others, though, the age-old animosities continued to rankle, driven by the Welsh leadership who kept alive the now fading vision of Y Wladfa. Just prior to Roca’s visit, two delegates of the Welsh leadership, Llwyd ap Iwan and Thomas Benbow Phillips, were sent to Buenos Aires to press the Sunday drilling case. They seem to have been unsuccessful in gaining access to power and so decided, in a frankly astonishing and delusional move, to take ship to London.⁶² There they petitioned Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury, backed by some Welsh MPs, requesting that the British government intervene to create a British Protectorate in central Patagonia, and suggesting that the USA should lend support. They cited the (brief) landing of Sir John Narborough in the region in 1670 and claimed that the Chubut valley had been in ‘British’ possession since 1865, the arrival of the *Mimosa*.⁶³ Lord Salisbury scorned their offer, saying that ‘the colonists do not make out a rag of a case’.⁶⁴

This proposal reveals two things: firstly, that they had only a very weak grasp of British colonial policy and the Argentine position; secondly, that they had a distorted and rather arrogant understanding of Y Wladfa’s importance. While this was born of the original dream to create a place where the Welsh could enjoy political power and cultural dignity, it reflects a cloistered engagement with the world, as if from within a glass corridor linking Wales and Patagonia. Indeed, it was precisely because the Welsh colonists did not take a global view of empire, were not attuned to the international flows of capital and trade, and believed themselves superior that they could think this proposal feasible. For, in reality, Argentina was an immensely profitable asset in Britain’s informal empire.⁶⁵ British companies dominated banking, insurance and investment in Argentina (which was, at that time, the sixth richest economy in the world). Britain built and ran the railways, telegraph and post office service, and British firms dominated the slaughterhouses, meat-packing plants, docks and freezer-ships which processed the famous Argentine beef in Buenos Aires.⁶⁶ Moreover, Britain already had the Falkland Islands as a strategic base in the South Atlantic, a place far less controversial and more defensible than central Patagonia. The political and economic turmoil that a British invasion of

⁶¹ ‘Visita la Colonia el Presidente’, p. 15.

⁶² Jorge Barzini, ‘La Mision de Thomas B. Phillips y Llwyd ap Iwan a Londres’, in Fundación Ameghino (ed.), *Los Galeses en la Patagonia III*, Asociación Punta Cuevas, Asociación Cultural Galesa de Puerto Madryn (Trelew: Biblioteca Popular Agustín Alvarez, 2008), pp. 119–134.

⁶³ Dumrauf, *La Colonia Galesa*, p. 63.

⁶⁴ Owen *Crisis in Chubut*, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Matthew Brown (ed.), *Informal Empire in Latin America: Culture, Commerce and Capital* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

⁶⁶ David Rock, *The British in Argentina: Commerce, Settlers and Power, 1800–2000* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2019).

mainland Argentina would create would have had a catastrophic impact on Britain's imperial standing – deflecting resources and funds away from all its other assets around the globe – and all to 'protect' 3,750 Welsh people who had chosen to migrate and had just been praised by their President.

From Argentina's perspective this foolish proposal was dangerous and insulting: they were furious. It confirmed their worst suspicions of Britain and the ever-awkward Welsh who always resisted membership of their new nation, the country that had offered them a home and furnished them with generous gifts of land, animals and materials to build the new life that they craved. For most Argentinians, there was no difference between Welsh and English – all British people are known as *ingleses* (English) in Spanish. Many politicians still remembered that Britain had invaded the lucrative port of Buenos Aires in 1806 and 1807, attempting to take over during the collapse of the Spanish crown.⁶⁷ Also, Britain had already, in 1833, taken the Malvinas/Falkland Islands and it was clear that they kept an eye on their informal empire from there. Moreover, Britain had form: in 1848 the British navy 'intervened to protect' a Protestant British colony in Central America and had taken over permanently, creating British Honduras.⁶⁸ Ap Iwan and Benbow's petition to the British government seemed to confirm that Britain was a global predator, given half a chance, and that the Welsh settlers exercised the same sort of arrogance and superiority as their countrymen. In response, Buenos Aires wrote angry letters to London, and Provincial Governor O'Donnell sent the police to Trelew to arrest fifteen Welsh officials outside chapel on a Sunday, charging them with sedition.⁶⁹

Let us return, then, to the three questions that frame this section: how did global colonial dynamics shape Y Wladfa; what role did it play in Argentina's settler strategy; and were the Welsh themselves subject to cultural assimilation in Argentina? It is clear that, while we tend to see Y Wladfa as being isolated from wider forces of capitalist modernity and colonial domination, its very existence was framed by precisely those dynamics. The Welsh themselves chose colonization as a strategy to escape domination and disparagement back home, and it was their experiences of assimilation in the USA which led them to choose a supposedly empty place – Patagonia – so that they would not be contaminated by Anglophone hegemony and might develop autonomously. Argentina had chosen a settler colonial model – much like the USA – and encouraged the Welsh as pioneers precisely because they fulfilled the racialised dream of 'white' settlement and (northern) European values. While they did not intend to act as a vanguard for Argentine expansionism – far from it – in fact they facilitated the 'opening up' of Patagonia. They enabled the Argentine state to engineer its settlement and bring dispossession and cultural decimation to Indigenous societies via the Conquest of the Desert. However, its arrival also heralded the end of their dream of Welsh autonomy. The

⁶⁷ Senado de la Nación, 'Diario de Sesiones 17 Agosto 1863', in Clemente Dumrauf (ed.), *La Colonial Galesa del Chubut: su lucha por el gobierno propio* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken, 2008), pp. 88–127.

⁶⁸ Senado, 'Diario de Sesiones', p. 93.

⁶⁹ Barzini, 'La Misión de Thomas', p. 127; Owen, *Crisis in Chubut*, pp. 47–48.

actions of Comisario Finochetto, in particular, revealed that Buenos Aires was determined to subdue the recalcitrant Welsh and assimilated them within Argentina. While we might sympathise with their desire for autonomy, the foolish trip to London served mostly to expose the naïve misunderstanding of their own place in both British and Argentine politics, and the very minor role that they played in global capitalism and Imperial politics. The glass corridor preserved Welsh dignity, but at the expense of recognizing harsh realities.

Conclusion

Thinking about a story as familiar as *Y Wladfa* in new ways is important not only because it brings a fresh perspective to a tired tale, but also because it challenges us to rethink one of the cornerstones of the Welsh narrative. Here, I am not arguing that we should criticise the *gwladychwyr*, but that we should cast fresh eyes over Welsh Patagonia in light of recent thinking. I have suggested that we can do so in two ways: firstly, by foregrounding Indigenous agency and inserting this into the tale of Welsh-Indigenous friendship; secondly, by placing the enterprise within the wider context of global politics: capitalism, colonization, and modernity.

Challenging assumptions is important because it helps us to think in more complex ways about Wales, Welsh history, and Welsh identity. It shows how the Welsh could occupy the position of feeling colonized (at home) and acting as colonizer (in Patagonia) and enter new relations of domination and assimilation in the context of Argentina's settler state and the juggernaut of globally expanding capitalist modernity in which they were swept up. It also suggests that Welsh 'race' works in complex ways: they were racially disparaged at home, racially embraced by the Argentine government as 'white', yet then also claimed racial superiority over the Argentine army. Moreover, it reveals intense ambiguity in the Welsh relationship to Britain: on the one hand they established *Y Wladfa* precisely in order to resist Anglophone assimilation at home and in settler scenarios like the USA; on the other, they invoked the might of the British Empire to help them when they felt threatened by Argentine attempts to consolidate their loyalty to the state and its national life. Setting aside binary thinking opens a world of ambiguity, incompleteness and contradiction which better reflect the messiness of human life, as well as generating fascinating puzzles which take our analysis deeper.

It is natural, for simple linguistic reasons, that a kind of 'glass corridor' approach exists between Wales and *Y Wladfa*. This glass corridor and the busy traffic of Welsh speakers there and back has built solidarity and strengthened cultural ties over the years – cultural products and activities can be shared, and joy found in meeting strangers who speak one's own tongue. Yet this glass corridor has also led to rather narrow thinking, whereby the same, rather romanticised, stories pass back and forth, without being touched by the messy and difficult realities outside. It has perpetuated a sense that Wales was exempt from colonialism (or only its victim) so Welsh moral virtue can remain unquestioned in the geopolitical arena. This has been an important source of political capital for Wales and has helped to engender national pride and political strength which are invaluable in the face of disengagement and cultural erosion. However, it is important that Wales opens a reckoning with its past, not

least because Indigenous movements everywhere, including Patagonia, are asserting their history, identity and agency. In order to sustain anew this position of moral strength, Wales needs to break through the glass corridor and claim its place in the world. This entails recognising the agency of Indigenous societies as well as Wales' role in global settler colonialism and capitalist development in Argentina – and beyond. Through the process of devolution and governance, Wales' identity as a nation is maturing and, despite difficulties, Welsh culture and language is becoming more confident. It is a sign of its new-found self-assurance that the nation is revealing and facing its history with slavery. Now is the time to take heart and tackle the more delicate and close-to-home subject of Y Wladfa. It is a key aim of my research to open those conversations, and I hope that the reader will join the dialogue with me.