

Wrenn, Corey Lee (2026) *Animal anxieties: A postcolonial analysis of veganism in the Irish discourse*. *Journal of Sociology* . ISSN 1440-7833.

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Animal Anxieties: A Postcolonial Analysis of Veganism in the Irish Discourse

Journal of Sociology
1–26

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DOI: [10.1177/14407833251413794](https://doi.org/10.1177/14407833251413794)
journals.sagepub.com/home/jos**Corey Lee Wrenn¹** 

Abstract

Veganism, the eschewing of Nonhuman Animal production and consumption, promises to deliver a significant disruption to the nation-state's heavy dependence on the systematic exploitation of other animals. For precarious newly developed nation-states, this disruptiveness takes on another level of sociological relevance. First, economic reliance on other animals is often presumed mandatory for global participation and legitimacy. Second, citizens of these new nations are frequently overcoming the legacy of colonialist racialization, which characteristically animalizes subjects to justify their subjugation. Animal nationalism is an emerging field which presses the discipline to negotiate the importance of animality in defining national and cultural identities. Using Ireland as a case study, this article advances animal nationalism theory by positing that it is more than humanity's relationship with actual nonhumans that is at play in nation-building, but also the metaphorical relationship between humans and other animals, given their utility in maintaining human stratification systems.

Keywords

Animality, colonialism, food, Irish studies, postcolonial studies, veganism

Introduction

At the turn of the 21st century, the sociological discipline began to seriously consider the “animal question,” as evidenced in a number of precursory publications which pressed the importance of Nonhuman Animals to the social (Nibert, 2003; Taylor, 2013).

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Indeed, the growing attention to Nonhuman Animal¹ studies has underscored the socially constructed nature of the social” by challenging the discipline’s traditional focus on humans (Peggs, 2012). There is also a more critical effort to draw attention to the destructive nature of hierarchical species relationships (Cudworth, 2016). For instance, some race and ethnicity scholars have identified the categorical role of “animal” as essential to the construction of the racialized “other,” particularly in the colonial context (Armstrong, 2002; Boisseron, 2018; Jackson, 2020; Ko & Ko, 2017; Nibert, 2013). Postcolonial Critical Animal Studies challenges the presumed authority of dominant groups, as well as their conceptions of “universal” knowledge born of Western epistemologies and ridden with biases of the oppressor. Relatedly, the field has revisited Indigenous knowledge systems, given their potential to confront colonial conformities of violence. Indeed, they have offered divergent perspectives that can often redeem other animals, granting them agency and signaling their importance in resistance to the colonial notion of a passive nature. This has been demonstrated, by way of some examples, in analyses of the Shona in Zimbabwe (Musijiwa, 2023), the Rastafari in Jamaica (Noland, 2023), the Maori in Aotearoa, New Zealand (Dunn, 2019), and some First Nations of the Americas (Robinson, 2020). That said, caution is necessary when drawing comparisons given the irreducibility of Indigenousness. Not all Indigenous or formerly colonized groups embrace animality, for one, and neither do they collectively reject the commodification of nature and fellow animals (Narayanan, 2018). Ireland, as this article explores, is an important case study in this regard.

Postcolonial Critical Animal Studies has forwarded a theory of animal nationalism to explain these connections, arguing that Nonhuman Animals are often politicized in the making and maintenance of colonialism as well as postcolonial national borders and identities (Gillespie & Narayanan, 2020). Animal nationalism is related to food nationalism and gastropolitics (Ranta & Ichijo, 2022) in its recognition that national identity is shaped by dietary customs, but it is distinct in that it identifies animality, a relational social category, as core to nationalism. Animal nationalism does often overlap with dietary practice, but, more broadly, it interrogates the species hierarchy as foundational to the control, ownership, and exploitation of marginalized humans, nonhumans, and the environment. In the late 1500s, the renunciation of Catholicism in England inspired a renewed interest in suppressing the neighboring Irish who were seen as wild, unruly, tribal, and savage. The civilization and development of Ireland was primarily useful in transforming the region into a profitable colonial resource. Through considerable and often violent force, Ireland’s human inhabitants were dispossessed of the lands upon which they collectively sustained themselves to make way for agricultural systems based on the oppression of fellow animals (Nibert, 2013). While tenant laborers produced “meat”² and “dairy” to feed the growing British empire, due to their association with animals and their lowered status as colonial subjects, the laborers were themselves animalized alongside the ballooning population of pigs, cows, and sheep also suffering under colonial rule. Through colonialism, inequality became justifiable and naturalized according to perceived corporal and mental differences between “civilized,” white British colonizers and “uncivilized,” “savage” subjects, both human and nonhuman. Although the systematic oppression of humans and other animals does frequently flourish outside of

colonialism, colonialism is discussed here as especially relevant given that it strategically creates, nurtures, and deploys divisions for the purposes of control and exploitation by leveraging animal anxiety. The status of humanity, in other words, is inherently fragile. Exaggerating nonhuman animality through the introduction of speciesist industries and putting into question the humanity of certain exploitable human groups, species status can be wielded as a powerful means of social control. Long after the colonial system had ended, this status uncertainty remains, thus perpetuating instability and the continued stigmatization of animality. Postcolonial regions, this article suggests, continue to respond to that stigmatization, and assuage animal anxieties by defending human supremacy.

Ireland is used here as a case study in this theory. Once a colony of Britain, the Republic of Ireland (as well as Northern Ireland which has remained in the United Kingdom following the partition from free Ireland in 1921) remains one of West's leading producers of "meat" and "dairy," and, not unrelatedly, it harbors an antagonistic relationship with environmental and anti-speciesist initiatives (Renglet, 2020; Yates, 2011). When faced with vegan claimsmaking relating to the wide-reaching negative consequences of "meat" and "dairy" production, public and professional dialogue can illuminate the ways in which colonial logics continue to inform contemporary postcolonial spaces. This article employs a qualitative discourse analysis of Irish media surrounding a vegan campaign that launched across the island in 2017. Using a vegan sociological and postcolonial perspective, I consider the role of animality in facilitating cultural control and shaping postcolonial outcomes. First, as has been previously established (Nibert, 2013), the oppression of Nonhuman Animals is both materially and symbolically foundational to the oppression of marginalized humans, and I argue this to be the case for Ireland. Second, I suggest that the colonial project in particular characteristically aggravates speciesist oppression in its effort to maintain and justify the oppression of its human subjects. Third, as former colonies transition into free nation-states, they can experience cultural anxieties regarding their legitimacy in the world system. These anxieties, I argue, reflect the country's association with other animals and efforts to dehumanize colonial subjects.

Oppressing Animals, Oppressing Ireland

Much of Irish history has been defined by relationships with other animals and foods eaten (or not eaten). Diet and food production are key to the economic and cultural development of a society, frequently delineating ethnic identity (Armstrong, 2015). Ireland has been uniquely successful in capitalizing upon the global romanticization of this identity, such that its lush green fields and old family farms are often associated with high-quality animal produce (Markwick, 2001; O'Neill, 2024). But Ireland is also infamous for its past periods of hunger and paucity. With cruel irony, times of want coincided with times of considerable agricultural productivity under Norman and British colonialism. "Dairy" and flesh were exported in great quantities to industrializing Britain and its other colonies (Nibert, 2013). Rendered destitute and landless, Irish subjects were forced onto the potato, touted for its resiliency in the poor soil remaining for tenants. Although some households kept chickens and pigs, flesh and eggs were frequently sold to make ends

meet, and the Irish peasantry typically subsisted on vegetarian or even vegan diets that were heavy with potatoes and cabbages (Wrenn, 2021).

After so many centuries of colonial rule, older, more sustainable, and resilient farming and foraging practices had been disrupted and lost to memory. Ireland's dietary diversity, subsequently, was not only inhibited by the impoverishment due to colonialism, but also by colonialism's obstruction of agricultural innovation and the connection that indigenous Irish peoples had to the land. Although vegetarian reformers in Britain touted the ability of Irish peasants to toil productively on a potato-based diet (Kingsford, 1892), the subsistence vegetarianism made necessary by colonialism was more often associated with shame and suffering (Mac Con Iomaire, 2018). Ironically, it would also serve as evidence for the need of British rule. As with the "rice-eaters" of South and East Asia, the Irish potato-eaters were thought lesser developed, weak and effeminate as a consequence of their diet. By this logic, it was only natural that British "beef-eaters" should assume leadership (Gambert & Linné, 2018). It would not be until the mid- to late-20th century, with the industrialization of food production, that "meat" and "dairy" would become a major source of sustenance. Thus, the proliferation of Nonhuman Animal products now available—not just for the now free people of Ireland but for the wider world it services—symbolizes hard-won prosperity and security.

Colonization and Animalization

Nonhuman Animals shape the Irish identity with regard to foodways, but also with regard to ethnic and racial constructions. Vegan scholars have noted that the oppression of other animals acts as a blueprint for the subsequent oppression of vulnerable humans (Mason, 1993; Nibert, 2013). Speciesist oppression is strongly correlated with the formation of hierarchies, and the otherization and subjugation of animalized humans. These connections reflect the importance of property and control under colonialism. Recall that the Irish have been animalized as wild and beastly savages to justify their subjugation ideologically. This was an especially potent tactic under Henry VIII, but it reaches as far back as the Norman conquest and as far forward as the Troubles (the period of political and cultural antagonism between Catholics and Protestants in 20th century Northern Ireland). From the 19th century, Darwinian concepts were employed to conceptualize racial and ethnic distinctions as well. In a presentation to the Anthropological Society of London, prominent 19th-century English ethnologist John Beddoe aligned the Irish with darker skinned racial groups in his "index of nigrescence," a classification system that associated darker skin with evolutionary inferiority (Castle, 2009). This work would be picked up by popular media, with Irish peoples regularly depicted as apes well into the 20th century (Curtis, 1971). Species categorization, in other words, naturalizes social stratification (Deckha, 2023). Social psychological research in several Western countries supports this connection, finding that lower-class groups are more likely to be stereotyped as ape-like as a means to emphasize their perceived primitive animality (Burkhardt, 2002; Deckha, 2023; Loughnan et al., 2014). A number of tactics, of course, were employed to divide, conquer, and subdue Ireland, including war, punitive laws and economic policies, disenfranchisement, and the usurpation of land and power for Protestant gentry, but

politicizing animality is foremost among these and it arguably laid the groundwork for the initial persecution of the populace.

The meaning of humanity in Ireland, as elsewhere in the postcolonial world, has been burdened by norms and ideals manufactured under settler-colonialism. Attempts to “restore” humanity obscure the fact that the very concept of humanity is, to some extent, a colonial construct. They also obscure pre-contact multispecies relations and value systems. Furthermore, Ireland’s relationship with nature and other animals transformed considerably as it was pushed from a largely pastoral and plant-based agrarian economy to the intensive production of “meat” and “dairy.” This shift, predicated on the “development” of Ireland, was, in actuality, a systematic exploitation designed to bolster Britain’s Industrial Revolution and further colonial expansion. Increasing rebelliousness in Ireland and the persistent strains of post-famine migration exacerbated this animalization. Simianizing Irish people served to highlight their supposed criminality, savagery, and incapacity to govern themselves (Curtis, 1971). With Irish people depicted as beasts, their control, incarceration, or deportation could be justified, just as happens with other animals.

Animal nationalism theorizes that Nonhuman Animals are frequently employed in nation-building, including the maintenance of geopolitical borders and ethnic identity (Dalziell & Wadiwel, 2017; Stănescu, 2018; Wright, 2015), particularly evident in the post-independence reconstruction efforts of previously colonized regions (Saha, 2017; Suzuki, 2017; Wiley, 2017). In the heady days of Irish rebellion, Britain was not alone in its desire to construct the Celtic people as “other.” Many of the Irish themselves were often keen to emphasize their Celtic exceptionalism. Employing similar tactics to British ethnologists, Irish researchers hoped to highlight Irish distinctiveness as evidence of *super* rather than *subhuman* status that justified independence. Archaeology and anthropology were employed in this project to delineate the Irish as a distinct racial group that, unlike the populations of Britain and mainland Europe, had mostly avoided intermingling with the Romans. Thus, Ireland could be positioned as “one of the original civilizations of Europe” (Carew, 2018, p. 27), combating the stereotype of Ireland as “isolationist and culturally barren” (p. vii). As Castle (2009) summarizes, “the belief in cultural or racial essence, together with a belief in moral and cultural reform” shaped modern Ireland (p. 4). Revivalist research resisted imperialist narratives of Irish primitivism, aiming to mobilize Ireland as a new nation emerging from a long-established culture with a distinct Celtic ethnicity (MacManus, 1921).

In an era of eugenics and Irish emigration, defining what it meant to be Irish was a political maneuver. Ideologies of biological determinism linked race and social position (Carew, 2018). Rather than accept a lower racial assignment, post-Independence Ireland championed its people as racially advanced. Findings from Harvard University’s anthropological mission in the 1930s purported to find larger skulls among the Irish, thus providing evidence for their superior intelligence. Ireland was no longer a wild country of barbaric semi-human apes; it was an “island of saints and scholars” (Carew, 2018, p. 199) and a glorious, ancient, and “great Celtic nation” (p. 190). Language, religion, literature, and the arts, meanwhile, were at the forefront of a great “revival” of Celticism, challenging the demeaning influences of colonialism and creating a new

idea of a modern Ireland based on what it had been before colonization, what it was *imagined* to have been like before colonization, and what it was imagined as capable of achieving beyond colonization (Castle, 2009; Mallory, 2016).

Brannigan (2009) has observed this animal anxiety in modern racial relations as well. Irish race relations have been strained by globalization and entry into the European Union (EU), as immigration has certainly tested its “Celtic” racial construction. Although exclusion and rejection are often employed in Irish nationalism, it is also the case that progressive politics and multiculturalism shape the Irish identity (BouAynaya, 2024). Ireland is not locked to the past and is far from static, nonetheless, its commitment to the maintenance of the human/nonhuman boundary takes on a deeper political meaning in this racialized postcolonial space. Although Celtic revivalism sought to define the Celt as other-than-Anglo-Saxon, it has also implicitly assimilated the Anglo-Saxon colonial taxonomy. Subsequently, to be Celtic is to be human; to be human is dominate other animals. Celtic multispecies traditions that blurred the boundary between humans and other animals, granted fellow animals greater cultural importance, and were less hierarchical in nature—traditions that are more consistent with Celtic indigeneity—were sidelined as Irish revivalists sought to resist colonialism on Britain’s terms (Wrenn, 2021).

Veganism and Plant-Based Eating as Anti-Colonialism

While Ireland has confronted many institutionalized sectarian, sexual, and gender inequalities installed by colonialism and aggravated by independence-era constructions of Irish distinctiveness, the deleterious impacts on the food system, environment, and human–nonhuman relations remain largely uncontested, at least at the structural level. The colonial infrastructure of intensive animal-based agriculture has endured, absorbed into efforts to reclaim pre-contact Irish culture, likely in an effort to highlight Irish humanity through nonhuman domination. Given the instability of animal-based agriculture in a society that is increasingly rocked by zoonotic disease, climate change, diet-related diseases, and concerns with the wellbeing and rights of animals exploited for food, there have been some significant changes in the Irish food landscape. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act of 2015 renewed efforts to move toward a low-carbon economy (Renglet, 2020), for instance, and the Green Party, upon entering a coalition government in 2020, has secured an amendment for climate neutrality by 2050. Ireland regularly exceeds EU emissions caps, however, and the meager fines it faces may be understood simply as regular costs of business. Indeed, Bord Bia’s animal-based Foodwise 2025 plan projects an increase in animal-based agricultural production totalling approximately €19 billion within the next two decades (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2020).

Despite the heavy institutional support of animal-based agriculture by EU subsidies and state-sponsored outreach in support of this proposed trajectory of growth, consumer demand has wavered. The industry has responded by expanding to global markets while also appealing to domestic markets by framing animal-based consumption as congruent with Irish autonomy (as evidenced by various manifestations of “Buy Irish” campaigns). Any challenge to the legitimacy of the industry is subsequently interpreted as a challenge

to the state. Indeed, this linking of animal-based agriculture with patriotism and global prowess is exactly indicative of animal nationalism (Dalziell & Wadiwel, 2017; Wright, 2015). Postcolonial countries may be especially prone to this phenomenon. India, for instance, boasts the highest production and consumption of cows' breastmilk in the world, due largely to the role that milk was assigned in resisting colonialism and increasing political power on the global stage (Saha, 2017). Likewise, China has been rapidly adopting Western-branded "dairy," despite widespread lactose intolerance, and is now one of the top producers of chickens and pigs (Gambert & Linné, 2018). As breastmilk and flesh production traditionally took place in oppressed colonies for the enjoyment of their more privileged colonizers, Nonhuman Animal consumption became a marker of wealth and societal advancement. The belief that animal protein builds stronger, healthier bodies, too, has enshrined Nonhuman Animal agriculture in nationalism as it is thought to build a stronger, healthier, and more competitive population (Cwiertka, 2004). This would be the case with Ireland, which opted to embrace and expand its speciesist colonial economy as a free state. Supporting the production and consumption of Nonhuman Animal products has become a point of national pride (Carroll, 2012).

Nevertheless, today many conscientious citizens are critiquing the Irish food economy as a serious inhibitor of the public good and sustainability of the nation. The number of vegans in Ireland is comparable to that of the US and UK (Vegan Society, 2025), and the discussion of vegan topics on Irish radio, television, and discussion boards is now commonplace. Perhaps one of the most potent provocateurs of this dialogue is the Go Vegan World (GVW) campaign. Based in County Meath, GVW relies on the dissemination of highly visible posters and billboards posted on signs, buildings, buses, subways, and newspapers in Ireland and Great Britain. The forthrightness of the GVW campaign has forced a lively debate across Irish media channels, drawing intense criticism from animal-based agricultural industries (Flynn, 2017). How can the recent interest in vegan politics be reconciled with the role that Nonhuman Animals play in the maintenance of the Irish nation-state both economically and ideologically?

Methods³

This study examines the introduction and reception of the advertising campaigns funded by GVW in Ireland beginning in 2017. GVW is, at the time of this writing, the preeminent and most visible vegan charity in Ireland. The first stage of this study engages a purposive sampling of interviews with GVW representatives, primarily GVW's director Sandra Higgins. These took place across Irish media channels, usually in debate with industry leaders and members of the public, and are hosted on the GVW website starting from December 30, 2017. The sampling window was closed on November 15, 2024, providing 15 interviews for coding. Interviews were included only if recorded in Ireland *and* discussed the Irish context, reducing the sample to 13 (Table 1). The interview format is limited in that it is self-selected from one vegan organization, but it offers a fruitful opportunity to analyze animal anxieties as they surface when Irish human supremacy is called into question. Higgins claims to have included most, if not all, of her interviews on the website, even when the interview format is biased against veganism in placing it on

Table 1. Go Vegan World Interviews/Debates.

Interview number	Date	Show	Interview run time	Format	Included
1	November 14, 2024	LMFM Late Lunch Listen Back	13:48 min	Radio	Yes
2	November 1, 2023	Gerry Kelly, LMFM Radio	17:39 min	Radio	Yes
3	November 1, 2023	Declan Meehan, East Coast FM Radio	10:09 min	Radio	Yes
4	October 30, 2023	Clare McKenna, Newstalk Radio	12:37 min	Radio	No (Irish, but no discussion of Ireland)
5	October 18, 2023	Ciara Kelly, Newstalk Radio	6:52 min	Radio	Yes
6	June 10 th , 2023	Shane Coleman, Newstalk Breakfast	6:53 min	Radio	Yes
-	January 3, 2020	BBC Radio 4	4:06 min	Radio	No (no discussion of Ireland)
7	January 7, 2020	BBC Radio Ulster Farming Matters	20:03 min	Radio	Yes
8	January 20, 2020	BBC Radio Ulster Talkback	21:15 min	Radio	Yes
9	October 20, 2020	Newstalk Breakfast	5:19 min	Radio	Yes
10	January 19, 2019	Gerry Kelly, Late Lunch Show	14:11 min	Radio	Yes
11	February 5, 2018	Cork's 96FM The Opinion Line	44:22 min	Radio	Yes
12	February 15, 2018	Today with Sean O'Rourke	15:03 min	Radio	Yes
13	January 5, 2018	Newstalk, Lunchtime Live with Ciara Kelly	17:05 min	Radio	Yes
14	March 29, 2017	Claire Byrne Live, RTE	17:13 min	Television	Yes

the defensive. Given the large amount of interview data, purposive coding was utilized, whereby comments by Higgins, the interviewer, other interviewees, and the public were only included if they were at all related to the importance of animal-based agriculture to the Irish state, with particular attention paid to comments related to animalization. These comments were transcribed and further analyzed to ascertain thematic patterns (Table 2).

The second phase of this study critically examines discourse as it transpires in Boards.ie in response to a particular vegan billboard posted by GVW at the height of its inaugural campaigning in 2017 (Figure 1). It also draws on theories of animal nationalism to guide coding design. As of this writing, Boards.ie boasts over 600,000 members,

Table 2. Frequency of Leading Frames in Go Vegan World Interviews/Debates.

Frame	Interview number														Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
<i>Frames utilized by those against veganism in Ireland</i>															
Irish distinctiveness	1	1								3	7		2	14	
Core to economy	2	1	1					1	1	7	1	1		15	
Supports the world	1						1			2	1			5	
Historical tradition	2							3	1	2	2	1		11	
External interference							1		1	2				4	
High Irish welfare standards								5	5	3	1	1		15	
Discomfort with humanizing other animals								3				2		5	
Farmer insecurity									1	1	5			7	
Ireland ill-suited to plant-based economy								1	1	2				4	
Farmers progressing society												1		1	
<i>Frames utilized by those for and against veganism in Ireland</i>															
Public health concerns							1	1	1	3	3		2	11	
Free speech/censorship	1							4	1	4			1	11	
Human exceptionalism										4			4	8	
<i>Frames utilized by those for veganism in Ireland</i>															
Ireland uniquely environmentally problematic	1	2	1	2		2		1		1		1	1	11	
Ireland not apart from global climate crisis	1			1						5				7	
Lack of awareness	2													2	
Industry interference/obfuscation	1					2					1			4	
Subsidies			1											1	
Ireland well situated for a plant-based economy	1			1		2		1	3					8	
Colonial legacy						1	1							2	
Discomfort with speciesism								1						1	
Intersectional appeal									2					2	
Human potential									2	2				4	
Changing Ireland									1	1				2	
Deceptiveness of Irish landscape/agricultural system											1	1		2	

suggesting that at least 1 in 10 Irish citizens utilize the site.⁴ The coding scheme reflects content analyses of vegan discourse already conducted on the American, British, and New Zealand press (Cole & Morgan, 2011; Freeman, 2016; Potts & Parry, 2010; Wrenn, 2025). All posts on the forum topic on the GVW billboard (titled “Vegan anti-



Figure 1. Go Vegan World Billboard Campaign.

Table 3. General Tone Frequencies on Boards.ie GVW Forum.

Supportive	27	8%
Neutral; unclear	95	28%
Negative	220	63%
Total	342	100%

dairy Billboards") were collected on April 25, 2018, totaling 342 posts. Each post in this forum was treated as a unit of analysis and hand coded. Because this data is publicly available, the methodology was not expected to present any serious ethical concerns. Most forum participants, furthermore, utilize nonidentifiable usernames, and the forum does not accommodate photograph-based avatars that might identify the users.

The coding scheme consisted of three main codes: posts supportive of campaign, posts that were neutral or unclear, and posts dismissive of campaign (Table 3). There were too few supportive units to necessitate subcoding, but the neutral codes were split into three subcodes based on whether the unit was (1) fully neutral, (2) acknowledged the influence of the vegan campaign but did not actually support or dismiss the campaign, or (3) was unclear on its position. Negative codes, being the most numerous, also required five additional subcodes relating to dismissiveness, tone-policing, violent intent, charges of hypocrisy, and logical reasoning (Table 4). Given that so many of these were explicitly dismissive, I introduced several subcodes to clarify the nature of dismissiveness (Table 5). Tone-policing (Table 6) and the use of logical fallacy (Table 7) were also further subcoded. Because the coding scheme had become so comprehensive, it was necessary to return to my theoretical interest and code also for any mention of Ireland as I had done with the GVW interviews (Table 8).

Table 4. Nature of Negative Posts on Boards.ie GVW Forum.

Threat of violence	4	1%
Charges of hypocrisy	24	7%
Tone-policing	39	11%
Logical fallacy	45	13%
Dismissive	108	31%
Total	220	63%

Table 5. Reasons Given for Dismissiveness, General on Boards.ie GVW Forum.

Profiteering	2	1%
Vegan food not tasty or satisfying	4	1%
Ignored by public	6	2%
Outsider or elite-funded	7	2%
Low in numbers	8	2%
Criminal, dangerous	11	3%
Cognitively impaired; cult-like	22	7%
General dismissiveness; other	48	13%
Total	108	31%

Table 6. Tone-Policing on Boards.ie GVW Forum.

Yuppie; middle-class	1	0%
Overly emotional	7	2%
Misanthropic	15	4%
Preachy; evangelical	16	5%
Total	39	11%

Table 7. Logical Fallacies on Boards.ie GVW Forum.

Feasibility of veganism	1	1%
Sustainability	7	2%
General; other	8	2%
Health	11	3%
Animal rights	18	5%

The coding scheme grew in complexity following the initial analysis. As such, the data required a second complete coding to check for reliability of the measure. Some posts were complex and contained multiple codes. Due to the volume of data, I opted to code with master frames for purposes of practicality, coding the unit according to the most dominant theme in terms of prominence and space allocated by the commentator. Several individuals

Table 8. Irish-Specific Posts on Boards.ie GVW Forum.

Post no.	Master code	Comment
8	Acknowledges power	Ya wanna see Dublin. Dublin buses were full of ads last year.
22	Few numbers	I'm no longer worried about them after the past weeks weather event. When you see empty milk shelves (bar almond juice) we see how the population returned to basics when the chips were down. I'm no longer concerned that the demand for milk alternatives is of any threat to our business.
23	Acknowledges power	Looks like Bread was the number one staple Allps [Boards.ie username]. That be tillage farmers in anyone's book ...
24	Unclear	JIT deliveries are a stones ... well proven now
26	Few numbers	Are you a local farmer? Are you bulling? I used to be worried about them also until I drove by our local McDonald's on St. Stephen's day and there was a que to get into the drive through and the restaurant was jammers. Nobody went there for vegan food! They are a very noisy well funded minority. Go vegan estimate that there are 500k vegans in the UK. In a population of 68million that's a very small percentage.
64	Crazy; cult	I think where the vast majority of them are concerned you are spot on. I've no more time for organised religion than most people, but I am inherently conservative ... and I'm old enough and cynical enough to know no matter what they like to think everybody worships something. The disappearance of regular churchgoing has people creating their own Gods and idols left right and centre, and many of them just as absurd and sinister as the ones they think they are replacing.
93	Acknowledges power	Very true, especially as the connection between farming and the general population gets weaker.
96	Tone-policing: Preachy	I think there is a lot of truth in this. And people have started to buck all the "traditional" mindsets we grew up with, if you didn't eat the dinner that was put in front of you, you went hungry! Also the huge difference in urban/rural attitudes; people from urban backgrounds are usually (although not always) anti hunting, against animals in circuses, and horse racing anti greyhound racing etc. They might think its cruel keeping a "working dog" but think it's OK to keep a pet dog in an apartment or town house all day while they're out at work. I think since the church has gone for a complete nose dive, there's a gaping hole which some people feel the need to fill by

(continued)

Table 8. Continued.

Post no.	Master code	Comment
102	Logical fallacy: Health	preaching at others as to what to do with their lives rather like the pressure that was placed on anyone outside of the Church in days gone by.
118	Logical fallacy: Health	They're not fed hormones here either! Banned here since 1986 or 1987. Thirty years ago.
121	Crazy; cult	Still routine in most of the countries where our food will be sourced, if militant vegans got their way and got rid of all farm animals in these islands.
146	Unclear	One of those billboards popped up here a few weeks ago. We're a village in dairy land (with a few beef + and no tillage farming). FFS! Know your audience ... might as well promote Nationalist politics in East Belfast.
200	Hypocritical	Maybe they are just trying to promote discussion—which we are doing—because surely they can't be as deluded to think that would have any effect.
		Come to think of it people in Ireland eat or used to eat rabbits and hares ... I suppose if you have never tried dog it's hard to comment ...
		Heard Sandra Higgins from Go Vegan Ireland on the radio Saturday morning. After spending half the night tending to a sick bullock, I was a bit offended by her contention that Irish farms terrorize their animals. She was fairly articulate though, in fairness, and did a good job explaining what a vegan was (clueless me thought it didn't extend beyond food).
218	Supportive	I do wonder if it's possible to have a complete plant-based diet that 100% excludes animals. Is it possible for example to say with certainty that the fruit, vegetables and cereals in vegan-certified foods haven't been grown on land that has been fertilised with animal slurry/manure? That might sound bit extreme but Sandra voiced opposition even to the practice of beekeeping so I have to wonder how practical that level of orthodoxy is.
219	Logical fallacy: Sustainability	Meanwhile, over on the Irish Dairy Council website they've decided to pretend cows milk is plant based. It would be inhumane? Growing food is farming, whether it be crops or meat! That's exactly my point in producing enough food to feed the population a meat/dairy and 2 veg based diet or a vegan based diet animals will die ... Lots and lots of them. Infact if we stopped farming cattle tomorrow the first thing we would have to do is kill them all humanely or they will starve and die horribly!

(continued)

Table 8. Continued.

Post no.	Master code	Comment
220	Dismissive, general	Male goats and chickens are raised till they are ready to be butchered just like any other male livestock in Ireland. The anti-immigrant groups aren't too fond of them either ... coming in and taking Irish worms from Irish birds.
224	Supportive	That's what I read. Do you think the Irish Dairy Council read somewhere that Cows milk is plant based and decided to use it as their slogan? Is beef part of a plant based diet too?
226	Hypocritical	Ah they're born and bred Irish. They just go to South Africa for the winter. Still though people forget about what actions they take have consequences down the line. I certainly wouldn't have time for vegans or the lifeless world in which they want to inhabit.
240	Supportive	All completely incorrect assumptions that you've brought to deflect and ignore my statement that the Irish Dairy council are pretending cows milk is plant based.
254	Threat of violence	Would Veganism not be another opportunity for Irish farmers? With so many not able to make a living from Sucklers or even struggling with dairy there could be a nice few nice markets to feed them Vegans
278	Supportive	Vegans don't live on fresh air at the end of the day. Do you actually read the utter nonsense you write—I'm vegan and I couldn't give a toss about trying to convert anyone to veganism. There's plenty of farmers giving out there about generalisations being made about their business (viz antibiotics, hormones, cruelty etc.) and yet you sit there making things up in your head for any, and everyone to lap up. I don't care that you have so little respect for vegans (who as someone else has pointed out so actually consume food which is produced by farmers who aren't afraid of a bit of hard work), however I do care about the fact that a percentage of the tax that is taken off my wholly unsubsidised income is taken to subsidise beef and dairy farmers incomes to the tune of anywhere between 2/3 to 3/4 of their incomes (without taking into account other grant assistance for farm buildings and whatever other "schemes" ye have going on). We're now at the stage where even more of tax payers money is being used to import fodder because (a) there's too many cattle in the national herd and (b) the 30% of carbon emissions caused by agriculture is further compounded by the deal reached in the EU today where agricultural carbon emissions are to be "sequestered" in soil and trees—another ticking time bomb that will result in the taxpayers being

(continued)

Table 8. Continued.

Post no.	Master code	Comment
285	Tone-policing: Preachy	<p>forced to pay huge fines when the whole thing fails to result in any reduction in emissions.</p> <p>Keep the head stuck firmly in the sand of your grossly subsidised unsustainable profession—I'd be happier paying higher prices for vegetables/grains/pulses/fruit/nuts grown here than paying taxes that are used to fund your work, but that won't happen anytime soon unfortunately.</p> <p>Yes Indeed you acknowledged food was grown by farmers—however what stuck out like a sore thumb was the rabid generalisations and evident dislike of farming and I quote: "henrypotter: Keep the head stuck firmly in the sand of your grossly subsidised unsustainable profession"</p> <p>And that was all made the more ironic of you having accused me of generalisations in the first place. And no on that basis I will not discuss subsidies etc and "drag the thread of the course"</p> <p>And now you put words in my mouth. No where have I generalised that vegans are idiots. You have said that. My post concerned proselytisers such as the subject of this thread. I don't care two pieces of cow dung what anyone chooses to eat—what I dislike is being told that farmers imprison torture 'slaughter' animals by vegans who wouldn't know a calf's bottom from a potato and vegans who arrive here to stir up trouble of which we have had quite a selection imo.</p> <p>The personal comments I noted are not its normal practice to attack the post and not the poster. I have no intention of getting worked up over as you may have liked. As for straw people—I don't have the foggiest what you are on about.</p>
288	Logical fallacy: Other	<p>Farming is far from the only subsidized industry in Ireland. It also contributes far more to the Economy than it takes out. All farming is subsidized not just livestock. Remove subsidies and livestock farming and you will be paying a lot more for your few veg.</p>
293	Neutral	<p>What were the chances that views opposing those of farmers would have any chance of a decent/normal discussion here? Like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas eh.</p> <p>The biggest problem now with the dairy industry is the easy street that farmers are on re subsidies and there isn't a hope in hell of the industry suffering enough regardless of how many people stop buying dairy.</p> <p>I suppose if I was receiving up to 60-70% of my income from subsidies then maybe I'd fear change too.</p> <p>Fair play though, I think anyone should take advantage of government at every opportunity.</p>
294	Hypocritical	<p>This is the farming forum, where farmers are allowed to discuss</p>

(continued)

Table 8. Continued.

Post no.	Master code	Comment
297	Logical fallacy: Other	<p>such things, would actually be something wrong if a direct media attack on our industry was not discussed here.</p> <p>I'd bet the discussion would be much easier if it was in the vegan forum, with no bias what so ever.</p> <p>An oh look another dig at subsidies which has zero relevance to this discussion as producing vegan food is just as subsidized.</p> <p>:D</p> <p>You obviously haven't thought about this much at all. Every sector in Ireland is subsidised to a greater or lesser degree. In the farming sector, that subsidy is listed in full on a Government website for all to see every year. It is fixed and hasn't increased in the 15+ years since the current system was put into place. Indeed, after two round of modulation (a fancy name for cuts!) and inflation averaging about 2% a year since the current system was started, the subsidy has reduced in real terms to under 60% of its value starting out, I've seen it described as a hard subsidy as it can be seen and measured and is more or less fixed, in monetary if not real terms.</p> <p>Your sector is also subsidised but it's a soft subsidy. It is formulate din legislation, like minimum wage legislation, sick pay, holiday pay, inability of firms to cut wages unless agreed with workers, rights to strike if wanted, necessity of work permits for foreign workers to supply their labour in Ireland. It also increases with every wage rise or added benefits. Note that none of those benefits are available to farmers but we pay for them when buying goods and services from firms in Ireland. We don't even have equality in tax benefits so at the same wage levels, we will pay more tax for less benefits.</p> <p>TL;DR? People in glasshouses shouldn't throw stones.</p>
316	Logical fallacy: Animal rights	<p>If you seriously believe what you wrote above then you have very little understanding of the economics of dairy farming in Ireland or the markets our dairy farmers supply.</p> <p>Subsidies are a sideshow where dairy farmers are concerned, today's farms are capital (if not livestock) intensive and subject to cyclical commodity markets.</p> <p>If every single person who read an anti dairy billboard in Ireland gave up all dairy products forever the impact on the industry would be, in my rough estimation, a reduction in sales of between 5 and 10% annually.</p> <p>The reduction of a market for local high quality products would however increase the pressure on dairy farmers to intensify to meet low cost export markets would increase. The</p>

(continued)

Table 8. Continued.

Post no.	Master code	Comment
329	Dismissive: Profiteering	<p>number of animals would increase but the pressure on animal welfare could be greater.</p> <p>Ireland is just about the best place in the world to be born if you are a cow. most of us here would wish to keep it that way.</p> <p>I note that the said extremist vegan organisation have recently set up a new Irish Company on Friday 13th of April 2018.</p> <p>http://www.solocheck.ie/Irish-Company/Go-Vegan-World-Company-Limited-By-Guarantee-624605</p>

posted a dozen or more times, such that their position had many opportunities to surface and assigning only one main code to each unit would still allow a reasonable degree of saturation. This coding technique, however, is liable to personal interpretation and introduces an added element of bias. For purposes of transparency, I identify as a vegan sociologist, and I am not a native of Ireland. I mitigated this bias by triangulating the methodology and performing an intracoder check. Indeed, the initial coding reliability was somewhat low, with just 75% of the second code analysis matching the original coding analysis (Cohen's Kappa score of 0.5). Following the addition of some subcoding and further clarification in the coding scheme, another reliability check was undertaken in two weeks after the initial coding session (as necessary to allow for memory decay and the reduction of bias) using a sample of 10%. There was only an 8% discrepancy in the recode ($k = .8$, almost perfect agreement), as three posts were unclear in their meaning without adjacent posts to help delineate them. The coding frame, then, was reasonably reliable, but indicates a need to consider context when coding to adjudicate ambiguous units.

Results

Twenty-five themes emerged from the GVW debates and interviews. Ten of these fell against veganism in Ireland, 12 spoke to the importance of veganism in Ireland, and three engaged both sides of the debate. Of those *against*, the distinctiveness of Irish animal-based agriculture was raised on 14 occasions, its supposedly unique high welfare standards 15 times, its importance to the Irish economy 15 times, its long tradition in Ireland 11 times, its importance in supporting the global food system 5 times, the poor suitability of plant-based agriculture to Ireland 7 times, and the precarity of Irish animal-based farming 7 times. The suspicion that it was under attack from external influences (such as UK-funded vegan food companies) emerged four times. Farmers were also described as key to the progress of Irish society in one case. In five instances, displeasure with the tendency to equate humans with other animals was argued.

For those frames used by *both* sides of the debate, there were 11 instances on the topic of free speech and censorship, 11 covering concerns with public health, and 8 on the topic

of human exceptionalism (although the majority of these were aiming to dismiss veganism).

Frames utilized by those in *support* of veganism in Ireland related primarily to the uniquely high environmental cost that animal-based agriculture exacts (11), as well as Ireland's shared responsibility for the global climate change crisis (7) and the country's suitability to a plant-based agricultural system (8). Structural awareness was also present at four points, whereby animal-based industry was charged with the intentional obfuscation of the issues. In one case, the subsidies supporting animal-based agriculture in Ireland were noted. To this point, the deceptiveness of the Irish landscape and rural idyll were noted on two occasions as masking the brutality of animal-based agriculture. The legacy of colonialism was raised once to explain the persistence of animal-based agriculture, and appeals to the tendency of speciesism to intersect with race, class, and gender were made twice. On four occasions the potential of Irish social progress was noted, and twice vegan changes already under way in Ireland were noted. There were also some frames directed at the farmers and public, noting their lack of awareness (2), and discomfort with speciesism (1). Because the sampling technique focused on instances in which Ireland was specifically referenced, the results of this sample over-represents GVW's use of environmental frames. Environmentalism was an overall theme in most of the debates, but so was the focus on anti-speciesism (which was a broader conversation and not specific to Ireland).

Of the 342 total posts published on Boards.ie between December 21, 2017 and April 25, 2018, 8% seemed to support veganism or at least the campaign. An additional 28% were either neutral or, in most cases, unclear on whether or not they supported the campaign or not (indeed, quite a few were irrelevant). The vast majority of posts (64%) were derogatory and dismissive. Twenty-eight posts, or 8%, of the posts specifically contextualized the debate in an Irish context. Most of these posts were dismissive of veganism.

Discussion

Farming Hegemony

Although Irish nationalism was not explicitly evidenced in either sample, several people drew on the hegemony of Irish farmers to substantiate their claims and to dismiss veganism and this could be seen, in turn, as an appeal to an idealized “traditional” Ireland. The following comments from Boards.ie exemplify this:

Ireland is just about the best place in the world to be born if you are a cow. [kowtow #316]

After spending half the night tending to a sick bullock, I was a bit offended by her contention that Irish farms terrorize their animals. [jooksavage #200]

What stuck out like a sore thumb was the rabid generalisations and evident dislike of farming. [...] I don't care two pieces of cowdung what anyone chooses to eat—what I dislike is being told

that farmers ‘imprison torture slaughter’ animals by vegans who wouldn’t know a calves [sic] bottom from a potato and vegans who arrive here to stir up trouble of which we have had quite a selection imo. [gozunda #285]

Likewise, the essentialness of animal-based agriculture to the economy was the most dominant theme in the GVW interviews in resistance to veganism in Ireland. A Cork farmer exclaims: “We create some of the highest employment in the country, right? In the co-op I supply alone, Dairygold, they have 1200 employees in Cork, right?” (Hynes, 2018). Implicit in both samples was the possibility that foreign countries may be behind the GVW campaign as a means of undermining Irish autonomy. This supports the theory of animal nationalism as Nonhuman Animals are politicized in the maintenance of national identity and borders. One caller to *Newstalk Radio* champions farming as, “something that we’ve been doing for generations and generations. How many centuries? I look back to my own farm here. There’s a ringfort just on the edge of the cliffs, you know” (Harold, 2018). Ringforts, ancient stone rings likely used for corralling “livestock,” remain widespread across Ireland and here become useful in contemporary defenses of animal-based agriculture.

A few commentators sympathetic to the GVW campaign drew attention to farming hegemony on the forum as well. “What were the chances that views opposing those of farmers would have any chance of a decent/normal discussion here?” observes one commentator; “Like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas eh” [klopparama 293]. Some drew attention to the overlooked cost of the climate crisis and the additional costs to taxpayers through farming subsidies:

I do care about the fact that a percentage of the tax that is taken off my wholly unsubsidised income is taken to subsidise [sic] beef and dairy farmers incomes to the tune of anywhere between 2/3 to ¾ of their incomes (without taking into account other grant assistance for farm buildings and whatever other “schemes” ye have going on). [henryporter #278]

In its interviews, GVW also recognized the powerful effect that subsidies, the legacy of British colonialism, and animal-based industries’ obfuscation of viable alternatives have had in sustaining the current system. In several instances, it referenced the precarity of farmers’ situation as well. GVW representatives spoke to this precarity in positioning a plant-based economy as especially well-suited to Ireland, and urged the need for Irish state support to transition farmers. While GVW was clear about the environmental and ethical devastation that animal-based agriculture had caused, it remained positive in describing a changing Ireland with considerable potential for more equitable and sustainable futures. Irish nationalism, in other words, is here being reimagined as one sympathetic to the environment, rather than dominant over it. Ireland’s potential for green leadership, currently stunted by the country’s commitment to animal-based agriculture, could be reclaimed from misleading greenwashing campaigns promulgated by “meat” and “dairy” industries, becoming a point of patriotic pride that easily aligns with vegan foodways.

Uniquely Irish

The regular appeals to Irish distinctiveness relating to the quality of its agricultural industry, geography, and climate implicitly suggests a superiority of Irish humanness in its mastery over nature. GVW challenged this on several fronts, suggesting that the romanticized image of Irish farming masked considerable violence against other animals and negative environmental consequences. GVW did, however, point to the geographic distinctiveness of Ireland as a sign of its viability for a plant-based agricultural system. Industry supporters tended to reject this, on more than one occasion arguing that the uniqueness made Ireland, in fact, *unsuitable*. In some cases, they made appeals made to the copiousness of grass as an obvious reason for relying on Nonhuman Animals. As Zoe Kavanagh (2018), CEO of the National Dairy Council, explains in a GVW interview:

Looking at the nutrient needs of the population, their economic limitations and balancing that with the agricultural production system and the environmental constraints. And if you look at Irish dairy being grass-based, we're beautifully positioned to continue for generations feeding our population safe, high-quality, sustainable, nutritious products.

Indeed, greenwashing Irish agriculture was a common retort to vegan claimsmaking. In the forum, veganism was often framed as anti-environmental, for instance, while farmers in debate with GVW frequently attempted to frame their products as “natural” (Colman, 2020; Kavanagh, 2018). Challenging the healthfulness of veganism, for that matter, was also a regular tactic in the interviews. One farmer participating in a *Newstalk* interview went so far as to frame farmers as frontline workers who were protecting the population from Covid-19 (although the coronavirus is known to be a zoonotic disease directly related to animal-based agriculture) (Holmes et al., 2021). There was overall a strong hesitancy to relinquish the superiority and “naturalness” of animal exploitation in Ireland, even when faced with overwhelming scientific evidence linking animal-based agriculture with climate change, indicating that the British colonial logic of human distinctiveness through speciesism remains firmly in place.

Because a key measure of growth in the Irish animal agricultural industry has been its export to traditionally plant-based societies such as China, another theme that arises in the discourse is the unique role the country claims in feeding the global human population. The world beyond Ireland was also useful as a referent in delineating the country’s geographical uniqueness. Irish climate and environment were regularly referenced as unique in the global system, and a move away from animal-based agriculture, in one case, was identified as a catalyst for ecosystemic devolution (Kavanagh, 2018). The supposed high welfare of the Irish animal-based agricultural system was the most frequently referenced claim, however. GVW consistently prioritized rights to life and bodily autonomy for Nonhuman Animals, a frame that is more difficult for industry representatives and the public to deflect. An international perspective, however, allows Irish farmers to delineate themselves as uniquely caring, with higher-than-average

welfare standards. GVW countered this maneuver by reframing the industry's predatory behaviors in the global market as nefarious as well as insensitive to the domestic suffering of Irish farmers.

Abstaining from "dairy," likewise, is sometimes discussed as deviant and alien among the Irish, suggesting that the consumption of nonhuman breastmilk is essential to being Irish. The CEO of the National Dairy Council, for instance, pathologizes lactose intolerance as occurring only among a small fraction of the population who have been "diagnosed," thus repositioning healthy weaned adult humans as abnormal and disabled persons (Kavanagh, 2018). Because Ireland is rather unique in its lactose tolerance in adulthood, this pathologization both invisibilizes the lactose intolerance of the global majority while upholding, if indirectly, Irish superiority. Indeed, there is frequent reference to "the Irish population" or "the 98%" in this interview, which further emphasizes nationalistic in-group delineation. This interview is also somewhat typical in repeatedly referring to abstainers as "young people," emphasizing their immaturity and vulnerability, implying that those who abstain from Nonhuman Animal products are somehow less than fully developed humans. Consuming fellow animals, in other words, is presented as a way to fully humanize the population.

Other Irish traditions were sometimes remarked upon to deflect veganism, such as steadfastness and practicality in times of scarcity. This, indirectly at least, draws on colonialism and its legacy post-independence:

And people have started to buck all the "traditional" mindsets we grew up with, if you didn't eat the dinner that was put in front of you, you went hungry! Also the huge difference in urban/rural attitudes. [whisky_galore #96]

The largely plant-based diet that had characterized the traditional Irish dinner here is either forgotten or strategically ignored, touting Irish resiliency under British colonialism as congruent with consuming the colonizer's diet.

Moderating Veganism

Embracing speciesism as traditional illustrates the potency of species domination in legitimizing the nation-state in the current world system. Acknowledging a history (or future) of plant-based living can thus prove difficult. Indeed, the right to discuss veganism in the public sphere was a major theme in GVW interviews. Although many farmers and industry representatives suggested that vegans should not be allowed to publicly challenge animal-based agriculture, some did suggest that vegans could discuss veganism as a diet in a presumably depoliticized manner. Vegan politics were seen unfavorably because they were presumed to be deceptive. For instance, GVW was criticized for "humanizing" Nonhuman Animals by acknowledging their personhood and capacity for emotion and suffering. Doing so, Ivor Ferguson (2020), president of the Ulster Farmers Union charged, "demonized" farmers: "it brings a human element and relates this to human behavior which is very different on our farms." Restaurateur Oliver Dunn puts to Higgins on *Claire Byrne Live*:

You always use clever photography as well where you're referring to animals pretty much like humans, even giving them names like Charlotte and Mary and Johnny, and, and photographs used, they'd show the photographs of nearly animals with facial expressions, like *human* facial expressions, and they play to pull on the heart strings of people. (Dunn, 2017)

An unnamed audience member agreed, "There is a risk that you actually reduce the human rights of a human person down to the level of the animal as opposed to upwards." The desire to delink humans from other, presumed lesser, species recurs throughout the GVW debates. Given the historical animalization of Irish colonial subjects, it is likely a resonating concern.

Responding to industry calls for vegan censorship in the GVW interviews, the interlocutor would sometimes highlight the importance of free speech. Indeed, the ample media space and overall respect granted to GVW in media interviews suggests a willingness to entertain the vegan debate. Very few Boards.ie posts were in support of veganism, but when debates emerged in the forum on the right of GVW (and vegans in general) to participate in the public sphere, some were in support of vegans' free speech despite adamantly opposing veganism themselves. Of note, the free speech of vegans was sharply moderated in the Boards.ie sample. The intense anti-veganism present in the forum, protected (and contributed to) by forum moderators, would have likely discouraged many vegans or individuals supportive of veganism from participating. Indeed, many posts questioned the cognitive ability (and stability) of vegans, and a handful even made jokes about hurting vegans, a vegaphobic response typically observed in the public discourse (Cole & Morgan, 2011). More than once a moderator had to intervene to reestablish codes of conduct in the Boards.ie sample, but this was only wielded against pro-vegan commenters.

Although veganism is stereotyped and marginalized as being inferior nutritionally, concerns about vegan food and health were small. Forum participants were more likely to focus on their ideological distaste for vegan food. A variety of logical fallacies were employed in the Boards.ie sample to undermine veganism. These logical retorts focused on environmental and "livestock" health with the aim of exposing vegan arguments as counterproductive. These points were often dubious and contrary to scientific evidence, as standard, even "high welfare," farming practices require systematic harm against Nonhuman Animals (Sanbonmatsu, 2025) and animal-based food production has been identified as a leading contributor to a litany of environmental problems (Steinfeld et al., 2006). For instance, some of these posts argue that Nonhuman Animal "husbandry" is consistent with anti-speciesism, or that animal-based agriculture is important for environmental sustainability. Quite a few posts considered that ants were known to "farm" other insects, thus redirecting the vegan critique and naturalizing human cultural practices. In the GVW debates, concerns over public health surfaced more frequently, and with more attention to factual accuracy, although industry supporters relied on emotional appeals by focusing on the wellbeing of women and children. In a few of these instances, GVW also focused on health to reframe animal-based agriculture as a threat to public health, as well as threatening the wellbeing of Ireland's future generations.

Conclusion

Just as the Irish had established their whiteness as what they understood to be a noble and distinct Celtic race, the Irish also established their very humanity. This seems especially poignant in postcolonial spaces, where the species hierarchy was strategically wielded to maintain order and control. Curtis emphasizes that the simianization of Irish people in the Victorian era “emanated from the convergence of deep, powerful emotions about the nature of man [sic], the security of property, and the preservation of privilege” (1971, p. 104). As Ireland asserted itself as a new and independent nation-state following hundreds of years of colonial oppression, it has much to prove and much to challenge in this regard. This painful history is undoubtedly related to contemporary Ireland’s pride in its plenteous animal-based agriculture in spite of the copious public health and environmental consequences (Holmes et al., 2023; Nibert, 2013; Renglet, 2020; Sanbonmatsu, 2025; Steinfeld et al., 2006). After its break with Britain, Irish subjects were no longer herbivorous others. They became meat-eating, milk-drinking full-fledged humans, signaling their newfound independence through their ability to consume diets of privilege and dominate fellow animals on par with their British colonializers.

The suspiciousness with which veganism is treated in the discourse reflects a fear of outside interference and a protectiveness of Irish tradition and independence. The process of decolonization, in other words, entailed an emergence from the animal-like state of colonial subject to the human status granted by autonomy. While today’s Ireland is conscientiously grappling with politics of race, immigration, gender, sexuality, and sustainability, animality remains underexamined and veganism remains more or less distrusted despite the ample plant-based foodways and multispecies relationships that thrived among indigenous Irish cultures pre-contact. Colonialism has institutionalized the belief (if implicitly) that oppressing fellow animals uplifts one’s humanity, not just through better nutrition but through the capacity to enact agency over others. This is particularly so as humanity, as a social category, is defined in opposition to other animals and domination over them. In this way, oppressing other animals can be interpreted as an expression of independence, despite this process being a substantial tactic invented by the colonial project itself.

It is, of course, difficult to build a generalized theory for a region so multifaceted in its approach to past, present, and future (Ireland, after all, experienced a bitter civil war over these divergent ideas in the 1920s). Yet, the results of this study suggest an Irish society in ideological conflict. It struggles to locate an ethnic identity that is true to its distinctive heritage but flexible enough to accommodate 21st-century challenges, namely multiculturalism and climate resiliency. The overwhelming disparagement of veganism suggests a commitment to human supremacist solutions rooted in a cultural anxiety about the country’s inherited hierarchical social structure. Campaigns that seek to reclaim Irish indigeneity, such as the national recognition of Celtic holidays and the resurgence of pre-contact foods (such as seaweeds and oats), are promising. These could be expanded to include vegan politics that respect the region’s heritage, are attentive to colonialism’s ongoing harms, uplift struggling farmers, and establish climate resiliency, all the while reflecting Ireland’s unique identity *as well as* its diversity, fellow animals included.

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Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. I capitalize this term as a politicized reference to the nonhuman diaspora struggling under human supremacy.
2. Where appropriate, euphemistic language and mass terms are corrected or disrupted to denote their contested nature and their ability to reinforce oppressive ideologies.
3. Transcripts of the GVW interviews, coding results for the GVW interviews, original posts in the Boards.ie sample, a coding scheme, and the coding results are available externally: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.29310347>.
4. This number could include duplicate or defunct accounts. Potentially, it could also include non-Irish users or Irish users living abroad. However, the website utilizes VPN restrictions, which would inhibit the use of the site from outside of the country.

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