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Decolonizing the Irish: The International Resistance and Entrenchment of the Global Irish Diaspora

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Abstract:

Narratives of Irish decolonization often take up local (rather than global) arguments focused on the liberation of Ireland, instead of looking to the participation of Irish people in decolonization efforts internationally. This paper argues that the Irish diaspora, whose population has extended into all corners of the Earth, has a key role to play in decolonization not simply because of the history of anti-colonialism in Ireland and its role as a test site for British colonialism, but specifically because of the need to extend sentiments about national liberation to the nations whose oppression the diaspora has become entrenched in. Through examining historical examples of Irish roles in the colonization of Canada, the United States, and Australia, this paper explores some of the ways that the desire to contribute to the liberation of Ireland within the Irish diaspora has often become linked to participation in colonization. In so doing, it argues that the Irish nation cannot become decolonized by liberating its own land alone; it must become a force for anti-colonialism by rejecting participation in colonial occupation wherever the Irish find themselves. Drawing attention to opportunities for advancing allieships between the diaspora and other nations struggling against colonialism, the author puts forth a call to action for decolonizing the Irish.

Keywords: Anti-colonialism, Colonization, Decolonization, Global Irish diaspora, Irish nationalism

1. Introduction

On January 24th, 2018, pro-Palestinian activists around the world celebrated that the Seanad (Upper House) of the Oireachtas put forward a reso-

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lution to pass the Control of Economic Activities (Occupied Territories) Bill of 2018. The bill which aims to enact the rules of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and customary international humanitarian law in-regards-to trade has been criticized for being anti-semitic. During the debates about the Bill on January 30th, the Tánaiste Sean Coveney opened the discussion with the following comments:

> The relentless expansion of Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory is unjust, provocative, and undermines the credibility of Israel's commitment to a peaceful solution to a conflict to which we all want an end. The introduction and settlement of communities from an occupying power to alter the demography of the area is unambiguously illegal under international law. The process of establishing settlements also inevitably involves violations of the rights of the occupied population through seizure of their land, demolitions, discriminatory treatment, including unequal implementation of planning laws, and other restrictions, including on movement. The Government has consistently and repeatedly condemned the construction and expansion of settlements. (Houses of the Oireachtais, January 30, 2019)

Coveney defended the proposed legislation by claiming that it does not apply to activities within the internationally recognized boundaries of Israel, and that rather than targeting Israel, it aimed at upholding international law that opposes the illegal occupation of sovereign nations. However, if we take these qualifying remarks seriously, they have important implications for Ireland's relationship with the territories that the majority of the Irish diaspora live in. In particular, all of the characteristics used above by the Tánaiste to describe the occupation of Palestine, can be equally applied to several of the main sites of migration for the Irish diaspora.

Within the past two years, the international media has been replete with examples of settler colonial governments using force to occupy, settle, or otherwise develop land which does not belong to them. In the United States, members of the Irish diaspora need only look at the violent encroachment of all levels of government onto Indigenous[1] land to try to enforce the development of the Dakota Access Pipeline for a recent example (Estes 2019). At the time of writing this article, it has been only two months since Canada, despite all of its talk about reconciliation, sent the Military and the Queen's Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to illegally enter and occupy unceded Wet'suwet'en territories in order to force the development of the GasLink/TransCanada pipeline (Unist'ot'en Camp 2019). Indigenous land defenders at the site were violently arrested, while officers refused to release them unless

[1] The term Indigenous is deployed throughout this paper to refer to the original inhabitants of land and the descendants of their nations, who have existed on their land from time immemorial.

they swore an oath to the Queen. In Australia, the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which culminated years of consultations with Indigenous communities, was met with outright rejection by the federal government because it asked for Indigenous sovereignty to be enshrined into the decision-making processes of the nation via the constitution (Grattan 2017). While numerous Irish politicians and activists around the world have noted the similarities between Ireland's struggles against colonial oppression and the experiences of Palestinian populations, these other comparisons might prove to be more challenging to confront.

The year 2018 marked the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and while numerous authors have problematized viewing the conflict between the Republic, loyalists and unionists as being one of an anti-colonial nature, the current political context of Brexit is once again bringing Ireland's relationship with British-rule back into question (Gormley-Heenan, Aughey 2017). While some people may characterize the Republic as having entered a post-national stage via their participation in the European Union, sentiments around the long history of liberatory struggles against colonialism continue to shape Irish national mythologies, held both within Ireland, and around the world by those claiming Irish heritage. This paper argues that these sentiments must be examined critically when faced with the contradictory realities produced by the Irish diaspora's ongoing role in global history: as populations living in territories occupied by colonial states; as descendants of populations who upheld and expanded British colonialism; and as a diasporic nation that has continued to both resist and rely upon colonial laws, politics, and economics, while participating in or joining in the resistance of the British occupation of Indigenous lands across the globe.

This paper also tries to work towards confronting such contradictions for the benefit of those members of the Irish diaspora, whose mixed-heritage connects our Irish ancestors to other colonized peoples around the world. I write this as someone whose heritage as a mixed-Indigenous Mi'kmaw and Irish scholar, has led me to study and compare the ongoing impacts of colonization in Ireland and Mi'kma'ki (the unceded territories of the Mi'kmaq Confederacy on the East Coast of Canada). I believe that through facing the harsh realities of the Irish diaspora's past and current entrenchment in colonialism, white supremacy, and empire, others who are like me will begin to want to share their histories with the rest of the diaspora. The call for this type of comparative research is widespread by authors who have questioned Ireland's postcolonial (or even colonial) status (Lloyd 1999; Howe 2002; Carroll, King 2003; Wilson 2013). The conclusion that the Irish have a very long history of utilizing colonial racial hierarchies to their advantage, and have benefitted from various forms of entrenchment in Empire is nothing new. However, by taking the position that the Irish diaspora needs to engage seri-

ously in the work of decolonising themselves, and that the independence of the Republic does not mean that the Irish have been freed from the clutches of "the colonial mind", this paper attempts to show that reductive narratives of Irish interactions with colonialism restricted to the locale of Ireland, tend to ignore the globalized nature of colonialism. Drawing on historical examples from North America and Australia, this paper argues that the Irish nation cannot become decolonized by liberating its own land alone, it must become a force for anti-colonialism, rejecting participation in colonial occupation wherever the Irish find themselves. To do so, this paper engages literature in Irish history, and debates that have emerged in Irish and postcolonial studies. In calling for the Irish diaspora to think through how decolonization must therefore be seen as a global project, I ask readers to reflect on how narratives of Irish decolonization can move beyond focusing solely on the liberation of Ireland rather than the anti-colonial struggles of Irish people internationally. By highlighting some of the varied and deep seated relationships that the Irish have to colonialism, I hope to respond directly to the question raised by the title of this special issue of *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies*, *Whose Homelands?,* in two ways: firstly, by examining critically how nationalist mythologies have influenced the actions of the Irish diaspora's anti-colonial sentiments in defense of the diaspora's imagined homeland; and secondly, in relation to the current struggles over land and sovereignty of the actual people whose homelands the diaspora continue to occupy.

2. Pre-colonial arrivals of the Irish Diaspora

It is worth noting that the ancestors of the Irish diaspora could very well have landed in regions like North America prior to the arrival of European colonialism. Given the documented intermixing of Irish and Norse culture, the migration of the diaspora may very well have begun with the Viking settlement called Vinland, in the region now known as L'Anse aux Meadows, in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Vinland, which is thought to have been established by the Viking explorer Lief Erickson around 1000 AD, is widely believed to have been abandoned because of war with the local Indigenous nations. While it may be true that skirmishes took place between the Norse populations and Indigenous nations like the Beothuk, it may also be the case that this belief is an ahistoric projection of Eurocentrism onto the past – propagating the belief that Indigenous civilizations did not have the capacity or ability to absorb European travellers into their societies, which contradicts much of the historical data we have around Indigenous host-nations, practices with refugees, etc. Despite the belief that Vinland was a failed settlement, in 2016, a second site which could establish a potential longer history of Norse settlement in North America was found at Point Rosee (Farand 2016). There are also other unsubstantiated rumours that St. Brendon had reached North

America in previous millennia (Howley 2013), and that the Irish might have been the "White-Natives" that D'Anghiera wrote about the Spanish encountering when they reached the region now known as South Carolina (in the 1530 text *De Orbe Novo*). These are but a few of many examples demonstrating that the Irish are looking to understand their nation's history in North America. The earliest known case of Celtic populations in North America, can be found in the oral histories of the Mi'kmaq confederacy, which tell of the Mi'kmaq encountering the Scotsman Henry St. Clair, who is believed to have "landed in Guysborough Harbour and travelled to Pictou and Stellarton" in 1398 (Cape Breton University 2007). Since the English project to colonize Ireland was well underway by this time, there can be no doubt that some of the ship's passengers would have been of Irish-descent. These examples offer us insight into pre-colonial migrations of the diaspora. However, after John Cabot landed in Acadia and Newfoundland in 1497, he claimed to "discover the land" in the name of King Henry VII. From the end of the 15th century, the migration of the Irish diaspora to North America became entangled with English colonization, as the English began to work to populate Indigenous land with subjects of the crown (*ibidem*).

3. Anti-colonial sentiments and colonial entrenchment

It is worth noting that like any nation or diasporic group, the characteristics and values of each person cannot be generalized in any substantive way without risking creating ahistorical or essentialist representations. The Irish diaspora in North America have been made up of people of all different walks of life, from those travelling through military service, to farmers and prisoners being sent via convict transportation. To understate the hardships that the Irish struggled through during the past four centuries as a colonized people trying to make a better life as a diasporic population, would be both unhelpful and historically inaccurate. However, while it should be evident that the Irish have much in common with other colonized nations around the world, they have also endured centuries of struggle through working as mercenaries for other European nations, and in some cases, agents of colonialism. From the 16th century onward, Irish troops which are now remembered as the Wild Geese of Ireland, served in the ranks of armies in various nations around intercontinental Europe. The work done by the Irish in these nations could have led many members of the diaspora to the far reaches of the globe as European powers sought to expand their access to distant geographies.

In North America, historical documents trace the arrival of Irish settlers to the start of British colonization in Virginia, which coincided with the development of the Plantation of Ulster. The establishment of Virginia, as the first English Settler-colony in North America (in 1607), preceded the estab-

lishment of the royal charter in the city of Derry/Londonderry[2] in 1613, and the colonial regime at the time was developed in both regions. The support of loyalist Ulster-Scotts, and Irish Protestant populations who intermarried with the Scottish settlers brought over to Ulster to help run the plantations, was instrumental in maintaining English-rule (Betit 1994). By the middle of the 17th century, as the regions under English-rule continued to grow, Cromwellian forces began to use prisoners granted transportation, and indentured servants from Ireland, to populate more of the English colonies, including those in Jamaica (Collins 2017). Although many of these groups were forcibly displaced, once they served their term of indenturement they often became entrenched in the ruling class. For example, in Jamaica, many of these settlers would go on to become slave-owners. Participation in colonization was therefore, at this point, forced in some cases and chosen in others.

According to Betit (1994), the 18th century brought an increase in the number of Ulster-Irish settlers arriving to live in the colonies, many of whom were loyalists from in and around cities like Derry/Londonderry. By mid-century, the Irish diaspora was deeply involved in intercolonial warfare, with Irish soldiers working for both the French and British during the North American battles of the Seven Years War, and both sides of the American War of Independence. The sectarian nature of conflict between the Ulster-Scotts supporting English Protestant rule and the Catholic-Irish populations, made for alliances based more along religious grounds than national ones. It is important to note that the skirmishes during this era were focused on who would control colonization in occupied territories in North America. It is likely (and certainly this is seen later with the Fenian Raids) that the resistance to English-rule in North America, was regarded as being part of the overarching battle against English-oppression that the diaspora had experienced in Ireland. However, whether we can qualify this as properly anti-colonial is more complicated. The fact that these battles were not aimed at preventing European invasion, rule, and occupation of Indigenous territories, makes claiming that Irish participation in the North American theatre of the Seven Years War or the American "War of Independence" was anti-colonial, entirely problematic. Even in Latin America, where the Irish diaspora played key roles in the liberation of Chile, Argentina, and Venezuela, the long history of the Irish working as mercenaries for competing colonial

[2] Derry is the anglicised toponym for Doire, which is Old Irish Gaelic for Oak Grove, and the original name of the city. A Royal charter in 1613 decreed its name as Londonderry. Today the second biggest urban centre in Northern Ireland bears both names, to reflect its coexisting cultures, Catholic and Protestant, and it is often shortened to L'Derry or colloquially referred to as "stroke city" because of debates around writing Derry/Londonderry as its name. The county is called Londonderry and has been part of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom since Partition, in 1922.

powers complicates any simplified analysis that would reduce resistance to Spanish-rule as being equal to anti-colonialism (Fanning 2018).

Nevertheless, the success of the American Revolution inspired Irish Republicans to form the United Irishmen, who subsequently led an uprising against the British in Ireland in 1798. The suppression and punishment of this rebellion provided a large population of prisoners for transportation to English colonies – most arriving in the region now known as Australia. Cornwallis, who was in charge of suppressing the rebellion, was also engaged in warfare against Indigenous nations in North America, putting out scalping bounties on Indigenous nations (Paul 2007). The failure of the Irish Rebellion of 1798, inspired unrest in the colonies in North America. In one example, in 1800, a group of Irishmen were caught planning a mutiny that is now known as the United Irish Uprising in Newfoundland (FitzGerald 2001).

The 19th century is famous for its large influx of members of the Irish diaspora fleeing the Great Famine, which was exacerbated by colonially enforced starvation in Ireland. What is perhaps less known, is that many of the Irish families who arrived in areas in North America, were actually given plots of land that had been stolen from Indigenous nations like the Mi'kmaq, who were undergoing colonially enforced starvation themselves, through forcible displacement and containment in non-arable lands (Paul 2007). It is possibly these members of the Irish diaspora who had the most in common with Indigenous nations, with their shared histories of oppression by the English (it is known that in regions like Mi'kma'ki, the Mi'kmaq recognized them as refugees). Kim Anderson (2000) has noted that Mi'kmaq families even took in babies from Irish families who were in danger because they were born out of wedlock. Indigenous nations also saw another influx of Irish migrants in 1848, as members of the diaspora fled to North America after the failed Young Irelander Rebellion. Unfortunately, some of the supporters of the rebellion went on to become the architects of colonial rule in North America.

In the region known as the United States, the 19th century was also one of extreme brutality, as then President Andrew Jackson, a member of the Irish diaspora of Protestant descent, implemented the large-scale forced removal of Indigenous nations from their homelands through the Indian Removal Act of 1830 (Deloria 1984). Many of the populations that were displaced, were forced to leave their homes without their belongings, walking to the regions that they would be re-settled in across long tracts of land, with thousands of people dying from starvation, exposure, and disease. Resistance was met with violence and full-scale military confrontations like the second Seminole War (La Duke 1999). Jackson and the subsequent governments that took up his work to depopulate the region for settlers and gold mining, would later have their legacy be known as the "Trail of Tears", which devastated Cherokee, Muscogee, Seminole, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) nations. Despite the hardships they encountered, the Choctaw nation raised

money and sent it to Ireland to help support those suffering from the Great Famine (Russell 2017). Indigenous nations like the Choctaw clearly saw the parallels between what they were experiencing and what the Irish were going through. This act of kindness is still celebrated and commemorated by a monument in County Cork in Ireland. It is unfortunate that there is no evidence demonstrating that the Irish have helped support the survival of Indigenous nations when they have experienced forced displacement and famine as a result of colonization. That the architects of colonization in the region now known as the United States have been primarily Irish, is not problematized by most members of the Irish diaspora – instead the fact that roughly half of the Presidents have been of Irish descent, is seen as a source of pride for Irish-Americans who live in occupied Indigenous territories.

Perhaps one of the most prominent examples of international anti-colonialism in Irish history, can be seen in the work of Irish abolitionists. As numerous Indigenous authors have noted, colonialism relied upon a triad of settler-slave-Indian (which arguably has now been replaced with a triad of settler-migrant-worker-Indigenous person). By disrupting the white supremacist foundations of colonialism, Irish abolitionists like Daniel O'Connell, who is famous in Ireland for getting the British to grant rights to Catholics, confronted some of the main contradictions that allowed colonialism to exist in the first place (Kinealy 2011). Further, when Frederick Douglas was visiting Ireland, and went to see O'Connell, groups like The Cork Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society worked directly with Douglas in helping him to organize, fundraise, and support his message of civil rights for Black Americans (Hume 2018).

By the middle of the 19th century, the development of anti-British sentiment amongst Irish settlers in the United States, many of whom were hardened by fighting in the civil-war, led to the establishment of the Fenian Brotherhood. The Fenian Raids against British North America were aimed at gaining control over territories held by the British, in order to use them as a bargaining chip for the liberation of Ireland (Senior 1991). The fact that some of the Irish people who fought for emancipation did not find the seizure of Indigenous land problematic, shows how deeply engrained the dehumanization of Indigenous people had become in the colonies. Had they been successful, these members of the Irish diaspora would have effectively re-colonized a region of North America, and held Indigenous nations and their land ransom for Irish liberation. Pressure caused by the Fenian Raids on British forts between 1866 and 1871, prompted the British to begin to work towards connecting the different colonies in British North America under one federal government in defense of British-rule (Stacey 1931). Irish intercolonial warfare became the basis for the transformation of the British colonies via confederation, and once again it was a member of the Irish diaspora who played a major role in that transformation.

Thomas D'Arcy McGee, whose life is celebrated by Irish-Canadians for having a huge role in the formation of Canada, was a Catholic who had fled to the

United States after having been a public supporter of the Young Ireland movement. Initially believing that the United States should win control over North America and push out the British, D'Arcy McGee had become disenchanted with religious sectarianism and republicanism both in Ireland and in the United States. As a result, he had become a vocal supporter of British colonization and argued that through confederation, the colony could forge a new national identity where Irish people could live together regardless of what faith they believed in (Wilson 2011). Some of D'Arcy McGee's remarkable achievements include ensuring that Catholic rights were enshrined in a region where previously Protestant forces had refused to acknowledge any rights for Catholics. In his later life, he was known as a fierce advocate for the creation of national unity amongst British-Canada, and believed that he was forging a better place for the Irish to live.

The Canadian nationalism that D'Arcy McGee fought so hard for, has overtime been used to prop up a national-mythology that Canada is no longer a colony, but is rather a consensual form of governance that emerged as separate. Further, the consolidation of British power via confederation was followed by the immediate contravention of prior treaties, such as The Treaty of Niagara, between the British-crown and Indigenous host-nations. A legislative regime that drew on the strategies that had been used against the Irish in Ireland, was immediately deployed against Indigenous nations who had their jurisdiction trespassed against by the colony. From the Gradual Civilization Act, to the modern-day Indian Act, laws that are eerily reminiscent of the Penal Laws and the Statute of Kilkenny in Ireland, were violently enforced to try to supress Indigenous sovereignty. In spite of these similarities, numerous descendants of the Irish diaspora went on to be the administrators of colonialism in this region. There is no doubt that the Irish diaspora has shaped this region for better or for worse – from Prime Minister John Sparrow David Thompson, who gave the order to execute Louis Riel in his role as the Federal Justice Minister, to Lester B. Pearson who instituted Canada's internationally leading universal healthcare, members of the Irish diaspora have invested their lives into shaping what Canada has become. It is unfortunate that so many of the Irish people who have shaped Canadian nationalism were willing to participate in the ongoing and illegal occupation of Indigenous nations by British colonialism.

On the other side of the planet, in Australia, the Irish had become deeply entrenched in genocide towards Indigenous Australians. Many of the original members of the Irish diaspora that arrived there, were sent via convict transportation, which was arguably a forced displacement (or at the very least a trip made under duress). The anti-colonial sentiments of convicts who had been transported after the 1798 Irish Rebellion, led to the Castle Hill convict rebellion of 1804. Later in 1854, the Eureka Rebellion again attempted to refuse colonial authority and was led by Irish descendants. Unfortunately, despite their anti-colonial sentiments, Irish people were also heavily engaged

in the Frontier Wars and other violent actions that worked to displace Indigenous populations from their homes (Malcolm, Hall 2019).

Unlike in Canada, no treaties were signed between the colonial government and the Indigenous nations whose land was invaded. However, by the middle of the 19th century, the colonial governments in Australia began to use strategies similar to Canada's in an effort to enforce assimilation via legislation. The *Victorian Aboriginal Protection Act of 1869*, and its amendment commonly known as the "Half-Caste Act", became the basis for the later *Aborigines Act of 1905,* all of which aimed to allow colonizers the jurisdiction to remove Indigenous and mixed-Indigenous children from their communities, and/or to forcibly assimilate them into white society. At the turn of the 20th century and the years that followed, the actions taken by the newly federated government had such a devastating effect on Indigenous communities, that the era became known as the "Stolen Generation". At the time when the federation was established, in 1901, members of the Irish diaspora were involved in all aspects of Australian life and made up 25% of the continents non-Indigenous population. Descendants of the members of the Irish diaspora who helped enforce the removal of Indigenous populations from their homes, would do well to read about the conditions in places like the Moore River Native Settlement, which was used also for internment. For other members of the diaspora, the conditions imposed on the Stolen Generation are a part of their history – as those who were mixed-Indigenous were some of those taken from their non-white families. It is a disservice to those families that the Irish diaspora continues to promote Australia as if it has resolved the harms of this contentious past, or is beyond continuing the harms of colonization. In 2015, the mainstream media began to note that once again, Australia is using withdrawal of financial support, removal of Indigenous children, and other methods of force and coercion, to attempt to force the closure of Australian Indigenous homelands which have been targeted for natural resource development projects by the Australian state (Pilger 2015). These tactics, Pilger notes, are in direct contravention of international law:

> Article 5 of the International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Icerd). Australia is committed to 'provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for […] any action which has the aim of dispossessing [Indigenous people] of their lands, territories or resources'. The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is blunt. 'Forced evictions' are against the law. (*Ibidem*)

It is extremely disappointing to see that former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, whose large-scale cuts to Indigenous supports caused these concerns to become present in the mainstream media, is now being given the role of special envoy for Indigenous Affairs to the new Prime Minister. If the actions

taken by the Australian, Canadian, or United States governments constitute violations of international law, why is the international community not intervening? Further, if the Indigenous nations in these countries are experiencing colonial oppression that has evolved from the strategies that were deployed by the British to rule and oppress Ireland, why are these places still some of the most popular destinations for the Irish diaspora to move to?

One reason most definitely pertains to the relationship that the Irish have to race. Several authors have historically linked the ethnic discrimination faced by the Irish to the experiences of people of colour around the world. The use of caricatures and animalistic epithets of the Irish, and various forms of stereotypes, were common in anti-Irish media around the world (De Nie 2014). Some Irish people also experienced slavery, which links the Irish to many other peoples around the world. However, it is evident when examining the history of the Irish diaspora, that the Irish have benefitted from their ability to pass as white, and that many of the people fleeing Ireland to make a better life, have spent their entire lives refusing to acknowledge the basic human rights of the nations whose sovereignty continues to be denied by settler-states.

To make matters worse, Irish people have the tendency to overlook their history of exercising whiteness while making claims about experiencing racism. On February 23, 2019, *The Irish Times Abroad*, posted an article entitled "Brexiles: 'It has become okay to make racial comments in the UK' ", with a caption that read: "Why people are leaving Brexit Britain: "My friend's kid in school was told: 'why don't you f**k off back to Ireland?'" (Carswell 2019). Articles like this are misleading and continue to attempt to equate ethnic discrimination and other forms of discrimination with racism. Irish people who are attempting to discuss racism should note that race is distinct from the term ethnicity. Racism is the system of oppression built around upholding white supremacy and shadism that oppresses people based on their inability to pass as white. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is the cultural or national background that people have. White Irish people cannot experience racism precisely because they are white[3]. Members of the Irish diaspora may face

[3] The positioning taken in this paper is an intentional intervention on the enduring arguments that are taken up by authors such as Hickman and Walter (1995) who argue that racism should not be limited to "colourism" because the Irish have experienced being dehumanized and othered by nations like Britain. The kind of arguments taken up by these authors obscures all experiences of othering and dehumanization into the category of racism, which then would be applicable to numerous types of discrimination (for example, ableism, homophobia, etc.). It is my argument here that while the Irish have endured harsh discrimination as a result of the dehumanization they have faced both in ethno-nationalist and religious persecution, it is precisely their whiteness which has allowed them to ascend through the colonial mechanisms of white supremacy. Irish people who refuse to understand racism from the perspective of non-white peoples who have extensively written about how racism

xenophobia, ethnic discrimination, religious discrimination, class discrimination, and a wide variety of other forms of oppression, but to mislabel this as racism, for anyone who is not both Irish and a person of colour, is a disservice to all Irish people. It also erases the unique experiences of mixed-race Irish diaspora members who are also people of colour and/or Black. Historically, Irish people have been actively engaged in resistance to anti-blackness through their work in struggles against apartheid in South Africa (Lodge 2006), their fights for abolitionism, and in the solidarity work that has been done connecting the Civil Rights movement in the United States with the Civil Rights movement in Derry/Londonderry (O'Dowd 2019). I do not intend to downplay the struggles for survival that many of the diaspora faced when they encountered the harsh realities of ethnic discrimination after they arrived to places like North America. But it needs to be said that claiming that white Irish people experience racism, is not only harmful in that it ignores that racism *is* white supremacy, but also causes harm by deflecting from the responsibility that the Irish diaspora has to undo the damages caused by our ancestors and relatives who have helped to create, sustain, and uphold colonial regimes that have functioned by dehumanizing Indigenous and Black communities. Beyond the historical legacies that members of the Irish diaspora inherit, it must be emphasized that the continued oppression of Indigenous nations in Australia, Canada and the United States is secured through the ongoing support of diasporic populations who are willing to become subjects and to benefit from colonial regimes.

4. The Irish Diaspora, migration, and colonial jurisdiction

Colonial regimes in Canada, Australia and the United States, have relied on the continued migration of Irish populations for quite some time. In Canada, Irish people aged 18-35 are eligible to attain work visas for up to 2 year stays through the International Experience Canada programme (Kenny 2018). This year, over 10,000 visas are available in the programme. In both Australia and the United States there are similar reciprocal agreements for Irish citizens of the same age range (working holiday visas) which allow Irish workers to contribute to the national economies in the colony, while also allowing them to experience what life could be like if they decide to move there. For Irish people facing lack of employment, or urban housing crises in cities like Dublin, these moves seem like ideal opportunities. However, for those who do decide to leave their homeland permanently, the process of gaining

is a system that upholds white supremacy and normalizes whiteness feed into myths about reverse-racism, and also undermine the difference between their experiences and the experiences of racism that mixed-race descendants of the Irish face as people of colour.

citizenship is also a process of re-enforcing colonial jurisdiction. In Canada, this entails taking an oath of allegiance to the Queen of England (because Canada is still a British colony). Since 1994, new citizens of Australia do not have to pledge allegiance to the Queen, but she remains the head of state for the country. Regardless of the beliefs that these countries are post-colonial, there has never been any formal decolonization in either region, and if there was, it would have to involve a different kind of governance, not based on colonial jurisdiction (via Indigenous-rule). While in North America there are Indigenous laws that can (and should) be followed, and treaties that are still considered legally binding to this day, Irish people moving to North America, whether in Canada or the United States, are not given the opportunity to be naturalized or become citizens within the nations whose land they will live on. The ability for Indigenous nations to naturalize citizens has been restricted since the introduction of quantum blood laws, and settler colonies continue to presume that Indigenous nations are in fact sub-communities of national subjects, rather than (at most) dual citizens. By restricting access to education about the obligations that newcomers from the Irish diaspora have as guests on Indigenous land, the colonial governments are able to increase settler populations that will uphold the process of colonization.

For members of the Irish diaspora who are interested in uncovering and strengthening their alliances with the Indigenous nations whose land they visit or move to, some may look to taking part in the wide-spread practice of saying land acknowledgements in their daily practices[4]. Dr. Ruth Koleszar-Green (2018) has noted that many of these statements that acknowledge the enduring presence and sovereignty of Indigenous countries, are phrased in a way to frame the people who speak them as guests on Indigenous land. To be a guest, however, means that we have a responsibility to understand the reciprocal relationship we are meant to have with the host nations whose land we travel to (175). It is this distinction that Koleszar-Green so eloquently explores. Members of the Irish diaspora, whether they have lived in Indigenous lands for generations or are just moving there, have an opportunity to learn the history, laws, and protocols of the regions they are in. In this way, they can become advocates for upholding Indigenous jurisdiction and move beyond being settlers whose presence continues colonization. The process of becoming responsible guests in Indigenous territories, is not a matter of discouraging the Irish from taking part in the landscapes that have been a part

[4] Land acknowledgements are statements used daily in professional settings in countries like Canada and Australia. They are generally used to preface the start of meetings, classes, lectures, and other events with a speaker verbally acknowledging and identifying the Indigenous nations whose land they are currently speaking on, the enduring Indigenous rights of that nation and the responsibilities of non-Indigenous peoples as guests on their land.

of so much of the Irish diaspora's history. Instead, it is a process through which the Irish diaspora can really acknowledge whose homelands they are living on, and find ways to have their presence as guests contribute to the work being done by these nations in the present.

5. A call for decolonizing the Irish

Since the turn of the 20th century, the revolutionary events that transformed Ireland into its present-day political configuration, have had significant impacts on Irish culture. Mythologies around Irish nationalism, influenced in large part by the heroic efforts of those who fought and died in the struggle to end British-rule, have been complicated by the complex realities of the sectarian qualities of anti-colonial conflict in Ireland. Since partition, the way that religious identity has been a driving force in the reasoning behind violence between Irish people has led many people to avoid characterizing the struggle for a united Ireland as an anti-colonial struggle at all. Is it possible, that the historical participation of the Irish in the dehumanization and colonization of North America and Australia, is because of the sectarian focus that has dominated Irish nationalism? If this is the case, there certainly should have been more records of alliances with Indigenous nations like those in the Mi'kmaq Confederacy who adopted Catholicism officially not long after Ireland was deemed a vassal state. In bringing attention to the entrenchment of the diaspora, I recognize the very real-risk of readers generalizing the Irish experience in these places – of ignoring the unwritten or less famous everyday narratives of solidarity and decolonial alliances that may have been taking place between the Irish and populations in these regions all along. As a mixed-Indigenous Mi'kmaw and Irish scholar, I continue to encounter many brilliant Indigenous people who identify as part-Irish, and who are actively committed to decolonization. Their stories, and the stories of their families, are part of a larger history of the Irish diaspora that has the potential to show a deep-rooted embeddedness in struggles against colonialism all around the world. I am encouraged not only by the work these members of the diaspora are doing in showing our mixed and shared heritages, but also in the enthusiasm that I have seen in academic circles in Ireland towards supporting research that can strengthen alliances between the Irish and Indigenous nations.

Currently, my own research explores in depth the ways that colonization in Ireland served as a testing-ground for strategies that were used in North America, and it is my hope that through understanding the similarities between Irish and Indigenous experiences members of the diaspora will become more committed to the liberation of all of the places they call home. The Irish have experienced first hand what it means to have their cultural practices banned, their language banned, to be removed from their land, to be forced into working on plantations, and so many other experiences that link

them with other colonized nations. Perhaps more importantly, they have at long last achieved at least partial decolonization of Ireland. For Indigenous nations who continue to fight while feeling like colonial occupation is a permanent reality after hundreds of years of oppression, the Irish have an opportunity to help Indigenous nations become more hopeful, by mapping the long view of their homes both in Ireland and around the world.

Returning to my opening comments on the Occupied Territory Bill of 2018, it is important to note that Palestine is struggling with misrecognition in the international community. Out of 193 member-states in the United Nations, only 137 recognize the Palestinian state (Lemon 2018). Without recognition of statehood and affirmed international boundaries, Palestine will not be considered a country in the international community. Despite this, the Irish government has recognized and re-affirmed the sovereignty of Palestine over its territories and the illegality of acts of aggression to settle Palestinian land by invasion. The strategy of misrecognition and denial is one of the most important weapons that colonialism has in its arsenal today (Coulthard 2014). Consider the fact that Indigenous nations, much of whose land has never been ceded to settler colonial governments in North America or Australia, have their own sovereignty, governments, and territorial boundaries, and yet none of the international community recognizes them as countries. There is a natural opportunity for alliances between these nations and the members of the Irish diaspora whose families have struggled to make it so that Ireland was able to become self-governing, be considered a country, and to exercise the jurisdiction of a nation-among-nations rather than a sub-community within the United Kingdom (or simply an ethnic-identity). Even for those members of the Irish diaspora who would consensually participate in unionism in Ireland, the support of colonial-rule in North America and Australia cannot be premised on more than a ruse-of-consent (Simpson 2017). Part of the way that I bring forward this work in my own research is by referring to Indigenous territories as countries, just like I imagine some people must have recognized Ireland as more than an adjacent appendage of the British Isles (Alderson 2019).

As members of the Irish diaspora continue to live in many of the world's colonized countries, working towards decolonization must mean something more than simply ending British-rule in Ireland. Decolonization must mean ending Irish participation in colonization itself. Ireland has often been recognized for its potential to be an important site of comparison in the struggle against colonialism (Said 2003). The global political system of British colonization, which caused nearly a millennia-of-suffering in Ireland, can arguably be traced as far back as the Anglo-Norman invasion in the 12th century (Cosgrove 2008). Examining the way that the Irish have survived and resisted against colonialism in Ireland may help the Irish diaspora to become resources for helping support international decolonization, but only if they are also willing to confront the legacies of Irish colonizers. I believe

that now that the dehumanization of the colonized is finally being confronted for the white supremacist mythology that it is, this era represents a crucial opportunity for the Irish to uncover those stories of the diaspora's history that go beyond the lack of empathy that is demonstrated when we celebrate the role of the Irish in colonization in other countries. It was precisely this point that David Lloyd re-iterated in 1999, when he wrote that the Irish have an opportunity to learn from their experiences, and to show real allieship with people of colour, both as the diaspora encountering colonial oppression of others outside of Ireland, and in Ireland where racism and membership in "Fortress Europe" offers to once again allow the Irish to invoke their white privilege (107). In reflecting on the histories and arguments laid out in this article, I hope that members of the Irish diaspora will join those of us asking the questions posed by this special issue of *Studi irlandesi*: *Whose Homelands?* We have much to gain through asking ourselves whose homelands we are on; whose homelands we are connected to; and whose homelands we are supporting. In asking these types of questions, with an aim to extending to other nations struggling with colonialism the same empathy that some of us feel for our relatives and ancestors who live(d) in Ireland, I believe we can finally piece together where the Irish diaspora fits into the global project of decolonization. To do so, we must go beyond the white-washing of the diaspora's history that normalizes and celebrates white-Irish advancement through entrenchment in colonial occupations. For members of the Irish diaspora who live on occupied Indigenous land, this means taking on the work of prioritizing being responsible guests of our host-nations (Koleszar-Green 2019). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, if we can build on our ancestors' wisdom, and draw on our experiences as a diasporic nation, I believe we have the potential to become agents of the type of international accountability that will bring an end to the colonial era.

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