


VEGANISM AS A CULTURAL AND IDENTITY PHENOMENON: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2025.008-019>**Annibal Gouvêa Franco¹ and Melissa Marcílio Batista².****ABSTRACT**

This article analyzes veganism as a cultural and identity phenomenon, exploring its implications in contemporary social, political, and cultural relations. The research adopts an anthropological approach and investigates how veganism goes beyond a food practice, functioning as a symbolic system that articulates ethical, environmental and social values. The study examines veganism as a marker of social distinction, which transforms consumption norms and creates new dynamics of belonging. Using theories about identity, morality and consumption, the research demonstrates how veganism challenges social norms and proposes a reconfiguration of cultural and social boundaries. In addition, it analyzes the practice as a critique of the hegemonic model of consumption, highlighting issues of social justice, animal rights, and environmental sustainability. The article reveals veganism as a transformative sociocultural force, with the potential to influence public policies and promote social change, expanding the understanding of veganism as a collective phenomenon of symbolic reconfiguration in today's societies.

Keywords: Ethical Consumption. Cultural identity. Social Identity. Sustainability. Veganism.

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INTRODUCTION

Veganism has been consolidated as a sociocultural phenomenon of wide expansion, transcending the food sphere and manifesting itself as a complex system of meanings. In the field of anthropology, food practices are recognized as symbolic expressions that structure social identities, ways of belonging, and relationships with the environment. More than an individual dietary choice, veganism is articulated with systems of beliefs and values that reconfigure the symbolic order and the regimes of social classification, becoming an object of moralization and distinction.

The emergence of veganism as a contemporary phenomenon can be analyzed under an ethnographic and interpretative approach, in the terms of Geertz (2008), which makes it possible to understand how this practice is inserted in the dynamics of cultural signification. Through this framework, it is observed that veganism is not limited to a set of dietary restrictions, but in the production of categories that order the social world and reflect culturally constructed classification systems. In this sense, Douglas (1991) contributes to the analysis of food taboos and their relationship with structures of purity and contamination, while the structuralist approach of Lévi-Strauss (1964), which analyzes food through binary oppositions such as raw/cooked, can be applied to veganism by considering that this practice reformulates traditional distinctions and proposes new symbolic criteria to classify foods.

In addition to a diet, veganism can be seen as a manifestation of broader social values, permeating issues of ethics, the environment, and social interactions. Their growth cannot be interpreted only as a reflection of individual choices, but must be inserted within a broader symbolic field, where food and consumption are means of communication and establishment of social boundaries. Bourdieu (1989) analyzes social distinction and symbolic capital in consumption practices, which can be applied to food by considering that certain eating habits can function as markers of status and belonging. This discussion is strengthened by the contributions of Miller (1998), who investigates consumption as a space for the construction and negotiation of identities and social belongings.

In the field of moralization of consumption, Rozin (1999) argues that certain food choices are no longer neutral and are interpreted under a normative bias, acquiring a moral dimension that influences behaviors and social interactions. This process can be observed in veganism, where the act of not consuming animal products often becomes a marker of ethical values and principles. This moralization also contributes to the formation of a vegan collective identity, as analyzed by Morant et al. (2016), who highlight how this eating practice is inserted in social dynamics of belonging and engagement. At the same time,

Valena and Carbonai (2014) examine veganism as a political practice, emphasizing its role in contesting hegemonic structures of food production and in social mobilizations aimed at environmental justice and animal rights.

In this context, its relationship with sustainability issues will be discussed, considering the influence of biotechnology and agricultural production (Twine, 2010), as well as the integration of veganism into sustainable practices and ESG (Franco and Batista, 2024). Finally, the role of alternative consumption networks in the structuring of veganism as a cultural and economic practice will be analyzed (Goodman et al., 2012).

The methodological approach adopted in this study is theoretical, based on a review of academic literature to support the analysis. To do so, we use classic and contemporary references from anthropology, consumer studies, and the social sciences. The article is structured into three main sections: the relationship between veganism and culture, its connection to social identity, and its impact on sustainable practices. Each of these sections will be developed from the articulation between theory and critical discussion of the concepts involved.

Through this approach, it is expected to contribute to studies on veganism as a phenomenon that goes beyond activism, food and consumption, consolidating itself as a system of meanings and belonging within today's societies. Finally, this study seeks to deepen the debate on the processes of moralization and resignification of habits, examining how the act of consuming of vegans not only reflects preexisting social structures, but also contributes to the creation of new dynamics of distinction and belonging.

VEGANISM AS A CULTURAL PHENOMENON

Veganism, as a practice and lifestyle, cannot be reduced to just a food choice or a political movement. It is also configured as a cultural phenomenon, involving symbolic systems that guide behaviors, values, and social identities. When incorporated by different social groups, veganism comes to be interpreted not only as a dietary restriction, but also as a socially loaded practice

In this section, we will explore veganism from the perspective of Cultural Anthropology, analyzing how it is lived and interpreted in different social contexts. From this perspective, we can understand how veganism acquires the status of a cultural phenomenon, shaping and being shaped by belief systems, values, and collective representations.

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE AND ITS APPLICATION TO VEGANISM

The concept of culture, as developed by Geertz (2008), is crucial to understanding veganism as a cultural phenomenon. The author defines culture as a set of shared meanings that the members of a society interpret and practice. Food, for him, is not only a utilitarian practice, but a symbolic system that organizes and transmits values and social norms. This view allows us to understand veganism not only as a food choice, but as a system of meanings that structures social relations and establishes identities.

In this sense, veganism can be analyzed as a cultural practice that goes beyond simple dietary restrictions. It is constituted as a symbolic system where food is classified not only as sources of nutrition, but as markers of ethical and social values. Veganism is articulated with issues of morality and identity, reflecting, through their food choices, an ethical, environmental and social positioning. Thus, the adoption of veganism by social groups connects to a shared interpretation that involves ethics and the collective sense of belonging.

Douglas (1991), in his analysis of food taboos, argues that certain foods are morally classified as "pure" or "impure" according to cultural and social norms. Although she doesn't directly refer to veganism, we can apply her theory by looking at how veganism creates its own food boundaries. In veganism, animal foods are often seen as 'unclean', while plant-based alternatives become symbols of purity, reflecting a set of ethical and social values that exclude animal exploitation.

Lévi-Strauss (1964), by analyzing binary oppositions such as "raw" and "cooked" in the food context, offers a key to understanding how veganism proposes new food categories. By rejecting animal products, veganism not only redefines these traditional distinctions but also transforms moral perceptions about food, which reorganizes what is considered ethical and acceptable in contemporary societies, reflecting a cultural movement that goes beyond food to question the foundations of the human relationship with nature.

VEGANISM AND FOOD TABOOS

The concept of food taboo is fundamental to understanding how veganism, by asserting itself as a cultural practice, establishes symbolic boundaries and dietary restrictions within a society. According to Douglas (1991), food taboos are not limited to arbitrary prohibitions, but function as classification systems that regulate what is considered "pure" or "impure" within a given culture. For the author, foods are "classified" according to cultural rules, and these categorization systems are used to maintain social and cultural order.

Within the context of veganism, these food taboos can be seen as a set of social rules that involve the exclusion of foods of animal origin. The choice not to consume meat, dairy products or other products of animal origin, as it is socially recognized as an ethical attitude, creates a moral distinction between those who consume such products and those who reject these foods. This process of exclusion reflects a cultural norm that emphasizes respect for animal life and concern for environmental sustainability. Therefore, vegans are not only making a food or even consumption choice in general terms, but reaffirming cultural norms that reflect a shared worldview.

Douglas (1991) argues that cultural classifications around food have significant symbolic power. By classifying certain foods as impure and others as pure, society establishes not only a system of meanings about what can or cannot be consumed, but also about who is considered part of a certain social group. In the case of veganism, these food taboos act as markers of identity and belonging and extend beyond food, as the act of following a vegan philosophy and lifestyle symbolizes an adherence to a set of ethical and cultural values that go far beyond the act of eating.

In addition, the exclusion of certain foods can also be analyzed from the perspective of purity and contamination, an essential concept in Douglas' (1991) study on food taboos. Animal products are often considered "unclean" by those who follow the vegan philosophy, as they are associated with the exploitation of animals and harm to the environment. Therefore, the vegan choice can be understood as a practice of purity that aims not to contaminate life and the environment with the negative consequences of the consumption of animal-derived products.

In terms of social impact, the food taboos associated with veganism are not exclusively limited to those who live this lifestyle, which even applies to food, but also have implications for society in general. Lévi-Strauss (1964) proposes that food organizes cultural relations based on binary oppositions. Although he does not directly address food taboos, his structuralist approach can be used to understand how veganism reshapes categories of food and consumption and redefines social boundaries. Thus, the practice of veganism can be seen as a critical response to traditional food taboos, proposing a new symbolic order that questions the role of animal exploitation in consumer society.

FOOD AS A CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION

Food has always played a fundamental role in the symbolic organization of societies. Lévi-Strauss (1964) argues that food, in all its forms, goes beyond a biological need and is inserted into symbolic structures that help organize human thought and establish binary

oppositions. One of the most famous examples of this analysis is the opposition between "raw" and "cooked", which, for Lévi-Strauss, represents one of the fundamental distinctions in the symbolic organization of food. This dichotomy is not merely a culinary issue, but is deeply linked to cultural transformation and the domination of nature.

According to Lévi-Strauss, the stew, by transforming the raw, symbolizes civilization, culture and the human capacity to dominate and transform nature. The raw, on the other hand, is associated with brute nature, instinct, and savagery. This distinction is more than a simple culinary choice, but reflects deep-rooted cultural views about how humans organize and make sense of the natural and social world.

In the context of veganism, this opposition between "raw" and "cooked" acquires new nuances. Vegan food, by excluding products of animal origin, proposes a broader reflection on the relations of power and morality associated with food. By avoiding the consumption of meat and other animal products, vegans directly challenge the traditional symbolic structure of "cooked" foods, i.e., those foods that have been mastered, prepared, and consumed by human society. Veganism suggests that this form of nature transformation, in which humans "dominate" animals for consumption, can be replaced by products that respect the boundaries of animal life and ethical considerations about animal suffering and environmental sustainability.

Therefore, veganism can be understood as a cultural practice that resignifies the opposition between "raw" and "cooked". Instead of seeing the animal as a product to be transformed, as in the traditional model, veganism proposes an ethical and symbolic distinction that is directly reflected in food and consumption. Therefore, this thinking can be interpreted as a restructuring of traditional food and consumption classifications, challenging the opposition between foods and products dominated by culture and those associated with nature. By refusing animal products, veganism suggests that the true "transformation" of nature should not involve the exploitation of animals, but rather the conscious choice to consume food and products from other sources.

In addition, veganism can also be seen as a symbolic movement that redefines the cultural value of food and consumption. Foods of plant origin and products of non-animal origin, by distancing themselves from foods and products of animal origin, are inserted in a new cultural language, where consumption is no longer linked to the domination and transformation of living beings in favor of human pleasure or convenience, but rather to an ethical respect for life and nature. In this context, veganism reconstructs the symbolic boundaries of food and consumption, redefining not only what is consumed, but how and why it is eaten or used.

Through this resignification, the vegan philosophy goes beyond a simple dietary alternative; It is configured as a cultural critique of traditional food and consumption norms, and as a proposal to rethink the relations between culture and nature. In this new symbolic arrangement, the foods and products classified as vegan, by remaining within the logic of "raw", do not represent a return to primitivism, but exactly the opposite, as it consists of an ethical reevaluation of cultural practices that have historically used animals as resources for human food and consumption. Thus, in terms of food, for example, eating vegetables (excluding meat and other animal-derived foods) comes to be seen not as a regression to primitive forms of eating, but as a moral transformation within the contemporary cultural structure.

VEGANISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

Veganism, in addition to being a cultural phenomenon, can be understood as a central element in the construction of the social identity of individuals who adopt this practice. In a world marked by dynamics of belonging and differentiation, consumption habits play a crucial role in the formation of individual and collective identities, functioning as symbolic markers that express values, beliefs, and ethical positions. Therefore, the adoption of veganism is not limited to a choice of consumption only, but represents an active inscription in a field of symbolic disputes, in which subjects affirm their identity and construct social boundaries.

Vegan identity emerges in the context of a social field structured by systems of moralization of consumption, dynamics of distinction and political engagement. Bourdieu's (1989) theory of social distinction can be applied to veganism by considering that specific eating practices can function as markers of status and belonging within the social space. The author argues that consumption practices are not neutral, but reflect and reinforce positions within the social structure. He suggests that eating habits, as well as other cultural practices, operate as forms of differentiation between groups, serving to establish hierarchies and consolidate identities. In the case of veganism, this distinction is not only due to access to certain material goods, but also to alignment with a system of ethical and environmental values, which can reinforce its position within a specific symbolic field.

Miller (1998) proposes that consumption should not be seen solely as an exchange of goods, but as a process of construction of social identities. In the case of veganism, this construction of identity becomes visible in consumption habits, where the exclusion of animal products is not only an individual preference, but a form of social differentiation. The act of consuming vegan foods becomes a marker of belonging to a group that adopts a

specific set of values, such as the moralization of consumption. This moralization has practical implications for the way vegans are perceived socially, distinguishing them from those who do not adopt the same food philosophy and generating social distancing between groups. The choice for vegan products and the rejection of animal products become strategies for the expression of values, through which individuals build bonds of belonging with communities that share these beliefs.

The moralization of vegan consumption, as pointed out by Rozin (1999), also plays a fundamental role in this process. According to the author, some food choices are no longer simple individual preferences and start to acquire a moral dimension, being incorporated into normative discourses about what is right or wrong to consume. When applied to veganism, this idea allows us to understand how refusing to consume animal products is interpreted as an ethical act, strengthening vegan identity and establishing distinctions between those who adhere to this practice and those who do not.

In addition to being an individual identity marker, veganism has been increasingly incorporated as a banner of social movements, articulating with environmental, animal rights, and social justice agendas. Studies such as those by Morant et al. (2016) and Valença and Carbonai (2014) highlight the role of veganism in the formation of collectivities and in the mobilization of political actions that aim to transform the relations between humans and non-humans. This perspective inserts veganism in the scope of new forms of activism, characterized by conscious consumption practices and strategies of resistance to the industrialized agri-food model.

In this way, veganism can be understood as a phenomenon that transcends the sphere of consumption and acquires a social and political dimension, in which individuals build their identities around shared values and a collective ethos. In the following topics, this discussion will be deepened from the analysis of the moralization of consumption and the insertion of veganism as a social movement.

CONSUMPTION AS AN EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY

Consumption is one of the main means by which individuals build and express their social identities. More than an individual act, it is inserted in systems of meaning that organize social hierarchies, values and forms of belonging. In the case of veganism, this relationship becomes even more evident, since food choice involves not only the satisfaction of biological needs and consumption desires, but also an affirmation of ethical and political values that reconfigure social and cultural boundaries.

Bourdieu's (1989) perspective allows us to understand how vegan consumption can be analyzed within the logics of social distinction. Bourdieu argues that consumption practices are not neutral, but reflect and reinforce positions within the social space. In this sense, eating habits, as well as other cultural practices, function as class markers and are used by individuals to establish distinctions in relation to other groups. In the case of veganism, this practice not only establishes a differentiation, but also configures itself as a symbolic capital, signaling a specific position within the social field. While not all vegans consciously identify with this logic of distinction, their eating practices can be read in this way within the social framework.

In turn, Miller (1998) expands this analysis by treating consumption as a process of construction of meanings. For him, consumption is not only a form of distinction, but also a means by which subjects negotiate their identities and their relationships with the world. This perspective helps to understand that the choice for veganism goes beyond a simple dietary restriction; It is part of a broader context of the production of subjectivities, where the consumption of vegan foods and the refusal to consume products of animal origin become ways of expressing and reinforcing identities, aligning with a specific set of values and cultural meanings.

This relationship between consumption and identity is deeply linked to the process of moralization of food practices. Rozin (1999) describes how some food choices, previously seen as neutral, are transformed into moral values. In the case of veganism, moralization goes beyond the simple refusal to consume meat and involves an ethical renunciation of animal exploitation. The choice to avoid animal products is not exclusively a consumption practice, but becomes an ethical stance, reinforcing vegan identity and creating a clear moral distinction between those who adopt this practice and those who do not.

This moralization, as described by Rozin (1999) and Miller (1998), not only changes the perception of eating habits, but also strongly influences social interactions. Refusal to consume animal products, for example, is not limited to a health decision or personal taste, but becomes a moral statement that distinguishes vegans from other groups, reinforcing a collective identity based on shared ethical values. This results in differences in status between individuals and groups, with vegan consumption often interpreted as a symbol of social and moral distinction.

Therefore, vegan consumption cannot be reduced to a personal decision detached from the social and cultural context in which it is inserted. It functions as an identity marker and a means by which individuals express belonging, establish distinctions, and participate

in social and political networks. In the following topics, we will deepen this discussion by analyzing the moralization of consumption and the role of veganism as a social movement.

THE MORALIZATION OF VEGAN CONSUMPTION

Food and consumption, as socially constructed practices, are not restricted to meeting biological needs or desires, but operate as a field of cultural and moral significance. Within this logic, veganism can be analyzed from the concept of moralization of consumption, as described by Rozin et al. (1999), who argue that certain eating habits undergo a process of transformation, ceasing to be mere individual preferences to become shared moral values within a social group.

The moralization of consumption occurs when previously neutral choices come to be loaded with ethical meanings, becoming part of a broader normative system. This phenomenon can be observed in the transition of individuals to a vegan way of life, in which the decision to avoid animal products is not limited to health issues or personal taste, but is incorporated into a moral framework that defines what is acceptable or objectionable within a given cultural context. Thus, vegan consumption transcends the field of food and products, acquiring a normative character, and is often mobilized in discourses of social justice, sustainability, and animal rights.

The study by Rozin et al. (1999) on the moralization of food demonstrates that individuals who adhere to vegetarianism for moral reasons tend to construct a symbolic framework that reinforces the distinction between "pure" and "impure" foods based on ethical criteria, and not only on sensory or nutritional aspects. This process can be related to the approach of Douglas (1991), who analyzes food as a classificatory system in which certain foods are socially constructed as impure or contaminating. In the case of veganism, this construction takes place in the rejection of animal exploitation, so that the consumption of meat and other products of animal origin becomes associated with morally reprehensible practices.

The moralization of consumption also has an impact on social interactions, since food and consumption are spaces for identity negotiation. The vegan choice can be perceived by individuals outside the group as a form of implicit moral judgment, which generates tensions and resistance. As Rozin (1999) points out, this dynamic can lead to defensive reactions on the part of those who do not adhere to veganism, who interpret moralization as a threat to their own practices and values.

In addition, the moralization of vegan consumption is reflected in public policies and institutional regulations. The increasing ban on the use of animal testing for cosmetics, the

certification of vegan products, and the encouragement of plant-based eating in some schools and institutions are examples of how ethical values are incorporated into broader normative frameworks. This phenomenon is in line with the argument of Rozin et al. (1999) that the moralization of certain behaviors often mobilizes governmental and institutional support, promoting long-term social changes.

In this way, veganism illustrates a paradigmatic case of moralization of consumption, in which food choices become vehicles of moral, political, and social significance. In the next topics, this discussion will be deepened with the analysis of the insertion of veganism as a social movement and its articulation with networks of activism and cultural transformation.

VEGANISM AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Veganism, in addition to being a set of food practices and an identity marker, can be understood as a social movement that articulates political, ethical, and environmental claims. The adoption of veganism, in this context, is not restricted to the individual sphere, but is part of a broader field of activism that questions the relations between humans and non-humans, the impacts of industrial production of food and products, and the power structures that legitimize animal exploitation. Thus, veganism is configured as a phenomenon of collective mobilization that seeks to transform consumption patterns and sensitize society to new forms of interaction between living beings.

The emerging vegan identity can be analyzed from the contributions of Morant et al. (2016), who explore how veganism becomes an element of social cohesion among those who share a set of values and meanings. According to the authors, vegan identity is not only defined by the exclusion of animal products from the diet, but also by an active commitment to the animalist and environmentalist cause, which leads to the formation of communities that share practices, discourses, and engagement strategies. Vegan consumption, therefore, is intertwined with social networks that reinforce adherence to this lifestyle, creating a sense of belonging and solidarity among its members.

Vegan activism, in this sense, can be interpreted as a contemporary form of political engagement based on consumption and the reformulation of moral and cultural values. Valença and Carbonai (2014) analyze how veganism is inserted in dynamics of social mobilization, highlighting its potential as a political practice that challenges hegemonic agri-food systems and proposes sustainable alternatives. This approach allows us to understand veganism not only as a cultural phenomenon, but as a strategy of resistance to industries that exploit animals as products.

Within this perspective, veganism can be interpreted as a social movement that operates through the reconfiguration of cultural and symbolic norms. The moralization of consumption, as discussed earlier, contributes to the legitimization of an ethical discourse that seeks to influence both individual behavior and institutional policies. This process can be observed in initiatives such as the promotion of vegan certifications, campaigns against animal testing, proposals for public policies that encourage plant-based diets, and the strengthening of alternative consumption networks, such as agroecological cooperatives and vegan product fairs.

In addition to institutionalized political activism, veganism also manifests itself in everyday practices that function as forms of cultural resistance. The use of digital media and social networks have played a key role in the dissemination of vegan discourses, allowing the organization of events, awareness campaigns, and debates on the environmental and ethical impacts of the consumption of animal products. Morant et al. (2016) point out that this virtual dimension of vegan activism facilitates the construction of transnational communities, expanding the reach of the movement and promoting exchanges of experiences and mobilization strategies.

In this way, veganism can be understood as a dynamic social movement that transcends the sphere of individual consumption and is inserted in activism networks that question traditional models of production and consumption. This mobilization not only reinforces collective identities, but also influences institutional and cultural practices, becoming a significant force in contemporary transformations related to food ethics, consumption habits, sustainability, and animal rights. In the following topics, this analysis will be deepened from a critical perspective on the challenges and limitations of vegan activism in the global context.

VEGANISM AND SUSTAINABILITY

Veganism, as a cultural phenomenon, has implications that go far beyond food, inserting itself in broad debates about sustainability and reconfiguration of the relationships between humans, animals and the environment. The anthropological perspective allows us to understand this practice not only as an individual choice, but as part of social processes that challenge traditional production models and propose new forms of interaction with the natural world.

By rejecting animal exploitation and promoting alternatives that minimize ecological impacts, veganism is configured as a vector of transformation within the paradigm of sustainability. This practice influences both consumption habits and institutional and

business policies, since its diffusion implies changes in production systems and in the way natural resources are used.

BIOTECHNOLOGY, LIVESTOCK AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Twine (2010) argues that the industrialization of animal production, driven by the advance of biotechnology, reinforces a model of maximum extraction of resources, intensifying the exploitation of animal bodies. Genetic modification and reproductive manipulation of animals are directed to optimize productivity, without adequately considering the ethical and ecological implications of these processes.

This production model perpetuates socio-environmental inequalities and is part of a biopolitical logic that instrumentalizes animal life to meet market demands. Twine (2010) points out that the criticism of the industrialized model of livestock farming is not restricted to the problem of meat consumption, but encompasses the productive structure that reduces animals to capital goods and impacts entire ecosystems.

In this context, veganism not only challenges the normalization of this structure, but also proposes alternatives based on reducing the exploitation of non-human life. By contesting the environmental impacts of cattle ranching and its biopolitical ramifications, this practice aligns with contemporary debates on ethics and sustainability.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CHALLENGES OF CONVENTIONAL PRODUCTION

Franco and Batista (2024) discuss the socio-environmental impacts of the production of animal products, highlighting their role in environmental degradation and excessive consumption of natural resources. According to the authors, cattle ranching is one of the main causes of deforestation, biodiversity loss, soil and water pollution, in addition to representing a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions. The authors point out that the production of meat, milk and eggs requires large amounts of water, land and agricultural inputs for animal feed, contributing to the scarcity of resources in some regions of the world. On the other hand, the adoption of a vegan lifestyle can substantially reduce the individual ecological footprint, by requiring fewer inputs and minimizing environmental impacts associated with conventional agriculture.

Franco and Batista (2024) point out that this criticism of the dominant agricultural model goes beyond environmental issues, also including its social and economic repercussions. The debate on sustainability cannot be dissociated from structural inequalities in access to food and natural resources, since intensive livestock farming

prioritizes global demand to the detriment of more equitable and sustainable production systems. Thus, animal production goes in the opposite direction of sustainability.

The integration of sustainable practices in the agricultural sector is often analyzed through the concept of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), which refers to a set of criteria used to evaluate business practices in environmental, social, and governance terms. However, Franco and Batista (2024) point out that, although some companies are beginning to adopt more responsible practices, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving working conditions, these initiatives are unable to significantly mitigate the environmental and social impacts caused by large-scale animal production. The traditional agricultural model, which involves the intensive use of natural resources and the exploitation of animals, does not align with ESG principles, as it continues to generate deep environmental and social imbalances.

Thus, it is impossible to be fully sustainable while maintaining the production of animal products. Even with efforts aimed at reducing environmental impact, animal production does not meet the requirements of a truly sustainable ESG model. The excessive use of resources such as water, land and energy becomes incompatible with global sustainability goals and the ethical expectations of new generations. To achieve real sustainability, the adoption of vegan alternatives presents itself as a viable solution, aligned with ESG principles and capable of promoting a fairer and more responsible future.

ALTERNATIVE CONSUMPTION NETWORKS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Goodman et al. (2012) analyze the emergence of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), highlighting production circuits that offer alternatives to the hegemonic agri-food model. These networks include organic fairs, production cooperatives and short distribution chains, bringing producers and consumers closer together and promoting new forms of economic and social interaction.

Although Goodman et al. (2012) do not specifically address veganism, their approach allows us to understand how sustainable eating practices, including plant-based diets, can fit into these dynamics. The valorization of less impactful production systems, the questioning of the industrialization of food, and the search for environmentally responsible consumption practices converge with part of the ideals defended by veganism.

In addition to food, the concept of alternative consumption networks can be expanded to encompass practices that prevent animal exploitation in other sectors, such as clothing and cosmetics. The growth of sustainable and vegan markets reflects the search

for new forms of production and consumption, which incorporate principles of environmental justice and transparency in production chains.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study demonstrated that veganism, as a cultural and identity phenomenon, transcends the simple eating practice, configuring itself as a dynamic field of symbolic disputes that crosses ethical, political and social distinction issues. Its moralization and insertion in different regimes of meaning reveal that veganism is not an exclusively individual choice, but positions itself as a collective phenomenon that reconfigures social classifications and established cultural norms. By reflecting the transformations in contemporary diets, veganism contributes to the production of new ontologies and cosmologies, reorganizing the relationships between humans and non-humans and reshaping the boundaries between nature and culture.

Veganism, by asserting itself as a space for symbolic negotiation, shapes practices and discourses that involve belonging, identity, and broader cultural issues. This study identified how veganism reflects and challenges the transformations in current consumption habits, questioning established norms in various spheres of society and presenting itself as a collective movement that articulates different cultural, religious and economic discourses. Veganism proposes a reasoned critique of hegemonic practices and contributes to the formation of new dynamics of belonging, focusing on values such as social justice, animal rights, and environmental sustainability.

The main contribution of this study to anthropology is the articulation of veganism with debates about identity, morality and consumption. By mobilizing classical and contemporary theoretical references, it was possible to show that veganism is not only a reflection of the transformations in eating regimes, but an active agent in the reconfiguration of symbolic boundaries and in the creation of new models of social belonging. Understanding veganism as a sociocultural practice, in constant negotiation with norms and dynamics of distinction, offers anthropology a unique perspective to analyze the interactions between humans, animals, and sociocultural systems, providing a solid foundation for exploring the new forms of belonging and social transformation that veganism proposes.

This study significantly broadens our understanding of veganism, not only as a dietary practice, but as a profound sociocultural phenomenon that reflects and challenges social, political, and ethical norms. Veganism is configured as an agent of transformation that transcends individual consumption and is inserted in collective social dynamics that reconfigure human relationships with the environment and animals. The anthropological

analysis proposed in this work offers a new perspective for the formation of social identities, the moralization of consumption and resistance movements, highlighting the importance of veganism as a cultural and political force in the current scenario.

FUTURE STUDIES

Veganism, as a cultural and identity phenomenon, offers wide possibilities for anthropological investigation, especially in the relationships between food, consumption, morality and symbolic systems. One of the main fields of study involves the ethnographic analysis of veganism in different sociocultural contexts. While most studies on the topic focus on Western societies, there is room to explore how veganism is appropriated and reframed in other cultures. Ethnographic analysis, with participant observation and semi-structured interviews, can broaden our understanding of how veganism adapts to different local cosmologies and traditions.

In addition, ethnographic investigations can examine how vegans maintain their eating and consumption practices in the face of global ethical pressures and local cultural traditions. It would be relevant to apply focus groups and in-depth interviews to understand how factors such as family structures, sociability networks, and religious beliefs shape vegan practices. These studies can identify the tensions and adaptations in different sociocultural contexts.

Another area of interest would be the analysis of discourses on social networks and their relationship with vegan activism. The internet has been fundamental in the dissemination of vegan practices and ideologies, functioning as a platform for mobilization and public debate. The study of digital platforms could provide insights into how social media helps form collective identities and drives cultural change. Social media content analysis and digital observation would be effective methodologies to explore these dynamics.

In addition, the intersectionality of veganism with class, race, and gender also deserves further deepening. The analysis of how accessibility to vegan food is linked to dynamics of social distinction could be enriched with interviews with diverse vegan groups, to understand how these issues influence the movement.

Further investigating biotechnologies and their implications, it would be interesting to explore how lab-grown meats and plant-based substitutes are impacting consumption habits and reconfiguring boundaries between nature and culture. To this end, interviews with biotechnology professionals and the observation of innovations in the plant-based food market could offer a deeper understanding of these transformations.

The impact of public policies also deserves more attention. Analysis of institutional policies related to sustainable food and regulation of animal use, such as vegan certifications or incentives for plant-based diets, can illustrate how veganism is influencing legislation. Participant observation in government and educational contexts would be useful to explore how veganism is being integrated into the education system and influencing public policy.

Regarding sustainability, future studies could investigate how veganism, by reducing the environmental impact of livestock, is articulated with alternative consumption practices. Research could focus on alternative consumption networks, such as agroecological cooperatives and vegan fairs, using interviews with consumers and producers to examine these new markets.

Finally, the analysis of digital activism in veganism, through online platforms, can reveal how the dynamics of social and political transformation are being driven by the internet. Research can address how vegan virtual communities act to form new collective identities and propagate values related to sustainability and animal rights.

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