Welsh devolution as Passive Revolution.

There is a dearth of critical, theoretical analyses of Welsh devolution. There has recently been a welcome return of critical works on state restructuring and rescaling, particularly within the field of economic geography (e.g. Goodwin et al, 2005; Jones et al, 2005a, 2005b; Rodriguez-Pose & Gill, 2005; Cooke & Clifton, 2005; Morgan, 2006; 2007; Hudson, 2007; Curtice & Seyd, 2009). These works have successfully demonstrated that devolution was not accompanied by the transfer of any powers which might have facilitated the improvement of the Welsh economy, thereby rendering the notion of devolution as an 'economic dividend' (one of the main 'selling points' of devolution) rather ludicrous; as well as criticising the Welsh government's economic strategy, which has perpetuated Wales' position as a 'lumpen region' within the world economy (Walker, 1978). Yet these sophisticated geographical analyses are primarily concerned with "the territorial reconfiguration of state capacities" (Jones et al 2005:338), that is, the 'interior' branches or state apparatuses which have altered with devolution (Poulantzas, 1969:248)- they do not analyse the *political processes* of devolution. This article, then, offers a new theoretical lens through which devolution and subsequent political events in Wales (and indeed Scotland and Northern Ireland) may be approached.

This article argues that Welsh devolution is best understood as a process of *passive revolution*. Passive revolution is a moment within the history and development of the state, whereby seemingly radical changes to society are in fact carefully *managed* in a way which preserves capitalist hegemony[1]. The concept has recently been usefully applied to empirical case studies of state restructuring and modernization across a diverse range of developed and developing countries, including Scotland (Davidson, 2010); Turkey (Tugal, 2009); Mexico (Hesketh, 2010; Morton, 2011); Brazil (Del Roio, 2012); South Africa (Satgar, 2008); Russia (Simon, 2010); Germany (Bruff, 2010) and Venezuala (Brading, 2014). The concept of passive revolution, underpinned by a re-reading of the post-war British state as a *historic bloc*, allows us to understand the political developments which have occurred in Wales since devolution.

Bruff (2010) reminds us that passive revolution was conceived by Gramsci at least in part as a heuristic concept that enables Marxists to understand "the history of modern states and class struggles …in terms of both general trajectories and historical specificities" (Morton, 2007b: 612). More than most, then, passive revolution is a living concept- like Marxism itself- which was meant to 'travel' (Said, 1983). This is not to say that it is a 'one size fits all' concept which may be rigidly imposed onto diverse national experiences: like Bruff's analysis of Germany, this analysis of the Welsh experience uses passive revolution as a framework for understanding developments on the ground. Whilst devolution fits the bill of a passive revolution in many ways, in others the fit is clearly imperfect and incomplete.

Wales & the British State

Part of the reason that devolution has not been adequately theorised and understood in Wales is because popular understandings of the *state* in Wales tend to oscillate between a reading of the British state as either inherently exploitative (a position still commonplace amongst Welsh nationalists); or as essentially benevolent (a reading popular with the Labour party in Wales) The former interpretation is best associated with Michael Hechter's (1975) *Internal Colonialism*, which characterises Wales as standing in a 'classically' colonial relationship with England, with the state *deliberately* extracting a surplus from Wales, which is then locked in a state of dependency. Hechter argues that this process was also underpinned by a legitimating racist discourse which held that the Celtic nations were inferior, and that there existed a 'cultural division of labour', whereby English people occupied the dominant managerial positions within Wales, mirroring 'classic' colonial situations throughout the Empire. Whilst it was criticised for empirical shortcomings (Ragin, 1976; Lovering, 1978; Evans, 1991; Day, 1980), the IC model found favour with many Welsh nationalists and with some of Wales' radical left groupings (Griffiths & Miles, 1979)for the way it confronted power inequalities and for its neat explanation of Britishness as a variant of false consciousness. Yet precisely because it called into question the legitimacy of the British state (and therefore the Labour party's entire political project) the work received, as Wyn Jones (2005) puts it, a 'hysterically hostile' reception from Wales' dominant 'traditional intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971: 204-5. Also Aull Davies, 2005; Williams, 2005)

The Internal Colonial thesis has many strengths. It remains useful in the attention it draws to unequal power relations and how these penetrate into discussions of national identity and culture; its awareness of the ways which powerful discourses penetrate everyday life and how they can condition the self/deixis; and the way power is institutionalized in the academy and within *culture* (Salter, 2010:130-132).

Yet the internal colonial model of the British state and its relationship with the 'regions' is far too rigid, and cannot adequately explain devolution, which is the crystallization of the British state's flexibility. A more sophisticated analysis of Wales' position within the state is put forward by Day (1980), who, Following Poulantzas (1973),) argues that given the complexity of economic development and regional underdevelopment, "we must abandon any notion of a polar opposition [i.e., ruling class/working class; core/periphery] in which the state acts purely and simply as the agent of one interest against another" (1980: 246). As Day notes, Hechter's conception of the British state as the 'managing committee of the whole bourgeoisie' ignores the complexity and sophistication of power within the capitalist state and its capacity to deal with the periphery. The intervention of the welfare state in regional policy, its job creation schemes and so on, problematizes the notion that the state is perpetually driven to 'exploit' problem regions. Instead, Day argues that the state simply cannot afford to leave such areas 'to rot': it *has* to pursue an ameliorative regional economic strategy, because a) capitalism needs such peripheral regions as markets, and b) if it leaves the periphery to stagnate, it will lead to a political challenge from dissatisfied peripheral groups, frequently in the form of nationalism in peripheral areas. To maintain consensus, and to limit the appeal of counter-hegemonic forces, it is in the interest of the state to 'prop up' ailing regions. The state therefore "*seeks as far as possible to reproduce existing conditions of accumulation: basically to maintain capitalism in its contemporary form*" (Day, 1980: 246).

The post-war British state as a *Historic Bloc*

Gramsci's reading of the liberal democratic state complements Day's reading and can help us better understand the historic nature of the British state, Wales' relationship to it, and its recent restructuring under devolution. The originality of Gramsci's conception of hegemony

lies precisely in its relationship to the *form of state.* Indeed, Buci-Glucksmann (1980: 274) argues that "*the rejection of an instrumental conception of the state*...[central to the post-colonial view of the state]*...is the fruit of Gramsci's entire political practise*".

A successful hegemonic project may be thought of as a complex machine (such as a watch) dependent on a series of cogs. All the interrelated components need to run smoothly for a stable capitalist society to function. The vital 'cogs' include material concessions to subaltern groups provided by a flexible or 'elastic' (Hesketh, 2010), *'integral state'* which actively concerns itself with the interests of subordinate groups (Gramsci 1971:182); a dominant ideology- normally nationalism (Pozo, 2007)- which submerges class differences and creates "*intellectual and moral unity*" between classes (Gramsci 1971: 181-2) ; an collaborationist or 'policing' labour movement, and a successful economy underpinning it all, providing the state with the means to distribute such concessions[2].

Gramsci called this situation the '**historic bloc'** (*blocco storico)*. The historic bloc represents *hegemony achieved* within a national political framework within historically and culturally specific national circumstances (Gramsci, 1971:182; Bieler & Morton, 2006: 16). It is the 'hegemonic moment' (Gramsci, 1971: 181-2)- a period whereby everything in society has clicked into place to successfully achieve a 'shared life' (Gramsci, 1971: 418) between leaders and led. The historic bloc is central to understanding that hegemony has two interrelated facets: ideological and material, i.e., it is not *just* the 'integral state', which in itself arguably presents a rewording of Bonapartism (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980: 275-9). Hegemony also requires an ideological dimension to ensure the creation of a 'higher synthesis' which leads to a 'collective will' that transcends class interests (Worth 2009). The post-war British welfare state represents the exemplar of a historic bloc. Wales and Scotland were bound to the bloc through a combination of material concessions *and* the mobilization of a national-popular will (Britishness) which was flexible enough to incorporate a host of 'alternative' identities within it.

The success of the historic bloc in getting regions and subaltern classes 'onside' was demonstrated by Wales' comprehensive rejection of devolution in 1979.

Organic crises? Thatcher as the 'midwife of devolution'

Given the ostensible stability of the post-war Keynesian consensus and Wales' integration into the historic bloc, the vote in favour of devolution in 1997- such a short period later seems startling. If the British historic bloc was so stable, how did devolution occur?

Gramsci's work is centrally concerned with processes of transformation within society. Just as hegemony is *contested*, the historic bloc as a condensation of hegemony is also a delicate balance of forces which is continually being made and remade in the attempt to secure stability (Thomas, 2006:68). If at any stage one of the components which facilitates consent within the bloc is disrupted, the stability or 'equilibrium' of the bloc may be threatened. Morton (2001: 211-212) argues that:

> *"…historical blocs are never static, but always fluid. Hegemony constantly needs to be reasserted and is open to contestation. Social forces from outside the historical bloc, but also from the margins within, may develop rival projects, challenging the hegemonic bloc and, in some instances, breaking it apart. In short, history is the result of constant struggle between social forces and is, therefore, constantly subject to change".*

Gramsci paid particular attention to the impact of what he called '*organic crises'* on the stability of the bloc. He observed how the hegemony of the bloc, so often seemingly unassailable, could be threatened when the state became embroiled in undertakings (such as a war or economic crisis, for example), whose 'invidious effects' (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980:98) would permeate the superstructures and apparatus of the state (Gramsci, 1971:210). Under such conditions of crises, a '*shift in the basis of the state'* occurs, and the state reveals its 'true colours' by moving away from its 'ethical' *integral* form back to its econo-corporate form (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980:98). These conditions of crisis reveal the dominant class to be "a narrow clique which tends to perpetuate its selfish privileges by controlling or stifling opposition forces" (Gramsci 1971: 189). During conditions of crises, society therefore moves from a united, 'harmonious' settlement, to one marked by corporate antagonisms and unrest.

This 'unmasking' of the state may lead to a *crisis of authority*, whereby the popular legitimacy of the state is punctured, the unity between subaltern classes and dominant classes is ruined:

the ruling classes *lose their consensus* (Gramsci, 1971:275). Crucially, under conditions of crisis "the great masses become *detached from their traditional ideologies*, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously" (1971:276). Conditions of crisis may lead to 'hegemonic shifts' in popular consciousness. Gramsci described this paradigm shift:

> "…*what was previously secondary and subordinate…is now taken to be primary-becomes the nucleus of a new ideological and theoretical complex*. The old collective will dissolve into its contradictory elements since the subordinate ones develop socially" (1971: 195).

Under the Thatcher administration the British state underwent 'drastic surgery' (Lovering, 1983) as its apparatuses now began to focus on serving the market. This restructuring had a profound impact on the peripheral regions of the UK, which under the regional policies of the welfare state had received public sector employment (further 'topped up' by the benefits system) to 'maintain some kind of decent minima' (Erturk et al, 2011:22, 29). The Thatcher government, however, began the abandonment of these ameliorative regional policies, as the UK economy refocused itself around the city of London and the South East (Erturk et al, 2011).

This move away from the integral KWNS towards a neo-liberal settlement had a drastic impact on the *legitimacy* of the British state in Scotland and Wales. The erosion of the welfare state apparatus and the destabilization of the British industrial infrastructure (which to a large extent represented the post-war vision of Britishness) fundamentally changed **what it meant to be British**: Britishness as a *political identity* could no longer be associated with the 'fairness' of the 'ethical' integral welfare state, and this change in the political connotations of Britishness impacted dramatically on the peripheral nations of the UK (Davies, 2006).

Logically, then, the alteration of the state form led to a re-definition of what it meant to be Scottish and Welsh. McCrone (2001:178) argues that:

> "Being collectivist, social democratic, liberal, was conveniently juxtaposed from 1979 until the 1990s against a Thatcherite government which was seen to be none of these things, and –almost by default- somehow spoke for 'the English' because the Conservatives got elected on the back of English votes".

In Wales, the dramatic swing from a rejection of devolution in 1979 to support in 1997 is ostensibly rooted in these conditions of 'crisis'; the attendant (ostensible) demise in British identity can be "attributed to eighteen years of conservative government in the UK, and particularly the impact of Thatcherism" (Davies, 2006: 116). Thatcherism has been interpreted as a *crisis of hegemony* (Nairn 1981, Law 2009), hence Mitchell's argument (2007:3) that Thatcher must be understood as the 'midwife' of devolution.

In this interpretation, as a reaction to the 'neglect' of Thatcherism, Wales became partially detached from the historic bloc, and something approaching a cultural awakening took root as Wales moved towards favouring devolved political representation. Under Thatcherism "huge masses... passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which, taken together...add up to a revolution" (Gramsci, 1971:210). Welshness, previously a cultural identity within the bloc, now gained a necessary *political* dimension as devolution became an obvious antidote to the excesses of Thatcherism.

Devolution as a Passive Revolution.

Devolution was therefore seemingly the outcome of crisis, a fundamental rupture with the past.

Yet It is on the impact of the crisis and the *nature of change* that my argument hinge, for organic crises such as Thatcherism do not *automatically* usher in a period of transformation or social change. Indeed, Gramsci's work is centrally concerned to break with the rigid Marxist determinism which postulated that each 'act' of society automatically and inexorably leads to the next. He assumes no 'necessary teleological evolution' between different moments within the struggle for hegemony (Hall, 1986:13-14). Crucially, Gramsci writes that whilst the crisis creates danger for the state in the short run, "the state apparatus is far more resistant than it is possible to believe" (Gramsci, 1994: 297) and that

During periods of crisis, the state reacts to the challenges it faces with a view to clawing back control, righting the ship. As Buci- Glucksmann (1980:72) notes, the true nature of the state- its flexibility and sophistication- is revealed by its *reaction to crises[3]*.

Labour: Modern Piedmont

Central to state restructuring are the 'personnel' (Gramsci, 1971:111). Buci-Glucksmann (1979) urges us to pay attention to the political organization and management of state transformations: What form is the transition taking? *Who* is leading it? Within passive revolutions, particular groups or parties may come to the fore and provide the 'mass basis' for a new policy *on behalf of the state* (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980:98; 1979:216-219). During the unification of Italy, for example, Gramsci pinpointed the role of the state of Piedmont as functioning as the leading group within the process of state restructuring (Gramsci, 1971: 104) on behalf of the Italian ruling class.

Whilst pressure for devolution and reform came from below as large swathes of subaltern classes became detached from the bloc and expressed their discontent in Wales and Scotland by voting for nationalist parties, the precise *form* this transformation and restricting took originated *within* the Labour party. Devolution therefore happened through and because of the *Labour party and the Labour party alone*.

Despite the rejection of devolution in 1979, cracks had begun to appear within the historic bloc in the sixties, *under Labour*, way before Thatcherism (Nairn, 1998; Rhodes, 2000). The ameliorative regional policies of the KWNS were faltering, and amounted "to little more than an ad hoc programme for subsidising multinational companies" (Rawkins, 1983: 218). This coincided with a resurgent Plaid Cymru, which came of age in the sixties, and won its first parliamentary seat in Carmarthenshire in 1966, followed by by-election gains in Rhondda and Caerphilly. At the same time, Welsh language activism (and indeed militancy) was growing in the Welsh speaking heartlands. The pressure group *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* were formed in 1962 and began effective campaigns of non-violent protest. In response, the Labour government passed the Welsh language act in 1967, but significant damage had already been done. Edwards (2011) brands this period as '*Labour's crisis'* as the party became dislodged from North West Wales where it had previously been dominant.

Because of one partyism, the key political cleavages that impact on Welsh society are not those between labour and other parties, but between factions within labour itself over the question of devolution. Labour has always contained a 'soft nationalist' wing of

devolutionists; and a 'Bevanite' wing, hostile to devolution (Morgan, 1989). Labour's policy on Welsh devolution has fluctuated at different periods according to political expediency: the ebb and flow of Welsh demands for devolution, the strength of Welsh nationalist opposition, and Labour's internal politics and competition (Butt Phillip, 1975; Jones & Jones, 2000:242). This evolving internal dynamic is an important caveat because it draws attention to the fact that Labour's strategy on devolution, like so many other things, is often contingent and far less decisive than a 'grand plan' that we may think of when discussing passive revolution.

Welsh nationalist electoral successes scared Labour into belatedly and hurriedly adopting devolution as a policy in the sixties and seventies. Devolution was included inthe party's manifesto in 1974, and this re-engagement with Welsh devolution culminated in the aforementioned 1979 referendum, although the dominant anti-devolution cadre within the Welsh Labour party successfully wrecked the campaign (Hopkin, 2009; Morgan & Mungham, 2000:32). The rejection of devolution in 1979 blunted Labour's enthusiasm for devolution as a strategic response to nationalism, and reasserted the preference for centralism combined with an effective regional economic policyYet whilst Labour could afford to fluctuate in its attitude towards devolution in 1979, their time in the electoral wilderness in the 80s and early 90s precipitated a change in attitudes The unpopular centralizing policies of the Thatcher administration, coupled with the continual growth of nationalist parties through this period- both Plaid Cymru and the SNP were repositioning themselves as social-democratic parties- illustrated the need to modernise and adopt devolution as party policy. The question of devolution and the democratic deficit ultimately *had* to be addressed if Labour wanted any chance of regaining power in the UK and consolidating their rule in Wales and Scotland (Mooney & Williams, 2006). Devolution was therefore an integral part of Labour's wider 'modernising' strategy (Nairn, 1998) which attempted to transform both the *party itself* and the state apparatus (Jessop, 2003; Cerny & Evans, 2004), although yet again, the internal dynamics surrounding the planning of devolution were chaotic, and frequently contingent on the tenacity of the then secretary of state for Wales, Ron Davies. Blair himself had reservations about the necessity of Welsh devolution (Rawnsley, 2010). On top of its transformation into a neo-liberal form (Motta & Bailey, 2007), devolution formalized Labour's transformation into a *multi-level party* (Moon & Bratburg, 2010), a process which granted significant autonomy to Welsh and Scottish Labour (even if informal). By solving its long

standing regional problem, devolution ensured Labour could now focus, uninterrupted, on Blair's quest to win over the English middle classes.

Devolution fits the bill of what Gramsci terms a **passive revolution**. Passive Revolution is a 'revolution... without a revolution' (Gramsci, 1971:59), or '*revolution/restoration'* (1971:109), whereby radical, (often incoherent) mass movements and transformations are *taken over* by 'traditional organic forces...parties of long standing' (1971:111-112). The traditional forces introduce concrete changes and transformations, but rather than these being radical, subaltern demands are "satisfied by *small doses, legally, in a reformist manner- in such a way that it was possible to preserve the political and economic position of the old feudal classes*," (Gramsci, 1971: 119, my emphasis). It is therefore a '*technique of statecraft'* (Morton, 2010: 318), the introduction of *moderate or molecular reforms* in order to neutralise radical demands from below and to maintain the status quo in the face of crises (Sassoon, 1980: 134).

A core feature of the process of passive revolution is the absence of popular participation and initiative in the development of history (Gramsci, 1971: 105). Radical, popular movements circulating at the bottom of society get absorbed into an *already established* conservative political project "undertaken by elites, garbed in the rhetoric of previous revolutionary movements, but without the extensive involvement of subaltern classes" (Thomas, 2006:72). Passive revolutions are therefore 'top down' affairs, whereby dominant groups or the state become the *motor of change* rather than popular pressure from below (Gramsci, 1971: 105-109). Indeed, the term *passive* refers to the lack of a *popular* element within the transformation of society (Thomas, 2006:73).

In Wales, devolution was led *from above* by the Labour party on *behalf of the state*.

Whilst parties or groups enter passive revolutions and dominate transformations, Gramsci argues that they are not 'leaders' (since this presupposes the existence of a mass movement which agreed to be 'led'). No-one was led by Labour, and *nor did they wish to lead*: "they did not wish to concord their interests and aspirations with the interests and aspirations of other groups" (Gramsci, 1971:104). Mitchell (2009: 159) illustrates that the most crucial debates surrounding devolution and its content were those taking place *inside* the Labour Party rather than between other actors (Mungham & Morgan, 2000: 13; Johnes, 2012: 413; Hopkin, 2009).

Labour's proposals for devolution- the *form* it would take, i.e., the powers of the proposed Assembly, were not subject to public debate (Wyn Jones & Scully, 2003:89). Indeed "it was clear that one of the primary concerns of the Welsh Labour Party was precisely to avoid such discussion" (ibid).

Once they have taken over the process of state restructuring or modernization, leading parties "progressively modify the pre-existing composition of forces, and hence become the matrix of new changes" (Gramsci 1971: 109). This *statisation* of change (Jessop, 1990:213) essentially alters the *character* of the transformation from a radical one to a moderate and reformist one. John Osmond (2011:10) notes how Ron Davies' 'maximalist' proposals for devolution[4] were rejected by Labour's policy commission in favour of far more moderate powers, revealing once more the desire to prevent radical change. The now infamous parachuting in of Alun Michael over 'local boy' Rhodri Morgan personified the government's initial treatment of the Assembly as the 'Welsh office plus', based on a (reasonable) assumption that Labour hegemony was taken for granted and that the Assembly would simply represent an outpost through which centralist policy could be transmitted. Few predicted that Labour would be anything but hegemonic in the nascent National Assembly, with one Labour peer remarking before the election that "if we are not going to control the Assembly, then it's better we do not have it" (cited in Morgan & Mungham, 2000: 172). As Fowler and Jones (2005) put it, "the very structure of government in the National Assembly was designed by the Welsh Labour Party in anticipation of a Welsh Labour victory". For example, the PR voting system introduced in the Assembly, although a hard fought concession to more progressive elements within the cross party campaign for devolution, was nonetheless skewed towards a majoritarian first past the post system which was designed to ensure Labour majorities in the devolved system (McAllister and Kay, 2010).

This language of the need to *control* the process of state restructuring and to neutralise potentially counter-hegemonic currents was not disguised within the discourse of devolution. Indeed, those in charge of constitutional restructuring explicitly stated that "the development of the policy of devolution has always had its roots in the desire to preserve the Union" (Mitchell, 2007:11). Although not utilizing the framework of passive revolution, Nairn (1998) reminds us that power devolved [by the state] is power *retained*, and claims that devolution

represents an attempt by the British state to reform itself '*virtually*', whilst leaving intact the core of the British state (i.e., parliament, the monarchy, etc). As he puts it, "everything else must be, in a curious sense, over-reformed round about the untouchable core". He claims devolution as a revolution from above is a way "of standing still while appearing to be running extremely hard". Labour's strategic view of devolution as a way of safeguarding the UK and capitalism is summarised by Curtice (2001:80), who states that "by advocating and finally granting devolution, Labour hoped to demonstrate that the aspirations of people in Scotland and Wales could be met within the structures of the United Kingdom, thereby killing demands for Scottish and Welsh independence stone dead".

Unstable Equilibrium: post 1997 power struggles and *transformismo*

Yet the process of passive revolution is not a 'clean cut' neutralisation of subaltern forces and a straightforward consolidation of power. Under conditions of passive revolution, where hegemony is necessarily '*thinned'* for a period, the *residue of crisis* is ever present, despite the best efforts of the intervening 'Piedmont': "the conditions of passive revolution therefore differ from the real exercise of hegemony over the whole of society which alone permits a certain organic equilibrium" (Gramsci 1971: 396). The situation of 'unstable equilibrium' is therefore often a *power struggle* (Hall, 1986: 13) unlike the relatively settled equilibrium of the bloc, and passive revolution must be therefore understood as an *ongoing process* in which ideological battles and so on are constantly being fought; in which one side may gain the upper hand and then the other (Morton, 2011: 111-129).

The *instability* inherent in passive revolutions was highlighted in the first Assembly Elections. These proved a 'quiet earthquake' as Labour recorded arguably its worst ever electoral showing in Wales and was unable to form a majority government (Morgan & Mungham, 2000: 182-183; Curtice, 2001:14; Wyn Jones & Scully, 2003) as Plaid Cymru recorded significant gains. The 'imposition' of first minister Alun Michael by Westminster was a miscalculation, and Labour paid for it at the polls. Ostensibly not fully appreciative of the prominence of 'Welsh matters' in 1997, Labour were outmanoeuvred by Plaid Cymru, who successfully used their slogan 'The Party of Wales' to imply that Labour was the party of London and 'lacked Welshness' (Morgan & Mungham, 2000: 180). In addition, Labour's visible shift to the right under Tony Blair allowed Plaid Cymru to outmanoeuvre Labour from the left (Morgan &

Mungham, 2000: 184; Curtice, 2001:89). Plaid now appeared as a social-democratic party in the style of 'old labour' (Evans & George, 1999).

This was all certainly not part of the plan Labour had in mind for devolution, i.e., of rapidly returning to the status quo in all essential features (Wyn Jones, 2001: 53). The scare of the first Assembly elections revealed the instability of the post-devolution milieu and acted as a catalyst for Labour, who, after recovering from their 'shell shock' (Morgan & Mungham, 2000: 198) then began what Gramsci labels the political strategy of *transformismo,* which is an integral part of passive revolution (Gramsci, 1971: 58) as the hegemonic force attempts to secure its dominance within the febrile conditions of passive revolution. Transformismo is in many ways the *second stage* of passive revolution (Gramsci, 1971:109), "the gradual but continuous absorption...of the active elements produced by allied groups- *and even of those which came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile*" (1971:58) with a view to '*annihilating'* and '*decapitating'* the emergent counter-hegemonic threat (Gramsci, 1971:58).

In response to Plaid's attempt to flank them on the left, Welsh Labour re-established itself as a social democratic party under new leader Rhodri Morgan, exemplified by Morgan's 'clear red water' speech in 2002 where he positioned Welsh Labour as an 'old Labour' outpost (Moon, 2012), disconnected from 'neo-liberal England' and the embrace of privatization by New Labour in Westminster. But despite the glaring disjuncture between rhetoric and reality[5], the 'clear red water' narrative helped perpetuate the notion that Labour was 'standing up for Wales', reflecting Wales' 'innately social democratic character' (Moon, 2012:5), and ultimately perpetuating the old narrative that Labourism and Welshness are one and the same (ibid). In response to the perception that they 'lacked Welshness' (Taylor, 2003:171) Labour begun a concerted effort to present a more Welsh image and to head off Plaid's challenge as 'The Party of Wales' (Wyn Jones: 2001: 46-47). The party subsequently rebranded itself as 'Welsh Labour: The True Party of Wales', an obvious affront to Plaid. Much of this rebranding of Welsh Labour as a distinctly Welsh force centred on the new leader Rhodri Morgan (Wyn Jones & Scully, 2004: 192) as Labour continually sought to occupy Plaid's ground. In addition, Labour also devolved much of its internal machinery to Cardiff (Taylor, 2003: 172; Laffin et al 2007). The 'issue' of the Welsh language was also neutralized, as the

WAG absorbed the issue from language pressure groups and adopted the Welsh language wholesale as part of their 'Welshification' (Phillips, 2005: 107-11), exemplified by the aforementioned 'Iaith Pawb' 'action plan' for a bilingual Wales (WAG: 2003)[6].

Raymond Williams' argues that the dominant hegemonic culture will attempt to incorporate 'harmless' subaltern narratives- evident in the co-optation of Welshness- but when this is not possible, threatening discourses will be "extirpated with extraordinary vigour" (1985:43). That is, articulation and disarticulation are dialectical, and the advocacy of one narrative inevitably involves the marginalisation of another. Post-devolution, much was made of the need to move away from 'ethnic' markers such as language and culture, towards a progressive, *civic* identity based on shared political values and institutions similar to that of Scotland's (Fowler & Jones, 2005) (regardless of the fact that 'civic' identities are in reality underpinned by 'ethnic' notions of nationhood- Calhoun, 1997). Whilst appropriating Plaid Cymru's main policies and their 'unique selling point' of being the 'Party of Wales', Labour systematically disarticulated any narratives which could not be grafted to their own platform. Building on a well-established strategy (Wyn Jones, 2014) Welsh Labour, with the active support of their allies in *The Welsh Mirror*, systematically 'othered' the linguistic view of Welshness as parochial, reactionary and backwards, or 'ethnic' completely at odds with the progressiveness and cosmopolitanism of Anglophone or 'civic' Labour Wales (Brooks, 2006; 2009).

Contemporary Wales- an interregnum?

The tactics of *incorporation* and co-optation have effectively neutralized Plaid Cymru, who have struggled greatly to define how they are any different from the social democratic, 'soft-nationalist' Welsh Labour party in the post-devolution epoch (Sandry, 2011; Trench, 2004:9). In 2003, Wales 'came home to Labour' (Wyn Jones & Scully, 2003), illustrating the ostensible success of Labour's 'Welshification' process and the 'decapitation' of Labour's main rivals. In the 2007 elections, Labour again failed to win a clear majority, but then embarked on the final stage of transformismo and "the absorption of the enemies' elites" (Gramsci, 1971:59) in the form of the *One Wales* coalition. This Plaid-Labour coalition dramatically blurred the

ideological differences between the hegemonic Labour party and its rival, further marginalizing Plaid and making their "explicit nationalism...irrelevant" (Glyn Williams, 2005: 231). In the 2011 Assembly Elections, Labour continued to march forward, securing half the seats in the Assembly. The Welsh conservatives gained momentum and became the largest opposition party, as Plaid Cymru lost 4 seats. In 2016, despite now possessing the most popular and visible political leader in Wales in Leanne Wood, Plaid Cymru gained only one seat, although both Labour & the Conservatives lost seats, something attributable to the dramatic rise of the right wing UKIP, who won 7 seats.

The powers of the Welsh Assembly remain weak. Westminster retains control over significant areas of legislation which impact on everyday life. The Welsh public has not engaged in any real way with the new devolved institution, demonstrated by persistently low turnouts in Assembly elections. In many ways there has been a remarkable *continuity* between pre and post-devolution Wales: support for independence has flatlined; Welshness has not significantly increased; levels of 'Britishness' remain stable; the proportion of people using the Welsh language has declined (Bradbury & Andrews, 2010; Wyn Jones & Scully, 2012). Wales remains a dependent *lumpen region*.

Conversely, it would not appropriate to assume that Welsh society has not changed at all since devolution. As in any passive revolution, changes, although 'molecular' and conservative, are nonetheless concrete and likely to impact on everyday life. This is consistent with the nature of passive revolution, whereby change is simultaneously *partially fulfilled yet also displaced* (Callinicos, 2010). Thus a 'thin veneer' of Welshness, to use Brooks' (2006) term, is nonetheless still a thin veneer. As part of changes which attempted to satisfy demands from below 'legally, in a reformist manner', as Gramsci puts it, Welshness has been given 'institutional expression' by devolution, and a distinct Welsh civil society has begun to take root. The establishment of these new 'hegemonic apparatuses' ostensibly provides a new, secure basis for forms of *cultural* Welshness.

How to characterise post-devolution Wales? Might we have arrived at what Gramsci terms an *interregnum*, a juncture within a period of crisis whereby "the old is dying and the new cannot be born?" Certainly, post-devolution Wales resembles a 'bastard' state, a malformed entity which has emerged from the process of passive revolution (Gramsci, 1971:90).

Representing perhaps a more contemporary interpretation of the interregnum, Barlow (2005:209) claims that the resultant situation that has emerged in post-devolution Wales is a period of '*in-betweenness'*. In addition, everyday life in contemporary Wales reflects the *messiness* and 'hybridization' typical of interregnums (Tugal, 2009: 244), containing residues of 'restoration' *and* 'revolution' and ultimately reflecting the complicated nature of the devolution settlement.

Conclusion: restoration or revolution?

So where is Wales going, and what is the likelihood of change? Gramsci's work on hegemonic **crises** and the political struggle within these periods surely offers the best analytical tool for understanding future developments in Wales. He argues that the real problem or question posed by the theory of passive revolution

> "is to see whether in the dialectic of revolution/restoration it is revolution or restoration which predominates; for it is certain that in the movement of history there is never any turning back, and that restorations *in toto* do not exist" (Gramsci: 1971: 219-20).

Of course, had the passive revolution in Wales been entirely successful- at least in Cuoco's terms which Gramsci borrowed from- this situation of 'inbetween-ness' would not have occurred- the emergence of reactionary forces and the disengagement of the Welsh electorate from devolved politics is testament to the (partial) failure of Labour's project[7]. The idea of an interregnum is a potential stumbling block for Marxists, since it potentially represents history grinding to a halt or indeed maybe even going backwards (Callinicos, 2010:503). This of course potentially undermines the logic of historical materialism, representing a 'mutilated dialectic' (Morton, 2012b).

Callinicos (2010) argues that interregnums *cannot* be indefinite. He states that passive revolution is inherently temporary, and that the organic crisis (which catalysed the process of state transformation which gave way to passive revolution in the first place) is always present

within this period of history. He implies that it is inevitable that at some point, change 'bursts through', and blows apart the process of restoration.

Gramsci is more pessimistic in his assessment of the interregnum, as he concludes that the complete 'restoration of the old' can be ruled out, "yet not in an absolute sense" (1971:276). This pessimism is echoed by Burawoy (2004:19), who claims that it is time to abandon 'any Hegelian philosophy of history', and instead proposes a Marxism 'with no guarantees'.

Bauman (2012: 49) notes that Gramsci's concept of the interregnum builds on Lenin's 'revolutionary situation': Gramsci suggests that mass disengagement and cynicism is symptomatic of interregnums: "the death of the old ideologies takes the form of skepticism with regard to all theories" (1971:276), which in turn creates a febrile moment. The alienation and disengagement wrought during these periods may lead to the appearance of "a great variety of morbid symptoms" (Gramsci, 1971:276). Governmental responses of austerity coupled with the 'pasokification' of social democratic parties has led to the emergence of revolutionary *and* reactionary currents across Europe. In Wales, the forces of reaction seem to be gaining momentum, capitalising effectively on this alienation, demonstrated by the vote for Brexit and the rise of UKIP

For nationalists, Wales' vote for Brexit and the rise of UKIP has re-opened the wounds of 1979. Faced with their nightmare scenario of 'absorption' into a post-Brexit 'Wangland' (*The Washington Post*, 2016), Plaid have belatedly adopted a more radical approach, proffering a more vocal advocacy of Welsh independence. Labour, too, have been jolted by Brexit. Previously, there was little incentive for the dominant party to attempt to 'solve' the interregnum due to the anaemic nature of Plaid Cymru and the sullen passivity of the Welsh electorate, but the role of 'non-voters' in swinging the Brexit vote has demonstrated the fragility of their hegemony in Wales.

Gramsci writes that the 'unstable equilibrium' (1971: 222) may last a long time:

> "...a crisis occurs, sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves (reached maturity) and

that, despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them, within certain limits, and to overcome them" (1971:178).

This notion of '*curing*' is central to the question at hand. Within the conditions of interregnum, incumbent hegemonic forces are continually battling to stem the tide of history and to overcome and neutralise the crises which prompted the passive revolution in the first instance. He continues "will the interregnum...necessarily be resolved in favour of a restoration of the old?" (1971:276)- In this situation, it seems unlikely that there will ever be a *total* return to the centralized British state (the 'undoing' of devolution), suggesting that the framework of an interregnum, at least in Gramsci's sense, may not be entirely applicable here. But clearly, within interregnums there is no given destiny- no inexorable progressive 'way out' - leading groups may seek to actively prevent passive revolutions developing into radical revolutions (Brading, 2014). Adam Evans (2014), for example, argues that an interregnum is very much viewed as an acceptable 'end point' by many in Welsh Labour, who are content to reject any further powers which would lead to more political responsibility or accountability. Indeed, why would Labour attempt to change a situation of mass alienation, given that it aids their continued hegemony in Wales?

At the time of writing, the latest Wales Bill (2017) has just been passed, designed to 'draw a line under' the 'Welsh question'. Could this 'solve' the interregnum in 'favour of revolution', or allow a new world 'to be born'? The list of caveats and issues with the bill are so extensive- for example the failure to devolve any juridical powers to Wales (something blocked by then shadow Welsh secretary of state Owen Smith) means that the Welsh government will struggle to legislate and drag the Welsh polity out of its current 'bastard' form: it is likely that this piece of legislation will run into difficulty and have to again be altered. Like devolution itself, whether or not the interregnum is solved in favour of 'revolution or restoration' will again probably depend on the outcome of the power struggles *within* the *multilevel* Labour party - between the devolutionists who seek to move beyond the interregnum, and the anti-devolutionists who wish to 'cure' or maintain it- rather than the influence of external forces and actors.[8]

Notes

[1] The concept of passive revolution, whilst fecund, is also somewhat ambiguous because it in fact has two interrelated meanings (Bruff, 2010: 411; Morton, 2011:3; Mayo 2015:61). The first, more expansive reading, relates to a 'general' elite led attempt to transform an existing form of capitalism within the nation state, or indeed as Buci-Glucksmann (1979:222) notes, even the passive transformation of capitalism *itself*. As Mayo points out, this understanding is closely linked to Caesarism,. This understanding of passive revolution has been contested by Callinicos (2010) who argues this interpretation stretches the concept to breaking point, and that these transformations of existing forms of capitalism may best be understood as 'simply' hegemony. The second, perhaps more restrictive meaning of the term describes a process when potentially revolutionary national moment is 'taken over' by elite interests or sections and pressed into a conservative project in which initial, radical demands from below are modified or diminished, as the transformation of society becomes about preserving the old order (Mayo, 2010:61). This paper employs the second usage of the term.

[2] It should therefore be acknowledged that this 'national' historical bloc was a function of the wider 'international historical bloc' of 'embedded liberalism' dependent on the backing of the United States (Gill & Law, 1989: 478; Panitch & Gindin, 2012) i.e., the national historical bloc is frequently contingent upon *international* stability. As Streeck (2011) argues, the post war national welfare state was an unprecedented era of stability, but notes that this short span of history, relatively free from crises, is the *exception* within capitalism, not the norm. That is, it was an *anomalous period*, and one which will never return. Nonetheless, the era has stamped itself onto the consciousness of social democratic movements across the world, and in particular the British labour party, as paradigmatic. As Poulantzas (1969) argues in his critique of Milliband, "each particular form of capitalist state is thus characterized by a particular form of relations among its branches" and that "each particular form of capitalist state must be referred back, *in its unity*, to important modifications of the relations of production and to important stages of class struggle: competitive capitalism, imperialism, state capitalism" (1969:248). Hence the British welfare itself should be understood as a particular epoch within the history of capitalism, with the British form being one particular manifestation of state capitalism which unfolded throughout Europe following WW2.

[3] It should also be noted at that conceptualising Thatcherism as an organic crisis is not unproblematic. After all, Thatcherism was as much a cultural project as an economic one, a 'radical revolution' which was simultaneously regressive and progressive (Hall, 1987:133). The radical break Thatcherism made with the post-war consensus, whilst alienating large sections of the working class, did not detach all classes from the historic bloc. In fact, Thatcherism contained some shrewd hegemonic policies and therefore did not entirely abandon the idea of consent. As Barnett (1982) notes, Thatcherism rearticulated Britishness away from the ideas of 'fairness' which underpinned the KWNS towards a militaristic 'Churchillism', which gained purchase amongst many, (this was evident during the Falklands war, for example). In addition to this reformulated British nationalism, economic initiatives such as the 'right to buy' scheme represented a shrewd concession to the 'aspirational' new working class, and undoubtedly succeeded in keeping a significant number of working class people, 'on side' (Huitson, 2013; Johnes, 2013). Within Wales, the scale of 'detachment' was uneven and spatial, related to the creation of new class fractions which grew out of the huge changes occurring to the Welsh economy. The coastal plane in particular represented an area of the new working class which moved towards conservatism (see Adamson, 1991). Although Law (2009) claims Thatcherism's cultural shift was never truly hegemonic or 'national-popular', the sheer popularity of Thatcherism is worth remembering and often gets overlooked when considering the 'decline of Britishness' and the scale of the 'detachment' of the subaltern classes within the bloc.

[4] These proposals included: an Assembly with 100 AMs; proportional representation; primary legislation and tax raising powers.

[5] The strength of any institutional form within a territory affects its ability to 'pin down' or 'embed' global processes of economic development, i.e. to actually have an impact on economic development (Lovering, 1999; Cooke, 2005: 444, See also Rodriguez-Pose & Bwire, 2005). Morgan (2006) illustrates that there is a chronic disjunction between the powers of the assembly and what the Welsh Government says it does.

[7] Of course it is not entirely unsuccessful because, unlike in Scotland, Labour remain in power in Wales.

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