Learning About Colonialism by Scrolling?

The Twitter Thread as Lifewide Textual Offer and Cosmopolitan Potentiality

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Abstract *It is here argued that lifewide learning possibilities may also be viewed in relation to social media, not least the platform Twitter, recently rebranded as X, and the Twitter/X thread; a number of tweets threaded together to form a longer text which is then communicated to, often, a large number of people. Twitter threads may be seen as a lifewide textual offer containing cosmopolitan potentiality, meaning here the potential for a transformation in perspective due to contact with others on global issues, as envisioned by Delanty (2008). It is also argued that the Twitter/X thread functions as a type of social media genre, and three specific types of thread are here analyzed: 1) a collectively created type of thread which looks for contributions from numerous followers on Twitter/X, creating a multi-agent text; 2) an individually-created, 'closed' and usually numbered thread; and 3) an individually-created and open and/or open to collectivization thread, to which other tweets may be added at any time. Twitter threads from the curated Indigenous Australian account @IndigenousX, the British-Irish academic Katy Hayward and Irish historian Liam Hogan are analyzed as lifewide textual offers containing cosmopolitan potentiality. The global issue at the centre of all three threads – and accounts – are the contemporary consequences of European colonialism.*

Keywords *Twitter/X; Cosmopolitanism; Colonialism; Brexit; Slavery*

1. Introduction

The concept of lifewide learning presents various facets of everyday life as imbued with learning possibilities, as containing the potentiality for informal, holistic and 'unmapped' forms of learning. It is here argued that lifewide learn-

ing possibilities may also be viewed in relation to social media, not least the platform Twitter/X and the Twitter/X thread; a number of tweets threaded together to form a longer text which is then communicated to, often, a large number of people. Twitter/X threads may be seen as a lifewide textual offer containing cosmopolitan potentiality, meaning here the potential for a transformation in perspective due to contact with others on global issues, as envisioned by Delanty (2008). It is also argued that the Twitter/X thread functions as a type of social media genre, and three specific types of thread are here analyzed: Twitter/X threads from the curated Indigenous Australian account @IndigenousX, the British-Irish academic Katy Hayward, and Irish historian Liam Hogan may be seen, it is argued, as lifewide textual offers containing cosmopolitan potentiality. The global issue at the centre of all three threads – and accounts – are the contemporary consequences of European colonialism. The accounts were initially analyzed due to their educational content and, subsequently, conceptualizations of digital textual genre were formulated. The accounts were analyzed from the methodological and literary-oriented perspective of digital hermeneutics (Gerbaudo, 2016; Sadler, 2021) and aphorism as literary form, as well as digital communicative genre as part of emerging online norms (Blommaert, 2018).

2. The Learning Context: Twitter/X, Lifewide Learning, Cosmopolitanism and the Twitter/X Thread as Digital Communicative Genre

Twitter and Education Research

Founded in the US in 2006, the online platform Twitter had acquired 313 million monthly users by 2016, including large and active populations of users outside of the English-speaking world, such as in Japan, India, Indonesia and Brazil (Burgess & Baym, 2020, p. 3). Indeed, as a social platform it has garnered a rather elite reputation. Burgess and Baym (2020) suggest that "many journalists, academics, and politicians are virtually dependent on it as a social listening, professional dialogue, and public relations tool" (p. 4). Despite the existence of several well-known far-right tweeters, and the re-establishment of various far-right accounts following Elon Musk's acquirement of the microblogging site in late 2022 and the subsequent rebranding as X in mid-2023, American-centred research suggests the platform attracts, in the US at least,

a disproportionate amount of liberal, young and well-educated individuals who generally vote for the Democratic Party (Wojcik & Hughes, 2019). Since the platform is of course relatively new, research on Twitter is also a relatively new phenomenon, with various orientations, such as, for example, research on the platform's relationship to media agenda-setting (e.g. Vasterman, 2018 and Abdi-Herrle, 2018), Twitter's influence on electoral politics (e.g. Galdieri et al., 2018 and Kamps, 2020), its interconnections with street protests (e.g. Gerbaudo, 2012 and Dang-Anh, 2019), and Twitter as a performance space for the creation of an online persona (e.g. De Kosnik & Feldman, 2019 and Burrough, 2016).

Twitter has also been extensively investigated from the perspective of learning and education research, especially in relation to the third-level educational context (Ricoy, 2016). Malik et al. (2019) have conducted a review of 1,313 anglophone academic articles written on the subject of Twitter and education between the years 2007 and 2017. The authors conclude that 80.6 % of the articles that they found deal with higher education; 9.7 % with the context of secondary schools; 3.9 % are categorized as dealing with online surveys; 2.9 % with academic conferences, while 2.9 % of the articles analyzed are regarded as having a miscellaneous educational institute as their principal topic (pp. 5–6). What is interesting here, from my perspective, is that *informal* situations of learning would appear to be largely absent from the existent research dealing with Twitter and education. In the context of a platform with more than 300 million monthly users this seems like a significant omission, as the platform surely retains a substantial potential for informal forms of learning.

Lifewide Learning and Cosmopolitanism

According to Jackson (2012) "lifelong and lifewide learning are considered to be necessary for learning societies which view the whole of life as an opportunity for learning" (p. 1). Ideas of lifewide learning have their roots in the "experiential learning" ideas of early 20th century educational thinkers, such as John Dewey and Eduard Lindemann (Jackson, 2012, pp. 2–3), while Jackson (2012) also sees Jost Reischmann as the most prominent contemporary theorist of lifewide learning (p.4). Reischmann's (2014) concept of lifewide learning is central here to the conceptualization of the Twitter platform as a space in which a type of informal, textual-based learning may take place. Reischmann calls lifewide learning "learning en passant" or learning "by passing by," which

may occur in many contexts and via numerous types of actions, and can, he believes, be divided into three types of learning (p. 293). Thus, learning may occur parallel to "other planned and intended activities;" may be seen as "single event learning" linked to a "clear describable life situation" (p. 294); or as "mosaic stone learning" with outcomes "woven into life routines" (p. 296). Indeed "Mosaic stone learning" may be intertwined with many life activities. As Reischmann (2014) writes: "Reading books, magazines, newspapers, watching tv, talking to colleagues, observing others, and exchanging with whomsoever forms a universe of small learning experiences" (p. 296). He sees lifewide learning as something that is "low compulsory" and "highly individualised" and also as something that retains a degree of uncertainty in its execution, as well as its outcome; "it can happen – or not" and "different people learn different things from the same situation" (p. 296). Lifewide learning, as conceived by Reischmann, may however also be highly experiential and go well beyond the acquirement of new knowledge: "Often this learning is holistic; it includes not only knowledge, but also reality handling, emotions, valuing, perspective transformation" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 297). Lifewide learning, in the contemporary context, can also be *digital* and can take place via social media; a context that is also without doubt "low compulsory" and "highly individualised", with outcomes "woven into life routines" (p. 296).

The idea of lifewide learning as potentially facilitating a transformation in perspective means that the process of lifewide learning may also be seen as somewhat analogous to cosmopolitanism, or at least to Gerard Delanty's processual understanding of the term. Delanty (2008) sees cosmopolitanism as a normative theory but also as a social phenomenon linked to a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance" (p. 218). Delanty (2009) argues that cosmopolitanism should not be seen as a synonym of diversity or transnationalism, but as a "relevant and critical moment" "arising out of the encounter or interaction with the Other" when "moral and political evaluation occurs;" "a constructive process of creating new ways of thinking" which is not to be found in particular individuals – 'cosmopolitans' as opposed to 'locals' – but rather "in identity processes, such as debates, narratives, forms of cognition, networks of communication, ethical and political principles" (p. 252). It is also clear such encounters resulting in the transformation of self-understanding and a change of perspective may also occur as online encounters, in a type of "postdigital cosmopolitanism" (Lenehan, 2022).

The most substantial argument in favour of the Internet as a tool for the advancement of a type of processual cosmopolitanism has come from Oliver Hall. He (Hall, 2018, 410) argues that the Internet may be seen as: "A communications media transmitting meaningful symbolic flows, across time-space, in virtual geographies where soft cultural types of cosmopolitan relationships can emerge in expressions of curiosity and openness located in the banal practices of online consumption of different cultural forms, but also from a greater intersubjective reflexiveness arising out of discursive intercultural exchanges". Thus, he views the Internet not just as a space packed with textual and image-based banal forms of cultural cosmopolitanism, but also as a space for possible self-reflection resulting from (medial) intercultural communication leading to a (potential) transformational process. Therefore, the Internet may also be seen as a collection of spaces full of cosmopolitan lifewide learning potential, not least on the platform Twitter/X.

Twitter/X, Literature and the Twitter/X Thread

Increasingly researchers have also seen tweets – short texts published on the Twitter platform, often in relation to images, films or other short textual expressions – as a distinct form of text. Indeed, a blog post in 2014 on *The Guardian* website already suggested that Twitter had given birth to a new literary genre: twitterature (Armitstead, 2014). Hui (2019) has argued that tweets may be placed within the continuous literary-historical context of the aphorism, "the shortest of genres;" "a basic unit of intelligible thought, this microform has persisted across world cultures and histories, from Confucius to Twitter" (p. 1). Hui defines the aphorism as "a short saying that requires interpretation" (p.5). He sees tweets as the "digital descendent of the analog aphorism" and Twitter as "the largest archive of the present the world has ever seen" (pp. 177–178). Indeed, there is little to no consensus regarding how exactly an aphorism, as a literary genre, may be defined (Spicker, 1997, p. 2; Spicker, 2004, pp. 6–8). Morson (2003) believes that aphorisms retain a degree of mystery and should not consist of "solving puzzles" but in "deepening questions" (p. 411); Maddocks (2001) emphasizes the importance of the "balancing act between irony and moral condemnation" in an aphorism (p.175), while Crosbie and Guhin (2019), from a sociological perspective, suggest that aphorisms are "often used to 'stand in' for more complex arguments" (p. 383). Of course, tweets can potentially do *all* of these things, depending on the individual tweet itself. Gray (1987) suggests that the aphorism form he examines – from the pen

of Franz Kafka – takes root "not as an expressive form placed in the service of traditional values; nor does it undertake the *dogmatic* presentation of new values; rather it strives to imbue static, rigid values and truths with fluidity and flexibility" (p. 37). The tweets examined here often fall into this category and look to suggest a greater plurality in relation to reality-creating concepts, arguing implicitly for more fluidity and flexibility in depictions of reality.

While many individual tweets may indeed be viewed as a form of (quasi-literary) aphorism, the central interest here lies with the *Twitter/X thread* as a text form: This is a collection of tweets, often numbered and organized chronologically, 'threaded' together to create a longer text. Indeed, the academic literature relating to the platform Twitter definitely appears to have somewhat neglected the Twitter thread as a topic of analysis. Burgess and Baym (2020), in their biography of the platform, give the @, the # and the retweet full chapters, but do not analyze the thread as a unique Twitter textual form. In *Twitter and Society* (Weller et al, 2014) – one of the first edited volumes examining the platform – there is also no dedicated chapter dealing with the Twitter thread. While it is perhaps true that Twitter threads have only more recently gained in (perceived) importance on the platform since they were formalized with a more specific thread tool in 2017 – before this one had to continually answer one's own tweet to create a thread – it is also true that threads have existed on Twitter for a (relatively) long time: The 2021 film *Zola*, the first Hollywood movie to be constructed from a Twitter thread, was based on a 148 tweet thread tweeted on the platform in 2015 (Puckett-Pope, 2021).

A Twitter thread may certainly be seen as a genre in the sense that "*all* communicative behaviour is genred – or at least if we intend to make our communicative behaviour understood by others, it needs to be recognizable as a specific genre" (Blommaert, 2018, p. 52). Yet, there are also sub-genres evident within the Twitter thread itself. Sadler (2021), in his discussion of Twitter as a platform of *Fragmented Narrative*, refers to "narratives which are built up through sequentially posted fragments" which he sees as a type of "vertical storytelling" as the fragments – the threaded Tweets – are presented vertically on the screen (p. 51). However, how one views such threads on the screen is not necessarily uniform and they may be read differently, as they may appear structurally differently on your screen. Sadler sees such Twitter threads as a type of bordered and clearly defined – often numbered – "bounded narrative" which may also be encountered as single fragments or as parts of a whole (p. 52). This type of textual genre has an undoubted flexibility: "Vertical narratives may be closed when their textual boundaries are clearly defined,

or open when they lack defined boundaries and may be added to at any time" (p. 20–21).

It is here argued that certain types of Twitter threads may be viewed as a lifewide textual offer with a cosmopolitan potentiality for a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty, 2008, p. 218), including the potentiality for "perspective transformation" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 297). The term "text" is consciously used here rather than "narrative." The term narrative has experienced a rapid inflation in usage in academia rendering the term perhaps less potent: Not every text is a narrative, not every text *needs* to be seen as a narrative. The Twitter threads viewed here may perhaps be seen as narratives, or perhaps not, but they are definitely text forms and part of an emerging digital-textual genre often widely read. I would like to discuss here three types of Twitter thread: 1) A collectively-created and very open type of thread which looks for contributions from numerous followers on Twitter. These types of thread are marked by an extreme openness and plurality, as they actively seek textual interaction from a variety of sources, from which they receive their meaning and force. They are, thus, multi-agent threads which may potentially have hundreds or even thousands of contributors. 2) An individually-created closed thread which is "bounded" (Sadler, 2021, p. 52) – a starting point and endpoint are created, thus suggesting that the thread is chiefly to be read and not necessarily to be added to – and usually numbered (e.g starting with tweet 1/15 and ending with 15/15 etc.). 3) An individually-created and open and/or open to collectivization thread, which is thus explicitly unbounded and "may be added to at any time" (Sadler, 2021, p. 20–21). The meaning and force of the second and third thread-type comes largely, I would argue, from the perceived expertise of the tweeters themselves.

1) A Collectively-Created, Open Thread: @IndigenousX

The Australian-based IndigenousX grouping describes itself as a "100 % Indigenous owned and operated media, consultancy, and training organisation" which "believes in the principles of self-determination and works to affect change by upholding knowledges, voices and ways of being" (IndigenousX, n.d.). Dedicated to digital storytelling, IndigenousX now consists of a website, a podcast, numerous social media accounts and is partnered with the Australian version of *The Guardian* newspaper. The project began, however, solely as a Twitter account, or more specifically, a curated Twitter account. A curated account is 'taken over' and run by different people, usually for a period

of a week, allowing for the creation of multiagent and changing content with a greater diversity of perspectives. According to Burgess and Baym (2020), "Indigenous cultural and intellectual leaders created innovative and culturally appropriate forms of media activism around the rotating @IndigenousX account," which was taken over by a different Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander[1] each week, "connecting Australia's Indigenous communities with each other and with First Nations people the world over" (p. 9). Writing on the ten-year anniversary of the account, the Indigenous X founder Luke Pearson (2022) describes how "IndigenousX began as a rotating Twitter account where a different Indigenous person would take control of the account for the week and tweet about ... well, whatever they wanted to." With regard to the reasons behind the founding of the curated Twitter account and the organization itself, Pearson (2022) writes: "IndigenousX was created for lots of different reasons, but a very important one was because Australian media are so woeful when it comes to reporting on Indigenous issues."

However, the hosting of the account was stopped on 14 September 2022 after one of the hosts – Professor of Indigenous Studies Sandy O'Sullivan – was threatened subsequent to her critical discussion of the British monarchy's position in the colonial system and her defence of those who wished to consciously not mourn or even lampoon the death of the 96-year-old British monarch Elizabeth II (Karvelas, 2022). The account tweeted on 14 September 2022: "Given recent events, the IndigenousX team is concerned that we cannot currently provide a safe space for hosts or followers via this account. As such, we are hitting pause on hosting in order to give us time to consider the best course of action for the future" (IndigenousX, 2022b). Thus, the "first rotating Twitter account in the world" (Deans, 2018) has ceased, for now at least, the act of rotating.

On 21 March 2022 – Australian time – the Indigenous X account was taken over by an academic called Amy Thunig. She began her curation with a short introduction, telling her Twitter audience she was a "Gomeroi/Kamilaroi person living on unceded Awabakal lands," was working as an academic "on unceded

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1   According to the website of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS): "Australia's Indigenous peoples are two distinct cultural groups made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. But there is great diversity within these two broadly described groups exemplified by the over 250 different language groups spread across the nation" (AIATSIS, 2020). The Torres Strait Islands are situated to the north of Australia and to the south of New Guinea.

Darug lands," ending her tweet with the question: "Whose land are YOU on today?" (IndigenousX, 2022a). Thus, the IndigenousX Twitter community – almost 75,000 followers – was asked to say whose unceded, Indigenous land they lived on. A long multi-agent thread consisting of 218 tweeted answers to the original tweet was then created.

Fig. 1: *Initial Tweet From the IndigenousX Account*

Some responses were short and factual and gave the name of the indigenous peoples who had originally resided on the areas they lived in in Australia, including "Kabi Kabi," "Naarm. Woi-warrung land," "Wergaia", and "Wurundjeri Woiwurrung," while one tweeter replied that it was "Gadigal land. Never ceded – always was, always will be Aboriginal land" (IndigenousX, 2022a). Some responses came from other tweeters who identify as indigenous. Thus, a tweet from an account called Gomeroi states: "Mine!! But their Govrmnt refuses to give it back to me #landback #gomeroi" (IndigenousX, 2022a). Other tweeted replies were from non-Indigenous people who remain, however, very conscious of their privileged position within a settler state built on brutal colonialism. A response answers: "Today I'm on Jarrowair & Giabal Land, where I spent much of childhood and teenage life – visiting this place always helps me get quiet enough to spend time listening and connecting and remembering my entanglements with and responsibilities to this Country as a settler" (IndigenousX, 2022a). Many tweeters write of respect, not least in

relation to elders who – within many Indigenous Australian traditions – are seen as intertwined with the landscape. Thus, a tweeter writes: "I am living on the unceded lands of the Wadawurrung, I pay my respects to elders, past, present and emerging" (IndigenousX, 2022a). A small number of non-Australian based tweets are also to be seen from other settler states, with one person responding: "I'm in San Francisco at the moment! Which is the unceded land of the Ramaytush Ohlone people" (IndigenousX, 2022a). Thus, this tweeter consciously creates a connection between the Australian and US Indigenous context.

Fig 2: Tweeted Reactions to the Tweet From the @IndigenousX Account

A multi-agent, open thread was created with the tweeted answers to the initial question appearing vertically on the screen, the text fragments being held together loosely. This collection of tweets may be viewed as a series of aphorisms in the manner envisaged by Gray (1987) as they strive "to imbue static, rigid values and truths with fluidity and flexibility" (p. 37); they question the validity of the existent and dominant language used in Australia to describe geographical realities, suggesting clearly and repeatedly that there are other linguistic terms linked to earlier settlements. This thread also retains, it is argued, lifewide learning and cosmopolitan potentiality which could be self-transformative due to the textual "engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty, 2008, p. 218). The issue of global significance here is colonialism and mass murder, and the thread highlights successfully how Australian geographical terminology remains interconnected with colonial processes which still retain repressive power in the construction of everyday linguistic realities.

2) An Individually-Created and Closed Thread: @hayward_katy

Katy Hayward is a British political sociologist who undertook her postgraduate studies in Ireland and is now based in Northern Ireland at Queen's University Belfast. Hayward's expertise is in the area of Irish and British engagement with the European Union and, since the United Kingdom's decision to leave the Union, she has been very much in demand in relation to analyzing Northern Ireland's position within these emerging new geopolitical realities. Hayward's Twitter account @hayward_katy (Hayward, n.d.), with circa 30,000 followers, has taken on a central role in relation to her wider communication on the Brexit issue. In her Twitter account she regularly posts Twitter threads, often embedded in online humour, which break down the complexities of what is happening in relation to Brexit for a wider audience. The importance given to her Twitter account is to be seen in her receipt of the Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial prize in 2019, a prize given to those deemed to have contributed to Irish-British relations and which remembers the British ambassador to Ireland murdered by the Provisional IRA in Dublin in 1976. The prize was given to Katy Hayward in 2019 "for the Twitter account on which she provides her own political and sociological account of the Brexit process as it unfolds, as well as curating an up-to-date link to a range of work by other authorities" (Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial Trust., n.d.). It is worth noting that the prize is generally given to literary authors, academics or journalists based on specific

books they have written, and it is unprecedented that someone would receive the award on the basis of a social media account.

In a thread from 5 February 2019 (Hayward, 2019) Katy Hayward analyzes the so-called Malthouse Compromise. This was an idea initiated by Conservative Party politicians in Britain to ease the Brexit situation in relation to Northern Ireland and which would, it was envisaged, keep the new external EU border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland open. As Elgot (2019) writes: "In basic terms, the prime minister would renegotiate the backstop element of her Brexit deal to replace it with a free trade agreement with as-yet unknown technology to avoid customs checks on the Irish border." The "backstop" mentioned here meant essentially that, if no other solution could be found in relation to keeping the border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland open, then the United Kingdom would remain in the European customs union, something which the more hardline Brexiteer elements in the Conservative Party greatly feared.

Hayward begins her 15 tweet thread so:

"Who isn't fed up of the #Brexit hell-on-wheels show? We want certainty, agreement, realism... In fact, we need compromise! Could the #Malthouse-Compromise be the olive branch that shows sign of dry land on the distant horizon? (I'm thinking esp of you, @BorderIrish) 1/15."

The tweet begins with a generalized viewpoint that is, initially, actually just looking for the Brexit process to come to an end but counteracts this by suggesting that compromise is needed. The tweet is also very much in tune with the humour norms of Twitter and tags the @BorderIrish account: An account run anonymously, but which pertains to be 'run' by the border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland and which often uses humour in making various highly political points. Posting numerous gifs, Hayward then summarizes what the Malthouse Compromise actually contains over a number of tweets, stating sceptically in tweet nine that, in relation to the border on the island of Ireland: "Its concession to avoiding a hard border? To have checks away from borderline & to 'promise' no physical infrastructure." Here the @BorderIrish account is again tagged, giving the impression that she is actually 'talking' to the border, while she also tweets a well-known gif from the movie *Scrooged* (1988) in which the character played by Bill Murray tells one of the Christmas ghosts that "I may be invisible but I'm not deaf,"

thus suggesting that she recognizes that the border has to be invisible and also suggesting she does not want to hurt the border's feelings!

Fig. 3: Tweet 9/15 from @hayward_katy 5 February 2019.

In her final tweet she summarizes the main problems with the so-called compromise and suggests ultimately that "this doc is designed to get an agreement within the Tory party, not with the EU."

This thread from Katy Hayward is also an example of a Twitter thread containing cosmopolitan potentiality, which could indeed perhaps result in a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty, 2008, p. 218). The issue of global importance is undoubtedly here Brexit, which may also be viewed as inherently linked with processes of historical colonialism, even if this relationship is more complicated than simply seeing Brexit as an expression of colonial nostalgia and an attempt to recreate the British Empire –dislodged from the European Union –in a new form, as "imperial modes of thought" shaped the views of both sides in the Brexit debate (Saunders, 2020, p. 1143). The thread is a closed thread, not oriented towards interaction, but steeped in ironic online humour and with the tagging of anonymous (humorous) accounts. While the thread

viewed earlier from the IndigenousX account was intentionally interactive and the communicative power of the thread came from the conscious creation of a highly pluralistic thread, this thread is based, and indeed this is true of Katy Haywood's whole Twitter account, on the perception of her expertise in relation to Brexit and on the idea that on this platform an academic is making complex issues understandable to a more general audience, in an accessible and at times humorous manner.

Fig. 4: Tweet 15/15 from @hayward_katy 5

3) An Individually-Created, Open and/or Open to Collectivization Thread: @Limerick1914

Liam Hogan is a librarian and an independent scholar based in Limerick in Ireland. In more recent years he has become prominent within Irish scholarly, intellectual and social media discourse due to his continued debunking of the "Irish slaves" narrative and accompanying online memes. This is not a narrative found in academic and scholarly history but in a small number of popular historical narratives which refuse to differentiate between indentured servitude and chattel slavery, even though "servitude in the Anglo-Caribbean was temporary and non-hereditary, with legal personhood, while chattel slavery was perpetual and hereditary with subhuman legal status," while the "re-

fusal to differentiate" often reveals attempts "to claim spuriously that slavery had nothing to do with race" (Hogan et al., 2016, p. 19). The "Irish slaves" myth has been especially prevalent on US social media, has been used to create "an 'equality of suffering' between enslaved Africans and white Europeans" and as an online rhetorical tool to "legitimise racism and to undermine black rights struggles," whitewashing history "in the service of Irish nationalism and white supremacist causes" (Hogan, 2015). Thus, Hogan has acted as both an academic historian and online media activist in his attempts to debunk an unfounded narrative used in transnational white supremacist discourse, but which has been especially prominent in the United States (Amend, 2016).

Liam Hogan has often used individually-created open threads – often with extensive references to source-based evidence – to debunk what is essentially digital white supremacist content. These threads are usually open and are not numbered, allowing other people to add to them and allowing the author to add to them himself, often over a longer period of time. So, for example, on 23 February 2019 Liam Hogan began an open, temporally extensive thread which he added to at various times until 12 September 2019. The catalyst for the thread was an article in the *Washington Post* concerning the support of three members of the American Democratic Party for what is described as "race-based reparations" (Stein, 2019). According to Hogan's first tweet: "This is, predictably, leading to a resurgence of the 'Irish slaves' meme across all social media platforms" (Hogan, 2019). This is followed by a tweet summarizing his general position on these memes and the general purpose for their proliferation, stating: "A gentle reminder that Irish "history" has been weaponised by racists to deny justice for African Americans for nearly two centuries. It seems that many are willing to incinerate the integrity of our history in the name of white supremacy and anti-blackness," while he argues that these contemporary online arguments are "a living legacy of the racist pro-slavery ideologies of the 19th century" (Hogan, 2019). He then proceeds to draw a comparison between this contemporary discourse and 19th century discourse which saw a comparison between black chattel slavery and the position of working-class white people. Thus, he writes: "In 1834 the Irish-born District Attorney in Tennessee stated that although chattel slavery was 'unlovely' the enslaved were in better condition than 'the labouring classes in Europe' (Hogan, 2019)." He sees the same type of thinking projected onto the past in the online discussion on mythical "Irish slaves," despairing at the logic of this comparison and believing that: "It is quite something to observe the flexibility of the denialism. Whether free or indentured someone else always

had it 'worse' than those born or condemned to racialised perpetual hereditary chattel slavery (Hogan, 2019)." He responds to this by posting a link to his own article on the numbers of slave-owners with Irish names in 1860 in the USA, who owned, he argues, a total of 110,000 slaves and, thus, points out the ridiculous nature of seeing Irish penal servitude and poverty in 19th century America and black chattel slavery as the same thing, as people who were likely to be Irish or of Irish background were also able to be slave-owners. He concludes the thread with a tweet on 14 September 2019 by directly debunking a meme circulating on Facebook showing 6 red haired girls and stating that the Irish were the first slaves. While earlier in the thread he had pointed out the discursive connections between contemporary Irish slave meme materials and racist 19th century pro-slavery discourse, he here changes tack and points out the simple falsity of the meme image itself, as: "The photo does not show 'Irish slaves' nor Irish children. It was taken on a beach in Holland by Igor Borisov & the children are Dutch (Hogan, 2019)."

Fig. 5: Tweet from Liam Hogan, 24 February 2019

Fig. 6: Tweet From Liam Hogan, 12 September 2019

Thus, the Twitter thread examined here by Liam Hogan may be seen as an individually-created and open and/or open to collectivization thread, which is explicitly unbounded and "may be added to at any time" (Sadler, 2021). It may also be viewed as a lifewide textual offer with a cosmopolitan potentiality for a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty, 2008, p. 218), including the potentiality for "perspective transformation" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 297). The issue of global significance is again colonialism and its accompanying dehumanizing and murderous practice of slavery, which continues to result in contemporary inequalities and injustice. Hogan's thread is informed by academic historical scholarship but is also embedded in digital culture and looks to debunk any truth which people may associate with a certain series of memes created to discredit justice issues for black people in the United States of America. He does this here by pointing out the similarities in these contemporary discur-

sive practices with plainly racist 19th century pro-slavery arguments and also emphasizes the shear falsity of some memes. While he posts hyperlinks and dissects memes and the thread is very much within the norms of digital culture, the thread does not attempt the Internet humour of Katy Hayward but retains a very serious and scholarly tone. This is perhaps understandable due to its content. The sense of specific expertise which Liam Hogan retains in relation to the debunking of Irish slave memes adds to the discursive power of the thread, as does his constant references to historical evidence to back up his tweeted statements.

3.   Conclusion

Thus, it was argued that lifewide learning possibilities may also be viewed in relation to social media, not least the platform Twitter and the Twitter thread, which may be seen as a lifewide textual offer containing cosmopolitan potentiality, meaning here the potential for a transformation in perspective due to contact with others on global issues, as envisioned by Delanty (2008). There is definitely potential here in these, at times, challenging social media texts for a type of "learning en passant" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 293), for a "mosaic stone learning" with potential outcomes "woven into life routines" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 296). It was also argued that the Twitter thread functions as a type of social media genre, and three distinct types of thread were identified and analyzed: 1) a collectively created and very open type of thread which looks for contributions from numerous followers on Twitter, creating a multi-agent text; 2) an individually-created, closed and usually numbered thread; and 3) an individually-created and open and/or open to collectivization thread, to which other tweets may be added at any time. Twitter threads from the curated Indigenous Australian account @IndigenousX, the British-Irish academic Katy Hayward and Irish historian Liam Hogan were analyzed as lifewide textual offers containing cosmopolitan potentiality, while the global issue at the centre of all three threads – and accounts – are the contemporary consequences of European colonialism, it was argued.

Polarization is also a major issue on social media and Twitter followers following a certain account may do so because they think similarly to the account producing the content they desire, and they may look simply to have their already-existing viewpoints validated. There is, thus, definitely a 'preaching to the converted' element present in aspects of social media. On the other hand,

scrolling a Twitter thread is a reading experience and may also represent a form of experiential perspective-widening and could, surely, have a potential transformative effect, not least due to the reciprocal and interactive nature of the Twitter platform, which generally enables users to ask authors/tweeters questions. The interpretation and relating of digital text to one's personal experience, and whether this contains perspective-transformative dimensions, is of course a highly subjective process that remains very difficult to map in any type of objectified manner. Indeed, this is also in line with the conceptualization of lifewide learning, based as it is upon the learning potentiality and *possibility* of learning contained within a wide variety of daily life activities. Reischmann (2014) sees lifewide learning as something that is "low compulsory" and "highly individualised," as something that retains a degree of uncertainty in its execution, as well as its outcome; "it can happen – or not" and "different people learn different things from the same situation" (p. 296). Thus, social media, and specific forms of the Twitter thread, represent ideal sites for lifewide learning.

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