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Meat: Historicizing an Icon Through Marketplace Contestations

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Abstract

Meat is both a loved and hated everyday consumption object across cultures and has become an icon throughout history. This article traces meat's trajectory in the Global North and identifies four periods that contribute to its iconicity. Meat's iconic status has been shaped by discourses on health, morality, ecology, class, science, and gender. It has been central to colonialism, wars, the Industrial Revolution, and scientific developments. We pinpoint the role of marketplace actors – from butchers to slaughterhouses to political institutions to corporations and scientists – in making meat a contested object and a marketplace icon. We conclude the article with a call for more research outside the Global North. We also invite researchers and policymakers to consider existing scholarly work that acknowledges a view of nature that is grounded in interspecies reciprocity, which can resolve enduring moral tensions that rely on rigid binary oppositions between humans and animals.

Keywords: meat, marketization, marketplace icon, morality, health

Meat is in fact both the most prohibited and the most suggested food of all; the most nutritious and the most dangerous for our health; it requires exceptional skills (hunting, carving, etc.) but also poses the most important of the moral questions (is it right to kill?). For (Rozin 2007), all of this depends on the fact that meat is the food that is made of the same substance as our body, and thus it is the food that, more than the others, provokes disgust (Buscemi 2018, 5:20).

Spending time with friends, going on a date, family meals, weddings, birthdays, ritual events and celebrations, religious and secular holidays predominantly involve consuming and sharing food, where historically meat has taken center stage.

Archeologists have argued that our engagement with meat, and the practices and tools we developed around meat production and consumption, distinguish us from other species (Bunn, Pickering, and Domínguez-Rodrigo 2017). Throughout history and across many cultures, the hospitality and wealth of a host have been signaled through the availability of meat on the table. Many rituals and traditions center around butchering and eating an animal, such as the consumption of turkey on Thanksgiving (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991), lamb during Eid Al Adha, barbecue on Canada Day, and roasted pig during Parada ng Lechon in the Philippines (T. Smith 2014). People across the globe are “meathooked” (Zaraska 2016). At the same time, meat attracts controversy, raises ethical dilemmas, and creates disgust. Meat is ubiquitous, political, and iconic.

In this paper, we historicize the market transformation around the production and consumption of animal flesh (Fiddes 1991) such as beef, chicken, and pork in the Global North. We reveal the iconicity of meat by documenting how it has been the focus of cultural contestations that have shaped key aspects of social life such as health, economy, gender, and morality, and through its role in the development and evolution of markets. We show that from the industrialization of meat supply chains to the proliferation of meat-based fast food to disruptive innovations such as lab-grown meat, meat has been an iconic and indispensable marketplace commodity. We also argue that

some of the historical dilemmas and unresolvable tensions we document around meat are rooted in a strict assumption about the dualism between animals and humans, which is the focus of the debates in the Global North.

Meat is probably one of the oldest commodities. It is still a part of everyday lives to such an extent that 239,394,640 tons of meat are consumed to date (The World Counts 2021). Throughout history, meat has always been embroiled in moral contestations and cultural contradictions despite its widespread consumption. It has remained at the intersection of significant cultural tensions around morality, health, class, ideology, and ecology both in the past and present.

Consider recent moral and health-based tensions between people who advocate entirely avoiding meat consumption (e.g., vegans and vegetarians), who advocate reducing it (e.g., flexitarians), who are indifferent to it (e.g.: omnivores), people who embrace a non-speciesist way of relating to hunting and fishing (e.g.: Indigenous traditions), and those who follow a predominantly meat-based diet as a way to optimize their health and physical appearance (e.g., the carnivore diet and ketogenic diet). These tensions permeate public discourse, politics, and everyday lives. Such tensions further reinforce the iconicity of meat and its status as a global commodity with everlasting cultural discourses and debates around it that sustain such iconicity. It has also been at the center of scholarly discussions, regulatory processes, and market systems.

Scholars have contributed to the iconicity of meat employing such debates. Philosopher Norbert Elias considers meat as a mark of human development (Buscemi 2018). On the other hand, thinkers as early as Pythagoras, Plato, and Siddhārtha Gautama (the Buddha) adopted no-meat diets for spiritual reasons (Buscemi 2018). Subsequently, in 1806 CE, Dr. William Lambe and Percy Bysshe Shelley publicly objected to meat for ethical reasons ("History" 2019a). Reflecting on this contradiction,

the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss saw humans' relationship with meat as a mirror of society's structures, sitting between the binary opposition of "good to think with" as totems and "good to eat" as food (Mullin 1999, 208; Levi-Strauss 1971).

While most cultures and scholars have seen meat production as a binary and extractive relationship between humans and animals, Indigenous scholarship has demonstrated that a balance between harvesting food, preserving land, and maintaining an interdependent relationship between humans and other species through sharing the land, reciprocity, and spiritual interconnectivity is possible (Kimmerer 2013; Nelson and Shilling 2018). However, in our paper, we focus on the iconicity of meat created through these dualisms.

In everyday lives, policies have also regulated and normalized the consumption of meat in day-to-day diets, from tribe-leaders organizing scavenger hunts, and regulating the consumption of hunted animals (Zaraska 2016), to kings controlling the quantity and quality of meat provided to their publics (Fiddes 1991; Buscemi 2018), to current regulatory institutions on food (e.g., FDA in the US and Food Standards Agency in the UK, and similar organizations elsewhere). These policies have shaped the meat supply and contributed to the emergence and evolution of actors along its supply chain: farmers, slaughterhouses, butchers, fast-food chains, and food companies. The shaping of the practices of the various producers (e.g., slaughterhouses and butchers) through history has also unfolded in tandem with cultural discourses around meat.

In order to understand the iconicity of meat in the marketplace, it is crucial to develop a historical perspective, since the contestations around the object have deep sociocultural roots. However, historicizing meat is a complex task due to the numerous entangled discourses, actors, and localized processes around it (Leroy and Praet 2015). Therefore, we make one admission: Due to space limitations, as well as a lack of

available translated secondary resources, we focus on a few geographical areas, mainly the USA, Canada, and the UK. We acknowledge that meat's cultural significance is not uniform around the globe, nor its interrelations with the history of colonialism and that this lack of representation available to secondary researchers about the history of this object elsewhere points to a more significant problem than we can resolve in a short marketplace icon piece. We further discuss these concerns in the conclusion section.

In the space available to us, we historicize the actors involved in meat's marketization in the mainstream markets in the Global North while mapping the ever-changing contestations around it. We trace its iconization through four historical periods characterized by different contradictions and market disruptions. In each period, we explicate the role of the marketplace actors in these contestations and shifts. We show how meat has been imbued with economic, social, and nutritional value and became associated with wealth, masculinity, good health, festivities, and good taste. We map such transformations while examining the practices of myriad actors: butchers, consumers, institutions, marketers. and the media in solidifying its cultural relevance.

ICONICITY OF MEAT ACROSS TIME

Meat and Early Festivities: Hunting, Masculinity, and Community

While the reason and the exact time that shifted our ancestors to the consumption of meat is impossible to trace, the first confirmed case of butchering animals goes back to as early as 2.5 million years ago (Zaraska 2016; Mann 2018). Humans started with raw consumption of meat, and the control of fire made the process even easier (Civitello 2011; Levi-Strauss 1983). In the early stages, meat was mainly obtained by hunting wild animals, primarily for survival (Zaraska 2016). It is believed that 56-65% of the dietary intake of early hunter-gatherer societies came from animal

food (Mann 2018). In America, for instance, the large buffalo, elk, and deer herds provided the Indigenous and early settlers with their meat supply (Bray 1997). Meat was a trophy symbolizing hunters' skill and talent as it required complex social coordination from hunting to killing to sharing of the meals (Rozin et al. 2012). Hunting and sharing of meat played a significant role in the development of community relationships since it enhanced social cohesion (Leroy and Praet 2015).

Scholars have argued that roasting, and later barbecuing of, meat was within the realm of men rather than women's territory (Fiddes 1991; Buscemi 2018; Douglas 2002). Recent research challenges the belief that hunters were only men as there were women hunters in the early Americas (Haas et al. 2020). Despite this, meat is still associated with masculinity as a result of the gendered division of labor around its production (Rozin et al. 2012). Meat is gendered, whether these associations are rooted in historical facts about actual labor practices or are performatively, historically, and discursively constructed and reinforced.

Complementary to these associations, animals were sometimes hunted in groups (Leroy and Praet 2015) and the hunt was shared among tribe members, building stronger ties within the communities (Groeneveld 2016). This image was fostered by the celebrations of the tribes and early settlers, the gatherings around the campfire to talk politics (Zaraska 2016), and meetings with other tribes to exchange hunted meat (Groeneveld 2016). Sharing started to occur, especially around big hunts (e.g., elephants and mammoths) as such huge animal carcasses could not be stored (Zaraska 2016; Hawkes 2001). This festivity and sharing laid the primary foundation for its strong association with gatherings, ties, and festivities that lasted into the 21st century.

14th Century to 19th Century: Organized Farming, Wealth to Accessibility

At the beginning of the 14th century, meat became a symbol of wealth, an image reinforced by the practices of society's elites, mainly within Europe. During this era, meat consumption started to be sanitized and dissociated from its source (i.e., the dead animal), especially among the royals (Elias 1978). Instead of placing the entire animal on the table, meat was now butchered, and specific parts were valorized as more edible than others (Buscemi 2018). During the Renaissance period, organ meat — once perceived to be a delicacy (e.g., calf's eyes) — started to be seen as undesirable by the elite (Toussaint-Samat 2009). This marks the beginning of the sanitization and normalization of meat as a commodity: meat was disentangled from visible cues to its source, the animal itself, which was defined as an absent referent (Adams 2015).

In addition, the quantity of meat one consumed became a class and a gender-based distinction. The secular upper classes consumed far more quantity than we do today, while the peasants did not have enough wealth to secure meat (Fiddes 1991). Studies indicate that men consumed preferred cuts of meat, were served first, and consumed larger quantities compared to women (Woolgar 2010). Accordingly, meat consumption was stratified in terms of quantity and quality across social classes and between sexes (Watts 2006; Woolgar 2010). This created a distinction between high-quantity and good-quality cuts for the royals and men, and low-quantity and low-quality cuts for the masses and women (Zaraska 2016; Woolgar 2010) While elites and commoners celebrated meat, religious sects and monasteries abstained from the consumption of meat out of a sense of self-denial and spiritual seeking (Fiddes 1991).

By the mid-nineteenth century, new hunting laws came into effect within Europe concerning hunting for food, and in the United States concerning hunting for game (Dunlap 1988). Such laws broadened the wealth gap even further as only landowners

were allowed to hunt (Fiddes 1991). Families spent an abundance of their time on farms: it is believed that in the 1800s, 90% of Americans spent their time on farms taking care of their cattle compared to 2% in the late 20th century (Bray 1997). This reduction in hunting dissipated the narratives around the masculinity of meat. Grazing and caring for cattle stimulated emotions of warmth and togetherness, as families were the sole caretakers of their animals (Fiddes 1991). This increased domestication, brought animals closer to human culture (Shanklin 1985). However, such intimacy with animals did not reframe them as sentient beings that were part of the family. Indeed, this opposing viewpoint appeared much later. Instead, meat became associated with family ties and kinship, as ownership of the flock brought generations closer together.

At the same time, slaughterhouses were visible institutions within American city boundaries, known and identified by the residents (Buscemi 2018). Butchers played a role in urban lives with their presence in the center of cities. Slaughterhouses were significant urban spaces with visibility and daily interaction with consumers (Watts 2006). People passed by them just afar enough to dodge the carcasses without any judgment or feeling of disgust (Buscemi 2018). These butchers provided cheap meat for the working classes (Fiddes 1991). Coupled with the ban on hunting, this increased the availability of meat, thereby dissociating it from elite consumption. Canned meat further allowed the stable supply of meat to the British Empire, especially to its colonized territories, while refrigeration made possible the export of lamb and mutton from New Zealand (Woods 2012).

The emergence of family-run farms, supported by innovations in agriculture, led to increased production and consumption of new breeds. More money was spent on meat compared to other food items, including bread (Burnett 1966). The abundance of meat dissolved its association with wealth, which would be further diluted once the

Industrial Revolution got underway. The abundance of meat and the emergence of new breeds led to the re-emergence of the distinction between good and bad meat; however, this time it was compounded with a problematization that concerned meat's health implication due to spoilage (Fiddes 1991). This seeded the discourse around meat being bad for health, as workers accepted undesirable meat (e.g., sick animals) instead of their wages. Tainted with an emerging reputation for causing bad health and the spread of animal-borne diseases, meat became an object whose quality became necessary to control: meat inspection appeared as a profession and continued to play a significant role since then (Ninios et al. 2014). The emergence of stock shows, first in Europe, and then in the USA, further contributed to the professionalization of meat workers, shaping the meat market, and establishing a hierarchy of aesthetics and quality of animals and meat (Peñaloza 2000; Ritvo 1987).

20th Century: Factory Farming, Politicization, and McDonaldization of Meat

This timeframe marks a dramatic transformation in meat consumption and production over a short period. The opening of the first fast-food restaurant in the United States in 1921 (Aronica 2014) further enhanced the ease of access to meat. During World War II, meat was perceived as a crucial item for the survival and nourishment of soldiers. Occupying countries also needed to seek out live cattle in war zones (e.g., when Germany occupied Norway) in order to provide soldiers with meat, since it was believed to be the most nutritional food source at that time (Zaraska 2016). In addition, meat consumption per capita was now subject to the control of governments through rationing, as supply chains became disrupted and the labor force was deployed to war (e.g., UK, USA) (Fiddes 1991).

As meat was hard to store during the war, yet considered essential for nutrition, armies started to look for solutions. One solution was the iconic canned meat product

SPAM, which popularized canned meat in America during WWII and further became a key ingredient in the cuisines of Hawai'i, East Asia, and Southeast Asia (DeJesus 2014; Martin 2008; Matejowsky 2007). This directed the consumption of meat away from civilians to troops, in order to prioritize feeding the soldiers (Ciment 2007). Another solution was plant alternatives that could be safely stored and provided the same strength to troops (Buscemi 2018). Soybeans became one such important substance (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Duffett, and Drouard 2011). Substitution of meat with other plant-based alternatives of equivalent nutritional value aided the counter-narratives against meat's healthiness and necessity. Consequently, the perception of the nutritional value of meat was now scrutinized.

Shortly after the end of WWII, fast-food chains proliferated. McDonald's opened in 1948, Burger King and Taco Bell in the 1950s, and Wendy's followed later in 1969 (Wilson 2006). The expression "fast food" was added to the dictionary in 1951 (History of Fast Food 2019). The expansion of fast-food chains was made possible by the elimination of rationing in most countries (*BBC Home* 1954; "Rationing" 2021). With the growth of fast-food restaurants, meat regained its association with accessibility. Average annual food expenditure per person spent on food outside the home in the USA (such as restaurants, cafes, colleges, work, etc.) grew by 215% (522-\$1125) from 1953 to 2014 ("USDA ERS - Food Expenditure Series" 2019). Fast-food chains grew in France from 109 in the 1980s to 2,036 in 1991 (Fantasia 1995). These developments created a new association between meat and convenience.

In the late 1950s, regulatory bodies once again changed the market dynamics of meat. With increased consumer demand for meat, fast-food chains pressured farms for supply (Ganzel 2007), and governments supported such a rise in demand. For instance, the US Secretary of Agriculture called on farmers to either expand and grow their

businesses or get out (Zimdahl 2012). This indeed pressured farmers who were unable to compete, resulting in the closure of many medium- and small-sized farms during this period (Olmstead and Rhode 2008). The dynamics of this closure and the centralization around big farms required the introduction of new technologies to increase meat production. Scientists came to play a more central role, with the invention of factory farming methods in the 1960s. The technique was introduced by scientists to increase the efficiency of producing meat in large quantities and fast (Buscemi 2018).

Factory farming led to changes in the operations of slaughterhouses in the 1960s; as the supply of animals increased, slaughterhouses had to automate their operations to keep up (Fitzgerald 2010). In addition, they were moved outside the city, where they became disconnected from city life and accordingly lost their cultural role (Buscemi 2018). Job specialization disappeared, as machines replaced workers. Personnel working inside were required to have less expertise and job specialization; they were transformed into “men with beards” (Claflin 2008, 40): simply, a low-skilled and easily replaceable labor force. Animals became mere objects fed to the machines which automatically butchered them. Butchers disappeared from cities, and those remaining in urban settings “cleaned up” (Buscemi 2018 p. 85) their interface with consumers, which meant increasingly hiding the remains of animals.

The increased supply of meat and the removal of slaughterhouses and butchers from city centers transformed the physical presentation of meat to consumers. As a result, consumers no longer got to see the animal carcass hanging from butchers’ stores: instead, they saw it packaged in clean containers in supermarkets (Pachirat 2011). The meatpacking industry helped eliminate the association between meat and the living animal through their production techniques (Belasco 2008). This dissociation continues

to hinder the moral considerations towards the slaughtered animals to this day (Adams 2015).

Supermarkets witnessed a significant boom until the mid-1960s by putting forward new strategies to attract consumers (Manchester 1991), which further shaped the demand for meat. There was also an increase in institutional resources (e.g., cookbooks and TV shows) teaching consumers ways to use these new products and integrating them into their recipes (Notaker 2017). Prepacked dinners containing meat as the main ingredient reinforced the associations of abundance and speed for the new middle class (Buscemi 2018). Soon meat became integrated into everyday food consumption, presented as part of all meals throughout the day, from breakfast to dinner (Fiddes 1991).

All these developments (factory farming, the closure of small farms, regulations advancing meat production, increased consumer demands) shaped the marketization of meat on supermarket shelves. With the removal of slaughterhouses and butchers away from city centers (Pachirat 2011), the consumers' associations between the object (i.e., meat) and its producers (i.e., farmers and butchers) got further sanitized, commodifying the object and dissociating it from the lived animal form. Industrial capitalism transformed animals into objects or natural resources available to be exploited by mankind (Mullin 1999).

Between the 1950s and 1980s, meat started to be stratified into healthier and less healthy types, in terms of fat content and white versus dark meat (Fiddes 1991). This stratification and consumer-led taste differences drove meat as an object of consumption into the middle of a health battle that is still raging. Such an argument against the healthiness of meat was also framed by a rise in hygiene concerns about animal products (Paxson 2008). Perhaps un/healthiness is the most enduring compounded

counter-narrative against meat. On the one hand, meat is considered unhealthy due to perceptions about the low nutritional quality of certain parts of the animals, but this seems unrelated to ethical concerns. On the other hand, the inhumane treatment to which animals are subjected is seen as unethical since they are objects of consumption merely serving human interests and providing pleasure. This compounded counter-narrative has produced the context for the production and marketing of the first veggie burger in the UK in 1982 (Smith 2021).

Late 20th Century to Meat Today: Scepticism, Scientification, Moralization, and Aestheticization

In 1986, the first documented case of Mad Cow Disease was reported in the United States, leading to an outbreak in 1988 (Center for Food Safety 2021). This disease can pass on to humans, with most human cases and deaths occurring in the UK (“Mad Cow Disease” 2019; Medicine 2020). While experts are not certain about the reasons behind the disease, there is a belief that the driving factor lies in trying to turn herbivore animals into carnivores by feeding them grain mixed with flesh and bones, for the sake of factory efficiency and cost reduction (Buscemi 2018).

Scientists fragmentally started to think, analyze, and research the relation between what we eat and the spread of diseases. As we indicated earlier, questioning meat’s superior nutritional value began during WWII, as armies looked into plant-based substitutes for logistical reasons. A growing and important link was established between nutrition and health (Vandendriessche 2008). Studies have argued that eating more red and processed meat brings a higher risk of heart disease and death (Zhong et al. 2020).

The scientification of meat became firmly entangled with concerns about its morality. The Paleo diet has revoked a primitivist romanticization of meat that equates it with the moralization of vitality and health (Etherington 2018; Knight 2015).

Vegetarians and vegans abstained from meat as they believed it to be unhealthy and immoral, equating meat with torture, oppression, and unsustainability (Adams 2015; Rudy 2012). Multiple studies have claimed that vegetarians have lower mortality rates than omnivores, and are therefore less likely to succumb to cancer or heart disease (Zaraska 2016; Campbell and Campbell 2016). Neal Barnard, professor of medicine at George Washington University, who has conducted numerous studies on plant-based nutrition, argues that plant-based diets are richer in vitamins, fiber, and other important nutrients, leaving zero added value for eating animal products (Zaraska 2016). Both plant-based discourses shaped consumers' revised relationship with meat. By 2020 it was estimated that there were 78 million vegans worldwide (Meyer 2020), and the movement is growing in popularity. In the UK, for instance, the number of vegans grew from 150,000 in 2014, to 276,000 in 2016, and finally, to 600,000 vegans in 2019 (Vegan Society Webpage) A similar trend is observed in the US, where one estimate indicates that 9.7 million people followed a plant-based diet in 2020 compared to 90,000 people 15 years ago (Kirkwood 2020).

Such conflicting claims about meat's moral nature have led both opponents and supporters to seize on new discourses to defend their position. Opponents of meat include vegetarian and vegan consumers and producers that appeal to these markets. They put forward narratives around the immorality of consuming meat in terms of fairness and equality between sentient beings (Singer 2009; Adams 2015) and humans' responsibility towards the planet (Fox and Ward 2008). They develop narratives around meat by bringing it closer to the source: the animal (Singer 2009; Joy and Harari 2020; Foer 2009). This reorients humans' perception of animals from being mere objects of consumption to being sentient creatures similar to themselves. In addition, they highlight the responsibility of humans towards the planet and its survival since meat

production causes 25% of all greenhouse emissions (Ritchie and Roser 2020). By negatively framing the object (meat), opponents seek to disrupt or eliminate the market. However, meat withstands such strong criticism through the support of dominant marketplace actors who create counter-narratives. Amongst this prominent fight between two dominant moral positions we also acknowledge that not all animal consumption is rooted in speciesism or commodification, particularly for Indigenous cultures that have maintained a balance between subsistence and preservation while paying close attention to animal agency, welfare, and dignity. We will revisit this in our discussion.

Consumers in industrialized societies are less inclined to think about animals as meat (Mullin 1999), and react with disgust when such a link appears (Rozin, Markwith, and Stoess 1997). The decoupling of animals and their meat counterpart is established by allies of meat through the tactics of absent referrals (Adams 2015), and dehumanization of animals (Bilewicz, Imhoff, and Drogosz 2011). In contrast, narratives by vegans and vegetarians strengthen the associations between animals and the flesh consumed and bring the sentience of animals to the center of the debate.

The allies of meat, including consumers and producers of meat, defend their practices through the creation of new images. Meat consumers defend its importance through stigmatizing and delegitimizing plant-based consumption. They question the masculinity of plant-based consumers (Garel 2019; Ruby and Heine 2011; Rudy 2012), implicitly relying on earlier narratives around the masculinity of meat. “Generation after generation, meat’s tie to masculine identity was reinforced, becoming an expression of a patriarchal world” (Zaraska 2016, 11). Due to its strong association with masculinity, women started to have less interest and taste for red meat (Buscemi 2018; Kubberød et al. 2002). Vegetarians and vegan men are sometimes framed as less masculine than

those consuming meat, an act still perceived by dominantly masculine men as essential for survival and good health (Contois 2020). In addition, meat consumers delegitimize the merits of a plant-based diet, claiming it is low in nutrition and unsustainable (Hunt and Lindquist 2018).

The ethical dilemmas concerning animal consumption also highlight issues with the inefficiencies of production. Meat production methods have led to objections that, within the Global North, meat consumption is increasingly unsustainable (Hoogland, de Boer, and Boersema 2005), which in turn have driven meat producers to protect their position in the market. They counter the negative image around meat by deploying four strategies: co-opting the vegan movement, moralizing their practices, aestheticizing the object, and conducting category-level promotion. To co-opt a movement that was once mobilized against their dominance on meat production, some food giants offer meatless meat in their restaurants to appeal to a growing segment. Beyond meat is offered in A&W, and other fast-food chains even introduced their own brands of meatless meat such as McDonald's McPlant (Brooks 2020).

Some producers moralize their meat by dignifying animals through humanely raising, handling, treating, and killing them. The moralization of the meat supply chain process has created new products labels like cage-free, free-range, sustainable meat (Laurence 2019; Leigh 2015; Otto, Johnston, and Baumann 2021) to create a moral segmentation in addition to the existing quality differentiation. The moral distinctions between these categories are constructed through narratives and imagery about how well the animals are raised, kept alive, and slaughtered in such a way as to reduce stress on animals (Holloway 2001). Animals are still treated as objects; however, they should be produced with care and respect towards the end of their lives. Moreover, meat produced ethically is not only seen as morally superior but was also tastier, healthier,

and more nutritious (Anderson and Barrett 2016; Henschion, De Backer, and Hudders 2017). Such a framing, despite appealing to omnivores, is unacceptable for vegans, who label it as the myth of the happy cow (Rudy 2012).

Meat producers aestheticize their practices to shape the status and symbolic value of the object. Butchers have started to face struggles and have been forced to downsize or close; for instance, in Britain, the number of butchers has decreased from 15,000 to 6,380 between 1990 and 2010 (Tapper 2019). To resist such struggles, they have aestheticized meat to revive a sense of luxury and a taste-based distinction, accompanied by upscaling their servicescape (Ocejo 2014). Their new spaces are reformulated to allow for social interaction or even gatherings. This is visible in the butcher shop-restaurant hybrid format like Clyde's Foothills Meats near Asheville, North Carolina; Kau in Greensboro, North Carolina; Revival Meats in Houston; Laurelhurst Market in Portland, Oregon; Clove & Hoof in Oakland; and Belcampo Meat Co. in multiple locations (Shirvell 2020). This aestheticization has even extended beyond the main component of the animal—meat—to its by-products (e.g., artisanal cheese) (Paxson 2008).

Aestheticization of meat production is also reinforced by the re-enchantment of organ meat and the romanticization of nose-to-tail eating in the foodie culture (Johnston and Baumann 2015). An owner of a high-end meat-centric restaurant in New York says “Our restaurant features nose-to-tail dining, so we break down whole animals [...] And if a customer wants to buy certain cuts they've had here to cook at home, like lamb neck, we can sell it.” (Fabricant 2011). Through its enchantment in foodie circles, meat is reassociated with good taste.

Category-level promotion has become one of the most effective strategies of meat producers, including beef, pork, and chicken, to keep demands stable or increasing

(Zaraska 2016). From 2017 to 2020, the EU used €60m (out of a total of €200m subsidy) on 21 meat marketing campaigns (Boffey 2020). An example of such campaigns was the van with a banner that said “Become a Pork Lover” touring Spain, reigniting the passion around pork in dinner tables (Elmes 2019). Such advertisements have upheld the golden rule of not using any images of living animals, in order to dissociate the meat from the source (Adams 2015) and to eliminate disgust (Kubberød et al. 2006). Meat vendors, including restaurants, have applied this golden rule, which has provided them with a strong standing in the market. For instance, McDonald’s sells on average about seventy-five burgers per second with a budget of \$1.37 billion on advertising in 2011 (Zaraska 2016).

Joining the debate between the opponents and supporters of meat, governments have taken positions in order to shape the market. In the US, for instance, the USDA’s guide has asked Americans to choose lean meat rather than advise them to consume less meat, a position not favored by the industry (Zaraska 2016). In Canada, the new Canadian health guide advocates consuming less meat (Flanagan 2019). However, governments have been more democratic than they were during the rationing period: They have taken a stand to responsabilize, rather than strictly regulate, individuals in terms of quotas and restrictions. It is evident in the politicization of these guides that the meat industry lobbies have also taken a significant role in steering these policies (Zaraska 2016).

The ethical quandaries alongside scientification have led to a new market opportunity: the innovation of lab-grown meat in 2013. Developed in a lab, artificial meat is the “most likely product to wean committed meat-eaters off traditional sources” compared to vegetarian options (Carrington 2020). The product combats the negative narratives around its unethicity in the context of animal welfare, to its unhealthiness

due to the bad quality of meat resulting from current production methods to its environmental harms for being a leading cause of carbon dioxide emissions, all tied to the source: the animal. Decoupling the live being from meat while maintaining all physical attributes and taste drivers around meat has enabled meat to be ethical once again. Despite its high price at introduction, more companies are now joining the quest (Banerji 2020). In December 2020, lab-grown meat was approved for sale in a Singapore restaurant for the first time (Carrington 2020).

Conclusion

Meat is connected to almost all social gatherings, festivities, and celebrations. Its trajectory is interspersed with and shaped by, turning points in world history, from the agricultural revolution to colonization to world wars to the genetic revolution of the 21st century. Within the last 50 years, world meat production has tripled, with individuals consuming on average of 160 kg, 80 kg, 110 kg in Australia, Europe, and North America, respectively in 2013 (Ritchie and Roser 2017). In North America alone, the meat and poultry industry contributes \$1.22 billion to the economy while creating 5.4 million jobs that generate wages of \$257 billion (North American Meat Institute 2021). Meat is a contested, moralized, and protean object associated with masculinity, conviviality, wealth, good taste, generosity, cruelty, bad taste, and bad health simultaneously.

In our limited space, we were only able to scratch the surface of these ongoing contestations around meat. The escalating moral tensions around this object, further aggravated by the moral grey zones of the 21st-century scientific discoveries such as lab-grown meat the environmental consequences of food supply chains bring new challenges for marketplace actors involved with the production of meat and meat substitutes. In moving forward, they further need to acknowledge the deep moral and

ideological tensions and develop socio-culturally informed processes and strategies to both better position themselves in the market and legitimize their positions against ideological attacks from other actors. At the same time, policymakers have the responsibility to navigate these tensions unbiasedly in developing recommendations and regulations to ensure the safety of citizens and the well-being of animals.

We look towards the future with curiosity, as meat-eating is increasingly problematized and meat-like products are becoming more common. While the indexical connotations of meat as flesh from a live being are diminishing due to mock and lab-grown meat, the iconicity of meat is the reason why plant-based foods still use meat as a referent, and why ideal meatless meat is expected to look and even bleed like real meat. As a result, significant resources are being spent on producing “meat” without killing an animal and significant debates are being held on whether this is desirable. As societies continue to weigh moral and ecological concerns against unceasing market demand for meat, we expect meat to remain at the center of such debates and innovations.

We also hope that researchers and policymakers give more attention to reciprocal ways of relating to nature inspired by Indigenous scholarship which highlights the possibilities of mutualist conservation. This might also allow us to resolve some of the moral paradoxes that rely on rigid binary oppositions between human-animal and food/not food while envisioning diverse food systems for human survival and well-being that respect animal dignity and entity. We invite researchers and policymakers to not oversimplify debates around our species’ relationship with animals and acknowledge the multiplicity of human conditions and traditions in hunting and farming.

In this paper, we have historicized meat. Our portrayal is a modest outline that is restricted by the space here, and by our being scholars who are not food historians.

While we conducted secondary research, we discovered that meat's documented history outside the Global North is fragmentary and requires more careful attention. As a result, our work contains an unfortunate geographical and linguistic bias. We acknowledge this and invite historians to carefully look at the different ways in which the meat market has been shaped across the globe.

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