***‘When and Where does being Welsh matter to me?’ The influence of cross-border mobilities on constructions of sub-national belonging in the lives of Welsh Muslims***

**Abstract**

This article will discuss how Welsh Muslims construct what a sense of place means to them through their cross-border mobility between England and Wales, and how this contributes to the ongoing re-construction of a plural understanding of nationhood in an era of diversity (Antonsich & Matejskova 2015, Brickell 2014). To understand when and where being Welsh matters to Welsh Muslims, it will explore how mobility rather than being the antithesis of belonging, can be used as an essential tool in highlighting how perceptions of the nation, sub-state nation, home and place are influenced and understood (Fallov, Jørgensen & Knudsen 2013).

**Keywords: Muslim identity, Wales, Mobility, Sub-state Nation, Nationalism, Cross-Border Mobility, Belonging**

## Introduction

The question ‘Where do I belong?’ is one that is forever negotiated. It changes context depending on *who* people are with and *where* people are at a particular moment in time. How a sense of belonging develops, not only involves questioning what does it mean to feel at home, but also, what does a sense of home mean when you return from being away from it (Fallov, Jørgensen & Knudsen 2013). The nation is one of the most important scales in this process, which people use as a tool to help identify what a sense of place means to them, and to locate where they feel they belong (Knott 2017, Antonsich 2010, Brubaker 2010). When asked ‘Where do you come from?’, a common response if someone is outside their country of origin, would be to state their nationality. This is heightened during periods of cross-border mobility, as our social relations are continuously re-defined through movement between *national* borders (Urry 2000, Richardson 2013). How we think about what national identity means to us is influenced by these trajectories, and so analysing them can reveal how the circulation of people back and forth between national borders can make us think differently about membership and power in communal communities (Bærenholdt 2013). This can be particularly useful for exploring the re-construction of nationhood in increasingly diverse societies.

Due to increasing migration, the movement of refugees from wars in the Middle East, the Arab country revolutions, Brexit and the rise of populism, European nation-states are at an important point in history where they are continuously having to ask themselves, what do they want the nation to look like. As a result, increasingly more attention is being given to exploring how accessible the nation is to minority populations, by asking what does it mean to them, and analysing the moments when, and the places where it comes to matter or not (Antonsich & Matejskova 2015, Hopkins 2010, Kymlicka 2015). This paper will contribute to this debate by arguing that through analysing the ways second generation Muslims think about their own cross-border mobility with neighbouring countries (Wales and England), we can shed light on the plural ways that attachments to the sub-state nation is constructed from the bottom up (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008). By doing so, it will reveal the moments where minorities show agency over how they construct their sense of belonging to the nation. Unlike those who argue that the nation is only a divisive force in the pursuit of more cohesive societies (Amelina & Faist 2012, Agnew 1994, Cantle 2015), this paper will argue that it must be brought back into migration studies as it remains central in the shaping of contemporary relations across diversity (Antonsich & Matejskova 2015). To discount the importance of nationality or sub-state nationality without understanding what it means to ethnic, cultural and religious minorities first, particularly the second generation, ignores the importance of place within their lives and the agency they have in shaping how they understand themselves.

This article will do so by analysing the scale of the sub-state nation. Sub-state nations are regions within nation-states with either a separate historic, ethnic, cultural or linguistic make-up which challenges state-wide uniformity, who have some degree of autonomy and self-determination either in the form of differing levels of self-governance or law making powers (Erk 2010, McCrone 1998). Traditionally, research on diversity and the identities of the second-generation has often been analysed through the lens of the centralised nation-state, neglecting the potential influence that sub-state nations can have. Increasingly, however, more attention is being given to how the experience of living in sub-state nations for ethnic and religious minorities is embedded with an important alternative narrative to that of the primary nation-state (see Dwyer & Bressey 2008, Hopkins 2008, Williams et. al 2003, Zapata-Barrero 2009).

Sub-state nations challenge the idea of a homogenous social and political culture and offer another site from which the second generation can derive attachment (Banting & Soroka 2012). By revealing moments where the sub-state nation comes to matter for those often absent from analysis of nationalism (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008), the paper will counter those like Mustafa (2015), who argue that sub-state identities such as Scottishness or Welshness are perceived by Muslims as a ‘White’ only racial category and consequently not as important. Thus, Welsh Muslims’ cross-border mobilities will be used as a tool for highlighting that although for the second generation a sense of attachment to place is inflected with multiple mobilities (Germann-Molz 2008), having a home bound with a fixed location is a meaningful way that they define the ways they belong to Wales.

### **Mobility, Home and Belonging**

The concept of mobility emphasises the way people and objects are connected to each other by their movement between places, and how this movement has political implications creating spatial stories which animate certain places (Cresswell & Merriman 2011, Kellerman 2006). This paper will argue that the significance of a sense of place, and the social relations which define it, cannot be fully understood until people’s mobilities between their homes and other places are explored. As Blunt & Dowling (2006) emphasise, home is not a given but is made through processes of creation, and this paper will use the mobilities of Welsh Muslims between Wales and England, to reveal moments where Wales comes to matter in tangible and ordinary ways. For some the concept of home is self-evident, for others it is a struggle which reveals its dichotomous, paradoxical and multi-layered nature (Mallett 2004). Home can be both a lived and longed-for experience, which includes the everyday interactions that happen within and beyond the four walls of a household, constituted through multiple relations and feelings, felt across numerous geographical scales (Ralph & Staeheli 2011, Taylor 2013, Blunt & Dowling 2006, Fox 2006). Home is therefore as much to do with the relations shared between people as it is to do with the locations which anchor people in certain places (Blunt & Dowling 2006, Blunt & Varley 2004, Nowicka 2006).

Previously, the concept of home and belonging have been associated with a single-bounded territory (Heidegger 1971). When discussing the construction of national and sub-state national identity, having a fixed homeland that people feel they belong to has always been essential (Özkirimli 2005, Antonsich 2010). A key character of nationhood is sharing a geography rooted in a particular place which people have an emotional attachment to (Billig 1995, Smith 1999, Agnew 1987, Connor 2001). Although this is always contested, as many conflicts and wars have been fought, and continue to be fought over which territory belongs to which nation or sub-state nation, imagining a shared national or sub-state national territory that people call home, can also provide comfort, stability and a sense of anchorage essential to developing feelings of belonging to a place (Calhoun 2007, Smith 2000). National and sub-state national identity is therefore constructed from having a spatial origin which helps mark the boundaries that one can call home, where feelings of belonging rely on fixity. This therefore makes national and sub-state national identity some of the most territorial of all political ideologies based on a shared idea of place(Agnew 2004, Ralph & Staeheli 2011, Smith 1999).

In an increasingly mobile world with increasingly diverse populations, understanding this fixity, however, becomes more challenging (Kymlicka 2015). Because of this, some have challenged the notion of home as being bounded with a sedentary national territory to concentrate on the more porous possibilities of home, where home is open to change and extends beyond immediate place (Massey 1994, 1992). Influenced by this, some have concentrated on the dichotomous nature of home as both sedentary and mobile (Ralph & Staeheli 2011, Germann-Molz 2008), or as Ahmed et al. (2003: 1) argues, ‘being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached’(Ahmed et al. 2003: 1). When considering *first generation* migrants, Ralph and Staeheli (2011) use a useful analogy to describe their attachments to home as being ‘accordion-like’ in that it stretches to expand outwards to distant places, while also ‘squeezing to embed them in their proximate and immediate locales, strengthening and deepening ties to multiple places’ (Ralph & Staeheli 2011: 518).

Although this is a useful analogy to consider for the first generation, for the second generation there is more fixity than this, where belonging must be viewed as a product of a pause and a chance of attachment which although exists at many scales (Cresswell 2004), has a strong sense of rootedness in a sense of place. For example, the use of the phrase ‘back home’ by the second generation is the survival of an expression used by their parents and family members daily, but it is often contested as not being the home of the second generation. This suggests that although the second (and consequent generations) idea of home is inextricably bound with multiple places, home and belonging is reliant on familiarity, stability and the continuity of daily life often expressed through national and sub-state national terms rooted in place (Bolognani 2014, Levitt 2009, Skey 2011).

Exploring how the second generation construct feelings of belonging to Wales therefore challenges traditional assumptions of *who* can claim the nation to be their home. Using cross-border mobilities as a tool for discovering how a sense of belonging to the sub-state nation is constructed, is one way we can better understand the plural ways that nationhood is being claimed. Although for brevity this paper cannot offer an in-depth analysis of plural nationalism (see Whittaker 2015), by focusing on how Muslims mobilise their sense of belonging to the sub-state nation, this article advocates a more flexible analysis of nationhood whichasks us to be aware of a self-reflexive reconsideration and negotiation of national identity. By understanding nationhood from the perspective of ethnic and religious minorities, we can better understand the constructive process of nation and sub-state nation building in a diverse era, and how it can be used to construct more flexible and inclusive national and sub-national narratives (Triandafyllidou 2011, 2013, Whittaker 2015, Kymlicka 2015),

This is not to say that other scales are not important or that the national and sub-national scale takes precedence in the mapping of diverse identities: all identities are influenced by global, national, regional and local development strategies (Aitchison, Hopkins & Kwan 2007). Also, the nation can be a site for both positive and negative forms of nationalism (Abulof 2015), and important to remember is that although claims can be made by minorities to the nation, this does not mean that the wider national community accept these claims. In fact, in many ways they can be rejected, as how the majority define the conditions and boundaries of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ will affect how ethnic and religious minorities identify with a national territory as home (Valentine, Sporton & Nielson 2009, Karlsen & Nazroo 2013). However, this article will argue that sub-national places are capable of not only being sites of challenge, oppression, xenophobia and racism, but also of liberation, opportunity, solidarity and attachment for Muslim and minority identities, and must be unpacked in order to understand how the nation and sub-state nation is being interpreted, claimed and normalised by its diverse populations (Phillips 2009).

**1.1.2 Muslims in Wales**

According to the 2011 census, the Muslim population of Wales lies at 1.5%, with the majority of Muslims concentrated in the cities of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. Since 2001, this population has doubled from 0.7%, and so has the research on Muslims in Wales, particularly since the founding of the centre for the study of Islam in the UK at Cardiff University in 2005 (see Mellor & Gilliat-Ray 2013, Gilliat-Ray & Mellor 2010, Gilliat-Ray 2010). Since then, important steps towards a comprehensive analysis of Islam and Wales are being made. Grahame Davies’s (2011) book, the Dragon and the Crescent, offers an historical account of the interactions between Islam and Wales over the past Millennium. Not only does he analyse Welsh-Muslim encounters outside of Wales during the crusades and the Great wars, he also reveals the modern impact of Islam within Wales due to migration. Substantial Muslim communities first began to settle in Wales in the mid nineteenth due to the seafaring industry as Yemeni seafarers settled in around Cardiff Bay, particularly in the Butetown area (Chambers 2015, Davies 2011). Newport would also experience an increased Muslim population due to the seafaring industry and the increasing industrialisation of South Wales, establishing what is now a long-standing community around the Corporation Road area of the city (Chambers 2015). Since these initial communities settled, Somalis, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have all added to the diverse population of Muslims moving to Wales, especially since the 1970’s, establishing themselves in industries such as the restaurant and retail industries (Chambers 2015). During the past three decades Swansea has also joined Cardiff and Newport in housing a significant Muslim population, as the area surrounding St Helens Road in the city centre has become a significant street in Islamic life with the Swansea mosque, Asian food and clothes stores and Islamic travel agents all situated there. The Muslim population therefore continues to grow, this, in comparison to the Jewish community in Wales which has steadily declined, since its height of 6,000 around the time of the first world war world war (Davies 2011).

As this population grows, other research has begun to unpack the social aspects of Islam in Wales, exploring family routines of Welsh Muslim Children (Scourfield et al 2013), the challenges Muslims face living in rural areas (Jones, R.D. 2010), and the political participation of Islamic organisations such as the Muslim Council of Wales in the Welsh referendum (2011), to highlight how Muslims are claiming ownership over a public Welsh identity through political space (Whittaker 2015). Wales’s Muslims are therefore increasingly being given more academic attention, and this article is a contribution to this literature by exploring the ways Muslims are becoming embedded in Welsh place. By analysing the meaning of their mobilities across the Welsh-English border and back again, we can reveal the moments where being Welsh matters to Muslims. Whilst others have argued how in Scotland and Wales, Muslims appear to feel more at ease associating with these identities than Muslims in England do (Ahmad & Sardar 2012, Sales 2012, Kabir 2010), this article furthers the notion that when it comes to analysing contemporary British Muslim identity, concentrating on the scale of Britain and Britishness alone ignores the other scale specific dynamics important in the lives of ethnic and religious minorities. Understanding this is therefore important for deciphering what complexities, barriers and opportunities this poses for concepts of future cohesion within particular multi-level state territories (Banting & Soroka 2012).

***1.1.3 Collecting the Data***

The data for this article was taken from a larger project exploring what Wales and being Welsh means to Muslims in Swansea, South Wales, and consists of a mixture of methods collected over a year spent at an organisation called the Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST). EYST was created in 2005 by a group of young Muslims who aimed to fill a gap in provision by providing a targeted, culturally sensitive and holistic support service for Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people aged 11-25. Since then, EYST has grown to deliver a range of services from education, employment and health, to personal and community safety, and has become a cultural hub for such services for any age groups within Swansea. The organisation was chosen because it is a place that provides culturally sensitive support and guidance for Muslims of all ages, and could be used to gain access to Muslim interviewees by building up contacts for focus groups and interviews (Moeran 2009, Bolognani 2007). Swansea was chosen because it is geographically important to gain a perspective from outside the capital Cardiff, where the majority of research on Welsh Muslims has been conducted. In Swansea, around 5,415 (2%) of people claim their religion as Islam, making it the most common religion after Christianity (Swansea Profile 2015).

The methods used to collect the data included a years’ worth of diary notes. These noted conversations and informal discussions which occurred at the office and drop-in centre when I was ‘hanging around’ trying to become a ‘thoughtful and reflexive’ observer, through volunteering and getting involved with life at the organisation (Jenkins 2011: 17). I also conducted 6 focus groups with 5 people in each, 15 with women and 15 with men aged 17-25. All the interviewees had been raised in the UK, or had spent the majority of their childhood and adult life in Wales and had all attended Welsh educational institutions. Hundred percent of the sample identified as Muslim and the ethnic heritage of the interviewees in the focus groups was majority Bangladeshi (twenty two participants) twelve women and ten men. The other eight interviewees were from Pakistani heritage, five women and three men. The reason for this larger make up of Bangladeshis is that the majority of clients at EYST are from Bangladeshi heritage, as Bangladeshis make up 1,944 (0.8%) of the total Swansea population, and are only second to Chinese with 2,052 people, 0.9% of Swansea’s population (Swansea Profile 2015). This also reflects trends of growth in the Bangladeshi community which has doubled (+94%) over the period 2001-2011 (Swansea Profile 2015). The amount of Pakistanis in Swansea, however, is less, so much so that any clear data of how many exactly is currently not available. The number of Pakistanis are instead included with other BAME people in the broader category of ‘Other Asian’, who count for around 1,739 (0.7%) of Swansea’s whole population (Swansea Profile 2015). I also conducted interviews with both the men and women Muslim members of staff aged between 25-40. The interviews with staff consisted of three with men (all Bangladeshi heritage), and two with women (one Bangladeshi, one Pakistani heritage). The questions used in the focus groups and interviews were a mixture of open-ended and intermediate questions to uncover the values, beliefs, behaviours, relationships, places, encounters and stories which made up the interviewees lives. The extracts used here are those related specifically to when the interviewees reflected on their short-term mobilities between Wales and England, either for short visits to see their family in England, for day trips or for longer stays when some of the interviewees went to England to study for University.

## Moving between Wales and England

In both the novel *Border Country* and the essay *Culture Is Ordinary* written by the Welsh New-Left thinker Raymond Williams, the journey of returning home to Wales from England plays a decisive role in discussions of identity and belonging. In *Border Country*, as the protagonist Matthew Price reflects on the significance of the journey he makes from Oxford back to where he grew up in Wales, his final words state: ‘For the distance is measured, and that is what matters. By measuring the distance we come home’. Here Williams urges the reader to think about what home means, and how processes of mobility and return make people question their attachments to place. Although the protagonist in the book lives in England, so his trajectory is different to the interviewees in this research who live in Wales and spend far shorter periods of time in England, it is still useful because it helps understand *how* and *when* Wales becomes relevant to the biographies of the interviewees during processes of cross-border mobility.

As Marcu (2014) emphasises, to better analyse cross-border mobility, there needs to be an understanding of its effect on the people who practice it. When asked what made them identify with feeling particularly Welsh, mobility over the Welsh–English border was mentioned as significant in the construction of the interviewees sense of self, and was an immediate trajectory which confirmed a sense of belonging.

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| ***(Narrative 1)***  ***Researcher = So why did you write Welsh?***  *2 = For me it’s definitely the everyday lifestyle, and the people, you just know you’re Welsh, when we go somewhere else to England, I happily say I am Welsh*  *1 = Yeah that’s the only time you have to say it, when you go somewhere else, Wales is home*  ***(Focus Group Women, Number 1)*** |

Narrative 1 highlights the importance of cross-border mobility in creating situations in the interviewees lives where they ask themselves not only who they are, but where they are, and where they are from. Both the women confirm that Wales is home and when Interviewee two states that she‘just knows’she is Welsh, she reinforces this by stating that this sense of belonging is heightened when she is somewhere else other than Wales, particularly England. Interviewee one agrees and emphasises how Wales is home and that this is realised when she visits somewhere that isn’t Wales. Unlike International mobility, there is no border control between the four ‘home’ UK nations, which means moving between countries is not laden with the same formalities that come with entering a different country, such as having to show a passport. Due to this, it could be assumed that mobility from and to sub-state nations would be less formal and symbolic. Meaning, however, is given to sub-state national borders through the very act of moving between the two, which reveal the different spatialities of sub-national belonging and how they come into being (Paasi [2009](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17450101.2012.747775#CIT0039), Scuzzarello & Kinnvall 2013). In Narrative 1, the Welsh-English border is given legitimacy through the act of moving in-between it, which helps define who can be included within a Welsh narrative and who cannot. For the interviewees, this is highly important because this cross-border mobility reveals to them much about their identity and where they feel that they belong or as Marcu (2014) argues, understanding people’s emotional reactions when confronted with cross-border mobility helps to understand how identities are configured.

An emotional attachment to this cross-border trajectory was expressed by many of the interviewees as a typical marker as to why they feel they belong in Wales. In Narrative 2, when asked how his family came to live in Swansea from Bangladesh, interviewee three teases out these emotional attachments and the significance of crossing the border between Wales and England.

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| ***(Narrative 2)***  ***Researcher= So was Swansea the first place your family arrived?***  *Interviewee 3 = My dad had been here for years before we arrived, my granddad was here as well and worked and worked and worked and sent money back to Bangladesh, helped all his family members, distant family members, to help them out. Then around 87, 86 when he came here he worked in all sorts. The docks, the factories, in Yorkshire, Bradford, London Birmingham, all these cities, I’m not sure why he came to Swansea, but when we moved to Swansea I was really young but remember him saying this is now your home. After travelling around the UK, for some reason he chose Swansea and said this is your home, but now we love Wales, so we naturally love Swansea believe it or not. I have relatives all over the UK in Leicester and Bradford, and on the way back from visiting I can’t wait to get back home to Wales, you know on the M4 and just as you pass Bridgend and in the distance you can see the peak of the Mumbles, honestly it’s such a satisfying… it’s a great feeling, it’s amazing, just amazing.*  ***(Interviewee 3, Male)*** |

The circumstances at which interviewee three’s family came to Swansea reveal that his father had worked around the UK in many English cities before deciding to settle in Wales. It is by chance he was brought up in Wales, but his attachments to place which have developed since, emphasises that how he negotiates his sense of belonging is influenced by how and where he constructs what Wales means to him. When visiting his relatives in England, this cross-border mobility provides a moment when the sub-state national border matters, and reveals an opportunity for him to have agency over how he shapes his belonging to Wales. Thus, when in England he is able to define himself differently from his extended UK based family which gives him a sense of ownership over how he constructs his sense of self. This cross-border mobility becomes more than just a change of scenery and has an influential impact on how he maps his identity.

The return journey to Wales from England is used by interviewee three to describe his satisfaction of wanting to get back to the familiarity of Wales. The fact that he ‘can’t wait to get back’ emphasises how his sense of belonging is not something static but is something that is actively given meaning to through these mobilities. Anthony Cohen (in Bechhofer & McCrone 2009) calls this a ‘personal nationalism’ where interviewee three is seen as a ‘thinking self’. Thus, his mobility is used as a process in which he ‘does’ his sub-state national identity, in other words, how he thinks about himself, others, and who is included within the ‘us’ and ‘them’ as he mobilises across national and sub-state national borders (Bechhofer & McCrone 2009). This self-reflexive moment contributes to the creation of a plural sense of sub-state national identity, where the interviewee merges the numerous aspects of his diverse biography, to understand what Wales means to him, and compares himself with his family members living in England. Although they share the same ethnic heritage (Bangladesh) and religion (Islam), he has a specific attachment to Wales which is important to how he constructs his identity and where he feels he belongs, which through the cross-border mobility between Wales and England, is emphasised. Thinking about his cross-border mobility in this way gives him agency over where and when he calls the sub-state nation into existence within his life (Antonsich & Matejskova 2015), revealing the times and places it becomes salient.

*Symbols of Identity*

Narrative 2 also reveals how interviewee three uses symbolic landmarks to construct what home looks like to him, as he maps the return journey from England to Wales. The M4 motorway is used as an important symbol to understand his mobility over the Welsh-English border. Rather than being a ‘non-place’ or an abstraction of space (Merriman 2004, Roberts 2010), it is viewed as having symbolic social relations which shapes how he constructs what Wales means to him. Interviewee three also describes another Welsh town, Bridgend, and the ‘peak of the Mumbles’ which is the headland which surrounds Swansea Bay, to reveal the landmarks which make up his own personal geographies on the journey back to Wales. The description of his return from England emphasises how a sense of sub-national place is ingrained within his personal maps of familiarity, which are highlighted when he thinks about such cross-border mobilities. These guide how he thinks about return and how he defines what Wales means to him. Such cross-border mobility should not be taken for granted because it allows these emotions to be expressed, and gives agency to the interviewee over how he constructs his sense of belonging to Wales. Understanding this trajectory, therefore, highlights how exploring people’s cross-border mobilities reveal the moments where they make sense of their attachments to place (Marcu 2014), and how they construct their geographies of belonging which can be articulated through describing local and sub-national symbols and landmarks of familiarity.

Not only were these cross-border mobilites between Wales and England articulated through larger symbolic landmarks, but also through the description of everyday objects. These helped the interviewees navigate how they expressed their sense of belonging to Wales when visiting family members in England. In narrative 3, the reference to the taste of water becomes a point of discussion which gives agency to the interviewees over how they negotiate their belonging to Wales.

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| ***(Narrative 3)***  *4 = Even between family we have that little banter, as in your side of the family is English, outside of the family is Welsh we even have that, it makes you proud to feel Welsh*  *3 = Especially about Welsh Water and English water, whenever we go to England we always complain about their water*  ***(Focus Group Women, Number 3)*** |

Such exchanges when visiting their English family highlights how these cross-border mobilities emphasise the ways that sub-state national identity is given meaning to, or as interviewee four in Narrative 3 puts it, ‘it makes you proud to feel Welsh’. Water is used as an object to understand how when in England, they construct attachments of belonging to Wales. As Cusack (2003) argues, not only is what people eat important to their individual and collective identities, but also what they drink. Welsh water is used as an important symbol in constructing a sense of sub-state national othering which reveals how through the acts of taste, the human body becomes implicit in the imagining of sub-state national communities, and in the legitimation of national and sub-state national boundaries (Sluga 1998). How the nation and sub-state nation is talked about is bound in the consumption of food and drink, which often articulates very visual notions of inclusion and exclusion, and conjures up images of nationality, sub-state nationality and home (Blunt & Dowling 2006, Bell & Valentine 1997). This is expressed as a lived experience created and recreated through everyday practices, which is emphasised when the interviewees think about the social relations experienced due to their mobility between Wales and England.

Not only is Welsh water perceived as being different, but it is also perceived as being better, which gives them ownership over how their attachments to Wales are articulated.The mobility across the Welsh-English border thus emphasises to the interviewees that although their family in England share the same cultural ties to Bangladesh or Pakistan as they do, and the same religion, Islam, subtle differences can suggest that the place that they call home, has sub-state national implications which makes their perceptions of belonging different to that of their English family. These differences highlight how Wales is made relevant through everyday taken for granted objects rooted in specific places with differing social relations (Billig 1995), which reveal themselves through the process of mobility and return across national and sub-national borders (Marcu 2014, Urry 2000).

Accents were also mentioned as a symbol which helped the interviewees identify how their belonging to Wales is constructed when in England. Being noticed for having a Welsh accent is used as a relevant marker which separates the interviewees from their English family, and becomes a moment when being Welsh becomes relevant. This was elaborated further in the following Narrative.

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| ***(Narrative 4)***  ***Researcher = What about family in other parts of the UK, do you have family there?***  *2= Yeah especially in Birmingham and London, I have cousins from there*  *3 = Yeah there is Welsh English Banter, they can’t understand our accents, but some of the girls they love it, its pride they won’t admit our accent is better than theirs*  *4 = The Welsh accent is awesome*  *3 = My mate he went off to America recently and they all love his accent*  *4 = When you go to Birmingham they know where you’re from because how you sound*  ***(Focus Group Men, Number 1)*** |

In this exchange the Welsh accent is used as a tool that gives the interviewees agency over who they are, helps them construct how and when Wales is given meaning to, and highlights how unconscious, place specific, bodily dispositions such as accent are very important in how a sense of habitus is developed (Bourdieu 1977), which is particularly realised through their cross-border mobility between Wales and England. National and sub-state national accents can become very meaningful cues for categorisation (Rakic, Steffens & Mummendey 2010), and is an integral part of how the interviewees identified with Wales when in England. Acknowledging an accent and its location creates an ‘ideology of nativeness’ and a dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Dragojevic, Giles & Watson 2013) as their accents become badges of ‘authenticity’ which forms a part of how they identify as Welsh (Scully 2012).

These are moments within the interviewees lives which reveal which social relations matter to them and confirms where home is, Wales, and where it isn’t, England. What would otherwise be seen as unremarkable in their everyday lives back in Wales, when thinking about the effects of their cross-border mobility between Wales and England, the interviewees reveal how accents can become a symbol which marks them out as the ‘other’ I.e. not English. The accent, however, becomes a source of pride for the interviewees as they utilise this as something beneficial which makes them stand out as different. When asked about family members in other parts of the UK, interviewee three first mentions the inter-family ‘banter’ which occurs because of their Welshness. One thing that marks them out as different in these exchanges is their accents, but this is not viewed negatively, as he stresses that he believes their Welsh accent is better than his family in Birmingham. Interviewee four’s final comment in Narrative 4 summarises the simplicity of this when he mentions that when he visits Birmingham, people know where ‘you’re from’ because that’s ‘how you sound’. Such moments highlight how the interviewees attachments to Wales are given meaning to, when exactly it is identified with and how cross-border mobility with England emphasises its significance.

What this extract also reveals is that when spending time in England with their family, this can provide a space of reflection where their Welsh identity is not problematic to the extent it can be in Wales. Here, claiming to be Welsh is often uncontested by English family members and instead is targeted for ‘banter’. In these exchanges, being Welsh is unproblematic because it is uncontested. During a year of getting to know many of the clients and staff at EYST, many had expressed experiencing racism or Islamophobia at least once in their lives and had been targeted for being perceived as looking ‘out of place’ in Wales. However, when with family members in England, an opportunity for reflection is created where their Welsh identity can be utilised as a significant and unproblematic identity. Here, their claims to being Welsh are unchallenged. This further reinforces how these cross-border mobilities re-affirm a sense of belonging to Wales, but also highlights the complex and contradictory relationship that exist with how being Welsh in England and being Welsh in Wales can impact differently on how their identity is negotiated, depending on who they’re with and where they are.

Such interactions reveal the layers of racial and religious tension which exist at multiple geographic scales, and the complex negotiations of place and home within the interviewees lives. Visiting family in England provided a space of reflection for Welsh identity to be expressed without having their position and attachment to Wales being questioned. When discussing the role that inter-family ‘banter’ played in their relationships with their English family, these moments provided a space where they were singled out not because the colour of their skin or their religion, but because of their Welshness. Although they are outside of Wales, in these moments, they can feel particularly Welsh, even more so than those moments in Wales when they might experience racism or Islamophobia. In their study on the influences of feeling 'at home' among Muslim groups in Britain, Germany and Spain, Karlsen & Nazroo (2013: 703) argue that the main drivers for young Muslims who were unable to easily identify with the national identity of their country of birth, or found it difficult to call it ‘home’, was because they felt they had been socially excluded, rather than any lack of integration caused by ‘insularity’, ‘religious affiliation’ or ‘religious practices’ of these groups. This was a sentiment often expressed by the interviewees, that when they were targeted for abuse, it made them feel like they didn’t belong to Wales. Thus, although the cross-border mobility between Wales and England acts as a tool for them to clarify where they feel most comfortable calling home, it can also reveal the complex and contradictory relationships which are bound up in what home can mean. These exchanges therefore reveal the multiple ways that the interviewees can feel simultaneously *in* and *out* of place as they experience competing hegemonic discourses, depending on where they are. This highlights, how different aspects of people’s identities are perceived, is highly dependent on how dominant hegemonic structures transform and interpret them, which changes with mobility between differing geographic scales.

*The English Myth*

Another narrative that the interviewees mentioned when reflecting on their cross-border mobilities between Wales and England was how it accentuated a sub-state national myth that Welsh people are accepting and friendly, whereas English people aren’t. A (sub-state) national myth is a narrative which shapes how people define themselves in national or sub-state national terms which although not verifiable, still holds power over how one imagines themselves within a national or sub-state national community (Smith 1999). In the UK, it has been highlighted when identifying with Scottishness, Scottish people acknowledge themselves as being friendlier and more hospitable than those from England (Bechhofer & McCrone 2009,2013, Haesly 2005). Such national and sub-state national assumptions are utilised by most nations and sub-state nations when comparing their sense of identity with bordering countries, and are used in the process of othering which confirms a sense of self, and was no different for Welsh Muslims. The cross-border mobility between Wales and England created opportunities to think about what belonging to Wales meant through comparisons with people in England, which helped delineate who they are and who they are not. This highlights how national and sub-state national identity relies on how people compare themselves sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly with others (Bechhofer & McCrone 2009,2013), which is accentuated through cross-border mobility.

This feeling is explored further in *Border Country* where the protagonist Matthew Price compares his own journey back to Wales and argues that ‘You don’t speak to people in London… in fact you don’t speak to people anywhere in England; there is plenty of time for that sort of thing on the appointed occasions – in an office, in a seminar, at a party’ (Williams 2006: 3). Throughout the novel, Williams makes this comparison in some form or another where Wales is portrayed as the familiar and personal, and England is the unfamiliar and distant. This was expressed by many of the interviewees when describing their experiences of their cross-border mobilities between Wales and England. Their visits between the two countries made them reflect on why they thought Welsh people were friendly, with Wales being described as a tranquil and peaceful place, whilst English people were described as unfriendly and England a more hectic and busier place to live.

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| --- |
| ***(Narrative 5)***  *Interviewee 2 = I went to England to University…. it was the first time I realised you know what I was quite Welsh, because I didn’t understand people’s accents, I felt different, I felt a real difference in people, and I thought you know, living in Wales, Welsh people are a lot more softer, more loving, more comforting, have more time for you. Whether it was where I lived I don’t know, and I went to a bigger city, Bristol, I felt people don’t have time for you. People don’t get to know you, maybe I was a student so it’s a different field, in part of my life, but nevertheless, you know, for me whenever I crossed the Severn bridge I felt I was at home, this is home. And even after my degree there was no way I was gonna stay in England, I decided I am more Welsh than anything else, so I had to come back to Swansea, and I settled here, and after that I’ve had many opportunities to move out of Wales, but I would never. I don’t feel I fit in in England, even though there are places in England where there are a lot of ethnic minorities, there is a lot of Muslims, but for me I go there as a tourist, that’s not who I am. I feel I belong here. In fact, there are parts of London for example, like I go with my children sometimes to Southhall, and we find it very uncomfortable, we do not belong there.*  ***(Interviewee 2, Woman)*** |

Narrative 5 emphasises how Interviewee two’s cross-border mobility marks the moments when she uses the English myth to help clarify what being Welsh means to her. After her experience of going to University in England, she emphasises how when she was there, she felt ‘different’. The reason for this was because she felt she couldn’t relate to the people in England because she believes Welsh people are ‘softer’, ‘more loving’ and more ‘comforting’. Here she invokes a sub-state national myth which reinforces her sense of belonging to Wales, and was important for her in making the decision to move back to live there. The fact that she feels more accepted amongst Welsh people impacts on how she constructs what Wales means to her. Her Welsh identity is not something static which she has no control over, rather, it is something that she has an active role in shaping and understanding through her social relations. Mobilising between Wales and England gave her the opportunity to compare life in both countries in a self-reflexive negotiation of her own sub-state national identity, where she re-creates her relationships with Wales from the bottom up. When reflecting on her cross-border mobility, it confirmed to her that she wasn’t English and that she was ‘more Welsh than anything else’.

Similar to interviewee three in Narrative 2, the process of returning home to Wales from England is used to reinforce why interviewee two calls Wales home. When describing her journeys from University in England back to Wales, she uses symbolic markers to express the effect those moments had on her. The description of the Severn Bridge is particularly important. This is a tangible marker which separates Wales and England and defines the border. For interviewee two, crossing it becomes emotionally symbolic as she develops a spatialised understanding of home and place. This trajectory made her invoke memories of past and future homes, displaying how her geographies of belonging are shaped through her departure and return to Wales from England (Blunt & Dowling 2006, Fallov, Jørgensen, & Knudsen 2013). This confirmed to her why she wanted to settle back in Wales after University, and why she felt as though she belonged.

This again highlights another complex contradiction in her and many of the interviewees relationship with Wales. Even though when in Wales she, and all the participants in my research, have experienced and still do experience racism and Islamophobia, because she has grown up there and is familiar with it, she still maintains that Wales is far friendlier than England and therefore she couldn’t imagine living anywhere else. Thus, the personal geographies of her identity are embedded in the familiar and stable even though at times she can be made to feel ‘out of place’ because of her religion or the colour of her skin, when back in Wales.

Thinking about her cross-border mobility gives her agency over how she shapes her sub-state national identity so that rather than accepting the narrative handed down to her, she plays an active role in how her belonging to Wales is continuously being reconstructed to reflect her own diverse biography. In the final sentences of Narrative 5, interviewee two further reflects on how such cross-border mobilities make her think about her attachment to Wales, by stating that even when she visits places in England such as Southall where she states ‘there is a lot of Muslims’, she feels as though she does not belong. When thinking about her cross-border mobility, she stresses not only can it have a profound effect on her attachments to sub-national imaginings, but also to religious ones, as she states how being a Muslim varies in different places. For her, being a Muslim in London would be very difficult as she feels she wouldn’t be able to be ‘who I am’. By arguing that she ‘belongs here’ in Wales, she stresses how place can have a profound effect in understanding how identities are formed, conveyed, read and performed (Hopkins 2010). Although being a Muslim is her prime identity, her Islam is shaped by the place and surroundings that she grew up in. By stating that she would find it difficult to be a Muslim elsewhere, she highlights the emotional pull of home and the sub-state national implications which are bound with it. Thus, how she is a Muslim is not only dependent on her faith, but is dependent on other aspects of her identity, such as her attachment to place, which are always in a state of negotiation and compromise, and are particularly emphasised during times of mobility.

This use of the sub-state national myth by the interviewees therefore helped them create an affiliation to Wales which belonged to them, which they had control over. This was often described through collective forms of identifications, where the interviewees would refer to Wales using the term ‘us’, in opposition to the English often described through the term ‘them’. Thus, the interviewees described this mobility as legitimising their Welshness by creating feelings of disconnect with England which highlight how the construction of identity often relies on the existence of an ‘other’, as there is always a perceived sense of difference to attach to an out-group to help solidify a sense of belonging to the in-group (Kuzio 2001,2002).

## Conclusion: From Home to There and Back Again

In this article, I have discussed the importance of viewing cross-border mobility back and forth between two countries as a tool to highlight moments where and when individuals give meaning to certain aspects of their identities. By exploring what the cross-border mobilities between Wales and England means to Welsh Muslims, I have revealed the moments where Welsh identity becomes salient in their lives. Although the interviewees all identify as Muslims, by exploring the various power geographies that inﬂuence their registers of home, I have highlighted that none identify *only* as Muslims or British Muslims, as their mobilities revealed the spatial relationships which define who they are, where they feel they belong to and where they call home. Understanding these cross-border mobilities reveal *where* and *when* Welsh identity is made meaningful, and the processes which contribute to this understanding. In other words, when discussing Muslim identity, scale matters.

Who is felt to belong and not to belong within the national and sub-national narrative contributes to the shaping of place and social space (Sibley 1995), and measuring how Welsh Muslims negotiate their sense of belonging to Wales, reveals how their identities are not only shaped by place, but by them claiming Wales as theirs, they are re-shaping what a sense of Welsh place can look like. Through describing how these mobilities affect their personal geographies, this article has revealed moments when Wales becomes relevant within Welsh Muslims lives, and how they have agency over how they give meaning to what place means to them. By doing so, it is a contribution towards understanding the re-making of the nation in an era of diversity, and advocates that through exploring the normal and everyday ways that ethnic and religious minorities interpret and claim the nation as theirs, this furthers the dialogue which considers diverse identities *within* the national and sub-national imagining, rather than outside of it. As I have also discussed, racism and Islamophobia can also provide moments within the interviewees lives where they feel they don’t belong in Wales and is also an important avenue for further research, but by concentrating on the more positive aspects of nationalism (Abulof 2015), this article is a move away from the assumption that diversity and the nation are mutually exclusive, and a step towards including ethnic and religious minorities within the national “we” to understand how the scale of the nation can be mobilised as a tool for cross-diversity solidarity.

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