



**Trinity College Dublin**

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

SCHOOL OF POLITICAL

**ENTITLEMENT METHODS –  
AN EXAMPLE OF THE GREAT FAMINE  
IN IRELAND, 1845 – 1851**

Chenxi Li

23330541

JULY 9, 2024

School of Social Sciences and Philosophy, TCD

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

M.Sc. APPLIED SOCIAL DATA SCIENCES

## Declaration

I hereby declare that this Dissertation is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

I have read and I understand the plagiarism provisions in the General Regulations of the University Calendar for the current year, found at  
<http://www.tcd.ie/calendar>.

I have also completed the Online Tutorial on avoiding plagiarism 'Ready Steady Write' and located at  
<http://tcd-ie.libguides.com/plagiarism/ready-steady-write>.

---

Signature: 

Date: July 9, 2024

## Acknowledgements

# *Abstract*

# *Contents*

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Literature Review</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 A Brief Famine Outline . . . . .	5
2.2 Food Shortages . . . . .	8
2.2.1 Potato Blight . . . . .	8
2.3 Entitlement Approach . . . . .	9
<b>3 Data</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4 Methods</b>	<b>13</b>

## *List of Figures*

2.1	County Population 1841 – 1851 . . . . .	7
2.2	Grain Agriculture Structure 1820 – 1900 . . . . .	8
2.3	Grain Price 1820 – 1900 . . . . .	9

## *List of Tables*

1.1	Timeline of Great Famine Root-Cause Academic Discussion . . . . .	3
3.1	Data and Sources . . . . .	11

## Chapter 1 | Introduction

*“October playing a symphony on a slack wire paling.*

*Maguire watches the drills flattened out*

*And the flints that lit a candle for him on a June altar,*

*Flameless”.*

— *“The Great Hunger” by Patrick Kavanagh.* (Kavanagh and Quinn, 2006)

The Irish Great Famine (1845 – 1851) reshaped the entire history of Ireland. Before the Great Famine, according to the 1841 census, the population of the Ireland had close to 8.5 million <sup>1</sup>. In 1851, when the Irish Great Famine had not yet ended, census noted that about 1 million people had died for hunger, and a similar number had gone into overseas exile <sup>2</sup>. In 1926, as a result of the Irish independence 5 years earlier, the Central Statistical Office was capable to integrate historical documents since famine and showed the fact that the population was decline of roughly 22% <sup>3</sup> in the 10 years from 1841 to 1851. Using parish baptism data, some scholars have estimated that in the year 1847 alone – which is also known as black’47 in Ireland history – there existed counties with a nearly 70% reduction in baptisms in Munster province in the south of Ireland (Cousens, 1960), especially from southwest Cork and including north and east Clare <sup>4</sup>, while it was not the worst hit by the famine compared to the province of Connacht in the west <sup>5</sup>. Apart from these quantitative explorations, the Great Famine is equally pivotal in Irish cultural history and ethnography. From Joseph O’Connor’s fiction “Star of the sea” to W. B. Yeats’s “The Countess Cathleen”, together they expressed that the Great Famine not only pointed to the corpses of the dead, but also to a black hole of identity, naming and meaning (Luchen, 2019).

---

<sup>1</sup> 1841 Census of Ireland, Last accessed: 13 May, 2024

<sup>2</sup> 1851 Census of Ireland, Last accessed: 2 May, 2024

<sup>3</sup> 1926 Census of Ireland, Chapter II, Last accessed: 9 May, 2024

<sup>4</sup> RTE, How “a truly modern famine” devastated Ireland, Last accessed: 11 May, 2024

<sup>5</sup> Wesley Johnston: The Famine: The Summer of Black’47, Last accessed: 13 May, 2024



The effects of the Great Famine were far-reaching, and reflected in the long-term population development, land institution structure and attitude to the UK government directly. It was not until 120 years later, in the 1960s, that Ireland's population began to grow consistently due to large-scale emigration, late marriage and a high incidence of permanent celibacy no longer hold (Grada, 1979), but it was still nowhere near as large as it had been during the Great Famine <sup>6</sup>. This also makes Ireland one of the few countries in the world to suffer population decline over the past 170 years when the world's population has increased more than 6 fold <sup>7</sup>. Regarding the land, on the one hand, in the aftermath of the famine, there was a tendency in Ireland to shift from agriculture to livestock husbandry <sup>8</sup>, and on the other hand, when the late blight back in the 1870s, the Land War, which was directed at the landowners and the government, took place at the same time, with a deep consequences for the land structure of Ireland. And finally, there raised hostility between Irish and UK government, which was described as "a bankruptcy of the British-Irish Union of 1800" (Gray, 2021).

But data on Ireland's food imports and exports show increases in specific commodities, even barley, oats and butter, that violate the characteristics of the Great Famine. In History Ireland magazine, Christine wrote:

*Almost 4,000 vessels carried food from Ireland to the ports of Bristol, Glasgow, Liverpool and London during 1847, when 400,000 Irish men, women and children died of starvation and related diseases [...] The most shocking export figures concern butter [...] That works out to be 822,681 gallons of butter exported to England from Ireland.<sup>9</sup>*

Scholars pondered if potato blight was the root cause of the famine, and they have engaged in many discussions about the origin factor, like Catholic and religious behavior (Miller, 1975), anti-Irish racism (Waters, 1995), the poor law and colonial bio-politics (Nally, 2008) and, typically, the potato blight (Bartoletti, 2001), etc.

---

<sup>6</sup> 2022 Census of Ireland – Summary Results, Last accessed: 8 May, 2024

<sup>7</sup> Blog by Ambassador Mulhall on Black'47: Ireland's Great Famine and its after-effects, Last accessed: 9 May, 2024

<sup>8</sup> CSO: Farming Since the Famine, 1847 - 1996, Last accessed: 12 May, 2024

<sup>9</sup> Ireland's Great Hunger Museum: Learn About the Great Hunger, Last accessed: 13 May, 2024

Although to this day, we can be certain that the root causes of the Irish Great Famine were multiple regardless of the perspective used, historically, the academic discussion of the root causes of the famine changed (Henderson, 2005):

Table 1.1: Timeline of Great Famine Root-Cause Academic Discussion

Timeline	Root Cause Summary	Reference
1845 – 1852: famine	Few food importation and opposition in poor law	1850/01/05 The Illustrated London News <sup>a</sup>
1852 – 1920: neglected	— <sup>b</sup>	(Kinealy, 2017)
1920 – 1960: nationalist	Key grouping, like land-lord class or the UK government	(Smith, 2005)
1960 – 1980: revisionism	Focus on history and event itself, ignore outside force	(Daly, 2006)
1980s: post-revisionist	Emotional description also blame UK government	(Hamera, 2011)
1980s: diverse	Malthus population theory	(O’Flynn, 2009) & (McGregor, 1989) & (Weir, 1991)
	Anti-Malthus theory	(Ó Gráda, 1983) & (Mokyr, 1980) & (Guinnane, 1994)
	Blight biological analysis	(Donnelly, 2011)
	Foucault’s bio-politics and colonial perspective	(Nally, 2008) & (Kennedy, 2020) & (Madden, 2016)

<sup>a</sup> The original newspaper mentioned: *Free importation of corn into this union is essentially necessary – [...] any attempt to re-impose a duty on the importation of food can only [...] tend to the starving of the people. Poor law [...] relieves the struggling farmer of a heavy burden he had hitherto.* (McNamara, 1850)

<sup>b</sup> The famine literature few. The quantity and quality of work on the famine sparse: *The two standard books of the Great Famine, [...] the chapters were uneven in quality and lacked coherence (some lacked footnotes, some were lost).* (Kinealy, 2017)

Famine narrative travel along the path of Irish history. When nationalism was high, there was a tendency to external attribution; then when the economy and society stabilized, revisionism was born. As Hu Shih, a Chinese philosopher of the 1900s, put it, *Reality, like a block of marble in our hands, is carved into whatever likeness we choose.*

What these strands of history described is that while food shortages are an objective fact, there are nonetheless other causes that conspire to drive famine – as Amartya Sen’s rights approach asserts.

Based on the theoretical structure described above, this paper would like to reject some of the established theories on the famine (**Chapter 2.1**) and propose an Amartya Sen entitlement approach perspective on the Irish Famine (**Chapter 2.2**). Then this paper will discuss the data used in this paper and its collection process (**Chapter 3**), present the RDD regression methodology employed (**Chapter 4**) and then verify the applicability of the rights approach to this scenario (**Chapter 5**). Finally, a conclusion will be presented (**Chapter 6**).

## Chapter 2 | Literature Review

*“Hunger roared up in him like a hopeless lust.*

*He walked the ship as though following a chart. Up. Down. Across. Back. Stem. Port. Stern. Starboard. The churning of the waves.*

*The ropes clanking on the masts. The blind of salt water. The wind ripping at the sails.”*

— *“Star of the Sea” by Joseph O’Connor*

### 2.1 A Brief Famine Outline

The Irish lumper potato with its excellent ability to grow in poor and wet soils, was the predominant potato variety in pre-famine Ireland. It was introduced to U.K. around 1806 (Tucker, 2016), and rapidly replacing almost all other varieties in the recipes of the poor. Usually, on account of its intolerance of frost, the farmer sows in March or April, and the first early potatoes will be harvested in June, followed by the second early potatoes in July, and the third not later than October. With a 1.32 % growth in lower class per year in Ireland from the centennial before 1841, in 1845 about 32% of the arable land in Ireland was already under potato cultivation (Solar, 2015).

The first record of late blight on potatoes in Ireland is thought to be Dr Lindley’s letter in September 16, 1845, with his concern words, he wrote: “The potato murrain has unequivocally declared itself in Ireland, where will Ireland be in the event of a universal potato rot”? (Kelly, 1995). Things were getting worse in 1846, a government documents collection book recorded that: “the poor Irish lost their potatoes again” (1 September, 1846) so that “Many, full many, must this winter leave their homes, and traverse the country in quest of work” (15 September, 1846). Government employee pointed out a fact, “to maintain Ireland’s population, her agriculture must be greatly improved” (31 October, 1846). Next year, due to a change in the Poor Law, “the poor-

est peasantry were draught to the shore of America" (18 January, 1847), but didn't seem to release the effect of famine. Later, in newspaper's leading article, reporter wrote: "eye-witnesses of scores and hundreds of poor creatures actually dying for want a meal" (8 March, 1847) and all "landlord, tenure and peasant were in a miserable situation" (13 March, 1847). Reflection was raising and people started to realize a serious famine come back since 1741 because "the food that suffered in both years was the same" (14 April, 1847). Till November, the exodus of the population was getting worse and caused the "disorder in Ireland" (November 13, 1847). Finally, because of sharply decrease population, Ireland faced a situation "Labour is the first price" (December 30, 1847) (The Times Office, 1880).

Throughout the history of the famine and pre-famine period, the role of the Poor Law cannot be ignored. The Poor Law was introduced in Ireland in July 1838 with the blueprint of the Poor Law in England and Wales, and provided for the establishment of 130 trade unions throughout Ireland, where the poor were to be relieved and regulated by the guardians of the trade unions (O'Brien, 1985). However, in January 1847, the government pushed for reform of the Poor Law, which exacerbated the ravages of famine in Ireland – particularly in the south and west of Ireland. The most significant consequence of the reforms was the almost complete transfer of responsibility and financial pressure for poverty alleviation to local government finances, which in the context of the famine resulted in the complete collapse of the local poverty alleviation system. It is very difficult to objectively assess the role of poverty law, which on the one hand does provide relief to many poor people (McHugh, 1986), but on the other hand is also characterized by Foucault's theory of power genealogy like "micro-power" and the operation of "bio-politics", as the 1847 letter reads:

*It is true we have been careful not to put forward a poor-law as a mean to supply, but have claimed for it only a place among the means of distributing supplies – of promoting employment, and of enforcing upon poverty the care and protection of the labour. Still, if that surplus of unfilled mouths is to be always in front of us, it must be confessed that very little good, after all, will be accomplished. (Spedding, 1847)*

After 1847, the rate of depopulation slowed and the most difficult period was over. Some scholars have pointed out that the cause of death of the population during this period was more due to diseases brought about by the famine, including dysentery, diarrhea, tuberculosis, fever, and swelling (Mokyr and Gráda, 2002). The 1851 census showed the population declined by approximately 1.62 million after the famine.

From the census data of 1841 and 1851, we can calculate the change in population of the different provinces after the famine, which showed the result that the west and south suffered far more from famine than the east and north (Figure 2.1). The five counties with the greatest decreases in population are Donegal, Connaught, in the west, 279,601; Cork, Munster, in the south, 209,822; Galway, Connaught, in the west, 125,026; Tipperary, Munster, in the south, 103,986, and Roscommon, Connaught, in the west, 80,155. *The freeman's journal* similarly supports this conclusion in its April 27, 1847 article documenting the damage to parishes including Killedy, Toomavara, Abbey, Lorha and Dorrow, etc (Newell et al., 1847).

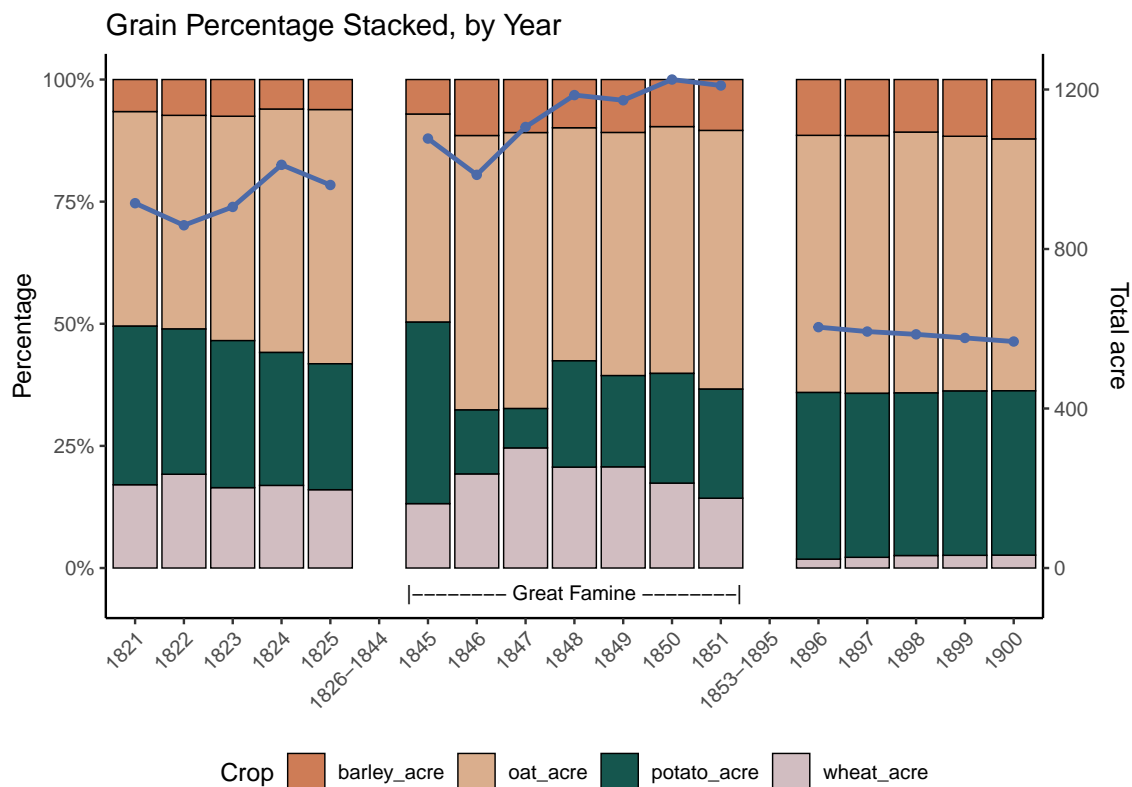
Figure 2.1: County Population 1841 – 1851



## 2.2 Food Shortages

This part I will refute some hypothesis of famine origin. Many people regard single factor as the root of the Great Famine.

Figure 2.2: Grain Agriculture Structure 1820 – 1900



### 2.2.1 Potato Blight

In Nature journal,

1845 June Belgium, August France, August South of UK, September Ireland

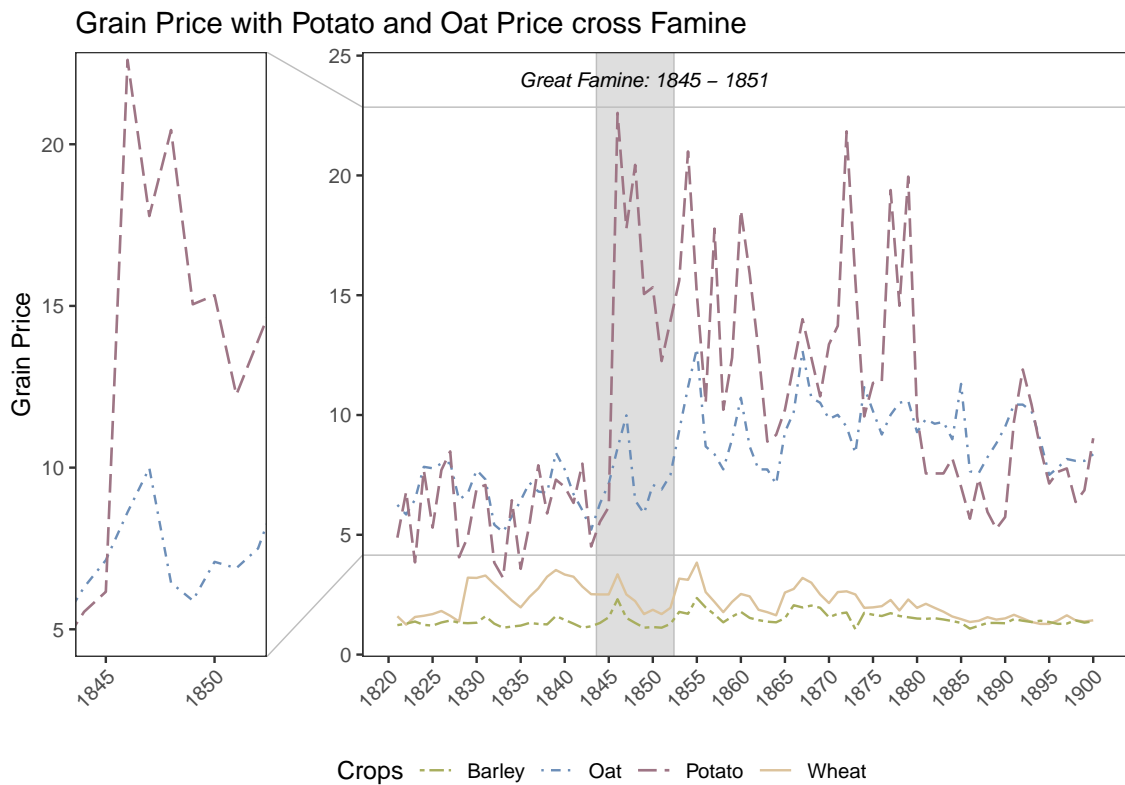
1. Blame potato blight as the only origin of famine

People believe potato blight was responsible for the Irish Great Famine.

lumper potato

Blight became a semi-permanent fixture until the end of the century, when effective treatments were found (O'Rourke, 1994).

Figure 2.3: Grain Price 1820 – 1900



2. Ireland have the bad land quality.

## 2.3 Entitlement Approach

In the field of famine studies, scholars as diverse as Susan George (1980), Amartya Sen (1981, 2000), Michael Watts (1983), Amrita Rangesami (1985), and Stephen Devereux (2001) have argued that famines do not necessarily begin with crop failures, droughts, or equivalent climatic hazards. On the contrary, their violence is coordinated much earlier when a population is progressively brought to the point of collapse. Read this way, a crop failure, or indeed a drought, is simply an “environmental trigger” in a much larger narrative of aggregated poverty and mass vulnerability (George 1984; Devereux 2002). Despite the fact that the Great Irish Famine is now a major field of scholarly enquiry, there has been very little attempt to engage with these critical perspectives—derived primarily from famine experiences in the global South—nor has there been any attempt to analyze the Great Famine from the perspective of colo-



nial governance and population management. (Nally, 2008)

I will operationalize entitlement approach into these 4 dimensions according to the book:

- (1) trade-based entitlement: price, grain amount,
- (2) production-based entitlement: tax policy
- (3) own-labour entitlement: wage, land own amount, poor law
- (4) inheritance and transfer entitlement: none, hard to get data

## Chapter 3 | Data

The data for this paper come from several primary sources, including (1) census data, (2) economic history research papers, and (3) original archival material from the National Library Ireland.

Table 3.1: Data and Sources

Data	Details	Time	Sources
Population	Population Population	1821, 1831, ... Remain years	Irish Census <sup>a</sup> Estimated population <sup>b</sup>
Wage	Craft man wage General wage	1821 – 1891 1821 – 1891	(Kennedy and Dowling, 1997) (D’Arcy, 1989) & (Bishop, 1915)
Ground Rent			
Grain Price	Oat  Potato Wheat Barley	1821 – 1828 1829 – 1859 1860 – 1900 1821 – 1845	(Daniel Cassidy, 2021) (Vamplew, 1980)  (Kenny et al., 2023)
Plant Acre	Oat Potato Wheat Barley		
Import	Oat Potato Wheat Barley		
Export	Oat Potato Wheat Barley Butter		

*Continued on next page*

Table 3.1: (Continued)

<b>Data</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Sources</b>
-------------	----------------	-------------	----------------

<sup>a</sup> *Irish census through history can be found in CSO. In 1851 census, there is a chapter discussing the differences between 1841 and 1851 to show the influence of famine.*

<sup>b</sup> *Base on Documenting Ireland: Parliament, People and Migration,*

## *Chapter 4 | Methods*

# *Bibliography*

- Bartoletti, S. C. (2001), *Black potatoes: The story of the great Irish famine, 1845-1850*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Bishop, A. L. (1915), 'A history of the commercial and financial relations between eng-land and ireland from the period of the restoration'.
- Cousens, S. H. (1960), 'Regional death rates in ireland during the great famine, from 1846 to 1851', *Population Studies* **14**(1), 55–74.
- Daly, M. (2006), Revisionism and irish history: The great famine, *in* 'The Making of Modern Irish History', Routledge, pp. 71–89.
- Daniel Cassidy, B. (2021), Irish exchange rates 1698–1826: credit, market integration, and international trade, PhD thesis, School of Business and Economics, National University of Ireland, Galway.
- D'Arcy, F. A. (1989), 'Wages of labourers in the dublin building industry, 1667-1918', *Saothar* **14**, 17–32.
- Donnelly, J. (2011), 'The irish famine', *BBC: British History* **17**.
- Grada, C. O. (1979), The population of ireland 1700-1900: a survey, *in* 'Annales de démographie historique', JSTOR, pp. 281–299.
- Gray, P. (2021), 'Was the great irish famine a colonial famine?', *East/West* **8**(1), 159–172.
- Guinnane, T. W. (1994), 'The great irish famine and population: the long view', *The American Economic Review* **84**(2), 303–308.
- Hamera, P. (2011), 'An outline of irish famine historiography', *The Linguistic Academy Journal of Interdisciplinary Language Studies* p. 65.

- Henderson, L. (2005), 'The irish famine: A historiographical review', *Historia* **14**, 133–140.
- Kavanagh, P. and Quinn, A. (2006), *Collected poems*, Penguin Books.
- Kelly, J. (1995), 'This great calamity: The irish famine 1845-52'.
- Kennedy, L. and Dowling, M. W. (1997), 'Prices and wages in ireland, 1700-1850', *Irish Economic and Social History* **24**, 62–104.
- Kennedy, S. (2020), 'Beckett, evangelicalism and the biopolitics of famine', *Beckett Beyond the Normal* pp. 62–78.
- Kenny, S., Lennard, J. and O'Rourke, K. H. (2023), 'An annual index of irish industrial production, 1800–1913', *The Economic History Review* **76**(1), 283–304.
- Kinealy, C. (2017), *The Great Irish Famine: impact, ideology and rebellion*, Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Luchen, W. (2019), 'The naming of identity: The famine narrative in joseph o'connor's star of the sea and the transatlantic diasporic writing', *Foreign Literature Studies* **41**(5), 123.
- Madden, E. (2016), 'Aids and the hunger: Fiction, biopolitics and the historical imagination', *The Irish Review* (1986-) (53), 60–73.
- McGregor, P. P. (1989), 'Demographic pressure and the irish famine: Malthus after mokyr', *Land Economics* pp. 228–238.
- McHugh, N. (1986), 'Famine and distress in drogheda during 1847', *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society* **21**(2), 157–178.
- McNamara, P. (1850), 'Condition of ireland. illustrations of the new poor-law. cabin of pat mcnamara, village of clear', *The Illustrated London News* .
- Miller, D. W. (1975), 'Irish catholicism and the great famine', *Journal of Social History* **9**(1), 81–98.

- Mokyr, J. (1980), 'Malthusian models and irish history', *The Journal of Economic History* **40**(1), 159–166.
- Mokyr, J. and Gráda, C. Ó. (2002), 'What do people die of during famines: the great irish famine in comparative perspective', *European Review of Economic History* **6**(3), 339–363.
- Nally, D. (2008), "'that coming storm": The irish poor law, colonial biopolitics, and the great famine', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **98**(3), 714–741.
- Newell, T., Meogher, O'Gorman, Walsh, J., O'Brien, Borrisoleigh and O'Reilly, P. (1847), 'Tally of the number of deaths attributed to potato famine in various irish parishes', *Freeman's journal* .
- Ó Gráda, C. (1983), 'Malthus and the pre-famine economy', *Hermathena* (135), 75–95.
- O'Brien, G. (1985), 'The new poor law in pre-famine ireland: A case history', *Irish Economic and Social History* **12**(1), 33–49.
- O'Flynn, M. (2009), 'Food crises and the ghost of malthus', *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry* **3**(1), 33–41.
- O'Rourke, K. (1994), 'The economic impact of the famine in the short and long run', *The American economic review* **84**(2), 309–313.
- Smith, M. E. (2005), *Reckoning with the past: Teaching history in Northern Ireland*, Lexington Books.
- Solar, P. M. (2015), 'Why ireland starved and the big issues in pre-famine irish economic history', *Irish Economic and Social History* **42**(1), 62–75.
- Spedding, T. S. (1847), *Letters on the Poor-Law*, London, UK.
- The Times Office, London, U. (1880), *The Great Irish Famine of 1845-1846: a collection of leading articles, letters and parliamentary and other public statements*, The Times Office, London.

Tucker, R. E. (2016), 'A potato glossary', *Tucker Farms, Inc* .

Vamplew, W. (1980), 'A grain of truth: the nineteenth-century corn averages', *The Agricultural History Review* **28**(1), 1–17.

Waters, H. (1995), 'The great famine and the rise of anti-irish racism', *Race & Class* **37**(1), 95–108.

Weir, D. R. (1991), Malthus's theory of population, in 'The World of Economics', Springer, pp. 401–406.