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Reclaiming Authenticity

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Reclaiming authenticity: The spaces and scales of national sincerity

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Abstract

At present, there seems to be somewhat of a paradox between critical academic and more political and popular understandings of authenticity. At one level, the notion of authenticity has become passé, almost a dirty word, for critical social theorists and human geographers: being something that reflects, at best, naïve, or at worst, essentialist and exclusionary ways of thinking. At the same time, we are in the middle of a period during which notions of authenticity have never been as prominent within political and public debate. In this paper, we develop the notion of sincerity as a way of enabling a more progressive interpretation of authenticity. We illustrate the value of this approach through a case study of the identities and cultures promoted within the education system in Wales. We witness here an emphasis on a negotiated sense of Welsh identity and one that is sensitive to difference, in spatial and scalar contexts. We conclude the paper by suggesting that the notion of sincerity might provide critical social scientists with a potential way of developing a more progressive and inclusive understanding of authenticity.

Introduction

At present, there seems to be somewhat of a paradox between critical academic and more political and popular understandings of authenticity. At one level, the notion of authenticity has become passé, almost a dirty word, for critical social theorists and human geographers: being something that reflects, at best, naïve, or at worst, essentialist and exclusionary ways of thinking. The work of post-structuralists, such as Derrida (1972 [1970]), has shown that

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the language used to signify a particular thing is ultimately arbitrary, undermining any essentialist claims to a stability of meaning or authenticity to language. Relational and social constructivist understandings of identity (Brubaker, 2004; Butler, 1990) have shown that identities are always shifting, tentative and relational in character. The sovereign, stable and authentic individual, which features within existential conceptions of identity (e.g. Heidegger,1962 [1927]), thus recedes from view. And in Geography, authors such as Massey (1994) have drawn attention to the conceptual and empirical failings of an understanding of place-based authenticity that is essentialist in character. Relational and topological understandings of space (e.g. Amin, 2004) have been used to question the envisioning of a world that is separated out into discrete territories and places, each one possessing an inherent authenticity and distinctiveness.

The irony, of course, is that we are in the middle of a period during which notions of authenticity have never been as prominent within political and public debate. The growing prevalence of populist leaders across the world is linked, patently, to an increased emphasis on more exclusionary forms of politics, with a sense of local and national authenticity at their heart. While current discussions about the need to build a wall between Mexico and the US or to expel immigrants from many European countries are usually couched in terms of the need to preserve national territories from allegedly pernicious external influences, they are also, implicitly, debates about the threats that face the cultural authenticity of states and their constituent communities (Gilmartin et al., 2018). When the German state of Bavaria, for instance, passes a law that states that immigrants should be required to respect the 'dominant local culture' (*The Telegraph*, 2016), it is, in effect, seeking to preserve what it deems to be aspects of its cultural authenticity. Current debates about the most appropriate ways of responding to claims of so-called fake news illustrate, once again, the fact that 'our fetishizing desire to distinguish the trustworthy from the fake has palpably intensified' (Finney, 2017: 131); the search for authenticity and truth comes to the fore once again.

How, therefore, should we as critical social scientists and critical geographers deal with this paradox? There is a danger that academics may be party to the reproduction of an unhelpful set of dualisms in relation to the notion of authenticity: ones which limit the academy's ability to promote more progressive understandings of social and spatial difference. These dualisms are played out in numerous ways: academic and sophisticated versus lay/popular and naïve understandings of authenticity, relational versus bounded understandings of space, progressive versus exclusionary visions of politics, and so on. Our central claim in this article is that we need to find appropriate ways of moving beyond our current disdain for notions of authenticity and to find ways to rehabilitate the concept. We maintain that the notion of sincerity – especially one that is conceptualized in a geographical manner – can provide a useful method whereby critical social scientists can reclaim the notion of authenticity in progressive ways. In reclaiming authenticity in such a way, our broader goal is to help promote a more productive dialogue between the academy and more political and public debates concerning the role of authenticity and to counter more essentialist and exclusionary accounts of social and spatial life.

We illustrate our arguments through a detailed examination of the way in which notions of authenticity have been articulated in relation to the education system in Wales. Evidence that we have collected as part of a four-year ESRC-funded project on the link between education, language and identity in Wales has shown how different interlocutors have negotiated a more reflexive and context-specific approach to notions of national authenticity, based in part on the role of place and scale. We believe that the attempts made by these individuals to develop what they view as locally sincere understandings of the Welsh nation

can provide a potential blueprint for academics, politicians and the public to approach notions of authenticity in late modernity.

In the following section, we discuss how the idea of authenticity has been conceptualized and critiqued. We also discuss how the idea of sincerity provides one route along which we can begin to develop a more progressive approach to authenticity. We then proceed to provide a brief outline of our case study of the education system in Wales. In the next two sections, we discuss how notions of authenticity and sincerity have been approached in the education system in Wales in recent years. We show how efforts to promote an authentic version of Welsh identity within the education system in Wales have proved to be somewhat problematic, partly because of the need to avoid the use of national stereotypes and partly as a result of the need to ensure that the version of Welsh identity promoted is inclusive. These difficulties have led to a concerted attempt to shape more localized and context-specific conceptions of Welsh identity, and ones which are connected in scalar ways to other spaces of identity. We conclude the article by discussing the value of the idea of national sincerity for contemporary debates about authenticity, politics and identity.

Approaching authenticity and sincerity

In this section, we examine the way in which notions of authenticity have been critiqued in different contexts. We then proceed to explicate how the notion of sincerity can help us to engage with authenticity in more progressive and nuanced ways.

The decline of authenticity

One of the key areas in which the idea of authenticity has been problematized is in the context of individual identity. Existentialist authors such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre placed great emphasis on understanding how individuals use their own consciousness to seek out their core values and identities. Kierkegaard (1992 [1846]: 130) charged individuals to 'become what one is', instead of reflecting pre-existing categories of identity. Heidegger (1962 [1927]: 12) used the concept of *Dasein* or 'being-there' to reflect on how individuals define themselves through their actions (Aho, 2014). Sartre (1992 [1943]), too, used the idea of 'facticity' to understand the nature of human identity and existence, particularly in relation to everyday life (Bell, 1989: 45). Each of these existentialist authors views a person's identity as something that emanates largely from within. A key duty for all individuals is to search for this 'essence' and act according to its characteristics; not least since doing so can be a source of ethical behaviour (Taylor, 1991). Evidently, this viewpoint has been challenged by authors writing from broadly post-structural perspectives. Foucault's work on the definition of madness (Foucault, 2006 [1961]) and sexuality (Foucault, 1979 [1976]) illustrates how different aspects of individual identity do not emanate from within an authentic self but rather are constructed through key institutions of modernity. Butler's (1990) research has used similar ideas to understand the construction of gendered identity. Such work illustrates the highly relational nature of identity as it is defined and performed in different social and spatial contexts. Individual identity is self-reflexive and mutable (Giddens, 1991).

A similar rejection of authenticity has occurred in relation to geographical concepts. For instance, geographers traditionally understood cultural regions or landscapes as geographical entities that possessed an internal coherence and authenticity. The French tradition of regional geography and Sauerian approaches to culture understood regions and cultural landscapes, respectively, as coherent, unified and unproblematic geographical entities

(Bowen, 1959; Sauer,1925 [1963]; Zelinsky, 2001). Cultural regions or landscapes were said to be authentic insofar as they sought to sustain those aspects of culture that underpinned their distinctiveness. Again, this line of argument has been the subject of critique. Some have maintained that the distinctiveness of cultural regions or landscapes does not derive solely from those things that are internal to them (Schein, 1997: 663). Geographers and others associated with the cultural turn have made a more sustained attack on the traditional conceptualizations of culture associated with the work of Sauer, with culture increasingly being viewed as something that is practised and contested by different actors (Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987; Duncan, 1980). Mitchell (1995) builds on this line of argument by maintaining that the notion of culture – and, by extension cultural regions and landscapes – merely exists as an idea or ideology. We cannot search for an objective authenticity within cultural regions or landscapes. All we can do is to comprehend those aspects of culture that are said to be authentic within particular socio-spatial settings.

The idea of authenticity has also been a long-running source of debate in the context of studies of nations and nationalism, which is the main focus of enquiry in this article. When viewed in cultural terms, the idea of national authenticity 'proposes a form of culture based on "authentic" and unique experience which aims to regenerate societies by uncovering and releasing their inner rhythms and energies' (Smith, 1998: 90). Efforts to determine the authentic qualities of particular nations were a key feature of the Romantic period (during the 19th and early 20th centuries). A variety of authors, artists and composers – and allied intellectuals – responded to the dislocation experienced during this period by using 'nativist history, shared memories . . . vernacular languages, native customs . . . and folk arts to mobilise fellow members of their ethnic communities' (Smith, 2009: 56); with a view to authenticating the nation, to 'reveal its true "essence" and its "pure" nature' (Smith, 2009: 56).

Notions of national authenticity were also increasingly politicized during this period. Breuilly (1993: 59) views the idea of authenticity as the main way by which historicist arguments about cultural specificity were translated into the political arena. Specificity and diversity were to be celebrated and, moreover, protected by political institutions, especially the nation-state. The process whereby claims to cultural authenticity were politicized comprised of three stages (Breuilly, 1993: 64). First of all, a complex cultural reality was simplified, primarily through the construction of stereotypes. Second, symbolism and ceremonies were used to turn these stereotypes into concrete forms. Third, stereotypes were repeated in speeches, songs, and so on. And of course, in certain cases, the search for authenticity could lead intellectuals to invent national traditions and cultural forms (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

There are, of course, many problematic aspects associated with both cultural and political approaches to national authenticity. The process of abstraction and simplification that is linked to the quest for cultural authenticity masks the cultural variety that characterizes the populations of all nations (Breuilly, 1993: 62; Scott, 1998). Essentializing nations in such a way leads to an ostracization of those who do not belong, for whatever reason. It is because of these kinds of concerns that the idea of an objective authenticity has long been thrown out in academic writing on nationalism in favour of a more discursive and constructivist approach. As part of the so-called group-making project of the nation (Brubaker, 2004), a constructivist approach to authenticity foregrounds: the critical role played by various actors in seeking to define the alleged authentic character of the nation, the role played by institutions of different kinds in conveying these versions of authenticity to the population at large, the need to examine the extent to which these versions of authenticity become accepted by individuals and groups. Geographers occupy an excellent position from which

to highlight the way in which such a process is inflected by key geographical considerations, not least in relation to how: (1) particular places become key objects of national authenticity (e.g. Gruffudd, 1995); (2) ideas concerning national authenticity are produced and decoded in different ways within particular places (e.g. Jones and Fowler, 2008). Authenticity, thus, is a sign of a successful group-making project, with the focus being on the ideas, objects, landscapes and institutions around which that group believes that it can coalesce.

Rethinking authenticity

The above discussion paints a consistent picture. Although there are exceptions – most notably in the context of work on tourism (e.g. Steiner and Reisinger, 2006) and management theory and practice (e.g. George et al., 2007) – the idea of authenticity, which once held considerable appeal in many spheres of academic endeavour, is now suspect. Critical social scientists, especially those influenced by a post-structural turn, are suspicious of the way in which notions of authenticity reduce complex social realities in over-simplistic ways. Identities, cultures, places, and so on become essentialized through recourse to notions of authenticity, meaning that, once again, complex social realities are reduced to simple essences. And of course, the tendency within notions of authenticity to essentialize things has the clear potential to alienate and exclude other social forms and practices: those which do not reflect the allegedly authentic characteristics of the thing in question. Finally, critical social theorists are suspicious of the tendency for notions of authenticity to create atomistic and inward-looking understandings of social and spatial difference: an understanding of distinctiveness that is derived from qualities that are internal to the thing in question.

Our aim in the remaining paragraphs of this section is to outline different ways we can rehabilitate the concept of authenticity. We begin by discussing more nuanced accounts of authenticity: ones that help to qualify some of the more problematic accusations levelled at the concept. We then outline how the notion of sincerity might help us to approach notions of authenticity in more progressive ways.

There are relatively straightforward ways in which we can rework the notion of authenticity. We can, for instance, view it as something that is socially constructed. Focusing on notions of authenticity in such ways opens the door to many important questions for critical social scientists. Who gets to decide what constitutes authenticity and, by implication, inauthenticity? What are the power relationships that inhere in claims to authenticity? To what extent are such claims accepted, amended or contested by others (Taylor, 2001)? There is also considerable value in exploring the interplay between authenticity and inauthenticity. Much of the literature on authenticity views the concept as something that is in a continual interplay with its putative opposite. Heidegger (1962 [1927]) described an individual as being authentic when they became aware, through angst, of their own inauthenticity (Golomb, 1995: 3). Benjamin (2008 [1936]), too, claimed that the growing use of technological means of reproducing art during the late 19th and early 20th centuries helped to highlight the (in) authenticity of art (Cobb, 2014: 1). One can see many practical benefits for critical social scientists in thinking about authenticity in such ways. Rather than viewing authenticity as something that represents certainty and homogeneity, the work discussed here shows that it is inherently fluid and unstable.

A more detailed examination of the literature on authenticity also destabilizes the notion that authenticity is solely defined from within. Many philosophers have maintained that authenticity is always defined in relation to various external reference points, including religious and more secular institutions (e.g. Erickson, 1995: 121; Heidegger,1962 [1927]; Kierkegaard,1980 [1849]: 13; Taylor, 1991). This work demonstrates the potential for

authenticity to be defined in more relational and contextual terms, encompassing ideas and themes that are putatively 'internal' and 'external' to the subject. In geographical terms, this approach reinforces the need to consider how the authenticity of places, regions, landscapes and territories can be said to come about as a result of interactions between those geographical entities and others that are external to them (Massey, 1994).

Such themes illustrate how it is possible to complicate and, perhaps, to begin to rehabilitate the notion of authenticity. Nonetheless, we recognize the inherent difficulties associated with rehabilitating a concept that has become anathema for many critical social scientists. It is for this reason that we wish to discuss the potential of the concept of sincerity – described as a 'philosophical cousin of authenticity' (Taylor, 2001: 8) – in enabling us to approach authenticity in critical and progressive ways. Literary critic Trilling (1972) explains that the notion of sincerity predates authenticity. Prior to the elevation of authenticity as an important character trait during the 17th century, it was the notion of sincerity that held sway: that of meaning what one said within particular social situations. Admittedly, for Hegel (2002 [1807]: 515), there is a pejorative meaning to sincerity. It is viewed as an almost unswerving commitment to one's social class or one's station in life. Sincerity, from this perspective, is viewed as something that fixes individuals and things in place, thus limiting opportunities for agency, creativity and constructive change.

However, it is possible to read the concept of sincerity in more constructive and progressive ways. Two themes stand out. First, the fact that sincerity can vary from one situation to another means that it is inherent flexible. Sincerity is predicated on contextualized and plural understandings of social meaning. Statements and representations – all of which are sincere – can vary from one social context to another. One can easily see how such flexibility can be exercised across time and space. Individuals can espouse totally different viewpoints from one period to another, with each being sincere within its own temporal context. Similarly, sincerity is predicated on a geographical sensitivity. As Berger (1972) puts it, prior to the era of the mass reproduction of art, there was a time when '[t]he uniqueness of every painting was once part of the uniqueness of the place where it resided' (19). One had to understand and appreciate a painting in its specific spatial context: something that was key to the painting's sincerity. We argue that it is by reconnecting with these more place-based sincerities that one can help to promote a more flexible and inclusive account of authenticity by showing, for instance, how understandings of a particular group identity can vary – and can be held to be equally sincere – across space. There is a scalar aspect to this process as well, with Taylor (2001) contrasting the way in which unhelpful national stereotypes can be countered by more sincere localized identities and values.

The second more progressive theme arising from the limited research that has been conducted on sincerity is the fact that the concept can help to highlight the negotiation that always characterizes attempts by different stakeholders to define social meaning. For Taylor (2001), sincerity is defined in a zone of contact between individuals and groups. Similarly, Erickson (1995) maintains that 'sincerity refers to whether a person represents herself truly to others; it does not refer to being true to oneself as an end but as a means' (124). While she overstates the distinction between a negotiated conception of sincerity and more internally defined understanding of authenticity – describing the latter as 'one's relationship with oneself' (ibid) – there is still much to commend in this relational definition of sincerity. It opens up the possibility for different individuals and groups, possessing contrasting beliefs and outlooks, to enter into negotiations about social meaning. And in more explicitly geographical contexts, we can use such an understanding of sincerity to draw attention to the relational way in which meaning, whether political or cultural, is negotiated across space and between places (Amin, 2004).

Our aim in what remains of this article is to show the value of sincerity as a more relational, flexible and contextual – in simple terms, more progressive – alternative to authenticity. Our case study focuses on the way in which actors of different kinds are seeking to define notions of national sincerity in contemporary Wales, particularly in the context of its education system.

Case study and methods

Our empirical focus on Wales requires some justification. Wales is clearly a region of the UK within which efforts have been made over the past 150 years to promote a nationalist discourse: a discourse that has sought to emphasize the distinctiveness of Wales and the authenticity of a Welsh culture. Various political parties, from the late 19th century onwards, began to emphasize a mixture of civic and ethnic markers of Welsh identity (McAllister, 2001; Morgan,1980 [1963]: 44–46). Arguably, the devolution of executive power to Wales in 1999 has led to an increased emphasis on more civic understandings of Welsh identity, centred on the National Assembly for Wales (Jones and Osmond, 2002).

Two further contextual factors require a brief discussion at this stage. The first relates to the role of language as a marker of national authenticity. Herder (in Barnard, 1969: 17–32, 117–177), writing in the second half of the 18th century, has been viewed as a key advocate of the significance of language for notions of national authenticity (Breuilly, 1993: 57–58). While the use of language as a means of determining national authenticity has been the subject of critique (e.g. Anderson, 1983), it is still clear that the mastery of a language, but also its use and performance, plays a critical role in determining the entry of individuals and groups into particular nations (e.g. O'Rourke and Walsh, 2015). Language has also played a key role in shaping nationalist discourse in Wales. One of the main reasons for promoting political self-determination in Wales has been the need to support and safeguard the Welsh language as perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Welsh identity (McAllister, 2001: 114–115; Phillips, 1998). This has not meant that the relationship between language, identity and political representation has always been viewed in positive terms in Wales. Concern has been raised that the definition of too close an association between the Welsh language and Welsh identity would lead to the majority of the population of Wales being alienated from Welsh identity, given that they cannot speak the language.

The second contextual factor that requires some explication is the role played by education systems in promoting understandings of national authenticity. It has become an axiom of research in the humanities and social sciences that education plays a crucial role in shaping the national identities of young people (e.g. Benwell, 2014; Korostelina, 2013). In seeking to promote a particular form of national identity within the classroom, various individuals are involved in defining what are deemed to be the authentic qualities and values of the nation, with the most explicit attempts to do so appearing in national curricula (e.g. Apple, 1993). Admittedly, various authors have drawn attention to numerous ways in which the nation-building qualities of education systems can be problematized (e.g. Benwell, 2014; Mitchell, 2003; Staeheli and Hammett, 2012). However, despite these developments, it is clear that education systems must still grapple with notions of national authenticity; they continue to instil a sense of what it means to be a member of a particular nation.

The education system in Wales has played a key role in defining an authentic Welsh culture and identity (Evans, 2000). There is a long and complicated history to this process but the key development in the context of this article relates to the creation of a national curriculum for Wales during the early 1990s: one that was 'adapted to the distinctiveness of the linguistic and cultural context in Wales' (Daugherty and Elfed-Owens, 2003: 233). The

Cwricwlwm Cymreig (a Welsh Curriculum), published by the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (hereafter ACCAC), provided guidance for those involved in education in Wales about how they could make the educational process more relevant to Wales, particularly in relation to the Welsh language and the subjects of Geography, History, Music and Art (ACCAC, 1993). The Cwricwlwm Cymreig received a further fillip in 2003 with the publication of another document, which provided guidance on how to integrate a Welsh perspective into all aspects of the curriculum (ACCAC, 2003; Welsh Government, 2013b). More recently, the discussions concerning a new curriculum in Wales, led by Graham Donaldson, have reaffirmed a need to develop a curriculum that possesses a clear 'Welsh dimension' or, in the report's words, one that is 'authentic: rooted in Welsh values and culture' (Welsh Government, 2015a: 14; Power, 2016).

The four-year research project we conducted was framed by these concerns. The project examined the contribution made by the education system to the identities enacted by young people in Wales. In addition to gaining an insight from elites involved in the development of education policy in Wales, we were interested in the way in which the themes taught within schools in Wales were inflected in different parts of Wales, in different schools, by different teachers and, not least, by students themselves (Scourfield et al., 2006). We were also interested in the extent to which the medium of education within schools precipitated a different approach to the teaching of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig and Welsh identity politics more broadly (Smith, 2016). As a way of examining this variety, we undertook qualitative and quantitative research in seven schools located in different areas of Wales. One was located in the middle of the so-called Welsh-speaking 'heartland' while another was located in a post-industrial area, which had witnessed a decline in the percentages of Welsh speakers. Two contrasting schools were located in Cardiff, the capital of Wales, and a further two were located in north-east Wales, close to the border with England. The final school was located in the more English-speaking and post-industrial south Wales valleys. These schools also reflected different levels of commitment to Welsh-medium education. Some were Welsh-medium schools in which either the whole of the curriculum or the vast majority of it was taught through the medium of Welsh, while others were English-medium schools possessing very little provision in Welsh beyond the statutory requirement to teach Welsh as a 'second language'.

We conducted over 80 semi-structured interviews with policy elites, teachers and students (around 12 in each school). We supplemented these interviews with documentary research on strategies and policies published by the Welsh Government and related agencies. We focused especially on documents associated with education in general, those linked to the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy, and the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy. The information from these interviews and from the documents was transcribed and coded using NVivo. A mixture of more empirical and more conceptual codes was generated from the data (Silverman, 2004). While we had not originally defined the notion of authenticity as a key object of enquiry within our research, it soon became apparent that many themes discussed in various documents and in our interviews pointed to a reflexive engagement with the idea of authenticity. The vast majority of the qualitative data that we collected and analysed was in Welsh. The quotes that we have used in this article have been translated into English. While we have made every effort to preserve the meaning of the original statements, we cannot guarantee that some loss of meaning has occurred through the translation process.

Authenticity 1: Welsh identity and the welsh language

There have been a series of long-running debates about the significance of the Welsh language for understandings of the authentic character of Welsh national identity, which can be

summarized as follows. First, the somewhat divisive role played by the Welsh language in helping to define Welsh identity for much of the 20th century has decreased and has been replaced by a general consensus among both Welsh and English speakers of the positive contribution that the Welsh language makes to Wales. Second, the belief that one needed to be able to speak Welsh in order to be counted as an authentic member of the Welsh nation is far less prevalent than it used to be. Understandings of Welsh identity are far more civic and inclusive than they previously were (Jones and Osmond, 2002).

It is in this context that the education system in Wales has operated over recent years. The Welsh language is viewed as an important skill for young people in Wales to acquire but mainly for instrumental reasons. The Welsh Government's (2010: 10) *Welsh-Medium Education Strategy* outlines some of the practical benefits accruing to individuals with bilingual skills in Welsh and English, and similar statements are made in the recently published *Successful Futures* report, where it is stated that the 'cultural, cognitive and practical benefits of learning Welsh as a living language provide a strong case for its inclusion as a compulsory element in the school curriculum' (Welsh Government, 2015a: 58). Additional value is ascribed to learning the Welsh language due to its 'commercial value for the jobs market' (Welsh Government, 2015b: 18).

The link between the Welsh language and an authentic Welsh identity is more contentious. Policy and guidance documents published in Wales since devolution in 1999 (e.g. ACCAC, 2003: 5) have tended to disassociate the Welsh language from a Welsh identity. The risks of making too strong a connection between the two are obvious and relate to the creation of a potentially exclusive vision of Welsh identity and culture, defined in linguistic terms. Recent documents reinforce this ambivalence. *Successful Futures*, for instance, accepts that there is some kind of connection between language and culture but also maintains that the exact nature of the association is difficult to gauge. As a result, it states that '[t]his report is not the place to rehearse the cultural arguments for preserving the Welsh language' (Welsh Government, 2015a: 58). While more positive statements about the link between the Welsh language and Welsh culture – and the role that education can play in fostering it – have been made elsewhere (Welsh Government, 2013a: 2), it is clear that the nature of this connection is still contentious.

While this is the official stance promoted within the education system in Wales, many of the teachers and young people we interviewed testified to the importance of the Welsh language as a key aspect of an authentic Welsh identity. To a large extent, this emphasis derived from an inability to define an authentic Welsh identity in any other way. Many referred to what one would consider to be stereotypical visions when asked to define Welsh identity: 'you think Wales, rugby, daffodils like, rich accent and stuff like that'. Equally, these respondents acknowledged that these kinds of stereotypical images were not really relevant to them as individuals – 'I'm not really any of them' – nor to large sections of the population. As one Welsh speaking student put it to us, 'there are stereotypes in Wales but I don't really think they're true, I wouldn't use them to describe Welsh people'. The students we interviewed displayed a high level of reflexivity about what some might consider to be important badges of an authentic Welsh national culture. Moreover, we witness an appreciation of the relationship between authenticity and the inauthentic; for the students, one was defined in relation to the other (Benjamin, 2008 [1936]).

Consequently, many of our respondents turned to the Welsh language as something that they viewed as being, patently, distinctive about Wales, thus providing a route to a more meaningful kind of national authenticity. This view was most apparent among Welsh speakers. One typical individual from north-west Wales maintained that the Welsh language was an important aspect of her Welsh identity and that the language helped her to 'be different'.

In addition to being something that was significant in its own right, the language was viewed as a resource that allowed individuals to access other kinds of cultural activities that were deemed to be authentically Welsh. A Welsh speaker from Cardiff stated:

> I go to the Eisteddfod [an annual large Welsh-speaking cultural festival], I listen to Welsh music, [I attend] Welsh festivals like Tafwyl [held in Cardiff] and I wouldn't really be able to do that unless I could speak Welsh and had Welsh-speaking friends.

In the above quote, the Welsh language is not merely a skill than can be learnt and acquired. It is also a key resource that allows young people to access other kinds of authentic Welsh cultural experiences.

While these kinds of statements are perhaps to be expected from Welsh speakers, even those with fewer Welsh-language skills still viewed the language as an important facet of their own Welsh identity. Those who could speak a few words of Welsh viewed their limited form of bilingualism as something that helped them to assume a distinctive Welsh identity. One learner from south Wales maintained that she was Welsh because she could speak some words of Welsh and that speaking the language also allowed her to be viewed as being more authentically Welsh, especially when she met her boyfriend's parents in England. Even those we interviewed who could speak very little of the Welsh language still viewed it as an important badge of Welsh identity. As one non-Welsh speaker from south-east Wales put it, 'obviously supporting the Welsh language, it is part of our tradition, it is very important to the way we act and it makes us very Welsh'.

Admittedly, not everyone felt the same. Some stressed that 'you can be Welsh without speaking Welsh' and that Welsh identity 'isn't necessarily in the language'. Moreover, a small minority of respondents drew attention to the sometimes negative consequences of too strong a connection being forged between the Welsh language and Welsh identity (Bowie, 1993). One young person from north-east Wales stated that they did not feel particularly Welsh in terms of their identity because of the implicit assumption they had made about the significance of the Welsh language for an authentic Welsh identity: 'I just have no connection to the language but obviously where I live, in Wales, but not any members of my family speak Welsh, they just base themselves in other places, mostly in England'. As a result, this young person felt as if they had been excluded from a Welsh nation that they felt was being defined in ways that were too narrow. For this individual, there was too much of a dissonance between their own internalized view of what it meant to be Welsh and the potential provided by the Welsh language as a source of an authentic Welsh identity.

We maintain that these findings are significant. At a time when the education system in Wales has sought to underplay the significance of a link between the Welsh language and Welsh identity and culture, it is clear that the majority of our respondents saw a stronger relationship between the two. The reasons for thinking this are not hard to determine. Students had learnt to be suspicious of allegedly distinctive aspects of Welsh culture, viewing them instead as unhelpful stereotypes. In the absence of other markers of an authentic and distinctive Welsh nation, the Welsh language has emerged as a meaningful badge of identity.

Authenticity 2: Creating sincere Welsh identities

We turn in this section to examine spatial and scalar configurations of the Welsh language, culture and identity within the education system in Wales. These variations reflect the efforts being made in Wales to create an education system that is spatially sensitive: a testament to

an attempt to promote more localized forms of sincerity, rather than more homogeneous forms of national authenticity.

There may well be more scope to develop a more spatially sensitive and sincere approach to understandings of identity in Wales than in many other states as a result of the perception that Wales is characterized by many internal variations in relation to language and culture. Numerous authors have argued that there are many, equally valid, ways of being Welsh and, significantly, that these can be practised differently in different parts of Wales (e.g. Evans, 2019; Jones and Fowler, 2007). This sensibility has underpinned the education system in Wales in recent years. An ACCAC guidance document, for instance, stated that '[b]ecause Welsh society is very diverse, there can be no single view of what it is to be Welsh' and that '[b]ecause of the variety and diversity within Wales, the Curriculum Cymreig will take different forms in different schools' (ACCAC, 2003: 5). The *Successful Futures* report (Welsh Government, 2015a: 14), too, emphasizes that the new curriculum will be 'based on subsidiarity: commanding the confidence of all'.

The advantage of delegating responsibility is that individual schools and teachers can ensure that the curriculum is tailored to the specific geographical contexts within which they operate or, in other words, can be developed in sincere ways in different settings. It is also a system within which 'positive disagreement and argument' can take place (Welsh Government, 2015a: 99). The approach adopted here is significant since it begins to illustrate how the education system in Wales seeks to promote an understanding of national sincerities that should be negotiated within and across particular schools and places (Erickson, 1995). And of course, this is also a version of national identity that is grounded in local interpretations and world views. There is a recognition that it is challenging and possibly misleading to attempt to promote an authentic vision of a Welsh nation that is equally applicable throughout the whole of Wales (cf. Taylor, 2001). Instead, attempts have been made to promote spatially sincere versions of the Welsh nation: ones that reflect the specific and varied understandings of Welsh identity that exist in different parts of Wales.

Such a perspective is reinforced by a scalar agenda, which informs the way in which the Welsh nation is reproduced in the education system. One of the aims of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig, in particular, has been to show how Welsh identity is locally embedded and globally extended, as well as being something that is articulated at a national scale. It discusses how the Cwricwlwm Cymreig should help pupils:

> to identify their own *sense of Welshness* and to feel a heightened sense of *belonging to their local community and country*. It also helps to foster in pupils an understanding of an outward-looking and international Wales, promoting *global citizenship* and concern for sustainable development. (ACCAC, 2003: 2, emphases added)

This scalar philosophy is to be applied to all disciplines, including Welsh as a subject. So, while Welsh is to be viewed as a national language of Wales and something that all of the inhabitants of Wales can take pride in, there is also an effort to ground the Welsh language in particular parts of Wales through the study of the accents and dialects of Wales (ACCAC, 2003: 5). The Welsh language is also portrayed as an international and cosmopolitan one, in relation to the impact that medieval Welsh poets had on the troubadour movement in continental Europe or in the context of the use of Welsh by foreign news correspondents in all parts of the world (ACCAC, 2003: 8). We witness an attempt to think about the Welsh nation in multi-scalar ways (Herb and Kaplan, 2018; Jones and Fowler, 2008) and to define Welshness through recourse to externalities; a distinctive Welsh identity and culture comes into being, at least in part, through its connections with other spaces beyond its borders.

Individual teachers are instrumental in implementing this spatial and scalar agenda. Some of the teachers we interviewed in north-west Wales were keen to stress how they had been able to develop a localized interpretation of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig and, by extension, of Welsh identity. Particular interpretations of Welsh identity were promoted within this school: ones that placed the Welsh language at the heart of a relatively un-reflexive and overtly nationalistic Welsh identity. What is equally significant for us is how students interpreted the education that they were exposed to in this school and how that education informed their own understanding of what it meant to be Welsh. One student explained as follows:

> A lot of the poems we did for GCSE, around 60% of them if not more went on about how unlucky Wales had been and how unfair the English had acted towards Wales. With Tryweryn [a key theme in Welsh nationalist discourse, which refers to the creation of a reservoir in north Wales to service Liverpool] and things like that.

Emphasis is placed here on developing a particular interpretation of Welsh history, identity and politics. It is one, moreover, that is attuned to the local political sensibilities and linguistic geographies that characterize north-west Wales (Jones and Fowler, 2007).

At the other extreme, English-medium schools located in areas of Wales with lower percentages of Welsh speakers were also able to interpret the curriculum in locally sincere ways. Some History and Geography teachers in the South Wales valleys, for instance, explained how they taught their students about the significance of their home towns as key sites within the industrial revolution, and how the coal mining and iron and steel production in these areas contributed to Welsh and British national institutions (e.g. trades unions and the National Health Service) and global process (early forms of globalization and, more equivocally, the British Empire). As well as reflecting an attempt to develop a locally sincere version of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig – one that resonates with the world views of young people in the South Wales valleys – we witness here the creation of an explicitly multi-scalar interpretation of Welsh identity.

Arguably, the more interesting negotiations about Welsh identity take place between these two extremes: in Welsh-medium schools that are located in areas of Wales with low percentages of Welsh speakers, or schools teaching students with mixed background in terms of language and identity. Attempts to develop locally sincere accounts of Welsh identity were more challenging here. Some respondents maintained that local populations were so mixed that any attempt to ground a sincere Welsh culture and identity within particular localities was impossible. One approach used in such circumstances was to avoid the whole issue altogether – 'basically, I try not to go there' – or, in other words, to retreat tactically from attempts to devise a sincere interpretation of Welsh identity.

However, such issues could not totally be avoided. A teacher based in an institution in north-east Wales, near the border with England, referred to how teachers had to become 'diplomats' and 'negotiators' within the classroom (Benwell, 2014). Students, according to this individual, came to this institution from a range of localities: some from within the Welsh-speaking 'heartland' and others from across the border in England. Teachers had to become skilled at working out how the Welsh language and Welsh culture could be introduced to audiences that were very mixed in terms of their linguistic and identity outlooks. One option was to make the definition of a sincere Welsh identity a topic for discussion: 'instead of telling them what Welsh identity is all about, we get them to discuss it among themselves, and to try to come to some sort of consensus'. We see here how the authentic qualities of Welsh identity and culture are negotiated in a zone of contact between different

individuals and groups (Erickson, 1995). This act of negotiation is not always straightforward, as the above evidence demonstrates.

The above discussion demonstrates the attempts being made in contemporary Wales to promote a spatially reflexive interpretation of Welsh identity: one that is also informed by scalar considerations. It is an education system that is predicated on a reasonably high degree of subsidiarity and there are, clearly, political and cultural benefits associated with this approach. It gives schools and teachers – and, by extension, students – opportunities to make sense of Wales, Welsh identity and the Welsh language in appropriate ways: ways that reflect a localized understandings of sincerity, we contend, rather than a monolithic national authenticity. It is also an approach to Welshness that emphasizes the connections between localities within Wales, Wales as an entity and other, more international and global processes and institutions. Above all, it is an approach that highlights the fluidity of an authentic Welsh culture and identity; the authenticity of a Welsh culture and identity derives from its localized sincerities.

Conclusions

The empirical research that we have drawn upon in this paper forms part of a broader project that has sought to examine the link between education, language and identity in Wales. We did not start out seeking to understand how the education system in Wales engaged with notions of authenticity but this theme arose in our research on a surprisingly regular basis. And of course, such themes chime with current public debates about cultural and political authenticity. How should critical social scientists respond to this process? As we hinted at in the introduction to this paper, one could easily adopt a position whereby such claims to authenticity were dismissed as being misplaced and misleading. And yet, as Smith (2009) has noted in relation to nationalism, even though we may 'lament the fact . . . purist theoretical objections have never been able to dissuade most people from their beliefs and ideals [about an authentic nation]' (123). It is because of such concerns that we have sought to approach the notion of authenticity in a sympathetic yet progressive way.

Overall, we were heartened by the reflexive way in which the education system in Wales – in terms of its stated goals and in terms of the embodied engagements of individuals with it – attempted to define an authentic sense of Welsh identity. In recognizing that there are many different ways of being Welsh, the education system as a whole is predicated on a plural sense of authenticity. It is up to teachers and pupils working and learning in different localities in Wales to negotiate their own, sincere versions of Welsh identity. Such a fluid sense of Welsh identity is augmented as a result of its multi-scalar character. Being sincere as an inhabitant of Wales means understanding the local variations in Welsh identity as well as appreciating how Welsh identity is defined by its engagements with global processes and communities: something that opens the door to a flexible negotiation of Welshness, as different scales intermesh. We contend, therefore, that the overall emphasis on developing locally sincere interpretations of nationalist discourse can help to avoid essentialist and atomized understandings of authenticity by encouraging a sensitivity to the: (1) multiple and equally sincere versions of nationalist discourse that exist within the same state, (2) ways in which sincere versions of the nation are embedded in a whole network of connections that extend outwards to other localities and people, (3) continual negotiations that underpin identity construction. Viewed in such terms, a focus on sincerity might contribute to a rehabilitation of localism (cf. Tomaney, 2013) and might also – through its emphasis on localized negotiations of the meaning of identity – enable a progressive politics of propinquity to emerge (Amin, 2004).

Does this mean, therefore, that it is impossible to define national authenticities at a national scale, as Taylor (2001) has suggested? Our respondents struggled somewhat to define what might constitute a nationally authentic version of Welsh identity and it was interesting that they tended to revert to the Welsh language as something that could meaningfully help to define Welsh identity and culture. Making those kinds of connections between language and identity flies in the face of the overall tenor of Welsh political and public debate for the past 20–30 years. Attempts have been made over this time period to disentangle the Welsh language from notions of Welsh identity. Yet, in the absence of other alternatives, it may be that the language provides one of the best means of articulating a distinctive Welsh culture, particularly if the contribution that the language makes to Welsh culture is defined in broad enough ways, so that it becomes a source of national pride for all Welsh people. The jury is still out in this respect and more research is required in order to evaluate the scope for a national authenticity to be configured in inclusive ways, in Wales and in other states (e.g. Confino and Skaria, 2002).

We began this paper by discussing some of the more problematic ways in which political and public debate was engaging with the notion of authenticity. Our claim was that critical social scientists needed to engage with these debates in different ways. If all we do is maintain that the notion of the authentic – defined in social, cultural and spatial terms – is misguided, then there is a danger that we will cede all engagement with the notion of authenticity to others: others who may seek to use it for more exclusionary ends. Our broader goal in this paper has been to rehabilitate the notion of authenticity and, in particular, to show how the idea of sincerity – a negotiated, and socially and spatially context-specific understanding of what it means to be a member of a nation – can provide one way of recapturing the notion of authenticity for more progressive ends. In spatializing and scaling identity in such a way, one can show how essentialized claims to identity promoted by certain groups are inherently plural, fractured and negotiated. Ultimately, one might also deliver a more progressive approach to authenticity, so that it becomes, for instance, authentically Welsh to be accepting of others, to promote justice, to live sustainably, and so on (Jones and Ross, 2016). In short, it is high time that the notion of authenticity needs to be rehabilitated. An explicitly geographical approach, which we have outlined in this paper, provides one way of achieving this important goal.

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