

## Vegan geographies in Ireland

### Chapter 34

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While it would not be accurate to suggest that Ireland is a hub of veganism or vegetarianism, too often it is written off as inherently unsympathetic to the ethics of plant-based eating and anti-speciesist politics. While it is true that Irish culture is historically tied to speciesism and its economy is especially dependent upon “meat” and dairy production, Ireland’s relationship with other animals is complex and sometimes forgiving. This essay seeks to bring shape to the Irish vegan ethic, one that can be traced along its history of animism, agrarianism, ascendancy, adaptation, and activism. From its pagan roots to its legacy of vegetarianism, Ireland’s history has been more receptive to Nonhuman Animal interests than might be currently understood. Its contributions to the modern Nonhuman Animal rights movement and developments in green agriculture must also be taken into account. More than a land of “meat” and potatoes, Ireland exists as a relevant, if overlooked, participant in Western vegan thought.

## Introduction

Ireland is stereotyped as a land of “meat”<sup>1</sup> and potatoes given its traditional reliance on animal-based production, but plant-based dietary practices and anti-speciesist mobilization in Gaelic, colonial, and free Ireland suggests another narrative. Celtic culture, which established in approximately 400BC, was highly animist, positioning Nonhuman Animals<sup>2</sup> as agential persons and often heralding them as superior and admirable members of the community (Green 249). This strong relationship with other animals was rooted in early Ireland’s “cattle” economy in which wealth and power was embodied by cows (more valuable alive than dead) and the precious breastmilk they produced. The very landscape of Ireland has been directly shaped by human relationships with these cows and other animals as evidenced in mass deforestation and the construction of thousands of stone “livestock” enclosures. So, too, have Irish bodies been shaped as humans have evolved to maintain lactose tolerance well beyond the natural age of weaning.

Medieval colonization under the Vikings and the Normans would extend this co-development as new dominant classes brought advancements in animal-based agriculture which coincided with shifts in Irish social life. British colonization, furthermore, the longest

lasting and most influential foreign domination of Ireland, would amplify this speciesist economy to the extreme, dramatically increasing the production and exploitation of Nonhuman Animals, and, in doing so, increasing the suffering of Irish humans. While speciesism expanded, the diet of the average Irish person (now likely to be living in considerable poverty and vulnerability) paradoxically shrunk. “Meat” and dairy made their way to Britain and its other colonies while Irish persons, many of whom were rendered landless tenants to make way for a growing population of cows and sheeps,<sup>3</sup> subsisted primarily on potatoes, cabbages, and forage. Gaelic semi-vegetarianism rooted in communal living with domesticated animals (McCormick 35) would be replaced by a vegetarianism enforced by the structural violence of colonialism, a diet one Irish nationalist, himself a teetotaling vegetarian and advocate of whole foods, referred to as “dead food for half dead bodies” (Russell 375).

Both Ireland’s indigenous Gaelic culture and the pressures of colonialism would lay the foundations for a modern Ireland that, in spite of its persistent speciesist agricultural economy, is relatively conducive to vegan ethics. The production, consumption, and culture of Irish food have undergirded its historical progression, shaping national values related to freedom and fairness. The British mandated industrial exploitation of Nonhuman Animals fueled colonial oppression (Nibert 126), but vegetarian consumption which predominated in this era at the same time sustained the Irish peasantry (Kellogg 264–5, 289). Some Irish activists, furthermore, explicitly recognized the relevance of Nonhuman Animals and plant-based consumption to Irish nation-building (famed author James Joyce featured a Dublin vegetarian restaurant in his *Ulysses*<sup>4</sup> given its status as a rebel rendezvous) (Adkins 2). Nationalist hero James Connolly cast a critical eye on animal agriculture, identifying it as a considerable point of vulnerability for a truly independent Ireland given its heavy dependency on foreign markets:

It has been felt – and rightly – that the land so given up to cattle would be better occupied by human beings. That it were better to see thriving men and women and children, and happy homes than to see sheep and cows.  
(“Capitalism and the Irish Small Farmers”)

The same consciousness to human–nonhuman entanglement persists today. Modern Irish society is increasingly multicultural, amenable to climate change, and concerned with the many injustices imposed on other animals. Development in sustainable and regional food

production is positioned as essential to Irish self-sufficiency and successful competition in an international market beyond the harbors of Great Britain. Although many Irish “farmers” have celebrated “meat” and dairy production as crucial to this independence, others are now exploring veganism as an alternative, more sustainable and ethical pathway to a thriving society. Ireland’s emerging vegan ethic, therefore, cannot be divorced from its rich history of animism, vegetarianism, and nationalist crusading.

## Human–nonhuman relationships in Gaelic Ireland

### Ancient Ireland and Animism

The relationship between Irish society and flesh consumption has fluctuated considerably across history as related to various political and economic shifts. While this culture has admittedly always been animal-based, it has not always been animal-intensive. Early Irish peoples relied on Nonhuman Animal “meat” and milk as a major source of calories for thousands of years, but this consumption (especially that of “meat”) was comparatively low (Green 11; Lucas 8). Human communities of this region were uniquely lactose tolerant, a recent evolutionary adaptation to the colder climate of Northern Europe which limits growing seasons. Cows were exploited primarily for dairy production and plowing and sheeps for their hair and breastmilk. It was primarily older, unproductive animals who would be killed to procure their flesh (Green 11; Hickey, “The History of Irish Cuisine”) or their male children who could not produce prized breastmilk. The bodies of those who were killed for this purpose were largely reserved for higher classed individuals.

Humans treated various species differently based on their socially constructed purpose in Irish society, a trend consistent with sociological observations of contemporary human relationships with other animals (Cole and Stewart 22). As mentioned above, domesticated animals were most often targeted as food, but free-living animals were less frequently so as Neolithic human relationships with the natural world were profoundly meaningful and often sacred. This animism was particularly marked with the arrival of Celtic culture. The exaltation of human relationships with free-living animals and the symbolic importance of the “hunt” surfaces regularly in Irish mythology. “Hunting” was primarily utilized for maintaining social hierarchies, such as male dominance, elite rule, and human supremacy. Archaeological evidence suggests that Iron Age communities before the arrival of the Celts engaged in “hunting” more infrequently. Wild flora, especially hazelnuts, constituted the bulk of their diet (MacLean 5–6). Fishes, eels, and mollusks were likely eaten as well (although

very few of their fragile skeletons have survived to the present in Ireland's acidic soil), but "hunting" of mammals such as pigs and hares primarily took place only in the winter season. As one researcher summarizes, the early Irish diet was "rich in plant foods" (MacLean 8).

Animism provided some cultural protections in early Irish society, but it clearly had its limitations given the degree of anthropocentrism it entertained. Domesticated animals such as horses, sheeps, pigs, oxen, and cows ultimately represented wealth, and this economic function would more dramatically aggravate their vulnerability to human violence and exploitation. Animals were given as tribute to early clan leaders in pre-colonial Ireland, as is fabled of the famous Brian Boru (otherwise known as Brian of the Cattle Tributes) (Newman 200). Furthermore, kingships were defined by exploits in "cattle" raiding and the robustness of their herds. That said, although this economy was both patriarchal and anthroparchal, the value placed on cows as living commodities ensured that they were less vulnerable to being killed for human consumption as would later become the norm.

## Traditional Gaelic Foodways

Despite these decidedly speciesist practices, it would probably be most accurate to describe ancient Ireland as agrarian, with "meat" consumption reserved for the wealthy. In addition to cows' breastmilk, the early Irish diet was cereal-based and heavy in barley, flax, oats, and sometimes wheat (Salaman 247, 253, 317). Bread and porridge, rather than "meat" constituted the bulk of Gaelic cuisine (Lucas 8). Indeed, the bounteousness of fruit and vegetables is highlighted in Celtic legends as evidence of a kingdom's success, similar to that of exalted "cattle" herds. Early Irish humans also collected (or, beginning in the medieval era, also cultivated) a wide variety of herbs, seaweeds, nuts, berries, and mushrooms (Hickey, "The History of Irish Cuisine"). With the coming of Christianity and its monasteries and, later, the Normans, the diversity of plant agriculture increased to include beans, peas, and cabbage. Plant-based eating, in other words, was conventional to Gaelic Ireland and informed Irish culture as much as its "cattle" economy.

## The impact of Christianity on Irish human–nonhuman relationships

Ireland may have avoided colonization by the Romans, but it did interact with Roman Britain, and Christianity would dramatically alter its medieval culture. New "husbandry" practices intensified animal-based agriculture, and, although Catholicism could often be critical of speciesism, new Christian ideologies would worsen Nonhuman Animals' welfare overall. Many monks and saints practiced vegetarianism and even veganism (Bitel 207), but many others promoted speciesist consumption or encouraged the ritual killing of other animals for

holy days. While animist Celts respected other animals as sacred, Roman thought would shift the Irish relationship with other animals to one of robust anthropocentrism such that Nonhuman Animals in early Christian Ireland were increasingly subordinated as divinely sanctioned resources (Bitel 32–5; Green 239). Nonetheless, some concern for other animals does emerge from the new faith. The church penalized hippophagy, for instance, a pagan holdover which had sustained destitute humans in times of hunger (Simoons 187). To this day, the Catholic faith encourages believers to abstain from animal flesh on Fridays, particularly during Lent.

The adoption of Christianity did entrench speciesism and fan anthropocentrism, but many of these changes in human relationships with other animals represented a blending of continental Christian practices with pagan Irish ideas and practices, such that many Gaelic values remained relatively intact. Ireland's incorporation into the modern world system via colonialism would arguably have a far more dramatic impact on Ireland's Nonhuman Animals. Under British rule, Ireland's meadows, farms, and pastures were increasingly subsumed under the jurisdiction of absentee British landlords and allied Irish elites who were especially interested in producing "beef," "butter," "wool," and living animals for export. The indigenous Irish population would soon find itself without political representation, land rights, or food security. Subsequently, "meat" and dairy would become items of luxury, privilege, and status. In a time of increased agricultural sophistication in Ireland, animal products would ironically become less accessible to the overwhelming majority of its populace.

## Post-1500 tenant farming, famine, and British colonialism

Following the British monarchy's split from the Catholic Church and its commitment to creating a Protestant kingdom inclusive of Ireland, European trade expanded considerably into what would become a world system (Halley 34). England's renewed interest in subduing the Irish in tandem with Ireland's now vulnerable position on the periphery of a new global economy would significantly transform traditional ways of life; it was a troublesome transition to say the least. The majority of the Irish population experienced intense impoverishment well into the 19th century due to land privatization and heavy taxation (Salaman 283, 520). Most lacked the same rights and privileges afforded to the people of England, including those related to food accessibility. One's relationship within the hierarchical colonial system determined life quality and access to resources, such that, for most subjugated Irish persons, the using and killing of other animals for consumption was

simply too expensive. Land clearances made it difficult to care for Nonhuman Animals for the purposes of individual consumption. Instead, landlords utilized confiscated lands for large scale “cattle,” dairy, and “wool” production. For the most part, the only nonvegan consumption available to the Irish peasantry came in the form of hens’ eggs, sometimes cows’ breastmilk, and the occasional flesh of pigs who could be fed cheaply on scraps and potatoes (Sexton “Food and Drink at Irish Weddings and Wakes” 186). Indeed, without land on which to independently farm, tenants came to rely on these potatoes as well since they could be grown in poor and rocky soil inappropriate for large-scale farming of interest to colonialists.

Nonvegan consumption was further encumbered by laws designed to protect class boundaries through the regulation of food and human relationships with other animals. “Hunting,” for instance was prohibited by both the Normans and the British with regard to their Irish subjects. The Irish peasantry would have little opportunity for hunting, in any case, as it would entail trespassing on land no longer at their legal disposal. Even the keeping of dogs (who might aid in “hunting” expeditions) was closely regulated by colonialists (Finlay 55). For political and economic reasons, then, most Irish subjects subsisted on plant-based diets. With no hint of irony, many colonialists justified the subjugation of their conquests by pointing to this vegetarianism as a marker of inferiority, backwardness, and need for rule and development (Adams 9; Nally 727), a phenomenon historians have described as “dietary determinism” (Eagleton 16). Famed British historian Thomas Carlyle, for instance, visited Ireland at the height of famine, reporting back on the “Irish physiognomy” as slovenly and dimwitted, regularly juxtaposing this characterization with the population’s overreliance on lackluster stirabout (Irish porridge), limited supplies of “meat” and dairy, and its overall “potato culture” (12). Colonial administrator Charles Trevelyan was more explicit in the connection between Irish subhuman animality, need for British rule, and the potato diet:

The Irish small holder lives in a state of isolation [...] rather than in the great civilized communities of the ancient world. A fortnight for planting, a week or ten days for digging, and another fortnight for turf-cutting, suffice for his [sic] subsistence; and during the rest of the year, he [sic] is at leisure to follow his own inclinations, without even the safeguard of those intellectual tastes and legitimate objects of ambition which only imperfectly obviate the viles of leisure in the higher ranks of society. [...] The excessive competition for land maintained rents at a level which left the Irish peasant the bare means of subsistence; and poverty, discontent, and idleness, acting on his

excitable nature, produced that state of popular feeling which furnishes the material for every description of illegal association and misdirected political agitation. [...] The domestic habits arising out of this mode of subsistence were of the lowest and most degrading kind. The pigs and poultry, which share the food of the peasant's family, became, in course, inmates of the cabin also. (5–7)

Subsequently, vegetarianism was no longer associated with the legacy of an animist Gaelic culture; rather, it became a marker of inferior class position. By way of another example, the 1830 *Good Housekeeper* sings the praise of the “beef-eating” British colonialists, equating power and masculinity with “meat” consumption:

In every nation on earth the rulers, the men of power whether princes or priests, almost invariably use a portion of animal food. The people are often compelled, either from poverty or policy, to abstain.—Whenever the time shall arrive, that every *peasant* in Europe is able to “put his pullet in the pot,” even of a Sunday, a great improvement will have taken place in his character and condition; when he can have a portion of animal food, properly cooked, once each day, he will soon become *a man* (Hale 12).

The working classes of Britain were also experiencing extreme poverty and malnourishment in this era of colonial conquest, but, on the whole, the English population's diet would become much more varied as a result of its speciesist and classist domination of Ireland (Clarkson and Crawford 60). In fact, as this exploitation intensified, the diets of Ireland's poor became increasingly vegan. Workhouse records from the early 19th century, for instance, document meals based in potatoes and sometimes cow's breastmilk or fishes' flesh. Cows' milk became increasingly scarce, however, as the industrialization of Britain increasingly usurped this product for factory workers and urban dwellers which inflated its price (Wiley *Re-imagining Milk* 45). The toiling of Ireland's poor made these products possible, but most were too beggared to purchase any for themselves (this is not to invisibilize the Nonhuman Animals whose labor went completely unrecognized, compensated only with enough food, water, and shelter as was necessary to keep them alive). Animal products were considered precious and generally reserved for special occasions such as holidays, weddings, and to a lesser extent wakes (Sexton “Food and Drink at Irish Weddings and Wakes” 115). Aside from those of the dominant class, most Irish persons could only access animal flesh in the form of organs and entrails, which were too perishable to be

exported (Sexton “I’d Ate It Like Chocolate!” 172). “Meat” and dairy were simply too luxurious for colonial subjects. By the 19th century, approximately 90 percent of the Irish population was relying on potatoes as their primary source of calories (Salaman 317).

The Great Famine of 1845–1849 (what some have deemed a euphemism for genocidal colonial practices) was the infamous result of this tenuous foodway (Coogan 230). The plant-based practices of traditional Ireland, which had sustained its human population for thousands of years before the comforts of modern agriculture, had now been replaced by a vegetarian diet of subsistence. Indigenous agricultural practices had long been forgotten under so many years of colonialist control over food production, and this loss only intensified their vulnerability (Lucas 8). Potatoes sustained millions of Irish peasants under a system of extreme colonial oppression, but this strategy of vegetarian precariousness entailed considerable risk. A number of food shortages and blights plagued Ireland, culminating in several episodes of mass starvation which claimed over a million human lives (as well as countless nonhuman lives who arguably had even less access to resources in such times of dearth).

## The nature of relief efforts

Precarious vegetarianism that had manifested as a response to colonial oppression was thus a major contributor to one of Ireland’s greatest tragedies, but indigenous Gaelic vegetarianism and emerging vegan politics provided new strategies for resistance. Famine victims looked to the fields and forests for sustenance as their ancestors once did. Parsley, nettles, sorrel, charlock, leeks, and other native herbs and wild-growing plants were gathered and eaten. Cabbage was heavily depended upon, particularly so in the early summer months when other vegetables were not yet harvestable (Cowan and Sexton 80). Both Irish and non-Irish charities provided plant-based relief as well. For instance, The Quakers provided a number of grains and staple goods, especially oatmeal. Soup kitchens regularly provided vegetarian fare, though sometimes they contained animal flesh. In these cases, even starving famine victims were reported to have abstained in accordance with their religious convictions as Catholics (Hatton 149).

## The legacy of famine

The post-Famine diet appears to have remained plant-based as Ireland continued to export expensive animal products (Clarkson and Crawford 36). It was a vegetarianism of necessity and subsistence, rather than a diet rooted in indigenous values or healthfulness. The



increasing availability of processed foods, black tea, and sugar made possible by Britain's wider empire, would have a deleterious effect on the population and worried food reformers and policymakers alike (Clarkson and Crawford 234–238; Friel and Nolan i; Russell 376). As such, food remained highly political with regard to the nutritional inadequacy of Ireland's precarious vegetarianism in tandem with its traumatic history with mass starvation. To be clear, animal-based agriculture was foundational to the oppressive relationship between Britain and Ireland: it maintained Ireland's dependency upon British markets, discouraged the production of nutritious and diverse vegetables, grains, and other crops for human consumption, and necessitated an overall disconnect between the Irish and their own land. As previously discussed, many nationalists, not surprisingly, considered the role of agriculture and diet in the Irish struggle for independence.

Indeed, vegan politics are greatly entwined with nation-building efforts (Wright 30–42). In the British Isles, speciesism and nonvegan food production provided the impetus for Britain's colonial expansion and global imperialism, and because of this, Nonhuman Animals were at the heart of Ireland's bid for freedom and new Republican identity in the world system. The exploitation of vulnerable peripheries like Ireland provided the wealth and resources necessary to increase "meat" and dairy production, as animal-based agriculture is extremely resource intensive and difficult to sustain without regular expansion to secure new resources and markets (Nibert 126). By the late 19th century, more than half of the island and two-thirds of its wealth were tied up in the "cattle" industry (Ross 30).

## The modern Irish food system

The suffering of the Irish people, therefore, cannot be fully appreciated or understood without also acknowledging the suffering of the Irish cows, pigs, sheeps, fishes, and other animals and the oppressive ideologies that accommodated it. Identity and status associated with consumption patterns further supported this oppressive system. Britons portrayed Irish persons, on one hand, as brutish in their consumption of blood and raw flesh (Fitzpatrick 41), while, on the other, as weak and in need of rule due to their vegetarianism and reliance on potatoes (Noonan 154). Irish nationalists thus faced a conundrum: they could emphasize their Celtic and Gaelic indigenusness by celebrating vegetarianism and rejecting animal-based agriculture as a colonial system of oppression, or, they could embrace the colonial animal-based system and assimilate into the world system as equals as exemplified by their production and consumption of other animals. As with other postcolonial nations such as

China (Gambert and Linné 137) and India (Wiley “Growing a Nation: Milk Consumption in India Since the Raj” 41), Ireland ultimately adopted the latter approach.

Ireland’s gradual progression toward independence would eventually improve the status of its subjects and, subsequently, their privilege to oppress and consume Nonhuman Animals for their own benefit. Yet, it would not be until relatively recently that Ireland’s foodscape would begin to witness any significant change, thanks in part to the influx of economic security and prosperity. A millennial food consumption survey suggests that “increasing affluence and changing lifestyles” had resulted in a dramatic change in Irish dietary habits (Higgins iii). Certainly, the industrialization of animal-based agriculture was partly responsible. Irish “meat” consumption increased by an extraordinary 74 percent, while the consumption of fishes tripled (Friel and Nolan 26). The Irish food industry experienced significant restructuring in the mid-1980s, and “meat” and dairy production would see even greater growth as a result of product diversification and rationalization of production techniques (Harte 32). Although entry into the European Union would expand Ireland’s previously agriculturally dominant economy into other areas of production, such as technology services and pharmaceuticals, “meat” and dairy remain high priority businesses (Friel and Nolan 42; McDonagh and Commins 349; Tovey 333). Indeed, animal-based agriculture dominates the modern Irish economy, much as it did under British rule, accounting for 69 percent of food and drink exports. In 2014, the country exported approximately 6.6 billion euros worth of living and nonliving Nonhuman Animals and products made from their breastmilk (Bord Bia “Export Performance & Prospects 2013–2014” 4). If nation-states are defined by their economic activity, it would seem that modern Ireland is now characterized by its domination over Nonhuman Animals. This structural arrangement is unfortunate given its roots in colonial oppression and continued reliance on the exploitation of workers, Nonhuman Animals, consumers, and any and all impacted by the environmental consequences of animal-based agriculture. Yet, it was this same history with structural violence that would urge Irish nation-builders to embrace a speciesist economy, concerned as they were with building wealth and self-sufficiency in a country where a long-entrenched animal-based system of agriculture appeared to be one of few available assets.

The Republic of Ireland emerged from revolution with an explicit celebration of equality as a principle that was extended to “all its citizens,” “the whole of the nation and all its parts” and “all the children of the nation equally.”<sup>5</sup> And, although the early years of the Republic were characterized by deep-rooted Catholicism, a protective economy, and a general conservatism, values of freedom and justice have persisted with prominence in Irish

culture, particularly as Ireland entered the late 20th century. For Nonhuman Animals, this Irish ethic has been a mixed bag. Today's Irish agriculture has transitioned from subsistence to surplus, and the meaning of food is imbued with a sense of abundance and national pride. In addition to reinvigorating domestic consumption, international consumption has been greatly bolstered by depictions of nonhuman victims as happy and consenting in lush Irish fields (Henchion and McIntyre 634). Despite the remarkable growth the food sector has already experienced, the Irish state at the time of this writing plans to further increase exports, primarily "meat," dairy, and "seafood," to at least 19 *billion* euros by 2025 under its "Food Wise" ten-year initiative (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine 3). Because expected growth in export will also necessitate growth in the Nonhuman Animal population (and the environmental impacts of increased flesh and dairy production are likely to be significant), this strategy will surely be disastrous with regard to climate change (Burke-Kennedy, "Analysis: Agri-food Roadmap Fails to Assess Environmental Impact"). Many Irish Nonhuman Animal rights activists, indeed, have pressed this concern with regard to speciesism and its environmental consequences.<sup>6</sup>

## The Irish Nonhuman Animal rights movement

As previously alluded to, a vegan imagination (distinct from both traditional Gaelic vegetarianism and precarious colonial vegetarianism) did manifest in Ireland in response to its colonial experience and transition into a republic. Although activists were not always vegan, many did position their diet as an explicitly *political* rejection of exploitation (for both humans and other animals). Rebel leaders such as AE (George Russell) critiqued Ireland's animal-based production and consumption as threats to Ireland's ability to achieve full independence: "There is no doubt that the vitality of Irish people has seriously diminished and that the change has come about with a change in the character of the food consumed. When people lived with porridge, brown bread and milk, as main ingredients in their diet, the vitality and energy of our people were noticeable, though they were much poorer than they are now. With increasing prosperity, in the financial sense, we have grown much poorer, if our standards are biological and not financial" (375). The Vegetarian Society in Dublin, furthermore, insisted that Ireland's suffering was directly tied to the speciesist economy Britain had constructed there. At The Vegetarian Society's fourteenth anniversary soiree in 1861, the organization's secretary Reverend James Clark exclaimed:

[...] in the North-west of Ireland whole town-lands have been left desolate; many families have been thrust out of their dear homes, and the land of their birth, in order

that the land which supplied food for human beings might be used for the multiplication of cattle. And this must be increasingly the case unless the consumption of animal food be diminished. Vegetarianism provides a remedy for this conflict, and would, not be a cause of it. There would certainly be no use for the enormous number of animals now in the country if we were all Vegetarians [...] (14)

Vegetarian restaurants sprouted up Dublin and in the North of Ireland, providing much needed sites for radical praxis in consumption behaviors as well as meeting sites for radical visions for a future republic. A number of nationalists (some of whom were also feminists and socialists) convened in these sanctuaries (O'Connor 18), and, perhaps as a testament to the political threat this intersection represented, they were regularly surveilled by police. The 1916 *Proclamation of the Republic of Ireland* was even signed on the premise of one such establishment (McNally "From a Vegetarian Restaurant in Dublin to the Presidency of India").

Nonhuman Animals were not always absent referents or political objects in the larger narrative of Irish independence. A number of Irish politicians, elites, celebrities, and activists contributed to major advancements in Nonhuman Animal rights in the West. Some of the first books published on Nonhuman Animal rights can be attributed to Irish authors, such as William Drummond (1838) and James Haughton (1877), the likes of whom greatly influenced the Irish intelligentsia, important activists in the United States (such as William Lloyd Garrison) (Merrill 13), and institutions emerging to cater to Nonhuman Animal interests. Playwright George Bernard Shaw incorporated Nonhuman Animal rights in his work as well, with his vegetarianism comprising a major part of his public persona.

Beyond the realm of ideas, some Irish persons succeeded in manifesting real policy change and lasting charities. Richard Martin, an MP from Galway, succeeded, after many years of struggle, in passing the 1822 Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act which attempted to reduce the suffering of cows and other animals destined for slaughter (many of these animals were beaten, starved, and dehydrated as they were marched to their deaths). The legislative success inspired Martin and his ilk to attempt further campaigns against various forms of speciesist violence, such as bull "baiting." It also hastened the creation of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Great Britain as Martin's law originally depended upon the public to uphold its aims (Phelps 100); Martin was especially active in its early years offering leadership and funding. The SPCA, which would later become the Royal SPCA with Queen Victoria's patronage, spread elsewhere in the West, including the United States in the

1860s and Australia in the 1880s. Irish vegetarian societies established in the mid-19th century, while vegan collective action began to emerge in the early 20th century (Vegetarian Society of Ireland 1).

Other leading charities and campaigns were founded by Irish women, such as the notorious Frances Power Cobbe who founded the National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS) and later the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) following the disappointing results of the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876 (Phelps 144). Cobbe had taken a leading role in designing the act, but its passage had the unintended consequence of streamlining and legitimizing vivisection. Undeterred by such setbacks, she was a tireless and prolific author, regularly producing essays, magazines, and legislation on behalf of Nonhuman Animals throughout her life. In the preface to her exposé on vivisection, *The Modern Rack*, she remarks on thirty years of dedication to the antivivisection cause:

[...] such has been the guidance of my life under pressure of claims from which I could not turn away; and, sickening as is the retrospect which the reprinting of these papers has cost me of years filled with helpless indignation and pity, I do not regret that so it has been. It will be enough if I can close my work with the conviction that, sooner or later, the God-given consciences of men [sic] will surely revolt against this deadly practice, and make an end of it for ever [sic] (Cobbe vi).

Numerous other women in Ireland committed themselves to anti-speciesism. Anglo-Irish nationalist Charlotte Despard, for instance, advanced vegetarianism alongside her socialist and feminist activism. She is perhaps most famously known for her involvement in the Brown Dog Affair, whereby a memorial statue to vivisection victims was erected in Battersea which led to considerable agitation between the established medical community and the statue's defenders (Lansbury 15). When laying out her principles for the women's movement, she included vegetarianism. As fellow "sub-humans," women were expected to be the "voice of the voiceless" and demand both food reform and an end to vivisection (Despard 44). Co-founder of the Irish Vegetarian Society, Margaret Cousins, meanwhile, frequented the aforementioned vegetarian restaurant in Dublin featured in *Ulysses* which was operated by fellow leader of the Irish Women's Franchise League, Jenny Wyse Power (Power was also a founder of the nationalist party Sinn Féin). Cousins would later move to India to join fellow Irish vegetarian socialist Annie Besant to combat the ills of colonialism and sexism there (Rappaport 166). For Cousins, vegetarianism was not only a matter of morality, but a strategic means to advance her feminism as plant-based cooking gave women "more time to

think” (296). Power, on the other hand, promoted the consumption of Irish produce as a means of Irish independence (O’Neill 54).

Although some decades of conservative rule in Ireland stifled vegan expansion, veganism would reemerge as a viable alternative by the late 20th century. Following the weakening of the Catholic Church, Ireland’s incorporation into the European Union, and an increasing interest in embracing a new multicultural identity, Irish veganism was coming into its own. Britain’s Vegan Society made inroads as early as the 1940s, primarily in the North of Ireland. Irish vegans were trailblazers in their own right, however. One of the world’s first vegan celebrities, Jack McClelland, a long-distance swimmer, retailer of natural food shops, and leader in Britain’s Vegan Society, hailed from Belfast. He astonished the Irish (and international) public in the 1950s and 1960s with several record-breaking (and plant-based) athletic stunts (Gunn-King, 1996).

McClelland and his contemporaries advanced veganism as a catchall solution to many social ills in an Ireland struggling against postcolonial dependencies, a claimsmaking strategy that would lay the groundwork for subsequent activists campaigning in a millennial society more conducive to veganism. They would be shocked, undoubtedly, by the popularization of veganism in such a short amount of time. Bord Bia<sup>7</sup> (“Dietary Lifestyles Report” 53) reports that over four percent of Irish persons now identify as vegan, one in four Irish persons claim to be reducing their intake of dairy, and one in four are reducing their consumption of “red meat.” A survey of Tripadvisor results in 2019 even determined Dublin to be the world’s top destination with regard to vegan options (McCarthy, 2019). Guinness, perhaps the most infamous of all Irish consumables, went vegan in 2017, citing its desire to appeal to vegans (Stack, 2015) (Bailey’s soon followed suit with a vegan version of its cream liqueur). Consider also Cornucopia, Dublin’s most prominent vegetarian restaurant in successful operation since 1986, which is now almost exclusively vegan in an effort to meet demand. Even Cork’s historic English Market, once a hub of animal trade and slaughter and now distinguished by its commitment to Ireland’s speciesist “sustainability” campaigning, now includes vegan vendors. Vegan festivals, too, are now commonplace since the 2010s, as is vegan discourse in the public sphere. Go Vegan World, a small nonprofit based on County Meath, has for several years now blanketed bus stations, buildings, billboards, newspapers, and other mediums with appeals to veganism, a campaign that has exacted considerable media attention (as well as industry pushback).

## Conclusion

Irish culture is often stereotyped as inherently incompatible with veganism, but centuries of cultural interactions, be they forced or friendly, have nurtured a seedbed that is conducive to plant-based living and respectful relations with other animals. This transferal of values and capital through Celticism, Catholicism, colonialism, and globalization may have entrenched speciesism, but it has also created awareness to alternatives. Ireland, in fact, has played an important role in the formation of the 19th-century Nonhuman Animal rights movement, and it continues to participate with its own indigenous contributions to vegan and anti-speciesist activism today. Given the tendency for Britain and the United States to dominate in the historical narratives of anti-speciesism and veganism, it is important to recognize that Ireland's veganism is not simply a small-scale replica of its neighbors, but rather a manifestation of something distinctly Gaelic, global, and postcolonial. It is part of a larger Irish tradition of freedom and resistance to injustice.

The persistence of Ireland's "meat" culture today stems from that very oppression. It is a legacy of British colonization, one that has strengthened over many years and economic developments encouraging an assimilation with human supremacy at the expense of transspecies solidarity. Colonization ensured that millions of Ireland's humans would starve or flee while Nonhuman Animals were "raised" on British-owned Irish land would be exported, both living and dead, to feed the privileged. Perhaps, then, it would be accurate to understand Ireland as a "land of meat and potatoes" insofar as Irish suffering and resilience will always be bound to the killing of animals for absentee elites, the meager consolation potatoes would bring, and the struggles of the marginalized in a speciesist, postcolonial society. The state today has embraced "meat" and dairy production with ambitious plans of expansion in international markets by drawing on the world's romantic fascination with the Irish rural idyll despite serious concerns that the strategy will have negative consequences for human, nonhuman, and environmental well-being. Now more than ever, it behooves Irish activists and their allies to underscore veganism as a politic of resistance that is more familiar than foreign to Ireland both past and present.

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<sup>1</sup> Euphemistic or otherizing language that objectifies Nonhuman Animals is placed in quotation marks to denote its contested nature.

<sup>2</sup> This is capitalized as a political measure to emphasize its status as a marginalized group in human society.

<sup>3</sup> Mass terms such as "sheep" are disrupted here as a measure of recognizing their individuality and personhood.

<sup>4</sup> Considered a classic in modern literature, *Ulysses* offers a contemporary critique of Anglo-Irish politics in the years of independence.

<sup>5</sup> From the *Proclamation of the Irish Republic*, 1916.

<sup>6</sup> See the aims and objectives of Vegan Ireland (<http://www.vegan.ie>) as well as Go Vegan World's 2018 *Vegan Guide*.

<sup>7</sup> Translates to "Food Board."