

## **Sounding Irish-Kurdish-Circassian Relationalities: Affirming Pluritopic, Imparative Methods**

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### **Introduction**

This article emerges out of numerous dialogues I was fortunate to have with Barzoo Eliassi (a Kurdish scholar whose work focuses on social work, statelessness and migration), Madina Tlostanova (a field-defining Circassian-Uzbek decolonial thinker) and Lillis Ó Laoire (an innovative scholar of Irish language, culture and Gaelic epistemologies), in which we related our histories of struggle against western imperialism.<sup>1</sup> The dialogues returned to the idea that coloniality of power is a global logic of racist/sexist domination which has been co-constructed on multitudes of communities and transported back and forth at multiple localities around the world-system (Quijano 1992). The dialogues raised the issue of how certain experiences of imperialism and coloniality have been overlooked within anti-colonial grand narratives. When broad, sweeping narratives are used for global historicization, specific local instances of colonial domination become erased behind monolithic interpretations of the forces that occupy their lands.

Here, we can think especially about the eulogization of Russia as an anti-western force or the USSR as having been an agent of anti-colonial transformation when both entities committed genocides and

displacements against indigenized people in Caucasia (Tlostanova 2022: 1008). We can reflect on the desire to recall the Islamic caliphate as a convivial, recalcitrant, anti-western force, while the narratives of those oppressed within Muslim-dominant States are circumvented (Eliassi 2021: 132). Likewise, we can reflect on colonized people ‘within Europe’ with histories of domination that exceed a 500-year timeframe, whose status as fully human was never accepted by their colonial oppressors, yet whose status as ‘European’ is an inconvenient disrupter of the strict European/non-European binary employed in a portion of decolonial historicisms. There are several instances of coloniality that do not fit the original modernity/coloniality group’s historical mold. This article reads in a relational manner some figures that were key in the colonization of Ireland, Kurdistan, and Circassia, so as to emphasize a pluriversal and interconnected approach, which will be key to resisting the current wave of global coloniality and imperialism, and beyond.

### **Irish-Kurdish Relationality: *Dengbêj* Methods of Resistance**

Song has played a pivotal role in preserving the macro-narratives of power of the colonized as they have struggled against attempts to erase and whitewash their histories and legitimate the occupation of their lands. When I listened to Şivan Perwer’s (1955-) live recording of Seyde Cigerxwîn’s (1903-1984) poem *Kîme Ez?* (Who Am I?), the emotion within the performance reminded me of Irish rebel music (Cigerxwîn 1973). Through the question of “who am I?” the song enters into an ontological testimony of the Kurdish historical experience: “who am I, you ask? The Kurd of Kurdistan, a lively volcano... I saved the Middle East from the Romans and the crusaders... My mighty ancestors were free people. Like them I want to be free and that is why I fight; for the enemy won’t leave in peace and I don’t want to be forever oppressed” (Liddle 2019). Perwer’s music was banned by the Turkish, Iraqi, and Syrian States due to its content and for being in Kurmanji. He was forced to leave his homeland due to fear of arrest or assassination.

Cigerxwîn, who had described Perwer as “the voice of his poetry,” was incarcerated and was also forced into exile from Kurdistan on multiple occasions (Şivan Perwer 2023).

Further resistance is enacted by the Kurdish musical practitioners referred to as *dengbêjs*, who are singer-poets of Kurdistan. Through their *keilam* (recital song) they resist the colonial nation-State borders by preserving their own sense of geographical homeness while maintaining the foreignness of imposed nation state structures (Hamelink and Barış 2014: 35). Through *keilam* the *dengbêjs* were able “to deliberately avoid being incorporated into a central state structure” by drawing on Kurdish place names, landscape marks, foregrounding local authority, celebrating the figure of the outlaw, memorializing battles against the State and allowing themselves to exist in an alternative temporality to that of the State (Hamelink and Barış 2014: 36).

Irish-Kurdish relationality can be traced within two 1916 British imperial moves, the first of which being the British response to the 24th of April Easter Rising in Dublin. This entailed the shelling of the city, the killing of 260 civilians and 66 rebels, and the execution of 16 of its leaders without trial. The second move occurred 22 days later, when the British and French (with support from Russia and Italy) carved up west Asia through the ratification of the *Sykes-Picot Agreement*, sequestering Kurdistan within four colonial boundaries. Within six months the man who partitioned Ireland, David Lloyd George (1863-1945), became the Prime Minister of Britain, who along with Mark Sykes (1879-1919) and Zionist leaders, drafted the *Balfour Declaration* (1917), which declared Palestine a British possession (Eliassi 2021: 20). During the first twentieth-century Irish National War of Liberation (1919-1921), the Kurds participated in *Ath Thanra al Iraqiyya al Kubra* (the Iraqi Revolt of 1920) along with various other Arab groups. This was part of Kurdish resistance to the British imperialist land-grab project resulting from the *Mandate for Mesopotamia and Palestine* (1920). To suppress the Kurds and exploit their stateless position, the British used chemical weapons on the rebels, which were advocated by Winston Churchill.

On the 14th of December 1918 the first general election which extended the vote to women resulted in the overwhelming return of the Republican Sinn Féin Party which advocated full liberation from British rule. The Irish Republic was declared in 1919 and in January 1920 the British responded by sending in over 10,000 soldiers to form a newly established group referred to as ‘the Black and Tans’ to stop the Irish from convening for political assembly. The ‘Tans’ or *Dúchrónaigh*, a colonial militia group, recruited substantially from prisons in England and trained in Ireland were given license to commit murder and sexual violence (Breathnach and O’Halpin 2021). This resulted in guerrilla warfare against the British and civil disobedience which eventually led to the British losing control of the majority of the south of the country. As a result, Lloyd George negotiated a ceasefire which led to the proposition of a divide and rule Treaty that ended in partition, the occupation of 6 counties in the north and a bloody civil war (1922-1923) in which the British supplied weaponry and ammunition as well as aerial capability to the pro-British forces.

Three days after the 1918 election in Ireland, Kurdish rebels established *Komela Tealîya Kurdistanê* (Society for the Rise of Kurdistan) in Istanbul which sought to form an independent State in the east of Turkey and promote Kurdish language and culture. This inspired ideas of revolution amongst the Kurds across the colonial borders; due to the denial of recognition by the British, Mahmud Hafid Barzani (1878-1956), referred to as the ‘King of Kurdistan’, demanded a full Kurdish independent State and led guerilla warfare against the British forces in Iraq. This resulted in British bombardment which amounted to “the ‘largest British led military campaign of the entire inter-war period’” (Newsinger 2006: 125; Jacobsen 1991: 323). The British killed around 10,000 rebels and even more unaccounted civilians, while the pro-British Faisal I (1885-1933) was put into power, shoring up British control until the establishment of the United Arab Republic in 1958 (Newsinger 2006: 126). Meanwhile the British would send the Black

and Tans into Ireland to suppress insurgency and terrorize civilians; regularly heard laughing and cheering during their atrocities, they destroyed Irish towns, beat non-combatants to death, burned Balbriggan and Cork, and interrupted a Gaelic football match at Croke Park opening fire on the crowd killing fourteen people and wounding over sixty. One of the people shot and killed was the Right Full Back for Tipperary, Mícheál Ó hÓgáin (1896-1920).

After the British partitioned Ireland, the Black and Tans would be sent to police Palestine and other parts of empire including some occupied Kurdish regions (Gannon 2019). During the proposed *Anglo-Iraqi Treaty* in 1922, the British then began a diplomatic war, making promises to the Kurds concerning regional autonomy in return for allegiance and support of the British presence (McDowall 1996: 169-71). They exploited the question of Kurdish rights and safeguards as a negotiation tactic within the redrawn boundaries to ensure full control over Iraq's foreign policy and as make-weight in dealings with the Turkish government. Once the *Anglo-Iraqi Treaty* was finally signed in 1922, it did not take long for the British to renege on their promises to the Kurds, most explicit of which being Churchill's declaration in support of provisions for Kurdish self-determination in the house of commons (McDowall 1996: 170). By 1926 the promises made in 1918 "had been managed down to the residual rights" as Britain "wittingly abandoned the Kurds to an Arab government intent on evading these pledges" amounting to a "betrayal" (McDowall 1996: 171). This exploitative British tactic of keeping the question of Kurdish independence and cultural rights "up its sleeve" (McDowall 1996: 170) was only the beginning of the disingenuous engagement with and depiction of the "ethnopolitical reality of the Kurds" (Eliassi 2021: 132). Today, as a means of denying equality, the predominantly Muslim-majority States in the West Asia represent the Kurdish liberatory struggle as "a colonial toy used by the West and Israel" (Eliassi 2021: 20). This is despite the fact that "the Kurds violently resisted the British occupation" and instead of being supported by the British were actually "bombed fiercely" by them (Eliassi 2021: 132). The Kurds' further ensnaring within the "colonial

matrix of power” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 37) between Western colonialism and Muslim majority State imperialism is salient today in Rojava, where the Kurds demand full inclusion and equality.

The aforementioned States learned these methods of suppression directly from the British military advisors who had tried and tested them in Ireland. A contemporary of Arthur Balfour (1848-1930) and Frederick Edwin Smith (1872-1930) – who were instrumental in the suppression of the Easter Rising – Edward Wood (1881-1959) was a major advisor in the formation of colonial tactics and suppression of independence movements across Britain’s colonies. During National Liberation War (1919-1921), he recommended that steps be taken to federalize Ireland into the UK, a predominant aim of which being to increase England’s access to Irish military labour. Irish resistance to this extraction of labour for British imperial conquests would prompt Churchill to remark: “the bloody Irish, what have they ever done for our wars?” In the 1940’s Wood would advise that to manage ‘the Kurdish problem’ the Turkish State needed to take the exemplar of how Scotland was incorporated into the Union with Britain. A Turkish diplomat responded by saying “Kurds aren’t Scottish... Kurds are Irish,” implying, like the Irish, they were incapable of engaging in ‘civil’ or ‘rational’ negotiation with the colonial metropole and being fully integrated into the imperium.

In terms of inter-imperial significance of the Kurdish-Irish-Circassian relationality and the invented discourse of race key to the logic of coloniality, we can reflect on the following matrix of power. While the British pushed the colonial narrative that the Kurds were “‘primitive’ tribesmen unqualified of governing themselves” (Eliassi 2021: 39), Russian anthropologists linked the Kurds to a supremacist European racial origin as part of their cultural war with the Ottoman empire (Natali 2005: 9-14). As detailed further below, while Russian officials declared the complete inhumanity of the Circassians, the British went to Circassia to express support and document the Circassians as

anachronistic subjects in need of civilization (Richmond 2013). While the British looked at the Irish as Ape-like “human chimpanzees” which were not fit for rational thought or government (Kingsley 1894), Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) described the 1916 rebellion as a “blow against the power of English imperialism;” Lenin would eventually meet Roddy Connolly (1901-1980), the son of the executed political theorist and military commander James Connolly (1868-1916), and profess to have read *Labour in Irish History* (McGuire 2008). Later the British policy on the use of chemical weapons would not be spared on the Irish; during the third twentieth-century War of National Liberation (1969-1997) the British deployed CS gas against incarcerated POW in the 1970s (Spelling 2016). In 2018 a Turkish anti-imperial feminist, MP Leyla Güven (1964-), led a hunger strike protest of 250 Kurdish POW against the incarceration of Abdullah Öcalan (1949-). They drew inspiration from Bobby Sands (1954-1981) the leader of the 1981 Irish hunger strikes in the Maze prison and were supported by Irish ex-POW, including Martina Anderson (1962-), who personally met Güven during the strike. In his outline for Kurdish liberation, Öcalan (2012: 41) makes reference to the peace process in the North of Ireland as a potential inspiration for Kurdistan, whereas the Turkish government sought advice from the British government on how it negotiated with and subdued the PIRA for its suppression of the Kurdish liberation movement.

### **Irish-Circassian Relationality: *Dzeguako* Methods of Resistance**

Sonorous expression has given strength to the Adyghe/Circassian people in remembering their histories and resisting Russian extermination. Given a choice to be relocated to other territories in the Caucasus controlled by the Russian army or leave the Caucasus, the overwhelming majority of the Circassians did not accept Russian blackmail. Thus, the overwhelming majority of Circassians were expelled from their homeland in 1864, and those who survived the genocide generated innovative ways to preserve their identity. Despite

further Russian ethnic cleansing, as well as facing further exclusion in the States into which they arrived, the Circassian people built an array of songs of resistance. They had previously relied on the *dʒegnaiko*, “an ancient Circassian caste of public singers, poets, musicians and storytellers” (Tlostanova 2022: 1005) to preserve the memory and language, despite various attempts to destroy the Circassian language.

One song that documents the struggle against Russian imperialism, composed by a collective group under the direction of the reputed bard Lhepschiqwe Tawiqwe is *The Song of the Kabardian Night Assault* (Jaimoukha 2012). The song narrates the events of the Kabardian army’s resistance against the Russian Tsarist forces who overpowered the Circassians at the end of September 1779 (Jaimoukha 2011). It marked the start of a century long war against the Circassians which would result in the Circassian genocide of the 1860s. The dirge recited: “Let me tell you the true story of the Kabardian Night Assault... Our time-honoured customs and revered way of life... Our sheep herds used to graze in the vast Qwrey Steppe... Our herds of horses had their pasturelands in the Setey Steppe... “This is unbearable!” – said the Kabardians, as they held their national council... The Kabardians gather full armed in large numbers and stand ready for battle...” That it is verily more fitting for us to die with our honour intact, than to endure such a miserable life!”

When I listened to the version sung by esteemed Circassian musicologist and singer Vladimir Bereghwn (1939-1998), the choral chanting of “Woyra, worariyra, woriyariy” reminded me of the keening of the Irish lament tradition, which functioned within a local, semi-public space of critical reflection on and resistance to colonial violence. When Madina spoke about how Circassian women represented themselves through song as they “concentrated on women’s feelings and emotions, on their willingness to be active and to make decisions in all spheres, including the erotic one” (Tlostanova 2010: 199), it conjured up images of women’s power within the Irish keening structure and wider

indigenous song practice. Similar to the Kurdish *dengbêjs* and Irish *filí*, the *jegwak'we* (roving minstrels) paid tribute to the figure of the outlaw, those who stepped outside of the imperial order, rallying the resistance of the people (Jaimoukha 2012).

In all three contexts, each new generation has paralleled the intensifications of occupation with revivals of resistance music. The Kurdish sonorous resistance was continued through the 2000's revival of *dengbêj* art (Hamelink and Bariş 2014: 43). In the Circassian context, there was a revival of music of resistance during the 1990's and there is another resurgence unfolding today. *Jrþjej's* album 'After the War Comes Funeral: Circassian Songs of Resistance and Sorrow 1763-1824' shows that young Circassian musicians continue to resist and remember the experiences of their ancestors through song. This rejuvenation is taking place despite the continued suppression of processions to mark the Circassian National Day of Mourning occurring in Nalchik, against which *Jrþjej's* album was created in protest. Beginning in 2022 the ban on the procession has continued through to May 2026 (Dergacheva 2024; Chukharova 2026). Notwithstanding Russian invasion, on May 21st 2024 the 'National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide' in Kyiv held a dialogue on the Circassian genocide. This evidences that the invasion of Ukraine has propelled to the fore the stories of the colonized and the oppressed within the former-Soviet space. Last year the Ukrainian parliament officially recognized the Circassian genocide (Mukhina 2025).

However, inside the Russian State, one activist remarked that the suppression of the Circassian Day of Mourning processions is part of a reformulating Russian imperialism which demands that all those it colonized "demonstrate complete solidarity and not remind Moscow of inconvenient pages of history" (Dergacheva 2024). Further musical activism from outside of the Russian imperium and within the Caucasian diaspora can be seen in the coming-together of the *Azar Ensemble and 70'lik*, comprising Adyghe and Abkhazian singers. They

show how displaced Caucasian communities continue to convene in their adopted homes to preserve their knowledge, develop their music and remember their expulsion, despite, in this case, the Turkish State control over their native names, surnames, languages and placenames.

At every stage of colonialism-coloniality the invocation of Irish language (*Gaeilge* and Gammon) song has been pursued towards decolonial horizons, yet it has also been invoked symbolically by the English colonial regime and 26-county State without commitment to material decolonization. In the aftermath of the British State's attempt to remilitarize its partitioned border in Ireland arising out of the 'Brexit' referendum, today we are hearing young artists turning towards Irish language and anti-colonial sensibilities in their musical pursuits across the spectrum of traditional music, *Sean-Nós* (old style ornamented singing), rebel music and protest song. One recent instance of this form of resistance centered around the mobilization in opposition to the attempted closure of The Cobblestone in Dublin in 2021. The Cobblestone is a public house at *Margadh na Feirme* ('Market of the Farmers' or 'Smithfield'), once a central market for Dublin's economy reliant on the skills and intelligence of nomadic peoples.

Thinking from the underside of the colonial difference while learning from each other in the interstices of inter-imperiality, the colonized can co-construct indices of support and models of time outside of Anglo-modernity's normative frameworks. This assists in the strengthening of connection, the spotting of forms of colonial self-negation and the acquisition of "additional relational angles" which can be "sung in a chorus of different voices" (Tlostanova 2022: 1009). In the Irish context, this could foster understanding of how Anglo-modern genres and Anglocentric appetites continue to exert power and control on the potential subversiveness of Irish-language music via the dominance of colonial and capitalist logics via record labels, modern stylistics and aesthetics. Inter-imperial research can also lead to deepened analysis and careful orientation of the anti-colonial impulse, where necessary political solidarity and self-orientalization collide and converge.

As in the case of the Kurds, that the experiences of the Adyghe and Gaels<sup>2</sup> were interlaced between and submerged under imperial histories. One instance of these interlocking histories relates to the role of James Stanislaus Bell (1797-1858), a British ‘adventurer’ in the Circassian war. Bell was in Circassia at the same time as two other British opportunists, Edmund Spencer<sup>3</sup> and J.A. Longworth, who went on expeditions to Circassia to sketch Circassia and research the Circassians. Spencer (1836: 19) wrote about the “wonton barbarity” and “insane passion for destruction” of the conquering Russian forces in Crimea. With respect to Circassia, Spencer (1836: 296) writes that Russia was in “direct violation of her own most sacred engagements, entered into with England and France”. It is clear from Spencer’s accounts that he was more concerned about British military strategy, access to trade routes, the ‘protection’ of cultural artefacts than he was about the welfare and sovereignty of the Circassians.

J.A. Longworth worked as a correspondent for the Times newspaper, a propaganda institution for British imperialism, to which he had contributed articles on the situation in Circassia, which are not included in his mémoires. His *A Year Among the Circassians* expresses that his ambition is aimed at “warmly sympathizing with the patriotic mountaineers in their struggle against their oppressors” (Longworth 1840: vi). Longworth (1840: vi) adds that “the soil of Circassia [is] untrodden” and “forbidden, ground to the traveler”. Longworth (1840: vi) sets up his agenda as completing antiquarian pursuits into Circassia that had not “penetrated” into specific Circassian regions. In other words, he sought to enhance British intelligence in the area and produce a British imperial narrative of salvation of the Circassians, which was key to British geopolitical impression management in their fight against Russia for control over the Black Sea. Longworth had spent a year with Bell (1840) in Circassia, who had previously written a volume on his travels three years previous to Longworth. Longworth (1840: vii) describes that “the landing of an European there is too extraordinary and event not to be deeply imprinted on the recollection

of the whole population, nor has such occurred within the memory of man that forms not still a common topic of conversation there.” Subsequently, despite not learning Circassian language he professes that it has “no affinity with any other known tongue.”

All three men were alleged to have been in Circassia on the orders of the British military in order to provoke the Russians. This movement stemmed from David Urquhart’s (1805-1877) quest to improve Anglo-Turkish relations in 1832, which resulted in the 1836 mission of the *Vixen*. This entailed Bell and his brother breaking the Russian blockade on Circassia on the orders of Urquhart, their ambition being to provoke the Russians into war or to land in Circassia and convince them into alliance with the British Crown. While Longworth and Spencer were part of the ‘soft’, cultural power arm of the British military, Bell, engaged in *mémoire* writing but was also a combatant and tradesman, who sought to protect his wealth that he had accrued in Moscow, which was under threat from the Russian authorities. On face value Bell could be seen as a humanist and defender of Circassian sovereignty, but Bell’s presence was part of the aforementioned strategic English provocation against Russia (Richmond 2013: 50). Bell had studied the Circassians and had hoped to profit from Circassia becoming independent and open to British trade. These figures are still contested within British epistemic centers, with Oxford-based historian Ahmad (2024: 878) emphasizing Longworth’s role as a strategic assessor within the British imperial project whereas Cambridge historian Kумыков (2024) offers a conservative appraisal of the direct connection between Spencer and the British military. At any rate, what is clear is that Britain aimed to incorporate the Circassian army as an ally for further imperialism in the Black Sea, where England’s interest lay in supporting the Circassians in order to contain the Russian advancements on the Black Sea.

When Britain had commissioned antiquarian mapping and ethnographies of Irish land and people during the 1820’s and 1830’s,

antiquarian foot soldiers were surreptitiously sent to Circassia under the banner of solidarity during the same period. While Britain starved the majority Irish speaking population in Ireland during the 1840's, the Russians were developing induced famine and scorched earth policies in Circassia. During the Russo-Circassian war Ireland experienced the 1798 rebellion, the act of Union as well as *An Drochshaol*, a genocide in which 1.5 million people starved and died in Ireland from 1845-1852 (Mokyr 1983). From the 1830s Russian generals such as Alexei Velyaminov (1785-1838), Grigory Khristoforovich von Zass (1797–1883) and Lazar Serebryakov (1795-1862) designed Russian genocidal coloniality within Circassia. They would have studied British and French colonial technologies of conquest and methods of settler-colonialism. Equally the British would have amassed intelligence from Russian colonial tactics during the Russian war against the Circassians, despite rhetorically supporting them. This is how the logics of coloniality are co-developed by imperial powers, when on the face of it, it appears that they are in opposition; however, this imperial opposition is on a territorial level – towards the colonized the imperial powers behave cooperatively in terms of sharing and co-developing the logics of conquest. In 1841 Russia renewed their previously imposed blockade on Circassian ports, stopping the Circassians from being able to trade by sea, a technology that the British would later use a few years later in Ireland at the height of *An Drochshaol*, as they militarily shut down ports and escorted food to England. In 1841 Serebryakov sought to capitalize on the poor harvest in 1839 to induce “forced starvation” (Richmond 2013: 57). At the end of the 1830s Velyaminov planned the settlement of the Circassian lands by the Cossaks, while Zass advocated brutal methods such as mass murders, decapitations, rape, and incineration (Richmond 2013: 56). He formulated a dehumanizing discourse against Circassians, referring to them as animals and thieves” (Richmond 2013: 56). Zass retired with military honours and in 2003 a statue of him was erected in Armavir/Yermelhabl, where mass murder against the Circassians took place (Bianet 2020).

During the height of *An Drochshbaol*, Charles Trevelyan (1807-1886), responsible for the British response to relieve starvation in Ireland declared: “the judgment of God sent the calamity to teach the Irish a lesson, that calamity must not be too much mitigated... The real evil with which we have to contend is not the physical evil of the Famine, but the moral evil of the selfish, perverse and turbulent character of the people” (Woodham Smith 1991[1962]: 156).” Widespread was the belief among the most fervent Protestants, English rulers and colonial administrators that the Irish ‘Papists’ were being punished due to their ignorance and inferior status. Four years after the worst period of starvation in Ireland, the treaty of Paris 1856 was signed with the ambition of ending the Crimean War. Two of the British signatories were George Villiers (1800-1870), who held the position of the fourth Earl of Clarendon, while the other was Henry John Temple (Viscount Palmerston, 1784-1865). Temple had been born into a settler-colonial English family in Ireland that had amassed some of the greatest amount of land of any planter during the expropriation dating to the 16th century (Fenton 2013: 5). In 1834 he would be in power when the Irish coercion bill was passed, a law which gave power to arrest people displaying any form of sedition against the Crown and, furthermore, the Poor Law, which in the context of Ireland punished poverty and starvation with demeaning, purposeless labour (Fenton 2013: 35). In 1865 he would go on to introduce one of the many iterations of internment without trial policy to subdue the Fenian resistance in Ireland. Villiers and Temple’s signing of the Paris Treaty 1856 resulted in Russian rule over Circassia, with no obligation to give rights to Circassians or to be held accountable for the extermination of Circassians, setting up the legal conditions for the worst of the Circassian genocide which was about to occur in the 1860’s.

Temple (Palmerston) and Villiers (Clarendon) left the Circassians completely at the mercy of the Russian regime; despite having expressed their support for Circassian sovereignty the British “walked away from the Circassians and left them to their fate” (Richmond 2013: 63). Furthermore, “geopolitical calculations on the part of England and

France left them empty handed once again and even placed St Petersburg in a better position than before the war to drive the Circassians from their homeland” (Richmond 2013: 60). Four years previous to the Paris Treaty Villiers (1800-1870) ended his tenure as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, during which time he oversaw the worst year of *An Drochshaol* and suppressed the 1848 Young Ireland rebellion. Instead of being held accountable for genocide in Ireland he was conferred a ‘Knight of the Garter’ by Queen Victoria in 1849. After the British retreated from the war and reneged on their promises to the Circassians, Queen Victoria would ‘knight’ Palmerston as she had done Villiers in 1849.

British involvement in the colonization of the Caucasus can be traced to the 1813 division of the Caucasus between Russia and Persia. Alexander I (1777-1825) had personally appointed Pavel Tsitsianov (1754-1806) as the Commander of the Russian imperial forces in the Caucasus. One year after Ireland was subsumed into the United Kingdom, in 1802 Tsitsianov was the initial instigator of the brutal and intense methods of conquest that Russia would employ in the Caucasus (Richmond 2013: 12-13). After the Russo-Persian war (1804-1813) they negotiated the Treaty of Gullistan (1813) to divide the lands of the Caucasus between them. The British orientalist Gore Ouseley (1770-1844) brokered the 1813 treaty of Gullistan, when Russia and Persia reconstructed its borders with the majority of South Caucasus territories and the entirety of North Caucasus territories coming under Russian rule (Yemelianova 2014).

Ouseley was born in Limerick, Ireland into an Anglican settler-colonist family. After the Royalist Civil War (1642-1651) in England his ancestors Richard (Wexford) and Jasper (settled in Limerick) fled England and settled on stolen land during the Cromwellian plantations (Arthur 1876: 2-3). His father Ralph Ouseley (1739-1803) was a major in the British army an antiquarian, collector, and published member of the Royal Irish Academy. His brother Joseph Walker Jasper Ouseley was an orientalist and colonel posted to Bengal. From a Gaelic-Adyghe relational

perspective the optics of one of the beneficiaries of one of the most brutal colonizations of Ireland brokering the start of direct Russian rule over Circassia are striking. In the 1840's and 1850's, when Britain claimed to be in support of the indigenous Circassians, it had already been involved in the legitimization of Tsitsianov's conquest of the Caucasus. In the same period Britain was committing genocide against indigenous people in Ireland. British support to the indigenous Circassians while ethnically cleansing indigenous Gaels exposes the rhetoric of Anglo- and Euro-modernity. When Villiers was Lord Lieutenant in Ireland during *An Drochshaol*, Britain sent combatants, antiquarians, and reporters to Circassia, yet in 1856 claimed that it had never had any contact with Circassia. When it came to the Paris Treaty 1856 British support to the Circassians was proven to be artificial, and simply part of its maneuvers to weaken the expanding Russian empire.

One year afterwards Dimitry Milyutin (1816-1912) would outline Russia's plan to deport every Circassian with the aim of "eliminating the Circassians" and "to cleanse the land of hostile elements" (King 2008: 94). Less than a decade after the Treaty of Paris 1856 Russia would intensify the use of genocidal logics that the British had developed during *An Drochshaol*, i.e. forced starvation, religious conversion and Russification. The Circassians would refer to this period as *Tsitsekun* ('the Massacre') a period of time in the 1860's whereby 1.5 million Circassians were mass murdered. Nikolai Yevdokimov (1804-1873) was the commanding Russian general during the genocide. Yevdokimov did not intervene in the starvation of the Circassians "but actually exacerbated it by driving more refugees to the shore" (Richmond 2013: 94). During *Tsitsekun* and *An Drochshaol* Yevdokimov and Trevelyan both knew that thousands would die through their policies yet did not intervene as hundreds of thousands of people starved to death.

Richmond (2013: 93) makes the link between the methods of Trevelyan and Yevdokimov; in relation to Trevelyan's treatment of the Irish he says that "by denying them food, they condemned the Irish to death just as surely as if they had killed them outright." Furthermore, there is an

uncanny similarity in the description of the sight of emaciated bodies hanging on the edge of Irish towns, who were too weak to walk and then eaten by dogs; on seeing the corpses ravaged by dogs in 1847, Rev Francis Webb (1814-1870) asked in a public letter: “are we living in a portion of the United Kingdom?” (Delaney 2012: 131). In the same year the Parish Priest in Roscommon would write “in very many instances the dead bodies are thrown in waste cabins and dykes and are devoured by dogs. In some parts the fields are bleached with the bones of the dead that were previously picked by dogs” (Bexar 2016: 67). Little over a decade later the Circassians waiting in Sochi for the boat to the Ottoman empire faced the same fate (Richmond 2013: 93). While the Circassians waited in Sochi on May 21st 1864, the Russians held a victory parade on the same day. During the genocide the British ambassador to Russia from 1860 to 1864 Francis Napier (1819-1898) was kept abreast of Russian plans for the expulsion of the Circassians, who was even informed that “an unknown tribe had been discovered in the mountains” whom the Russians were preparing to displace (King 2008: 95).

On April 7th, 1864, Circassian leaders sent a petition to Alexandrina Victoria, the reigning British monarch requesting humanitarian aid. Victoria was later to be known as “The Famine Queen” amongst the Irish. She sent meagre support to the Irish during *An Drochshaol* – using effective hyperbole indigenous epistemologies suggest that she donated only £5; she did not respond to the Circassians’ plea for help during *Tsitsekum*. This is not coincidental if there is anything to be read into her first name being given to her after her godfather, Alexander I (1777-1825), the emperor who had originally sanctioned the conquest of Circassia. The same mechanisms of denial are employed by the Russians and British to reject the accusation of genocide in both instances, citing a lack of ‘expressed intent’ and ignoring of how starvation was used as a weapon of mass murder, colonization, and conquest.

## Conclusion

Panikkar (1980: 9) referred to the possibility of speaking past hegemonic control on mutual intelligibility as “diatopical hermeneutics”

which he simplified as “the thematic consideration of understanding the other without assuming that the other has the same basic self-understanding and understanding as I have.” This form of understanding leads us away from a way of thinking that perceives itself as “ultimate” and towards an “imperative philosophy,” whereby we are “ready to undergo the different philosophical experiences of other people,” we do “not pretend to possess a fulcrum outside time and space and above any other philosophy from which to scrutinize the different human philosophical constructs” and we are “open to a dialogical dialogue with other philosophical views, not only to dialectical confrontation and rational dialogue” (Panikkar 1988: 127-29).

Pointing out Panikker’s limits concerning western dualisms and building on his “questioning of modernity”, Mignolo and Tlostanova (2009: 15) would later describe “pluritopic decolonial hermeneutics” as a mode of analysis that highlights submerged and neglected indigenized perspectives, which can assist the colonized in our piecing of the puzzle of global coloniality together. Through this “imperative” way of understanding the *filí* (Irish song-poets), the *dengbéjs* and the *dzɛgɔakɔ*, we can reflect on the “continuing power asymmetry” constructed by the figure of the antiquarian, anthropologist and the folklorist, who, as they collect and taxonomize the “space that is being known,” deny the oral practitioner’s capacity to know and research themselves (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2009: 18). The “imperative” can take attention away from the dominant narratives which abide by the narration of imperial differences, and instead focus on how colonial powers, while appearing to be at war with each other, collude and co-construct the logics of coloniality on indigenized communities, while rhetorically offering them solidarity. While the colonial logics deployed in Ireland, Circassia and Kurdistan had their own specificities, they were not invented there, *tabula rasa*. Caught in the middle between these imperial designs are the indigenized, downtrodden, the *cosmbuintir*, those who are denied rights and whose stories are hidden behind imperial treaties. Some of whom such as the Kurds, Circassians and Irish are inconvenient for the dominant anti-western or universalizing anti-imperial narrative.

Considering the widespread actions and commitments of the British war machine in places like Kurdistan and the Caucasus can further help scholars of Ireland to contextualize colonial policy in Ireland and the surging Irish population amassing the capabilities and strength to hit Britain close to home. British interventions in Circassia can give us explanations for why the British wanted to keep Ireland weak and destroy its native population in order to minimize the threats to British power in its 'back garden'. This allows us to further contextualize the response of starving the Irish-speaking colonized as a way to manage Britain's ability to spread itself across its empire, an overlooked explanation of *An Drochshbaol*. By the same token, viewing Irish history vis-à-vis other autonomously voiced histories of struggle in interconnected ways draws us away from internal explanations, Anglocentric narratives and the structuring logics of Eurocentrism.

Further to this, the imparative method developed in conversation with Barzoo, Madina and Lillis pieced 'fragments' together in ways that constructed a picture unavailable within narrow frameworks designed to partition colonized histories from one another through Anglo-modern epistemic domination across the world-system. Through these relationalities, it becomes possible to observe how coloniality reclassifies and reproduces itself at different historical nodes. In this sense, the article gestures toward a "triadic imparative" methodology that triangulates colonial formations across three (or more) relational sites, enabling the co-conspiratorial decoding and circulation of imperial logics and ontological partitions to emerge beyond the epistemic pathways actively foreclosed through Anglo-modern systems of epistemic control, including some anti-imperial critiques canonized within academic orthodoxies structured through Anglocentric epistemologies, particularly in Britain and North America. The triadic imparative seeks to rupture forms of temporal monopolization through which particular colonial experiences become universalized while preceding and co-constitutive colonialisms are subordinated, obscured, or denied.

In the Irish case, the partition of the island, the continued British occupation of the annexed Six Counties, the Twenty Six County State's complicity in EU imperialism and the emergence of fascistic and exclusionary currents within twentieth-century Irish ethno-nationalism (now at a resurgent moment) can largely be understood as continuities within a historico-structural Anglo-modern racial matrix of power. This includes the marginalization of Mincéirs, *lucht siúil* or Travellers through racialized logics inherited and reformulated from Anglo-modern anti-Irish colonial discourse (Joyce 2018; Sweeney 2026), as well as Eurocentric drives within sections of the post-partition elite, including so-called de-anglicization projects that reproduced civilizational and developmental assumptions aligned with Euro-modernity.

From this perspective, the article questions any assumption that Ireland has straightforwardly entered a 'postcolonial' condition. So long as coloniality, partition, racial hierarchies, and occupation persist, postcoloniality cannot be understood as complete. The relationalities between Irish, Kurdish, and Circassian histories provide nuances often flattened by liberal sensibilities that retroactively absorb certain colonized peoples into narratives of European progress, reconciliation, or whiteness. Imparative analysis instead foregrounds the culpability surrounding the immense human losses obscured within dominant imperial and even certain anti-imperial grand narratives. Across Irish, Kurdish, and Circassian histories, millions were killed, displaced, starved, assimilated, or rendered epistemically invisible through colonial partitions of knowledge that continue to shape whose suffering becomes intelligible.

The relationalities meditated on here illuminate how genocide, starvation, forced displacement, and epistemic erasure recur across interconnected imperial formations rather than emerging as isolated historical exceptions. The fingerprints of British colonial technologies developed in Ireland are visible within the ongoing Sudanese civil war (including the Darfur and Nuba Mountains genocide) through the

dependent logics of colonial rule established during the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899–1956), alongside Britain’s subsequent unequal distribution of political and economic power between North and South Sudan (Lin 2018). These methods would also reappear in the Herero and Nama genocide of 1904–1908, often referred to as “Germany’s Black Holocaust” (Carr 2003), the Armenian genocide of 1915–1917, Holodomor of 1932–1933, the British Bengal genocide of 1943–1944, the colonial partitioning of Kurdistan and recurrent genocidal campaigns directed against Kurdish populations, the exterminatory campaigns directed against populations of the Caucasus, and the currently unfolding Israeli genocide in occupied Palestine. Across these histories, imperial technologies of domination mutate across different geographies while remaining obscured within Anglocentric frameworks of epistemic intelligibility.

## Notes

1. While these dialogues fell under the academic designation of ‘supervision’, the reconstitutive relational dynamics they generated were more akin to nonconformist encounters occurring beyond and in resistance to the normative sanctioning of the Nordic settler-colonial university space.
2. In the context of Ireland the category of Gaels is understood here as an open, creolizing identity extending to the Mincéirs, lucht siúil or Travellers, following Sweeney's (2026) intervention and wider work with TraVision concerning Traveller belonging within the Gaelic world (See the TraVision archive and educational resources on Traveller-Gaelic histories and identities: <https://travellercollection.ie/items/61745f4b639ffe0000710e57>).
3. Not to be confused with Edmund Spenser (1552/3-1599) who was a colonist who advocated genocide against the Gaels during the sixteenth century Tudor conquest.

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