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

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## Acknowledgements

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## 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In 1926, as a result of the Irish independence 5 years earlier, the Central Statistical Office was capable to integrate historical documents since famine and showed the fact that the population was decline of roughly 22% 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).

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<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.

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<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 Rebut Food Availability Decline (FAD) Theory

As Amartya put it in his book – “*the most common approach to famines is to propose explanations in terms of food availability decline (FAD)*” (Sen, 1982) – In the Irish famine, where the FAD theory contains two aspects: (1) the potato late blight; (2) the monocultural structure of the Irish diet. For a long time it was believed that these two were at the root of the famine, in historical fact, however, while the existence of both is undeniable, their impact is not decisive.

Firstly, potato late blight. During the middle 19th century, people saw the potato blight, they saw the famine, which made them think potato late blight was directly associated with famine due to the empirical observations and logical extrapolations. Native Irish farmers have a set of folk myths about this, believing that fairies in the sky were fighting over the potatoes, or that Fear Liath, the fog man, which led to the blight and famine (Bartoletti, 2001). There are also frequent references in correspondence with the British government, or locally, to the relationship between late blight and death in potatoes:

*In the year 1845, I think about the month of July or the beginning of August, the potatoes withered and decayed all over the country like what you have seen on the watersides with early frost, [...] poor families were badly off and striving to live on bran.* (McClure, 1848)

*When they came back home, there was not a potato in what they dug but was infected [...], it is the whole cry among the people.* (Blackwell, 1845)

Braa, on the other hand, argues that the potato blight was as important as a single dietary structure in influencing the Irish famine. (Braa, 1997)

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

In Nature journal,

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

Figure 2.2: Grain Agriculture Structure 1820 – 1900

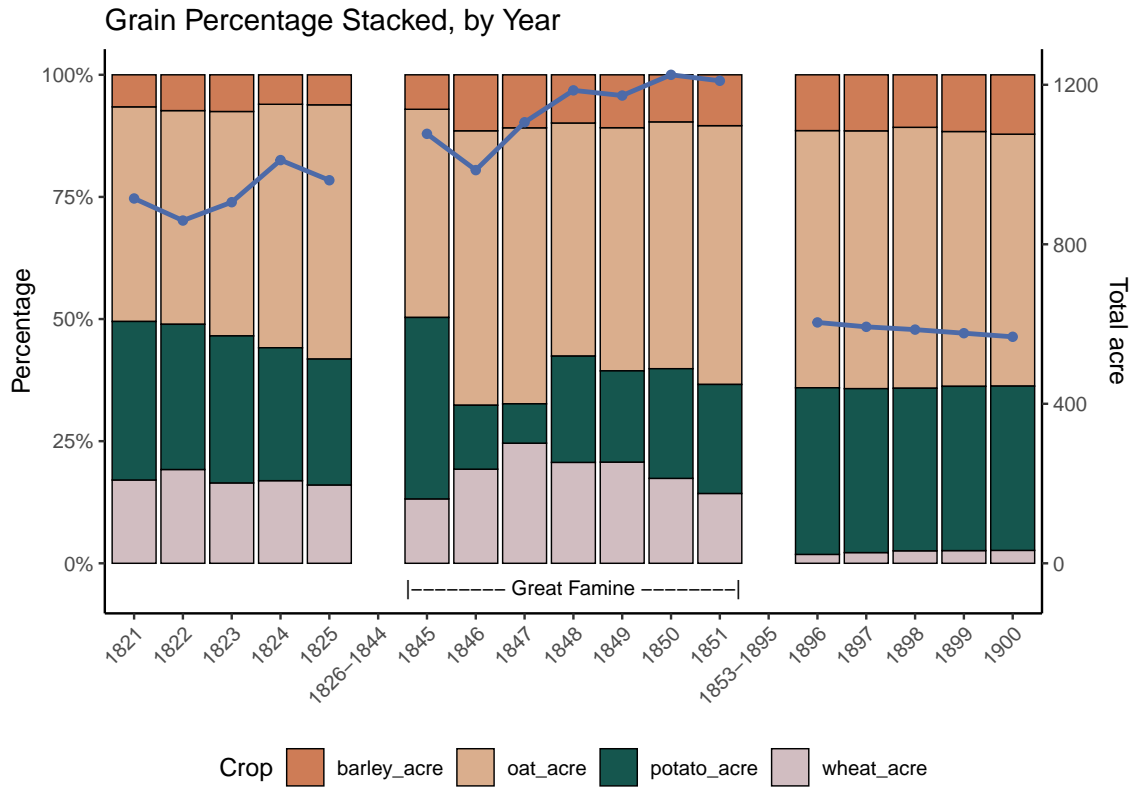
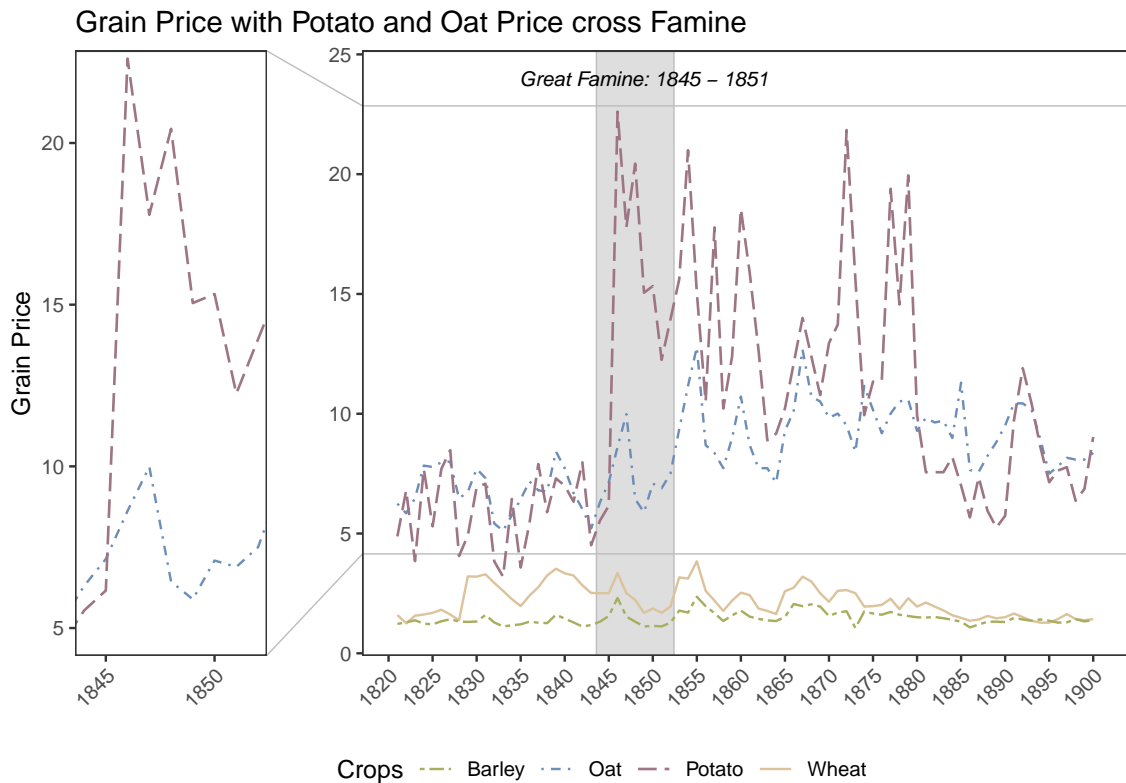


Figure 2.3: Grain Price 1820 – 1900





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).

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 Rangasami (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 colonial 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	1821, 1831, ... Remain years	Irish Census <sup>a</sup> Estimated population <sup>b</sup>
Wage	Craft man wage General wage	1821 – 1900 1821 – 1900	(Kennedy and Dowling, 1997) (D’Arcy, 1989) & (Bishop, 1915)
Ground Rent	Ground Rent	1821 – 1844 1850 – 1885	(M Solar and Hens, 2013) (Guinnane and Miller, 1996)
Grain Price	Oat Potato Wheat Barley O. P. W. B. O. P. Agriculture index	1821 – 1828 1829 – 1859 1821 – 1845 1824 – 1837 1821 – 1828 1840 – 1900 1821 – 1850 1850 – 1900	(Daniel Cassidy, 2021) (Vamplew, 1980) (Kennedy and Dowling, 1997) Southampton library <sup>c</sup> (Clark, 2004) (Barrington, 1926) (Kennedy and Dowling, 1997) (Turner, 1987)
Plant Acre	Potato O. W. B. O. P. W. B.	1821 – 1846 1821 – 1846 1847 – 1900	(Kenny et al., 2023) <sup>d</sup> Estimated from Price Index CSO agriculture report
Import	O. W. B. O. W. B.	1821 – 1838 1839 – 1900	Linear Interpolation (Brunt and Cannon, 2004)
Export	Wheat O. W. B. O. W. B. Butter O. B.	1821 – 1828 1829 – 1838 1839 – 1900 1821 – 1900 1821 – 1828	(Tennent, 1840) (Vamplew, 1980) (Brunt and Cannon, 2004) (Solar, 1990) NA

*Continued on next page*

Table 3.1: (Continued)

<b>Data</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Sources</b>
<sup>a</sup> <i>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.</i>			
<sup>b</sup> <i>Base on Documenting Ireland: Parliament, People and Migration,</i>			
<sup>c</sup> <i>The digital version of this document can be found in Southampton Library. The data was calculated from the Dublin Gazette since May 1st, 1824 to 1st May, 1833</i>			

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