

Black Spots of Whitewashed Id-entities: Rethinking the Deltaic Tributaries of the “Celtic Spider”

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“We returned safely from Ireland on Thursday, a week ago; were in Dublin, the Wicklow Mountains, Killarney and Cork. Had quite a good time but both women came back even hiberniores than they had been before they left...The worst about the Irish is that they become corruptible as soon as they stop being peasants and turn bourgeois. True, this is the case with most peasant nations. But in Ireland it is particularly bad. That is also why the press is so terribly lousy.” **Engels to Marx September 27, 1869**

“Over the broad Atlantic I pour forth my voice saying come out of such a land you Irishmen or if you remain and dare continue to countenance the system of slavery that is supported there, we will recognize you as Irishmen no longer!” – **Daniel “the Liberator” O’Connell**

“Look here...you had no choice in the matter. You are an Irishman merely by accident of birth. But I, with all the countries on the face of the globe to choose from, made a deliberate choice of Ireland.” **Kees van Hoek to Irishman in the 1800s**

Introduction

The increase in the presence of Africans in Ireland in the last decade or so generated a lot of controversies. These controversies are completely at odds with the way Ireland is often imagined and projected to the outside world. This is in spite of the fact that the British have consistently been the largest “immigrant community” in Ireland for hundreds of years. In recent years, the British and most likely the Polish and Chinese constitute the largest number of non-Irish nationals in the Republic of Ireland. If we then add Ulster, which is part of Ireland but ruled by Britain, the number of British nationals will be very significant in relation to Irish and other nationalities. In addition to the blatant enmity, the duplicity of the official rhetoric in Ireland in relation to the plight of “undocumented” Irish citizens in the United States and the simultaneous demonization of “undocumented” Africans in Ireland speaks volumes. As Fintan O’Toole put it in the foreword of Lentin and McVeigh’s book, *After Optimism* (2006):

“What Noel Treacy, the Minister of State with responsibility for emigrants, calls ‘stress and strain of daily lives of all those caught in this difficult situation’ is felt, apparently, by Irish migrants in the US but not by, say, Nigerian migrants in Ireland. The underlying assumption—that ‘we’ feel pain but that ‘they’ do not – is implicitly racist. It suggests a hierarchy of human feeling, in which ‘we’ are at the top and ‘they’ are at the bottom” (Lentin and McVeigh 2006: i)



What then can explain the hierarchical ordering/othering that surrounds the presence of a relatively small number of Africans in Ireland? The romantic exilic narratives and historical image of the Irish as *"Peregrinatio"*; disparaged as "blacks turned inside out"; portrayed as the "black people of Europe" or the Irish global missionary and "humanitarian" reputation does not fit the aforementioned hostility. The intense and persistent nature of those controversies is well documented by many sources³. What is clear is that the real issue is not the numbers or statistical determinations, costs and benefits analyses, "immigration", "foreigners" or "non Irish nationals". The real issue, as it is always the case with all modern European in and out groups differentiations, seems to be the particular phenotypes closely associated with geohistorical categories like "Negro", "blacks", "third world" or "Nigerians". These terms or categories of ordering human beings are not Irish but the specific transnational vocabularies of a planetary discourse and practice.

"Race" as the concept of modern biocultural binary differentiation is by its very nature specific to a broader episteme linked to a particular historical period. This is why the binary forms and contents of words like "white", "negro", "race" appeared in the common vocabulary of Europeans from the 15th and 16th century⁴ onwards. Despite this clear evidence, there are still those that insist that "race" is a generic hold-all for prejudices that are as old as "humanity"

¹ A Newspaper article critical of the treatment of an "undocumented" Irish worker in the US but rather silent on the worse treatment of "undocumented" Africans in Ireland. The outrage expressed in bold prints is rather typical for African migrants in Ireland.

² The "multicultural" weekly newspaper Metro Eireann report on the treatment of "documented" African and other non EU migrants in Ireland.

³ See for example Suzanne Chan's *Marching, Minstrelsy Masquerade: Performing Whiteness as 'Blackness' in Northern Ireland* (2005); Lentin and Mc Veigh 2002, 2006; Patrick Guerin 2002; Greenslade 1992, Fanning 2002 or Brian Conway's *Who Do We Think We Are? Immigration and the Discursive Construction of National Identity in Irish Daily Mainstream Newspaper, 1996-2004* (2006) IMRSTR, Volume 1, Issue 1, pp 1-20.

⁴ According to the Etymology Online Dictionary. White "in the racial sense (adj.) of 'of those races (chiefly European or of European extraction) characterized by light complexion' is first recorded c.1600. The noun in this sense ('white man, person of a race distinguished by light complexion') is from 1671; whitey in this sense is recorded from 1828. White supremacy attested from 1902". See also Negro 'member of a black-skinned race of Africa,' c. 1555. And Race as 'people of common descent,' c.1500, from M.Fr. *razza* 'race, breed, lineage,' possibly from It.

itself. However, recent research like Nell Irvin Painter's *The History of White People* (2010) reinforces the already known fact that "race" is not only a modern phenomenon but a defining one. The latter claim holds even though such history of "whiteness" is told from the Greco-Roman or Occidental world-view not the point of view of even those non modern Europeans conquered and "Romanized" by the men in Togas.

The latter is of course implicitly inscribed in the avowed Greco-Roman onto-epistemology of the prevailing world-system. Such core episteme serves as the formative mound upon which is built up the constellation of assumptions, relations and mindsets that predominantly structure and limit the prevalent mode of thought in that particular age. In this sense, "race" (and its corresponding „isms“) is not mere prejudice or "xenophobia" but one of the main ontology of the modern historical period. For that very reason, the appearance of "race" in modern Ireland should not surprise us. After all, Michael McDowell, the former Irish Minister of Justice, spelt it out for us that his racist citizenship "law" (like the Jim Crow laws in the U.S) were enacted: *"in line with European norms"*⁵, not Irish norms. It is important to bear in mind the fact that the very thing the referendum was designed to modify was a principle enshrined in the Irish national constitution. McDowell is the architect of Ireland's unprecedented "citizenship" referendum. The referendum was wholly based on the usual ploy that there was a "loophole" in the Irish constitution that "Nigerians" were exploiting. As Vincent Browne and Emma Browne put it:

"Michael McDowell sponsored a referendum on the citizenship issue in early-2004, in the run-up to the local and European elections, on the pretext that there was a major loophole in the Irish constitution that was subverting Irish and European immigration law. The loophole, he claimed, was the entitlement of Irish-born children to Irish citizenship, which in turn gave their families an entitlement to remain in Ireland and elsewhere in the European Union. The claim was false."

One of the hidden aspect of the citizenship "debates" was of course Britain since Ireland is not part of the Schengen arrangement of the other European countries. Ireland is not only a country that borders the most "successful" of all the European imperial powers of the last 500 years - Britain, but also a country still entangled in a British "Victorian expansion" mindset. A clear proof of the latter is rather obvious. "Irish language" exists as a poor proxy of the "Irish" version of the English language not only in road signs, but at the core of the dominant popular culture in Ireland today. "Irish culture" is incoherently pauperised and reduced to the "low culture" status of vernacular, the characteristic colonial "comedy in calamity" variants, "self depreciation", "begrudging natives", rural sensibilities, sports, "trad, pints and craic" or folk music, not politics, economic doctrines or existential ideologies. The vision of "Irishness" implied in Oscar Wilde's "Celtic generosity" ontology does not appear in the general cultural radar or institutional arrangements in Ireland. Consequently, the Irish continue to draw from the disparaging clichés of the dominant European colonial hierarchical "knowledge" reservoir even in their description of "Irishness".

My aim in this paper is to discuss the latter serial contradiction that manifest as "Irish racism" by inserting it back into the historical mound and total cultural environment that made it possible or thinkable. "Irish racism" bears the entire hallmark, and recycles all the wanton rhetoric of the old European "race" discourse. Predictably, "Irish racism" has also updated its core discourses in line with the "new" trends in crypto-eugenics, "racism without racism" or the so called "new racism" bubbling across the Anglo-American and European discursive landscapes. As it is often

⁵ See McDowell's speech at the wake of his successful "citizenship referendum", RTE 12 June 2004. It is worthwhile to mention that the citizenship "law" was in line with European (colonial) norm not Irish norm stipulated by the founding fathers of the Irish republic.

⁶ Quoted in the Village Magazine, March 2007, Issue 122, page 31

the case in Ireland, the old racism “poison” is repackaged with some notable “Hibernian” updates or “neo-liberal” customization seeped in global managerial “*amts-sprache*”⁷.

At its roots therefore, the localised “racism” we are speaking of is not local, Irish or Hibernian but a local marginalization that is necessary for integration into the “magnificent bribe” of a non local “whiteness”. It follows therefore that our understandings of “race” or modern entities like “Britain”, “Ireland” or “Nigeria” must situate the spatio-temporal id-entities within the larger historical context and intersection of genealogies that made them possible as particular forms of localities. The key words here are: “complementarity”, “connectivity” and “in-formation” as Arvin Laszlo (2003) notes in his formulation of the new “integral quantum science”. The words that make up the title of this paper is an attempt to draw on the latter connectivity paradigm by: (1) evoking the relational metaphor of a concealing “whitewash” and the “black spots” underneath; (2) drawing on the plural and confluent geohistorical processes implicit in words like “delta” or “tributaries” and finally, (3) excavating the transnational webs underneath the belly of the “Celtic Spider”. The words themselves are rather illuminating when viewed from the prism of the geopolitics of “race”. Delta for examples denotes the following:

- A fourth letter of the Greek alphabet – **an inherited system of signs with practical uses and implication**
- An object shaped like a triangle – **tripartite but basically a binary or bi-polar construct with a broad multi point base and a singular pinnacle point – in short a pyramid⁸ in three dimension**
- A low triangular area of alluvial deposits where a river divides before entering a larger body of water – **the pyramidal division indicates an “entry point” into a larger body**
- A usually triangular alluvial deposit at the mouth of a river – **the flowing “alluvial deposits” are always historical and always at intersections in low areas indicating “points of entry” into an-other sphere**
- A similar deposit at the mouth of a tidal inlet, caused by tidal currents – **entry point deposits are always “charged” but are predictably products of struggles and tidal currents**
- Mathematics: A finite increment in a variable – **increments in its variable are ultimately finite not infinite or “universal”**

Tributaries denote a stream that flows into a larger stream or other body of water.

“A tributary (or confluent/affluent) is a stream or river which flows into a mainstem (or parent) river, and which does not flow directly into a sea. In orography, tributaries are ordered from those nearest to the source of the river to those nearest to the mouth of the river. A confluence is where two or more tributaries or rivers flow together.”⁹

The term “Celtic Spider” is a phrase coined by Dr Jan Parmentier of the University of Ghent in his paper *“Irish Mercantile Communities in Dunkirk, Ostend and Bruges and their Socio-Economic Networks, 1660-1750”* presented at the Leuven Summer School, 6-9th of May 2008.

⁷ Or official speak, as the Nazi’s described their vocabularies of moral distance

⁸ Interestingly, the ancient Egyptians, Nubians and possibly Kushites associated Pyramids with “death” and “whiteness”. However, “death” to the ancient Egyptians was a point of intersection or transformation of “worlds” not the “final bus stop”.

⁹ <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/tributaries>

In the Summer School, Dr Jan Parmentier and others highlighted the transnational grids and networks that underscore the complicated trajectories of Irish history. In homage to Dr Jan Parmentier's metaphor, understanding the discourse of "race" in Ireland requires coming to terms with that complicated trajectory as a "whole". This of course means excavating the buried historical contents, undersides or "black spots" that enabled the Irish assimilation into the blinding lights of "whiteness". The concealed historical contents will then provide us with the lenses to see the hitherto invisible grids or episteme that serves as the background to the Irish flight from the image of their origin as "black" or "CeltIberian" with "Moorish tendencies".

The Colour of "race" in black and white



In today's world of naïve merchants of "hope", "pesoptimism", "colour-blind racism" and not so colour blind denials based on the enthusiastic evocation of the word "complex", how can we conceptualise the politics of "race" in the Emerald Isle? The dominant discourses about who or what the Irish are is entwined with British and European Greco-Roman imperial propaganda and its extensions across the Atlantic. David Miles of the Institute of Archaeology in Oxford and the former Chief Archaeologist at English Heritage states that:

"Over two thousand years ago explorers and traders from the Mediterranean world first recorded for posterity the names of the inhabitants of these remote north-western islands: they called them 'Pritani' – 'Britanni', as Latin-speakers mispronounced it – though the locals may not have thought of themselves by that name... The earliest written reference to Ireland, though, called its inhabitants 'Hierni' or 'Iverii', which can be translated as the People of the Fertile Earth'." (Miles, 2005: 7)

David Miles' thesis is somewhat supported by Stephen Oppenheimer's *The Origins of the British: A Genetic Detective Story* (2006). In his research, Oppenheimer found that most of the inhabitants of Britain and Ireland can be traced back to Mesolithic and Neolithic migrations from the Iberian Peninsula. The homogenizing "Anglo-Saxon" and "Celtic" ancestry that is central to the "national identity" of both Britain and Ireland according to Oppenheimer is largely a myth. In the "Myths of British ancestry", Oppenheimer sums his argument up by stating that:

"The fact that the British and the Irish both live on islands gives them a misleading sense of security about their unique historical identities. But do we really know who we are, where we come from and what defines the nature of our genetic and cultural heritage?"¹⁰

Despite the illusory isolationism prevalent in the Irish discourses of "self", Ireland is often said to be situated "between Berlin and Boston"¹¹. It follows therefore that the "Island" cannot be isolated from the racist undercurrents generated from both sides of the Atlantic as the historical

¹⁰ http://www.propect-magazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id+7817

¹¹ Or indeed positioned between Anglo-Saxons in Europe and the ones in America.

evidence shows clearly. Just as people and ideas have flowed in and out of Ireland, the vast webs of transnational relations that made Ireland possible left their marks discreetly in the Irish discourse of self. The Irish tend to see themselves as a point of intersection between the dominant forces of the Atlantic trade circuit. The popular term “Mid-Atlantic” can be seen in the light of the latter argument. Ireland’s role in the Anglo-Spanish imperial wars, involvement in the Franciscan movements and the School of Salamanca lends strong credence to the latter claim. This is even more glaring if we look at Ireland’s colonial past and the Irish bid to “whiten” the race as a consequence of that colonial experience. Liam O’Ruairc of the Irish Republican Socialist Party argues that Frantz Fanon’s metaphor of “black skin, white mask” is relevant to the Irish situation. In his own words:

“Colonialism has imposed ‘an existential deviation’...on the colonised as colonialism creates an inferiority complex in Blacks and other colonised races... He showed how the oppressed tended to interiorise the racist and colonial stereotypes. This is the ‘black skin, white mask’ syndrome. This inferiority complex in blacks results in a desire to ‘whiten the race’ or ‘lactification’. If being black or colonised has connotations of inferiority, blacks and other colonised people will denigrate their own race and will want to become ‘more white than white’. One can witness a similar process amongst many middle class Catholics in the North or with ‘West Brits’ in the south, as they try to be ‘more British than the British’ and denigrate their own Irishness. That is the ‘existential deviation’ imposed by the legacy of British rule.”¹²

Denigrating “Irishness” and substituting it with the binary identities of the “settler’s” global designs constitutes the “existential deviation” that forever links the Irish beyond the pale to the “blacks”. Bearing this in mind, the constant appropriation of the narrative of “blackness” by the Irish is grounded in real historical experiences. This is mainly why unlike the English; the Irish epic quest to assimilate to the power/knowledge of whiteness has a strange, contradictory and ironic ring to it. The subordination that constitutes the “black” existential deviation is always buttressed by the residual mechanisms, hangover or “afterglow” of assimilating into a brutal colonial power/knowledge nexus. Despite the obvious differences, such “racism” is curiously similar to the “racism” or “Nazism”, the Afrobeat musician Fela Kuti saw in the Nigerian elite’s treatment of the diverse peoples the British called “Nigerians”. To qualify for the outer crumbs of “whiteness”, it seems one is required to kick “blacks” in such a way that prove ones “whiteness” credentials. As Franz Fanon (1963:52) put it:

“The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people...We have seen that the native never ceases to dream of putting himself in the place of the settler – not of becoming the settler but of substituting himself for the settler”.

More important, historical “lactification” also serves as a “performance indicator” that demonstrates that one has no “blackness” residue within or lurking somewhere. In a nutshell, it is a process of making sure one has left “blackness” or “Irishness” “behind” en route to the blinding white lights. It seems that the difference between the 1950s Britain and today’s Ireland is that “Dogs” are now allowed but still not “blacks”.

Barrack Obama’s defence of U.S Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid’s “racially insensitive” remarks about Obama during the presidential campaign illustrates the latter point rather well. In an ironic sense, Obama may actually be pointing to something significant when he stated that Reid is always on the “right side of history” despite his “racially insensitive” remark. In their book *Game Change* (2008), Mark Halperin and John Heilemann reported comments by Reid that sums up the point I am trying to make. According to Halperin and Heilemann, Reid said privately that Obama, as a “black” candidate, maybe successful due his “light-skinned” appearance and the fact that he speaks “with no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one.”

¹² *The Prison Art Newsletter* Volume 3, Issue 11 November 2003, p 5

The point is that Obama needs to “transcend” blackness (not whiteness) in order to be “successful” in a world defined as “post racial”. In other words, “post racial” is just another word for “seasoning”: a situation where “blackness” or “Negro dialect” is the low culture “sending society” and “whiteness” the ultimate destination or high culture “receiving society”. In their own words:

"He [Reid] was wowed by Obama's oratorical gifts and believed that the country was ready to embrace a black presidential candidate, especially one such as Obama -- a 'light-skinned' African American 'with no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one,'"¹³.

Reid’s colour mobility thesis is well illustrated by the extent a lot of African, Latin American, Asian and Middle Eastern persons will go to “whitenize” by torturing their skins with Hydroquinone based cosmetics. Some of these cosmetics bear the quite blatant names of “Fair & White”, “White Sure” or “Whitenizer”. Revealingly, the website of the Skin Lightening Product *Euoko* says it all: “does your skin communicate”¹⁴?

DOES YOUR SKIN COMMUNICATE?™



Does your skin communicate “historical relations”?

¹³ See the Report; *Reid apologizes for racial remarks about Obama during campaign*, by Mark Preston, CNN Political Editor January 9, 2010 11:32 p.m.

¹⁴ <http://www.euoko.com>.





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The race for whiteness is a signifier for the dynamic but durable asymmetries constitutive of the modern/colonial world and its extension. By pointing to the historical contents buried beneath the colonial “synthesis of repetition”, we also begin to see how today’s equivalents of “slaves” and “coolies” fit the historical pattern. The mantra “whiten or die trying”, is not only applicable to the epidermis or skin but also to “dialects”, world views, local histories, memories, languages and knowledges. Within the auspices of the global racial system, Africans or “blacks” occupy the bottom of the system and consequently forced into a situation where they are required to “bleach” off the very thing symbolizing their position in that system. The word “bleach” itself demonstrates the sturdily installed nature of the Victorian “race hygiene” doctrine animating the quest for whiteness and the corresponding “product line”. This is not simply about the

¹⁵ A range of cosmetics designed to “bleach” off the dark shades of the human complexion

dominance of European ideas of aesthetics and symmetrical “beauty”¹⁶. As Fanon suggested, it is linked to practical things like jobs, income, life chances and social status not simply an abstract thing in people’s heads called “inferiority complex”. “Lactification” is now so imperative and necessary in our “post racial” world that Harley Street surgeons in London are “developing safer treatments” for the “disease” of dark skin. This is not the 18th and 19th century but today, here and now. According to Velupillai Ilankovan, a consultant surgeon with the British NHS: *“Virtually every black or Asian patient who comes to see me for skin improvement wants lighter skin”*¹⁷

Horried by the Victorian “race hygiene” medicalization of the dark skin, the former British Labour Party Member of Parliament Oona King, said: *“It is horrifying that at the intersection between materialism and racism we are getting skin-whitening products that help black or Asian people to look less dark”* (Ibid)

In an article in *News Africa*¹⁸ entitled *What is wrong with being Black*, Austin Kaluba explores the very practical aspects of this race for whiteness. According to him:

“Air Jamaica advertisements for Stewardesses emphasised on the applicants having a ‘good’ complexion, good hair. The word ‘good’ implied ‘fair’ or ‘straight’. Sometime back, a newspaper advertisement for a secretary caused uproar among many indigenous Zambians when the advertisement stated that the female applicants had to be white. It is such deeply-rooted attitudes on colour that makes the slogans ‘black is beautiful’ seem to make very little sense”

In Nigeria and many African countries, dark skin colour is not only seen as a burden, “mistake” or “curse” but an “evil” to expunge or exorcize. In Schools, hospitals, Churches, Prisons and other public institutions deep inside villages in Africa, the lighter or more “oyibo” you are the higher your chances of better treatment. The same unilinear binary racial logic of the slave plantations and colonial regimes continue to thrive out of sight in Africa as we discuss the “new racism without racists”. Nigerian Churches and Pentecostal Pastors¹⁹ for example, are still teaching young African children Victorian version of the “Curse of Ham” theology today. African languages or “vernacular”, histories and knowledges are treated with the same scorn and disrespect as the dark skin despite the fact that Africa has the most diverse language and cultural groups in the world.

Amongst the African diaspora, the same racial logic is prevalent no matter where one looks. Many Africans in Ireland for example hierarchically differentiate between their own children on the basis of if they are “Irish born”, “light skin” or the “other” shade. By doing so, they bringing into the family sphere of today the same racial hierarchical ordering Frantz Fanon experienced in his childhood several decades ago half way across the world. Superiority and inferiority even within and amongst the colonized become based on where one is located in the discreet shades between white and black in everything from speech, mannerism to values and complexion. In simple terms, the Irish quest for whiteness and the corresponding subjugation of “blacks” is rather ubiquitous. The renowned Irish “race traitor” Noel “the abolitionist” Ignatiev declared in his “race traitor” website that:

¹⁶ There is always the need to seek “symmetry” in asymmetrical situations. “Americans” for example say that they are pursuing “happiness” and that makes sense to them. The latter statement to a Native American or an igbo person simply means that “happiness” is probably running away from “Americans”. So, the obsession with symmetry implies the very opposite from a different geohistorical location.

¹⁷ The Sunday Times (Ireland), July 8, 2007, page 9.

¹⁸ June 2007 Issue, page 18. Also see Chris Rock’s insightful documentary “Good Hair” 2009.

¹⁹ The pastors and prophets, since the IMF and World Bank “Four Steps to Damnation” Structural Adjustment Programme, are virtually in control of most public institutions in the Southern regions of Nigeria.

“The white race is a historically constructed social formation. It consists of all those who partake of the privileges of the white skin... Its most wretched members share a status higher, in certain respects, than that of the most exalted persons excluded from it, in return for which they give their support to a system that degrades them. The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race, which means no more and no less than abolishing the privileges of the white skin. Until that task is accomplished, even partial reform will prove elusive, because white influence permeates every issue, domestic and foreign... The existence of the white race depends on the willingness of those assigned to it to place their racial interests above class, gender, or any other interests they hold. The defection of enough of its members to make it unreliable as a predictor of behavior will lead to its collapse. RACE TRAITOR aims to serve as an intellectual center for those seeking to abolish the white race. It will encourage dissent from the conformity that maintains it and popularize examples of defection from its ranks, analyze the forces that hold it together and those that promise to tear it apart. Part of its task will be to promote debate among abolitionists. When possible, it will support practical measures, guided by the principle, Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity.”²⁰

It is clear therefore that “Irish racism” is a local manifestation of the planetary biocultural classification one encounters almost everywhere in the globe. From Russia to Finland, Australia or Egypt, the basic racial binary of “black” and “white” persists across vast modern/colonial geographical and cultural boundaries. Ireland is just one part of the enormous racial network connected to vast multilayered circuits of the “white” racial “contract”.

Archaeo-genealogy of the Many Faces of Race-isms in Ireland

A Canadian website thread under the heading of “Ethnic Cleansing in Ireland”²¹ captures some of the nuances of the many faces of the global “race” discourse in Ireland. The various manifestations and folk rationalisations of the “race” discourse were dutifully expressed in the statements in the thread. The following are some of the opinions expressed in the blog:

“As a blackman who has lived in the Republic of Ireland for the best part of four years, it was indeed quite a revealing experience. The brand of racism you’ll find in Ireland, you’ll find in no other country on this planet. It is not only the interface of racial bullying and victimhood but it’s the ignorance, cretinism and stupidity and irrelevance in some of the questions posed to me while I was there. The racism in Ireland is visceral and pathological. Irish children are taught to hate. Look at the history curriculum, and you’ll understand why the situation in Ireland is so serious. There is no political correctness there. You can say almost anything you want to say about blacks, gypsies, romanians and Travellers, and get away with it. The Irish it must be remembered became a part of America’s white power structure by turning on blacks. I first visited Ireland during the 1980s when I was the only blackman in an the size of manchester, UK. It took me six months before I saw another black face. The Irish look at the black skin with quizzical puzzlement and bewilderment, wondering why the black phenotypical modality is as it is. There will be racist riots in Ireland. It’s the black skin that is problematic for the Irish. Many Irish Fathers chide their daughters on a daily to keep away from blackmen. Some Irish families are in conflict over a member getting pregnant for a black man. The Irish do not like race mixing, I this is one of the most significant reason why the black presence in Ireland is opened to much protestation and contestation. I am looking keenly at developments in Ireland. The Irish are far more racist than the white south africans and whites from the southern states, a fact which is generally understated because of victimhood. The Irish can bully, abuse and murder members the so-called “inferior groups, then use victimhood as a cloak of convenience. The Irish are the most intolerant whites on this planet and they can create major security problems for the growing black, mostly nigerians, population there.” --- Joseph Collins

“I must say that my experience in the Republic of Ireland has forever changed the way I will look at race relations. I’ve lived in Ireland for a little over one year. While I have met some good people, and have had the support of

²⁰ <http://www.racetractor.org/>

²¹ <http://www.blogscanada.ca/blog/PermaLink.aspx?guid=567778E7-8C73-4989-9ABF-E107C825D7BC:20/05/2004 19:11:18> (accessed 17/06/04)

friends at the University I attend I have never been in an environment of such overt racial hostility. It has absolutely soured my view of Ireland and the Irish people.” --- Katherine

“I agree with some of the viewpoints suggested by others about racism in Ireland. I have experienced racism in Ireland. The elderly people in Ireland are very nice and comfortable to talk with from my personal experience. Its only the young generation “especially the girls” that are likely to be racist.”--- Amit

“As an Irish person I feel slightly ashamed of my fellow citizens but I must say that the racism in Ireland is not so much as a hate thing as it is a about understanding. There were no minorities in this country apart from travellers a black person in Ireland is an oddity to say the least. In countrys like Britain and America the white people have been seeing black people for a long time its something they have grown up with but in Ireland we have not had the chance to gain anykind of social interaction to get used to seeing black people as little as two years ago a black person was mind blowing. I can remember the first time I saw a black person, just that I can remember is proof how mind blowing it was. Ireland is not the most racist race in the world the only racist people here are in fact travellers. Yes thats also racism but its the truth. Most travellers are pig ignorant and thats were the problem lies, ignorance.”--- Devin

As shocking as it might seem to a casual observer, Ireland²² is one of the most racist and racist countries in Europe and even in the world in real terms. The term “race hate capital of Europe”²³ could apply to both sides of the “border”. The typical person of African descent in Ireland is subjected to all kinds of mutually reinforcing types of discrimination. These includes blatant exploitation, harassments, cruel verbal abuse by land lords, employers, government officials or frankly anyone with a sense of “whiteness entitlement”; to finger printing just to renew residency papers and the tendency to apply the never ending immigration legislations and “directives” retrospectively. Threatening racist terms like “niggers out” or “leave here nigger”, imported from the Jim Crow era in the United States, have appeared in many places, including public spaces or private homes of Africans in Ireland.

In other words, as an African in Ireland you are always under suspicion or scrutiny in one form or another from government officials to the man in the pub²⁴. In the midst of this hostility, Africans and other “third world” ethnicities are then conveniently accused of not “integrating” and disparaged for forming “ethnic ghettos”. This self fulfilling prophecy is then used as reason to argue for the restriction of immigration since “multiculturalism” and “political correctness” does not work. The term “usual suspects” is not an exaggeration for the typical African person in Ireland. Report after report from different local and international organizations, including the United Nations, European Union and Amnesty International have more or less confirmed this. The peculiar thing about the Irish case is that unlike other Western European countries, Ireland achieved this racist “status” without any significant history of colonizing non Europeans or a so called “extreme rightwing” political culture. The manic discourses and practices however hide the fact that, as I previously stated, the Irish have always been preoccupied with, or associated with “blacks”.

In her book *Black Baby* (1988) Clare Boylan reminds us that:

“The Irish always had an intense sentimental preoccupation with distant pagans... it was the dusky heathen who stirred the infant imagination. There was romance in these stories and terror too, for the missionary fell prey to foul disease, to the leopard’s tooth and the cannibals’ pot. Children loved to hear such tales and were schooled early to sacrifice for God’s unchosen. ‘Penny for the black baby’ was one of the first phrases learnt. There was much

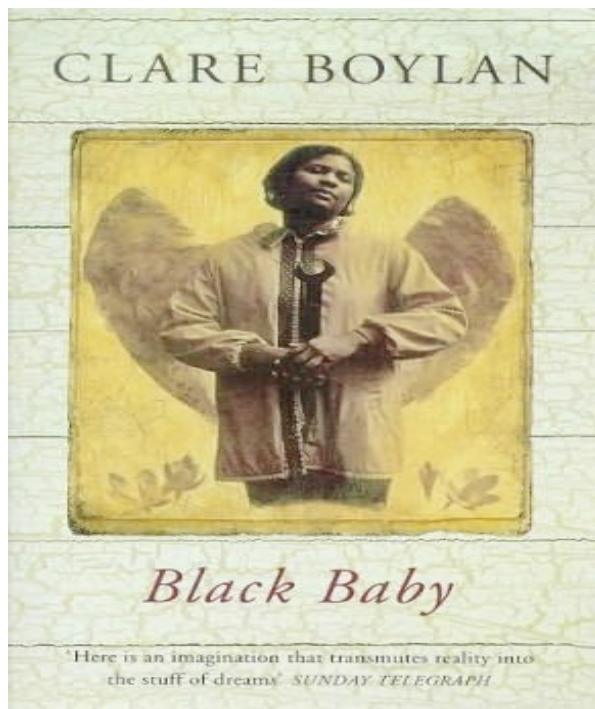
²² both north and south

²³ See chapter 9 of Lentin and McVeigh (2006) for further discussion of the theme

²⁴ See the Blue Lion pub incident, Irish Times 2001

*pleasure in putting a penny in the mission box, with its nodding black head on top, as spending it on an orange.*²⁵

The submissive, “pious” or “self depreciating” image used in the cover of the book is a gendered version of the familiar childish depiction of African adults. In many ways, it encapsulates the modern Irish ironic attitude to Africans especially and the narrative of “blackness” in general.



How did the Irish move from “penny for black baby” to a referendum to deport the same black babies? Clare Boylan’s clue is the mixture of “romance” and “terror”, the penny in the mission box and “God’s unchosen”. Bob Geldof on the other hand informs us in his book *Geldof in Africa* (2005: 15) that the “little black baby box” had little to do with “starvation or poverty per se” but was simply a ploy to “leaven the load from the dire admonishments preached against the perils of masturbation”. The latter is related to the fact that: “...in general, the first breast any of us saw would have been a young black African girl’s” in the National Geographic. In the end, the blacks were always present in the Irish imagination in more “spheres” than one in spite of the “foreigner” and “exoticism” rhetoric. Yet, the vital question remains unanswered since the images deployed in “romance”, terror or “masturbation” implies some level of familiarity. On what basis did the Irish evoke such a high degree of contrast given the fact that the “black baby” bears striking resemblance to the suppressed “Irishness”? Daniel O’Connell, Fredrick Douglass and Noel Ignatiev all blamed the opening of the Atlantic trade circuit and Ireland’s place between the “Anglo Saxons” on both sides of the Atlantic. This does not detract from the fact that the racism in Ireland is intense in a way that is difficult to comprehend given the aforementioned. A quick search of the phrase “racism in Ireland” in Google returns a staggering 1,880,000 results in 0.08 seconds. According to the CSPE website:

“In a recent survey carried out in Ireland by Amnesty International: 78% of the sample has experienced racism. This varied widely when the different ethnic groups were compared. 36.2% of the sample has frequently heard or seen people making insulting comments about their skin colour or ethnic background. Over 80% of the sample

²⁵ Quoted in Kieran Allen’s *Citizenship and Racism: The case against McDowell’s Referendum*, Bookmarks Ireland.

tends to agree that racism is a serious problem in Ireland today. 81.5% of the sample believes that not enough is being done to educate the public about racism."

Is the problem really "education" about the treatment of foreigners "beyond the pale" in a country that was described in the 9th century by the abbot of Reichenau in these words: *"the Irish are now so used to exile that it is part of their heritage"*? The idea of "education" merely reinforces the fiction that the victims of racism are actually "aliens" that somehow requires "tolerance" to exist. What type of human being needs "education" to get along with other human beings they classified as "blacks"? This is especially relevant considering the fact that the so called "others" were the same alleged recipients of the "penny for black babies" Catholic "civilizing" missions of the late 19th or early 20th century. How can you eat banana from Ivory Coast and then need "education" to get along with those that planted the banana?

A recent study by the Irish Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on the experiences of discrimination in the labour market found that people of African descent are nine times more likely to be unemployed than their "white" Irish counterparts. The result of this is that over one quarter of the African population in Ireland are unemployed according to 2006 Census²⁶. Eric Yao, the coordinator of the African Centre, a local NGO, points out that the grim statistical picture is the tip of the iceberg because it only reflects the predicament of Africans during the boom years in Ireland. On the other hand, the above statistical picture is merely a snapshot of a snapshot of the real picture because the decisive set of things that come into play in any moment of "racism" is beyond "surveys" or statistics or the usual technical tools of the "race relations" industry. These tools are ultimately the same set of statistical tools and techniques that develop in concert with the concept of "race" and thus derive from the same eugenic episteme.

In his book, *The Order of Things* (1994), Foucault argues that prior to the enthronement of the modern episteme based on agonistic differentiation, binary contrasts, observation and scientific experiments, that pre-modern European episteme were based on affinities, "similitude" and resemblances. According to Foucault, the fundamental anchor of the modern episteme is a cast of mind based on inquisitorial and discriminatory classifications – in short, a "war by other means" concept. A particular episteme produces particular types or modalities of knowledge and consequently the exercise of power. This is because episteme set the limits to the very grounds of knowledge and experience. Foucault evoked the ancient Chinese "unusual" system of categorisation of animals as told by the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges to demonstrate how different kinds of episteme give rise to different ways of categorization, classification and thus thinking or acting. The Irish persistent preoccupation with "blackness" thus resonates with an older non-modern system of categorization based on connectivity or affinities not an agonistic binary contrast.

The diverse peoples often lumped into categories such as "Celts", "Vandals", the "Visigoths", "Goths", ancient Britons, Dacians and even the great "unifier" Vercingetorix himself did not classify themselves as "white". They did not refer to themselves as "rational subjects" pitch against others who are fundamentally irrational bio-culturally. Leaving the Roman roots of the term "Celt" or "Gaul" aside, if one is Gaul or Celt, such narrative of belonging does not require a binary opposite or contrast. The opposite of white in the modern European way of thinking is black but this is completely absent in narratives of belonging like "Celt" or "Gaul" however we draw the homogeneity line.

The usual confusion stems from the conflation of real Western history and Occidentalism²⁷ or the usual "Western civilization" narrative that conflates biology, ethnicity and culture. Most of

²⁶ See New Africa April 2010, page 96

²⁷ As Mignolo (2000) defined it: the Western affirmation of Greco-Roman (imperial) culture.

the contemporary references to the Gaul and the Celt are in fact made by people whose world views were shaped by the victor's propaganda of those who killed, burnt, looted and pillaged the Celt, Gaul and ancient Briton. For instance, the word "Celtic" as it is understood today was supposedly coined in 1707 by a Welsh antiquary and naturalist Edward Lhuyd. He used the word to identify Irish, Welsh, Cornish and Breton as distinct group of languages. Terry Jones and Alan Ereira (2006:13) wrote in their very amusing but enlightening book "Barbarians" that:

"We actually owe far more to the so called 'barbarians' than we do to the men in togas. And the fact that we still think of Celts, the Huns, the Vandals, the Goths, the Visigoths and so on as 'barbarians' means that we have fallen hook, line and sinker for Roman propaganda. We are still letting the Romans define our world and our view of history...Rome used its army to eliminate the cultures that surrounded it, and paid its soldiers with the wealth it took from them. It 'Romanized' these conquered societies and left as little record of them as possible. The truth is that much of what we understand to be 'Roman civilization' was plundered from the Barbarian world".

Equally noteworthy is the fact that the ancient Europeans also did not see themselves as sharply distinct from the natural world; neither did they see the natural world as a "resource" that is simply in the service of the modern ego "economy". According to Walter Mignolo (2005:114)

"The idea that humanity is universally defined by the separation from nature first emerged in seventeenth-century Europe and developed in tandem with the industrial revolution, as the appropriation of land increased, accompanied by the increasing demand for natural resources"

If we dare to take Mignolo's reasoning to its logical limit, we can safely argue that the historical processes that produced "whites" and "Western Civilization" equally subjugated "blacks" and the "aboriginal" people of Europe. I am certain that many Basques or even Catalans will, to some extent, agree with this formulation. In other words, to understand the issues, contradictions and ideological representations that are concealed beneath the discourses and counter-discourses pertaining to the presence of Africans in Ireland, we need to look at the diachronic contradictions and bifurcations of the particular geohistorical episteme Quijano encapsulated in his concept of "coloniality of power". It is that difference in episteme that will allow us to understand why the ancient Celtiberians or the Celt in general, Gaul, Goth, Visigoth, Dacian, Briton did not consider themselves "white", "Caucasian", "Indo European" "Aryan" or any one of the rather silly terms evoked to conceal the European "historical a priori" or "blackness".

The ancient Europeans also did not define themselves via the Greco-Roman "civilizational" axis Jones and Ereira reduced to a "Roman propaganda" or Occidentalism. It is in the latter sense that the modern occident episteme derives its precarious "stability" by burying, or as Dussel put it, concealing the violent "image of its origin" (Veroli 2002). The latter concealment of the "original sin" of modern coloniality equally allows us to treat its mutations and extensions as the everlasting return of the "new". The logic of transcending a darker inferiority locked in the "past" links the Spanish reconquest and "conversions", to US and Caribbean slave plantation systems, Hacienda systems in the Americas, and even the so called colour-blind "new racism". These so called "improvement" celebrated in the "race relations" industry remind me of those that describe Aldous Huxley's dystopia as an "improvements" over the classical Orwellian nightmare. "Black people" it seems, should always be thankful for the fact that "massa Johnson" is "better" than "massa Thomas" or the simple fact that the situation could be worse. As I always point out to those that highlight the difference, the binary system merely grew a "third leg" or "third way", just like Liberalism and Marxism. In both quantum physics and African indigenous systems of thought, permutation is not generally seen as giving rise to completely new forms. Consequently, the slave plantation, Victorian eugenics, Jim Crow laws and the "new racism without racism" are the many faces of the same binary system. And just as modernity has

many faces as Matei Calinescu (1987) suggested in *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*; coloniality also possess many faces.

Old Poison in “Designer” New Bottle

The Irish referendum on “citizenship” in June 2004, in many ways, encapsulates the essence and basic direction of those hostile treatments of people of African descent. From the very beginning, the response to the presence of Africans in Ireland was, to put it mildly, quite antagonistic in many instances. Many ex post excuses ranging from the characteristic “we are an emigration country, immigration is new to us” to the very Catholic *mea culpa* were used to cover up a sustained resentment in the generalised social atmosphere in Ireland. Racialized notions of “third world” and “immigrant groups” became the disposable themes of the never ending moral panics, bogey man jingoism, “debates”, cost and benefit “analyses”, “discussions”, “jokes” and ministerial gaffs. “Black Africans”, “third world standard” and “Nigerians” also became the negative analogies used to illustrate everything from “hard workers” to the state of Drogheda Hospital. The African person as usual became a venue for the everlasting Eurocentric binary struggles between “left” and “right”, “conservatives” and “liberals”, defenders of white privileges and those intent on writing the time table for another man’s freedom.

It is important to remember that many of the factors people usually attribute to the eruption of “xenophobia” were lacking in Ireland during the period in question. For example, after his successful “citizenship” referendum and prior to the 2007 general election in Ireland, the then Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr Michael McDowell, announced the approval of the drafting of the proposed Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill²⁸. One of the main thrust of the proposed bill is the codification of the identity check regime that many “third world” migrants were subject to anyway. The new twist is the introduction of “bio-metric” techniques into the “pass” identity paper regimes that hitherto existed in various forms in Western countries and their colonies. Revealingly, recent developments and trends in the “bio-metric” technologies or “surveillant assemblage”²⁹ are based on the same core principle as the idea of “race” – the socio-technical coding of the human body in accord with the expediency of prevailing social relations and dynamics.

Besides the bio-political linking of “immigration”, “residency” and “protection”, many of the provisions of McDowell’s proposed legislation are revealingly reminiscent of the “pass law”³⁰, “pass-book” or “influx control” system during the slave trade, the British gulags in Africa and Apartheid South Africa. Pass laws throughout history have always been used to control the movements of certain people³¹; to control the formal and informal relationships between “insiders” and “outsiders”, and to control the “outsiders” access to privileges reserved for “insiders”. Again, it is important to stress that these trends are part of the so called “Global Mobility Governance” that have assumed the role of distributing mobility and immobility largely on racial, religious and ethnic lines.

²⁸ Recently another Immigration, Residency and Protection bill has been proposed in Ireland in 2010 in the wake of the last one, barely 3 years down the line. This is in the pipe line even though Irish people are now emigrating at a very high rate due to the economic crisis.

²⁹ According to Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson (2000): *The resultant ‘surveillant assemblage’ operates by abstracting human bodies from their territorial settings, and separating them into a series of discrete flows. These flows are then reassembled in different locations as discrete and virtual ‘data doubles’*. See <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/sociology/pdfs/survassemb.pdf>. See also van der Ploeg (2003)

³⁰ See *The Imposition of Pass Laws on The African Population in South Africa 1916–1984*, M. Savage, London 1986; 85: 181-205. Also see <http://www.ccds.charlotte.nc.us/History/Africa/04/Jsmith/Jsmith.htm>

³¹ Since only some people are required to carry the passes at all times.

Indymedia Ireland described the then new proposed immigration bill as “The Nuremberg-style law”:

“Taken together, the proposed legislation and the amendment to the constitution strangely resemble the two measures announced at the Nuremberg rally on the 15th of September 1935. The Nazis then passed two laws, namely The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour and The Reich Citizenship Law.”³²

While the 1930s period is quite different from our current situation, we need to remember that this particular immigration legislation was proposed at a time when the immigration and residency restrictions formally placed on many countries in Eastern Europe were being dismantled. Germany in the 1930s was a decimated country situated at the backdrop of the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the humiliation of Germany after the First World War. McDowell’s bill was riding on the back of a prosperous Ireland in an era of “globalisation”. The proposed immigration legislation, as it is always the case, is by no means generic in terms of who it is aimed at. Just like the “pass laws”, it is quite specific on who is at the receiving end. The “non-EU” nationals targeted by McDowell’s immigration bill are of course the same “non-nationals”, whose presence sparked off the citizenship referendum. This was rather obvious to Labour Party TD Joan Burton, who argued in April 2004 that:

“Tens of thousands of people in say South Africa apply and obtain Irish citizenship papers and passports from the Irish Embassy in Pretoria for the right fee if they can establish a tenuous distant family link. Many of these people have no interest in Ireland, no current family links to Ireland. They never visit Ireland nor intend to do so. They are white so Michael McDowell has no worries that they have the run of Europe with an Irish Passport. No, his concern is exclusively with a small, as yet unquantified, number largely of black African origin who slip through the border security net to give birth here.”³³

Similar to the treatment of those the Irish branded “travellers”, a treatment rooted in British Victorian sedentary bias, the word “immigrant” is so often conflated with “black” that Unwin Hyman Dictionary of Sociology (1999:414) informs us that:

“There have been a number of MORAL PANICS about immigration since 1945, focusing on the immigration of black people, and it is therefore important to distinguish between immigrants and black people; it is wrong to assume that an immigrant is black...”

The serial conflation of “immigrants” and “black” are therefore metaphors for those that incessantly “enter the picture and the strategy only a resistant to be overcome” (Bauman, 1991: 38). Even Michael McDowell himself would not disagree with Bauman because, as he stated in The Irish Sunday Independent in 1998 prior to becoming the minister of Justice:

“I had, when a member of the Dail Eireann pointed out that the Department’s policy on immigration and aliens were racially prejudiced. I was immediately subjected to a bullying and offensive public attack by a civil service union demanding that I should withdraw the remarks. The Ceann Comhairle³⁴ was written to. But I stood my ground – because I knew the truth. Black and coloured people are treated differently by our immigration service. As a TD, I became aware of many, many instances of...discrimination. But, these of course, would be denied by those responsible. In recent months, we witnessed the appalling spectacles of a Belfast-Dublin bus being escorted by squad cars because there was a black man on it who turned out to be a long term Belfast Resident. In recent months, immigration officers shocked railway workers by routinely inquiring in Dundalk whether any blacks or coloured people had been seen on the trains. If an Irish woman marries a black man, he will be treated very differently from a white spouse. He will be routinely halted at airports. He will probably experience great difficulty

³² <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/78451>

³³ <http://www.joanburton.ie/?postid=199>

³⁴ Chairman of Dáil Éireann (the House of Representatives)

in securing the right to reside here. At every level, from the treatment of black and coloured doctors by the powers that be in medicine, to the queues of rain-sodden children outside the Department of Justice, the Irish state has a tradition of hard-nosed, red-necked discrimination.”³⁵

Consequently, the real issue here is not migration or movements of people since some migrating persons are classified as “pioneers”, “puritans”, “missionaries”, “explorers”, “EU nationals”, “technical assistants”, “aid-workers”, “people from Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries” or “expatriate communities”; while others are dehumanized as “slaves”, “coolies”, “bogus asylum seekers”, “illegal immigrants” and “migrant workers”. Marshall McLuhan’s concept of the Western “outering”³⁶ culture and Claude Levi-Strauss’s “anthropophagic” and “anthropoemic” binary to a great extent illustrate the infinite othering problematic. The ESRI report³⁷ on migrants’ experience of racism and discrimination in Ireland indicated this age-old truth that “black Africans” are the most likely to encounter racial discrimination in Ireland as it is the case elsewhere. The then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern responded to this report with the characteristic “muddled thinking” and “absent mindedness”. As Liam Fay put it in the Sunday Times:

“Addressing the issue of racism in the Dail last week, the Taoiseach chose his words so badly that he appeared to make excuses for bigotry. His confused rhetoric suggested muddled thinking about race that poses a much greater threat to multiethnic integration than outright intolerance... Ahern was speaking on the foot of an ESRI report that found that more than one-third of immigrants and half of black Africans have encountered racial discrimination in Ireland. By way of explaining this hostility, he blundered into a riff about rising crime that seemed to suggest the shifty foreigners are responsible. Attacks on Irish citizens and especially women have increased rapidly, he declared. As though the subjects were related, he proceeded to insist organizations representing immigrants have a duty to “get their communities” to adhere to the law”³⁸

There is always an ideological dimension pertaining to racial violence and subjugation. Historically, this has always accompanied the “race” discourse. Did the Nazis not put up a sign that says, “work sets you free” in the same place where they were mass producing Jewish death? The denials, convenient diversionary discourses or long-winded rationalisation have always been part of package of subjugation since the “mission to civilize”. The latter is the “knowledge” Francis Bacon linked to, not only “power” or over the natural world, but also the knowledge in the service of the “revolution of the rich against the poor”.

Hidden Variable in the “Debates” on a Modern/Colonial Thought Horizon

The main problem with contemporary discourses and “debates” about “race” is not the often cited shift from materialist approaches to the recent preoccupation with symbolism and “discourses”. “Race” as a core motif of the age of “reason” is not merely reducible to juridical discourses, everyday prejudices in people’s heads, or simply a contour of nationalism, or mere ideological justifications for political and economic subjugation. It is equally not reducible to the institutional arrangements that buttress such state of domination. “Race” as a planetary method or way of classifying and ordering human beings is rooted in a binary horizon of thought that emerged in a specific cultural environment. Kenan Malik (2009), in his lecture on Voltaire, considers the latter argument “dangerous” on the ground that it resonates with John Donne’s view that it is that very “science” that is sold as the solution to “humanities problem” that is dangerous. In his own words:

³⁵ Quoted in Lentin and McVeigh (2006: iii)

³⁶ Marshall McLuhan, (1965:124) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill

³⁷ See Frances McGinnity et al (2006) The Economic and Social Research Institute’s report on *Migrants Experience of Racism and Discrimination in Ireland*. The report was based on a survey conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute for the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.

³⁸ The Sunday Times (Ireland) 12/11/06

“It is against this background [the disenchantment with reason], that many have come to accept that the roots of racial science lie within the scientific method itself. The view that there is an intrinsic relationship between race and science is as much a product of a particular political and social culture as was the view that science legitimated a racial hierarchy. And in some ways it is as dangerous”

Malik’s “throwing away the baby with the bathwater” familiar argument misses the point because it recasts “science” as a mythical ideal-type without a messy history. Science, in the latter sense, is reduced to the 20th century conflation of science, the will to truth/power and technology. It conveniently assumes that “science” is just an abstract way of achieving certain goals or a purely technical process above the realm of particular political and socio-cultural influences or considerations. Where is this pure science situated in this planet of ours? The former is a cardinal myth of scientism – a disease of the “age of reason”. The “science” of human beings like Galileo, Bacon and Boyle, the argument goes, is somehow a pure technical process above normal human activities but somehow still linked to “solutions to humanity’s problems”. The idea of an Enlightenment disciplinary “science” that consists of pure thinking or technique, separated from the corrupting “social” and “cultural” is characteristic of the modern binary system of thought. And it is that illusory separation that makes such vulgar rendition of classical physic not only defunct but the cornerstone of modern coloniality.

The latter is of course the grounds for the high/low culture binary deployed in the lumping together of selected parts of ancient Greek and Roman history; Enlightenment Philosophers and “science” in a bid to create a big bang theory of successful “white Europe”. This is largely why many defenders of Occidentalism believe that the selected variations that were generated within the cleavages and struggles of the European historical experience “agreed upon” constitute the “universal” or “humanities problems”. This imperial “success-oriented” approach depends on a constant threat of corruption from below for its stability, hence the never ending siege mentality that set it apart not only from its own history but also other local histories. The Dutch word “apartheid” or its U.S WASP version “segregation” rely on the same siege mentality.

Many people today seem to have forgotten that many of the precarious arguments dressed up in euphemisms like “essentialism”, “reverse discrimination” and “autarchy” were initially anchored on the idea that “racism” is basically a deviation from “rational” European Enlightenment principles. “Essentialism” for example, is largely an oxymoron that not only transfers the burden of “responsible speech” over to victims of coloniality, but assumes the usual curious “neutrality” that attributes all the bad examples of European political history to the “other”. The oxymoron “Islamic fascism” is another good example because it ignores both Benito Mussolini and his philosopher Giovanni Gentile’s definition of “fascism” as “Corporatism” – that is, “fascism” as *“a merger of State and corporate power”*. The latter of course has nothing to do with Islam. Clearly fascism is not an Islamic ideology, just as “essentialism” is rooted in the European Enlightenment binary between reason and unreason or the fleeting and the immutable. It is on the same sort of basis that references to actual racial subjugation derails or corrupts some arbitrary “universal” unity and thus “divides” the working class, women or an a priori “transculturalism”. On the latter basis, many notable “race” analysts denounced something called “multiculturalism” or “political correctness” and argued that the idea that “white” people cannot understand racism from the undersides is in itself “racist”. The established fact that the basis of “whiteness” is that very incessant segregation that creates the differential binary experiences and thus “world views” is of course ignored.

The former view is simply giving voice to the tacit idea that politically charged discourses are a corruption of a “real” world devoid of prejudicial sentiments and only accessible to a “critical”

but ultimately, self legitimizing scientific method. Separating the objective from the subjective³⁹ constitutes the very thing that enables the privileged studying subjects to understand what “black” people mean by “racism” without being “black”. Just as Voltaire, Kant, Hegel, Carlyle or Galton “empirically” discussed “Negroes”, “slaves” or other “cultures” without any direct experience, there are those that believe you can reverse scales temporarily and see the world from “both sides” while firmly rooted on one side. This “laboratory” view of “race” completely deviates from the original meaning of the much abused term “empirical”.

The “all seeing” idea in itself tells us all we need to know about debates happening mostly in Western institutions, in Western languages, employing Western reasoning and binaries but seen as sufficient enough to be representative of every human experience or “humanities problems”. The latter argument not only ignores what we can all observe in the world we live in, but also ignores the obvious fact that debates on “race”; “race” theorists and mongers from the beginning have always been “white” from those specific locations that claim the mantle of “reason”.

However, there is a more sophisticated version of the above argument. Kenan Malik for examples argues:

*“There is no intrinsic link between the idea of race and a rational or scientific view of the world. On the contrary: what made ideas of race plausible were the growth of political sentiments hostile to both the rationalism and the humanism of the Enlightenment. It is true that many in the nineteenth century looked to science to legitimate their political and moral claims about human differences. That is a warning about the need always to be on guard against the illegitimate use of science to give authority to political and moral claims. But that is a warning against a political culture that exploits science in such a fashion, not against the scientific method itself. The idea of race developed out of the space between an abstract belief in equality and the concrete reality of an unequal society. And it developed through a fusion of Romanticism and positivism - the one a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism, the other an attempt to strip away the negative, critical qualities of Enlightenment thinking. If the history of race tells us anything, it is the necessity of holding on to both a rational, scientific view of the world and to a critical politics.”*⁴⁰

Again, the problem with this view of a “neutral” but “critical” scientific rational world view is not simply the naïve *Le Rosbif* empiricism⁴¹ but the obvious fact that the history of “race” (and modernity) tells us different things depending on what we are “holding on to”. Malik’s choice of words is even more interesting: the term “world view” is intrinsically connected to the trendy word “location”. In the light of the dawning of the “new”⁴² “Integral Quantum “Science”, the many worlds views idea will increasingly displace Malik’s “exorbitant singularity” as Foucault put it. It is indeed ironic that earlier on in his “career”; Foucault was seen as the “new Kant” by a few brave souls.

What is important for us here; in terms of what the history of “race” and worlds views tell us, is that the grounds of Kenan Malik’s exorbitant singularity is the same system of thought that prevents Western internal “critical politics” from seeing that the real world is diverse. Such diversity is irreducible to a “Faustian pact” of Western knowledge politics or history; or a conspiracy to “divide” women or the “left” or other such views of “balance” and “both sides” from universalistic societies immersed in asymmetries tilting only towards “one side”. There are

³⁹ usually through an incestuous process ironically termed “peer review”

⁴⁰ See Kenan Malik lectures - http://www.kenanmalik.com/lectures/voltaire_lecture_2009.html (accessed 23 June 2010)

⁴¹ In the sense of the old French or Late Victorian and Austrian School mixes that the contemporary French and German schools of thought find irritating

⁴² New in the Western world since ancient cultures the world over understand these things much better

many types of “rationalities” linked to different world views - not simply the “scientific method” or its partial genealogy in Europe. Malik’s constant reference to ancient Greece not Egypt, Caral, India, China or Judea betrays the usual “Western Civilization” Occidentalism he is entangled in, or perhaps, “holds on to”. Maharishi’s Vedic world view, like quantum physics, highlights the integral nature of unity and diversity as implying one another, not one or the other. Malik’s typically modern attempt to separate form from content and then ascribe the familiar binaries of “good” and “evil” or knowledge and power to the contents cannot adequately appreciate the multiplier effects and constants of “race”. “Race”, as Bonilla-Silva notes, is “beyond good and evil” and thus anchored at the level of the dominant trajectory of the modern system of thought and will to truth/power. The ubiquity and hidden pitfall of the “race” discourse is something Jacques Barzun was aware of even in the 1930s. In *Race: a Study in Modern Superstition*, Barzun not only highlighted the fact that the “superstition” was “modern”; he also noted its remarkable resilience:

“It is one of the penalties of toying with the race-notion that even a strong mind trying to repudiate it will find himself making assumptions and passing judgments on the basis of the theory he declaims.” (Barzun 1938:44)

Superstitions are not a mere attributes of a religion but its core requirement. In the same sense, the separation of the nucleus of the total cultural environment from its attributes tends to reinforce such nucleus. To paraphrase Eduardo Bonilla-Silva in *Racism without Racists* (2010: xiii), despite the best efforts and good intentions of Kantian Universalists, “race”, “*like Freddy Krueger, refuses to die*”. And this is not simply down to Bonilla-Silva’s efforts, insistence or methodological choice. Contrary to Malik’s enlightenment “pesoptimism”⁴³, the reason why race persists like Freddy Krueger is mainly because the race “notion” is rooted in that very “exorbitant singularity” Malik’s fear of contamination depends on. “Race” is not merely “structural” or reducible to some ideological dimension of the “structural” but a concealed intersection between the power Malik condemned as a bastard malformation and the Baconian knowledge he extols with considerable passion. Exorbitant Singularities are always based on binary systems since something has to be “defeated” in the enthronement of such a binary “war concept” and the will to knowledge and power it implies. Hence, the “adversarial” method is seen as an immanent “rational” process that produces the “truth” and revealingly, separates the rational from the corrupted irrational.

It is in the latter sense that we can begin to understand not only the fear of an inherently corrupting “relativism” in the Anglo-American world, but the power/knowledge dimension of the “race” discourse and how the Irish case illuminates this point clearly. As it is well known, Ireland is unique in Western history due to the way it poses a considerable challenge to the usual binary discourses. Its proximity to Britain and the Irish contradictory relationship to the notion of “whiteness” provides us with a unique insight into the hidden aspects of the Baconian theme of knowledge and power. The Irish, throughout modern history, have been described both by their British overlords and themselves as “blacks turn inside out” and the “black people of Europe”. In other words, the language of “black” and “white” is deployed even in instances that are often considered to be within the boundaries of “whiteness”. Like the Nigerian Lugardians⁴⁴, the Irish always seem to become “black” when there are no “blacks” around and “white” when there are no “whites” around. This indicates a marginal “whiteness” which, as Fanon suggested, creates the need not to become “white”, but to “substitute” oneself for “whiteness”.

⁴³ See Bonilla-Silva (ibid: 5)

⁴⁴ The term refers to Sir Frederick Lugard and Flora Louise Shaw or “Lady Lugard” who was born in 1852 in Dublin, the daughter of major-general George Shaw. She became the wife of Lord Lugard, who was Nigeria’s first Governor General from 1914 to 1919. Lady Lugard alongside her husband and the Royal Niger Company invented the entity now called “Nigeria” and the “Lugardian” mantra that continue to be the Nigerian state’s *raison d’être* and *raison d’État*

The appropriation of the metaphor of “blackness” both by the Irish and British colonialists indicate an angle in the race discourse often concealed in the metaphors of the everlasting return of the “new” or “improved”⁴⁵. More important, the Irish case may help to illuminate the inherent contradictions that manifest as Bonilla-Silva’s “triracial” order and even the recent colonization of the “victim” status and narrative. Nevertheless, we should all bear in mind that the “victim-blaming” is happening in a corporatist social environment suffused in the language of “evidence based research”, “care”, “global village” and “humanitarian intervention”.

According to Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (2002: 4-5):

“...in an earlier phase of imperialism, northern countries extracted natural resources and agricultural products from lands they conquered and colonized. Today, while still relying on Third World countries for agricultural and industrial labor, the wealthy countries also seek to extract something harder to measure and quantify, something that can look very much like love. Nannies like Josephine bring... ‘caring work’, performed either in private homes or in institutional settings such as hospitals, hospices, child-care centers, and nursing homes”

It is again not surprising that the meagre employment most Africans have in Ireland is mostly related to “care work” and the “health” and “longevity” industry. The important point however is that the binary distribution of reason played its part not only in the making of “race”, but also in the hierarchy embedded in the “relations of extraction” and the colonial “zones of exchange”.

Conclusion: Black Spots in the Spurts of Whiteness

To conclude, how then are we to conceptualise “Irish racism” given the intersections, fissures and struggles that characterise the history of “race” and its link to modern/colonial power/knowledge? In *Science, Culture and Modern State Formation* (2006), Patrick Carroll showed how transnational transformative forces of “engine science” turned colonial Ireland into a “laboratory” for the experiments in British “statecraft”. The principle figure of the knowledge and power mantra, Francis Bacon, gave us some insight into the ideological dimensions of “engine science” and “statecraft” when he declared in relation to Ireland and Scotland in 1603 that:

“[We shall] reclaim them from their barbarous manners...[and] populate plant and make civil all the provinces of that kingdom...as we are persuaded that it is one of the chief causes for which God hath brought us to the imperial crown of these kingdoms”

The formation of the Irish state through the “cultivation” and transplanting principles of colony administration and “improvement” tells us clearly that we are not talking of an ontologically bounded entity. The Irish state, which by the way, only contains Munster, Leinster, and Connacht and excludes Ulster, is not a self contained unit - whatever the illusory protests of crude nationalists. The contemporary Irish state, despite Morgan Stanley’s *Haute-finance* label “Celtic Tiger” is very British and Victorian, not Celtic - and of course there are no tigers in Ireland. The very things cited by the Irish as the basis of an ontologically bounded Irish identity are themselves largely transnational. The image below demonstrates the ludicrous nature of some of the nationalistic discourses in Ireland. “Don’t shop over the border”, the leaflet says but the “border” in question is actually Ulster. But, as it is always the case with modern nationalism, the leaflet, it turns out, was printed in Ulster.

⁴⁵ Given that the binary system always includes a “third realm” that functions as “zones of exchange”.

DON'T SHOP OVER THE BORDER...SAY LEAFLETS PRINTED IN THE NORTH

Blunder by business chiefs

DAFT business chiefs have urged shoppers to buy locally – on flyers printed in the North.

The Dundalk Chamber of Commerce distributed the leaflets encouraging people to shop in the town as part of an Easter promotion.

But despite there being four printing business in the area they got the flyers promoting value for money in Dundalk produced across the border because it was cheaper. One angry local printer fumed:

"It is ridiculous they are promoting shopping locally and then taking their business across the border because it is cheaper."

"It is completely hypocritical. They expect local people to show loyalty to local shops and businesses but they don't do the same. They should start practising what they preach."

The Dundalk Fighting Back leaflet, distributed to homes and firms in the town, featured offers from 13 local shops and businesses. Local businesses funded the promotion but the printing job was not given to a firm in the town.

Dundalk Chamber of Commerce boss Bill Tosh defended their decision and claimed they had to go for the cheapest option.

He said: "The Easter flyer attempted to selectively platform best value items available in Dundalk, to show the myth that everything north of the border is cheaper is not true."

"The leaflet did not invite Dundalk shoppers to only shop locally, they only pointed to incidences when they could get good value."

"The chamber obtained quotes from two local printers for printing the flyers but went with a firm in Northern Ireland after it came in cheaper."

"We always seek local quotes but equally are always obliged to extract best value for our budget. The campaign was a great success for participating businesses."

However, it emerged only one Dundalk firm was asked to price the job with the other quote being obtained from a printing company in Drogheda despite the fact there are four printing companies in the town.

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Bearing this recurrent "blunder" in nationalism and self representation in mind, the Irish portrayal of Ireland is a contradictory reflection and vestiges of transnational forces and global designs. First, the Roman Catholic Church's headquarters is in Rome, not in Cork or Tipperary. The word "Catholic" or *catholicus* denotes the "universal", "general" or "all embracing". Second, the missionaries the Irish use to prop up local manifestations of transnational colonial contradictions were in the last analysis not evangelising anything reducible to Ireland. Even James Connolly and St. Patrick himself were "immigrants" in the sense that both were born in Scotland. According to the Catholic Church, St. Patrick was born in Kilpatrick, near Dumbarton Scotland, in the year 387. Third, the ideological representation of the Irish as "white" was fundamentally transatlantic even though the "Anglo Saxon Protestant" part of the WASP package was hidden until recently. The Celtic Tiger consumerist economy merely brought out the hidden Weberian "*Protestantoid*" inside the so called Catholic *hiberniores*. After all, Britain was also "Catholic" prior to the reformation.

Aníbal Quijano has theorized that functional 'institutional structures' like nation states, modern universities, churches etc. emerged to manage the classifying and reclassifying of the planets population by the colonizing modern matrix of power (Mignolo 2000: 17). If, as Noel Ignatiev (2009) suggested, the Irish become "white" by assimilating into Quijano's model of power, something equally has to be expunged in that process since all processes of imperial assimilation are always framed as a rupture. In other words, the Irish became "white" not simply by trampling on the "blacks" without, but all those inherent historical contents that had to be buried alongside the "blackness" en route to whiteness.

When the Irish refer to themselves as "White, Christian, Catholic and Celtic", they are thus evoking a fundamentally flawed transnational geohistorical system of thought far beyond the boundaries of every definition of Irishness. "Irishness" in this latter sense has very little to do with Ireland, its unique history or the fact that those "obedient" demographics that are now within the "whiteness" pale do not fit the quintessential historical image of the "Irishmen" and "Irishwomen" of the *Forógra na Poblachta* also known as the "Easter Proclamation".

Statements by Frederick Douglass in 1853, Daniel O'Connell in 1854, the "No Blacks, No Dogs, No Irish" signs in the mid 20th century Britain and "The Irish are the blacks of Europe. So say it loud - I'm black and I'm proud" by the Commitments in 1991 all suggest that the Irish have always seen themselves through the prism of "blackness" or black-like. For Daniel O'Connell and Frederick Douglass, hatred of "blackness" or what Michael McDowell described as "hardnosed racism" is alien to the Emerald Isle. According to both men, the Irish leant to eat the "forbidden fruit" of racism outside Ireland or the normal tendencies of "Irishness". Even McDowell had to evoke the transatlantic term of "red-neck" in his description of "Irish racism".

The words of the Easter proclamation will perhaps fit the experiences of today's "black people" of Ireland as it was the case with both the earlier "blacks turned inside out" and the "black people of Europe" analogy. In the words of the founding fathers of the Irish state:

"We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign (white) people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty: six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and its exaltation among the nations. The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past."

Today in Ireland, whose experiences are consonant with the majority of the Irish Volunteers and Irish Citizen Army? Which section of the Irish population today fits those "obedient" demographic Daniel "the liberator" O'Connell told they were "Irish men no more" with his "Abolition horn"? Who is persecuted, silenced or treated as strangers in a country they are required to call their own just like some of the founding fathers of the Irish state who were executed in Ireland? Who is suffering something similar to "caste oppression" and landlordism in Ireland today? Who fits the Irish depiction of those within and beyond the pale? An editorial in the Irish Post entitled "Founding fathers would be horrified", in relation to the recent international financial crisis states that:

*"...I actually realised that the blundering, objectionable O'Keeffe may well have stumbled upon something. For after all it does say quite a lot about this state of ours... for the founding fathers of this state would surely be horrified by the financial and political clique who have made a mess of this country for so long. After all, as many have often pointed out, James Connolly warned that merely changing the flag from a Union Jack to a Tricolour achieved nothing if it left the same clique and class in charge... the founding fathers of this state, like James Connolly, were not merely squalid little nationalists buttressed up by prejudice and the desire to support a corrupt Irishman over a corrupt Englishman. They were believers in a certain kind of Irish state and whilst there may well have been a divergence of views between Connolly and Pearse and later on Collins as to what that state might be, there is no reason to believe they would have been anything but united in their abhorrence of the corrupt developers, builders and financiers that Bertie Aherne and Fianna Fáil so openly anointed as our masters these last 15 years."*⁴⁶

The origin of the notion of race and the planetary constellation of relations it implies, as both Quijano and Foucault suggested, links the accumulation of capital to the "conquest" of

⁴⁶ <http://www.irishpost.co.uk/tabId/69/itemId/905/Founding-fathers-would-be-horrified.aspx> (accessed 23/5/10)

nature/space and the accumulation and “epidermalisation” of men. These accumulations would not be possible without an episteme that will drive as well as cloak the vital mechanisms. These mechanisms were driven by a serial Eurocentric global design that transformed these accumulations into geo-historical locations and bio-cultural scales of superiority and inferiority. In other words, to understand the contemporary Irish unequivocally cruel treatment of “blacks” in Ireland and how this is related to the curious contradictions of “Irish whiteness”, we have to look at the condition that made such a peculiar binary system of thought thinkable. The many faces of the global binary system are still at work in Ireland in terms of those within and beyond today’s “pale”. This serves as the background within which we can begin to understand not only the underpinning contradictions of “race” but also the corresponding confused ethnic politics in Ireland. “Irish racism” in many ways is a misleading term; the correct terminology should be “racism in Ireland” – suggesting perhaps that “race” historically, is “foreign” to the predominant but subordinated Irish consciousness and as such, is the very thing that needs “deportation” - not “blacks”. So, say it loud!

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