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‘Decolonising’ medieval Irish history? The (im)possibility of challenging existing practice

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ABSTRACT

The ‘Decolonial’ turn has come to the discipline of Irish history. How will it be used? As a liberal metaphor or decolonial praxis? As the turn proceeds through the discipline to pre-modern studies, it is increasingly likely to be liberally defanged and homogenised. We, three scholars from various fields, present some questions on the application of epistemic decolonisation to ‘medieval’ ‘Irish’ history and some methods and methodologies along with warnings to well-meaning academics. Listening to, learning from and being in conversation with decolonial scholars from the Global South, we propose to unsettle the coloniality in medieval Irish history/studies while respecting Global South epistemologies and struggles and not using decoloniality and decolonisation as an academic fad. This unsettling is necessary as coloniality is visible in medieval Irish studies. Colonial positionalities, epistemes, axiomatic assumptions and institutions are constitutive of the field. Are academics ready and willing to challenge existing practice?

KEYWORDS

Medieval Irish history;
decolonial theory;
coloniality; epistemology

Recently, historians of early modern and modern Ireland¹ engaged with some of the identifiable problematics of ‘decolonising’ Irish history.² They mostly reserved their comments to the 17th to 20th centuries, with one reference to 1169 and one to ‘700’ years of English/British colonisation and inclusion in its empire. While decolonial scholars conceptualise global euromodern colonisation as beginning in 1492,³ historians of Ireland would be right to understand English colonisation of the territory as beginning in 1167 × 1169 (employing a conceptualisation of proto-settler-colonisation with which we believe decolonial scholars in the Global South would broadly agree).⁴ This casts its origins firmly within the purview of medieval Irish history and supports the consideration of decolonisation as a viable critical position. Decolonisation is best understood, both denotatively and connotatively, as a praxis to unsettle the colonial foundations of a field and not as a mere interpretative lens that risks possible metaphorisation of the

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concept, as well as conflation between symbolic and material decolonisation. From this position, this paper will first introduce decolonisation – here referring to decolonial epistemology and decoloniality – to scholars of medieval Irish history and studies and then outline the colonial language and assumptions (Global North perspectives) firmly established in the field that necessitate a critical dialogue on decolonisation with decolonial intellectuals.

As the title implies, introducing decoloniality to scholars situated in the Global North who occasionally reinforce colonial epistemes will be challenging to everyone involved. We have briefly introduced some of the foundational material below, but we cannot undertake the substantive intellectual work for them. Scholars of medieval Irish history and studies, who wish to participate in decolonisation, must engage with these epistemologies authentically and deliberately. We initially questioned whether any medieval scholars would follow the roundtable piece and declare that they wish to decolonise medieval Irish history and studies. During the extended review period for this article (over a year), one piece has come out calling for exactly that.⁵ Since some medieval historians/medievalists have demonstrated a readiness to unsettle the colonial foundations of medieval Irish history/studies, we are now providing an onto-epistemological basis for future inquiry. Rather than critiquing the singular venture into decolonisation thus far, we direct our attention to essential theoretical groundwork and introduce key epistemologies that will inform decolonial projects.

Decolonisation is a praxis

Before discussing any application of decolonial epistemes, it is germane to examine the understanding of ‘decolonising’ which unsettles the academy (and historians) to such a degree. Though conceptually, and therefore temporally, coexistent with colonisation and its manifestations as racialised territorialisation, genocidal pacification and extraction (labour, materials, knowledges), decolonisation is more than simply an antinomial counter-hegemony or part of the stadial path which includes colonisation and postcolonisation, particularly in relation to the Global South. In other words, it is not an inexorable historical sequence, teleology or event that simultaneously and definitively unsettles colonial domination in all spheres of social existence. Rather, decolonisation is a collective, simultaneous and quotidian praxis that unsettles, even if gradually, the deeply entangled social, cultural, political, economic and epistemological foundations of coloniality, including its racial grammar and logic, linear historiography, dualism and geopolitics of knowledge. In Fanon’s words, we are living in the ‘history of decolonization’.⁶

While decolonisation encompasses the liberation struggles that resulted in the configuration of the ‘national’ territories of the geographical South, which continue to endure the structures of domination of coloniality such as racial capitalism and epistemic erasure, the concept of the Global South foregrounds the differing economic, racialised and epistemic positionalities and power differentials of countries contained therein (power differentials that exist within, between and beyond the nation-state). Further, decolonisation situates the sites of agentic and materialist struggle and epistemic engagement against these structures of domination in other locations beyond the geographical South. The antinomial concept of the Global North may be understood to comprise the hegemonic knowledge(s), temporality and spatiality which pass as universal on a global

scale. These simultaneously asserted concepts are mutually incompatible; the 'Global North' does not function as a stable geographic or economic designation but depends on asserting universalist normativity while disavowing its historical production through colonial expropriation, racialised extraction and structural dependency. It positions itself as the telos of global order while relying for its coherence on the subalternity of the Global South, thereby requiring the continued differentiation it claims to overcome through progressivist and positivist façades. This understanding provides a necessary stimulus for the historian, medieval or other, to take pains so as to avoid framing the discipline as a 'mere conduit for inculcating Western knowledge, values and worldviews'.⁷

For example, even a concept as fundamental to history as designating a 'medieval' period would have little meaning to say, the Walmajarri people of the Kimberley region of Western Australia, whose understanding of a cosmogonic Deep Time necessitates a calendar of 65,000 years. Enrique Dussel also reminds us that:

periodisation is a certain arbitrary division of history – that is, it requires an arbitrator or tribunal – and it might seem like a secondary matter. However, since the presentation of all history involves analysing the whole of the historical continuum in parts, the method of division implies two levels. On one hand, there are the criteria for periodisation, and on the other hand, there are the assumptions of these criteria. Frequently, both the criteria and their assumptions remain in the realm of the implicit, but they never cease to be valid. The historian of philosophy may not explicitly explain their criteria or assumptions, but they exist nonetheless.⁸

The question, as Joel Burges and Amy Elias point out, is 'not what time it is, or where we are in time, but whose time it is?'⁹ Historical periodisation is one way that coloniality of knowledge is reproduced, and a comparative approach, as well as a broader non-stadial understanding of history, may be more productive to the field.

While the authors invite the decolonial turn, conceptualised as a counternarrative and praxis involving 'thinking and doing',¹⁰ to drive our engagement with medieval Irish history below, we also acknowledge the truth embedded within the Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji's concept of extraversion¹¹ – the outward, typically European and North American, orientation of African intellectual production is structurally imposed by colonial history and not in response to internally generated questions or autonomous theoretical agendas. The contradiction lies in the simultaneous universalisation of Northern epistemologies and denial of the South's capacity to define the terms of knowledge production, which is not resolved with the system but is operationalised by it. As scholars of decolonisation, we recognise that we are invariably constrained by the Global North's episteme that links capitalism and colonialism to the project of modernity. Furthermore, we are constrained by the neoliberal model of academia with its 'large systems of authoritative control, standardization, gradation, accountancy, classification, credits and penalties',¹² and in which history (and all other disciplines) is simply a 'marketable product bought and sold by standard units',¹³ and, as such, firmly set within the project of modernity. The university has 'been complicit in colonialism, in patriarchy and in capital accumulation, and those logics have shaped the world, the university',¹⁴ and our schools of history in very fundamental ways. This results in a dialectical tension at the core of history, since '[f]rom the vantage point of the colonized, ... the term "research" is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, "research", is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary'.¹⁵

The connected frame of knowledge and power inherent in the Global North's dominant onto-epistemologies is not accommodating and acknowledging of marginalised viewpoints that interrogate 'received knowledge traditions' and make more visible 'the relations and entanglements of incommensurable scales, intelligences and contexts, as the very conditions for knowledge itself'.¹⁶ The teleology and dualist ontology immanent in this understanding suggest that rather than superseding the existing onto-episteme, with its discursive economies and regimes of representation, the decolonising we celebrate in academia is often mere window-dressing, and may be characterised as 'decolonisation light'.¹⁷ Rather than challenging epistemological foundations intimately linked to actually existing systems of domination, '[d]ecolonizing becomes a form of intellectual self-critique and self-cleansing, which seems to proceed at some distance from concrete sites of political praxis, especially sites beyond the West'.¹⁸ Insurgent decolonial thought, as well as other radical traditions, tends to be uprooted from their material sociopolitical contexts once institutionalised within the counterinsurgent machine of academia.¹⁹ To take a single example (from many), the Global North academy may embrace performative citational practices (citing Latin American, Black, African and Asian scholars) as a manifestation of decolonising the curriculum, without interrogating their own racial, sexual, gender and methodological positions, their intersectional entitlements and privileges beyond surface-level acknowledgments of identity, the 'incommensurability between the terms of the investigator's analytic and the subaltern as the "object" of investigation',²⁰ and the geopolitical and historical contexts that create the conditions to think otherwise.²¹

Despite its seemingly inherent complexity and the failure by purveyors of the concept to employ an appropriate metacritical understanding, decolonisation as a purported project is everywhere. Scholars from the Global South point to decolonisation as tending towards the status of fad in the Global North (both as location and episteme), reduced to tokenistic and self-serving performativity or, in the words of Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, a 'metaphor'.²² This is because '[d]ecolonial critiques have become a valuable currency within the intellectual, affective, relational and material economies of mainstream Western educational institutions'.²³ Sara Ahmed points to the metaphoric use of anti-racist work, which finds resonance with the way decolonial scholarship becomes non-performative; that is, void of material implications. Publications become speech acts that 'do not do what they say; they do not, as it were, commit a person, organization, or state to an action'.²⁴ As Ahmed explains, academia's 'speech acts that commit the university to equality ... are non-performatives. They "work" precisely by not bringing about the effects that they name'.²⁵ More egregiously, perhaps, decolonisation is often misused by 'those who work for the status quo and are already using the term "decoloniality" for legitimising colonial attitudes, relationships, projects and many other activities that sustain rather than subvert the colonial project'.²⁶

Traversing the architecture of decolonial praxis reveals poetry as a fundamental modality of knowledge production that challenges the hegemonic structures of colonial rationality. Aimé Césaire, whose seminal *Discours sur le colonialisme* establishes the conceptual foundations for decolonial epistemology and the broader project of decoloniality, exemplifies this intersection of poetic expression and revolutionism. He was first and foremost a poet.²⁷ His 1944 essay 'Poetry and Cognition', composed during his sojourn in Haiti, constitutes what Robin Kelley has characterised as 'one of [Césaire's]

most systematic statements on the revolutionary nature of poetry'.²⁸ The genealogical influence of Césaire's poetic epistemology extends through subsequent generations of decolonial theorists, including Frantz Fanon, Cedric Robinson and Sylvia Wynter. Fanon praised not only the 'poets of negritude' (e.g. Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire and René Ménénil) but also quotes Aimé's 'Les Armes Miraculeuses' extensively.²⁹ This poem dialectically interrogates the existential dilemma between perpetual subjugation (slavery is death) and death by freedom (after killing the 'master'). When introducing the coloniality of 'research' and the well-founded, acerbic reaction to the word, Linda Tuhiwai Smith said that the distrust 'is so powerful that Indigenous people even write poetry about research'.³⁰ For Indigenous people, poetry is a powerful weapon against coloniality; poems articulate more than prose can. Poetry is a means of decolonisation.

Decolonising medieval Irish history, therefore, should not be understood simply as the inclusion of Global South epistemologies into our existing dominant understanding of the field, since such an underdeveloped framing risks the hierarchisation of knowledges.³¹ Rather, decoloniality is a 'perspective, stance, and proposition of thought, analysis, sensing, making, doing, [and] feeling', which enables an 'actional'³² interrogation of power structures such as embodied privilege, socio-economic advantage/academic employment status and methodological positionality(ies) of historians (and medievalists), as well as the nature of postcolonial dynamics and the ongoing effects of colonialism, since we live in what Folúké Adébisi terms 'present-continuous-colonial time'.³³ It is essential to any understanding of decolonial theory to note that a situated form of engaging with decoloniality would necessitate within the academy the embodiment of shifting from symbolic gestures, like including Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum, to the 'actional' restoration of Indigenous collective rights to land and natural resources. This must not be seen as some broader social justice initiative, nor can it be comfortably placed within the liberal paradigm of diversity.³⁴ Rather it is reflective of the ontological, epistemological and cosmological connections these communities have to their land which transcends the 'creation of human hierarchies of value [which] enabled the enclosure and commodification of land'³⁵ by the colonial project. Viewed in this manner, decolonisation remains 'an insatiable reparatory demand, an insurrectionary utterance, that always exceeds the temporality and scene of its enunciation [which] entails nothing less than an endless fracturing of the world colonialism created'.³⁶ The authors feel that the application of this 'purist' understanding of decoloniality would open up a stimulating debate on what constitutes land-ownership and indigeneity within the medieval Irish context. However, we do not undertake such a project in this paper as that project will require geometrically more space than a single article. Any such work should be in full conversation with Indigenous scholars working on land rights and not simply name dropping (superficially citing) a single piece on the topic.

Decolonising medieval Irish history entails an approach to historiography that engages with the colonised logics of temporality, spatiality and knowledge(s),³⁷ since such an approach must 'respond to the dominance of power abstracted from and through this colonial history and present'.³⁸ As decolonisation is a 'question of present ontology not of ancient history',³⁹ this involves considering how historical actors perceived and interpreted their world, often incorporating elements of subjectivity and cultural context into the analysis. It will demand extensive unlearning⁴⁰ and emphasises

understanding the past from an insider's perspective to interrogate historical narratives, which, to appropriate a phrase from Colin Graham, may well 'have since been refuted, made more complex or left behind'.⁴¹ Thus, this history is no longer simply a form of excavating Seamus Deane's essentialist Irishness, that 'hungry Hegelian ghost looking for a stereotype to live in',⁴² or of moving between the oppositional binarisms of nationalism and imperialist-settler colonisation, but is instead an examination of the western racial and cultural supremacy of historical Irishness refracted through a pluriversity of knowledges.

'Medieval' history, medievalists and global north-ness

Coloniality is pervasive in interpretations and depictions of medieval Irish history, culture, language and within historiographical assessments of these. Certain epistemes are colonial, and anticolonial scholars have manifested them as Orientalism, racism and racialisation,⁴³ nationalism,⁴⁴ and civilisation.⁴⁵ The historiography concerning 'medieval Ireland' is replete with this coloniality. Even a fundamental conceptualisation of Irish history as 'pure' autochthony by Celticists, framing this real 'Irish' history as pre-dating 795 and the first 'viking' raids in Ireland, is then undermined by the dissonant use of English colonial concepts and terminology (e.g. 'king', 'Ireland', 'Irish', 'tribe', 'native', etc.) or the errant conceptualisation of aurradus and the cánaí as a singular 'Brehon law'.⁴⁶ This practice cannot be apologised for, excused, liberally rebranded and continued. Colonial conceptions, such as 'native Irish law', are flippantly deployed to describe customary practices and legal texts from cultures five or six centuries before English colonisation brought the words 'native' and 'Irish' to the island.⁴⁷ Fanon identified that there can be no 'native' before colonisation: 'for it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence'.⁴⁸ There is, of course, another reason for this performance: the appropriation of Indigeneity by dominant Global North scholars, which distracts attention from the current suffering of Indigenous peoples and avoids self-reflection on positionality. Indigeneity requires a separateness, especially from Europe and European cultures, that cannot be claimed on behalf of early medieval peoples from Éire. It is a common boast to discuss the 'Irish' missionaries to Britain and the European sub-continent and their extensive writing and foundations of monasteries, the opposite of Indigeneity.⁴⁹

Another inclination that distinguishes many Celticists is their regard for Eoin MacNeill as foundational for their field, which leads to difficulty in critiquing his epistemology and analytic rigour. Seventy-seven years after his death, books by medievalists are still being published praising his life and works. While the editors claim that the most recent book is a work of 'iconoclasm', the chapters by the medieval experts fall short in that regard as they fail to address a number of assumptions in MacNeill's work.⁵⁰ The most pertinent of MacNeill's conjectures are that the particularistic force of 'Irish' nationalism⁵¹ had always existed, being both good and deserving of promotion, and by its very definition anti-colonial. Another is the projection of 'Gaelic', 'Irish' and 'Celtic' as being interchangeable synonyms.⁵² Medieval scholars in the MacNeill book critique aspects of MacNeill's arguments (e.g. no slavery after Patrick) but never touch the epistemic foundations of calling medieval peoples in/from Elg/Banba/Éire 'the Irish' (English colonial term of violence and a singularity)⁵³ and interchangeably

‘Celtic’ (British colonial term),⁵⁴ or of conceiving of ‘Celtic’ languages, cultural products and peoples. More importantly, the colonial construct of ‘Celtic’ is ontologically part of the Christian (colonial) belief that all peoples came from a single language and then were dispersed and all languages today came from a ‘common’ root. Celtic was at the same time part of the ‘scientific’ search for *homo europeus*, the colonial invention of a ‘white’ race. This paper entire could focus on the persistence amongst some Celticists in arguing that the Féni, Ulaigh, Laigin, Déisi and others can all be unproblematically flattened into ‘the Irish’ and any cultural or cosmological differences erased.

It is telling that MacNeill conceived of these (white!) Irish people as being superior to other colonised peoples and therefore did not deserve to be treated similarly,⁵⁵ which is in line with the understanding that whiteness is a position against other colonised and racialised peoples. MacNeill and many other anti-imperialists of the early twentieth century believed and argued that there were ‘deserving’ peoples who should be liberated, that other peoples (especially Black peoples) were ‘inferior’. To be ‘deserving’ one had to demonstrate the similarities of one’s culture to that of the coloniser’s, thus framing all analysis in colonial concepts, and resulting in a belief that the colonised Irish owed no solidarity to other colonised peoples.⁵⁶

Other forms of colonial nationalism are prevalent in medieval ‘Irish’ history. Gall is a Goedelach word that appears in a great deal of medieval writing. Several studies have focused on it as a compound term (fine gall and dubh gall), its medieval meanings and modern translations.⁵⁷ None of these studies, however, seem to have taken note of the coloniality of the dictionary translation (and preferred term in medieval histories) of the uncompounded version: ‘foreigner’. The historical dictionaries and the practices of medieval historians are modern creations, and with colonial-modernity came the nationalising of history and historical thought, hence the foundational work above. And since Goídel, Gaedhel and Gael today have to be ‘Irish’ (the English colonial term) and nothing else ever, the rational conclusion is that Gall must be non-Irish, i.e. ‘foreigner’. From a medieval historian standpoint, this belies the medieval Fénech/Goedelach/etc. mindsets. The annalists before 1169 mostly used this term for people born in Banba who were not members of a Goedelach polity and after 1169 mostly for groups of settler-colonists. The annalists also described people from outside Ireland with adjectives from that specific place, e.g. Albanach for someone from Alba. From a decolonial perspective, the more important point is that this continued ontology of people born in Ireland who can never be ‘Irish’ manifests the coloniality of medieval Irish history and studies. This epistemology (modern-nationalist translations) is not harmless, it influences ongoing debates and manifestations of racism in Ireland today.⁵⁸ We propose that Gall should not be translated in most instances, and that its connotations should be explicated – was it referring to a battle with Lochlannaigh or Danair in the 10th century, Dubliners existing in the twelfth century, or English colonial settlers attacking Cenél nEógain in the thirteenth century? This practice is relevant to decoloniality in that it would mean medieval scholars acknowledging the relevance of rhetoric from medieval studies to current Global North racism and coloniality.

A major part of coloniality in Ireland (and in the Global South) was geography, and it continues to be.⁵⁹ Here is where some medieval scholars have done decolonial work and we should note that work as a useful foundation. Edmund Hogan, working with the research of John O’Donovan, published *Onomasticon Goedelicum*,⁶⁰ and this work was

later revised by Pádraig Ó Riain and Kevin Murray,⁶¹ and then by Donnchadh Ó Corráin.⁶² This was an attempt to locate medieval (pre- and post-colonial) places and connect those sites to modern placenames. The decolonial aspect involved the uncovering of the earlier names for tuatha and bailti that the English settler-colonists had replaced with names such as Kingstown and Queenstown. Paul MacCotter produced a book, based on Hogan's work, to reconstruct Goedelach and Austmenn⁶³ geography before 1169 based on pre-colonial and post-colonial (post 1169) records.⁶⁴ However, and in keeping with the argument of this paper, some of the same scholars that worked on these projects to recover or reconstruct pre-colonial and early colonial place-names also deploy colonial geography and terminology, such as claiming that a church was in 'Kings Co.' or 'Co. Westmeath' c.900-1000⁶⁵ or that the peoples in early medieval Ireland were 'tribal'.⁶⁶ Working on one aspect of decoloniality does not appear to shield one's work and worldview from colonial epistemes and epistemology.

The overriding irony of writing about decolonising medieval Irish history in English is not lost on us. Scholars can and should write studies as Gaeilge. This method, however, is neither ontologically anti-colonial nor decolonial. Steven Ellis wrote a study of 'ioncam na hÉireann' ('Irish revenue': extracted wealth from the English colonies in Ireland to England) in the late medieval period, as Gaeilge, without any critique of coloniality.⁶⁷ Ellis refers to 'an rí' (the rí) extensively in the article, which are in fact references to the king of England and not to any actual rígh from Ireland, assuming that the holder of the crown of England was the only rí and therefore needed no qualification. While this article is not recent, it does serve as a reminder not to assume that writing as Gaeilge makes an author and their analysis 'decolonial', or even, for that matter, anti-colonial. Briefly consider another example, the widespread acceptance of the transformation of Sacs-Béarla (the English language) into simply 'Béarla' (language): once again implying that the English version of something requires no adjective.⁶⁸

The other side of the coin is the rationalising of anglicising every non-England term in the name of 'intelligibility' while writing in 'English'. This is the assumption that readers cannot understand toisech and so it must be transmogrified into 'chief', 'warlord', or 'petty chieftain', all of which carry colonial semantic baggage. But the general public today is well aware of the word taoiseach and rightly critiques British press for Britishising it into 'Irish PM'.⁶⁹ This indicates that the general public is quite capable and smart enough, once contextualised by the historian, to read and understand rí, toisech, tánaise, etc. without italics or 'translations'. Some scholars have already noted part of this problem and are publishing works with fewer anglicisations of medieval Irish cultural and political concepts.⁷⁰ The majority of scholars have practised this for individual names, to various extents.

The colonial elephant in the room is, of course, Goddard Orpen. He is rightly remembered as a staunch supporter (more than simply an apologist) of medieval colonisation and modern imperialism. His four-volume series, *Ireland under the Normans, 1169–1333*, is known for its inferiorising language regarding the Gaedhil and its promotion of absurd, colonial concepts such as *pax normanica* (Éire/Inis Fáil/Banba was violently anarchic until the 'Normans' came and introduced the concepts of peace and feudalism).⁷¹ While some historians of English colonisation overlook or even agree with Orpen's pro-colonial conceptualisations, it is the acceptance and adoption of his colonial epistemes by the Celticists (supposedly anti-colonial scholars) that is most surprising. For

Orpen, the colonists from England and the English colonies in Deheubarth were 'Normans', a 'race' of people, mostly men, who could move territories, marry people from many other cultures, have bi- and trilingual children who identified as English or Gael or other, or could simply be someone with a 'de' in their surname but could never escape the label 'Norman'. This primordialism racialises patrilineal descent and risks the misattribution of identity(ies). As an empirical antiquarian, Orpen knew that the colonists in the 12th and 13th centuries called themselves *les engleis* (the English), the Gaedhil called them *sachsain* or *saxain* (English), and everyone writing in Latin called them *anglici* (the English). Even today, some scholars are antithetical to challenging Orpen's racialised normanisation of medieval English settler-colonists.⁷² Respecting the self-identity of the invaders and colonisers might not be a concern for anti-colonial thinkers, but it is part of a larger problem: the colonial grá for relabelling peoples, 'correcting' their 'wrong' endonym with an exonym.⁷³ Orpen referred to various speakers of Gáedelg as 'the native Irish', a doubly colonial concept. This term was forged in the fires of medieval English colonisation in Éire and it carried socio-legal consequences for hundreds of years. When someone was labelled a *nativa* (as it mostly affected women), this was a socio-legal death sentence for her and all of her descendants – if they held lands and these were stolen, they could not sue in colonial courts to recover; if they were owed debts, the debtors did not have to answer in colonial courts, etc. *Nativitas* (being a 'native') was always alleged from birth (*nata*) as a tool for disenfranchisement, even when it was a legal fiction. Applying this colonial label of violence to all speakers of a version of Goídelc/Gáedelg was an effort to insult their cultures, and it continues to erase the complicated socio-legal hierarchies in medieval Ireland.

The limiting dominance of Global North perspectives in medieval Irish studies, and hence the need to undertake the decolonial unsettling we are proposing, is most evident in the perennial discussion of Ireland as a colony. Wedged between von Ranke's principle of '*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*'⁷⁴ and Howe's 'discourse about discourses',⁷⁵ arguments on whether Ireland constitutes a colony have something of the Hobsbawmian 'permanent present'⁷⁶ about them and are outside the scope of this paper. Our concern lies rather with how the definitional intent of colony is imbricated within the Global North worldview. To take one striking example, in a recent book chapter on 'colony' (for a book that he co-edited), Peter Crooks set forth a number of arguments on how to conceptualise the colonial paradigm within the context of medieval studies.⁷⁷ Crooks speaks about colonisation and the (im)possibility of its existence before 1492 without engaging with any Global South worldviews. He argues for an objective lexicon that can be deployed to discount the applicability of 'colony' and 'coloniality' to certain places and times. His analysis extrudes colonial language and tropes, such as when he claims that using the word colony is 'intruding an alien concept' into medieval history.⁷⁸ He believes that 'colony' was viewed positively until the end of the nineteenth century but fails to realise that his perspective is only possible from a Global North positionality. Crooks's theoretical foundations are Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and the works of Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper. Stoler is cited to ground Crooks's logocentrism, while Cooper is acknowledged as 'up-end[ing] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak!' The latter point should be a cause for concern. The original formulation of Spivak's subalternity in 'Can the Subaltern speak?' problematised the fact that Global North men (Foucault and Deleuze) were discussing and debating the experiences of Global South

women without the latter being afforded a platform from which to respond. The irony, therefore, of a Global North man (Crooks) praising another Global North man (Cooper) for upending the complaint of a Global South woman is not lost. Furthermore, Cooper's article itself, while theoretically grounded in South Asian postcolonialism, fails to address the differences between European coloniality in South Asia and in Africa, dismissing the history of the latter as being *too focused* on the historical crimes committed by European coloniality.⁷⁹ Some African scholars are mentioned by Cooper but there is little indication that they have influenced his thinking.

Notwithstanding the limitations of using Cooper as a basis for interrogating the concept of colony within a medieval Irish and British context, Crooks reveals his antithesis to viewing medieval colonisation from a decolonial position, with his praise for Orpen.⁸⁰ With considerable *mauvaise foi*, he frames medieval English colonisation in Éire as not 'colonial' because the settler-colonists did not call their settlements 'colonie', which is unusual as this argument follows the detailing of R R Davies's usage of colony for a medieval 'military intervention by an external power, the bureaucratic routinization of metropolitan authority, and a racialized construction of difference'.⁸¹ As with many medieval historians of the Global North, once Crooks does engage with medieval coloniality, it is entirely from the viewpoint of the coloniser. English sources are searched for their usage of 'colony' and 'planting', while the considerable corpora of Goedelach literature are ignored. This is to the detriment of his argument as he could have read C  ir Chonnacht, where the praise poet states that the Gaoidhil were enslaved by the action of Diarmait mac Donnchadha [Mac Murchadha] (*Toisg dar dhaor Gaoidhil ghlana t  id Diarmaid mac Donnchadha*) and that Aodh    Conchubhair demanded that the colonists be banished from the world (*Goill do gabh  il a domhain agras Aodh    Conchubhair*).⁸² And Muireadhach    D  laigh's address to Cathal Croibhdhearg    Conchobhair, when the former rejoices at a dream of the latter riding with battalions through Meath and burning every stone house there:

Suaire an taidhbhsi t  rfas damh

ar  ir do chathuibh Cruachan

a dhul amach san Midhe

gach clach 'na tur theinntidhe

   D  laigh also predicted that    Conchobhair will 'drive eastwards [into the sea] the Gulla [gaill: settler colonists] who have seized Teamhair' and 'he should banish them from   ire':

As    an Croibhdhearg chuirfios soir

Na Gulla do ghabh Theamraigh

An duine n   diomb  idh linn

'ga ttiom  in uile a h  irinn.⁸³

This is anticolonial sentiment writ large.

Within the specific historiographical context of medieval Ireland, this poetic epistemology assumes particular significance as a methodological intervention capable of

excavating subaltern voices from beneath the sedimented layers of settler-colonial documentation. The decolonisation of medieval Irish history necessitates a fundamental interrogation of archival authority, wherein poetry, in the footsteps of Césaire, functions as an archaeological instrument for the recovery and reanimation of colonised subjectivities that have been systematically occluded by the hegemonic narrative structures imposed by coloniality. Turning to suggestions for future practices, decolonial scholars promote the idea of *pluriversity* and it already exists in ‘medieval’ records, especially poetry. Besides the well-known metonym for the island, Éire – daughter of Delbáeth and Ernmas, there are Arthrach Dhá Thí, Banba, Crú Cuind, Elg, Fál/Inis Fáil, Fúata and Taitiu. These names are used within a single piece of writing (e.g. Cóir Chonnacht, Ceannaigh duain t’athar, a Aonghas⁸⁴ and Tabhrum an Cháis ar Chathal⁸⁵). So why limit the study of ‘medieval’ Banba/Inis Fáil/etc. to the English settler-colonist name ‘Ireland’? There are countless more areas to explore.

Concluding thoughts

In the opening sentence of his introduction to his history of Ireland, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, Geoffrey Keating wrote:

Whosoever proposes to trace and follow up the ancient history and origin of any country ought to determine on setting down plainly the method which reveals most clearly the truth of the state of the country and the condition of the people who inhabit it.⁸⁶

This determination as to method, for what Keating calls ‘truth’ but which we better understand as knowledge, is what motivates this paper. In keeping with Nic Dháibhéid and colleagues’ round table, we would argue that the unique position of Ireland affords a chance for medieval Irish history to learn from Global South epistemologies and contribute to the ‘*pluriversity of knowledges*’,⁸⁷ while at the same time disentangling differences in form and context (embodied legacies of enslavement and on-going colonisation to list but two), as well as differences between product and *poiêsis*. The Irish context, ‘marinated in historical notions of western racial and cultural supremacy’,⁸⁸ and possessed (if we may borrow the term) of a ‘frigid apathy’⁸⁹ towards the Global South, affords us the opportunity to test the subalternity of the Irish, who are more usually positioned as colonial victim and not as being proximate to coloniser. Efforts to reclaim reciprocity, land relationships and knowledge must acknowledge the modern/colonial structure. Decolonial thought such as Fanon’s and Grosfoguel’s critiques of essentialism reveals the challenges tied to the pursuit of pure autochthony and emphasises the denial of colonisation as a tool used by scholars with a Global North worldview. Dussel and Quijano suggest that colonised agency systematically excludes and silences histories and geographies that challenge that of the coloniser. The imposition of a singular narrative results in the erasure of alterity, rendering the rich and diverse history of the colonised as having little worth. Engaging with epistemic decolonisation, such as Walter Mignolo’s ‘epistemic disobedience’,⁹⁰ presents a welcome way forward since epistemologically, coloniality exists throughout medieval Irish studies. We should not fear leaving behind British/colonial constructs and epistemes as the paths forward have already been surveyed by decolonial scholars and are liberatory in nature.

Moreover, this engagement with decolonisation confirms our understanding of history as an unfinished theory, given the supplementarity of the discipline. Notwithstanding that decolonisation will ineluctably introduce the medievalist to a new (and challenging) terminology, this is to be welcomed. We are in agreement with Ian Hunter who argues that the academic must see new theory, and its concomitant terminology, as 'critical practices of interrogation performed on other theories'.⁹¹ Such 'critical practices' may, in turn, enrich decolonial thought. For example, the temporal depth of decolonial thought, typically beginning in 1492 for global euromodern coloniality,⁹² may be deepened by thinking seriously about earlier colonial domination in Ireland. Scholars such as Cedric Robinson and Geraldine Heng have already begun this work and a great deal more is needed.⁹³ Another possible contribution is that by extending the geographic scope of decolonial thought to the Irish sphere, we introduce another geographic space not typically discussed in the broad field of decolonial studies. An excellent example of a field pushing the boundaries of decolonial thought is the scholarship advanced by critical Muslim studies that examines coloniality, epistemicide and dispossession in Al-Andalus prior to 1492.⁹⁴ Similarly, medieval Irish studies can benefit from and contribute to decolonial theory by having conversations with decoloniality scholars about temporality, geography and even Goedelach cosmologies.

While the benefits of the decolonial turn are manifold, so too are the challenges. This paper has confined itself to a small number of conspicuous features such as language and underlying modern-colonial assumptions and epistemes within the field, which combine to occlude what Keating referred to above as 'truth' in medieval Irish history. However, the scale of the challenge extends far beyond these artefacts. The proper application of the decolonial turn within our field goes far beyond what George Sefa Dei and Cristina Jaimungal call 'subverting the taken-for-granted'.⁹⁵ Further, studying medieval Irish history should not be instituted as a haven from engaging with broader social debates of the twenty-first century. Earlier reference was made to MacNeill's racialised thinking. While Elva Johnston has addressed MacNeill's racism,⁹⁶ the question remains as to whether a broader interrogation of racial ideologies within the field of medieval Irish studies in general is required. A growing body of literature, especially by Black Irish academics, supports the view that many white Irish people in the twenty-first century try to deny the benefits accruing to their racialisation as 'white' to the detriment of those who are not racialised as 'white'.⁹⁷ Janet Mawhinney describes this broader denial on the part of white people as 'moves to innocence' and a 'rush to the margins'.⁹⁸ Such avowed innocence is predicated on the claim to be both ignorant of the deleterious impact of such racialisation of non-whites, while simultaneously asserting their own sense of oppression and discrimination (usually at a socioeconomic level). Whiteness is embedded in current Global North positionality⁹⁹ and this rush to the margins results in the constitution of medieval Irish history and studies as almost entirely white/Global North, middle class and liberal – a point also raised by Boyle et al.¹⁰⁰ While this presents a number of challenges for the field, more existential threats can also be detected. Drawing insights from decolonial thinkers and activists, it is apparent that decolonisation necessitates a broader compass than merely challenging established liberal narratives in the historiography. To confront the coloniality embedded in medieval studies, we must acknowledge also its appeal as foundational myth to avowed and covert racists, right-wing factions, white supremacists and fundamental nationalists in the Global South. Having recognised

this linkage, our commitment must lie in actively combating it. It requires us to cease silently observing as scholars like Mary Rambaran-Olm contend with racism from both the general public and established academics. No longer confined to private expressions of support via email, we advocate for public solidarity and political activism whenever marginalised scholars and students take a go at the decolonial turn, or even simply voice their day-to-day concerns.¹⁰¹ True decolonial praxis manifests as genuine solidarity, involving putting one's name, reputation and career on the line, to support those who face opprobrium and death threats with recent examples provided by scholars who have spoken up in solidarity with Palestine.¹⁰² In contrast, other scholars seem to have used decolonial theory solely as a means to advance their careers rather than subscribing to the broader range of action – and activism – it entails. It suffices to say that the decades of scholarship on decolonization and decoloniality have not unsettled the colonial foundations of academia. Can we dismantle the master's house of modernity, coloniality and universality with the master's tools while working in the master's house?¹⁰³ Whether this is possible remains an open question.

Rambaran-Olm and other scholars have highlighted racism, intersectional sexism (misogynoir) and coloniality in medieval studies and noted that diversifying the staff of medieval departments alone will not end racism and Global North positionalities.¹⁰⁴ Ashlee Christoffersen and Akwugo Emejulu remind us that many 'diversifying' efforts have resulted in white, middle-class women becoming full members of Global North hegemony.¹⁰⁵ Cultural changes will have to be made in Irish and Global North academes, which then brings up fundamental questions. Julian Yates has already asked some: '(1) what happens when potential decolonial praxis does not reject, and indeed perhaps accommodates, modernity/coloniality; (2) what happens when potential decolonial praxis is supported by the kinds of politics and practice that otherwise uphold the colonial matrix of power? (3) how do we understand cases where diverse knowledges and forms of praxis (colonial, decolonial, otherwise) may co-exist, but without commensuration and without cross evaluation?'¹⁰⁶ If every Global North-positioned person in the Global North universities is replaced by a decolonial scholar, will these universities still be universities? Will governments and societies allow these new bodies to remain? If so, will these societies try to liberally colonise the new bodies into 'decolonial' metaphors? The history of the liberal colonisation of postcolonial studies into a metaphor warns us of the very real effort to do the same with epistemic decoloniality, and we, and any likeminded scholars, can and must resist the metaphorisation.

We started this paper declaring that it provides a foundation for future research as our purpose was not to exhaust the subject, but only to open up the debate and invite responses. The temporal, geographical and conceptual aspects of medieval Irish history reflect asymmetrical interrelations between language, tropes and the worldview of the coloniser and the colonised. In itself, this is not a new claim. Some decades ago, Steven Ellis discussed the need for a 'historiographical framework' within which to study Irish history:

In modern history there are few countries which present the historian with the kind of interpretative challenge offered by Ireland. The general outlines of the problem are well known the impact on the island of successive waves of colonisation; the endemic unrest, religious strife, and political instability, exemplified in recent times by the partition of the island between two states; and the interaction and conflict since the middle ages of two cultures and two peoples,

Gaelic and English. These salient features of Irish history raise the question of an appropriate historiographical framework within which the island's history might be interpreted if we accept that Ireland's historical experience cannot be understood in isolation.¹⁰⁷

The decolonial turn offers such a framework as it 'highlights the epistemic relevance of the enslaved and colonized subjectivities into the realm of thought at previously unknown institutional levels'.¹⁰⁸

Notes

1. While the term Ireland is infused with political and imagined significance, it is intended here to refer to the entire island, without any of its post-1921 connotations. We have chosen to not rely on a more geographically precise designation (for example, island of Ireland) simply for concision. Similarly, Irish, unless indicated, simply refers to the people who inhabit(ed) Ireland or to people descended from this source.
2. Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, Shahmima Akhtar, Dónal Hassett, Kevin Kenny, Laura McAtackney, Ian McBride, T G McMahon and Jane Ohlemeyer, 'Round Table: Decolonising Irish History? Possibilities, Challenges, Practices', *Irish Historical Studies*, 45(168), 2021, pp 303–332.
3. Catherine E Walsh and Walter D Mignolo, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis*, Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2018, pp 3–4; Kehinde Andrews, *The New Age of Empire: How Racism and Colonialism still Rule the World*, London: Allen Lane, 2021, pp 1–110; Folúke Adébisí, *Decolonisation and Legal Knowledge*, Bristol: Bristol UP, 2023, p 16.
4. Walsh and Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, pp 1–2. Cedric Robinson and Geraldine Heng already adroitly made the case for including the medieval English colonisation of Ireland and racialisation of the 'Irish' as foundational for global capitalist racist coloniality: Cedric J Robinson, *Black Marxism*, London: Zed Press, 1983; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018.
5. This article was written in August–December 2023 and submitted to PCS in June 2024. The subsequent piece is: Elizabeth Boyle, Chelsey Collins, Victoria Krivoshekova, Seungyeon Lee, Truc Ha Nguyen and Tiago Veloso Silva, 'Decolonizing Medieval Irish Studies', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 32(1-2), 2024, pp 66–78. It is indicative of the (im)possibility of challenging existing practice that Boyle et al could not publish their piece in *Peritia* or *Irish Historical Studies*.
6. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Constance Farrington (trans), New York: Grove Press, 1963, p 41.
7. Toyin Falola, *Decolonizing African Knowledge: Autoethnography and African Epistemologies*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2022, p 9.
8. Enrique Dussel, *Historia de la Filosofía y Filosofía de la Liberación*, Bogotá: Nueva América, 1994, pp 13–14. Translated by Jairo.
9. Joel Burges and Amy J Elias, *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present*, New York: NYUP, 2016, p 4.
10. Walsh and Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, p 49.
11. Paulin J Hountondji, 'Producing Knowledge in Africa Today: The Second Bashorun MKO Abiola Distinguished Lecture', *African Studies Review*, 38(3), 1995, pp 1–10.
12. Achille Mbembe, 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive', *Africa is a Country*, 9 June 2015 (<https://africaisacountry.atavist.com/decolonizing-knowledge-and-the-question-of-the-archive>).
13. Mbembe, 'Decolonizing Knowledge'.
14. Adébisí, *Decolonisation*, p 12.
15. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2021, p 1.
16. Lisa Lowe and Kris Manjapra, 'Comparative Global Humanities after Man: Alternatives to the Coloniality of Knowledge', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 36(5), 2019, pp 23–48, p 24.

17. Handel Kashope Wright and Yao Xiao, 'Decolonisation and Higher Education: Theory, Politics and Global Praxis', *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, 10(1), 2021, pp 23–50.
18. Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena, 'Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory', *Critical Times*, 4(3), 2021, pp 359–388, p 362.
19. Jairo I Fúnez-Flores, 'Insurgent Decoloniality: Situating Thought in Sites of Struggle', in Jairo I Fúnez-Flores, Ana Carolina Díaz Beltrán, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sandeep Bakshi, Agustín Laó-Montes, and Flavia Rios (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Decolonial Theory*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2025, pp 142–161; Alana Lentin, *The New Racial Regime: Recalibrations of White Supremacy*, London: Pluto, 2025; Dylan Rodríguez, 'On University Abolition', *American Quarterly*, 77(2), 2025, pp 367–374.
20. Eva Cherniavsky, 'The Canny Subaltern', in Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge (eds), *Theory after 'Theory'*, London: Routledge, 2011, pp 149–162, p 157.
21. Jairo I Fúnez-Flores, 'Anibal Quijano: (Dis)Entangling the Geopolitics and Coloniality of Curriculum', *The Curriculum Journal*, 35(2), 2024, pp 288–306.
22. Jairo I Fúnez-Flores, A C Díaz Beltrán, and James Jupp, 'Decolonial Discourses and Practices: Geopolitical Contexts, Intellectual Genealogies, and Situated Pedagogies', *Educational Studies*, 58(5-6), 2022, pp 596–619; Jairo I Fúnez-Flores, 'Toward Decolonial Globalisation Studies', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 21(2), 2022, pp 166–186; Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*, 1(1), 2012, pp 1–40.
23. Sharon Stein, Vanessa Andreotti, Rene Suša, Sarah Amsler, Dallas Hunt, Cash Ahenakew, Elwood Jimmy, Tereza Cajkova, Will Valley, Camilla Cardoso, Dino Siwek, Benicio Pitaguary, Dani D'Emilia, Ubiracy Pataxó, Bill Calhoun and Haruko Okano, 'Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures: Reflections on our Learnings thus Far', *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 4(1), 2020, pp 43–65, p 44.
24. Sara Ahmed, 'The Nonperformativity of Antiracism', *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 7(1), 2006, pp 104–126, p 104.
25. Ahmed, 'Nonperformativity', p 105.
26. Morgan Ndlovu, 'Well-Intentioned but Vulnerable to Abuse', *Critical Dialogues*, 23(4), 2020, pp 579–583, p 580.
27. René Depestre, 'Interview with Aimé Césaire', Maro Riofrancos (trans) in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Joan Pinkham (trans), New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000, pp 79–94.
28. Robin DG Kelly, 'A Poetics of Anticolonialism' in Césaire, *Discourse*, pp 7–28, p 17.
29. Fanon, *Wretched*, especially pp 86–88.
30. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, p 1.
31. Gargi Bhattacharyya, Adam Elliott-Cooper, Sita Balani, Kerem Nişancioğlu, Kojo Koram, Dalia Gebrial, Nadine El-Enany, and Luke de Noronha, *Empire's Endgame: Racism and the British State*, London: Pluto Press, 2021.
32. Walsh and Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, p 100.
33. Folúké Adébísi, 'Power and Possibility: The Role of Universities in Decolonisation', *Times Higher Education*, 26 June 2023, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/power-and-possibility-role-universities-decolonisation> (accessed 14 August 2023).
34. Leon Moosavi, 'The Decolonial Bandwagon and the Dangers of Intellectual Decolonisation', *International Review of Sociology*, 30(2), 2020, pp 332–54.
35. Adébísi, 'Power and Possibility'.
36. Joel M Modiri, 'The Aporias of Decolonisation in the South African Academy', in Oluwaseun Tella and Shireen Motala (eds), *From Ivory Towers to Ebony Towers: Transforming Humanities Curricula in South Africa, Africa and African-American Studies*, Sunnyside: Fanele, 2020, pp 157–173, p 172.
37. Frank B Wilderson III, *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid*, Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2015.
38. Adébísi, *Decolonisation*, p 23.
39. Adébísi, *Decolonisation*, p 64.

40. See, for example, Catherine Walsh's experiences with the Zapatistas in the Escuellita: Walsh and Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, pp 81–96.
41. Colin Graham, 'Anomalous Theory', *The Irish Review*, 15, Spring 1994, pp 117–123, p 120.
42. Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature*, London: Hutchinson, 1986, p 58.
43. Edward W Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon, 1978.
44. Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, London: Nelson, 1965.
45. Fanon, *Wretched*.
46. There are many scholars who do this, so it will be easier to mention an exception: Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha is very clear and accurate in her analysis of legal systems during and before the creation of Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium*: 'Birr and the Law of the Innocents' in Thomas O'Loughlin (ed), *Adomnán at Birr, ad 697: Essays in Commemoration of the Law of the Innocents*, Dublin: Four Courts, 2011, pp 13–32.
47. For example, Patrick Wadden, 'The Pseudo-historical origins of the *Senchas Már* and royal legislation in early Ireland', *Peritia*, 27, 2016, 141–158.
48. Fanon, *Wretched*, p 30.
49. Donnchadh Ó Corráin noted that MacNeill was a nationalist but also situated that nationalism within the construct of 'European civilisation' [Euro-modern coloniality]. The former wrote: 'MacNeill was very consciously a European and he saw the study of early Irish history as an invaluable contribution to European culture: [MacNeill said] "Irish law is one of the most European things that can be known, an essential chapter in the history of European civilisation": Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Introduction', in Eoin MacNeill, *Celtic Ireland*, Dublin: Academy Press, 1981, p vi.
50. Conor Mulvagh and Emer Purcell, 'Introduction: Reassessing Eoin MacNeill', in Mulvagh and Purcell (eds), *Eoin MacNeill: The Pen and the Sword*, Cork: Cork UP, 2022, pp 1–18, p 1.
51. In the beginning of *Phases of Irish history*, MacNeill states that he does not view 'the Celtic race' as being entirely constructed 'by blood'. Some scholars have used this quote to argue that MacNeill was inclusive in his conceptions of Irishness ('nationality' as somehow different from 'nationalism'). That was not the case and if we read through *Phases*, MacNeill regularly refers to his conceptions of race as real biological phenomena and his beliefs in craniognomy and white European superiority over others, and he argues that the Gaelic peoples are white: Eoin MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History (Second Impression)*, Dublin: M H Gill & Son, 1920, pp 1–2, 9, 240. For later apologiae: F J Byrne, 'MacNeill the Historian', in F X Martin and F J Byrne (eds), *The Scholar Revolutionary: Eoin MacNeill, 1867–1945, and the Making of the New Ireland*, Shannon: Irish UP, 1973, pp 15–36; Donal McCartney, 'MacNeill and Irish-Ireland', in Martin and Byrne (eds), *Scholar Revolutionary*, pp 75–97; Stephen H Harrison, 'Re-fighting the Battle of Down, Orpen, MacNeill and the Irish Nation-State', in Michael Brown and S H Harrison (eds), *The Medieval World and the Modern Mind*, Dublin: Four Courts, 2000, pp 171–82; Mulvagh and Purcell, 'Introduction', p 16; Elva Johnston, "'By Blood and by Tradition": Race and Empire in Eoin MacNeill's Interpretation of Early Ireland', in Mulvagh and Purcell (eds), *Eoin MacNeill*, pp 67–79, n. 52. Nagle is critical of MacNeill and states that MacNeill was concerned with nationalism: Shane Nagle, 'Eoin MacNeill and Nationalism', in Mulvagh and Purcell (eds), *Eoin MacNeill*, pp 188–207.
52. In *Phases*, MacNeill is quite clear that before Buchanan invented the idea of British and Irish 'Celts', no one in Ireland ever identified as Celtic, but he also repeatedly calls the peoples in Éire 'Celtic' based on his assumption that Gaeilge is a 'Celtic' language: MacNeill, *Phases*, p 9. Cf. the English antiquarians who argued that Celt, Gaul, German, Saxon, Sythian, Cimmerian, Cimbri, Cymry, Gomeri, Briton, Teuton, etc. were all interchangeable: Stuart Piggott, *Celts, Saxons, and the Early Antiquaries*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1967. Piggott's booklet is full of colonial and imperial epistemes but does detail the history of, and anti-historical nature of, the invention of Irish and British 'Celts' and it demonstrates the colonial epistemology behind the continued usage of 'Celt' for medieval Irish peoples.

53. There are numerous works on the effects of being called 'Irish' by the settler colonists and so we do not expand on this point here. For example, Heng, *Invention*, pp 36–42; Stephen Hewer, *Beyond Exclusion in Medieval Ireland: Intersections of Ethnicity, Sex, and Society under English Law*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2021, pp 137–59, 195–258. Of course, this colonial phenomenon can and should be studied further, especially embedded in decolonial epistemology.
54. Joseph Lennon, 'Irish Orientalism: an overview', in Clare Carroll and Patricia King (eds), *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, Cork: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003, pp 129–157.
55. MacNeill, *Phases*, p 240. MacNeill's comment on other colonised peoples, who he felt were 'inferior' (he referred to peoples from New Guinea and southern Africa, with racist discursive violence, who he felt deserved colonisation), and his racism in general is briefly mentioned in Johnston: Johnston, 'By Blood', p 76. This mention is couched in a great deal of praise for MacNeill, diminishing his clear and obvious racism. For example, the chapter begins by eliciting sympathy for MacNeill and his son Brian, and Eoin's racism is not introduced until the ninth page.
56. The racism of John Mitchel, Arthur Griffith, Frank Hugh O'Donnell, and Douglas Hyde is mentioned by Howe: Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, Oxford: OUP, 2005, p 44. Eamon De Valera, Erskine Childers, and Douglas Hyde, amongst others, framed their case for independence from Britain on the basis of the profound injustice of 'Ireland [being] the only white nation on earth' still enslaved: Maurice Walsh, *Bitter Freedom: Ireland in a Revolutionary World, 1918–1923*, London: Faber & Faber, 2015, p 216.
57. For example, Clare Downham, 'Viking Identities in Ireland: it's Not All Black and White', in Seán Duffy (ed), *Medieval Dublin XI*, Dublin: Four Courts, 2011, pp 185–201.
58. At the Dublin Riot (Nov 2023) one person shouted 'Let's have little groups splintering off, doing what we got to do. Seven o'clock, be in town. Everyone bally up, tool up. And any fucking gypo, foreigner, anyone, just kill them ... That no more foreigners are allowed into this poxy country.' Rory Carroll and Lisa O'Carroll, "Remember who We Are": Riots, Race, and the End of the "Irish Welcome", *The Observer*, 26 Nov 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/26/remember-who-we-are-riots-race-and-the-end-of-the-irish-welcome> (accessed 5 December 2023). Similar discursive violence is deployed outside accommodation and even planned accommodation for refugees, several of these buildings have subsequently been damaged and destroyed by arson.
59. Catherine Nash, 'Irish Placenames: Post-Colonial Locations', *Trans of the Institute of British Geographers*, 24(4), 1999, pp 457–480.
60. Edmund Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum Locorum et Tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae: An index, with Identifications, to the Gaelic Names of Places and Tribes*, Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co, 1910. Kevin Murray claims that Eoin MacNeill was involved in Hogan's work: Kevin Murray, 'Eoin MacNeill's Contribution to the Study of Medieval Irish Law', in Mulvagh and Purcell (eds), *Eoin MacNeill*, pp 33–39.
61. Kevin Murray and Pádraig Ó Riain (eds), *Edmund Hogan's Onomasticon Goedelicum: Reconsiderations*, London: Irish Texts Society, 2011.
62. Edmund Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum: Revised and Corrected*, Donnchadh Ó Corráin (ed), Dublin: DIAS, 2017, <https://www.dias.ie/celt/celt-publications-2/onomasticon-goedelicum/> (accessed 18 December 2023).
63. This is the closest to an endonym that we have for the various Irish peoples/peoples in Ireland who came from Scandinavian and Goedelach mixed backgrounds. They are called many modern, hyphenated and nationalised names. Besides Austmenn (people from the East), they called themselves Dubliners, etc. specific to their home polity or region, or simply their personal name. In addition to modern-nationalist renaming of these peoples (plural), there is a tendency to gender them as only male ('Ostman' and 'Ostmen') based on the medieval Anglo-Latin, colonial term for them *Ostmanni*: Hewer, *Beyond Exclusion*, pp 162–175.

64. MacCotter notes that Hogan used fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Gaelic records for twelfth-century Gaelic placenames and takes issue with this: Paul MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland: Territorial, Political and Economic Divisions*, Dublin: Four Courts, 2008.
65. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *The Irish Church, its Reform and the English Invasion*, Dublin: Four Courts, 2017.
66. Murray, 'Eoin MacNeill's Contribution', p 33. Murray should not be singled out here. Daniel Binchy and FJ Byrne, students of MacNeill, argued extensively for the usage of colonial terminology in regard to the various peoples in early medieval Ireland (flattened in the English concept of a singular 'Irish') in direct opposition to MacNeill's call to not use 'tribe' and 'tribal'. There has been wide acceptance of Binchy's and Byrne's terminology and epistemes.
67. Steven Ellis, 'Ioncam na hÉireann, 1384–1534', *Studia Hibernica*, 22/23, 1982/1983, pp 39–49.
68. See Thomas De Vere Coneys, *Foclóir Gaoilghilge-Sacs-Bearla, or, an Irish-English Dictionary, Intended for the Use of Students and Teachers of Irish* (Hodges and Smith: Dublin, 1849); Niall Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (An Gúm: Baile Átha Cliath, 1977).
69. For many years, Irish people have critiqued British news media on social media for mispronouncing/misspelling taoiseach as 'prime minister', for example <https://twitter.com/CiaraLynnMurphy/status/1276857278696751106>. The BBC is still doing this: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-64337106> (accessed 18 December 2023).
70. For example, MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*.
71. Seán Duffy, 'Historical Revisit: Goddard Henry Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans, 1169–1333* (1911–20)', *Irish Historical Studies*, 32(136), Nov 2000, pp 246–259. Elva Johnston is right to note that Duffy wrote an apologia for Orpen: Johnston, 'By Blood', n. 16.
72. A good example is Evelyn Mullally's intentional mistranslation of *des Engleis* into 'of the Normans': Evelyn Mullally, *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland: La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande*, repr. Dublin: Four Courts, 2019.
73. Some medievalists use 'emic and etic' instead but nevertheless promote the colonial-anthropology perspective of etic.
74. Georg C Iggers, 'The image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought', *History and Theory*, 2(1), 1962, pp 17–40, p 18.
75. Howe, *Ireland*, p 5.
76. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, p 3.
77. Peter Crooks, 'Colony', in J W Armstrong, Peter Crooks, and Andrea Ruddick (eds), *Using Concepts in Medieval History: Perspectives on Britain and Ireland, 1100–1500*, Cham: Springer, 2022, pp 51–71.
78. Crooks, 'Colony', p. 59.
79. Frederick Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History', *American Historical Review*, 99(5), 1994, pp 1516–1545.
80. Crooks, 'Colony', p 59.
81. Crooks, 'Colony', p 62.
82. Throughout the poem, the English colonists are called Lochlannach [referring to their boats], Saxonaib, and Goill at various points: Séamus Mac Mathúna, 'An Inaugural Ode to Hugh O'Connor (King of Connacht, 1293–1309)?', *Ziatschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 49–50, 1997, pp 548–573 (stanzas 9, 19); Katharine Simms, Bardic Poetry Database, <https://bardic.celt.dias.ie/pdf/POEM503.pdf> (accessed 18 December 2023).
83. Osborn Bergin (ed), *Irish Bardic Poetry: Texts and Translations, Together with an Introductory Lecture*, David Greene and Fergus Kelly (eds), Dundalk: DIAS, 1984, no. 23 (stanzas 15, 18).
84. Bergin, *Irish Bardic Poetry*, no. 45.
85. Bergin, *Irish Bardic Poetry*, no. 23; Simms, Bardic Poetry Database, <https://bardic.celt.dias.ie/poem/1761> (accessed 16 June 2025).
86. Geoffrey Keating, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, David Comyn and P S Dinneen (eds), 4 vols, London: Irish Text Society, 1902–1914, i, p 3.

87. Adébisi, *Decolonisation*, p 51.
88. Washington Marovatsanga and Paul Michael Garrett, *Social work with the Black African Diaspora*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2023, p 117.
89. John Lanigan, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland from the First Introduction of Christianity among the Irish to the Beginning of the Thirteenth Century*, 4 vols, Dublin: J Cumming, 1822–1829, iii, Preface.
90. Walter Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 26(7-8), 2009, pp 159–181.
91. Ian Hunter, 'The Time of Theory', *Postcolonial Studies*, 10(1), 2007, pp 5–22, p 7.
92. Fúnez-Flores, 'Toward Decolonial Globalisation Studies'; Enrique Dussel, *1492: El Encubrimiento del Otro: Hacia el Origen del 'Mito de la Modernidad'*, La Paz: UMSA, 1994.
93. Robinson, *Black Marxism*; Heng, *Invention*.
94. Iskander Abbasi, 'Islam, Muslims, and the Coloniality of Being: Reframing the Debate on Race and Religion in Modernity', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 33(2), 2020, pp 1–31; S A Sibai, *La Cárcel del Feminismo: Hacia un Pensamiento Islámico Decolonial*, Madrid: Akal; Ramón Grosfoguel, 'The Structure of Knowledge in Westernised Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long Sixteenth Century', *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 1(1), 2013, pp 73–90.
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96. Johnston, 'By Blood'.
97. Ebun Joseph, 'The Wages and Price of Whiteness: The Case of Ireland and White Supremacy', *Radical History Review*, 143, May 2022, pp 79–88.
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