

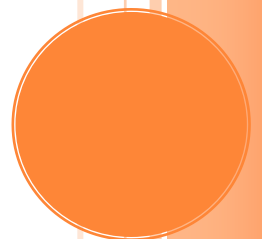
# WHAT'S IN A NAME: REFLECTIONS ON THE ANGLO-SAXON DEBATE

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Bachelor's thesis English Language and Culture

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## **Abstract**

The field of Anglo-Saxon (AS) studies is facing accusations of racist structures and promoting a predominantly white field. The term 'Anglo-Saxon' is emblematic of these problems, some academics argue, as the term has become contaminated with racial issues throughout history. Academics in the field of AS studies are arguing about the tenability of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' and whether the term should be retained or rejected. This bachelor's thesis reflects on the developments of this debate and explores the implications this debate has for the use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon'.

Keywords: Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Saxonism, Early Medieval England, racism, diversity, white supremacy, debate, misappropriation.

**NB** For reasons of consistency and clarity, the term 'Anglo-Saxon' is used throughout this thesis to refer to the AS period, its culture and people. This thesis is explorative in nature and while reasons to replace the term are examined and central to this thesis, I opted to maintain the term 'Anglo-Saxon', and reflect on this choice in my conclusion.

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## Introduction

*What's in a name? that which we call a rose*

*By any other name would smell as sweet;*

Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

A major ripple effect within the field of AS studies was in the making when Dr. Mary Rambaran-Olm took the podium to deliver her speech at the *RaceB4Race* symposium in Washington in September 2019. In a dramatic turn of events, she resigned as the second vice president of the *International Society of Anglo-Saxonists* (ISAS), arguing that ISAS' refusal to reject the term 'Anglo-Saxon' was emblematic of the field's racist structures and facilitation of predominantly white voices. Her speech sparked the debate about the tenability of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' in light of the accusations of racism and white gatekeeping within the field of AS studies. The current academic debate is about whether the term 'Anglo-Saxon' should have a place within the scholarly lexicon, considering the term has acquired problematic connotations of racism and white supremacy throughout the centuries after the AS period.

The debate about the term 'Anglo-Saxon', sometimes also referred to as the 'Anglo-Saxon debate' in essays, provides insights into what profound effects seemingly arbitrary labels can have. It highlights how language is never neutral, and allows us to explore what to do with that information. When does this lack of neutrality demand change, and when not? The Anglo-Saxon debate provides a running example of language's multi-layered and complex nature, and its exploration shows how the labels we use are not static but highly dynamic. The debate is very much alive and developing, and its developments and outcomes are of great significance to the academics using the term 'Anglo-Saxon'. It impacts the way these academics present themselves and use the term 'Anglo-Saxon' in their research, but also

has implications for the term's non-scholarly use. Re-evaluating the term 'Anglo-Saxon' suits an academic field that constantly and critically dares to question itself.

This exploration of the Anglo-Saxon debate aims to contribute to further insights into a recent and impactful debate and its underlying background, issues, questions, voices and implications. A detailed exploration facilitates an outline of a running example of language's power and complexity and highlights that in fact, there can be much more to a name than Shakespeare's Juliet assumes. The current academic debate about the contamination of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' has had serious implications for the use of the term as it developed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, primarily since medievalist Mary Rambaran-Olm's speech in September 2019. Objectively exploring the term's meaning followed by a thorough assessment of the debate's key voices and arguments lend weight to the argument that the term 'Anglo-Saxon' cannot continue to be used in its current form, but needs thorough revision instead.

## Chapter 1: Exploring the Term ‘Anglo-Saxon’

### The historical meaning of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’

The term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ seen within the historical context of the AS period refers to those peoples that migrated from the European continent to what is now England and ruled until the Norman Conquest in 1066. This historical meaning does not cover other connotations and meanings the term has taken on throughout the centuries after the AS period.

Reynolds argues that the assumed historical referential meaning of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is actually a modern use of the term.<sup>1</sup> The people that the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ refers to did not frequently use this label themselves, according to Reynolds.<sup>2</sup> She states that they were “by the early eight century if not before, using the simple word “English” (*Angli, Anglici*) to refer to themselves.”<sup>3</sup> Reynolds does note, however, that the term was used by several kings from the 9<sup>th</sup> century and onwards; West Saxon kings and their successors used the terms *Angli Saxones, Angolsaxones, Anglosaxones* and *Angulsaxones* in their titles.<sup>4</sup> How a king refers to himself is of great significance since it provides insight into a king’s and his people’s identity. Given that some kings included references to the Anglo-Saxons in their title indicates that this term was relatable to the people of the time. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when those fifth century invaders began to identify themselves as a unity, but a term does not have to be used by the historical group itself from the start to be historically accurate. Labels used for self-identification are very unlikely to be instantaneously there from the beginning. The idea that the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ only started to come into play in later centuries during the period does not necessarily challenge its historical accuracy – which Reynold seems to think it does, – for the time it takes to develop labels used for self-identification needs to be valued and

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Reynolds, “What do we mean by “Anglo-Saxon” and “Anglo-Saxons”?”, *Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 4 (1985): 397, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/175473>.

<sup>2</sup> Reynolds, “What do we mean,” 398.

<sup>3</sup> Reynolds, “What do we mean,” 398.

<sup>4</sup> Reynolds, “What do we mean,” 398.



understood. It is not an unusual process for a group to develop their identity gradually. Ignoring the time this process demands overlooks important developments in a search for identity, which are crucial developments to understand if we want to grasp peoples and cultures from the past.

Reynolds also argues that those people we refer to as the Anglo-Saxons were at their time “not consistently distinguishable from everyone else.”<sup>5</sup> However, the Anglo-Saxons were distinguished as a group in one of the period’s most important history sources, namely Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English people*.<sup>6</sup> The Old English translation of this work was commissioned by King Alfred during his reign in the 9<sup>th</sup> century as part of his educational programme. This educational programme was set up to translate those books to the English language Alfred deemed necessary for his people to become acquainted with<sup>7</sup> and served as an opportunity for his people to become educated.<sup>8</sup> The translation of Bede’s work was abbreviated to highlight those matters that were relevant to the English people.<sup>9</sup> The translation includes a passage about the settlement of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, indicating that Alfred considered this text to be important and relevant to his people. The Old English translation tells about the arrival of the “Angelþeod, Seaxna and Geatum,” (‘Angles, Saxons and Jutes’)<sup>10</sup> explaining, “Then the people of the Angles and Saxons were invited by the aforesaid king [Vortigern] and came to Britain in three large ships. . . .”<sup>11</sup> The origins of these new invaders are explained in quite some detail, and King Alfred’s of Bede’s work implies

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Reynolds, “What do we mean by “Anglo-Saxon” and “Anglo-Saxons”?”, *Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 4 (1985): 403, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/175473>.

<sup>6</sup> “Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*,” in *Old and Middle English c.890-c.1450: An Anthology*, 3rd ed., ed. Elaine Treharne (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Irvine, “Old English prose: King Alfred and his books,” in *Beowulf and Other Stories: A New Introduction to Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures*, ed. Richard North and Joe Allard (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), 253-254, Google Books.

<sup>8</sup> Irvine, “Old English prose,” 254.

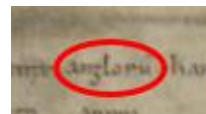
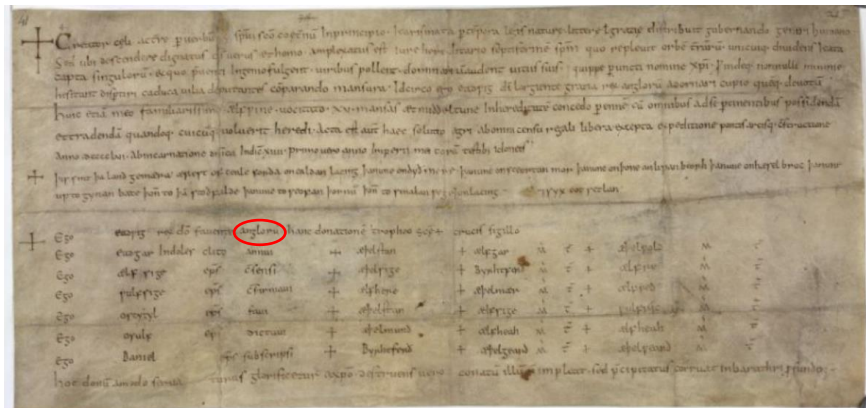
<sup>9</sup> “Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*,” in *Old and Middle English c.890-c.1450: An Anthology*, 3rd ed., ed. Elaine Treharne (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> “Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*,” 4.

<sup>11</sup> “Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*,” 4.

that the origins of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes and by implication the terms *Angle* (‘Angles’) and *Seaxum* (‘Saxons’) were of a certain significance to the people of Alfred’s time.

References to the Anglo-Saxons are made by others during the period as well. Wood notes how “[o]n the continent in the eighth century, Paul the Deacon speaks of the *Anglisaxones*.”<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the charter shown below written during King Eadwig’s reign in 956 includes the Latin abbreviation *Anglosú*, which stands for *Anglosaxonum*.<sup>13</sup>



*Cotton MS Augustus II 41, The British Library*

The aforementioned examples show that variations of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ did exist in the period we refer to as the AS period. It seems that the Anglo-Saxons and their kings were familiar with and able to relate to the term. To render the term historically insignificant in terms of the way the Anglo-Saxons defined themselves therefore appears to be inappropriate. The term is by no means perfect; it for example lacks reference to an important group of the Germanic invaders – the Jutes. However, King Alfred and some of his successors identified themselves as Anglo-Saxons which provides legitimacy for the use of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ in its historical sense. Reynolds’ claim that the Anglo-Saxons’ primary

<sup>12</sup> Michael Wood, “As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’?”, *History Extra*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/anglo-saxon/professor-michael-wood-anglo-saxon-name-debate-is-term-racist/>.

<sup>13</sup> “Grant of King Eadwig of England (r. 955–959) to Ælfwine,” *Cotton MS Augustus II 41*, Archives and Manuscripts catalogue, The British Library, 956, [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton\\_ms\\_augustus\\_ii\\_41\\_f001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_augustus_ii_41_f001r).

manner of self-identification was the label 'English' is not helpful, because it covers such a broad range of meanings that it is not useful to refer to the Anglo-Saxons specifically. The adjective 'Early Medieval' has been proposed – and in some cases already adopted – as an alternative by some scholars to refer to the time period, its people and the language. This alternative appears to render the argument about historical accuracy usually made against using the term 'Anglo-Saxon' by opponents of the term, i.e., the argument that the Anglo-Saxons did not prominently use the label themselves, insignificant for the adjective 'Early Medieval' was certainly not used by the Anglo-Saxons. Based on the originally intended historical reference of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' it seems that the term is quite useful and acceptable. However, more critical issues have to be faced when looking at the use of the term after the AS period up to and including the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The usage of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' throughout history**

The term 'Anglo-Saxon' has been used in various contexts throughout history. The term became widely used in the sixteenth century as a result of the break with Rome and the establishment of an English Church. This break and the establishment of an English Church prompted, as Horsman notes, “an interest in a primitive Anglo-Saxon church.”<sup>14</sup> Referring back to AS times was a means for reformers to justify the break with Rome: England was reviving the “older, purer, religious practices”<sup>15</sup> from AS England.

The interest in the AS political and legal institutions provided a foundation for the Parliamentarians' arguments in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Horsman states that “the supposed antiquity of Parliament and of English common law

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<sup>14</sup> Reginald Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 387, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

<sup>15</sup> Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism,” 387.

provided a rationale for opposition to royal pretensions.”<sup>16</sup> The AS heritage served to validate the Whigs’ aim to limit the royal authority, since the Anglo-Saxons allegedly did so too by electing their king via a “prototype parliament.”<sup>17</sup> ‘Anglo-Saxon’ was a widely positively used and researched term in these centuries. The freedom that the Anglo-Saxons represented in the eyes of the English people of the sixteenth and seventeenth century was a source of inspiration – and continued to be so in the following centuries – and was to be revived in the English institutions and democracy.<sup>18</sup> The Restoration era was marked by an increased interest in the AS language and sources, which is exemplified by the rise of AS scholarship and Oxford scholars exploring the AS past.<sup>19</sup> This research provided the next generations with a legacy of a praised AS past. Horsman states that the praising of and identification with AS values in this period were not concerned with “specific racial characteristics, in innate physical or intellectual attributes separating the Anglo-Saxons from other peoples,”<sup>20</sup> and were, therefore, mostly non-racial. It seems that at this point in history, the AS heritage was not part of a racialised narrative.

Still, it should be noted that in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the connection between the Anglo-Saxons and their Germanic ancestors was repeatedly stressed. Roman historian Tacitus provided the primary source for the Germanic tribes’ history and his views, therefore, influenced the English views on their past and origin.<sup>21</sup> Horsman reports how Tacitus wrote that “In the peoples of Germany, . . . there has been given to the world a race untainted by intermarriage with other race, a peculiar people and pure, like no one but themselves.”<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> Reginald Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 388, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

<sup>17</sup> Ken McLeod, “Ideology and racial myth in Purcell’s King Arthur and Arne’s Alfred,” *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 34, no. 1 (2010): 91, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/404013>.

<sup>18</sup> Reginald Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 388, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

<sup>19</sup> Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism,” 388.

<sup>20</sup> Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism,” 388.

<sup>21</sup> Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism,” 389.

<sup>22</sup> Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism,” 389.

authority of Tacitus as a source in this period implies that ideas about races from the past shaping the English people's identity were gaining ground. The late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the rise of the English search for creating a tale of English origins and an increasing interest in AS heritage.<sup>23</sup>

The AS past would gradually become more and more intertwined with racialised ideas in the following centuries, especially in light of England's imperialism. Horsman notes how "as the English language, and English power, girdles the earth, Anglo-Saxons were given empirical "proofs" of their innate racial superiority,"<sup>24</sup> which implies that England's imperial accomplishments were interpreted as resulting from its AS background. Historical racial background became a tool to explain contemporary actions and achievements. The late eighteenth century saw the seeds being sown for a more racial explanation of the AS heritage supposedly running through the English veins. The increasing interest in looking for their Germanic and AS background now also resulted in a glorification of the English past. The created image of the AS legacy fuelled English nationalism and Jones notes how the AS "stories of migration, conquest and settlement told in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*"<sup>25</sup> seemed to prove to the English people that occupying territories overseas had always been their right.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the idea of the "free Anglo-Saxon" not only served as a source of inspiration for institutional matters, but now also became a matter of personal and individual traits in light of Romanticism's rise.<sup>27</sup> This paved the way for turning the AS past into an inherent personal trait. This is exemplified in Sharon Turner's *Ivanhoe* (1817) in which he, as

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<sup>23</sup> Ken McLeod, "Ideology and racial myth in Purcell's King Arthur and Arne's Alfred," *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 34, no. 1 (2010): 91, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/404013>.

<sup>24</sup> Reginald Horsman, "Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 390, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

<sup>25</sup> Chris Jones, "Anglo-Saxonism in Nineteenth-Century Poetry," *Literature Compass* 7, no. 5 (2010): 358, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2010.00704.x>.

<sup>26</sup> Jones, "Anglo-Saxonism in Nineteenth-Century Poetry," 358.

<sup>27</sup> Reginald Horsman, "Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 393, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

Horsman notes, “inspired a whole generation with a view of Saxon freedom and honesty” and depicted “these attributes more effectively as individual and racial traits than as an abstract institutional excellence.”<sup>28</sup> Turner’s *Ivanhoe* illustrates how in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the AS past and its legacy were turned into more tangible, racial characteristics of the English people. These developments fit the context of the time in which science became concerned with the racial classifications of humans.<sup>29</sup> The 1820s and 1830s were marked by ethnologists who argued on the basis of a comparative method for the superiority of the Anglo-Saxons as a race, assigning them an important place within the Caucasian race.<sup>30</sup> This problematic effort to create a framework of supposedly superior and inferior races provided people with the illusion that their DNA partly determined their rights and place in the world.

By the nineteenth century, Anglo-Saxonism was flourishing<sup>31</sup> and the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ had become part of a racialized classification of humankind which was intertwined with the idea of a superior white race. This idea was put into practice by the magazine *The Anglo-Saxon*, which ran from 1849 till 1850 and appeared to believe that eventually the AS race would rule the world, stressing that its readers must be proud of their AS heritage.<sup>32</sup> This is one example of the many ways in which the AS past was extensively appropriated in literature during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> The idea of AS racial superiority and racial theory in general “rapidly began to permeate English publications, and found articulate spokesmen,”<sup>34</sup> Horsman notes, indicating that the racialised AS narrative became increasingly common and

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<sup>28</sup> Reginald Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 394, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

<sup>29</sup> John S. Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), xi-xv, Google Books.

<sup>30</sup> Reginald Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 395, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

<sup>31</sup> Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism,” 407.

<sup>32</sup> Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism,” 408.

<sup>33</sup> Chris Jones, “Anglo-Saxonism in Nineteenth-Century Poetry,” *Literature Compass* 7, no. 5 (2010): 358, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2010.00704.x>.

<sup>34</sup> Reginald Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 399, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

was adopted by authoritative works and people. English educator and historian Thomas Arnolds, as cited in Horsman, claimed that “Our English race is the German race; for though our Norman forefathers had learnt to speak a stranger’s language, yet in blood, as we know, they were the Saxon’s brethren: both alike belong to the Teutonic or German stock,”<sup>35</sup> just one of many similar statements by influential men from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such influential articulators exemplify how the idea of the superior AS race became widespread and normalised during this period.

The AS racial superiority narrative expanded overseas during the 19<sup>th</sup> century; it was adapted by and applied to the United States, serving as a racial-exceptionalist argument in favour of America’s colonialism. Kramer describes how “throughout much of its history, Anglo-Saxon freedom radiated from racial diaspora itself: only Anglo-Saxon bodies could carry the germs of liberty across space and time.”<sup>36</sup> The idea of the free Anglo-Saxons carried a certain exclusivity with it; only the AS diaspora were able to embody a unique form a freedom. Anglo-Saxonism inspired the idea of American nationalism and colonialism; the special mission and values attributed to the AS race were also thought to be part of the blood running through the American veins. While there were immigrants who deprecated and spoke out against the intertwining of Anglo-Saxonism with American nationalism,<sup>37</sup> Kramer notes how despite those challenges “the virtues attributed to racial Anglo-Saxonism – extraordinary purity and continuity, raging outward movement, and transformative power over land and people – made it a persuasive form of racial exceptionalism.”<sup>38</sup> This demonstrates the increasing dominance of the racialised AS narrative and how it was deemed authoritative

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<sup>35</sup> Reginald Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 401, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

<sup>36</sup> Paul A. Kramer, “Empires, exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and rule between the British and United States empires, 1880–1910,” *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 4 (2002): 1322, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2700600>.

<sup>37</sup> Kramer, “Empires, exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons,” 1324.

<sup>38</sup> Kramer, “Empires, exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons,” 1324.

enough to be used in arguments about racial background and its associated exclusive rights and traits.

Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana, as cited in Kramer, exemplifies how at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Saxonism and stressing the shared racial blood ties between England and the United States served to build a narrative that legitimized the American colonial quest, “The sovereign tendencies of our race are organization and government, . . . we organize by instinct. Under the flag of England our race builds an empire out of the ends of the earth. [O]urs is the blood of government; ours the heart of dominion; ours the brain and genius of administration.”<sup>39</sup> To those who objected to the colonial zeal he said, “Let them study the history, purposes and instincts of our race, . . . and then read again the Constitution, which is but an expression of the development of that race.”<sup>40</sup> Beveridge captures the prevailing idea that colonialism and foreign policies could be explained and justified by the AS race underlying the British and American identity and their constitution. American colonialism at this time is another case that highlights how ideas of the AS values, blood and race have served to lay the foundation for racialised narratives throughout history. Horsman is right in concluding that by the mid-nineteenth century, the racialised idea of AS superiority “was firmly ingrained in English thinking.”<sup>41</sup>

The term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ has become contaminated – or continued to be contaminated – by white supremacy and alt-right movements throughout the last two centuries. Wood mentions how the acronym WASP – which stands for White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant – is “a code for racial purity that white supremacists and neo-Nazis have embraced.”<sup>42</sup> Concerns

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<sup>39</sup> Paul A. Kramer, “Empires, exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and rule between the British and United States empires, 1880–1910,” *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 4 (2002): 1332, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2700600>.

<sup>40</sup> Kramer, “Empires, exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons,” 1332.

<sup>41</sup> Reginald Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 410, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Wood, “As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’?”, *History Extra*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/anglo-saxon/professor-michael-wood-anglo-saxon-name-debate-is-term-racist/>.



about the hijacking of AS and medieval symbols and narratives by alt-right and white supremacist movements are shared by academics working in the field. These concerns are understandable, since there are several cases of appropriation of medievalism and AS culture by white supremacists and alt-right movements. Miyashiro mentions the example of the Gilroy Garlic Festival shooting in California in July 2019. The shooter, a 19-year-old white male, had shared “white supremacist literature in his last Instagram post that have specific ties to Neo-Paganism, Anglo-Saxon/Teutonic supremacists myths.”<sup>43</sup> This example underscores how the AS past and culture have become part of the white supremacists’ toolkit to establish their narrative of white, racial superiority. The term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ has, as Miyashiro puts it, come to signify “colonial whiteness as an ethno-racial category”<sup>44</sup> and “a myth of white “heritage.”<sup>45</sup> The myth and ethno-racial category of whiteness that the term has come to embody are part of the arguments white supremacists and neo-Nazis use to strengthen their idea that whiteness and its history are rooted in an inherent racial superiority.

The term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is not a neutral, purely historical term. Instead, its usage throughout history appears to be in line with Jones’ remark that the AS past has been pressed into “often highly politicised uses.”<sup>46</sup> While there were voices throughout these centuries who opposed the racialised AS narrative that has been created, the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ served as an imagined historical justification for white superiority. It has become intertwined with colonial expansion, national identity and white superiority narratives. These problematic connotations have to be faced and their influence on what it means to use the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ needs to be assessed.

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<sup>43</sup> Adam Miyashiro, “Our deeper past: Race, settler colonialism, and medieval heritage politics,” *Literature Compass* 16, no. 9-10 (2019): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12550>.

<sup>44</sup> Miyashiro, “Our deeper past,” 1.

<sup>45</sup> Miyashiro, “Our deeper past,” 2.

<sup>46</sup> Chris Jones, “Anglo-Saxonism in Nineteenth-Century Poetry,” *Literature Compass* 7, no. 5 (2010): 358, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2010.00704.x>.

## Chapter 2: The Anglo-Saxon Debate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

### Mary Rambaran-Olm: the debate's initiator and her supporters

The current Anglo-Saxon debate does not mark the first time that scholars are reflecting on the term's accurateness, racial connotations, and multi-layered meanings. Reynolds already questioned the term's historical accuracy in 1985 by arguing that the Anglo-Saxons themselves did not consistently and primarily use the term as a label of self-identification.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Horsman gave an extensive overview in 1976 of the development of racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain by exploring how the praising of the Anglo-Saxons in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries turned into the basis for a firmly established belief of an English superior race in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>48</sup> And in 1977, McCormick shows how the term has more than a purely historical referential meaning by noting the existence of "the persistent belief that the United States represents a homogeneous, Anglo-Saxon culture"<sup>49</sup> in her essay on multiculturalism in education. These examples show that there were scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century who were aware of the term's the multi-layered meanings and who in some cases questioned its accurateness. However, only in the 21<sup>st</sup> century scholars have started to connect the term's issues to the academic field's climate and structures to question whether its usage is outdated and to highlight its issues extensively and explicitly.

In order to explore the Anglo-Saxon debate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we look at one of its key voices; Dr. Mary Rambaran-Olm. During her speech at the *RaceB4Race* symposium in September 2019, Rambaran-Olm raised the issues of racism and white supremacy which are intertwined with the term 'Anglo-Saxon', she argues. In an unexpected turn of events, she resigned as the second vice president of the *International Society of Anglo-Saxonists*

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<sup>47</sup> Susan Reynolds, "What do we mean by "Anglo-Saxon" and "Anglo-Saxons"?", *Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 4 (1985): 395-414, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/175473>.

<sup>48</sup> Reginald Horsman, "Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 37, no. 3 (1976): 387-410, DOI: 10.2307/2708805.

<sup>49</sup> Theresa E. McCormick, "Multiculturalism: Some principles and issues," *Theory into Practice* 23, no. 2 (1984): 96, DOI: 10.1080/00405848409543097.

(hereafter ISAS) during that same speech.<sup>50</sup> Her speech sparked the Anglo-Saxon debate throughout the academic world of experts on AS England and forced academics to re-evaluate their views on (using) the term 'Anglo-Saxon'.

As early as 2018, Rambaran-Olm wrote about problematic issues within the field of AS studies, stating that “[t]he field is just too white . . . . Historically, Early English studies was perceived, taught and studied within an Empirical framework which most often created an implicit bias surrounding ‘British’ origins. The perpetuated false narrative continues to prevent students of color from connecting with the texts, and in short, drives away both students and scholars of color — people who, like me, grow tired of constantly being asked to justify their existence in a field assumed to belong to white people. . . . I have been told many times I “do not look like an ‘Anglo-Saxonist.’ ”<sup>51</sup> She describes how within the field of AS studies research is often assumed to be conducted by white people.<sup>52</sup> Her experiences show that as a person of colour, she continually has to justify her place in the field, which seems to imply that there exists – whether unconsciously or consciously – an association in the field between its topic of study and the skin colour of its researchers. While expertise should be enough to justify someone’s place in a field of study, Rambaran-Olm has felt like there seems to be some sort of illusion present within the field that studying the AS past goes hand in hand with certain origins – perhaps best defined as the existence of a ‘white illusion’. Her skin colour appears to require her to justify her place in the field. Her being a scholar in this field has raised eyebrows on several occasions, as if the fact that a person of colour put the effort in becoming an expert on AS studies is somehow unusual and requires further explanation.

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<sup>50</sup> Erika Harlitz-Kern, “Academics Are At War Over Racist Roots of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ Studies,” *The Daily Beast*, December 2, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/academics-are-at-war-over-racist-roots-of-anglo-saxon-studies>.

<sup>51</sup> Mary Rambaran-Olm, “Anglo-Saxon Studies [Early English Studies], Academia and White Supremacy,” *Medium*, June 27, 2018, <https://medium.com/@mrambaranolm/anglo-saxon-studies-academia-and-white-supremacy-17c87b360bf3>.

<sup>52</sup> Rambaran-Olm, “Anglo-Saxon Studies.”

As long as ideas of the field's association with whiteness continues to exist, people of colour will not be able to fully connect to the field and its research, Rambaran-Olm argues. Instead, a barrier of 'white illusion' will always stand between academics of colour and the heart of the field. She goes on to analyse how the prevailing white dominance makes her and fellow colleagues of colour feel excluded and unconsidered, stating that "there are guardians and gate-keepers on hiring committees committed to keeping the field white. Demonstrably, merit has no meaning. By and large, this gate-keeping has been the modus operandi for specialists of early English studies. . . . There is nothing structurally available for scholars of color in our field and no movement within academia to work on eliminating racism."<sup>53</sup> The white gatekeeping Rambaran-Olm describes is passively endorsed; she has not experienced efforts within the field to combat this, which actively keeps the field's dominating whiteness. People of colour are, Rambaran-Olm argues, discouraged in their attempts to be an equal part of and contribute to this field of research and are leaving the field because of its racist structures. It is debatable whether the active gatekeeping Rambaran-Olm observes within the field is a reality or a feeling. Rather than people within the field actively putting effort in keeping the field white, as Rambaran-Olm sees it, it could also be the case that the field is unaware of its structures that allow the association between the field and whiteness to continue to exist.

Nonetheless, the field has to face the allegations of racism and the existence of a 'white illusion'. The question is how these observations tie in with Rambaran-Olm's views on the term 'Anglo-Saxon'. She writes in another article that the term 'Anglo-Saxons' "has long been associated with the early English people, but this label suffers from a long history of misuse. The scholarship and field supposedly draw their name from the people that scholars

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Rambaran-Olm, "Anglo-Saxon Studies [Early English Studies], Academia and White Supremacy," *Medium*, June 27, 2018, <https://medium.com/@mrambaranolm/anglo-saxon-studies-academia-and-white-supremacy-17c87b360bf3>.

study, although the labels 'Anglo-Saxonist' and 'Anglo-Saxon studies' are also fraught with inaccuracies."<sup>54</sup> The long history of misuse and the inaccuracies of the term mentioned by Rambaran-Olm are based on similar arguments raised by Reynolds; both question the term's historical accurateness by claiming that the term 'Anglo-Saxon' was only sporadically used by the Anglo-Saxons themselves. Additionally, she describes how the term was turned into a racial superiority narrative, citing developments similar to those mentioned by Horsman; the term has been used to construct a narrative that underscores British patriotism, imperialism and racial superiority. Rambaran-Olm concludes that " 'Anglo-Saxon' has become a supremacist dog-whistle reinforcing the idea of the 'Anglo-Saxon race' as an indigenous group in England. . . . The field has traditionally been represented by white people and unsurprisingly still attracts mostly white students due to the field's inherent whiteness. . . . [R]efusal to understand the racist roots of the discipline and how the term inaccurately represents the early English demonstrates an insidious and obstinate ignorance within academic institutions."<sup>55</sup> To Rambaran-Olm, 'Anglo-Saxon' is an inaccurate term that has become usurped by a racialised political agenda and racial associations of whiteness and she argues that the field has to face these issues if it wants to prevent itself from ignorance. Neglecting these issues will only perpetuate the field's whiteness, making the room left for non-white perspectives increasingly smaller. Using the term 'Anglo-Saxon' symbolises the field's blindness regarding its racist structures and the term's racial issues and misuse outside the academic gates. These have to be acknowledged within the academic gates as well. This suits the academic field's characteristic and value to constantly revise its insights, Rambaran-Olm argues, stating that "scholars specializing in this period also have an obligation to interrogate the language they use, and to guide the public's understanding of these historical

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<sup>54</sup> Mary Rambaran-Olm, "Misnaming the Medieval: Rejecting "Anglo-Saxon" Studies," *History Workshop Online*, November 4, 2019, <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/misnaming-the-medieval-rejecting-anglo-saxon-studies/?fbclid=IwAR1EndSzaJOhf8mTirqWBx434G-Ehu9OYOk3eKBUhJOiLBqKCDNifD8p44>.

<sup>55</sup> Rambaran-Olm, "Misnaming the Medieval."

terms.”<sup>56</sup> An academic field of study is self-critical and dares to question itself, which the removal of the mischaracterizing term ‘The Dark Ages’ from the scholarly lexicon exemplifies, Rambaran-Olm observes.<sup>57</sup> These characteristics are the core values of any academic field and Rambaran-Olm connects the fulfilment of these core values with the need to face the inaccuracy and racial connotations of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ as a field of study.

Based on a snapshot of Rambaran-Olm’s arguments, we see that her main arguments for changing the term are its historical inaccuracy and its consistent misappropriation which resulted in its racial connotations. It is not just about the term Rambaran-Olm points out; the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ represents the broader issue of a too white field and a lack of effort to counter this. The field sees important voices leaving because of this, and therefore misses out on a crucial opportunity to reinvent itself. Rambaran-Olm cleverly connects the term’s issues with the values of reinventing and revising perspectives and evidence that are central to any academic field. She confronts those working in the field with the question: why do we neglect these academic values when it comes to the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’?

Rambaran-Olm’s arguments represent other argumentations by voices opposing the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ to a great extent. Karkov also mentions the term’s history to argue that it is impossible to say the term is objective.<sup>58</sup> Karkov argues that retaining the term has a profound impact on people of colour working in the field, as she states,

[t]he term cannot be separated from its racist past and the violence it helped to justify, nor from its racist implications today, nor from the violence committed by those who in their academic defence of the term incite attacks on their colleagues. . . . [T]o value an outdated term over the lives and careers of colleagues is both absurd and horrific. It is a clinging to the past that remains stubbornly blind to the racism of the past and its direct connections with the racism of the present. . . . The way we define and study

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<sup>56</sup> Mary Rambaran-Olm, “Misnaming the Medieval: Rejecting “Anglo-Saxon” Studies,” *History Workshop Online*, November 4, 2019, <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/misnaming-the-medieval-rejecting-anglo-saxon-studies/?fbclid=IwAR1EndSzaJOhf8mTirqWBx434G-Ehu9OYOk3eKBUhJOiLBqKCDNifD8p44>.

<sup>57</sup> Rambaran-Olm, “Misnaming the Medieval.”

<sup>58</sup> Catherine Karkov, “Post ‘Anglo-Saxon’ Melancholia,” *Medium*, December 10, 2019, <https://medium.com/@catherinekarkov/post-anglo-saxon-melancholia-ca73955717d3>.

early medieval England needs to change, dismantle its racist structures and language and start again.<sup>59</sup>

She strongly calls for change and the need for the field to reinvent itself and sees the term's usage as contributing to harming her colleagues' lives and careers. Karkov is generalising by claiming that academics participating in this debate and arguing for the term's retention are committing violence. While that claim is certainly debatable, it demonstrates that some academics perceive the racism in the field as deeply rooted. Karkov argues that the term is no longer relevant; the field needs to leave behind this term that embodies the racism intertwined with the field of AS studies. Her statements reach beyond discontinuing using the term; the field's racist structures and language need to be dismantled entirely. Rejecting the term 'Anglo-Saxon' is part of that, but from Karkov's statements it becomes clear that she thinks that is only the top of the iceberg. Rambaran-Olm seems to agree, as both scholars imply that the term's issues represent a far broader problem underlying the field of study.

### **ISAS' response**

In light of Rambaran-Olm's speech and the resulting debate, ISAS announced in September 2019 that it would change its name. Rambaran-Olm communicated to ISAS per email that "[t]here was no way we were going to be able to 'fix' the multitude of problems in the field, but as the field's largest organization we should have moved more quickly to address the glaring issues which might then send a message to the field and more importantly to victims who we owe this to."<sup>60</sup> ISAS, as Rambaran-Olm sees it, failed to be an organisation truly supporting all colleagues working in the field of study and neglected the field's issues for too long. ISAS' decision to change its name to the *International Society for the Study of Early*

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<sup>59</sup> Catherine Karkov, "Post 'Anglo-Saxon' Melancholia," *Medium*, December 10, 2019, <https://medium.com/@catherinekarkov/post-anglo-saxon-melancholia-ca73955717d3>.

<sup>60</sup> Colleen Flaherty, "It's About More Than a Name," *Inside Higher Ed*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/09/20/anglo-saxon-studies-group-says-it-will-change-its-name-amid-bigger-complaints-about>.

*Medieval England* (hereafter ISSEME) implies that the organisation recognised – although some would say too late – the issues raised by Rambaran-Olm and many others. Currently, ISSEME’s home page looks like this:



The website’s link still contains the abbreviation ‘isas’, and the website reads “A special section has been designed specifically for graduate students and others new to the field of Anglo-Saxon studies,”<sup>61</sup> maintaining the term itself. ISSEME’s twitter account also retweets tweets using the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’. It appears that the new change has not been fully implemented yet.

ISSEME’s home page contains a link named “Statement on the term “Anglo-Saxon”,” which provides more insight into why ISSEME may not have fully excluded references to the term on its website and Twitter. The statement reads “[i]n 2019, this society voted to change its name from "International Society of Anglo-Saxonists" (ISAS) to "International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England" (ISSEME), in recognition of the problematic connotations that are widely associated with the terms "Anglo-Saxon" and "Anglo-Saxonist"

<sup>61</sup> “Welcome,” International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England, accessed April 28, 2020, <https://isasweb.net/>.



in public discourse. . . . ISSEME possesses no authority to legislate rules for our field; only to make recommendations. To that end, it is our intent that the guidance which follows will foster a respectful, collegial atmosphere wherein scholarly discourse among the various parties we represent may thrive.”<sup>62</sup> Although ISSEME itself changed its name in light of its problematic connotations, it does not follow statements made by Rambaran-Olm and Karkov, who extensively voice why they think using the term is profoundly problematic, hurtful and damaging to the field and the people part of it. ISSEME on its part, stresses that both sides of the debate should be able to thrive and that ISSEME is not in the position to tell the field of study how to handle this debate. ISSEME’s statement focuses more on underscoring its effort to create and encourage a kind and compassionate climate while at the same time emphasizing its members freedom of choice.

ISSEME stresses that the statement is subject to change, “we realize that this statement must be adaptable to changing circumstances and may evolve over time,”<sup>63</sup> indicating that ISSEME seems to think more time is needed for a definitive outcome of the debate. ISSEME mentions that terminology differs between specific fields, countries and languages, noting how these differences can cause differences in opinions on the appropriateness of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ as well.<sup>64</sup> ISSEME argues that granting academics within the field the liberty to use the terminology they think is appropriate is not necessarily incompatible with creating a compassionate and respectful climate within the field. ISSEME’s statement on this debate is more accommodating to both sides of the debate, which could also explain why ISSEME has not banned all references to the term on its website and Twitter.

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<sup>62</sup> “Statement on the term “Anglo-Saxon,” International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://isasweb.net/AS.html>.

<sup>63</sup> “Statement.”

<sup>64</sup> “Statement.”

### **The debate's other side: arguments in favour of the term's retention**

Opposed to voices advocating the term's rejection are scholars arguing in favour of retaining the term. Some of these voices have been united in a forum called *A Forum for Multidisciplinary Anglo-Saxon Studies* (hereafter FMASS). This forum consists of a statement signed by academics named *The responsible use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon'*, which argues in favour of retaining the term and using it in a way that they argue is appropriate. One of their arguments consists of explaining the difficulties of finding a replacement that captures the term's historical accuracy. The scholars who signed this statement argue that the term is "historically authentic in the sense that from the 9<sup>th</sup> century it was used externally to refer to a dominant population in southern Britain, and came into regular use within England itself from the late 9th century onwards,"<sup>65</sup> opposing those who question its historical accuracy. The problematic and racialised usage of the term is mentioned in the statement, but in a milder way. They state that "[F]rom the 1870s, we have the first uses of 'Anglo-Saxonist' to denote crude racist and nationalist attitudes."<sup>66</sup> The discussion of the term's problematic usage is noticeably less extensive by its advocates who believe that these issues gained ground only from the 1870s and onwards, as opposed to the available evidence for earlier instances of misappropriations.

The statement is less strongly voiced in highlighting the term's racial issues, which becomes clear in the statement that

[w]hen Archaeology consolidated as a well-defined and professional discipline by the end of the 19th century, . . . 'Anglo-Saxon' became established as the summary, conventional term for the radically new range of material and visual culture that was introduced to southern and eastern Britain from the Continent and Scandinavia starting in the 5th century; and as a collective term for the range of societies with whom those remains were associable. At that time the term tended to be attached by historians

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<sup>65</sup> John Hines et al., *The responsible use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon,' A Forum for Multidisciplinary Anglo-Saxon Studies*, PDF file, accessed April 21, 2020, 1,

[http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible\\_use\\_of%20the%20term%20\\_Anglo-Saxon.pdf](http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible_use_of%20the%20term%20_Anglo-Saxon.pdf).

<sup>66</sup> Hines et al., *The responsible use*, 3.

primarily to studies of 'Anglo-Saxon' institutions, but that represents the focus of History then rather than a divergence of meaning.<sup>67</sup>

This statement exemplifies how the racist connotations the term has taken on throughout history are downplayed by these scholars. Instead, it is explained that the term 'Anglo-Saxon' is rooted in a tradition that used the term for its accurate historical referential meaning. The focus on AS institutions at the end of the nineteenth century is explained as a focus of history; the racialised narrative built around the interest in AS institutions that Horsman outlines is not even mentioned. The scholars seem to suggest that the meaning of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' is to a great extent static; its historical referential meaning has always been its (primary) meaning, they argue. It can certainly be argued that this account of the term's past usage does not capture the whole picture, given the evidence available concerning the term's problematic past.

The contributors to FMASS also argue that the term's usage in the USA differs from its usage elsewhere, stating that as opposed to the term's usage and its racial connotations in the USA, "[i]n the UK the period has been carefully presented and discussed in popular and successful documentaries and exhibitions over many years, and is now incorporated in the National Curriculum for History in England in a forward-looking way."<sup>68</sup> Stressing that the way the UK handles the term differs from the USA's usage implies that the scholars who signed the statement perceive the racial connotations more as an American problem than as a problem that is intertwined with the field of study as a whole. Wood comments on this difference as well, stating that "some British scholars are exasperated by what they see as a US problem, centred on literature, as opposed to history, archaeology and material culture."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> John Hines et al., *The responsible use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon,'* A Forum for Multidisciplinary Anglo-Saxon Studies, PDF file, accessed April 21, 2020, 4, [http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible\\_use\\_of%20the%20term%20\\_Anglo-Saxon.pdf](http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible_use_of%20the%20term%20_Anglo-Saxon.pdf).

<sup>68</sup> Hines et al., *The responsible use*, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Wood, "As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term 'Anglo-Saxon'?", *History Extra*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/anglo-saxon/professor-michael-wood-anglo-saxon-name-debate-is-term-racist/>.

In the UK, effort has been devoted to incorporating awareness of the term's issues in teaching about the AS period, as Wood observes that “[i]t is probably fair to say that the story of Anglo-Saxon England as taught today is about diversity, not homogeneity. . . . As one university lecturer told me: “Most of us who teach early medieval history and archaeology in the UK deal with this, overtly and explicitly in our teaching.”<sup>70</sup> The British field of AS studies appears to have implemented critical awareness of the term's multi-layered meanings and connotations; Wood's observations show a field that realises its responsibility to openly discuss the term's complex background. Awareness and understanding of this background are, as the university lecture quoted by Wood shows, essential to truly grasp the field's research topic and the power of language and history. The racialised narrative built around the term in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are, in Wood's experience, recognised and rejected in UK teaching.

The complex background of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and its issues appear to be more widespread and openly discussed in the UK than in the USA. The question is whether this difference serves as an argument for retaining the term. The scholars signing the signing believe it does, but Wood calls for the need to change, even though the UK may already be more critically aware of the term's meanings and issues. He argues that the UK must acknowledge the points that are being raised in the US, stating that “[r]acism is to be condemned everywhere and in every form.”<sup>71</sup> Wood recognises that the field has racial issues it needs to face. Furthermore, he observes that Britain, just like other countries, still struggles with integrating diversity in the humanities. He supports this argument by citing a recent *Royal Historical Society* report which showed that 96 per cent of the university historians is

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Wood, “As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’?”, *History Extra*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/anglo-saxon/professor-michael-wood-anglo-saxon-name-debate-is-term-racist/>.

<sup>71</sup> Wood, “As a racism row.”

white, indicating change is needed.<sup>72</sup> These observations suggest that Wood expects the UK to take responsibility instead of turning a blind eye to these racial issues based on the idea that more awareness has already been implemented. While the FMASS seems to make the term's issues more of a local problem, Wood perceives it as a universal problem.

The scholars who signed the FMASS' statement argue that finding an appropriate substitute for the term is a difficult task. They point out that replacing the term is not possible and would require giving up some of the accuracy and level of precision that they claim the term carries with it, stating that "it is impossible for scholarship and debate to continue in the future at the level of clarity and precision it enjoys at present without the use of this term, and acceptance of its use. . . . It represents a certain level of generalization, and the ability to move between broader and narrower levels of reference is essential to the articulate and precise presentation and interpretation of evidence."<sup>73</sup> The FMASS claims that rejecting the term 'Anglo-Saxon' equals a (partial) rejection of the field's clarity and precision. The term generalises the period it refers to and can adapt to different levels of reference. These abilities will be lost when the term is rejected; the historical referential meanings within the scope of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' do not automatically transfer to a potential substitute for the term. The FMASS states that the proposed alternative "Early Medieval" has different connotations than the term 'Anglo-Saxon' and is defined differently across different countries. Additionally, this adjective replaces a compound name with an "adjectival construction," which makes it even more difficult to capture the same essence as the term 'Anglo-Saxon' does.<sup>74</sup> This difference in word class causes references to the AS people to be phrased

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<sup>72</sup> Michael Wood, "As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term 'Anglo-Saxon'?", *History Extra*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/anglo-saxon/professor-michael-wood-anglo-saxon-name-debate-is-term-racist/>.

<sup>73</sup> John Hines et al., *The responsible use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon,'* A Forum for Multidisciplinary Anglo-Saxon Studies, PDF file, accessed April 21, 2020, 4, [http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible\\_use\\_of%20the%20term%20Anglo-Saxon.pdf](http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible_use_of%20the%20term%20Anglo-Saxon.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> Hines et al., *The responsible use*, 4.

differently syntactically speaking, resulting in awkward and less concise and precise discussions of the Anglo-Saxons. Replacing the term without a suitable replacement blurs the boundaries of English identity in the AS period, harming the fruitful academic discussion of the period significantly, these scholars argue.

Wood agrees that it may be impossible to do without the term entirely, stating that “[w]e may drop ‘Anglo-Saxonists’, then – we may prefer ‘Early English’ – but we cannot dispense entirely with ‘Anglo-Saxons’.”<sup>75</sup> Wood supports views from each side of the debate. While opponents of the term foreground its problematic racial connotations, proponents of the term repeatedly stress the difficulties of finding a suitable replacement for the term’s accurateness and precision seen within the historical context of the AS period. Both are valid points and both need to be taken into account; foregrounding only one of them and ignoring the importance of the other fails to recognise the debate’s whole picture.

Another argument raised by the FMASS is whether it is justifiable to make a term the bull’s-eye of the debate about gatekeeping and racism within the field. They state that “[i]t can also be held in a good conscience that it is a damaging misdirection of attention to target a word rather than the actual realities that need to be tackled.”<sup>76</sup> They perceive the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ as a distracting factor in the debate that is going on and wish to make a distinction between the debate about whether the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is suitable or not and the actual debate about the racism and lack of inclusivity that are experienced by some of their colleagues. To the term’s opponents, on the other hand, these debates are one and the same: Rambaran-Olm notes how “[a]s scholars, we know terminology is important,”<sup>77</sup> and she states

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<sup>75</sup> Michael Wood, “As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’?”, *History Extra*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/anglo-saxon/professor-michael-wood-anglo-saxon-name-debate-is-term-racist/>.

<sup>76</sup> John Hines et al., *The responsible use of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon,’* A Forum for Multidisciplinary Anglo-Saxon Studies, PDF file, accessed April 21, 2020, 5, [http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible\\_use\\_of%20the%20term%20\\_Anglo-Saxon.pdf](http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible_use_of%20the%20term%20_Anglo-Saxon.pdf).

<sup>77</sup> Mary Rambaran-Olm, “Houston, we have a problem:” Erasing Black Scholars in Old English Literature,” *Medium*, March 3, 2020, <https://medium.com/the-sundial-acmrs/houston-we-have-a-problem-erasing-black-scholars-in-old-english-821121495dc>.

that “[i]t matters when we use a racist dog-whistle term like ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ which is neither neutral nor correctly represents the early English people. As the old adage goes: ‘words matter.’<sup>78</sup> Words do indeed matter – as both sides recognise in different ways, but the question is whether the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ becoming the symbol of the racial issues that have contaminated the field of study is justified and fitting. The term’s proponents doubt whether that is the case, but opponents argue that the term’s racial connotations justify its central position in the debate.

Another question that needs to be answered in this debate is whether – or when – racists context in which a term has been used make the term itself racist. This issue can be explored by examining how Hilbert, a Cambridge student of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic (ASNAC), interacts with Durand’s article for the University of Cambridge’s newspaper *Varsity* called “The University of Cambridge must renounce the use of the term ‘ASNAC’.” Durand states that “[t]he University’s continued use of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is not only broadly ahistorical but also a tacit endorsement of the cultural baggage of institutionalised racism and white supremacy with which it has always been associated, both within and outside the academy.”<sup>79</sup> Durand’s statement echoes the arguments made by Rambaran-Olm and Karkov. Again, the term’s historical inaccuracy and the racialised narrative built around it are cited as reasons for replacing the term. Durand assumes that the term has always been associated with these issues outside of the academic world as well. This contrasts with Wood’s remark that the term’s racist connotations “play no role in the current broad public understanding of the period,”<sup>80</sup> which makes Durand’s assumption debatable.

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<sup>78</sup> Mary Rambaran-Olm, “Misnaming the Medieval: Rejecting “Anglo-Saxon” Studies,” *History Workshop Online*, November 4, 2019, <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/misnaming-the-medieval-rejecting-anglo-saxon-studies/?fbclid=IwAR1EndSzaJOhf8mTirqWBx434G-Ehu9OYOk3eKBUhJoiLBqKCDNifD8p44>.

<sup>79</sup> Jack Durand, “The University of Cambridge must renounce the use of the term ‘ASNAC’,” *Varsity*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.varsity.co.uk/opinion/18597>.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Wood, “As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’?”, *History Extra*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/anglo-saxon/professor-michael-wood-anglo-saxon-name-debate-is-term-racist/>.

Hilbert notes how Durand disregards context, arguing that “[u]sing a term is not an endorsement of every way in which that word has ever been used.”<sup>81</sup> To illustrate this point he provides the example of the word ‘Viking’; if continued use of a term is indeed endorsement of the problematic contexts in which the term has been used, as Durand seems to claim, the existence of the SS Division *SS-Panzer-Division Wiking* during World War II would mean that we cannot use the term ‘Viking’ anymore.<sup>82</sup> Such an approach would result in giving away all sorts of historical terms that have been misappropriated in some way. Hilbert raises an interesting point here; many historical terms and elements have their problems concerning the way they have been used and sometimes hijacked by people with problematic, racist views. But the question then is where this debate ends. Should all these terms and elements of histories and cultures that have been misappropriated in some ways be replaced? That would be a cumbersome and maybe even impossible task, which would make the discussion and study of these histories and cultures deeply complex.

It needs to be clear what makes the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ different from other terms that have been misappropriated – why replace this term, and not others? Otherwise, the seeds may be sown for a climate of taboo in which every historical term is scrutinized, possibly hindering an effective study of past peoples and cultures. What such a climate of taboo could look like becomes clear in Durand’s concluding paragraph, as he states that “[p]ossibly the ASNAC department should not exist at all, arguably, . . . privileging the study of certain cultures and societies over others. However, assuming the department is to continue in its current form, it should at least do so, symbolically, under a different name.”<sup>83</sup> This point of view has not been voiced by other opponents of the term previously discussed, and it is a

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<sup>81</sup> History with Hilbert, “Is ‘Anglo-Saxon’ A Racist Term And Should My Degree Be Banned? (ASNC),” YouTube video, 7:16, February 7, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdPK\\_3J2Ppc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdPK_3J2Ppc).

<sup>82</sup> History with Hilbert, “Is ‘Anglo-Saxon’ A Racist Term.”

<sup>83</sup> Jack Durand, “The University of Cambridge must renounce the use of the term ‘ASNAC’,” *Varsity*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.Varsity.co.uk/opinion/18597>.



dangerous point of view. This past needs to be researched and claiming that a department studying that past maybe should not exist at all is harmful to the field. Knowledge about this past shapes our understanding of history, but also of the present. As Wood puts it, “[t]he early English story is of great importance to us all: it is one of the roots of our modern world, in language, literature, law and governance.”<sup>84</sup> The AS past provides great insights into the medieval period and the developments of medieval societies and cultures. Studying certain pasts and cultures does not automatically mean that you privilege them over others, but according to Durand it does. Durand seems to promote a kind of censorship, and embodies a fear voiced by the FMASS that “[t]he imposition of a taboo on the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ will only exacerbate divisions and entrench geographical and disciplinary non-communication amongst the world-wide body of scholars, students and the wider public with whom we wish to share knowledge and understanding, and enhance interest in an accurately portrayed past, with all of the moral issues it represents.”<sup>85</sup> It is probably better to avoid this debate going in that direction, since it creates a culture of taboo and censorship which harms the study of pasts and cultures that are worth studying. This debate is about whether and how to reshape the field of AS studies in a way that tackles the racial issues and white gatekeeping that some working in the field experience, not about whether the academic field studying this period, its people and culture should cease to exist. Mistaken the latter for the former creates a dangerous undermining of the field.

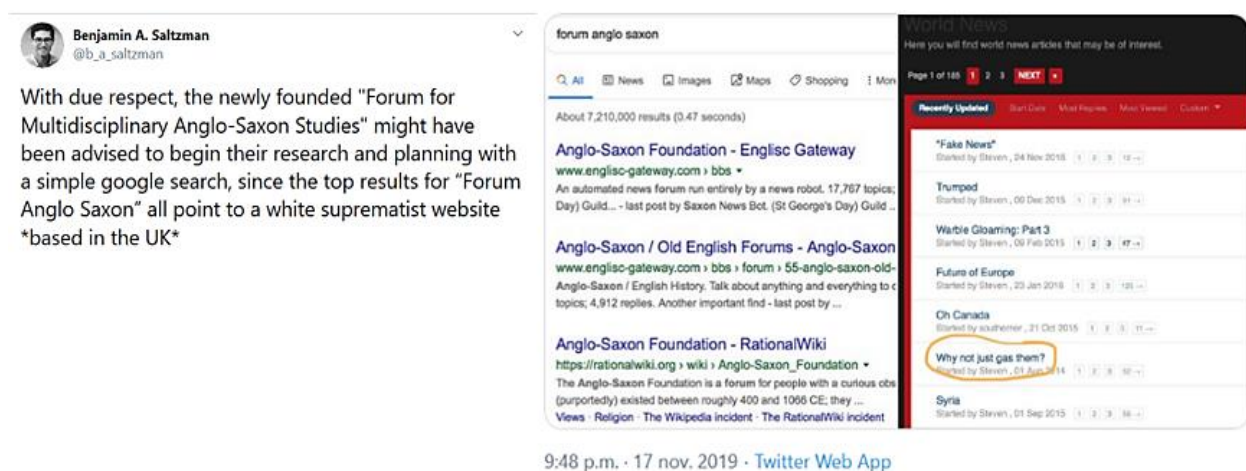
FMASS concludes in its statement that “[c]ontinuing to use the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ in a rational, informed and responsible way is entirely consistent with the obligation to raise awareness of the controversial history of our field (as part of the controversial history of the

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<sup>84</sup> Michael Wood, “As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’?”, *History Extra*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/anglo-saxon/professor-michael-wood-anglo-saxon-name-debate-is-term-racist/>.

<sup>85</sup> John Hines et al., *The responsible use of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon,’* A Forum for Multidisciplinary Anglo-Saxon Studies, PDF file, accessed April 21, 2020, 5, [http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible\\_use\\_of%20the%20term%20\\_Anglo-Saxon.pdf](http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible_use_of%20the%20term%20_Anglo-Saxon.pdf).

West), as is widely done with historical buildings and monuments.”<sup>86</sup> They do not think that continuing to use the term and creating a climate within the field aware of the critical issues are incompatible and argue that as long as the term’s issues are faced, we can continue to use the term in a responsible way. In fact, they criticize that the term’s opponents hold their colleagues responsible for the term’s problematic connotations, stating that “[i]t is neither justified nor constructive to impose collective guilt upon colleagues who are not directly responsible for wrongs committed in quite different contexts.”<sup>87</sup> But the question is whether – and in what way – they have a responsibility as scholars to explicitly distance themselves from these issues and to contribute to a more inclusive climate in the field. While they are not directly responsible for how the term has been misappropriated in the past, they have a responsibility to think about how they go about these issues in the present. The FMASS does so by arguing that responsible use of the term is possible and does not exclude the existence of a more inclusive working climate. Saltzman points out in a tweet accompanied by images that the FMASS may lack the level of awareness itself that its contributors argue can go hand in hand with using the term: <sup>88</sup>



<sup>86</sup> John Hines et al., *The responsible use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon,'* A Forum for Multidisciplinary Anglo-Saxon Studies, PDF file, accessed April 21, 2020, 5,

[http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible\\_use\\_of%20the%20term%20\\_Anglo-Saxon.pdf](http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible_use_of%20the%20term%20_Anglo-Saxon.pdf).

<sup>87</sup> Hines et al., *The responsible use*, 5.

<sup>88</sup> Benjamin A. Saltzman (@b\_a\_saltzman), “With due respect, the newly founded “Forum for Multidisciplinary Anglo-Saxon Studies” might have been advised to begin their research and planning with a simple,” Twitter, November 17, 2019, [https://twitter.com/b\\_a\\_saltzman/status/1196168272909131776](https://twitter.com/b_a_saltzman/status/1196168272909131776).

This is indeed an awkward issue; the claim that an aware and responsible use of the term is possible is certainly weakened by the fact that people can easily find a white supremacist forum when searching for the statement. Overall, the FMASS raises important issues that need to be taken into account, such as determining where this debate ends considering other historical terms have been misappropriated as well and avoiding the creation of a taboo culture. At the same time, it is unlikely that this forum and its statement tackle and adequately address all the issues of racism and white gatekeeping – whether actual or perceived – that are experienced and raised by some academics working in the field.

### **Key argumentations in a nutshell**

The analysis presented here is based on a snapshot of the ongoing debate. But this snapshot effectively represents the main arguments and highlights key voices and statements that form the heart of the academic debate, including the voices of scholars as well as students. The main arguments for replacing the term are that the term is not the most fitting and accurate label historically speaking and represents white gatekeeping, racial issues and a lack of diversity within the field of scholarship. Continuing to use the term endorses these issues and hinders reshaping and reinventing the field in a way that allows for more diversity and inclusivity. Proponents of the term argue, contrary to its opponents, that the term is historically accurate and precise. Finding a replacement for the term that captures the same essence is a complex task and is, they argue, incompatible with the same level of precision and accurateness that the term 'Anglo-Saxon' represents. Another frequent argument in favour of the term's retention is that the difference in the term's usage between the USA and other places should be taken into account. It is argued that the former knows a more problematic history of the term than for example the UK. Proponents of the term also question whether attacking the term is the way to go about tackling the issues of the field. They doubt

whether the term should be at the centre of this debate and think that its underlying realities should be foregrounded instead. They also state that just because the term has been used in racial contexts, it does not mean that using the term is an endorsement of its racial issues. Lastly, they fear that banning the term might create a taboo culture that harms the field and research and blurs the lines for the usage of other historical terms, since many other historical terms have been misappropriated as well.

### **Chapter 3: Evaluating the Future of the Term 'Anglo-Saxon'**

#### **A complete rejection of the term is untimely and improbable**

What is in a name? That is the central question of the Anglo-Saxon debate. Labels may simply be arbitrary, but their meanings and connotations can become increasingly complex and multi-layered due to their different articulators and usage contexts over time. This process sparked the debate about the tenability of the term 'Anglo-Saxon.' The term's dynamic history requires a dynamic interaction with it; this interaction has now reached a point of significant change – its usage needs to be thoroughly revised to suit an academic field that dares to critically question itself and reinvent its arguably problematic structures. The term 'Anglo-Saxon' is historically accurate to a great extent and its level of historical precision and accuracy when referring to the AS period needs to be preserved as much as possible. But it must also be recognised that the term's historically accurate referential meaning has been troubled by a history of misuse and racial connotations which developed in the centuries after the AS period. The racialised narrative built around the term throughout history has not ceased to exist in the 21st century, and the term is inherently two-faced.

Based on the term's problematic connotations together with the accusations that the field of AS studies lacks diversity and is too white, the term cannot continue to exist within the academic field in its current form. The field has to change; arguing otherwise would mean turning a blind eye to academics' valid feelings and experiences of racial structures being present in the field. It is desirable to stop referring to the scholars in the field as 'Anglo-Saxonists,' as the terms 'Anglo-Saxonists' and 'Anglo-Saxonism' have been associated with the belief in the importance and superiority of AS blood and heritage. They are therefore only more prone to misappropriation and racial connotations and do not contribute to dismantling the field's association with whiteness. The term's usage will undoubtedly be narrowed down and limited in the future by using it in its historical context and original form only, and the

field will reshape and reinvent itself to tackle the issues the Anglo-Saxon debate has highlighted. But rejecting the term completely right now skips too many steps and overlooks practicalities which are crucial to assess for a true reshaping of the field.

### **The difficulties of finding an appropriate replacement**

The time period the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ refers to is clearly defined, unlike candidates for replacing the term like ‘Early Medieval England’ and ‘Early (Medieval) English.’ It is desirable to use the adjective ‘Early Medieval’ in constructions like ‘Early Medieval England’ in those cases deemed appropriate, as this adjective does not have the same problematic usage history and connotations as the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’. However, it is highly unlikely that this replacement is fitting in all cases and can serve to replace every instance of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’. ‘Early Medieval’ has different and less accurate connotations concerning time reference – the Early Middle Ages do not refer to a universal time period; which centuries they cover differ among countries.<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, using the identity label ‘English’ in combination with ‘Early Medieval’ to refer to the Anglo-Saxons and their language is not free from problems either. The label ‘English’ is in fact also associated with racial and ethnic connotations in the United Kingdom; McCrone notes how “the term ‘English’ is reserved largely for white ‘natives’; almost an ‘ethnic’ identity that the non-white population in England feels excluded or excludes itself from.”<sup>90</sup> Referring to the Anglo-Saxons and their languages as ‘Early Medieval English’ does not dismantle these references from racial and ethnic connotations. Condor, Gibson and Abell state that ethnic nationalism has often been depicted as an inherent property of the category

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<sup>89</sup> John Hines et al., *The responsible use of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon,’* A Forum for Multidisciplinary Anglo-Saxon Studies, PDF file, accessed April 21, 2020, 4,

[http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible\\_use\\_of%20the%20term%20\\_Anglo-Saxon.pdf](http://www.fmass.eu/uploads/pdf/responsible_use_of%20the%20term%20_Anglo-Saxon.pdf).

<sup>90</sup> David McCrone, “Who do you say you are? Making sense of national identities in modern Britain,” *Ethnicities* 2, no. 3 (2002): 305, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968020020030201>.

English.<sup>91</sup> Using 'Early Medieval English' therefore does not solve the term's problems; it only puts a different label on them. These replacements are not perfectly suitable and involve losing some level of historical correctness and precision and retaining some of the term's racial connotations. A more historically accurate label than the term 'Anglo-Saxon' has yet to be found – and even if one is found, it is doubtful whether such a label is free of problems.

### **The Anglo-Saxon debate in relation to other misappropriated historical terms**

The term 'Anglo-Saxon' and AS cultural elements are being used by Neo-Nazis and white supremacists, but other historical terms and elements are as well. Terms have been and will always be misappropriated. Assuming that misappropriation by certain racist groups and people automatically makes historical and cultural terms and labels unfit to use as an academic field would mean that terms like 'Viking' need to be abandoned as well, as (neo-)Nazi's and white supremacists have misused the term 'Viking' and Viking culture.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, the Nazi regime was inspired by Greek and Roman culture and art and Hitler found in the Roman empire a source of inspiration for his own zeal to create a ruling world empire.<sup>93</sup> Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* that "[t]he Hellenic ideal of culture, too, should be preserved for us in its exemplary beauty."<sup>94</sup> The Nazis' praising of Greek and Roman culture would then trouble terminology in the scholarship on Greek and Roman history and culture too. It is crucial to pinpoint exactly why in the case of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' its misappropriations would justify erasing it from the scholarly lexicon. Otherwise, all sorts of terms and labels that have been misappropriated and misused become potential candidates for such debates,

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<sup>91</sup> Susan Condor, Stephen Gibson, and Jackie Abell, "English identity and ethnic diversity in the context of UK constitutional change," *Ethnicities* 6, no. 2 (2006): 150, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796806063748>.

<sup>92</sup> Christoffer Kølvrå, "Embodying 'the Nordic race': imaginaries of Viking heritage in the online communications of the Nordic Resistance Movement," *Patterns of Prejudice* 53, no. 3 (2019): 270-284, DOI: 10.1080/0031322X.2019.1592304.

<sup>93</sup> Volker Losemann, "The Nazi concept of Rome," in *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945*, ed. Catharine Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 221-235, Google Books.

<sup>94</sup> Losemann, "The Nazi concept," 221.

which makes the actual academic study of history and past people and cultures an excessive delicate matter. Based on the exploration of the Anglo-Saxon debate, a more in-depth assessment of this issue is required. Hilbert, Cambridge student of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic (ASNAC), appears one of the few voices explicitly raising this point by arguing that using a term does not equal endorsing all the contexts in which a term has been used and asking what the existence of the SS Division *SS-Panzer-Division Wiking* would mean for using the term ‘Viking’.<sup>95</sup> The question of when to erase labels from the scholarship’s lexicon needs to be reflected on more explicitly; it allows for a more well-developed debate and a fuller picture – which is needed, as especially the humanities will always have to find a way to handle problematic histories. Rejecting the term at this point would not only mean losing a significant level of historical accuracy and precision, but also an inadequate assessment of the impact problematic uses have on a term.

### **The Anglo-Saxon debate and the non-academic world**

While this debate is lively within the academic field of AS studies, it is not clear-cut to what extent the debate’s issues have raised the broader public’s awareness so far. The *International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England* (ISSEME) justified its name change “in recognition of the problematic connotations that are widely associated with the terms "Anglo-Saxon" and "Anglo-Saxonist" in public discourse.”<sup>96</sup> Durand also writes about the term’s “cultural baggage of institutionalised racism and white supremacy with which it has always been associated, both within and outside the academy,”<sup>97</sup> arguing that these issues are known by the broader, non-academic public as well. Wood, on the other hand, comments on the

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<sup>95</sup> History with Hilbert, “Is “Anglo-Saxon” A Racist Term And Should My Degree Be Banned? (ASNC),” YouTube video, 7:16, February 7, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdPK\\_3J2Ppc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdPK_3J2Ppc).

<sup>96</sup> “Statement on the term “Anglo-Saxon,” International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://isasweb.net/AS.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Jack Durand, “The University of Cambridge must renounce the use of the term ‘ASNAC’,” *Varsity*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.varsity.co.uk/opinion/18597>.



term's problematic connotations and usage throughout history that "to my knowledge, doing outreach today in schools, they play no role in the current broad public understanding of the period."<sup>98</sup> There is no consensus on whether and to what extent the non-academic world is aware of the term's complexity.

The extent to which the term's issues are known by the broader public presumably differs per country; Britain has, unsurprisingly, a more extensive integration of AS history in education programmes than the Netherlands for example. But it seems unlikely that these issues have consistently and universally trickled down to the broader public. My fellow students of English Language and Culture and I have only become aware of the term's issues recently, for example. While my experiences are by no means representative of the overall broader public, and while in Britain more awareness about these issues has been integrated in educational programmes, it is very unlikely that these issues are known to the majority of the public. Especially since a thorough understanding of the term's issues requires quite an extensive background knowledge. It is therefore unrealistic to expect the term to be rejected completely and consistently within a short time frame by the non-academic world.

Even when the academic field rejects the term entirely, the term outside the academic arena will, at least for the near future, continue to exist. It is valuable to assess what we expect from this debate's outcome when it comes to the non-academic world. This debate helps to reshape the academic field and dismantle its racial structures, but does it end there? How to approach the transition from the academic to the non-academic world? Awkward issues will certainly arise when this debate abruptly stops at the academic gates – how are academics to go about giving public lectures on the AS period, for example? How do we handle the term's usage outside the academic gates, and can we ask its non-academic users to face the same

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<sup>98</sup> Michael Wood, "As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term 'Anglo-Saxon'?", *History Extra*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/anglo-saxon/professor-michael-wood-anglo-saxon-name-debate-is-term-racist/>.

issues as we ask the academics? Of course, the term's rejection can be implemented without tackling and thinking about the non-academic world's usage of the term. It is, however, the question whether that is desirable and an adequate way to handle this debate as an academic field. Academic fields are, after all, always connected to the non-academic world; they interact with one another, influence each other, and are tied together. It is therefore crucial to think about what example the academic world wants to set for the non-academic world when it comes to using the term 'Anglo-Saxon'.

A rejection of the term is unlikely to be universally applicable to all non-academic and academic contexts (and everything in between), as the academic call within the field of AS studies for the term's rejection is rooted in a unique and specific set of circumstances. What this means becomes clear when zooming in on a specific example. My bachelor's (English Language and Culture) study association is called *The Great Anglo-Saxon Gobblers* (G.A.G.). How should they handle this ongoing academic debate? What is their responsibility in this case? The study association shares the use of a contested term with the field of AS studies, but lacks the accusations of racist structures and white gatekeeping. What can we expect from organisations like this? What is their place in the debate, if they have one at all? Terms will never be neutral, and if a study organization like G.A.G. lacks accusations of racism – a key element in argumentations against the term's retention – why should they reject the term while its historically accurate. Considering the term's rejection by the non-academic world that the academic world's rejection would require is unfeasible – and arguably unnecessary, together with the lack of a problem-free replacement that is as historically accurate and precise and the adequate assessment of why this term should be replaced as more historical labels have their problems, the term's rejection is currently on shaky ground.

### **Looking forward: the term's future**

Change must be welcomed. The field needs to reshape itself and dismantle its current structures to allow for a more diverse and inclusive working climate. The term 'Anglo-Saxon' certainly has a place in this debate about change; its consistent misusing and misappropriation throughout history up to and including the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires an in-depth assessment of what it means to use the term as academics. Derivatives of the term do not contribute to a developing and diverse field, but weaken its reshaping instead. They lack the historical accurate element that is part of the term 'Anglo-Saxon,' but are prone to problematic interpretations and connotations and should therefore be replaced and avoided. It might be fitting to replace the term 'Anglo-Saxon' by constructions using the adjective 'Early Medieval' in some cases, for example 'Early Medieval England.' However, replacing the term with the construction 'Early Medieval English' to refer to the AS people and language is not a problem-free alternative either.

A complete rejection of the term at this point would mean overlooking the term's element of historical accuracy, the lack of more fitting replacements and the assessment of what this debate means for other historical labels that have been misappropriated. Additionally, it would not have thoroughly considered how this debate is to relate to the non-academic world, which is a complex issue as the non-academic contexts in which the term is used are not in all cases tied to accusations of racist structures, as is the case with the field of AS studies. The term's usage needs to be narrowed down and replaced whenever possible and fitting, and its issues must be openly discussed. But we cannot abandon the term entirely. That is not to say that an eventual complete rejection is out of the question – if these aforementioned issues can be adequately handled and the term 'Anglo-Saxon' turns out to be truly superfluous, its rejection stands ground. But to reject the term completely is simply improbably and impractical at this point. The challenge the field of AS studies now has to

face in its search for a new identity is to reconcile the climate of change that must be embraced and the retention of a term that needs to have a revised place in the scholarship's lexicon.

## Conclusion

The term 'Anglo-Saxon' consists of two opposites fused together; historical value and a history of misappropriation. This paradoxical blend is what makes the term deeply complex. Amidst the Black Live Matters movement surging, it becomes painfully clear how racist structures are incredibly impactful and need to be dismantled; a difficult but necessary task. Facing accusations of racist structures, the field of AS studies is critically looking at its climate and its language.

The heated debate amongst academics in the field of AS studies is a collection of answers to what the balance of the term's inherent paradox looks like. Some argue the term's historical accuracy and precision and the lack of an adequate replacement tip the balance in favour of the term's retention, while others perceive the term's problematic connotations as incompatible with its existence in the scholarly lexicon. Determining this balance rests on multiple considerations; the field's lack of diversity and inclusivity, whether the term's central place is justified in the field's accusations of racism, and when racial contexts make a term itself racist all are crucial points that are being raised in the Anglo-Saxon debate. While a consensus has not been reached yet, the Anglo-Saxon debate has made clear that terms are not static, unequivocal, or straightforward. Examining the Anglo-Saxon debate has shown that the term 'Anglo-Saxon' cannot continue to exist in its current form, but rejecting the term's existence entirely is not probable either. The debate's implication is to find a middle ground when it comes to using the term 'Anglo-Saxon' as an academic field. The field needs to find a way to deal with the fact that historical terms are never neutral and many have their problems.

Future studies could zoom out and address the general impact and meaning of problematic connotations and usages of historical terms used in the scholarly lexicon. Comparing small case studies of misappropriated historical terms, such as the term 'Viking', would contribute to a better understanding of the impact these misappropriations have, but

also the effects of the scholarly contexts in which these terms are used. Awareness and open discussion of these terms' complexity benefit fields of study, as it prevents blindness to the power of language. Further research could also do the opposite and zoom in by specifically examining the contemporary scholarly uses of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' rather than its general usage throughout history, as this would shed further light on to what extent the term's multi-layered meanings have been adopted by academics. Additionally, comparing the integration of the term's connotations in different educational programmes and surveys examining the general public's perception of the term and its connotations would provide more insight into how this academic debate relates to the non-academic world. This would benefit a successful interaction between the academic and non-academic world concerning the debate's outcome.

The future appears to be one where the term 'Anglo-Saxon' still has a place in the scholarly and non-scholarly lexicon. A narrowed down use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' is the most probable outcome of the debate, considering the term's proposed replacements are not historically as fitting nor free of problems. The decision to use the term 'Anglo-Saxon' for its historical referential meaning throughout this thesis therefore turns out to be fitting. Additionally, the debate's outcome must acknowledge the existence of other historical terms with problematic connotations, the non-scholarly perception of the term, and the many contexts in which the term is used that lack accusations of racism. A revised and narrowed down way of using the term 'Anglo-Saxon' is therefore the most likely. But whatever the eventual outcome may be, the field must be aware that this debate is about much more than a name. Otherwise, just like a rose would smell as sweet by any other name, any other name can leave an equally bitter aftertaste.

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