



ISABEL MARGARITA
AGUILERA BORNAND

ORCID

Universidad Arturo Prat
isabelaguilerab@gmail.com

JUAN IGNACIO
ALFARO FIGUEROA

ORCID

Universidad Diego Portales
jjalfaro@uc.cl

CLAUDIA TRINIDAD
GIACOMAN HERNÁNDEZ

ORCID

Pontificia Universidad
Católica de Chile
cgiacoma@uc.cl

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Isabel Aguilera Bornand
Universidad Arturo Prat



Towards veganism. An affect theory approach to vegan trajectories thought life stories¹

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the beginning of vegan life trajectories using Ahmed's perspective on emotions. We aim to understand how emotions work in the path to veganism. We analyzed biographic interviews, specifically stories about catalytic experiences and moments of contact with animals during childhood. In both kinds of experiences, feelings of fear, disgust and love are intertwined, and are driving force behind distancing, drawing closer, identification and alterization processes that shapes the lives and social relations of the participants. We claim that catalytic experiences are entanglements of emotion, cognition and sensation where self awareness and a quest for congruence occur. We also claim that the path to veganism is made of contacts and impressions that leave traces on the bodies and resonate in the trajectories.

KEYWORDS: Veganism; emotions; catalytic experiences; animals; Ahmed.

La ruta hacia el veganismo. Una aproximación desde los afectos a través de relatos de vida

RESUMEN: Este artículo examina los inicios de trayectorias de vida veganas, siguiendo la perspectiva de Sara Ahmed respecto de la productividad social de las emociones. Nuestro objetivo es comprender cómo operan los afectos en el devenir vegano y para ello analizaremos relatos –recogidos mediante entrevistas con enfoque biográfico– sobre experiencias catalíticas y el contacto con animales durante la infancia de jóvenes veganos. En ambas instancias se observa que afectos como el miedo, la repugnancia y el amor se presentan simultáneamente, impulsando acciones de alejamiento y acercamiento, identificaciones y alterizaciones que configuran la experiencia. Sostendremos que las experiencias catalíticas corresponden a una toma de conciencia y a la búsqueda de consecuencia que descansa en el entrecruzamiento de emoción, sensación y cognición. Además, propondremos que el camino al veganismo se pavimenta de contactos e impresiones que marcan los cuerpos y resuenan en las trayectorias.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Veganismo; emociones; experiencias catalíticas; animales, Ahmed

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Introduction

During life, it can be observed different types of turning points or key moments that unleash certain quick or gradual changes, in our own choices, and practices (Giddens, 1991). Involves experiences and bonding moments that, seen in retrospect, serve as milestones or cues in the future (Denzin, 1989) or, paraphrasing Ahmed (2015), moments when you can feel your own path. These kinds of experiences are strongly observed amongst vegans, and lead to changes in food choices, identities, and the ethical-political posture regarding carnism and speciesism.²

The life path of vegans has been noted as a non-linear process with different stages: personal questioning, attempt vegetarianism, vegetarianism, veganism, and, in some cases, activism (Giacoman *et al.*, 2021). It is generally acknowledged that, in their beginnings, vegans undergo “experiences that produce a ‘click’, and often lead to the next step” (Giacoman *et al.*, 2021, p. 10). These experiences had been commonly known as conversion experiences (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992); i.e., catalytic experiences (McDonald, 2000) or epiphanies (Jamison *et al.*, 2000) and they tend to be related to an unveiling: the meat as an animal and/or animals as sentient beings, therefore Pallotta refers directly to them as “meat epiphanies” (2005, p. 63).

It is also known that these experiences, as well as the first step towards veganism, have an important emotional element, often characterized by guilt, sadness, shame, disgust, frustration, and loneliness; but also with pride, realization, and optimism (Díaz, 2012; Jacobsson y Lindblom, 2013; Jamison *et al.*, 2000; McDonald, 2000; Twine, 2014). In addition, studies about vegan activism reveal that cognitive and emotional effects, and the political uses of “moral shock”, i.e., the exposure to rhetoric and images that alter the “moral feelings” or produce a “moral awakening” (Herzog & Golden, 2009; Jacobson & Lindblom, 2013; Jasper & Poulsen, 1995; Pallotta, 2005).

² Carnism is a system of values and beliefs that normalizes and legitimizes meat consumption. Speciesism is the cultural paradigm that, positions humans as superior to the rest of the animals and naturalizes the inequality between species (Navarro, 2016).

Now, the consensus regarding the concurrence of emotions in the beginnings of the vegan path has not been translated into investigations that focus on it and through specific theoretical approaches about the role of affect in social life. Perhaps that is the reason why studies about trajectories, like those by Díaz (2012), McDonald (2000), and Pallotta (2005), tend to identify the emotions rather than ask themselves how they operate; to measure the weight of emotions in relation with cognition, instead of perceiving them as indistinguishable components in experiences, and to temporally restrain the catalytic experiences, either as events or processes.

Without going further, in the widely referenced work done by McDonald (2000), the temporality of change decisions aligns itself with the differential weight of emotions and cognition: “if the decision was made temporally close to the catalytic experience, it was typically more emotional than if it was made after a period of learning” (2000, p.14). In that way, a catalytic emotional experience would be more like an event, while cognitive experiences are a process. McDonald realizes that it is more common that people embark on a learning path and, therefore, gives a decisive value to the reading, and the logical screening of the practices during the first stage of veganism. The same approach is offered by Presser, Schally, and Vossler (2020), who talk about “epiphanies of knowledge” as milestones that distinguish an ignorant and non-vegan self, from an informed and vegan one. Although Pallotta (2005) recognizes that a cognitive act involves emotions and vice versa, he reaffirms that the slow twists and turns of life rely more on reflection, sustained questioning, and the study instead of sensations or emotions. The emotions, as the author says, would be focused on experiences prior to the moments and/or twist processes, for example, the first “meat epiphanies” during childhood.

In this article, we consider the first steps towards veganism from the affect theory, and we will wonder, following Ahmed (2015), what created emotions? Our goal is, then, comprehend how emotions function in the vegan development. We will stand that, on the one hand, that the catalytic experiences rely on a complex and non-removable intertwining of emotion, sensation, and cognition. On the other hand, we will propose the existence of

experiences that pave the way to veganism, stories about contact between human animals and non-humans that leave a mark or feeling and resonate in the trajectory of life.

We will work by interpreting the narratives that we gathered through biographic interviews of young vegans who had adopted that diet for moral reasons, ethical or political, and who defend an anti-speciesist posture. Theoretically, we will use three central ideas; the first one is the experience because it allows us to think of emotion, cognition, and sensation as inseparable elements that form the subject and its relationship with the world (Highmore, 2010); the second one, the contact, that refers the meeting between the subject and the object of feeling as a locus to appreciate the circulation of affects, and the third one, the feeling, that takes us to the historicity of affections, and the effects of the affects: experiences can leave a mark or feelings in the bodies that return to the present (Ahmed, 2015). We will observe, then, the path towards veganism as experiences of contacts, and feelings.

Thinking of veganism from the affects

Thinking about affects involves appropriating the critique of the Cartesian division between body and mind to observe what sensation, emotion, and thinking are an interweaving that experiences simultaneously in the bodies: “cultural experience is often a densely woven entanglement of all these aspects [...]. the sticky entanglements of substances and feelings, of matter and affect are central to our contact with the world” (Highmore, 2010, p. 119). From this point of view, affects are the articulators of the human experience “is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 29).

This dense and embodied way of conceiving the experience is suitable to work around food practices and veganism, because eating is an act of sensorial, cognitive, and emotional interweaving that defines our contact with the world.³ (Sutton, 2010); while

³This approach to the act of eating fluidly dialogues with the concept of experience that this article supports, but of course it does not involve all the phases of such practice. For example, Sutton himself (2001) emphasizes relevance, history, and memory in food practices; Harris (2011 [1985]) points out the emphasis on economical determinants of nutrition; Fischler (1990) observes its biosocial function; Rozin (1995)

veganism, as a practice and identity, it would be shaped through experiences where human-animal empathy is formed, and bodily sensibility is refined (Hansson & Jacobsson, 2014; Pallotta, 2005; Rothgerber & Mican, 2014; Twine, 2017).

Contemporary theories about the role of emotions and affects in social life do not represent yet an important reference for the study of veganism, but its influence has been sensed in research about veganism as a social movement. Jacobsson and Lindblom (2013) reuse concepts from the sociologist Arlie Hochschild to warn the activism as “emotional work”, where the “rules of feeling” -that regulates the emotions allowed and promoted among specific contexts- manifest themselves, for example, in common ways of feeling against the smell of meat or in the stabilization of the means of expressing empathy or outrage. Additionally, Hansson and Jacobsson (2014) state that becoming a vegan activist “implies the developing of affective-cognitive repertoires, and sensibilization processes”, as well as refined “bodily sensibility and ability to feel” (2014, p. 264). Therefore, the implementation of “affective dispositions that forms the activist subjectivity” (2014, p. 62) would be the foundation to strengthen and maintain the political commitment.

Studies about activism are aligned with an important statement of the belief about affects: the criticism of the distinction between positive and negative emotions in political analysis (Macon, 2014). Said dichotomy would assume that some affects are lean towards emancipation, while others would be oppressors and disempowering, a matter that is totally dismantled in veganism. As we indicated, the future of veganism is linked with emotions such as empathy and optimism, also with “bad feelings” (Ahmed, 2010a) like disgust, guilt, and shame; those that, far from inhibiting behavior and disempowering, present themselves as an incentive to opt to change, elements that allow the politicization and shared sensations that a practice holds (Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013; Jamison *et al.*, 2000).

considers the psychological issues associated with ingestion, while Douglas (1995, 2007 [1966]) analyzes the normative and sociocultural aspects of certain food practices, and Weismantel (1989) highlights the symbolic aspect of eating as a way to explore gender and racial order. Thus, the sensorial, cognitive and emotional facets of the act of eating are included in a complex physical, sociocultural, historical, and economic structure.

The investigations aforementioned provide a framework for viewing veganism from emotions, even so, they do not analyze the beginnings of the vegan path nor the catalytic experiences. Regarding this statement, the only work that we found was Twine's (2014) which notices how happiness (and unhappiness) flows among the young vegans, their families, and friends, and how it impacts so much with both the transitions to veganism and social media. According to the figure of "party-poopers" that Ahmed (2010b) assigns to feminists, Twine (2014) will sustain that vegans tension the hegemonic emotional order by putting in jeopardy the "omnivorous happiness" that would be forged once we all eat together.

For our approach, we will use three notions that articulately cross Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*: experience, contact, and impression. Ahmed does not establish a distinction between emotions and affections⁴ because, as she indicates, discussing the first ones implies the examinations of the bodily processes of affecting and being affected, and when it comes to thinking about emotions, we must think about how we enter in contact with objects and people (Ahmed, 2015). This contact with the world is a human experience that, as we said, cannot be understood as a body sensation, emotional, and thinking interweaving. Therefore, distinguishing between these elements "as if they could be 'experienced' as distinct realms of human 'experience'" (2015, p. 28) becomes meaningless. In other words, avoiding a pristine demarcation between affects and emotions would allow to capture the "complexity of the experience of human bodies: bodies that feel, think, and repeat cycles, improvise, make surprises, and, very often, do all of this at the same time" (Solana, 2020, p. 37).

The concept/metaphor that allows to show that affects articulate human experience as an unbreakable entity is the "impression". Using Ahmed's multifaceted nature of this word, she points out its potentiality:

An impression can have an effect on the subject's feelings ('she made an impression'). It can be a belief ('to be under an impression'). It can be an imitation or an image ('to create an impression'). Or it can be a mark on the surface ('to leave an impression'). We need to

⁴ For the discussion about the distinction between emotions and affects, consult: Solana, 2020.

remember the 'press' in an impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace (2015, pp. 27-28).

Contacts leave a mark because affects do something in and in between the subjects. They function leaving a mark since they have shifted -circulated- among ego and alter, thereby an encounter may imply "seemed touched" by the proximity of other (Ahmed, 2015). Emotions, then, are relational. They are not in the subject, but they circulate and accumulate making "affective economies" and giving place to actions, reactions, distancing and approaching relationships, generating proximities and distances, identifications, and differences (Ahmed, 2004, 2015). From this perspective, emotions are not only social, but they produce the social life.

Thinking about the path to veganism as for ethical and/or anti-speciesist motives from affection, implies considering that the contact and impression experiences are not only between humans but also among humans and animals that, frequently, are seen like humans.

Establishing a similarity between humans and animals that transcends sentience is commonly present in anti-speciesist movements, and would benefit, as Cherry states (2010), the deployment of "universalizing victimization" as a political strategy.

According to Boisseron (2018) the political-philosophical critique to the frontiers and hierarchies between species develops by building an "analogy of experiences", as to say, a similarity that goes beyond sharing the capacity of feeling pleasure and pain. In this way, not only we would be alike by nature, but we would share a history of comparable or even matchable oppressions, as dominance structures such as sexism and racism would be analogous and complementary to speciesism. Now, following Pallotta (2005), the perception of similarity among animals and humans has nothing to do only with the appropriation of argumentation for politics, but with specific experiences, being, or not, catalytic experiences, where the border between species blurs, giving room for a not necessarily wanted identification with animals.

Hansson and Jacobsson discuss about the identification as part of the experience of vegan activists and understand it as the possibility of feeling for others: “in other words, it’s the production of feelings of empathy for the pain of the other” (2014, p. 273). For instance, Ahmed observed that identification is a form of love bond: “it is an active kind of loving, which moves or pulls the subject towards another. Identification involves the desire to get closer to others by becoming like them” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 197). The identification connected to empathy assumes that we have the ability to feel for others; while being linked to love supposes a rapprochement whereby we can feel and perceive the other as we do to ourselves. This last point is what Pallotta (2008) believes to be characteristic of vegan animal rights activists who develop some kind of empathy based on the blurring of boundaries between species. An empathy that we could refer to as affinity and alignment that “an emotional response that entails mental projection into another’s situation and vicariously feeling what that person would, as if it were happening directly to you” (2008, p. 160).

Methodology

During July and September 2020, we conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with a biographical approach towards vegan women and men between 20 and 35 years old living in Santiago.⁵

The interviews with a biographical approach are broadly used in studies about turning points during life and general epiphanies, as in research that observes the vegan and/or vegan activist future (Abrams, 2014; Green, 2016; McDonald, 2000; McKenzie & Watts, 2020; Pallotta, 2005; Twine, 2014; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). These interviews allow us to know the longitudinal dynamics of human life, taking as its center the subject as an “agent situated in historical contexts and social positions linked to dynamic and

⁵ This sample design responds to the purpose of the major research in which this study is inserted: comprehend the adoption and practice of veganism between the younger people from different social classes in the city of Santiago.

diverse connections” (Tabilo, 2020, p. 1). It refers, therefore, to a conducive approach to study the life paths by linking the individual and subjective with the social.

Due to the mobility restrictions because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were carried out by video call and the following topics were discussed: family and childhood; adoption of veganism; food practices and other consumptions; barriers and facilitators of the practice. Each topic was elaborated by using open questions orientated to cause a “narrative unfolding of life experiences” (Güelman, 2013, p. 58) to approach the meanings that the subjects attribute to their experiences, obtain detailed descriptions of their paths, and gain access to the assessment of events (Tabilo, 2020). This narrative unfolding lies on evocation, a memory exercise that requires to be situated, from the present, in relation to groups, spaces, and situations of the past (Güelman, 2013).

Participants were selected through a public call on social media, they all signed an acknowledgment of consent and the information was anonymous for its analysis⁶. The analysis of the content was carried out by open coding with the MAXQDA program, and then, timelines were elaborated case by case, identifying the phases of the path as well as the turning points. Observing these lines gave origin to the subject of this article, and cases were selected for its development by following the next criteria: a) ethical motivations linked to animal suffering and/or animal rights; b) density and extension of the speech about catalytic experiences and relationships with animals; c) explicit sensorial references and emotions linked with such experiences and relationships. This decreased the number of cases to 18.

According to Cornejo, Mendoza, and Rojas (2008), and regarding the analysis of the biographic interviews, we developed an intra-case reading intended to highlight the uniqueness of each history in relation to catalytic experiences and relationships with animals. Subsequently, a transversal analysis was performed where the main themes that will be considered in the following sections were identified. Lastly, we put into practice an interpretive approach orientated to “the reconstruction of the point of view

⁶ The names that we will use are pseudonyms.

of the actor [...] and the microsocial relationships from which the actors are involved” (Sautu, 1999, p. 25).

Experiences of consciousness and consequences

In this section we will consider tales of catalytic experiences and lessons that allowed the participants to make the next step in their paths, to observe how sensations, emotions, and learning processes are connected to them.

These stories are centered around the notions of consciousness and consequence. The first one is used as a synonym for realizing how the world is. The second, is to indicate the desire to act in order of what has been done or is being done consciously. Even when, in some stories, consciousness appears as an epiphany that precedes the search for coherence; consciousness and consequence are not classified as stages of a process but as shades of a complex experience. Most tales show becoming conscious and looking for the consequence are synchronic and complementary issues. Consciousness leads to consequence while searching to be consequent results in making decisions consciously or a broadening of consciousness.

In those where becoming conscious was mentioned, we identified two speech logs. On one side, one that emphasizes on senses, in particularly the vision, and appears with strength in cases where the absent referent is present (Adams, 2010), in other words, now we see an animal instead of food:

[...] I think what bothered me at first was seeing the meat and associating it directly with a corpse, you know? However, some yogurt makes it look less shocking. [Seeing meat] is more graphic, because you see the muscle and the blood, how the animal is (Luis, 28 years old, vegan since 6 years ago, lives with his mother, lower class, interview, 07/23/2020).

Seeing is used here in a literal way, it is not about "opening the eyes" as a metaphor for awareness, but vision perceived directly as a way of relating to the world and what it affects.

Hence the difference between watching meat and yogurt. Even though Luis has already become aware of animal suffering through a “meat epiphany” (Pallotta, 2005), he does not feel compassion in front of a yogurt because the perception is blocked by the packaging. Having a “affective experience” when in contact with a yogurt may occur, maybe, before a process of “re-engineering” of affective cognitive repertoires and “sensibilization” that some animal rights activists go through (Hansson & Jacobsson, 2014, p. 263), but rarely at the beginning of the path.

The second log to talk about becoming aware accentuates emotions and affective bonds, and it can be appreciated in cases where is revealed the animal as a sentient being similar to oneself. For example Maria’s case, who became vegan at the age of 12:

I have always had dogs, since I was a little girl, I had a dog named Alba for a really long time. Alba was like my older sister, my parents went out for the weekend and we stayed with my sister, with Alba, she was very important to me [...] And I felt really anxious about the topic, I did not knew what to do with that, and I started to vomit the meat; if they served me meat I would throw up because I could not think of something else. I talked with my parents, and I said: “I cannot eat meat anymore, it grosses me out, I feel pity about it, I do not know what to do” [...] At the end it was like, how can I... I would never eat a dog, why would I eat a cow? If they are not so different, my own is not as well (Maria, 23 years old, vegan since 1 year and 4 months ago, live with her parents, high class, interview, 07/09/2020).

The capacity to establish an analogy between a loved animal and animals in general -and therefore of “generalizing empathy”- is, according to Rothgerber and Mican (2014), a common feature among people who avoid meat consumption. That seems exactly what consciously Maria did: find similarities between her dog-sister, dogs in general, cows, and herself. As stated by Ahmed (2015), we would say that love united Maria and Alba to then create a bond with the rest of the animals. In this bond of identifying order, the differences between humans and animals are eliminated, and between types of animals; therefore, a standard that defines what deserves love and what does not is destabilized: similarity (Pallotta, 2005). According to the author, the social esteem assigned to the animals is according to the distance -culturally established- that divides them from humans. Thus,

empathy is distributed decreasingly following this distribution: “humans, pets, wildlife, farm animals, and vermin” (2005, p.122). Maria’s case demonstrates that emotions function disrupting that distribution and, hence, removing a culturally stabilized emotional norm.

On the other side, this experience of awareness operates a paralyzing anguish - Maria does not know what to do and delays the conversation with her parents- that breaks through in the form of vomit, shame, and disgust.

Ahmed (2015) claims that repugnance emerges during the encounter between ego and something that is identified as harmful. Here, what is harmful -something that cannot be incorporated into the body or must be removed from it- is the meat that, to the point that it had been classified as non-edible, is rejected (Fischler, 1990). But repugnance does not only lead to rejection, but it is also an ambivalent affection “involving the desire for, or an attraction towards, the very objects that are felt to be repellent” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 136), in other words, has effects of rapprochement and detachment. The story of Maria demonstrates that the detachment from meat is parallel to the approach with animals, and even though they are not the same object -meat from an animal is not the same as an animal-, might be interchangeable due to their proximity (Ahmed, 2015). In sum, the presence of repugnance, anguish, grief, and filial love – “good” and “bad” affects- between Maria, Alba, the animals, and Maria’s parents are setting a scenario of awareness and change in the practices that implies reconsidering who we are, as well as the perception of non-human animals.

Along with consciousness, comes the idea of consequence. The latter, or its opposite, inconsistency, is usually presented as part of the scrutiny of food and political practices prior to the adoption of veganism. Jamison, Wenk, and Parker (2000) suggest that sayings about consequence exhibit the guilt and shame of who knows what is right, and yet does nothing. Meanwhile, Presser, Schally, and Vossler (2020) think that knowing about animal suffering, but not changing the practices or doing it inconsistently can generate “moral repugnance” towards oneself (2020, pp. 723-724). Finally, Greenebaum (2012) draws attention to the guilt and frustration that some vegans feel for ethical reasons

about not achieving the moral standards they believe to be those of an “authentic” vegan. In each one of these cases, “negative” emotions lead towards the seeking of consequences, and we observed that too in our research, where the perception of inconsequentiality is expressed as self-criticism or as feeling bad about oneself, and that is a trigger for change. But our discoveries indicate that guilt and discomfort are not caused only because it is known or is not done, but because they appear as emotions concomitant to the learning process and may even precede it.

Sofia became an anti-speciesist vegan from a feminist background, and a former doubt crossed her political formation:

[...] it is unfair and inconsistent fighting against a system that oppresses us for being woman, and you oppressing other species, I find that inconsistent. That is how I got in, how we got in. It seems like something that I had in myself just woke up, that doubt that I had since I was a child triggered it [...] But when I started to think about it seriously was when I started to attend some feminist workshops and seminars, and they discussed about the topic of anti-speciesism (Sofia, 27 years old, 2 years vegan, lives with her son, lower class, interview, 07/28/2020).

The analogy between women and animals, sexism and specism, appears as an inconsistency trigger and the awakening of a childhood doubt. This doubt would not resolve until later during the interview, because the story about the turning point is situated, foremost, during the learning of the anti-speciesist argument. This latter, Sofia says, makes her think about it seriously. However, we know that feelings of discomfort in relation with children in, for example, meat consumption, can configure a framework of “predispositions” towards veganism (Pallotta, 2008), thus, we will state that the perceived in consequence can be linked not only to the acquisition of knowledge, but also to something that returns to the present and marks the experiences during the workshops. We will return to this point with more detail in the next section.

Meeting consequences through learning is also Pilar’s path, who thanks to love and constant pressure from a college classmate realizes that it is inconsistent to love animals

and eat them. She decided to attend an animal protection law workshop with lectures, presentations, and evaluations where it seemed it was very relevant what she learned the way she did:

Even though I knew it was bad because it was obvious. After all, one knows that they kill animals, like, that was not strong enough for me [...] but finally understanding that it is an ethical position, when you realize the motive behind all this, and you really internalize it, you study it, you give yourself the courage to do it because is not easy, because obviously, it is hard to realize it. Realize that you were wrong, your mom was wrong, all your family was wrong, that the world is terrible, and that the human is the worst thing that ever existed in life, how everything is horrendous. Going through that process obviously is not easy (Pilar, 26 years old, vegan since 9 months ago, high class, lives with her parents, interview, 07/20/2020).

It is known that killing animals is wrong, but it is not enough to encourage a change. That is the inconsequence that is faced with hostile self-demandingness by means of formal studies. In this regard, the statement of McDonald (2000) regarding that reading and thinking are key to making a decision is confirmed, however, the understanding is not only linked to weighting, but also to affection. Learning has a cost, and requires “encouraging ourselves” or, in other words, being prepared to have a harsh time. In Spanish the Word “Lata” (“darse la lata”) can be translated as a synonym for boredom, discomfort, and/or disappointment..., it never means something nice, on the contrary, is a pressure, that in Pilar’s case produces a change in the way of viewing the world at the level of subverting the hierarchy between species – humans are the worst – and to generalize horror as a sign of existence.

In Nicolas’ case, it is confirmed that learning implies being affected. His transition from omnivorism to veganism was a “quick click” given by an intense exposure to lectures that introduced him to “the philosophical, political reasons [...] of the ethical subject, the utilitarian subject, abolition”. That is how he realized his inconsequence and the guilt appeared: “What I am doing is super wrong [because] I already considered animals simply as people”. Then, he became vegan and felt for the first time compassion fatigue:

“Questioning has often worn me out, and also the compassion fatigue, ... you enter some kind of depressive spiral, you feel that you could do more that you are already doing” (Nicolas, 27 years old, 8 years vegan, lower class, lives with his parents, interview, 07/08/2020).

As we see, seeking for consequences is linked to the accumulation of knowledge through the study and the capacity to make decisions thanks to this comprehension. But at the same time, the stories demonstrate that looking for veganism does not simply come from a logical conclusion, but from putting ourselves to be affected by scientific and philosophical arguments, by the relationship with other humans -friends, activists, relatives- and by the animals:

[...] knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world (Ahmed, 2015, p. 260).

Conscience and consequence are then notions that talk about catalytic experiences, making decisions, and the first actions orientated towards veganism. Both of them refer to complex experiences, where emotion, feeling, and cognition are inseparable. In this framework, the affects show their social productivity: they approach and distance, touch, give way to understanding, question the self, create worlds and, of course, they mobilize politically. This type of story confirms that, simultaneously, “ideas and bodies, speeches and affective resonances are part of the political life” (Solana, 2020, p. 35). Affects, then, shapes the subjectivity of the younger ones, and forms them as future political actors, they do it in a way that escapes the logic of an ideological conviction as a privileged motive of the political transformation.

Outstanding Contacts

The recollection of the biographical interviews brought out stories that affected the lives of the participants. This refers to contacts that occurred during childhood and adolescence, where animals play an important role.

Childhood experiences with animals are an important part of the study of vegan trajectories (McDonald, 2000). In addition to the association between attachment to animals during childhood, and rejecting meat in adulthood (Rothgerber & Mican, 2014), it has been noted that realizing our own capacity to hurt animals and the experiences when the frontier between species becomes blurry form milestones in these trajectories. Therefore, going fishing, hunting, dissecting an animal, seeing the veins in a piece of meat, and realizing that we have the same veins are identified as catalytic experiences intersected by guilt, disgust, and grief (Pallotta, 2005; Presser *et al.*, 2020).

The stories that we will address herein are not identified as catalytic experiences by the participants, but as moments that left an impression. Some of them are the general context that led them towards veganism, and therefore could be comparable to what Pallotta (2005) identifies as predispositions. Other moments, however, unexpectedly burst into the discourse from a back room. In this sense, the information about outstanding contacts that show the route to veganism is paved with resonances where the traces of the past are visible. Let's start by considering the memories that disrupt and break the story of the vegan future.

Bonds and emotions that returns unexpectedly

Magdalena started quitting her meat consumption when she realized the relation between ribs and animals: "I stopped eating pork when I was 14 years old, because the first thing I saw were the ribs. I mean, eating the ribs was, like, the closest thing to an animal, it was like the most caveman-like thing" (28 years old, vegan for 9 years, medium class, lives with her parents, interview, 07/14/2020). After that, she started to see pigs in the Vienna sausages and in hamburgers, and thus she gradually develops a story in which her disgust for pork ribs becomes more and more intense towards meat in general. Along the lines of previous research, her story presented the relationship between disgust and the adoption of plant-based diets, which would be more common between those who adopt veganism for moral reasons (Rozin *et al.*, 1997). Even so, unexpectedly, the story about her path is interposed by something forgotten and other affects:

I forgot to mention you one super important thing, I met a sanctuary, that is called "Santuario de igualdad" ["Sanctuary of Equality"]. By that time, I was not vegan, my dog died and we were in the Buin Zoo, and just when we were about to put my dog to sleep, I saw some little girls that were with some baby goats, like going to rehab, and I approached them [...] and she tells me: 'we are a sanctuary that takes care of this type of animals'. I researched them, and became the godmother of a piglet, as I had always wanted to have one, and when one was a godmother, after a period of time, they let you go and visit your godson (Magdalena, interview, 07/14/2020).

This story brings disgust in dialogue with other emotions, temporalities, and contacts. Grieving for the puppy, perhaps the pain of loss, takes Magdalena to an encounter with people that love animals in a particular way, people that, given to the name of the sanctuary, had already established an analogy between species and generalizing empathy. Then, that encounter allows the establishment of a relationship of godfathering with a piglet, an approach between species that attract it by motherly love. From that point, we can hypothesize the resonance between the disgust experiences in front of the pork ribs, and the scenes of love and comfort with a little pig. The contact with the pig godson could have left an impression which pressure is felt in front of the pork ribs, and caveman food. Who would dare to eat their godson, if not a savage?

Let's consider a new story about grief and human-animal contact to see how the affects that circulate outside catalytic experiences temporally disrupt the trajectories.

Alejandra associates her start with veganism with feeling guilty because her knowledge and convictions were not translated into political action. During the interview the memory arises: "Now that you asked, I remembered that event that I had never thought about". It is, now, about a fundamental "click":

When my great-grandfather died was the first dead of the family, and I think I was like 10 years old. I was very surprised that I was crying when they told me he passed away, and my dog at that time kind of cuddled with me. That shocked me, like, I never imagined that the dog, my dog, would realize that I was sad. I cried and he just, like, stayed with me, like he wanted to hug me. I think that was a turning point, there I realized that he is not like the

dogs that just take care of the house, he is your companion, your pal, your friend too (Alejandra, 24 years old, vegan since 8 months ago, medium class, lives with her parents, interview, 09/11/2020).

The cardinal change that is observed in this story is the abandonment of "mascotism", a constituent element of anti-speciesist veganism (Méndez, 2020), that gives place to the construction of a bond with someone else that is not me but like me. That possibility of identification, according to Alejandra's interpretation, is crossed by emotions that bring people, and animals, closer: her sadness is felt by Anku (the dog), who does not express it by crying, but with cuddles and hugs, a skin-to-skin comfort, that could express an I want to reach out to you, touch you "to feel the loved one's pain, to feel the pain on her behalf" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 63). This contact fully demonstrates the perception of animal-human empathy to the point that Anku is represented as a being capable of having an emotional response to another's emotion (Rothgerberg & Mican, 2014).

Affects, similar to the previous section, are linked to the emergency of a conscious action that looks very comparable with an epiphany because it is a moment that will change the perspective about the differences between species and will define new methods of the relationship between them. From this experience, the animals would be like me, companions, and friends. However, this epiphany does not lead to the decision to stop eating all animal-based foods. The step towards veganism, actually, is signed by the guilt that in consequence produces, but nowadays we can say that this guilt is framed within a history of impressions.

Present Impressions

Let's review now scenes that are situated in the memory, experiences from the past that continue in the present. These stories are stated by participants who had once lived in rural areas or visited relatives in the countryside, and reflect the fear, disgust, and astonishment experienced there. The stories are about contact with animals, and with animal suffering, where to hear and listen to the death of the other will hurt deeply as a cut. They are also

stories about human contact that, given to its practices, intended to be cruel, will be represented as "savages". These scenes show something that has been already mentioned in Magdalena's story, the ribs, and the cavemen: the role of emotions and feelings during the creation of otherness (Ahmed, 2000; Herzorg & Golden, 2009).

As we saw, Sofia associates her first steps to veganism with the participation in anti-speciesist feminism workshops where the "doubt that I always had since I was a little girl" arouses. Later in the interview, the origin of the doubt can be perceived: the past that "just kept ignoring", and experiences "that left me thinking". Is the story about contact with death, and "savagery" articulated around fear and the urban/rural dichotomies, civilized/savage. The first scene that shocks Sofia happens when she is 8 or 9 years old during some "vacations in the south":

This is when my mind changed, it kept spinning, because in the south they act like savages -maybe to say it- to eat. I remember that during a weekend that we were there I saw a little goat, "ow, what a cute goat!", I still have some photos of me with that goat. One day we woke up and heard, like, screams from children, but it was not coming from them, it was coming from the goat, because they were killing him. Overall, for me was very shocking to see the difference between living in Santiago and living in a city in the South, that there, they literally kill animals and leave them hanging outside a house or in the backyard, those things shocked me. I remember that I did not want to eat anything because I found it very cruel [...], he had a lot of goats, but there was a very little one, like a baby, and that was the coolest thing, to hold him in my arms, be with him, and him letting me, that was the same that they later killed and I did not want to eat, besides, they scream horribly⁷ (Sofia, interview, 07/28/2020).

The immediate consequence from this episode is the food rejection. The meat that she will eat in the future makes an appearance in the form of the little goat and becomes inedible. Like with fear, rejection does not come from what "is here" but from what is approaching and "involves an anticipation of hurt or injury" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 109). What is

⁷ During the last article we consider looking at this abstract from another analytic perspective. Consult: Giacomani *et al.*, 2021.

approaching is the meat, the savages, and the future injury that is not about the goat - already dead-, but about herself. The impact of testifying the death and consumption of the other that cried like a child, and who before cradled like a baby, as to say, like another human, produces a backlash -from the meat- and seems to transform the geographic distance between Santiago and the South into a moral distance between life forms.

Sadness and fear are also involved in Sandra's story:

I was there [in the country], I was with my mom and I saw everything, when they went to look for the pig, then when they hit him on the head with an axe, and I got scared because the pig started to scream and running, he did not die right away [...], after that, I run back to the house and I remember I started crying, because my mom came to see me and asked me what was wrong, and I told her that what I saw scared me. But what I remember the most are the screams, because they were human-like (22 years old, vegan since 7 years ago, medium class, lives with her mother, interview, 07/16/2020).

Even though Sandra does not make any reference towards savagery, a key element in the story of Sofia, the similarity in the way they communicate their experiences is astonishing. The inseparability between listening, seeing, and fear is repeated; the distancing effect -either in the form of rejection or flight- is produced by emotions and, of course, the perception of the animal as similar to me. It talks about, then, stories of individual experiences that might seem shared. That can happen because these scenes, reconstructed in the present, are a vague look at the past, subsequent to the affective learning -in particular of the rules of feeling- that involves becoming vegan (Jacobson & Lindblom, 2013).

The analogy between the goat and the child, the pig and the human person, demonstrates two forms of identification. The first one, that something that manifests in the possibility of feeling for someone else, and that Hansson & Jacobssons (2014) name as empathy towards the pain of others. The second one, shows "an active kind of loving" signed by the desires of approaching the other (Ahmed, 2015, p. 197). The death screams open the path to feel for the other and as the other.

Let's get back to fear to ask ourselves, what is feared? Similar to the repugnancy being associated with injury, fear it is with threats and the preservation of "not simply of 'me', but also 'us', or 'what is' [...] or even 'life itself'" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 108). As a result, other humans are constituted as terrible (savages), and the death of another falls upon the little girls as a warning of what is approaching that warrants flight. The fear experimented while being in contact with death, by proximity and resonance, would make one escape from death itself. In this sense, what is searched to keep is oneself. Is about keep living and not becoming a savage through ingestion.

Let's take a closer look to this savagism-death relationship by introducing the second scene that marked Sofia's life:

I remember one time they called me over to the kitchen, like to make me a joke. I remember entering the kitchen and there was the table, and something covered up with a cloth, and they were like "come, come watch this"...and they uncovered it, it was the head of the little goat. I ended up bad, it was very shocking, but for them it was hilarious; they grabbed the head and kissed it, like playing, that was traumatic for me (interview, 07/28/2020).

This quote offers a key element: savagery and, therefore, the elements on which the alteration is based. Cruel savagery is expressed in the act of killing, the way of killing, and in the manipulation of the corpse: hung, exposed, profaned, torn to pieces. A manipulation that encourages laughter and mockery and ends with a ridiculous kiss. Savagery makes it real that "there is something worse than death, and that the death of someone else, a death with a story, not only the remains of organic matter" (Michelson, 2022, p. 27).

In addition, being in the South translates into a distancing through fear and repugnance that resonated in later experiences. Those first contacts with death and savagery find their way to veganism. So, even if there is a previous catalytic experience that encourages a twist in the trajectory, rather than the beginning of such experience, can be the end of a process. A moment of cut preceded by moments that had to be lived:

One time I was talking with her [mother], and she told me she felt guilty for allowing me to see that, but I told her it was not her fault, that maybe if I had never seen it, I would not have become vegan or vegetarian. So, perhaps at the time, it was still shocking, because I was a child and I got scared, but I do not regret it... I think it was something I needed to experience (Sandra, interview, 07/16/2020).

Conclusions

Alongside these pages, we have observed the beginning of these trajectories towards veganism, following the question: how does affects function there? Raising this question within the framework as a part of a line of studies that consistently refers to emotions that remains necessary for two reasons. First, because it is a formulation based on a theoretical view about social productivity of affects that have been poorly used in this field. Second, because the few investigations that are placed from there, seek to understand vegan activism, not catalytic experiences and/or the first steps on a route, are almost always, long, and tortuous.

To interpret the stories about the participants we have used three articulated concepts: experience, contact, and impression, and we have considered catalytic experiences and interactive moments previous to the orientation to veganism that have marked them.

Catalytic experiences are described as a consciousness development linked to a search for consequence. The stories demonstrate the crosslinking between emotion, sensation, and cognition, even when the first two appear with more emphasis in the tales of consciousness development, and the cognition in the tales of consequence.

Clearly, as the investigations by McDonald (2000), Pallotta (2005), and Presser, Schally & Vossler (2020) suggest, the participants tend to relate the change of their practices with the application of rationality and the learning through lectures, workshops, and seminars. Even so, our analysis shows that these are instances of circulation of affects, moments where the subjects are touched by the vegan argumentation and, at the same time, by their affective bonds with humans and animals. From there, we will say that the predisposition to be affected is inseparable from learning. As some participants say

“knowing something is wrong is not enough”, what is missing does not seem to be further reading and information, but to widen the sensory and emotional repertoire or, in the words of Hansson & Jacobsson (2014), to sharpen the ability to feel.

On the other side, the analysis of the outstanding contacts -prior to veganism and early in the biographic- reflects that emotions press leaving a mark and resonate in temporally distant experiences. Some of these marks are remembered as milestones that paved the way to veganism, others, however, appeared without notice and its weight in the vegan future is unclear. In both cases, it is observed that affects like fear, repugnance, and love function encouraging actions and reactions of distancing and rapprochement: they get humans closer to the animals, and distance other humans that take place in alterity, as they are referred to as cavemen and savages. Likewise, the similarity of the statements regarding children’s experiences reinforces that being vegan involves the appropriation of norms of feeling and behavior, insofar as a common way of expressing feelings about specific topics like abuse and death. The existence of these norms, however, shall not lead us linearly to interpret experience as socially and normatively determined. On the contrary, if we attach to this theory about affects, what we should observe in the future are the tensions between the incorporation of norms and the irruption of affects in the trajectories of vegan life.

Lastly, both in catalytic experiences and in the prior experiences that are not meant as such, we can confirm that the circulation of affects between human animals and non-humans enables identification and a blurring of the border between species. Now we consider a limitation of this study and two open discussions. The first one, the type of stories that we analyzed makes it look like the transition to veganism was influenced mainly by the one-to-one social relationships rather than collective relationships, however, the bibliography indicates that relationships with vegan collectives, family dynamics, and groups of friends are key to the vegan future (Giacoman *et al.*, 2021; Twine, 2014; Hansson & Jacobsson, 2014).

Regarding the open discussions, let it be noted that working on the evocation from settled veganism involves approaching an interpretation of prior emotions to learn the

norms of feeling. The stories recreate moments of contact and affection from a normative emotional framework and, therefore, they probably interweave normative speech and evocative speech. Critically observing this intertwining is a task that will remain unresolved.

Besides, we have not explored in depth the moral aspect of the stories, but the shift between affects and moral economies can be observed. The statements are crossed by notions of good and bad, and by a hierarchy of values because experience requires evaluation: “we judge something to be good or bad according to how it affects us” (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 31). Now, because the bad (and the good) seems to be linked to affects, its content is slightly blurred, what is wrong and why? Is not a simple question when the moral is involved with affects, which tend towards the unconscious and the indeterminate (Gregg y Seigworth, 2010).

From this perspective, questioning the shift between emotions and moral economies would be useful because in the vegan case, that is not appreciated a total alignment between emotions and moral judgment, in the way of considering as good what produces pleasure, and as bad what produces pain. A lot of vegans miss meat consumption, and they are tempted to (Giacoman *et al.*, 2021; Greenebaum, 2012), there is a pleasure in that consumption that is bad. Many vegans do not have catalytic experiences, instead, they suffer from them, and yet seem to have a happy and good ending: becoming vegan.

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ISABEL MARGARITA AGUILERA BORNAND

Chilean. PhD in Anthropology by the Universidad de Barcelona with a degree in Sociology by the Universidad de Chile. Currently working as a researcher for the PhD in Social Sciences at the Universidad Autónoma de Chile, Chile. Areas of research: anthropology of food and consumption; representations and racial-ethnic alteration; common nationalisms. Recent publications: "Adaptación metodológica en un contexto de pandemia. Una aproximación reflexiva a las entrevistas por videollamadas" (2022) "Transición política y gastrodiplomacia en Chile. Reconciliarse en la mesa" (2021).

JUAN ALFARO

Chilean. Sociologist in the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and student of the Magíster en Métodos para la Investigación Social de la Universidad Diego Portales, Chile. Areas of investigation: sociology of cultural consumption, sociology of alimentation, and sociology of elites. Recent publications: "Construcción de privilegios y actitudes hacia la riqueza: percepciones y creencias de madres y padres de colegios de elite en Chile" (2022) and "Pandemic patriotism: Official speeches in the face of the global Covid-19 crisis" (2022).

CLAUDIA GIACOMAN HERNÁNDEZ

Chilean. PhD in Sociology by the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and Adjunct Professor of the Instituto de Sociología de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Areas of research: sociology of alimentation, of the body, and health. Recent publications: "Dance to resist: emotions and protest in Lindy Hop dancers during October 2019 Chilean rallies" (2022) y "Becoming vegan: A study of career and habitus" (2021).