

# **Changing narratives of minority peoples' identities in Welsh and Basque film.**

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**Abstract:**

This thesis discusses how changing narratives of Welsh and Basque identity have been represented in film. It builds on Higson's (1989) notion of 'heritage film', and ideas derived from postcolonial theory to develop a threefold system of classification. It develops an argument that narratives of identity have shifted from long-standing 'traditional' essentialist versions centred on heteropatriarchy and collective, stable narratives of identity; through a transitional stage featuring the reversal of dualisms on which the 'traditional' is grounded and narratives based much more on the individual and connected to a crisis in masculinity; to a stage that transcends these dualisms through featuring ambiguous narratives of multiple selves and characters caught between fractured selves and global currents. Films are thus classified according to the degree that they may preserve, reverse or transcend traditional narratives of identities. Analysis focuses on elements such as the representation of minority nationhood, rural and urban landscapes, character, religion, gendered familial and social roles, aspects of community, cultural heritage, resistance and stories about sameness and difference, continuity and discontinuity, charting how these alter to shape new narratives of identities. It describes how films over the period from the 1930s to the present document the impact of politics and wider social changes and trends on Basque and Welsh peoples, for instance the impacts of Thatcherism and in the case of the Basques, the Civil War, Franco's regime and post Franco democracy. This threefold system of classification is used to structure the chapters of this thesis. By comparing and contrasting Welsh and Basque films, this thesis identifies common themes that may be evident in film narratives of other minority peoples' cultures and identities.

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## **Volume One**

# Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis arises from my own interest in and curiosity about Welsh identity. As a woman, a farmer, a regular steward at the Royal Welsh Show, as someone keenly interested for decades in culture, film and the National Eisteddfod, I have become aware of an often informal hierarchy of Welshness within which I have tended to be located below others who otherwise would seem to have no greater claim to Welshness than my own. I have also become aware of how the Basque Country is often looked to within Wales as an example of how Wales should or could develop itself further. However, my interest in the Basque Country dates back to a school visit in 1960 to San Sebastian.

This thesis is therefore concerned with changing narratives of identity in minority nation film, using the examples of Welsh and Basque identity. Terms like ‘minority’ and ‘majority’, and ‘dominant’ and ‘subordinate’ are imprecise, merely a convenient shorthand for what are always contested and fluid power relations. ‘Nation’ is imprecise, for instance the Basque Country can be described as a system of provinces located on the coast of the Bay of Biscay, extending either side of the Pyrenees mountains into the separate nations (and states) of Spain and France. It includes within the boundaries of Spain the Autonomous Basque Community established in 1979 and made up of three provinces (Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Álava), plus the separate autonomous region of Navarra. There are also three provinces in France (Basse Navarre, Labourd and Soule). Wales could be described as a single province located on the western margin of the British mainland.

However, Anderson (1991) has proposed that ‘the nation’ is an imagined political community, as distinct from the kinds of institutional characteristics discussed by authors such as Mar-Molinero (2000). According to Anderson ideas of nationalism construct ‘bounded communities’ with a sense of ‘a deep horizontal comradeship’, which may be centred on notions of race, language, religion, culture, history and tradition. Film is one way through which nation may be imagined.

‘Minorities’ are those who are somehow not in a majority in a particular social and political system. ‘Politically, ‘minorities’ are groups or even societies that somehow have a set of common interests and beliefs. They are thought of usually as having a permanence, or at least a very long-term existence’ (Robertson 2004: 314). However, the term ‘minority nation’ is often used to refer to ‘...communities so well established that they can be properly regarded as the historic occupants of the territories in which they live, whose language is certainly not the official language of any state’ (Stephens, 1976: xiii). These are socio-cultural groupings that share the common experience of dominance and subordination by an external, politically greater state that has sought to subsume their territory and absorb their distinctive culture.

This thesis discusses an analysis of films covering the period 1940 to the present. This does not include detailed consideration of issues relating to language, production or distribution. Each of these could easily be the subject of separate research projects. An analysis that incorporated a focus on language would demand linguistic skills that as a research I lack, plus sensitivity to both Welsh and Basque regional dialects and differences, and historical linguistic and social change in ways that are beyond the scope of this research. Focusing on these kinds of issues would vastly reduce the breadth of film that this research considers. So instead, this analysis focuses on the depiction on screen of elements including characters, plots, family structures, everyday life, place, communities, morality, religion, culture, and power in a total of 123 individual films. Since issues of power are often connected to these elements of representation and textual cultural construction (as highlighted in the works of authors such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Frederic Jameson, and Edward Said, whose ideas are discussed in various parts of this thesis), they are also a focus.

This research adopts a cross cultural approach, to investigate changes in the depiction of these elements in film from Wales and the Basque Country, in order to develop an understanding and conceptualisation potentially applicable to a variety of different minority nations. Wales since this is my own personal grounding, and Basque for the following reasons. It has a significantly different history to Wales, which includes civil war and the traumatic effect of Franco’s long dictatorship. The Basque country also has a more post-industrial development. Yet the two also share some similarities, for instance in terms of the economic and cultural significance of rural landscape, mountains, and cultural events. They

also share a recent history in which the question of independence has been central. This has found expression in cinema.

This chapter outlines the structure of this thesis, discusses key terms and concepts, key research questions and areas of investigation, and the selection of films. It introduces a new system for the classification of films from minority nations developed during this research, and describes how this system links with the theorisation of identity. Collapsing distinctions between documentaries and features, this threefold system of classification highlights differences in narratives of identity and power relations.

In following chapters, films are classified according to the extent to which they cohere with, reverse, or transcend elements on which traditional minority nation narratives of identity tend to be based. The three categories of this system of classification are named as ‘Preserved’, ‘Reversal’ and ‘postnational’. Using a lower case ‘p’ for postnational is not intended to suggest that ideas of national identity are redundant or no longer significant (which perhaps would be postnational with a capital ‘P’), but that in this class of films they have become pluralised and are distinctly different. This three-fold system is demonstrated through its application to case studies, providing a template that could be applied to other minority nations, or to cultural forms other than film.

## **Research Aims: highlighting changes in narratives of identity**

Narratives of identity arise from the experiences and aspirations of minority peoples, but simultaneously play a role in shaping how these are made sense of, which is why understanding these narratives is so important. The chief research aims from the outset were to investigate changes in the way that Welsh and Basque people have been presented on screen, and to develop a coherent theoretical framework for these changes. This in turn entailed investigating the changing elements from which narratives of minority identity are constructed, and a consideration of connections between versions of minority identity and power. For instance these changes in power relations are evident in different stages of a minority nation’s relationship with an external, dominant power (e.g. from subjugation and oppression towards autonomy), changing gender relations, and increasing recognition of

multiplicity within narratives of minority national identity (a shift from a singular, monolithic and essentialised notion of national *identity* to a plurality of national *identities*).

To some extent, other commentators on minority nation film have acknowledged these kinds of links between changes in narratives of identity and wider shifts in socio-political and economic contexts (e.g. Marshall 2001, Martin-Jones 2009).

As analysis of films progressed, the research aims were refined and amended accordingly. It soon became apparent that changing representations of identity were often linked to changes in representations of the relationships between landscape and characters. For instance as later chapters will discuss in detail, these range across miners and farmers living collectively in harmony with the rural land, through social delinquents and the unemployed within urban decay, to individuals struggling within discordant landscapes. The theoretical framework thus had to take this into consideration, and the research aims were amended accordingly. This research also aimed to further assess links between change in narratives of identity and changes in the political, economic, social and cultural circumstances of minority nations. The aim in developing a way of analysing, classifying and theorising these narratives was to develop a system that might be effective enough to apply across different minority nations, but simultaneously sensitive enough to highlight significant differences across different nations and different films.

## **Previous approaches to culture and identity**

Two sets of writings in particular are self-evidently relevant to the research aims. These are a threefold perspective on minority culture developed by Raymond Williams (1921 -1988) in his work on literary narrative analysis, and Manuel Castells' (1942 - ) writings on minority identities.

### **Raymond Williams**

Set out in *The Long Revolution* (1961), *Marxism & Literature* (1977), and *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (1980), Williams' threefold classification of

culture comprises 'Dominant', 'Residual', and 'Emergent'. 'Dominant culture, is always passed off as 'the tradition', 'the significant past', [it is] built into our living' (Williams 1980: 39). This is contrasted with 'residual', which he defined in this way:

'I mean experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue - cultural as well as social – of some previous social formation.' (Williams 1980: 40).

This sense of something built into the contemporary everyday means that the residual contrasts with the merely archaic, or that which definitely belongs to the past but which may be subject to revival. The residual 'has effectively been formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element in the present' (1977: 122). Yet at the same time Williams explained that 'a residual culture is usually at some distance from the effective dominant culture' (1980: 41). He used the example of 'the rural community' to illustrate how the residual could have 'an alternative or even oppositional relation to dominant culture'. He argued that rural communities were residual in the sense of formed in the past, but could be regarded as oppositional to urban industrial capitalism, even though 'the rural' is a component of dominant culture as an idealised or even 'exotic' leisure landscape.

This is one way of conceptualising Welsh and Basque culture. Elements such as language, heritage, history, and other aspects of social culture carried over from times 'pre-colonisation' or pre-subordination to dominant external rule are built into some everyday lives. These 'residual' elements were suppressed during the era of direct external rule, and therefore were reconstituted as acts of resistance to a state culture imposed externally. Yet simultaneously, they were reconstituted and incorporated within the dominant state culture as a means of justifying external rule; for instance a view that Welsh people are 'twp' [slow, dim], drink, make good soldiers, but actually 'need' management by the English in the form of mine owners and landlords or the Anglican church, or that Basques 'need' leadership by a Catholic church seen by some as 'Spanish', and policing by the Civil Guard. However, it has been argued that this notion of residual highlights a conservative, reactionary attitude towards

change (e.g. Bala 2005: 239). Williams played down how this kind of residual culture could be used to enact political resistance.

‘Emergent’ was characterised by Williams (1977) as seemingly new values, meanings, practices and relationships in culture, that are continually being created. But he argued that it was extremely difficult to separate out what might truly be emergent from what might simply be new phases of the dominant. The dominant is always shifting, changing, and exhibiting new forms and processes. Williams summarised the distinction as between the merely novel and that which is ‘substantially alternative or oppositional’ (1977: 123).

Williams’ work is useful because it highlights the differences, and the difficulties of distinguishing between these, between cultural elements as linked to cultural change and relations between dominant and subordinate. However, it is quite clearly a product of its time, developed primarily for the analysis of literature rather than film. Williams also did not have minority nation experiences, or relations between minority nation and dominant ruler directly in mind. Instead, he was much more concerned with socio-economics from a Marxist perspective, social class, British culture in general, and he neglected aspects such as gender.

## **Manuel Castells**

This is in contrast to Manuel Castells’ threefold categorisation of identities set out in *The Power of Identity* (Castells 1996: 8 – 10). He proposes three different forms of identity, as follows.

### **‘Legitimising identities’**

These function to rationalise sources of structural domination, they prop up existing social and cultural hegemony via fixed, stable notions of dominant and subordinate. The possibility of in some way transcending this simple perspective on minority nation/external ruler relations is never really expressed. Narratives of identity both cohere with and reproduce this power relationship. For example, as the following chapters will discuss, a focus on icons such



as the Welsh farmer, poet, miner or soldier, and portraying these as stout, ‘soulful’, but crucially knowing their place can be seen to legitimate English rule. Castells argues that these legitimising identities come to be internalised by the subordinate, and so this links with Gramsci’s concept of hegemony (Hoare 2005: 245), and the idea that through internalisation the rule of the dominant comes to be ‘common sense’. So legitimising identities rationalise sources of structural domination, they make external rule ‘make sense’.

### **‘Identities for resistance’**

Forms of collective resistance to internalised domination are constructed along with ‘identities for resistance’. Castells characterised these as usually constructed via historical, geographical, and biological discourses. These work to essentialise ethnically based versions of nationalism. So, for example, a combination of historical, geographical and biological ‘evidence’ is often used to construct ‘Basque’ as a rational and ‘racial’ category distinct from French or Spanish or any other identity. Such identities are constructed in resistance to what is regarded as unbearable oppression – they draw together a people (biologically essentialised as a ‘pure’ race) to attempt to overthrow a de-legitimised external ruler.

In this sense resistance to external rule makes for authentic Basque/Welsh identity, and this narrative shapes celebrations of minority identity and cultural heritage (for instance as evident in film documentaries). Identities of resistance tend to construct minority identities as somehow ‘better’ and/or ‘more authentic’ than the identities available to members of the dominant. They also tend to reverse the kind of negative racial discourses used by the dominant mentioned above that legitimate their rule of the subordinate. Identities for resistance are thus closely connected with the postcolonial projects of reclaiming and retelling of history (e.g. Said 1994), and the enactment of political resistance through the subordinate’s view of themselves as compared to versions of the subordinate authored by the dominant. So narratives of identity may be expected to include ‘martyrs of resistance’ and the re-presentation of history from the perspectives of the subordinate. But this category of identity has limited value in terms of analysis of minority nation film. It does not allow for different kinds of resistance in different social contexts. For instance in Wales the Rebecca rioters of the nineteenth century were freedom fighters, as were members of ETA in the

Basque country to some in the 1960s. However, ETA's taste for direct, violent action is far less popular amongst Basques at present, and it is likely that Welsh responses to something like the Rebecca riots might be quite different in the context of today's Wales, with a National Assembly in Cardiff. It is notoriously difficult to define and classify those acts that may be resistance from those that may not.

### **'Project identity'**

'Project identity' produces meanings through which individuals achieve a more universal understanding of their experiences in the interplay of global and local, independently from more traditional notions of identity. This is usually as a part of a project, the purposeful transformation of society, and thus linked to wider changes in society. An example Castells cites is the category 'feminist', which can unite women from all over the world in a universal struggle against patriarchal domination that transcends things like national borders and different ethnic identities. This links with the notion of the subversive or postnational being fundamentally associated with identities and social relations that are simultaneously local and global, but which no longer seem to have a clear existence or relevance at the level of the national or regional. In terms of collective or communal identities, the idea of 'project identities' acknowledges a shift from the significance of face-to-face interaction and geographical proximity in constructing these to the idea that collective and communal identities may be forged at transnational and global levels using 'remote' modern communications technologies. Thus notions of a 'Celtic Fringe', or of a truly international category of 'minority nation' become a possibility, in the same way that other minorities or subordinated coalitions, for instance such as those defined by gender, sexuality, or environmentalism have become more vocal and more powerful through uniting across national boundaries. Thus, 'project identities' can be linked with the emergence of a postnational social and cultural landscape.

But 'project identity' does not capture what seems to be a simultaneous 'ballooning' of identity from the more locally defined collective to above the level of the nation, yet shrinking of identity downwards from 'the local' to below the level of the self. Additionally,

it does not allow for how identities like Welsh and Basque may combine elements of his notions of 'identities for resistance' and 'project identities', as through the enactment of resistance, individuals may come to both shape and understand their place within more global cultures.

Although more closely concerned with identities and power than Williams, Castells' work is still not very suitable for the analysis of narratives of minority identity in film. For instance, his notions of legitimising identities and identities for resistance are linked closely through being associated with the opposing sides of a dualism. On one side are the narratives of the dominant that see the subordinate as inferior and incapable of self rule, and portray the dominant as a kind, benevolent parent figure nurturing a wayward child. These kinds of narratives are further supported by their internalisation by the subordinate, who may then produce their own versions of the same basic, hegemonic narrative. On the other side of the dualism are subordinate narratives of resistance that are critical of the legitimacy of the rule of the dominant, for instance portraying this as exploitative, oppressive and evil. These narratives of the subordinate portray the subordinate as capable and deserving of autonomy, and morally as 'victims' of the dominant.

Castells' system is unsuitable because Reversal reverses not just the dualisms on which rule by the dominant is based and legitimised. It also reverses other dualisms on which the subordinate's view of themselves is based. This is not just the internalised narratives of the dominant, but also aspects of older narratives on which long standing and supposedly 'authentic' versions of minority identity are based, for instance those connected with gender, religion and notions of 'community'. So neither Williams's nor Castells's approaches would seem to adequately address how the (re)construction of Welshness or Basqueness as a minority national identity is bound up with patriarchy, for instance.

Others have of course found these authors useful, for instance Roger Owen (2003) uses Castells' system in his discussion of Welsh identity and drama companies, a different project to this one. Postnational narratives are like Castells' notion of 'project identities', since they construct identities more at the level of the individual and move away from the dualisms and

monolithic collective narratives of more traditional notions of identity. Instead, it may seem that individuals think and act within complex moral frameworks, unmotivated by collective belonging, and unencumbered by previously held notions of nation and national identity.

In contrast, Williams is unhelpful when it comes to Postnationalism because his work drives against globalisation, despite his Marxist approach focusing on relations between a universal working class and their oppressors. Typical of left wing thinking of his time, Williams does not approach 'dominance' in the context of emerging global cultures and what is sometimes referred to as 'transculturalism', or the complex interplay between cultures in contact with each other. But an important idea derived from Williams is that it is difficult to say whether new forms of identity are actually 'subversive', or whether they are merely a part of a changing form of the dominant.

The works of Williams and Castells prompted ideas of how to conceptualise the products of analysis of films. Other authors were also influential, for instance Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) work on gender and performance, and Frederic Jameson's (1991, 1992) on postmodernism. The discussion of Welsh and Basque films in the analytical chapters that follow also reviews and references a variety of literature, ranging from Derrida to Maria Pilar Rodríguez's (2002, 2009) work on Basque film. This breadth is because of the lack of available writing on Welsh and Basque film. The literature on Basque cinema tends to focus on directors, and much of it is only available in Spanish. Welsh film tends to have been more generally neglected, except for Berry's (e.g. 1994) work on its history. For example, Petrie & Hjort's (2007) edited collection of writings on minority nation film ignores Welsh and Basque film in a section on Europe that discusses films from 5 other minority nations.

Other authors have focused on films from a single minority nation, and have structured their analysis around the kinds of shifts in wider contexts mentioned earlier (e.g. Marshall 2001) or around film genre (e.g. Martin-Jones 2009). However, in terms of addressing changing narratives of identity these approaches seem to produce fragmentary and singular stories. They seem to take already pre-determined and pre-examined systems of classification based around characteristics such as setting, plot, characterisation, and year of production and to

focus on infrastructure whilst lacking a coherent system of analysis. The advantage of this can be providing readers with already understood and familiar categories; however it does mean that films are not immediately presented in terms of different narratives of identity. It also does not provide for direct comparison across films from different minority nations in order to move towards a theoretical framework that may be applicable across a variety of minority nation cinemas. These are weaknesses that this thesis aims to address. But before moving on to discuss the analysis of films, it is important to clarify some methodological issues.

## **Methodology: selecting films for inclusion in this research**

Various authors and commentators have discussed different selections of Welsh and Basque films, dependent on their own purposes, and my selections were guided by these. For instance a list of 24 films compiled by Dave Berry in 2005 (arguably the prime commentator and archivist of Welsh cinema and film) assisted in identifying films considered to be amongst the most significant in the history of Welsh film. Berry's *Wales and Cinema: The First Hundred Years* (1994) has been described as the most 'tremendously useful and important historical work (Blandford 2000: 21), his work in general on Welsh film as 'monumental' and 'pioneering and very important' (Woodward 2006: 158).

Berry's list was composed for the opening of a new 100 seat auditorium at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. The public were invited to vote for 'a classic film from Wales' from this list. Significantly, even though the size of this new facility is small, the auditorium is not dedicated to film alone but used for a variety of other purposes connected with Welsh arts and culture. This gives some indication of the expected appeal of screenings of 'home' produced film, and of the relatively tiny size of the possible market within Wales for Welsh film.

Of twenty four films in Berry's list, twenty two are discussed in this thesis. The list illustrates some significant issues surrounding the identification and classification of minority nation film. It includes both features and documentaries. The earliest film is *Proud Valley* (1940:

Penrose Tennyson), the most recent *Dal: Yma / Nawr / Still Here / Now* (2003: Marc Evans). It encompasses one short *David* (1951: Paul Dickson), two films that achieved mass popularity in *How Green Was My Valley* (1941: John Ford) and *Zulu* (1964: Cy Enfield), but the majority have not achieved the kind of audiences of these two films. Ten films were made in the Welsh language, and four were arguably made primarily for audiences outside Wales. These are the two major productions mentioned above plus *Only Two Can Play* (1962: Sidney Gilliat) and *Tiger Bay* (1959: J Lee Thompson). The list includes films that were variously not made in Wales, feature no Welsh actors amongst the leads, were not made by Welsh directors, nor financed within Wales. This illustrates some of the complexities of film classification, since films may qualify as being 'Welsh' for a variety of reasons.

A programme of films selected by Rob Stone for a festival of Basque film at the National Film Theatre in London in 2004 was also a starting point. Stone is the author of several publications in English on Spanish and Basque film. There are twenty films in Stone's list, 18 of these are discussed in this thesis. The list encompasses films made in Euskara (the Basque language), travelogue made in English for audiences outside the Basque country, and films made by non-Basque production teams.

There are dangers in being too reliant on lists of films such as these. Those compiled by individuals are heavily subject to individual preferences. Therefore my attention was drawn to films that repeatedly featured in the writings of others. But I also found personal conversations with others familiar with films from the minority nations useful. These individuals included the Welsh film maker Marc Evans.

Organisations such as the Mercator Project (University of Wales Aberystwyth) were also useful. Mercator aims to encourage interest in the minority languages of Europe, and a network of contacts developed from this, such as with the Department of Audio-Visual Communications at The University of the Basque Country in Bilbao. Understanding minority nation film perhaps requires understanding of the dominant mainstream (e.g. in the case of Basque film to first have some understanding of Spanish film). This may be especially so in the case of cross-cultural research. The film archive in San Sebastian run by the Basque

Department of Culture, and the Film and Sound Archive at the National Library of Wales were also useful sources in this respect.

It was not difficult gaining access to films produced and released in other countries via the internet from on-line stores such as Movie-mail and Amazon. This is an indicator of how minority film is becoming increasingly readily available to potentially international audiences via new kinds of technologies and forms of distribution.

Distinctions between documentary and feature films are notoriously problematic and have been the focus of sustained attention within film studies. This analysis seeks to avoid the potential trap of regarding any film as presenting a 'truer' representation of identities. Distinctions between feature and documentary are unclear since features may adopt a documentary style [e.g. *Tasio* (1984: Montxo Armendáriz)] and documentaries may adopt characteristics more associated with features [e.g. *La pelota vasca. La piel contra la piedra/The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone* (2003: Julio Medem)].

From the outset pragmatic distinctions between feature and documentary are of course not clear cut, and considering the two in isolation from each other may be less than helpful. The documentaries discussed in this dissertation comprise imaginings and (re)presentations of their subjects on the part of documentary makers.

## **Methodology: textual analysis**

Initial analysis began with focusing on the elements listed previously, looking at similarities and differences between how these are portrayed in different films. It soon became clear that different groups of films portrayed these elements in different ways. Some films seemed to quite clearly re-circulate longstanding stereotypes or stock characters, such as the Basque farmer and the Welsh miner. Others seemed to critique these stereotypes, often by reversing elements such as gendered roles, or by placing those marginalised in relation to national stereotypes at centre stage. But other films seemed to bypass these stereotypes completely, in

many cases it was not immediately obvious what might be distinctively Basque or Welsh about them. From these early beginnings, a threefold system of classification evolved and was refined.

This process drew on aspects of my own experiences of living in rural communities in Wales, of what it is like to be a member of a subject people, of issues surrounding family, inheritance, religion, arts and crafts, generational change and cultural expression.

Interpretations of the social significance of events and characters started from my own personal awareness, but became more informed as analysis progressed, and as the threefold conceptual framework was developed more fully. No rigid system of film analysis was employed. Each film presented different characteristics and had its own unique set of significances.

There are several important issues related to cross-cultural research that are directly relevant to the interpretation of film. These issues go beyond the general points discussed by authors such as Peters (1980), Seale (2004), Bryman (2004), and Neuman (2006). For example, I regarded conducting an analysis of Welsh films set in the valleys of South Wales as cross-cultural research since Welsh culture is fragmented and takes on distinctive elements depending on place, class, urban/rural differences and a host of other variables. Gaining understanding and insight into life in South Wales helped in doing the same for the industrial and post-industrial lives depicted in films set in Bilbao. At the same time, my own grounding in West Wales rural/agricultural life helped in appreciating films set in similar landscapes in the Basque country.

## **A threefold system of classification**

Having taken film as the primary source, as opposed to literature, poetry, art or drama, initial analysis focused on the elements mentioned previously. Immediately, it would seem reasonable to assume that as a given minority nation moves through different stages in terms of its relationship with an external, dominant power (for instance from subjugation and oppression through a movement towards autonomy to the granting of some form or aspect of independence), so might the stories that the people of this nation tell themselves and others



about themselves alter. Thus differences in narratives of identity would seem to be closely associated with changing political, economic and social conditions. But as many commentators have pointed out since Marx proposed his base – superstructure model, the economic, political, social and cultural are interdependent aspects of human societies, with none of these in particular playing a clearly prime role in shaping the others. So, these narratives of identity are best thought of as not simply being shaped by changing aspects of minority nationhood, but as being intimately bound up with both being shaped by and simultaneously shaping these aspects. Narratives of identity thus come to arise from the experiences of minority peoples, but simultaneously play a role in shaping how these experiences are made sense of. Narratives of identity may also be seen to both shape and be shaped by the aspirations of minority people. But what makes these narratives identifiable in the first instance is a historical sense of shared, collective identity. Identity thus seems to begin with shared collectivity, but just as human societies are never totally static and cultures are always subject to development and change, it makes sense to regard narratives of identity as similarly dynamic. The task of classification thus becomes one of identifying aspects of change that may seem most significant, and that may seem to be linked to a practical usefulness in terms of increasing understanding of how power operates in human societies.

In terms of systems of classification and analysis in general, simplicity is a key requirement. Complexity tends to be the enemy of comprehension and practical usefulness, and the more detailed a system of classification, the less applicable it may be to different kinds of context. Thus the aim in developing a way of analysing, classifying and theorising minority nation film was to develop a system that might be simple enough to be possibly applicable across many different minority nations, but simultaneously sensitive enough to highlight significant differences between narratives of identity as these vary across different nations and different films.

It followed that a system of assessment of films had to be developed, which categorised these in terms of the extent to which they cohere with, diverge from or transcend long standing, traditional narratives of identity. Therefore a threefold system of film classification was developed, and analysis led to the classifications rather than vice versa. Assessment of representations of gender in particular helped to shape this system of analysis. The first two

categories, Preserved and Reversal, actually comprise a dualism. Preserved includes elements closely associated with longstanding, traditional notions of nation and national culture. The first stage in deconstruction is the reversal of the two components of a dualism, hence the use of the label Reversal in the second of the three categories. The third category, postnational, groups together narratives of identity that seem to transcend the original dualism, and include what has sometimes been referred to as elements of postnational cultures.

This threefold system of classification does not represent a simple linear progression through contiguous stages, the categories may overlap each other temporally and otherwise. A single film may be regarded as containing elements that fit with all three categories, and may therefore be placed within more than one of the three categories (e.g. *Solomon a Gaenor* (1999: Paul Morrison), *Vacas/ Cows* (1991: Julio Medem)) and neither does this system represent a simple linear progression through time. Some films classed in Preserved, the first of the three categories, have been made and released more recently than films that reverse or transcend the traditional narratives of identity that define Preserved. This system of classification has little to do with the era a film is set in, postnational films can be made that are set centuries ago, and films classed as Preserved can be made that are based in the present. No particular time periods are associated with each category, it does not make sense to suggest, for instance, that Welsh films made between 1940 and 1970 are all of Preserved, nor that films post 1995 are all postnational.

However, there are links between categories and historical events or eras. For instance, the reversal in gender roles in Reversal, in which men are unemployed whereas women have paid jobs outside the home and are major supporters of families economically, is within the context of the collapse of traditionally 'male' forms of employment and economic recession. Similarly, the landscapes of social and economic dereliction and depression that provide a backdrop for urban youth engaged in drugs, violence and other crimes in films owe themselves to the 1980s and 1990s. The multiple, fractured and ambiguous selves of postnational are made possible by the increasing popularity of new forms of information technology and emergence of global cultures in the 1990s onwards. These three categories relate to work in the broad field of cultural analysis in the following ways.



## Preserved

A starting point is the historical sense of shared, collective identity referred to above, and the versions of this that infused minority nation literature and culture at the time that films from these nations started to be made. A key strand in early films is 'roots', and narratives of identity tend to refer back towards mythical origins of identity long predating domination by external forces. For instance in the case of Wales, narratives draw on historical works as the *Mabinogion*, a collection of stories from the middle ages animated in the film *Y Mabinogi* (2003: Derek Hayes). In the case of Basque identity, some early film references ancient cave art. These references shape 'narratives of origin' and 'narratives of belonging', which may be prenational, and which contrast with external perspectives. These narratives tend to be presented uncritically, contributing towards their 'naturalisation' and essentialisation. The rural tends to predominate as 'the cradle' of these supposedly wholly authentic, 'natural' versions of identity.

Another prime characteristic of Preserved is a single narrative of identity framed within patriarchal social organisation. This singular, hegemonic narrative of identity includes the celebration of minority nationalism and of those who martyred themselves for the cause of self-rule, those resisting outside domination. In this way Preserved tallies with accounts of resistance to an external power described in Edward Said's (1993) writing on postcolonialism. Closely associated with this is a simplistic moral framework within which the minority nation is treated uncritically as simply 'good', whereas external rulers are contrastingly simply 'bad'. There is no room for complexity, ambiguity, or for critiquing narratives of national identity. National identity is celebrated, nationalism regarded as unproblematical.

Preserved can be regarded as the dominant form of a minority culture, as the supposedly prime 'authentic' version. Preserved tends to be associated with stability, for instance with the categories of subordinate and dominant, and the relations between them, as fixed. This is a paradox of Preserved, in that relations between dominant and subordinate tend to be portrayed as fixed and stable, which seems counter to the project of political resistance to the

rule of the dominant. So resistance is evident in terms of struggles and sacrifices and martyrdom, but the full possibility of overthrowing external rule is never clearly expressed as an ambition or even as a hope. It would seem that the subordinate never see themselves as strong enough or otherwise capable of ending the rule of the dominant, only of making their rule more difficult.

Preserved develops Andrew Higson's (1996 & 2003) notion of 'heritage film' within minority cultures. This features a retelling of history that highlights the oppression of external government and celebrates central events and heroic individuals in the struggle for autonomy. In this way, films are one way for a minority nation to reclaim history and retell it in ways that differ from the perspectives of the dominant, external power. Said (1993: 274) has described one of the first tasks of cultural resistance to external domination as being the reclaiming and retelling of identifications and histories. These films are the minority's view of themselves, and their view of the dominant. These perspectives from the margins, as they might be characterised, therefore contrast with versions of history and views from the centre, and more widely in the productions of a global film industry centred on Hollywood.

Higson defined British 'heritage film' as 'a middle class elite, conservative vision of the national past'. This is quite similar to what is being referred to here as Preserved. It presumes an imagining of a nation as a 'knowable community' with a 'known history' (Higson 1995: 275). It must be acknowledged that Higson was writing about a collection of films within the specific context of Thatcherism in Britain, that tend to feature the dominant's view of themselves, and to a lesser extent some of their colonial subordinates. In-depth discussion of Preserved draws attention to how particular visions of the past are shaped around dominant, stereotyped, and supposedly stable notions of identities relating to gender, class, race, community, religion, family, morality and sexuality. In effect, films of Preserved feature the subordinate's view of themselves, from the perspective of an internally dominant position, with little reference to or acknowledgement of a potential plurality of narratives of minority identity and culture. These may function as a kind of 'comfort blanket', kept available to reassure and as a place of refuge in times when identity may seem to be in crisis. It is important to acknowledge the importance of audiences in discussions of national cinema, but in this way, Preserved goes some way further than Higson's notion of 'heritage film' as a way of classifying films.

## Reversal

This threefold system of classifying films draws on the writings of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) to argue that some narratives of identities are based on constellations of dualisms. Derrida was of course influenced by the earlier work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908- 2009), and his attempts to describe a 'cultural grammar organized around the binary oppositions' (Smith 2001: 107). If *Preserved* is fundamentally based on a relatively small number of elements, each of these may be theorised as occupying one side of a series of implied dualisms. These elements can be seen as the 'core' components of these dualisms, as central, with the alternative pair part of each dualism making up the secondary or subordinate part. For example, masculine usually takes up the 'core' position in a gender dualism, with all that is deemed somehow 'non-masculine' being relegated to the subordinate pair part and lumped together as 'feminine'. The same is true for a dualism of 'race', with 'white' forming the dominant part of a pairing with 'non-white', a category into which every other supposedly inferior racial grouping is aggregated.

So elements of *Preserved* each suggest or rely on a much less visible, alternative. 'Jacques Derrida demonstrates that they are not pure opposites - each is motivated by the other, ultimately dependant on the absent other for its own presence and meaning' (Storey 1993: 87). So for instance the opposite of 'Basque' is not 'Spanish', the opposite of the close knit local community in the mining villages of the valleys in South Wales is not the 'amoral' anonymity of the inner city. Instead, these dualisms are more based around what is evoked by the presence of the elements of *Preserved* listed above, what each may be contrasted with, what each in effect may rely on, in order for each element to make sense.

And so there is a class of films in which the dualisms of *Preserved* are reversed in some way. As a consequence of this Reversal, the longstanding, simplistic narratives of identity that shape *Preserved* are critiqued. In this sense Reversal marks a moving away from and a moving towards, a state of somehow being in between older, singular narratives of minority identity, and newer, plural, 'postnational' narratives of multiple ways that a person might achieve minority identities.

This kind of reversal is often associated with the first stage in deconstruction, as set out in the writings of Derrida; ‘a deconstructive reading of a text subverts its apparent significance by uncovering contradictions and conflict within it’ (Blackburn 1994: 95). More explicitly; ‘Derrida’s deconstruction reverses the hierarchy’ (Culler 1979:178), and ‘of deconstruction Derrida says structure is decentred’ (Childs & Williams 1997: 228). So, for example, elements central to Preserved such as the family, religion, the rural, and ‘local communities’ are present in Reversal, but their importance is less, the respect afforded them is less, and they do not function in ways that underpin longstanding narratives of identity. From being the main protagonists in films and often occupying ‘heroic’ roles, men are relegated in importance, no longer the respected heads of family units but instead more likely to be figures to be mocked. In this respect Reversal is comparable to Duncan Petrie’s characterisation of postindustrial realities in Scottish film and literature:

‘gone are the expectations of stable communities, jobs for life, security and predictability. These have been replaced by transience, generating a deep sense of anxiety’ (Petrie, 2004: 109).

In contrast, women are not confined to supporting roles and the domestic, their positions are on a more equal footing with men, they are not leading lives that are circumscribed or dictated by the power of husbands or fathers. Furthermore, in contrast to their invisibility in Preserved, non-heterosexuals are featured. These kinds of differences contribute to a sense of national identity as pluralistic.

With its ostensibly stable, fixed givens in relation to identity, Preserved can be likened to a structuralist’s perspective, whereas Reversal is born out of deconstruction: ‘...structural unity and identity are always deconstructed, leaving in their place the complexity, contradictions and fragmentation implied in difference...’ (Grossberg 1996: 155).

Reversal begins the processes of looking inwards at history and identities, and in particular critically discussing forms of nationalism closely interwoven with traditionally dominant forms of masculinity. Instead of a simplistic moral dualism of ‘minority nation equals good’

and ‘the dominant equals bad’, narratives move towards being critical of minority nationalism, and towards reconciliation with members of the dominant nation.

### **postnational**

This third category of films is influenced by postmodern theory, as discussed by authors such as Harvey (1989), Smith (1996) and particularly Jameson (1991 & 2009). Principal features are therefore an accelerated pace of life, and a kind of transnationalism. Identity tends to be ambiguous and seemingly multiple, but crucially seems to be collapsed inwards from the collective into the self or a sense of multiple selves. There is little sense of ‘community’; for instance families tend to be dysfunctional as compared to those associated with Preserved and Reversal. In tandem with this, notions of collectively held moral frameworks lose significance or are simply not evident; individuals tend to show much less respect for each other. Any clear notion of ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’ recedes, as though these have been mislaid somehow. Instead of stable social structures and cultural givens, there is ambiguity, shifting uncertainty, dreams and forms of escape are more significant than realities.

Feature films predominate in this category. These tend to be provocative, characters tend to be unreasonable, conflicts are a feature in contrast to consensus, the surreal may have more significance than the real. Within a globalised cultural system where the specifics of place are eroded, minority identity becomes almost entirely undistinguishable or insignificant. This may be comparable with Bill Marshall’s characterisation of postmodern Quebec film as transcending a binary opposition of ‘home’ and ‘identity’ on one hand and ‘alienation’ and ‘inauthenticity’ on the other ‘in a rather postmodern way: everything becomes a play of ungrounded signifiers, performances, provisional masquerades’ (Marshall, 2001: 299).

But there is also recognition of how larger, supranational structures may play a significant part in promoting minority national identities and cultures. For instance:

‘Historically grounded nationalities such as the Catalan, the Basque, or the Scottish identity, not only have they survived, but they are stronger every day, as



a part of the general trend toward the importance of cultural identity in a globalized world. For these generally subdued identities, the European Union is a much better environment than their dominant nation-state' (Castells & Ince 2003: 129).

A similar claim might be made for 'Latin America' as an umbrella that has nurtured the cultural identities of its member states, as well as finding new ways of linking with Spain.

Some commentators have suggested that these features are the kinds of standard ingredients of contemporary societies that have lost their connection to their own history. For example, Heffernan (2004: 261) writes of 'cultures marked by a depthlessness... the new prevalence of pastiche is a further symptom of this loss of history... no longer available as collective lived experience, history is reduced to a collection of texts, images or period details'; and of selfhood that is 'emptied of any impulse to struggle for coherence or integrity'. As Pam Cook comments in her analysis of costume in British cinema, 'pastiche militates against fixed identities' (Cook 1996: 7). However, Jameson cautions against regarding a transition from modernity to postmodernity as a big leap, he states that postmodernism is 'little more than one stage of modernism' (1991: 4), and it is 'what Raymond Williams usefully termed 'residual' and 'emergent'' (1991: 6).

Yet this kind of social culture is sometimes referred to as 'postindividual'. Elements such as gender, class, sexuality, and age that previously seemed stable or even wholly natural are instead rendered unstable. Characters in films no longer abide by long standing 'rules' associated with these aspects of identity. postnational narratives pose or move to address questions such as 'Who am I?' and 'What am I?' that arise in the absence or acceptance of more collective narratives of identity. But in contrast to Castells' notion of 'project identities', any sense of this being a part of a wider political project to change society may seem absent.

Thus, postnational films tend to feature prolonged engagements with the self, for instance through individuals tactically mobilising multiple selves or somehow transcending narrow, fixed scripts of identity that would present this as singular and unchanging. So rather than simply glorifying or interrogating them, these films tend to focus on other ingredients from

which a sense of self may be composed. So postnational is classified as such through the lack of references or appeals to nationalism. Instead of the collective and the communal, films tend to feature personal greed, selfishness, or the antisocial. There is no sense of moral certainty, journeys and searches are undertaken that seem to lead towards an ‘elsewhere’ but which really lead into the self. Identity is a cause of anxiety; people are unhappy with themselves or try to keep true identities hidden. But postnational does not represent an entirely gloomy destination to the trajectory of minority national identity and culture. Arguably, these ideas free individuals from false and potentially oppressive concepts of identity.

## **Summary**

This section has outlined the research aims and discussed some previous approaches to issues of culture and identity relevant to minority nations and the operation of power. It has outlined the research methodology, and introduced the new three-fold system of classification adopted in the analysis of films, drawing attention to how these categories relate to ideas in cultural theory, from films studies to postcolonialism and postmodernism. The following six chapters comprise analytical case studies that apply the three fold system of classification in turn to Welsh and Basque films. Each chapter deliberately reviews literature relevant to the case studies, and so there is no separate chapter that discusses previous work in this area.

## Chapter Two: Welsh Preserved

### Introduction

This chapter develops the argument that there is an identifiable collection of films that are centred on a particular set of narratives of Welsh identity. Drawing on numerous examples of Welsh film (as this label was defined earlier), it draws attention to a set of basic ‘ingredients’ within films that cohere into this particular narrative of identity. These basic ingredients are recycled within these films, with the overall effect of repeating the same basic narrative. In this sense, this particular narrative of identity comes to resemble gender, as theorised by Judith Butler (1989 & 1993). ‘gender is a set relations indeed a set of relations , and not an individual attribute’ (Butler 1999 :13) It perhaps becomes essentialised, or presented as wholly ‘natural’, through multiple performances within a more rigid framework composed of socio-cultural ‘rules’ through which these same performances come to have meaning and significance for audiences.

### ‘Preserved’

Before beginning to discuss particular examples of Welsh films, this chapter first introduces some initial ideas concerning what it is that links these films together so that they seem to fall into a cohesive category. This category has already been discussed as Preserved. This is because films within this category privilege elements of a presumed national culture, of particular forms of gender and gendered relations, and particular forms of stereotypical socio-cultural identity. These tend to be presented as singular, in that these films may seem to imply that there are a very few, limited ways in which people may legitimately or recognisably be presented as ‘Welsh’ (or ‘Basque’). Such ‘correct’ ways are themselves represented as essentialised certainties, as stable and fixed natural givens. Since details of the manner of achieving these ‘correct’ identities may vary across cultures and minority nations, the terms ‘Welsh Preserved’ and ‘Basque Preserved’ are used in this thesis. These refer to particularities within these two separate cultures, which ultimately achieve the same effect of depicting traditional national stereotypes. These films are classed as ‘preserving’, since they

may seem to attempt to achieve the highly political project of presenting and maintaining aspects of minority nation in terms of a single, unified 'truth'.

As the previous discussion suggested, in theoretical terms this single 'truth' can be seen to be closely linked to Raymond Williams' notions of 'the dominant' and 'the residual', and with Gramsci's concept of hegemony. This is because as they challenge or retell versions of history in ways that reclaim it from the dominant external oppressor, in turn these narratives themselves legitimise a kind of internal dominance and can be linked to a dominant form of patriarchal social and cultural organisation. Through their repetition, these narratives preserve (in the sense of naturalising and maintaining) certain stories about identities, and particular stereotypes of Welshness that are closely linked to patriarchy. This argument builds on the works of commentators on identity, such as (Castells 1997: 8-9 ) Anderson (1983: 15) Hall (1996: 4) and Williams (1961:90 &1977:121- 123 &1980:40) and commentators on identity and film such as Higson (1989: 23 & 1995: 274, 1997: 233 & 2000: 64). However, through highlighting the strong links between narratives of identity and dominant forms of patriarchy, the arguments developed in this chapter take the ideas of these authors further.

### **Why 'Preserved'?**

As this chapter will illustrate, Preserved features cultural identity simplistically represented as monolithically collective, and centred on dynamic masculinities. It features narratives of identity that seek to unify or privilege a single version of national identity with patriarchy and preserve the dominance of these two. Interwoven with this is a postcolonial 'celebration' of oppression and sufferings experienced as a subject *people* (but not subject *peoples*). In this sense, one component of Preserved may be the celebration and circulation of a past that exists in spite of colonial oppression and pressures to adopt the culture of the dominant. Particularly during external domination, this strand can be seen as radical, as a form of resistance to colonial oppression, though this sense probably recedes as the bonds of the colonial oppressor weaken.

Preserved features a moral certainty, and the reduction of complex moral issues into simplistic dualistic notions of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. This moral certainty goes hand in hand with a simplistic boldness in narratives of identity, and a set of recurring themes or elements linked with notions of ‘authentic’ life. These features include elements depicted in films such as the rural, family, ‘heroic’ men and domestically oriented women in various forms, eating, communal religion, poetry and music and art as a form of cultural (re)production. As Preserved in the sense of resistance to external political and cultural forces recedes, the overall effect can be likened to an avoidance of the present and the future through a nostalgic retreat into the past. Through repetition this ‘preserves’ a particular kind of ‘past’ in ways that seem to provide a kind of safety net or ‘comfort blanket’ which provides succour and prevents lasting crisis in times of trouble. This perhaps explains why there are more films in the Welsh and Basque Preserved category than in the other two categories. Preserved conveys a sense of something kept, arrested, perhaps during a moment in time when most ripe, or at a peak, with any sense of alteration held at bay. In relation to change, the act of ‘preserving’ prevents or at least postpones any kind of decline or decomposition. In this sense ‘preserving’ in relation to narratives of national identity is an explicitly conservative political act which may tend to see any kind of change as problematical at least and more usually linked to dangerous social and moral shift or drift.

In this respect, psychologically, Preserved may present a place of safety or ‘comfort blanket’ to which members of a minority nation can retreat in times of anxiety, so what is being Preserved is being kept in good order for potential future use. ‘Preserves’ in a culinary sense have traditionally long been associated with women, and ‘preserving’ as a feminine craft. What is preserved are the flavours and goodness of a summer or autumn harvest time, to be kept in storage for times of winter shortage, possibly to enhance a mundane winter diet that lacks in nutrition. There is also something practical and pragmatic about the efficiency of preserving part of a harvest, of avoiding waste or over-indulgence. This is why Preserved seems such an appropriate term. Furthermore, what is preserved is kept for future use, kept to be admired, an object of attention, kept for spectacle.

Of course another set of associations with the word Preserved are connected with processes such as embalming and pickling, and the preservation of something beyond a ‘natural’

lifespan. In this sense the word Preserved is linked to notions of specimens preserved in jars of formaldehyde for future examination by the curious. In contrast to other connotations, there is a sense of keeping something beyond its death, of the prevention of decomposition, of something that has outlived its natural lifespan or purpose.

Another set of meanings that can be attached to the word Preserved concerns the serving of 'preserves' as an act of hospitality towards visitors or 'outsiders'. There is a sense of presenting the best of a household larder, which carries the same kind of sense of films that offer particular sets of narratives of identity to non-domestic audiences. In contrast, there may be a sense of presenting something dead, from bygone times, as a curio or spectacle for present and future observers. Preserved can thus be seen as carrying with it several nuances of potential meaning that are contrastingly very appropriate for the kinds of narratives of identity featured in films discussed in this chapter.

## **Narratives of identity and Preserved**

In connection with narratives of national identity, films in Preserved seem to proclaim and celebrate relatively simple notions and narratives of identity. They may seem to address issues such as 'Who are we?' and 'Where are we from?', with little or no discussion of how the 'We' in these questions is actually constituted, drawing on simplistic notions of what 'Who' and 'Where' might actually mean in connection with these issues. As Higson (1996) describes matters in relation to heritage film, there seems to be a strong assumption that 'nation' is something not only knowable, but generally known, in this case throughout Wales by all Welsh people. 'Wales' is simply an unexplained given, 'Welsh people' is similarly unexamined.

The proclamation and celebration of a simplistic, singular sense of 'we' is one of the main elements of Welsh films that I class as Preserved. In addition, there seems to be a collection of basic elemental constituents that recur in these films. These include particular representations of women and men and relations between them, families, community, inheritance, religion, struggle and the resistance of oppression by external rule, and cultural

heritage. But before moving on to examine these basic elements in more detail, there are some further general issues that should be addressed first.

## **Feature films and documentaries**

This chapter discusses both feature films and documentaries, collapsing distinctions between the two in terms of how narratives of identity are presented to audiences. As several commentators have argued ‘documentary is not as objective as people used to think, but deeply imbued with the filmmaker’s subjectivity’ (Chanan 2009: 17). ‘Boundaries between fiction and documentary are sometimes very difficult to define’ (De Pablo 2008: 82). As previously argued, the most ostensibly ‘authentic’ screen narratives of national identity may be presented to audiences via documentaries, because these may often be regarded as presenting a totally unmediated account of ‘the real’ unproblematically to audiences. However, narratives of identity evident in feature films to at least some extent are based around long-standing ideas since many of these are based on established literature. Furthermore, similarities between features and documentaries may not merely be connected with the basic narratives that films contain, there are other considerations that shape what ends up on the screen. For instance, given the struggles that film makers in Wales have usually been confronted by in order to gain funding for their projects, the decision to make either feature or documentary may be shaped as much by the availability of funding as by any other kind of consideration.

In order to facilitate the collapsing of distinctions between feature films and documentaries, both are discussed together. This is not to deny some differences, for instance Chanan (2009: 23) defines ‘documentary as different from fiction cinema of escapism and a cinema of conscience’ This helps to highlight what several documentaries made for television have in common with a variety of feature films made for domestic and more international audiences. Thus documentaries focusing on the lives and works of notable artists and poets such as Ceri Richards (1903-1971) *Piano With Many Strings* (1966 :John Ormond), David James Jones (Gwenallt) (1899-1968) *Ar Waelod y cof / Deep in the Memory* (1984: Richard Watkins), and

T.Glynne Davies (1926-1988) *Teulu T.Glynne Davies* (2008: Gwyndaf Roberts) can be discussed alongside feature films such as *How Green Was My Valley*, *Solomon a Gaenor*, and *Carrie's War* (2004: Coky Giedroyc).

The kinds of 'personal portrait' documentaries included above rely heavily on style, adopt poetic perspectives, and seem to try to present the 'reality' of seeing the world from the exceptional perspective of the subject. This is evident from the poetic character of several of the documentary titles. They stress the subjectivity of personal experiences, and the significance of specific, personal moments so as to present psychological depth. Individuals are presented as unique or distinctive, as 'mythic' through foregrounding the drama and intensity of 'experiences, of maturation, catharsis, and insight'. When combined with processes such as editorial selection, perhaps really meaningful distinctions between documentary as 'real' and feature as 'story' begin to collapse.

A consideration of aspects of three recent documentary films provides a way into establishing some basic points about Preserved. In some ways these films may be regarded as representative of a progressive 'moving on' of Welshness and Welsh traditions. These three films contain elements that could be characterised as bold, brash and dynamic, but are also slow paced and poetic. They can be regarded as educative depictions of contemporary Welshness, that link with the past and with Welsh cultural traditions. They may be regarded as bringing these traditions up to date in ways that present them as being somehow at the forefront of cultural and creative development. They are updatings or windows into contemporary Welsh cultural production. These three films are *Beautiful Mistake* (2001: Marc Evans) *Dal: Yma/Nawr* and *Sleep Furiously* (2008: Gideon Koppel). An initial point to make is that although the term Preserved may initially suggest some kind of early stage in Welsh cinema, these three films are recent releases. What locates them within the category of Preserved is the ways that Welsh culture is presented in these films, and more fundamentally, the stories that these films tell about Welsh identity.

*Dal: Yma/Nawr* is a celebration of Wales the nation as the home of a powerful, longstanding poetic tradition. This tradition is dominated by men, as shown in the film, and associated with



a complex system of ritualistic competition and hierarchy. Rural landscape dominates *Sleep Furiously*, which focuses on a single small community in the farmed uplands over the period of a year. It portrays this community as under threat from depopulation, loss of local services, agricultural intensification and an aging population. It depicts a tapestry of local traditions unravelling, whether this should be a cause for concern is ostensibly left to audiences to decide. Yet the very making of such a film suggesting that this question requires addressing in turn suggests an anxiety over cultural change.

*Beautiful Mistake* presents contemporary developments in the field of 'pop' music. Welsh born musician John Cale, a member of the internationally successful Velvet Underground in the 1960s, is shown working in a Cardiff studio with a collection of contemporary Welsh musicians often associated with the 'Cool Cymru' cultural current in the 1990s. This film can be regarded as a kind of rebranding of Welsh singing traditions for a new market, contemporary youth audiences. It deals in new cultural trends and production, but in such a way as to directly connect with traditional, longstanding features of cultural heritage. What they have in common is that all three of these films in some ways present themselves as pushing at the edge of the cultural envelope in terms of innovation, yet at the same time they are inextricably woven into threads of Welsh heritage from which the most basic, essentialised stories of Welsh identity are woven.

For instance, each of the three are unselfconsciously dominated by men. This is not to say that women are not present, but they do tend to occupy a very narrow range of largely ancillary roles. As more in-depth discussion later in this chapter will highlight, these films celebrate different kinds of 'craftsmanship' (and not 'craftswomanship') connected with agriculture, poetry and music that have been an intrinsic part of Welsh cultural traditions for centuries. These films are a continuation of a heavily masculine tradition. In this sense they might fit with the notion of 'heritage film' developed by authors such as Higson (1997:232) and Blandford (2005:101), if this notion is developed so far as to acknowledge the way Welsh heritage is intrinsically shaped around very traditional notions of gender, and narratives of heterosexual Welsh masculinity in particular. This is why the term Preserved seems so apt. It is as though the film makers deliberately sought to uphold or hark back to particular versions of Welshness through celebrating them in such simplistic, uncritical ways.

In tandem with this, it may often seem as though most aspects of characterisation, of the ways characters talk, eat, dress, live, work and even die are iconic of traditional versions of Welshness.

But it is not always the case that more traditional aspects of Welshness and Welsh experiences are presented uncritically, and sometimes negative elements or perspectives are included in what is Preserved for spectacle, for instance the oppressiveness of life in local communities in *Solomon a Gaenor*. What this film shares with other films classified as of Preserved is the representation of fixed, 'naturalised' notions of identity (e.g. Welsh, Jewish) together with traditional lifestyles and values. So this term Preserved also refers to that which seems to be held in time, static and presented in ways that are linked to monolithic, 'natural' or essentialist versions of identity, class, gender, sexuality and other aspects of characterisation.

This chapter now moves on to discuss men in a variety of Welsh films, and draws attention to how the depiction of men in these films reproduces and recirculates stereotypical versions of Welsh masculinities. These are linked to iconic figures such as men as miners, farmers, poets and warriors, singers and choir members to a particular set of male dominated sites such as the farm or the mine or the quarry, and processes such as inheritance and religious practices. This section draws attention to how Preserved is effectively often about the 'celebration' of certain kinds of patriarchy. It discusses how forms of patriarchy are interwoven with certain stories about 'origins' and 'belonging', and linked to religion and Welsh experiences of being subject people. This chapter then moves on to highlight how those figures in film the 'Welsh Mam' 'Widows' and the 'Wayward Daughter' underline these particular, patriarchal stories.

It concludes by arguing that Preserved is characterised by bold and simplistic depictions of Welshness, the narrowness of which are often shaped around a moral clarity. Nationalism tends to be presented as positive, though compared to Basque films this is more muted.

## **Men and masculinities**

As Beddoe (1986: 225) has commented, dominant images of Wales tend to be male, and more specifically of 'hard men'. They are often explicitly engaged in either the industrial or agricultural sector. It is often as though there is only one gender and one social class in Wales. If it is accepted that the growth and popularity of rugby 'the one Great pastime' (Smith & Williams 1980:1) in Wales was made possible through industrialisation, then men as rugby players and supporters can be fundamentally linked to this very narrow set of categories. For instance Stephanie Jones has commented that:

'Masculine and therefore community identity transmuted from an association with mining to the rugby team' (S. Jones 2003:45).

Often, films focus on rural men doing demanding physical work, enduring hardships and suffering, and usually working together. Exceptions to this kind of presentation of men primarily in terms of a heavily stereotypical masculine physicality include films centred on men either engaged in political resistance as icons of Welsh people subjected to rule from Westminster, or as exploited by this rule in the case of men serving in the British army. Another way that men can be featured is as poets (for instance participating in the National Eisteddfod) or choir members. In some cases this is in combination with men being industrial or agricultural workers, or soldiers. A third broad way that men are featured is connected directly with religion, either as ministers, deacons or members of the congregation at chapel. It is probably no coincidence that those responsible for making films categorised as Preserved are almost entirely men. This is one possible reason for this preoccupation with life in Wales as structured around men, male dominated sites and practices. These films collectively tend to look back through time in order to present particular visions and versions of Welsh history that are partial, which exclude alternative narratives of identity.

### **Men at work**

Films of Preserved generally place working class men centre stage, to celebrate their labour. There are numerous examples of films that feature men as central characters engaged in mining and agriculture. At a fundamental level, this can be connected with dominant stereotypes of masculinity, since mining and agriculture involve hard physical work,

demanding muscular strength and stamina. In addition, both of these areas of work involve the conquering and exploitation of 'nature', which is usually coded as female/feminine (e.g. Rose 1993). Examples include *How Green Was My Valley* (1975: Ronald Wilson), *Valley of Song* (1953: Gilbert Gunn), *Angry Earth* (1989: Karl Francis), *Blue Scar* (1949: Jill Craigie), *Citadel* (1938: King Vidor), *Proud Valley*, *Solomon a Gaenor*, *David* (1951: Paul Dickson), *Hedd Wyn*, *Sleep Furiously*, *On The Black Hill* (1987: Andrew Grieve), *Johnny Be Good* (1984: Marc Evans), *Y Chwarelwr* (1935: Ifan ab Owen Edwards) and *Calon Gaeth* (2006: Ashley Way).

Some have claimed that mining, along with other forms of industrialisation, has been central to the development of modern versions of Welsh identity, e.g. 'The vital industrial experience of the Welsh is encompassed within less than seventy five years from 1860 to 1930' (Jenkins 1992: 76). It must be noted however that this same period in history saw the emergence of the family-owned and run farm, following a shift away from tenant farming as part of a much larger form of country estate owned by aristocratic landlords (Howell 1986 & 2000). Thus agriculture and industry have come to compete with each other in the generation of national icons. What they have in common is being fundamentally interwoven with patriarchal cultures and systems of social organisation.

Arguably, in order to understand the role of industry in shaping contemporary versions of Welshness, the whole period of industrialisation from the late nineteenth century through deindustrialisation in the 1970s-1990s to subsequent postindustrialisation has to be fully appreciated. In particular the industrial societies (still rural small scale communities) of the south Wales valleys have been characterised as 'diwydiant hollol batriarchaidd/completely patriarchal' (Ffrancon 2003: 169). However, as some commentators stress, it is important not to conceptualise 'the valleys' in monolithically homogenous terms, for instance Holmes (1976:163) writes of the 'unevenness and diversity in the development of the South Wales coalfield both in time and place.

In contrast to the broad historical movement in south Wales through industrialisation to deindustrialisation and post-industrialisation, through my own experiences from the 1950s I

have witnessed how agriculture has moved through industrialisation and into intensification, entailing significant reduction in the amount of labour required, and significantly more economic and general entrepreneurial skills of farmers now increasingly involved in a global economic system.

## **Miners**

Several commentators have stressed that the contribution towards Welsh national cultural heritage that mining as a part of industrialisation is often credited with cannot be overlooked (e.g. Stead, 1986; Jenkins, 1992; Berry 1994, Philip Jones, 1998, Ffranco 2003, Blandford 2007). Miners as men are often further 'masculinised' through being portrayed as routinely risking physical danger underground. For instance in *How Green Was My Valley* the Morgan family, the principal focus of the film, lose both father and son in separate mining accidents. In *Angry Earth* the character of young Guto Ellis (Mark Lewis Jones) is a miner from the age of eleven, like his father Emlyn (Robert Pugh). He witnesses his father's death in a gas explosion down the mine, and later in the film he himself meets exactly the same fate.

## **Suffering, hardship and saintliness**

In combination with this brave masculinity, is the portrayal of miners and their families in terms of the hardships and exploitation they suffered at the hands of mine owners. For example, the accident in *Angry Earth* is presented as being due to the failure of the mine owners to attend to issues of safety underground. Gwen Ellis (Sue Roderick), Guto's mother says *safety is ignored for greater profit*. We are shown how she is evicted by the police from the family home whilst pregnant with her fourth child. The family receives no compensation for the father's death. Guto's mother is later raped by English soldiers, present to break a strike by miners protesting over low pay and dangerous conditions. This is in keeping with a common theme in films of Preserved. This is the reclaiming and retelling of history from the perspectives of the dominant (in this case the 'ruling classes' of mine owners, wealthy industrialists and English colonial masters) by the subordinate. This is in order to shape postcolonial discourses that draw attention to the injustices of the colonial system and the suffering of the 'saintly' and thoroughly innocent subordinate at the hands of the thoroughly evil dominant.

This example illustrates how the iconic Welsh man, physically strong and brave, is often presented to audiences as caught in a relative position of powerlessness by colonial masters. Woven with the narrative strand of Welsh masculinity is a strand centred on the oppressive and exploitative rule of the English colonial master. Of the industrial ruling classes, Gwen Ellis, in the final line in *Angry Earth*, describes them bitterly as *parasites of our land that have learned nothing*. The relationship between colonial master and the subordinate colonised is collapsed into a simple moral dualism of the vaguely ‘saintly’ miner and his family as martyrs, and the mine owners (who remain invisible in the film) almost as pantomime villains. The complexities of relations between colonisers and colonised in terms of the operation of power, as discussed by authors such as Stuart Hall (e.g. 1992) Edward Said (e.g. 1993), are reduced to this simple moral certainty, and thus potentially intricate stories about Welsh and English identities and relations rendered one-dimensional.

However, simply regarding films that portray miners and their families in terms of their hardships as being postcolonial critiques of the colonial master is inaccurate. Aspects of miners' struggles and suffering feature in a number of films made in Wales up to 1955, made by film makers and production companies from outside Wales. Examples include *Blue Scar*, *Valley of Song* and *The Proud Valley*. Some attention was given to mining due to the suitability of life in mining communities for screen treatment.

Additionally, the Second World War was obviously a time of suffering and struggle, but was also a stimulus for the production of films aimed at encouraging the civilian population in production work that contributed to the overall (post)war effort. This partly explains a focus on the hardships of workers and community lives, how these were overcome, and the sacrifices involved in bringing coal up from out of the ground to power war and other industries. In this way, these films can be seen as ‘celebrations’ of or ‘homages’ to the iconic figure of the miner. During wartime mining was for a time a reserved occupation, meaning that it almost equated to service in the armed forces in terms of brave patriotic duty. The importance of the economic role Welsh mines played in the British economy came to be mirrored in the centrality of the coalmine to narratives of Welshness on the screen: ‘Welsh

coalfields came to take a large impact in terms of cinematic representation' (Stanton 2002: 80).

Ironically, given the centrality of coal mining and miners, audiences are rarely shown any underground shots, unless this is during or immediately after an explosion or shaft collapse. Partly this must be explained by the technical difficulties and cost involved in either taking cameras underground or attempting to recreate an authentic looking mine in the studio. For this reason, the bravery, physicality and homosociability of miners had to be presented to audiences via above ground scenes, and by an almost 'reality TV' approach in which audiences are invited into different aspects of miners and their families lives. For this reason, audiences are presented with scenes of families eating together, attending chapel, and engaging in other kinds of domestic and social behaviour in ways that reinforce ideas about the close unity of men who work together in dangerous conditions underground.

### **Exploitation**

Yet, somewhat ambiguously, these saintly icons of masculinity are presented as powerless, or as easily exploited. For instance the mine featured in *Proud Valley*, Blaendy Colliery, is closed following an explosion. Audiences then see how it is reopened following a demonstration by unemployed miners using the war effort as a lever to get their jobs back. The mine is reopened without extra safety measures, the miners are not paid any extra for working in such extra dangerous conditions. Their 'pride' in wanting to contribute to the war effort reopens the seam of profit for the mine owners, whom audiences are shown during meetings with the miners.

Similarly, miners are easily led in *The Citadel* by the chairman of the local hospital Dr Llewelyn (Joss Ambler). In this film, he manipulates a miners' medical aid committee so that they agree to show no confidence in the work of a young Scottish doctor (Robert Donat) who has conducted private research into connections between lung disease and coal dust. This collusion not only demoralises the young doctor (Ffrancon 2003: 69), it reinforces the class difference between the uneducated and naive miners and educated, sophisticated middle and upper class men.

An example of how the icon of the miner is interwoven with narratives of masculinity, identity, sameness and Other can be drawn from the character of Crad (Mark Lewis Jones), the brother of Gaenor in the film *Solomon a Gaenor*. The film has been described as a great love story (between the characters Gaenor, daughter of a miner, and Solomon, son of a Jewish haberdasher) which brings together two distinctive yet similar cultures which ultimately end up dividing the lovers (Crown, 2001).

The relatively narrow set of intelligibly Welsh male characters in films of Preserved is underlined when considering the actor who plays the part of Crad in *Solomon a Gaenor*. Mark Lewis Jones also plays a similar part in the film *Angry Earth*. He is the son who witnesses his father's death underground, and the traumas of no compensation and eviction. It is possible for some audiences of both of these films that Mark Lewis Jones himself comes to embody 'the Welsh miner', the repetition of the role renders both him and it, and him as it, even more readily intelligible. Yet in *Angry Earth* he is a saintly character whose father, job and eventually life are taken by those seeking merely to profit from his and his father's work. But in *Solomon a Gaenor* Crad is an ignorant racist.

## **Blacklegs**

It is also worth noting that although 'the miner' is often presented in generally very positive ways (the character of Crad being an exception), films such as *Angry Earth* also feature 'blackleg' miners, those who refused to participate in strikes. We see how Gwen Ellis, the widow in this film, whilst working for a local undertaker, runs the gauntlet of a group of local women shouting 'bradwr/scab' when she arrives at a house to prepare a miner's body for burial. The house is clearly marked as belonging to the family of a strike breaker. It is notable that it is women doing this informal form of 'picketing', since the men are engaged in more formal strike and picket line activities at the pit. This scene provides a sense of the deep social divisions within communities that were created during miners' strikes. In this way the general saintliness of the icon of 'the miner' is by no means a blanket form of representation.



### The 'Literate and poetic' miner

As the above example begins to illustrate, in some films the icon of the miner is presented in more in depth ways, suggesting the extent to which mining as a form of employment came to shape other aspects of peoples' lives and personalities. A clear example of this can be drawn from the film *David*. Both Berry (1994) and Ffrancon (2003) describe this film as 'poignant', as about the 'sacrifice and suffering' of the 'saintly' David. The film was specifically commissioned in order for it to represent Welsh culture and landscape, and the figure of 'the worker' at the 1951 Festival of Britain. This information is provided to audiences at the end of the film via text prior to the credits. At the start of the film text informs audiences that the film was made involving the people of Ammanford, and that the story is a true depiction of the life of David Rees Griffiths (1852-1953) from the age of twelve until past his retirement. As was common at the time for films depicting Wales and Welsh people, the director along with others involved in the making of this film were London based and not originally from Wales. For this reason, this film can be regarded as an external perspective on Wales, and is certainly an external view of the life of David and the people of Ammanford.

David Rees Griffiths was selected by scriptwriter Aneurin Talfan Davies because his life experiences were seen to embody the required ingredients (Ffrancon 2003). The film takes audiences through David's personal loss of his son to tuberculosis as a teenager. We are shown David, a former Amman Valley miner, working as a school caretaker following injuries sustained underground. His 'saintliness' is enhanced through having Ifor (John Davies) a pupil at the school narrate his life story. We are shown how David takes Ifor out to the long abandoned coal shaft head, and in this way we see: 'David: observed lovingly through the eyes of a schoolboy'. (Berry 1994:246)

The film portrays miners in unlikely ways. We are shown how, during lunch breaks underground, David sits in front of a pit pony holding a miner's lamp as each of the men working alongside brings out a book or newspaper. David says in voice over that *miners were great readers, always carried books in their pockets*. Following the advice of fellow miners David collects his poetry together for publication as *O Lwch y Lofa/From the Dust of the Mine* and, in a scene that employs very direct metaphor, we are actually shown a pristine

copy of this emerging from underground on the top of a coal truck. We see how David uses the proceeds from this publication to set up a scholarship for another young miner to take up a place at college to be a minister. The figure of the 'saintly' miner is thus combined with the twin 'improving' forces of education and religion. We also see how Ifor, the school boy, encourages David to attend the adjudication at the National Eisteddfod, following having submitted poetry into the competition, and listen to the adjudicator's praise. David's life may be read in terms of a successful transcendence of the dirt and danger of mining via poetry, but at the same time he is a man who still grieves for his dead son, who is the subject of his entry into the poetry competition.

This association of the figure of the miner with poetry is arguably a particular Welsh inflection or version of masculinity, and as already mentioned it has been associated by some commentators with a 'soulfulness'. It also features in connection with slate workers in the film *Y Chwarelwr*. In this early Welsh feature, we are shown slate workers taking their lunchbreaks together in a hut (caban bwyta) at the quarry site to listen to fellow quarrymen's poetry. The figure of the quarry man as literate is exaggerated. For instance we are shown instances where quarrymen singing verses from folk songs that they would have been totally familiar with read these from books. During the pretend Eisteddfod in the caban, we see the quarryman playing the part of the adjudicator writing down notes on paper. Ffrancon argues that like the miner, the figure of the quarryman is presented as: 'Y Chwarelwr ceidwad y diwylliant Cymraeg /conserver of Welsh culture' (Ffrancon 2003:20)

However, these scenes may seem to be so unrealistic as to be almost patronising. One explanation of this is that the director of *Y Chwarelwr*, Ifan ab Owen Edwards, was the founder of The Urdd youth movement. This movement is based around Welsh culture and Christianity, and aims to promote the continuity of Welsh culture and language, 'popularizing and furthering the sale of Welsh books. Wales was in the vanguard in adopting European marketing ideas' (Löffler 2000:203).

The use of Welsh books in *Y Chwarelwr* gave Welsh literature a timely lift. We are shown how at the large chapel Sunday school in 1936 each class member holds a book and flicks the

pages. In one scene a quarryman is shown consulting his diary to check the date of his upcoming wedding to the local schoolteacher. These reading scenes at the mine, quarry and chapel may be regarded as quite artificial. It seems unlikely that during their short meal breaks, working men would turn to writing, and a critical appreciation of each others' poems, given both the lack of light in a mine, the general habits and interests of working class men, and the position of poetry and artistic creativity more generally within dominant forms of heterosexual masculine cultures. Perhaps the desired effect was a kind of 'ennobling' of working class Welshmen, presenting them as cultured, educated, imaginative, and as transcending the dirt and sweat of quarry and pit.

These are not the only films that may be accused of portraying an unreal vision of working class Welshmen and their families and communities. It has been said of *How Green Was My Valley* that this exhibits: 'Perfect timing, in its wartime message on miners and unionism on the wholeness and wholesomeness of communities' (Harris 2003:209) Like the quarrymen in *Y Chwarelwr*, *How Green Was My Valley* has been said to portray a: 'transposed peasant society that celebrates an ease in a cultural world that fuses the popular and the highbrow' (Harris 2003:208)

Presenting men as writers in this way may have arisen from a general popularisation of writing during the two world wars, when working class men in their millions had writing as the only means of maintaining communication with family and friends from the front. Additionally, there was a significant upsurge in the popularity of poetry amongst working class people, both as authors and audiences, during the first World War (e.g. Walter 2006). These factors perhaps helped to lend a bit of plausibility of these kinds of poetry scenes, which in turn present Welsh culture as 'higher'.

A consequence of combining Welsh masculinity with poetry is that this masculinity is distanced from 'lower' forms of masculinity not seen to encompass literary abilities and appreciation. It takes the focus of Welsh masculinity away from physicality, strength, and stamina. However, other aspects may be regarded as presenting Welsh masculinity in these films as closer to male stereotypes. Miners are portrayed as being in the relatively powerless

positions within the patriarchal hierarchy, as deferring to other men higher up the class ladder. These films depict communities:.. 'dominated by an utterly ruthless coal industry' (Blandford 2007: 89). Therefore men are depicted in complex ways in relation to notions of masculinities, yet in other ways they are presented in ways that accord with stereotypical masculine behaviours and patriarchal social structures.

### **Homosociability**

What is also significant in film depictions of miners is how they illustrate men's homosociability in groups, for instance as workmates, neighbours and relatives. This contributes to what has been described as a sense of: 'long-suffering and democratic working class community' (Stead 1986: 165)

Central relationships tend to be depicted as between men, and in particular the relationship between fathers and sons (e.g. *Solomon a Gaenor*, *Johnny be Good*), *On The Black Hill*. This is one of the crucial elements of a patriarchal social system, especially the passing on from father to son of knowledge, responsibility and wealth. In *Preserved*, this process of inheritance tends to be presented as 'natural', and largely unproblematic, given that generational differences are acknowledged between father and son. As later sections of this chapter will discuss, sons come to accept from fathers even though there may be some uncertainty and tension surrounding this process of inheritance.

### **'The Farmer'**

In contrast to a relatively straightforward division between north and south Wales based on mining in the south and quarrying in the north, different forms of agriculture can be associated with different parts of Wales. For instance sheep farming (e.g. as depicted in the films *On The Black Hill* and *Sleep Furiously*) is associated with east and mid Wales. West Wales is associated with dairy farming (e.g. *Johnny Be Good*). The depiction of agriculture in *Hedd Wyn* is consistent with the emergence of subsistence farming following the freeing up of land ownership around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## The rural

Many of the same themes are clearly evident in films that focus on men as farmers in rural settings as those that focus on miners, but transposed to the countryside. This is highly significant, because the icon of the farmer is dependent on the depiction of the rural in ways that the miner/quarryman is not. The rural holds a special place within narratives of identity, as commentators such as Iordanova (2003) have pointed out, being regarded as the cradle of national identity in comparison to historically more recent towns and cities. This kind of narrative finds its most extreme form in discourses about blood and soil, often associated with more extreme forms of nationalism and notions of ‘fatherland’ or ‘motherland’. These kinds of longstanding and widespread concepts tie national identity essentially to biology and environmental determinism, as though identity is purely the product of interrelations between ‘blood’ and landscape.

In addition to this, location within the rural itself is highly significant: ‘locality remains of vital importance in constituting local farming communities which are strongly tied to a place and locality’ (Hutson 2003 :148)

As this section will highlight, in films such as *Hedd Wyn*, *Carrie’s War*, *Johnny Be Good*, *On The Black Hill*, *Sleep Furiously* and *Calon Gaeth* the rural is presented as a place of tradition and continuity, and in *Hedd Wyn* and *Carrie’s War* in particular, as a place of safety and healing. For example, in *Ar Waelod Y Cof* the poet Gwenallt is shown as mentally saved during isolation in his prison cell by his memories of the rural idyll in which annual holidays were spent with his parents’ families. He dreams of Sunday and the safety of his rural chapel roots.

Rural Wales also features in films such as *Piano With Many Strings* as inspirational, in this case through scenes showing the artist Ceri Richards walking or sitting by himself above the sea. Richards describes himself in the film as inspired by the Gower. These kinds of films can be regarded as (re)tying ‘authentic’ notions of Welshness to the rural, or as collectively the

repetitive performance of an authentic Welshness that is rural / agricultural and predates 'industrial' versions of Welshness associated with miners or quarrymen.

However, in other films the rural is depicted in contrasting ways. There are anxieties in *Sleep Furiously* about the future, about the closure of the primary school because there are not enough pupils, about the disruption of rural generational continuity. Scenes showing a farm sale of tools and equipment can be interpreted as continuity with the past – there have always been such farm sales, there have always been farmers with an eye for a bargain. However, these scenes are juxtaposed with views of a derelict farm workers' cottage. On the other hand the farm sale can be linked with failure and disappointment, with farms and farmers that have failed economically, with desperate attempts to make ends meet, and with the sale of elderly and obsolete farm equipment in the face of rampant modern agribusiness. In short, continuity under threat.

### **The 'bad' farmer**

In *On The Black Hill* the central character Amos (Bob Peck), a tenant farmer, is not depicted as an iconic 'hero'. This is in contrast to the depiction of miners as 'saintly'. Amos is constantly in dispute with others over the borders of the fields he works. This is perhaps a metaphor for Anglo-Welsh relations, and the struggle for territory associated with the on-going struggle to maintain identity in the face of oppression from England. Perhaps this is also a metaphor for a masculine urge to mark out and dominate space. Berry (1994: 413) has suggested that this may symbolise 'tensions inherent in the community'. Amos maltreats his English wife, whose middle class background contrasts sharply with his own. He bullies her into submitting to his rule, subordinating her religion, her reading and music. He is depicted as an unsympathetic character, we are encouraged to feel sympathy for the rest of his family, who suffer under his tyranny.

## Mythical rurality and masculinity

The notion of the idyllic rural is dispelled in *Hedd Wyn*. Increasingly the shadow of war falls on the countryside in the form of a firing range, and soldiers who appear in the landscape (Stanton 2002). However, the notion of men's homosociability is clearly present. Home on leave after training and before battle we are shown Hedd Wyn and his father standing shoulder to shoulder looking out at their fields that need ploughing. Both wear tweed waistcoats over their flannel shirts, traditional Welsh rural dress for men. They seem comfortable in one another's company. In an understated, emotionally cool way the father enquires of his son's progress with his ode for the Eisteddfod of 1917. In this way the Welsh farmer is depicted in ways similar to the icon of the miner, as 'soulful'.

Despite the more recent pressures on rural Wales from tourism and economic shifts, the rural has tended not to be depicted as somehow under threat. Rural roots and settings seem immediately and unproblematically available, it seems as though a connection with the rural has never been lost, and the rural is not merely a backwater that has been left behind. This perspective contrasts with how the rural features in Basque films, as later chapters will discuss. An exemption to this is *Sleep Furiously*, already discussed in terms of how it depicts the rural and the lives associated with it as under threat.

But the rural also features in more critical perspectives in film as a place of narrow petty-mindedness amongst older people (e.g. *Solomon a Gaenor*, *Carrie's War* and *Ar Waelod Y Cof*), lack of opportunity for younger generations (e.g. *Johnny Be Good*), and anxiety and conflict concerning inheritance (e.g. *Johnny Be Good*, *Stormydd Awst /August Storm* (1987: Endaf Emlyn), *On The Black Hill* and *Sleep Furiously*).

Welshmen as farmers tend to be depicted in terms of elements that are similar to those that make up the iconic figure of the miner. This includes a masculine physicality. For instance in *Hedd Wyn* we see Hedd Wyn and his father Evan Evans (Grey Evans) working with spades, cutting and laying out peat for their family winter fires. In *On The Black Hill* audiences are

shown men gathering the sheep with sheepdogs down from the hills to the farm yard for hand-shearing. We see men packing the wool and branding the shorn sheep with the Jones brand 'A.J.'. We see men repairing fences. This kind of depiction contributes to the way films set in the countryside place narratives of masculinity at the heart of narratives of Welshness.

### **Anxiety over change**

Yet in contrast to this more traditional way of depicting 'the farmer', is the rurally based Ceredigion mobile library van driver featured in *Sleep Furiously*. John Jones is presented as a frequent visitor to the villages of Cwm Erfyn and Trefeurig as the film depicts life here over the period of one year. We are shown how the library van is nearing obsolescence in the age of internet, DVDs and CDs, eBay, and satellite television. John Jones is presented as under pressure to use a computer, as reluctant to become IT literate. John's clients are all elderly. John Jones seems an anachronism, he is struggling to keep up with increasingly ubiquitous new media and technologies which may be rendering the book obsolete. Yet he is also portrayed sympathetically, as someone struggling to keep pace with change. When combined with anxieties over the closure of the local school and the changing face of modern agriculture, it is easy to see this film as an 'oblique homage to the rituals and values of belonging witnessing disappearance' (Ford 2009:18). Others have commented on this film as portraying the passing of traditional rural ways of life: 'Trefeurig appears to be dying, and Koppel's camera captures the consequent ripples of loss and regret' (Bradshaw 2009: 8).

And yet this kind of anxiety over change is a defining characteristic of films of Preserved. We are shown another abandoned workers cottage, this time in the small rural town of Llanrwst, in the film *Cofio T.Glynne* (Gwyndaf Roberts: 2008). We are informed that this cottage, which was empty in 1951, inspired the winning entry in the poetry competition of the 1951 National Eisteddfod. The poem is read out on the soundtrack, to accompany images of the stone ruins of the cottage in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century



*Adfeilion /Ruins: T.Glynne Davies 1926-1988*

R'oedd niwl pen y mynydd  
Yn ffedog wen  
Am darddle'r hirbell afonydd,  
A gyrrai iasau'r awelon  
Hwb  
I geirydd y diflanedig oriau.

The fog on the mountain top  
a white apron where start out long rivers  
on their journey and the shudder of the  
breezes caused a jarr to the forts of the  
hours which have dissappeared

Heddiw mae Pant y Maes yn furddun  
Ar ben ffordd leidiog gul;  
Datgymalwyd ei wreiddiau,  
Mae'r gweithfaen yn hen.

Today Pant Y Maes is a ruin  
in a narrow muddy lane.  
The ancient root was shattered  
The granite is old.

Digon bod yma furddun  
Lle bu bywyd yn drydan  
Mewn cyrff.

Now there is a dead ruin where once there  
was an electricity of life

Mae'r plant a fagodd Pant y Maes  
Yn furddunod  
Mewn hetiau meddal lliwgar  
Ar strydoedd dinasoedd du.

The children raised at Pant Y Maes are in  
ruins, in soft colourful hats on the streets  
of black cities.

This illustrates that anxieties about shrinking employment in agriculture, the impact of new technologies, worry over depopulation and the attraction of the city were being expressed back in the 1950s.

## **The Welsh farm**

Agriculture has been the industry of the countryside for centuries. It is traditionally associated with the family farm and a clear gendered division of labour, in which men do heavy physical work out in the fields and women look after the domestic realm of the farmhouse and engage in craft in kitchen and parlour. Films about 'the Welsh farm' tend effectively to be narratives of masculinity in 'the rural', and they contribute to how farm, village and country town space are predominantly represented as gendered in accordance with heteropatriarchy.

Arguably, industry manufactured new narratives of Welshness and shapings of Welsh cultural heritage from those cultural materials that had previously developed within the rural. Like all cultural systems the Welsh farm has complex sets of meanings that are integral to it.

Farming is perhaps a more intensely family-based enterprise than waged work in mining, quarrying or the ironworks of the valleys. In contrast to industry, in agriculture the boundaries between the family home and place of work are much less sharply defined, if at all present. Families do not live in such close proximity to each other, the rhythms and timetables of working days are more individualised, the work is less collaborative. For these reasons notions of community may be less intense in rural places, and this contrast is evident in films set in rural locations. However, this is not to deny a sense of 'belonging to the land' and social continuity arising from most people in rural Wales living in the county of their birth, 'usually within a fairly small portion of it' (Ormond 1989: 60). It is important to acknowledge the dynamism of agriculture in relation to changing structures in Wales, and the shifts from tenant to small landowner to intensive agribusiness on larger and larger farms (e.g. as depicted in *Sleep Furiously*).

### **The sleeping rural**

*Sleep Furiously* as a film title may be interpreted by audiences in a number of ways. Those familiar with the work of linguist Noam Chomsky may recognise it as being part of a sentence offered in his 1957 *Syntactic Structures* ('colourless green ideas sleep furiously'). Chomsky argued that this obeys the structural grammatical rules of English yet makes no sense. Commentators have more recently critiqued Chomsky's argument that the sentence is nonsensical, arguing that it has the kind of metaphor and poetics to be found in types of artistic language, and thus that it is an example of a particular kind of language rich in implied meanings. Some have pointed out more recently that 'green ideas' is now a meaningful unit of language since the emergence of 'green' as something relating to environmental issues.

One interpretation of the film title therefore is that what the film presents may seem at first to have no overall meaning, but perhaps the audience is expected to construct oblique, poetical meanings from the juxtaposition of elements that may seemingly be put together almost at random. There are parallels here with the icon of the poetic miner (e.g. *David*), soldier (e.g. *Hedd Wyn*) and conscientious objector in *Ar Waelod Y Cof*. This poetic strand accords with the film's fragmented structure in comparison to the more straightforward and predictable

ways that the Welsh rural has been depicted in previous films such as *Johnny Be Good*, *Hedd Wyn*, *Carrie's War*, *On The Black Hill*, *Rebecca's Daughters*, *Pen y Berth*, *Dal: Yma/Nawr* and *Y Weithred*. The camera in *Sleep Furiously* provides elliptical views of the rural in terms of community, village buildings, farms, and social events. For instance we are shown a lone figure dressed as a mayor out on a hillside ringing a bell like a town crier. We are not told why, audiences are expected to make their own sense of this from the very limited materials provided.

However, interpretations could go further. Those familiar with the whole sentence may take 'green' to be a conventional reference to the greenness of the rural in Wales, and the notion of 'sleeping furiously' as a reference to dynamic tensions and anxieties to be found beneath the surface of the ostensibly peaceful, conservative, unchanging rural. This last meaning is of course arguably readily available to those audiences unfamiliar with Chomsky, who are simply trying to make meaningful sense of the film title. It is notable that this is an example of a film title that draws on a globally famous item of academic literature which seemingly has no connection whatsoever to the subject matter of the film. A more traditional approach might be expected to have been to take the name of the community/village/locality as the film title, or if the title was to be taken from literature, Welsh literature or perhaps the Bible be the source of this. This move away from the traditional may be associated with those who know the background of the director with him being 'a newcomer' into Wales (whose German-Jewish parents came to Wales to escape persecution by the Nazis in Germany). It would thus make more sense for him as 'a newcomer' to look outside existing Welsh traditions and cultural heritage, and to adopt an 'outsider's' perspective on rural west Wales in the film.

### **Inheritance and wayward sons**

Additionally, farming is directly associated with issues connected to patriarchal systems of inheritance. Land ownership or the working of the same piece of land for every farming generation might be characterised in terms of the projection of a family's own blood within the next generation. This captures the narratives of biological essentialism associated with many versions of nationalism, not just narratives of Welshness and Wales. It makes clear how

many prime or master narratives of national or regional identity locate origins within the rural and agriculture, and make strong links between the soil and bloodlines.

For example the importance of inheritance down the male family line is underlined in *Johnny be Good* and *On the Black Hill*. In *On the Black Hill* Amos's twin sons are shown at the end of the film to be content that another generation of their blood line will take on the farm. On their eightieth birthdays their estranged nephew re-establishes contact with the news that he is about to become the father to a newborn son. In *Johnny be Good* it is through a younger man's rejection of farming that a dynamic tension is established, as the patriarchal line of inheritance on which the rural 'community' is founded comes to be threatened. Family inheritance comes face to face with changes associated with the 'invention' of the teenager and the emergence of distinctive 'youth' cultures in the 1950s and 60s as Johnny, the central character, becomes immersed in an emergent rock and roll subculture.

This film provides a clear example of how inheritance is interwoven with issues of family, loyalty, 'otherness' and age to shape complexity in narratives of identity, and to introduce tension around stability and continuity. The farm has one paid employee Warren, considered to be 'simple'. Warren does not share the farmhouse with the family owners. In Warren's caravan in the farmyard Johnny the teenage son and only child of the owners learns and practises American rock and roll music of the 1960's, and gets an Eddie Cochran haircut. Warren drives the farm car to the village cafe where they spend money listening to a new jukebox. Warren is thus presented as a clear outsider, whose influence is a threat to the 'normal' order of things. Warren could never become like a son, could never take up a position within the system of inheritance of the farm.

In contrast to Johnny ( Emyr Jenkins) and Warren (Adam Crockett), Johnny's father is elderly, miserable and ungenerous towards his son. Warren's difference is further marked by him being English, and his influence shapes young Johnny's desires. Johnny comes to buy Elvis Presley clothes and a guitar on a day trip to Swansea, he gets bored with the farm, all to his father's dismay. Warren is thus a vehicle through which Johnny is exposed to the world

beyond the farm and beyond the rural, his horizons are broadened. Johnny's father represents traditional values and loyalties, Johnny is caught between the two.

Shock and anxiety stemming from the threat of losing his son, who 'wastes' money on music and his dreams under the influence of Warren, disturbs the father so much that it contributes to his death from a heart attack. We see him receive a traditional Welsh funeral and burial, and Warren walking away to leave Johnny to decide his future, which is presented as split between commitment to music or to the farm. There is no middle ground. Johnny affirms his inheritance of the farm and thus shows loyalty to his father's values, and the patriarchal system of inheritance is thus rescued by the end of the film. In this way the film ends up upholding narratives of Preserved, having gone some way towards challenging them earlier.

Another example of this kind of narrative thread can be drawn from the film *Calon Gaeth*, which is based on Sian James' 1979 novel *A Small Country*. The central character Josi Evans (Mark Lewis Jones) has turned his back on his family's farm in exchange for romance and upward social mobility with Rachel Evans (Rhian Morgan), the lady of a country estate. We meet them in the film as the parents of teenagers, at a point where Josi begins an affair with local school teacher Miriam Lewis (Nia Roberts). He leaves Rachel Evans, whilst she is ill, to set up house with his new mistress, and the child he has fathered with her. However, he ultimately decides to return to the rundown, abandoned farmhouse (Caerhebog) of his late father, after his mistress commits suicide and his wife has died. There he settles with a former servant from the estate house, and a new child. It is only at the end of the film, when Josi comes to accept his inheritance of Caerhebog, that his life seems to become settled. This redemption comes hand in hand with the successful resolution of a patriarchal line of inheritance.

This narrative thread is also evident in the film *Stormydd Awst*. Set in 1957, the film shows how like Johnny, young Penri Jones (Arwel Gruffydd) leaves school believing he has a musical talent that will make him a star in London. He ignores his father Dan Jones (Dylan Roberts) and his occupation of printer. Dan writes dramas for the local community, to be performed in the village hall. Penri takes up the relatively more glamorous job of fitting

television aerials, glamorous because it is connected with the new media of television, which assumes the position of rock and roll in Johnny Be Good as an external influence on the young that threatens to take them away from a 'normal' destiny of following in fathers' footsteps. Although not farmers, Dan (Dylan Roberts) and Penri (Arwel Gruffydd) live in a small rural community, which is thus presented as under threat from modern advances, particularly television. In the film Dan writes a column in the local newspaper he prints, *Y Glorian*, on the evils of the television. His column is intended to elicit a response within his readership of 'moral panic', as defined by Cohen (1972) as outrage over threatened shared values. Dan is a nonconformist deacon, he and the chapel minister (Stewart Jones) collaborate in trying to spread the idea that television is a threat to the morality of the local community. There follows a series of disasters when Penri discovers that the music teacher Miss Edwards (Judith Humphries) he believed would help his career in the arms of his headmaster Mr Jenkins (Trefor Selway). As well as relying on her for help and guidance, Penri was infatuated with her. Penri drives his employers' van through the plate glass window of the television shop. He comes to realise that the only avenue open to him now is to follow in his father's footsteps and take up work in the print room.

What Josi, Johnny and Penri have in common is that each is an only son, with no other direct competition for inheritance and following the father's example. Similarly, each has their dreams smashed, or sees them as unrealisable, or more simply sees through them as ultimately not desirable. Following this, they 'return' to the straight and narrow of rural patriarchy, almost as though this were a consolation prize or a fall back to a default position as only son.

Anxieties over inheritance also feature towards the end of *On The Black Hill*, directed by another Welsh film director but based on Bruce Chatwin's 1982 novel. Although Chatwin was born in Birmingham and never lived in Wales, both the novel and the film are regarded as convincing portrayals of landscape and life during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the mountain country beyond the Brecon beacons on the border with England (Kemp 1987, James 1991 & Berry 1994). Throughout the film it appears as though a great deal of attention has been paid to present life at the farm 'authentically' over the period of eighty years covered by the film. As well as costume, farm machinery and farming methods, this also includes

presenting: 'Tensions born of age-old conflict against gentry, tradition against change' (Kemp 1987: 232) The landlord calls a public sale of the farm, named 'The Vision', and Amos is denied his right as a sitting tenant to make a first private offer for the farm. Instead Amos has to compete against other bidders to be able to pass it on to his twin sons, Lewis Jones (Robert Gwilym) and Benjamin Jones (Mike Gwilym).

Clearly in *Johnny Be Good*, *Stormydd Awst/August Storm* and *Calon Gaeth* notions of inheritance and heritage are also not tied merely to issues of landownership, but more loosely with notions of 'home' and other 'things' such as value systems that are passed on from father to son (but not mother to daughter, or father to daughter). These elements feature in other films. For instance in *Hedd Wyn* we see in flashback as Hedd Wyn lies wounded in France the landscape of the previous harvest on his parent's farm, with him happy quietly working the fields as he cuts hay. One interpretation is that the film suggests that this is Hedd Wyn's rural inheritance, that this is where he belongs rather than dying in the mud of a foreign battlefield fighting somebody else's war. This scene also presents the rural nostalgically as a place of safety and peacefulness. *On The Black Hill* shows something of the effort of hill farm work, highlighting how father and sons co-operate together, and how farming knowledge and skills are passed on between generations. This form of 'inheritance' is integral to the working of the farm.

In these ways the centrality of patriarchy in narratives of rural Welsh identity is underlined. A further way is through the figure of the widow, who will be discussed in more detail in a later section of this chapter. What is significant is how the figure of the widow assumes tragic proportions through having to struggle without a husband within a patriarchal social system.

### **'Poets' at work**

A prime feature of narratives of Preserved is the up-dating of older and arguably highest valued Welsh traditions in order to present these to contemporary audiences. In particular, amongst these traditions are the creation and performance of poetry. For instance in *Hedd Wyn* we see the poet having private coaching from the assistant preacher, the film also shows

him judging a local literary competition, and his poetry also features on the soundtrack. The poetry of Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) features in *Dylan* (1962: Jack Howells) and *A Bronze Mask* (1967: John Ormond). The poetry of Alun Lewis (1915-1944) features in *Fragile Universe* (1969: John Ormond), that of Gwenallt in *Ar Waelod y cof*, and Vernon Watkins (1906-1967) in *Under a Bright Heaven* (1966: John Ormond).

This last film is the only one of these that actually features the living poet, and incorporates interview material. Watkins underlines the centrality of poetry within Welsh culture. He describes the strength of a bond felt with other, earlier poets. He states how he imagines 'no interval of time' and how 'from ancient truths my poetry stems'. This is the strength of this connection with the past, this sense of continuity, of inheritance. Partly Watkins is referring to poets in a universal sense because of his inspiration by classical poets writing in Latin and Greek. However, a distinctive feature of Welsh literature is how written language has altered very little over time, in comparison to other languages. This means that literature several centuries old is more or less immediately accessible and credible to contemporary readers. By comparison for example, the works of writers such as Chaucer or Shakespeare feature language and cultural references that are far more opaque to contemporary speakers of English. This feature of Welsh in part contributes to an enduring linearity and centrality of poetry within Welsh culture. Poetry has also proved to be a tool through which Welsh culture can be presented to audiences outside Wales: 'Mae marchnata wedi bod yn rhan o lenyddiaeth / marketing has always been a part of literary creativity' (Gwyn Thomas 1995: 23). Within this poetic tradition the figure of the bard is important.

### **Men as bards**

Wales and its poetry is of significance as arguably Europe's oldest recorded surviving bardic tradition. *Dal: Yma/Nawr* (translatable as '*Still Here Now*') explores the continuing transformation of poetic styles within a traditional framework of verse structure. These styles originate from Eisteddfod bardic competition which began at the Aberteifi/Cardigan Castle sitting of 1176. It is a complex system of alliterations and internal rhyme that creates patterns in which sound is equally as important as words in creating a symbolism associated with ritual and costuming.



In some ways this is similar to Bertsolaritza in Basque culture, or sung poems associated with mainly illiterate people that emerged pre 19<sup>th</sup> Century. These improvised performances of verse are the focus of competitions (Lasagabaster 1995: 355) and have become a cultural and political symbol of the Basque Country, (e.g. *Bertsolari* 2011: Asier Altuna). Like the bardic tradition in Wales, Bertsolaritza has been dominated by men, though this is now starting to change (Watson 1999: 423).

There are no formal interviews in *Dal:Yma/Nawr*, or formal script. The film is divided into seven sections (or verses), each focusing on a particular poet drawn from seven different regions in Wales. The number seven is central to the rhythmical structure of traditional Welsh poetry, being the number of beats per line of verse. The whole metre of the film is shaped by the selection of poets and the audible characteristics of their work, not the written word. The film takes audiences around the seven regions of Wales to notable locations related to the lives of local bards and poets writing centuries ago who are played by actors. In between these scenes, the film returns to the Eisteddfod pavilion at St David's in the present, and the druids' bardic circle.

The position of Archdruid, head of the bardic circle, has only ever been open to men until 2012. This position is like that of the master of a masonic lodge. The structure of the Gorsedd, or druid circle, was borrowed from the structure of the Freemasons, and subsequently the English Druidic system, by Iolo Morganwg, when the modern druid circle was set up and accepted by the Eisteddfod. Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams 1747- 1826) known more often as simply Iolo, was responding to a perceived crisis over the loss of connection with Welsh cultural traditions due to pressure from forces such as religion, which had clamped down on dangerous, sinful activities such as dancing and celebration, and pressure from England: Iolo Morganwg delighted in the maypole and Morris dance culture and cherished its music and folksongs.

'He was one of the earliest Welsh scholars to see its value, and bitterly denounced Methodism for destroying it' (Stephens & Jones 1975: 3).

‘Hand in hand with the campaign to make the Gorsedd of the Bards into a national body relevant to a modern nation and capable of withstanding English criticism came efforts to make it as expressive as possible of an ancient Celtic past’ (Löffler 2007: 63)

‘Reinventing’ or re-presenting culture is thus not merely a modern phenomenon, just as anxiety over cultural change is an enduring theme in relation to narratives of national identities associated with Preserved. There are parallels here with the clamp down on Basque culture and identity under Franco, discussed in later chapters, and Basque attempts to reinvent and re-present culture to those feared to be losing touch with their cultural heritage. It is also notable that Iolo was effectively seeking to ‘reinvent’ himself when he changed his name from Edward Williams.

A consequence of basing the modern bardic tradition on the Freemasons has been the endurance of what has been until very recently a totally male institution. Much of the ideology and ritualism of the Welsh druid circle is borrowed from Freemasonry, such as various aspects of symbolism. The romantic myth of the druid circle is therefore based around systems of hierarchy, honour and award and other elements of what are stereotypically masculine social and cultural systems. When Iolo confidentially presented his vision for The Druid Circle to the Welsh society in London in 1792 he is reported to have stated: ‘I am giving you the patriarchal religion and theology, the divine revelations given to mankind, and these have been retained in Wales until our own day’ (Jenkins 1993: 57). As later chapters will make clear, there is no equivalent to the bardic circle, with its basis in patriarchy, within Basque cultural traditions.

As a written and spoken tradition poetry perhaps does not immediately lend itself to presentation on the film screen, and yet film can bring those audiences to poetry who would otherwise never encounter it in mere written or spoken forms. In addition, what is presented on the screen can enhance the impact of poetic verse, and in the case of biographical films, appreciation of the poet. In *Hedd Wyn* the way the poet speaks, his letters and love poems, his courtships and love-affairs, all reflect a slower rural pace in keeping with the tempo of the sound track, a lingering camera style, and the tempo of verse.

## Literature

Many films of Preserved are based on established Welsh literature: *Hedd Wyn*, *Dal :Yma /Nawr*, *David*, *Y Weithred* (1995: Richard Lewis), *Rebecca's Daughters* (Karl Francis: 1991) and *Ar Waelod Y Cof*. In some cases, literature from outside Wales provides the basis as in *How Green Was My Valley*, *On The Black Hill* and *Carrie's War*. However, by being based on established elements of Welsh culture, these films almost necessarily take a backward looking perspective as they present aspects of the past to audiences. Evident in some of these films is a clear anxiety concerning the possibility that new cultural forms such as television and music may supplant the more traditional, longstanding significance of poetry and prose in Welsh culture. This coheres closely with Higson's conception of heritage film as concerned more with celebrating 'high culture' such as 'great' literature, film and art, and the general anxieties that can be associated with supposedly 'lower' forms of art such as television and pop music. However, Preserved does include films that are totally concerned with contemporary forms of mass culture, and one example of this is the film *Beautiful Mistake*. But in addition to presenting the supposedly 'lower' cultural form of 'pop' music as continuing traditions that are fundamental to Welsh cultural heritage, it also reaffirms the centrality of masculinity to narratives of Welsh identity.

## Men giving master classes

As mentioned previously in the introduction to this chapter, *Beautiful Mistake* provides a clear example of how musical traditions are dominated by men, and of this up-dating of tradition. The film shows John Cale working with a variety of different younger musicians and singers drawn from contemporary Welsh 'pop'. It is in effect a master class taken by Cale, who was born in 1942 in Garnant, a mining village in the Swansea Valley in South Wales. Cale describes his father as a miner, and his aunt, Mai Jones, composed music for Welsh composer Ivor Novello's famous song '*We'll Keep a Welcome*' (Lewis 1999). These two pieces of biographical information may locate him firmly within essentialist narratives of identity as bearing the DNA of two different icons of Welshness, the miner and the musician/singer. Cale left Wales to pursue his education, attending Goldsmiths' College in London. During the 1960s Cale left his classical music education in London for New York,

where he joined the alternative scene that developed around Andy Warhol. He became the viola player for The Velvet Underground, and contributed much to the composition and performance of this highly successful and influential group's material. The Velvet Underground were at the heart of the late 1960s explosion of new genres in music and art and the emergence of a distinctive subculture.

It is notable that Cale has more recently been the Welsh representative at the Venice Biennale 2009 art festival. His exhibit consists of an audio visual installation depicting the blasting and cutting away of rocks from the edge of valleys in Wales. It is easy to see how this reconnects with his father's occupation, and with narratives of Welsh identity more generally. His own narrative arc seems to have returned him to Preserved from a previously more radical body of work.

The film presents the development over ten days of composition and performance by contemporary musicians in Wales, many of whom were associated with the 'Cool Cymru'. Welsh popular music rose to a new prominence with the stamp of approval from the rest of Britain (Woodward 2006:46). Featured performers include Cerys Matthews (of Catatonia), James Dean Bradfield (of the Manic Street Preachers), Gorky's Zygotic Myncci and Super Furry Animals. Matthews is the only female performer. The film is basically a series of master classes with Cale assuming a role that in some way mirrors that of the Archdruid in charge of the Eisteddfod ceremonies at St David's.

The audience is encouraged to feel present at a part of the master class, and as the title implies, mistakes are made in class. Cale says 'mistakes are really what makes a human, gives guts to the character'. Through witnessing these mistakes made during the processes of composition and rehearsal, audiences may presume they see 'real' people engaged in 'real' work in a 'real' situation. Yet the entire film is of course contrived, staged, edited, the musicians have been brought together purely for the making of the film and in this sense there is actually very little that is 'real' about this film.

The film can be seen as an updating or 'renewing' of the 'ancient tongue' of Welsh cultural traditions associated with performance and literature. We see these musicians working inside a studio located within the Coal Exchange in Bute, a noted building in the industrial history of Cardiff, now within the new Cardiff Bay area. The Cardiff depicted in the film is no longer a city that benefits from the coal industry. However, even within the studio connections are deliberately made with the industrial past through a series of panels around the performance space in the studio that feature images of men's lungs damaged by coal dust.

In this way the film presents a new generation of performers from the contemporary Welsh pop scene, as 'alive' and as something 'real' to a new generation. It can be seen as an ongoing celebration of music and performance, a vibrant area of contemporary Welsh cultures. But it is clearly a mere 'up-dating' and re-presenting of musical performance. Through its combination of images, music and the structure of the master classes it can be clearly seen as a continuation of heritage. Potentially significant questions concerning for instance what and whom actually constitutes 'Welsh' pop music and 'Welsh' musicians are not addressed. Although a woman is included amongst the performers (Cerys Matthews), the domination of this cultural genre by men is similarly unremarked upon. The iconic references to the industrial period and landscape that help establish continuity with heritage are also icons of working class masculinity.

The film includes images of Cardiff, prior to the recent redevelopment of the bay area. Examples of the capital in darkness and daylight hours present a narrative of Cardiff, as we are shown a combination of moving and still images that include a multi-storey car park, the airport, coaches and the coach station, shopping within a shopping complex, a flock of pigeons lifting off from one of the city squares. But for all the attempts to engage with contemporary younger audiences in Wales which give the film a 21st century feel, it presents a quite one dimensional set of narratives of Welshness. Collectively, the film presents a comparatively narrow version of culture, history and tradition in comparison to the Basque films discussed as of Preserved in a later chapter.

This up-dating is suggestive of an anxiety surrounding Welsh culture and tradition and young people, an insecurity stemming from a perceived threat of young people becoming indifferent to issues of Welsh identity, of losing connections with cultural traditions and history in the face of the emergence of global 'youth' cultures. This anxiety is arguably perceivable within many S4C productions, though I must acknowledge that part of the remit of S4C is to (re)educate in connection with Welsh culture and heritage. But this continuing engagement with the past can be a sign of a lack of direction or foresight or planning in terms of the future, and in turn an unease concerning the future. This perhaps also explains why there are no productions by S4C discussed in the chapter on Welsh 'subversive' film, that actively seem to pose fundamental questions concerning the nature of Welshness and its cotemporary significance.

This up-dating of heritage is also clearly evident in *Dal: Yma/Nawr*, along with the masculine nature of central cultural tradition. The bardic tradition of Wales is the focus of this film, which attempts to represent 2000 years of poetry within one artistic documentary, something which had never been done before. This film uses the National Eisteddfod in St David's in 2002 as a platform to explore Welsh poetic traditions. It is a celebration of the National Eisteddfod bardic circle, and of a collection of Welsh identities.

### **Men and sport**

Another iconic symbol of Wales is the male rugby player, and yet he and sport in general do not feature frequently in film. The founder of the Urdd recognised the significance of sport to national culture: '(Ifan ap) Owen Edward's most striking and controversial innovation of the interwar years was his National Sports Games for the youth of Wales which were held annually from 1932, and which provided a national focus for those whose strengths did not lie in the language, literature and the history of Wales' (Löffler 2006: 99). In effect, this can be seen as an attempt to accommodate different forms of masculinity associated with different social classes. Far from the notion that all of Wales is working class, Edwards was acknowledging that not all had the educational background and literacy skills to become involved in the realms of poetry and literature.

One example of a film in which sport is featured is *Ymadawiad Arthur/Arthur's Departure* (Marc Evans 1994). Set in 2096 *Ymadawiad Arthur* features a flashback to the days of television. During this the central character Dai Arthur (Ioan Evans) wears a number 10 Welsh rugby jersey (the number worn by some of the most famous Welsh rugby players such as Barry John and Phil Bennett), and runs for the try line against England. But Dai is sent off the field because he does not have the rugby ball, leaving the Welsh team one man short. This could be interpreted as a comment on Dai himself as a man who fails in a fantasy attempt to become a stereotypical masculine Welsh hero, or as a comment on Welsh men more generally who cannot achieve idealised performances of Welsh masculinity. Since the opponents are England, there are also clear meanings relating to postcolonialism and perhaps the failure of Welsh attempts at resistance to English domination.

The dying father in *Y Chwarelwr* has ambitions for his son to succeed at football in the Urdd competition. But we are not shown any scenes in which football is played. *Dal: Yma /Nawr* features the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, as we see a man stripped to the waist, barefoot, wearing jeans who runs into the stadium and onto the pitch, where he slowly rotates in the centre of the pitch whilst holding a Welsh rugby scarf aloft. He hears an invisible crowd singing the Welsh hymn tune 'Cwm Rhondda', always sung at Welsh rugby internationals. Again, this scene may seem to be about pride, identity and belonging, and the centrality of men to sporting narratives of identity. Another possible interpretation is that this is an ironic statement of the marriage of rugby and religion, of the sport being as important as religion to Welshmen. This scene is introduced by a voice over speaking the words to another famous Welsh hymn:

'I imagine that I hear a Heavenly voice  
 Who has conquered great storms of water and fire  
 Come, Holy Spirit, lead the way  
 To Thy Heaven above  
 I feel a longing for that place  
 Where there are hosts that  
 Sing the anthem all their days  
 Of death on Calvary'  
 ('*Pererin Wyf/I am a pilgrim*' William Williams, Pantycelyn 1717 – 1791)

Wearing only a pair of jeans enhances the physical masculinity of this man as he runs through the streets of Cardiff to get to the Stadium. It is possible to equate this physicality with that of ancient warriors, shown in other scenes in the same film and discussed below.

Despite the popularity of rugby in Wales, and the success of the national team in the past, this has not constructed the rugby player as an icon, unlike mining. There are considerable technical difficulties associated with filming football matches within feature films in ways that render this convincing to audiences. However, technical difficulties with filming in coal mines have not prevented the miner from becoming iconic. Sport is not lacking in drama and dynamism, neither is supporting a sports team. Therefore it is perhaps surprising that so few Welsh films in general feature sport, and that there are not films of Preserved that, for instance, celebrate the successes of past national rugby teams and players, particularly over England. Perhaps one reason for this is that rugby and football have their origins in England, and there is no real indigenous sport to compare with, for instance, pelota in the Basque country.

### **Men as warriors**

Beyond the masculine structure of the bardic circle, *Dal: Yma/ Nawr* effectively documents the extent to which poetic tradition stems from war poetry and the works of bards who sang the praises of warriors and celebrated wars. Featured in the film are testimonies of death and defeat including ‘The Gododdin’ from The Book of Aneirin, argued to be one of the earliest or oldest Preserved works in the Welsh language, and probably the most accessible body of tribal poetry from anywhere in Europe (Conran 1993). This documents the battle of Catteraeth (Catterick in North Yorkshire) and celebrates the men of the Brythonic tribe who fell during a suicidal attack on the English. It takes the form of a kind of formal boasting and praising of them as battle heroes who fought and died.

‘Bright mead was their drink, and that was their poison  
Three hundred fought in the order of battle  
They paid for this with their lives  
Caradog and Madog, Pyll and Ieuyan  
Gegon and Gwion, Gwyn and Cynfan’



Part of this section of the film adopts a style I feel is readily identifiable as that of Marc Evans, at 'Y Gromlech', or a megalithic burial chamber consisting of a capstone and three standing stones, in the landscape of present West Wales. Similar burial structures are found in the Basque country and feature in the film *La Pelota Vasca. La piel contra la piedra/The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone* (2003: Julio Medem), which is discussed in a later chapter. In *Dal: Yma/ Nawr* a warrior (Daniel Evans) is filmed inside the megalithic burial chamber, strapped in a chair, hair shaven, chest bare to the waist with a stitched wound from throat to waist. He is smeared with blood. Evans filters the camera with tinges of orange and red. The lighting is harsh, from above, and the background is dark. The soundtrack features hammering, heavy breathing and dripping water. The theme of the poem is that death at battle is coveted, and is a prime way for a man to show his masculinity.

The film also features an elegy or lament for Llywelyn the Second, known in Welsh as 'Llywelyn ein Llyw Olaf' which translates as 'Llywelyn last Prince of independent Wales'. It was written following his escape from imprisonment in the Tower of London and death at the hands of Edward the First at Cilmeri (near Builth Wells). Some have argued that the poem expresses: 'fear of the devastation to come after the last Prince of Wales was killed by Edward I's soldiers at Cilmeri 1282' (Aaron 2005 p.139)

On the screen we are shown a horse losing his armoured rider, accompanied by the following narration written by court Poet Gruffydd Yr Ynad Coch:

'Fair head of Llywelyn, a harsh fear to the world  
That an iron stake should rive it.  
Head of my lord, the pain of his downfall,  
Head of my soul, no name upon it,  
A head that, once, nine hundred lands honoured.'  
(Extract from film script)

This is intercut with images of the Archdruid of Wales Dr Robyn Lewis unsheathing and sheathing the sword on the Eisteddfod ceremony platform for the chairing of the winning bard at St David's in 2002. We also see Robyn Lewis addressing the druid circle and stating the importance of land and language in Welsh identity. Marc Evans has said that: 'older poems read aloud reconnect us with our past in a very real way, they literally wake the dead'

(Evans 2007: 29). To the masculine icons of the miner and the farmer can thus be added the masculine warrior, through whom aspects of Welsh history and cultural heritage are (re)imagined and the past re-presented to present generations.

## Film and literature

What this illustrates is that in order to understand Welsh film there must first be a clear awareness and understanding of Welsh literature. There are numerous examples in films of Preserved where references are made to the central canon of Welsh literature. For instance when he is wounded in battle we see Hedd Wyn visited by a black veiled muse Arianrhod (Manon Prysor) who is a character that appears in the oral middle ages tales of *Y Mabinogion*. So through her Hedd Wyn is linked with Welsh literary history.

This indexing of literature possibly extends across many cultures, minority and otherwise. It seems a very obvious point to make, but nevertheless it may sometimes be overlooked. This point will arise again in later chapters that discuss Basque film and literature and the relationships between the two, and has already been flagged up in the discussion of the methodology adopted for this research.

Elsewhere in *Dal: Yma/ Nawr* there is a performance of a traditional Welsh hymn notable for being written by a woman, Ann Griffiths (1776-1805), entitled *Disgwyl Yr Arglwydd/Waiting for the Lord*. This performance is by contemporary musicians, featuring Cerys Matthews on vocals and John Cale at the keyboard. This is clearly about connecting contemporary Welsh cultural practices and cultural icons with cultural and historical traditions, and presenting these with iconic symbols of success beyond Wales. We are shown a collection of contemporary young Welsh actors who have achieved success internationally, including Matthew Rhys and Ioan Gruffudd, in a variety of iconic American locations. These include 42nd Street in New York, Grand Central Station bursting with people, and the subway, the

contemporary in-crowd of figures drawn from current Welsh artistic and media production and performance.

This film is about the preservation of dominant narratives of Welsh identity because it is simply an updating for contemporary audiences of a central part of masculine Welsh cultural heritage. It is possible to see that what is being celebrated here is men as active agents, men as warriors, men as poets recording their versions of history, and the male-dominated system of competition, honour and hierarchy associated with the Bardic circle.

These parts of the film present an updating yet essentially unchanging version of these central components of traditional Welsh poetry. The poems are given a visual presentation for the first time, but Welshness is unquestioned, neither is the whole ritual of the bardic circle and Eisteddfod competition and honour. A second important point is that within Welsh masculinities there is room for the expression of emotions and vulnerabilities, for men to be involved in poetry and music. This is something that 'traditional' versions of masculinity rooted in other national cultural traditions may tend to exclude.

## **Family, Religion and 'Community'**

Intermingled with patriarchy, another fundamental strand that links together family and community is religion. Nonconformism in Wales has been described as the 'religious and cultural norm' (Llywelyn 1999: 49), 'Nonconformist people of Wales *were* the nation' (Griffith 2006:91), and films of Preserved implicitly portray religion in Wales as dominated by men as clergy or ministers. The religious structure confers power and authority on men, and a moral superiority that legitimates the judgement of others, particularly those regarded as having sinned and/or otherwise infringed the 'rules' of the local community. Often, this is presented in ways that are critical of the treatment those who fail to conform with shared community values, morals and standards of behaviour. Nonconformist deacons, those lay members concerned with secular matters below ministers, feature in *Solomon a Gaenor*, *Y*

*Chwarelwr*, *Ar Waelod Y Cof*, *Valley of Song*, *Storom Awst* and *Carrie's War*. They dish out judgements and punishments at will, and this is presented in ways that encourage audiences to recognise them as unjust. An effect of lay members behaving in these ways is to render their actions and responses to members of the congregation as those of members of the local community, not those of a more distanced, higher authority more likely to have arrived from 'outside'. So these films are quite critical of the working class communities they depict.

Like Gaynor (Nia Roberts) in *Solomon a Gaenor*, Miriam (Nia Roberts) the pregnant local schoolmistress in *Calon Gaeth*, is barred from entry to her own chapel. Gaynor is expelled from chapel during a Sunday service by Noah Jones (Steffan Rhodri), a deacon, when her being pregnant outside marriage becomes known. We have already learned that Noah had designs on her himself. Miriam is confronted by local women outside chapel doors when her unmarried pregnancy becomes evident. These 'pickets' being women suggests quite strongly that not only has Miriam offended against dominant patriarchal and religious discourses surrounding heterosexual female sexuality, but also against dominant versions of femininity. Her status is presented as even more shocking to the local community, and the local community's values as even more retarded to contemporary audiences. In contrast to the stereotypical ways mining and otherwise local communities are portrayed in films that valorise the icon of the miner and the tranquillity of the rural, here they are presented as insular, non-inclusive communities with conservative values and strict moral codes. These communities readily seek to expel those deemed to be 'sinful', who somehow fail to uphold dominant social norms.

## **Religion**

In *On The Black Hill*, religion is part of the landscape, like the hills. Amos uses the Bible to justify his own worldview and punitive actions against his neighbours. When he finds his fences damaged, he assumes his neighbours are responsible and takes an eye for an eye by damaging their fences. When he finds dead animals, he similarly takes 'revenge' by killing animals belonging to his neighbours. However, a marked distinction between miners and farmers in film is that chapels and chapel galleries in mining communities tend to be depicted as full to the point of bursting. But in farming communities we are either only ever shown the

exterior of chapels, in the landscape (e.g. *Hedd Wyn*, *Johnny Be Good*) or small and aging congregations (e.g. *On The Black Hill*, *Sleep Furiously*).

Religion binds families and communities. For instance in *On The Black Hill* Amos forces his wife to stop taking the children to church in favour of attending chapel. This is one way that he imposes his own will and exercises his control over the family. *Hedd Wyn* ends with Evan Evans (Grey Evans), Hedd Wyn's father, leading a horse that pulls a cart carrying the National Eisteddfod chair that his son has won back to the farmhouse, veiled in black. The whole community walks behind the cart, as though at a funeral service. Death frequently features in films of Preserved in the form of death of the father, the head of a family. This presents a moment during which the position of head of the family is transferred, usually to eldest son (e.g. *On The Black Hill*, *Johnny Be Good*). This reflects Preserved's preoccupation with inheritance and centrality of the male line within patriarchy. Funerals are presented as being conducted according to longstanding traditional 'rules' in terms of religious, social and cultural rituals. For instance there are scenes of coffins being carried respectfully, of families wearing black, and in *Ar Waelod y Cof* of men only attending at the cemetery.

These kinds of portrayals of religious behaviour can perhaps be divided into those aspects that seem positive and those that seem negative. This is a rather simplistic division, but it merely reflects the simplicity of how films of Preserved tend to portray aspects of Welsh culture and experience. For instance chapel is 'good' because it helps to bind local communities; it offers opportunities for poetry, singing, for people to learn reading and writing. Hedd Wyn's development as a poet is shown to be facilitated by him both entering poetry into competition at chapel and acting as an adjudicator. There are numerous examples of films that include scenes in chapel of the congregation singing hymns (e.g. *Solomon A Gaenor*, *How Green Was My Valley*, *On the Black Hill*). This can be readily interpreted as a metaphor for community, all engaged in a communal activity, all demonstrating their shared commitment to a common religion. Several films also feature references to Sunday school (e.g. *Ar Waelod y Cof*, *Milwr Bychan/Boy Soldier* [1986: Karl Francis] and *Bydd Yn Wrol*) and the experience and knowledge it imparted to central characters. In *Valley of Song* the new chapel choir master Geraint Llewelyn (Clifford Evans) acts as a mediator between two feuding families when it is decided that the part of the contralto in the annual Easter Messiah

service should be split between Olwen Davies (Maureen Swanson) and Mrs Lloyd (Rachel Thomas). Previously divisions between these two families (Davies and Lloyd ) had been exacerbated when Llewelyn gave this part to Mrs Davies, after Mrs Lloyd had the role for a number of years.

Religion also seems to offer comfort to those in dire circumstances, such as Wil in *Boy Soldier* and Gwenallt in *Ar Waelod y Cof* when these two are imprisoned. However, Wil's faith can be interpreted as naive and misguided. The title of the film comes from a Sunday school hymn from Wil's childhood. A member of the Salvation Army is the only person to show Wil any compassion and kindness whilst he is in prison, but is unable to change Wil's circumstances.

More clearly negative perspectives on religion come from films such as *Solomon a Gaenor* and *Carrie's War*. Chapel harbours the mean, selfish and hypocritical shopkeeper Mr Evans in *Carrie's War*, who fails to show any kindness or consideration to anyone else, but who tries to ingratiate himself with his estranged sister so as to benefit when she dies. Chapel is used to uphold men's power in *Solomon a Gaenor*, when Gaenor is shamed and exiled for becoming pregnant out of marriage. From the pulpit Reverend Roberts (Emyr Wyn) above his open Bible invites Noah Jones (Steffan Rhodri) to speak. He denounces Gaenor as a fornicator in front of her family and the entire congregation (Stanton 2002). Reverend Roberts announces that Gaenor be banned for six weeks from chapel and from the 'seiat' (prayer meetings) for life. As Iordanova (2003) argues in relation to rural communities more generally, through unquestioning acceptance of locally dominant religion, 'community life is sweetly preserved'.

Similarly, in *Angry Earth* we are shown an argument in the Chapel vestry between chapel member Evans (Dafydd Hywel) a leading strike agitator, and chapel minister Mr Thomas (Robin Griffiths). Evans asserts to Mr Thomas:

'It is not for you to use this chapel as a platform to preach sermons in support of managers ....we are in this chapel for all men...I will not worship with Mamon..'

Mr Thomas replies:

‘Let God judge the sins of managers who pray here, not us’

Chapel is thus presented as seeking political neutrality in disputes between mine managers and miners, rather than being on the side of the working class and seeking justice for those risking their lives to earn profits for mine owners. In *Solomon a Gaenor* religion is also used to construct oppressive notions of difference between a Jewish family and non-conformists. Audiences are presented with scenes that depict the daily routines and rituals of the families of Solomon and Gaenor side by side. For instance we see several scenes of each family preparing and eating meals, and praying at chapel and synagogue. The Jewish father Isaac (David Horovitch) holds family values stereotypical of his upbringing and homeland. He is loyal to the Sabbath, the Talmud, the prayer shawl and the Synagogue. Gaenor's father Idris (William Thomas) is depicted as the master of the home. We are shown Idris on Sunday afternoons dressed in his black woollen suit and waistcoat, white shirt and black tie, sitting in the parlour of their house to have tea following the chapel service. There is a strong sense of 'correctness' and strict adherence to social and religious custom within both families and the local 'communities'. Again, this film takes a critical perspective on these elements of narratives of identity. A clear message in the film is of the injustices of traditional 'communities', Jewish and Christian. One of the things that the two families have in common is their intolerant response to Solomon and Gaenor's romance. It can be argued that audiences are encouraged to regard scenes like these as presenting social and cultural differences that the film treats as practically insurmountable. Solomon attempts to pass himself off as English to Gaenor's family. This is as close as the film comes to suggesting some way for the central characters to transcend or otherwise escape from the narrow, simplistic, naturalised categories of gender, class and ethnicity.

This clearly illustrates the way that films of Preserved deal in a kind of one dimensional version of Wales and Welsh experience. To use a fittingly rural metaphor, they tend to keep to the same single furrow. There is no discussion of alternatives, of any degree of mobility individuals might have to move between social categories. These categories themselves are presented as simple givens. For instance there is no real attempt to interrogate 'Welshness'. It

is presented in a taken-for-granted, simplistic way, as though all potential audiences will know what Welshness is, as though there is a single, shared understanding of this. This is in keeping with a presumed desire to reclaim history from the British and retell it from the perspective of a subject people.

## **Oppression, exploitation and resistance**

As previously mentioned films of Preserved can be seen to fit with a postcolonial drive to reclaim history from the perspectives of dominant, imperialistic rule. They celebrate those who suffered and were exploited by colonial masters, and those who resisted. They present dominant rulers as unequivocally morally wrong, as evil, and those who suffered and resisted their rule in the nationalist cause as 'saints' and heroes. The term 'hero' is more or less completely correct since resistance tends to be portrayed as undertaken by men. These films can be regarded as both celebrations of a new sense of independence and confidence, and as useful in educating newer generations about earlier struggles for survival and for self-determination.

For instance narratives connected with social class and national identity are constructed through depictions of the exploitation of Wales and Welshmen by the British/English. For instance Alun Lewis in *Fragile Universe* is described by Lord Chalfont, a high ranking officer in Burma, as 'unable to kill another', an echo of Hedd Wyn's pacifism. Lewis is described as always wanting to test himself, and as more concerned for the welfare of the men serving under him than for his fellow officers. Arguably it is his elevation to the middle and upper class rank of officer away from the working class soldiers that isolates and disturbs him so much that he takes his own life. *Ar Waelod y Cof* depicts the dire consequences of the poet Gwenallt's pacifism (he refuses to serve in the British Army during World War One) on his steelworker father (Ernest Evans). We see him being spat on in the street by chapel deacons. The film also presents Gwenallt as anti-industrialist, he sees his father's masters at the steelworks as 'sly leopards'.



Several films can clearly be regarded as retellings of history, since they are shaped around historical events largely ignored in dominant British culture or highlight Welsh involvement. *Rebecca's Daughters* is an example of the first of these. This film portrays resistance to the tolls imposed on roads in Wales by the Turnpike Trust. Welsh rioters, men dressed as women, burn down tollgates and gag a gate steward employed by rich English landlords. There is a more or less simple division in the film of the Welsh into poor tenants and the English into greedy opportunists. The English dragoons who pursue the rioters are portrayed as stupid, easily outwitted by the rioters. The film can be read as about class struggle mapped onto colonial struggle. That the rioters disguise themselves as women underlines women's status within a patriarchal social and cultural system. By implication women are relatively powerless, non-threatening, incapable of physical, illegal or violent acts of resistance, non-participants in political arenas.

Several films of course discuss the contribution of Welshmen to the British army, in a variety of conflicts. For instance the son of the mean shopkeeper in *Carrie's War* is killed at the front. Films of Preserved also depict ways that some Welshmen sought to resist becoming involved, and the negative consequences of their involvement for those who failed to avoid military service. In *Hedd Wyn*, *On The Black Hill* and *Carrie's War* major or minor characters are in the army. Like Gwenallt in *Ar Waelod y Cof*, Hedd Wyn is a pacifist who seeks to avoid the call up but is unsuccessful. The British authorities imprisoned Gwenallt in Wormwood Scrubs for three years for refusing to do military service.

Both Gwenallt and Wil in *Boy Soldier* explicitly endure racism from their English jailors whilst imprisoned for pacifism and a murder in Belfast respectively. *Boy Soldier* tells the fictional yet credible story of Wil Thomas (Richard Lynch) who joins the British army and serves in Belfast in the 1980s. Wil is presented to audiences as wanting to join up to escape the increasingly narrow opportunities offered by the South Wales of his home, where he lives in a tower block. We learn that Wil also wanted the uniform, it is important to him because he feels it gives him status. He can be regarded as pushed into the army because of the declining economic fortunes of South Wales; he is a pawn within a greater game that is linked to British rule.

Wil's Welshness is foregrounded in *Boy Soldier* through how he 'takes refuge in his own language' (Berry 1994 p.391) via the words of the hymn from which the film takes its title whilst he prays in his prison cell awaiting trial. In particular *Boy Soldier* has been described as a 'savage attack on the behaviour of the British Army' (Blandford 2007: 89), and as focusing on the 'driniaeth ffiaidd/loathsome treatment' meted out to a young Welshman by higher ranking English officers (Woodward 2006: 43). It is possible to read the character of Wil's English commanding officer Lt. Colonel Trustcott-Jones (James Donnelly) as epitomising English rulers through his: 'general capacity for inhumanity to those placed in subordination to him' (Jones 1987: 96) A strong sense of a 'postcolonial take' (Stanton 2002: 81) on the English as oppressive in Ireland and exploitative of young Welshmen is thus given in this film.

Along with Hedd Wyn, Gwenallt and Wil are forced to write home in English in their heavily censored letters. When Hedd Wyn sends his entry to the poetry competition in the National Eisteddfod from the trenches in France, an English officer insults and ridicules it on the grounds that it may be a coded message divulging military secrets. Hedd Wyn dies in France, Gwenallt is left a shattered person by his experiences in prison as a conscientious objector, and Wil is dismissed from the army a broken man, having been a scapegoat for the British Army as an 'all powerful self-regulating organisation' (Jones 1987: 95-96) for the illegal killing of a civilian.

What emerges from this collectively is how an ungrateful and in some ways suspicious colonial master creamed off Welsh youth to waste it in its various conflicts. Those who did not immediately take up arms when called were treated like the lowest of criminals. But the situation of Wales and the Welsh as subjects of English rule remained largely unchanged. As Jones (1987) states, Wales is a paradox in that its men are long given to fighting and dying willingly for England. Indeed, it has been argued that an essential point made in *Boy Soldier* is that Wil's identity cannot cope with being the member of a colonial army of occupation in Northern Ireland (Blandford 2007: 89).

Wales made its sacrifice for English gain. This mirrors how miners and quarrymen and those working in the ironworks are depicted in films as toiling and suffering in poverty at work and at home for the benefit of wealthy English mine and quarry owners and industrialists (e.g. *Y Chwarelwr/The Quarryman*, *Proud Valley*, *How Green Was My Valley*, *Blue Scar*, *Citadel*, *Solomon a Gaenor*, *David*). In this way English oppression can be seen as what Raymond Williams described as a dominant system with a variety of agents and organisations, preventing Welsh people from 'working out their own future in their own ways' (Williams 2003: 186). Furthermore, in *Hedd Wyn* the landscape itself is 'invaded' in that it is used for a rifle range. The local chapel is damaged when a window is broken by the distant explosions caused by soldiers being trained for France. Thus the war reaches into both the lives, the symbols and the land of Wales.

The Welsh soldiers depicted in *Hedd Wyn* and *Boy Soldier* contrast quite clearly with how Welsh soldiers tend to have been portrayed in films from outside Wales. For instance in *Zulu* (Cy Endfield: 1964) which features and was produced by the Welsh actor Stanley Baker, the South Wales Borderers, whose regiment were based at Brecon, are featured in an account of the siege at Rorke's Drift in South Africa. They are largely stereotyped as 'typically Welsh (passion, plain speaking and a poetic soulfulness), 'thoughtful yet cheerful cannon fodder' (Shail 2004: 11).

Other ways that films 'preserve' the past include the depiction of more remote historical events that again portray the colonial master as cruel, immoral and remorseless. For instance *Dal: Yma/Nawr* features a re-enactment to an elegy to Llywelyn, the last Prince of Wales, murdered by the soldiers of Edward I of England in 1282 in Wales. Llywelyn is celebrated in the elegy for his resistance to English rule. This can be regarded as a 'reminding' of the past, a message to contemporary audiences of historical and cultural roots, especially since *Dal: Yma/Nawr* now features on the syllabus in Welsh secondary education, along with *Hedd Wyn*.

### **Welshmen as 'rioters' and 'saboteurs'**

A further example of the heroic Welshman in films of Preserved is the Welshman as active in resisting oppression and exploitation by the English. In *Angry Earth* the character Evan (Dafydd Hywel) leads striking miners into revolt against mounted police and English soldiers present to enforce the rule of the mine owners. Evan, the eloquent striking miner, calls for meetings in the fields away from those who would be likely to report them to the soldiers. As already mentioned, we see how Evan is angry with chapel minister Mr Thomas (Robin Griffiths), and he blames chapel 'bosses' as a cause of miners' poverty. The dominant religious system in Wales is thus presented as colluding with English domination and exploitation.

The nationalist Saunders Lewis (1893-1985), a visionary politician who helped establish Plaid Cymru, features in two films that portray the origins of what could be considered to be modern Welsh nationalism. *Penyberth* (1985: John Hefin) depicts Saunders Lewis (Owen Garmon) as one of three arsonists involved in a famous protest against the English government in 1936, that was 'seen as a rallying call to a sense of Welsh nationhood' (Williams 2006:162). They set fire to huts and contractor's materials on the site of an RAF bombing range on the Llyn peninsula. They then report this symbolic action at the local police station. The film focuses on more humorous aspects of these events. The arsonists are portrayed as woefully inexperienced at starting fires. At the police station, the local policeman wakes his wife so that she can make tea for the three confessors to arson. There is a strong suggestion that he is supportive of their actions, but at the same time unsure as to what to do with them, which may have been how many Welsh people thought at the time. During their trial, the three attempt to give the untrue impression that none of them can speak or understand English. Although Saunders Lewis and these events remain a central part of recent Welsh nationalist mythology, he is not portrayed in the stereotypical ways associated with national heroes and dominant versions of 'heroic masculinity'. Attributes such as courage, physical strength, dynamism and an unflinching devotion to the cause of nationalism in the face of brutality are not ascribed to him.

Instead, in *Y Weithred* (Richard Lewis: 1995) Saunders Lewis's abilities with oratory are featured, when his 1962 radio speech '*Tynged Yr Iaith/The fate of the language*' is shown to incite militant action. The film charts how the Welsh language society Cymdeithas yr Iaith

was formed directly as result of Saunders Lewis's speech. It shows public meetings addressed by Emyr Llewelyn (Jeremi Cockram) in his fawn duffle coat and college scarf. Llewelyn draws together naive and clumsy arrangements to blow up a transformer in the Tryweryn Valley of mid-Wales. The film shows the saboteurs unprepared, stumbling in the snow, having a car that breaks down, suffering from poor planning as they try to undertake their mission. Welsh audiences would mostly know that their efforts were in vain. The valley was later flooded and the village of Capel Celyn drowned in order for the city of Liverpool to have water. The film underlines how at the time in Wales there was increasing anxiety over emergent youth cultures, and the extent to which these might distract from the project of attaining political and cultural autonomy. Saunders Lewis's speech is presented in the film as the springboard for a reinvigorated push for autonomy drawing together issues of language, water, and territory.

It is striking that these events are portrayed on screen as involving small groups of amateurish activists engaged in the destruction of property. This is in marked contrast to Basque film. Nobody is hurt in the fire or the explosion. There is no big chase as the authorities try to capture those responsible, nobody is shot trying to escape. Nobody is subsequently tortured in prison. In comparison to Basque films of Preserved these films have a clearly different dynamic. The activists day jobs and career plans suffer following their imprisonment, but they do not become martyrs in the way that nationalist freedom fighters in other minority countries have become. There are no big protest marches calling for their release from prison.

As portrayed in these two films, both dramas based on historical accounts, Welsh activists operated on a small scale, were tiny groups or individuals who were rurally based but not 'rural people', in the sense that they were not farmers. There is a suggestion of middle classness in this. Welsh audiences probably bring to these films the knowledge that these activists were academics, ministers, poets, or the son of a school teacher. They have been mythologised and looked up to as intelligentsia, as the forefathers of contemporary senses of Welshness, especially in relation to the political independence and the status of the Welsh language. These activists on screen are disorganised, beginners, clumsy, portrayed as almost playfully dabbling in activism, the films dispel the myths.

This is in highly marked contrast to the physically strong, young, aggressive, almost fanatical, ruthless, widespread collective of ETA as portrayed in Basque film, as discussed in later chapters. In terms of masculinities, Welsh activists seem quite 'nerdy' in comparison to members of ETA. They seem 'nerdy' in comparison to those other icons of Welshness, the miner, the farmer, the quarryman, the warriors. Welsh activists most closely resemble the poets of Eisteddfod competition. It is notable that one aspect of Saunders Lewis's own political convictions is not referred to in *Penyberth* or in *Y Weithred*. As is made clear in a recent S4C documentary on the life of the retiring First Minister of the Welsh Assembly, *Rhodri Morgan* (Tweli Griffiths: 2010), Saunders Lewis was a keen and lasting supporter of Franco during and after the Spanish Civil War. Partly this may be explained by his being a Catholic, and therefore feeling a strong alliance with the Catholic Church in Spain. However, Welsh audiences may well have been both surprised and horrified by his support for fascism, and this may have tainted him, and the origins of modern Welsh nationalism if some kind of mention of this were to be included in the film.

There is a significant difference here between the (re)construction and representation of Welsh and Basque identities. Basque identities, as represented in films, historically tend to be closely connected with masculine resistance enacted by organised groups engaged in often violent or otherwise physical political actions. Welsh identities are defined more closely in connection with issues surrounding 'the domestic', family, religion and home. This is not to suggest that there is a simplistic 'public' versus 'domestic'/private' distinction between Basque and Welsh narrative of identity. However, the greater significance of organised physical resistance within Basque narratives of identity explains the comparable 'invisibility' of women and mothers in particular in Basque films of *Preserved*. At the same time providing reasons for the attention given to the domestic in Welsh film, and the existence of another icon of Welshness, 'the mam', (who has no equivalent in Basque film).

## Welsh women

It may seem that placing discussion of women following that of men simply reproduces patriarchal structure. But given the patriarchal character of Welsh societies as portrayed in films of Preserved, it makes sense to discuss women in these films after having first highlighted the portrayal of men. This permits an immediately clearer understanding of the roles of female characters in these films, and the extent to which films in Preserved focus on men's experiences, and men as agents in social action. Some contemporary audiences may immediately anticipate this from the title of the film *Solomon a Gaenor*, which of course of the two names places 'Solomon' first. This section highlights the limited positions that seem to be available to women within films of Preserved, and the extent to which they contain women within traditionally dominant, hetero-patriarchal narratives of gender and sexuality.

### **The Welsh mam**

She has been described as 'the most eminent character ever seen on the Welsh screen' (Ffrancon 2007:71), and *Calon Cymreictod /Heart of Welshness* (Ffrancon 2003:88) despite the patriarchal character of Welsh society (Beddoe 1986: 228) and industry (Ffrancon 2003: 169). This patriarchy is clearly depicted as reliant on 'women's primary identification with the home' (Jones 1991: 112), and on the mother as an 'indomitable' (Stanton 2002: 80), 'devoted and scrupulous housewife' (Miskell 2006: 89), who had little visibility or influence away from the home, for instance in connection with religion or waged employment. In contrast to the major social and economic changes associated with industrialisation, the home was still a place lacking in basic amenities, associated with a heavy burden of work for women that now had to be shaped around the work shift patterns of husbands, sons and male lodgers (Beddoe 2000: 16).

Away from the mines, quarries and foundries, the experiences of farmers' wives in rural areas were not so different. An example of this comes from *Ar Waelod Y Cof*, in which the poet Gwenallt's sister tells us how their mother went without new clothes so Gwenallt's university fees were paid. While her husband is out collecting the congratulations on a Saturday afternoon following Gwenallt's success at the National Eisteddfod in 1926, she is shown warmly and gently moving her son's certificates as she lightly dusts her sideboard. In *Johnny Be Good*, Johnny's mother sits down to knit once she has fed the men at her table at night. In

*Sleep Furiously* women are shown in stereotypically nurturing and supporting roles and activities: baking cakes, playing the chapel organ, as a 'choir master', setting up the church communion table, as exhibitors at a summer show, and giving a pottery demonstration to school children.

However, despite the strength and endurance of patriarchy in Wales, it is important to acknowledge that the Welsh home in the industrial valleys has been described as matriarchal by some commentators, a similarity it shares with the Basque country. Others have argued that these are myths. There is the clear role of the Welsh mam in managing the household budget and domestic routines, determining personal relationships within the family, and through their influence keeping the wider community 'clean, sober, out of debt and sane' (Arnold 2006: 6). This perspective adds complexity to the figure of the Welsh mam. In fact the term 'management' could be amended to 'mamagement' in order to reflect the role of mams within their families. Yet other commentators have stressed that mams were still subordinate to the major breadwinner (Bianchi 1988: 11), stressing the centrality of economics in the composition of family units.

In contrast, Basque working rural mothers in films such as *Kutsidazu bidea*, *Ixabel/Show Me The Way Isabel* (2006: Mireia Gabilando and Fernando Bernués), *Secretos del corazón/Secrets of the Heart* (1997: Montxo Armendáriz), *Tasio* (1984: Montxo Armendáriz), *Vacas* and *Obaba* (2005: Montxo Armendáriz) tend to be portrayed differently. This has been described as:

A popular and historical vision of The Basque woman as inhabiting a pre-capitalist rural or coastal world, free of either gender or class conflict (Hamilton 2000:156).

## **Widows**

Added to this must be the frequency with which Welsh mams feature in films of Preserved as widows. For instance the figure of the widow appears in *Ar Waelod y cof*, *Blue Scar*, *The Citadel*, *Y Chwarelwr*, *Johnny Be Good*, *On The Black Hill*, *Proud Valley*, *Angry Earth* and both versions of *How Green Was My Valley* (1941 & 1975). The presence of so many



widows is suggestive of several points. The widow has become a staple icon of Welshness in much the same way as the miner and the farmer, to be trundled out to provide a sense of authenticity and to underline the hardships of Welsh life without a male head of the family. This underlines the risks men faced working in the mines for instance, and the uncaring exploitation of men and their families by the poet Gwenallt's 'sly leopards', as he described (English) industrialists in Wales. We see the above widows adjusting to life without their husbands and major breadwinners by managing their families. For instance wages are collected (*How Green Was My Valley* (1941)), budgets amended, one child is selected to receive the benefits of higher education (*Y Chwarelwr*).

We also see widows take in lodgers to provide an additional stream of income into the family budget (e.g. in *Proud Valley*, who takes in a black lodger David Goliath (Paul Robeson)). Although physically embodying Other, Goliath is both a miner and an accomplished singer in the local miners' choir, thus rendered as 'same' to some extent. Her character is 'rewarded' for this acceptance of a racialised Other when David Goliath sacrifices his own life to save her son during a tragic accident down the pit.

### **Wayward daughters**

The 'wayward' daughter is another category for women that emerges in Welsh film. For instance in *Blue Scar* we see an Abergwynfi mam Gwen Thomas (Rachel Thomas) trying to maintain connection with her only daughter Olwen (Gwyneth Vaughan) by letter. Olwen's ambitions lead her to enter what rapidly becomes a loveless relationship in London when she marries up the social scale. The imperative to seek a suitable husband locally (i.e. ethnically Welsh, and of the same social class) meant that those who fell short of this came into conflict with their family and local community (for instance as evident in *Solomon a Gaenor* and *On The Black Hill*, where daughters leave their families to be with partners that are, respectively, the Jewish Solomon and an unseen Irish itinerant). Furthermore, although premarital sex may have been a normal practice in 'old Wales' (Beddoe 1986: 234), 'respectable' young women were supposed to be chaste and illegitimate pregnancy was a strong source of family shame.

As with *Beautiful Mistake* and other films discussed earlier in this chapter, *Patagonia* (Marc Evans :2010) can be seen to update old elements of Preserved to present them for more contemporary audiences. The wayward daughter is a feature of *On The Black Hill* and *Solomon and Gaenor*, and in *Branwen*, discussed later in this thesis. The wayward daughter is a threat to the father, to the bloodline of inheritance, to men's control of women. She struggles (usually in vain) to achieve a 'dangerous' independence.

There are thus a relatively narrow set of interlinked positions within Welsh films of Preserved that can be occupied by female characters. These are the icons of the Welsh mam, the widow, and the wayward daughter. Of these, the mam and the widow arguably demonstrate at least as much resilience and ingenuity as men in coping with the demands of life on the farm or in the pit village.

There are exceptions however. For instance in *The Black Hill* the mother character, Mary Jones (Gemma Jones), is from a markedly different social background. The daughter of a travelled vicar, she is educated and very literate, she is used to having servants, she plays the piano. It is she that has secured the tenancy of the farm. What the film depicts is how the main protagonist Amos (Bob Peck) reduces her bit by bit. He imposes complete control over her, turning her away from her upbringing. He is disparaging of her manners; he makes fun of her putting out white napkins for tea, he is cross when she plays the piano, he throws an Indian meal that she has prepared onto the floor. When Mary, with her three children, prepares an Easter Cross for display in the Anglican church she attends, he crushes the spring flowers in the cross and insists that she and the children attend chapel only. In effect he tries to force her into the narrow position of the Mam as an upholder of local, rural traditional family roles, values and aspirations.

### **Women poets and singers**

Also, amongst the presentation of Welsh poetic and musical traditions as heavily masculine in *Dal: Yma/Nawr*, this film does feature the work of some women. Comparing and contrasting the coverage given to the poet Mererid Hopwood and the singer Cerys Matthews

illustrates further some of the issues involved in assessing gendered narratives of identity as these appear to shift in more recent times. Arguably, the simple presence of these two amongst so many male poets and singers constitutes an updating of masculine narratives of Welsh identity. But on the other hand their presence may be regarded as made possible through these two women adapting their own performances and output in order to conform with more masculine normative styles.

For instance Cerys Matthews performs an updated version of a traditional hymn originally composed by Ieuan Gwyllt/John Roberts (1822-77), the first Welsh composer to publish music teaching materials for use in Sunday Schools. Similarly, Hopwood appears at the 2002 National Eisteddfod wearing traditional white robes during the ceremony, lost amongst all the other male chair and crown winners in their white robes.

Yet she also appears dressed in her own clothes to perform a section of the poem for which she was awarded a chair in 2001, the first woman to be successful at the National Eisteddfod. In contrast to a focus on warriors, battles, and nature that may be associated with much of Welsh traditional poetry, Hopwood's poem seems to address the death of a child, and it takes the form of a parent speaking to a child. It can be regarded as a clear equivalent of the Welsh *mam* on the screen as presented through verse.

Dadeni/Rebirth (Dinbych 2001)

Dere'r un bach,mae'r machlud  
yn bwrw'i aur, ac mae'n bryd  
cloi corlan dy deganau  
a hi'r nos oer yn nesau.  
Dere i wrando'r stori  
am y wawr, a gad i mi  
mewn nyth twt, am unwaith 'to,  
dy ddal. Estyn dy ddwylo  
bach gwyn amdanaf  
cyn llithro heno i'th haf.  
Dere, fe ddaw'r bore bach  
ei frenhin a'i gyfrinach.  
Cwsg, cwsg fy nhywysog gwyn,  
darfod mae'r dydd diderfyn

Come little one sunset  
casts its gold, and its time  
to close up the fold of your toys  
with the cold night coming.  
Come to listen to the story  
about the dawn, and let me,  
in a tidy nest, hold you  
one more time. Stretch your  
small white hands about me tightly  
before, tonight, you slip away to your  
summer.Come now, the early morning will  
arrive and its king and its secret.  
sleep, sleep my white knight,  
the day without end is ending.  
(Translation by Gwyn Thomas)

Therefore, the extent to which the inclusion of Matthews and Hopwood (the first woman to win all three prizes of chair, crown and medal for a novel in the years 2001-2008) constitutes a break with the traditions of Preserved seems open to question. I would argue that it simply retells traditional narratives of identity in a way that is pitched for contemporary audiences. In short, these women are present, but beyond this there is nothing to suggest that the 'rules' of Preserved have altered.

## Conclusions

This chapter has discussed a number of films classed as belonging to Preserved in terms of the ways that they portray Welsh patriarchy. It charts a shift from simplistic portrayals that verge on the canonisation of icons such as the Welsh miner, farmer, poet, and warrior to discuss films that feature more complex and critical perspectives of masculinities, and begin to locate gendered relations as closely interwoven with issues of family, community, class, religion, morality, inheritance and employment. In keeping with Higson's (2000: 69) notion of heritage film, some of these films seem to comprise a coherent celebration of what can be understood as indigenous Welsh culture. This chapter has drawn attention to how Preserved can be characterised by bold and simplistic depictions of Welshness, the narrowness of which are often shaped around a moral clarity. These simplistic narratives of Wales and Welshness are recycled within films of Preserved. Nationalism tends to be presented as positive, and Wales as a country is often presented as a 'safe' idyllic place centred on rural or semi-rural families living in small communities.

Some more recent films can be regarded as 're-presentings' of elements of traditional Welsh history and culture for contemporary, younger audiences, presumably in order to educate and encourage interest in Welsh history and culture. This is clearly evident in *Beautiful Mistake*. Film could be used as an important medium for this kind of project. However, a strand that seems to run through these films is the relative weakness of Welsh nationalism in comparison to far more confrontational Basque narratives of identity, as subsequent chapters will make clear. It is important to acknowledge that: 'the clue to the understanding of nationalism is its weakness at least as much as its strength' (Gellner 1996: 43) These films seem to address for Welsh audiences questions such as 'who we are' and 'where we are from'. But the 'we' within these questions seems to be taken for granted, as something that is clearly distinguishable

from 'Other'. This distinction, blurred briefly for instance in *Proud Valley*, begins to attract more critical attention in films classed as Reversal in this research.

# Chapter Three: Basque Preserved

## Introduction

I have already begun to develop an argument that films in Preserved tend to be centred on a particular set of narratives of identity involving a valuing of the past in ways that privilege elements of a presumed national culture, masculinity, and particular forms of stereotypical cultural identity (which are singular), which are themselves represented more or less as certainties, as essentialised, stable and fixed givens. Preserved features cultural identity simplistically represented as collective and centred on dynamic masculinities, at the expense of femininities. Interwoven with this is a 'celebration' of oppression and sufferings experienced as a subject people (but not subject peoples). Preserved features a moral certainty, and the reduction of complex moral issues into simplistic notions of 'good' or 'bad' and 'right' or 'wrong'. This goes hand in hand with a simplistic boldness in narratives of identity.

In connection with narratives of national identity, films in Preserved seem to proclaim and celebrate. They seem to address questions such as 'Who are we?' and 'Where are we from?' with little or no discussion of how the 'We' in these questions is actually constituted. These main elements are principle features of Basque films categorised in Preserved. But in addition to this, there seems to be a collection of basic elemental constituents that recur in Basque films that seek to 'preserve' the past. These include blood, arms, and symbols of life and death interwoven within themes of religion, the countryside, agriculture, community, sport, and the creativity of art.

Before discussing these further, it is important to bear in mind central features of Basque experiences, and to acknowledge that from my own non-Basque perspective these films address the question 'Who are you?'. Unlike researching Welsh film, in which I draw on my own Welsh life experiences and knowledge (particularly of literature), analysis of Basque films demands investigation of significant points in Basque history and developing awareness of Basque cultural traditions.

## Basque experiences

In comparison to Wales, Basque experiences have been more recently intense, bound up with the wider Spanish experience of Civil War and the long dictatorship under General Franco that followed. Colonial oppression in Welsh films tends to be collapsed into the exploitation of young men as soldiers in the British Army fighting away from Wales or being punished for seeking to avoid this, or through reference to ‘y llewpart diwydianol a naid yn sydyn slei/ the sly leopards’ as the poet Gwenallt referred to (English) industrialists in his poetry (1951: 9), and as featured in voice over in the film *Ar Waelod Y Cof*. In Basque films political oppression is far more interwoven into the everyday experiences of Basque people, and features as dark shadows in the memories of older generations and as the subject of curiosity in children (subsequent generations). In particular, silences of various forms feature on the part of many characters in films of Preserved. Many of these silences can be linked directly to feelings of shame in relation to present or prior involvements in events and movements such as Carlism, Spanish nationalism, and the Civil War, and certain versions of Basque nationalism. These silences inhibit relations within and across families, communities and generations. Silence also features as being the product of political oppression, from prohibitions on the use of Euskera (the Basque language) to silences maintained due to the fear of eavesdroppers turning Republicans, Basque nationalists, ETA members and their supporters in to the authorities.

A key feature is that, perhaps more so than Welsh cultures, Basque cultures are dominated by men, and the Basque country has been described as ‘a country where machismo rules’ (Stone 2002: 161). However, the Basque country is arguably less ‘machista’ than other parts of Spain, and there is a tradition of tough rural women and matriarchal relations that will be discussed later. Basque identity has received a lot of attention focused on the uniqueness of the Basque language, Euskera. This is older than any other language in Europe, including Celtic languages, ‘Basque is beyond doubt the sole surviving pre-Indo- European language of Western Europe’ (Trask 1997: 35). There is no evidence of any other language spoken in this territory before the Basque language (Astrain 1997: 10). However Euskera is a component in a Basque history and set of traditions that is in some ways older, more complex, more unique and quite different from Welsh history and traditions. Unlike the wider Celtic roots that subsume Welsh history, a relative isolation dictated by the presence of the Pyrenees is

believed to have contributed to the development of a culture and identity clearly separate from any others throughout Europe. For instance the cave paintings in the arguably strongly nationalistic *Gernika el espíritu del árbol* / *Gernika, the Spirit of the Tree* (1987: Laurence Boulting) are said to be uniquely Basque, and not the product of some form of wider culture such as 'Celtic'. However, the two cultures share some similar historical experiences.

Use of Welsh language was discouraged in some schools during the Victorian period via the Welsh Not. Similarly, Euskera was banned in some public spheres at the start of Franco's regime. A scene in the feature film *Operación Ogro* (1979: Gillo Pontecorvo) shows schoolboys being caned by their teacher for speaking in Euskera. But despite this there has been no need to 're-invent' elements of Basque culture in the way that there has been for some elements of Welsh culture, for instance with the modern development of a Druid Circle based on a Masonic model, as described earlier. Basque culture, although more recently oppressed, has in some ways a longer period of continuity, since Welsh culture arose from a wider 'Celticness'. Furthermore, in comparison the 're-emergence' of Basque culture post Franco occurred at a time when technologies for circulating materials relevant to cultural identity (for instance as connected with TV, radio, film, literature, art, telephone, etc.) greatly facilitated its transmission. Some commentators have suggested that this 're-emergence' was focused more amongst a new generation of urban Basques:

‘...after the ‘60s, however it was the industrialized urban centres, overflowing with young people that led the most important movement ever known in the history of the Basque Country in favour of the new revitalization of the native language (Zuazo 1995: 21).

Like the industrial valleys and rural hills of Wales, national identities are often largely defined through enduring traditions linked to landscape that provide visible shape and imaginings of the nation through ‘symbolic landscapes of national identity’ (Daniels 1993: 3). Integral to the formation of Basque nationalism is the geography of the territory, which is ‘pivotal to Basque mythology’ (Evans 2004: 262). But in addition there is the long conflict between the Spanish central government and Basque nationalists, one of the most severe of its kind in contemporary Europe (Raento 1999: 219). In addition to the influence of Spain, there has been a rate of social change that has been more intense and faster than many



societies (Arango 1985: 212). The 1960s were a time when emerging Basque nationalist feelings combined with a shift to the Left in political outlook which occurred during a large movement of the population from rural areas to the cities. There is thus an intensity to Basque experiences that is different to Welsh experiences.

## **Franco**

The Spanish Basque country has always had relations with Spain. After the death of General Franco in 1975 a gradual process of democratisation began (Aitken 2001), involving a shift from a centrist democratic to a socialist government in 1982. The key points about Franco are that from 1939 to 1975 he ruled unopposed, and imposed an iron rule that included Basques living in Spain. Franco was intensely anti-Basque Nationalist as well as being the cruel leader of a harsh regime. Power and rule was enforced by the Guardia Civil/Civil Guard, who at the time earned a reputation as a ruthless and brutal force along with the army and the police, despite many of its members being pro-republican in 1936. The Civil Guard was how Francoist authority dealt with the perceived challenge posed by the cultural activism of peripheral nationalist movements, and leftist opposition to Franco.

In most of the films to be discussed in *Preserved*, Franco, the Civil Guard or the ultra right wing Falange feature, opposed by Basque resistance. Welsh history has no figure in recent history to compare with Franco. Franco's influence comes across in Basque film in a variety of ways, and rather than presenting any kind of narrative history of Franco's rule in relation to Basques, this chapter focuses on his influence as it may be reconstructed by film audiences.

To greatly simplify, Basque national consciousness differed from Spanish identity and the uniformity that Spain tried to impose during Franco's rule. Cultural representations of Basque identity had to be funded by donation, there was no support from the government. Films during this time have been described as a treat for the 'hidden self' (Martí-Olivella 1999: 205), in that audience reactions included identification with a coded Basque national

consciousness, the further celebration of an everyday, practical and spiritual identity systematically hidden and denied under censorship imposed by Franco.

## **The Basque rural**

Many authors have stressed how the rural and especially the values of rural traditions, are central to Basque culture (e.g. Kurlansky 2000: 177, Jordan & Tamosunas 1998: 48, Saizarbitoria 1985: 11, and Gabilondo 2002: 269, amongst others) and the director's voice over in *Around the World with Orson Welles* (1955: Orson Welles). In understanding the influence of recent history on the Basque rural, the struggles associated with Carlism are a key element, along with the civil war period and oppression experienced under Franco's rule following the civil war. Carlism effected major divisions within the Basque people and for this reason, it is important to explain Carlism a little further.

## **The 'Fueros' and Carlism**

Considerable mythologizing has grown up around the 'Fueros'. More contemporary Nationalists tend to regard them as 'historic rights' or laws of an independent country, with roots in the Middle Ages. In reality, they were part of the internal administration of the Spanish monarchy. They governed taxes, laws and traditional liberties for each of province of the southern Basque country. Under the fueros Basques were free from direct Spanish taxation, customs duties, and conscription into the army for the purpose of fighting outside of the Basque country. This time has been described as 'a golden era' for Basques (Tremlett 2006: 301). But Nationalist myths have grown up that suggests that the fueros were the beginning of a system of old laws that became integral to Basque identity and history. In other words, they were 'symbols of freedom, sanctioned laws based on freedom of the people', according to the film *Gernika, The Spirit of the Tree*. These old laws of social privileges or common laws were tantamount to a constitution shaped by repeated community practices. Over time they became codified in written laws. They came to contribute to divisions between rural and emerging urban centres.

A principal feature of Spanish politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a struggle between modernist liberalism and a traditionalism that underlined rule by monarch and the centrality of the church. In 1833, following the death of Ferdinand VII, Queen Isabella II ascended to the throne, supported by liberalists within the military. Traditionalists put their support behind the pretender to the throne Don Carlos V, the Carlist King. Carlist support was particularly prevalent amongst rural small holders. In 1872 a new Carlist revolt broke out and Don Carlos VII (the new Carlist pretender) took an oath in Guernica in 1875 to uphold the 'fueros'. This action cemented Guernica as an exceptional place in Basque history (De Pablo 2011: 233).

Thus Basque nationalism for many became linked with a broader Spanish traditionalism bound up with support for Don Carlos (*ibid.*). This Carlism was itself linked with traditionalism, monarchism and support for the traditional position and rights of the church, and this directly linked back to the rural and the fueros. After the end of the first Carlist War (1834-1840) the fueros were modified, and, after the end of the second Carlist War (1872-1876), 'the emergence of the liberal Restoration Monarchy of 1876 led immediately to their final elimination' (West 1998: 275).

A significant Basque element thus fought to maintain the fueros against more liberal, modernist rebel elements, with a division mapped onto this conflict arguably between liberal urban and Carlist rural, although this is not to deny the presence of Carlism in cities. Carlists tended to consider themselves as authentic, loyal patriots defending themselves from supposedly foreign influenced urban forces of change that menaced the monarchy and the church, and the old rights of the fueros (although it must be acknowledged that many Basque liberals were also in favour of the fueros). 'The Carlists were traditional, monarchical, Catholic, anti-liberal' (Burns 2009: 34). They were staunchly anti-modernist. Similarly:

'Early Basque nationalism was rooted in local particularism and insularity, with a racist element rejecting outsiders, anti-industrial and politically conservative if not reactionary' (Keating 2000: 35).

There were several Carlist up-risings within Spain, for instance the first Carlist war of 1833-1840. These were ruinous to rural areas, especially to tenant farmers. Those who were not supportive of Carlism in particular suffered. It is argued by some that it may be no coincidence that Guernica was selected for the notorious bombing raid by the fascists in 1937, given its significance as the seat of the *fueros*.

The Basque Nationalist Party (Partido Nacionalista Vasco or PNV) was founded by Sabino de Arana Goiri in the mid 1890s. 'Membership was confined to those of Basque descent on both sides of their families, '...the aim was of securing a large measure of local self-government' (West 1998: 277). In 1899 Sabino de Arana Goiri was elected for the PNV as provincial representative of Bilbao. His popularity was a response to the defeat of Carlism and the elimination of the *Fueros*, seen by many Basques as the final loss of their independence. de Arana Goiri died in 1903 but the PNV continued growing. In elections in 1933 the PNV became the largest single party in the Basque country for the first time, based on a largely Catholic vote and a moderate commitment to the cause of autonomy.

### **Carlism, fascism and Basque nationalism**

There was thus a strong link between Carlism and Basque Nationalism, with this being bound up with what Sabino de Arana Goiri characterized as being fundamentally for 'God and the old Laws' (cited by Grugel 1990: 101). This became the PNV party slogan, with efforts directed towards the defence of Catholicism, and combating the threat of disappearance through assimilation into a progressively liberal Spanish state. This form of Basque nationalism advocated the reinstatement of the *Fueros*, which, according to Sabino de Arana Goiri, would have been stripped away by the Spanish liberals. In the Spanish civil war Carlists came to fight on the side of Franco and the Spanish nationalists. Some Catholic Basques came to be amongst the most loyal and horrifically ferocious fighters on the side of Franco (Beevor 2006: 48), although in general Basque Catholics were divided, since the PNV decided to back the Republican side against Franco.

Following the Civil War there was a fundamental shift in many Basques' political outlooks. In 1959 ETA ('Euskadi Ta Askatasuna /Basque Homeland and Freedom') was founded as an organization for political independence. In 1961 ETA began to use armed violence against the Spanish state, and a personal and collective Basque anger became evident through the embracing of ETA in favour of the old PNV (Hamilton 2000: 158). 'Unlike the conservatism of the PNV, ETA called for both socialism and independence for the Basque nation' (Kasmir 1996: 201), and became distinguished for taking up extremist positions (Sartre 1972: 16). From 1968 onwards, ETA killed more than 800 people: not only policemen, soldiers and politicians but also ordinary Spanish and Basque people, including children. Sometimes described as a small, extremist militant organisation or guerrilla group that employs terrorist tactics, ETA arguably continues to dominate coverage of Basque politics within international news media, framed mostly negatively in terms of 'ETA terrorism'.

The anger that prompted some to reject the old PNV stemmed from Basques supporting Franco during the civil war, only to have their hopes of an independent Basque state let down under Franco's ruthlessly centralistic rule, which extended from the end of the civil war to the mid 1970s. These hopes had persisted despite Franco never promising to grant Basque autonomy. The character of Franco's rule helps explain why individual young men joined ETA. Some have argued that it also directed women towards ETA:

'Following the Civil War, the freedoms of Basque women, like those of all women in Spain, were among the chief targets of the ultra-reactionary Franco regime which sought to confine women discursively, and to a large extent physically, to the home. By the mid 1960s increasing numbers of women made their way into ETA' (Hamilton 2000: 160).

ETA was arguably the only political organization that physically opposed Franco in the Basque country (Díez Medrano 1995: 184), and it attracted sympathisers 'because it was an effective vehicle for opposition to the dictatorship' (ibid.). Support and recruitment for ETA was significant in rural areas and particularly amongst students in Bilbao. 'Young female nationalists looked to both old and new in order to forge identities for themselves' (Hamilton

2000: 226), and found these combined in ETA. Three of the sixteen ETA prisoners celebrated in the film *The Burgos Trial* (discussed later) were women. By the early 1980s women constituted 8% of ETA prisoners held in jails by the Spanish authorities (Hamilton 2000: 160).

In comparison to Wales, Basque experiences have thus been more shaped by direct conflicts. Furthermore, there was a fragmentation of Basques, sometimes quite clearly along the lines of right and left wing politics, which had origins reaching back centuries to the *fueros* and the emergence of rural and urban divisions. In more recent times, Basque society has been more dynamic than Welsh society, partly as a result of the impacts of Franco's rule and post-Franco liberalisation. This mirrors developments in wider Spanish society, but with the added dimension along which ETA's standing has altered. Additionally, all families felt the impact of wars fought on their home territory, civil and Carlist. In this way Basque experiences of being subject peoples is more direct and more recent than Welsh peoples, for whom war was more distant, partially experienced (e.g. increased demand for coal and crops, rationing, bereavement, the arrival of evacuees) or directly involved only a minority of the population (e.g. the bombing of Swansea during World War Two, still photographs in *A Bronze Mask*, in or in the presence of military training grounds and ranges on land and out to sea). 'The Franco years were a time of coercion and repression of any sign of Basque language, culture and identity' (Grugel 103: 1990).

### **Basque culture under Franco and post Franco**

Particularly under Franco's rule (1939-1975) there were growing concerns that a generation of Basques was growing up forcibly divorced from its culture, heritage, traditions and history. Along with Euskera other forms of expression of Basque identity were restricted. Cinema initially consisted of domestic propaganda in accordance with the ideology of Franco's regime. This has been described as 'a fascist masculinity, an ideology driven masculinity based on extreme nationalism and militarism, the glorification of violence and the pursuit of dominance' (Beynon 2002: 160), although the cinema of Franco's regime was probably more complex. There was no Basque cinema as such, although there had been silent folklore and travelogue films made prior to the outbreak of the civil war.

In addition, in both Spain and the Basque country the Civil Guard pounced vigorously and viciously on dissenters, and there was a general mistrust and fear of informers. Unlike Welsh culture, Basque culture is marked by an explosion of creativity and output, mainly following the end of the Franco regime. But arguably this began earlier, for instance with the Basque film *Ama Lur* (1968: Néstor Basterretxea and Fernando Larruquert) which got by Franco's censorship. Under Franco stern penalties threatened those seen to be exploring or otherwise promoting anything other than a conservatively 'patriotic' Spanish cultural identity. Following his death literature, film and other cultural forms could suddenly explicitly be concerned with celebrating Basqueness and promoting independence, without the risk of imprisonment and worse. But with the release of pressure that came with Franco's death also came the emergence and deepening of divisions and fractures within Basque Nationalists, formerly unified by oppression. Commentators have suggested that the PNV was divided into 'nationalists who favoured outright separatism, nationalists who genuinely accepted autonomy and nationalists who were prepared to accept autonomy as a tactical move, a half-way stage before eventual independence' (Gilmour 1985: 221). The Spanish government passed the Statute of Autonomy in 1979, and an autonomous Basque government was set up in 1980, led by the PNV. ETA was against autonomy.

Films in Basque Preserved can be divided into those made during Franco's rule and those made either before or after. The directorial partnership of Néstor Basterretxea (1924) and Fernando Larruquert (1934) made their first film, *Pelotari* (1964), focusing on pelota, arguably the fastest men's ball game in the world, requiring stereotypically masculine attributes of skill, power and precision. They subsequently made *Ama Lur/Mother Earth* (1968), which brings together historical and social elements, along with cultural and artistic motifs typical of the Basque Country. Both of these films celebrate Basqueness in ways that satisfied the domestic system of censorship imposed by Franco's regime.

The only other film that I class in Preserved made during Franco's rule was *El espíritu de la colmena /The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973: Víctor Erice), which is set in northern Spain in 1940 and directed by a Basque born in 1940. Although by no means explicitly so, there are

several reasons for classing this film as 'Basque', although this status is open to debate. This thesis is not the only place where this film has been classified this way. It was shown as part of a Basque film series sponsored by the Basque Educational Organization and the Basque Cultural Centre at the University of Nevada Reno screened in 2010 at San Francisco. This was because Erice was born in the Basque Country. By criteria in Wales, a film is Welsh and qualifies for funding by the Welsh Film Council if directed by a person born in Wales. The place of birth of the director can therefore be used to classify a film. In addition to this perhaps questionable system, other features of *The Spirit of the Beehive* may be used to support the case for this being classed as a Basque film.

For instance, there is the possibility that as *The Spirit of the Beehive* was the director's first film, elements are based on his own experiences, since as well as directing he wrote the story. It can also be regarded as a Basque film via implied and metaphorical references to oppression under Franco, although this would seem to be very much open to interpretation. References to oppression in the film could be linked to the leftist Spanish opposition to Franco and not to the Basque nationalist movement. Central characters in the family on which the film is centred demonstrate this. Fernando (Fernando Fernán-Gómez) is father to three daughters. He is a former academic who lives in a small village and keeps bees. He is educated and intelligent. We see his study, lined with books, we see him tending his bees. We may assume that he is politically opposed to Franco, and that this has cost him his job as an academic. Intellectual life suffered gravely under Franco. When they were opened back up universities had to be at the service of the state, and staff and students had to form part of the Francoist set-up. The mother, Teresa (Teresa Gimpera), writes to a Republican soldier who has fled to France following the end of the civil war. One of their daughters, Ana (Ana Torrent), assists a Republican soldier who has escaped from the Civil Guard.

However, some commentators have suggested that Fernando is actually a metaphor for Franco himself. We do not see him involved in political activity, but we know that he is collected some mornings by an anonymous car, which takes him away somewhere for reasons unknown. He controls and subdues the bees he tends (e.g. Lomillos 1995: 126). He behaves monstrously towards his wife and two daughters (Edwards 1995: 136, Lomillos 1995: 127). Several times in the film we see Fernando alone in his study, fruitlessly working



on a beekeeping journal, something that has been described as a 'state of inner exile' (Kinder 1993: 127). It is also possible to see in Fernando a representation of 'the consternation, impotence and silence of men who fought in the Civil War' (Hopewell 1986: 207).

These means are how a film maker such as Erice could insert references to political dissent and critiques of contemporary Spanish nationalism in ways sufficiently ambiguous to get past government censorship and prosecution. Despite the complexity of the character of Fernando he nevertheless can be argued to share some basic characteristics with other men featured in films of the Basque Preserved. Before discussing this in more detail, it is important to draw attention to how differences between the Basque and Welsh experiences seem to have shaped differences in film makers.

### **Basque film makers: true to their inclinations**

It would be simplistic to say that the harshness of the Basque experience forged a collection of determined and single minded film makers. However, it must be noted that a significant proportion of Basque film makers work from their own scripts, something absent in Wales except for Karl Francis. Through involvement in writing screen plays and direction, the level of commitment to each film is far greater than is usually the case with Welsh films. Films also come to be sharply focused around one vision, more passionately intense, more idiosyncratic. As a consequence, the individualistic talents of film makers become clear characteristics of the work of individual film makers, and directors become utterly key to the creative process, films become much more personal projects.

For example a deep love for the Basque country is clearly evident in *Pelotari* and *Ama Lur*, the films of Nestor Basterretxea and Fernando Larruquert. Of these two directors, Nestor Basterretxea was a sculptor, Fernando Larruquert was already established as a musician. Both were thus influential, key figures. And because these two were not simply jobbing directors working on the screenplays of others, this is evident through the ways these films present Basques and Basque culture to audiences. In *Ama Lur* there is an immediacy to scenes of sculptors at work in stone and metal shaping abstract forms, being juxtaposed with scenes of

shepherds and boat builders at work, that speaks of the strength and vibrancy of Basque culture, that it should embrace the traditional and the modern so equally. These film makers present portraits of individuals, whose life stories are woven around ‘an oral literary phenomenon beginning with those *bertsolariak* from the nineteenth century’ (Aulestia 1999: 227). These *bertsolariak* are the metres of a Basque poetic structure, called the *bertsolari*. ‘A bertso simply has a next line with the same rhythm and rhyme’ (Bye 1989: 209). Their use in the film underlines historical elements of Basque national identities. These include rural or countryside skills such as tending farm animals, woodcutting, rowing, and skill at the sport of pelota. In *Ama Lur* these film makers take the rhythms of these activities and combine them with *bertsolari* to form a ‘lyrical documentary’ (D’Lugo 1999: 195). Welsh poetry too has rules that call for strict metres. The method and effect is very similar to the use of poetic rhythm that runs through *Dal: Yma/ Nawr*, as discussed in the previous chapter. Some have gone so far as to suggest that:

‘Ama Lur is similar to the language of memory. That is to say, the film is like a verse to aid memory; a memory of what the Basque Country was like before Franco, and an idea of what it might be again.’ (Stone 2006: 69).

These two film makers could be described as ‘poets of memories’ working in a regional context to (re)present existing and new forms of Basque rural identities. Like Basque authors, nationalist sentiment infuses their work. In some ways this echoes sentiments expressed by the central characters in the Welsh films *Ar Waelod y cof*, authors expressing a depth of feeling for their country and its language.

Commentators often express consternation as to how *Ama Lur* managed to attract approval from Franco’s censors. Basterretxea and Larruquert’s films present different regions of the Basque country, in the same way that *Dal: Yma/Nawr* celebrates the seven regions of Wales. *Ama Lur* features all seven provinces of the Basque country, the four that are in Spain and three in France, evidence of a perceived need to be inclusive. The first film to present Basque rural traditions was *The Estate of Basterretxe* (1929: Mauro and Victor Azcona), for instance the old custom of a wife telling the bees in hives on the farm of the death of the head of the family.

Similarly other film makers have been responsible for directing and writing screenplays, such as Montxo Armendáriz (1949) Imanol Uribe (1950) and Julio Medem (1958), whose films are discussed later in this chapter and in the chapter that follows in Basque 'Reversal of Preserved'. Both of these worked with the same cinematographer Javier Aguirresarobe (1948). Partly this illustrates how there is only a small pool of Basque film makers, and partly the way that contemporaries are united through a desire to make films about Basques, particularly post Franco and his control of film production.

## Men and masculinities

As with Welsh film, Basque film making has been dominated by men. The only script and direction by a woman of the films discussed in this chapter is *Urte ilunak / Los años oscuros / The Dark Years* (1992: Arantxa Lazkano). It was another fourteen years before another woman, Mireia Gabilondo, co-directed the film *Show Me The Way Isabel*. Apart from these two films, all others discussed in this chapter were written and directed by men. This is in keeping with the general characterization of Basque culture as heavily masculine (e.g. White 1999: 144), and film in general as being a male preserve.

As Beddoe (1986: 225) has commented, dominant images of Wales tend to be male, and more specifically of 'hard men'. They are often explicitly engaged in either the industrial or agricultural sector. It is often as though there is only one gender and one social class in Wales. The same is true of the Basque country, for instance 'In sport the Basques have traditionally pursued exhausting pastimes like weight lifting and wood –chopping (Trask 1997: 35).

The focus of films in Preserved tends to be rural men doing demanding physical work, enduring hardships and suffering. Exceptions are films centred on men either engaged in political resistance as icons of the Basques as subjected to external rule and oppressions, or men as artists. As with Welsh films in Preserved, this is probably no coincidence given men's

domination of film making. Similarly, there seem to have been consequences of this when it comes to how other elements tend to be presented in films: 'The family has come to represent for conservative social and political forces an imagined past characterized by stable social relations ...a marker of stability' (Hamilton 2000: 153).

### **Men as farmers**

*Ama Lur* clearly exemplifies some of these features of Preserved. As a celebration of Basque identity, it sets out to remind, inform and enthuse Basques through telling a story of Basque nationhood. This is centred on the rural, for instance through scenes showing men wearing espadrilles using double pronged forks to turn the soil. This is highly reminiscent of a scene in *Hedd Wyn* in which Welsh men are shown using spades to cut peat.

The rural is also celebrated in *Guipúzcoa* (1979: Pio Caro Baroja), scripted by the director's brother Julio Caro Baroja. The film is a celebration of traditions in the province of the film's title that were perceived to be in danger of extinction. By this time the threat was no longer Franco's regime, but the pressures of modernism. Thus the film features many scenes of men engaged in traditional activities. These include foresters clearing timber to the soundtrack of singing, a blacksmith at his forge, farmers using scythes working in summer, men working at furnaces carrying hot iron with tongs to be forged by hammer, by hand or machine, quarry workers using dynamite and carrying stone shoulder-high, shepherds dressed in sheepskins draped over their shoulders as they drive their sheep, each with a bell around its neck, on common grazing land. The church was an intrinsic part of rural tradition and ways of life too. In the film we see a Catholic priest at shearing to bless the sheep. All of these images are of the rural and of small-scale industry. This constant repetition of rural sports, crafts and work has the effect of underlining a sense of nation: 'The theme of nation can only emerge in the course of a film's viewing if the relevant forms of aboutness are flagged or foregrounded. That is I can think of no case in which a single instance of foregrounding suffices to evoke a theme of nation' (Hjort 2000: 107).

Other scenes in the film feature images of landscape, megalithic burial chambers and ancient cave paintings, flocks of sheep and herds of ponies, charcoal burners, peat cutting, rural shooting, villages and farms, rivers and the sea, wine-making, small rural kilns, the making of pointed curved hand baskets for zezta punta players, stone lifting competitions, and flour milling. Amongst one of the traditional rituals captured in the film is a family leaving their hearth on the death of the male head of the family to go and tell the bees. They talk to the hives.

But in addition to being a celebration of the traditional, the film also encourages connection and an embracing of the contemporary. In this sense, there is arguably a Reversal thread within the film. Both sculptors Jorge Oteiza and Eduardo Chillida are featured. Chillida is shown at the steel furnace, Oteiza with his stone sculptures of rowers. These iconic figures of Basqueness were rejected for a new chapel that was being added to an old monastery by the Bishop of San Sebastian on the grounds of being too modern. The complex work of modern artists is celebrated in ways that include a criticism of the conservatism of the church. Chillida is a sculptor who has pushed the boundaries of modern art in his work, by making art specifically for public places. His three part iron sculpture 'Comb of the wind' from 1977 was fixed to rocks on the seashore at San Sebastian. This marks a real departure from the scripts of Carlism and the traditionalism associated with Basques as a 'rural peasantry' fighting to keep their fueros. A great deal of change took place over the period stretching from the fueros through Carlism to the work of these artists.

However, the film is in Preserved because it is almost entirely based on the lives and work of men, women are almost entirely absent. What the film highlights in terms of masculinity is that traditional assumptions and power relations relating to gender do not only affect men's experiences socially, but also their economic and political interests, circumstances and opportunities (Panelli 2004: 64).

Several other films, although very different in other ways, portray the Basque rural in the same kinds of ways in relation to masculinity, for instance through featuring farmers, rural skills and crafts, and similar kinds of social continuity in *Around the World with Orson*

*Welles, Tasio, Lauaxeta To The Four Winds* (1987: José Antonio Zorrilla), *Cows, Secrets of the Heart, Bosque de sombras/The Backwoods* (2006: Koldo Serra) and *Show Me The Way, Isabel*.

A series of short documentaries made by directors early in their careers includes *Ikuska 12 / Something Able to be Seen* (1981: Mirentxu Loyarte), with scenes of rural men fishing and milking cows by hand. *Ikuska 11* (1981: Montxo Armendáriz) shows men working the fertile land of The Ribera and its large rivers crossing the south of Navarre, farmers cultivating the soil and directing the river to irrigate crops, and communities of men drinking their own wine at their local fiesta and bull fight in Navarre.

*Tasio* is set in the mountains of Navarra. The main character is Tasio (Isidro Solano young man, finally Patxi Bisquert), whose life is shaped around traditional activities, including charcoal burning, hunting in the forest, and poaching fish. The film portrays 'the dailiness' of naturalistic small village life (Kinder 1993: 129, & Jordan 2001: 16). It also depicts the relative poverty of rural Basques in comparison to rural Wales, in that Tasio neither owns nor rents land. We learn that Tasio's father (Enrique Goicoechea) led his mule strapped with sacks of coke to sell, and although poor he taught his son to take over his work as a charcoal burner, to poach fish, lay traps for wild boar and shoot wild rabbits from the woods. This film has been described as having the aura of a rural conservative tradition, as being a 'powerful illustration of a way of life bound by nature's unchanging cycle' (Marti-Olivella 2003: 53), and as depicting a 'hard and bleak rural subsistence involved in this disappearing trade and dedicated process of raising a family' (Stone 2002: 144).

Rural skills also feature in *Spirit of the Beehive*. I suggest that the central character Fernando's beekeeping can be linked with tradition, firstly through being a skill that is passed on, thus connecting generations of men. Beekeeping, arguably a mixture of craft and art, is not something that can simply be picked up, it is more associated with the kinds of skills passed from father to son that feature regularly in films in Preserved. Furthermore, beekeeping and honey and its use to make mead feature significantly in rural cultural traditions in the Basque country and Wales (e.g. Mela 2004: Emlyn Williams).

But in comparison with the mysterious and closed in existence of Fernando in *Spirit of the Beehive*, Tasio's life is centred on the local village and its community. His wife comes from there, and we never see him leaving. We see Tasio the adult (Patxi Bisquert) remembering his childhood, the freedom of the countryside, playing with other boys, chasing hens, taking aim with sling and stone, throwing stones, and stealing milk from the goat that he hand milked. This is similar to childhood recollections featured when Lauaxeta, the central character in *To The Four Winds* is imprisoned after his capture at the fall of Guernica. The film shows him revisiting scenes from his rural childhood in flashback. This is clearly similar to scenes in the Welsh films *Hedd Wyn* and *Ar Waelod Y Cof*.

We see Tasio the adolescent playing the ancient game of pelota in his village, meeting his sweetheart Paulina (Amaia Lasa) with her long dark hair in plaits resting on the shoulders of her puff sleeved dress after a summer dance, where the accordion is played. She is the girl he marries. The rural is depicted as a place of isolation, but also as the location of an 'authentic' sense of identity and a place of 'community'.

Yet the film also depicts Tasio in terms of self-sufficiency. He works alone, he is in tune with his environment, with nature. As Marti-Olivella (2003: 58) claims, 'Tasio is a classic patriarchal' he is portrayed as a fearless and independent coal worker and hunter. He has a wide range of rural skills and awarenesses. But he is also an integral part of the local community. We are shown that Tasio's way of life is threatened when the van that usually collects his charcoal to take it for sale stops coming. The film is thus a celebration of a traditional way of life, disappearing under the forces of change and modernisation. Tasio's livelihood depends on nature, but also on faceless others relatively far away who no longer have need for his charcoal. In addition to the poverty, hazards and hardships of Tasio's way of life, Paulina dies in childbirth, leaving Tasio to bring up a daughter Elisa (Amaia Lasa) alone. It is significant that the same actor plays both of these roles, affording a sense that through Tasio's eyes that they are the same, that there is continuity. When Elisa grows up, she departs for the city, leaving Tasio as the last of a line of traditional charcoal burners. She may be seen as iconic of a young generation of Basques rejecting the past, parents and rural

cultural heritage. He is stubborn, he will not desert his way of life, but there is no-one to inherit home or skills or knowledge from him. The themes of hardship and resistance to authority that feature strongly in many narratives of Basque masculinity are also clearly evident in his film. For instance as a poacher he has been pursued by the forest guard all his life. He is located at the bottom of the social ladder, and the wealthy landowner class remains anonymous.

The rural is presented in similar ways to some extent in *Cows*. In terms of cultural narratives this is a complex film. Julio Medem is a groundbreaking director famed for the depth and complexity of his films, and for the daring and novel ways that he addresses issues such as the psychological motivations of his characters and presents these to audiences. His films, including *Cows*, 'reproduces the typical Basque rural saga format only to subvert it by stressing asphyxia, madness, and the need to escape,' (Labanyi 1995: 403). However, *Cows* has several features that I argue associate it with *Preserved*. The film is set amongst hills and valley forest, and Stone (2002: 162) has suggested that the portrayal of details of life in a Basque valley are what give the film the ability to project a strong sense of cultural identity, to 'highlight both repetition and change'. Santaoalla (1999: 322) suggests that the film has a documentary quality to it in places. An authentic 'Basqueness' is partly established through two characters, Carmelo Mendiluze (Kándito Uranga) and Ignacio Irigibel (Carmelo Gómez), being shown to have woodcutting (*aizkolari*) skills. In one scene they compete against each other for the prize of a cow, with their neighbours betting on the outcome.

The film focuses on a rural family, named Irigibel, and on changes between generations in an extended time frame covering the 1875 Carlist rising to the civil war in the 1930s, thus underlining the importance of heritage and (dis)continuity to traditional rural ways of life. The Irigibel family is similar to the Jones family portrayed in *On The Black Hill*, which similarly covers three generations. Both films underline the importance of wealth in the form of the ownership of animals (cows in *Vacas* and sheep in *On The Black Hill*), and the importance of horses and their strength before rural mechanization.



In *On The Black Hill* we are shown a typical Welsh farmhouse and farm yard ‘y ty fferm ynghanol y clos’. In Wales the farmhouse is usually separated from the other buildings and yard, often by a symbolic hedge or a wall. This separation may refer back to desires that began to arise during medieval times for the wealthier and more cultured to distance themselves from animals and dirt, and the separation of work place and ‘the home’ that arose with the industrial revolution. Farms tend to be orderly, in the sense that different buildings are present for different and specific purposes. Livestock is kept apart by species, in specific locations in fields and sheds. In *Cows* a typical Basque farm and buildings is evident as one unit or ‘baserria’, or as Santaolalla (1999: 314) terms ‘caseríos’ in Spanish. There is no separate farmhouse, there is a more relaxed approach to keeping livestock and the building is multipurpose. In several Basque films we are shown multiple generations of families living on the same farm. In Welsh films tensions often arise when younger generations seek to leave the farm.

Furthermore, Basque farms are presented as occupying elevated locations on the tops of hills, ‘it was possible to live relatively isolated on one’s mountain baserri’ (Urza 1999: 251), whereas Welsh farms tend to be located more towards valley bottoms, for example as in *On The Black Hill*, *Hedd Wyn* and *Johnny Be Good*. A difference here is that Basque farms loom over the landscape and forest, symbolic of power and control, and enabling surveillance of land and livestock. This sense is underlined perhaps by the unit of the ‘ancestral landscape’ (Rodriguez 1997: 134), the ‘baserria’, which is more readily defensible than the more scattered and fragmented structures of Welsh farms. This sense feeds into elements of ways that the Basque rural tends to be presented in films, for instance as a place of uncertainties and violence, which are discussed in more detail later on in this chapter. This is further enhanced in *Vacas* by the hatred and rivalry between the Irigibels and their neighbours the Mendiluze family. This leads to disaster and death, a contrast with the relatively much more muted conflict that farmer Amos Jones has with his neighbours in *On The Black Hill*.

The rivalry in *Cows* between the Irigibel and Mendiluze families is partly played out via competitive attitudes in wood cutting competitions in the field, this traditional Basque craft forming contests at all levels from local to national. Rural skills are thus conflated with the stereotypically masculine theme of competition. In the film the central character Ignacio

Irigibel achieves national success at woodcutting, the prizes include a car and a horse, and he is revered by the whole community. We see his triumphant homecoming, and how local people follow him through the fields. This scene is almost exactly the same as the triumphant homecoming of the bardic chair won posthumously by the poet Hedd Wyn in the film *Hedd Wyn* at the National Eisteddfod. In contrast, defeat and subsequent jealousy destroys Juan Mendiluze. He throws away his axe, the icon of wood cutters, into the forest.

As with the Welsh Preserved, in these films Basque men are usually portrayed as working class breadwinners, heads of families, they usually have male heirs, they are disciplinarians, they remain silent about their own feelings and vulnerabilities, they are aggressive, they are active agents, are possessive, and they have strong senses of identity. However, the circumstances are different from the Welsh context. Domination and subjectification of the Basques is far more overt and intensive, and therefore elements of these masculine characteristics are different accordingly. For instance Welsh men in Preserved often use Welsh language in social situations, Basque men less so. They can be Catholics, but they must be Spanish Catholics. External oppression shapes many aspects of everyday life in Basque film, in ways that are not evident in Welsh film. Welsh men in contrast could be Anglicans or members of Welsh Chapels.

## **The Basque rural**

A key difference from Welsh films lies in the way that the countryside is portrayed. In comparison to being a place of safety, of retreat, a place that sustains, away from villages and homes the countryside in Basque films is portrayed as a place of uncertainty, mystery and danger. It is still central to many narratives of Basque identity, in that Basque nationalism derives its ‘foundational discourse’ from ‘the rural Basque environment’ (Gabilondo 2002: 269). Although not directly linked to Basqueness, as well as providing, the forest is a place in which Tasio must avoid those guarding from poachers. In *Cows* the forest seems to belong to nobody, it is where Juan throws away his axe, a strong symbol of Basque masculinity. It is also where Ignacio meets Juan’s sister Catalina (Ana Torrent) while they conduct a

clandestine relationship, and the home of 'the buzzing tree stump' (Evans 2009: 134). This last is a hollow stump with insects inside. Things that have come to the end of their life or usefulness are thrown here to be reborn, according to myth. The forest can be seen in these examples as a place of mystery and secrets.

In *The Spirit of the Beehive* Fernando teaches his daughters out in the forest to distinguish between harmless and harmful mushrooms, a poisonous growth or 'evil to be recognized' (Edwards 1995: 142). In *The Backwoods / Bosque de sombras* (Koldo Serra 2006) Lechón (Jon Ariño) is among local men that use the forest. Lechón enjoys a free peep show when his new neighbour Isabel (Aitana Sánchez-Gijón) takes a naked dip in the forest lake. Lechón tails her and makes advances. The forest has a secret known to Lechón and his relatives, locked up like a dog is young deformed Nerea (Yaiza Esteve) who is unable to either speak or walk. When discovered Nerea is carried from the forest depths to be comforted like a daughter by childless Isabel. Out in the forest angry Lechón and his men walk, guns ready, to chase away those who have discovered their forest secret and claim Nerea back. The forest is portrayed in these examples as a place of danger, and again secrets and transgression.

*Silencio roto/Broken Silence* (2001: Montxo Armendáriz) portrays Spanish resistance to Franco's rule, thus mirroring aspects of Basque resistance. The mountains of Navarra in 1944 feature as a hunting ground over which those who reject fascist rule are sought by the Civil Guard. In addition to uncertainty, mystery and danger this is in some ways similar to the oppressive character of local rural communities as depicted in the Welsh film *Solomon a Gaenor*. In *Obaba* the key to a young film-maker named Lourdes (Bárbara Lennie) unlocking stories from the past of the rural community whose story she seeks to tell only comes via flashbacks to village members' childhood memories of a trip into the forest, and thus back to mystery, uncertainty, secrets and shame.

Amongst the short stories presented in *Obaba*, one in particular draws together various themes evident throughout Basque Preserved films. This particular story, known as the 'Lizard Story', features a character called Ismael (as a child Alejandro Jiménez, as an adult Héctor Colomé). We are shown Ismael as a child in the village of Obaba, which is so poor

that it lacks a proper school. A Catholic church-goer, he is a jealous bully who brings trouble on other children in the village, makes fun of them, and tries to assert control over them as a kind of gang leader. As an adult he runs a hostel in the village. Amongst the outbuildings is a shed where he keeps lizards. The suggestion in the film is that he uses the lizards to exert control over others. For instance the character of Tomás (as a child Pablo Manjón, as an adult Txema Blasco) goes deaf and dumb and supposedly mad when Ismael puts a lizard into his ear when they are both children. The adult Tomás is a virtual zombie who follows Ismael's authority. We see him showing collected insects to Ismael for his approval before they are fed to the lizards. Tomás guards the lizards; he holds the keys to the shed. These two may be regarded as symbolic of Franco (Ismael), and those who unthinkingly and uncritically supported him and carried out his bidding are symbolised by Tomás. When he takes control of the hostel Ismael renames it 'The Lizard Hostel, from 'Obaba Hostel'. This may be regarded as symbolic of the 'rebranding' of Spain under Franco, involving the adoption of a new flag amongst other measures relating to government, education, the church and social policy (e.g. Beevor 2006: 224).

The story also features two women characters. Begoña (Iñake Irastorza), who is Tomás's spinster sister, may be interpreted as a metaphor for ETA, in that from childhood she continually contests Ismael's control of others, and at the end of the film she seems to set fire to the shed containing the lizards. In contrast, Merche (Pepa López) works for Ismael, and seems to symbolise more traditional versions of femininity. Merche will be further discussed later in this chapter.

What is therefore implied in Basque films in *Preserved* is that forest and mountains can be seen to stand for a place in which secrets reside, a place of danger and potential shame, a place that of itself can trigger the unexpected and conflict. The nearest equivalent to this in Welsh *Preserved* is during mountain storms in *On The Black Hill*, which nearly kill one of the farm owners Amos's sons. Also, in *Hedd Wyn* soldiers being trained for the Great War and a rifle range appear in the otherwise tranquil countryside. But in comparison to the largely benign countryside of Wales, the Basque countryside features as a place linked to intrigue and danger.

## Rural/urban divisions

In contrast to the way that Welsh narratives of identity feature competing rural (farmer) and urban/industrial (e.g. miner) based notions of an 'authentic' Welshness, Basque films in Preserved tend not to feature these kinds of contradictory iconic depictions. Instead, supposedly 'true' Basque men are simply farmers, skilled at woodcutting and other rural crafts. So in *Show Me The Way Isabel* the character of the city boy Juan Martin (Mikel Losada) from San Sebastian is marked as an outsider. He does not understand rural dialects, the iconic sport of pelota, or rural customs. This is despite him being a student studying Euskara in San Sebastian. His city-based college course does not equip him with abilities to understand or even communicate with 'authentic' rural Basques. The film is a love story between Juan Martin and Isabel (Ainere Tolosa) across rural/urban divisions. By bringing city and countryside together in this way, it points up distinctive narratives of Basqueness. This divide refers back to the kinds of rural/urban divisions associated with earlier generations, with (rural) Carlism and (more urban) republicanism in the civil war. As a love story the film attempts to reconcile these kinds of divisions, showing that romance can bridge across them.

There can be subtle differences between how urban men are portrayed as compared with rural men. For instance in the short film *Ehun Metro / 100 Metres* (1986: Alfonso Ungría) we see the main character Ion (Patxi Bisquert) pause as he runs the final metres of his life amidst the old cobble streets into Plaza de la Constitución (*La Consti*) overlooked by empty balconies as the pigeons fly off disturbed by the gunshot at eight A.M. on *La Consti* clock. The gunmen in plain clothes had failed in a previous attempt to shoot Ion. During this pause Ion revisits the child (Aritz Sarria), recollecting how his father, wearing a black beret and pale raincoat, took him to play with other boys of a similar age on Concha beach in the city of San Sebastian. We see the father reminding young Ion to be careful as all the boys play with the waves, and to avoid getting his sandals wet.

What is significant is the father features as a man engaging in childcare duties, taking his son to play with others and actively watching over him to ensure his safety, and to make sure that

he takes care of his shoes. There is nothing to compare with this in the ways that fathers are portrayed in films set in rural areas. Farmer fathers are far too busy farming, engaging in rural crafts and competitions, and local rivalries to get involved in childcare, which is portrayed as women's work. Similarly, rural children are portrayed as far more independent, able to go off into the forest unsupervised, allowed to explore (e.g. in *Cows*, *Show Me The Way Isabel*, *Tasio*, *Obaba*, *Secrets of the Heart* and *The Spirit of the Beehive*).

### **Industrial men**

There are no icons of Basqueness associated with industry to compare with the Welsh miner, quarryman or steelworker. Although industrial centres have long existed within the Basque country, along with ports, these do not seem to have been afforded the same kinds of social significance or to have been incorporated within narratives of Preserved identity. One factor that this points to is that Welsh experiences of domination have been far more associated with economic exploitation by the 'sly leopards' of industry, whilst Basque experiences have been far more to do with political/(para)military domination and greater complexity. Another factor is that since in Wales coal was the raw material, but timber from Basque forests helped to fuel industrial revolution there, there has been no equivalent to the mine as an iconic site, even though mines have been important in Basque history.

Therefore, although small-scale industrial activities appear in films such as *Guipúzcoa* and *Ama Lur*, no stereotyped characters are associated with these. There is no equivalent of the Welsh working class rural mining community, with its family unit and domestic routines structured around men working on shifts, workmates, chapel, choir or rugby team. There is urban Bilbao in *Euskadi hors d'état* (1983:Arthur MacCaig) of working docks, steel furnaces an industrial setting and *Lauaxeta. To The Four Winds*. At the end of this film we are shown the port of Bilbao blockaded during the civil war, and the evacuation of refugees by sea. There is no attempt to feature men as dock workers, sailors or fishermen for example, even though sailors and fishermen feature in Basque culture. This means that there is a far more restricted repertoire of iconic male stereotypes within Basque narratives of identity in Preserved, as compared to Wales. However, one category that is far more developed in Basque film is that of 'the warrior'.

## Basques as men, as warriors

This section adopts a chronological order for discussing films that portray Basques as men and as warriors, according to the setting of films. It moves from the civil war, through the Second World War, to the 'war' against Franco's regime. This facilitates the collapsing of Basque struggles into a simplistic moral dualism in which Basques are of course on the side of right and fascists are cruel, evil doers of wrong. This justifies Basque violence, particularly in films that depict ETA. ETA's violence is presented as the logical outcome of the dominants' use of force and terror to subjugate Basques and deny them independence. In these films Basques who took the side of fascism, particularly during the civil war, are invisible, unmentioned, unacknowledged. It is only when subsequent generations have come to pose questions concerning the actions of some of their predecessors that the role of some Basques in fascist terror has become the source of shame. The chronological ordering of films in this section is also intended to introduce readers previously unfamiliar to some central aspects of recent Basque history.

The first film in this section *Lauaxeta. To The Four Winds* is a biographical film about the iconic Basque poet Esteban Urkiaga (1905-1937), played by Xabier Elorriaga, whose pen name was Lauaxeta. The film includes battle scenes of Lauaxeta fighting on the republican side during the civil war, on the front line. It shows Lauaxeta as a boy in flashback being taken to the town of Guernica by his father, a man very proud of his Basque identity. As mentioned earlier, Guernica is a central, iconic place within Basque culture. Beneath the oak tree there, kings of Spain used to swear to respect the 'Fueros'. Later in the film we are shown Lauaxeta at Guernica again, this time witnessing destruction and carnage during the notorious bombing of the town by German planes fighting on the side of Franco.

The bombing of Guernica and the fall of Bilbao are central moments in Basque history, and Franco was rapidly identified as a major threat to Basque identity and opponent in the struggle for independence when he came to power. In the film, these events are portrayed very vividly. We see the confusion, lack of preparation and clumsiness of the efforts of Basques to coordinate themselves against the well equipped and organised forces of the fascists. As mentioned earlier, there are grounds for suggesting that the bombing was a

deliberately symbolic attack on the Basque people, but more recent analysis suggests that this may be overstating the intentions of the fascist forces (e.g. Beevor 2006: 259-260).

The sense of suffering and injustice surrounding the bombing of Guernica may be intensified for more contemporary audiences by the fact that Germany issued an official apology for this act as recently as 1998. This features in Julio Medem's film *Los amantes del Círculo Polar/Lovers of the Arctic Circle* (1998), which is discussed in relation to postnational in Basque film. But there are several key elements in *Lauaxeta /To The Four Winds* that are in common with Welsh Preserved. Firstly, the character of Lauaxeta is drawn from the same materials as characters featured in *Hedd Wyn* and to a lesser extent Gwenallt in *Ar Waelod Y Cof*. They are all acclaimed poets from families with rural backgrounds who become caught up in wars as reluctant soldiers (though imprisoned for pacifism in the case of Gwenallt), and who come from strong Christian backgrounds. Like Hedd Wyn within Welsh culture, Lauaxeta has become a central icon of Basqueness.

The film is centred on themes of roots, sacrifice, suffering, of ideals crushed, of war and violence destroying the soulful poet and his dreams and vision for the future for Basques. The figure of Lauaxeta can be seen to stand for the Basque nation: intelligent, creative, loyal, but subject to violent external forces from Spain that threaten destruction. This film is about preservation in this sense. The same can be argued of the figure of Hedd Wyn, who stands for the exploitation of the Welsh by the English, and a mocking of Welsh language and culture via a dominant cultural system that has sought to deny and eradicate Welshness as something separate from English authored versions of 'Britishness'.

What is also significant is that the film focuses on the lives of men, women feature mainly as either mothers, wives or girlfriends. Basque history and identity is thus portrayed as masculine, men are the active agents in historical and cultural narratives. But what makes this film particular is the focus on Lauaxeta as an educated and literate man. In one scene we are shown Lauaxeta's study with the walls lined with books, his own amongst them, and family photographs. This further consolidates the idea of a particular kind of masculinity that is quite



different to versions associated with the physical, rural activities and sports presented in *Ama Lur* and *Guipúzcoa*.

### **Men as warriors opposing external oppression**

In comparison with Welsh cinema, there are numerous films that depict Basque men as warriors, fighting for Basque autonomy, independence and even revolution against external forces of oppression. In terms of English language films and international audiences, a starting point for discussion and understanding of these films might be the Hollywood production of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943: Sam Wood). Based on Ernest Hemmingway's epic novel, which was in turn derived from his own experiences as a war correspondent, this can be regarded as a propaganda film released to further stir up anti-fascist sentiments during World War Two. We are shown the depth of feeling of American Robert Jordan (Gary Cooper), who whilst fighting on the side of republican guerillas is willing to sacrifice his own life. Mortally wounded, he uses a machine gun on Franco's Nationalist cavalry whilst his comrades escape within the mountains of their own community. The guerilla band includes old and young men, and a mother figure in the character of Pilar (Katina Paxinou), who cooks meals and tends wounds as well as fighting alongside the men. Although not Basques, this small band of remorseless, tough warriors drawn from mountain villagers united in hatred of outside forces may perhaps be taken as symbolic of those who were opposed to Franco during the civil war, including some Basques.

The depth of political commitment of the character of Robert Jordan is very similar to that of the character of Manuel (Juan Diego Botto) in *Broken Silence*, who is similarly willing to die in his efforts against Franco's men. The film is set in 1944, and features members of the Maquis, armed resistance fighters opposed to Franco's regime who fought side-by-side with the French Underground Maquis fighting German occupation on the French side of the border.

In the film young Lucía (Lucía Jiménez), returning to live with her poor parents in a small mountain village, falls in love with Manuel (Juan Diego Botto), the young village blacksmith.

Manuel succeeds in freeing fellow Maquis from Civil Guard arrest in his village. He protects the secrecy of 'The Maquis'. We learn that his father is also a member, and we see Manuel leaving his forge to go off with the Maquis to fight in the local mountains. Lucia has to endure coming second to this. Manuel is portrayed as a stubborn, determined, gritty man who lives simply, is clear in his convictions, knows the countryside extremely well and possesses excellent rural skills.

What this film presents is the primacy of fighting against Franco or German occupation, it comes before work, home and love. It is also significant that both father and son are involved, the son is following the father's lead. The film depicts the Maquis as brave, tough, dedicated men accustomed to living a harsh existence out on the mountains whilst being pursued by the Civil Guard. Under Franco's regime the Maquis were depicted as bandits, but the film places them centre stage (Jordan 2001: 47). It is a celebration of the sacrifices made by the Maquis during a demoralising period. It portrays the intensity of the isolation, tension and fearful secrecy that villages in the Pyrenees experienced at this time (Pariser 2002: 15). This has consequences for work and domestic routines, and the local community, in ways that do not feature in Welsh films that portray soldiers going off to fight in 'British' wars elsewhere.

### **Basques as ETA 'warriors'**

The involvement of some Basque men in the struggle against Franco defines them in terms of traditional versions of masculinity, with underlying themes of loyalty and brotherhood. Two films of the Preserved portray this very clearly, *The Burgos Trial* and *The Segovia Breakout*. Both are based on real events, are pro ETA (Jordan & Morgan-Tamosunas 1998: 187), and were made after Franco's death. They are perhaps slightly unusual in that 'ETA as a collective is rarely dealt with' (Davies 2009: 106). They can be regarded as 'postcolonial' in the sense of reclaiming history from the dominant and retelling it from the perspectives of the subordinate: 'The absence of private television in Spain after the transition meant that there was still a need for film-makers to supply alternatives to the official version of key historical figures, periods or events' (Hopewell 1986: 172). But both may be said to construct modern versions of Basque cultural heritage rather than rehashing older elements of Basque folklore (Hopewell 1986: 233). The fall of Francoism offered new opportunities for the full

emergence of a distinctively Basque cinema (Hopewell 1986: 233) that went beyond the documentation of everyday Basque ways of life. Unlike some other films discussed in this chapter, the Basques in these two films are presented as a unit, there is less sense of internal variation, of local loyalties and cultures, of regional or provincial identity, as earlier in *Tasio*. The Basques in these films are simply Basques, united in the experience of being a subject people. Both *The Burgos Trial* and *The Segovia Breakout* engage with the history of the organisation of Basque extremist resistance.

Between 1939-1950, sometimes referred to as 'the dark years', Basques were by necessity silent about themselves. From 1950 -1981 there was greater reportage, and the international media monitored the Basque situation more closely, paying special attention to what it tended to portray as 'terrorist' violence. These two films were made to document historical events primarily for Basque audiences, 'violence is directly represented as a political problem' (Gabilondo 2002: 268), and when they achieved wider success they provided a challenge to the perspective adopted by the international media. This was achieved through the dynamic combination of the films being part historical account, part fictional epic.

*The Burgos Trial* tells the true story of members of ETA imprisoned and tried for the death of a Spanish Police Commissioner in 1968. Meliton Manzanás González was shot at close range by a single gunman. It was alleged that Manzanás had acquired a reputation as a brutal and sadistic official who especially enjoyed beating and torturing Basque nationalists during interrogations (Clark 1984: 49, Heiberg 1989: 107, Astrain 1997: 34). It was the first Basque film to attract large audiences (Hopewell 1986: 233). Where *Ama Lur* and *Guipúzcoa* attempted to define and celebrate Basque culture relatively narrowly, and thus failed to connect with wide audiences, or even with critics, *The Burgos Trial* focuses on a dynamic story that is one of the most famous episodes of Basque resistance to the Franco regime. It is effectively a documentary about the trial of 16 ETA militants. Their direct actions contrasted with the more indirect, political resistance enacted by the PNV in the 1940s and 1950s. They included two priests (Stephens 1976: 647), who had the support of the Pope for a fair trial, but not for their actions. The trial took place over 3-28 December 1970. It was infamous and ridiculous, a 'disaster for Franco' (Kurlansky 2000: 243) and 'entirely insensitive to the worldwide revulsion that it was provoking' (Preston 1986: 28). The accused appeared in

court chained together. Six death penalties resulted (3 double death penalties), all the other accused were sentenced to thirty years in prison, but by 1977 all were free from jail. The Franco regime gave in to popular pressure by commuting the death sentences, following general solidarity between Basque workers and nationalists (Stephens 1976: 649), and widespread political unrest in the form of strikes and demonstrations outside the courtroom, and further afield in France and in Rome. 'The attitude of the Church gave a tremendous moral boost to the anti-Franco opposition' (Preston 1986: 31).

The film focuses on the trial itself and the popular support throughout the Basque country and beyond for the accused, using some archive film footage and interviews with individual Basques who were involved. Each appears on screen alone in conversation with an unseen interviewer, in a standard documentary style, each in a different setting. The effect of this may be to underline the passage of time; each is now in a very different situation. Each setting may seem to inform audiences, telling something of the personality, identity or political outlook of the interviewee. For instance one is interviewed beside a large poster of Lenin, another in a greenhouse in which he grows carnations. The film also takes audiences on a tour of various locations, for instance to parts of old Bilbao, that were significant to the ETA members.

In comparison with more recent documentary films such as *The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone*, *Beautiful Mistake*, and *Dal: Yma/Nawr*, *The Burgos Trial* is far more sedately paced. Each interview is presented as a part of an extended conversation, in what is perhaps a more reverential manner. Stone (2009: 83) has argued that the film clearly takes the perspective of 'support for the interviewees', demonstrating their 'sense of unity, purpose and defiance'. This is in contrast with the rapid inter-cutting of far smaller interview fragments that are a feature of these more recent documentaries. In particular there is far less to suggest respect on the part of the director towards those featured in interviews in *The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone* (discussed in the next chapter). Perhaps this reflects a sense of awe on the part of the director; these are people of action and violence who were willing to sacrifice their lives for Basque independence. The film presents them differently to how poets or sculptors or farmers are presented in films such as *Dal: Yma/Nawr*, *Ama Lur*, *Guipúzcoa. Pen y Berth* has no

archive footage of widespread demonstrations or strikes in support of those on trial, because these never took place.

This film is in Preserved because the basic narrative is one of the shared experience of being an oppressed, subject people. It highlights the cruelty and injustices of Franco's rule, at the same time making martyrs of ETA members, as those willing to die to achieve independence for the Basques. It has been argued that this film encouraged a new generation to realise it must do things for itself, and that the political repression it depicts encouraged the development of a communal consciousness (Thomas 1995: 1). The film also locates men as active agents in resistance to Franco's regime and the struggle for independence, and in this they are very different from the silent and defeated men discussed later in this chapter. At this time ETA was compelled by a dual urge among young Basque men for both continuity and change, to *break* with their fathers' generation, and simultaneously to *continue* their fathers' political struggle (Hamilton 2000: 224). As she remarks, 'In this tradition, men were the citizens and activists of the movement' (ibid.).

*The Segovia Breakout* can be described as part escape thriller, part historical epic (Marti-Olivella 2003: 49). It was a film that may have inspired other directors to portray Basque-authored narratives of identity. It also has a postcolonial sense in that it can be seen to counter dominant Spanish and more widely international discourses that were constructing Basques simply as dangerous 'terrorists'. Central themes in the film are the oppressions of Franco's regime in the form of the treatment of these prisoners. For instance when one of the prisoners gets married, we are shown the bride to be, Nerea (Virginia Mataix), having to undergo a full cavity body search before she is allowed to proceed to the civil wedding ceremony. It also focuses on the unity of this community of men within the prison. It shows the men throwing an extremely exuberant party in the prison after the wedding ceremony. The bridegroom Iturbe (Mario Pardo) stands in front of a barred window drinking wine. This is contrasted with Nerea much more femininely taking a quiet meal with her family. The prisoners learn of the death of Franco whilst in prison, and the film shows them celebrating exuberantly, underlining the freedoms that suddenly were granted to film makers following his death in real life. This scene in turn underlines how the film is a 'postcolonial celebration' of the

ending of brutal political domination and oppression. It is notable that during this scene, the prison guards make no efforts to intervene.

The film shows men co-operating together in the planning and the execution of the breakout, for instance in diverting the attention of the prison guards. Once they have escaped, the men head for the French border with the assistance of other ETA members who have made elaborate arrangements for smuggling them past the authorities. To British audiences the film may in many ways be seen to follow the template of a standard British prisoner of war film, and through this it presents ETA members as like regular soldiers rather than guerrillas, and the conflict as 'war' rather than 'terrorism'.

What the film depicts is a close community of men, brought together by the shared experience of imprisonment and united in their determination to escape. Their cohesion is lost when they escape, the outside world is more complex. Instead of being focused within the ETA structure of eight men teams or cells, outside the prison they are confronted with situations in which they must trust and rely on others with whom bonds are not so close. Once outside the prison the escape plans start to show cracks. Inside the prison these men are in an almost monastic environment. In this way, the ETA structure is what provides security, it is a classic narrative of a form of political homosociability.

Both *The Burgos Trial* and *The Segovia Breakout* are set outside the Basque country. This is a part of the overall narrative about the external oppression of a subject people that the films contain, in that the trial and imprisonment of ETA members takes place in Spain, they are removed from the Basque country. This enables the films to deliver a sense of unity and co-operation between French and Spanish Basques that might not otherwise be so possible if the settings were somewhere particular within the Basque country.

Scenes that portray urban riots in *Ke arteko egunak /Días de humo/ Days Of Smoke* (1989: Antton Ezeiza) depict ETA in terms of dynamic actions. Audiences are shown rioters setting fire to buses and other parts of the urban fabric, throwing stones and petrol bombs and

generally resisting the police. These scenes tend to form part of the backdrop the main plot lines, but the more general theme of civil unrest is nevertheless part of the main part of the story. An effect of this is perhaps to suggest that political resistance is an integral part of what is presented as a 'universal' Basque experience, it permeates all lives, all Basques are potentially recruits for ETA, and that resistance is part of the Basque way of being. However, it is notable that only men are shown engaging in riots. This is resistance as a spontaneous, fairly disorganized action, fuelled by an anger that supposedly all Basques feel towards the state. Rioters engage in stereotypically aggressive male ways; shouting, charging at the police and throwing stones at them. In these films the state usually takes the form of a faceless and almost dehuman mass of male police officers behind riot shields. The action is portrayed from the perspective of rioters, with the police simply icons or instruments of state oppression.

*Days Of Smoke* portrays ETA cells, small groups of members organized for secrecy and security, not knowing their superiors or other members of the organisation. This film depicts assassinations, carried out covertly, with planning in depth. ETA cell members use public telephones to avoid the possibility of phones being tapped or calls being traced. This professionalism is in contrast to the scenes of more amateur spontaneity associated with riots. 'Professionalism' itself has of course long been associated with masculinity, since women's roles in Basque societies were traditionally centred on the home and unpaid domestic labour.

From 1959 when ETA emerged 'Women ... were largely positioned in 'support' roles akin and parallel to their domestic position', and during ETA's first decade women appeared only infrequently, on the margins of debates over culture, class and armed struggle (Hamilton 2000: 225). In particular Hamilton argues that the icon of the Mother was 'a repository of cultural values' (ibid.). It associated Basque women with an imaginary family unit, and thus symbolised one of the prime elements of a disappearing culture and language in a world rapidly changing under the impacts of modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, and migration (ibid.: 226).

Therefore, both modes of resistance (rioting and membership of an ETA cell) are portrayed as being masculine behaviours. This exclusively masculine representation of ETA may even be extended by default to those responsible for creating pro ETA graffiti evident in the backgrounds to scenes in several films on walls and buildings (Watson 1999: 105). Audiences may simply assume that the authors of this work were male in the absence of many representations of women as rioters or members of ETA cells.

## **Summary of Basque men as warriors**

So although in ways very different from each other *Lauaxeta*, *To The Four Winds*, *The Segovia Breakout* and *The Burgos Trial* all dwell on the bravery, sacrifice and resilience of (mainly) Basque men collectively, who fight with an honour and dignity that Francoism and wider 'terrorist' discourses tried to deny them. Also evident are the political struggles that engaged Basques via support for the PNV, for instance in the form of Lauaxeta being pro-PNV. The films portray the origins of modern Basque struggles, they clearly intend to be inspirational for newer generations, and to restate and reclaim Basque separatism as political resistance rather than 'gangster like' violence. They are preserved because in accordance with the first stages of postcolonial cultural freedom of expression, 'Basqueness' itself is not critically interrogated. They also feature the unproblematical centrality of masculinities. There is a simplistic, almost moral certainty about these films, in which those in opposition to Francoism are unquestionably on the side of right and justice, and their actions are unquestionably for a greater 'good'. They are martyrs to be revered. In addition, Basque violence is either portrayed as the spontaneous bubbling over of anger into urban riots, or the more subtle and more complex professionalism of ETA cells. In both cases dynamic action by men is celebrated.



## Men as artists

As highlighted above, both Welsh and Basque films in Preserved feature the icon of the warrior poet. Although not featured in the film, many Basque audiences will be aware that in real life *Lauaxeta*, *To The Four Winds* is credited with leading a 'flowering' of Euskera poetry in the 1930s (Kurlansky 2000). Additionally, he is celebrated for his efforts to stimulate the growth of Basque language. The film ends with Lauaxeta's execution, and we are shown him dying with a cross in his hand, a saintly figure, having received absolution from a priest. The choice of pen name reflects the memories of the poet's childhood in the family home called Lauaxeta (which can be translated as 'open to the four winds'). This is significant because it maintains a clear link to 'home' and 'past', yet at the same time presenting these as under the threat of destruction and dispersal by 'the four winds'.

The four winds feature in a famous poem by Lauaxeta, which is often interpreted as being about a romantic love that is a clear metaphor for love of the Basque country:

### *A cuatro vientos*

Todo fue conocerte  
Se abrieron las flores..  
Y el amor de mi adentro  
Escapó... a cuatro vientos  
Para seguirte a ti

Everything was knowing you  
The flowers opened up.  
And the love inside of me  
Escaped to the four winds  
To Follow you

No más noches negras  
Ni caras duras  
Ahora... todo es locura  
Cuando brilla tu tenue luz

No more black nights  
Nor rough faces  
Now... everything is madness  
When your soft light is shining

Todo fue conocerte  
Y aquellos días... tan solitarios  
Ahora vagan  
Buscando el mar

Everything was knowing you  
And those days ... so lonely  
Now waiting  
Searching for the sea

El tiempo viejo  
Cuando no estabas  
Se hizo nada  
Y el amor de adentro  
A cuatro vientos  
Buscó tu huella  
Para seguirte a ti

The old time  
When you were missing  
Transformed into nothing  
And the love inside  
The four winds  
Searched for your face  
To follow you

Unlike Welsh poets, Basque poets may seem to be less tragic figures. Whereas Welsh warrior poets tend to go off to die or be in some foreign field fighting wars for the dominant oppressor (e.g. *Hedd Wyn*, *Zulu*) to be scapegoats (e.g. *Boy Soldier*) or are imprisoned for refusing military service (e.g. *Ar Waelod y Cof*), Basque poets fight and sometimes die for Basque autonomy, although using different weapons to their colleagues in ETA. The effectiveness of this is sometimes commented on, ‘the Basques should just continue to be themselves if they want to remain open to the world and become part of the global community, for the international audience most values what is both original and authentic’ (Zabaleta 1999: 88).

More recent poets feature in the film *Agian/Maybe* (2006: Arkaitz Basterra Zalbide). In this acclaimed Basque poet Kirmen Uribe (1970- ) provides insights into the inspirations for his work. We are told that these include the sea, love and play. He shares memories of his childhood on the coast near Bilbao. As in the Welsh film *Dal:Yma/Nawr* we see poets and musicians (in this case all men) giving recitals of their work. But here, rather than these performances being within the home country, they are in New York. Unlike *Dal:Yma/Nawr*, in which actors recite the celebrated and traditional works of dead poets, the poets featured in *Maybe* are all contemporary. This film is thus not so much a celebration of traditional cultural output, more a window into contemporary cultural production.

Some indication of the vigorousness of this cultural production and its distribution to international audiences is evident in that unlike the performances featured in *Dal:Yma/Nawr* and *Beautiful Mistake* there is a cooperatively compiled CD available of the work of the poets and musicians featured in the song *Zaharregia txikiegia agian/Too old, too Small, maybe* in the film. Welsh film has yet to be established within such an international network, or to find such a wide potential audience. This film is in Preserved since it portrays this cultural activity as dominated by men. Through their work and interviews at home in the film, Mikel Laboa delivers folk music of Basque identity, he sings about Basqueness on behalf of all Basques.

But there are more complex issues involved in the relationships between cultural expression, film and narratives of identity than these. These films to some extent grew out of earlier links

between artistic expression, film, film making, and the circulation of meanings relevant to Basque identities. The symbolic strength of art in general had thrived under Franco's regime. Euskera, the Basque language, had been partially banned in the public sphere and instead critical expression was shifted into symbolism of various kinds. The importance of art and symbolism in Basque culture was further underlined when Bilbao was chosen for the location of the Guggenheim Museum when it opened there in 1997. An entire floor within the Guggenheim is devoted to works by Basque artists.

The film *Ama Lur* rode on a crest of expression alongside symbolic modern art, which had embraced the abstract by the 1960s. The centrality of art and creativity (e.g. sculpture) in films depicting rurality in Basque contexts is equivalent to the centrality of poetry and singing in traditional Welsh cultures. At the time *Ama Lur* was made there was a realisation that film was a way of reaching a mass Basque audience to stimulate ideas of cultural identity and Basque 'emotional sensibility'. The documentary format was a vehicle that allowed artists and their work to be brought to mass audiences, alongside other forms of cultural expression, such as sport. This may also have been driven by funding for the film coming from donations from over 900 people. This strength of support that these two figureheads gathered lent them extra confidence to make the film, and to challenge Franco's censors.

I regard *Ama Lur* as a clearly ideological attempt to reconstruct a national Basque culture during the period of suppression from Spain, to rescue Basques from the cultural restriction associated with Franco's regime. The official film censors demanded that Picasso's famous mural 'Guernica' be removed. They feared that *Ama Lur* could be understood by the public as having a particularly Basque nationalist message. Some favoured its prohibition; several changes were made to obtain permission for public viewing (Jauregiondo 2002). However, these efforts illustrate issues relating to attempts to remove political meanings and significances from film: 'Spain's censorship missed the point that meaning does not exclusively reside in the content of cultural expression, but it is also produced by the receiver within a concrete meaningful frame' (ibid. p. 303).

The Franco regime was quick to condemn the film as a piece of Basque propaganda that praised folklore, language and custom. It saw a threat to the cultural uniformity it sought to impose in scenes such as that showing men dressing up as 'joaldun', where bells and sheepskin are worn to invoke a pre-Christian Basque myth. *Ama Lur* was very well received within the Basque country, but since it was not aimed elsewhere at a wider audience, it did not have much impact beyond the Basque country. Basque symbols to a great extent tend to be lost on non-Basque audiences. However, it inspired a new generation of film makers who revisit this film and incorporate archive footage from it in their films. It is now a foundation for the national showcase that is now Basque film. Montxo Armendariz has said *Ama Lur* was a symbol of the Basque national consciousness; it proved that it was possible to make 'our own Cinema' (Jauregiando 2002: 301). It inspired many who saw it, both politically and artistically; 'Basque cinema may be said to have emerged, with *Ama Lur*' (Stone 2002: 136).

What this illustrates is that symbolism and a complexity of layered meanings were necessary parts of films made under Francoist censorship, for instance as in *Spirit of the Beehive*. Consequently, films made post-Franco started from a position in which relationships between art, symbolism, film meanings and narratives of identity had already been combined in ambiguous and complex ways. In comparison, Welsh film may seem much more straightforward and simplistic. This matter becomes of even more significance within films classed in Reversal and postnational. Yet for all the possible complexities of meaning in films such as *Ama Lur*, it is still possible to see a clearly conservative current in this film. One means through which this is evident, in a similar way to Welsh film, is through the featuring of a masterclass.

## Masterclasses

The image for the original film poster for *Ama Lur* (see figure 1 ) is by sculptor Jorge Oteiza (1908-2003). It is a human head in stone, perhaps reminiscent of much earlier art.

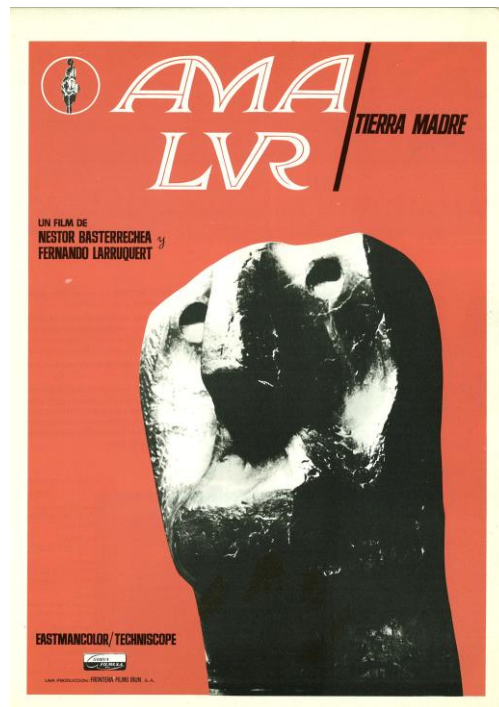


Figure 1: Film poster and DVD cover for Ama Lur (1968)

It can be interpreted as a symbol of the age, endurance and resilience of Basque culture. *Ama Lur* features the sculptor Eduardo Chillida (1924-2002). He is from a new generation of Basque cultural producers, and his work has been described as the most symbolic and significant art of contemporary times by the Basque Trade Industry and Tourist Department 'Euskadi' in promotional materials. Chillida is shown giving a masterclass in the steel foundry, supervising workers who are forging components of abstract sculpture according to his directions.

Chillida also features in the film *Ikusmena* (1981: Montxo Armendariz), working in his studio. He is alone this time, but he talks to camera as he works, explaining the ideas behind the sculpture he is producing. The whole film can be regarded as a masterclass, with 'pupils' being the film audience. *Gernika, The Spirit of the Tree* presents Chillida planning and executing a commission for a sculpture to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Guernica. The piece is located on the site of the old political assembly point where the Fueros were first agreed. The Basque nation is symbolised by a centrally positioned oak tree.

Scenes of prominent artists (all men) giving instructions to others and discussing their own inspirations also feature in *Gipuzkoa*. There is a very strong parallel to be drawn between these scenes and the Welsh film *Beautiful Mistake*, in which John Cale gives a series of masterclasses to contemporary Welsh singers. All can be read as attempts to connect on-going cultural production with the past and cultural heritage. Scenes showing a writer actually at work contrast with Welsh films, and how these feature the lives of poets and their poetry, but do not include scenes showing them actually at work with pen and paper. Scenes showing men giving masterclasses in Basque films link closely with other aspects of masculinity and patriarchy.

## Inheritance

As with Welsh culture, systems of the inheritance of traditions, rural skills and social roles (for instance within the unit of the family, or more widely) are also key themes in Basque films. For instance in *Tasio* we are shown how rural skills are passed to Tasio from his father and grandfather. We are shown how Tasio's father saved money in a tin in a hole in the kitchen wall so that Tasio can buy his first gun for shooting in the forest. The film thus features direct material inheritance in addition to the passing on of knowledge and skills. In *To The Four Winds* Lauaxeta's ties to family, the church and the nation are continually woven together throughout the film. There is a focus on times spent with his father. We come to understand that although Lauaxeta does not take up his father's profession, he does inherit a strong sense of identity, in accordance with the theme of continuity and cultural inheritance. However, themes of inheritance are not as straightforward as they tend to be in Welsh films in *Preserved*. One reason for this is connected to shame, silence and secrecy surrounding the actions of fathers.

## Silences

A prime feature of Basque *Preserved* is how the passing on of knowledges and what might be referred to as a 'social heritage' linked to essentialist narratives of Basque identity is layered through silences of various kinds. In some cases these silences are interwoven with issues

such as family, community and politics in complex ways directly connected with the passing on or restriction of knowledges about or from the past.

### **Silencing of Euskera**

As already mentioned, Basque experiences include a silencing through not being able to use Euskera (the Basque language). This is a feature in several films including *Gernika*, *The Spirit of the Tree* and *The Dark Years*. An example of how this form of silencing is resisted is evident in *The Burgos Trial*, where we see how the Basque prisoners on trial break out into singing Basque nationalist songs in Euskera inside the courthouse.

In *Secrets of the Heart* we see how the use of Euskera in song perhaps transforms a social occasion into a celebration of Basqueness amongst the central family in the film. However, audiences may interpret this scene differently, since people in this part of the Basque Country, Navarre, tend not to speak Basque. This film is Armendariz's most internationally successful, being a winner of the award for best European film at the Berlin Film Festival in 1997. It too is set in the hills of Navarre, and the city of Pamplona in 1962. Throughout, elements of setting, costume, props, make-up, hairstyles and lighting suggest great efforts to create an authentic looking representation of the time. We see three generations of men in the same rural household. There is the quiet, stubborn father and grandfather Zabalza (Joan Vallès) whom we see through the eyes of his grandson, Javi Zabalza (Andoni Erburu). The grandfather refuses to go to church because he regards it as corrupt. He is a republican, clearly somebody who has lost under Franco's rule (Perriam 2003: 75), and who lost in the Civil War (Stone 2002: 105). Significantly, we see grandfather and other members of the family come to life when a toast is chanted in Euskera. This happens twice, at the Easter dinner table, and after his son's wedding, a ceremony that he does not attend. On both occasions it happens at home, behind closed doors, at the meal table.

*The Dark Years* portrays marginal 'personal and private worlds that have national significance' (Marti Olivella 1997: 215 & 226), in ways that are similar. A central character in the film is Iciar/Itziar (as a child Eider Amilibia, as a teenager Garazi Elorza). The name

‘Iciar’, or ‘Itziar’ as translated by Rodriguez (1997: 132), Martí-Olivella (1997: 229) and Martin (2005: 100) (and the version adopted from now in this thesis), is the same as the name of a Basque village with a shrine to the Virgin Mary, which is near to the fishing port of Zumaia, the hometown of the character Itziar in the film. The village of Itziar, along with a large section of the Basque country, is on the pilgrimage route to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. The director Arantxa Lazkano (1949- ) was herself a Basque child of post civil war era of Franco’s regime. Her work as director and co-script writer is informed by her prior study of psychology and experience working as a teacher. It may be presumed that to those familiar with the village of ‘Itziar’, the character is thus located within a traditional Catholic agrarian setting (Martin 2005: 100).

Itziar is trapped, she has a repressive father who punishes and cruelly beats her for stealing a pen when she is a child. She continually has to submit to ‘the law of the father’ (Rodriguez 1997: 132). He tells her to speak in Basque, but at local convent school to her dismay she has to speak Spanish because she is taught by ‘repressive’ (Martin 2005: 103) Spanish Catholic nuns. This enforced division of her life into Basque at home and Spanish at school is one factor that pushes her in adolescence into attempts to escape her reality via fantasy. Additionally she has a Basque boyfriend. Her best friend from her childhood, with whom she swore a blood-sister pact, seems neither Spanish nor Basque, but has been described as a ‘migrant exile’ (Marti Olivella 1997: 226). These factors of course relate to issues connected with language which are beyond the bounds of this thesis.

### **Avoiding eavesdroppers**

Already mentioned is a covert silence amongst Basques in case members of the Civil Guard or other Francoist authorities are listening (e.g. *Secrets of the Heart*, *Broken Silence*, *The Burgos Trial*, *The Segovia Breakout* and *The Dark Years*). In direct connection with this, the phrase ‘Silencio roto/broken silence’ refers to the art of infiltration by the Civil Guard into the underground networks of The Maquis. In *The Segovia Breakout* the jailed prisoners must constantly moderate their communication to try to avoid their jailers’ overhearing as they plot their escape.



## Silence and secrecy

In addition there is also the silence of older generations stubbornly keeping their actions and loyalties in the past secret. This goes together with secrets and lies about earlier or present family members that seek to deny or distort family history. This secrecy about the past is highly evident in films such as *Secrets of the Heart*, *Spirit of the Beehive*, *The Backwoods* and *Cows*.

In *Secrets of the Heart* we learn that the character of the grandfather, discussed earlier, had two sons. The eldest, Antonio, has earlier taken his own life. A central component of the film's plot is grandson Javi's curiosity as to how his father Antonio died. Learning from old photographs that his father was an accomplished rifleman, the question that Javi poses is 'If father was so good with the rifle, how come he shot himself?' Antonio's suicide has been kept from Javi because it is linked to the bigger secret that Antonio was not actually the boy's father. His natural father is the grandfather's second son, the bachelor Ignacio Zabalza (Carmelo Gómez), who had an illicit affair with his brother's wife (Silvia Munt), who is simply called Mother by all family in the film. It is she who has decided that the boys be sent to school in Pamplona, partly so that they are protected from learning of these events in the past from amongst the local villagers in Navarra.

The grandfather stands for traditional Basqueness, he is a 'stay at home patriarch' (Newman 2000: 57) who has not recovered from his son's suicide. A prime feature of his character is that he is given over to stubborn silences (Perriam 2003: 75). He conservatively holds onto the past, but restricts what knowledge is passed on. But he is against Javi and his brother being sent to the Spanish Catholic school in Pamplona, seeing this as separation from the rural hearth. The grandfather prefers darkness to electric light, we see him repeatedly remind Javi to put out the lights. Again, this can be regarded as in keeping with the theme of secrets and of shame, this preference for the obscurity of darkness rather than clarity.

The family history can be read as a metaphor for Basque history in the twentieth century, and the situation of a new generation growing up in the 1960s. Instead of a celebration of the

durability of masculinity and identity, the narrative is of secrets, deception, shame, silence, uncertainty about paternity and the disruption of male lines of inheritance that comes with it. This is explored through the curiosity of a young boy kept from parts of his family history. We see how Javi is not allowed into Antonio's bedroom, by which he is fascinated (Newman 2000: 57), where Antonio took his life. It has frosted glass panels, obscuring any view into the room. It is kept closed but as Antonio left it. There is implied in this an anxiety about a younger generation, if and how they might come to terms with the past, of knowledge and experience creeping up on innocence (Perriam 2003: 75), and the extent to which a younger generation might (dis)continue identification with more traditional forms of identity.

As already mentioned, in *Spirit of the Beehive* there is the suggestion that possibly the father might be keeping secrets. Who or what is it that takes him away each day by car to an unknown destination? 'A high proportion of professional men, and most notably of university intellectuals became republicans' (Jackson 1970: 21), but the father's own political stance is never made explicit. It is never talked about in the film, but shameful secrets might perhaps explain the cold relationship between the father and wife. It might also explain the relatively comfortable lifestyle the family enjoys in a large house and garden. This cannot be paid for through beekeeping alone. Preoccupation on the part of the parents and a lack of communication contribute to the youngest daughter seeking to escape into fantasy, as discussed later in this chapter.

Secrets about the past also feature in *Cows*. Paulina Mendiluze (Pilar Bardem), the widow of a Carlist officer who died a hero's death, tries to prevent her daughter Catalina (Ana Torrent) from entering a relationship with Ignacio Irigibel by stating: "If you gaze on that old coward's son only trouble will become". Between the Irigibel family and Mendiluze's family, it is a secret that Manuel fled from the fighting and hid amongst corpses. He is presumed by everyone else to have been a hero like Paulina's husband. But Catalina and Ignacio do have a secret relationship and flee to America. Their son Peru (Carmelo Gómez) returns to the family home as a cameraman to cover the civil war. He is on the point of being shot by Fascist soldiers when he is recognised by one of them, his uncle Juan (Kandido Uranga), as the grandson of two Carlist 'heroes'. These two heroes were Juan's father (Paulina's husband)

and Manuel, who in reality was the coward who fled. In this narrative, extended family allegiance trumps political allegiance, but family esteem is built on the secret lie of heroism.

Secrecy, lies and shame thus bridge across from the personal to the national. In *Secrets of the Heart* the characters of the Zabalza family can be seen to confront audiences with symbolical references to a history that may be uncomfortable. The familial issues of paternity and shame in the film can be seen to stand for more widespread national issues of shame about the past. In *Cows*, this referring back to the past is more complex. Amongst contemporary audiences, despite being associated with the ultra-right wing, Carlism has some favour since it also has connections with the revolutionary Left and the PNV.

## Children and inheritance

Unlike in Welsh film, in addition to these silences of various kinds, ‘social inheritance’ from one generation to the next is disrupted through combinations of parental secrecy and how parents respond negatively to the curiosity of children (the next generation of Basques). In some cases, keeping knowledge from children leads to them being unable to confront and challenge reality, and to escape into fantasy and dreams. This is evident in films such as *Secrets of the Heart*, *Alas de mariposa/Butterfly Wings* (1991: Juanma Bajo Ulloa), *The Dark Years*, and *Spirit of the Beehive*. In addition to these it is also clearly evident in the recent mainstream Spanish film *El laberinto del fauno/Pan's Labyrinth* (2006: Guillermo del Toro), in which a young girl seeks to escape the horrors of the Civil War through a retreat into fantasy, and in general may be a wider feature of Spanish film.

In *Secrets of the Heart* Javi's curiosity is a source of potential danger. The truth about his father's identity is kept from him by older family members to avoid disruption of an idealised, ‘proper’, essentialist narrative about his parenthood, namely that like his older brother he was born in wedlock. It is deemed vital that Javi believe this, this is one reason why he is sent to Pamplona to school. Pamplona thus represents ambitions for Javi's future,

away from a traditional or even backward rural where being born out of wedlock is a strong source of personal shame. Pamplona offers distractions from curiosity about the past. Javi can be seen to represent a generation of young Basques, caught between the desires of older generations (e.g. his grandfather) that they should be given a ‘traditional’ Basque upbringing, and anxieties that this might prompt awkward and shaming questions surrounding past family history. In this way *Secrets of the Heart* can be read as a metaphorical discussion of a wider history, culture and identity that begins to critique combinations of essentialist, nationalist and patriarchal narratives. This effect is also achieved through the film adopting Javi’s perspective. However, this critique stops short of the kind of reversal of elements associated with *Reversal*, which is why *Secrets of the Heart* seems best categorised in *Preserved*.

Another notable feature is how death tends to have a different value in Basque films as compared with Welsh films. In Welsh films death marks a transition point at which issues connected with inheritance and the patriarchal line are brought sharply into relevance and focus. Men make choices concerning the degree to which they will commit themselves to a shared family way of life and destiny. They tend to have to give up an alternative, such as rock and roll in *Johnny Be Good*, education in marriage in *Y Chwarelwr*. However, in Basque films death tends to be more significant in terms of adhering with the dominance of Catholicism as a religious system, since this is so closely linked with Basque identities. The good Basque has a Catholic funeral, other considerations such as inheritance are of secondary importance. This is evident in *Days of Smoke*, where central characters are shown going to a great deal of trouble to ensure that a funeral follows the correct catholic format.

## **Inheritance, silences and problematical daughters**

Three other films take these issues a step further. *Butterfly Wings*, *The Dark Years*, and *Spirit of the Beehive* all feature young girls as the main protagonist, and relate a similar story in slightly different ways. All three are punished in the home, mostly by their father, since in accordance with patriarchal narratives Basque fathers tend to be featured as stern disciplinarians to the point of being violent. There are no themes of cultural inheritance

passing from father to daughter, such as skills or knowledge relating to work, to identity, or otherwise. As has already been discussed in relation to *Spirit of the Beehive*, there are few scenes of tenderness or nurturing, these qualities seem to be mostly absent in these father-daughter relationships. These films are classed in Preserved because patriarchy, though seemingly threatened, is reasserted somehow. Women continue to be confined either physically to the domestic, or discursively to the margins.

*The Dark Years* is centred on the home as a place of conflict (e.g. Sibley 1995: 91). At the start of the film we see Itziar's father Juan Laza (Carlos Panera) attending a secret rural meeting in the 1950s in which four Basque Nationalists plan to attract international support for the fight for independence from Francoist Spain. Later in the film we learn that he mourns the death in prison of the Basque patriot who called this meeting (Martin 2005: 107). His sadness and defeat colour his relationship with Itziar, which the film concentrates on. Both Juan and teenager Itziar are in their 'dark years'. Juan is 'tormented by defeat and betrayal and torn between an urge to fight the dictatorship and a need to heal wounds and survive the postwar situation' (Martin 2005: 100). He is embittered by his experiences as a dissident (Martin-Marquez 1999: 283). Itziar is tormented by her failure to reconcile opposing demands to be Basque and Spanish, she presents 'not so much the illusion of a stable (Basque) imagined community but ... oppressive national discourses' (Martí-Olivella 1997: 230), until the final scene when it appears as though Itziar's inner self embraces a Basqueness found in time of desperation. The ending is ambiguous but it does seem as though she pulls back at the last minute from taking her own life, having discovered her own sense of self, in contrast to the various identities that others have tried to force onto her.

During her primary school days Itziar is not allowed to be bilingual, her rural village is monolingual (apart from her father), and she stands for a generation of children trapped between Spanish and Euskera. In Wales the first local authority Welsh medium primary school was founded in 1947 in Llanelli following a campaign by parents, but Basque schools (Ikastolak) existed before the civil war. New versions were set up under Franco in the 1960s and 70s.

In contrast to Itziar, her mother (Klara Badiola) spends money on clothes and cosmetics. She expresses no interest in politics. Instead of time and energy and resources going into the continuation of Basque identity and separatist sentiments and activities, we see that these are now channeled into leisure and materialism. This is a narrative strand about a generation of Basques who become politically disengaged either through an economic pragmatism that means they tolerate the Spanish hand that feeds instead of biting it, or through a retreat into personal materialism and escape via social pleasures. Itziar's mother is thus an icon for a generation of Basques 'silenced' politically through being diverted into materialism and pleasure-seeking.

The three themes of inheritance, silences and the problematical daughter are closely interwoven in the film *Butterfly Wings*. This features a poor Basque father, Gabriel (Fernando Valverde), who works as a rubbish collector in Vitoria, the Basque capital. The film focuses on the relationship between Gabriel and his 6 year old daughter Ami (Susana García), and later adolescent Ami (Laura Vaquero). It explores this relationship over several life episodes. At the start of the film his wife Carmen (Silvia Munt) shuns Ami, because she is obsessed with having a son. This obsession is encouraged by her father, Alejandro (Txema Blasco), who lives with the family and also shuns Ami. This shunning is intensified when Carmen becomes pregnant. When a son is born, Alexander (Oier López de Munain), six year old Ami becomes further estranged. She is not allowed contact with the baby, and she is left alone to watch violent programmes on television. Subsequently, she smothers her younger brother, the next in the family line of inheritance, whilst he is still a baby. Her mother refuses to speak at all to Ami following this, and Ami is kept in her room with her father looking in on her everyday when he has finished work. Gabriel brings her gifts of silver paper and other objects gathered from the rubbish, which she uses to make hundreds of models of butterflies which hang from the ceiling of her room. The film picks up the family later, when Ami is in her late teens. She escapes from her room, goes out into the city and is raped by a friend of her father's. She becomes pregnant, and her father subsequently suffers a stroke which renders him paralysed and speechless. There follows a miraculous reconciliation between mother and daughter when Ami gives birth. They combine to look after Gabriel, and we see how Ami is shattered when he has his stroke. He was the only person who paid her any attention, even though this was a quiet form of attention.

In some ways the plot and characterisation of *Butterfly Wings* and *The Dark Years* depart from the kinds of essentialist, patriarchal narratives of identity associated with Preserved. For instance neither adopts a male-centred perspective. In *Butterfly Wings*, unlike the stereotypes of Basque men featured in other films, Gabriel does not speak much either at home or at work. At home he has to tolerate his wife and his father-in-law, their joint obsession, and his wife's social ambition. She is driven to get on in life. In contrast to the 'abnormality' of Carmen's behaviour, Gabriel sticks to his routine, and in some ways is almost as much a prisoner as Ami. He goes to work and then returns with his little gifts for Ami, and has a loveless relationship with his wife. He shows no real warmth towards Ami, or concern for her welfare. It would seem that he too does not forgive her for robbing him of his son. But the dead son in some ways does not seem to be his son, he belonged more to Carmen and her father because of their obsession, evident in his being named Alexander, like Carmen's father. Gabriel seeks to impose obsolete Catholic moral values (Labanyi 1995: 398), in that he urges Ami to turn to religion (Besas 1991: 198). For these reasons the characters of Gabriel and Juan may be regarded as iconic of a generation of Basque men feeling powerless and cut off from the young, unable to bridge or pass on across a generational gap, and simultaneously cut off from the kinds of core economic and political roles associated with Basque masculinity. However, unlike in *Reversal*, there are no strong women characters filling the breach where masculinity was previously imperious.

Gabriel is quite similar to the character of Juan (Carlos Panera), the father in the film *The Dark Years*. In this both husband and wife have a troubled relationship with Itziar, who is inquisitive and strong willed. We see how when Itziar inquisitively examines the contents of a drawer in the sitting room at home, Juan slams it on her fingers. Itziar is punished by Juan for stealing his pen, and when she is older, for being late home, by being locked in a dark room. Juan is the disciplinarian of the family, but it is noticeable that Itziar's punishments follow a pattern of withholding knowledge, of closing channels of communication, of denying access. In the drawer slammed shut and the darkness and isolation, it is possible to identify a symbolic narrative in which Itziar stands for a new generation of young Basques curious about the past and the lives of their parents and other elders, knowledge of which is forcibly withheld by parents. At the end of the film Itziar seems to try to commit suicide,

cutting her wrists with her father's razor and then adopting a Christ-like posture, lying with arms outstretched, under an oak tree (symbolic of the tree in Guernica). The film thus contains a narrative about intergenerational conflict in which parents deny the past to children who ask why?/zergatik? (as Itziar repeatedly does on screen), and are cornered by their curiosity, which is a threat.

Although made at different times, depicting different points in history, each family in *Butterfly Wings*, *The Dark Years*, and *Spirit of the Beehive* share other characteristics. There are two parents, mothers stay at home, they do not seem to work outside the home, and are in conflict with their husbands. The mothers are unsympathetic characters, they are preoccupied with personal aspirations, for instance although in many ways a down-trodden and dutiful wife, in *Spirit of the Beehive* the mother spends time writing and posting letters to an unknown correspondent. They do not fill the role of the traditional mother, like their husbands they are not nurturing towards their daughters. In *The Dark Years*, and in *Spirit of the Beehive* elements of the past, of their parent's own histories and deeds, are kept secret. The fathers are 'defeated men' seemingly with no hopes for the future and only the trauma of the past and the problems of the present. Daughters symbolise the future, they have hopes and dreams, but the past is kept from them, and the present is harsh and about being controlled or trapped.

Daughters are used in these films as narrative and symbolic vehicles. This is in contrast to Welsh films, in which father-daughter relations feature but are not depicted in the same kinds of symbolic ways. Daughters in Welsh films, when they are problematical (usually this is through premarital sexual conduct with 'the wrong man') are expelled or escape from the home and are treated as a cause of shame. Thus the daughter as a problem is rendered public, it is something located within a community context, and the behaviour of daughters is judged according to community-wide systems of morals and ethics. But in these Basque films there is a clearer theme of daughters used as vehicles to interrupt patriarchal lines of inheritance and continuity. Daughters are problems, but these problems emerge at an earlier age and fathers struggle to keep them within the family, to control daughters, to coerce them to conform, but this takes place within the privacy of the family. There is little sense of shared,



public, communal senses of moral and ethical correctness or public standards that are mobilised to police the actions of daughters.

These films draw attention to the legacies of the repression and injustice associated with Franco's rule through the depiction of dysfunctional families within which a central theme is parental violence. An effect of the civil war was the breakdown of community, and what we are shown is that after this trauma comes a breakdown of communication. Forms of communication are absent in families and communities depicted in these films, where dialogue might be expected there is silence (especially a lack of communication between mother and daughter in *Butterfly Wings*). But although there is silence, much social action is actually going on. Silence between characters is used to punish, to signal disillusionment. At this time, there were stern penalties for unapproved political expression, silence within families can be seen as a metaphor for the lack of free political expression more widely. These films tell private stories with intense public relevance. Children suffer because of their parents' disillusionment. Parents are divided, as the country was divided. People live in fear.

In each film there is no immediate, obvious or familiar cinematic narrative. Each film is abundantly open to several readings, yet each has disturbing conclusions. Order is not restored, violence is not reconciled, each features young protagonists whose emotional lives are profoundly affected by repression (Kinder 1995: 404). Each features what Martí-Olivella (1997: 230) has called a 'fragile communal dream of children at play in the midst of oppressive national discourse'. Each film includes ambiguous, fluctuating or suspended camera shots, scenes where the camera literally adopts the gaze of characters as they huddle scared, we see the world through their 'confused eyes' (Jordan & Tamosunas 1998: 200) as an uncomfortable place. As an audience we are taken into the characters, and this is in keeping with each film's discussion of the self and the psychological. The young girls cannot understand or question their cold fathers, and are themselves unintelligible to their fathers. Each film captures the sadness of this.

Each daughter metaphorically finds her own escape in some way, or at least a source of comfort. Dream imagery is used as a vehicle for re-imagining (Martí-Olivella 1997: 231). In

*The Dark Years* escape is provided by the shelter of the old oak tree under which Itziar later contemplates suicide, and a childhood blood-sisterhood pact with another young school friend girl from Spain, who is referred to as 'Korean', a Basque pejorative slang expression for Spanish emigrants in the 1950s and 60s. In childhood we see that she is heavily influenced by a film she sees, *Marcelino pan y vino/Marcelino Bread and wine* (1954: Ladislao Vajda). Itziar identifies with the character Marcelino, a young orphan raised in a monastery who prays to Jesus to be with his dead mother. It is possible to see a parallel between the inability of the monks to improve Marcelino's situation and Itziar's own ineffectual relations with her own family. In *Butterfly Wings* it is symbolised via the transformative craft of making butterflies from street rubbish, and in *Spirit of the Beehive* it is a transcendent dream of the Frankenstein monster that allows an escape from the everyday. In some ways these escapes into fantasy and dreams are quite like the character Johnny's fantasy of himself as a rock and roll star, an escape from the mundanity of the Pembrokeshire farm that is his destiny.

Ana, the daughter in *Spirit of the Beehive* seems to link independence with the forbidden. This stems from the fear she holds of her father, although perhaps Ana's mother is even more fearful, and this explains why she demonstrates so little emotional feeling towards him. However, in each film the daughter seeks to escape into fantasy. This escape is not simply into dreams and thus an escape within. It is an escape outward, but which is ultimately futile. Each escape is impelled by an external influence. In *Butterfly Wings* this is the influence of violent television programmes, in *Spirit of the Beehive* it is the film *Frankenstein* (James Whale: 1931), in the *The Dark Years* it is the Spanish Catholic school, where Francoist nuns violently impose Spanish language (Martí-Olivella 1997: 230).

It is possible to read into this the kind of cultural anxieties over the growing generation already argued to be clearly evident in Welsh film. If each daughter symbolises the new generation of Basques growing up post-civil war and post-Franco, then this anxiety resembles a kind of Frankenstein complex. This perspective could also encompass the character of Nerea in *The Backwoods*. She is kept chained up and cannot speak, she is a source of shame due to her deformity. She can be seen to symbolise both the Frankenstein of the new generation and shame about the past as something hidden away from her village in a forest

cabin. A possible meaning is that if this generation grows divorced from its historical and cultural roots, away from the control of parents and other elders, then it has the power to destroy essentialist fragile, minority national identity.

It is also possible to see these films symbolically addressing the kinds of negotiations required to achieve a postcolonial decolonization of the mind (Martin 2005: 108). According to this the infanticide in *Butterfly Wings* and Itziar's fascination with suicide in *The Dark Years* as forms of 'death' come to resemble a kind of necessary jettisoning or rejection of the past and the present to make a better future possible. This points to the deep seatedness of Spanish nationalism, the extent to which it invaded the personal and private of individual lives, and the seemingly drastic measures required to transcend it. Yet in each case, these wayward daughters either come to conform with family wishes, or are punished in some way for failing to do so.

Although some commentators have drawn attention to how *The Dark Years* and *Butterfly Wings* depart from patriarchal narratives (e.g. Martí-Olivella: 1997: 226), the extent to which they do this is open to some question. Although each adopts a feminine gaze to discuss issues of culture and identity, using young girls as metaphors for the growing nation may be regarded as fundamentally essentialist in the sense that it follows dominant narratives based on notions of 'mother country' and 'mother earth'. These films are also preserving of essentialist narratives because they are about cultural anxieties over the development of a growing generation of young Basques. Each features the traditional family unit, although they do highlight oppressions and divisions within this unit. In each case, most of the action is centred on the family home. Instead of depicting the benefits of inheritance and valorising cultural transmission from father to son, these films are about anxieties over the lack of these between fathers and daughters. As evident in the time period covered by these films, these anxieties are not short-lived; they have been around since the post-civil war period. Crucially, in each of these films the problematical daughters are punished, through being driven to consider suicide as a means of escape, or through mental trauma or rape for their waywardness. Punishment follows straying from parental control, and can be regarded as the reassertion of patriarchy.

For these reasons these films have been classed in Preserved, since although in some ways (e.g. through feminine gaze, featuring ‘weak’ men and mothers who do not actively mother) they reverse some gendered dualisms, they seem to remain within the parameters of essentialist narratives. ‘Weak’ men and mothers who do not actively mother seem not to be featured in order to transcend or subvert dominant stereotypes and narratives, but in order to stand for ‘the defeated’ oppressed Basques under Franco who seek escape via materialism. In this way they may still be regarded as ‘celebrating’ oppression, and as according with post-colonialist impulses to portray the damage wrought by the oppressor. In particular, one message that may be drawn from *The Dark Years* is of the negative consequences for the father, and the rest of the family, of withdrawing from involvement with the Basque nationalist movement. In comparison to the ‘heroes’ of Basque nationalism, republicanism, the Maquis and ETA in *To The Four Winds*, *Broken Silence*, *The Segovia Breakout* and *The Burgos Trial* the men in *Butterfly Wings*, *The Dark Years*, and *Spirit of the Beehive* seem ‘cowardly’, perhaps riven by inner tensions and conflicts, for instance that lead to a stroke in *Butterfly Wings*, and mourning for a suicidal daughter in *The Dark Years*. They are relatively powerless, directionless, seem not to be immersed within a community, inhabit cold and unloving family homes with little sense of mutuality or family loyalties. Crucially, they are unable to comprehend their own children or to predict the consequences of their lack of parenting skills. But crucially, they do not seem to be portrayed in this way in order to critique dominant narratives of masculinity. Instead, they merely seem to stand for a generation of defeated men, the losers of the civil war. They are in contrast to parents in Welsh films in Preserved, who tend to present a consistent face to their children, to exercise power and control, and have a clear sense of direction, and of priorities and continuity.

## Religion

A feature of Welsh films in Preserved is the extent to which attending chapel forms part of the structuring of family and community shared routines, and how chapel also provides a moral framework for community values. In comparison, religion is less evident in Basque Preserved. When featured, the prime function of religious institutions is the provision of

schooling for children (e.g. in *The Dark Year* and *Secrets of the Heart*). Otherwise religion is present mainly only through the sheer physical presence of churches within the landscape of the countryside, and within villages as a perennial feature within the village square, along with the pelota wall. Only rarely are we shown the inside of a church or a religious service. For instance in *Secrets of the Heart* we do see the children home from Catholic school in the city for the Easter holiday, attending the Easter Sunday service in the local church. In *Obaba* we also see two of the main characters Tomás (Pablo Manjón) and Ismael as children singing in the village church choir, and in *La muerte de Mikel/The Death of Mikel* (1983: Imanol Uribe) the end of the film features a funeral within a Catholic church. Priests are mentioned in other films (e.g. *La Blanca Paloma/The White Dove* (1989: Juan Miñón), *Todos estamos invitados/We are all invited* (2008: Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón), *Operación Ogro*, and *La buena nueva/The Good News* (2008: Helena Taberna) features a priest as a central character.

However, this elision of religion is in contrast to the centrality of Catholicism in Basque culture, as described by several commentators. For instance, ‘Religion has certainly formed part of nationalism’s historical essence’ (Tremlett 2006: 299). Other commentators have highlighted the role of the church at crucial points in Basque history. For instance ‘...local priests were instrumental in rallying Basque peasants to the Carlist cause by making it sound like a religious crusade’ (Kurlansky 2000: 147), and ‘Resistance to Franco’s regime came from dissenting clergy particularly in the Basque country, where many radical priests felt the direct wrath of the dictatorship’ (Buse, Toribio & Willis 2007: 58).

One reason for what may be a reluctance to include religion, the church, and priests in films may be a sense of unease arising from the position of the mainstream church in relation to the rural poor in general in Spain prior to the civil war, and its alliance with Franco during and afterwards. This is depicted in the British film *Land and Freedom* (1995: Ken Loach), in which a village priest (Ricard Arilla) is shot by members of POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista) for passing on the secrets of local republicans heard in confession to Franco’s soldiers. The priest also snipes at the members of POUM with a rifle from the church bell tower.

Alternatively, the absence of religion from Basque films may simply reflect the anticlerical left wing ideologies of many film makers. The situation is different to that in Wales because of the different position occupied by Non-conformism, as one central component of working class identity. Historically, some politicians and scholars accused the Catholic Church in Spain of being aligned with those with royalist loyalties, the aristocracy and the political right, though more recently its position has become more complex.

In the same way that the civil war is discussed in films in terms of secrets, evasions, and shame, as discussed in this chapter, similar feelings may surround religion. Coupled with this may be a perception of the teachings of the church as overly restrictive in light of the new forms of liberalism and socialism associated with the republican movement, and of the hypocrisy of the church exposed via its support for the monarchy and the Right, and its fight to maintain its relatively wealthy position. However, this is not straightforward; the role of the church in education and even anti-Franco politics has been significant. For these reasons there may be a deep ambivalence towards the church and religious practice in the Basque Preserved. Although Catholicism is a basic part of many longstanding narratives of Basque identity, in some ways it is also an instrument through which external oppression has been effected and maintained.

## **Women/Mothers**

Women tend to be featured in different ways as compared with films of the Welsh Preserved. For instance *Cows* includes scenes of women using scythes, pitching hay and otherwise physically contributing to rural work in ways that Welsh women do not, or as employed outside the home. Women thus tend to be featured more as social actors, rather than simply being relegated to 'the domestic' and being the mainspring of domestic routines. In *100 Metres* the character Ion's dying flashbacks include his memories of the market square in San Sebastian. The vendors are all women, who shout out their prices and haggle over prices with customers. We see how these women set up their stalls, bringing crates of fresh vegetables and fruit they have produced. We see how all their customers are women, who walk among the stalls touching the tomatoes and smelling the apples.

Matriarchy does not seem to feature in *Gipuzkoa*. Although entitled 'mother earth', no women feature prominently in *Ama Lur*. Similarly, in *Tasio* the mother figure is largely occupied by Tasio himself, following the death of his wife. Where mothers are present, they do not compare with the stoic, solid Welsh Mam. Partly this may be explained by economics, in that mining and other industry tends to be absent in Basque films. There is thus no equivalent of the 'valley family' unit, in which the mam plays a crucial role in contributing to the labour of men via catering, cleaning, laundry, and taking financial responsibilities for the day to day running of the home. There is no equivalent of the moral duty of the Welsh mam in regulating husbands' and sons' behaviors, of organising the Sunday rituals associated with chapel.

Instead, the family unit is looser. In *Cows* Ignacio Irigibel abandons his wife Madalen (Klara Badiola) (Rodriguez 1997) and she is left alone to look after their three daughters. Ignacio Irigibel leaves the Basque country for America with Catalina Mendiluze (Ana Torrent), a neighbour. This kind of behaviour would be most remarkable in the strictly religious and morally straight-laced films of the Welsh Preserved, although this kind of behaviour is also unusual amongst characters in the Basque Preserved. Similarly, in *Secrets of the Heart* the dishonesty of widowed Teresa (Silvia Munt), the mother of the two central characters Juan (Alvaro Nagore) and Javi (Andoni Erburu), hides the truth that they have two different fathers. She keeps secret the fact that Juan's father committed suicide as a result of her adultery. An adulterous wife would be an even more remarkable character in Welsh Preserved.

### **Tough rural women**

Instead of the Welsh mam, some films feature the icon of the tough rural woman, such as market traders in *100 Metres*. Lucía (Lucía Jiménez) in *Broken Silence* is robust enough to cope with a mountain winter, it does not restrict her from supporting the Maquis. Similarly the character of Pilar in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, carries a gun like a man. The tough peasant woman was enough of an iconic Basque or Spanish figure to be recognised.

There is thus no real equivalent to the Welsh mam. The nearest is perhaps the character of Merche in *Obaba*. She is presented as somebody who knows all in the village, and the village's social history. She is used to link the various stories in the film, so is presented as central to social networks in the village. However, she defers to male authority in every story she features in, and she is not presented as a social actor in her own right. When we see her in the film, she is always linked directly to the domestic, for instance preparing meals, waiting tables in Ismael's hostel, being a housekeeper and carrying out the wishes of the hated Klauss Werfell (Esteban's father) after he has died. Yet it is through her that we are presented with the various stories in the film.

Women also feature in 'mothering' roles in *Broken Silence* and *The Burgos Trial*. We are shown temporary 'mothers', supplying beds for the night and food to Maquis resistance fighters as they evade the authorities. Only two women seem to feature in *The Segovia Breakout*, one as bride, one has the job of making sure the escapees change into dry clothes and that each is armed as they emerge from a sewer used in the escape. Although slightly more of an active agent, this role is nevertheless one of supporting the entirely male escaping prisoners. This reflects the patriarchal nature of ETA and the extent to which women only occupied 'supporting' roles, as mentioned earlier.

The other stereotypical kind of way that women feature in *Preserved* is connected with the passing on of 'feminine' skills, such as Bego (Mireia Gabilondo) a farming grandmother showing Isabel how to wash and hang clothes in the field alongside the farmhouse in *Show Me The Way Isabel*. In contrast to these depictions of women, there are of course the non-maternal mothers in *Butterfly Wings*, *The Dark Years*, and *Spirit of the Beehive*. They are relatively minor characters, always in the background.

There are reasons for this, arising from the way that home and family seem to be used in these films to symbolise the position of Basques, and the effects of Franco's rule. In order to construct postcolonial narratives that portray the extent to which the evils of this oppressive



rule reached into the lives of Basques, it is necessary to present families as dysfunctional, parents as dislocated from children, children as seeking nurturing or escape elsewhere. One of the prime ways of doing this is arguably to present those whom essentialist narratives of gender construct as primary careers for children, and as those most responsible for maintaining domestic harmony, as withdrawing from these responsibilities. Given the traditional scripts of gender, portraying fathers as cold disciplinarians unable to understand their children simply does not have the same impact as portraying biological mothers in this way as 'non-mothers'. What is preserving about this is that in each of these cases the children involved are daughters, and not sons. This kind of intergenerational dysfunction accords with male-centred views of the world, in which daughters are in any case more problematical and less intelligible than sons.

This is the case in *Welsh Preserved*. Tensions surround male lines of inheritance, and these structure relations between father and son, and underline symbolic narratives of cultural inheritance. In comparison daughters are freed from the responsibilities of carrying the line of inheritance, they symbolically move away from a presumed cultural heritage and national identity by taking outsiders as lovers. However, in Basque films daughters present problems from much earlier ages, and this is one way of underlining the potential Frankenstein complex that may surround perspectives on Basque children post-Franco, and at the same time of indexing the kinds of psychological processes involved in the decolonisation of minds required post-Franco.

## **Recurring themes in Basque Preserved**

Perhaps the most prevalent themes in the films discussed in this chapter, apart from the silences of various types discussed earlier, are violence and oppression. Violence takes on different forms, from the child trapped like a caged animal in *The Backwoods*, the trapping and killing of animals for food in *Tasio* and for the pleasure of hunting in *Cows*, to a bloody shoot-out in *100 Metres*. In between is the violence of war in *To The Four Winds* and *Cows*, the guerilla fighting of *Broken Silence*, the off-screen shooting of a fugitive republican in *Spirit of the Beehive*, and the blood stained chair in which a father shot himself in *Secrets of the Heart*.

Added to this may be the physical disciplining and punishment of children in the home and at school in *The Dark Years*, *Secrets of the Heart*, and *Butterfly Wings*. This last film also contains a fratricide. In *Obaba*, a child punished other children by holding a lizard to their ears so that it punctures their ear drums and renders them deaf. Numerous films also contain under-currents of violence or the threat of violence between family members. *Spirit of the Beehive* and *Butterfly Wings* feature children escaping present circumstances via the violence of the Frankenstein story and violent television programmes, respectively.

In addition to these forms of violence, there are numerous depictions of oppression, for instance in the form of the imprisonment of members of ETA in *The Burgos Trial* and *The Segovia Breakout*. These captives are imprisoned for their own acts of violent resistance to oppressive authority. According to the simplistic moral framework that underpins *Preserved*, violence by ETA is simply a ‘good’, but by the Spanish is simply an evil ‘bad’.

## Conclusions

This chapter has discussed a number of films classed as belonging to *Preserved* in terms of the ways that they portray Basque culture, heritage and identities. It has drawn attention to how certain aspects of a presumed national culture are highlighted in these films, how masculinity is privileged over femininity, and how narratives of identity may tend to draw on iconic stereotypes such as the farmer, the warrior, the poet, the artist, the tough peasant woman. These are presented in broadly essentialist terms, as stable, fixed and ‘natural’ forms of Basque identity. These come to be married to a gradually emergent postcolonial celebration of oppression, suffering and triumph over Spanish and more especially Francoist rule. This in turn is underpinned by a simplistic moral framework in which everything (male and) Basque is ‘good’, everything Spanish is evil and ‘bad’.

As with the Welsh *Preserved*, there is a confident certainty surrounding Basque culture, heritage and identity. These films, especially those made for domestic audiences, in effect tell

audiences ‘who’ they are, what their heritage is, and act as instruction manuals for Basque identity. There is no interrogation of Basqueness, or notions of national identity more broadly, what it might be, why it might matter and what uses it might have. Those at the centre of Basque identity are clearly if rather simplistically defined, as those icons of Basque identity discussed in detail within this chapter. Almost as though by some invisible conjuring trick, this centre is presented as though it has always been; as rational, stable, logical and natural. We are given no real sense of those on the margins of Basqueness, beyond the patriarchal division into men at centre stage and women in supporting roles away from the centre.

## **Conclusions relating to Preserved**

Ironically, Preserved is presented as stable, and yet is generally fundamentally based on the struggle for Basque independence. So this stability is actually premised on stasis in this struggle, neither side achieving a victory that would end this struggle and thus kick out the cornerstone on which Preserved rests. It is hard to imagine what kind of form Preserved would take were it not for the struggle with Spain, just as the Welsh Preserved relies so much on the struggle against English oppression and exploitation. Fundamental to this is the simplistic moral binary of Basque/Welsh equals good, Spanish/English equals bad. Closely interwoven with this moral binary are many other dualisms on which Preserved is built. These can be summarized in Figure 2 below:

<b>Welsh/Basque</b>	<b>English/Spanish</b>
Morally good	Morally evil/bad
Suffering, hardship	Exploitation, oppression
The Rural, idyllic and regenerative OR as a place of mystery and danger	The Urban, change and cosmopolitanism, cultural dilution
Celebrations of cultural heritage, shared history and identity	Censorship, cultural absorbance
Community, shared religion, 'insiders'	'Outsiders' and Otherness
Reclaiming and retelling history	The Dominant's version of history
Inheritance, heritage and cultural continuity	Change, new cultural forms, external influences, precarious younger generations
Miners, farmers and other 'tough men'	Less masculine men, wayward sons
Welsh mams and 'tough peasant' women	Wayward daughters
Working class	Non-working class
Freedom fighters and 'martyrs'	'Cannon fodder' in someone else's war

Figure 2: a summary of dualisms in Preserved

Figure 2 illustrates the extent to which Preserved is based on a series of dualisms. In the case of Welsh and Basque, being a minority nation historically dominated by an external source of oppression is integral, political history is one key to understanding narratives of minority identity. So, as soon as the terms of the relationship between minority nation and dominant nation start to change, it must be expected that the stories that a minority nation tells itself about itself also start to change. As the next two chapters will argue, this is what has happened. The system of dualisms set out above is very useful in understanding fundamental shifts in minority nation narratives of identity.

## **Volume Two**

# Chapter Four: Basque Reversal

## Introduction

This chapter discusses a class of films that contain distinctly different narratives of Basque identity compared to Preserved. In chapter one it was explained that there is a class of films in which the dualisms on which Preserved is based come to be reversed in some way. This reversal involves that which was given the prominence of being ‘core’ parts of these dualisms, that which is granted ‘centre stage’, instead of being relegated more to the margins. As a corollary of this, that which occupies the margins or remains unacknowledged, unmentioned, even taboo in Preserved instead comes to take up ‘centre stage’. Examples that were mentioned included elements such as the family, religion, the rural, and ‘local communities’. It was suggested that these tend to be present in films in this category, but their importance is less, the respect afforded them is less, and they do not function in ways that underpin longstanding narratives of identity. In a sense these elements are mythologised in Preserved through being depicted in ways that tend towards the reverential. In Reversal the perspective adopted towards these kinds of elements is significantly different.

It was also suggested that longstanding narratives of gender are reversed, so that in comparison in Preserved men are relegated from central ‘heroic’ roles and tend instead to be figures that are relatively powerless. In contrast, women are promoted from supporting roles and the domestic, to leading lives that are not circumscribed or dictated by the power of husbands or fathers. In this way, the patriarchal nature of Preserved is both highlighted and critiqued. This critical perspective can be further enhanced by the presence of non-heterosexual characters in films, in contrast to their ‘invisibility’ in films of Preserved.

It was proposed that as a consequence of this Reversal, the longstanding, simplistic narratives of identity associated with Preserved come to be critiqued, since this reversal can be seen as the first step in their deconstruction, or the highlighting of the even more fundamental ideas lying behind dualisms of this type. This process of deconstruction continues when the dualisms associated with Preserved and Reversal are transcended in films classified as

postnational, which are discussed in later chapters. In this sense, this 'Reversal' thus marks both a moving away from and a moving towards, a state of somehow being in between older, singular narratives of Welsh or Basque identity, and newer, plural, 'post national' narratives of the multiple ways that a person might be Basque or Welsh.

## **Reversal as 'therapeutic'?**

Reversal thus involves stepping from the security, stability and 'comfort blanket' of the past, to begin to embrace the instability and unpredictability of the present and the future. It means a shift from a preoccupation with a mythologised and psychologically sustainable past to addressing a more psychologically disturbing present. This is a shift away from narratives of identity valued amongst the majority of a minority nation, to newer and unstable narratives presented as contemporary social commentary. These narratives are not 'valued' as such, since they resemble a collective alarm bell or wake up call, by confronting audiences with contemporary social problems. In this sense, these narratives may be regarded as educational or therapeutic, since the ultimate aim may seem to be to heal these social problems and the rectify the damage they are presented as causing to the minority nation and its cultural identity.

Although there is movement through the threefold system of classification developed in this thesis in the sense that Reversal must follow Preserved and postnational must follow both, it was stressed from the outset that this is not to suggest a simple, linear time bound progression. However, a feature of films classed as of Reversal is that they tend to have been made between the 1980s and the early part of the second millennium. In this respect, these films both reflect and are a part of major changes in the Basque context, such as the new era that followed the death of Franco.

And so issues discussed in this chapter will be centred on a how narratives of identity in films move away from the rigidities and certainties of Preserved, through the reversal of dualisms

on which Preserved is based. Attention will be given to how films of Reversal tend to adopt a highly critical perspective on the past, and of key cultural elements associated with Preserved. This chapter will discuss how films of Reversal tend to address the present and future pessimistically, and to portray complexity, in contrast to more simplistic celebrations of an ostensibly singular cultural heritage associated with Preserved.

It is perhaps not surprising that films by women are included amongst those that seem to adopt a critical perspective on the longstanding narratives of identity associated with Preserved, given its patriarchal nature. Women directors are amongst those film makers who can be seen to begin the task of deconstructing Preserved and suggesting new narratives and forms of Basque identity, particularly in relation to gender.

## **Changes in source materials**

As has already been highlighted, a significant number of films classed as Preserved are based on or borrow from established canons of Basque and Welsh literature and art. For instance in connection with Welsh films, it was noted how poetry and the lives of poets going back to original bards such as Aneirin are presented. In Basque films it was noted how celebrations of cultural heritage referred back as far as ancient cave art. In contrast to this, films classified as of Reversal, where they are based on literature, take much more contemporary sources, and in some cases look beyond Basque or Welsh authors. For instance Spanish author Juan Madrid's 1993 novel *Días contados* became a film of the same title in 1994, directed by Imanol Uribe. Uribe added ETA activities as plot elements in the film, in ways that critique ETA's methods and raise fundamental questions of morality. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Another example is the 1996 novel *Esos Cielos /Lone Woman* by Bernardo Atxaga, who has been described as 'Spain's most nationally and internationally acclaimed Basque thinker and writer' (Martin 2000:193). This was made into the film *Zeru horiek/Those Skies* (2006:



Aitzpea Goenaga). Yet another is the film *Yoyes* (2000: Helena Taberna), which is based on the true life story and the journal of María Dolores González Katarain, '*Desde mi ventana/From my window*' (Pamplona: 1988); 'Yoyes' was her ETA code name.

## **Wider political and socio-cultural changes**

This change in the source materials used by film makers itself reflects wider political, social and cultural changes, rather than being something merely confined to film. For instance the novel *Días contados* has been summarized as primarily dealing with 'the deleterious effect of the drug culture of the *movida madrileña*, the cultural resurgence that took place in Madrid in the early 1980s' in the post-Franco period (Davies 2003: 123). At this time, in December 1983, the Basque television channel Etb (Euskal Telebista) began regular broadcasting, with the consent of the Spanish Broadcasting Corporation and thanks to the Basque Statute of Autonomy of 1979. Etb came to be involved in the making of films discussed in this thesis.

Reversal closely follows the downturn in Western economies from the 1970s onwards, when longstanding manufacturing industries such as steelmaking, and primary activities such as fishing and mining began large scale decline. The consequences of these more global trends were unemployment amongst those formerly employed in these sectors of economies, and the emergence of the bleak postindustrial urban landscape of abandoned factories and those trying to eke a living by whatever limited means might be possible.

In politics the EIA (Euskal Iraultzarako Alderdia/Party for the Basque Revolution) was formed in 1977, when disillusioned Basque leftists separated themselves from the anti-system strategy of the main ETA (ETA-Militar), following the path of ETA-Político-Militar, which split from ETA-Militar in 1974. A year later, in 1978, the EIA formed a coalition with Basque communists who had split from ETA some years before. They came together to form the EE (Euskadiko Ezkerra), which participated in the first democratic election held since 1936, following a referendum on the Spanish constitution that generated the Basque

Autonomous Community and the Foral Community of Navarre. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Navarre maintains its own political independence from the Basque Autonomous Community, from which French Basques are of course also separate.

In 1982 ETA-Político-Militar decided to disband. Therefore, in contrast to ETA-Militar (the only ETA from then to nowadays) and its political branch Herri Batasuna, from 1982 the EE was a purely political party. It has not been involved in violence and coercion and in 1993 merged with the PSE, the Basque branch of the PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español/Spanish Socialist Workers Party). Peaceful political struggle came to play an increasingly central role in the new post-Franco era. Significantly, government of the Basque Autonomous Community has been achieved via coalitions between Centre and right wing nationalist parties such as the PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco/Basque Nationalist Party), and more left wing non-nationalist parties such as the PSOE (Castells and Jauregui 1996). This shift from the violence associated with the nationalist movement has come to be an increasingly important influence on film makers, and plots and characterisation in post 1978 films that depict ETA. It also marks the emergence of a more pluralistic set of narratives of Basque identities. For years, violence in the Basque country had been presented as an expression of radical nationalism. Inígo Bullaín (2011) poses important questions on the links between the two. For instance a group called MLNV (Basque National Liberation Movement) was set up mid 1970's, which treated politics as a war. This was used to justify violence, and attempts to exercise a coercive power over the population. The expression of radical nationalism was achieved through the types of actions that are often equated with 'terrorism'. It must be acknowledged here that 'Terrorism' is a notoriously difficult concept to define, but that the word seems to be mostly used to refer to acts of violence and threats designed to instill fear employed towards some kind of political goal. Often the term is used by a dominant power to refer to the actions of a political minority. However, Bullaín (2007 & 2010) suggests that a form of patriotic Basque revolutionism, by adopting politico-military methods, became synonymous with terrorism at this time. ETA used the Basque conflict, which involves a conflict over the national identity of the Basque population, for their own revolutionary purposes (Bullaín 2007).

Associated with this, there have been some shifts in Basque culture, particularly in connection with iconic emblems of Basque identity. In 'The Preserved', icons such as the Basque flag and Picasso's *Guernica* are simplistically emblematic of a monolithic, overarching version of Basque identity, that in the case of Picasso's painting for example, draws deeply on narratives of hardship, suffering and external domination. So films such as *Ama Lur*, *Gernika*, *The Spirit of the Tree* and *Guipúzcoa* feature artists giving master classes, and these can be seen to refer directly to a history of Basque cultural creativity stretching right back to cave art, and simultaneously to men's domination of this creativity.

However, in *Reversal*, the traditional meanings and significances of these kinds of icons and emblems are disturbed, they have an ambiguity. For instance, the Basque flag, instead of being transparently iconic of Basque identity and the struggle for independence, can also refer to the violence of ETA, and thus to carry contradictory meanings, some positive and some negative. So films in *Reversal* do not tend to feature the same kinds of iconic symbolism associated with the kind of monolithic version of Basque identity that is to be found in *Preserved*. The difference is between the singular notion of 'Basque identity' associated with *Preserved*, and with more plural notions of 'Basque identities' evident in *Reversal*. One difference between films in these two classes is that art and artists are noticeable by their absence, but there are several other differences.

## **Reversal**

The previous chapters have drawn attention to several fundamental ingredients of films of *Preserved*. These have included: representations of the hetero-patriarchal family and wider society; 'local communities' as clearly defined, with shared values and morals; 'the rural' as the cradle of an authentic version of an essentialised nationality, which is also linked to essentialised versions of gender; narratives of suffering, oppression and exploitation by an immoral external power; and anxieties surrounding change. In particular in relation to Basque film, those (male) members of ETA enacting resistance to external oppression were portrayed as heroic martyrs.

In films classed as of Reversal what is presented to audiences is what was much less visible, and in some cases thoroughly invisible alternatives to basic elements of Preserved. To paraphrase Derrida, through contrast Reversal features the foregrounding of that which more implicitly motivates and gives meaning to Preserved. Derrida (1982) also writes of drawing attention to the intellectual force which brings together the two pair parts of dualisms. So in contrast Preserved, identity in Reversal tends to be bound up with more marginal practices. Where Preserved tends to portray communities in terms of stability and unity, Reversal films tend to feature friction, diversity and conflict. 'Outsiders' instead come to take centre stage, the portrayal of ETA shifts from 'martyrs' to a more critical questioning of ETA's methods. Instead of a focus on external domination, examples of internal oppression (i.e. amongst members of the minority nation) are featured. Even the characters and settings of films change. In contrast to rural farms, miners, charcoal burners and others highly skilled in rural and artistic activities, films of Reversal tend to be set in urban locations and feature the disenfranchised and disenchanting.

In order to draw attention to the extent to which Reversal is composed of the binary elements of basic dualisms effectively swapping places, this chapter will now discuss the main features of films highlighted in the chapter on the Basque Preserved.

## **Women and Femininity**

One principal feature of Preserved is the extent to which films are dominated by men in terms of those making films, taking leading roles in them, and in terms of the masculine perspectives thus adopted. This is why the chapter on Preserved began analysis by discussing the representation of male characters and masculinity in films. It therefore follows that a prime feature of films of Reversal is that women film makers emerge, as do films that feature female leads and adopt more feminist perspectives. For this reason, this chapter first focuses on the representation of women and femininity in films, taking into consideration other aspects of films that are relevant to the reversal of gender.

Over time within ETA young female activists looked at both the old and the new in order to forge identities for themselves in a society which had confined them discursively, and to a large extent physically, to the home (Hamilton 2000: 226). By the 1960s-70s there was increased participation of women in politics generally and as militants in ETA (ibid.: 228). This required a measure of rejection. Being a 'rebellious woman' signified a renegotiation of patriotic motherhood, both gender and national identities, among other things because Basque nationalist tradition defined women chiefly in terms of their domestic and maternal roles (ibid.: 224).

Three films to be discussed in this chapter are by women directors, these are *Ander eta Yul/ Ander y Yul /Ander and Yul* (1989: Ana Díez), *Yoyes* and *Those Skies*. *Yoyes* and *Those Skies* have a central woman character. Both of these characters have involvement with ETA, and this is a departure since in Preserved ETA was presented almost entirely as composed of men. Both of these women are thus presented as occupying the kinds of active roles that in Preserved is associated with men. In contrast to these two films, *Ander and Yul* is centred on two male leads, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **ETA's problematical daughters**

However, rather than being used as vehicles through which to glorify ETA, they are used in ways that suggest a feminist critique of ETA and its methods. As mentioned already, *Yoyes* is based on the true life story and personal journal of María Dolores González Katarain (Ana Torrent), whose ETA code name was 'Yoyes'. From being an ETA cell member from an early age, she rose towards the top of the organisation's hierarchy before becoming disillusioned with ETA's methods. Seeking to leave ETA, she fled abroad, fearful of punishment since the organisation does not allow members to leave. When amnesty was offered to those who renounced ETA in the post-Franco period, she returned to the Basque Country, and was subsequently assassinated by ETA. ETA is thus portrayed as ruthless,

brutal, determined, pervasive, and unable to accept criticism of its violence, which is a stereotypically masculine trait.

*Those Skies* follows the fictional character Irene (Nagore Aramburu) on her release under amnesty from a Spanish prison in Barcelona, where she has been serving a sentence for ETA membership. During a bus journey to Bilbao, she reflects on aspects of her harsh life, which are shown in flashback. We learn that her lover Larrea (Iban Garate), a member of a nationalist terrorist organisation, was killed in a police ambush. Irene's ETA cell leader Yeu (Andoni Agirregomezkorta) disowns her when she applies for amnesty. We also learn that she is estranged from her father and brother, who both distrust her ETA activities. In various ways therefore, ETA has brought her misery; she has paid a high price in the struggle for independence and revolution.

Both films thus focus on the personal cost of involvement with ETA. *Those Skies* draws attention to various negative impacts on one woman's life that ETA has brought, which in *Yoyes* prove fatal. In particular, a decision to leave ETA under amnesty leads to isolation and emptiness. This is especially so in the case of Irene, but since *Yoyes* had a husband and child, it is less true for her. Nevertheless, it underlines the extent to which ETA may absorb a person's life, that involvement in the terrorist struggle demands all that these women have to give. There is perhaps also a suggestion that involvement with ETA demands so much that individuals get sucked into its struggle to such an extent that a kind of tunnel vision develops, where there is no room for other aspects of a person's life to be considered. This is why leaving ETA leaves these women with so little else in their lives.

The theme of women suffering because of their involvement with ETA is also evident in films made by men that feature male and female leads. For example *Días contados/Running Out Of Time*, (1994: Imanol Uribe) features Lourdes (Elvira Mínguez), a woman ETA agent who must let her partner Antonio (Carmelo Gómez) live undercover in Madrid with another woman, in preparation for a bomb attack on a police station. In *A ciegas/Blindly* (1997: Daniel Calparsoro) Marrubi (Najwa Nimri) is an ETA commando who shoots one of her colleagues during an assassination attempt on a wealthy businessman. She is thus on the run

from the police, who seek to imprison her, and from ETA, who want her dead. She manages to escape both, taking her son with her, but only by moving in with her boss from her day job, who treats her as sexual fair game despite the presence of his wife. *El viaje de Arián/Arian's Journey* (2000: Eduardo Bosch) features a young ETA member whose cell kidnaps a young girl for ransom. Asked to kill the girl, Arián (Ingrid Rubio) refuses, and ends up responsible for the deaths of her ETA colleagues when their car goes over a cliff. She escapes to Catalonia and is subsequently killed by Maite (Silvia Munt), an ETA woman commando.

What emerges is a series of women characters (fictional and non-fictional) who suffer for ETA's cause. In the cases of Yoyes, Arián and Irene, they rebel against ETA by seeking to leave (in Irene's case merely via amnesty). In the case of Yoyes, Marrubi and Arián they are directly critical of ETA's methods and the orders they are supposed to follow. They are against the violent methods that they are supposed to use. In this respect, these women behave in accordance with dominant stereotypes of gender, since violence is often stereotypically thought of as masculine (Bourke 1999: 57 'Training Men to Kill'). It is therefore no surprise that characters rejecting violence as a method should be women rather than men. The exception to this is Maite, the commando who kills Arián in *Arian's Journey*. We learn in the film that she is an accomplished killer for ETA with lengthy experience. An effect of this is perhaps to render ETA as a kind of monstrous organisation that can either include a woman so removed from stereotypical femininity in its ranks, or that ETA has somehow managed to indoctrinate this woman into its methods to the extent that she subverts a 'natural' feminine proclivity against violence.

These women characters also rebel against men who are seeking to control them. They thus mirror the problematical daughters of *Preserved*, with ETA occupying the role of the controlling and punishing father. Just as problematical daughters that fathers are unable to control in the Basque *Preserved* were an issue contained within the privacy of the family, these women in *Reversal* are problems that are resolved internally by ETA. They threaten continuity, and the passing on of ETA approved methods and morals, and ETA exacts the ultimate punishment when they run out of control. Problematical daughters are used as vehicles in *Preserved* to explore cultural anxieties, issues of identity, and the extent to which Basques have been colonized by Spain. This is presented to audiences via the family

symbolizing the Basque nation and its intergenerational conflict. In *Reversal* these daughters are grown up and willful in ways that go beyond childhood. Within the symbolism of *Preserved*, wayward daughters are presented as an internal family problem and are disciplined by their fathers. But in *Reversal*, films are far more direct in portraying the Basque nation and issues relating to the nationalist struggle, related to issues of loyalty, identity and nation, and portraying recent social and cultural developments.

## **Tough urban women**

The icon of the tough rural or peasant woman has already been discussed in the previous chapter on the Basque *Preserved*. A characteristic of films in *Reversal* is the presence of tough urban women, and this is in accordance with a difference in setting between these two types of film. In contrast to the prominence given to the rural in *Preserved*, in *Reversal* the city predominates. Instead of men proving their rural skills (e.g. woodcutting, charcoal burning, poaching, agricultural abilities etc.), films in *Reversal* feature women who prove their abilities to survive within oppressive, morally complex urban landscapes and cultures. This shift to the urban will be discussed in more detail shortly, but the figure of the tough urban women deserves immediate consideration.

This figure features in five films, set in contemporary times, which collectively form a progressive movement away from the kind of conventional femininity featured in films of *Preserved*. Chronologically, the first of these is *Siete calles/ Seven Streets* (1981: Javier Rebollo & Juan Ortuoste). Malen (Mariví Bilbao) is a thief skilled in the art of disguise. We see her robbing a diamond merchant, who is the father of her boyfriend Tomi (Enrique San Francisco). She plans the robbery, and uses her feminine charms to get her naïve boyfriend to accompany her. She is thus skilled at manipulating men. We see her at home, dressing up mannequins in her bedroom with the extremely valuable stolen diamonds. So although a tough woman, she retains familiar aspects of conventional femininity.



In contrast to the thief, the figure of the mother features in *The Death of Mikel*. Doña María Luisa (Montserrat Salvador) has been described as ‘the stern unflinching mother’ (Martí-Olivella 2003: 77) and a ‘domineering revengeful mother’, who may be responsible for the ambiguous death of her gay son Mikel (Imanol Arias) (Stone & Jones 2004: 57); ‘The final image is that of Mikel’s mother staring stoically out from the window of her house, suggesting that it was she, not the police, who killed Mikel’ (D’Lugo 1999: 102). Also described as an ‘undesirable bourgeois woman’ (Davies 2003: 131), Doña María Luisa acts as moral judge over Mikel, using her Catholicism to justify her oppression of Mikel, which seems to stem more from a preoccupation with issues of social status and class, and small town conservative values. Ultimately, her toughness is expressed through her culpability in Mikel’s death. This intergenerational family conflict contrasts with representations of the family in the preserved. In *Todo por la pasta /Anything For Bread* (1991: Enrique Urbizu) Verónica (Kiti Manver), the manager of a nursing home, and Azucena (María Barranco) who is a singer, nightclub entertainer and sex worker, are skilled at robbing men and of disposing of the proceeds of their crimes. Having quite non-traditional occupations for women in films, these two characters are able to keep their criminal activities hidden from others. As the title suggests, during the film they develop the art of following the 1980s mantra of ‘greed is good’, of advancement in a world of moral ambiguity in which money is the only thing that is worthwhile.

Taking these themes a step further in *Salto al vacío/Jump into the Void* (1995: Daniel Calparsoro) Alex (Najwa Nimri) swears, is violent, and sells drugs. She does not seek to hide her life as a criminal beneath a veneer of respectability, as Verónica does in *Anything For Bread*. Furthermore, she is physically rendered androgynous by her shaved haircut and choice of name. Alex is portrayed as dynamic, in control, a money earner, even a father figure (Martí-Olivella 1999: 212), who is physically capable, and who can thus hold her own in a macho criminal underworld. In these ways she is simply an extension of the stereotypically male character to be found in mainstream films set in urban criminal underworlds. In one scene in the film she prepares her appearance by adopting a stereotypically feminine appearance via makeup, but this is only so that she does not arouse suspicion whilst working as a bodyguard at an illegal dog fight.

Finally, the movement away from traditional femininity arguably reaches its ultimate conclusion in *Pasajes* (1996: Daniel Calparsoro). Set in the port area of San Sebastian that has the same name as the film's title, the film is centred on Gabi (Najwa Nimri), an illiterate orphan who belongs to an even bigger criminal gang than Alex in *Jump into the Void* (which featured the same leading actor and director). Gabi is as skilled with using a gun, committing robbery, acts of physical agility and strength as the character Alex. Yet she retains some elements of traditional femininity through being slim and small. Having a dream that she will find an escape from her dangerous existence via a person wearing green marbled shoes, Gabi embarks on a lesbian affair with the alcoholic Carmina (Charo López). It is this abandonment of heterosexuality, with all the subordination of women stereotypically associated with it, which marks the ultimate jettisoning of the kind of femininity associated with Preserved.

Characters in four of these five films share several elements that define the icon of the tough urban woman, as a reversal of the rural peasant woman. The tough urban woman is slender and small, physically strong and agile, but still feminine enough to use physicality and sexual attractiveness as a tool for exploiting men when necessary, although ultimately men and hetero-patriarchy are left by the wayside. She is skilled at deception and manipulation, at using guns, and is emotionally disengaged from her victims. She has no morals, no aims beyond that of moving on to bigger and better crimes and greater personal wealth gained by any means. She has no loyalties or commitments to others, exists in an urban landscape without any sense of 'community', and she does not overtly seem Basque at all. The only Basque element in these films seems to be the setting of the twenty four hour postindustrial Basque city, which is discussed in more detail below.

The only character in these films who does not fit this template is Doña María Luisa in *The Death of Mikel*. However, she is a clear reversal of the maternal, nurturing figure of the Basque peasant mother. Her harsh judging of her son leads her to possibly commit the ultimate reversal of maternalism, when her son is killed. Doña María Luisa acts as moral judge over Mikel, using her Catholicism to justify her oppression of Mikel, which seems to stem more from a preoccupation with issues of social status and class, and small town conservative values. Ultimately, her toughness is expressed through her culpability in Mikel's death.

## The postindustrial Basque city

In contrast to the focus on the rural in *Preserved* as the authentic ‘heartland’ of Basque identity, films in *Reversal* tend to be focused on the city. In these films the city is portrayed mainly as a place of social, cultural and moral decline, a grubby place of sin and despair in contrast to the verdant Basque countryside of *Preserved*. Several films feature ‘postindustrial’ urban locations in Bilbao, the only big city in the Basque country that went through industrialization. These are: *El pico 1/The Needle* (1983: Eloy de la Iglesia), *Días de humo/Days Of Smoke* (1989: Antton Ezeiza), *The White Dove*, and *Jump into the void*. An exception is *The Death of Mikel*, which is set in a small town, but which nevertheless features scenes in Bilbao.

In these films Bilbao is no longer a ‘symbol of work’ featuring ‘machinery noise’ (e.g. as depicted in *Guipúzcoa*, *Euskadi hors d’etat* and *Lauaxeta.To The Four Winds*), but a place where ‘those buildings of fire are all gone, but their ghostly ruins still remain’ (Zulaika 2003:147). Bilbao is ‘a city with a lack of future, empty warehouses’ (Arruti 2003: 167). This is by no means a fanciful portrayal, in comparison with the rest of Europe it has been claimed that ‘by the late 1970s Bilbao and its outskirts constituted one of the continent’s most disturbingly depressed urban landscapes’ (Crumbaugh 2000: 41).

In addition to the films listed above, a smaller number of films are set in San Sebastian area and its fishing industry; these include *27 Horas / 27 Hours* (1986 Montxo Armendáriz), *Pasajes*, and *We are all invited*. In comparison to Wales, San Sebastian has some similarities with Cardiff, mainly because shipping and dockside have been a feature of both cities (e.g. as mentioned in the next chapter on Welsh ‘Reversal’). However the postindustrial cityscapes of Bilbao may seem to more closely resemble the postindustrial southern valleys of Wales in terms of industrial and social decline (as featured in films to be discussed in the next chapter) only on a larger scale.

Unlike the working Bilbao as featured in *Preserved*, the Bilbao of *Reversal* coincides with industrial decline prior to a period of regeneration the mid 1990s. There is little sense of celebration in these films, or of community, rather it is ‘feelings of alienation in post-industrial landscapes’ (Stone 2002: 155) that mark the character of these films. Whereas *Guipúzcoa* and *Euskadi hors d’etat* celebrate men working in the blast furnaces of Bilbao, for instance showing them feeding the furnaces with coke, films such as *Jump into the Void* ‘dislocate’ these kinds of representations of the Basque Country (Rodríguez 1997:140). The audience is shown a declining Bilbao of ‘postindustrial... sites of deprivation’ (Rodríguez 1997: 137). The film tells the story of a single day in the lives of a group of young delinquents involved with drugs, crime and guns. The day starts with them committing a robbery, followed by the kidnapping of a blindfolded local policeman who witnessed the robbery, and whom they subsequently murder. The film follows them as they joyride in a stolen car out of the city centre, to where deserted quarries are all that remain of the old iron ore industry that once fed the city's furnaces. The policeman’s body is dumped here, in a plastic bag, there being little chance of discovery there by any passerby. This underlines the sense of social decline married to industrial decline. Perhaps symbolic of (Spanish) authority or of law, order and even morality more generally, the policeman is consigned simply as refuse. The central character of the film, Alex, was discussed earlier as a prime example of the tough urban woman; ‘Alex comes to represent a peculiar subjectivity generated within a world whose social and economic structures have collapsed’ (Crumbaugh 2000: 46).

The various ways that Alex subverts the traditional scripts of gender may arguably seem secondary to conveying a strong sense of social and moral dislocation via Alex and her companions. Additionally, in contrast to the portrayals of traditional, ‘macho’ Basque masculinity in the *Preserved*, Bilbao has become the place for venues that host a transvestite singer Fama (Fama), for whom Mikel falls in love in *The Death of Mikel*. To contemporary conservative audiences, this ‘increasingly overt homosexuality’ (Davies 2005: 347) may have been taken as symbolic of moral decline.

The director Daniel Calparsoro's 1990s films have been noted for their portrayal of marginalized youth and violence in 'grim urban surroundings' (Davies 2009: 51). *Pasajes* is set amongst those struggling on the margins of society in the docklands area of San Sebastian, following the collapse of the fishing industry. Audiences are shown an abandoned fish warehouse, and the dark interiors of other disused buildings. These are emblematic of the docklands of the 1990s. Again, industrial economic decline is married to social and moral decline, and there is not even a kind of honour amongst thieves. All are out for themselves.

In comparison to the close communities in rural settings associated with *Preserved*, these films feature the city as an asocial place of marginalization and moral decay, as a battleground featuring struggles amongst urban youth, and between them and the police. These films address social changes 'which have moved the centre of life in the Basque provinces from the country to the towns' (Hopewell 1986: 233). Characters do not give to 'community', instead they take, being more interested in personal gain and the exploitation of others through criminal acts. These films are a more direct form of social commentary and critique, in contrast to the more simplistic retelling and reclaiming of history associated with *Preserved*. In these films, nobody is good, everybody is flawed, and issues of morality are played out through depictions of drug cultures, crime, sexual 'deviancy', and dysfunctional relationships between parents and young adults and young adults with each other. There are no happy endings.

## **The disruption of 'inheritance'**

One of the alarm bells rung in films set in the postindustrial city concerns drug use. This is presented as a major threat to the traditional line of patriarchal inheritance that features so often in *Preserved*. For example in the film *The Needle* a father, Aramendía (Luis Iriondo), becomes estranged from his son Urko (Javier García) because of the son's drug use and his sexuality. Aramendía is a local Basque nationalist candidate, a member of EE (Euskadiko

Ezkerra), at that time a Basque nationalist-communist party that contrasted with the “conservative” Basque nationalist party the PNV).

In contrast to his straightlaced father, Urko steals and kills in order to feed his drug habit, before succumbing to a self-administered overdose. We are shown the Civil Guard inspecting the needle marks in Urko’s arms, and pointing them out to his father. At the mortuary Urko’s father asks his supporters to leave as he looks over the body of his gay son. In this way the audience is shown disruption in the chain of ‘inheritance’ that was a key ingredient in the preserved, of sons following in their father’s footsteps. We also learn that Urko was in a relationship with Paco (Jose Luis Manzano), the son of a member of the Civil Guard. So in addition to non-heterosexuality being used as a way of constructing intergenerational difference, it features alongside the ‘betrayal’ of having relations with ‘the enemy’. Up to this point in time, to a Basque nationalist, the Civil Guard was always presented as being the enemy.

In *27 Hours* we learn that the character Jon (Martxelo Rubio) was thrown out of his home by his father because of his dependency on drugs. Jon returns to steal from his father. We learn that Jon’s downward spiral began when he dropped out of school, and he dies in a rowing boat after taking drugs, away from prying eyes on an island in Concha Bay. Rowing is a celebrated Basque skill, children growing up on the coast learn all about boating from a very early age. Both *Guipúzcoa* and *Ama Lur* include scenes of men making oars and rowing. But here rowing is subordinated to drug-taking, which is presented as a solitary and self-destructive attempt to escape from issues such as lack of opportunities, family obligations and social responsibilities. Drugs are presented as a great evil that disrupts families and patriarchal relationships and kills members of the younger generation of Basques, who are presented as feckless, unambitious, directionless, and looking only to their peer group.

These films portray the urban subcultures of young people on the margins of society. What emerges are the possibilities for new forms and narratives of ‘Basqueness’ arising from the margins, from the bleak social and physical landscapes of the city, as opposed to the

centrality of rural narratives of identity associated with Preserved. However, the city is portrayed fairly one dimensionally as a 'bad' place, ridden with crime, deprivation, unemployment, poverty and drugs. On the one hand the city makes a dynamic setting for films, and makes possible dynamic plotlines and characters, in ways that may not be possible or seem credible for the countryside. For instance, action takes place on a twenty four hour basis in the city, night time is significant in ways that would not be possible in rural settings. The gritty realism of these films functions as an alarm bell, sounding concerns over the next generation of Basques.

## **ETA's problematical sons**

The earlier section on ETA's problematical daughters drew attention to a collection of fictional and non-fictional women characters in films who are portrayed in terms of how they suffer for ETA's cause, and how they rebel against the violence of ETA's methods. It was suggested that these characters can be seen as an extension of the figure of the wayward daughter, who featured in Preserved as the disruptive child within a family unit symbolizing the Basque nation.

Another way that the wayward daughter may theoretically be extended into Reversal from Preserved is through a transformation into 'problematical son'. This character type actually occurs in three films: two that have already been mentioned, *The Death of Mikel, Ander and Yul*; and *El Lobo/The Wolf* (2004: Miguel Courtois). All three feature the recurring theme of criticism of ETA, its methods, and the way that it punishes those members that stray. In this respect what emerges from a consideration of ETA's wayward children (daughters and sons) collectively is a narrative thread concerning how ETA uses violence and murder to stifle criticism from within the Basque nation.

In Preserved men are largely portrayed in terms of gendered stereotypes, for instance as active and responsible 'heroes', as heads of families, breadwinners, 'masters' of art or

country crafts, or martyrs for the nationalist cause. In *Reversal* in contrast, men feature as ‘irresponsible’, as failing to obey the prescriptions of patriarchal social and cultural systems, and crucially as failing to obey ETA’s own prescriptions.

‘Basque separatism comes down on the side of moral law and inscribes itself within the Basque community as an upholder of the law’ (Davies 2003: 131). Since its emergence ETA has held a position as moral or spiritual guardian, paternalistically reaching into peoples’ lives to dictate its own forms of morality and other social conduct. For a time, during Franco’s Dictatorship, ETA embodied some Basque hopes for the future, and ETA activism was simply the most dynamic expression of Basque nationalism (Grugel 1990: 104). This is the ETA that features in *Preserved*. In *Reversal*, in addition to the feminist critiques of ETA’s methods already discussed, ETA’s own moral code and its position as moral authority is critiqued via films that portray the punishment meted out to ETA’s own wayward sons.

In *The Death of Mikel*, the non- heterosexuality of Mikel (Imanol Arias) is a central issue, and ETA is portrayed as homophobic. Set in the late 1970s, this film shows the ‘demonisation of homosexuality’ (Jordan & Morgan-Tamousuans 1998: 149), how same sex relations were non-permissible or a reason for intense shame on the part of ETA and other Nationalist party members, and parents. In contrast to being a farmer or a ‘warrior’, Mikel owns a small town chemist’s shop. The film depicts his struggles to reconcile his political commitment to Nationalist activism in Herri Batasuna and sympathies towards ETA with his increasingly overt same sex activities. The married Mikel has a relationship with a male transvestite singer in Bilbao, his promiscuousness is ‘outside the bourgeois norm’ (Davies 2003: 123). His Herri Batasuna (the political party linked to ETA) colleagues then backtrack on a previous offer for Mikel to be their candidate in forthcoming elections.

This underlines ‘Mikel’s alienation from the Basque national community they claim to represent’ (Davies 2005: 347), he becomes an outcast from both sides of the political binary, and is ejected from 'family' by his domineering and critical mother, as previously discussed. He is surrounded by intolerance (Evans 1999: 207), and the film has been described as ‘a



denunciation of intolerance' (D'Lugo 1999: 206). Mikel is very different from the stereotypes of Preserved, and the film is clearly a movement away from hegemonic masculinities and patriarchy. The ambiguity of Mikel's death in the film means that the audience is unsure as to exactly who is to blame; his mother or torture by the Civil Guard. The film depicts how ETA contributes to a show funeral for Mikel, with a huge crowd and a coffin draped with the Basque flag. It thus portrays ETA as morally ambiguous or hypocritical, opportunistically raising its profile in the small town via the funeral of a man that it rejected.

Having a central character involved in drugs, the film *Ander and Yul* is another major departure from the stereotypes associated with Preserved. This film is a condemnation of ETA, with ETA's methods presented as being extreme (Stone 2004). Drug culture can be seen as symbolic of a 'poisoning' of a generation, in ways that distance it from dominant versions of Basque culture and community (this notion is clearly evident in other films such as *The Needle*, *27 Hours*, and *Running out of Time*). The character Ander (Miguel Munarriz) is from a relatively well off background. We see the relatively large detached house he grew up in and to which he returns when he is released from prison after serving a sentence for drug dealing. He simply returns to the drug business, and comes to renew his childhood friendship with Yul (Isidoro Fernández), who is now an ETA member, when he recognizes him carrying out an assassination on the street. By this time ETA had begun a policy of executing drug dealers in order to demonstrate that they too, as well as the authorities, were concerned with the well being of the wider community. Yul finds drugs hidden in Ander's apartment, his ETA cell decides that Ander must be killed, and they select Yul to do this.

The film is an exploration of the complexities and contradictions of relations between ETA members and their friends, and of the difficulties of reconciling tensions between involvement in armed struggle and the previously unexplored topic in Basque films of personal relationships. It may be no coincidence that, as one of the first Basque films made by a woman director, it addresses political issues via the personal. In addition to this, a sense of realism is also fostered visually through the representation of authentic street scenarios (Rodríguez 2002:159).

*The Wolf*, is based on actual events. Txema (Eduardo Noriega), known as El Lobo /*The Wolf*, and whose ETA code name provides the title of the film, is only involved with ETA for financial gain. He becomes caught in the middle of a dispute within ETA between an advocate of violence and brutality, Nelson (Patrick Bruel) and Asier (Jorge Sanz), an opponent of these methods. The complexity of *The Wolf's* relations with ETA members is deepened since he acts as a double agent for the Spanish authorities. In the film we are shown how he was involved in a bank raid in Barcelona to finance the mass prison escape depicted in *The Segovia Breakout*. But he becomes a target for elimination by both ETA and the Spanish authorities when his cover is blown. He escapes death by undergoing plastic surgery, paid for out of the money he receives from the Spanish, and forging a new identity.

*The Wolf* can be regarded as a move towards a more complex approach to issues of identity and loyalty. The Basque *The Wolf* is presented as a mercenary without conscience, who perhaps simply enjoys violence and the dynamism of being a double agent. ETA is portrayed as an organisation sufficiently distracted by internal divisions over methods to allow a double agent to operate within its ranks. *The Wolf* is arguably the most wayward son, since his divergence from characters in *Preserved* goes as far as treachery. Coming 30 years after the events that it depicts, the film can afford to be critical of ETA in a way that film makers perhaps felt unwise, unrealistic, and unattractive to Basque audiences in the 1970s.

These wayward 'sons' are a major departure from the stereotypical representations of 'community' and family evident in *Preserved*. Some (i.e. Ander, *The Wolf*) do not give to 'community', instead they take, they are more interested in personal gain and exploitation, individualism rather than the collective. They are primarily concerned with immediate and often criminal pleasures and forms of escape.

They are used as vehicles to portray ETA's own morals in terms of a morality in which killing is necessary, and other practices such as same sex relations or involvement with drugs are potentially capital offences. ETA's intolerance mirrors that of the harsh father figures of films in *Preserved* towards their own wayward daughters. This harsh paternalism perhaps leaves ETA unaware of the complex issues facing a new generation of Basques. Rodríguez

(2002: 159) writes of a 'rigid discipline' imposed on the character Yul when he is directed to kill his best friend Ander. And although ETA maintained a stance strongly opposed to its members involvement with drugs, commentators have accused the organisation of gradually turning to drug trafficking as an alternative source of income when faced by declining membership and previous sources of income such as donations; 'Reluctantly at first, drugs have helped ETA offset the loss of its revenue (Labrousse & Laniel 2001:125), The same authors acknowledge the claim that ETA's involvement with drugs may have been overstated, and that only a tiny fraction were involved in drug trafficking.

## **Shifting representations of ETA**

All this is a considerable shift away from the shining martyrs imprisoned or dying for the cause of independence that feature in films of *Preserved*. Instead ETA members come to be portrayed as brutal, emotionless and unforgiving butchers, opportunists and exploiters. In this way ETA on the screen is relegated away from the centre and towards the margins, as an extremist organisation, in Basque popular culture. Violence creates 'a serious image problem' (Keating 2000:36), and ETA seems to be no longer acting in harmony with and on behalf of all Basques.

In connection with this shift in the position of ETA in Basque popular culture, it is notable that other films such as *27 Hours*, *Days Of Smoke*, and *The White Dove*, include scenes of street riots. As a more spontaneous action in comparison to the 'professionalism' of ETA members, these scenes may suggest that resistance to external rule is part of the Basque way of being. But what these films quite vividly illustrate is that not all Basques may be potential recruits for ETA. The 'wayward', who do not conform to ETA's moral code, instead are Basques who become legitimate targets for killing by ETA.

ETA's declining popularity began at least in the 1980s, but has been such that a leading member of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) Juan José Ibarretxe Markuartu, who was

President of the Basque region in 2003, declared 'ETA is suffering from a terminal illness' in the film *The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone*. This critique of ETA's methods stems from the perception that they are highly counterproductive to the Basque nationalist cause. This critique is evident in a series of documentary and fictional films, very different from one another, which include *The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone* and *Asesinato en febrero/A Killing in February* (2001: Eterio Ortega Santillana), *Perseguidos/Pursued* (2004: Eterio Ortega Santillana), *Tiro en la cabeza/Bullet in the Head* (2008: Jaime Rosales), and *Todos estamos invitados/We are all invited* (2008: Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón). These films question ETA's methods and morality, particularly in relation to violence, and will be discussed in more detail shortly. However, it is first important to acknowledge possible connections between violence itself and Basque identity.

It has been argued that ETA's violence arose as a consequence of the violence of Franco's regime (e.g. Watson 2003: 332). Indeed some commentators have argued that that violence is a defining element of Basque film (e.g. Bermejo and Juaristi, cited in Gabilondo 2002). Gabilondo has presented an argument for considering violence as 'the unrepresentable moment of Basque cinema' because 'Basque cinema does not represent violence but rather performs the violence of the process whereby its identity is represented as other' (Gabilondo 2002: 268). Thus violence is rendered as not an integrally Basque phenomenon, but as part of the process through which 'Basque' has been constructed via oppressive Spanish rule. It must be noted though that Gabilondo does not develop his argument in relation to films, he is concerned with violence in 'real life' as a cultural phenomenon.

However, this is one possible perspective on the film *Bullet in the Head*, a more or less dialogue-free account of an actual event in which two off-duty plain clothes Spanish Civil Guards were shot without warning in a car park in France. Most of the film follows the ETA assassin Ion (Ion Arretxe) through his everyday routine life, establishing it in terms of an almost banal level of ordinariness until the shocking explosion of premeditated violence, prefixed by one of the only bits of speech, when Ion exclaims 'txakurra' (literally 'dog', or 'Fucking police' in ETA and Herri Batasuna's slang). If Gabilondo's argument is accepted, then Ion's actions are justified, even rendered meaningful, through being resistance to

oppressive Spanish rule. However, the events take place in 2007, well after the end of Franco's oppressive rule, and the granting of autonomy to the Basque country by the Spanish authorities. An alternative interpretation is that the film locates violence within the banality of everyday life, as a mode of resistance that some Basques are in effect trapped within. According to this interpretation, the film is anti-ETA, a clear critique of the organisation as trapped within a cycle of violence, and of the assassin as almost robotic, unquestioning of his expected duty.

## **Shifting representations of Basque identity: from single to plural**

The emergence of these critiques of ETA and its methods in films can be linked to a shift from the single narrative of Basque identity associated with *Preserved* to the emergence of a more plural perspective on Basqueness. Indeed, the kind of nationalism associated with ETA that is a cornerstone of *Preserved* is relegated towards the radical extreme in *Reversal*. In terms of Judith Butler's work on performance, (Butler 1999: 173) what was totally intelligible, morally unquestioned and thoroughly Basque in *Preserved* becomes unintelligible, morally dubious and the work of extremists more on the margins of Basque society in *Reversal*.

ETA is portrayed in *We are all Invited* as turning against fellow Basques. The character Orkatz Gonzalez (Adolfo Fernández) is a high ranking ETA member imprisoned for his activities. We are shown that even from within his prison cell he organizes the killing of Xabier Legazpi (Jose Coronado), a university lecturer, for 'spreading shit' about ETA. Legazpi's 'crime' was to voice criticisms of ETA's methods during a television interview. Clearly in this film, Basque culture is no longer a singular central narrative, in the sense that there is no longer a single, unifying version of culture and identity, rather a collision between a version of Basque nationalism promoted by ETA and more moderate other versions, even non-nationalist or Basque-Spanish versions.

Two documentaries by the same director specifically shift attention from Basque nationalism to violence itself directly represented as a political problem. These are *A Killing in February* and *Pursued*. The first of these two addresses an actual event in Vitoria (the seat of the Basque parliament) in 2000, when ETA members killed both Fernando Buesa (a member of the Basque Socialist Party PSOE and former Basque Minister of Education) and his *ertzaina* (Basque police) bodyguard Jorge Díez Elorza with a car bomb. Buesa was considered to be anti-nationalist. The film does not depict the killing though, instead focusing on the grief and suffering of the dead men's families. The film contains testimonies of the bitterness and injustice felt by relatives, who are interviewed whilst going about their everyday business (e.g. cooking, chopping firewood). This underlines how the effect of ETA's violence reaches into the ordinary lives of everyday people. In a marked departure from films of Preserved that detailed ETA's methods in terms of professionalism, instead these methods are described during fragments of an interview with a policeman (Holland: 2001), as more simply the prelude to a murder.

*Pursued* is a documentary that depicts how bodyguards provided routine day-to-day protection for two councillors, members of the party PSE-EE (Spanish Partido Socialista de Euskadi-Euskadiko Ezkerra), the Basque branch of the Spanish Socialist Party. The film shows how PSE-EE is regarded by ETA as too moderate, to the extent that the two councillors' lives are in danger, they have become potential targets for ETA. Bodyguards provide round the clock protection, so again the film portrays very ordinary daily routines into which the threat of ETA violence has intruded.

## **Collapsing distinctions between ETA and Franco's regime**

Thus, with ETA portrayed as pursuing Basques, and these films dwelling on the suffering presented as directly caused by ETA's violence (Tremlett 2006: 291), it might seem that ETA has supplanted Franco and the Civil Guard as the scourge of moderate Basques. In these films Basques live in fear of other Basques, the sense of Basque unity evident in Preserved is dissolved through the depiction of Basque on Basque violence.

This is a view that has been clearly voiced by Juan José Ibarretxe, President of Spain's Basque Country autonomous community from 1999 to 2009, and a leading member of the PNV:

‘It is easy to see where violence starts, but never where it ends. During the years of the dictatorship nobody would have imagined that ETA, however reprehensible their actions, would end up as the sad reality that the terrorist organization represents today. The vast majority of the Basque people detests the barbaric behavior of ETA and wants to eradicate it from their lives for once and for all’ (Ibarretxe 2002: 8).

Ibarretxe is amongst interviewees featured in the documentary film *The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone*, another film that highlights violence itself as a problem. His contribution to this film is to comment on the political relationship between Spain and Basques. However, seventy interviewees amongst the politicians, (except the Partido Popular, Spain's ruling political party and ETA) ex-terrorists, intellectuals, writers, artists and victims of violence featured in this film specifically address the issues of culture, geography, race, violence, politics, history and language. For instance a Professor of Sociology at the University of Deusto in San Sebastián, states the view that ‘terrorism and violence is out of keeping with Basque plurality’ (Javier Elzo, 2003 in *La pelota vasca...*). Elzo states that he regards ETA as

‘a small band that has been indoctrinated in the strongest sense with what is basically one idea, that Euskadi is the homeland of the Basques and it is presently subjugated by the French and Spanish state... preventing them from realizing themselves as Basques’ (ibid.).

He characterises Basque society as ‘basically having a multiple identity’. Similarly to *A Killing in February*, *The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone* also contains interviews with family members of individuals selected for assassination by ETA. The film presents those killed as having been marked out for having opinions that differed with those of ETA.

Another interviewee, professor in Sociology at the University of the Basque Country Gotzone Mora, voices regret at her involvement with ETA in the 1970s. She was a student leader who led campaigns to oppose the execution of ETA members by Franco's firing squads (Tremlett 2006: 304). However, she later took a more critical position in relation to ETA, and

consequently became one of their targets and received death threats. In the film she describes how she was targeted at work at the university, and how friends, colleagues and students were both intimidated from contact with her and were too scared to speak out in her defence.

Mora's contribution to this film raises important issues in connection with documentary film itself and the role of the film maker in relation to those featured in the film. On seeing a preview of *The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone*, Mora asked for her contribution to be removed,' because she considered the documentary presented a biased view of the victims of terrorist threats' (Stone 2007:193). She was reportedly not the only interviewee who appears in the film who perceived it in this way (AFP 2003). Julio Medem made the decision not to remove Mora's contribution to the film, or those of others who read the film in the same way, since his intention was to provide an opportunity for different opinions on the question of Basque nationalism to be voiced (ibid.). His intention was to 'shape a 'dialogue' between people who wouldn't be caught dead engaging in conversation' (Mottram 2004:105).

To this end the film is notable for its 'stylistic eye for compositional patterns and mercurial editing', and 'the use of parallel montage' (Smith 2004: 45). Although this technique can be used to suggest difference, or 'a false moral equivalence between the two sides' (ibid.) it can also function to suggest similarity. So, for instance, the film includes a mix of archive film and the recreation of events such as ETA's assassination of Spain's Prime Minister Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco in 1973. Carrero Blanco has been described as 'violent in his repressive attitudes ... the key which guaranteed the continuity and stability of the Francoist system' (Preston 1986: 49), and as 'a living embodiment of hard-line Francoism, the Caudillo's closest adviser since 1940.' (ibid.p.24). To some audiences, his death may be a righteous blow against the evil forces of Francoist oppression. But others may instead focus on similarities between the brutality of the Franco regime and ETA's methods, and a much more complex moral maze woven by two sides trapped in a cycle of violence. This sense may be further underlined by the film being prefaced by the statement that 'this film declares solidarity with those who suffer violence related to the Basque conflict'. Although Medem sought to address the issue of anti-Basque nationalism from the Spanish state, he was particularly concerned that his own perspective should not shape how individual testimonies were edited, especially since interviewees' contributions became increasingly polarised (Stone 2007: 185). He is also



reported to have wanted to make a film with people trapped in the conflict, and to present local stories as related by the local people. He reportedly grappled with ‘numerous perspectives surrounding Basque separatism’ (Mottram 2004:105).

For these reasons, it is perhaps not surprising that the film may be regarded as ambiguous, and that interpretations of the film varied so much between film-maker, contributors and audiences. The film was publicly denounced in Spain, and funding from the Spanish authorities for a BFI festival in London at which the film was to be shown was withdrawn.

## **ETA from feminist perspectives**

In addition to these films seeming to collapse distinctions between Franco’s regime and ETA, it is also noticeable how the voices and experiences of women are featured, and how these films tend to feature aspects of everyday life, as opposed to momentous historical events. These films engage with the emotional, rather than the emotionless professionalism that tended to feature in films of *Preserved*. They portray the aftermath and effects of killings, and the effects that the threat of assassination can have. Instead of focusing on perpetrators, the focus shifts to victims and their families and friends. In gendered terms, professionalism is a classically masculine attribute, whereas of course emotions and the banality of ‘the everyday’, for instance as featured in *Bullet in the Head*, have long been closely associated with the feminine. In this way these films adopt a much more feminine perspective on ETA, in comparison to the way that the organisation is portrayed in *Preserved*.

But rather than crediting the emergence of critical perspectives on ETA to a growing strength of feminism in Basque culture, this collection of films perhaps merely reflects criticisms of ETA already evident in Basque society, rather than being ground-breaking in themselves. Arguably, these films could not have been made ten years earlier than the start of the twenty first century, since the makers themselves may simply have become ETA targets themselves. What is suggested very strongly is that by the time these films were made ETA had been

relegated sufficiently towards the margins as a minority extremist group lacking much support amongst Basques. These perspectives on ETA had thus become commercial, attractive to Basque audiences. For this reason *The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone* can feature an interview with the widow (Cristina Sagarzazu) of a policeman killed by an ETA car bomb in 1996, in which she describes her grief and her struggles with bringing up their eighteen month old son. In effect these films act as barometer or thermometer, providing a clear indication of ETA's standing more generally amongst Basques, and thus of the extent to which those who once held centre stage by this time have been pushed out onto the margins, and how those who were once vilified as oppressors have moved towards the centre.

## **ETA becomes toxic**

In addition to the repositioning of ETA as a radical extremist group on the margins, some films highlight how involvement with ETA has destroyed the personal lives of characters. In the film *Those Skies* Irene is shown sitting on a bus, mentally reflecting on her life, which we learn about in flashback. We learn she has been away from the Basque country for four years in prison, and that whilst in prison reading provided her with companionship and a way of bettering her education. Even on the bus, she sits alone in silence in contrast to the other passengers. We learn her husband is dead, and her ETA lover was killed on a mission. On the day she comes out of prison, instead of home and warmth and love, we see her engage in a fairly anonymous sexual encounter in a cheap hotel room before beginning her bus journey.

In the novel on which the director's screenplay *Those Skies* is based, *The Lone Woman* (Atxaga 1999), Irene is simply a nameless 37 year old divorcee until two thirds of the way through (page 74 of 120 in Costa's 1999 translation). Thus, whilst travelling home to meet rejection from her father and brother, the real journey is within Irene's mind. Notably, she only looks to the past, there is no sense of hope for the future or ambitions, or dreams. She is an outsider in a variety of different ways; as a woman member of male dominated ETA. We learn that Irene volunteered for a social rehabilitation plan in prison, through which she obtained her release. This involved turning her back on ETA, under the terms of an amnesty

offered by the Spanish authorities. She now seems alone in the world. In this respect, Irene may be seen as a metaphor for ETA, as unloved, alone, uncelebrated, in need of rehabilitation, and unwelcome, in a clear reversal of the heroic martyrs of the Preserved.

Furthermore, the film can be classed as feminist because it relates a part of recent Basque experience from the perspective of a woman member of ETA, previously depicted largely in male terms. It retells history in terms of how a woman has suffered and lost because of her involvement with ETA. There is no triumph, no glory, no flags, and no sense of a future, no scenes of violence to provide impact, no dynamism or professionalism, instead a downbeat sense of a woman who has lost those closest to her because of ETA.

In the case of Yoyes in *Yoyes*, her opposition to ETA's methods leads to her resigning, her exile, and her death on her return to the Basque Country at the hands of ETA, after she takes amnesty.

‘Yoyes is one of the most enigmatic figures of recent Basque history. Her life and death encapsulate the drama and tragedy of the recent Basque political experience’. (Watson 2003:10).

Again, her involvement with ETA is toxic, fatally so. In two other films already discussed, the two central women characters are also directly critical of ETA's methods and the orders they are supposed to follow. In *Blindly* Marrubi becomes a target for the police and ETA. She only manages to escape both by submitting herself to her boss's sexual advances. Although she manages to keep her son with her, it is quite clear that her involvement with ETA has destroyed her life. Arián in *Arian's Journey* is killed by ETA when she flees from the botched kidnap following the deaths of her fellow ETA cell members. Her killer Maite perhaps offers an example of the kind of women that ETA recruits or makes, subverting dominant ideas about gender in being a cold-hearted killer and showing no sense of sisterhood. In these films ETA is portrayed as an exploiter of women, both those that find its methods morally distasteful when confronted by them, and in the case of Maite, those that toe the line. ETA is still a highly masculine organisation, as it was portrayed in films of Preserved, that is brutal, and toxic to those women who do not shed an opposition to violence that can be connected to dominant forms of femininity. These critiques suggest the

extent to which ETA has fallen from favour with Basques, and become a minority organisation on the margins of the mainstream.

## **Men and masculinities**

In addition to the kinds of feminist critiques of ETA discussed above, another characteristic of films of Reversal more generally is the portrayal of men and women in ways that suggest a reversal of the gender dualism. Men are portrayed more in terms of a lack of dominance, ability and characteristics such as ‘heroism’, and therefore closer to the feminine side of the gender dualism, whilst women are portrayed more in terms of these kinds of characteristics, and thus as closer to the masculine side of the dualism.

One immediate example of this is in the film *Jump into the Void*, where the female character Alex exists in a subculture on the fringes of legitimate society. She is an individual engaged in self-preservation and self-advancement, almost asocial, except for a tender care she shows to her brothers. Hers is a character more usually associated with men in film, for instance the careers of male Hollywood actors such as Robert de Niro, Sylvester Stallone, Clint Eastwood and Al Pacino have been based on playing the lone outsider who survives by breaking a few rules. There seem to be no women equivalents of these in mainstream Hollywood.

But in addition to Alex as a ‘masculine’ character, there is also a gang member, Javi (Robert Chalu) who confesses his sexual impotence to Alex through a prank over who has ‘the biggest balls’ (Rodríguez 1997: 139). He is loved by Alex, whom he ignores (Marti-Olivella 1999: 211). It has been argued that *Jump into the Void* ‘...reverses the image of the Basque male as the epitome of virility by offering a Brazilian protagonist instead who confesses his impotence to Alex’ (Rodríguez 1997:139). However, arguably the extent to which this is achieved is perhaps diluted through Javi being ethnically an outsider, as a Brazilian immigrant.

However, this stereotype is Reversed in the film *Ander* (2009: Roberto Caston), in which the character Ander (Josean Bengoetxea) is a forty something Basque farmer, who lives quietly with his mother and sister on a small rural farm. When he falls and breaks his leg a young Peruvian handyman José (Cristian Esquivel) is hired to help on the farm. He and Ander then embark on a sexual relationship. The iconic figure of the macho Basque farmer of *Preserved* is thus Reversed. Ander is the only son of his ageing mother (Pilar Rodríguez), his father is not present. Ander's lack of a wife is a great trouble to the head of this matriarchal farm, there is no established line of inheritance from him, whereas Ander's sister Arantxa (Leira Ucha) is getting married soon. His mother is also deeply troubled by the shame that her son's relations with José will bring in their local community. This shame is intensified through José's otherness as a Peruvian, which might potentially dilute Ander's Basqueness. Scenes at mealtimes illustrate that there is a language barrier, since the mother will not speak Spanish to José, and does not make use of either her son or daughter as an interpreter. *Ander* is a critique of *Preserved* since it mocks values associated with it, essentially the mother's values, as small-minded and repressive. It also presents an alternative form of masculinity to the rural Basque stereotype. There is nothing exceptional about Ander, in terms of being a Basque farmer with a part-time metalworking job, beyond his sexuality. It is possible that the film makers deliberately avoided the kinds of gay stereotypes sometimes found in film, for this purpose.

In the introduction to this chapter it was stated that one aspect of Reversal involves that which was given prominence in *Preserved* instead being relegated more to the margins, whilst that which occupied the margins instead comes to take up 'centre stage'. Ander is one clear example of this. Generally films of *Preserved* simply ignore non-heterosexuality, but here a gay relationship takes up centre stage and the homophobia of a rural community is critiqued. Two other films already discussed in this chapter include gay relationships and draw attention to homophobia, *El Pico* and *The Death of Mikel*, but the relationships are set within the more cosmopolitan urban centre of Bilbao, rather than in the countryside. Also, in *El Pico* and *The Death of Mikel* a son's gayness is perhaps used to underline intergenerational differences from parents, and ETA's own tunnel vision which is focused on political struggle at the expense of all else. The gay characters in both of these films end up dead, which is not the case in *Ander*, where there is a focus on the relationship itself.

Other films similarly intertwine new ideas about Basque identity with sexual desire, particularly in connection with issues of nationalist loyalty. Together, these films mark a clear movement away from the stable, collective notions of identity evident in *Preserved* to engage with internal conflicts experienced by individual characters, and how desire is prioritized above what is expected of characters in terms of their duties and obligations towards the nationalist cause. These films clearly illustrate a shift towards the centrality of the significance of the individual as somebody with choice and will, and in contrast how the collective/communal becomes something restrictive, to be shed. In some ways, characters may seem self-indulgent, selfishly pursuing their desires and failing to meet their responsibilities towards nationalism and family, the iconic symbols of *Preserved*. Yet in other ways, some of these characters may seem to be the victims of their own desires, and they end up 'punished' for straying.

Another way of interpreting the decline of the centrality of a collective sense of identity and the rise of individualism is connected with the situation of Basque identity post-Franco. With the increasing liberalisation of the Spanish government and the granting of autonomous regions, arguably it became more difficult and even unclear as to how a collective identity founded on opposition to oppressive Spanish rule might actually be defined. Edward Said has argued that nations emerging from colonial rule can no longer define themselves in terms of their relations and experiences with the external ruler, and that they therefore may undergo a stage at which identity becomes unfocused. This can be accompanied by internal economic problems and social unrest. It is as though the disappearance of the external oppressor leads minority peoples' room to identify and explore potential social and cultural fault lines within the nation, to identify who it is who might now be perceived to be seeking to take the place of the external oppressor. The kinds of materials from which difference came to be made can be connected with Carlism, fascism, liberalism, republicanism and bridge centuries of conflict.

## **Sex and morality**

Another defining characteristic of Reversal is how the longstanding simplistic morality that underpins the family- and community- based social organisation of Preserved is critiqued. The simplistic, 'straight-laced' combination of social and moral ideas that construct taboos around minority sexualities, ethnic otherness, and presents Preserved as largely crime-free is instead replaced by a more liberal interrogation of morality through characters and activities that are simply not present in Preserved. Interwoven within plots that deal in romance and sexual desires are narratives concerning identity and shifting loyalty to Basqueness. Reversal thus features the inversion of a heteropatriarchal morality, as well as the kind of inversions of gender described above, what has been described as a 'progression from 'proper men' to men that are not 'proper men'' (Beynon 2002: 54). In particular, in addition to installation of gay characters in films, there is a distinct movement away from the kind of conservative heterosexual monogamy associated with men in Preserved. Linked to this are notions of an escape from 'traditional' Basque identity, with central male characters pursuing romance and sex above nationalism and loyalty to ETA. Three films in particular illustrate this.

Set in Bilbao in the 1970s, the first of these films, *The White Dove*, focuses on Mario (Antonio Banderas), a Basque nationalist, member of the youth branch of Herri Batasuna, who has become disillusioned with ETA struggle. The audience learns that he has recently lost his brother, who was killed by the police during a demonstration. Mario falls for Rocío (Emma Suárez), the daughter of the owner of the riverside tavern *The White Dove/La Blanca Paloma*. The owner of the tavern is Domingo (Paco Rabal), a migrant from Andalucía in Southern Spain, and a fascist who hates Basques. The tavern is like an island of Domingo's regional otherness as an Andalusian. His repugnance as a fascist, is coupled with a clear moral otherness, since he sexually abuses his daughter Rocío. His wife Adela (Sonsoles Benedicto) is ill in bed. She knows about Domingo's abuse of Rocío but is powerless to intervene. Adela eventually shoots herself in despair, suicide is her only escape. Mario ignores the advice of his former ETA colleagues to not get involved with the people in the tavern. Mario chooses Rocío over ETA and the struggle for Basque independence. But Rocío tragically burns to death when the tavern is set on fire by Mario as part of a plan to get rid of Domingo and run away with Rocío.

The character of Lourdes in *Running Out Of Time* has been mentioned earlier on in this chapter. She is an ETA agent who must let her partner Antonio (Carmelo Gómez) live undercover in Madrid with another woman, a young Spanish prostitute Charo (Ruth Gabriel), in preparation for a bomb attack on a police station. It has been suggested that she acts as a 'repressive mother figure', similar to Mikel's mother in *Death of Mikel* (Davies 2003: 124). She confronts Antonio at the apartment he shares with Charo, slapping him across the face. However, there are some differences between her and Mikel's mother. Mikel's mother Doña María Luisa is powerful within the contexts of family, the domestic, and the church (where she is recognised by others due to the strength of her shows of faith and her bourgeois middle class lifestyle). As a mother, she has been described as 'domineering' (Stone & Jones 2004: 57), and as 'stern' and 'unflinching' (Marti-Olivella 2003: 77).

However, Lourdes is powerful away from these kinds of contexts. She is in Madrid, away from home, outside the Basque country. She is an ETA agent, carrying and using guns, engaged on active service, professionally keeping her cover and doing her duties as a cell member. This includes allowing her partner Antonio to live under cover away from her as a photographer. Antonio turns his back on a comfortable middle class home shared with Lourdes. Theirs has been described as 'a bourgeois monogamous relationship' in 'a house protected by gates that fence in the private sphere' (Davies 2003: 130). Instead he travels to Madrid and takes up with Charo, living in squalor in a cramped apartment. The 'emphasis is on promiscuous sexuality outside the bourgeois norm' (ibid: 123). Antonio pretends to be a photographer, and we see nude photographs of Charo hanging up over the bath in the apartment, alongside photos he has taken of the police station that is to be targeted for a bomb attack. At the end of the film Antonio risks his life and his cover in a vain attempt to try to save Charo from the blast of a car bomb to be detonated by the police station. She has discovered his true identity and has gone there to report him, but he is by this time smitten, it's her life he seeks to save, not his own. Lourdes watches Antonio trying to save Charo, determined to see him die even though she has to hold her colleague at gunpoint to be able to do this.

When his increasing disillusionment with ETA propels him into sexual and romantic relations with Charo, Antonio goes beyond what was planned, and Lourdes becomes the spurned lover.



She is able to use the bombing to gain a kind of revenge, as Antonio and Charo are eventually ‘punished’ for breaking the ‘rules’ of his bourgeois heterosexual monogamous relationship with Lourdes, and Antonio is ‘punished’ for his faltering commitment to ETA. In this sense, Lourdes can be seen as reflecting ETA’s own moral stance at this time (Davies 2003:125). There is no sense of the film being directly critical of ETA and its methods, and it was ‘widely criticized in Spain for its violence, sordidness, and sympathetic portrait of a terrorist’ (Stone 2009: 84).

Yet as Davies points out, mere ‘personal’ issues such as sexuality are subordinated to the political goals of ETA’s struggle. Nationalism usually involves a valorisation of ostensibly ‘pure’ ancestry and a disdain for the ‘impure’ and those towards the margins, including those who are transgressive of the dominant discourses of gender and sexuality. It is Antonio’s transgressive desire for the marginalised Charo and rejection of the bourgeois monogamy offered by Lourdes that undoes his devotion to Basque separatism and thus leads directly to his and Charo’s deaths. This unhappy ending to some extent mirrors that of *The Death of Mikel*.

Another film that addresses broadly similar themes has a much more happy resolution, in that the main character is not punished in the same way as Mario and Antonio. In the comedy *Airbag* (1997: Juanma Bajo Ulloa) successful but clumsy Juan txo (Karra Elejalde) is the son of a powerful family. He is to be married to the daughter of another wealthy Basque family, in what has been described as ‘the symbolic consolidation of Basque elite society’ (Gabilondo 2002: 271). The inexperienced Juan txo celebrates with his friends at a brothel, where he loses a valuable wedding ring given to him by the bride’s mother during a sexual encounter with Vanessa (Vicenta N’Dongo), a mixed race prostitute. This symbol of inheritance and of a union between two elite Basque families is actually lost inside Vanessa, not merely dropped on the carpet or similar. Most of the rest of the film is an extended chase as Juan txo and his friends try to get the ring back, which in the meantime has fallen into the hands of a local crime boss. The film ends when Juan txo jilts his intended bride at the altar and makes off with Vanessa instead. It is an escape from a life mapped out within the simplistic moral parameters of the hetero-patriarchal Preserved, and the chase can be seen as

a metaphor for this escape from middle class Basque identity and its trappings. This film has been described as presenting a ‘liberating flight from Basque elite society’ (Gabilondo 2002: 271).

Taking the dates of release from 1989 to 1997 of *The White Dove*, *Running Out Of Time*, and *Airbag*, these films chart a movement away from films about the strivings of Basque men in the nationalist cause. Instead, the main characters in these films choose love and sex with non-Basque women above Basque nationalism and identity. The deaths of Rocío and Charo in *The White Dove* and *Running Out Of Time* respectively short circuit the possibility of a kind of miscegenation involving the ‘dilution of Basque blood’ by long-hated Spanish blood. In this way, the plots of these two films sidestep racist, patriarchal anxieties concerning the kind of ‘purity’ set out by Sabino Arana. Only the most recent of these three films, *Airbag*, dares to end with the male character unpunished for escape, and the possibility of the creation of hybrid or fusion identities that combine elements of Basque, Spanish and Black.

This is a major shift, in that identity is not of prime importance, or effectively the bond that glues people together. Sons no longer obey the will of parents, friends and colleagues; the traditional family has declined in importance; sexual desires are to the forefront, rather than taboo. However, in some ways this is not a reversal. The central characters involved are men, not women. Where women feature, they are more as objects of desire rather than being active, dynamic agents.

## Religion

Previously, it has already been mentioned that religion is of less significance in Basque than in Welsh Preserved. Nevertheless, the contribution that Catholicism has made to Basque identity historically has also been mentioned. In films such as *Obaba*, *Tasio* and *Secrets of the Heart* churches are a part of the rural village landscape, and a focus of local communities. Religious ceremonies such as weddings and Easter feature in plots and settings, and there are

schoolroom scenes that include Spanish nuns and priests in the roles of teachers. But rather than being spiritual, moral and educational leaders, they tend to feature more as harsh and intolerant, particularly towards Basque children. In this sense religion is bound up with Spanish rule, Catholicism encompasses both Spaniards and Basque nationalists, being caught up in the politics of domination and subordination, according to these films.

In Basque films categorised as belonging to Reversal, religion is not 'reversed' as such, but becomes something to either be critiqued, mocked or simply ignored. For instance in *The Death of Mikel* the mother is unable to accept Mikel's sexuality. She is portrayed as a devout, regularly churchgoing Catholic. It is suggested that her small town religious outlook contributes to her son's death. Thus her Catholicism is a negative factor, and is compared with ETA's own conservatism and homophobia.

In *Ander and Yul* we see in that when Ander is released from jail and journeys home by bus, as he gets off the bus he dumps a crucifix from his bag in a bin. In this very short moment on screen we are presented with the possibility that religion perhaps provided some means of comfort and of coping with life in jail. But it is dropped unceremoniously as soon as he regains his freedom. There is perhaps a sense of Ander moving on, and moving away from an old way of being towards a fresh start, though he soon becomes involved with drugs again.

Moving on from the critique and abandonment of religion, the film *Airbag* contains a ridiculous wedding ceremony, during which Juantxo the groom abandons his bride and takes off with Vicenta N'Dongo the prostitute from the bordello he visited during his stag party, and inside whom he lost the wedding ring given to him by his mother-in-law. Added to this, whilst at the church altar, cocaine that has got into Juantxo's pocket inadvertently during the chase to get the ring back from an underworld gang leader accidentally falls out and lands on the priest's face.

This mockery of the church is also clearly evident in the film *El día de la bestia /Day of the Beast* (1995: Álex de la Iglesia). This features an obsessive Basque Catholic priest, Ángel Berriartúa (Alex Angulo) whose intricate mathematical calculations as a professor at a

Basque University lead him to predict the birth of the Devil's son on Christmas Eve in Madrid. Ángel goes to Madrid determined to commit all the evil he can in order to pass as a Satanist and draw the Devil out, gain his confidence and then defeat him (Buse, Toribio, Willis, 2007: 54). He conscripts the help of a fake TV futurologist Professor Cavan (Armando de Razzo) and a heavy metal fan José María (Santiago Segura). In a way they parody the three wise men, instead coming to kill the newborn child rather than to adore and offer gifts. Instead of underlining the virtuousness of poverty and the humble stable 'the film is ferociously critical of the glossy new Madrid of rampant Yuletide consumption (Buse, Toribio, Willis, 2007: 70). The extent to which religion is parodied in this film calls to mind Judith Butler's promotion of parody as a means of attacking oppressive ideas surrounding gender. In this case, it is not a critique of Catholicism as such, more a mockery of Christianity and faith in general.

What emerges in these films is how religion seems to be a part of traditional ways that a newer generation of Basques either reject, ignore or mock. It is shed in the same way that old loyalties to family, community, the nationalist and revolutionary cause in the form of ETA are shed, as individuals pursue their wants and desires. This is a part of the shedding of an old moral framework, along with the reduction in significance of old notions of collectivity and communality. In contrast to the stable and singular notions of identity and community that help to define *Preserved*, there are fractures within Basque identity and the emergence of plurality, and different perspectives on the once revered elements of Basque national identity.

## **Basque Reversal: conclusions**

Sections of this chapter have argued that Basque Reversal is a shift in the kinds of narratives of identity contained within films, along with differences in the kinds of perspectives adopted within films. Dualisms evident in the earlier chapter on *Preserved* are reversed. For instance some films adopt a noticeably feminine perspective, critique ETA and its methods, and focus on the individual rather than the family or community collective. Simultaneously, films focus on the harsh realities of urban life, and the subcultural social elements that compete for

existence in the postindustrial city, rather than the rural 'heartland' presented in *Preserved*. Women become more empowered, more masculine, and yet masculinity for men is critiqued and patriarchal culture and social organisation is decentred. The past is not entirely jettisoned, but is presented as something either to be escaped, or as simply an irrelevance. At the same time, the future is uncertain, and anxieties are clearly evident concerning the nationalist project either being hijacked by radicalism or submerged under personal desires and greed.

Instead of the Spanish state being presented as the 'evil' source of all oppression, films in *Reversal* highlight competition between street gangs, and ETA's predilection for harshly punishing those who do not conform to its own standards of conduct and brand of violent nationalism. ETA comes to be equated with Franco. In contrast to Spanish suppression and Basque resistance in *Preserved*, these films depict Basque on Basque violence, at the same time critiquing the conservatism and internal oppressions of 'the traditional' that were absent in *Preserved*. From being an important component of everyday life, religion comes to be the target of mockery.

*Reversal* in some ways may therefore be considered as a purging of the Basque cultural repertoire. This is the beginning of a process of the deconstruction of the dominant icons of Basque culture up to this point. Arguably, a process of the re-inscription of the term 'Basque' itself starts with presenting to audiences contemporary versions of Basque identity, and rejecting the stereotypes and icons of the past. Instead of the singular of *Preserved*, there are more plural versions. Basque *Reversal* is impossible to define without extended references to *Preserved*, because *Reversal* is an argument with the past, and of itself makes no sense if separated from *Preserved*, it is defined in relation to *Preserved*.

# Chapter Five: Welsh Reversal

## Introduction

This chapter discusses Welsh films that I regard as containing sufficient elements to be collectively regarded as Reversal. What is reversed are components of the dualisms that Welsh Preserved is built on. These differences and this distancing deconstruct patriarchy within Preserved through parodying some of its elements, in turn highlighting, for instance, the identities and power relations that characterise Preserved. Furthermore, it also highlights how many of the supposedly ‘naturally fixed’ and stable meanings on which narratives of Preserved are based are in fact temporary and open to (re)negotiation.

So the films discussed in this chapter tend to adopt a critical perspective instead of a simple acceptance or celebration of the past. Identity is no longer a taken for granted and collective, public ‘thing’. In contrast to Preserved, items of Welsh culture such as rugby, singing, bardic symbols, and Chapel are gently mocked through humorous or light-hearted treatment. In particular masculinity is problematised, these films pose questions about what makes a ‘real’ Welsh man, and engage with issues surrounding masculinity at a time when this is argued to be going through a period of crisis. The films discussed in this chapter were produced in the context of a period of deindustrialisation prior to the emergence of a new post industrial society and community, and an ‘Economic shift, bringing a far greater percentage of women in the paid work-force, who begin to undermine the strict demarcation of women’s and men’s ‘worlds’, ....women could start to exercise control over their own lives’ (Williams 1998: 69). Reflecting this context, families tend to feature as under economic pressure.

These films tend to adopt a critical perspective on notions of identity at the levels of the self, the family and the community. However, like films classed as Preserved, films classed as

Reversal still tend to draw on literature (including drama) as a source<sup>1</sup>. In comparison to Basque Reversal, these Welsh films may be regarded as more tentative and exploratory, less confident. In part this may be a reflection of a lack of film-making infrastructure and other support, and a reflection of the relatively less harsh Welsh experience of being a subject people in comparison to that of Basques. So Welsh films may be regarded as less complex than Basque, being more linear in terms of characterisation and plot in comparison. Plotlines tend to be resolved at the ends of the films rather than left hanging or forcefully resolved via death and destruction. The Welsh films in this category are far less discussed, unlike Basque films which have received regular critical and academic attention. Perhaps reflecting the relatively mild recent experience of being a minority nation, Welsh nationalism is much less directly evident, and these films tend to be less directly political. As will be discussed in more detail, where they do take a politically critical stance, Thatcherism tends to be the main target, rather than English rule in general.

Another aspect of reversal discussed in the previous chapter on Basque film is how this involves those previously either ignored or placed on the margins in films taking up centre stage. In the case of Welsh films, arguably, some earlier films do just this, for instance *Tiger Bay* (U.K. 1959: J. Lee Thompson). In the film the district Tiger Bay is portrayed as a vibrant working dockland in Cardiff, but crucially as a culturally and ethnically diverse part of Wales. The central character is a young girl from London, Gillie (Hayley Mills), who lives in a tenement block with her aunt. The other principal character is the Polish sailor Korchinsky (Horst Buchholz). *Tiger Bay* was produced at a time when Welsh films tended to be based around the characteristics of Preserved, and primarily feature Welsh men as the main

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<sup>1</sup> Examples include: Dylan Jones's 'Thicker Than Water' which became *Thicker Than Water* (1993: Marc Evans); Gareth Miles' stage Play *Dyrnod Branwen*, itself based on the second branch of *The Mabinogion*, forms the basis for the film *Branwen* (1994: Ceri Sherlock); the poetry and elements of the life story of the poet Prosser Rhys in *Atgof* (1998: Ceri Sherlock); the stage play 'Flesh and Blood' (2000: Helen Griffin) which became her film script *Little White Lies* (Wales 2006: Caradog Jones); William Owen Roberts' 2006 stage play 'Cymru Fach' which became *Cymru Fach* (2008: Gruffydd Davies); Caryl Lewis's 2005 novel 'Martha, Jac a Sianco' became *Martha, Jac a Sianco* (2008: Paul Jones) and Owen Sheers 2007 novel *Resistance* became *Resistance* (2011: Amit Gupta)

protagonists. In Reversal women transcend the narrow confines of the Welsh mam. They become the main protagonists, for example in *Resistance* (2011: Amit Gupta) Maggie (Sharon Morgan) and Sarah Lewis (Andrea Riseborough) become farmers confronting the harshness of the notorious winter of 1944 following their husbands mysterious disappearance. Gay men become visible, and their sympathetic portrayal critiques straight masculinities (which perceive gayness as 'evil' and taboo), as those who were previously cast as 'other' and outsiders come to be more central, whilst those previously central (e.g. the miner, the farmer etc.) become less significant.

Other forms of reversal are connected with the portrayal of families and other forms of social organisation and social institution. From being functional units featuring stable roles and routines, families become dysfunctional, with roles reversed and internal power struggles in ways that would seem unthinkable in films such as *How Green Was My Valley* or *On the Black Hill*. Children no longer follow in their parents' footsteps; instead they have aspirations and values that are now at odds with those of their parents. There is a dislocation between generations. Religion becomes more of an object of fun, a system of empty rituals. Funerals are still a feature of films in Reversal, but tend to have an element that destabilises the solemnity, reverence and the 'normality' that funerals have in *Preserved*. Nobody is publicly shamed in chapel or exiled, there is less of a sense of shared moral values. Similarly, the sense of community evident in *Preserved* is no longer evident.

Whereas *Preserved* focuses on 'the communal' ('the public' plus the domain of 'the home'), with 'the personal' elided or glossed over, in Reversal 'the personal' comes to be more of a focus than 'the communal'. A sense of 'community', and of collective identity, recedes. Rather than prioritising 'community', many characters instead prioritise family and self, and conflict arises between those who are more collectively orientated and those who have selfish motivations. Later chapters will argue that in postnational 'the communal' as the paramount social sphere or arena in which most of consequence in characters' lives takes place is simply not present. The movement from the collective to the individual continues, reaching a level beneath that of the individual. Characters become composed of ambiguous, conflicting elements, usually set in train by childhood events.



In common with Basque reversal, some films in Welsh Reversal are the work of emerging women directors. These are *Very Annie Mary* (2001: Sara Sugarman), *Happy Now* (2001: Philippa Collie-Cousins) and *A Way of Life* (2004: Amma Asante). Also like Basque film, Reversal is connected with a focus on the harsh realities of life for an urban underclass, on gritty realism, and a sounding of an alarm bell regarding the fate of the newest generation of young people in Wales.

The previous chapter discussed Reversal in terms of this being therapeutic, as a stepping away from the security, stability and ‘comfort blanket’ of the past, to begin to embrace the instability and unpredictability of the present and the future. Yet this movement is also a shift from a preoccupation with a mythologised and perhaps psychologically sustainable past to addressing a more disturbing present. This decentring of traditional narratives may be regarded as an attempt to heal contemporary social problems and the damage they are causing. However, there is also the possibility of the liberating effects of films either shedding traditional cultural baggage, particularly where this baggage seems outdated, or poking fun at stereotypical elements of Preserved culture.

## **Wider political and socio-cultural changes**

As was the case in the Basque Reversal, the changes in source material discussed above reflect changes in the wider political and socio-cultural contexts in which Welsh films were being made. A fundamental change was the shift to right wing monetarist economic policy, and the deepening of social divisions and labour unrest associated with this, as evident during the period when Margaret Thatcher was the British Prime Minister. The seeds for this were arguably sown earlier though, starting with the recession under the Edward Heath Government of 1970 -1974, conflict with the Unions, the two coal miner’s strikes of 1972 and 1974, a rising unemployment crisis and the three day working week. To some extent, this mirrored Spanish and Basque experiences in the 1970s, with a deterioration of labour relations throughout the 1970’s and 20,000 miners on strike in Asturian mines in Spain, with

major disputes involving shipyard and agricultural workers in the Basque country (Preston 1986: 25). Thatcher came to power in 1979, and ‘coming after a long span of the same party in power, was accompanied by strong expectations from the population who clearly wanted political and social changes to take place’ (Lehin 2005: 213). She was determined to limit the power of the Unions that had brought the Heath government to its knees. The prime example of this is of course the miner’s strike of 1982, when Thatcher crushed the National Union of Miners.

This battle with the Unions took place within the much wider global context of the changing economic and social circumstances associated with deindustrialisation and the emergence of a ‘postindustrial’ society. Films in Welsh reversal therefore document the decline of longstanding, traditional forms of employment. They depict Welsh men as suffering under an exploitative rule, as even more marginalised by the changing economic rule associated with Thatcherism, and the rise of the ‘greedy’ 1980s, when ‘community’ supposedly collapsed in the face of personal ambition and upward social mobility. But these films are not so much critical of an explicitly ‘English’ rule, but much more to the rule of the centre and right wing economics. Margaret Thatcher becomes the focus of discontent, the cause of all problems, rather than this being presented as merely English. The fact that her policies were impacting on the lives of miners and other workers in traditional industries in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, as well as Wales, contributed to the clear sense that this was not simply another round of exploitation and marginalisation by ‘the English’, but economic and cultural marginalisation from a centre located within a part of England (McLoone 2001: 188). So for instance, Welsh miners came out on strike in support of their English colleagues when a ‘hit list’ of mine closures became public knowledge.

This marginalisation was most directly experienced through ‘the serious threat to personal and social health represented by unemployment and poverty’ (Williams 1998: 77), and which in Wales, as elsewhere, impacted on whole communities (Jachimciak 2006: 95). This was experienced most intensely within communities based around traditional forms of industry, such as mining and steel making. As a consequence, local issues in films, relating to the lack of work or other opportunities, are placed within a wider Welsh and British context within the trade union movement. Crucially, events and problems are shown as being largely

irresolvable at a local level. In this respect, it is possible to see Margaret Thatcher as in some ways similar to how Franco was regarded by Basques as a figure of hate and icon of oppression, bearing in mind that Franco was an undemocratically elected dictator, and thousands were sentenced to death during his rule. Basques could look to how he oppressed political opponents and critics on the Left within Spain, and regard Franco as personally responsible for their pain, rather than the wider Spanish nation.

It has been argued that a consequence of the collapse of traditional forms of employment in Britain, and across much of the so called 'First World' was a crisis for masculinity. This was because the 'central tenets upon which previous masculinity was based (patriarchy, breadwinning, tasks demanding strength)' were eroded (Beynon 2002: 159). Men lost their positions as the only or main wage earners in families. Women increasingly took their places, employed in newer, different types of jobs. A feature of films discussed in this chapter is the extent to which women are louder, they drink in pubs, they smoke, they have their own money. Men in contrast are failures, lost, without purpose. Hand in hand with this is the collapse of distinctions between rural and urban, the Valleys become neither city nor countryside, merely a depressed area, in some ways not unlike a Third World setting where external investment or grant funding represents the only real hope for local regeneration.

In addition to this, another significant development is the movement towards the limited political autonomy that Wales now has from England. By the 1970s pressure had grown sufficiently for the English Labour government to propose a referendum on devolution for Wales and Scotland. This occurred within the context of a wider resurgence of calls for political autonomy amongst minority nations across Europe, in Catalonia, Corsica, Brittany, Flanders, Scotland, Wales and the Basque Country (Smith 2001: 88).

But in 1979, only 12% of the Welsh electorate voted for devolution, and in Scotland only 32.5%. Under the Conservative administration, the matter was taken off the political agenda. But when a second referendum was held in 1997, following the end of the Conservative administration, Wales voted for devolution by a tiny majority. A Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) was duly founded, with limited powers relating to matters such as health

and education. Many decisions taken by WAG have to be ratified in Westminster, though the recent referendum in 2011 on this issue saw a substantial majority in favour of the extension of WAG's powers.

In 1986 the director of the radical Brith Cof theatre company Cliff McLucas recommended to the Welsh Arts Council Film and Video committee of which he was a member that it 'should encourage the development of an independent film and video culture that grows out of Wales' [Film Committee – minutes and papers deposit Film /C/1/8 1986-89:8.3d held at The National Library of Wales ]. If this recommendation had been wholeheartedly adopted, S4C (created in 1982 and imposing its own parameters on the films that it funds) would not have been the only body providing a platform for Welsh language feature film makers.

## **Wales, deindustrialization and the collapse of patriarchy**

The economic context outlined above and its social consequences are clearly evident in three films directed by Karl Francis whose films have been described as portraying 'the tradition of a Loach or an Alan Clark' (Blandford 2000: 28), 'disquieting realities of South Wales life' (Berry 1994: 376), and focusing on 'social and political problems' (Berry 2000: 130). These films also feature the same kinds of reversals of dualisms on which *Preserved* is based that characterised Basque Reversal. So for instance the kinds of communities based on mining, quarrying and steel working that featured so prominently in *Preserved* are depicted as distressed, depressed, fractured and collapsed in *Reversal*. Two of these films do not employ a cast of actors, Francis uses real people whose everyday lives are similar to the events depicted in the stories that the films relate. So in *Above Us The Earth* (1977: Karl Francis), miners are played by real miners, their families play the parts of miner's families in the film, and Union organizers are played by real life representatives of the miner's union.

The film opens with a stereotype of industrial community, a dairy van delivering pints of milk in glass bottles to terraced house doorsteps. But the film depicts the breaking down of stability under external political and economic pressures, focusing on miners striking

following a decision to close Ogilvie Colliery. It ‘records the friction and anxiety attendant on the redeployment of the men to other pits’ (Tarratt 1977:44). The film depicts miners attending meetings, standing in picket lines, and clashing with the police. We are shown future Labour Party Leader Neil Kinnock (Welsh born, with working-class ‘Valleys’ credentials, and often characterised by his intensely emotional speeches) driving his car in the rain as he follows the miners’ coach to a political meeting. Michael Foot (local M.P. and cabinet Minister of Trade and Employment in James Callaghan’s Labour government at the time, and another future leader of the Labour Party prior to Neil Kinnock) sits in the back seat holding important documents. But the conversation is not on the paperwork, nor the meeting that both are shortly to address, they are talking to each other about other matters.

The message is that even the Labour Party in Wales is not particularly interested in the plight of these miners. Foot and Kinnock are shown at the meeting saying that the miners should move to other pits that are still working, which for later audiences refers forward in time to Conservative Party Leader Norman Tebbit’s infamous ‘get on your bike and look for work’ speech a decade later. Foot’s ‘mild words of sympathy are dutifully as a matter of courtesy’ (Tarratt 1977: 45). What comes across clearly is a sense of miners abandoned to their own fates, marginalised by a political centre, but also of a fracturing of the kind of working class solidarity the Labour Party might be associated with. In one melancholy scene workers are shown in an aerial shot walking in the pit head yard where snow partially covers coal truck rail lines, suggesting disuse and dereliction. Other scenes show unemployed miners walking to interviews with the local union secretary, and walking to meet the bus to take them to a meeting. The lack of private transport underlines the sense of harsh times and their poverty. Furthermore, Neil Kinnock’s lack of sympathy to the mining community’s plight can be read as a much more muted form of the kinds of internal divisions within the minority nation that featured in Basque films.

The film focuses on the fictional example of a miner Windsor Rees (played by himself, and in real life a miner), suffering from pit dust inhalation (silicosis). This renders him unable to work, or even walk. He does not qualify for proper assistance, he gets no sickness allowance from his employers since silicosis was not recognised as a work related illness, and his health

will not allow him to work in another pit. In comparison to being a major icon of Preserved, Welsh miners are depicted as ‘failed’ men. Furthermore, we learn that his only son Ozzie never had intentions of following in his father’s line of work. The film illustrates how the plight of miners like Rees was brushed over by those in positions of authority, such as Joe Gormley, President of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Gormley is shown in a television interview stating that there are clear economic arguments for shutting down pits, but no need for unemployment. Members of his own union watching his appearance are stunned by this. There is a clear implication of miners ‘having been sold out by the very men they voted into power’ (Tarratt 1977: 44)

When Windsor Rees dies, his fellow miners, mainly in their fifties, are unable to attend his funeral because they are now working at another colliery some distance away. The film clearly shows how they are expected to transfer loyalties to another pit, and another community. Windsor Rees’ coffin is arguably a symbol of the death of traditional, local working communities in Wales, and elsewhere in Britain.

In this respect it is possible to see the foregrounding of a sense of working class identity that extends beyond Wales and is based on a pan national sense of class identity. This is something that underpinned the formation of the Miners Federation of Great Britain in Newport, Monmouthshire in 1888 and the South Wales Miners Federation in 1898. Both of these organisations were to eventually merge with other miner’s organisations from England and Scotland to form the National Union of Mineworkers in 1945. This pan-national class identity is something that is largely ignored in films of Preserved, with their focus on essentialised, introverted narratives of Welshness.

Scenes of striking miners clashing with the police are also a feature of *Ms Rhymney Valley* (1985: Karl Francis). This film takes place during the 1984-5 miner’s strike in Britain, and again, characters in the film are played by non-professional actors drawn from the community shown in the film. The film depicts the changing politics of gender associated with the 1970s and 1980s. It shows how miners’ wives joined picket lines to try to prevent ‘scabs’ from breaking the strike. Unlike in Preserved, we see women outside their traditional domestic

role, as an organised and politically active unit, vociferous, away from home and hearth. However, they have still not transcended traditional notions of gender, as the film shows them in traditional nurturing roles, organising soup kitchens for striking miners, fundraising events, and support for miners arrested on picket duties.

The film focuses on a beauty contest organised by Abe Roberts (played by himself), the local Labour Party chairman along with Roy Davies, a local Labour County Councillor. Abe Roberts, and to a lesser extent Roy Davies, is presented as the holder of very traditional ideas about femininity that clash profoundly with those of young out of work Charmaine Nind (played by herself), a charismatic and fiery granddaughter of a former miners' union leader. She is on bail following being arrested on a picket line. She is incensed by the idea of a beauty competition for women in swimsuits as a fundraising event, and the 'contradictions implicit in the idea of holding a conventional beauty contest at a time when women were joining their men on the picket line' (Berry 1994: 388). Charmaine is told by Abe that her stance is 'feminist nonsense ... we can't have women running us,' The contest can be seen as an attempt to push women back into the narrow category of 'feminine' made available by the patriarchal social system associated with Preserved. This is clearly suggested by Charmaine's assertion that 'women make policy, not tea'. The contest is changed for one that honours the wives of imprisoned miners. Nominations are judged by an all women panel chaired by Charmaine, and the prize, equally divided amongst three wives and their families, is a pint glass full of paper money. Implicit within this row over a beauty contest is how:

'the politics of the Thatcher government denied the existence of poverty, other than to recognize it as a consequence of the failing individual. It did not recognize structural causes of poverty or any link between the collapse of the economic environment in Wales and increases in the measured levels of deprivation' (Adamson 1999: 42).

In the third film, *Streetlife* (1995: Karl Francis), the focus is again on women and poverty, 'disquieting realities' (Berry 1994: 376) and 'contemporary social problems' (Berry 2000: 130, Risoli 1997: 10). The film is set on a typical South Wales housing estate which is huge, bleak, badly planned, badly built, run down and riven with drugs and other crime. It is populated by the disenfranchised and the marginalised, who face massive unemployment and few opportunities. In this unpromising setting, a group of eight women, who are leading

disturbing lifestyles, set up a cut price laundry business. The film suggests that women working together involves co-operation and collaboration, stereotypically feminine characteristics, but these have to be negotiated amongst a group within which loyalty only extends so far. These women are portrayed as tough, streetwise, they compete for each other's boyfriends. Some of them are sex workers. The film presents them sympathetically, not sensationally. In some ways they are new icons for the Valleys of the 1980s and 1990s, in the same way that miners and steelworkers were previously. They stand for a perceived moral and social decline that has come hand in hand with economic decline.

These women are a far cry from the demure, domestic, religious, placid women of *Preserved*. For instance the character Gail (Donna Edwards) dresses in a fake leopard skin coat. We see her carrying black plastic bin bags of laundry on the housing estate. In her own council house she sells telephone sex, and she and her friend Jo (Helen McCrory) pose for pornographic photographs for cash. The eight women dress colourfully, and have visibly dyed hair (some being peroxide blondes) in marked contrast to the figure of the woman of *Preserved* in tight fitting black hat and heavy dark overcoat dressed for Sunday chapel.

As the main wage earners for their families, these women are shaping a matriarchal economic and social order. The families however are quite different from the idealised units presented in *Preserved*. Where men contribute to families, it is only in the form of infrequent help with masculine chores such as decorating. Men otherwise feature merely as punters, to be milked for cash via sex work. Single mothers predominate, including the one character, Lynwen (Lynwen Hobbs) who is a grandmother. When her daughter Jo becomes pregnant, she advises her to get rid of the baby. Jo rejects this advice, clinging to the vain hope that the father, Kevin (Rhys Ifans), will leave his wife and come to her and the baby, although she already has a daughter living with her from a previous relationship. In a quite shocking scene, she gives birth in her mother's caravan in Porthcawl, where she has gone alone, and then kills the baby, dumping the body in a plastic bag in the river. It is difficult to think of a scene that could more thoroughly enact a reversal of the discourses on which the icon of the Welsh mam is founded.



The purpose of the film would seem to be to inform, to show audiences the harsh realities of life for women in urban Wales. We are encouraged to feel sympathy for these women, to understand the effects of the pressures they live under, especially those that push Jo into infanticide. In relation to power, their destinies are shaped by economic and political forces that ultimately they have little or no control over. Significantly, Jo describes how she was initially attracted to Kevin when she first met him by learning that he shared a dream of an escape to the countryside to wear 'green wellies' and raise chickens. Arguably, this is perhaps an echo of the narratives of *Preserved*, where the rural is constructed as a place of tranquility and regeneration, where authentic roots reside or may be put down. But here, this is only seen as an empty dream, the rural almost as mythical, as though the harsh realities of life in the Valleys overwhelms the project of being Welsh and buries it beneath the struggles of merely surviving.

In terms of how these three films address the harsh realities of everyday life, Karl Francis's work might be compared with that of Daniel Calparsoro, the Basque director whose portrayal of postindustrial urban subculture was discussed in the previous chapter. However, there are some significant differences. Calparsoro's trilogy of films (*Jump into the Void*, *Pasajes* and *Blinded*) are all set within a Basque urban landscape, within two years of each other, and feature interchangeable characters and cast. Francis's trilogy of films, although all set in the Valleys, are spread over two decades, and feature distinctive cast and characters. They chart a progression through time from male unemployment through gender politics to female assertion, with each being very much a product of the time it was made. It was argued in the last chapter that Calparsoro's films could be seen as a wake up call to Basque audiences that confronts them with contemporary social problems within Basque society. The short length of time that separates these films in turn prompts a sense of urgency, when these films are considered as a trilogy. In contrast, although Francis's films confront audiences with the same overall themes of poverty and marginalization, each of the films adopts a different perspective, highlighting different aspects of contemporary social problems, as these become more evident at different stages. It has been argued that in relation to deindustrialization in Wales 'social dislocation was most apparent in areas of poverty and economic decline' (Jones 1999: 20), and Francis's three films reflect how the pain of economic collapse has lasted longer and extended deeper in Wales in comparison to the Basque Country.

## The changing position of Welsh women

A key theme in these films is the changing role of men, from breadwinners and heads of families in *Preserved* to far less powerful and active roles within families and communities. As previously mentioned, this ties in with the 'crisis of masculinity' associated at least in part with the decline of traditionally masculine forms of employment in coal, steel, quarrying and other industries in Wales. However, in these three films gender roles have not been reversed, in that women have not fully transcended the home and the kinds of nurturing roles associated with *Preserved*. Women are largely absent from *Above Us The Earth*, and struggle to prevent the staging of a traditional female beauty contest in *Ms Rhymney Valley*, the kind of event that reduces contestants to a set of attributes mainly connected with physical appearance, to be assessed in accordance with the 'rules' of dominant heterosexuality. That Charmaine Nind, the chief objector to the contest, is on bail, is a testament to her active involvement in the miners' strike. However, she is arguably caught up in fighting a men's battle, for those who still adhere to the kinds of old fashioned narratives about women that make a beauty contest seem like a good idea. She has to battle the men she was arrested for supporting in order to seek to lift women out of the gender 'ghetto' of *Preserved*, where they are 'firmly fixed within the domestic space. A matriarch in her own home, 'Mam' had little power and influence outside it' (Ryan 2000: 39).

The women in *Streetlife* run their own business and achieve a degree of independence. But through the laundry, they are still directly connected to the kinds of domestic responsibilities and work that was their lot in *Preserved*. And through sex work, they are of course gaining a new found independence that, as Perrins (2000: 165) comments whilst discussing prostitution, is nonetheless dependant on the men's continuing role as sexual predators. So, although in these three films there is a progressive movement of women away from the domestic and more into the world beyond the home, only relatively small steps seem to be evident. This becomes especially clear when these films are compared with those of Calpasoro and others in *Reversal*, where women characters carry and use guns, as criminals

and killers for ETA. However, in other Welsh films made around the same time as *Above Us The Earth*, *Ms Rhymney Valley* and *Streetlife*, women are depicted in arguably more powerful roles that are further removed from kitchen and the bedroom. This mirrors wider changes at the time, in particular the emergence of the UK's first woman Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.

## **Women take control**

A collection of films portray women in ways that clearly reverse gender relation and roles associated with Preserved. In wider terms this is directly connected with the erosion of patriarchy, the decline of traditionally male forms of employment, and changes in social and cultural contexts associated with de- and post-industrialisation. In some ways the simplistic moral framework of external domination of the minority nation is therefore evident in these films. *Coming Up Roses* (1986: Stephen Bayly) also depicts 'South Wales life under the Tories in the eighties' (Berry 1994: 328), and the 'struggles to survive pit closures' (ibid: 329). At the start of the film we hear the sound of a hammer nailing up warning signs and danger signs on disused buildings, and for sale signs being put up. The local Rex cinema is for sale, and other images include broken window panes and boarded windows.

We meet Trefor (Dafydd Hywel) the now out of work cinema projectionist. It is the only occupation he knows, or is qualified for. Tref cannot afford a decent home for himself: his rented room is next door to a drummer who practices on his drums all hours, above the local fish and chip shop. We see him prepare to sell his maroon Mini to pay debts accrued by his ex-wife and her new partner, with whom his two sons live. Her video machine is repossessed, along with a red settee. Tref could quite easily be taken as a metaphor for Welsh miners, losing their livelihoods. Paying his ex-wife's debts could be a metaphor for a loss of masculinity. The cinema becomes a metaphor for the plight of South Wales (Berry 1994: 328), 'urban blight' and 'pit closures under Thatcherism' (Berry 2000:143). As with the films previously discussed, a clear element of Reversal is a breaking down of the stabilities associated with Preserved, notably the stability of male roles as breadwinners, heads of

traditional family units and wielders of social power. In a scene that may be seen as heavy with symbolism, we see Mona (Iola Gregory), the cleaner inside the deserted cinema. She performs a song in front of the screen with plastic roses in one hand and a feather duster in the other, whilst Tref lights her with up a spotlight. She sings:

Everything's coming up roses!  
You'll be swell! You'll be great!  
Gonna have the whole world on the plate!  
Starting here, starting now,  
Honey, everything's coming up roses!  
They think that we're through  
Everything's coming up roses!

If the cinema stands for South Wales, then it is women who are taking centre stage and looking to the future, whilst powerless men can only look on and grant them the spotlight. Ironically, the local Council officials declare the site of the Rex Cinema as suitable for a car park. Tref is selling his car, Mona does not have one.

Mona uses the closed down cinema auditorium to grow mushrooms for sale, before the building is due to be auctioned off. This is to raise money to help Tref repay money lent to him by Mr Davies (W. J. Phillips) his former boss at the cinema, who is now dead. Without this Mr Davies's grave cannot be marked with a headstone in accordance with his wishes. Mona harvests the mushrooms with the help of fellow women, who wear miners helmets with lamps on their heads. They are like miners working, each row of seats is like a seam of coal, with baskets of mushrooms passed along to the aisles to be packed and weighed out for distribution. This is another layer of parody.

Significantly, June (Mari Emlyn), Mona's daughter is a single mother. Mona's own partner, June's father, is also an absent figure in the film. Again, from being centre stage and the heads of families in *Preserved*, fathers in contrast tend to be absent figures in *Reversal*, or 'powerless' in the case of Tref. To further underline the extent of economic depression, Mona

takes in June's baby whilst June goes to Birmingham to secure a place on a government employment scheme. In both *Bydd Yn Wrol/Be Brave* (1997: Terry Dyddgen Jones) and *Coming Up Roses* the film ends with the future still uncertain and unsecured. All that is achieved is that the immediate future of the hall is saved in *Be Brave*, and in *Coming Up Roses* Tref manages to provide a headstone for his former boss's grave. In both cases the actions of the main protagonists are aimed at historical legacy and obligation, the repaying of debt literally in the case of the headstone, figuratively as part of the project of paying tribute to miner as part of the local past. In both cases, tribute to the dead is involved, as well as those in the present fulfilling a moral obligation, a connection to the past and 'better times'. Both Tref and Arichen are unswayed by the possibility of personal gain, Tref does right by his dead boss, and in the face of corruption and exploitation Arichen uses her knowledge about the private and shameful goings on of locals for the benefit of her community rather than herself. Other films in this category of Welsh Reversal lack this kind of unambiguous moral duty towards previous generations and local community.

The themes of powerless men and the dysfunctional families are also evident in *Oed Yr Addewid/Do Not Go Gentle* (2000: Emlyn Williams). The central character Wil (Stewart Jones) is an aging widower with Alzheimer's who is committed to a private nursing home when his daughter, Maureen (Gwenno Elis Hodgkins) refuses to take him in. We learn of his involvement with chapel because one of his few personal possessions in the nursing home is a tuning fork, which he used as leader of singing during services. We also learn that, encouraged by the Thatcher government, he bought his council house, but now faces financial ruin because the house must be sold to pay for his fees at the private nursing home. There is no room for dementia patients in the local state nursing home. A direct link between his plight and Margaret Thatcher's policies is thus clearly established (Woodward 2006: 53). Once again, a father figure is absent, in that Maureen is a single mother of three, with two part time jobs (ironically including being a cleaner at the local Conservative club). We learn that she gave up years of her life tending to her sick mother until her death. Wil cannot understand why she will not now do the same for him.

This is not an issue raised in connection with his two sons however. The obligation that Wil feels is on Maureen connects directly with the stereotypes of gender that shape women and

men's roles in *Preserved*, and the kinds of ideas that confined women to the domestic and nurturing. There is no sense that either of Wil's two sons feels any obligation to take him in themselves, until there is a major change of circumstance. In comparison to Maureen, the sons have had a good education and opportunities beyond the local. The elder son, John Meredith's (Gwyn Vaughan) successfulness is symbolised by him arriving at the nursing home in a large, expensive car. He later tries to give Maureen money to clean up Wil's house after he moves out. It is the younger son, Alun Cledwyn (Arwel Gruffydd) who takes Wil out of the nursing home. Alun has just lost his job because of his alcoholism, and resolved that he will return home to look after his father. Sadly when he returns Wil to his home, which is up for sale, Wil dies in the night. Together, Alun and Wil symbolise the powerlessness of men, whereas through her decision to get Wil into the nursing home, Maureen demonstrates her relative powerfulness.

The link between Wil's life and Conservatism is made even clearer by the events portrayed in the film taking place during spring 1997, and the final six weeks of Tory government before the sweeping victory of the Labour party. Wil passes away on the final night of the Tory regime that he so despised. During the film he refers to her disparagingly as 'an alligator' and 'a crocodile'. Yet this aversion to the Conservatives stems partly from Wil's sexism, he cannot stomach a woman Prime Minister, nor his daughter's position of power in relation to him. Wil is clearly an icon for a collapsing generation of Welsh men; physically feeble, sexist, unaccepting of change, blind to his own shortcomings, and still trying to be the patriarch. This is further underlined when he runs away from the nursing home, from where he is under the control of female nursing staff.

The sweeping economic changes, the relative powerlessness of men, and the emergence of strong women characters assuming roles associated with men as heads of families and the doers of social action in *Preserved* tend to be attributed to Margaret Thatcher directly. There is a strong similarity here with how the problems faced by Basques are attributed to Franco in *Preserved*. In comparison, *Basque Reversal* features critiques of ETA and its methods, as Basque audiences are encouraged to look more closely at themselves and violence in critical ways. Thus a major difference is that in *Basque Reversal*, potential solutions to problems lie with Basques themselves, whereas in Wales the source of problems lies beyond the border

and out of reach of Welsh people. There is no sense of anything other than temporary respite and relief being achievable within Wales by Welsh people. The fate of the nation is beyond the powers of the Welsh, who are presented as relatively powerless in comparison to how Basques are presented in the films of Reversal.

Arguably the death of Franco presented the Basques with such optimism for the future, that the impacts of economic restructuring and recession on the relatively well off Basque country do not assume the same widespread impacts that they did in Wales under the Conservative government. This must be coupled with the argument that the Welsh economy was far more vulnerable than the Basque.

## **The reversal of Welsh morality: social class, sex, drugs and corruption**

A collection of films also span the movement towards and the founding of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). There is also a significant additional dimension, in that individual Welsh characters are also portrayed as corrupt and opportunistic exploiters of others, a feature not evident in *Preserved*, where generally all Welsh characters are ‘good’ and at the mercy of the ‘evil’ English. These films feature men in powerful, respected positions being toppled or otherwise punished by characters that occupy marginal positions; an elderly spinster in *Be Brave*, two young students in *In the Company of Strangers* (1999: Endaf Emlyn), and two feckless unemployed youths in *Twin Town* (1997: Kevin Allen). In addition, this theme is also clearly evident in *Cymru Fach* (2008: Gruffudd Davies). In particular three of the ten interlinked stories in the film feature the exposure of respected men’s sexual infidelities (a politician, a musician, and an academic).

In almost every case personal knowledge about men is used to either expose or threaten to expose them publicly. In some cases the exposure or threat of exposure is done in support of community-based campaigns, within a relatively simplistic moral framework. In others it is

for personal gain or revenge, with morality more complex. In some cases the wider Welsh elite, especially the political elite, are the target. Collectively these films represent a sustained attack on patriarchy, only one corrupt character in these films is a woman, WAG finance staff member Annie Lloyd (Menna Trussler) in *In the Company of Strangers*.

*Be Brave* focuses on Arthur (William Thomas), a councillor and chair of Planning for Blaenllechau, in the Rhondda Valley. Blaenllechau was founded as a colliery village in 1857, with two pits. The film is set in the 1980s, at a time when traditional roles for men within a mining community were disappearing. The film depicts corruption, in that Arthur has his own plans for demolishing the local Municipal Hall, so that his son-in-law, a builder, can construct a new supermarket in its place. He is opposed by Arichen (Menna Trussler), an elderly, loud chapel goer (amongst a small congregation) and a regular at the bingo hall. She voices her opposition in public and mobilises local opposition to Arthur's plans. She starts by arousing the opinions of her fellow elderly locals, pointing out to them how the hall was built on the labour of previous generations of local miners. She says 'Listen the rest of you geriatrics, my father and brother helped to build this place', and 'This place is more than bricks and mortar. It's sweat and blood and strength and effort and a thousand other things worth fighting for'. Clearly, what is at stake is a symbol of Preserved and the patriarchy associated with it, but it is an elderly woman who leads the fight to keep it.

She gains the support of local 19 year old Jules (Matthew Rhys), who is gay. At a public meeting he informs Arthur that the hall is history, and stakes his claim as a local gay man to be part of this history, and unequivocally a member of the local community. Jules is a clear example of those either invisible or on the margins in Preserved moving towards centre stage in Reversal, as the straight, powerful, able bodied white men who take up centre stage in Preserved move away towards the margins. For instance, Arthur is a local symbol of the 'greed is good' ethos that is sometimes said to epitomise the Thatcher era. His greed comes to position him as an outsider or outcast, he is not trusted. During the public meeting, Arichen asks 'Whose pocket is the money going into?' She asks if Arthur is the 'chair of self development'.



Arichen uses her local knowledge of everybody's private conduct against those who oppose her, including some of Arthur's fellow councillors. She is aware that the councillor holding a key vote has had an affair. Again, this kind of internal conflict is about as close as Welsh film gets to the murderousness of Basque-on-Basque conflict in films such as *Yoyes*, *Ander and Yul* or *Arian's Journey*. Arichen differs from the stereotypes of Preserved in that we learn that she is a spinster, she is neither Welsh Mam nor wayward daughter. She is similar to Charmaine in *Ms Rhymney Valley* in that she too is fighting for the local miners, in this case not for their jobs but for their heritage. In addition, she has plans for the hall to be used for the benefit of the local community. She mobilises local drug addicts amongst the local young unemployed, to redecorate the inside of the hall. This is in preparation for a fundraising concert at which the famous Welsh singer Tom Jones will headline. However, it transpires that the act the youngsters manage to secure is merely a lookalike Tom Jones, Arichen comes to realise this when he turns up on the night. The rest of the audience in the hall remain blissfully unaware, as enough money is raised to save the hall from demolition. It is quite ironic, given Judith Butler's arguments relating to parody, that at a time when masculinity is in crisis, those opposed to the demolition of the hall look to a contemporary icon of Welsh masculinity, Tom Jones, only for an imitation 'Tom Jones' to prove to be their saviour.

The theme of powerful men being toppled from positions of authority and respect is also clearly evident in *In the Company of Strangers*, *Cymru Fach* and *Twin Town*. The downfall of Conor White (Robert Pugh), a fictional Labour Assembly Member, features in *In the Company of Strangers*, which is set in 2001, two years into the future when it was made. The title immediately suggests a departure from the closely knit communities that films of Preserved tend to be centred on, and the systems of morals and values on which narratives of Welsh identity in Preserved tend to be based.

Cardiff students Kim (Nia Roberts) and Elen (Mali Harris) expose his affair with Kim's sister Helen (Nia Roberts). After Helen is found drowned in Cardiff Bay, they investigate whether he may be responsible for killing her when she became pregnant. However, the film is more complex. Elements of Preserved are included, for instance in one scene David Robb (Fergus Campbell), an English Labour MP at Westminster, refers to Wales as 'that pissy little country of yours' when in conversation with Conor White. The film also features the character Annie

Lloyd. She is the leader of the WAG financial team. Superficially she resembles a Welsh mam in that she is imposing, solid, trusted, and colleagues and politicians confide in her. She is popular, well known, very much like a mother figure to her 'family' at WAG. The only element that distances her from the icon of Welsh mam is that she is a professional, in a position of authority, in what is still a masculine area of work. But behind her façade she is corrupt, she is part of a conspiracy by male Assembly Members to get rid of their female leader. We see Annie Lloyd plant money into the private off-shore bank account of fictional Assembly First Minister Tina Martin (Gillian Elisa). When Tina Martin is murdered, this money is discovered and assumed to be bribes she has accepted. Tina Martin is therefore discredited, and Annie Lloyd also emerges as a traitor to women. In this respect, her character is actually the reverse of the Welsh mam which she at first seems to so closely resemble.

The film can be seen as a cynical representation of people in powerful positions within contemporary Wales, almost a parody of levels of corruption in politics, of a masculine dislike of and discomfort with a woman in a position of prime authority, which leads to the death of Tina Martin. Annie Lloyd, as superficially a Welsh mam, does not attract this discomfort. Coming at the time of the founding of WAG, it is also possible to see this film as perhaps a statement of anxiety about autonomy, with audiences being warned that Welsh politicians may be no better than any others in the public limelight, and perhaps even more subject to exposure within the small confines of Wales.

This last theme is also clearly evident in *Cymru Fach*. The film comprises 10 short episodes or scenes, each featuring two characters. The following scene features a character from the preceding scene plus a new character, so the accumulative effect is to present a series of characters whose lives are intertwined, thus suggestive of the 'small Wales' of the title. This in turn links with an old saying in Welsh, 'perfedd mochyn' (literally 'a pig's guts'), which is used to refer to people as closely interrelated or dependent, after the finely intertwined appearance of a pig's entrails when it is slaughtered. This film also features men in powerful, authoritative positions being exposed and toppled due to sexual indiscretions and fraud. These include an academic, Eurwyn (Aneirin Hughes), handing out academic honours for sexual favours, and Raymond (Steffan Rhodri) using his network of personal connections to obtain WAG funding for a fake music and video promotion. The film thus also features the

making 'public' of the supposedly 'private' of sex and sexuality. 'The personal' in terms of the sexual desires and personal greed and ambitions of these men prove to be their downfall, their emotional motivations destroy their standing on 'the communal' stage.

It is also significant that generally, these male characters are married, but without heirs. Thus, in terms of the values of *Preserved*, they are failures, terminal points in family lines instead of having sons to whom they could pass on wealth, property, possessions, values and knowledges. These men can therefore be seen as 'traitors' to patriarchy, undermining the patriarchal order of inheritance as well as undermining the position of men in general in society and culture through letting personal emotions and motivations erode male supremacy within 'the communal'.

The lack of confidence in Welsh politicians evident in *Be Brave* and *In the Company of Strangers* broadens out in *Cymru Ffach* to be a more general pessimism about an emergent Welsh Cardiff and Swansea based middle class. In *Preserved*, Welsh characters tend to be stereotypically portrayed as working class; as miners, farmers, steel workers, quarry workers, or as mams. The only possible exception to this might be chapel ministers, whom audiences tend only to see in chapel. A feature of *Reversal* is the emergence of a bourgeois Welsh middle class who are generally portrayed negatively, as motivated by self, anti-community, devious, treacherous, even murderous. It is possible to see this as a lingering moral hangover from *Preserved*, with the Welsh middle class portrayed as untrustworthy, selfish and as therefore opposed to the narrative of Welsh people as communal, mutual, and morally 'good'. In this sense, this new Welsh middle class is presented as composed of 'traitors' to the longstanding narrative of Welshness.

This kind of depiction of middle class Welsh men is clearly evident in *Happy Now*. In this film a banker running for a seat at a local election, Glen Marcus (Paddy Considine), kills local estate agent Joe Jones (Richard Coyle), when the body of a local beauty queen Jenny Thomas (Emmy Rossum), whom they buried as teenagers is being dug up. We find out that Glen and Joe allowed 'Tin man' (Om Puri) from India to wrongfully serve a prison sentence for her death, when the two of them were actually responsible. Their motivation for her death

was a sexual insult; she told Glen that he had a 'small dicky'. Facing the prospect of the ruin of his career and local standing, Glen shoots Joe.

These themes are also evident in *Twin Town*, in which those in authority are portrayed as corrupt whilst those on the margins of society enact a rough justice that suggests a depth of morality at odds with their lifestyles. The film focuses on two unruly Swansea brothers, Julian (Llyr Evans) and Jeremy (Rhys Ifans) known as the twins. They are unemployed, on probation for car theft and joyriding, and involved with drugs. Their outsider status is partly signaled through the location of their home in a caravan on the outskirts of the city, in a bleak landscape of motorway and disused dockland. The iconic domestic setting of 'mam's tidy terraced house' with a back yard for hanging the washing in the valleys is replaced by 'the cramped confines of a caravan, squeezed between the entry and exit of the M4 corridor and the now doomed Baglan Bay chemical works' (Perrins 2000: 152).

The brothers are easily recognisable urban characters, members of a sub-working class subculture. Like *Streetlife*, the main protagonists are highly unlike the kinds of morally upright, straight-laced characters featured in films of *Preserved*. This is one of the reasons why the film 'incurred the wrath of a number of self-styled guardians of Wales' (Blandford 1999: 123). Another reason may have been the extent to which characters in the film swear at each other, another feature that is absent in *Preserved*.

The film portrays a story of how Julian and Jeremy embark on the task of obtaining justice and revenge against Bryn Cartwright (William Thomas), a well off chairman of the local rugby club. He offers a mere £30 in cash to Fatty Lewis (Huw Ceredig), Julian and Jeremy's dad, for repairs to the roof of his rugby club, on the cheap. Fatty Lewis unfortunately falls off the roof whilst on the job. He is not covered by his own insurance, or by insurance arranged by the rugby club or Bryn Cartwright. The boys attempt to obtain compensation for their father's injury from Bryn Cartwright. When they turn up at the door of his large house with

security gates and swimming pool, he offers them £20 and tells them to buy 'a big can of sticky-sticky' and 'to fuck off to Noddyland', references to the boys' habit of sniffing glue.

Again, this film presents a wealthy Welsh man seeking to exploit other, poorer Welsh people, and Cartwright has been described as 'a product of Thatcherite economic brutality' (Perrins 2000: 166). The boys respond to Cartwright's offer by beheading his pet white poodle, and leaving the body on the bed of Cartwright and his wife. We learn, after the poodle's funeral, that the source of Cartwright's wealth is drugs, and that two corrupt police officers, Terry Walsh (Dougray Scott) and Greyo (Dorien Thomas) assist as go-betweens in deals when Cartwright buys drugs in large quantities to sell on. The £40,000 involved makes his offers on pay and compensation to Fatty Lewis and the boys even more derisory. Walsh and Greyo are also customers of Jean (Di Botcher), the boys' sister, who works as a prostitute along with her friends.

Cartwright's retaliation for the death of his pet poodle is to direct one of the two police officers, Terry Walsh, to set fire to the Lewis family caravan. Fatty, Jean and their mother Adie (Rachel Scorgie), who are inside at the time, are burnt to death. Greyo had just left the caravan after paying for sex with Jean. Cartwright enlists his own daughter Bonny (Jenny Evans) to testify to the police that one of Fatty Lewis's workmates was responsible for setting the caravan on fire. The boys then enact their own rough justice on Cartwright and Walsh, they hang Cartwright in the garage of his house so that when his wife returns home and opens the door, he is killed. They strap Walsh alive to their father's coffin prior to a burial at sea.

*Twin Town* thus features a moral complexity that is not evident in films of *The Preserved*. Welsh people exploit and kill other Welsh people; Welsh people take up the position of 'evil' occupied by the English in films of *Preserved*. Scales of identity are centred on the levels of family and criminal associate, and the film portrays 'the individual level, not the characteristics of the stereotypical miner on film' (Woodward 2006: 49). In the ways described above, the film is every bit as gritty and realistic as the films of Daniel Calparsoro discussed in the previous chapter.

And yet there are features which refer back to traditional, stereotypical elements of Welsh culture. Swansea is referred to at one point in the film as a 'shitty city', It's a reworking of former resident Dylan Thomas' description of Swansea as a 'lovely ugly' town. The iconic Mumbles pier is also featured, though the way both are depicted 'brought down the almost inevitable (but still hugely comic) wrath of the tourist board and Swansea civic authorities' (Blandford 2007: 95).

Whilst Fatty Lewis's body is being lowered into the sea in a coffin with the policeman Terry Walsh strapped to the outside, a male choir sings 'Myfanwy', an old Welsh love song. Fatty Lewis's 'funeral' parodies funeral scenes in *Preserved*. The boys are careful to provide all that their father would have wanted, but in their own way. In contrast, their mother and sister are shown being buried in a traditional graveyard. The contrast is comedic, but still refers back to the family unit of *Preserved* and the strong links between fathers and sons. Although *Twin Town* has been described as presenting Welsh family life 'turned on its head' (Perrins 2000: 160), it is family loyalty that drives the boys to seek their revenge on Cartwright, Walsh and Greyo.

Those on the margins are the moral superiors to those at the centre. Although criminal, seemingly antisocial and anti-community, or involved in the sex industry, they confront and enact a kind of vigilante justice to those responsible for arguably greater evils who are consumed by personal gain and who exploit others. This redeeming feature for those on the margins is however not evident in other films where the young are portrayed far more closely in nihilistic terms of Basque films such as *Jump into the Void*. There is a shift from women characters as sex workers in *Streetlife* to women exposing men as the breakers of the rules of sexual morality relating to the standard heterosexual family unit. This is a critique of the double standards of normative hetero-patriarchy, highlighting how the supposedly logical, rational and unemotional figures of male power and authority are in fact motivated by illicit desires and have 'secret' lives.

In Basque films, there is shame and secrecy surrounding the past, and the extent to which some Basques sided with Franco, or did little to oppose his rule and fight for autonomy. The equivalent to this in Welsh film is authoritative and powerful characters (mainly men) exploiting other Welsh characters, and so going against traditional narratives of identity that construct Welsh people as community minded and spirited, as co-operative. These individuals are instead anti-community, self-serving, and consumed by the ethos of self-advancement that is often associated with Thatcherism and the 1980s-1990s. These individuals may thus be regarded as ‘traitors’ to the Welsh cause.

In the discussion of Basque films of Reversal, ETA’s problematical daughters became targets for assassination because they were critical of ETA’s methods. Similarly, those from the margins (women, students, and unemployed youths) are critical of and expose those in authoritative positions in Welsh films. A critique of broadly patriarchal authority comes from the kinds of characterise marginalised or simply absent from films in Preserved. Furthermore, in Basque films ETA’s wayward sons abandoned their duties and placed romantic and sexual desires above these, which cost them their lives. In Welsh Reversal, powerful and authoritative men are exposed in public for their sexual indiscretions, and pay with their positions or in a few cases with their lives. Thus secrets are about the private and the personal, sexual conduct, presenting those in authority as far more human and fallible than the stereotyped icons of Preserved. Narratives of identities are also constructed at the level of the individual, down in scale from the collective and ‘community’. Reversal is marked by the emergence of individuals, motivated by self-gain, who are anti-community, rather than individuals who are figureheads of community.

## **Young Wales rebels**

In addition to sharing the types of elements of Reversal discussed above, two other films, *Mwg Glas Lleuad Waed* ( 1988: Peter Edwards) and *Branwen* (1994: Ceri Sherlock), also depict members of the next generation turning their backs on Wales and becoming involved in the political struggles of two other minority nations. Amongst the central characters, Crad

(Jâms Thomas) in *Mwg Glas Lleuad Waed* and Branwen (Morfudd Hughes) in *Branwen* become involved in the struggles of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) respectively. Both characters are educated, from middle class backgrounds. Both films are complex and multilayered, particularly in their treatment of identity and identity politics, but an implied question that they raise is why the Welsh have not engaged in the kinds of struggle for autonomy associated with Northern Ireland and Palestine. Both were made at a time when the push for autonomy for Wales could be described as stagnating. Devolution had been rejected in the 1979 referendum. Specifically, during a scene set in a pub in Cardiff Crad is told by Johan (Lex Van Delden), a student member of the PLO who is being tailed by the British SAS, that:

‘Unless you are willing to kill and die, unless you find life expendable for your cause, you have no hope. Thatcher understands that, what with Gibraltar and the Falklands. You people here in Wales have not the heart to carry it through, you compromise, you lose yourself in your culture. You are just a kid.’

Crad, standing for Wales, is thus assessed unfavourably because of a perceived lack of personal commitment. The struggle for autonomy from a ruthless and fully committed dominant is presented as do or die, with culture a mere sideshow. Johan’s dismissal of Crad immediately prompts him into a pathetically incompetent, spontaneous attempt to assassinate a visiting NATO Admiral, presumably to prove his mettle. Similarly, Branwen and her husband Kevin (Richard Lynch) are asked at one point ‘What has pacifism done for Wales? What the Irish have done should inspire The Welsh’.

The message is that autonomy can only be achieved through violence, which is very similar to the perspective of ETA at this time, as discussed in the previous chapter. At this time representations of ETA in film had shifted from the heroic martyrs of *Preserved* towards being radicals on the margins, no longer representative of the views of the majority of Basques. Similarly, Crad and Branwen can be regarded as misguided innocents, in no way representative of a generation of Welsh people, who try to attach themselves to supposedly authentic freedom fighters.

Both films adopt a markedly anti-British stance. In *Mwg Glas Lleuad Waed*, during his botched assassination attempt, Crad is shot down by the SAS, who then try to cover up that



Crad was unarmed at the time. This part of the plot is reminiscent of the shooting in Gibraltar referred to by Johan above, when three unarmed members of the IRA were shot down by the SAS, whose claim that they were about to detonate a large bomb was later disproved. In *Branwen* the British Army are shown murdering Dominic McCarthy (Kevin Reynolds), Branwen's future brother in law, minutes after his arrival at a large party to celebrate his release from prison, where he served a sentence for his IRA activities. Both films thus make reference to debates surrounding a 'shoot to kill' policy that the British security forces or those working on their behalf were claimed to operate for decades in relation to the IRA. Furthermore, when the character Mathonwy (Robert Gwyn Davies) kills Branwen's baby by starting a fire around its cot, the trauma that he suffered as a soldier in the British Army in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers on duty in Belfast and Bosnia is presented as a contributory factor. He is yet another Welshman who has gone off to fight in Britain's wars.

In contrast to films discussed earlier, both *Mwg Glas Lleuad Waed* and *Branwen* feature dysfunctional families. In *Mwg Glas Lleuad Waed* Crad is the only son of Phylip (Elwyn Hughes), whose stressful work as a Welsh representative at the European Union in Brussels has given him a nervous breakdown, we learn. The family live in a large house with a grand wooden staircase and wall panelling. We only see his mother, Sara (Olwen Rees) in the sitting room, with her makeup and jewellery, or hosting an outdoor dinner party with her husband's fellow diplomats on the lawn, at a table adorned with a lace cloth and crystal wine glasses. We never see his mother engaged in domestic work. She gets Crad's sister, Angharad (Nicola Beddoe) to do this. In some ways the mother resembles a kind of Margaret Thatcher type character, in marked contrast to the mam of *Preserved*. This kind of lifestyle and domestic arrangement is in marked contrast to how Welsh families generally tend to be depicted as living in *Preserved*.

Unlike the boys in *Twin Town*, Crad rebels against his parents. He fails to occupy a place at the dinner party which has been set for him, going off to the pub to meet Johann, the PLO member, instead. His parents are unaware that Crad is involved in a criminal holdup, or that he has guns and ammunition stashed in an outhouse at the family home, which only his sister knows about. When Crad is shot down by the SAS, it is Angharad who goes to identify his body.

As with *Twin Town* and *Mwg Glas Lleuad Waed* features ‘evil’ Welsh characters, in the form of Ali Tomlynn (Geraint Griffiths) and Detective Sergeant Harris (Dyfed Thomas). Tomlynn is a ruthless, rich landlord who carries a flick knife, drives a cream coloured Mercedes and is motivated by greed. In his own words he seeks to ‘throw out old trash for better who will pay more’. Harris colludes with the authorities in covering up how the SAS shot down Crad whilst he was unarmed. The real circumstances of Crad’s death are only brought to light by Jim Bowen (J. W. Thomas), a former police detective who at the start of the film works for Tomlynn as a rent collector. Feeling misgivings about Tomlynn’s methods, when Bowen confronts him to say he is quitting this job, Tomlynn is furious, and cuts Bowen on the cheek with his knife. Bowen then goes to live with a young woman, Julie (Lowri Glain) that Tomlynn has previously evicted, in a room rented from friends of Bowen from his police past, Jane (Mair Rowlands) and Gari (Dewi Rhys Williams), who perform sex shows at a nightclub. Again, sex work features as a kind of shorthand for those socially marginalised, yet morally superior to those in positions of power and authority.

*Twin Town* and *Mwg Glas Lleuad Waed* are clear examples of how the types of characters kept on the margins or simply elided in Preserved take up centre stage in Reversal. Conversely, the types of characters in positions of authority and respect in Preserved are presented as flawed, corrupt, and deserving of the comeuppance they tend to receive. Justice is however not always forthcoming, for instance in the case of Tomlynn in *Mwg Glas Lleuad Waed*, the film ends with the murder of Jim Bowen, with the audience left to presume that Tomlynn is responsible, but with the possibility that he may not be brought to justice for this crime left open. This lack of moral resolution is in keeping with the character of Tomlynn standing for the ruthlessly ‘greedy’ culture of the 1980s associated with Thatcherism, whose leadership was still in progress at the time the film was made. This link between the two is suggested at one point in the film when Tomlynn remarks ‘bloody vandals’ on seeing the graffiti ‘Thatcher Out’ daubed on a wall.

## References back to Preserved

When *Twin Town* and *Mwg Glas Lleuad Waed* are considered alongside films such as *Be Brave* and *In the Company of Strangers*, what emerges is the clear suggestion that ‘evil’ Welsh characters (generally either middle class or police officers) are a product of the continuing domination of Wales by England. This domination is responsible for the ‘importing’ of moral corruption, greed and ruthlessness into Wales, where these are taken up by a minority in order to exploit the majority. These characteristics are an anathema to the ‘traditional’ elements of Welsh culture centred on unity, community, mutuality and cooperation, which in *Twin Town*, via the Lewis family, resolve evil. In their more traditional form, these characteristics also win the day in *Be Brave*. In *Coming Up Roses*, local unity registers the symbolic victory of being able to afford a gravestone for Mr Davies, the former manager of the Rex Cinema, in the face of the sweeping deindustrialization and unemployment associated with Thatcherism.

In this respect, themes refer back to some of the narratives of Preserved. The funeral of Fatty Lewis in *Twin Town*, and the efforts of his sons to meet his last wishes suggests a sense of respect. The struggle over the municipal hall in *Be Brave* similarly indexes respect for previous generations of miners. In this film it is the local community who arrange the funeral of Henry George (Islwyn Morris) an elderly deacon and bachelor who lives alone, when he dies. Again, there is a sense of respect in this, and a sense of propriety, which in turn suggests a sense of continuity with the standards and codes of ‘proper’ behaviour in the past. These values triumph over those associated with the English and Thatcherism, and to some audiences it may seem that Welsh society proves wrong Margaret Thatcher’s infamous pronouncement that ‘there is no such thing as society’. So, in these ways these films refer back to narratives of Welsh identity and moral narratives about English rule. This underlines the relationship between Reversal and Preserved, specifically that the two do not make sense without reference to each other.

Preserved is referred back to in a different way in the case of the film *Branwen*. This is a modern adaptation of a story originating in the Mabinogion, the collection of traditional Welsh stories dating from the twelfth century. However, in some ways *Branwen* features

elements that reverse aspects of *Preserved* more strongly than films discussed so far in this chapter, though this reversal is still relatively weak in comparison to Basque films. There are some basic similarities between *Branwen* and the Basque film *Yoyes* which illustrate this. Both concern a well educated central woman character after which each film is named, who becomes involved in armed struggles for minority nation independence. But unlike *Yoyes*'s involvement with ETA, in which she attains a highly esteemed rank and which is based on actual diaries, *Branwen* is a fictional character who leaves Wales specifically to try to join the IRA in its fight for the independence of Northern Ireland from English control. The film shows *Branwen* 'marrying into a republican family, settling in West Belfast, and committing herself to the cultural, political and military activities of the republican community' (Miles 1995: 81). However, she is rejected by the IRA, who see her as playing 'political games with no real understanding of the repercussions of her actions' (Stanton 2002: 81). As one member of the IRA, Donal (Ian McElhinney), remarks during the film, 'she thinks she is a tough bitch'. In contrast, *Yoyes* of course is more dynamic and successful as a freedom fighter; the label 'tough bitch' would be more suited to her. She rises through the hierarchy of ETA to the point that she becomes one of their targets when she voices her criticisms of ETA's methods.

However, one significant difference between the two films is how *Branwen* is confronted by issues of identity politics, despite her efforts to 'become Irish'. Her mother-in-law Eilish McCarthy (Marie Jones) states to *Branwen* at one point in the film, 'You have no idea. You'll never be Irish, better not trying, don't sacrifice my son Kevin, and Gwyn my grandson'. Yet, *Branwen* works in Belfast as a Gaelic teacher, and amongst her pupils is her mother-in-law. In terms of linguistic abilities, *Branwen* is thus arguably the more Irish of the two. But her attempts to transcend her status as a Welsh woman and join in the Irish Republican struggle are unsuccessful (Miles 1995: 81). Unlike *Yoyes*, *Branwen*'s status as a teacher (a profession in which women predominate at lower levels) keeps her on the feminine side of the gender dualism, as does the fact that she has become a mother. In contrast *Yoyes* only becomes a mother once she has left ETA and gone into exile. For these reasons *Branwen* has been described as 'a powerful, sometimes disturbing reflection on both national and gender identities' (Blandford 2007: 91). However, her character does not reverse the heavily stereotyped gender roles associated with *Preserved* to the extent that *Yoyes* does.

## Dysfunctional families and sibling rivalries

In *Preserved*, Welsh families are generally represented as staying loyal and united in the face of hardship and social change (e.g. *Hedd Wyn*, *Ar Waelod Y Cof*, *Johnny be Good*, *How Green was my Valley*, *Valley of Song*, *On The Black Hill*, *Proud Valley*, *Y Chwarelwr*, and *Solomon a Gaenor*). Threats to family continuity come with death, the actions of wayward daughters, and external influences, but even then functionality tends to prevail. There are exceptions though, in films that otherwise have the standard characteristics of *Preserved*. An example is the comedy *Only Two Can Play*, which may be considered a Welsh film in that it is set in Swansea and based on a novel by Kingsley Amis that was written whilst he was a lecturer at the University of Swansea. However, the film offers a rather selective view of Welsh family life. Part of the comedy is supposedly derived from the central character, assistant librarian John Lewis (Peter Sellers), having an exaggerated Welsh accent, and from the poverty that his family lives in. Therefore the portrayal of Lewis as embarking on a sexual affair with the sophisticated, socialite wife of a city councillor, Liz Griffiths Williams (Mai Zetterling) must be regarded in this context as an English view of Welsh life.

Nevertheless the way that families are depicted is a characteristic that helps to define the category of 'Reversal' in comparison to the stereotypically close-knit families of *Preserved*. For example *Gadael Lenin /Leaving Lenin* (1992: Endaf Emlyn) features a soured and failing relationship between two characters, Eileen (Sharon Morgan) and Mostyn (Ifan Huw Dafydd), married for twenty years but discussing divorce, something unheard of in The Welsh *Preserved*. However, more prevalent is sibling rivalry rendering family relationships dysfunctional. *Martha Jac a Sianco* (2008: Paul Jones) features jealousy and violence amongst two brothers, Jac (Ifan Huw Dafydd) and Sianco (Geraint Lewis), and a sister Martha (Sharon Morgan), that stems from Jac not inheriting the family farm when their mother died, against his own expectations. Sianco takes his own life after poisoning Jac with strychnine. In *Y Mapiwr/The Making of Maps* (1995: Endaf Emlyn), we learn that a central character, Ruth Ellis (Abigail Creel), murdered her younger sister Alis (Lara Ward) during a family picnic when she was a young girl. We learn that jealousy sparked by Megan Ellis (Catherine Tregenna) and their mother's favouritism towards Alis was the main motivation. Later on we learn that Robert Ellis (Maldwyn Pate) Ruth's father was thrown out of the family home after his affair with his boss's daughter was discovered. In *Thicker Than Water*

(1993: Marc Evans) the main character Debbie (Theresa Russell) murders her identical twin sister Jo (Theresa Russell) because she is jealous that Jo is pregnant. Debbie is unable to have children herself.

These dysfunctional families do not mark a simple working class, rural Preserved. Nobody is punished or brought to justice for the violence and the killing that takes place in these films, the stories that these films tell are not concerned with crime and punishment, but with rivalry, jealousy, and the claustrophobia of family relations gone sour. In this respect, these films may be regarded as presenting a more accurate, gritty and reflexive perspective on Welsh families in comparison to the iconic stereotypes of Preserved. This is in keeping with the development of a more self-critical evaluation of Welsh society and culture that goes some way beyond the simplistic moral framework of Preserved, in which Welsh people are 'good' and the English 'bad'.

The development of this may be regarded as a third stage in a series of self-perspectives adopted within minority cultures. Firstly, typically during a period of colonisation the minority culture comes to adopt the dominant's view, of themselves as incapable of self-government and thus needing the rule of an external, paternal power. The postcolonial period is typically marked by the emergence of the minority's views of themselves, as suffering the unjust rule of the colonial oppressor (Said 1993: 38) and proving their fitness for self-government through the struggle to throw off the oppressor. This is the perspective that dominates in films in Preserved, with its simplistic moral framework. But beyond this is the emergence of a more self-critical set of perspectives, which take in the presence of 'evil' Welsh people, and the actuality of Welsh people oppressing and exploiting other Welsh people. As already mentioned earlier, in films such as *Twin Town* and *Be Brave*, the external influence of England, its government and the culture of the greedy 1980s is presented as responsible for the importation of 'evil' into Wales and the rise of a nasty, self-serving and exploitative strain of Welsh men getting rich, or trying to, at the expense of others in less powerful positions than them.

However, in the films discussed above, there is no reference to some kind of external influence from beyond Wales that drives the passions that lead to murder. Instead, these have their genesis within Welsh families, which is in keeping with an understanding that these kinds of passions are a universal part of humanity. Earlier I claimed that one of the basic elements of *Reversal* in comparison to *Preserved* is a shift away from collective notions of identity towards identities defined on a much more individual level. However, it is possible to also see movement in the other direction, from collective notions of identity on the scale of the nation towards a more universal notion of identity that encompasses human existence. In terms of some aspects of plot and characterisation, several of these films could have been set outside Wales. For instance the Swansea of *Twin Town* could be any post-industrial city, as could the Cardiff of *Thicker Than Water*, only incidental elements such as snippets of language and names mark these films on screen as Welsh. In part this is because these films deal with processes and events that happened across many nations, such as de- and post-industrialisation. These films pick up on how these more universal elements have taken on a Welsh inflection as their more local effects work through social and cultural fabrics in Wales.

The same is true of the film *Human Traffic* (Justin Kerrigan: 1999), which portrays a disparate group of young people in Cardiff spending an entire weekend on the clubbing scene, enjoying the pleasures of rave music, drugs and drink (McLoone 2001: 187). The film has been described as ‘most definitely not interested in the more sterile debates about identity’ (Blandford 2000: 36), since these people display ‘no loyalty to anyone nor anything’ (Woodward 2006: 52). These young people ‘are residents of Wales rather than Welsh by birth or ethnicity, emphasising the strange sense of dislocation or in-betweenness that hangs over the whole film’ (McLoone 2001: 184), and a clear sense that they lack connection to any sense of ‘roots’ (Blandford 2005: 185 & Blandford 2007: 100). In addition, given the ubiquity of club culture in the late 1990s, *Human Traffic* could most easily be set in any major city.

## Shifting towards the sub-national, via racism

At the same time as the shift towards the universal described above, which seeks to place recent minority nation experiences within a more global context, some films use the portrayal of racism by Welsh people towards others to contribute to self-critical perspectives on Wales. These films may be regarded as similar to the work of Basque director Daniel Calparsoro, discussed in the previous chapter on *Reversal*, in that they seem to sound an alarm regarding ills and evils associated with the contemporary young generation, in this case of Welsh people. This may seem at first an odd claim to make given that the first film I want to discuss in this category is *Solomon a Gaenor*, discussed earlier in the second chapter on *Welsh Preserved*, and set in the early 1900s. Scenes in this film portray anti-Jewish riots and violence, in which shops, including one belonging to Solomon's father, are looted and burnt (Blandford 2005: 107), and the character Solomon receives what proves to be a fatal beating from Gaenor's only brother Crad. This is based on the actual historical event of such riots in Tredegar, South Wales in 1911, which took place 'against a backdrop of racial tension and industrial unrest in the Welsh Valleys' (Rubinstein 1997: 667). Crad is a ringleader amongst miners involved in the riot, which is presented as stemming from a lack of education and opportunities amongst young Welsh men.

It has been argued by some historians that jealousy on the part of miners of the 'minute Jewish population' was responsible (e.g. Rubinstein 1997: 668). In this sense, this film links with films such as *Martha*, *Jac a Sianco*, *Y Mapiwr* and *Thicker Than Water*, which depict jealousy operating within Welsh families in the last twentieth and early twenty first centuries. It is possible to see *Solomon a Gaenor* as sounding an alarm regarding racism in Wales for its contemporary audiences, through presenting them with a historical racist event in such a way as to clearly highlight its injustice, and its origins amongst such negative, childlike elements as ignorance and jealousy. At the time that *Solomon a Gaenor* was made, several commentators were drawing attention to how '“Valleys racism” has become a matter of increasing concerns in Wales.' (Williams 1999: 278), and how 'racism is a by-product of desperate lives' (Gray 2004: 17).



This inwardly critical perspective on Wales is also clearly evident in *A Way of Life*, in which audiences are shown something of contemporary street culture in connection with racism. In this film the focus shifts from the 'private' of houses, and from workplaces, to the more public spaces of the street. We are shown streets of terraced housing, which in Preserved are icons of community as collections of domestic spaces governed by the Welsh Mam. However in *A Way of Life* these streets pitch households into confrontation as they face each other across the shared space of the street. The film explores racism from the inside through focusing on a gang of young criminals and drug users, what has been called a 'worklessness' culture (Shipton 2008: 7), led by Leigh-Anne (Stephanie James). In this respect, Leigh-Anne reverses aspects of gender roles. She is a seventeen year old single mother, whose mother committed suicide when Leigh-Anne was a child and whose father abused them both and is now absent. Leigh-Anne is the product of a care home, along with her brother, who is also a member of the gang. We are shown how the gang steal items to order for Leigh-Anne. The target of their racism is a Turkish Muslim family who live across the street from Leigh-Anne's house, which serves as the gang's headquarters.

We get to know relatively little about the Turkish family, the Osmans, we only see them through the eyes of Leigh-Anne. She is jealous of their relative wealth. The father Hassan (Oliver Haden) is a decorator, and we see him with a pencil placed behind his ear when he is talking to members of the gang, a symbol of his engagement with work. Hassan is tall, so members of the gang physically have to look up to him. His occupation is all about improvement, and it is noticeable that he has a ladder attached to his van, a symbol of social advancement. His daughter Julie (Sara Gregory) attends high school, and her name itself suggests that she is the member of a generation of ethnic hybrids. These are indicators of a future, and optimism in comparison to the white gang, who seem to be going nowhere, to be trapped. They lead lives that are unstructured by work or education.

We see Leigh-Anne's anger towards the Osmans, how she regards them as outsiders or intruders, and believes that they are watching her, and that they have reported the lack of care that she gives to her baby to the social services. But we learn that it is the baby's grandmother, Anette (Brenda Blethyn), a 'pushy paternal grandmother' (Driscoll 2004: 8),

that has reported Leigh-Anne. This refers back to the stereotyped Mam of The Preserved, but Anette is loud and swears, and families in Preserved are not subject to institutions such as the Social Services, whose functions were performed informally within families and communities. Anette is highly aware of the various complexities of different types of welfare benefits, information which we see her passing on to Leigh-Anne.

In the background in the film we see idle cranes, icons of industrial and social decline, in Swansea. The film is set amongst a multiracial 'community' that is dominated by young Welsh men and women, who make the most noise and dominate the street, they rob from others. We see in the film how one character is refused a job simply on the grounds of his address. In tandem with this depiction of dysfunctional community we are also presented with the non-traditional family composed of Anette, Leigh-Anne and her baby, whose father is in prison. The film also confronts audiences with a picture of accelerated age, the shrinking of childhood in these bold, cocky, loud streetwise gang members who are well educated in the manipulation of the social system, but little else.

The gang's racism escalates from wrecking an Indian takeaway to them following Hassan when he accompanies Julie to the local library, where he was going to help her with her studies. The gang murder Hassan in the street. The film maker has described this as 'disempowered children committing a crime against a disempowered minority' (Asante 2004: 16). The film can be regarded as a warning that contemporary Welsh society has lost its direction and moral values. The Osmans could be any non-white family, members of any ethnic minority, that fall victim to 'pent-up anger' in a setting 'where racism is a way of life' (Driscoll 2004: 8). The film confronts audiences with how nasty Welsh people can be to those identified as 'Others', and how the failings of parents in turn can have highly negative consequences when their children approach adulthood; 'There are many people in the Valleys who have never worked. One of the most challenging aspects of this is the inter-generational nature of the problem' (Morgan 2008: 7). This reverses the narratives of inheritance and the bestowal of wealth and knowledges evident in Preserved.

Similar themes are clearly evident in *Little White Lies* (2006: Caradog Jones), based on a play by Helen Griffin set in Swansea. This portrays a father, Tony (Brian Hibbard), as an armchair racist who does not venture outside his terraced house. We see him shout ‘Fuckin Pakies’ at his television screen in one scene. His son Steve (Jonathan Owen) is actively involved in racist thuggery, and is responsible for the death of an Indian man following a late night beating in the street. It later transpires that Steve’s victim is actually his sister’s future father-in-law, grandfather to her as yet unborn baby. The effect of this is to underline the tragedy and stupidity of racism, and to highlight links between casual and active racism (Wightwick 2010: 29). It also presents the Welsh family as divided by attitudes to race, with the daughter Serena’s (Sara Gregory) love for an Indian man in contrast to her brother’s involvement as a campaigner for the British National Party, which both keep secret from their parents. There do not seem to be any equivalent Basque films, which portray young Basques engaged in similar kinds of racist acts. Partly, this may be because the Basque Country has not experienced the same degree of unemployment, state dependency, urban decay and poverty as Wales, which all tend to be closely associated with the rise of racism. As one commentator put it, ‘Wales has become a target area for recruitment of members to fascist organisations such as the British National Party (BNP)’ (Williams 1999: 278). It may also partly be because the Spanish authorities were for a relatively long time available as hate figures to Basque Nationalists, bypassing the need for Others to be constructed along the lines of race.

## **The Reversal of Welsh Masculinity**

In *Preserved* the standard icons of Welsh identity are the miner, the farmer, the quarryman, the steelworker, the warrior and the poet. Each cohere closely with dominant versions of heterosexual masculinity, which for instance construct men as physically strong and active, dominant, homosocial, unemotional; and as predominant in public life and the arts, which is ostensibly the realm of matters of consequence. This is how men tend to be portrayed in films in *Preserved*. In contrast, women are portrayed along the lines of dominant versions of heterosexual femininity as maternal, domestic, emotional, nurturing, subservient, as predominant in the home and active in crafts. These gendered identities, roles and relations

make up the patriarchal social organization associated with the kinds of families and communities featured in Preserved.

Reversal contrasts with this through gendered and sexual characters moving away from the stereotypes of Preserved. Previously ‘invisible’ or ‘Othered’ masculinities come to be rendered familiar and incorporated into ‘the normal’. For instance, gay men become visible, sympathetically portrayed in a small collection of films. But more generally, central male characters tend to be less powerful, adrift, lacking in direction, not in control of their own circumstances and thus feature as relative ‘failures’. This is in keeping with wider social change in the 1980s and 1990s within and well beyond Wales. Some commentators describe this social period as being one of the rise of ‘self –definitions and the acknowledgement of difference’ (Boone 1992:30), and of the ‘loosening of the compulsory characters of heterosexuality and the simultaneous emergence of homosexual cultural possibilities of behaviour and identity’ (Butler 1999: 95).

For instance commentators write of the ‘crisis in masculinity’ from the 1970s onwards that was associated with the collapse of traditional, masculine industry and the rise of alternative service employment that is termed ‘post-Fordism’ (e.g. McDowell 1991: 400). From being the only breadwinner and head of the traditional family unit, many men’s situations changed as they found themselves unemployed or in new kinds of jobs where they were actively competing with and working alongside women. Women’s roles shifted too, as discussed earlier, and many women became the major or only wage earner in families, sometimes with consequent effects on domestic arrangements and roles within the family. For instance ‘fathering’ in a traditional sense is either problematical or absent in Reversal, and more generally parents’ relationships with their children are not straightforward or wholly positive. However, the men and women in films classed as Reversal form arguably quite a disparate collection.

## Different masculinities

The first film to actively move beyond the masculine stereotypes of *Preserved* is the comedy *Grand Slam* (BBC Wales 1978: John Hefin), which has been described as a diversion from the harsh realities of Thatcherite economic policies (Jachimiak 2006: 95). It celebrates the game of rugby, one of the most popular and most masculine icons of Welsh identity. It focuses on a motley collection of men travelling to Paris to support the Welsh national rugby team at an international match. We see how one character, Mog Jones (Windsor Davies), normally very sober and upright and who takes responsibility for organising the trip, gets drunk on the eve of the match. As he gets progressively more drunk, he strips off his rugby club blazer, club tie and shirt at a strip club. In just his patriotic red underpants, vest, shoes and socks, he is arrested by the police and kept overnight in a cell. His inabilities with the French language contribute to this situation. When Mog is released by the police, a blanket is thrown over his naked shoulders, reminiscent of a Welsh Mam's shawl. Mog then arrives at the stadium too late to see the rugby international. He returns to Wales as a comic 'failure', the victim of his own sexualised misbehaviour, inability to adapt to the language and customs of another country, and alcoholic excess, which are stereotypes of masculine behaviour away from home. Comedic effect is generated from the audience's understanding of how Mog usually behaves when at home in Wales, and how this contrasts with his behaviour in Paris.

But in addition to Mog, *Grand Slam* also features several other male characters. These include Sion Probert (Maldwyn Pugh), a 'feminine' hairdresser, a stereotyped gay man who is equally a member of the group of supporters. We learn that he hates the strip club, he does not get drunk, he does get to see the match, and thus he maintains his dignity in comparison to Mog's fall from grace. He is physically marked out from the others in the group through his choice of coat (fawn with a fur collar) and sunglasses. His is the hidden gaze of a gay man who admires more than merely the rugby, but also the sight of the players as sexual objects. We learn that another member of the group Caradog Lloyd-Evans (Hugh Griffith) was in Paris during the Second World War, and whilst the others are getting drunk and attending the strip club, he finds and is entertained by a former wartime girlfriend Madame (Marika Rivera) he met there. This can be seen to refer back nostalgically to the warrior icon of *Preserved* fighting for Britain. Now in Paris he is free from the constraints of home and the

British Army. His illicit liaison is prioritised over attending the rugby match. The film thus includes multiple masculinities (Jachimiak 2006: 97).

Another film that also rejects the masculine stereotypes of Preserved is *Cameleon/Chameleon* (1997: Ceri Sherlock). In this the main character Delme Davies (Aneirin Hughes) is a soldier in the British army during the Second World War who deserts. He hides out in the attic of the terraced house in Llanelli of his mother, Iwanna (Sue Jones-Davies) and we see how he is fed meals by his mother via the attic trap door. His character is explored in relatively great psychological depth during the film, since the film focuses on a character who spends a great deal of his time in isolation. In terms of Preserved, his mother's hiding of him can be seen as an extension of the kind of nurturing associated with the icon of the Welsh mam. Delme's desertion can be seen as resistance to British control. In terms of the traditional scripts of masculinity, Delme is mentally weak, he fails to fight alongside the British, and he thus does not measure up to the warrior icon of Preserved. Delme is 'hiding from the war' (Morris 1998: 82), but in a sense he is also hiding from dominant masculinity, and to some extent from adulthood through seeking refuge with his mother, whom he therefore puts at risk. He is hunted by the 'Redcaps', the army military police. He is a 'failure' as a man in traditional senses, psychologically weak, in the film he drifts between insanity and depression, and he exists almost entirely within the 'feminine' space of the home. On one of the few occasions that he leaves the attic he helps with decorating the room of an old woman neighbour who shares the attic, which is a feature of some terraced houses. When she later dies, he lays the body out by himself, and washing the dead is usually heavily coded as 'feminine'. Delme does not even get as far as serving time in prison, unlike Gwenallt, for pacifism. It is the unmasculine emotion of fear that fuels his desertion. In these ways the character of Delme reverses masculine traits associated with Preserved.

## **The breaking down of stabilities and journeys**

In addition to the different kinds of masculinity evident in Reversal, associated features are the breaking down of stability and the influence of wider external political/economic

pressures. An additional element to be discussed in more detail is journeys. Sometimes these are out of Wales, but there are also metaphorical journeys towards characters learning about themselves and the world. A journey outside Wales of course features in *Grand Slam*, and in *Gadael Lenin/Leaving Lenin* (1992: Endaf Emlyn) and *Dafydd* (1993: Ceri Sherlock).

Identity is always defined relationally, so the Welshness of characters can be directly brought into focus by taking characters out of Wales and into some other cultural setting. This makes discussion of questions of identity and the links between narratives of national identity and the self more explicit. Journeys are also used as a way of bringing together characters with different backgrounds, thus of bringing together conflicting sets of narratives of identity on several different levels, and questions about personal morality (for instance in relation to sexual conduct or drug taking) and history. These films can be seen to discuss these issues in ways that arguably do not mark a total break from the dominant narratives of Preserved, but which reverse key elements. This is clearly evident in *Grand Slam*, as the discussion above highlighted.

In *Gadael Lenin* Welsh school sixth former Spike (Steffan Trefor) falls in love with a predatory young Russian man Sasha (Ivan Shvedoff) whilst on a school trip to see the art of Russia. Through Sasha, Spike gets to see Leningrad in a way that he would otherwise not have done as a member of the official party. He comes to share the same impoverished communal city flat in Leningrad. Spike comes to experience the two opposing faces of Leningrad, the wealth of public art in the galleries and buildings, besides the daily poverty of those who live there. Spike's sexual identity is drawn into question in the eyes of his classmates and teachers. Thus the film engages with issues of identity in various ways, 'Whether the youth of St Petersburg adrift in a post-Soviet Russia or those struggling to adulthood in post-Thatcherite Wales, the foreign location adds an extra dimension to the underlying theme of Welsh identity.' (McLoone 2001: 189). The railway station in Leningrad/St Petersburg becomes the starting point for a series of new possibilities.

At the end of the film Spike agonises before deciding to return with his school class from Russia. He makes his mind up at the last minute, all on the official party wait anxiously at the station for him when it is time to leave. Spike ultimately decides to return to Wales, he is changed by his experiences but the film leaves him on the train home, with issues concerning how he lives his new identity in Wales unresolved. In this way, the film raises questions about identity that begin to locate national identity at the level of the individual, and explore alternatives to dominant narratives of identity, placed within the context of sexualised identities.

In contrast to Spike, Dafydd (Richard Harrington) in *Dafydd* leaves Cardiff to journey to Amsterdam, a city often characterised as a place for opportunity renowned for its liberal attitudes, particularly in relation to sex and drugs. There he meets and has a relationship with David (William Thomas) an older Welsh speaking music lecturer from Llandeilo. The two men 'belong' as gay men in the gay spaces of Amsterdam, where they speak Welsh to each other, and establish which part of Wales each comes from. Within Wales great significance is given to the specific location of a person's origins, it can locate an individual within a specific set of narratives of identity, with variations within the category 'Welsh' defined in terms of 'fy milltir sgwar' or 'my square mile'. This is one way that members of a minority nation can establish connection with each other, through exploring possible social contacts and acquaintances that they may have in common. This sense is underlined through both men sharing the same name. In some ways the experience of minority nation identity is mirrored to some extent in other kinds of minority identity, such as being gay.

Through language the two create a Welsh space within Amsterdam. In addition to this, David has fresh daffodils on the table in his apartment, a clearly iconic reference to a Welshness retained. But it is possible to read this as a direct acknowledgement of the plurality of the category 'Welsh'. These two characters can create new forms of Welshness in ways that would not be possible if they were within Wales. In relation to this point, Dafydd and David are shown drinking coffee in a smart café, we learn that they attend an opera, we see them dining in a candlelit restaurant, all middle class pastimes which it would have been far more difficult for them to accomplish together in Wales at the time.



Like the Basque film *El Pico*, this film is groundbreaking in that it includes scenes of these two men having sex together, something that would be inconceivable in *Preserved*. It is noticeable that both *Gadael Lenin* and *Dafydd* present gay relationships that have ended before each film ends, neither has a happy ending. Spike returns to Wales, like Dafydd, who discovers that David is cheating on him with a woman. Similarly, *Atgof/Memories* (1998: Ceri Sherlock) also features a short-lived gay relationship, reviewed in flashback by the main character. The film is mostly made up of letters read in voice over, and memories that show the feelings and vulnerabilities shared between the poet E. Prosser Rhys 1901-1945 (Arwel Gruffydd) and William T Morris 1900- 1946 (Toby Sawyer). The letters, were sent whilst Prosser Rhys was in Caernarfon working as a reporter, and Morris in Paris, spending a year away writing a novel that was never published.

Prosser Rhys enters a piece of writing, an ode, in the National Eisteddfod competition. The theme or title for that year was *Atgof* (memories). The letters express Prosser Rhys's anxieties about the content of his ode, which celebrates sexual experience. The *Western Mail* in August 6<sup>th</sup> 1924 described *Atgof* as a 'daring poem of sensuous youth, the whole theme is sex and male flesh'. In several scenes we see Prosser Rhys by the bed that he had shared with Morris, the bed is thus presented as a private site of intimacy. But 'the private' of sexual desire and intimacy is made 'public' through entry of the ode into the competition, and the process of adjudication and publication. The film is thus a retelling of history; it makes visible the contribution of a gay man to the cultural traditions and histories of Wales. Prosser Rhys's ode broke down the stability of a poetic practice that up to then mostly celebrated themes such as history, war, nature or heterosexual romance. Welsh puritans were shaken to their roots following the ode winning the crown in the competition and the crowning at Pontypwl in 1924. This in itself worked to reinscribe the category 'poet', and problematised the stereotypical ways that masculinity featured in poetry. Although scenes of the Eisteddfod are not included in the film, bardic symbols such as the crown and cloak are, in playful ways. For instance in one scene the crown is tossed onto the bed. But the film does not really question or problematise these traditions any further. Prosser Rhys plays by the rules of the Eisteddfod, and similarly, the 'rules' through which Welshness may be defined are not really subject to discussion.

Some audiences may know from history that Morris did not return to Prosser Rhys when his time in Paris was up. Nevertheless, through focusing on a period when the two were apart from each other, *Atgof* similarly presents gayness in tandem with the unfulfilled, sadness and the lack of a romantically happy ending.

## **A new stability?**

In contrast to the themes of instability, journeys and unhappiness associated with gay men characters in *Gadael Lenin*, *Dafydd* and *Atgof*, two more recently made films present gay men as characters within their local communities in Wales. As already mentioned in *Be Brave* 19 year old Jules ‘comes out’ at Henry George’s funeral, testifying to how the recently deceased Deacon accepted and helped him. Jules also affirms his and his partner Laurence’s (Daniel Evans) love and loyalty towards their local community. In *Very Annie Mary* Hob and Nob, (Matthew Rhys and Ioan Gruffydd) are a gay couple who run the popular local corner shop in a village in the Valleys, and are young Annie-Marie’s (Rachel Griffiths ) best friends. They are presented on screen totally unsensationally, simply as men who just happen to be gay. This is in contrast to the secrecy and ‘otherness’ of gay men’s existences as portrayed in *Gadael Lenin*, *Dafydd* and *Atgof*, where gay Welshmen exist, but only away from Wales itself. What this suggests is a confidence in audiences accepting a far wider category of Welsh masculinities, which can include gay men amongst contemporary male characters in post-industrial South Wales, at a time when men here in general occupy a much less powerful set of positions in comparison to the patriarchal communities of Preserved. Even when compared to the camp hairdresser Sion in *Grand Slam*, who with his fur trimmed coat and sunglasses is a very 1970s comic gay stereotype, it is plain to see how the characters of Hob and Nob in particular contrast. It would seem that the reversal of gender roles perhaps opens up spaces and possibilities for far more sympathetic and less sensational representations of gay men as members of local Welsh communities.

## Religion

Another fundamental element in films of Preserved that is portrayed in very different ways in Reversal is Religion. In Preserved Chapel is a distinctively Welsh branch of Christianity. Historically Chapel provided a moral and spiritual foundation that traditionally underpinned Welsh communities. Dominated by men in positions of leadership, attendance at various Chapel activities provided a weekly routine and structure for working families. This is clearly evident in films such as *Hedd Wyn*, *Valley of Song*, *Ar Waelod y cof*, *Y Chwarelwr*, *On the Black Hill*, and *Solomon a Gaenor*. Chapel is portrayed as an institution that is an intrinsic element of ‘the proper’ Welsh culture and community. Sunday is about attendance at Chapel, listening to the local preacher, singing hymns, sitting in the family pew, children learning the Bible at Sunday school, strict obedience, wearing dark colours but with a white collar and tie for men and bonnets for women, and later a family tea in the parlwr. Chapel is also the moral arbiter, the moral authority, and through Chapel punishment for those who transgress against local community values and moral codes is dealt out. Chapel is also a symbol of patriarchy.

In films in Reversal, all this changes. Chapel is presented as in decline, as suffering from reduced levels of participation. With smaller congregations comes a decline in respect for Ministers, and a reduction in the role of Chapel as moral authority. This is presented in films in a variety of ways. For instance in *Branwen*, Branwen’s widowed father Llion Roberts (J.O. Roberts) is a Chapel Minister. We learn that far from being the austere, respected, firm, distant stereotype of Preserved, only seen in the pulpit or dishing out orders, he is a weak parent who does not command the respect of his daughter. She disobeys him, becomes pregnant, and gets involved with terrorism when she goes to Belfast. We learn far more about his private and domestic life away from the pulpit, and see how he is quite ordinary. Similarly, in *Very Annie Mary* Annie-Mary’s widowed father Deacon Jack Pugh (Johnathan Pryce) is ‘the overbearing, chapel-strict father’ (Pryce 2001: 4), but his relationship with his daughter is a parody of masculine power and control. She runs after him, constantly doing errands and living a life of drudgery. Annie-Mary is reminded by her father to offer prayers to God before every meal, and he insists she attend Chapel. Again, we see him within the private of the home and the domestic, away from Chapel. We are shown how he uses Annie Mary like a dog to keep his feet warm at the end of his bed. Through his unreasonable, selfish

demands audiences are encouraged to dislike him and perhaps see him as symbolic of a moral and spiritual decline.

In addition to this, we are shown Jack in his bread delivery van (he is also the village baker) masquerading as the opera singer Pavarotti. He wears a face mask, black tail coat and white bow tie. Through a loudspeaker system, mounted on the roof of his van, he broadcasts his idol Pavarotti singing 'Puccini'. All of this can be interpreted in several different ways. Jack takes the Welsh interest in singing to the extreme of parody. Simultaneously, he is symbolic of the decline of men, and of parents, as well as Chapel. He combines contradictory elements, and during the film he is the subject of mockery because of his eccentric obsessions. In light of this his position as deacon is recast as another obsession, a role in which he masquerades as a moral and spiritual authority, something at odds with his conduct towards his daughter. Jack is a parody of a deacon from *Preserved*, and through him audiences are encouraged to think of Chapel as a similarly eccentric institution.

The Chapel featured in these films is also different from those depicted in *Preserved*. In *Reversal* the congregations are small, sprinkled about the pews and noticeably older. Jack is a prominent leader of the chapel, but it is dying. Thus, Chapel and those connected with it move to the margin in *Reversal* from a position at the centre in *Preserved*. At the margin, they are figures of fun for those who now occupy the centre in *Reversal*.

## **Conclusions**

The previous chapter discussed *Reversal* in terms of this being therapeutic, as a stepping away from the security, stability and 'comfort blanket' of the past, to begin to embrace the instability and unpredictability of the present and the future. Aspects of *Reversal* seem therapeutic because they involve acknowledgement of contemporary social problems and the shedding of outdated or no longer relevant cultural baggage. This movement is also a shift from a preoccupation with a mythologised and perhaps more psychologically sustainable past which was centred on the workplace for men, religion and traditional family and community,

to addressing a more disturbing present. By necessity, this involves promoting those from the margins in Preserved to centre stage, whilst those previously occupying central positions are relegated to the margins. This decentring of traditional narratives may be regarded as an attempt to heal contemporary social problems, such as the dislocation of generations, and the damage they are causing. However, there is also the possibility of the liberating effects of films either shedding traditional cultural baggage, particularly where this baggage seems quaint and outdated, or poking fun at stereotypical elements of Preserved culture.

In tandem with these considerations is a marked shift from identities defined collectively at the levels of family, community and nation, to identities defined at the level of the individual. The 'glue' that binds together in Preserved, the cohesive collective, these are replaced more by individualism. This in turn contributes to what appears to be a relative loss of national confidence in some films, as these come to be more inward looking and self-critical. These are features that continue as identities become defined beneath the level of the individual in postnational, the category of films discussed in the next pair of chapters.

## **Volume Three**

# Chapter Six: Welsh postnational

## Introduction

This chapter discusses narratives of minority nation identity evident in films in which the set of dualisms used to define both Preserved and Reversal are transcended. These dualisms foreground the significance of landscape, place, gender, and collectives that are larger in Preserved and reduced in size in Reversal, whereas postnational films move away from these elements.

Thus, as explained in the introduction to this thesis, the term ‘postnational’ is used to suggest that ideas of national identity have become pluralised and are distinctly different from the more traditional notions of nation constructed from materials stemming from the dualisms on which Preserved and Reversal are based. This is distinct from ‘Postnational’ with a capital ‘P’, which can imply that ideas of nation and national identity have become redundant or no longer matter.

To reiterate, the three categories or classes of Preserved, Reversal and postnational are not entirely clear cut. To some extent they mirror ideas in postcolonial theory, in that distinctions between these categories relate to shifts in films from the dominant’s view of the minority, through the minority’s views of themselves, as these change from celebratory retellings of history towards self-critical introversion. As this chapter will discuss in detail, films classed as postnational thus feature identities shrinking further inwards and away from collectives and stabilities, a sense of placelessness, discordant landscapes and of impermanence. This chapter builds towards an argument that the cumulative effect is of a sense of minority nation identity mislaid, as though overlooked, since film makers and narratives address other themes. To clarify further, it is important to describe the relationships between postmodernism, postcolonialism and the use of the term postnational in this chapter and the subsequent chapter on Basque film.

As was mentioned earlier in the first chapter on Reversal, on Basque film, the reversal of dualisms has been described as the first step in the process of deconstruction. Deconstruction lays bare the assumptions and ideas underlying the bringing together of two pair parts into dualisms, in which one pair part occupies a position of dominance over the other.

Deconstruction is often linked to postmodernism in social theory, as was discussed earlier in relation to the works of authors such as Derrida and Jameson (1991, 1992). In several ways films discussed in this chapter exhibit characteristics that tend to be associated with a postmodern era, (e.g. as described by authors such as Jameson), such as an accelerated pace of life, the shrinking or removal of physical and cultural distance, social dysfunctionality, and fractured and multiple senses of identity. Films often adopt a distorted, nonlinear structure. Partly this can be seen as a rejection of the traditional, and the ways that the traditional has been (re)presented to audiences on film. There are none of the single dimensional stereotyped characters to be found in the Preserved or Reversal. Instead, complex and flawed characters look back to their childhood and youth and beyond, always with very dramatic and shocking consequences.

However, some theorists may overstate the extent to which postmodernism involves a break from the past. For instance Jean Baudrillard is credited with characterising postmodernism as involving the dissolution of 'reality, meaning and identity' (Durham & Kellner 2012: 385). As already mentioned above, the argument I will put forward is that there is more of a sense of identity (temporarily) mislaid or overlooked, rather than lost.

So this chapter and the following chapter on Basque postnational film describe a third category of film shaped through a coming together of some elements associated with postcolonialism and postmodernism, to arrive at the notion of postnationalism used in this thesis. The relationship between these three 'posts-' can be summarised as follows:



<u>Postcolonialism</u>	<u>Postmodernism</u>
(can be summarised as a progression through 3 stages):	(can be summarised as a collection of elements):
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Celebrations of minority identity, people and landscape co-constructed as Basque/Welsh (<i>Ama Lur, Guipuzcoa, Dal:Yma/Nawr</i>).</li> <li>2. Reclaiming history from dominant perspectives and retelling it from minority perspectives (<i>Boy Soldier, Hedd Wyn, Penyberth, Y Weithred, Ar Waelod y cof, To The Four Winds, Burgos Trial, Segovia Breakout, Broken Silence</i>).</li> <li>3. Introspection, self-criticism and self-doubt (<i>Soloman a Gaenor, Gadael Lenin, Grand Slam, In The Company of Strangers, Be Brave, Twin Town, Yoyes, El Pico, El lobo, Death of Mikel, Ander and Yul</i>).</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rejection of ‘stable natural’ givens, for instance of gender, family structure, community, growing intergenerational conflict (<i>Very Annie Mary, Streetlife, Coming Up Roses, Running Out of Time, Ander, Jump Into the Void</i>).</li> <li>• Moral complexity (<i>Twin Town, Little White Lies, A Way of Life, La Blanca Paloma, Pursued, Basque Ball</i>)</li> <li>• Shrinking of the world and interconnectedness (<i>Dafydd, Branwen, Vacas</i>)</li> <li>• Multiplicity of identities, those at the margins take centre stage (<i>Gadael Lenin, Atgof, Death of Mikel, Pasajes</i>).</li> </ul>

Combination of stages and elements above generates



### postnationalism

(Can be summarised as a collection of elements):

- Imitation and parody (*Red Squirrel, The Dead Mother, The Stone, House of America, Flick*)
- Discordant landscapes (*Tierra, Lovers of the Arctic Circle, Aupa Etxebeste! Arriya, Patagonia, Un Nos Ola Leuad*)
- Submergence (*Flick, Patagonia, Submarine, Un Nos Ola Leuad, Elenya, Lovers of the Arctic Circle, Tierra, Red Squirrel, Sex and Lucia, )*
- Blurring of distinctions between children and adults (*Submarine, I Know You Know, Un Nos Ola Leuad, Elenya, Lovers of the Arctic Circle, The Dead Mother, Red Squirrel, Arriya,*)

Figure 3: links between postcolonialism, postmodernism and postnationalism

The argument presented here is not that postcolonialism and postmodernism somehow joined forces in order to generate a world in which the significance of national identity is eroded. It is that in the case of Wales and the Basque country, the combination of the removal of some of the weight of external domination along with changes in the modes of everyday life and the representation of this in film has resulted in a category of films in which it seems as though minority nation identity has fragmented, whilst at the same time lost at least some of its significance or relevance. This is best exemplified by considering some of the differences between this category of postnational film, and films categorized as Preserved and Reversal.

A major difference in postnational concerns differences in the ‘attachedness’ that characters have with the land. In Preserved ‘attachedness’ is a combination of strong, clear physical and economic links with the landscape that characters have who live on farms and in village communities, and have rural skills that shape cultural practices such as crafts and sporting competition; and how people and landscape are bound up in the production of cultural meanings that combine in narratives of identity. These are narratives of identity that seem to draw on environmentally essentialist and deterministic ideas in the links made between Basqueness in people and the Basque landscape. Both people and landscape are coincident; they co-construct each other as ‘Basque’. In Reversal, characters instead co-construct urban landscapes of decay and complex morality. In postnational, characters appear once more in rural settings, but in unhappy circumstances. They seem out of place, their relationship with the land itself is fraught, and the land is more anonymous.

Places that took up centre stage in Preserved/Reversal, that provided for and nurtured families and communities, are now marginal in postnational, sites of struggle and depression that work against people. Unlike in Preserved, families are dysfunctional, and not structured around the demands of ‘honest working class’ life. Families are no longer united around a working week shaped by a daily routine of earning wages, and the stereotyped family roles and relationships associated with this structuring of family life so characteristic of the stereotypes of the Welsh family evident in Preserved. In part reflecting the depth of the economic decline of the valleys in the 1980s, instead there are characters who exist on the

dole (*House of America*), who cannot work due to depression (*Submarine*), and Mams who totally subvert the stereotype of the nurturing, kind hearted character that was such a feature of Preserved. In addition to lacking the foundation that the traditional family unit of Preserved is presented as providing, in postnational films, it also seems as though the additional grounding and rootedness of belonging to wider collective units such as ‘community’, chapel congregation, work colleagues in the mine or the farm, or village/town, characters are isolated. As a result, it seems as though characters lack the type of confidence in themselves and sense of self that stems from these kinds of multiple, nested means of belonging. Instead, they are beset by doubt, indecision and uncertainty.

This theme of a lack of belonging runs through all the films discussed in this chapter, as will become clear in later sections. Lack of belonging can take different forms. For instance in *Submarine* (Richard Ayoade: 2011), we learn that Lloyd Tate (Noah Taylor), father of the main protagonist, is a former marine biologist at the Open University who has lost his job. He now spends most of his time at home, nursing his depression and a seemingly endless attack of flu. Oliver (Craig Roberts), his son, is different from his peers at school, and bullied as a result. In one scene Lloyd sits at the kitchen table with a trademark lemon drink in an unwashed glass cup, in his distinctive camel coloured dressing gown. His wife Jill (Sally Hawkins) asks him ‘planning on getting dressed today?’. This underlines Lloyd’s detachment and retreat from the ‘normal’ world, and contributes to a sense of him as similar to the lost; drifting men of *Reversal*, whose main function in life was taken when they lost their jobs. Lloyd mainly only appears in the film inside the family home, not outside, except in dream sequences or flashbacks. The only exception is one scene in which he drops Oliver off by school.

Lloyd is different from many of the male characters evident in *Reversal*, in that it is poor health, in the form of depression, which prevents him from working. He is educated, and self-aware, and unlike those seeking to avoid work in *Twin Town*, *A Way of Life* or *Little White Lies*, (who are quite similar to characters in *House of America*, discussed later in this chapter). Lloyd is sapped of vitality, and unlike the patriarchal figureheads evident in *On The Black Hill*, *Solomon a Gaenor*, and *Johnny Be Good*, Lloyd is patient, tolerant, liberal, and understanding. When Oliver asks his father about his depression (‘You often feel like this?

How long for?'), Lloyd tells him 'Since about your age... It feels like being under water, the ocean is six miles deep.' In two scenes we see Oliver dressed in his father's dressing gown, with a hot lemon drink in his father's glass cup, and in one of these scenes he is sitting on the edge of his parent's bed.

This suggests that Oliver himself is similarly lacking in confidence about himself and his place in the world. In class, instead of focusing on the lesson, we see him write down 'Three reasons for not killing myself' on a piece of paper. These are:

- 1 Mess/ clean up tissues;
- 2 Make parents look bad;
3. Would never see Jordana again.

Jordana (Yasmin Paige) is a girl in his class that he is infatuated with. The class is supposed to be working on the theme of 'Who am I and what sort of a young person am I?', which is presented by the teacher as an opportunity for self-discovery. The paper is ripped from Oliver's notepad by Chips (Darren Evans), and ends up in the hands of class teacher Mr Davey (Steffan Rhodri), who offers Oliver counseling. Lloyd and Oliver are thus examples of male characters beset by doubts and pessimism. It seems that the main gifts that Oliver has inherited from his father are unhappiness and depression.

## **Rural**

A feature of postnational films is how rural places have changed in their meaning and significance. Previously, fundamental to *Preserved* was a sense of the rural as sustaining, idyllic, bound up with tradition and continuity. The rural has long stood in films as a prime icon of an 'authentic' Welshness, and is of course always closely bound up with many different narratives of race and identity that are based on essentialism, as the 'homeland', the rock on which a national or regional identity can be based. Landscape presented in this way is in a relationship of co-construction with people, both help to make each other 'authentically Welsh'.

But in postnational film, the rural has a different set of meanings. It is harsh, a place of unfulfilled dreams and unhappiness, murder, suicide, and other kinds of tragedy. In this way, the Welsh countryside comes to resemble the rural in Basque films in *Preserved*, as a place of uncertainty, mystery, danger and violence. For example *Un Nos Ola Leuad* (Endaf Emlyn: 1991) is a film about an unnamed man (Dyfan Roberts), revisiting the site of his troubled, religious childhood in the early part of the twentieth century. It culminates in him committing suicide at the same lakeside place at which he murdered another child Jini (Delyth Einir), when he was a young teenager (Tudur). Although set entirely in the countryside, only fleetingly do we get to see the countryside as productive, when we are shown the boy helping a farmer collect reeds. There is little else in the film that presents the countryside as providing and nurturing inhabitants, for instance through crops, or people living close to nature. Instead, we see the countryside in black and white as bleakly dark. Scenes include blasting at the quarry, which highlight explosive exploitation and destruction and the production of waste that ends up on slag heaps.

The very lives of the boy and his mother migrate into the non-physical world of religious mania, dreams, and visions; and away from the physical world of landscape, village and valley, farm and town. The relationship of co-construction and harmony between landscape and people is thus not evident. When the boy's mother is committed to an asylum as the result of a breakdown brought on by the combination of grinding poverty and religious fervour, he is forced to go to work in the slate quarry. The quarry is presented as a cold, harsh place of work, in which the young boy is clearly out of place. Although in one scene we see the starving boy stealing potatoes from a field, the Welsh landscape is presented as oppressive, rock faces tower over the characters, the lake is known as 'Black Lake' because of the presence of waste from the quarry in its waters. It is a discordant landscape.

Coupled to this, the film tells a story of a single mother and her young son being ostracised by the local Anglican church following the death of the old canon. It is a community in which they clearly do not belong, they are unsupported and isolated. The gloomy trajectory of the

film leads to the mother's insanity and the son, released from his long confinement, heading back to the lake to end his own life.

This theme of the countryside as a place of violence is also highly evident in *Elenya* (Steve Gough: 1991). In flashback this tells the story of a young girl Elenya (Pascale Delafouge Jones), who helps an injured German flier Franz (Klaus Behrendt), during World War Two. Because of her efforts to obtain medicine for his injuries, she unwittingly leads men from her local village to Franz, and he is tracked by dogs and then shot. The film *House of America* (Marc Evans: 1997) has an almost unrecognizable rural setting, in a village in the valleys of South Wales, during the final, savage throws of mineral exploitation. Open cast quarrying extends almost to the front door of the family home, which is an isolated dwelling away from any sense of physical or social community. The young are unemployed and without opportunity, they use drugs and fantasy to seek to escape their situation. Scenes of violence include a fight in the local pub when sons from the house trade insults with a worker from the open cast quarry. The two boys are also beaten by other workers from the quarry as a result of an unsuccessful attempt to gain work. Later in the film, the eldest boy commits suicide.

In *Patagonia*, the Welsh countryside of the central character Cerys's heritage is presented as a drowned valley. She is uncertain as to the location and fate of the farm her mother grew up on. At the end of the film Cerys dies, her body is placed on a raft on the lake covering the valley her mother grew up in, which is then set alight. Only three others are in attendance at this low key ceremony.

The rural is therefore depicted as a site at which celebration, community, cohesion and the collective have ebbed away. All that seems to be left are the bones of the past, misery, violence and death. The link of co-construction between people and landscape and identity is not evident. Instead, it is as though the countryside is the setting for the destruction of people. This is quite similar to how the rural is portrayed in Basque postnational film, discussed in the next chapter. One characteristic of postnational films is how the countryside, previously

iconic of identity, a fount of nurturance, and a sustaining pillar of community and collectivity, is instead a discordant landscape.

## Religion

This pillar of Preserved is an object of mockery and fun in Reversal. In postnational film religion is largely absent in comparison, no longer intrinsic to versions of Welsh identity. Apart from the Anglican church in *Un Nos Ola Leuad*, no characters are ministers, no one is shown praying or attending chapel, no one is mocked for their religion. In *Patagonia* a chapel in Wales has been turned into a family home for Kate (Alys Thomas), one of the supporting characters, her husband and their three children. This refers directly to the dwindling sizes of congregations, and the redundancy and closure of chapels in Wales, to be ‘recycled’ and used for other purposes. As will be discussed later in the chapter, empty chapels are also depicted in the country Patagonia in the film of the same name. And far from being a source of comfort and commonality, religion is presented as the source of unhappiness and torment in *Un Nos Ola Leuad*. In postnational films, religion is either a skeleton in the landscape, or destructive.

## Films about ordinary people

Many films in Preserved focused on notable people, for instance poets, deacons, those resisting English oppression, on heroic soldiers, and on iconic miners, farmers, and mams. This collection could be summarised as the Welsh establishment. As previous chapters have stressed, in many films Welsh people are simply working class, whilst those in positions of real power and wealth tend to be implicitly English, such as mine owners, land owners, and the ‘sly leopards’ of industry as they are referred to in *Ar Waelod y Cof*. In Reversal Welsh characters include County Councilors, Welsh Assembly members, drug dealers and users, and middle class entrepreneurs. In *Way of Life* and *Little White Lies* the focus is on the gritty

realities of the street, since these films cast a contemporary spotlight on the evils of racism in Wales.

But in the postnational, characters are more everyday, unexceptional, even anonymous. The dramatic tension is derived from exceptional events happening to these ordinary people, these ‘nobodies’. These include fantasy (e.g. *House of America*, *I Know You Know* (Justin Kerrigan: 2009), *Submarine*), the supernatural (*Flick* [David Howard: 2008]), religious mania (*Un Nos Ola Leuad*), war-time (*Elenya*), an odyssey (*Patagonia*), and killing and death (all of the films previously mentioned except *Submarine*). None of the characters in these films are iconic, in the sense that they don’t seem to stand for Welsh people collectively, other than to suggest once more that everybody in Wales is probably white. There is no sense of cultural melting pot, no embracing of non-white narratives of Welshness, but at the same time no nationalist sentiment. There are none of the stereotypes that feature in *Preserved* or *Reversal*, and yet collectively these films invoke small town life in north and south Wales across almost a century.

A characteristic of postnational films therefore seems to be an embracing of ordinary people, as though the exception, the famous, the iconic are no longer relevant. Personal history is no longer provided. There is no sense of characters somehow keying into a wider and deeper history, no connection with a sense of nation. These are the kinds of characteristics associated with postmodernism and identity in the works of commentators such as Frederic Jameson.

## **postnational Wales on film**

Location forms a significant element to what is portrayed on screen in terms of plot and characters. *Patagonia* features a journey in Wales from the Severn Bridge to Llyn Celyn near Bala, a reservoir formed when a valley was flooded in 1965. *Un Nos Ola Leuad* / *One Moonlit Night* (S4C 1991: Endaf Emlyn) is set within a quarrying village in rural North Wales. *Elenya* (Steve Gough 1991), *House of America*, *I Know You Know*, *Flick* (David Howard: 2008) and *Submarine* depict the poverty, lack of opportunities and economic decline



associated with much of Wales. Place is not as significant as in *Preserved* and *Reversal*, and neither does it seem to be as iconic, representing Wales, but it is nevertheless still present in these films.

## Focus on children and young adults

Four films (*Submarine*, *Un Nos Ola Leuad*, *I Know You Know* and *Elenya*) in this category of Welsh film feature children as the main protagonists, which is in contrast to the focus on adults in *Preserved* and *Reversal*. There are some exceptions, for instance *Carrie's War*, classified in *Preserved*. But to some extent this film is also exceptional for being based on an outsider's view of Wales derived from a children's book by the English author Nina Bawden. Another exception is *Tiger Bay*, in which the plot unfolds via the naïve perspective of a young girl on the adult world. *Gadael Lenin* could also be included as an exception, but this film deals more with a young man's first tentative steps into a more adult world, whilst away from Wales. But more generally in *Preserved* and *Reversal*, children feature mainly in terms of the continuity of families, communities, society and culture. For instance it is they who inherit materially, psychologically and spiritually from their parents. Alternatively they potentially may interrupt these processes of inheritance (in *Reversal*), thus featuring as a source of anxieties, as a generation that might be growing away from their predetermined cultural heritage. Three films do not feature those still of school age (*Flick*, *House of America* and *Patagonia*) but instead protagonists there are youths and young adults amongst the main.

So Welsh postnational can be linked with the adoption of a child's or young adult's perspective on the world. Basque film is different in this respect, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Furthermore, the children and young adults in these Welsh films stand to inherit little from their parents, unlike children portrayed in the other categories of *Preserved* and *Reversal*. In some cases their parents are mentally unstable. None own farms, or businesses, or property to pass on to their children. There is no sense of skills or abilities or knowledges being passed from parents to children. Grandparents are absent and not referred to in any film, apart from in *Patagonia*, where the central character Cerys (Marta Lubos) is returning to

her grandparents' grave. Generally in these films, parents are not capable of looking after their children. In *Submarine* comedy is derived from the inadequacy and inaccuracy of the two parents' separately given advice to their son when they learn that he has a girlfriend. Their son is way beyond their image of him in terms of knowledge and maturity, he has a much better assessment of his own capabilities than they do, as though they have lost track of how he has grown up.

Childhoods have also been blighted. The theme of unhappiness in childhood is evident in several films, for instance the main characters in *Submarine*, *Flick* and *Elenya* are all the subjects of mockery and bullying from their peers. In *Submarine* it is notable that the bully is a girl, Jordana Bevan. Added to this is the impression that audiences may have of the childhood experienced by the young adults in *House of America*, when we learn that their mother killed their father, suffers from depression, and tries her best to prevent them from leaving. A prime feature that results from these quite different kinds of relationship between parent and children is the rejection by children of an adult view of the world. The adult world is less than fully comprehensible to them, but unlike in *Tiger Bay*, this is not due to naivety. Instead, the children seem more worldly wise, grounded, and sensible in comparison to adults. One characteristic of postnational films is thus the rejection of adult views of the world. A child's perspective does not have the cultural grounding of an adult's, since children are not fully socialised, they have more independence of thought. A new generation is growing up within the context of a postmodern and postnational world.

## Parents and children

A significant feature of these films is that children have an absent parent (e.g. in *House of America*, *Flick*, *Un Nos Ola Leuad*, *I Know you Know* and *Elenya*). This contrasts with the standard plot lines and relationships depicted in *Preserved* and *Reversal*. *Preserved* is centred on the traditional family, and usually on characters who cohere closely with dominant norms of gender. Thus, 'normal' women in *Preserved* become Welsh mams, with family and domestic responsibilities. Those who do not meet this standard become outcasts, 'problem

daughters'. In reversal, the family unit still exists, but financial responsibilities have shifted from men to women, who are now the major breadwinners outside the home. Men, in comparison, are relatively powerless, and directionless, in terms of employment. The family as a functioning nuclear unit is absent.

Instead we are presented with families that are dysfunctional. In several of these films the parent who is present either is or becomes mentally unstable (*House of America*, *Flick*, *Un Nos Ola Leuad* and *I Know You Know*). In *Patagonia* the central character Cerys is an eighty year old woman with diabetes and poor eyesight, single-mindedly on an odyssey to Wales from Patagonia. When she arrives, she and her companion Alejandro (Nahuel Perez Biscayart), who tends to her like a devoted son, are reduced to hitch-hiking with their suitcases, unsure of where they are going. Her lack of prior planning and preparation for the journey suggests either a sharp focus on her purpose to the exclusion of all else, or a level of obsession that suggests mental deterioration. In other films, it is made more obvious that mothers in particular have issues with mental health (e.g. *House of America*, *Flick* and *Un Nos Ola Leuad*).

So in postnational 'the family' as portrayed in *Preserved* and *Reversal* is either not present or unrecognizable. Without 'real' men and 'mams' the traditional Welsh family dissolves and what is left is neither sustaining nor nurturing. This has consequences too for narratives of identity. In contrast to levels of collective identity such as community, chapel, family, farm, quarry or mine, in postnational characters are presented much more as individuals. There is little sense of them belonging to any kind of wider collective, even 'family', since the 'micro-families' that they do form a part of are based around very different kinds of parent-child relationship.

For instance in *House of America*, the younger son, Boyo (Matthew Rhys) effectively occupies the position of 'Mam'. His mother, Mrs Lewis (Siân Phillips), has been described as 'Welsh Mam 'obliterated' (Ffrancon 2007: 7) because of the lack of nurturing she gives her children. There are no meals ready on the table, the house is a mess with laundry not done, and she shows no warmth and affection towards her children. A Welsh Mam would be

expected to organise and instill a domestic routine of mealtimes and bedtimes, and to manage the family finances. She fails to do either. The younger son Boyo instead is the one to provide emotional comfort and support, by listening to the troubles of his mother, sister Gwenny (Lisa Palfrey) and brother Sid (Steven Mackintosh) as well as comforting them all.

In *Un Nos Ola Leuad* The Boy is loyal to his mentally ill and spiritually damaged Mam. For instance it is his prayers that seem to prompt a gift of a basket of food when they are starving. He also steals potatoes for both of them from a field for food. When his Mam is committed to an asylum, The Boy accompanies her in the taxi, to reassure her. He answers her question ‘Where are we going?’ by telling her ‘You and I are going for a trip in the taxi to the seaside, everything is alright mam’. She does not notice that when the taxi arrives there is already an official from the asylum and a policeman inside. They all join in when she starts singing verses from hymns. This example illustrates the extent to which the children are in charge, and yet behave considerately and with tenderness to their parents.

In *Flick* when the ghost of Jonny ‘Flick’ Taylor (Hugh O’ Connor) returns to his mam (Liz Smith) 40 years after his death, she fails to recognise that he is only a ghost. For instance she bakes him his favourite cake and is then puzzled why he does not eat any, or drink any tea. Again, the mam is portrayed as childlike, with a fragile grip on reality.

In *I Know You Know* the figure of the mam is absent, and this is never explained. Young Jamie (Arron Fuller) plays along with his father Charlie’s (Robert Carlyle) fantasy of being on a secret mission. So in this film, the father is childlike, and unable to separate fantasy from reality. Jamie demonstrates his loyalty and his depth of feeling for his father by following his father’s instructions, at the same time learning how to handle his father’s instabilities. In some ways Jamie is thus like a father to his own father. Another film in which a child assumes the role of parent to an adult is *Elenya*. The young girl Elenya (Pascale Delafouge Jones) acts as a parent to the injured German flier Franz (Klaus Behrendt). He is initially not found by the Welsh adults from the village because his parachute has become entangled in

the trees. Elenya cuts him free and tends to his wounds. She builds a tent in the woods, brings food and clothes, and medication which she has stolen from the village.

In general it is clear that what these films have in common is that the traditional relationship between parents and children is turned around. Children are the ones with ability; they are in control and assume responsibility. In *Preserved*, the older generation is to be respected. They look after the younger generation, provide an inheritance, and are people whose footsteps are to be followed. In *Reversal* fathers have become powerless and are no longer role models, mothers have become principal wage earners outside the home, and families are under stress. In *postnational* the older generation is to be treated with consideration and tenderness, but is no longer a source of useful guidance or advice. They offer no inheritance, they are no longer role models, and they have a loosened grip on reality.

## **Incapable adults and capable children**

The relationship between young and older generations portrayed within these films is relatively complex. Within families adults are relatively weak and incapable, whereas children are relatively powerful and capable. This is exemplified in *Submarine*. Over his school Christmas holidays Oliver in voice over tells the audience ‘During this brief hiatus I think I can save my parents’ marriage, and then resume my duties as the best boyfriend in the world’. Oliver comes across on screen like a teenager imbued with the sophistication and knowledge of the thirty eight year old author of the novel on which this film is based. His precocity is used for comedic effect, as is his retro, nerdy style of dress (including a long, dark duffle coat, complete with toggles).

His mother Jill is in the middle of a fling with a former boyfriend from her teenage years Graham Purvis (Paddy Considine). He has recently moved next door, and together they go to the pictures because her husband cannot summon up the motivation to go. Oliver also sees Graham pick up his mother from the hairdresser, and he sees them on New Year’s Eve in

Graham's van, we later learn that they have engaged in sexual relations in the back of the van. Oliver tries to save his parent's marriage by sending his mother love notes in his father's forged handwriting, not knowing that his mother has already finished her fling with Graham. It is this attempt to manipulate his parents, although slightly misguided, that marks a difference in the relations between parents and children.

This feature is clearer in *I Know You Know*, in which the capable young son Jamie turns his incapable father Charlie in to the police when his behavior becomes intensely erratic. Part of the acute delusion that Charlie suffers from is that he is to receive £2 million payment for undertaking a mission as a secret agent. His mission is to bring to justice an international satellite television company ('Astrosat'), which he deludedly believes was responsible for his own business collapsing, and which occupies his former business premises. Before setting off and on their way to the police station, his son does not tell him where they are going. He says:

'Charlie wake up, it's over it's all over, I have spoken to policeman John, all the money is waiting for you at the station, he wants to thank you... they all want to thank you'

It is notable that he calls his father by name (Charlie). He is playing along with the delusions and fantasies of his father, in which he is an accomplice on a mission as an equal rather than a son.

In a similar way, in *House of America*, mentally ill and incapable mother Mrs Lewis has a terrible fear of losing control over her three children, which is part of the 'gafael egwan sydd ganddi ar realiti/weak hold she has on reality' (Ffrancon 2007:81). For instance she slashes the tyres on her sons' car and motorbike when they have job interviews, to prevent them from potentially achieving the means to move out of the family home. She is thus portrayed as being more than simply incompetent. Like Charlie she is frail too, both of them rely on their children, they need their more capable children to be present.

This significant difference in the relationships between generations in Welsh families in these films may be suggestive of several things. Firstly, it may suggest that older generations no longer have anything of value to pass on to newer generations, even if they were capable of doing so. Secondly, it is as though there is no longer anything to be gained from the past, or from the systems of continuity so evident in films of *Preserved*. Thirdly, it portrays the younger generation as capable, as carers for the older generation.

However, this is not the only difference in intergenerational relations between characters in these films, in comparison to *Preserved* and *Reversal*. In *Un Nos Ola Leuad /One Moonlit Night* the behavior of adults is more extreme. The Boy and his friend Moi (Dilwyn Vaughan Thomas) watch from outside the window how Moi's Uncle Now (Wyn Bowen Harris) threatens Moi's mother (Sian Wheldon) with a knife. We learn later in the film that Uncle Now hangs himself. Another local man Em (Dafydd Clwyd) is chased by a local mob and then arrested by the police and taken to the local asylum after taking young Jini to the woods to sexually abuse her. In addition, Mr Preis (Michael Povey) the local headmaster is portrayed as using his position to sexually abuse Jini in his office. Jini and to a lesser extent the boy are thus on the receiving end of violent and exploitative behavior on the part of adults. This is again very different from how intergenerational relations are portrayed in *Preserved* and *Reversal*. This can be seen as symbolic of a total fracturing of relations between generations, with a younger generation having nothing to learn or gain from an older generation except evil.

Tragically, when Jini encounters the Boy at a lakeside and makes advances to him to initiate him into an adult sexual world, he panics and strangles her. This happens at a time when the Boy has just committed his mother to an asylum and is about to start work at the quarry. He is on the cusp between childhood and adulthood. Jini has similarly left school, and sees the Boy as potentially a romantic partner, in contrast to the abusive adults she already knows. In contrast to *Preserved* and *Reversal*, where boundaries between childhood and adulthood were clear, in postnational they are blurred. Adulthood seems to entail being flawed, evil or ill.

## The Past

In Preserved generally, the past is something revered and celebrated as a crucial part of collective heritage. Films in Reversal tend to concentrate on the problems and tragedies of the present, which thus contrast with an implied relatively golden and trouble free past. So for example *Coming Up Roses*, *A Way of Life*, *Little White Lies* and *Twin Town* can be regarded in various ways as alarm calls, drawing the attention of Welsh audiences to pressing social issues such as unemployment amongst men, racism, crime and drug culture. These films do not place these subjects within any kind of wider historical perspective, thus suggesting that these contemporary issues are entirely 'new' to Wales, and that the past therefore was not blighted by them or any kind of equivalent.

In contrast to this, the past in films in postnational tends to be presented in negative ways. Older characters unsuccessfully seek to reconnect with it, others seek to document it, and yet it is presented as holding little of worth. Alternatively, the past is something which quite literally, comes to haunt the present. For instance, in *Patagonia* Rhys (Matthew Gravel) leaves Cardiff when offered a contract to photograph and record chapels built in traditional Welsh styles in Patagonia. We see these small chapel buildings in silhouette, isolated from houses, villages, communities. We see no people in or around these chapels; they are thus presented as relics of the past, a focus for generations now passed.

A young child Pablito (Nicolas Silva) believes that the cans of film reels Rhys uses on his assignment will have instant photographs. Pablito had previously been photographed by Gwen (Nia Roberts) using a Polaroid. Pablito had never seen a camera before. In an orange polo shirt and yellow and green sleeveless pullover he makes a colourful figure as he unwinds the reels of film like reels of ribbon in the dusty bland coloured landscape. This visual contrast between Pablito and his surroundings may be interpreted in several ways. His bright and colourful appearance may underline a sense of innocent playfulness, he has no idea what damage he is doing by opening the cans and unreeling the film. In this sense, Pablito perhaps may stand for a young generation, unconsciously destroying attempts to preserve cultural heritage and the past, maybe because although this was valued by previous generations, it is of little relevance to the young now. In the film, we see how Rhys's attempts



to document the chapels in photographs is thwarted, almost as though the past itself is being erased.

In the same film Wales has nothing to offer Cerys when she arrives. The local village and the graveyard in which her grandparents are buried have both been wiped out along with the family farm. She discovers the valley, and the graves relocated. The fact that the flooding of the valley in 1965 for a reservoir is news to Cerys underlines how her links with Wales have been broken, along with lines of inheritance. Again, the past has been obliterated, when Cerys tries to reconnect to her family past, it is not there anymore. Audiences may make assumptions as to why Cerys has chosen a time when she is elderly, infirm and needs assistance to visit Wales. She is uninvited and she has told nobody in Patagonia where she is going, in fact she has used the excuse of a trip to Buenos Aires for eye surgery as a means of slipping away to travel to Wales. Once there, she looks for the family farm, having no idea where it might be. Shortly after finding the farm is no more, she dies, by the reservoir that now covers the land of her forebears.

This fruitless search for the past, which has been erased, presents the past as something with no value except to one near to death who is seeking some final solace. Audiences are encouraged to feel a sorrow for Cerys's realization that nothing of her family past remains in Wales, and over her own subsequent death. She is a strong character, undertaking such a journey and search in her condition. Yet she is also so out of touch, and this is a large part of the tragedy the film depicts. Her alienation from Wales is underlined from the start of the film, as we realize before she comes to Wales that she cannot speak either Welsh or English.

A similar theme in connection with heritage, family and the past is evident in *I Know You Know*. We learn that Charlie the father, an embodiment of the past, is placed into psychiatric care by his son Jamie, for 12 years, until his death. We get some sense of the sorrow that Jamie may feel over this action through the sincerity, tenderness and understanding that he shows to his father, and which comes across in the voice-over narration provided by Jamie as an adult. For instance the narration informs us that 'For the next 12 years Charlie went deep underground on a mission, changing identities, calculating perfect lives in the future.

Suddenly at the age of 50 Charlie died. I said goodbye by taking his ashes to America and put them in a rocket into space. Bye Dad. Five, Four, Three, Two, One.’ We are shown the rocket blasting off into space.

Both Charlie and Cerys in *Patagonia* are given low key but nevertheless grand funerals. Cerys’s body is launched onto the reservoir in a small wooden boat, adorned with wild flowers, which is then ceremonially set alight by Wil (John Ogwen), the only Welsh person to have helped her during her search. Only Alejandro and Sissy (Aimee Duffy), who has acted as a translator and who is by this time romantically attached to Alejandro, are present at this funeral. These two funerals are markedly different from the traditionally ritualistic funerals depicted in *Preserved*, which are parodied for comedic effect in *Reversal*.

In the film *Flick*, the past is negative, and in fact comes back to haunt a group of teenagers from the 1960s forty years later. We learn that as a boy the main protagonist Johnny ‘Flick’ Taylor stuttered, and this attracted the making of difference amongst his peers, bullying and rejection. The film depicts how, as a shy teenage loner, he rehearses saying ‘Will you dance with me Sal?’ as he arrives at the local dancehall on a Friday night in 1960. But when he approaches Sal (Hayley Angel Wardle) the object of his deep desires, her friend Sue (Kerrie Hayes) interjects, snarling ‘Beat it creep’. Creeper Martin (Ricci Harnett), who is the dancehall owner’s son, then dances in an overpoweringly sexually suggestive way with Sal, in front of Johnny. When Johnny tries to intervene, Creeper yells ‘Are you deaf as well as dumb? Sal only dances with me’. Johnny is then kicked and beaten to the floor by Creeper and his friends. Johnny recovers sufficiently to rescue Sal from Creeper, and to carry her away in his car. But when she escapes from the car in fear of Johnny and his intentions, he crashes into the harbour and drowns. The film then moves forward in time 40 years to show how Johnny’s ghost comes to exact a terrible revenge on Creeper and his friends, and even on Sue. By this time Sal (Julia Foster) has been unhappily married to Creeper for some years, she and her daughter are the only ones that the ghost of Johnny does not kill.

In *House of America*, the past is to some extent something that members of the Lewis family are seeking to escape. Partly, this escape is via a fixation with all things American. The film has been described as a 'desperate search for identity that leads to incest, insanity and murder' (Roms: 1997:10). As previously mentioned, mother Mrs Lewis is in terrible fear of losing control over her three children, and is tormented by her conscience because we learn she murdered her husband in the family house with a coal hammer, an iconic tool within Welsh history. Her two older children Gwenny and Sid remember events from that night. This contributes to Sid committing suicide, and to Gwenny being as mentally unstable as her mother. She is incestuously pregnant with Sid's child. The family is totally dysfunctional.

The past is similarly negative in *Un Nos Ola Leuad*, which has been described as portraying 'the tortured world of a protagonist suffocated by memories' (Berry 1994: 417). Central character The Man returns to the village of his birth and childhood on release from being committed following his murder of a young girl, Jini, when he was a teenager. The film follows The Man as he revisits his old home, the local church, schoolroom and vicarage. This has been described as a 'pererindod hunllefus' (Roberts 1991:13) which can be translated as 'nightmarish pilgrimage'. Through a series of flashbacks, this revisiting brings back many painful memories. For instance there is a happy scene of the local Canon (Stewart Jones) in his garden, on the washing line is laundry done by The Man's mother (Betsan Llwyd). She was employed as a washerwoman by the Canon when others shunned her because she gave birth out of wedlock. He gives The Man, or more accurately The Boy in the flashback, a coin. But in another scene we see the Canon laid out in his coffin, and how The Boy's mother wept in grief. We learn that she was subsequently cast out by a new, less tolerant vicar (Grey Evans). This casts The Boy and his mother into the misery of poverty.

This remembering culminates in his recollection of Jini, and he returns to the edge of the lake where the murder took place, takes off his overcoat, and wades into the lake to drown himself. The film has also been described as a 'hermetic study of guilt' (Berry 2000:145), in which the local community is depicted as stifling, conservative and something to be escaped from. The original Caradog Pritchard novel of the same title, published in 1961, has been described as depicting the 'savage, pent-up violence' of an early twentieth century Welsh

community (Thomas 2010: 333), as a 'haunting memory' (Kemp 1992: 55), and a 'downbeat portrait of a primitive and repressed Wales' (McLoone 2001: 187).

Another film that adopts a similar style and composition is *Elenya*. Through flashbacks this tells the story of events in a Welsh village during the Second World War through the eyes of a twelve year old Welsh girl, Elenya. It has been characterised as 'emphasising the violence, brutality and xenophobia that lurks beneath the surface in a seemingly serene Welsh rural community' (Macnab 1992: 43). The flashbacks follow Elenya as she finds and tends and tries to nurse the downed German flyer, Franz, following a plane crash in woods by the village. She is othered by her school teachers, whom she overhears in their staffroom discussing her as the 'possible Italian'. The village chemist (Meredith Ioan) addresses her as 'you the Italian girl', on account of having an Italian mother, who is absent, along with her father, Glyn (Seiriol Tomos). We see how her peers in the village shout 'you are a foreigner' at Elenya, and mock her. She is a loner, happy and freer in the forest. She is beaten by her aunt Maggie (Sue Jones Davies), with whom she stays, and who is resentful of having Elenya dumped on her whilst her father goes off to try track down her mother. Elenya manages to keep Franz's presence a secret until she is followed into the woods by the chemist. Elenya has been stealing medical supplies to try to save Franz from injuries he sustained in the plane crash. Elenya is seen by the chemist's son Sidney (Iago Wynn Jones), and the chemist then leads local men with dogs, which track down and kill Franz.

In the final scenes we learn that Elenya was thrown out by her aunt after Franz's death and left the village. Elderly Elenya (Margaret John) returns to the village, and admits whilst in the woods 'I had to return in order to be free at last.' Her conscience had been troubled since her childhood, for instance by agonizing over whether she had done the right thing by helping Franz. In a recurring childhood nightmare, she dreams that Franz confronts her father in combat and shoots him. Again, like *Un Nos Ola Leuad*, *Elenya* is clearly about troubling childhood events, being forced out of the place of one's birth, and the psychological burden imposed by these.

This is in clear contrast to the rose tinted perspectives usually found in *Preserved*. In *Preserved*, the past is something to celebrate, a glorious part of heritage. But in this category of films the past is something negative. It can be obliterated, or it holds guilt, regret, loss; it was damaging and is still damaging when individuals look back, the past is more millstone than heritage.

## Submergence

One feature that the films discussed in this chapter seem to have in common is references to ‘submergence’. The traditional, essentialist relationship between characters and landscape so evident in *Preserved* is disrupted by this. Submergence involves visual references to bodies of water that cover the land, or mark a boundary or liminal zone where the land stops. These references may be regarded as metaphors for the disruption of links between characters and the land, with the land iconic of issues closely connected to identity, history, cultural heritage, collectivity and belonging.

In *Submarine* this is clearly signaled by the film’s title, and in the scene already mentioned where Lloyd tells his son Oliver of his depression. ‘Since about your age... it feels like being under water, the ocean is six miles deep.’ In *Un Nos Ola Leuad* The Man takes his life in a lake. In an earlier scene, in a deranged state the mother goes in her nightgown to splash about in the leet below a waterwheel. She is rescued by her son, and subsequently committed to an asylum. In *Elenya* old Elenya (Margaret John), revisits the river where Franz was shot, having been caught there by the chasing dogs and the mob, and in flashback we see this happen again. In *Flick* the central character Johnny is killed when his car plunges off the harbour edge. In a later scene we see how the car is discovered during reclamation work decades later, with Johnny’s body inside it. In *Patagonia*, as well as a valley being flooded to create a reservoir and thus drowning the farm that Cerys seeks, her Viking-style funeral takes place on the lake, her remains are consumed by it.

There are three other scenes in films that take place at the seaside. These are *House of America*, when Boyo takes his mother to the seaside to sit on a deckchair on the seafront during the final stages of her mental instability, before she is committed to an institution. In *Submarine* Oliver and his girlfriend are reconciled whilst paddling on the beach. In *Patagonia* Cerys and Alejandro sit on the prom in Aberystwyth in one scene. The seaside can be regarded as a liminal zone, a shifting, tidal boundary where the land meets the sea.

It is possible to interpret this featuring of submergence in various ways as a form of erasure. People are erased in water, the land is drowned, and water is associated with trauma. Water is presented as a powerful fundamental element that can take away. Although it is of course possible for that which has buoyancy to float in water, it could be seen as a metaphor for wider or global currents in which the position of a minority nation and its distinctive identity and culture are threatened with drowning.

## **External influences and the new global world**

The influence of powerful external, imperialistic cultural forces on subordinate minority nations has long been recognised:

‘The greatest factor in the modification of indigenous ways of life comes not from the movements of population, significant as they are, but from external influences which show every sign of becoming more far reaching and more powerful with time and technical advance’ (Carter 2010:136).

In films in postnational, the main external influence in *Preserved*, the English, is replaced by the influence of more powerful global cultures, which permeate everyday life through a variety of different means. These include film, music, novels, clothes, and other cultural items. In *Flick* the influence of American culture is evident in the presence of a US detective from Memphis, Lieutenant McKenzie (Faye Dunaway), and three animated links in the film in the style of American cartoons, complete with an American voice-over. In another scene, Johnny’s mad mother (Liz Smith) voices her preference for cowboy and Indian films. These

elements are in addition to the centrality of rock and roll music and fashion fundamental to Johnny's character.

The difference between Johnny in *Flick* and Johnny in *Johnny Be Good* is that in *Preserved* rock and roll is presented as a passing fad, rejected in the end by Johnny in favour of the family farm when his father dies. But in *Flick*, rock and roll underlies the character of Johnny and the way that he dresses. When he dies and later returns as a vengeful ghost, rock and roll music from a pirate radio station acts as a cue for his ghost to rise and carry out murderous vengeance. Other scenes in the film are set in an American style café with a jukebox. We learn that Lieutenant McKenzie, a one armed older woman, is in Wales on a 'swap a cop' scheme. It is perhaps an indication of the terms of the relationship between America and Wales, as a minority nation, that she is such an unlikely police officer. Even she contributes to the rock and roll ambience of the film, by informing the local Sergeant Miller (Mark Benton) that Elvis Presley was her school prom date.

In *House Of America* several characters have an obsession with things American, such as Sid (Steve Mackintosh) and Gwenny's (Lisa Palfrey) worshipping of the author Jack Kerouac. The two of them live out fantasies as Kerouac and his partner Joyce Johnson, whose experiences of travelling on a motorbike in America formed the basis for Kerouac's famous novel *On The Road*. We see how Gwenny sends a letter to Dodge City, in America, in the belief that this is where her father is. She has been encouraged to believe he has gone there to make a success of himself by her mother. Throughout the film, it is clear that the children see America as a land of dreams and opportunity (Ffrancon 2007: 84), although they are 'despairing of ever raising the money to move to the US' (Spencer 1997: 45). The mother seems to maintain this delusion in order to suppress the truth, and her part in his death.

The isolated family house resembles an old American wooden house, cheaply and quickly built, like a shack belonging to the unsuccessful prospectors in the Klondike goldrush. It is in poor condition. It can be regarded as a metaphor for the family, who are the complete antithesis of the family unit of *Preserved*. The local open cast mine, the main employer, is owned by an American company, The Michigan Mining Company. Again, this may be taken

as a metaphor, for the exploitation and extraction of wealth from Wales, the relationship Wales has with America.

In *I Know You Know* the main character Jamie adopts clearly American clothing styles when not in school uniform. He wears a red tracksuit branded 'Giants New York', an American football hat, or his green no 44 Boston Celtics basketball vest. His father Charlie has encouraged this, since travelling to America for a holiday and going in the space shuttle are key elements of his own dream. This is why his ashes end up being taken into space aboard the shuttle after his death.

Even in *Submarine*, a film in which no character has obsessions or aspirations connected to America, aspects of American culture are still present. For instance Oliver hands Jordana Bevan (Yasmin Paige) three books on their first date in front of the box office before they enter the cinema. One is J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, which Oliver says is a 'great example of a modern American influential novel'. Oliver's situation as a troubled teenager matches that of Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*. When Jordana temporarily breaks up their relationship, Oliver says to himself 'I wish life would be like an American soap opera that fades down and fades up again'. Although these are relatively minor references to American culture, this is still in contrast to films of *Preserved and Reversal*, such as *On The Black Hill*, *Solomon a Gaenor* or *Coming Up Roses*. The only clear exception to this is *Johnny Be Good*, in which a young Welshman's love of American rock and roll culture is presented as a direct threat to Welsh identity, heritage and inheritance.

## **Fantasy, injustice, guilt and futility**

Fantasy features in the film *Submarine* in various ways. Oliver has the fantasy that he can somehow save his parents' marriage through his interventions, as previously mentioned. His parents are reconciled towards the end of the film, but it is not because of Oliver's efforts. Early in the film we also see Oliver's fantasy of the excessively emotional tributes and



mourning he dreams would follow the announcement of his death in school. It is a socially awkward and isolated young boy's fantasy of how much those in his life would miss him and appreciate him if he were to die.

Fantasy features in other films in much more significant ways. For instance, in *Un Nos Ola Leuad*, The Boy is tormented by religious nightmares and visions of the devil pursuing and crushing him. This religious torment can be linked to the guilt surrounding his later murder of Jini, and the role he played in having his mother committed to an asylum. This in turn prompts his suicide, the point at which his own life becomes futile to him. *Elenya* is in some ways similar, in that the adult Elenya is shown travelling to the woods and the river by the village she grew up in and was expelled from. This is similar to how The Man in *Un Nos Ola Leuad* is shown revisiting various sites of his own childhood, such as the now derelict house in which he grew up, and places where he used to play with other children from the village before he was cast out. In this way the older character is a vehicle through which troubled episodes of childhood are presented. These episodes return to haunt, and cannot be changed or undone. In this sense, revisiting the past is presented as futile.

It is notable that *Un Nos Ola Leuad* is the only film amongst those classed in Welsh postnational in which religion features. But instead of being either amongst the bedrock elements of local community as in *Preserved*, or something to be mocked, as in *Reversal*, it is presented as a part of the stifling village environment in which The Boy grows up. The film has been described as offering a 'bitter critique of the fundamentalist religion that dominated community life in rural Wales' (McLoone 2001:189). A clear message in the film is that The Boy commits murder, and subsequently grows into a broken man, partly because of his experience of religion. The past is thus presented as a psychological burden.

Fantasy of course plays a large part in *I Know You Know*, in which Charlie creates a whole world of delusion. It also provides the central part of the plot to *Flick*, in the form of the vengeful ghost of Johnny Taylor, who comes to get his revenge on those who treated him so badly fifty years before. The past is again presented as traumatic, as violent, as unjust. As the

ghost appears one by one to his tormentors, each instantly recognises him, and immediately knows why he is there. It is clear that they each have been carrying the psychological burden of guilt for the parts they played the night he died. Johnny also has the fantasy that he can attract Sal to be his girlfriend on the night of the dance, a futile dream that leads to his death. Arguably, the nihilistic ghostly vengeance that results in multiple deaths achieves very little, it is a futile exercise in retribution. Only the adult Sal survives, and Johnny's ghost returns to the docks to disappear beneath the water.

Similarly, characters in *House of America* are preoccupied with fantasies of life in America, from Dodge City to the alternative itinerant life described in Kerouac's *On The Road*. They too are also consumed by guilt, stemming from the murder of their father and the incestuous relationship between Sid and Gwenny. The other prevalent theme of injustice in the past is also evident in *Patagonia*. We learn that Cerys's mother was exiled to Patagonia from the farm in Wales when she became pregnant out of wedlock. Cerys's odyssey to Wales can be seen as an attempt to connect more closely with the past in order to reconcile this injustice somehow.

Unlike films in *Reversal*, in which Welsh on Welsh violence and exploitation forms part of contemporary action, the injustices in postnational are historic. Instead it is retribution, revenge, or reconciliation that are the focus of these films. A sense of futility arises from the realisation that the past cannot be altered, and that those living in the present struggle to cope with the burdens of guilt. It is as though the past can only bring sorrow, it will always be uncomfortable

It is also notable that there is a shift away from mainstream Welsh literature, whether historical or contemporary, as source material for films in postnational, and more films are made by directors also responsible for writing the screenplays. Only two of these films are based on novels (*Submarine*, *Un Nos Ola Leuad*), three were written by their directors (*Flick*, *Elenya*, *I Know You Know*). Each tells a relatively complex story on a relatively small, local scale, with attention to detail. Each film focuses on an individual, rather than a community or a nation.

## Conclusions

Far from being a source of heritage and culture, a ‘comfort blanket’, and providing a sense of continuity, the past is depicted in postnational film as holding no value. The pasts of characters are often painful or traumatic in some way. The past is also something that somehow cannot be escaped, and which ends up destroying some characters.

Another distinctive feature is how central adult characters are incapable, flawed, evil or ill – in extreme cases they are either buried/cremated or committed to institutions. More generally, they are shed by children, for whom the future seems more hopeful once parents or parent figures are either removed in some way or their issues resolved. However, in some cases the children are emotionally scarred as a result. Thus, the traditional notion of family so evident in *Preserved*, and to a lesser extent in *Reversal*, is disrupted further. Also disrupted is the relationship between people and land, for instance via submergence.

To recap, *Preserved* is a ‘comfort blanket’, there to be used in times of stress. A minority nation can lose itself once more in heritage, times when morality was simple, and an external power was readily available to take the part of villain, the oppressive exploiter that had sought to colonise peoples’ minds. *Reversal* can be seen as therapeutic, about highlighting social problems and anxieties about the next generation. *Reversal* is about embracing the present, in all its grittiness, and about the large scale changes associated with the crisis of masculinity. It is a necessary step in the direction of transcending the dualisms on which *Preserved*, and dominant versions of minority identity are based. *Reversal* perhaps satisfies the needs of younger generations who are seeking stories about themselves and their heritage that do not simply hark back to the simplicities of *Preserved*. In some ways, postnational also satisfies the needs of another younger generation, who are not satisfied with previous generations’ versions of minority identity. They may seem to look forward and outward, in comparison to the backwards and inwards looking perspectives of their elders, for stories about themselves and their place in the contemporary world. This is perhaps why intergenerational relations in this class of films are portrayed as so fraught, so different, and ultimately as so problematic and toxic.

# Chapter Seven: Basque postnational

## Introduction

Previous chapters have described how the three fold system of film classification reflects ideas in postcolonial theory relating to the minority's views of themselves as these change from celebratory to self-criticism, doubt and anxiety. So Preserved can be regarded as a 'comfort blanket' characterised by narratives of identity that define this at levels of the broad collective. Reversal represents reflexivity and critical review, and narratives of identity collapsed to the level of the local and the individual. In contrast, postnational is characterised by placelessness, struggles against nature and landscape, a lack of belonging, selfishness, exploitation, fantasy, and futility.

## postnational film

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this category of film transcends the dualisms of Preserved and Reversal. A major difference in postnational concerns differences in the 'attachedness' that characters have with the land. In the Preserved 'attachedness' combines environmentally essentialist and deterministic ideas in strong links between rural people and landscape, with these generating narratives of identity. Both people and landscape are coincident; they co-construct each other. In Reversal, landscapes of decay, violence and complex morality co-construct urban characters. In postnational, characters appear in rural settings again, but in unhappy circumstances. Landscapes are relatively anonymous, and through fraught relationships with the land itself characters no longer seem to belong.

Of the seven films discussed in this section, four are the work of film writer and director Julio Medem. Unlike other Basque filmmakers his work clearly divides opinion. It has been

described as otherworldly (Smith 1997: 12), as stylised and disturbing (Martí-Olivella 2003: 63), and as having visually subversive and edgy narratives (Jordan & Allinson 2005:73). Medem has been described as the only film maker of his generation who could legitimately claim the status of 'auteur' (Heredero 2003:149). He has been described as relying on 'philosophical shock tactics' (Charity 2000:27), to tell his stories. For these kinds of reasons Medem has been described as a visionary who 'creates the perceptible from the imperceptible', to 'reveal extraordinary dimensions' (Diego 1998:68). Others have reacted less favourably, for instance characterising his films as shaped around 'exceedingly eccentric narratives' (D'Lugo 2002:88). Additionally, Medem's films 'seem to express a particular Basque sensibility, yet to reject the notion of a geographical located self' (Evans 2006:173), 'to unsettle complacent notions of individual and national identity' (Santaolalla 1999:312). He tells stories that cross 'porous national boundaries' (Heredero 2003:150) and have an 'uncomfortable relationship with prescriptive notions of identity' (Santaolalla 1999:310). To summarise, these films could be described as being about nobodies from nowhere, in which no characters iconically stand for a Basque collective and film settings tend to be characterised by a sense of 'placelessness'.

## Placelessness

'Placelessness' can be defined as a lack of explicit reference to location, generational roots, attachedness, or stereotypical visual icons used in films to prompt audience understandings of a specific cultural context. To at least some extent, the use of these kinds of icons usually relies on audiences having some knowledge and understanding of the culture that is being depicted. This is of course more of an issue in the case of minority national cultures, since by definition, the numbers of audiences with sufficient cultural grounding is smaller.

A strong sense of placelessness pervades the films discussed in this chapter. This includes Medem's three films *La ardilla roja/The Red Squirrel* (Julio Medem: 1993), *Tierra/Earth* (Julio Medem: 1995), and *Los amantes del Círculo Polar/Lovers of the Arctic Circle* (Julio Medem: 1998) discussed in this section, and *La madre muerta/The Dead Mother* (Juanma

Bajo Ulloa: 1993). For instance in *Earth* people are mobile, some characters are incomers and others are gypsies. There is less of a sense of a rooted community in place for generations. In *The Red Squirrel*, the setting for part of the film is a camping and caravan site, a place of the temporary and the mobile. This is a hasty choice of destination by the two principal characters. In Sofia's (Emma Suárez) case she is escaping from a violent partner. Jota (Nancho Novo) is trying to escape from the heartbreak of losing his girlfriend, which has already prompted him to one suicide attempt. Both of them thus have a desperate and yet weak relationship to the landscape. This film has been described as depicting a society in which reality takes on a weak and more fluid nature (Gianni Vattimo cited in Smith 1996), and depicting a weak version of Basque identity (Smith 1996: 130).

In *Lovers of the Arctic Circle*, the Arctic Circle is a blank space that two children fill with dreams and hopes. Several scenes in the film take place within a winter snowscape, with the land masked and anonymised. In *The Dead Mother* the main character Leire (Ana Álvarez), a young woman, has spent her life from a very early age in an institution for the mentally ill. She has been psychologically disturbed since she and her mother were shot by burglar Ismael López de Matauco (Karra Elejalde). Her mother was killed. Leire is incapable of communication; she does not recognize her nurse or any of her fellow patients. Because of the health of the patients and the lack of social awareness and interaction, the institution seems placeless. Staff seem to come and go, much like the campers and caravaners in *The Red Squirrel*. The institution is closed off from the 'real' world, unaffected by events outside. Even Medem's *Lucía y el sexo/Sex and Lucia*, (2001: Julio Medem), though we are informed that it is set in Madrid and the island of Formentera, is suffused with images that present Formentera as an extraordinary landscape. The other two films discussed in this chapter, *Arriya/La Piedra/The Stone* (Alberto J. Gorritiberea: 2011) and *Aupa Etxebeste!/Go Etxebeste!* (Asier Altuna & Telmo Esnal: 2005) share the same kind of feature to at least some extent. In *Go Etxebeste!*, the two main characters pretend to be on holiday in Marbella, attempting to recreate this without actually leaving their flat. In *The Stone*, we are presented with a very different version of the Basque rural, which is riven with conflict, economically depressed, backward, and marginal.

## Discordant landscapes

Coupled with this sense of placelessness, is how the land does not sustain, how main characters in the films are not nurtured by the kind of provident rural landscape that is such a feature of *Preserved*. This is evident in the wintery snowscape of Lapland in *Lovers of the Arctic Circle*. When Ana (Nawja Nimry) stays at the cabin that used to belong to her step-grandfather Otto (senior Joost Siedhoff), the setting is an idyllic lake surrounded by forest. But it is anonymous, there are no other houses, it is isolated. It is calm, but barren. Survival is reliant on bringing things in, such as food, and on having transport. It is notable that Ana is sustained by a delivery of food arranged by Otto senior. A sense that she is out of place at the cabin is partly produced through it being apparent that she would be unable to fend for herself there.

*The Stone* is set in a small rural town, where the old clock in the church tower goes backwards and cannot be mended. This is clearly a strong metaphor for a community that is backward looking and keeps with the past. It underlines that the setting is a rural backwater, part of the traditional and stereotypical way that Basques have tended to be portrayed in the past. An abandoned flour mill that features in several scenes is iconic of economic decline. These scenes include the complex suicide of a young woman, Jone (Sara Casanovas), who sets up a piece of string attached to a door in the mill. Her husband Peru (Iban Garate) has been using the mill for liaisons with his mistress María (Begoña Maestre). When Peru comes to the mill looking for María, he opens the door, pulling the string, which fires a gun that kills Jone.

At Jone's funeral her up to now absent mother (Klara Badiola) arrives alone from Madrid. Her difference from those in the small rural town is underlined visually. She is a relatively sophisticated dresser in pearls, black sunglasses, and what looks like a black designer dress. She is clearly a confident character from the city, in comparison to the bland and dowdier appearance of women characters living in the rural town featured elsewhere in the film. Distraught at her young daughter's suicide, when her long estranged husband Sabino (Joseba Apaolaza) tries to stroke her arm to comfort her at the graveside, she turns on him sharply on him in front of other relatives and tells Sabino 'You are to blame... this crazy place, this

damned town'. The rural town is thus presented as a place that contributes to the death of a young woman.

In *Earth* the vineyards of an entire rural area are infested with woodlice, apparently making the wine taste of earth. The local maize crop is infested with wild boars, who are feasting on it. The land is thus unproductive to the local population, it has ceased to sustain and nurture them, it has become a problematical territory, out of their control. They also struggle with the land and the 'rules' of nature. Older methods for eradicating woodlice in the vineyards are neglected in favour of fumigation, carried out by Ángel (Carmelo Gómez), who organises some gypsies who are staying locally as hired labour to carry the work out.

In *The Dead Mother*, Leire is recognized by Ismael, who shot her when she was a child, during a short trip outside the institution. Frightened that she will report him to the police, Ismael therefore constantly watches Leire through the perimeter fence of her urban institution. Leire is out of place outside the institution and away from those that usually care for her. Ismael's gaze is intrusive, crossing the boundary between the 'real' world and the closed world of the institution. When he kidnaps her, he takes her to squats, one in a church and the other in a dark and draughty house, sites where mainstream social 'rules' do not apply. The squatters have transgressed the 'rules' of ownership and occupation, which make them out of place.

In *The Red Squirrel* a sign advertises the caravan and camping site as having a 'Mediterranean atmosphere'. Yet it is not by the sea, it is alongside a reservoir. The claim is thus, it is a 'fake location', (Smith 1996:133), 'implausible' (Evans 2007:56), formed when a valley was drowned to create a water supply, it has none of the beauty or actual appeal that a true Mediterranean setting might be expected to have. This is not the only artificial place in the film. When Sofía gets a job in order to cement her newly found independence, it is in an urban zoo, a collection of artificial places with their own characteristics to suit the animals contained within.



In *Go Etxebeste!* Patricio Etxebeste (Ramón Agirre) and his wife María Luisa Etxebeste (Elena Irureta) try to maintain a wealthy lifestyle in the eyes of their village. His beret factory has just gone bankrupt, yet he is still running for the office of Local Mayor. In order to keep up appearances, as previously mentioned, they pretend to take an already planned month's holiday in Marbella, but in fact do not leave the bare flat they now live in. Having made blinds to cover the windows so no-one can look in, they fix lamps and mirrors to mimic sunlight inside the flat. They then indulge in a variety of mock holiday activities, whilst dressed suitably for the seaside. This includes taking a pretend excursion by car, turning on a sound track of the sea lapping, eating at a picnic table, splashing in a child's paddling pool, and checking a map to say where they have been when someone enquires how they are on their mobile phone. They pretend to promenade up and down the seafront in the evening whilst in the corridor. They have plenty of alcohol to drink but the cupboards are bare, and they are reduced to tempting birds to eat from the roof-top in order to shoot them for food.

This lack of authenticity and connectedness to the landscape is quite different to the agricultural stereotypes of Preserved, and the neighbourhoods, gang territories and local 'patches' of Reversal. In these cases, characters exert degrees of control over their settings, in which they generally seem to belong. But in Basque postnational, characters seem to be in a 'somewhere' that is not under their control or of their own making, or in a 'somewhere' that is fake and implausible. One of the characteristics of Preserved is the relationship of co-construction between characters and setting, in that each seems to make the other more recognisably Welsh or Basque. Thus the landscapes of the Basque forest or the Welsh valley are iconic of and simultaneously help to construct the stereotypically masculine characters of traditional, monolithic versions of Welsh and Basque identity. In Reversal, settings are reduced in scale, and are no longer presented as standing for the whole of Wales or the Basque country. In postnational, a relationship of mutual co-construction seems to be evident, but instead of stereotyped identities and settings, this is now between the combination of placelessness, discordant landscapes and relatively anonymous characters.

As later sections in this chapter will describe, and as was discussed in the previous chapter on Welsh postnational, like the landscape, characters tend to be flawed. As the landscape is

unable to nurture or provide, so characters are dysfunctional, in cold and not warm emotional relationships with each other. As the landscapes are fake or implausible, so characters are selfish and exploitative. The rural landscape took up centre stage in *Preserved*, the urban in *Reversal*. In postnational film both are still present, but instead of being locked into the process of the mutual co-construction of stereotypes, settings are co-constructed with anonymous characters as marginal. Whereas the landscapes of *Preserved* and *Reversal* are iconic, these marginal landscapes take centre stage in postnational film. The traditional and essentialist relationship between characters and landscape so evident in *Preserved* is also disrupted by submergence.

## Submergence

As the previous chapter on Welsh postnational film discussed, submergence involves visual references to bodies of water, or in the case of *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* to snow, that cover the land, or mark a boundary or liminal zone where the land stops. These references may be regarded as metaphors for the disruption of links between characters and the land, with the land iconic of issues closely connected to identity, history, cultural heritage, collectivity and belonging.

As mentioned above, *Red Squirrel* features the campsite with a fake ‘Mediterranean atmosphere’ beside a reservoir. In one scene central characters swim and laze in pedaloes on the reservoir. Similar to the reservoir in the Welsh film *Patagonia*, we learn that this reservoir covers a drowned landscape, in this case a forest rather than a valley and village community. So not only is the land drowned, it entombs a forest, an iconic symbol of the Basque countryside that is closely linked with the rural skills of wood chopping and hunting, which featured so heavily in films such as *Tasio*, *Ama Lur*, *Gipuzkoa*, *The Backwoods*, and *Cows*. In one scene in *Red Squirrel*, reminiscent of the Welsh film *Flick*, Félix loses control of his car following a fight with Jota, and it plunges into the reservoir and he drowns. So the reservoir rids the main characters Sofia and Jota of Félix, Sofia’s psychotic husband, who had been intent on tracking them down, with violence in mind. They are freed from his threat, and

able to start building a possible new life together, shedding a burden of lies, deception and violence.

In *Tierra* there is a reference in one of the final scenes when Ángel and Mari travel to the sea, as they embark on a new romantic life together following a period of turmoil. The sea thus can be seen as iconic of a means through which characters can be renewed, reborn, stabilised and washed clean of the past. This is similar to the final scene in the Welsh film *Submarine*, where Oliver and his girlfriend Jordana are reunited after falling out earlier in the film, and walk hand in hand in the sea.

The wintery snowscapes mentioned earlier evident in *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* can be seen as a form of submergence, with the land rendered anonymous by a covering of snow. In one scene Otto junior goes sledging with Ana on a snow covered hillside. As the sledge accelerates she leaps off, before it crashed over a cliff onto a snow covered forest floor below. Whilst unconscious Otto has a vision of a Yeti standing over him, who offers him advice and coaxes him back to life, just as Ana reaches him. In the same way that the seaside is associated with redemption in *Tierra*, the winter landscape thus features as something with the potential to heal as well as to harm.

In *Go Etxebeste!* there are numerous references to the coast. There is the fake holiday in Marbella, plus Patricio says to his son Iñaki's (Iban Garate) question about what he could do if he was elected mayor, 'A beach is just what we need in the village, the river's much cleaner since we closed the workshop, (the beret factory), with a place to swim and some activities people would stay'. Creating a beach can be regarded as creating a copy of something caught between land and water, which is more attractive than berets, the icon of the past. Again, the water's edge is presented as a place where the past may be displaced.

Although not a Basque film because none of the characters or the settings are Basque, the theme of submergence is also evident in *Lucía y el sexo* /*Sex and Lucia* (2001: Julio Medem). The film is largely set on the small island of Formentera, in the Balearic Islands off the

Mediterranean coast of Spain. The film features many tranquil, uncrowded images of the island and the sea bathed in summer sunshine, and some of the action takes place by an imposing lighthouse. There are multiple scenes of characters at the water's edge and swimming in the sea. This maritime landscape is given the power to actively heal three of the central characters in the film. Towards the end of the film, they literally fall through a hole in the middle of the island and are granted the ability to start afresh with their lives, to move on from a past shrouded in secrets, lies, deception and violence, to be reborn (Stone 2004: 47, Smith 2005: 243). Here submergence involves escaping from the past, almost literally being washed clean of it, in order to shape a better and happier future.

This concept of submergence can be taken further in relation to Basque postnational film. As is discussed in the next section, Sofia feigns a tactical memory loss at the start of *Red Squirrel*, following a crash on her motorcycle. Two other characters recover from comas in *Tierra* (Angel) and *Sex and Lucia* (Lorenzo (Tristán Ulloa)). Memory loss and coma can be regarded as a form of psychological submergence, a temporary forgetting and freeing from the past. The teenager Leire in *Dead Mother* has the mental age of the child that she was when she was shot in the head by Ismael. She is still trapped in the past, but has no real understanding of the past or the present. So an even wider definition of 'submergence' emerges from these Basque postnational films. Not only are there references to water, drowned land, and the liminal zone of the shoreline, there are also references to minds submerged in ways that temporarily or more permanently remove the past and its influence. This liberation from the past can be seen as a necessary stage in the evolution of new forms of identity that no longer draw on long standing narratives of identity. It is like the shedding of an old skin, necessary in order to be able to grow into a new form with a new skin.

## **Selfishness and exploitation**

Another main feature of postnational film is how characters are selfish and seek to exploit others. A feature of *Preserved* is the extent to which characters subordinate the personal in favour of the collective, whether this is the family, the community, or the cause of Basque

freedom. In Reversal characters are far more motivated by personal gain, yet there is still a sense of loyalty to gang members and ‘honour amongst thieves’. Reversal also features the organised Basque on Basque violence associated with the activities of ETA and its treatment of some of its members. This is absent in postnational film, where individuals seem to have far less to be loyal to. To some extent this may be linked to a fragmentation of Basque society post-Franco and post-autonomy, as internal divisions have become more polarized. For instance at this time it has been suggested that ‘the narrative of national cohesion’ could no longer be signified (Bhabha 1990: 304).

So audiences are confronted with individualistic, selfish characters. For instance in *The Dead Mother*, Ismael’s self-interest leads him to kidnapping Leire, in order to avoid prosecution in case she recognises him as the murderer of her mother and alerts the authorities or staff at the institution. Having committed one crime when he killed her mother, he has no hesitation in committing another to save his own skin, when shoots Leire in the head. In *The Red Squirrel* Jota immediately takes advantage when it becomes clear that Sofia is suffering from amnesia, by concocting a fictional version of events in which he is her boyfriend, even though they have never met before (Stone 2007: 81). He even insists that she is called ‘Lisa’, the name of his ex-girlfriend (Evans 2007: 46). He exploits her when they are at the campsite, assuming that she will do exactly as he says. When Sofia recovers her memory, she plays along with Jota’s fantasy since this helps her to evade her psychopathic ex-partner Félix. In *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* the selfish adolescent Ana (Kristel Díaz) deliberately sets out to be with her step-brother Otto (Víctor Hugo Olivera) every day, thus breaking an existing arrangement that Otto only stays in the same house as her every other weekend. Later in the film, following being abandoned by Otto’s stepmother Olga (Maru Valdivielso), his lonely father Álvaro (Nancho Novo) remarks ‘the world’s becoming selfish, everything is ruined here’.

In *The Stone* the character Sabino is selfish, in that he exploits a traditional contest that made his daughter Jone lame. This involves a single horse or mule pulling a large stone across the cobbled village square. It is a big annual event, on which many of the local men gamble illegally, for instance betting their farms, their homes and their businesses. We learn that whoever of the two owners of the horse or mule wins the contest; Sabino has made sure that he will come out on top because he has laid bets off against each other. He stands to win

either a farm and farm house, or a mill, an apartment and patch of woodland, depending on who wins. Jone was injured as a child when the police intervened before the start of the contest, and she was trapped underneath the stone as the police towed it away. The stone can be seen as a metaphor for the past, a weight of history and heritage, a burden. Sabino's greed extends to buying the altar stone from the village church on the square to be used in the contest. This is to replace a stone used to begin the contest, but which the police have once more towed away. Sabino is determined that there will be an outcome, so that he will reap the benefit. This use of the altar stone can be seen as a comment on the decline of the importance of religion.

These are examples of how individuality reigns. Characters prioritise the personal above the collective, or are motivated by purely self-serving reasons, counter to any notion of narratives of collective identities. In some ways this selfishness is less shocking than the Basque on Basque (and Welsh on Welsh) exploitation and violence in *Reversal*, since there are no references to a collective sense of identity, to community, or to shared moral values.

## **Families, adults and children**

This individualism is clearly evident when considering how families are depicted. In these films, in contrast to the extended Basque rural family in *Preserved*, families as such no longer exist. In *The Red Squirrel* neither Jota nor Sofía (both in their thirties) have parents or children. Levels of loyalty and commitment amongst close family members are also markedly different. Both *Earth* and *The Red Squirrel* feature unfaithful husbands amongst the supporting characters. In *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* adolescent Otto breaks his promise to his mother to look after her. She dies neglected; we are shown her slouched dead over her kitchen table. Consequently, Otto's guilt drives him from the home he shared with Ana, his father and his step-mother.

In broad terms films of Preserved stereotypically tend to portray patriarchal families, and in Reversal a feature of urban based films is that where much more loosely defined ‘families’, are present (including urban criminal gangs and ETA cells), women are depicted in relatively more powerful positions. In postnational however, families are portrayed differently again, with children as the central members, who as they grow up assume control over parents. Parents are weaker, more peripheral. In *The Dead Mother* this feature has its fullest expression, Leire’s mother is killed right at the start of the film, and the status and identity of her father remains unexplained.

In addition Medem seems to blur clear distinctions between adult and child. There is thus no sense of generational progression, instead a sense of stagnation and pessimism. For instance early in *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* the child Ana (Sara Valiente) states her intention to substitute her father, when he is killed in a car accident, with the boy Otto (Peru Medem) (Evans 2007:95), whom she comes to regard as the reincarnation of her father (Stone 2007:99). Ana and Otto become step-siblings when Otto’s father Álvaro, moves in with Ana’s mother Olga. They embark on a covert sexual relationship when they are both still adolescents. In this way the formerly, stable, cohesive, collective unit of the family within its local community is instead replaced by a unit that is shifting and isolated. Through their sexual relationship and their deception of their parents, it is the adolescent Otto and Ana that seem more powerful within ‘the family’.

In *The Red Squirrel* adolescent Alberto (Eneko Irizar) stands up to question Félix (Carmelo Gómez), Sofía’s ex-partner, and to defend the name of Jota when Félix arrives at the campsite to claim back Sofía. ‘Why don’t you ask Sofía who she wants to be with?’ he asks. The boy’s father is passive in this scene, slumped in a deckchair. Elsewhere in the film two young girls Cristina (Ane Sánchez) and Ana (Sarai Noceda) volunteer to put up Jota and Sofía’s tent for them because they are incapable. In contrast, in *The Dead Mother* the adult burglar Ismael delays his escape through a kitchen window because, like an unrestrained child, he wants to eat the young Leire’s chocolate.

The effect of this is to foreground the centrality of younger generations at the expense of older generations and the past. The young are capable of being at least the equals of their elders in some respects; and are more at home in a contemporary world in which simplistic notions of identity may no longer be relevant. In comparison, an older generation seem to be either unstable, unfaithful, killers, harbouring secrets or fantasists. In *Earth* Ángel rejects Tomás's (Txema Blasco) older remedy for crop pests. When the formal apology for the German bombing of Guernica is broadcast on television in *Lovers of the Arctic Circle*, Otto and Ana seem totally disinterested.

Generational conflict and the rejection of parents' ambitions for their children is also evident in *Go Etxebeste!*. Tuba playing Iñaki (Iban Garate), the son of Patricio, is devoted to music and wants to be a musician. Throughout the film, his tuba playing features on the soundtrack. However, his parents want him to be a businessman, and believe he is still attending a business course at college. Towards the end of the film, as the family unravels in the face of bankruptcy and the threat of shame, Iñaki complains to his parents that they have never considered what he wants to do with his life, and informs them that he gave up his course three years ago. He says to them "At last we are telling the truth, that's the important thing". Through his honesty Iñaki confronts the present, unlike his parents, and refuses to continue the charade of the fake holiday. Again, the failings of parents and their obstinate refusal to let go of the past and of their children's lives are contrasted with a child with a much more realistic perception of present and future.

## **Fantasy and futility**

Central characters are ruled by fantasy and retreat from reality. In *Earth* the character Ángel is introduced to audiences as having come from the cosmos, and able to be in more than one place at a time. He is supposedly a heavenly being that will bring good into the lives of others. But Ángel is unable to get rid of the crop pests, they are only temporarily reduced in numbers. We also learn that he has spent time in an asylum. The character has been described



as his own 'imaginary friend', who creates 'an indecipherable view of what is real and what isn't' (Stone 2007:99).

In *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* the seed of a fixation underling the central plot is sown by Ana, in her bedroom with Otto, whilst she is doing school homework on the topic of Lapland. She draws attention to the Arctic Circle and the town of Rovaniemi, which 'represents their idealised dream destiny' (Rodriguez 2002:101), on a map in her school book, and to Lapland as the land of the midnight sun. They then kiss for the first time. For this reason the Arctic Circle is special, through their later separation as they grow up. Medem has stated that these two lonely people effectively 'invent' the Arctic Circle as a place where they can be safe together (Evans 2007:97). This connection is the only one that they manage to maintain, as their adult lives taken them in quite different directions. When, towards the end of the film, it seems as though they will be reunited here, at the cabin belonging to Otto senior where Ana is staying, such is the ambiguity of the film that to some audiences it may appear that both of them are actually dead. Otto (Fele Martínez) is by this time a courier pilot who overflies the Arctic Circle on a regular basis, whilst Ana is staying at the cabin. Otto's plane runs out of fuel and he leaps out by parachute to land in trees, exactly the same as Otto senior did during the civil war.

This is the kind of circularity of plot that echoes the circle around the world that defines the Arctic, and that Medem seems to employ in order to encourage multiple interpretations of the film. There is a similar circularity surrounding Ana's death where Otto the narrator is saying 'I am alone' as the film reverts to its opening scene. As Evans puts it in her discussion of Medem's films '...it does not matter so much how we think the films end as what those endings convey' (Evans 2007: 20-21). Where *Preserved* deals with historical narratives, *Reversal* with gritty urban reality, this illustrates how postnational film seems to sidestep the increasing complexity of issues of identity by retreating into ambiguity and fantasy. Audiences may interpret this as film makers either simply sidestepping the increasingly complex issue of identity, or of depicting identity in novel ways that simply reflect contemporary reality.

In *The Red Squirrel* there is Jota's fantasy identity for Sofia, and how Sofia plays along when her memory returns. In *The Dead Mother* Ismael's fantasy is that Leire will return the affection he has developed for her. But Leire is only able to respond to two things, she moves towards chocolate and screams at the sight of blood. However, in each case fantasy is closely associated with futility, as though reality will always out-compete it. By the end of *The Dead Mother* Leire is back in the institution she has been in for almost all of her life, not really worse but certainly no better for her experiences with Ismael. He is apprehended by the main gate of the institution, to finally be prosecuted for his many crimes and murders, having been led there by his fascination for Leire. In *The Red Squirrel* hiding out in the campsite proves futile for Sofia, as do the deceptions already described. In *Earth* the attempts to get rid of the crop pests are futile, as is Ángel's attempt to pass himself off as a heavenly being. In *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* Otto and Ana are never reunited. Characters are only able to make unsuccessful efforts to achieve their goals.

In *Go Etxebeste!* the central character Patricio Etxebeste is bankrupt because the family textile business 'Etxebeste Textil' set up by his father was centred on manufacturing berets, up to two thousand a day we are informed. The beret is historically an iconic and heavily stereotyped item of clothing for Basques, but few Basques wear berets anymore. This is suggestive of a failure to let go of the past, to accept change. Patricio is running for mayor, but we see him and his father Luziano (Paco Sagarzazu) at a large empty building that has only abandoned machines, which is reminiscent of the abandoned flour mill in *The Stone*. This is where Patricio hides his car whilst faking the holiday in Marbella, so that no-one will know that he and his wife have not gone away. The whole enterprise can be seen as a retreat into the past, and a failure to face up to the present. Instead of confronting change, Patricio and his wife engage in a morally questionable deception, that is part of their fantasy of maintaining a no longer financially sustainable lifestyle.

These examples open up questions such as whether or not Basque society is heading towards a situation where few individuals share the same morals, beliefs, outlooks, hopes and aspirations. People only seem to co-operate with each other when either coerced or tempted by some kind of personal gain. Even childhood sweethearts Ana and Otto fall out and go their separate ways when Otto's mother dies.

## Conclusions

As with Welsh postnational film, the past is depicted in Basque postnational film as holding no value. The pasts of characters are often painful or traumatic in some way. The past is also something that somehow may be escaped, though this ends up destroying some characters. Icons of Preserved such as ‘the family’ are no longer evident, and the relationship between people and land is disrupted via submergence, and via parodies of rural life. The land no longer sustains, marginal landscapes take up centre stage, central characters no longer have skills to grow crops, get rid of agricultural pests, to address reality, to transcend selfishness, even to pitch a tent. In some ways self interest and the exploitation of others comes to replace ETA terrorism as connected to critiques of Basques.

Basque postnational film may seem to be both more subtle and more far-reaching in the ways that it engages with issues of identity. As mentioned in relation to Welsh film, postnational also satisfies the needs of another younger generation, unsatisfied with previous versions of minority identity. This explains why intergenerational relations are portrayed as so different, fraught, and ultimately as so problematic and toxic. Arguably, Basque postnational film is more in keeping with Baudrillard’s account of postmodernism as ‘hyperreal’ (Baudrillard 2012: 398), liberating, positive, and involving self-empowerment. In contrast, Welsh postnational film seems to be more akin to Jameson’s account of postmodernism as bleak, selfish, evasive, aimless, and involving ‘social confusion’ (Jameson 2012: 416).

## Chapter Eight: research findings

### Welsh and Basque film: similarities and differences

Similarities and differences between Welsh and Basque film have been highlighted throughout the previous chapters. This research has identified a corpus of Welsh and Basque films, and this may be of use to others investigating other aspects of minority identity and film, for instance in studies that may focus on language, actors and directors, or documentary and feature film. The extent to which both cohere with the threefold system of film classification developed in this thesis underlines similarities between the two, and that this system of classification is a useful analytical tool, providing a contrast to studies that categorise films in other ways, such as genre (Martin-Jones 2009), or by the wider socio-political and economic contexts of film production (Marshall 2001), or by themes within films such as gender, class, childhood and travel (Petrie 2004). In contrast to the work of these authors, this thesis has described the development and application of a more coherent system of film classification in relation to identity. Further investigation may perhaps determine the threefold system of classification's applicability to other artistic media, for example theatre studies, literature, and poetry, and to the cultural products of other minority nations. This system of classification needs to be tested further, in other contexts and in relation to other peoples and other histories. Yet differences in wider context that encompass major differences in history, culture, film funding, and the significance granted to film in Wales and the Basque country also shape distinctive characteristics. For instance, film seems far more central to Basque culture, whereas film still tends to be a poor relation to Welsh literature.

There are differences in what ends up on the screen. Higher levels of funding for Basques perhaps encourage film makers who are not preoccupied with identifying funding sources and securing the means to make films. This has encouraged a significant number of Basque filmmakers to write and direct their own films. In contrast, in Wales directors tend to simply direct a script that others have written, and may be under a stronger financial imperative to create a commercial product. The difference in levels of passion, engagement and artistic vision that these differences may have in terms of directors perhaps may explain some of the

differences in what we see on the screen. Basque film tends to exhibit levels of complexity, symbolism and meaning that are not so evident in Welsh film. This is evident when considering differences between, say, the straightforward adaptation of a stage play in *House of America* and the complex, multilayered strands, symbolism and circular story structure in Medem's *Lovers of the Arctic Circle*. These types of differences are mirrored in a comparison of *Elenya* and *La madre muerta (The Dead Mother)*. *Elenya* is more simplistic in terms of plot and characterisation, whereas *La madre muerta (The Dead Mother)* is more of a stylised exploration of the psychology of interpersonal relations, exploitation, death, innocence, and the nature of love. It should be noted that each pair of these films were released within two years of each other.

Differences also reflect interest in Spanish and Latin American Studies. Basque film has a platform alongside film from Spain and South America. As a consequence, Basque films have tended to have been made with more of an international audience in mind, whereas Welsh films tend to be aimed more towards domestic audiences. There is more vigour in Basque film production as a consequence, with film makers seemingly more willing to take chances and go beyond stereotypes. Welsh film makers in comparison seem to be both preoccupied with, and constrained by, finance and funding, since potential audiences are far smaller and international distribution opportunities are fewer. For these reasons, Welsh film may seem like a poor relation to Basque film.

## **The threefold system of classification**

Disregarding language, distribution and consumption, this thesis has focused on various ways that narratives of minority identity can be included or presented in films. I have drawn attention to changes in narratives of Welsh and Basque national identities, and highlighted how these have been discussed and presented through film. I have argued that these changes can be characterised by a threefold system of classification. As previously mentioned, prior to this research, the analysis of film had delivered categories such as 'heritage' as a way of categorising films depicting history (e.g. Higson 1997, Hjort 2000, Blandford 2005). Analyses of minority nation film had focused on genre and social context as a means of

trying to categorise films in relation to minority nation identity (e.g. Marshall 2001, Petrie 2004, Martin-Jones 2009). Commentators such as Andrew Higson focussed on British films but stopped short of exploring power relations between dominant and minority, and axes along which power operates, such as age, gender, sexuality, insider/outsider, and race. Commentators in the field of postcolonial studies have drawn attention to the lengthy process of decolonising minds that is required in order for the subordinate to truly throw off the yoke of domination. This involves the minority reclaiming history and developing new ways of seeing themselves that contest dominant versions.

As was set out in the introduction to this thesis, this research has taken these ideas as a starting point for the development of a system of film classification that focuses on power ultimately, and groups films according to differences in narratives of identity. Having been partially influenced by the theoretical ideas of Raymond Williams and Manuel Castells, this research has adapted and applied some of their ideas to a specific collection of films. These two authors never set out to include film in their theoretical work, or to produce any type of concrete analysis of a collection of actual cultural artefacts. This thesis operationalises a distillation of their theories. These differences in national identity are shaped by altered power relations between dominant and subordinate, as the effects of domination are gradually shaken off and members of the subordinate attempt to impose privileged narratives, which are often presented as essentialised, stable, natural givens in a form of 'minority nationalism', in which there seem to be only a very few true ways of achieving a legitimate, thoroughly recognisable or intelligible form of nationality, or minority nation identity. This is what underlies the category of Preserved, where identity is a collective project.

In Reversal, this minority nationalism breaks down as a more reflexive and self-critical stance is adopted towards minority nation and identity. Multiple ways of achieving minority identity emerge, as do fractures and dislocations between distinct groupings within the minority nation population. Minority nationalism becomes but one of many competing voices, each describing different versions of minority nation identity, each tending to reverse the systems of dualisms on which Preserved is based. The stable, 'natural' givens of The Preserved and minority nationalism come to be critiqued, and identity folds inwards on itself to become much less of a collective project. Reversal is clearly the doorway towards postnational film.

In addition, aspects of Reversal seem therapeutic because they involve acknowledgement of contemporary social problems and the shedding of outdated or no longer relevant cultural baggage. This movement is also a shift from a preoccupation with a mythologised and perhaps more psychologically sustainable past to addressing a more disturbing present. By necessity, this involves promoting those from the margins in Preserved to centre stage, whilst those previously occupying central positions are relegated to the margins. This decentring of traditional narratives may be regarded as an attempt to heal contemporary social problems, such as the dislocation of generations, and the damage they are causing. However, there is also the possibility of the liberating effects of films either shedding traditional cultural baggage, particularly where this baggage seems quaint and outdated, or poking fun at stereotypical elements of Preserved culture.

Reversal is about embracing the present, in all its grittiness, and about the large scale changes associated with the crisis of masculinity. It is a necessary step in the direction of transcending the dualisms on which Preserved, and dominant versions of minority identity are based. Reversal perhaps satisfies the needs of younger generations who are seeking stories about themselves and their heritage that do not simply hark back to the simplicities of Preserved.

In postnational film, there is little sense of collectivity, and little that seems to directly refer to minority national identity, indeed it seems as though more longstanding and traditional notions of identity are no longer relevant. A main characteristic is how central adult characters are incapable, flawed, evil or ill – in extreme cases they are either buried/cremated or committed to institutions. Icons of Preserved such as ‘the family’ are no longer evident, and the relationship between people and land is disrupted via submergence, the land no longer sustains, marginal landscapes take up centre stage. In some ways postnational film is caught in the tension between the shedding of minority nationalism and a less explicit sense of identity reduced to afterthought, or simply mislaid. Minority nationalism, still available as a ‘comfort blanket’ in times of trouble, when it can act as a kind of psychological rallying point, is also a force that can separate and divide, fracturing minority people into different, competing social groupings through prescribing historically preferred ways of being ‘Welsh’ or ‘Basque’.

As the significance of minority national identity recedes in postnational film, it seems that the gates are increasingly opened to claims to minority national identity from those who otherwise historically have been excluded or had claims somehow disallowed. As the importance of Welshness or Basque identity declines, these categories seem to be far less rigorously policed from within. As the criteria for ownership of minority national identity become less clearly defined, the easier it is for a variety of groups or individuals to lay claim to this identity. This seems far more compatible with contemporary Welsh and Basque societies, and far less oppressive.

## What is minority identity?

A number of issues surrounding narratives of minority identity and how this identity may be defined arise in the preceding chapters. In *Solomon a Gaenor*, the character Crad, the valley miner, is an internal enforcer of Welsh identity. He tries to prevent his sister Gaenor from being courted by Solomon, and he leads his fellow miners in a riot to expel the Jewish community that Solomon belongs to. Crad can be contrasted with the precocious Oliver, from *Submarine*, about whom there seems to be very little that is recognisably Welsh. It is not *The Mabinogion*, Welsh poetry or *The Bible* that Oliver recommends to his girlfriend Jordana as reading material, it is the American cultural classic *The Catcher in the Rye*. This infiltration of popular culture in Wales is echoed in *House of America* and *Flick*, where characters are obsessed with items of American culture. These films contrast with *Johnny Be Good*, in *Preserved*, where the central character turns his back on American rock and roll to take up his inheritance of the family farm.

*Preserved* featured a hierarchy of minority identities that to at least some extent coincide with social class. In this hierarchy, those connected with religion featured in high positions, along with those engaged in literature and cultural arts, and those engaged in the struggle for autonomy. Lower down the hierarchy came the staple icons of identity; for instance the farmers, miners, mothers, and those engaged in rural sports. As the significance of identity has declined and identity itself become defined in more complex ways, so this hierarchy has faded. It seems as though minority identity has for at least some become less important, much



less of a core issue. This coincides with release from dominant external pressure, suggesting that it was this pressure that tended to unite the population against the dominant, with the stereotypes and icons of minority identity rallying points around which a consensus of narrow definitions of identity could be played out. It is as though, with the release of pressure from the dominant, minority identity has become progressively less significant and more broadly defined. Characters such as Boyo, Cerys, Oliver and Charlie in *House of America*, *Patagonia*, *Submarine*, and *I Know You Know* respectively have few links to the past, few connections to Welsh culture, and few elements on screen that render them recognisably Welsh. This is also true of most of the characters in Julio Medem's films; they have little that identifies them as either Spanish or Basque, even fewer links to a collective sense of past, and few connections to recognisably Basque culture. In these Welsh and Basque films characters are individuals, there is no real sense of them sharing some form of collective identity.

If narratives of minority identity are regarded as vehicles for exploring connected, wider issues, then *Preserved* may be regarded as a collection of films that explore issues of domination by external power and resistance. Reversal is used to explore internal divisions and their politics within the minority population, and to sound the alarm regarding a new generation growing up in ways that are divorced from the parent minority culture. In postnational film, personal obsessions of various kinds (for instance desire for revenge, religion, a search for roots, outsidersness) overshadow established narratives of identity to the extent that the sanity of characters is called into question, and any issues relating to collectivity seem irrelevant. This is especially true in Medem's films.

It might be suggested that postnational equates with rallying around seemingly frivolous things in the absence of a readily identifiable external power with whom to struggle for nationalist political autonomy. As mentioned in previous chapters, the intensity of the Basque struggle, and of Basque unity in the past, is a product of the intensity of Spanish rule under Franco. Since English rule of Wales has historically been more benign in recent centuries, Welsh unity has not had the same level of intensity. Regardless of this difference in intensity, it would seem that *Preserved* is still available in troubling times, as a 'comfort blanket' that provides a sense of security and continuity when these are otherwise in short supply. It can assist in the avoidance of addressing the present and future. A minority nation can lose itself

once more in heritage, in times when morality seemed simple, and an external power was readily available to take the part of villain. In contrast, it would seem that in the case of films where identity seems to have been mislaid, this does not render characters unintelligible. This bears out Jameson's (1991) perspective on postmodernism as tending to depoliticise the masses whilst retaining existing ideologies.

This suggests that nationality may be a less significant component of identity than other aspects, such as age, gender, social class, ability and race. Rather than drawing attention to nationality by omitting it, the omission merely suggests that it has declined in significance. Whilst the loss of traditional forms of identity may be lamented by some, the new possibilities that are opened up permit minority identity to continue to survive, and to keep pace with contemporary communications technologies and practices such as Facebook, and Twitter which encourage personal preoccupation and the formation of new types of communities and collectives that are arguably far less tightly defined, bound together, and much more temporary. In this respect, it may be that the analysis here illustrates how film keeps pace with contemporary social trends.

# Filmography

## Films examined in Chapter Two: Welsh Preserved

*Ar Waelod y cof/Deep in the Memory* (1984: Richard Watkins)  
*Angry Earth* (1989: Karl Francis)  
*Beautiful Mistake* (2001: Marc Evans)  
*Blue Scar* (1949: Jill Craigie)  
*Calon Gaeth* (2006: Ashley Way)  
*Carrie's War* (2004: Coky Giedroyc)  
*Y Chwarelwr* (1935: Ifan ab Owen Edwards)  
*The Citadel* (1938: King Vidor)  
*Dal :Yma/ Nawr* (2003: Marc Evans)  
*David* (1951: Paul Dickson)  
*Hedd Wyn* (1992: Paul Turner)  
*How Green Was My Valley* (1941: John Ford)  
*How Green Was My Valley* (1975: Ronald Wilson)  
*Johnny Be Good* (1984: Marc Evans)  
*Milwr Bychan/Boy Soldier* (1986: Karl Francis)  
*On the Black Hill* (1987: Andrew Grieve)  
*Penyberth* (1985: Peter Edwards)  
*Piano With Many Strings* (1966: John Ormond)  
*Proud Valley* (1940: Penrose Tennyson)  
*Rhodri Morgan* (2009: Tweli Griffiths)  
*Rebecca's Daughters* (1991: Karl Francis)  
*Sleep Furiously* (2008: Gideon Koppel)  
*Solomon a Gaenor* (1999: Paul Morrison)  
*Stormydd Awst/ August Storms* (1988: Endaf Emlyn)  
*Teulu T.Glynne Davies* (2008: Gwyndaf Roberts)  
*Valley of Song* (1953: Gilbert Gunn)  
*Y Weithred* (1995: Richard Lewis)  
*Ymadawiad Arthur/Arthur's departure* (Marc Evans 1994)

## Films examined in Chapter Three: Basque Preserved

*Around the World with Orson Welles* (1955: Orson Welles)  
*Alas de mariposa/Butterfly Wings* (1991: Juanma Bajo Ulloa)  
*Ama Lur/Mother Earth* (1968: Néstor Basterretxea, Fernando Larruquert)  
*Agian/Maybe* (2006: Arkaitz Basterra Zalbide)  
*Bosque de sombras/The Backwoods* (2006: Koldo Serra)  
*Ehun metro/Cien metros/100 Metres* (1986: Alfonso Ungría)  
*El proceso de Burgos/The Burgos Trial* (1979: Imanol Uribe)  
*El espíritu de la colmena/The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973: Víctor Erice)  
*Euskadi fuera del estado/Euskadi hors d'état* (1983: Arthur Mac Caig)  
*For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943: Sam Wood)  
*Gernika, el espíritu del árbol/Gernika, the Spirit of the Tree* (1987: Laurence Boultong)  
*Gipuzkoa /Guipúzcoa* (1979: Pío Caro Baroja)  
*Ikusmena* (1981: Montxo Armendáriz)  
*Ikuska 11/Something Able to be Seen* (1981: Montxo Armendáriz)  
*Ikuska 12/Something Able to be Seen* (1981: Mirentxu Loyarte)  
*Ikuska 13/Something Able to be Seen* (1982: Imanol Uribe)  
*Ikuska 19/Something Able to be Seen* (1984: Pedro de la Sota)  
*Ke arteko egunak/Días de humo/Days Of Smoke* (1989: Antton Ezeiza)  
*Kutsidazu bidea, Ixabel/Show Me The Way Isabel* (2006: Mireia Gabilondo & Fernando Bernués)  
*La casa de mi padre/Blacklisted* (2008: Gorka Merchán)  
*La fuga de Segovia/The Segovia Breakout* (1981: Imanol Uribe)  
*Lauaxeta. A los cuatro vientos/To The Four Winds* (1987: José Antonio Zorrilla)  
*Obaba* (2005: Montxo Armendáriz)  
*Operación Ogro* (1979: Gillo Pontecorvo)  
*Pelota* (1988: Jorge Leth)  
*Pelotari* (1964: Néstor Basterretxea & Fernando Larruquert)  
*Secretos del corazón/Secrets of the Heart* (1997: Montxo Armendáriz)  
*Silencio roto/Broken Silence* (2001: Montxo Armendáriz)  
*Tasio* (1984: Montxo Armendáriz)  
*Urte ilunak/Los años oscuros/The Dark Years* (1992: Arantxa Lazkano)  
*Vacas/Cows* (1991: Julio Medem)

## Films examined in Chapter Four: Basque Reversal

*Airbag* (1997: Juanma Bajo Ulloa)  
*Ander eta Yul/Ander y Yul/Ander and Yul* (1989: Ana Díez)  
*Ander* (2009: Roberto Caston)  
*Asesinato en febrero/A Killing in February* (2001: Eterio Ortega Santillana)  
*Bertsolari* (2011: Asier Altuna)  
*Días contados/Running Out Of Time* (1994: Imanol Uribe)  
*Días de humo/Days of Smoke* (1989: Antton Ezeiza)  
*El día de la bestia/Day of the Beast* (1995: Álex de la Iglesia)  
*El lobo/The Wolf* (2004: Miguel Courtois)  
*El Pico 1/The Needle* (1983: Eloy de la Iglesia)  
*El viaje de Arián/Arian's Journey* (2000: Eduard Bosch)  
*La Blanca Paloma/The White Dove* (1989: Juan Miñón)  
*La muerte de Mikel/The Death of Mikel* (1983: Imanol Uribe)  
*La pelota vasca. La piel contra la piedra/The Basque Ball: Skin against Stone* (2003: Julio Medem)  
*Pasajes* (1996: Daniel Calparsoro)  
*Perseguidos/Pursued* (2004: Eterio Ortega Santillana)  
*Salto al vacío/Jump into the Void* (1995: Daniel Calparsoro)  
*A ciegas/Blinded* (1997: Daniel Calparsoro)  
*Siete Calles/Seven Streets* (1981: Javier Rebollo & Juan Marino Ortuoste)  
*Todo por la pasta/Anything for Bread* (1991: Enrique Urbizu)  
*Todos estamos invitados/We are all invited* (2008: Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón)  
*Tiro en la cabeza /Bullet in the Head* (2008: Jaime Rosales)  
*27 Horas/27 Hours* (1986: Montxo Armendáriz)  
*Yoyes* (2000: Helena Taberna)  
*Zeru horiek/Esos cielos/Those Skies* (2006: Aitzpea Goenaga)

## Films examined in Chapter Five: Welsh Reversal

*Above Us The Earth* (1977: Karl Francis)  
*A Way of Life* (2004: Amma Asante)  
*Atgof* (1998: Ceri Sherlock)  
*Branwen* (1994: Ceri Sherlock)  
*Bydd Yn Wrol/Be Brave* (1997: Terry Dyddgen Jones)  
*Cameleon* (1997: Ceri Sherlock)  
*Cymru Fach* (2008: Gruffydd Davies)  
*Dafydd* (1993: Ceri Sherlock)  
*Gadael Lenin/Leaving Lenin* (1992: Endaf Emlyn)  
*Grand Slam* (1978: John Hefin)  
*Happy Now* (2001: Philippa Collie-Cousins)  
*Human Traffic* (1999: Justin Kerrigan)  
*In The Company of Strangers* (1999: Endaf Emlyn)  
*Little White Lies* (2006: Caradog Jones)  
*Martha Jac a Sianco* (2008: Paul Jones)  
*Ms Rhymney Valley* (1985: Karl Francis)  
*Mwg Glas Lleuad Waed* (1988: Peter Edwards)  
*Oed Yr Addewid/Do Not Go Gentle* (2000: Emlyn Williams)  
*Only Two Can Play* (1962: Sidney Gilliat)  
*Resistance* (2011: Amit Gupta)  
*Rhosyn a Rhith/Coming Up Roses* (1986: Stephen Bayly)  
*Streetlife* (1995: Karl Francis)  
*Twin Town* (1997: Kevin Allen)  
*Y Mapiwr/The Making of Maps* (1995: Endaf Emlyn)  
*Thicker Than Water* (1993: Marc Evans)  
*Tiger Bay* (1959: J.Lee Thompson)  
*Very Annie Mary* (2001: Sara Sugarman)

## **Films examined in Chapter Six: Welsh postnational**

*Elenya* (1991: Steve Gough)

*Un Nos Ola Leuad/One Moonlit Night* (1991: Endaf Emlyn)

*House of America* (1997: Marc Evans)

*Flick* (2006: David Howard)

*I Know You Know* (2009: Justin Kerrigan)

*Patagonia* (2010: Marc Evans)

*Submarine* (2010: Richard Ayoade)

## **Films examined in Chapter Seven: Basque postnational**

*Arriya/La Piedra/The Stone* (2011: Alberto J. Gorritiberea)

*Aupa Etxebeste!/Go Etxebeste!* (2005: Asier Altuna & Telmo Esnal)

*La ardilla roja/The Red Squirrel* (1993: Julio Medem)

*La madre muerta/The Dead Mother* (1993: Juanmo Bajo Ulloa)

*Los amantes del Círculo Polar/Lovers of the Arctic Circle* (1998: Julio Medem)

*Tierra/Earth* (1995: Julio Medem)

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