

Ethical Crises and the Uptake of Veganism among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the UK

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5 July 2022 | BSA SocRel Annual Conference 2022



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What is my Research Topic?

Topic: Experiences of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim vegans in the UK

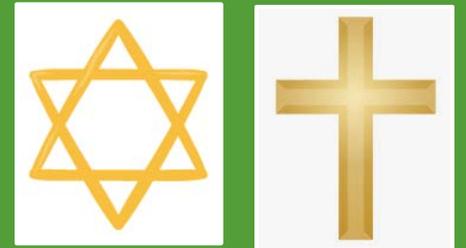
Context: Late Modern Great Britain

Research Interests: Sociology of religion, vegan studies, food studies



Timely Research

- Veganism is growing exponentially - Estimates range between 600,000 [1] and 3.5 million [2] vegans in the UK
- Religion is still relevant – Estimates suggest up to 2/3 of the population of England [3] identify with one of the Abrahamic religions
- **Veganism within religious and ethnic groups is very much absent from the academic literature**



[1] The Vegan Society (2022) 'Worldwide Growth of Veganism'. Available at: <https://www.vegansociety.com/news/media/statistics/worldwide>

[2] Petter, O. (2018) 'Number of vegans in UK soars to 3.5 million, survey finds', Independent, 3 April. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/food-and-drink/vegans-uk-rise-popularity-plant-based-diets-veganism-figures-survey-compare-the-market-a8286471.html>

[3] Office for National Statistics (2020) 'Exploring religion in England and Wales: February 2020'. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/exploringreligioninenglandandwales/february2020>

Important Research

- Veganism offers huge potential for overcoming the ethical crises of the day
- Religious communities have yet to engage in serious discussion on the topic
- My research offers valuable insight into how vegan and religious lifestyles come together and complement one another
- Enabling more effective communication and advocacy between vegan and religious communities



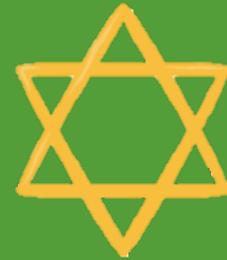
Research Questions

- How do religious and cultural beliefs, values, and practices shape one's vegan experience?
- How is religion embodied through veganism?
- How are Jewish, Christian, and Muslim vegans reshaping and redefining what it means to be Jewish, Christian, or Muslim through veganism in late modern Great Britain?

Methodology

36 participants (12 of each religion)

- Identify as Jewish/ Christian/ Muslim
- Identify as vegan
- Aged 18+
- Live in the UK and have done so for 5+ years



Non-probability purposive sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling - Recruited via Facebook groups, social media posts and a few referrals from others

Methodology

Multiple Qualitative Methods:

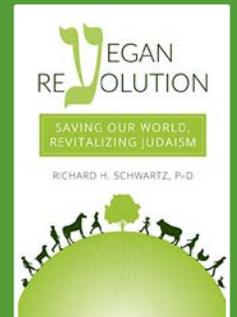
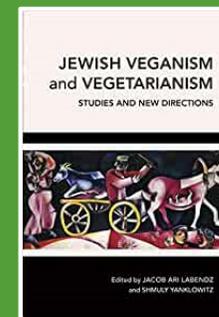
- 36 semi-structured interviews: 40mins – 2hrs 25mins (av. 1hr 30)
- 3 WhatsApp diary groups spanning 3-4 months
- 6 Virtual Participant Observations: cooking demonstrations and kitchen tours

All transcribed and coded
Thematic analysis



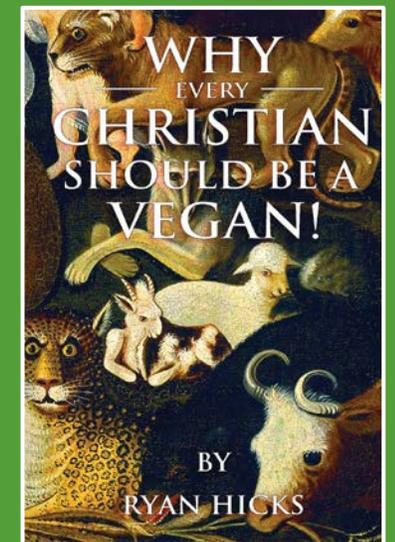
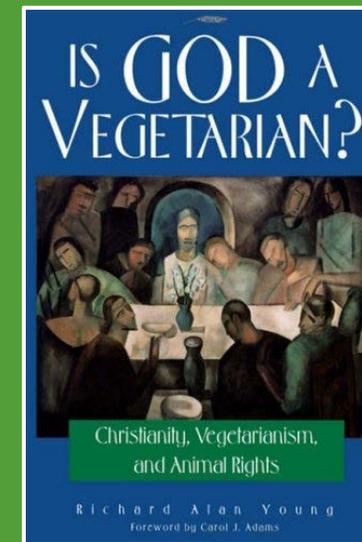
Veganism and Judaism

- Various organisations advocating veganism
- Various activists, rabbis, and authors advocating veganism
- In 2017 70+ rabbis called on Jews to adopt veganism
- World's first Jewish Vegan Centre opened in London in 2019



Veganism and Christianity

- Various organisations advocating veganism
- Growing concern where animal welfare is concerned
- Books exploring related topics, some by scholars, some by activists

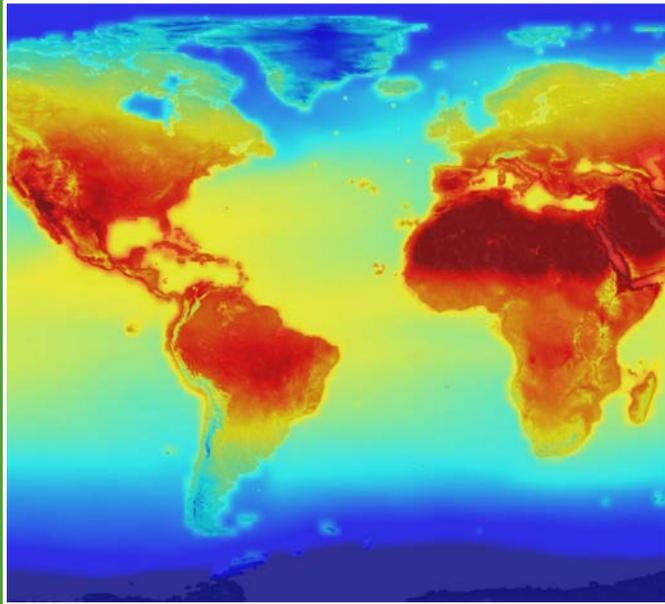


Veganism and Islam

- Organisations emerging advocating veganism in Islam
- Numerous online communities and activists
- A documentary in production exploring Muslim vegans



Ethical Crises



Climate change



Environmental disasters



Mistreatment of animal in industry – factory farms, etc

Veganism as a Solution

- Veganism as a solution to the ethical crises of the day
- By being vegan, participants were able to do something positive in the world
- Veganism is linked to ethics and morals, which are emphasised as very important
- The ethical side of religion is neglected in religious discourse
- Too much focus solely on the juristic side of religion, which is insufficient for navigating everyday life



Emphasis on Ethics

- Ethics is of huge importance to my participants
- Main motivations – ethics, mistreatment of animals and environmentalism
- Ethics is understood from a religious perspective – religious ethical teachings and stories
- Rehearsed narratives to justify how veganism and religion align and complement one another



Connecting Veganism & Religion

Ethics

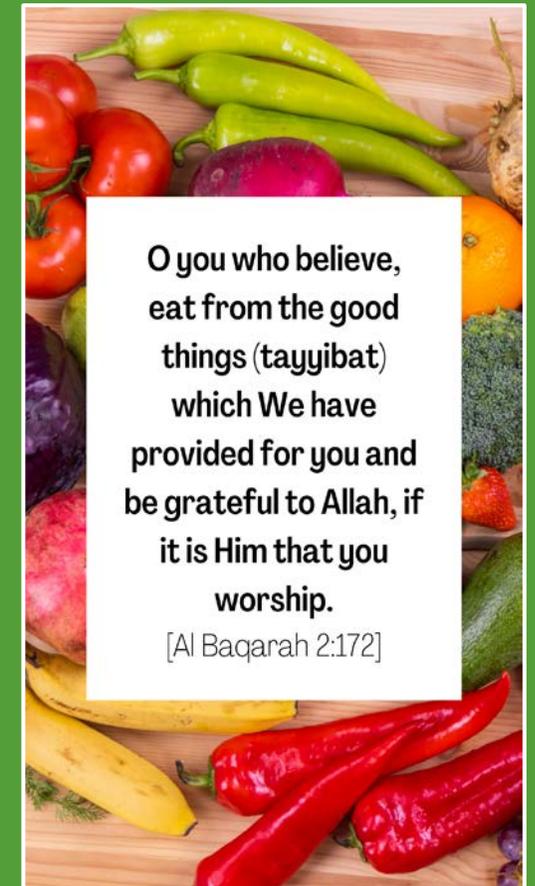
- Ethical teachings linked to compassion and peace
- Plant-based references in religious texts – Garden of Eden as vegan, Israelites punished for craving meat (Numbers 11), Prophet Muhammad ate a predominantly plant-based diet
- Stewardship – we have a responsibility to look after the Creation
- Emphasis on different contexts: If Jesus, Prophet Muhammad, etc were alive today, they wouldn't condone factory farming and would likely be vegan
- You need a very good reason to take a life, and lots of conditions are attached, so if we can avoid killing, we should



Connecting Veganism to Religion

Religious Dietary Injunctions:

- Kashrut law – only kosher meat is permitted, meat and milk should not be mixed, x hours between consuming each, crockery dedicated to each food type
- Islamic dietary law – only halal meat is permitted
- Conditions attached to the life of the animal and slaughter practices
- Tayyib – wholesome, lawful, pure, clean
- Being vegan makes it easier to follow religious dietary laws in the West



Veganism as Religious Practice

- For some, veganism could be considered a religious practice
- The sense that by being vegan, they are being better practitioners of their religion
- Veganism makes it easy to follow religious dietary injunctions – for some the vegan label trumped kosher/halal labels
- Veganism enabled participants to carry out religious requirements/ recommendations



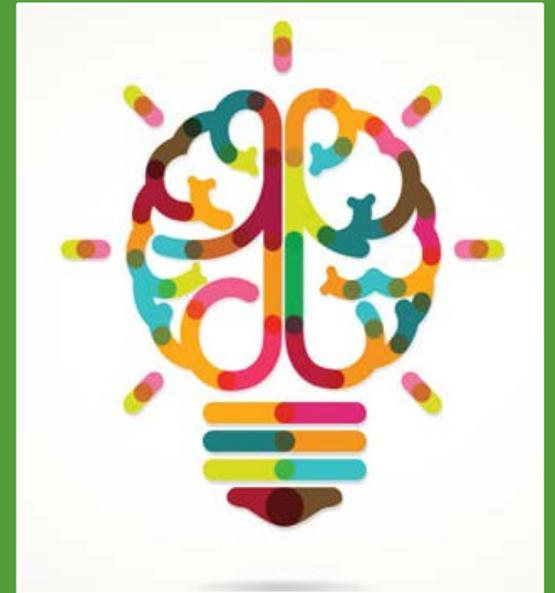
Negotiating Challenges

- Cultural/ritual foods > Veganising through substitution
- Rituals: e.g. Seder plate > Substitution in line with symbolism
 - e.g. Eid sacrifice > Not partaking in it/ vegan alternative
- Eating in religious spaces > Taking own food/ eating beforehand
- Others' opinions > Rehearsed explanations/ activism
- Ritual items e.g. Tefillin > Second-hand



Reflexive Religiosity

- Reflexive religiosity was evident in all participants
- Reinterpreting religious teachings – ethical vs legal
- Applying values to modernity
- Participants undergo a process of reflexivity: personal reflection and research involving a wide range of resources when evaluating and coming to a decision
- Common response: “I ask myself, would I be happy if this was done to me?” – A focus on sentience
- Transformation of religion in modern society



Experiences of Food and Eating

Making eating more “religious”

Conscious ways of relating to food and eating

- Meals as a social experience
- Experimenting with foods
- Creativity and self-expression
- Mindful eating
- Gratitude
- Consuming peace
- Cleanliness





Thank you!

Any questions?

