

A black and white map of the Americas, showing the continent of North America and parts of South America. A thick, dark, irregular line is drawn across the map, starting from the western coast of North America and extending eastward, following a path that roughly corresponds to the location of the Appalachian Mountains and the Great Appalachian Valley. The map includes various geographical features like rivers, coastlines, and a grid of latitude and longitude lines. The text is overlaid on the left side of the map.

Despite the absorption of veganism by the capitalist market – a process that admittedly reinforces pre-existing divisions across class and racial lines – a vegan lifestyle taken to its logical conclusion is fundamentally *anti-capitalist* and *anti-colonial*. By (re)acknowledging sentience and personalities within the bodies of colonized (animal) subjects, a vegan lifestyle rejects authoritarian relationships based on disrespect for the bodily autonomy of those whose lives have been re-purposed for human supremacist consumption.

This small collection of shared experiences, while reflective of a larger anti-colonial struggle, highlights the inclusion of an anti-speciesist, animal liberation.

# Veganism as Anti-Colonial Praxis

*A Collection of Indigenous Vegan Perspectives*

Warzone Distro  
WARZONEDISTRO.NOBLOGS.ORG  
2023

Fatimat Adelabu, the author of the blog Je Gbese, says that she grew up eating many meat-heavy dishes. Goat, cow tripe, oxtail, and fish were common additions to stewed dishes. She transitioned to plant-based in 2017 after watching the documentary “What the Health” on Netflix.

*“I started off watching it with a bowl of chicken and rice, by mid-way I had placed the half-eaten bowl next to me, and at the end,” says Adelabu. “I was in the kitchen bagging meats from my fridge and freezer and tossing them into my garbage can.”*

Chipara, author of Plant-Based African, adopted a whole foods, plant-based diet after being diagnosed with type-2 diabetes in 2018. Prior to that, she struggled with other health issues such as anemia, fatigue, joint pain, and depression.

*“I realized that I was going down a slippery slope that would end up with me without limbs, blind or worse dead,” she says. “Looking at evidence-based research the most successful way to deal with insulin resistance is to adopt a whole food plant-based diet.”*

In addition to health-related reasons, many people adopt a vegan lifestyle due to the ethical aspects associated with animal farming. By choosing veganism, these individuals recognize that animals are not ours (humans) to use or consume, and in this manner take a stand against cruelty and exploitation by abstaining from its products and practices.

On a personal note, and speaking as someone who lives a vegan lifestyle, many people ask me why did I suddenly decide to change such a big facet of my life. Modernization, industrialization, and colonization aside, the most honest answer I can give is because it allowed the most authentic expression of myself. I could not advocate for life and protecting the environment while I clearly turned a blind eye to the suffering of sentient creatures and the systematic destruction of our environment. My bottom line is and always will be: due to our history, colonization will always have remnants in Africa, our responsibility is our choices and actions.

What do you think about veganism as an African?

Despite the absorption of veganism by the capitalist market – a process that admittedly reinforces pre-existing divisions across class and racial lines – a vegan lifestyle taken to its logical conclusion is fundamentally *anti-capitalist* and anti-colonial. By (re)acknowledging sentience and personalities within the bodies of colonized (animal) subjects, a vegan lifestyle rejects authoritarian relationships based on disrespect for the bodily autonomy of those whose lives have been re-purposed for human supremacist consumption.

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also began to dwindle as meat production became a lucrative industry and changed the eating patterns of people on the continent.

According to Kagoro, when Africa was colonized by the West, they started industrial livestock farms for exporting meat. With time, the locals too adapted to it and the plant-based diet started fading. But this Zimbabwe-based chef is not keeping up with the current times; rather, she is going back to the roots. When Nicola Kagoro told her friends that she wants to start a vegan movement in her community, they laughed at her. “*Our ancestors were vegan,*” she said. “*We have always been vegan, and that tradition and culture should not be forgotten.*” Kagoro was referring to the time before the West has colonized the African continent and overthrew the plant-based diet for a meat-based one.

Hummus, injera and tahini, like many other African dishes, have gained prominence on an international scale owing to the increased popularity of veganism. The earliest mention of hummus made using tahini dates back to Egypt in the 13th century, although it is popular in Greek cuisine too.

In research on the world’s healthiest diets, published in The Lancet in 2015, west African countries such as Mali, Chad, Senegal and Sierra Leone, which boasted diets rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains, topped the list. Ethiopian cuisine relies on plant-based foods such as the sourdough flatbread injera, lentils and beans. Ethiopian cuisine is very vegan-friendly due to strict fasting periods imposed by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Thus, during fasting, they are not allowed to consume any animal products. Their meals mainly comprise of vegetables, legumes, and spices during these periods. Injera is a staple flatbread used in place of plates or utensils in Ethiopian cuisine. Stews (called wat) are spooned on top and pieces from injera are used to scoop up the food.

### ***“What the Health”***

Health and climate concerns accelerated the growth of plant-based diets which were once prevalent on the continent. Conditions such as heart disease and cancer have now overtaken infectious diseases such as cholera and measles to become the biggest drain on Africa’s economies, according to the World Health Organization. Much of the continent is already feeling the effects of the climate crisis – a common reason for reducing meat intake – as more regular and unpredictable droughts and floods wreak havoc for farmers and regularly claim lives. There is a name for this: nutrition transition. This explains a shift in dietary consumption that coincides with economic development. It’s most often used to talk about a shift away from more grain and fiber-rich diets toward processed meat-heavy Western dietary patterns.

## **Veganism Is Not Anti-Indigenous**

***by Samah Seger***

Indigenous people represent around 5 percent of the world’s population. Even fewer continue to live according to traditional ways, which can include killing animals for survival. Despite just how rare this is, arguments against veganism often evoke Indigenous peoples to prop them up.

How often have you heard — “would you tell an Indigenous person to go vegan?” In fact, the argument that veganism is incompatible with Indigenous culture is unfounded. Advocates for humans, animals and our ecosystems are natural allies in the fight against oppressive colonial structures.

As an Indigenous person, I understand the drive to protect our customs from further erasure. Because I’m also an immigrant, I know this sentiment exists among people living outside of their home lands who use food to maintain a feeling of home. But modern meat production and other systems of animal agriculture are rooted in pastoralism, which is central to the western Judeo-Christian tradition, with its pastors and godly shepherds. Colonizers were able to spread animal agriculture around the world with the help of Christianity, a tool used against Indigenous peoples.

### ***Indigenous Hunter Stereotype***

The argument that veganism is anti-Indigenous makes the mistake of equating indigeneity with hunting. Portrayals of Indigenous people that focus on violent, primitive or devious aspects of our cultures reinforce colonial narratives of Indigenous people as savages, when in fact we have long been masterful thinkers, gardeners, foragers, story-tellers, builders, healers, navigators, astronomers, artists, sailors and so much more.

The shallow snapshot of Indigenous people as hunters paints us as frozen in time, ignoring our lived reality. Today, most of us get our food from supermarkets, eating food that bears very little resemblance to our traditional diet. The fact that we eat differently — plant-based or not — doesn’t make us any less Indigenous.

### ***Dairy as a Tool of Colonization***

Before Europeans introduced dairy farming, the majority of the world did not consume the milk of other species. High numbers of non-Europeans have never adapted to the adult consumption of lactose and even experience disproportionate rates of disease linked to dairy consumption.

Many Indigenous cultures too did not raise cattle for milk. Yet animal milk

has long been used as a tool of colonization. In the article, *Animal Colonialism: The Case of Milk*, author Mathilde Cohen writes that because animal milk was wrongly thought to be a way of boosting population growth, governments pushed dairy farming to fulfill the “desire for a larger indigenous [and black] labor force and army.” Long term breastfeeding — a traditional form of contraception — was demonized, and animal milk was aggressively encouraged.

Despite widespread knowledge of its harmful effects on mothers and babies, ‘breastfeeding colonialism’ continues today, with formula companies using “pervasive, misleading and aggressive,” marketing tactics. According to The United Nations, these tactics are used on vulnerable parents around the world, creating a “substantial barrier to breastfeeding.”

The practice continues into childhood. In Aotearoa (New Zealand) today, government guidelines tell us to consume 2.5 servings of dairy a day, and offer it in schools with no alternative, even though around 64 percent of the Indigenous Māori people are lactose intolerant.

### ***The White Gaze of Veganism***

The earliest record of nonviolence towards animals comes from around 3000 years ago in ancient India. Nonviolence, or ahimsa, became central to Hinduism, Buddhism and especially Jainism, which asks its adherents not to enslave or hurt other animals. These philosophies inspired countless people and paved the way for movements of nonviolent resistance.

Since then, decolonial and anti-racist activists, environmentalists, disability advocates, anti-capitalists, feminists, anarchists, philosophers and others have discussed the oppression of animals through numerous and important lenses. For example, civil rights activist Dick Gregory once said in an interview that “the same thing that we do to animals, the system is doing to us,” believing that “eventually it will come to a vegetarian world or no world at all.”

More recently, during a talk at the University of California, Berkeley, political activist Angela Davis called on humanity to “develop compassionate relations with other creatures with whom we share this planet,” placing veganism as “part of a revolutionary perspective.”

Despite the many powerful and diverse activists fighting against some of the world’s most exploitative industries, veganism is often reduced in media and academia to a mere fad for privileged white people. In reality, Black Americans are noted as the fastest growing vegan demographic in the U.S.,

Above all, abandoning the colonial legacy of dairy would free millions of cows, bulls, and calves from the system of exploitation to which they are currently subjected, eliminate the suffering of mothers and babies that are prematurely separated every day, avoid painful diseases to hundreds of sentient animals and would allow them to enjoy the grass, the sun, and their loved ones. For humans, such an act of compassion would bring as a reward a healthier life, with a lower risk of invasive diseases and, probably, a longer life span.

So, what are we waiting for?

## **Veganism Through the Lens of Decolonization**

*By Venita Januarie*

### ***Our Ancestors Followed A Plant-Based Diet***

To many of its advocates veganism is not a new trend – it is simply a return to traditional African diets. “*I particularly think it’s important to spread veganism around Africa because it originated in Africa*” says Nicola Kagoro, a chef working in South Africa and Zimbabwe. “*Our ancestors didn’t eat as much meat. It is through colonization that we learned these crazy meat-eating practices*”. Kagoro founded the African Vegan on a Budget movement to show Africans vegan diets can be affordable and filling. She also cooks for female vegan armed rangers group the Akashinga, who fight elephant poaching in Zimbabwe. Tendai Chipara, the Zimbabwean blogger behind Plant-Based African, adds that the plant-based movement is not new to Zimbabwe:

*“Our ancestors followed a plant-based diet and they thrived and most died of old age. The food they ate was organic and meat products were consumed minimally. The unfortunate thing that happened to us as people was colonization which led to a massive change to our food production, access to land, and the emergence of processed foods. We now have a high number of the population being affected by lifestyle-related issues such as type-2 diabetes. So I am very passionate about Zimbabwean plant-based cuisine because it is medicine.”*

Until about five centuries ago, Africa remained mainly dependent on traditional food. When adventurers and slave-traders came to the African continent, they introduced various crops and the larger-scale domestication of animals for commercial consumption and export. These capitalistic farming methods exacerbated the spread of animal diseases among humans. The nomadic lifestyle of some African tribes, which required smaller herds,

according to a paper in this regard. Lactose intolerance can present symptoms such as acne, bloating, cramps, or diarrhea, among others, and yet it is not the worst consequence of milk for health. Dairy consumption has been associated with an increased risk of breast, ovarian, and prostate cancers, autoimmune diseases, and Parkinson's. According to the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, saturated fat in milk and other dairy products contributes to heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and Alzheimer's disease. In addition, studies show that the consumption of milk has higher risks of total mortality and, contrary to popular belief, bone fracture rates tend to be higher in countries that consume milk, compared to those that don't. Despite all this, in most countries of the region, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans are taken as a reference, and programs to promote dairy consumption are carried out based on it—for example, in Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Colombia—which proves that colonialism has transcended until today to the detriment of the population health.

### ***Imagining a world without dairy***

As writer and activist Zane McNeill explains, the dominance exercised by nations and corporations from the Global North over previously colonized nations in the Global South, through international capitalism, is a form of neo-colonialism. And that is precisely what is currently happening with the dairy industry in the Americas. But what would happen if the entire region decided to leave the cow's milk for the calves? Can we imagine another future?

Ecologically, a measure like this would contribute to considerably reducing the carbon footprint, the use of water and land, and the pollution of rivers. The use of antibiotics and pesticides would also be reduced. Deforestation of the Amazon rainforest would be much less, leading to the recovery of local flora and fauna, and allowing a greater capture of greenhouse gases. Population health would improve in many ways, helping to reduce the current overload of the health system and saving money that the States could invest in improving hospital care. It would also reduce the risk of zoonotic diseases associated with dairy production, such as tuberculosis, brucellosis, leptospirosis, salmonellosis and listeriosis.

Latin America and the Caribbean are full of nutritious plants that are perfect for preparing plant-based milks, such as amaranth, tarwi, quinoa, Amazonian nuts, peanuts, and potatoes, among many others. Changing animal milk for milk based on local plants would not only be an act of cultural and territorial vindication, but also a full exercise of food sovereignty. Workers from the old dairy sector could find employment in the native plant-based industry.

and there is notable growth of veganism among Māori too.

These stereotypes about Indigenous cultures ignore and erase the many nations that have long relied on cheap and abundant plant staples such as lentils, corn, potatoes, beans and chickpeas, as well as the many poor vegans in affluent nations.

### ***Indigenous Values***

In contrast to the modern anthropocentric worldview, which sees humans as separate and superior to other animals, most Indigenous traditions recognize that humans are part of nature. We knew that animals were our relatives long before Charles Darwin said so.

For example, the Mandaeen God (Hayyi or “the living”) is the life force of the natural world and all its inhabitants, a perspective which sees the sacredness of all living things. Our teachings say all killing and bloodletting is sinful — and though we are (perhaps paradoxically) given permission to eat male sheep, prey birds and scaled fish, “the attitude towards slaughter is always apologetic.” Some say that we, or at least our priests, used to be vegetarian.

Though some Indigenous cultures are tokenized against veganism, their stories tell us they cared deeply about their animal siblings. In her talk Indigenous Veganism: Feminist Natives do eat tofu, Margaret Robinson discusses the Mi'kmaq view that all life is related, encapsulated by the concept of “M'sit No'maq,” which means “all my relations.” Because of that view, she explains, “The modern commercial fishery, often touted as offering economic security for Aboriginal communities, is even further removed from our Mi'kmaq values than modern day vegan practices are.”

These perspectives offer pathways to a veganism which is compatible with the values of our ancestors, and may even help us live up to them. As Robinson says, “Veganism offers us a sense of belonging to a moral community, whose principles and practices reflect the values of our ancestors, even if they might be at odds with their traditional practice.”

### ***Veganism as a Decolonial Tool***

Veganism is often accused of being anti-Indigenous, but in reality it is a response to the anti-Indigenous systems of today. Veganism offers an opportunity to disrupt colonial logic by challenging the most basic building blocks of colonialism, which reduce all life forms to mere objects for capitalist exploitation.

Our people had to adapt in order to survive – and we now must do it again.

## **The Fascinating Plant-based History of the Diné People**

*by Mansour Yarow*

The Diné are an Indigenous tribe located in what is now the southwest United States. Commonly referred to as Navajo, this population extends to the four corners region of Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. As the most populated tribe in the U.S., we are perhaps best known for herding sheep and weaving wool. Yet it turns out this legacy was greatly influenced by European colonizers. The Diné people were not always sheep herders — we have a lesser-known history that predates this colonial-era, a history very much rooted in a plant-based way of life.

### ***Corn, Beans and Squash Before Sheep***

The Navajo Churro sheep have been a central facet of Diné culture and life since the arrival of the European settlers in the 1500s. These animals provided food and clothing, including mutton soup and wool blankets. Yet prior to colonization, there were very few known instances of domesticated animals for consumption among Indigenous people.

The Diné — which means “the people” in our language — were mainly semi-nomadic, relying on hunting and gathering for hundreds of years for sustenance, while migrating southwards across the plains in as early as the 1300s. We soon settled in northern New Mexico surrounded by mesas, canyons and rivers, where they named this great land Dinétah (among the people). Here we encountered the Pueblo, a group of Indigenous people with strong plant-based agricultural ties that live along the Rio Grande river.

Some scientists believed the Pueblos were the ones who taught us how to farm, although others speculate the Diné already knew how to farm at this point. Nevertheless, the Diné culture shifted towards a farming and agriculture lifestyle thanks to its interactions with the Pueblos, and trading between the two groups.

Like many Indigenous tribes, the Diné learned to plant and harvest the “Three Sisters” crops of corn, beans and squash, and discovered ways to cook them. We used corn for a variety of dishes, such as steamed corn, stews, corn mush, corn cakes and many more. We also used corn pollen to bless homes, farmland and family. Though the Diné continued to hunt animals and forage when necessary for survival, we increasingly came to rely on farming plants, which provided families with enough food to get them through dry summers and to be able to survive harsh winters. Soon, all

breeds, and the introduction of new foods in the diets of the cows to improve their productivity. “As with other nation-state-building techniques, milk production has produced new forms of domination,” Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Cristina Vintimilla, and Alex Berry, researchers on the issue in the Andean region, state.

### ***The colonial footprint of the dairy industry***

Today, the colonial legacy of milk continues to affect the region. Although Latin America represents only 8 percent of the world’s population, it produces 11 percent of the world’s milk. Almost a quarter of the bovine cattle are used for milk production in Brazil, which has the second-largest dairy herd in the world and is the first producer of milk in the region. In other countries, the percentage can be even higher, as in Colombia, where 41 percent of the cows work for the dairy industry. In South America alone, milk production reached 64 million tonnes in 2018, and at the Latin American level, it increased by around 3.3 percent between 2020 and 2021. All this has negative consequences for the environment, ranging from the pollution of rivers, high emissions of greenhouse gases, excessive use of water, and, probably the most serious, the destruction of the Amazon.

It is estimated that between 1985 and 2018, the Amazon rainforest lost 72.4 million hectares of forest and vegetation cover, of which 70 percent is used for pasture and much of the rest for forage crops. Of course, local milk production contributes to some part of this catastrophe, but in this case, it shares the responsibility with the international dairy industry. According to a recent investigation by the Bureau, Greenpeace Unearthed, ITV News, and the Daily Mirror, “UK farms supplying milk and dairy products for Cathedral City Cheddar, Anchor butter and Cadbury chocolate are feeding their cattle soya from a controversial agribusiness accused of contributing to widespread deforestation in Brazil.” This affects not only millions of animals that are diminished by the loss of their territory, but also the entire ecosystem of South America, which depends on the Amazon, and the more than 100 Indigenous peoples who live there.

In addition to environmental devastation, dairy production and consumption in the Americas come with various health problems. According to a study published in *The Lancet*, approximately 68 percent of the world’s population suffers from lactose malabsorption. This means that once they pass early childhood they stop producing lactase and cannot digest milk sugars. However, despite the fact that in the United States lactase non-persistence occurs in a majority of African-, Asian-, Hispanic-, and Native-American individuals, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends two to three daily servings of dairy products, which could be described as racial bias,

consumed mostly by the families of the *hacendados*, and by their workers when there was a surplus. Only towards the end of the 18th century, the growing need for labor led to concerns about the fertility, birth rate, and breastfeeding practices of female workers, and the imposition of cow's milk as a necessary food group. The long breastfeeding period to which Indigenous and Black slaves were accustomed seemed to negatively impact fertility and reduce the amount of work for the lactating mother. In addition, the milk from these mothers was considered poor quality compared to that of European cows. For Mathilde Cohen, Professor of Law at the University of Connecticut, milk colonialism and breast-feeding colonialism are part of what she calls "animal colonialism." "Improving or modernizing maternity meant replacing the human breast by cow's milk," so "lactating animals were conscripted in a colonial reproductive politics aimed at reforming maternity," she writes.

Most colonies in the Americas achieved their independence from Europe between the 18th and 19th centuries, however, milk continued to be imposed throughout the region as a form of neo-colonialism linked to the interests of capital. As Merisa S. Thompson, Lecturer in Gender and Development at the University of Birmingham, writes, "Both the milk of humans and milk from animals is increasingly manipulated for economic means, with the latter increasingly coming under the purview of the law." During the 20th century, the mass consumption of milk was the result of state policies, first in the United States and then in the rest of the continent. According to Vox.com, during World War I many American farmers left grain farming to concentrate on milk due to state demand for this food for soldiers. With the end of the war, the demand for milk dropped significantly, but its production didn't cease, rather campaigns were implemented to encourage its consumption. Milk was advertised as essential for growing children and strengthening bones, it was introduced in school breakfasts, restaurants were encouraged to create high-dairy menus, and leftovers were sent to other countries as aid food.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, milk production quickly became an essential part of the desired economic development. Governments of the region not only created campaigns to promote milk consumption but also facilitated the importation of milking equipment and dairy processing infrastructure by large landowners, and invested in training and breeding programs. The United States also intervened through development-oriented credits that, according to Ficek, "encouraged fences, improved pasture grass, vaccination, sanitation, and other interventions that helped turn cattle into profit." This meant the expansion of a standardized capitalist model that implies the importation of special grasses, antibiotics, herbicides, new

throughout Dinétah, cultivated plant crops filled the land. By the 1600s we were masters of our own agricultural practices.

"As more and more Navajo Bands began farming, their population increased," says Lawrence D. Sundberg, author of 'Dinétah: An Early History of the Navajo People.' "The Farms provided more food," he writes, boosting health and food security. As a result of this cultivation, "more young children and older band members survived the hard winters."

Evidence of the Diné's plant-based lifestyle also emerges from the oral stories passed down through generations. In Diné Bahane' (Navajo creation story) the evolution of life is told through a sequence of worlds, the first being the beginning of time all the way through the fifth world being the present. In the fifth world, the Diyin Dine'é (holy people) gifted corn, beans, squash, and tobacco to the Diné people. We believe that by consuming these foods, a person will live a long life and achieve the "ultimate goal of sacred existence in old age."

Straying from these spiritual foods also has consequences, we believe, a higher chance of suffering poor health. By eating corn, beans and squash, our bodies and organs function as they should and we are gifted with healthy skin.

### ***Healthy Indigenous Diets Replaced By Rancid Pork***

The Diné witnessed a big cultural shift in the late 1500s after the arrival of Francisco Coronado, a Spanish colonizer in what is now regarded as the American Southwest. He and his armed forces brought with them horses, goats, cattle, and sheep, which were traded among our people soon after acquiring the Churro sheep. This interaction started the domestication of animals within our tribe, eventually leading us to integrate Churro sheep into our diet and culture for the following centuries.

Our food system was even further disrupted in 1864, when our people were displaced from their original homeland by the U.S. Army. American soldiers burned our farmlands, slaughtered the herds and forced us on a 300 mile walk, known as "The Long Walk," to Fort Sumner, New Mexico for internment at Hwéeldi (Bosque Redondo).

It was there that our people had a hard time adjusting to the white man's food. The land there was unsuitable for growing our staples, and the Diné had to rely on government food rations of pork, cattle, flour, coffee, sugar and goats milk. But these foods were nutritionally inadequate and, in some cases, cooked improperly. After falling ill eating rancid meat of pork and

bacon, many Diné developed an abhorrence to pork that exists in our culture to this day. Dairy products, such as goat milk, were forced upon us. In hospitals and boarding schools, children were fed dairy products despite expressing a strong dislike for these foods — perhaps because nearly 75 percent of Indigenous people are lactose intolerant.

My tribe is not the only one with strong plant-based ties. Records show that throughout Turtle Island, most Indigenous people were in fact predominantly plant-based agriculturists. According to Choctaw tribal member Rita Laws, Choctaw Indians based in Mississippi and Oklahoma were excellent farmers who grew and ate corn, pumpkins and beans — eating very little to no meat. Their homes were made from wood, bark and cane — even their clothing was plant-based and made from cotton.

The Mayan, Aztec and Zapotec people had twice the lifespan as most Spanish people, eating a nutrient-dense vegetarian diet since birth. And almost half of the world's crops were originally cultivated by Indigenous people of North and South America, including four of the top ten: corn, cassava, potatoes and sweet potatoes.

Many Indigenous tribes have creation stories that point to vegetarianism. In the Choctaw creation story, corn was given to them by Hashtali (the Great Spirit) which is considered divine. In Cherokee legends, animals, plants and humans lived in harmony with one another until the humans became aggressive and ate the animals. The animals created diseases in response, to keep human population in check. Even among the Mi'kmaq people, legends are told with multiple references to veganism, including regret at animal death and a kinship relationship between humans and animals.

Historically, animal agriculture was used as a tool for colonization by the European settlers to disrupt our food systems and leave us food insecure on reservations. For example, meat and dairy were fed to Indigenous children in boarding schools as an effort to “civilize” us and disconnect us from our agricultural history. Antonio De Mendoza, first Viceroy of New Spain, to the Spanish king in the 1530s boasted of plans to take our land: “May your Lordship realize that if cattle is allowed, the Indians will be destroyed.”

Today, I am vegan as a Diné person, and as an act of protest and opposition to the oppressive systems that exploit humans, animals and the natural world. By recognizing our animal siblings as one of our own, we reject the colonial idea of anthropocentrism and live in a more harmonious existence with the world around us.

## **Dairy in the Americas: How Colonialism Left Its Mark on the Continent** by Matilde Nuñez del Prado

The Americas have a long, strange history with milk. While the domestication of animals was a widespread practice in several pre-Columbian cultures, the introduction of milk to the diet on the continent began only in the 16th century as part of the process of territorial occupation and colonial domination. Today, milk production continues to occupy large amounts of land, polluting water and damaging vital ecosystems around the world, and its consumption leads to serious health problems in more than two-thirds of the world's population.

The introduction of animals to the “New World” was one of the most effective strategies for consolidating the European colonial agenda. The first cows arrived on the continent with Columbus on his second voyage in 1493 and spread throughout the continent in a short time. The introduction and expansion of cattle to the Americas helped the conquerors to occupy territories, destroy native environments, introduce European crops, and support various extractive activities that favored the empire. As anthropologist Rosa E. Ficek writes, “Conquest worked indirectly through bodies of cattle taking up more and more space.” The native inhabitants—animals and humans—were invaded not only by the settlers but also by their animals, who helped transform the Americas' environments to suit European ends.

The importation of animals also had an ideological background bathed in racism and a superiority complex. According to Rebecca Earle, author of *The Body of the Conquistador*, for Europeans, food made their bodies different from those of the natives. “Without the right foods Europeans would either die, as Columbus feared, or, equally alarmingly, they might turn into Amerindians,” she writes. In addition, the conquerors considered that their methods of agriculture, mostly based on cattle, were better than the local forms. In the eyes of the colonists, the exercise of human dominance over other creatures considered “lesser” was a demonstration of cultural superiority. Imposing their livestock system, transforming human-animal relations, and changing the feeding patterns of the natives was a way of “civilizing” them, which was one of the main objectives of colonization. Thus, food colonialism was not a consequence of the conquest, but an integral part of the imperial project.

Despite the early expansion of cows after the arrival of Europeans, milk consumption did not spread so quickly across the continent. For much of the colonial period, milk production remained at a subsistence level and was