The Crisis of Welsh Europeanism:
Raymond Williams and Hannah Arendt after Brexit

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Introduction

In *Politics and Letters*, a volume of interviews with the editors of *New Left Review*, Raymond Williams described himself a "Welsh European" (1979: 296). The book was first published in 1979, an inauspicious year for claiming such an identity, for on March the 1st the Welsh electorate voted by 956,000 to 243,000 against the devolution of political power from London and against the establishment of an elected Welsh Assembly (G. A. Williams 1985: 296). According to historian Gwyn A. Williams, in rejecting "the political traditions to which the modern Welsh had committed themselves" the nation had written "*finis* to nearly two hundred years of Welsh history" (295). Yet, the sense of an ending proved premature, for 1997 saw the Welsh electorate voting narrowly in favour of a devolved "National Assembly for Wales" (Davies 2007: 673).

If 1992 saw Francis Fukuyama announcing the 'End of History' with the creation of a single global liberal-capitalist economic order after the fall of Soviet Communism, historian Merfyn Jones offered a Welsh equivalent in that same year by declaring the end of a distinctive national history. At the cusp of political devolution with the 'yes' vote of 1997 followed by the establishment of a Welsh Assembly in 1999, the Welsh had at last moved 'beyond identity'.

> The Welsh are in the process of being defined, not in terms of shared occupational experience or common religious inheritance or the survival of an ancient European language or for contributing to the Welsh radical tradition, but rather by reference to the institutions that they inhabit, influence, and react to. This new identity may lack the ethical and political imperatives that characterized Welsh life for two centuries, but it increasingly appears to be the only identity available. It is as well that this process coincides with similar developments in the rest of Europe as the modernization of economy, society and state polity undermines the validity of previous certainties. [...] Wales slips into Europe as another political unit, not as a single national identity; as a place with citizens, not a cause with adherents. Wales

is an identifiable place, but the Welsh are hardly a people with a distinct, shared, and immutable identity. They should make good Europeans. (Jones 1992: 357)

Accounts of the transformation that had taken place between 1979 and 1997 tended to take a teleological form, where the outmoded cultural bases of identity were seen to have been jettisoned for a civic and pluralist future. Welshness is not, Jones tells us, rooted in a common religious inheritance, an ancient Celtic language, nor in a radical tradition. The choice of these cultural elements is, of course, not accidental. These are the cultural forces that have shaped modern Wales. But political and institutional structures can now define the Welsh as they move from the cultural to the civic, from being 'adherents of a cause' to being 'citizens of a place'. Citizenship marks the end point of Welsh cultural history.

While the war and ethnic conflict in Yugoslavia almost immediately shattered the Liberal-capitalist complacency of Fukuyama's prognosis, Jones' desire to go 'beyond identity' proved more enduring and continued to be influential in the years after devolution. In the year 2005, what was essentially the same argument was given a postcolonial makeover by historian Chris Williams who advocated a "post-national" Wales where "the discourse of national identity and the rhetoric of Welshness would be left behind as the idea of a national culture would be decoupled from the civic rights and responsibilities that go with being a citizen of Wales" (C. Williams 2005: 16). Williams, like Jones before him, celebrated the slackening of the link between nation and culture, embraced postmodern forms of hybridity and cosmopolitanism, and the belief that a wholly civic, politically defined Welshness could be the crucible for the coexistence of cultures. Such a view is appealingly tolerant and hospitable in theory, though its limitations in areas such as education – where it becomes a question of whose history are we to teach, what language(s) are we to teach, and so on – would seem to be obvious from the outset. Today, after the result of the 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum, Merfyn Jones' vision of Wales "slip[ping] into Europe" clearly needs serious revision (1992: 357). On 23 June 2016, Wales followed England in voting to leave the European Union with 52.5 (854,572) voting to leave and 47.5 (772,347) voting to remain (Both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to Remain in the European Union) (*BBC News*). To claim a Welsh European identity in the centenary year of Raymond Williams' birth may seem as inauspicious as it was for him to enunciate his Welsh Europeanism in 1979. While seeming eccentric from an English perspective, Williams' self-defined Welsh European identity was but a variation of a long-standing Welsh tradition in which authors and intellectuals – from Emrys ap Iwan in the nineteenth century to Saunders Lewis in the twentieth – had located their nation within a broader continental context as a means of countering the dominance of Anglo-Britishness in the United Kingdom. As M. Wynn Thomas (2021) has documented recently, the Welsh of 2016 had, quite as much as the electorate of 1979, turned their

backs on the political traditions to which they had committed themselves since the nineteenth century. Yet as Raymond Williams noted, Welsh history testifies to a "quite extraordinary process of self-generation and regeneration, from what seemed impossible conditions" (R. Williams 2021: 363). This article, which ultimately asks whether Welsh Europeanism has a future, is written in that spirit.

Naming England

It could be argued that Wales slips out of Europe due to the process advocated by those, such as Merfyn Jones and Chris Williams, who sought to go beyond 'identity' and 'nationhood'. The failure of the 'beyond identity' or 'post-national' analysis was two-fold. Firstly, those seeking a jump to this or that universalist position beyond cultural identity and nationhood failed to see that the 'End of History' had carried us forward into a more nationalist world. To abandon the nation, in cultural and political terms, as the legitimate ground for the articulation of identity was to leave Wales significantly enfeebled as we faced a more united globe that was also, paradoxically, "far more ethnically aware, and more liable to political division" (Nairn 1997: 65). A form of British anti-European xenophobia underpinned the Leave vote in Wales, partly because the cultural base for an alternative vision was not sufficiently strong (Brooks 2017: xiv). Secondly, post-nationalist thought perpetuated the occlusion of the national question in English intellectual life, a result of the sheer numerical and political dominance of England (Henderson and Jones 2021: 196). "The English just are" as the social anthropologist Nerys Patterson once noted, for "the weak get dissected while the strong are embodied, institutionally and imaginatively, over and over again" (Patterson 1995: 72). But there is more to it than that, for the comparative literature on nationalism suggests that England is a somewhat unusual case. Liah Greenfeld (1993) sees English nationalism as the 'firstborn' modern nationalism, serving to underpin the formation of the emergent state's governing institutions whose territorial reach would expand to encompass the constituent peoples of the British Isles and, later, Empire. In that process the English nation was enveloped within a British national and imperial identity. Linda Colley notes that the "English and the foreign are still all too inclined to refer to the Island of Great Britain as 'England'", but also draws attention to the fact that "at no time have they ever customarily referred to the English empire. When it existed, as in retrospect, the empire has always been emphatically British" (130). The result, according to Alisa Henderson and Richard Wyn Jones, is that England "is highly unusual as the referent object" of national identification for "the identity of the nation that is being referred to and hence reproduced is opaque and unstable":

> It is seldom straightforwardly England. Yet England is also always present. This
> apparent paradox becomes more readily understandable when we recall [that] the

Anglo-British fusion that is so central to the state's institutional architecture – a fusion that has as one of its characteristic consequences a deep reluctance on the part of the UK government, public and civil-society bodies, political parties, and indeed journalists, to name 'England'. And yet it is England that politicians and commentators are referring to when they cite, as they routinely do, 'a thousand years of British history'. (200)

While opacity and instability may characterise many imagined national communities, this analysis helps to foreground one of the striking aspects of Raymond Williams' work. For Williams repeatedly names England. Evoking his upbringing on the Welsh side of the Wales-England border, Williams recalled that the members of his formative community "talked about 'the English' who were not us, and 'the Welsh' who were not us" (2021: 171). Given centuries of othering, documented in the literary record from the Holinshed Chronicles (Griffiths 2012) to Kingsley Amis (James 2013: 172), there is little that's unusual in naming or identifying 'the Welsh'. But to name 'the English' is more unusual, and it is rarely noted that *Culture and Society*, viewed by many as the inaugural text of English Cultural Studies, was written by an author who defined himself a 'Welsh European'.

If Williams' Welsh identity is often ignored – some even erroneously detecting aspects of a reactionary English xenophobia in his work (Gilroy 1987) – he was clear as to the foundational sources of his vision. When challenged by his *New Left Review* interlocutors in 1979 about the lack of any reference to "nationalism or imperialism" in *Culture and Society*, Williams responded as follows:

> There are in fact two places in the book which do refer to the imperial experience, although in a way they confirm your general emphasis – the discussion of Carlyle's criticism of emigration as a social solution, and the analysis of the magical function of departures to the empire in the fiction of the period. But otherwise there is nothing about it. [...] I think one of the reasons for this is that the particular experience which ought to have enabled me to think much more closely and critically about it was for various reasons at that time very much in abeyance: the Welsh experience. The way I used the term community actually rested on my memories of Wales as I've said. But the Welsh experience was also precisely one of subjection to English expansion and assimilation historically. That is what ought to have most alerted me to the dangers of a persuasive type of definition of community, which is at once dominant and exclusive. (R. Williams 1979: 118-19)

If Williams' use of the term 'community' was informed, unconsciously, by his Welsh formation in 1958, it would become the conscious object of his meditations from the late 1960s onwards. Yet, as the engagements with national identity in his first novel *Border Country* (1960) indicate, it would be erroneous to follow Fred Inglis in thinking of Williams' Welsh consciousness as "late come" or a fitful manifestation "of the kind of fervour which overcame [him] several times in later life" (Inglis 1995: 258, 66). Writing for the journal *Encounter* in 1963, for example, on the envisaged entry of the United

Kingdom into the European Common Market, Williams noted his weariness with endless reports in the British press of "what 'the English' were thinking", and expressed his relief that he "needn't feel bound by it [...] having been born across the Welsh border" (2021: 303). By the time Williams' response appeared in print, General De Gaulle and the French government had adjourned the accession negotiations due to alleged incompatibilities between European and British economic interests. Nevertheless, Williams' words speak to the current moment:

> I want to see the Common Market judged by European standards. If it divides even Europe, not accidentally but as a matter of policy, I am against it. If it disgraces Europe, by breaking our complex and delicate links with the non-European peoples to whom we are in living debt, I am against it. If it is a tired, painted cartel, seeking to substitute efficient consumption for the democratic and socialist traditions which are Europe's major contributions to humanity, I am against it. But I am only against as a European, and I recognise the European responsibility to put our house in order, to co-operate with each other and with the rest of the world. It will be a bloody tragedy if we betray Europe by being pseudo-Europeans, or by being so 'English' that we find ourselves in the wrong century facing the wrong problems. Still, to have two parties, locked in amplified combat and both wrong, is what we've had to get used to for years. It's time for a change, don't you think? (2021: 304)

Often thought of primarily, and with some justification, as a cultural historian of, and a voice for, a British working class, Williams understands the question of the United Kingdom's entry into the Common Market in terms of nationhood. His analysis of 1963 is particularly prescient in that he sees a distinctive form of Englishness as being related to isolationism and a barrier for transnational co-operation. The determining factor here is national identity as opposed to class, a dimension of Williams' thought that is either ignored or assumed to be a late response to the politics of identity and discourse of the 1980s (Inglis 2008). Undoubtedly, Williams remained committed throughout his life to a politics of class, an assumption of equality with ordinary people and a resistance to the tendency – manifest in the writings of the Frankfurt School, the New York Intellectuals and of key strains of European Marxism alike – of treating the working class as passive victims, irredeemably corrupted by TV and mass consumption. This dimension of his thought has been widely documented and analysed. What is less widely acknowledged, beyond Wales, is the role of the national question in his work.

Citizenship and the Nation

If Brexit is a moment of existential danger for Welsh Europeanism, it is also a crisis of theory and interpretation. Are we dealing with a protest vote of a squeezed and impoverished working class, or the xenophobic fantasies informing an emergent English

nationalism stoked by a form of neo-imperial nostalgia? A proportionate and sufficiently subtle account of the UK's vote and its outcome has eluded commentators; it seems "too early to tell" – as Zhou Enlai responded when asked in 1953 about the effects of the French Revolution – and nationalism, classes, political parties, individual egos and inter-state relations and rivalries are all at play (quoted in Žižek 2008: 157). There is little doubt, however, that UKIP and other committed Eurosceptics succeeded in linking genuine economic discontent in a period of accelerating asymmetrical development to the question of EU membership, with which that discontent had – at best – a partial and indirect relationship. The basis on which people voted continues to be debated, but given that they seem to have done so against their economic self-interest, it would appear that we are dealing with behaviour informed by national fantasies and desires more than by class consciousness (Henderson and Jones 2021: 196-202).

There is nothing new, of course, in this ambiguity as to whether national identity or class lies at the root of people's actions. A dramatic example is recalled by Hannah Arendt in her volume *Men in Dark Times* (1968). Arendt notes that Hitler's provision of full employment posed a problem for Marxist theorists in the 1930s. If the stimulants of revolutionary action were to be hunger and unemployment, then National Socialism's success in satisfying these basic human needs required a radical reinterpretation of Marxist categories:

> By 1935 or 1936 Hitler had liquidated hunger and unemployment; hence, for Brecht, schooled in the 'classics', there was no longer any pretense for not praising Hitler. In seeking one, he simply refused to recognize what was patent to everybody – that those really persecuted were not workers but Jews, that it was race, and not class, that counted. There was not a line in Marx, Engels, or Lenin that dealt with this, and the Communists denied it – it was nothing but the pretense of the ruling classes, they said – and Brecht, stolidly refusing to 'look for himself' fell into line. (243)

Arendt argues that the Marxist frame prevented Brecht from seeing what was obvious to many, that the rise of fascism in Germany was about race not class. Theodor W. Adorno wrote to Max Horkheimer in 1940 stating that "it often seems to me that everything that we used to see from the point of view of the proletariat has been concentrated today with frightful force upon the Jews" (quoted in Wiggershaus 1995: 275). A shift away from class as the primary determinant of action in Marxist analysis in the 1940s was directly connected with Marxism's insufficient theorisation of anti-Semitism, a failure to recognize that Hitler's commitment to racism was fundamental to his politics and was not merely a symptom of deeper class tensions. Those decrying the rise of 'identity politics' today may do well to consider that one reason for its emergence was orthodox Marxism's failure to see how central anti-Semitism was to National Socialism.

Out of this re-orientation away from class as sole determinant of social allegiances and activism, a New Left would emerge in the post-war years that was anti-racist, identity-based and sceptical of claims regarding the primacy of the economy. As the analysis broadened beyond the case of Europe's Jews, and as ancestral models of kinship gave way to an emphasis on the performative dimensions of identity (music, food, clothing etc.), the shift from 'class to race' in the 1940s became more widely expressed as a shift from 'class to ethnicity' or 'class to culture' (Michaels 2006). While each of these terms have different implications and resonances, a general shift from economic to identitarian explanations for social change is being identified and described. Raymond Williams can be seen to have contributed to this shift and may be located within this intellectual milieu.

Indeed, on 11 April 1962, Hannah Arendt wrote to Raymond Williams from her home in New York City to tell him how much she had enjoyed and profited from reading his review of her book *Between Past and Future* (Arendt 1962). Williams' piece, in which he paid "a more than ordinary tribute" to Arendt's work, appeared in *The Kenyon Review* in 1961. He described Arendt's latest study as a "worthy and natural successor to *The Human Condition*", and as a profound meditation on "the breakdown of tradition in our time, and the consequent effects of the loss of this natural bridge between past and future". He found much in the book to be "genuinely clarifying" but wished "there could be a genuine encounter between what seem to me the patterns of thought of a particular society and similar local patterns elsewhere" (Williams 1961: 698). Williams was addressing a tendency that he identified in Arendt's work of assuming that the American experience, where the bonds of society were allegedly being eroded by a devastating "consumer culture", could be generalised into a truth about the contemporary world. While acknowledging that "very powerful consumption tendencies" had appeared in Britain, Williams presented himself as a member of a group of critics who saw this as "a particular stage of capitalism" that could be resisted and was "capable of being beaten back". His American contemporaries, on the other hand, seemed unable to "look at capitalism with any sense that it is transient and replaceable". No meaningful dialogue across the Atlantic could happen, argued Williams, if "the processes of American society are held, consciously or unconsciously, to be universal processes". It is only through the acceptance of the particularity and non-generalisable nature of national cultures that "a genuine encounter between what seems to me the patterns of thought of a particular society and similar local patterns elsewhere" could take place. (701-702)

Though presented as a critique, Williams' emphasis on the particularities of national cultures was working with, rather than against, the grain of Hannah Arendt's thought. For Arendt had argued that universal 'human rights' would only find expression and enactment within particular forms of national citizenship. She knew something of the fickleness of citizenship as the daughter of assimilated German Jews who had her

citizenship stripped in 1937. Attempting to escape the Third Reich she fled to Czechoslovakia, then France, and eventually made it to the United States travelling on an illegal visa issued by an American diplomat who aided roughly 2,500 Jewish refugees in this way (Bernstein 2018: 5-7). She witnessed at first hand the way in which the "assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships – except that they were still human" (Arendt 1966: 299). Arendt had therefore found herself denied of human rights in 1940 at the very moment when, stripped of her German citizenship, she was reduced to being human 'in general' and thus in most need of the protection of those 'universal human rights' which belong to individuals independently of citizenship.

The loss of political status renders the human superfluous, argues Arendt, and this is wholly in keeping with the ultimate aim of totalitarianism:

> Radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous. The manipulators of this system believe in their own superfluousness as much as in that of all others, and the totalitarian murderers are all the more dangerous because they do not care if they themselves are alive or dead, if they ever lived or were never born. The danger of the corpse factories and holes of oblivion is that today, with populations and homelessness everywhere on the increase, masses of people are continuously rendered superfluous if we continue to think of the world in utilitarian terms. Political, social and economic events everywhere are in silent conspiracy with totalitarian instruments devised for making men superfluous. (Arendt 1966: 459)

This is the point at which the inborn and inalienable rights of man should come into play, but it seemed that a man who is nothing but a man loses the very qualities which make it possible for him to be treated as a fellow man by others. Indeed, the idea of the 'human being as such', of the human reduced to her essence, had been realised most frighteningly in the concentration camps. Deprived of the particular socio-political identity that accounted for citizenship, the Jews of 1940s Europe found that they were no longer recognised as human at all. "The world" noted Arendt in a chilling sentence "found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human" (392).

For Arendt, the loss of citizenship is the loss of 'the right to have rights' resulting in a 'political death'. Those in this condition, as Nancy Fraser notes in a discussion of Arendt, "may become objects of charity or benevolence", but they have no "first-order" claims as citizens, "they become non-citizens with respect to justice" (Fraser 2005: 77). "The concept of human rights", states Arendt, "can again be meaningful only if they are redefined to mean a right to the human condition itself, which depends upon belonging to some human community" (Arendt 1951: 439). It turns out, notes Arendt, that "Man" can "lose all so-called Rights of Man without losing his essential quality as man, his

human dignity. Only the loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity" (1966: 297). For Arendt, there is no usable concept of human nature that can be accessed independently from particular communities.

Culture and the Nation

Raymond Williams approaches the national question from a different starting point but shares Arendt's fundamental belief in the particular as a basis for pluralist tolerance. Though Williams played a not insignificant role in the "decisive re-entry of the problem of the capitalist state into Marxist thought" his focus was on cultural practices as opposed to political formations (1979: 120). If a theoretical distinction can be made between ethnic and civic forms of nationalism, Williams insisted that in practice these types will frequently overlap, and a given national culture will display both ethnic and civic components in its forms of nationhood. He argues, for instance, that the various forms of "Welshness" are typically "simultaneously political and cultural", and thus suggests that whether created in the crucible of culture or formed by the development of political institutions, all nations are to some extent "cultural" entities (R. Williams 2021: 78). In the chapter entitled "The Culture of Nations" in *Towards 2000* (1983), Williams argued that the nation was legitimate ground for developing a socialist project. "There is little point in jumping from the nation to a projected internationalism" he noted. He claimed that no headway would be made "by the familiar intellectual jump to this or that universality [...] indeed, we have to move in the other direction":

> To reduce social identity to the formal legal definitions, at the level of the state, is to collude with the alienated superficialities of 'the nation' which are the limited functional terms of the modern ruling class. That even some socialists should reply in such terms – socialists who should entirely depend on deeply grounded and active social identities – is another sign of the prepotence of market and exchange relations. One reason is that many minority liberals and socialists and especially those who by the nature of their work or formation are themselves nationally and internationally mobile, have little experience of those rooted settlements from which, though under exceptionally severe complications and pressures, most people still derive their communal identities. (R. Williams 2021: 341)

Williams is, then, offering an analysis that is virtually a mirror image of that developed by those seeking to reach 'beyond identity'. His position would entail the rejection of a post-national theory that prioritises the political frames of citizenship. Williams' emphasis is on the cultural practices that constitute a national community.

There are problems with Williams' analysis. If his account of national identity offers a useful corrective to those who discuss nationalism merely at the level of politics and statehood, the cultural definition of the nation leads logically to one of two highly

problematic positions: an authoritarian monoculturalism where the culture of one ethnic or linguistic group is promoted as the only 'authentic' national culture, or a self-frustrating libertarianism where any claim to national distinctiveness evaporates as the 'nation' is regarded as a vessel in which a limitless plurality of cultures may co-inhabit and co-exist with equal validity. Throughout the chapter on "The Culture of Nations", the 'artificial' political structure of the nation-state is contrasted with an alternative form of identity variously designated as 'deeply grounded', 'settled', 'real' and 'residual'. Furthermore, the tendency to espouse the legal forms of national citizenship is seen to derive from a 'mobile' and 'detached' intellectual class. Francis Mulhern found Williams' distinction between "natural communities" and the "artificial order" of the nation-state to be "disturbing" (Mulhern 1998: 111) and it was this dimension of *Towards 2000* that led the Black British critic Paul Gilroy to argue that Williams' conception of national belonging was essentialist and hard to differentiate from the overt racism of Enoch Powell (Gilroy 1987: 49-50). As I have argued elsewhere, Williams never endorses the language of 'race' (D. Williams 2015: 93-98). Settled and rooted communities need not be 'old' nor 'essentialist'. Williams drew on his formation in the Welsh border country to emphasise that identities must be 'lived' and 'experienced' in an ongoing process of cultural and communal creation.

> It happens that I grew up in an old frontier area, the Welsh border country, where for centuries there was bitter fighting and raiding and repression and discrimination, and where, within twenty miles of where I was born, there were in those turbulent centuries as many as four different everyday spoken languages. It is with this history in mind that I believe in the practical formation of social identity – it is now very marked there – and know that necessarily it has to be lived. Not far away there are the Welsh mining valleys, into which in the nineteenth century there was massive and diverse immigration, but in which, after two generations, there were some of the most remarkably solid and mutually loyal communities of which we have record. These are the real grounds of hope. (R. Williams 2021: 342)

Williams attempts to walk a tightrope between the monocultural logic of what Barbara Foley has termed "metonymic nationalism" – where one part of the national community is elevated to represent the whole – and a pluralism that renders any talk of national particularism obsolete (Foley 2003: 160). Williams insists that it is "from recognizing the plurality, instead of insisting on the authority of any chosen (but then competitive) singularity, that we can learn to be open to each other", but then sees that plurality as the basis for making "the effort to move through to effective new common ground" (2021: 135). The structure of this argument – where plurality forms the basis for a new sense of Welsh communality – is repeated throughout Williams' writings on national identity. He notes, for instance, that the "major Welsh response" to what we may identify as the postmodern "dissolutions of community and identity", is to attempt "to remake communities and identities which will hold" (R. Williams 2021: 81). Wales may then

offer a location for the realisation of Williams' call in *Towards 2000* (1983) for "a new kind of socialist movement" based on "a wide range of needs and interests" which can be gathered into "a new definition of the general interest" (174). For Williams, no political structure can satisfactorily precede, nor be decoupled from, a particular cultural community. To embrace citizenship is not to move beyond culture, for no usable concept of citizenship can be accessed independently from particular communities.

The Ends of Welsh Europeanism

For Williams, there is no usable concept of human nature that can be accessed independently from particular lived and formed identities. For Arendt there is no usable concept of human nature that can be accessed independently from the legal and political structures of particular national communities. Despite the former focusing on cultural identity and practice, and the latter on the political structures of the state, they come to compatible conclusions.

One of the reasons that their arguments lead to similar endings, is that they draw on the same source. Arendt's celebrated section on the "right to have rights" in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* includes a discussion of the Irish critic of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke. Burke is often seen as a foundational figure for conservative thought in Britain, but in an illuminating account of Raymond Williams as a 'left Burkean', Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes that the reactionary critic of enlightenment universalism and the French Revolution may also be considered a father of cultural relativism and anti-colonialism (Gates Jr. 2010: 28-32). Burke criticized the modern colonial state, campaigned against the British administration in India, and led an eight-year prosecution of Warren Hastings, governor of Bengal and head of the East India Trading company. Luke Gibbons has emphasized the ways in which Burke, informed by Irish history, described the violence, both material and cultural, that colonialism inflicted upon subject peoples, "whether generated by religious bigotry in Ireland, the plunder of Warren Hastings in India, or the sordid excesses of British military policy during the American Revolution" (Gibbons 2003: 88). Burke's emphasis on particular cultures and traditions as opposed to the universalistic discourse of 'the rights of man' make him an important inspiration for Arendt:

> These facts and reflections offer what seems an ironical, bitter and belated confirmation of the famous arguments with which Edmund Burke opposed the French Revolution's *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. They appear to buttress his assertion that human rights were an 'abstraction', that it was much wiser to rely on an 'entailed inheritance' of rights which one transmits to one's children like life itself, and to claim one's rights to be the 'rights of an Englishman' rather than the inalienable rights of man. According to Burke, the rights which we enjoy spring

'from within the nation', so that neither natural law, nor divine command, nor any concept of mankind such as Robespierre's 'human race', 'the sovereign of the earth', are needed as a source of law. The pragmatic soundness of Burke's concept seems to be beyond doubt in light of our manifold experiences. (Arendt 1966: 391-92)

Arendt traces the roots of her argument that human rights are best articulated and defended in relation to particularistic traditions back to the writings of Burke.

Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958) begins with Burke. For Williams, Burke establishes the tradition of deploying culture as a means of critiquing industrial society. As the following quotation suggests, Burke also seems significant for articulating a definition of national belonging:

> [Burke] prepared a position in the English mind from which the march of industrialism and liberalism was to be continually attacked. He established the idea of the State as the necessary agent of human perfection, and in terms of this idea the aggressive individualism of the nineteenth century was bound to be condemned. He established, further, the idea of what has been called an 'organic society', where the emphasis is on the interrelation and continuity of human activities, rather than on separation into spheres of interest, each governed by its own laws.
>
> > A nation is not an idea only of local extent, and individual momentary aggregation; but it is an idea of continuity, which extends in time as well as in numbers and in space. And this is a choice not of one day, or one set of people, not a tumultuary and giddy choice; it is a deliberate election of the ages and of generations; it is a constitution made by what is ten thousand times better than choice, it is made by the peculiar circumstances, occasions, tempers, dispositions, and moral, civil, and social habitudes of the people, which disclose themselves only in a long space of time.
>
> Immediately after Burke, this complex which he describes was to be called the 'spirit of the nation'; by the end of the nineteenth century, it was called a national 'culture'. Examination of the influence and development of these ideas belongs to my later chapters. (R. Williams 1958: 11)

But in fact, "these ideas", at least as they relate to the "nation" which seems to be the subject of Burke's thoughts here, do not return in Williams' later chapters. Nor for that matter do they appear in *The Long Revolution*, the 1961 sequel to *Culture and Society*. Indeed, while the idea of nationhood is an explicit concern of the novels, and of the essays on Wales and Welshness that Williams began to write in the early 1970s, it is not until *Towards 2000* (1983) that he engages with national identity both theoretically and at length. His argument in that book, published five years before his untimely death in 1988, is that the "legal (and communal) defence of dislocated and exposed groups and minorities is essential". But, he notes that "it is a serious misunderstanding, when full

social relations are in question, to suppose that the problems of social identity are resolved by formal definitions. For unevenly and at times precariously, but always through long experience substantially, an effective awareness of social identity depends on actual and sustained social relationships" (R. Williams 2021: 341).

For Williams and Arendt, the form that a common humanity would take was not a globally individualist universalism, but it would be based on the universalizing claim that every individual is inseparable from his or her local communal or national particularity. Humanity must be developed within local communities as part of a shared value common to all local, particular, communities in order to guarantee, universally, a human 'right to have rights'. This model, as Mark Greif has noted, would seem to require a form of supra-national, planetary or species-level guarantee, some sort of over-law or world government to ensure that all communities lived up to their ethical and moral responsibilities (Greif 2015: 94). "Politically", stated Arendt, "before drawing up the constitution of a new body politic, we shall have to create – not merely discover – a new foundation for human community as such" (1951: 434). In response to "political forms that now limit, subordinate and destroy people", stated Raymond Williams, "we have to begin again with people and build new political forms" (2021: 345).

Conclusion

For the past quarter of a century Welsh nationalists have viewed Welsh political autonomy within the European Union as the form allowing for maximum autonomy. Brexit, as Ned Thomas has noted, removes Wales and the Welsh language from "a framework in which minority language communities, smaller states and cultural regions are the norm, and not exotic curiosities". Brexit takes Wales out of a context where there is the potential for such communities to forge alliances and to exert a combined pressure on the dominant nations. Brexit removes Wales from a context where multiculturalism is understood in terms of a territorial mosaic rather than in terms of an Anglophone melting-pot. It is unlikely, proceeds Thomas,

> that a federal UK, if achievable, could offer us so favourable a context, and there are worse scenarios in which British nationalism and the assimilationist pull of a still powerful neighbour might call the political unit of Wales itself into question. (2017: 15)

While Raymond Williams is often evoked, justifiably, as a thinker who "urged mutual recognition of common ground against common enemies whether they be internal or external" (Smith 1993: 280), his views on Wales' constitutional future were unambiguous. In an essay of 1976, he noted:

> Division […] is someone else's name for independence. Once you are not controlled, in advance and systematically, by others, you soon discover the kinds of co-operation, between nations, between regions, between communities, on which any full life depends. But it is then your willing and not your enforced co-operation. That is why I, with many others, now want and work to divide, as a way of declaring our own interests certainly, but also as a way of finding new and willing forms of co-operation: the only kind of co-operation that any free people can call unity. (R. Williams 2021: 321)

Williams came to see Britain's disintegration as a positive development. The implication would seem to be that Wales should take a step back into independent statehood in order to re-join the international community on its own terms; to enter, in Tom Nairn's vision, "a globality where there are certain to be more self-governing units rather than fewer and bigger" (2014: 419). It is surely in keeping with the thinking of Arendt on national citizenship and Williams on the culture of nations that a tolerant globe should be made of many distinctive citizens and citizenships. Dreams of universalist global orders have tended to underpin totalitarian regimes. In *Towards 2000*, Williams argues for public involvement in constructing a form of modern nationhood that is socialist, republican and stripped of formal privilege. A form of nationhood in which the whole citizenry subordinates the nation state to its democratic will. The trouble with the 'Yookay' for Williams (as for Tom Nairn) is that it is historically programmed to impose power from above. Brexit is the realisation of some of Williams' direst prophesies. At the time of writing, the 'Yookay' is undergoing a conservative counter-revolution led by Boris Johnson. Is not national independence for Wales and Scotland, in such a context, an urgent necessity? Welsh Europeanism envisages a more plural world in which Catalonia, Wales, Scotland, the Basque Country and others will redefine and revivify a Europe of the peoples. It remains a – distant – possibility.

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