

Interlocutions with Passive Revolution*

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Abstract: This article critically engages with debates on uneven and combined development and particularly the lack of attention given in this literature to accounts of spatial diversity in capitalism's outward expansion as well as issues of Eurocentrism. Through interlocutions with Antonio Gramsci on his theorising of state formation and capitalist modernity and the notion of passive revolution, we draw out the internal relationship between the structuring condition of uneven and combined development and the class agency of passive revolution. Interlocuting with passive revolution places Antonio Gramsci firmly within a stream of classic social theory shaping considerations of capitalist modernity. As a result, by building on cognate theorising elsewhere, passive revolution can then be established as a *lateral field of causality* that necessarily grasps spatio-temporal dynamics linked to both state and subaltern class practices of transformation in social property relations, situated within the structuring conditions of uneven and combined development.

Keywords: Antonio Gramsci, passive revolution, Leon Trotsky, uneven and combined development,

This article seeks to engage three lines of criticism in the literature around uneven and combined development. First, that there is no fully reconstructed theory within the original approach to uneven and combined development and, by extension, contemporary approaches to uneven and combined development have not been adequate in 'accounting for *both* the spatio-temporal dynamics of capitalist development *and* the causal effects of socio-political multiplicity' (Rioux 2015: 494, original emphasis). The danger here, in the useful framing by Sébastien Rioux (2015: 494), is that the theory of uneven and combined development is 'nothing more than a friendly reminder about the importance of "the international"'. Second, for some time, David Harvey (1982/2006: xix) has prominently opined that historical materialism cannot exist without a solid appreciation of the dialectics of spatio-temporality, hence the agenda-setting advancement of historical-geographical materialism. Yet it is perplexing that much of the recent literature within historical sociology is

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aspatial (Hesketh and Morton, 2014: 150). There is a failure to develop an internal dialectical perspective on the relationship between the ‘political’ state and the ‘economic’ modalities of exploitation. Third, this opens up the need to recognise and then focus on what Ernest Mandel called the ‘historical detour’, in order to consider how the unfolding of capitalism occurred within societies of socio-economically uneven and combined developmental conditions (Mandel, 1976/1990: 85). Put differently, without the concrete analysis of the spatio-temporal dynamics of uneven and combined development, debates have been presently coy in delivering place-based accounts of the historical detour that capitalism has taken in time and space (see Matin, 2013 for an exception). The result is that ‘we are left with the important *identification* of a lateral field of causality, without the latter being incorporated within social theory’ (Rioux, 2015: 485, original emphasis). The originality of this article is, then, that it asserts the notion of *passive revolution* as precisely a lateral field of causality capable of grasping spatio-temporal dynamics linked to state and class practices of transformation in social property relations within the overriding structuring condition of uneven and combined development.

When conceptualising the relation between the structuring condition of uneven and combined development and class interventions of passive revolution, we draw on the philosophy of internal relations (Ollman, 1976), allowing us to tease out the internal dynamics of structure and agency in capitalist expansion. Thus, starting the analysis from how capitalist production is organised around the private ownership of the means of production and ‘free’ wage labour, ‘it is this understanding, which generates the key ontological properties of structure and agency. First, there are the structuring conditions of capitalism, the way production and accumulation of surplus value is set up. At the same time, these social relations of production also engender social class forces as the key collective agents’ (Bieler and Morton, 2018: 37-8). In the next section, we discuss, first, how the structuring condition of uneven and combined development can be understood without falling into

the trap of Eurocentric diffusionism. This will then be further developed through an engagement with Antonio Gramsci by outlining the internal relation between class interventions linked to processes of passive revolution uncovering the varied spatial dynamics in capitalism's outward expansion. In other words, the argument reveals passive revolution as an affinal concept to uneven and combined development, which delivers a field of causality that captures expressions of state and class agency internally related to the structuring condition of uneven and combined development (Morton, 2011/2013: 35-9, 237-51; Morton, 2017a; also see Hesketh, 2017b).

The multilinear dialectic of uneven and combined development

With capitalism, production is organised around the private ownership of the means of production and 'free' wage labour, which results in a number of structuring conditions. First, not only workers but also capital are constantly compelled to reproduce themselves, which generates a constant emphasis on competitiveness and a related pressure for further technological innovation in a relentless struggle for ever higher profit levels. As Marx (1867/1990: 381) noted, 'under free competition, the immanent laws of capitalist production confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him'. Nevertheless, what works for the individual capitalist, is problematic for capital as a whole. With more goods produced but fewer workers employed, there is a lack of demand for these goods. 'We see here', Harvey argues, 'the necessary contradiction that arises when each capitalist strives to reduce the share of variable capital in value added within the enterprise while speculating on selling his output to workers employed by other capitalists' (Harvey, 1982/2006: 134). Hence, capitalism is structurally crisis-prone.

Rosa Luxemburg recognised the inevitable tensions between expanded reproduction of capitalism and limited demand constantly driving capital towards outward expansion to secure new markets and cheaper raw materials and labour (Bieler et al., 2016). Famously, in *The Accumulation of*

Capital, by analysing the creation and expansion of the hothouse conditions for capital accumulation in non-capitalist environments, Luxemburg concluded that ‘from the very beginning, the forms and laws of capitalist production aim to comprise the entire globe as a store of productive forces’ (Luxemburg, 1913/2003: 401). Luxemburg’s first focus is on processes of primitive accumulation in dispossessing peasant producers to create a reserve of labour power based on the wage system in non-capitalist territories. Second, militarism was also famously traced by Luxemburg (1913/2003: 419) as ‘the executor of the accumulation of capital,’ as a province of the expansion of capital in gaining possession of the means of production and labour power through colonialism and imperialism (Luxemburg, 1913/2003: 367). As historical examples, Luxemburg mentions British policy in India, French policy in Algeria, and the extension of commodity relations by European powers in China (Luxemburg, 1913/2003: 367). Finally, Luxemburg discussed the role of international loans and the credit system, the role of the built environment and fixed capital, as an essential spatial arrangement for the absorption of surplus value (e.g. through railroad building, roads, dams, irrigation systems, warehouses, schools, hospitals, universities). For Luxemburg, then, capitalist production for a world market has gone hand in hand with decimation, mass murders, slave trade and extermination in the Americas, Australia, North Africa, West Africa and China (Luxemburg 1915/1972: 112, 147).

Granting a privileged focus on the spatial system of Europe without making connections between intertwined histories that lie both within and beyond the European context can, however, be defined as Eurocentrism. While the periphery of non-Europe is often portrayed as a passive recipient of diffusions from the European core, the modern expansion of capitalism is often presented in some circles largely in terms of internal, immanent forces (Blaut, 1999: 130-2). It is beyond the scope of this article to deliver any resolution to the debates on the spectre of Eurocentrism that has curbed recognition of the role of non-European states and societies in the

constitution of capitalism and the states-system (see Anievas and Matin, 2016; Anievas and Nişançioğlu, 2015; Bhambra, 2007; Chakrabarty, 2007; Chibber, 2013; Nişançioğlu, 2013; Tansel, 2015; Tansel, 2016). Nevertheless, the critique of ‘Eurocentric diffusionism’, the problem of examining capitalism through the notion of uneven and combined development as a wave of diffusion unfolding outward from western Europe to the non-European periphery (Blaut, 1993), has to be addressed. ‘It is therefore crucial to reflect further on whether an account of the rise of capitalism and the modern state can avoid the perils of Eurocentrism’ (Morton, 2005: 517). In order to overcome Eurocentrism, the goal is to avoid positing the non-West as ontologically exterior to the constitution of capitalism (Tansel, 2015: 78).

In the following, we respond to the charge of Eurocentrism in two ways. First, we contribute to busting the myth that Marx projected a linear causality or progressive movement from capital’s becoming in one specific temporal and spatial instance to its universalisation throughout the world. Second, we empirically illustrate how the emergence and outward expansion of capitalism from England and the Low Countries was heavily conditioned by their insertion within “the international”. As for the former, there is a strong multilinear understanding of social development directly evident in Marx that reveals the wider geographical scope of his critique of political economy (Anderson, 2010: 197). Equally, ‘deprovincialising Marx entails not simply an expanded geographic inclusion but a broadening of temporal possibilities unchained from a hegemonic unilateralism’ (Harootunian, 2015: 2). This endeavour pivots on a re-reading of the statement by Marx that ‘the country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future’ (Marx, 1867/1990: 91), which is interpreted as having a form of unilinear determinism built into it (Shanin, 1983: 4). However, Derek Sayer and Philip Corrigan (1983: 79, original emphasis) have argued that the comparative analysis here is between England and Germany.

Since Germany is a society in which capitalism has taken root already, its “normal development” can reasonably be expected to follow an “English” path. But this in no way

implies any necessity for societies in which capitalist production is *not* already established to do the same.

There is, therefore, a multilinear theory of history evident here that contains a focus on the dialectical unity of the inneraction of particularity and universality within social development that needs to be recovered within and for historical materialism (Anderson, 2010: 178-9). This is evidenced very well in Marx:

It would therefore be unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive. Their sequence is determined, rather, by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society, which is precisely the opposite of that which seems to be their natural order or which corresponds to historical development. The point is not the historic position of the economic relations in the succession of different forms of society . . . Rather, their order within modern bourgeois society (Marx, 1857-58/1973: 107-8).

Envisioning capitalism as creating a form of unevenness that combines both the general and the particular is also of a piece with provincialising Europe and deprovincialising Marx (Chakrabarty, 2007; Harootunian, 2015). For Harry Harootunian this entails emphasising the process of unevenness embedded in capital's continuous expansion across heterogeneous temporalities and spaces. Referring to Marx on the lever of primitive accumulation:

The history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs. Only in England, which we therefore take as our example, has it the classic form (Marx, 1867/1990: 876).

Hence, this is not to argue that such expropriations outside Europe follow a linear causality, a singularly progressive movement, in the expansion of capitalism as a mode of production. 'Attention to the different ways capitalism developed in singular and specific sites affirms Marx's decision to privilege the global theatre reflected in the formation of the world market as the principal organising principle in envisioning any possible world history (Harootunian, 2015: 19-20). Capital's process of becoming, through its own spatial and temporal expansion, was therefore an uneven developmental process that absorbed and combined previously non-capitalist elements within and across the peripheries of Euro-America. Trajectories of state formation are therefore embedded in the *uneven*

world-wide spread of capitalism *combined* with the condition of differently constituted preceding political forms and social relations. Trotsky recognised this multilinear causality, when he developed the notion of uneven and combined development. ‘It is false that world economy is simply a sum of national parts of one and the same type . . . In reality, the national peculiarities represent an original combination of the basic features of the world process’ (Trotsky, 1929/2004: 23). ‘Unevenness’, in his regard, ‘is the most general law of the historic process [that] reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of the backward countries’ (Trotsky, 1936/1980: 28). Due to the unevenness of the developmental process, features appropriate to different historical periods become combined within the character of a social formation. Therefore a ‘peculiar mixture of backward elements with the most modern factors’ arises within a social formation confronted with insertion into the expanding system of capitalism (Trotsky, 1936/1980: 31-2, 36, 72).

It was Marx who recognised that ‘the capitalist mode of production is conditioned by modes of production lying outside its own stage of development’ (Marx, 1884/1992: 190). The circulation of capital is therefore characterised by ‘the many-sided character of its origins’ and conditioned by the existence of the world market, whether that be in relation to the forms of existence of productive capital, money capital, or commodity capital. Within the decisive prevailing social conditions of capitalist production, then, Marx has this important remark that is worth quoting at length.

Whether the commodities are the products of production based on slavery, the product of peasants (Chinese, Indian ryots), of a community (Dutch East Indies), of state production (such as existed in earlier epochs of Russian history, based on serfdom) or of half-savage hunting peoples, etc. — *as commodities and money they confront the money and commodities in which industrial capital presents itself, and enter both into the latter’s own circuit and into that of the surplus-value borne by the commodity capital, in so far as the latter is spent as revenue; i.e. in both branches of the circulation of commodity capital. The character of the production process from which they derive is immaterial; they function on the market as commodities, and as commodities they enter both the circuit of industrial capital and the circulation of the surplus-value borne by it* (Marx, 1884/1992: 189-90, emphases added).

David Harvey, too, highlights this commentary as significant for understanding how capital integrates with noncapitalist modes of production, indicating that once commodities enter into the orbit of capital they act just like all the others. These insights are therefore a fecund source for considerations of uneven geographical development, systems of commodity exchange with noncapitalist social formations, and the expansion of the world market having ‘all manner of implications for our understanding of how capital becomes grounded in particular situations, including those of a noncapitalist world’ (Harvey, 2013: 76-7).

More recently, Alex Anievas and Kerem Nişançioğlu demonstrate well how the emergence of capitalism in England and the Low Countries and its subsequent outward expansion cannot be explained by referring exclusively to these countries’, or more generally Europe’s, internal dynamics. Rather, both the constitution and outward expansion of capitalism has to be understood by the way these countries relied on relationships with non-European space along lines of uneven and combined development. First, English capitalism was heavily conditioned by the Atlantic expansion following Columbus’s invasion of the Americas in 1492. ‘If it were not for the specifically international conditions created by Europe’s expansion into the Atlantic, it is likely that capitalism would have been choked off by the limits of English agrarian capitalism’ (Anievas and Nişançioğlu, 2015: 152). The American colonies provided both markets for surpluses, which could not be sold in Britain, as well as super-profits resulting from plantations based on slave labour for re-investment into the industrial revolution. ‘In the late eighteenth-century, income from colonial properties in the Americas was equal to approximately 50 per cent of British gross investment. Since much of this would have been reinvested in British industries, it provided a significant input into British industrialisation’ (Anievas and Nişançioğlu, 2015: 164). In other words, the full establishment of the capitalist mode of production in England, was conditioned by the opportunities afforded through the Atlantic expansion and the combination of wage labour in England with slave labour overseas

(Anievas and Nişancioğlu, 2015: 169). As for the Dutch case, the very emergence of capitalism was conditioned by “the international”. Farmers in the northern parts of the Low Countries were only able to switch to milk and dairy production for the market because they gained access to cheap grain imports from the Baltic area from the mid fifteenth-century onward (Anievas and Nişancioğlu, 2015: 181), where production was based on feudal social relations. In the late sixteenth-century, then, Dutch agriculture was increasingly characterised by large farms worked by wage labour. ‘Crucially, one outcome of this process was an increase in the demand for labour-power concomitant with a reduction in its supply in the seventeenth-century, as population growth could not keep pace with economic growth’ (Anievas and Nişancioğlu, 2015: 226). Unlike in Britain, this bottleneck was not overcome through rapid technological innovation. Instead, Dutch capitalism drew on the availability of labour power in Asia in its expansion. ‘By incorporating labour-power on a global scale, Dutch capital acquired a power of expansion it hitherto did not possess’ (Anievas and Nişancioğlu, 2015: 227). Importantly, rather than occupying territory and levying taxes as feudalist Spain and Portugal did in Latin America, Dutch capitalism focused on controlling production processes. ‘Dutch preponderance rested on intervening and eventually establishing control over production and thus also labour-power. The integration of intra-Asian trade, therefore, ‘facilitated for the first time the organisation of ‘a hierarchy of capitals connecting a dispersed mass of labour-power’ on a “global” scale’ (Anievas and Nişancioğlu, 2015: 234-5 citing Banaji 2010: 274). Localised resistance was crucial in the way this process played out. In order to get a foothold in South Asia, Dutch capitalism either integrated into existing networks or relied on blistering violence. At times, surplus labour was provided for free as in the case of clove production in Moluccas, while rebellions against clove production elsewhere were suppressed with brutal force.

Clearly, outward capitalist expansion and the full development of capitalism in Britain and the Netherlands was conditioned by the opportunities offered *inter alia* in the Americas and East

Asia. There is the argument that a focus on a set of Eastern inventions and resource portfolios (ideas, technologies, institutions) enables a breakout from the cul-de-sac of Eurocentrism (Hobson, 2011). But this position overlooks the subtle point made by Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995: 37, original emphasis) that:

The crucial issue is not the presence or absence of private property in land as such. China, for example, had well-established private landed property from a very early stage . . . The important point is the relation between private property and political power, and its consequences for the organisation of production and the relation between appropriator and producer. The unique characteristic of Western development in this respect is that it is marked by the earliest and most complete transfer of political power to private property, and therefore also the most thorough, generalised and direct subservience of production to the demands of an appropriating *class*.

The fact that capitalism was first fully established in Britain and the Netherlands, rather than Spain or Portugal, indicates that the prior reconfiguration of the social relations of production around wage labour and the private ownership of the means of production in the former social formations was crucial for their ability to absorb the opportunities offered by imperialism in other areas of the world. ‘Those countries where protocapitalist relations were emerging or had already emerged—Holland and England—made much more productive use of the bullion than did Spain, which was set on a course of empire-expanding geopolitical accumulation congruent with its feudal relations of production’ (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, 2015: 248). In short, the origin of capitalism is spatially a European phenomenon based on the emergence of a particular set of social property relations in England and the Netherlands, but one which was conditioned in its emergence and outward expansion by opportunities and resistances it encountered elsewhere.

These aspects are absent from Justin Rosenberg’s projection of uneven and combined development as a transhistorical phenomenon and, thus, as intrinsic to the historical process itself (Rosenberg, 2006: 309). This is contrary to Trotsky’s own stance that capitalism gains mastery over inherited unevenness through *methods of its own* through seeking new territories and economic expansion (Trotsky, 1928/1970: 19-20). What is overlooked is Neil Smith’s argument that ‘uneven

development is the systematic geographical expression of the contradictions inherent in the very constitution and structure of capital' and thus unique to capitalism (Smith, 1984/2008: 4). As Kees van der Pijl (2015: 61-2) clarifies, uneven and combined development is valid only for capitalism.

Following Neil Smith (2004: 182):

A law that explains absolutely "everything in the world" explains nothing, and the fact that "nothing develops evenly", used as a philosophical justification for such a law, reduces it to triviality. Dressed in such pretence, it tells us absolutely nothing specific about capitalism, imperialism or the present moment of capitalist restructuring.

To argue, as Rosenberg does, that the theory of uneven and combined development itself 'captures at a general level the sociological characteristics of *all* development' (Callinicos and Rosenberg, 2008: 80, emphasis added) and that it is able to meet Kenneth Waltz's requirements for a general theory of international relations (Rosenberg, 2013a: 185) indicates a misplaced envy of positivism and constitutes a departure from historically specific analysis of modern capitalist political space. Following our analysis elsewhere (Morton, 2010b: 215-16; Morton, 2011/2013: 242-3; Bieler, 2013), the specific character of uneven and combined development can only be fully grasped through an understanding of capitalist social relations of production. Importantly, uneven and combined development does not only characterise the historic expansion of capitalism and the incorporation of non-capitalist space into capitalist social relations of production. Our argument is that uneven and combined development continues to shape the re-configuration of social relations between different areas within global capitalism today.

When analysing the constitution and outward dynamic of capitalism along uneven and combined lines it is essential to grasp the spatio-temporal dynamics and causal effects of state and class agents in the making of capitalist modernity. This is, however, missing from the literature to date. For example, Justin Rosenberg (2013b) references the spatio-temporal character of uneven and combined development without examining the organisation of space, the spatial logistics of state power, or the contradictions of space. Space is "there" but redundant and unexplored, a mere

happenstance of developmental unevenness and combination. Nevertheless, addressing the spatial dynamics in capitalism's outward expansion is crucial for the understanding of the wide variety of processes through which capitalism has become constituted in different geographical locations around the world. Otherwise, the framework of uneven and combined development can collapse into an impoverished historical geography of capitalism unable to explain the involvement of states and classes in processes of production and surplus appropriation (Rioux, 2013: 108). It was Michael Burawoy (1989: 793) in his illusive statement that recognised 'where Trotsky's horizons stop, Gramsci's begin'. Or, in David Harvey's (2003: 101) usage, 'the molecular processes of capital accumulation operating in space and time generate passive revolutions in the geographical patterning of capital accumulation'. In what follows, then, we present processes of passive revolution as capable of providing a lateral field of causality to address state and class forms of agency with the structuring conditions of uneven and combined development. This will allow us to capture spatial diversity in the making of capitalist modernity within the structuring conditions of uneven and combined development, emphasising the internal relations between the agency of social class forces and the structuring conditions of capitalism.

The passive revolutionary road to capitalist modernity

With reference to the Italian Risorgimento—the movement for national liberation that culminated in the political unification of the country in 1860-61—Gramsci introduced a cluster of terms to capture the contradictory outcome of the crystallisation of this state formation process. These terms, he admitted, were difficult (sometimes impossible) to translate into a foreign language given their situatedness in Italian historico-political discourse but they, nevertheless, had entered common circulation throughout 'Europe and the world' to address a category referring to the creation of modern states that 'was not restricted to Italy'. The Risorgimento therefore represented a fragile

combination of *Rinascimento*—*Rinascita*—*Rinascenza* literally meaning ‘renaissance’ and ‘rebirth’ or a triptych of revival, rebirth, and reawakening. However, in the same note from the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci states that ‘all of these terms express the concept of a return to a condition that had already existed before: that is, the concept of an aggressive “*ripresa*” (“*riscossa*”) of the nation’s energies or of a liberation from a state of servitude in order to return to pristine autonomy (*riscatto*)’ (Gramsci, 1996: 387, Q5§136). All these terms express an amalgam of revolt, insurrection, or awakening [*riscossa*] as well as that of revival or renewal [*ripresa*] in relation to the state formation process of the Italian Risorgimento and its territorial, spatial and geographical patterning within wider uneven and combined developmental conditions. The Risorgimento was as much a rebirth, or revolution, as a restoration in which there was ‘the acceptance, in mitigated and camouflaged forms, of the same principles that had been combatted’ (Gramsci, 1996: 389, Q5§138; Gramsci, 1996: 389, Q5§139). But, given that Gramsci (1971: 220, Q13§27) recognised that ‘restorations *in toto* do not exist’, how are the contradictions of revolution and restoration conjoined in a way that offers a lateral field of causality to the structuring condition of uneven and combined development? What is the *essential form* that is conveyed by these contradictions of revolution and restoration impacting on state formation processes beyond the mere *form of appearance* in time and space in the case of the Italian Risorgimento?

On the *form of appearance* of these contradictions in the case of Italy, it was the failure of the ‘Jacobins’ in the *Partito d’Azione* led by Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi, among others, to establish a programme reflecting the demands of the popular masses and, significantly, the peasantry that came to mark the Risorgimento. Instead, challenges were thwarted and changes in property relations accommodated due to the *Partito Moderato*, led by Vincenzo Gioberti and (Count) Camillo Benso Cavour, establishing alliances between big landowners in the Mezzogiorno and the northern

bourgeoisie, while absorbing opposition in parliament through continually assimilated change (or *trasformismo*) within the current social formation.

‘The Moderates do not acknowledge the agency of a collective force . . . in the Risorgimento; they only recognise single individuals, who are either exalted so that they can be appropriated or slandered in order to rupture collective ties (Gramsci, 1996: 110, Q3§125).

The essential form sustaining the form of appearance of the Risorgimento, though, was the concept and condition of passive revolution that can be defined as referring to various concrete historical instances when aspects of the social relations of capitalist development are either instituted and/or expanded resulting in both a ‘revolutionary’ rupture and ‘restoration’ of social relations. ‘The problem’, as Antonio Gramsci (1971: 219, Q13§27) states, ‘is to see whether in the dialectic of “revolution/restoration” it is revolution or restoration which predominates’. A passive revolution therefore represents a blocked dialectic (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980: 315), or a condition of rupture in which socio-political processes of revolution are at once partially fulfilled and displaced (Callinicos, 2010: 498). According to Gramsci, after the French Revolution (1789), the emergent bourgeoisie there, ‘was able to present itself as an integral “state”, with all the intellectual and moral forces that were necessary and adequate to the task of organising a complete and perfect society’ (Gramsci, 2007: 9, Q6§10). In contrast to the instance of revolutionary rupture in France, other European countries went through a series of passive revolutions in which the old feudal classes were not destroyed but maintained a political role through state power. As a result, such ‘restorations are universally repressive’ (Gramsci, 1996: 40, Q3§41). Hence:

[The] birth of the modern European states [proceeded] by successive waves of reform rather than by revolutionary explosions like the original French one. The “successive waves” were made up of a combination of social struggles, interventions from above of the enlightened monarchy type, and national wars . . . restoration becomes the first policy whereby social struggles find sufficiently elastic frameworks to allow the bourgeoisie to gain power without dramatic upheavals, without the French machinery of terror . . . The old feudal classes are demoted from their dominant position to a “governing” one, but are not eliminated, nor is there any attempt to liquidate them as an organic whole . . . Can this “model” for the creation of the modern states be repeated in other conditions? (Gramsci, 1971: 115 Q10II§61).

At issue here is not the question of the historical validity of the examples deployed. After all, as Gramsci himself noted, ‘historians are by no means of one mind (and it is impossible that they should be) in fixing the limits of the group of events which constitutes the French Revolution’ (Gramsci, 1971: 179-80, Q13§17). Equally, it was acknowledged that there can also be a ‘system of interpretations of the Risorgimento’ (Gramsci, 2007: 382, Q8§243). Nevertheless, it was concluded that:

The important thing is to analyse more profoundly the significance of a “Piedmont”-type function in passive revolutions—i.e. the fact that a state replaces the local social groups in leading a struggle of renewal. It is one of the cases in which these groups have the function of “domination” without that of “leadership”: dictatorship without hegemony (Gramsci, 1971: 105-6, Q15§59).

The significance of the French Revolution was highlighted in terms of its geopolitical impact on the states-system, ‘which spilled over into the rest of Europe with the republican and Napoleonic armies—giving the old régimes a powerful shove, and resulting not in the immediate collapse as in France but in the “reformist” corrosion of them which lasted up to 1870’ (Gramsci, 1971: 119, Q10§I9). The Italian form of passive revolution in the appearance of the Risorgimento ‘was a question of stitching together a unitary state’ (Gramsci, 2007: 77, Q6§89). ‘The concept of passive revolution, it seems to me’, Gramsci (1996: 232, Q4§57) accordingly stated, ‘applies not only to Italy but also to those countries that modernise the state through a series of reforms.’

There are at least two different but linked processes defining the *essential form* of the condition of passive revolution. It can refer to:

- 1) a revolution without mass participation, or a ‘revolution from above’, involving elite-engineered social and political reform that draws on foreign capital and associated ideas while lacking a national-popular base. Passive revolution here describes the ‘historical fact of the absence of popular initiative in the development of Italian history’ (Gramsci 2007: 252, Q8§25) and how issues such as agrarian reform were ‘a way of grafting the agrarian masses on to the national revolution’ (Gramsci, 2007: 257, Q8§35); and
- 2) how a revolutionary form of political transformation is pressed into a conservative project of restoration in which popular demands of class struggle still play some role. It refers here to, ‘the fact that “progress” occurs as the reaction of the dominant classes to the sporadic

and incoherent rebelliousness of the popular masses—a reaction consisting of “restorations” that agree to some part of the popular demands and are therefore “progressive restorations”, or “revolutions-restorations”, or even “passive revolutions” (Gramsci, 2007: 252, Q8§25).

In the latter sense, passive revolution is linked to insurrectionary mass mobilisation from below while such class demands are restricted so that ‘changes in the world of production are accommodated within the current social formation’ (Sassoon, 1987: 207; see Femia, 1981: 260n.74). As Gramsci (1996: 360, Q5§119) notes in the case of the Risorgimento, ‘the bourgeoisie did not lead the people or seek its help to defeat feudal privileges; instead, it was the aristocracy that formed a strong party made up of people opposed to unbridled exploitation by the industrial bourgeoisie and to the consequences of industrialism’. In Italy, the ruling class systematically prevented the emergence of a ‘new structure from below’ and ever since ‘has made the preservation of this crystallised situation the *raison d’être* of its historical continuity’ (Gramsci, 2007: 121-2, Q6§162). Perhaps for that reason, it was noted that there was a ‘congenital incapacity’ within the *Partito d’Azione* to exercise leadership while the *Partito Moderato* resorted to a form of “political-economic neo-Malthusianism” to block substantive agrarian reform (Gramsci, 1996: 181, Q3§125). The contradictory combination of revolution-restoration that is emblematic of a passive revolution is therefore that of an insurrectionary force domesticated (Morton, 2010a: 330). Or, to turn to the primary source, the theory of passive revolution as revolution-restoration refers to a ‘domesticated dialectic’ within the struggle-driven process of historical development (Gramsci, 2007: 372, Q8§225; Gramsci, 2007: 253, Q8§27). This does not mean that passive revolutions are consciously made by capitalists themselves; rather the emphasis is shifted to the effects of transformations constituting capitalism as a mode of production and the consolidation of modern state power (Callinicos, 1989: 124). The forms of appearance that passive revolutions may take do not imply inert, literally passive, processes. Everyday forms of passive revolution can be violent and brutal, the outcome neither predetermined nor inevitable. Hence, beyond the *form of appearance* of the Italian Risorgimento, a

chain of passive revolutions called forth by capitalist modernity throughout the nineteenth- and twentieth-century may be identified, marking passive revolution as an *essential form* in the historical sociology of state-making processes. It indicates a description of capitalist modernity where there is a structural inability of the bourgeois political project to realise fully the practice of hegemony, delivering an incomplete process that becomes more the rule rather than the exception of state formation (Thomas, 2009: 154; Thomas, 2013: 25). Albeit without the direct intent of a bourgeois class, these processes of state formation have often culminated in the persistence of old regimes in the latter half of the nineteenth-century and, in the twentieth-century, the failure of hegemony in peripheral capitalist modernity notwithstanding the partial molecular absorption and redefinition of class interests from below (Endnotes, 2015: 86, 100; Mayer, 1981/2010; and, for example, Allinson and Anievas, 2010; Gray, 2014; Hesketh, 2017a; Munck, 2013; Roberts, 2015; Webber, 2016).

Regardless of the form of appearance *or* the essential content of a passive revolution, it is crucial to appreciate the role of class struggles over the political form of the state. The developmental unevenness of social property relations are open-ended rather than closed or ensnared within the structures of passive revolution and its logic of absorption. ‘The thesis of the “passive revolution” as an interpretation of the Risorgimento’, Gramsci acknowledged, ‘and of every epoch characterised by complex historical upheavals . . . [is in] danger of historical defeatism . . . since the whole way of posing the question may induce a belief in some kind of fatalism’ (Gramsci, 1971: 114, Q15§62). Two factors can therefore be underscored to account for social change or contradictions and conflict within the theory of passive revolution. First, the concept of passive revolution ‘remains a dialectical one—in other words, presupposes, indeed postulates as necessary, a vigorous antithesis which can present intransigently all the potentialities for development’ (Gramsci, 1971: 114, Q15§62). This means emphasising the very contradictions of revolution-restoration and the role of popular masses in shaping the form and content of passive revolutions against state

classes. The flow of organic and conjunctural movements within the structures of passive revolution are ultimately conditioned by the ‘relations of forces’ between contending class factions (Gramsci, 1971: 177-85, Q13§17). Second, in developing the theory of passive revolution, Gramsci (2007: 357, Q8§210) posed himself the following question: ‘Should one regard as “revolutions” all those movements that describe themselves as “revolutions” in order to endow themselves with dignity and legitimacy?’ In response, passive revolution is offered not only as an analysis of the specificity of Italian historical development (form of appearance) but also as a consideration of state formation conditions (essential form) through a method of historical analogy as an interpretative criterion (Gramsci, 1971: 54n.4, Q25§2; Gramsci, 1971: 114, Q15§62). Gramsci’s analysis of the specificity of Italian historical development and its form of appearance of passive revolution is thus developed ‘not as a programme . . . but as a criterion of interpretation, in the absence of other active elements to a dominant extent’ (Gramsci, 1971: 114, Q15§62). The explicative power of this method of interpreting state formation and the contradictions of class struggle therefore lies in ‘the method of historical analogy as an interpretative criterion’ (Gramsci, 1971: 54n.4, Q25§2). As argued elsewhere (Morton 2007b: 604-5), Gramsci derives certain principles of historical research linked to the circumstances of Italian state formation while comparing—through historical analogy—different historical processes and, therein, the particular configuration of class struggles over the political form of state and capitalist modernity. Within the conceptualisation of passive revolution, then, there lies an alternative interpretative theory of the history of modern state formation, the making of revolutions, and the contradictions of class struggle. As a summing up of the internally related dimensions of uneven and combined development and passive revolution, Chris Hesketh (2017b: 15) states ‘the universal pressures generated by capitalist geopolitical competition are acknowledged but the geographical seats of class articulation remain the priority for analysis’.

Our argument, then, is that it is now possible to appreciate the concept and condition of passive revolution as a lateral field of causality to the structuring condition of uneven and combined development. This means that the concrete consideration of instances of passive revolution brings forth an engagement with state and subaltern class forces as agents that have been crucial in the making of modern states and transitions to capitalism. The concept of passive revolution offers a mode of theorising *both* the inner dynamics of capitalist modernity within states across space and time *and* how these processes of developmental catch-up are internally related to the geopolitical pressures of the states-system. Passive revolutions are therefore a working through of pre-established sovereignties that may both transform (revolution) and sustain (restoration) the change-inducing strains brought about by a transformation in social property relations. Hence we can:

propose the category of passive revolution as an equivalent political form to a production process that privileged suborning what was useful at hand to serve capital's pursuit of surplus value and along the way produce continuing economic unevenness [that] modern nation-states were pledged to eliminate (Harootunian, 2015: 131).

The challenge, accordingly, is to appreciate 'processes of passive revolution as *specific* instances of state transition that are internally related through the *general* world-historical conditions of uneven and combined development' (Morton, 2007a: 71, original emphasis).

Conclusion: passive revolution as the political rule of capital

Existing conceptualisations of uneven and combined development provide a static spatial countenance, which means that they are predominantly remiss in providing analysis of the causal effects of capitalist development. One consequence is that uneven and combined development approaches have been reluctant to deliver concrete accounts of the changing dynamics of developmental unevenness across space and time. For that reason the chronotope of passive revolution—a category functioning across space and time—has been presented in this article as a concept and condition that has an affinity with the theory of uneven and combined development

but without the erasure of agency. Said otherwise, uneven and combined development as the structuring condition and passive revolution with its emphasis on class agency are affinal and internally related concepts addressing how capitalist development unfolds and how class struggles between state and subaltern agents have produced and transformed space across time throughout variegated cycles of revolution and restoration. Passive revolution therefore provides a lateral field of causality or way of working through the internal dialectical relation between inherited processes of state formation and those ensuing class struggles that result from transformations in social property relations. How the force of capital—through its uneven and combined expansion on a world-scale—comes to change the meaning of the production of space and place through variegated passive revolutions is therefore significant in attempting to address the different functions of capitalist space across time (Morton, 2017b). Instantiations of passive revolution are not part of a transhistorical universalisation but are, rather, part of a historically specific set of processes that exist within particular and local conditions. For that reason, this article has underscored the multilinear dialectic of uneven and combined development and the passive revolutionary road to modernity as internally related aspects of the same whole. The particularities of the form of appearance of passive revolution in producing and transforming space within local conditions, as part of the generalising essential form of passive revolutions marking state formation processes within uneven and combined developmental circumstances, are therefore significant internally related aspects of capital's entrance into modernity. As Gramsci (2007: 357, Q8§210) stated, writing in 1932, 'the whole of historical materialism is a response to this question', namely, 'whether the processes of nature and history are invariably "evolutionary" or could also include "leaps"'. Developmental catch-up is therefore very much about the spatial processes through which states and classes are 'compelled to make leaps' (Trotsky 1936/1980: 28). For Gramsci (1996: 180, Q4§38, emphases added) writing earlier in 1930:

In real history, these moments become entangled with one another, horizontally and vertically; that is through economic activity (horizontally) and territory (vertically) *combining* and diverging in various ways. And each of these *combinations* may be represented by its own organised economic and political expression. It is also necessary to bear in mind that international relations become intertwined with these *internal relations* of a nation-state, and this, in turn, creates peculiar and historically concrete *combinations*. An ideology born in a highly developed country is disseminated in a less developed country and has an effect on the local interplay of *combinations*.

Passive revolution is therefore the essential form of this expression of historical geographical restructuring that illuminates the spatial and temporal practices of state and class agents. To enforce this argument three points will tally up this conclusion.

First, capturing the expression of capitalist expansion through passive revolution, it was Gramsci (1971: 116, Q15§62) who stated that such instances unfold when, ‘the impetus of progress is not tightly linked to a vast local economic development . . . but is instead the reflection of international developments which transmit their ideological currents to the periphery—currents born of the productive development of the more advanced countries’. But it would be thoughtless to dismiss this as a straightforward diffusionist argument. For example, Gramsci (1996: 204, Q4§49) states elsewhere, again in 1930, that ‘the Germans and the French provided the protoplasm of Russian history with a strong skeleton’ but the assimilation of such influences was undertaken by ‘Russifying them’. In the same passage, it is acknowledged that ‘on another terrain and in quite different temporal and spatial conditions, this Russian phenomenon can be compared to the birth of the American nation (the United States)’ that ‘continued to develop the forces implicit in its nature but at an incomparably faster pace than in old Europe’ (Gramsci 1996: 205, Q4§49). As Trotsky crafted this correlation subsequently, ‘the European colonists in America did not begin history all over again from the beginning’. Hence:

Although compelled to follow after the advanced countries, a backward country does not take things in the same order. The privilege of historical backwardness—and such a privilege exists—permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole of series of intermediate stages (Trotsky 1936/1980: 27).

Second, likewise, it was also Gramsci who expounded on the peculiar combination of different stages of uneven development to define the historically specific process of capitalism. Again in 1930 he wrote:

Just as methods of traction did not pass directly from the animal-drawn stagecoach to modern electrical express trains but went through a series of “intermediate combinations” some of which still exist (such as animal traction on tracks, etc., etc.), and just as railway stock that has become obsolete in the United States remains in use for many years in China where it represents technical progress—so also in the cultural sphere diverse ideological strata are variously combined, and what has become “scrap iron” in the city is still an “implement” in the provinces. Indeed, in the cultural sphere, “explosions” are even less frequent and less intense than in the technical sphere . . . The allusion to the fact that sometimes what has become “scrap iron” in the city is still an “implement” in the provinces can be developed usefully. The relations between urban population and rural population are not always the same (Gramsci 1992: 129, Q1§43).

Third, this focus on the pathfinders of capitalist development was put less coarsely when compared to some renditions. The evocative but maladroit Trotsky therefore wrote that ‘savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without travelling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past’ (Trotsky 1936/1980: 27). By contrast, the orbit of capitalist expansion is posed as a question by Gramsci to his former mentor, Antonio Labriola.¹ It was in one of the latter’s lectures on pedagogy that the topic ‘How would you go about the moral education of a Papuan?’ emerged. In recounting this story, Gramsci indicates that the reply from Labriola was, “Provisionally, I would make him a slave, and that would be the pedagogy in his case; but then I’d want to see whether it would be possible to start using something of our pedagogy with his grandsons and great-grandsons”. Gramsci crafts his analysis otherwise:

It seems to me that historically the problem should be formulated differently, that is: whether a nation or social group that has reached a higher level of civilisation can (and therefore should) “accelerate” the civil education of the more backward nations and social groups, universalising its own experience. In short, it seems to me that the mode of thinking encapsulated in Labriola’s reply is not dialectical or progressive but somewhat reactionary (Gramsci 2007: 349-50, Q8§200).

¹ Trotsky emphasised that one of his foremost philosophical influences on materialist dialectics was, indeed, Antonio Labriola, see Trotsky (1930/1970: 167-8, 170-1, 177).

In sum in this 1932 note, Gramsci highlights that a focus on external discipline—the whip of external necessity—to coerce a ‘backward people’ and reduce them to slavery would be reductive. Instead, the process of proletarianisation—what he refers to as ‘the concept of a “labour army”’—would indicate that ‘there is no need to resort to “slavery” or to colonialism as a “mechanically” inevitable historical stage, etc.’ (Gramsci 2007: 350, Q8§200). It would therefore be mistaken to grasp onto the theoretical purity of a single thinker on the geopolitical unevenness and socially combined character of development. Rather, the theory of passive revolution affords further insight into the uneven social development and worldwide spread of capitalism in its combination with, and internal relation to, the geopolitical consolidation of the modern state. Passive revolution is therefore the essential form of this expression of historical geographical restructuring that illuminates the spatial and temporal practices of state and class agents.

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