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Decentering local leadership workshop

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Leadership without 'the led':

A case study of the South Wales Valleys

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This essay stretches the remit for the workshop in that I have been sidetracked by the current political situation in the UK and how the vote to leave the EU is making unanticipated and fundamental changes to British society, culture and politics. In trying to make sense of these events, and the place of leadership (if any) within them, I locate my arguments within 'the communities' served by leaders in local government and look at local leadership from that viewpoint. That is, I add to CBS' workshops focus on 'different webs of meaning – elite narratives, social science rationalities, and local traditions' another web of meaning, one in which 'leadership' is a highly questionable concept.

What follows is work-in-progress, an unfinished speculative exercise that may or may not work.

Introduction

In this essay I will develop a theory of insouciance towards public service leadership amongst those who are, at least in theory, the beneficiaries of that leadership, the electorate/citizenry/service users. Using a case study of working-class communities in the Eastern Valleys of South Wales. I develop a thesis that these communities (lived domains) and public sector services (worked domains) occupy separate although inter-connected spheres. I will borrow the Welsh word *gwerin*, or kin/community, as a label for what I will argue are neo-communitarian, self-governing, leaderless, lived domains of the home and the community. The neo-communitarian philosophy governing the *gwerin* contrasts greatly with the (neo/left/right) liberalism of managers and leaders. The *gwerin* understands the public sector to be a provider of services and not a space of governance. It regards it as alien, distrusts it, and understands it to be incapable and incompetent. Infringement upon the *gwerin* is regarded as interference with the smooth and efficient functioning of work, life and society. 'Leadership' belongs in that other, alien sphere and lacks meaning in the lived domain.

This thesis was stimulated by the 'Brexit' referendum in the UK in 2016, the myths that have grown up about the electorate in the aftermath of that vote, and my own

agonised struggles to understand why a large percentage of the electorate are adamant Brexiters, another large proportion are equally adamant remainers, with many citizens feeling utterly confused and wishing the whole thing were resolved. Opinions have become frozen, and discussing politics has become so fraught that it is something to be carried out in whispers, behind people's backs. I will argue that the fault-line between pro- and anti-Brexit positions can be understood, in part, between liberal and neo-communitarian political philosophies¹.

To develop this thesis I will draw upon developments in post-qualitative and post-human research methods and undertake an auto-ethnographic/biographical piece of fringework within the working class communities of the Eastern Valleys of South Wales in which I grew up and where the rest of my family all still live.

Literature review

As of 1st September I am unsure to which body of literature this essay will contribute.

Methodological approach

My methodological approach is influenced by the turn to what are called 'post-qualitative' or 'posthuman' research methods. These extend the logic of poststructural theory's deconstruction of the Enlightenment concept of the person. The theory of the self as never pre-given and always in process has implications for qualitative research methods that are only recently being given serious attention. For example, if the self is always in process of becoming, then who is the 'I' that is interviewed and how can the snapshot in time that is the interview be in any way 'scientific' as proclaimed by the social sciences? These challenges encapsulate a quiet revolution that rebels against the ever-increasing worship of methodolatry in qualitative research methods in my own discipline of management and organisation studies. John Law's (2004) *After Method* is an early text articulating these concerns. He is critical of what he calls 'Euro-American' methodologies that do not allow insight into 'provisionally congealed realities' (p. 155) that emerge in an 'out-there-ness' of 'overwhelming, excessive, energetic, ... undecided potentialities, and an ultimately undecidable flux' (p. 144). Earlier, Taussig (1992, 141-42) had posed a challenge to 'practically all critical practice across the board of academic disciplines' to address their failure to develop understanding of the everyday 'embodied and somewhat automatic "knowledge" that functions like peripheral vision, not studied contemplation, a knowledge that is imageric and sensate rather than ideational' that is vital to making, and making sense of, everyday life.

Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* (20XX) offers a new methodological approach that holds the promise of addressing the problems highlighted by Law and Taussig. She immerses herself in the everyday rather than carving out 'a field' to be studied, observing herself (to whom she refers as 'she') and others she encounters in the

¹ To these should be added the philosophy of mercantilism that seems to inform the thinking of some arch-Brexiters.

normal, ordinary, everyday quotidian. The accumulated descriptions of numerous observations, examined through an anthropological eye, build into a powerful indictment of contemporary life in the USA. Her style of writing abjures norms of academic writing: description of an incident follows description after description of incident after incident, and then description is interrupted by analysis and commentary. Dragged along in her wake, the reader experiences viscerally Stewart's remorseless account of the bleakness and emptiness of much modern American life. But even as I celebrate its methodological innovation I rebel against that bleakness. It washes out, ignores or cannot see the little happinesses as well as the struggles and despair of much everyday, ordinary life. Stewart, to me, is an observer of an 'out-there-ness' rather than a participant in what we could call an 'in-there-ness'.

Facilitation of insights into the 'in-there-ness' is being made possible through deep, sociological reflections by academics mining their own experiences for insights. Through 'memory work' involving analysis of her family photograph album Annette Kuhn (2002), in *Family Secrets*, tells a history of Britain and its people in the second half of the 20th century. She contends that researchers must shake off any concerns about the distinction between collective and personal memory: the psychic and the social are so intertwined that the analysis of the self is an analysis of the social (p. 165). She writes, secondly, that through analyzing the 'I' we make it immanent, avoiding that transcendent academic 'I' that aims at understanding the other as if from a distance, and we instate in its place a continuity of individuality and community. Such a way of thinking, analyzing and writing, in which the authorial 'I' is also the object of study and analysis, facilitates looking at things afresh, 'not casting aside our analytical procedures but using them differently, making greater demands on them' (p. 46). That is, there is no need to abandon the rigour and depth of understanding made possible through good academic work, but there is a need for freedom from the deadening impress of conventions that limit our thinking, seeing and understanding.

Kuhn's is an in-depth study of working class life in the second half of the 20th Century in Britain, enabled through her ability to turn her academic lens upon her experiences of growing up in a working class home. Eribon's (2013) *Returning to Reims* is a similar study of French working class life from someone who, immersed in it in childhood, can now turn his skilled sociological lens remorselessly upon himself and the family from which he struggled to escape. Through his insider/outsider gaze Eribon develops remarkable insight into the politics of contemporary France. Admitting that in the academic milieu in which he works it has been more difficult to 'come out' as working class than as gay, his insider/outsider position allows him to critique 'reified notions and fantasmatic representations' such as the 'working' and 'bourgeois' classes that prevent understanding of the politics of the early 21st century (p. 146). He illuminates how and why French workers abandoned their communist heritage and took up right-wing populism.

Finally, Katherine Angel's *'Unmastered: A book on desire, most difficult to tell'* (2014) asks 'what is it to define, or even to know, our desires – to identify which are our own, and which result from a kind of porousness' (p 22). How, particularly, are women (or indeed men) to know what are their own desires and what are those that have been culturally imposed? She seeks answers through a forensic analysis, written poetically, into a love affair that has ended. She brings a scarringly honest to analysing how one is undone by sexual desire. A woman's desires make her feel guilty if she espouses them, she writes. But (p. 200) whose desires are they? 'these desires rioting noisily through me – whose are they? They are mine, and yours, and anyone else's. They have found their way inside me, and taken up residence. They have folded their arms, and said, Ha. Ha. (p. 200). Through this penetrating analysis of her own private thoughts and experiences she suggests it is the 'unruly, lustful' body that undermines feminism's politics.

Together these academics authorise a move towards immersive, hyper-reflective methodologies, or 'quiet and more generous versions of methods' (Law, 2004, p. 156) that do not bleach clean and then neatly tidy the fluid, messy, contradictory, elusive, molecular, multiple quotidian. In 'abstracting from reality so as to understand reality', as the classic definition of theory has it, 'reality' disappears. These approaches lament too much abstraction. In following their lead, I apply a sociologically-informed interrogation of my own experience of being both an insider and an outsider to the community in which I grew up and which I, in many ways, 'left' when I went to university at the age of 27. My approach involves an account of moments of encounter (following Stewart) with my family. Some are recent, others follow Kuhn and Didion in being recalled from childhood. My aim is to locate the perspective of the study within the home, a space that is largely unremarked in leadership studies where it is a forgotten, supportive adjunct to the public spaces where leadership is enacted. The home is public space's constitutive outside. Rather than the typical academic stance of looking *in* from the academic outside, I want to position this study in the home and look *out* at public space. I write thus as daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, aunt, great-aunt, friend, acquaintance, service-user, citizen and multiple other identities. I have to do some acrobatic manoeuvres to both look at myself as an academic while drawing on the skills academia has wrought in me. It is from the perspective of the working class home understood through an academic sensibility that I can offer a theory of insouciance towards leadership.

Firstly: the class position of this 'me' as she looks outward. I am the oldest of seven siblings born in the South Wales Valleys in the UK after the post-war revolution that brought in the National Health Service and universal rights to education and freedom from the worst excesses of that poverty that had blighted the inter-war (1918-1939) years. Our father was a coal-miner, our mother a very frustrated housewife who yearned to be a nurse. We grew up in a rented house that had no bathroom or hot water supply, an outside toilet, and no lights or electric sockets in the bedrooms (light was by means of a lamp on the landing). Of these seven children, all left school at the first opportunity, although two of us later went to university. I

am the only one who has a middle class occupation. Between us we have 17 children and a fluctuating number of sons/daughters-in law, about two-thirds of whom work in manual labouring jobs, and a third in white-collar jobs. Few of the grandchildren who are now reaching adult-hood are studying for university degrees: my own grandsons are apprentices, one training as an electrician and the other as a carpenter. There is much experience of zero-hour contract employment in the extended family. Everyone, even the few with successful careers, insists that they are working class. However, we are not a homogeneous working class family that, stereotypically voted to leave the EU on racist grounds: we contain Brexiters and Remainers; racists and anti-racists; homophobes and homophiles. I lived in Leeds in the north of England from 1996-2017, visiting my family every school holiday. I now live in Cardiff, about 30 minutes drive from my relatives. I returned to a very different Wales from the one I had left 22 years before: it is a country that seems increasingly at ease with itself, more sure of its Welshness. It is becoming a post-colonial nation.

The pub lunch and the Brexit bombshell

April 2019: five of my six siblings and I went on one of our regular days out. We stopped for lunch² at an old coaching inn (it claims to have been there since the 17th century) in Crickhowell, a town near the border with England. I 'dropped the Brexit bombshell': I asked 'what do you think of Brexit preparations?' Two of my sisters, not looking up from their food, repeated over and over, 'our vote must be honoured'. Another sister and a brother did not know what to think: they were confused, did not understand what was happening, and just wanted the whole thing to be over and done with. The two of us who have university degrees argued in favour of another vote. The discussions became heated: we called a halt as distress levels mounted. Although demographically we were not representative of the British population (our average age was 62, and females outnumbered males five to one), politically we seemed a microcosm of the British population, as polls at the time were showing a similar three-way split and what seemed to be a climate increasingly intolerant of debate.

What this description does not show is the passion with which the Brexiters and Remainers voiced their opinions. There seemed to be little rational thought underpinning these views. This applies to my own thoughts too. I reach for the reasons why I voted to remain in the EU, but reasons vanish as soon as I question them and I am left saying 'I just feel European'. In the place of thought was sheer, unadulterated, emotional conviction. There is no insight in regard to leadership whatsoever in this incident. No-one mentioned being influenced by any individuals, only the principles that they now (suddenly) hold dearly. This is important: through tracing how such views could be articulated I will trace a history in which the community becomes one that looks to itself and not to leaders. My suspicion is that the discussion that took place in 2019 in that 400-year-old coaching inn was replete with barely-

² 'Lunch' is an alien word that I learned to use when I went to university as a mature student aged 27. It is otherwise known as 'dinner'.

articulated theories that travel through the generations, much as do dead metaphors in living languages. One well-known example of how beliefs may persist over centuries is that which has prevented children from going out to play while their hair is wet (see, for example, Ingham, 1970). The history of ideas I am tracing here is one that is unwritten; the ideas are those of people whose thoughts, with few exceptions, were not recorded for posterity. They are those of people whose formal education, if any, was poor, and for whom pen, ink and paper were luxuries. Theirs is an oral history of ideas. It is also a geography of material ideas: the land is a major influence on the account I am developing.

The South-Wales Valleys

The United Kingdom consists of the nations of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. The 2011 Census records England's population as 55,268,100, Scotland's as 5,404,700, Wales' as 3,113,200 and Northern Ireland's as 1,862,100. (The population of the island of Ireland in total is c. 6.6 million). Wales's population is thus 4.8% of the UK's population of 66.04 million. About three-quarters of Wales's population live in the south of the country. Its small size belies its position as a crucible of the first Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, a century that saw its population of 587,000 in 1801 doubling by 1851 to 1,163,000 and reaching 2,421,000 by 1911. Most of this increase in population was in the South Wales Valleys, that were rich in the raw materials, primarily coal and iron ore, necessary for the Industrial Revolution.

The Valleys, according to Wikipedia, are 'a group of industrialised peri-urban valleys in South Wales' with most running 'north-south, roughly parallel with each other'. Gwyn Alf Williams, a Marxist historian from the Merthyr (or Taff) valley, describes them more poetically as 'deeply scored valleys running down from high upland plateaux under the Beacons where God had clearly never intended human beings to live until the ironmasters corrected Him on the point. Those human beings struggled out of company towns in a mauled, moon-mountain landscape against all the odds to create some of the most remarkable working-class communities in Britain' (1985, p. 185). Another historian, Dai Smith, imagines the Valleys of South-East Wales as like a city, but with steep-sided hills and mountains separating the suburbs from each other. Today, with most heavy industries gone and the trees that had graced those hillsides regrown, the scenery is sometimes dramatic and often delightful. 200 years ago those hillsides hid rich seams of coal and iron ore, and from the 1820s they were ruthlessly exploited. Williams describes the Rhondda Valleys of the 1850s as like the Klondyke, for by this time the rate of migration into the Valleys was exceeded only by migration into the USA. The human inflow (Williams again) became 'almost unmanageable, throwing up communities everywhere, breeding semi-pirate and bohemian districts outside the law, a beady-eyed and enterprising middle class, speculators, jerry-builders, crooks, swarmed in' (p. 186). By the 1870s 'the whole region was thickly colonised' and 'the country had become, alongside Lancashire, one of the first truly industrial societies in the world, and like Lancashire, it nested at the heart of an imperial economy' (Williams, p. 201). The population was

'ruthlessly exploited'. The dominant language spoken was Welsh (one of the oldest living languages in Europe), with the flow of Welsh-speaking migrants from rural Wales meeting the Welsh-speakers already living in the Valleys. In the late 19th century migrants from England and the near Continent joined the flood of incomers and, Williams reports, many learned to speak the Welsh language. He writes that it was the 'overlay of masters, an imported "society", many shopkeepers' who 'tended to be [and speak] English' (p. 187). We have only the faintest hints of this history in my family's memories. My father's parents moved from rural Shropshire in the first decade of the 20th century to the small village in the Sirhowy valley where I grew up. My grandfather, who worked on the railways, was born and brought up on a farm and had a Shropshire accent until the day he died some 60+ years later. (To the family's great relief, my father found that his father had been born just inside the Welsh side of the border with England: we did not have English blood coursing through our bodies). My mother's parents had been settled in the Valleys, in Tredegar, for much longer and there seem to have been Welsh speakers amongst them: my mother could understand Welsh but not speak it. It is only now that they are gone that I realise how much history they could have recounted, if only I had had the right questions to ask.

The Valleys population was exploited, the conditions of work in coal mines and iron foundries nightmareish, life expectancy was short in the 19th century. At the same time the culture was vibrant and the population was politically active. Secret societies fought for workers' rights. One, the Scotch Cattle, was a 'half-hidden movement' with 'puckish humour' that policed not only greedy landlords and employers, but also the morality of the community. The Children of Rebecca rendered south-west Wales ungovernable by formal government agencies in the 1840s, and they too policed the community. I wonder if they are the originator of the *gwerin* as I describe it below. Meanwhile, in the towns and villages more generally grew up a people 'sustained by all the dense and interlocking networks of working-class life, with its bubbling world of imprisoned talent often marooned and mauled among the dark and bitter struggles, the harsh, hacking, unremitting labour, the disasters which could kill 200 men and boys at a time and blight whole communities. This was the distinctive, sardonic, complex, warm, picaresque, soft-hearted and malicious, hard-headed and cock-eyed, ambitious and heroic and daft world of the miners, whose disappearance has left south Wales a cubit shorter in spirit' (Williams, 224). It was also a culture that was deeply matriarchal, the 'Welsh mam' emerging in the Valleys of the 19th century as governor of everything that goes on within the home.

We sat discussing Brexit over lunch, more than a century after our paternal grandparents had arrived in the Valleys, five of these six siblings living no more than three miles from where our grandparents had settled. In the intervening century the heavy industries have disappeared and few new industries have taken the place of the old. The population is dependent on public sector employment and state benefits: the boom towns of the 19th century are now some of the poorest in Europe. 45% of the Welsh population live in districts where the GDP per person is under

20,000 euros, while GDP per head for Wales as a whole is 84% of the EU average (for the UK as a whole this figure is 118%), and 23% of the Welsh population are estimated to live below the poverty line (*figures from Wikipedia, to be checked*). Where grandparents and perhaps great-grandparents had left their homes to find work in a booming industrial sector, many of their grandchildren and great-children have remained rooted while industry and landscape changed around them. The question of how this history informs today's ways of thinking about and constituting the home now arises. I will suggest a complex mix of pride (perhaps from the half-known memory of surviving that earlier traumatic upheaval and the forging of new communities in conditions not conducive to such an achievement) and a sense of inferiority. In part, this is an aspect of a colonized mentality.

750 years of colonialism?

My grandsons were spending a holiday with me in Leeds in the north of England when they were about 13 and nine years old. We had been to the local skate park, where they had spent the afternoon on their roller-skates and scooters, discussing new moves with local boys, trying them out, learning from each other, and generally having a great time. As we left, my younger grandson screwed his face up into a deep thought, and observed, with much surprise, that the boys they'd spent the afternoon with were English (or rather Ing-er-lish) but they were, well, okay. Just like their friends back in Merthyr in fact.

Dylan is not unique in his surprise that the 'Ing-er-lish' are human – there is a visceral dislike within the Welsh population (and those of the other countries of the Celtic fringe) towards the English, seen most palpably on the rugby field during international matches between the two countries but there in everyday conversations. Contemporary analyses suggest such views are informed by the experience of having been England's first colonial conquest and Wales its first colonised subjects who are only now, more than 700 years later, regaining their independence. It must be noted that this is an independence of thought and feeling rather than of law. 'Wales was England's first colony. Its conquest was by military force and led to a process of colonisation whereby the Welsh were denied what today would be called civil rights' (Johnes, 2019, p. 2). In the 13th century the countries now known as Wales and England were being consolidated out of disparate princedoms but towards the century's end Edward 1st of England, having conquered the last of the Welsh princes, issued a statute at Rhuddlan in March 1284 that laid down how the 'conquered territory' of Wales was to be governed. This 'first colonial constitution' (Cam, 1962, in Evans and Fulton, 2019, p. 20) established divisions between colonizer and colonized that for more than a century were to breed underlying tensions that erupted in uprisings. These were to end with the crushing in 1409 of the last revolt led by Owain Glyn Dwr, still celebrated today as a Welsh hero.

Wales's history as a colonised nation is complex: even while being colonised it has been complicit in the British Empire's colonisation of others. The Welsh have been

assimilated into England but remain defiantly separate from it. The importance to contemporary identities of this history, and the even more ancient history that saw the Celts pushed to the Western extremities of the British Isles, is spelt out by Johnes (2019). The exact truths of history are irrelevant, he argues; what has been of importance is what people have thought, and the tales of colonisation have given the Welsh an account that has inspired them to 'retain their sense of difference and distinctiveness. It gave them stories to understand who they were and to be inspired and angered by. It ensured that the Welsh never started to think of themselves as English' (p. 9). That history, and how it is experienced not just as stories but as feelings and affect, were articulated through my grandson's surprised observation. Seven centuries of history spoke through him, compressed into a few phrases about loathing the English. Those phrases perhaps come loaded with a history that is unknown to the speakers; what was conscious has become unconscious (Johnes, 2019, p. 11) so that they/we now know only that to be Welsh requires that we are anti-English.

But I have been struck when reading accounts of Welsh history from the 13th century to the 20th, of how many uprisings against the English crown led, after defeat, to those Welsh people who possessed what would be called today the necessary social capital, capitalising on their assets through taking lucrative positions in the service of the conquerors. Is there a trace memory of these betrayals within the contemporary population's understanding of itself, I wonder. This is a history that has allowed some to flourish in ways that may best be understood through a class lens, for it is a history of colonisation entwined with a history of class (Johnes, 2019).

Looking out from the home in which I grew up I sense there is more to this than class. A memory from childhood: my father singing, to the tune of the Red Flag, 'the working class can kiss my arse, I've got the foreman's job at last'. Another memory from childhood: my father dismissing socialist politics, because 'you get rid of one lot of bosses and they will be replaced by another lot'. Lacan said something similar, when observing students rebellions in 1968 Paris. Welsh history has seen centuries of 'leaders' disappointing, betraying and exploiting 'followers'. My intuition is that this is one of the ways in which deep suspicion of hierarchies, and thus leadership, has entered into the discourses within and through which the identities of Valleys people are constituted. It is the single most influential idea on my own academic interests, although I had thought, until drafting this essay, that I had come to the idea as an adult, after my induction into academia.

Returning to the loathing towards the English: my experience of growing up in the Valleys suggests it is accompanied by feelings of inferiority such as are experienced by many colonised peoples (Fanon, XXXX). England is bigger, richer, and informed by a sense of its own superiority. *I was taught in my 1960s classroom to be proud of the British empire. The atlases used in the geography lessons contained maps in which countries that were or had been part of Britain's empire were coloured in pink. There were so many countries coloured pink! I learned, almost through osmosis it seems,*

that the British Empire was a fundamentally moral endeavour concerned with taking civilisation to the farthest corners of the world. These stories are currently informing the debate about Brexit: some people are dreaming of returning to that imaginary idyll. Welsh people can be simultaneously and paradoxically seduced and repelled by such a notion: it is articulated by the loathed English, but is a sentiment that has been as much a part of Welsh as of English history. A sense of superiority battling with a sense of inferiority brings peculiar challenges to anyone who would be a leader. That paradoxical sense of being both superior and inferior is experienced also through the experience of class.

From working to middle class and back again; or from neo-communitarian to left-liberal and back again.

The results of the Brexit vote were announced on Friday 24th June 2016. A few days later I was with colleagues from the UK and northern Europe at a writing retreat. Everyone seemed to be in shock. I was ardently in favour of 'remain' and found that my colleagues shared with me feelings of numbed grief that had now lasted for several days. In the weeks leading up to the vote I had had to agree with some Brexit-supporting close family members not to debate politics because we disagreed so totally.

In contrast, some of my relatives, close and distant, were jubilant. The relative with whom I had and continue to have most discussions about contemporary politics argued that migrant workers from Central Europe were driving down wages and denying jobs to local youths, and were also not as efficient and hard-working as the myths about them would have it. In this he articulated a classical law of supply and demand, but my response was that his arguments were racist, and I felt dismayed that such a close relative could have such unenlightened opinions. But, as Irwin (2018:214) notes, non-academics can be 'nuanced analysts of social structural processes, and articulate a more coherent and detailed conception than implied by much literature in the area (Irwin, 2018:214). This is not a surprise to me (see Harding, 2013, for a similar argument) but in this paper I wish to explore why I interpreted my relative's words so negatively.

At the writing retreat I read an email sent by fellow critical management studies scholars to a CMS distribution list. The email complained about the awful working class that had unthinkingly voted for Brexit, as the analyses in the immediate aftermath of the vote were suggesting. My first, unbidden thought was 'walk a mile in their shoes before you criticise them'. My second thought was: where did that thought come from?' Schooled in the analysis of identities, I came to understand that that immediate response was from my working class roots, and the email had called me back to experiencing the thoughts, beliefs, affects and feelings of that childhood and young adult identity. A few months later I was at a literature festival and heard the playwright David Hare discussing the demanding norms of his middle class childhood. Oh goodness – as he talked I sensed how in the six years I had spent studying a B.Sc. and then a Ph.D, and a subsequent working life in academia, I had moved into a middle class subject position, replete with a certain left-liberal philosophy. I had to climb down from my academic high-horse when I next debated politics with my relatives.

This led me to a need to analyse how the norms of Western liberalism inform the professional middle-class 'I' and makes it blind and deaf to other possibilities of becoming 'I'. These I found embedded within the left-leaning, liberal UK newspapers, the Guardian and Observer. There is a casual use of the 'we' in these newspapers. An example plucked at random was Aaron Hicklin's interview of Thomas Page McBee on 5th August 2018³. Referring to Obama's time in office, he wrote 'As we all know now, whatever optimism we felt then was about to be upended by Brexit and the election of Trump'. In this casual use of the 'we' that had felt 'optimism' but now has knowledge, a global 'we', through its extension in the 'all', positions readers in that 'we' that is enlightened. It constructs the Brexit/Trump voters as destroyers; ignores the fact that large swathes of two populations may not have been feeling optimistic; and pits the 'we' against the unnamed, destructive other. It invites me, the reader of a newspaper designed for educated, left-leaning readers, to align myself with the 'all' and against this seemingly malign voting other.

Academic discussions are not immune from such rhetorical and constitutive use of language and may indeed be characterized by such positioning. In business schools 'we' profess to know how to manage and to lead. Those of us who identify ourselves with an anti-business school agenda, often within the umbrella term of 'Critical Management Studies' (CMS), can see this 'we' in Grey's (2017) agonised self-examination of CMS and Brexit, in which he self-consciously discusses a CMS 'us' and a leave-voting, working class 'them'. He writes

'If emancipation from oppression and opposition to neo-liberal globalization (exemplified by the financial crisis) are the hallmarks of CMS then the working class has decided to emancipate itself by embracing nativism (often with a racist element), populism, nationalism and illiberalism.'

Similarly, a Call for Papers for a stream on Brexit in the CMS conference 2017 noted, on its first page, that 'One of the most apparent and shocking features in the wake of the vote has been the surge in hatred attacks, including those engendering racisms, xenophobia, and homophobia, with some media reporting as much as a 147% rise in July, August and September 2016⁴. This was repeated in the CfP of a special edition of *Organization*, with the additional comment that 'Brexit seems to have legitimised the expression of belief in [the] legitimacy of racism, xenophobia and associated behaviour' (p. 2).The referendum has unleashed brutal forces'. The implication is that those who are 'not I', not the (supposedly) young, educated, middle-class Remain supporters, can now be seen as the barbarians they have always been.

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2018/aug/05/my-fight-to-be-a-man>

⁴ <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/business/files/2016/11/48-Brexiting-CMS-Call-for-Papers.pdf>

In other words, an educated and articulated group unthinkingly demonises others whose philosophy and politics are assumed to differ from it. This demonization (at least in this case) is achieved by eliding with a vaguely-defined 'class' what is utterly and objectively obnoxious, racist violence. All members of that class become deemed to be bearers of such beliefs and behaviours. They are the constitutive other of a class that identifies itself as educated and articulate and, importantly, practising liberal beliefs.

Liberalism is understood as an ideal in which liberty, equality, state neutrality and voluntarism are valorised (McCabe, 20XX). It emphasises respect for the Other and inclusivity (Brooks, 2017, p. 136). Freedom of movement is fundamental to liberal philosophy (Freiman and Hidalgo, 2016), an issue that represents the fracture line in the Brexit campaign. But, exploring the failure of the Welsh to establish themselves as a nation state and locating the Welsh language at the heart of that failure, Brooks (2017, p. 131) (in an argument I will return to below) argues that liberalism is responsible for the failure of Welsh nationalism, and is 'an ideology which at its very heart discriminates against minorities'. My experience suggests that, more than this, liberalism is a form of thought that is intolerant of dissent, marking anyone critical of the free movement of people in the Brexit debate as automatically and by definition racist.

And that is how I now understand my own intolerance towards my relative's concerns about how the cost of labour is being driven down in the Valleys, where too many people are seeking too few jobs.

James Bloodworth's (2018) experiences of working in the gig or zero-hour economy shows how an obvious and overt racism by local UK populations against EU migrants can exist alongside a exploitation of both migrant and local workers. I now wonder if the unconcealed ageism levelled against Brexit voters (the older a person, the more likely they are to have voted leave) is another exercise of illiberal liberalism. Older populations in the UK are far less likely to have been educated to degree level, or even to age 18. They may not therefore have experienced that inculcation into unthinking liberal values that I absorbed as I studied for my first degree. I did not know this consciously: liberal values are embedded in the sentences and paragraphs of the books and papers I read as I learned how to speak middle-class English and academic language. They worked on me, colonising me, until I breathed them, thought within and through them, and saw the world through them. My beliefs that my relative was expressing racist thoughts came from this way of thinking and seeing. My visceral response to the anti-working-class email in the comfort of the writing retreat sent me tumbling, albeit momentarily, out of that liberal self and, floundering, into my pre-university self. My academic self, looking at both philosophies, asks: how do we make sense of arguments communities put forward about that community's flourishing and the preservation of their culture if they receive a knee-jerk response: you are racist (to which I whisper a *mea culpa*)? That academic self despairs. If my arguments hold any truths at all, then the current tensions between Brexiteers and Remainers arise from fundamental philosophical

differences, and from philosophies that require much further interrogation than they are receiving. They are also related to class, inevitably so if higher education is the rite of passage from a working class subordinate philosophy to a middle class liberalism.

Pethau cyffredin

I do not speak Welsh and neither do most members of my family, but I wanted to appropriate Stewart's term 'ordinary affect' while keeping some sort of distance from it. '*Pethau cyffredin*', an on-line translator tells me, is Welsh for 'ordinary things'. What follows first is a list of things I have observed in childhood and adulthood that continue to resonate.

Firstly, a distrust of authority. I referred above to my father's cynicism about what happens when people become bosses: they abandon any previous convictions and become as bad as all their predecessors. This extends to cynicism about management: *1986, returning to work after the year-long miner's strike, my then-husband recounted the stupidity of the managers and the jokes made by the miners at management's expense. Managers hadn't changed, they were just as useless after the strike as they had been before it.* Flash forward to c. 2012: *my elder son, a nurse, was appalled that a fellow nurse he met when visiting me in Leeds had called him a manager: he saw it as an accusation. Managers are regarded as interfering in the smooth running of things; they get in the way and don't know what they are doing.*

That distrust is echoed in cynicism about politicians. There was a referendum in 1979 concerning the establishment of a Welsh assembly and thus a certain degree of self-government. *I joined in discussions in the village shop, at the bus stop and within the family that revolved around the cost of such an assembly. It was seen as providing 'jobs for the boys' (privileged insiders) and for people interested only in making money for themselves. They were an unnecessary cost: rather than pay them to do little [sweet bugger all] in the vernacular] better to use the money where it was more needed.* The plan was defeated by a majority of 4:1. A second referendum in 1997 saw a narrow majority 'yes' vote of 50.3%, on a turnout of just 50.2% of registered voters. The first years of the Assembly were dogged by political infighting and scandals. There were numerous calls for the Assembly to be disbanded, leaving one commentator to observe that only in Wales would the shortcomings of politicians be used to argue for the abolition of a democratically-elected national government (Shipton, 2011).

This lack of trust in, and respect for, 'leaders' is part of a culture of self-government and self-policing. *In the 1950s and 60s my father, a coal miner and trained first-aider responsible for providing immediate help to fellow miners injured while cutting coal, was the first person called to help for anyone in the village injured in an accident. The doctor or ambulance was called if he advised it.*

C. 2010: at an impromptu family gathering on a warm summer evening at a local pub/restaurant, there was a sudden bustle of discussion after which a group of male members of the family left. The step-daughter of one had been beaten badly by her

boyfriend. He had broken an unwritten law: men do not beat women. Those who break that law get summary treatment: a beating. 2019: neighbours in a local village were bothered by some 'rowdy youths' who were gouging the paintwork on cars and making some people nervous about walking alone down the street at night. The police had been called but had 'done nothing'. Some of the biggest men in the village gave them a 'quiet talking to' and the trouble stopped.

I do not want to romanticise this self-reliance: informal policing can be intolerant and damaging. *I grew up with a deep sense of shame because our family home was dirty: cleanliness is superior to Godliness in the Welsh Valleys. In the sensed but inarticulate hierarchy of the community, only one family had lower status, because the father was a scrounger. One of my sisters still smarts from being verbally abused by older women in the village when she became an unmarried mother in the 1980s, and today there continues to be much gossip about women who are judged to be poor housewives.* But what I do want to emphasise is the contrast between norms of self-government, with groups forming to deal with issues as they arise, and contrasting attitudes towards (despised) management (and thus leadership). I suspect that none of the people I am including in this analysis would describe the culture in the way I am doing here: it's just the way things are done, they might say, and is so obvious that it does not need telling. But I wonder, as I put together the numerous examples of 'ordinary things', if this way of arranging the world accounts for the low esteem in which management and leadership, including political leadership, is held. There just is no need for them: we know how to do things and we do them well. When things are done by 'everyone' there can be no betrayal, and no 'selling out'.

The radical politics of the 19th century Valleys seemed to come to nothing, but are part of local lore. The Merthyr Rising of 1831, for example, which may have been the first occasion when a red flag was used as a workers' symbol, saw the town effectively out of control before the army seized it back. 24 protesters were killed in the rioting, and Dic Penderyn, a 23-year-old miner, was charged with injuring a soldier and sentenced to be hung, the last person to be hung in Wales for his politics (Brookes 2017). A pub in Merthyr is named after him, and the Merthyr Rising has been commemorated since 2013 in an annual 'cultural festival of music, arts, political discussion and ideas' that 'celebrates working class culture and resistance at the birthplace of the red flag' (<http://www.merthyrising.uk/about.html>)

The radical politics of the 20th century did however have major successes, in the establishment of the welfare state, and protection from harm from cradle to grave. I have noticed some other 'ordinary things' as my siblings have aged that are intriguing. *When I gather with my sisters the conversation usually turns to accounts of the people they know and what they are doing. Having left so long ago I don't know the people they are talking about but sit there, as I imagine anthropologists might do, listening engrossed in how a group of matriarchs construct their worlds. Complex connections are drawn – 'you know, she's XXXX's daughter, the one who was married to YYY but now she's married to ZZZZ'. Oh yes, her, I know who you mean'. It's the laughter that accompanies these discussions of what are objectively tough lives that*

makes me wonder what Stewart did not see from her perspective outside the homes and communities of many of those she observed. Many of my siblings are now dependent on state benefits for survival. This is often not a happy state of affairs, especially given governmental attempts in the last decade to reduce the costs of the public sector. The change to paying benefits monthly rather than weekly left one sister living for a whole month on just one-quarter of a week's income, and that sister was similarly affected by more recent changes to 'universal benefit'. It is difficult to save towards such rainy days when living on the poverty line, and she is proud of how she always survives. However, the long history of despising 'scroungers' persists, but a distinction seems to be drawn now between 'just' and 'unjust' recipients of state benefits, with definitions of 'just' and 'unjust' established within the community. Those who have a 'just' right to benefits regard them as that: a right. Civil servants responsible for handling claims for benefits are talked about not as if they are employed to assess claims, but as difficult and unpredictable barriers to fairness and equality. They are 'outsiders' who unfairly disrupt the lives of those 'inside' the community. Another sister has become expert in the benefits system and provides advice and support to those needing help.

These are aspects of contemporary life in the Valleys today. There is no place for leadership here – indeed leadership speaks of hierarchies and hierarchies are antithetical to the norms that govern how people live and how order is maintained.

There is one final issue to explore: the complex mixture of pride and inferiority that emerges through class and language. Pride is related to insouciance in regard to leadership (it's not needed so why bother our heads about it, as Valleys people might say), while inferiority inculcates resistance towards leadership because it elevates some above others, adding another superior/inferior binary.

Pride and inferiority by class and by language

The Valleys communities are proudly working class and, as noted above, regard being described as middle class as a slur. But, assimilated into England even while keeping its sense of identity, the Welsh culture is not immune to the ways in which the working class is regarded as inferior to the middle class. So along with pride there is a complex sense of inferiority. Annette Kuhn has written eloquently of her experience of being a working class child who attended a middle class grammar school. When I read her words I am thrown back into the child who was sent by her mother to the door to tell the rent man 'Mammy isn't in this week. Can you come back next week?' Kuhn's words will suffice as description and explanation. 'Class', Kuhn writes, (1995, p. 116) is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being. In the all-encompassing English class system, if you know that you are in the 'wrong' class, you know that therefore you are a valueless person'. That is, there is 'something shameful and wrong about you, that you are inarticulate and stupid, have nothing to say of any value or importance, that no-one will listen to you in any case, that you are undeserving, unentitled, cannot think properly, are incapable of 'getting it right'.

...And you learn that these feelings may return to haunt you for the rest of your life' (ibid). Those of us who are working class learn not to speak, we learn to be silent 'through shame' and 'the hardest thing of all is to find a voice: not the voice of the monstrous singular ego, but one that, summoning the resources of the place we come from, can speak with eloquence of, and for, that place' (p. 123).

There is another complex intertwining of pride and inferiority that is caught up in the Welsh language and Welsh identity. By the late 19th century the Welsh language was in retreat. It had lost any official status in an Act of Union in 1536 but had nevertheless flourished. It was thriving in the Valleys in the mid-19th century but by 1900 only half the population could speak it. This was partly through deliberate policy. An infamous commission reported on the state of education in Wales in 1847 that its encouragement of Welsh-speaking produced a race that was 'ignorant', 'lazy', and 'immoral'. Abolishing Welsh was seen as a moral imperative, and it was done in part through preventing schoolchildren from speaking Welsh. A schoolchild heard speaking Welsh was made to carry a 'Not', typically a piece of wood, that they could pass on to the next child they heard speaking Welsh: the child holding the Not at the end of the period was punished. The Welsh language withered away but did not die, and today about 20% of the population remain Welsh speakers and the language is reviving, although it almost disappeared from the industrial valleys. In the grammar school I attended morning assembly was held in Welsh on Friday mornings, although few of us could understand it. In chapel on Sundays we sang some Welsh and some English hymns. We learned to sing the national anthem in Welsh without understanding the meaning of the words although feeling the emotions it aroused. We sang hymns by William Williams Pantycelyn (great tunes but we did not know what the sentences meant), sensed that the words of *Ar Hyd y Nos* (All through the Night) must mean something beautiful, and that *Rhyfelgyrch Gwyr Harlech* (Men of Harlech) was a call to arms. We knew that *Sosban Fach* was supposed to be funny and we guessed that the chorus referred to Johnny Bach being scratched by a cat. Welsh was there in place names and personal names: it was everywhere but we could not speak it. The result? Williams describes my own experience of growing up as a monoglot English speaker, albeit using a dialect that overlays English semantics on a Welsh syntax and that can be almost impenetrable to those not accustomed to hearing it. Williams writes that in the second half of the 20th century there was 'mutual alienation' between English- and Welsh-speakers, with the majority of the population, unable to speak Welsh, 'perceived as in some basic senses, un-Welsh' and unable to account for their identity.

That is, we definitely were not English; we were Welsh and Welshness was in part defined by being not English. But we could not speak Welsh, so were we really Welsh? And if we weren't Welsh and weren't English, than who were we? Our fierce pride in being Welsh was matched by a confusion about whether or not we really were Welsh. We turned that antipathy towards Welsh speakers, for reasons that lack all justification and are indeed unfathomable, save that we felt inferior towards

native Welsh speakers because they could truly call themselves Welsh and we could not.

It was only when reading Simon Brooks' *Why Wales never was* (2017), written originally in Welsh and now available in English, that I realised native Welsh speakers felt similar ambivalence and envy towards the monoglot peoples of South Wales. He writes (p. 110-11) that "Non-Welsh-speaking Welsh" is now a 'normative, and indeed dominant, Welsh identity' that can threaten the right of Welsh-speakers to be Welsh. It seems Welsh- and non-Welsh speaking Welsh people alike are uncertain of their identities, but each assumes that the other is not beset by such contradictions. His book is in some ways alienating: his study of the failure of Welsh nationalism is a study of men, and of only educated men. Few women make an appearance and when they do they are swiftly passed over. He seems often to use the term 'the Welsh' to refer only to Welsh-speaking people, arousing in me that old enmity and old sense of uncertainty of identity. But he also offers a nuanced understanding of the binds in which Welsh- and non-Welsh speaking working class people alike are 'oppressed as a social class and as a nationality, and on the fringes of the British state as well'. Efforts at resistance through left-wing politics 'promoted British hegemony by subsuming the Welsh working class within the British working class' and so the left-wing politics that have seen much of the Valleys voting for the Labour Party 'promoted assimilation', catching left-wing Welsh politics in 'a colonial net'. (p. 119). He identifies the Welsh (although which Welsh is unclear) as an ethnic minority in the wider Britain, and worries over the ability to continue the historic dependence on 'ethnic self-consciousness to maintain a sense of their own culture and identity' (p. 130). But whose culture, and whose identity? These questions are circular: for people in the English-speaking Valleys we are Welsh but not Welsh, so who are we? Pride in being Welsh is thus challenged by uncertainty about what Welshness is, and whether or not we can justifiably claim to be whatever it is.

Discussion but not yet a conclusion

Imagine now, sitting at a kitchen table in one of the towns and villages of the East Wales Valleys and thinking about leaders and leaderships. I will pass you a list of words, from Word Hippo⁵, that mean 'leader' in Welsh. They range from arweinydd, arweinyddion, benadur, benaduriaid, blaenwr, blaenwraig, blaenwyr, dywyswr, dywyswyr, dywysydd, flaenwr, flaenwyr, harweinydd, harweinyddion, mhenadur, and so on to thywyswyr, thywysydd, tywyswr, tywyswyr and twysydd. It will be a rare reader of this paper who understands what these words mean and the subtle distinctions between them (and I surely don't). But I am suggesting that the terms 'leader' and 'leadership', and even more 'follower' and 'followership', carry as little meaning in the Valleys of South East Wales as these Welsh terms do. The English terms are as alien as the Welsh ones. They do not belong amongst people who

⁵ <https://www.wordhippo.com/what-is/the/welsh-word-for-b25f598744d2fedc95944f9c35b697828e50ed10.html>

resent those who elevate themselves into supposed positions of authority: life is better lived with everyone 'doing their bit' (contributing according to their abilities) and not adding unnecessary overhead costs. Local government provides services, and service providers equally should 'do their bit' and not set themselves up as arbiters of other's entitlements.

Underlying this philosophy are vulnerabilities and contradictions that are threatened and challenged by such concepts as leadership. Leadership suggests some are better than others, and carries with it hints of a colonialism that has been sensed and resisted even though it remains largely un-articulated. Assimilation and independence are contradictory but lived out daily in the *gwerin*. It is proud to be working class but ashamed of that status; proud to be Welsh but uncertain if it is Welsh. To impose the identities of leader and follower would add yet further complexities. Many of its members draw on a neo-communitarian philosophy that would be met by leaders, their understanding rooted in a (neo-)liberal philosophy, as racist. Such a charge silences speakers – they become subalterns who cannot speak. They remain unrepresented politically (save for some but not all who find representation in the dead grasp of UKIP and a radically-right Tory government doing its utmost to be populist) and unrepresentable (they cannot exist so cannot be described).

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