

WEBINAR *Tuesday 19 July, 15:00 – 16:00*

VEGANISM AND ABRAHAMIC RELIGION

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ON
**THE
PULSE**

The
VeganSociety

My PhD

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 and Important Research

- Veganism is growing exponentially - Estimates range between 600,000 [1] and 3.5 million [2] vegans in the UK
- Veganism offers huge potential for overcoming the ethical crises of the day
- Veganism within religious and ethnic groups is very much absent from the academic literature



Timely and Important Research

- Religion is still relevant – Estimates suggest up to 2/3 of the population of England [3] identify with one of the Abrahamic religions
- Religious communities have yet to engage in serious discussion on the topic of veganism
- 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



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



Abrahamic Religions on Veganism

Judaism on Food

- Kashrut – Jewish dietary law
- Meat is permissible but only kosher meat; no pork
- Fish is permissible but shellfish is not
- Dairy is permissible but must not be mixed with meat
- Eggs and honey are permissible
- Crockery and cutlery reserved for each food type: fleishig (meat), milchig (dairy), pareve (everything else: plant-based foods, eggs, fish)
- Some other rules e.g. grape products/ wine must be kosher



Judaism on Veganism

- God's ideal diet: Garden of Eden as a vegan paradise (Genesis), the messianic world as vegan (Isaiah)
- Permission to eat meat was due to human weakness/greed and doesn't please G-d (Numbers 11 - Israelites were punished for craving meat)
- Corruption where animal slaughter is concerned – not perfectly kosher
- Being vegan makes it easier to keep kosher
- Jewish values: Tza'ar ba'alei chayim (prohibition against cruelty to animals), bal tashchit (not wasting or unnecessarily destroying), tikkun olam (healing the world)
- Factory farming and modern animal agricultural and environmental practices violate these values and teachings

Christianity on Food

- No dietary restrictions per se.
- Jesus says “Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them.” (Mark 7:15)
This is often taken to mean Christians can eat anything.



Christianity on Veganism

- God's ideal diet: Garden of Eden as a vegan paradise (Genesis), the messianic world as vegan (Isaiah)
- Permission to eat meat was due to human weakness/greed and doesn't please G-d (Numbers 11 - Israelites were punished for craving meat)
- Daniel's vegan diet
- Numerous passages in the Bible and stories relating to Jesus's life which talk about compassion for animals and not harming them
- Veganism prescribed on Wednesdays, Fridays, and during Lent for Orthodox Christians
- Veganism is more in line with Christianity's teachings on stewardship, animal flourishing, and looking after the whole of Creation

Islam on Food

- Islamic dietary law
- Alcohol is forbidden
- Dairy, eggs, and honey are permissible
- Fish and shellfish is permissible (Sunnis); Some fish and prawns are permissible, whilst shellfish is not (Shias)
- Meat is permissible but it must be halal; no pork
- Halal monitoring committees only focus on slaughter process, but in reality there are laws governing the entirety of the animal's life to determine whether its meat will be halal (permissible) or not



Islam on Veganism

- Corruption in halal industry – meat likely not actually halal
- If there is any doubt whether meat is halal, out of obligatory precaution it should not be consumed
- Halal (permissible) and tayyib (wholesome/pure/lawful/clean): Animal-based foods are likely not halal, let alone tayyib, whereas vegan foods are.
- Multiple hadith referring to not separating mother and young, not caging birds, not stealing milk from a calf
- Multiple hadith on compassion for animals and caring for the environment
- Khilafa - stewardship
- Animal sacrifice is not obligatory

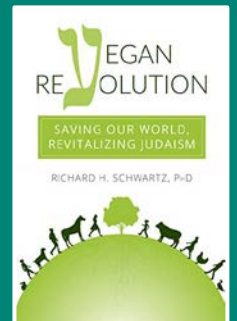
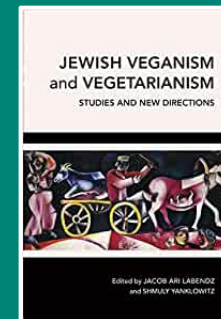
Cultural Influences on Food

- Lots of Jewish cultural foods which are not vegan (gefilte fish, chopped liver, chicken soup, salt beef sandwiches)
- Festivities are often centred around non-vegan foods (e.g. Christmas turkey, Easter lamb, animal sacrifice and meat on Eid-al-Adha, honey cake on Rosh Hashanah, cheesecake on Shavuot)
- Meat is often a centrepiece of ritual meals (e.g. chicken soup at Shabbat dinner, the Sunday roast)
- Other rituals may not naturally lend themselves to veganism (e.g. Seder plate has a bone and an egg, animal sacrifice on Eid-al-Adha)
- BUT all of this can be veganised and overcome

The Rise of Veganism in Abrahamic Religions

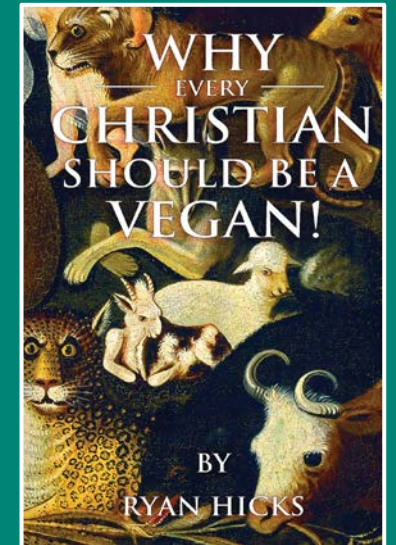
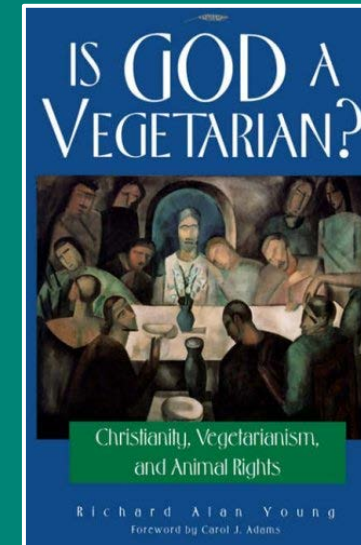
Veganism and Judaism

- 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



Experiences of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Vegans in the UK

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

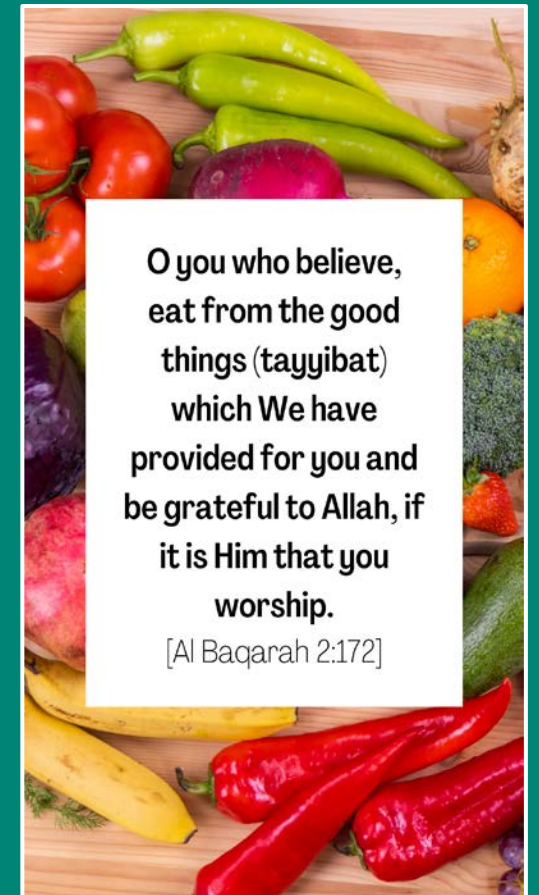
- Ethical teachings linked to compassion and peace
- Plant-based references in religious texts – Garden of Eden as vegan, Israelites punished for craving meat (Numbers 11), Prophet Muhammad ate a predominantly plant-based diet
- Stewardship – we have a responsibility to look after the Creation
- Emphasis 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:

- Jewish Kashrut law
- Islamic dietary law
- Being vegan makes it easier to follow religious dietary laws in the West
- Corruption in slaughter industries raising doubt over permissibility of animal-based products
- Conditions attached to the life of the animal are often overlooked
- Tayyib (wholesome, lawful, pure, clean) often overlooked



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



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 enabled participants to carry out religious requirements/ recommendations
- Veganism makes it easy to follow religious dietary injunctions – for some the vegan label trumped kosher/halal labels



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 |



New Ways of Being Religious

- 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
- A focus on sentience and suffering: “I ask myself, would I be happy if this was done to me?”
- Religion is transforming in modernity: followers as evaluative beings



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



References

- [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>



Thank you!

Any questions?

