

From A Tolerant Nation? to an *Anti-Racist* Nation?

The Welsh Political Archive lecture 2024

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Introduction

This is the first lecture in the Welsh Political Archive series to be devoted to the subject of the politics of race and Wales. (*Not the most edifying of subjects but indeed a critical issue of our times*).

A lot has been happening at home and away to suggest race politics as a critical focus. This summer the UK witnessed widespread rioting and disturbances following the murder of three children and the maiming of many others in Southport by Cardiff born Axel Muganwa Rudakubana.

This unrest in major British cities profoundly affected social relations across the nation and was indicative of a bubbling cauldron of discontent which has become increasingly focused on issues of immigration, legal and illegal.

All this has occurred against a wider UK political trend bent on stoking rising hostilities and divisiveness towards domestic ethnic diversity, a widespread populist anti-immigration politics, and a grand politics of isolationism. Sir Keir Starmer recently commented ‘*cracks in our foundation laid bare, weakened by a decade of division and decline, infected by a spiral of populism*’¹

This nationalist populism is complemented across Europe with the rise and successes of Far-Right political parties and the growth of Far-Right sentiment. For many from minority communities this instills a broader climate of fear and volatility and a deep insecurity in everyday life.

Our newly appointed Prifweinidog called out this behaviour, the need for action and to not tolerate this in Wales. She was quick to make the point that ‘*there is no complacency here*’ given the fact that there were no visible incidents in Wales.

Amidst this distressing picture, she could proudly boast a commitment by Welsh government to an *Anti-Racist Wales by 2030*, and note the government declaration of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary. Race had taken on a significant profile in Welsh public policy.

We are now two years on from the publication of the pioneering Anti Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP). In addition, we have witnessed a government audit of monuments, buildings, and street names in relation to their connections with slavery, as history and heritage are being revisited, questioned, and reimagined (*e.g. the case of the Thomas Picton statue*). Across Wales institutions such as the Arts

¹ Fixing the Foundations Speech 27.8.24

Council, the National Theatre, National Museums and indeed, the National Library are exploring what it means to be anti-racist – relooking at their collections, their policies, and practices. My own contribution included leading the Ministerial Working Group that instituted the groundbreaking mandate on the teaching of Black histories in every school in Wales. Clearly, a process of decolonization is underway.

All this is perhaps oddly summed up by the Telegraph headline citing ‘*Wales as the UK’s wokist nation*’²

A critical shift has occurred in the socio-political landscape of race in the UK with implications for welfare subjectivities and for social relations. So, we should ask – What precipitated this change? Does this represent a distinct social topography of race relations suggesting a decentering of the race politics of the UK? Has devolution opened up new and distinct scalar imaginaries of identity, citizenship, and association?

This evening my focus is on Wales as we recognize 25 years of devolution. I want to offer an observation on this trajectory in race politics, noting some particular twists and turns in approach by the Welsh government. I will suggest one way of considering the race politics of Wales in this period is to view it as marked by three distinct eras, each underpinned by particular assumptions and approaches to change, begging the overall question: can governments comprehensively steer and sustain a path towards racial justice?

Tonight’s lecture are my observations drawing here on 30 years of academic research, my public policy roles, my lived experience of growing up and undertaking my entire education in Wales and much of my working life. This lecture seeks to capture some of my key observations, and conclusions. In voicing my commentary I acknowledge the huge work of so many others working in the field and in research and a particular mention to my friend, career long colleague, mentor, and collaborator Dr. Neil Evans who, with Paul O’Leary we published our first edited collection entitled ‘*A Tolerant Nation?*’ and with whom tonight I will introduce you to the new UWP Series *Race, Ethnicity Wales and the World* and formally launch the product of our most recent collaboration ‘*Globalising Welsh Studies: Decolonising History, Heritage, Society and Culture*’³

My discipline is social policy and I have been interested to ask questions about the distinctiveness of Welsh policy-making in relation to race equality. What this overview speaks to is political conditions and political change, political opportunity structures, the effectiveness or not of different types of intervention. It concerns the extent to which institutions, people and places can respond to a given political

² Daily Telegraph 17.03.23

³ Available on Open Access <https://www.uwp.co.uk/book/globalising-welsh-studies/>

agenda. The point is that different socio-political/cultural contexts produce particularized politics of race. Thus, I examine the idea of ‘A Welsh way?’

I am suggesting here an analysis that pivots on three phases or eras in the Welsh government approach to race equality. These eras, evidently overlapping, reflect particular triggers to change and identifiable approaches that are underpinned by certain assumptions and ideological positions. I label them: **Distinctiveness** (Clear Red Water); **Decoherence** (new Equalities legislative era); **Decolonisation** (Black Lives Matter and beyond).

The *Tolerant nation*?

Before we dive into my 3Ds let’s begin with the story of our cultural inheritance; the *Tolerant Nation* question that first prompted my academic interest.

I have long argued that to progress race equality in Wales we must understand how race is represented in Wales – what I have called ‘*race thinking*.’ I have been concerned with its discursive formation within the particularism of the socio-cultural context of Wales. This is because race equality goes well beyond public policy to ask questions about the very identity of society itself. It evokes debates about nation and national belonging, about histories, culture, and development. Who we are and who we would like to be.

The historians tell us that a particular constellation of factors have fed the Welsh positioning and sustained the idea of Welsh exceptionalism in relation to race. The racialization of the Welsh themselves as rehearsed by the cultural commentator Mathew Arnold; the cultural politics of the Welsh language as exemplified by the Treason of the Blue books and reflecting broader oppression of the Welsh by English Imperialism (Yma o Hyd); the idea of Welsh internationalism fostered by the community spirit of the ‘gwerin,’ the role of Welsh missionaries in abolitionism and in outward migrations such as settlement in Patagonia. All in all, these sentiments produce an active and articulated disassociation with the Imperialist project that in the words of one Welsh academic placed Wales as ‘*devoid of the culpability*’⁴ and sponsored a strong sense of national unity. Indeed, Lucy Taylor uses the term “*colonised colonisers*” to critically examine this positioning in relation to the Patagonian settlement.

This reading of the historiography indicates the tenacity of these ideas and how they play out in ‘*race thinking*.’ Now I skirt over a huge historical inheritance here that the text *A Tolerant Nation?* sought to interrogate.

As a contemporary theorist it wasn’t too difficult for me to pick up how these ideas have fostered a benign notion of racial tolerance that served to underpin policy (or

⁴ See Rhys Jones ‘A deliberately forgotten history? Wales and Imperialism in Modern history writing’ in Globalising Welsh Studies Chapter One

indeed lack of policy). In populist examples the alignment of the predicament of the Black man and the Welsh man (Paul Robeson style), the rainbow imagery of an integrated and peaceable Butetown community, the assumptions of a white Welsh rural landscape and more - all translated into “*there’s no problem here*” and the denial and deflection of policy drift. Aberrations to this national portrait (and there were many) were hard to take hold and framed as either led by or perpetrated by the English *other* or the “few bad apples” idea; i.e.: being seen as very un-Welsh.

So, in furthering race equality policy it becomes important to ask: Do Welsh cultural sensibilities of tolerance, empathy and internationalism drive or inhibit change towards race equality? Are these articulations useful to or a powerful mask of the realities of lived experience.

Much of the evidence drawn upon in challenging the tolerance thesis is based on examination of overt conflicts, riots, disturbances, miscarriages of justices, reported incidences of race hate and latterly public attitude surveys. Yet it is a truism that Welsh historiography largely stopped short of any thoroughgoing examination of Wales itself in the whole enterprise of imperial and colonial incursions.

This legacy, institutionally articulated and socially imbued, shaped a picture of both neglect and protectionism, both positive and negative sentiment, activity, and inactivity; pockets both of anti-racist sentiment and of racist intolerance, indeed nothing to support the overall claim of Welsh exceptionalism. What I am drawing attention to here, is the unevenness within nation of any coherent or indeed orchestrated stance on anti-racism.

So, we need to consider politics (small p) as well as Politics big P as sets of power relations, located in a broad range of settings and spaces but also related to discourses, ways of talking about through narratives, categories and symbolic gestures that are socially constructed.

Understanding race equality and race relations requires a reading from both top down and bottom up, as multi-level governance, not solely in terms of formal policy but also a reading of infra-political activity. Race and racism find different articulations in different places at different times. This makes attention to the discursive character of race in any specific context significant to crafting change.

This complexity is an important point. Indeed, isn’t it true that we all have something to say and something to do in terms of race equality a point to which I return to later.

But let’s now look at my 3 Ds and at government as a driver of change. These are not so much discrete epochs but evolutionary developments.



Divergence

My overall argument is that equalities strategies must be tailored and adapted to national realities and needs if they are to realise their transformatory potential.

One point worth making here about the Welsh policy approach is that equality provisions are non-prescriptive (not based on the 9 protected characteristics as elsewhere) but all-embracing in scope, referring to *all* people and *all* functions of government. They are an *Absolute Duty*. This itself is a clear divergence from elsewhere in the UK. Thus, from the outset race equality was constitutionally embedded in the devolutionary settlement and linked to the wider ambition of “a more egalitarian Wales”

The Welsh equalities agenda has been suggested as ‘world leading’ not solely because of the constitutional architecture but notably, the values-led policy orientation and the government’s redistributive aspirations.⁵ Political divergence or “*clear red water*” drove a progressive politics of change from the outset. The hallmarks of the now familiar trope of Welsh policy divergence – namely progressive universalism, participation, collaboration, high trust, and equality of outcome would shape the approach to race equality. The ambition was not to view race as an isolated example of policy distinctiveness but as a coherent and embedded facet of Welsh social policy-making aimed at “a more egalitarian Wales”.

If Rhodri Morgan’s *clear red water* meant the foregrounding of participation and collaboration in crafting equality of outcomes, he placed the Race Equality Strategy firmly within the broader framework of collectivism and universalism as ‘*the powerful glue of social solidarity*’, the faultline of progressive universalism. The ratcheting up of race equality on the public policy agenda was unprecedented.

In an overview paper I wrote in 2006 I talked about the shift from a *laissez faire* politics of race – the *no problem here*, denial, deflection and drift as the dominant orientation pre-devolution towards what I termed ‘*a nationally responsible politics of race equality*’. The oft cited justification for the colour-blind politics of the past were largely twofold. A focus on demographics i.e. the relatively low percentage of ethnic minorities and their geographic dispersal and that historical legacy that spoke to tolerance as a national characteristic.

The approach of the first term instituted a *mainstreaming* methodology following a European model that demanded that all functions of government address inequality and the Public Sector Equality Duty mandated a framework for equality monitoring across the piece. This approach which looked away from the individual and their particularized disadvantaged status to a focus on institutional policies, processes, and procedures. It relied on equalities indicators, on equality impact statements, on targets, measures, and other technical infrastructure. It sought out consultation and

⁵ (Chaney 2012, Hankivsky *et al* 2019).

thus interpreted participation as groups being drawn into often newly created structures of governance. Terms like capacity building aimed at mobilizing civil society to engage had the interesting effect of creating us as a Black constituency. The scenery of race relations in Wales was changing.

At the opening of devolution, I was involved in an ESRC project focused on tracking the idea of participatory democracy. My brief was to look at the nature and extent of ethnic minority participation in governance. A series of articles I wrote back then put forward the argument that:

- The political clout of minority groups/organisations was particularly weak. Factors of dispersal, diversity and the legacy of marginalization meant that minority communities lacked a coherent political identity and any clearly articulated focus for their lobbying. They were not yet a coherent constituency and lacking in power and clout.

and

- That there was a complacency about the nature and extent of racism by government who lacked a clear evidence base specific to Wales in a number of policy fields.

and

- That politicians and civil servants were poorly geared up to respond to the race equality agenda. There were lots of faux pas, lots of incompetency, and lots of resistance.

I described the participation scene as '*characterised by elite burnout, consultation overload, lack of capacity in terms of skills, expertise, and resources and a responsive rather than proactive mode with a widespread and declared inability to shift agendas*. In short, both bottom up and top down we were ill prepared for this encounter.

Yet the process of rescaling citizenship had begun. We were new political actors becoming a class in ourselves; we had entered civil society and we were learning the rules of engagement. Drawing on Nancy Fraser's notion of social justice as embracing the triad of rights, recognition, and redistribution, I would summarise this period as characterized by recognition, broadening ideas about Welsh civil society about Welsh identities and locating, acknowledging and placing a Black Wales. The attention to substantive rights and to redistribution would require a more comprehensive approach largely lacking in this period.

I wrote a book, *Sugar and Slate* elaborating on the themes of identity, belonging, heritage and the Black histories of Wales, that somewhat captured the broader

zeitgeist of a changing Welsh identity. It was a text that served to stretch the multicultural imaginary of Wales beyond the Butetown core.

Yet our participation did not produce change to the structural and institutional economy of power and gradually internal conflicts, power differentials, and diversity within diversity provided grounds for conflicts over funding, favours, paternalism, geography and more.

However, these sub-national constitutions as a critical site of divergence had shifted disciplinary concerns and knowledge production. I could academically write about the specificity of race and Wales. I spelled out the implications of this devolved lens for the discipline of social policy identifying the potential of the sub nations as comparative sites of analysis, their ability to change the language (terminology) of social policy, reconstruct the production of knowledge and reconfigure policy communities within the UK. In effect, a new scalar politics of race had emerged.



Decoherence.

I borrow this term from quantum physics so apologies to all physicists who understand it better than me. But I use it to characterize a second era in which simply stated ‘*the loss of information from a system into the environment*’ produces the loss of quantum coherence, when we can use terms like scattering and where the essence of something is subject to a loss of energy through multiple entanglements with its environment.

Emerging under the auspices of the Blair government a postmodernist approach would reconfigure the Black constituency as superdiverse, intersectional, complex, and rapidly changing. There was by now a domestic politics of second, third, fourth generation Black Britons, and the politics of immigration saw new migrations increase, including Eastern European migration and increased refugee and asylum seekers. New political rights were being asserted through an ever-expanding standpoint politics, and concern for *cohesion* became a critical political driver.

Wales has no remit over primary equalities legislation. Under the 2002 Race Equality Act (a reaction to the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent inquiry), the Blair government introduced concepts such as positive action, proactive race relations and equality of outcome into the public policy frame. The new thinking looked to a society where equalities learnings/strategies could be transferred between groups and a focus on similarities would outweigh single standpoint positioning and embrace complex subjectivities. The fear that our differences may become more than our similarities demanded a new solution.

The 2010 Equality Act saw a period of reconfiguration with the amalgamation of all equalities strands within one Act, under a single enforcement body. It demanded

proactive engagement measures, instituted the socio-economic duty, and required documented plans and monitoring towards securing equality.

Here we see a confidence that government intervention can steer institutional behaviour. The case in Wales was one where confidence in the mechanisms of the Equality Act were assumed and where the political opportunity structures saw a focus on gender equality thrive with some success.

This was no fallow period in terms of race. I found myself on Ministerial groups aimed at creating more diversity in public appointments and greater democratic participation in local government. Issues of representation were highlighted annually by the Equalities Commission in their *Who Runs Wales* publications.

But I was to question whether the aspiration of progressive universalism would produce anything more than the one-size-fits-all of its socialist post war predecessor. I also questioned the Assembly's own positioning in this era, signaling that on the one hand the Morgan administration in its aspiration to establish an ideologically divergent welfareism might be increasingly become more centrist and bureaucratic rather than fundamentally pluralist. I forecast the need for the Assembly, now Senedd, to move beyond seeing itself as fundamentally neutral arbiter. The new pluralist politics I was foreshadowing demanded more than patronage. It would mean entering into the risky business of more deep and genuine partnership, power sharing and deep interrogation. Neither solely top down nor an artificially 'manufactured' bottom up was going to work.

Overall, the decoherence era would become characterized by a tick-box tokenism, a technical, minimalist and managerialist approach to public service. It put confidence in the idea that a technical approach would produce institutional change. It was a period in which race was significantly depoliticized and regarded in ways largely ahistorical.

Ultimately the equalities bodies functions would be restricted by lack of funding. Single issue standpoint politics had been undermined and the emergent neo-liberal interpretations of diversity would come to take precedence.

Neo liberal modernizing approaches placed equalities firmly within a meritocratic individualized frame with an emphasis on productivity. Teresa May's red-tape initiative directly attacked equalities bodies and new articulations of race emerged that reconstructed the debate to profile a particular interpretation of 'the working class' as the real victims of social disadvantage and faulty immigration policies.

Racism would find new modes of articulation and be reshaped in ways that considered palatable to a wider public whilst denouncing more vulgar and explicit racisms of the past. If Du Bois had given us the colour line – we now had a narrative of the culture line, culture wars, cohesion –and an assimilationist view of British values.



Decolonising

That I am here giving this lecture this evening in many ways itself reflects this era as a particular moment in racialized time. We have entered a revisionist era, a time when we are witnessing efforts to *decolonize* and *globalize* the canon, to decolonize institutional practices, a time when world events have triggered deep reflection and acknowledgement of past injustices across nations.

2020 would see the emergence of this taking stock moment, precipitated by the critical conjuncture of the Brexit anti-immigration propaganda, the global Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement which was triggered by the murder of George Floyd and the Covid 19 pandemic that evidenced starkly differential impacts. There can be no doubting these accelerants as a catalyst to review and change. This was not confined to Wales. A global movement and momentum actively challenged nations to consider their past sins of omission and commission, to reorient and offer reparations – to decolonise.

The nature of the change agenda that ensued in Wales is worth outlining. This critical conjuncture prompted a reset moment. A shift in approach towards an explicitly moral stance, a moral appeal, and a moral standpoint towards the “real and risky engagement” of a more pluralist politics. This may be nothing short of an ideological, values driven agenda but these are clearly values mandated by our electorate. The aim? The *decolonising* of institutional life. Wales would begin a process of redefining itself, questioning its past and reconsidering its place in the world in order to design a pathway forward. Neither was this solely a theoretical/academic enterprise. It would be (if not precisely named) the underpinning approach for practical political and institutional action.

The declared political ambition of the Welsh government is an Anti-Racist Wales by 2030. Thirteen policy areas with clear and measurable goals and explicitly stated expectations in terms of outcomes are outlined in the ARWAP, based on an accumulated body of evidence of racial disparities.

The Plan was the product of 6-8 months of *co-production* – its guiding approach. This ambition is sited at the apex of Shelly Arnstein’s ladder of participation; co-production being seen as a goal in itself. The government funded community engagement strategies, deep dive vision setting events, training and capacity building seeking an investment in the Plan that would lead to ownership and trust.

Therefore, what marks out the current departure, I would argue, is *process*. A process analysis asks how much involvement, what measures of success, asks

questions of style (how consultative), learning amongst key actors (civil servants, civil society) and how policy is being interpreted (operationalized) and implemented.

The ARWAP plan moves us from the patronage of the previous eras to efforts to garner genuine partnership providing a demonstration of ‘co production’ in the democratization of social policy making and the valorising of experiential welfare. It is itself an exercise in *decolonial reflexivity*.

A quick glance at the opener of the Plan reveals this deeply reflective moment. It rehearses in its retrospective where-we-are-now considerations and comments on slow progress which it puts down to weak leverage, accountability, weak monitoring, and review with no penalties for non-compliance. Such reflective moments are themselves highly significant to the process of change. In telling a story of Wales and providing ‘*provisional narratives about possible futures*’⁶ The Plan seeks to define racism and define what success will look like across key policy fields. In doing so it points to the future spelling out the benefits to *all* citizens of an anti-racist society.

The Plan provided a stark acknowledgment that “*current policy and practice has not gone far enough to dismantle systemic and structural racism in Wales.*” Reasons for this include a culture of ‘non-racism’ rather than ‘anti-racism,’ an implementation gap between policy intention and practice, and lack of engagement with affected communities.

What is interesting about this reflective opener is not only the forthright language and the transparency but what we see in the ruminations is a shift in terms of the positioning of the Welsh government apparatus itself within a significantly pluralist frame.

New vocabularies are added to the narrative as the Plan boldly engages with a radical terminology of race – Anti-racist by 2030 – which it defines as a *proactive* process. It talks about crafting an anti-racist culture in public institutions, uses terms like white privilege, (if not decolonizing) and talks about levers and mechanisms to retain traction. Its bedrock assumptions are that inequalities are structurally driven and interventions must address systemic discrimination proactively. (*note the stark contrast with the UK Sewell report that came out at around the same time*)

The evidence provided in the report is explicit in underscoring the systemic and institutionalized nature of racial disparities. Across a range of indicators some startling examples of racial disparity mark our nation. The high representation of minority children in care, differential educational outcomes, income poverty, poor housing, lack of representation in public appointments and ongoing racism in Welsh institutions, many of which have been sustained over a considerable amount of time. (e.g. *Butetown remains one of the poorest neighbourhoods*)

⁶ (Rhodes 2011)

Previous Race Equality Plans with positive intentions had not resulted in meaningful improvements in the lives of ethnic minority groups. The problem of implementation had marred the efficacy of the legislative framework and greater emphasis would be given to monitoring accountabilities across a range of public sector organisations and those funded by the Welsh government.

It is of note that this Plan integrates anti-racism into the broader Welsh welfare settlement, into notions of linguistic integration (Cymraeg 2050), and into the idea of Welsh citizenship. It prompts decolonial interrogation across the Arts and Culture sector, demands greater representation and power shifts in public life, signals the desire for children and young people to become '*ethical and informed citizens of Wales and the World*' The bold statement of intent is reverberating across public institutions. Literature Wales, the Arts and Books Councils, Museum of Wales, National Library, the Universities, local government, and health Boards are all to some extent engaged with the decolonizing revisionist thread and taking a long hard look at what they do, the composition of boards, recruitment etc. This level of review is unprecedented.

Of course, it is not without some omissions, several of which are being addressed in the second iteration of the Plan. Frustration over policing and criminal justice, garnering the involvement of local authorities in development of the plan, and above all defining the requirements of leadership towards cultural change across the public sector. It is clear that Welsh government alone cannot bring about the transformatory change required to meet this ambition. The private sector, a disenfranchised absentee populace, social media channeling and a thin national media are all live concerns.



From a Tolerant Nation? to an Anti-Racist Nation?

So how do we summarise this story of A Tolerant Nation to an Anti Racist Nation?

Let me answer my own question about prospects of government led aspiration and draw out a few conclusions. Let me delve a little deeper into the idea of a decolonizing society.

Clearly Tolerance would never be enough. Tolerance fails to shirk off the host/minority tableau, it is provisional and can easily be withdrawn.

A summary might say – we have shifted from patronage to pluralism, from the margins to a more central and integrated concern, to increasing representation in public life if not yet to a substantive power or redistributive shift.

It feels good to lay down the story of this trajectory in the political archive. I acknowledge I can't give all the detail the record of academic publications over this 25-year period deserve capture: political speeches, policy initiatives, protest, backlash, media reporting and more. That'll be for the new UWP series to capture.

Another version of this story would speak to the issues of political rhetoric, the dangers of co-option and compromise, to the silence of white power and to a portrait of Wales little threatened by a generally weak and dispersed black minority with a weak and impoverished Butetown core.

But it is worth asking: What prospects are there for the Anti Racist nation by 2030?

I frame this initially as a success story on the basis of encounter, experiential, identifications, investments, and how the story is told, i.e. the discursive narrative of change, vision, and ambition. I have identified this era as a moment of consolidation of an ideological politics of change and transformation in terms of race equality. A moment of reconciliation with the past in order reset the future.

The underpinning driver for the Plan is '*a more egalitarian Wales.*' That is, this is not framed as a special case within an isolated distinctive policy initiative but as part of an integrated plan that reflects the wider values driven agenda, the social justice values of a *Welsh way*. Its narrative is one of an active and collective endeavor, its reach is framed in terms of linking policy fields and policy actors and the continuities of learning. The distinctiveness lies in the link to and embedding within particular political values and ways of working that will influence how 'race' and race equality is defined, interpreted, and enacted and thus how race influences what Welshness comes to mean.

The approach that government has adopted is a *moral* (ethical) standpoint. This for example is a stark contrast to the Scottish approach which has been mobilized around skills shortages plus a public attitudes focus. An important point must be that given the multi-level character of governance in the UK race equality developments in the 4 nations have critical relevance for understanding policy opportunities, what works in terms of impacts, where and how etc. So maybe it is not so much whether the Wales approach is/will be more effective in terms of outcomes but in terms of *the how* of the matter. The *how* of the matter contributes to wider processes of building trust, involvement, confidence, and ownership in governance. Perhaps the learning about the "how" process is itself the impact.

But these developments also in my opinion, encroach on issues of racialized identities and rights within the wider hegemony of British multicultural citizenship. It is these experimental and experiential welfare relations that will be what counts. The inclusions/exclusions that permeate policy and practice and the subjectivities within the various welfare settlements across the home-internationals will tell their own story. What Fiona Williams called '*The social topography of enablement and constraint.*'

To attribute this moment solely to 25 years of a Labour government would be too easy an explanation. The AWRAP has had and needs all party support. Yet it must be important to note that this fact alone has offered the continuity, learning, experience, and reflection conducive to progress. Policy is problematic as we know – it can of course be performative and symbolic rather than representing deep change and for a number of reasons, interpretation and implementation being key, it doesn't necessarily produce the lasting change it seeks. The 2026 elections will see the Senedd substantially transformed. Is this therefore a window of opportunity before a change of political actors?

We can't underestimate the scale of what is being asked here of the government and public institutions. Can policy drive everyday practice and public attitudes? The shaping of organisational culture, attitudes and values and/or behaviours representations a huge undertaking.

There are indeed a number of challenges. Many critical areas of policy lie beyond the remit of Welsh government, principally policing and immigration policy. A key point of leverage, the EU legislation and monitoring as part of the supra-level governance of racism and discrimination has been lost as a result of Brexit. Large swathes of public services are operated by the private sector over which the Welsh government has few levers. Much of the success of the Plan relies on implementation within associated bodies like local government and health boards and there will be concern as to whether local democracies can/will engage with change. Will there be consistency in interpretations of the mission and in implementation? Funding issues and austerity impact on what is often seen as the luxury of equalities. In several policy areas Wales' funding models undermine Welsh aspirations.

On a broader level, and lest I be accused of falling into the trap of methodological nationalism (a true hallmark of social policy), I am mindful these ambitions do not occur in a vacuum. The complexities of contemporary moment must be acknowledged: the wider UK politics, the rise of nationalist populism and the Far right as responses to complexity across Europe and a world politics filled with conflict and uncertainty. Wales is not immune to the wider influences of a neo-liberal racialized politics which continues to play out in in the wider UK, many aspects of which were explicitly rehearsed in the Brexit debates and reiterated by key political influencers in the disturbances of this summer.

We have witnessed how neo-liberal strategies have reconstructed what we understand by working class identifying them as main victims of the impacts of globalization, generating a racial divide between white working class and those who are black and brown and recruiting them into the camp of anti-immigrant right. New right groups have taken up the mantle of speaking for the working class (now white) in populist discourses that speak of 'illegal immigrants,' foreigners taking jobs and all

the while deflecting attention away from the real cause of their disadvantage: white elite power. This is the socially constructed “common sense” that profiles white power as the natural order of things.

Neo-liberal modernizing approaches have placed equalities firmly within the meritocratic frame of equality of opportunity and with an emphasis on economic productivity i.e. that equality is good for business. It is through the very mechanism that meritocracy plays today in naturalising white privilege. This is a frame which has placed equalities policies as part of ‘looney’ left – left leaning woke-driven political traditions and cultures.

Wales is a stakeholder in the wider UK politics. A new UK Labour government may be seeking to turn the tide. We shall see.

Neither should we forget that a Black constituency exists and is mobilised beyond national boundary. So herein lies the big questions of the 21st century – how to square economic globalization with socio-cultural change that ensues in its wake; how to maintain national identity in the face of blurred boundaries, liquid migrations, digital encounter. Populist politics everywhere are forging a narrative of boundary and border controls, of protecting spurious histories and narratives that speak to nation as homogenous and hermetically sealed units.

Theorists articulate the ways in which racism services capitalism – a global capitalism that denies past acts of subjugation, dispossession, subordination of whole populations in the accumulation of resources and new markets. We witness the fundamental inequalities between the global north and the global south daily as a world of people are on the move.

And so, racism finds new articulations in different moments of racialized time. New scapegoats for social ills appear, new narratives take hold within people’s fears of social change. These discursive socio-cultural elements shape and derail the best intentions of policy.

Conclusions

This era of reparation sees nations deeply reviewing the past. Yet we should note these moments of review embody two contradictory visions: one of Imperial longing (make Britain great again) and the other committed to coming to terms with the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. One seeking retreat in the reinstatement of nationalist sentiment, the other recognizing the imperatives of an increasingly globalized world. Attempts to resolve the tensions between globalization and national integrity marks out the contemporary moment.

My observation is that Wales is less threatened in terms of national identity and not aligned to the defensive and protectionist little Britain visioning of England. There is

evidence of an openness and willingness to reshape Welsh national identity in the new democracy. The toppling and questioning of public monuments, places, street names and nationally held artefacts associated with slavery has raised public awareness. The discipline of history is publicly ruminating its methodologies and Welsh history is being revisited and revised as it gains a greater profile in the national curriculum. We are questioning cynefin in the national curriculum and are preparing a 'decolonizing' agenda within education. Greater efforts are being made at language integration, seeing the Welsh language as not solely associated with particular ethnic and culturally homogenous characteristics but belonging to all. This refashioning of Welsh ways of life is what will make these policies travel.

As spaces (like these) are opened up for discursive revisiting, reimagining, and reparation of the past, for a decolonizing project that is reflexive, iterative, and sustained then these are the resources of hope. All of us will need to contribute towards this ambition – not just the Welsh government, civil servants, ministers, councillors, institutions but us, the populace. We do need more diverse leadership from below, more catalysers, new political actors in civil society and fundamentally new approaches to knowledge building with refreshed understandings of our past to guide our futures.

Rising to the radical agenda set out by the Welsh government will mean, not reducing the change effort to a technical activity but promoting narratives rooted in that idea of *Welsh ways of life* – its histories, narratives that make connections, develop symmetry, and seek out the potential of collective action and that look to past shared mobilisations and old solidarities. For example, the work of anti-slavery activists, addressing the solidarities of a strongly working-class Wales, tackling as a collective the challenges of Wales as a poor country, moving beyond host/minority thinking,

Encouraging and sponsoring new groupings is ripe for development. Robust advocacy coalitions (national and transnational) are being formed as we have seen in the BLM protests and the anti-racist coalitions. The bottom-up Black Lives Matter departure offered a consolidating moment for minority social movements, a particular point around which to cohere and coordinate the advocacy.

Coproduction between policy actors, academia and the third sector is also something that is well underway and above all new thinking about how we amass evidence and knowledge about Wales and its place in the world, past and present.

My conclusion is that we are all learning. Those of us from minority constituencies as policy shapers as well as government policy makers. Today minority communities have a better understanding of how their claims are located within a pluralist framework (not us/them) – a better understanding of the role of civil society organisations, trade unions/social movements etc. in articulating change and greater skill and experience in scrutiny and calling for accountability.

The task of decolonizing is necessarily difficult and contested, it is about citizenship, who we believe we are, the values we hold dear, and about ensuring rights, and it is about scholarship.

Diolch am wrando