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Building a Dam, Constructing a Nation: The ‘drowning’ of Capel Celyn

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Abstract: Throughout history, the planning and construction of a dam has become symbolic of wider political events and processes. This paper investigates how the Tryweryn scheme in north-west Wales in the 1950s and 1960s became a central signifier within the emergent Welsh nationalism of the period. The project, providing water to the city of Liverpool, flooded the village of Capel Celyn and displaced its 48 residents. However, the opposition to the project extended beyond this rural community, with the scheme becoming a focal point for Welsh nationalism. This paper explores this significance, arguing that the Tryweryn scheme was articulated in a number of ways that elevated the project from a local issue to a national outcry, resulting in the term ‘Tryweryn’ having a resonance that continues to this day.

If you find yourself driving along the A487 - the road that runs from Haverfordwest in the south to Bangor in the north of Wales - there is little doubt that you will spend time looking out of your window, admiring the landscapes for which this corner of the world is famous. However, as you drive along this road, north of the village of Llanrhystud, cast your gaze to the left. There, present in the tedium of an anonymous lay-by, you will find a landmark of Welsh nationalism and a monument to a lost village. Daubed on the rock of a derelict wall, the words *Cofiwch Dryweryn* ('Remember Tryweryn') transport the reader to an era of emergent nationalist politics, to the flooding of a village to serve a city and a deep scar that persists to today.

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This paper explores the event behind the words *Cofiwch Dryweryn*, focusing on the damming of the Tryweryn river - resulting in the flooding of the Welsh village of the Capel Celyn (creating the Llyn Celyn reservoir, closed in 1965) - to provide the English city of Liverpool with water. It follows recent scholarship by asserting that the flooding of this small village, made up of little more than a dozen dwellings and a local chapel, represents a particular turning point for Welsh nationalism (Cunningham, 2007; Whitehead et al., 2007; Griffiths, 2014). By analysing letters of dissent sent to the UK government at the time, it argues that the Tryweryn project became a central signifier in this Welsh nationalist project, symbolising the complexities of the use of Welsh water resources by English urban areas and exposing the tension between Welsh grievances and the demands of the Westminster government. Due to this resonance, the village of Capel Celyn was transformed into a nationalist space, in which opposition storylines of cultural protection were fused with the territorialisation of water resources. Tryweryn ceased to be an apolitical water engineering project, becoming a symbol of the complexity of Wales' relationship with the British state and entered into the vocabulary of Welsh nationalism as a key term to describe the loss of water resources to external interests.

Contested waters

This paper follows scholarship in understanding the management of water as permeated by politics, power and contestation, with the control of water symbolising the control of both space and population (Whitehead et al., 2007; Swyngedouw, 2009; Loftus, 2009; Linton, 2010; Linton & Budds, 2013; Perrault, 2014; Menga, 2017). Within this reading, rivers cease to be simple flows of water but are socially-produced objects that are made and remade through power-laden socio-political and technical interaction (Swyngedouw, 1997). Previous research has shown how the construction of infrastructure, such as dams, become articulated within storylines that assert the infrastructure's symbolism as representative of both nationalism and state-building (Mitchell, 2002; Mossallam, 2014; Akhter, 2015; Menga, 2015). For example, Kaika (2006) has explored the construction of the

Marathon Dam, built in the 1920s, arguing that the project's neoclassical ornamentation represented the construction of parallels between Athens' modernisation and the successes of Ancient Greek civilisation. Within this process, the infrastructure became a *set piece*² of nationhood, similar to other objects of modernist prestige, such as space programmes, international sports tournaments and the nuclear bomb (Mitchell, 2002; Bromber et al., 2014). Within this reading, hydroelectric projects provide common spectacles that grasp the attention of citizens and consolidate a state's power, demonstrating the techno-economic power resources of the state itself (Mitchell, 2002).

In exploring this relationship, Allouche (2005) draws from theories of nationalism and territory in political geography to argue that states work to 'territorialise' water resources to consolidate and demonstrate statehood. Within this reading, territoriality is not only dependent on physical geography but is also the result of how land and water is conceived by those who live there and interact with the landscape (Grosby, 1995; Allouche, 2005). The context of the management of water resources becomes representative of wider political and nationalist motivations, becoming "constructed as an integral part of the homeland" (Allouche, 2005: 93). This symbolism of water resources is perceptible in dams and other infrastructure, with these projects existing within a political context of nationalism, state-building and the consolidation of existing political structures (Mitchell, 2002; Whitehead et al., 2007; Mossallam, 2014; Miescher, 2014; Menga, 2015). Within this reading, we can understand dam projects as engineering water resources to represent territory, with this territorialisation representing a process of "excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries" (Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995: 388). This can often result in a moment of contestation, in which competing actors engage in a process of negotiation and debate regarding ownership of water resources (Whitehead et al., 2007; Baviskar, 1995; Boelens et al., 2016). In these processes of consolidation and contestation, water resources become understood as *my/our/their* water,

² In this case, a "set piece" is drawn from the language of film production in which the term describes a scene or that requires extensive logistical planning and significant expenditure.

demonstrating a notion of possession over watersheds as well as a potential resistance against the use of these resources by those deemed 'outside' of a particular territory (Allouche, 2005).

Tryweryn: A brief history

The origins of 'Remember Tryweryn' can be found in the United Kingdom's³ search for a solution to increased demand for, and declining supply of, water in periods of low rainfall in the mid-20th century (Hassan, 1998; O'Hara, 2016). The expansion of industry and migration to urban areas, coupled with a growth of household supply, resulted in increased demand for water in the cities of the UK, with total demand increasing by approximately 2.5% per year in the 1950s, and 3% in the 1960s (Hassan, 1998).

In response to this increased demand, municipal governments in England sought to secure future water security by developing new sources of supply, predominantly in rural areas. Many of these projects faced significant opposition from local communities. This is perceptible in the city of Manchester's attempts to source water from Ullswater and Bannisdale in Cumbria in the 1960s (Hassan, 1998). The scheme faced extensive opposition from numerous local and regional interests, concerned about the impacts of new reservoirs on the natural landscape of the Lake District, a national park area in the north-west of England (Hassan, 1998). Additional projects facing opposition include the Cow Green reservoir on the County Durham-Cumbria border (completed in 1971) and the Meldon reservoir on Dartmoor, north Devon (completed in 1972). Both projects were opposed on grounds of environmental conservation and the protection of the landscape. Similarly, Welsh municipal governments had also looked to rural areas to provide water to urban populations. For example, in 1961, the Swansea Corporation announced plans to build a reservoir in the Gwendraeth Fach Valley in Carmarthenshire, flooding parts of the village of Llangyndeyrn. This plan was met with resistance from the population of this area, who built barricades to stop construction workers entering the region

³ Defined here as consisting of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Although these nations can be understood as countries, they are not sovereign states. The Republic of Ireland achieved its independence in 1919-1922.

(Wightwick, 2013). This opposition was ultimately successful, with the Swansea Corporation finding an alternative site on unpopulated land and building the Llyn Brienne reservoir near Llandoverly.

This paper concerns itself with a single case during this period – the damming of the Tryweryn river in 1965 to create the Llyn Celyn reservoir. This scheme was designed to provide the city of Liverpool and neighbouring Wirral with water. In 1954, Liverpool Corporation began to search for new sources to secure the supply of water for the area. The municipal authority had considered alternative sites – including within the English Lake District and Dolanog in Montgomeryshire, Wales. However, these alternatives had been rejected on the grounds of financial costs and the cultural importance of the respective regions. In the mid-1950s, the Corporation proposed sourcing water from the Tryweryn river, flowing near the market town of Bala in Merionethshire, north Wales, fifty miles away from Liverpool.

The Liverpool Corporation plans involved the building of a dam to create an 800 acre reservoir (1.25 square miles) (Liverpool, Town Clerk's Office, 1956), and would hold 81,000,000 cubic metres of water (Griffiths, 2014). The proposed reservoir would flood the village of Capel Celyn and a series of surrounding farms in a rural area that was home to 48 residents. The village consisted of a number of houses, a school (educating 14 children at the time of their displacement), a post office, a small chapel and adjoining cemetery (Cunningham, 2007). The village was sited in a mountainous region of Wales, commonly known as Snowdonia, that had been designated national park status in 1951.

The Liverpool Corporation's turn to rural Wales to secure water supply was not a new decision. The Tryweryn scheme represented a new episode of a dominant nature-state relationship, in which Welsh water was supplied English cities from the 19th century onwards (Hechter, 1998; Roberts, 2006; Whitehead et al., 2007). Examples of this relationship include the creation of Llyn

Efyrnwy in the 1880s and Elan Valley reservoirs in 1906 to supply water to the cities of Liverpool and Birmingham respectively (Griffiths, 2014). In 1923, a group of towns in the north-west of England, including Warrington, planned to dam the Ceiriog river in north-east Wales for the supply of water. This scheme was ultimately defeated by the mobilisation of local opposition, assisted by influential supporters in the British Houses of Parliament (Roberts, 2006).

In response to the Liverpool Corporation's Tryweryn proposal, the *Pwyllgor Amddiffyn Capel Celyn* (Capel Celyn Defence Committee) was formed, to organise opposition against the scheme. Whilst the resistance to reservoir projects elsewhere in the UK often represented local episodes, the resistance to the Tryweryn scheme developed a national character. 1,055 public bodies expressed their opposition to the scheme – including 125 public authorities (Griffiths, 2014). In September 1956, four thousand people attended a rally at the nearby village of Bala to show opposition to the scheme, where they were read letters of support from across Wales and beyond (including one from, the Irish nationalist leader, Eamon de Valera) (Thomas, 2007). A 1956 letter from the Capel Celyn Protection Committee provided a long list of its supporters, ranging from the Bala ratepayers association to the Farmers' Union of Wales, as well as Welsh Societies in Oxford, Leamington Spa, Crewe, and as far afield as Canberra and Sydney, Australia (Watkin Jones, 1956). In addition, hundreds of letters of protest were sent to Gwilym Lloyd-George, the then-Home Secretary and Minister of Wales (1954-1957).

Despite this opposition, at a December 1956 meeting, the Liverpool Corporation voted in favour of damming the Tryweryn river, with 262 votes for to 161 against (Manchester Guardian, 1956). Strict precautions to ensure that only Liverpool taxpayers were able to attend the meeting were reported, resulting in the exclusion of the population of Capel Celyn from the decision (Manchester Guardian, 1956). Mr Gerald Thesiger Q.C., providing legal representation to the people of Capel Celyn, would later speculate that the Liverpool meeting was attended by numerous city employees, in uniform but given the day off to attend the meeting, voting in favour of the project at the orders of their superiors (Liverpool Daily Post, 1957).

In light of this process, it is important to delineate the location of Wales within the United Kingdom. Wales is a country (understood as representing a region with a distinct history, a differently-associated people and political characteristics) within the unitary state of the United Kingdom. Although annexed by England and incorporated into the English legal system in the 16th century, Wales retains a cultural identity, commitment to its language and demonstrated a distinct national politics (Morgan, 1991; Davies, 1990). Whilst Wales has since been subject to the devolution of political powers since the Government of Wales Act in 1998, it was constitutionally-ruled by the Westminster government at the time of the Tryweryn scheme. In the first half of the 20th century, both the Conservative and Labour parties had consistently refused Welsh self-government, resulting in an increased frustration felt by Welsh nationalists (Williams, 1985). The Westminster parties attempted to placate nationalist demands by creating the governmental office of the Minister of Welsh Affairs in 1951. However, this was perceived as a lame-duck office of an ornamental nature, with the government not working hard to conceal this tokenism (Williams, 1985). It is important to place the opposition to Tryweryn within this wider political context of under-representation and a collective sense of political neglect by the primary political parties of the United Kingdom.

The resistance against the Tryweryn scheme represents a landmark event for Welsh nationalist politics in the mid-20th century (Whitehead et al., 2007). The flooding of this small Welsh village to provide water for an English city, 50 miles away, left an indelible mark on the relations between the two nations that persists to this day. This contrasts with the experience of Llangyndeyrn, the village which resisted Swansea Corporation's plans to build a reservoir in the Gwendraeth Fach valley, which does not have the same resonance within Welsh historiography (Rhys, 2013). Whilst Llangyndeyrn has faded into history, the Tryweryn scheme became a signifier for Welsh nationalist politics, simultaneously representing the commitment of a generation of nationalists to protect the Welsh culture and language and the complexity of the relationship between Wales and the United

Kingdom. Whilst other projects remained localised contests, the Tryweryn scheme was transformed into nationalist space that invoked the territorialisation of water resources and a historical episode with a resonance that remains to the time of writing.

Tryweryn as a nationalist space

Although Welsh autonomy and home rule had been supported by a number of political actors in Wales at the turn of the 20th century, it was not until the formation of *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* (the Welsh Nationalist Party, herein *Plaid Cymru*) in 1925 that Welsh nationalism became articulated within a formal political party (Griffiths, 2014). *Plaid Cymru* was characterised by a nationalism that focused on the protection of traditional Welsh culture and language, a non-conformist religion and of Welsh society's historic links to the landscape (Davies, 1990; Williams, 1994; Gruffudd, 1995; Griffiths, 2014).

During this period, Welsh nationalists articulated these links between Welsh culture and the nation's landscape and territory (Williams, 1994; Gruffudd, 1995; Llywelyn, 1999). In a 1966 thesis, J.R. Jones wrote of *Cydymdreiddiah tir ac iaith* ('the interpenetration of land and language') that articulated the historic links between the people and the landscape of Wales, with the nation's cultural traditions found in the population's engagement with nature (see Williams, 1994). Similarly, the word *hiraeth* was used to describe a sense of belonging – or homesickness for – the Welsh landscape, be it the mountains of the north or the valleys to the south. The word symbolises an emotional attachment to a natural landscape, a cultural place, and the connections between Welsh culture and its land. Embracing this concept, Plaid Cymru called on the Welsh people to "return to the land" to demonstrate their connection with the landscape of the Welsh nation (Gruffudd, 1995).

Within this focus on the relationship between the people and the landscape, Welsh nationalist actors engaged in the territorialisation of resources and accusations of English exploitation of Welsh

land (Gruffudd, 1995). This is evident in protests against the expropriation of Welsh land for military purposes in the 1930s and 1940s. When the Royal Air Force built facilities at Pen-y-Berth on the Llyn peninsula of Gwynedd in 1936, members of Plaid Cymru set a number of airfield buildings on fire in protest against this use of land deemed ‘Welsh’ (Williams, 1985). This resistance can also be seen in protests against the expropriation of land in Pen-y-berth to build a bombing school and in Epynt for an army shooting range (Lloyd-Morgan, 2014). After the close of World War Two, close to 10 percent of Welsh land was in the possession of the British military (Gruffudd, 1995). Within these resistance movements, the land requisitioned by the military was characterised as ‘Welsh’ land of cultural value, being appropriated by Westminster regardless of Welsh objections (Gruffudd, 1995).

The opposition to the Tryweryn scheme further articulated these links between Welsh nationalism and the cultural value of the landscape. A key element was the assertion of Capel Celyn as representing a site of the Welsh community and a location where the traditional culture and language of Wales thrived (Whitehead et al., 2007). This resonance was deeply entwined with the type of community that Capel Celyn was, with the village perceived to embody a certain type of *Welshness* – characterised as rural, connected to the landscape and Welsh-speaking (Gruffudd, 1995; Cunningham, 2007). The Tryweryn scheme coincided with a period in which the Welsh language underpinned a process of political mobilisation in Wales (Davies, 1989). The number of Welsh-speakers in the nation had experienced a decline since the beginning of the 20th century (Williams, 1985; Williams, 1994; Gruffudd, 1995). The 1961 census reported that only 25 percent of the population reported being Welsh speakers (Williams, 1985). Since its creation, Plaid Cymru politicised this decline, locating the language’s preservation as a central element of Welsh nationalism (Williams, 1985; Williams, 1994; Gruffudd, 1995). For example, in a February 1962 radio address, Saunders Lewis, the former-President of Plaid Cymru (1926-1939) called upon the party to devote its resources to securing an official status for the Welsh language within the United Kingdom’s political framework. In direct response to this call, a number of young members of Plaid Cymru formed *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*

Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society) that campaigned for the increased role of the Welsh language within political life. The success of this nationalist commitment to the Welsh language is perceptible in the development of Welsh language-based infrastructure, with BBC Radio Cymru (established 1945), a Welsh Arts Council (1967) and S4C, the Welsh language television channel (1982) established (Davies, 1989). It is during this period that the Welsh language gained a saliency as a political cause, strengthening Welsh nationalism and providing a signifier of the nation's cultural difference within the British state (Davies, 1989).

The flooding of Capel Celyn was presented as a key site within this nationalist storyline of the protection of the Welsh language and culture. With the majority of the residents of the rural village speaking Welsh as their primary language, Capel Celyn was presented by Welsh nationalists as symbolic of the links between Welsh communities and the landscape (Griffiths, 2014). The village was understood to represent a particular way of life that was being forced into retreat – with the decline of the Welsh language providing a catalyst for its defence (Griffiths, 2014). Opposition materials produced by the Capel Celyn Defence Committee referred to the importance of the preservation of the Welsh language, articulating this as an argument to stop the scheme. For example: in a 1956 letter, it argued that the group believed that “the scheme if carried out would destroy something that has taken centuries to build up, namely the cultural achievements which are characteristic of this area” (Watkin Jones, 1956). It is these links between the region and cultural notions of *Welshness* that endowed Capel Celyn with a particular nationalist significance, via its links to campaigns of Welsh language preservation. The words of, former resident, Elwyn Edwards are particularly pertinent here, with Edwards stating when interviewed in 1999, that the campaign came to have a “particular resonance because it was a Welsh-speaking community being destroyed” (in Gibbs, 1999).

The equivalence between Capel Celyn and the protection of Welsh language and culture is further evident in a number of letters of protest sent to the Conservative government at Westminster. A letter sent Gwilym Lloyd-George, argued that “this area is essentially Welsh and if the proposal is proceeded with, it would have a detrimental effect on the district, displacing many families from their native homes and neutralising the traditionally Welsh character of this part of our country” (Anonymous, 1956). Furthermore, a letter from Mair Morgan (1957), the Secretary of the Rhondda Youth Section of Plaid Cymru, argued that the project involved the “annihilation of [the] social, cultural and economic life of a Welsh community by an external authority which persists in disregarding all reasonable protests. The preservation of this stronghold of Welsh language and culture is of vital importance to our nation.” In a letter sent to Thomas Alker, the Town Clerk of the City of Liverpool Corporation, Gwyn M. Daniel (1956) argued that the Tryweryn scheme involved “the uprooting and destruction of a traditional Welsh community, and would have its repercussions on the entire cultural life of our nation.”

With the people of Capel Celyn representing a Welsh-speaking, rural community, their displacement by the Tryweryn scheme was articulated as representing a wider threat to the Welsh nation itself (Gruffudd, 1995). This role of the Welsh language in stimulating opposition to the Tryweryn scheme was discussed by, the President of Plaid Cymru (1945-1981), Gwynfor Evans in an editorial for *The Western Mail*. Evans wrote that “the struggle in defence of Welsh land has...been most fierce when the community which it supported was Welsh in language” (in Cunningham, 2007: 632).

Within the opposition to the Tryweryn project, the population impacted was elevated from being a local population to a community of national importance. The defined *Welshness* of Capel Celyn linked the village’s flooding to wider nationalist efforts towards language and cultural preservation. As a result, the Tryweryn scheme provided a material episode of what Gwynfor Evans

(1976; 446) has described as “[the] years of the deliberate destruction of Welsh-speaking rural communities.” The village of Capel Celyn was transformed into a political space, gaining a nationalist significance. As Llwyd has written in reference to the Welsh language movement, “Saunders Lewis’s lecture was the [movement’s] midwife: Tryweryn was the mother” (translated by Griffiths, 2014: 453).

Exposed complexities in the Welsh-British relationship

Within the equivalence of the flooding of Capel Celyn and the destruction of Welsh culture, the Tryweryn scheme became a signifier of a wider conflict between Welsh culture and the demands of English cities (Roberts, 2006; Griffiths, 2014). The cultural character of Capel Celyn was fused with storylines that invoked both the assertion of the Welsh nation’s need for greater decision-making powers and the territorialisation of water resources. Within this understanding of the project, the Tryweryn scheme pitched Wales against England – with the economic and political power held by the Liverpool Corporation dwarfing the unrepresented community of Capel Celyn and, standing with them, the rest of Wales (Griffiths, 2014).

Central to this competition was the role of Capel Celyn as indicative of the impotence of Welsh protest within the current system of political representation within the UK (Cunningham, 2007). In 1957, the Conservative MP for the London constituency of Lewisham West, Henry Brooke was appointed Home Secretary and Minister of Wales (1962-1964). In this role, Brooke was able to support the Tryweryn scheme of the Liverpool Corporation, with no Welsh political authority able to challenge this decision nor block its implementation. The final decision was to be taken at the British Houses of Parliament, London – where Members of Parliament from across the state would be able to pass judgment on the plan. 27 of the 36 MPs elected to represent Welsh constituencies at Westminster voted against the 1957 Liverpool Corporation Act that provided the power to acquire lands and rights to work in the Tryweryn Valley. Yet, the scheme was approved by 166 votes to 117.

Within nationalist storylines of opposition, it was this failure to prevent the village's inundation that demonstrated the weakness of Wales to resist decisions made in Westminster, whilst highlighting the futility of any form of organised Welsh opposition within the Houses of Parliament (Adamson, 1991). A sense of the toothlessness of national political parties, such as the Labour and Conservative parties, to support Welsh demands was prominent in a number of letters sent in protest against the scheme. In a 1956 letter of protest, the Welsh academic, Bobi Jones (1956) argued that "The nervous obsession which many MPs have about the Welsh Nationalist Party [Plaid Cymru] has made the Parliamentary opposition to this move most ineffective. But the opposition from the people themselves is determined and will not, I fear, stop at constitutional resistance alone." Within his words, the ineffectual nature of the political protest against Capel Celyn demonstrated the failure of the constitutional structure of the UK to allow for effective representation of the Welsh nation at Westminster. Gwynfor Evans (1959) later argued that the scheme has "removed many Welsh illusions about the English parties", with the futility of appealing to the two main parties of British politics demonstrated by the continued development of the scheme.

During the parliamentary discussions that surrounded the plans for Tryweryn, the scheme was described using the invocation of national, universal progress (Cunningham, 2007). As E.M. 'Bessie' Braddock, a Labour MP for Liverpool Exchange, stated, "Everyone deplores the fact that in the interests of progress sometimes people must suffer, but that is progress (Braddock, 1957). A utilitarian element can be found in the words of Braddock, with the justification being rooted in what is in the interests of *the greater good* – intricately tying assertions of progress to a utilitarian defence of the flooding of Capel Celyn. This image is further articulated by the words of Sir Victor Raikes, a Conservative MP for Liverpool Garston: "if it is decided that it is in the interests of a large number of people [and] the rights of a small number of people are affected, then, subject to proper safeguards for the minority, the right of the majority must prevail" (Raikes, 1957).

These assertions of the utilitarian progress of the British nation were met by a barrage of criticism from Welsh nationalists. Opposition materials questioned the legality of the scheme. A letter from Arthur Thomas (1956), on behalf of the Montgomeryshire Congregational Association, argued that the organisation did “not believe that an outside authority like this has a moral right to own natural resources of our country contrary to the wishes of the people of Wales.” It is in within this reaction that the findings of research published in, the 1959 Plaid Cymru pamphlet, *We Learn from Tryweryn*, are significant. Within this short tract, party members examined the records of the Liverpool Corporation's water committee, finding an important discrepancy in the city's assertions of the necessity of increased supply (Evans, 1959). Whilst Liverpool's politicians had argued that population growth and industrialisation necessitated the Tryweryn scheme, Plaid Cymru's research argued that domestic consumption had barely increased in the years from 1920 (Evans, 1959). These explanations based on increased demand were perceived by Welsh nationalists as false. As the pamphlet argued, “It was thus perfectly clear that the Tryweryn water was to be used for industry and for resale at a profit” (Evans, 1959). With the benefits of this scheme to be serving the interests of an English city, and the negative externalities to be exclusively faced by a Welsh community, an injustice was detected and opponents of the scheme asserted that the interests of an English city should not count as equal to the interests of a Welsh community (Cunningham, 2007). Letters of opposition defined the water of Tryweryn as ‘Welsh water’. This mobilisation was described by *the Times* in February 1956 as follows: “The rumblings of a new discontent are sounding from the Welsh valleys. The time has come, observes the Welsh patriot to talk of saving Welsh water for Wales (The Times, 1956). In a 1956 letter, Llewellyn Lloyd Tudor argued that “should this bill go through the water will be lost to Wales for ever” (Tudor, 1956). Similarly, a letter of protest from the Reverend Griffith Quick (1956) of the Penybryn Congregational Church in Wrexham, argued that “There is sufficient fresh water for Liverpool and other towns in Lancashire if they so desire in the Lake District within their own borders. There is no need to come to Wales. The economic wealth of North Wales lies in her potential water power and if we part with this once then the whole future is doomed.”

These declarations of the role of water resources in Wales' future represents an important example of Allouche's *water nationalism*, with the waters of the Tryweryn becoming defined as 'Welsh water' at risk of appropriation by an external power. The English expropriation of Welsh land for its own uses formed an important part of Plaid Cymru's territorial politics of nationalism (Gruffudd, 1995). Tryweryn represents a similar process occurred for water resources. The assertions of the scheme as representing *Welsh* water provide an example of how the scheme became enrolled into a nationalist project, representing an integral element in defining Welsh territory and a homeland. Within this process, the diversion of water resources to the city of Liverpool became described in terms of an external power engaging in an act of appropriation of 'our' water and

The notion of the English exploitation of Welsh water resources formed a central element in the territorial politics of Welsh nationalism, arguing that the flooding of Welsh villages represented the appropriation of the Welsh landscape by English interests (Gruffudd, 1995; Roberts, 2006). *The Times* (1956) described the protests as arguing for "Welsh resources for the Welsh... It is bad for Liverpool to come to Wales, continue the more nationally conscious, as it would be for the French to filch some English resources. What would the English say then?" A letter sent to both Gwilym Lloyd-George and the Liverpool Corporation in October 1956 declared its "strong opposition to the Liverpool Corporation's plan to take Welsh territory" (Roberts, 1956). Another letter compared the Tryweryn scheme to the public outcry, at the time, against the Soviet Union's violent suppression of the 1956 Hungarian Uprising (Quick, 1956):

"We decry the Soviet blood-bath in Hungary. This red-handed attempt to seize vital water supplies and strangle a rural community is equally to be condemned. No condemnation can be strong enough for the ruthless way in which the Liverpool Corporation has set about its task. It must be resisted at all costs, or it will be the beginning of what will mark the end of a Wales as a country."

This role of territory allowed for the opposition movement to extend its effective reach well beyond the community's immediate geographical area (Cunningham, 2007). The Tryweryn scheme became a signifier of the wider concerns of Anglo-Welsh relations, resulting in the widening of the opposition. As one 1956 letter argued, "All Wales is astounded at the barefaced atrocity which Liverpool has planned in Merioneth. This feeling [of opposition] is nothing local but shared by all the common people of our nation" (Jones, 1956). This represents how local issue became entwined with questions of national importance, with the fate of Capel Celyn defined as a threat faced by all of Wales. This politicised relation between the Tryweryn valley and emergent Welsh nationalism is perceptible in a series of letters sent by agents of the Conservative Party in 1957 (Jones, 1957; Neish, 1957). Within these letters, members of the Conservative Party, then in government in Westminster, wished to film a promotional video linked to agricultural policies, in rural Wales. When a party worker at Westminster raised the potential of filming at a farm in the Tryweryn Valley, J. Morgan Jones, a bureaucrat at the Welsh department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, responds: "Tryweryn is hot politics at the moment and one's general reaction is to urge that any organisation connected with the government of the day should steer clear of it for the time being" (Jones, 1957).

The uncovering of the futility of Welsh protest against utilitarian British demands coincided with a change in the Welsh political landscape. Plaid Cymru, a dominant organisation in the opposition movement, experienced a period of electoral success in the years after the completion of the Tryweryn project. The party has previously underperformed in elections. In the 1951 general election, Plaid Cymru fielded four parliamentary candidates, with no real success. Four years later, eleven candidates were put forward, securing 45,119 votes. In the 1959 General Election, Plaid Cymru increased its total votes received to 77,571, cast for 20 parliamentary candidates. In the years after the completion of the Tryweryn scheme in 1965, the party began to enjoy greater electoral success. In 1966, Gwynfor Evans became Plaid Cymru's first Member of Parliament (MP), elected to the seat of Carmarthen with 38.8% of the vote. Impressive results at by-elections at Rhondda-West (1967) and Caerphilly (1968)

followed. Plaid Cymru's rise was partially fuelled by the emotive appeal of the flooding of Capel Celyn, with members of the party prominent in demonstrations against the Tryweryn scheme. The project allowed for a moment of a "rare unanimity in Welsh politics" and elevated Gwynfor Evans, leading the opposition, to an unprecedented level of fame (Jenkins, 1992: 399). It was Evans who had spoken on behalf of the residents of Capel Celyn at the 1956 Liverpool Corporation meetings on the scheme, being forcefully ejected on one occasion (Thomas, 2007). A letter of protest warned Gwilym Lloyd-George of the emergence of renewed nationalist spirit in Wales, informing him that "I am not a member of the Welsh Nationalist Party but the surest way to ensure that I, myself, and thousands of other young Welshmen and women join that party is for the British government to allow the Liverpool Corporation to flood Cwm Tryweryn" (James, 1956).

Yet, this period of success of Plaid Cymru also witnessed an emergent division. Gwynfor Evans, a pacifist, was criticised by other members of the nationalist community for not engaging more directly against the scheme (Evans, 2008). A number of groups, believing that Plaid Cymru's commitment to an institutional form of opposition to be ineffective, were formed – many of which subscribed to tactics of direct action. In 1956, a warning was provided to the Liverpool Corporation in an anonymous letter which, in crude handwriting, affirmed that: "We will sabotage any work you do there, keep out of our country. This is a warning. We remain, yours truly, the Welsh nation" (cited in Thomas, 2007). A number of Welsh nationalist groups engaged in direct action against both the project and other infrastructure schemes. It is during this period that *Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru* (the Movement for the Defence of Wales, MAC) was founded, conducting a number of acts of vandalism. On 22 September 1962, an electricity transformer was destroyed at the Tryweryn construction site. Less than three months later, the site was attacked again and a workshop damaged (Thomas, 2007). On Sunday 10th February 1963, the sound of an explosion woke the valley. The primary transformer at the site had been seriously damaged, delaying any work taking place. Three men were arrested for this action, Emyr Llywelyn Jones, Owain Williams and John Albert Jones. Both Emyr Llywelyn and

Owain Williams were imprisoned for this crime, whilst John Albert Jones was granted a period of probation of three years.

In 1963, a group dubbed the Free Wales Army (FWA), led by John Cayo Evans, began recruiting members – promising further direct action in the name of Welsh nationalism. Dozens of bomb and arson attacks occurred across Wales, with popular targets including water pipelines and dams. In 1966, Clywedog dam was bombed, and this period also saw attacks of Pembrey air force base in Carmarthenshire and offices in Cardiff. It is important to note that this period of violence occurred before the more famous ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland. Extensive police activity from 1969 resulted in the arrest of dozens of leaders of MAC and FWA, muting direct Welsh nationalist action as the United Kingdom entered the 1970s.

The Tryweryn scheme - and the flooding of Capel Celyn - revealed the limitations of the Welsh political role in the governance of the United Kingdom. Despite an outpouring of opposition to the scheme, the final decision lay with the Westminster government resulting in the exposure of the ineffectiveness of Welsh protest and the restrictions upon Welsh politicians influencing policies deemed of a national importance. This uncovering of Welsh political vulnerability coincided with an increased significance of the nationalist cause in Wales, evident in the increase vote share of Plaid Cymru and an upsurge of nationalist direct action. Whilst the village of Capel Celyn represented the need to protect the Welsh language and culture, its flooding to provide the city of Liverpool with water signified the impotence of Welsh protest. As Gwynfor Evans (1959) argued, “However it ends, the fight for Tryweryn will have taught the Welsh some hard lessons. If they are learnt properly the protracted struggle for this Merioneth valley may prove to be one of the most important happenings in modern Welsh history.”

Tryweryn as a verb

The resistance to the Tryweryn scheme held a symbolism for both the nationalist protection of Welsh culture and language and the impotence of the Welsh political community to resist the wider demands of the United Kingdom via traditional routes. Within this equivalence between of Tryweryn and a wider Welsh nationalism, the influence of Capel Celyn extended way beyond this small corner of Snowdonia, with this symbolism persisting to the time of writing.

In the decades since the village of Capel Celyn was submerged, the phrase ‘Remember Tryweryn’ became an important part in the lexicon of Welsh nationalism, coming to represent a form of shorthand to describe the appropriation of Welsh resources for English and British purposes (Griffiths, 2014). This is perceptible in the 1959 pamphlet, *We Learn from Tryweryn*. Within this short pamphlet, Gwynfor Evans (1959) transformed the word *Tryweryn* into a verb:

“*To Tryweryn* - to exploit the land or natural resources of a small nation, or to destroy its social life or language, in the interests of a big neighbouring country or part of it.”

The message of this pamphlet was clear, as long as Wales remained subservient to Westminster its natural resources were at risk of appropriation:

“When a small country has no Parliament of its own, it is possible for a big neighbour to Tryweryn it at will, however strongly the small nation may oppose the process. It is in fact possible for the big neighbour to Tryweryn the small country to death. If the small nation lacks the political institutions of a nation how can she prevent it?” (Evans, 1959).

Although the term ‘Tryweryn’ remains a noun at the time of writing - adopted to describe the occurrence of an injustice in resource management - this storyline has been repeated by a number of Welsh nationalist politicians, with the scheme presented as a signifier in discussions of contemporary events. For example, in a discussion of the impacts that power lines would have upon the landscape around Abermule in the Vyrnwy Valley, Glyn Davies (2011), the Member of Parliament for

Montgomeryshire, drew on the experience of Capel Celyn by arguing that “For the people of Montgomeryshire, it is our 'Tryweryn'.” This is also perceptible in the protestations against the siting of wind energy facilities in Wales. With the energy generated at Welsh wind farms (both onshore and offshore) being provided to the British national grid, opponents articulated the parallels between these schemes and Tryweryn. For example, the development of the Gwynt y Môr wind farm on the coast of north Wales was accused of exploiting Welsh energy resources for the benefit of others, with the energy created being “spirited away” (Batcup, 2010).

This is not only related to natural resources. In 2015, Plaid Cymru MP, Liz Roberts, speaking of Westminster’s plans to build a new ‘super-prison’ in Wrexham, evoked the memory of Capel Celyn, stating that: “... as long as Wales is shackled to this imbalanced institution at a constant democratic disadvantage *vis-a-vis* England, there will always be another Tryweryn waiting to happen” (Williamson, 2015). Furthermore, Tryweryn is referred to by those discussing schemes elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The siting of Trident nuclear submarines in Scotland was described as representing a ‘Scottish Tryweryn’, in which the wishes of the Scottish community were overruled by the interests of the Westminster government (Williams, 2015). This equivalence has been extended further to encompass international questions regarding the appropriation of land across the globe. The Tryweryn scheme continues to have such a resonance in Wales today that when Oxfam launched a campaign for justice in terms of international land rights, it evoked the memory of Capel Celyn (Wales Online, 2012). Within this event, the injustice of Tryweryn was linked to struggles elsewhere but was also defined as a struggle for justice and power in the face of the appropriation of water resources. In discussing this campaign, Julian Rosser (2014), of Oxfam Cymru, argued that, despite the Tryweryn scheme becoming a part of history, “Tryweryns are still happening every day around the world.”

The continued memory of Capel Celyn can be perceived in its resonance in Welsh literature and music. Griffiths (2014) has charted this continued influence of the Tryweryn scheme, exploring how the poetry related to the project described rivers changing from their natural states into technological objects. These poems, as well as other cultural artifacts, provide an important element of a cultural narrative that continues to influence what it *means* to be *Welsh* to this day (Griffiths, 2014). One of the most striking nationalist sentiments can be found in the poem ‘Llyn Celyn’, written by Gwynlliw Jones in 2007 (in Thomas, 2007), which concludes with the lines:

“The Celyn that were will recall,
Will not be a lake, but a local
Community drowned by indifference
And by foreign interference”

In the terminology used to describe the Tryweryn scheme, Capel Celyn is often described as being ‘drowned’ by the rising waters of the reservoir. Throughout Welsh legend, a rising of the waters has provided a frequent theme: from the drowning of the mythological kingdom of *Cantre’r Gwaelod* (‘the Lower Hundred’) to the literary use of floods to describe contemporary English migration to the nation (Griffiths, 2014). In the years since its flooding, the village of Capel Celyn has also undergone a similar process of mythologisation, becoming a signifier of an emergent Welsh nationalism. This occurs in a number of materials, from the poetry directly inspired by events (see Griffiths, 2014) to news outlets in the 21st century (Richards, 2010; Crump, 2013; Lloyd, 2015). The use of the term *drowning* to describe the inundation of Capel Celyn provides a particularly powerful technique, with the personification of the village as being under threat and powerless to resist. The term demonstrates a perceived violence of the scheme and the existential nature of the loss.

At the time of its construction, the Tryweryn scheme developed a national resonance, with the project linked to the protection the Welsh language and culture and deemed to symbolise the ineffectiveness of Welsh dissent in contemporary British politics. This role of both the Tryweryn

scheme and Capel Celyn as a signifier of Welsh nationalism has continued to the time of writing. The term 'Tryweryn' has developed a resonance beyond its initial meaning, becoming representative of the 'drowning' of a village, of the appropriation of Welsh water resources and of the need for continued resistance against dominance by an external power.

Conclusions

In his foreword to the collection of Claudia William's paintings of Tryweryn, the Welsh MP, Elfyn Llwyd (2014: 12) writes of his childhood memory of taking a trip into the Welsh countryside. Llwyd tells of how his father stopped the car suddenly, and the family "saw and heard the dreadful scene of mud and dirt and noise - that which a child would imagine would be similar to the hell of the First World War...He [my father] turned to us, his eyes full of tears, and said, 'Children, whatever you do in your lives, don't ever forget this.'" This scene of devastation was unrecognisable from its form several years earlier. The farmers had gone, the post office had closed and the chapel's bells remained silent. Capel Celyn was to be flooded within weeks of Llwyd's visit.

When taken at face value, the Tryweryn scheme - diverting water from a rural area in Snowdonia to the city of Liverpool - may appear as a project with limited impacts, flooding a small village and displacing only 48 residents. However, the scheme became a signifier for two emergent narratives in Welsh nationalism: first, the protection of Welsh language and culture and, second, the futility of opposition to the scheme within the political apparatus of the time. The village of Capel Celyn became defined by its *Welshness*, representing the Welsh-speaking tradition that prominent nationalists wished to secure and consolidate. Its inundation represented the limited authority of the Welsh political community in the management of water resources. This characterisation resulted in the transformation of 'Tryweryn' into a term used to describe the appropriation and exploitation of the resources of a smaller nation by a larger, more powerful neighbour. This definition has persisted, with

the phrase 'Cofiwch Dryweryn' ('Remember Tryweryn') remains on the lips of Welsh nationalists even today.

As Lloyd (2014: 13) concludes, “Now, half a century has passed [from the event]. I have not forgotten.” In many cases, nor has Wales. It is within this context that the lost Capel Celyn and, with it, the graffiti at the side of the A487 has become an important part of the Welsh landscape. This graffiti, originally painted by Meic Stephens in 1965, was not the only slogan painted, with similar phrases painted across walls in Wales during this period. However, Stephens' slogan has endured and been updated by new generations of Welsh nationalists. It has become an imprint on the Welsh hills, as pertinent as it is evocative, that demonstrates the indelible mark that the Tryweryn project has left on the political landscape of the Welsh nation.

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