



Vegephobia

The rejection of vegetarianism
for reasons of animal rights and welfare &
Discrimination against vegetarians

VEGGIE PRIDE

Vegephobia - The rejection of vegetarianism for reasons of animal rights and welfare & Discrimination against vegetarians

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I. Introduction

Purely basing their reasoning on justice and reason, no one could deny that on the one hand, animals do not want to suffer nor be killed¹, and that on the other hand, humans do not need to eat animal flesh in order to survive². Therefore, any form of animal exploitation for our consumption, from fisheries to breeding, should logically stop.

As this logic is not reflected in today's reality, and is not even object of public debate, (despite the efforts of an increasing number of people) it is mainly thanks to an ensemble of social rules that we can gather under the name of "vegephobia".

Vegetarians³ for the animals try to give a voice to those who don't have one: animals raised for their meat. However, this voice is not heard, and when it is, it is often censured. Everything is put into place, at the scale of an entire society, to make vegetarians inaudible and to prevent any form of debate. As soon as the issue of livestock's fate is raised and questioned, even by the act of refusing to eat meat at dinner, a form of censure is created.

Vegephobia prevents any improvement to the fate of animals, by preventing the diffusion of ideas and by distorting the debate.

How can we define "vegephobia"?

The term "vegephobia" was used for the first time during the French Veggie Pride⁴ demonstration. Just like other expressions using the suffix "phobia"⁵, it shows the rejection of a behaviour that holds political importance. Like hom-

1 See the notion of animal sentience: OneKind.org, "Animal Sentience", http://www.onekind.org/be_inspired/animal_sentience/

2 See the position of the American Diet Association and Canadian Dieticians: "vegetarian diets", http://www.vrg.org/nutrition/2003_ADA_position_paper.pdf

3 Vegetarian: an individual who does not eat animal flesh. Vegans: an individual who does not eat meat or any animal products such as milk or eggs. Vegetarian for the animals: an individual who refuses to eat animal flesh; motivated by the suffering inflicted to animals. In order to keep this paper short, we will refer to them as vegetarians, unless mentioned otherwise.

4 See the Veggie Pride manifesto on www.veggiepride.org.

5 The word "phobia" is also used on a psychological level to designate irrational fears (e.g. arachnophobia), we will be interested in its meaning on a social and political level to designate an attitude of rejection and discrimination as in "Islamophobia".

ophobia rejects homosexuality, it implies discrimination towards homosexual people; vegophobia is about the rejection of vegetarianism for animal welfare and rights reasons as well as discrimination towards vegetarians. Feelings such as fear, disdain and even hate can also form a part of this discrimination.

If vegetarians are rejected, it is because their behaviour alone questions the consumption of animal flesh, even without orally expressing their opinions. To not consume meat is a way of questioning human domination, and this querying of dominants' privileges can lead to violent reactions against vegetarians. It is this phenomenon that we are calling "vegophobia".

Vegetarianism as a matter of taste, personal health, spirituality, ecological consideration or as a form of solidarity with developing countries is relatively well accepted socially.

Vegophobia is therefore not hostility against simple vegetarianism as a way of life, but is triggered by the fact that this attitude leads to questioning the idea of human domination, also known as speciesism⁶.

Why the comparison to homophobia?

Homophobia stems from an ideal of a social order based on the clear assignation of male and female gender; on male domination and on heterosexuality. It consists of a varied ensemble of violent social devices aiming at suppressing (by ridiculing, hiding, etc.) male and female homosexuality, as they constitute a threat to dominant gender ideals as well as patriarchal domination.

Similarly, vegophobia stems from an ideal of a system based on a strict differentiation between animals and humans; on the refusal to consider the interests of animals and on human domination of animals. Vegophobia, like homophobia, is also composed of various social devices, aimed at deterring anybody from questioning the consumption of animal flesh - the main practice as well as the clearest symbol of speciesist domination.

Vegophobia is therefore a social strategy, whether done consciously or not, aiming to avoid at any cost any possibility of doubt in current speciesist beliefs. In other words, it prevents any challenging of the exploitative norm and the place of animals in our society.

⁶ Speciesism is the currently dominant ideology, according to which human interests, as trivial as they are, always take precedence over those of animals, even when they injure the fundamental interests of the latter. If one weighs the value of a human eating meat and interest of an animal not to be killed for this purpose, a speciesist society would consider that the fleeting pleasure of the human (meat not being necessary for survival) trumps the systematic suffering implied by the breeding, transport and slaughter of the animals that provide the meat. This is because, according to the speciesist ideology, human interests always prevail over non-human interests.

Victims of discrimination versus spokespeople for the victims of discrimination.

Unlike the victims of other social injustices, who have themselves worked for their liberation, animals only have vegetarians to defend them. However, due to vegophobia, the questioning of the human species' omnipotence in relation to other beings is not heard. Therefore, to attack vegetarians is to attack the lawyers of animals, and in the end, it is the animals who are the victims of these attacks.

II. Different forms of vegophobia

1. Teasing and mockery

Teasing is often the knee-jerk reaction of vegophobes. Despite appearances, their never-ending teasing is neither light nor innocent.

Teasing is often the first stage of aggression, difficult to stop because it appears to be fun, friendly, pleasant. To criticise it risks reversing the situation; making the vegetarian victim appear unpleasant, touchy and aggressive. Often recurrent, this teasing can become real harassment, to the point where a number of vegetarians prefer not to reveal their preferences.

Below can be found a list (non exhaustive) of the various mockeries vegetarians can be subjected to on a daily basis.

Those that play on sensitivity (the famous "sentimentality")

Doesn't the carrot scream when you pull it out? Don't you want to eat Bambi?

Any empathy to what non-humans can feel is considered to be misplaced and ridiculous; easily classified as sentimentality. This implies that eating meat is based purely on emotions and, in addition, that such emotions are not valid. The choice of being vegetarian is therefore stripped of rationality and is not even considered as deserving of discussion.

This mockery is comes with sexist overtones: sensitivity and irrational feelings are qualities traditionally attributed to females, whereas a "real man", ra-

tional and always in control of his emotions, must eat meat with no qualms. The social acceptance of female vegetarianism (which seems a slightly easier than male vegetarianism) might be explained by the fact that women are devalued and delegitimised: as they are always suspected of irrationality, their point of view is hardly worth taking into consideration.

Those that deny the viability of vegetarianism

But what do you eat? Stones? You're going to suffer from nutritional deficiencies. The vegetarians I used to know were very pale and skinny, and they died when they were only 40.

The nutritional advice given by people who don't know anything about nutrition, but firmly believe that they do, is doubly damaging. Firstly because these people are often so dishonest that no explanation will have any effect on them. Secondly, because they bring the entire discussion round to focus on the consequences of vegetarianism for humans and by doing so, they dismiss the animal question.

The possibility of vegetarianism can also be denied in a more concrete manner: vegetarians are often confronted with the impossibility of obtaining a vegetarian dish during family reunions or at restaurants, even if they notified the chef beforehand. They are sometimes surreptitiously served a small amount of meat in their dish, such as bacon or tuna in their salad.

The impossibility of a viable meat-free diet is also implied in a practical way. By refusing to eat what is on their plate, vegetarians prove that their way of life is socially unsustainable, and that vegetarians are therefore impossible to live with.

Those that praise the taste of meat

I couldn't, I looove the taste of meat! You don't know what you're missing. Tofu is so tasteless. You must give in from time to time!

These comments aim to reduce the discrepancy between the animals' interest in living and humans' interest in eating their flesh. If eating meat provides such an immense pleasure, it is therefore less reprehensible to kill animals in order to satisfy such pleasure. Such comments are quite interesting in that they imply a certain consciousness of the disparity between the relatively short-lived pleasure found in eating meat and the importance the animal would give to its life. However, they simultaneously reaffirm the absolute right to kill or to have a non-human killed for what is ultimately a whim.

Those that devalue the vegetarian ethic by mocking it

...I had not even sat down and the jokes were already starting. There were four of them. For 20 minutes, they were killing themselves laughing, brandishing the kebab skewers cooking on the barbecue, shoving them under my nose whilst mimicking animal screams and telling me: can you hear the burning veal?...

Solidarity can easily form against vegetarians, who can sometimes find themselves cornered by a barrage of jokes that lean towards aggressive side. Hidden by supposedly light and funny remarks is the negation of everything vegetarians stand for: the fate of animals becomes an amusing matter; to worry about their welfare is funny by definition. Whatever their reaction, vegetarians always end up the losers in this type of situation.

If they agree with the comments and laugh, perhaps in order to avoid conflict or maybe because they fail to see any maliciousness in the remarks, they validate the idea that animal welfare is not a serious matter. In this case, vegophobia has succeeded in its aims: animal suffering and the ethical importance of the problem are minimised.

If they do not let the comments pass and try to answer seriously, the mood changes. Vegetarians now appear aggressive or too serious, out of place and moody because they can't take the joke.

Those that are nonsensical

Did you know that Hitler was a vegetarian? Animals are happy to sacrifice their lives for us! If we stopped eating meat, towns and cities would be overrun with cows and pigs!

Vegetarians are often faced by absurd arguments, that are neither logical nor fact-based, but that still also form a part of discrediting vegetarianism. Using any random argument, without worrying in the least about its relevancy implies that neither the cause nor the defender are to be taken seriously. The fate of animals is therefore considered a topic that does not even deserve respect, let alone serious debate.

Moreover, all vegetarians are not equal in facing such teasing. A new vegetarian, a child; a timid person; isolated in their social group or in front of his/her boss - in other words a socially vulnerable person - will not necessarily be capable of dealing with such jokes. We cannot say, as many vegetarian activists do, that this teasing has no impact, simply because they have learned how to handle it. Many vegetarians do not know how to handle it and feel isolated and assaulted by the never-ending teasing.

2. Denial

We could easily believe that vegetarians do not exist. Canteen menus do not cater for them, there is no nutritional advice in public health guides, scaremongering about meatless diets is rife among medical bodies, etc. The list is long.

Invisible vegetarians

You would not be ill / tired if you ate meat!

This “invisibilisation” starts with the type of thinking usually directed at vegetarians, as well as in the reactions shown when talking about animal suffering due to intensive farming: “we have to eat!”. The denial of the possibility of a meat-less diet is equal to a negation of the existence of vegetarians. It is a symbolic violence, as with any denial of a patently obvious reality, which is equivalent to saying: “you do not exist, you cannot exist, because meat consumption is imperative”.

The denial of their existence seems incomprehensible: real flesh-and-blood vegetarians exist right in front of their interlocutors, who have surely also heard of the existence of people or civilisations who refuse to eat meat (in India alone, around 40 million people are vegetarians).

Likewise, during the mad cow crisis, the destruction of entire cattle herds was shown on television. People were shocked and spoke of collective responsibility, as if everybody ate cows and as if vegetarians did not exist.

By hearing everywhere that vegetarians do not exist, vegetarians feel isolated, marginalised and abnormal. However, it is not only vegetarians that are made invisible but also the reasons that pushed them to become vegetarians: this denial is not just about their existence, nor even the viability of their existence but equally about those reasons that led them to become vegetarians in the first place.

Unseen ethics

You are annoying us with your vegetarianism, personally I do not like beetroot, but that doesn't mean I prohibit other people from eating it!

The fact that vegetarians act for ethical reasons is denied in every conceivable way possible. Even when they clearly state ethical reasons for their vegetarianism, they are often dismissed and their refusal to eat meat is reduced to a question of taste; excess sentimentality; the desire to eat healthily; the need to be different, etc.

This denial has a purpose: to depoliticise vegetarians, that is to say, to ignore

any arguments that could explain their choice and to cancel the range of any contentious arguments in order to reduce it to a personal choice.

This is emphasised by the fact that vegetarians are often depicted as eccentrics, effectively blocking the spread of their ideas. The validity of their ethical motivations is denied by putting their choice down to their “unconventional” personality, and consequently, the universality of their ethical motivations is refuted.

Relativism, or the refrain of “personal choice”

I respect your vegetarianism, so you have to respect the fact that I eat meat.

The universalist ethical arguments cited by vegetarians are systematically reduced to a simple “personal choice”. Relativism thus says that the different options are of the equal value: to kill or not to kill, everyone has the right to choose. The consequences do not count; it is the choice that counts.

The relativism seems to imply a certain respect of the vegetarian’s choice: each opinion is worthy of respect, theirs no less than others. Vegetarians can be tempted to accept this apparent lifeline, choosing to be accepted rather than mocked. However, the price of this respect is that they stay silent, and not explain the reasoning behind their choice, so that others do not feel guilty. It is yet another way to make the fate of animals invisible.

Vegetarianism as a religion?

We respect vegetarianism as we would respect a religion, meaning, we don’t discuss it. However, it is something open and amenable to discussion. And as for arguments, vegetarians have many, for anyone who is willing to take the time to listen to them. But, just as religion is personal, nobody wants to talk about it. Those who do not respect this rule are quickly as labelled proselytes and extremists. However, it is not a truth to be revealed or something inexpressible that pushes them to refuse to eat the flesh of others: it is a logical sequence of ideas that is perfectly able to be shared.

In truth, to consider vegetarianism as a religion, even as a priesthood forms part of the most subtle vegophobic strategies. Some express their admiration toward vegetarians, recognising the importance of their struggle. They are interested in the practical aspect of vegetarianism: what do you eat? Where do you buy your shoes? However, once again the political aspect is ignored. While vegetarians explain how to replace eggs in a cake, they do not talk about slaughtered male chicks, while they are explaining where they buy their veggie steak, they do not talk about animals being slaughtered in slaughterhouses or suffocated on

fishing boats. When practical aspects of vegetarianism are being talked about, the question of animals is yet again made invisible. And if vegetarians do not talk about animals, who will?

3. Institutional discrimination

Medical discrimination

A number of vegetarians are confronted by sweeping assertions from doctors. Such peremptory statements add a problematic element to vegetarians' day-to-day life, as they cause them not to receive the care that they are entitled to.

In fact, doctors often openly endorse disapproval in this type of diet whilst at the same time, they are often incapable of giving advice or comprehensive analysis, revealing a serious gap in their nutritional training. When facing a stubborn and badly informed medical body, vegetarians have two options:

The first one is to admit to being vegetarian, risking that every health problem they have will then be put down to vegetarianism. No matter what happens, vegetarianism is always the cause of an illness, which can lead to a serious misdiagnosis.

The second option is to hide their diet and hence not be advised or treated properly. A number of vegetarians do not talk about their vegetarianism for fear of being told off by their doctor. However, the more doctors see vegetarians, the more they will have to rethink their opinions and act accordingly.

In front of their doctor, vegetarians are vulnerable as their health depends on their doctor's knowledge. The doctor is the one who always knows what to do, the person who should make you feel safe. Vegephobia can this easily achieve its aim. Many vegetarians have stopped their diet on their doctor's advice.

Vegetarian parents, the first victims of discrimination

Vegetarianism is easily stigmatised and vegetarians labelled as irresponsible. They put their health at risk, suffer from vitamin deficiency, and talk rubbish. Mostly, they are irresponsible towards their children: the pretext of child protection allows others to interfere with vegetarian families, when in any other situation such interference would be seen as abusive.

The marginalization of vegetarians, as explained above, has an important

impact on how vegetarian parents are seen. The portrait of vegetarian parents depicted by medias creates distance between them and the readers, who can in no way identify to them, since they seem so out of the ordinary. One of the most common criticisms directed at vegetarian parents is that they do not use mainstream doctors but instead seek out alternative medicine. However, most conventional doctors are not able to correctly advise a vegetarian - much less a vegan - about their diet.

Vegetarians do not put themselves intentionally place themselves on the margins of society. It is because of their refusal to exploit animals that they are marginalised by society.

Vegetarian families are the most affected by this type of vegephobia and it is important that they are supported. In essence, if an adult cannot be forced to eat meat, everything about their children's' education, including what is on their plate, can justify the intrusion of educational staff. The cases of suspicion and accusation of abuse against parents of vegetarian children, together with the dramatic consequences that can follow, are legion.

The presumption of belonging to a cult

In France, a report from the Interministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat against Sectarian Aberrations was made public in 2009. It cites vegetarianism as an indication of possibly belonging to a cult. Vegetarianism (and above all veganism) arouses suspicion. It "physically weakens" and "makes social interactions with people outside the movement difficult".

Here occurs an astonishing reversal of position. Vegetarianism is accused of being a sectarian practice, and in doing so vegetarians are marginalised, unable to eat in public establishments because of the lack of vegetarian options. Then, they are accused of not having social interactions with the "outside world". Vegetarianism is declared to be unviable, as it makes people physically weak and is a threat to children's "physical and intellectual potential". It is then considered surprising that vegetarians do not use mainstream medicine and that they express a distrust of the medical world. The dominant ideology is vegephobic, it assures the status quo. Woe betide those who question the human domination over other animals, they can learn the hard way that it is not on an equal footing that they fight against a deeply speciesist society.

III. The reaction of vegetarians facing vegophobia

Vegophobia achieves its aims

As conversations about meat have the tendency to make people uncomfortable, many vegetarians avoid proselytising.
Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating animals*

It should be remembered that vegophobia's goal is to avoid any questioning of speciesism (since it is unjustifiable and an honest debate would destroy its credibility), most particularly the key speciesist practice of meat consumption.

Vegophobia achieves its goals not just by forcing vegetarians to stay silent, but also by planting the idea that their ideas are not legitimate, therefore discouraging them from being at ease with their convictions and thus expressing them. This leads vegetarians to express themselves uncertainly, to soften their arguments to avoid conflict, in essence to give up their freedom of belief and expression. If they manage to overcome these difficulties and speak unambiguously, the mocking that is sure to follow has the automatic effect of convincing all those present that such comments are ridiculous and illegitimate.

The vegetarians who don't stand up to their colleagues' jokes; who feed their children meat; who hide their vegetarianism from their doctor; who avoid calling themselves militant (and therefore avoids speaking openly about their solidarity with animals), or even the vegetarians who pretend that they are doing it for health reasons, for the environment, or because of a dislike of meat; the vegetarians that prefer to exchange recipes rather than talking about the dead animal on someone else's plate; or vegetarians that eat meat under pressure or who eventually give up, they all give in to the social pressure and stop fighting against animal exploitation. By losing these invaluable voices, animals lose a powerful tool that could, one day, put an end to their exploitation.

Vegophobia is not perceived nor denied

Why do so many vegetarians deny the existence of social mechanisms to

silence or discredit them? Why do they so often minimise their impact?

Vegetarians: adverts for vegetarianism

Trapped by their own desire to convince people, vegetarians often try to be a showcase for vegetarianism. They have the tendency to want to convince people that it is easy to be a vegetarian, which is wrong. In reality, life is easier for meat-eaters. To refuse to taste a colleague's birthday cake, to decline an invitation to a barbecue with friends, to not be invited because they sound like killjoys, are social situations that are difficult to handle. Most of all, to be aware of the omnipresent suffering of animals, with their parents, their friends, their neighbours as sponsors of these murders is not easy at all.

In fact, it would be a safe bet to say that it is not only their desire to persuade that drives vegetarians to be on their best behaviour. It would seem that the main reason behind this behaviour is that they have perfectly integrated vegophobia into their lives. They know that as soon as they set a foot wrong, their interlocutors will take advantage of it, so they are always trying to justify themselves, finding reasons that might persuade others, and to please them. Why work so hard at it? What social struggle demands its participants to be beyond reproach? None. A cause is not more or less fair depending on the people that espouse it. However, vegetarians must be healthy, sporty, socially integrated, have a good job, be happy and courteous in any circumstances.

Vegetarians have let themselves be defined by a way of life, which is what ultimately unites them. This explains the enthusiasm which greeted a study "proving" that vegetarians have a higher IQ than the others, that they are sexier etc.

Therefore, it is unfortunately logical that vegetarianism is perceived as an identity and not seen as a position. It is not surprising that vegetarians try to present themselves as always at their best in order to play the role of "showcase" of vegetarianism, rather than emphasise the political nature of their claims.

The refusal to be a victim

Another reason to deny the existence of vegophobia stems from the fact that vegetarians are reluctant about the idea of claiming their rights and respect. They say that to compare their situation to that of other animals is obscene, due to the fact that non-human animals are tortured and killed. Despite this social pressure, the lack of respect and marginalization that they are suffering from, as well as the daily difficulties that they have to face, vegetarians are reluctant to see themselves as victims of discrimination, once again because of the disdain and teasing that they would have to face if they did.

The lack of solidarity between vegetarians

People who do not want to recognise the existing pressure against them often try to discredit those vegetarians who are unable to face the same pressure. Instead of being united in adversity, they disassociate themselves from their comrades, to make themselves look good and avoid the victim status. However, it is essential to put collective mechanisms into place that fight against this social discrimination, the first necessity being to emphasise that this pressure is not a personal issue, but a social issue related to the fact that vegetarians are opponents to a system of domination which is the basis of society.

Vegephobia induces involuntary behaviours in vegetarians

The denial that they are vegetarians for the animals

We have seen that vegetarianism for animal rights reasons provokes far more hostile reactions than vegetarianism for ecological, health or any other reasons. This explains the fact that a large number of vegetarians put forward reasons other than animal welfare in order to make their reasoning more acceptable and ensure that they are able to take a personal position that will cost them less socially.

All vegetarians probably have a more or less vague perception of the existence of something like vegephobia, which quite rightly seems to them to be a near-insurmountable adversary due to its widely spread, generalised character. They thus classify it as something they always will have to face, and therefore unconsciously prohibit themselves from taking positions that are socially untenable. Social pressure stops them from thinking too carefully about their own ideas and practices. The following examples can be analysed in this context:

The focus on “effectiveness”

Many vegetarians say that effectiveness is their priority: we should not talk about things that could start arguments; we have to make a good impression and be friendly; we should not talk about ethics or animals: we should not get annoyed; we should not be too fat or too thin; nor should we be badly dressed, etc. The integration of vegephobia here incorporates vegephobic rhetoric, according to which we should not cause any fuss or discomfort.

However, evaluating the effectiveness of how we do things is a difficult task,

even more so when we differentiate between short, medium and long term effectiveness. We especially need to clarify what it is that we want to be effective about. To be accepted? To be understood? To convince people? To convince people about what? A diet? An ethical issue? A matter of health, taste or politics? Are we aiming to change the immediate behaviour of the person in front of us, or to change society in general on a long-term basis? It is, for example, the difference between an ad campaign that aims to convince people by any means possible to buy a product right now, and a political campaign that aims to profoundly change a society by questioning the balance of power on which it is based, and that acts on the long term by demanding a strategy that is planned in years, not months.

Self-censuring emotion

Vegetarians avoid the display of certain feelings such as outrage, anger, and the behaviours that result, reactions that would, however, be considered as normal when facing other scenes of suffering or ill treatment. This attitude of self-censorship has probably been developed in reaction to the usual mocking and accusation of being sentimentality.

By being on their best behaviour, and by arguing only about trivial questions such as human health, vegetarians themselves contribute to the spread of the implicit message that animals and animal issues are not that important.

The personalisation of the animal rights question

This is a very important aspect of general vegephobia. The question of animals is systematically brought back down to personal issues (I respect you, you respect me). This is tantamount to admitting that the question of meat consumption is not important in itself, but that it is something that should be left to personal discretion. Just like we can't force somebody to prefer red to blue, we can't dictate for somebody to stop eating meat. This taboo is very strong, it prevents people from seeing meat consumption as bounded by the same ethical rules as other human issues: namely, that these rules should be applied universally. And that a practice that deeply harms individuals should be prohibited, independently from any question of personal freedom.

The vegetarian identity

The pressure against vegetarians is clearly emphasised by a tendency favoured by “democratic” societies: communitarianism. Liberal societies tolerate each “social identity” with formal and relative benevolence, and they allow small ghettos to be created, a little apart from the rest of society, governed by life rules, practices and values that are a slightly different, but not too different from the norm, otherwise they risk being likened to a “cult”. These communities enable

us to feel more at ease that in a global society less inclined to accept people who deviate from the norm. However, to gather vegetarians into ghettos on the basis of their diet or, more generally, their way of life, it is to accept seeing the subversive force of their refusal of to accept human domination neutralised.

Vegetarian refusal to be part of animal exploitation cannot be purely personal, that would make no sense. If they judge that an act is “bad” (unfair, unethical, etc.), it means that it is “bad”, not just when practised by them, but also when practiced by anybody. Thus, it is ultimately it is not their lifestyle that should unite them, but the reasons why they chose this lifestyle: the political reason.

Vegetarians are not obliged to adopt for themselves the categories that society imposes onto them. It would be preferable that they define themselves by their demands: another society, non-exploitative, non-oppressive, that would not cause so much suffering to animals for such trivial reasons.

IV. Conclusion

It has been seen that the types of behaviour hidden behind what we call vegophobia are extremely varied, whether, personal or institutional. Nonetheless, it appears legitimate to gather them under one generic term, as these behaviours makeup a complex social system, internalised and accepted by everyone, that aims to avoid the spread of any questioning of animal exploitation. We can compare vegophobia to similar mechanisms put into place in order to silence or delegitimise any feminist ideas, for example.

Moreover, what is called here vegophobia seems to be a particularly well developed and omnipresent subset of an even more widespread phenomenon that has no name, but that we could call “animal welfare—phobia”. Indeed, whilst the question of the legitimacy of meat is a fundamental question at the heart of the animal issue, it cannot be reduced to only to that. And animal rights activists, vegetarians or not, are effectively strongly devalued as such.

This animal welfare-phobia, and particularly the vegophobia which constitutes a major part of it, is formidable, as it dissuades many people from even thinking about the status of animals, whilst also preventing the animal rights rhetoric from being heard socially. In this sense animal welfare-phobia is a subsystem of a global speciesist ideology.

The situation has evolved tremendously this last quarter of a century, the meat taboo has been at least partially removed and the calling into question of meat is becoming increasingly possible. It can be said that most social mechanisms defending human domination are becoming less and less effective, they can no longer prevent the animal rights work; only slow it down at significantly. However, we cannot expect them to fall by themselves and die a natural death. By solidarity with other animals, but also by solidarity with the numerous people who are morally committed but are struggling to become vegetarians; or who are struggling to support the cause due to those around them, it is essential to highlight this vegophobia in order to be able to fight it.

Perspectives

This short overview of what vegophobia is certainly limited, and is not exhaustive. This leaflet should be considered as an introduction to the topic, a topic that deserves to be explored in depth and further developed.

A website has been created that aims to gather a range of testimonies and, to analyse them so that the reality of vegophobia becomes harder to deny, and also aims to emphasise its importance: <http://fr.vegophobia.info/>

What can you do?

Individual struggle is possible but for the situation to progress, vegetarians have to become aware of the reality of vegophobia. Once vegophobia becomes an accepted concept, it will be easier to fight it by being more visible and by claiming the rights due to vegetarians. Discretion feeds a vicious circle: the more vegetarians hide themselves, the more vegetarianism is considered as being marginal and the more difficult it becomes to feel comfortable with one's vegetarianism.

Collective initiatives are possible: in 2011, a letter was sent to the “Special-Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief” (an independent expert chosen by the human right council of ONU) and a petition will be addressed to him again during the 2013 Veggie Pride.

The Veggie Pride aims to denounce vegophobia and to act against it. It intends to give prominence to those who refuse to kill animals for human consumption. Its purpose is to show the world that vegetarians (for reasons of animal welfare) do exist and that they are united in their solidarity with the victims of animal exploitation, slaughter and fishing.

For more info: <http://www.veggiepride.org>

Notes



NOUS SOMMES DES ANIMAUX
SOLIDAIRES DE TOUS LES ANIMAUX