

The Battle Against Tradition



An ethnographic analysis of the cultural critique of vegan animal rights activists in The Netherlands



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Master's thesis Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship

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¹ Cover photo: AV Activists on the street during a march against animal testing, 20-4-2019.

Abstract

In the battle against animal cruelty, some people take it one step further than others. A small group of people in The Netherlands presents itself as vegan animal rights activists. With many different types of actions, they strive to create their ideal world free from speciesism, where everyone is vegan and no more animals are being used for food, clothes, entertainment, etc. Veganism, for them, is not just a diet or a lifestyle. It stands for an ideological cause to which they dedicate their whole lives. Their ideology is based on knowledge and research and shaped by their senses and emotions. This way, taking action forms their identity and gives meaning to their lives. Since the goal of vegan animal rights activists is changing society, and thus battling the 'tradition' of eating meat and using animals, this thesis argues that vegan animal rights activism can be seen as a transition movement in the Chthulucene epoch.

Keywords: veganism; activism; transition movements; Chthulucene; speciesism; emotion; senses; human-nonhuman relationships; identity.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is the result of my second fieldwork period as a student of cultural anthropology. The first time I did fieldwork was during my bachelor's study. Although everything about that experience was new and exciting, it was not what I hoped it would be, mainly due to problems with my health. This time, as a master's student, I immediately felt that my research was more academically and socially relevant than my previous research. Furthermore, due to being in a better place myself I could exploit a broader range of interests and truly immerse myself in the population. All of this combined made these three months of being in the field an intriguing and informative period. Still, the actual start to this research took place well before my fieldwork; seven months ago, in December 2018 to be exact. I was having a drink with my father and we talked about my studies. I said that I did not have a clue yet as to what I wanted to do for my thesis. He mentioned something about veganism and said that he finds it fascinating that this movement is growing so rapidly nowadays. This got me thinking and before I knew it, I wrote a research proposal on vegan activism. Therefore, this thesis would not have come about without my father, Tim, who brought up the idea for my subject. I am proud that I can thank him for being the first person who played a role in the creation of this thesis.

In February 2019, when I started doing fieldwork, I was a bit anxious about how people would respond to me as an anthropologist, and if they would allow me (a vegetarian at the time) to be part of their community. Luckily, some research participants made me feel comfortable and accepted from the beginning, and helped me to find my way around the field. I would like to thank my key informant Austin for the good conversations we had, and for taking me to all the activist events and activities. Furthermore, I thank Gwen, Chloe and John for helping me out and providing me with a lot of information during the first weeks of my fieldwork.

Halfway through the fieldwork period, I participated in a demonstration in front of a slaughterhouse, where we were able to see the animals inside the trucks before they went to get slaughtered. This experience made me 'go native', and I felt so bad about the practices in the bio industry, that I wanted to become vegan as well. A special thanks goes to Caren, who was the first person I spoke to when I came to this conclusion. Thank you for your understanding, your kind words and the practical tips you gave me. My words of gratitude also go to all the participants I spoke to and interviewed during this research, in particular Anna, Joyce, Jim, Deborah, Alice, Ian, Dominique, Dan, and Jade. Thank you for sharing your stories with me, letting me inside your homes and your hearts, and helping me find my place in the world of vegan activism.

When my fieldwork period came to an end, I took some time to look back and reflect upon my experiences before I started writing this thesis. I wrote in my diary: "The fieldwork period was

beautiful, intense, emotional, cheerful, funny, sometimes cringeworthy and sometimes exciting, but I am grateful that I have experienced this and that my participants gave me so much access to their group” (fieldwork diary, 2-5-2019). Now that even the thesis is written, and the entire investigation is coming to an end, I still agree with the words I wrote that day. It has been a wonderful experience that taught me a lot, both academically and personally, and I am proud of the final product. I want to thank my close friends Margriet and Heleen for critically revising the text and helping me with the finishing touch to make this thesis what it is right now. That being said leaves me with one more person to thank for her contribution, my supervisor Fabiola Jara Gomez, who helped me writing the research proposal, gave me practical advice during the fieldwork, and guided me step by step through the process of writing this thesis. Finally, I thank you, the reader, for taking time to read this work. I wish you find it illuminating, and hope you will read this thesis with interest and enthusiasm.

Lisanne van Kesteren

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Lexicon

Abbreviations

PvdD	Partij voor de Dieren, the Dutch political party for the animals
NVV	Nederlandse Vereniging voor Veganisme, Dutch association for veganism
AV	Anonymous for the Voiceless
TSM	The Save Movement
DxE	Direct Action Everywhere

Vocabulary

Corpse / cadaver / flesh	Meat
Dead animals	Meat
Bee-vomit	Honey
Ovulation / menstruation of a chicken	Egg
Corpse smell	Scent of (cooked) meat
Bodily fluids	Dairy
(Animal) Cruelty	Animal products
Murder	Slaughter
Breastmilk	Cow's milk
Rape	Insemination
Carnism	The dominant believe system that animals are here for us humans, and should be eaten
Omnis / omnivores	People who eat meat
Silent vegans	Vegans who do not participate in activism

Introduction

With approximately 750 people, we march through the streets of Rotterdam. Despite the warm weather, everybody is super energetic. We are holding signs saying ‘Stop Animal Testing’ from PvdD (Partij voor de Dieren) and the foundation Animal Rights. On the left we see people having lunch on terraces outdoors. While we march on, we are chanting loudly: *“There’s no excuse, for animal abuse! There’s no excuse, for animal abuse!”*. Seeing the meat and cheese on their plates makes us chant even louder. *“Their bodies! Not ours!”*.²

Many people already know what it is, or have at least heard of it; veganism. In the past twenty years, veganism has grown rapidly in The Netherlands. From an estimated 16.000 vegans in 1996, to around 121.000 vegans at the beginning of 2019 (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Veganisme, Dutch association for veganism).³ Scholars propose several reasons for the current popularity of veganism. The arguments heard most often are that veganism is considered to be beneficial for the environment, overall physical health, the world food problem and the animals.⁴ For some practitioners, however, veganism is about more than health and animal welfare. They stand for a vegan morality, defined by The Vegan Society as follows: “Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.”⁵ Being an ‘ethical vegan’, therefore, means eating a plant-based diet without meat, dairy products, eggs and honey and avoiding animal products, and products tested on animals, in clothing and cosmetics, as well as avoiding places that use animals for entertainment.

Ethical vegans can be so eager to stop all types of animal suffering, that they get active to encourage others to become vegan too. A fast-growing group of vegans tries to raise awareness about the cruelties that take place in animal industries. They do so through online activism (spreading images and videos on social media), street activism and protests (as outlined in the vignette above). Since the beginning of 2019 there have been some major vegan actions in The Netherlands that received a lot

² March against animal testing on World Day for Laboratory Animals, 20-4-2019.

³ Source: <https://www.veganisme.org/veelgestelde-vragen/>. Accessed on 12-4-2019.

⁴ Sources: <https://veganchallenge.nl/waarom-meedoen/>; <https://proveg.com/nl/5-pros/>; https://evengeenvlees.nl/waarom?gclid=CjwKCAjw0ZfoBRB4EiwASUMdYQB7NieQ65jAhTi-wfe9sboZL_zhN_zmBGQLMJf69C5d8PmJGFQuhhoCZgcQAvD_BwE. Accessed on 16-6-2019.

⁵ Source: <https://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/definition-veganism>. Accessed on 12-4-2019.

of media attention. On April 14 for example, four activists disrupted the Raveleijn⁶ show in theme park De Efteling by jumping inside the arena while show horses ran around with burning blankets on their backs. The activists believe that this is animal abuse and demand the theme park to stop using animals for their shows. Another protest that was extensively discussed in the media, was the recent occupation of a pig farm in Boxtel by over one hundred animal rights activists (May 13, 2019). For about ten hours, they stayed inside the farm to make photos and videos of the pigs' living conditions. Farmers of the surrounding areas got mad and started a counter protest outside, which led to intervention of the riot police and the arrest of 76 animal rights activists after they got out of the farm.⁷ Since then, the public debate around animal rights has intensified and discussions concerning the issue are heating up. Overall, these events have caused severe emotional outbursts from both supporters and opponents of the activists⁸, leading from threats to physical violence.⁹ Animal rights issues even form part of the political agenda and are being discussed in parliament.¹⁰

In The Netherlands alone, there are around twelve different organizations that promote animal rights and veganism, most of them also operating worldwide. Some examples of these organizations are The Save Movement (TSM), Anonymous for the Voiceless (AV), Bite Back, Earthlings, Animal Rights and Direct Action Everywhere (DxE). What these organizations have in common, is that they all fight for animal *rights*, rather than animal *welfare*. Animal welfare means that it is okay to use animals for human interest, as long as the animals are treated well and humane. Animal rights on the other hand means that animals have their own rights, just like humans, so humans should not use animals for their own needs. For that reason, people who participate in vegan activism can be seen as *animal rights activists*. Some even call themselves 'advocates for the animals' who try to 'be a voice for the voiceless'. Cole and Morgan (2011, 135) state that most vegans see veganism as an aspect of anti-speciesist practice. Speciesism is a form of discrimination based on species, usually as human prejudice against nonhuman animals (Ryder 1983, 5 in Cole and Morgan 2011, 135). By asking the question why people eat one animal (for example a cow) and love another (a cat or a dog), animal rights activists show societies' speciesist practices. This illustrates their criticism towards dominant culture, where eating meat and other animal products is still the norm (Nederlandse Vegetariërsbond

⁶ Source: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2280414-dierenactivisten-verstoren-efdeling-show-raveleijn.html>. Accessed on 7-6-2019.

⁷ Source: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2284588-alle-dierenactivisten-boxtel-vrijgelaten.html>. Accessed on 7-6-2019.

⁸ Source: <https://www.omroepbrabant.nl/nieuws/2997767/Van-walgelijk-tot-helden-emoeties-op-social-media-lopen-hoog-op-na-stalbezetting-Boxtel>. Accessed on 7-6-2019.

⁹ Source: <https://www.omroepbrabant.nl/nieuws/2983190/Dierenactivisten-die-Efteling-show-verstoorden-bedolven-onder-bedreigingen-lets-met-kogels>. Accessed on 7-6-2019.

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/03/14/antwoorden-kamervragen-over-de-concrete-aanpak-van-bedreigingen-van-boeren>. Accessed on 7-6-2019.

2018, 5). Vegan animal rights activists strive to ban the use of animals completely, and live next to animals instead of with them as properties. This approach is called *abolitionism* and is comparable to notions of banning human slavery. Ingold (1994) explains this by saying “[...] the domestic animal is no more the physical conductor of its master’s activity than is the slave: both constitute labour itself rather than its instruments, and are therefore bound by social relations of production” (Ingold 1980, 88 in Ingold 1994, 52). Hence, activists have profound relationships with animals, in which they make no distinctions between domesticated animals and other animals. By taking action, vegans want to express their cultural critique and change the majorities’ behaviour, hoping this will lead to a transition in society.

The notion of transition is becoming more and more important in the future-oriented academic debate (Feola and Nunes 2014, 233). ‘Transition’ indicates progressive processes of change towards an uncertain future, and the notion of transition is increasingly used to contextualise discourses of community development and environmental change. Such discourses must try to ‘hold the future together’ (Brown et al. 2012, 1607), which is an increasing necessity in the current epoch where human and nonhuman are inextricably linked (Haraway 2016, 55). Haraway refers to this post-Anthropocene era as Chthulucene, because it requires ‘making-with’ all the species rather than ‘self-making’, which is exclusively for humans (Haraway 2016).

This thesis aims to respond to the societal tension around animals rights activism and the academic discourse in the post-Anthropocene era with its need for transition and social change, by providing evidence from three-month long ethnographic fieldwork in The Netherlands from February 11 until May 12th, 2019, in order to answer the following research question:

‘How can vegan animal rights activism in The Netherlands be understood as a transition movement in the era of the Chthulucene?’

This question is divided into five subsidiary questions. Subsidiary question ‘What is a transition movement?’ addresses the theories briefly mentioned above, to explain this specific tendency in the Chthulucene epoch. Additionally, it provides information on activism and (grassroots) social movements. The second subsidiary question: ‘What is vegan animal rights activism?’ elaborates on the scientific theories about veganism, speciesism and abolitionism and describes who vegan animal rights activists are. To get a better understanding of vegan notions, the third subsidiary question is: ‘Which scientific and/or academic debates are followed and used by activists to sustain their cultural critique of current human-animal (capitalist) relationships, and form the base of their activism?’. Since experiences are more basic than practices, the fourth subsidiary question is: ‘How do senses and

emotions shape and influence the practices of vegan animal rights activists?’ The final question is directed to clarify: ‘How do vegan animal rights activists function as a community?’.

All of the data gathered to answer these questions was collected using ethnographic research methods. By studying vegan activist practices, both online and offline, I tried to gain better understanding and knowledge of this small, ideological group. I wanted to find out what ‘triggered’ people to join this movement and how, and to what extent, people remain active for veganism and animal rights (Cherry 2015, 63). The main method used for this research is participant observation, which took place during actions of AV, TSM, Animal Rights and Bite Back. To build *rappport* I started with informal conversations and *being there* (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 47). Additionally, I held a large number of conversations with many of the participants, both personally and in groups. Lastly, a total of nine in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted, for which topic lists were used. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed (Boeije 2010, 69; DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 139; Evers 2015, 35). During two of the interviews, Pink’s (2007, 82) method of *photo elicitation* was used, which means that the researcher gives the participant an image of something related to the study, and asks what this evokes, or means for them. With this method, the researcher can get different information and other insights. I did this by showing the interviewee a video of an animal welfare-oriented farm and ask them what they think about that.

Since the vegan activist movement mainly operates through Facebook, I also used the internet for materials. This was necessary and useful, because social networking sites follow the logic of snowball samples and give access to a wide (in this case even transnational) network, which I needed to find participants and events to attend (O’Reilly 2012, 175). I also examined activists’ posts on Facebook and Instagram. It is important to note that all research participants that I quote and/or name are anonymised, and with that, all of the names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

I started this research thinking I would learn about vegan lifestyles and food activism, but I discovered more along the way. Shortly after beginning my fieldwork, I found out that vegan activism is not a form of food activism, but something that is more profound. Vegan animal rights activists shape their emotions, and with that, their understanding of human-animal relationships and vegan notions through extensive research. This can lead to the formation of new identities, based on a strong belief and willingness to do ‘the right thing’. Some even argued that vegan activism forms part of their life purpose, and hence gives meaning to their lives.

Personally, I also went through a change during the fieldwork period. When I started my research in February, I considered myself a vegetarian. I did not eat meat or fish, but dairy, eggs and honey were part of my weekly intake. Also, I did not pay attention to animal products in my cosmetics

and clothing, nor was I avoiding places that held animals for entertainment (like zoos). I did not have the intention to become vegan myself, which was something I struggled with at the beginning of the fieldwork. Many participants saw me as someone to be persuaded, and they did not fully let me into their community. I continuously felt a certain level of distance between me and the researched group. This changed when I went to a Pig Save from The Save Movement on April 1st 2019, which occurred halfway through the fieldwork period. Being there and seeing the animals inside a truck before going to be slaughtered, was so intense and emotional, that I decided to become vegan as well. Making this decision undoubtedly changed the relationship with my research participants, because then, they considered me as 'one of them' and started asking if I would remain active after the research had ended. Although at first I was worried that this would affect my research and make my perspective more biased, I actually found some essential new information about the vegan community, that definitely gave this thesis more depth. Therefore, this thesis does bear some resemblance to, and examples of, autoethnography (Ellis et al. 2011, 273).

This thesis is structured along five chapters. The first chapter gives a theoretical framework and deals with transition movements, veganism and activism. Chapter two presents the context of this research through a discussion of the different vegan activist organizations in The Netherlands that played an important role in my fieldwork. Their types of activism, as well as their goals and the way they perform actions will be illustrated. After that, I introduce the activists themselves; my research participants. Next follow three empirical chapters: chapter three discusses vegan animal rights activists' cultural critique on the way animals are treated in bio industries today, based on theories of humanity, animality and phenomenology. Chapter four looks into how sensorial experiences can cause such intense emotions that they lead to an ideology which forms a life purpose for some activists. In the final chapter of this thesis, I describe the vegan activist community. Here, I dig deeper into the sense of belonging and concepts of othering and I explain some internal contestations the activist community struggles with. The conclusion that follows is a short summary that presents and connects the main theories, findings and arguments of this research, to state the final argument that vegan animal rights activism is a form of a transition movement in the Chthulucene epoch. This thesis finishes with a personal reflection on the process of doing ethnographic fieldwork and writing the thesis, as reflexivity is of major importance in anthropological research (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 35-36).

1. Veganism as a transition movement

This chapter provides a theoretical framework on the anthropological debates around the Anthropocene, transition movements and veganism, to answer the subsidiary question: ‘What is a transition movement?’. It argues that in the light of posthumanism and the post-Anthropocene epoch, grassroots initiatives arise in order to build a more resilient future and fight for a change in society. These initiatives can be referred to as *transition movements*. By elaborating on theories around veganism and vegan activism, this chapter explains why vegan animal rights activism can theoretically be considered a transition movement.

1.1 From Anthropocene to Chthulucene

In the 1980’s, ecologist Stoecker coined the term *Anthropocene* to “refer to growing evidence for the transformative effects of human activities on the earth” (Haraway 2016, 44). Geologists started to call the current epoch Anthropocene in the year 2000, as the human disruption is now outranking geological forces (Haraway 2016, 72; Tsing 2015, 19). Some interpreters see this name as indicating the triumph of humans, for example in the form of technological advancements, but many anthropologists think that the opposite is more accurate. As Tsing (2015, 19) says: “without planning or intention, humans have made a mess of our planet”. Despite the prefix *anthropo-* (human), she says, the mess is not a result of our ‘species biology’, but the Anthropocene timeline begins with the occurrence of modern capitalism, which has led to the destruction of landscapes and ecologies. This can be explained by the fact that since the beginning of capitalism, humans feel driven by ideas of progress and the spread of technological advancements which turned both human and nonhuman beings into resources (Tsing 2015, 19). These critiques on the Anthropocene coincide with the ideas of cultural posthumanism, which strives to move beyond old concepts of ‘human nature’. Posthuman thinkers believe that human nature does not exist anymore and that we need to take responsibility for our actions (Hornborg 2017).

Haraway argues, accordingly, that we should call our time the *Chthulucene* instead of the Anthropocene. The name Chthulucene is a compound of two Greek roots, *khthôn* and *kainos*, which stand for a timeplace where we need to learn to stay with the trouble of living and dying on a (by humans) damaged earth. *Kainos* means ‘now’, a time of beginnings. *Khthôn*, or Chthonic ones, are beings of the earth, both ancient and current. They are monsters that demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earthly processes and critters, but also consequences (Haraway 2016, 2). Through several distinct examples, Haraway shows how humans and nonhuman beings become enfolded in each other’s lives and how they come to need each other, as *sympoiesis* (‘making-with’),

instead of *autopoiesis*, which is 'self-making' (Haraway 2016, 58, 71). She states that the Chthulucene "is made of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake". Human beings are thus not the only important actors in the Chthulucene, in contrast to the Anthropocene. In the Chthulucene, all other beings are able to react because human beings are both *with* and *of* the earth (Haraway 2016, 55).

1.2 Transition movements

The notion of transition is becoming increasingly important in the future-oriented academic debate (Feola and Nunes 2014, 233). According to Brown et al. (2012, 1608), *transition* indicates progressive processes of change towards an uncertain future, and the notion of transition is increasingly used to contextualise discourses of community development and environmental change. Such discourses must try to 'hold the future together' (Brown et al. 2012, 1607). Sage (2014) uses transition as a 'path' that brings together broad social movements that seek a more resilient future. This explains why in this Chthulucene era, more and more grassroots innovations start to arise to address capitalist problems. According to O'Brien (2012, in Feola and Nunes 2014, 237), grassroots innovations can act as 'incubators' for the social change that is needed to counter future environmental changes. These innovations often challenge the status quo (made up of technologies, values and practices) and promote different ways of organizing social and economic life (Feola and Nunes 2014, 237). Feola and Nunes (2014, 236) state that local initiatives for social change are called 'transition initiatives', or in other words, *transition movements*. These movements work to establish a sustainable eco-economy that is an alternative and diverse space for the development of new production and consumption networks. A motivating factor for transition movements is the fear that unsustainable lifestyles are leading towards an uninhabitable future (Sage 2014, 255). Therefore, movements that argue for a more enriching, sustainable life are growing fast and gain extensive support. Another factor in the increasing popularity of transition movements, is the fact that these movements do not need to rely on politicians alone, but they take collective action towards change (Connors and McDonald 2011, 559). According to Feola and Nunes (2014, 245), a transition initiative can only be successful when it has developing outreach projects such as education and awareness-raising in the community.

1.3 Veganism

As stated in the introduction, vegans do not eat any products that come from animals. This includes meat, dairy, eggs and honey. However, this research is about ethical vegans who are not just on a plant-based diet. They follow the definition of veganism as stated by The Vegan Society: "Veganism is

a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.”¹¹ Living by this guideline makes veganism a major point in someone’s life; it forms their lifestyle, identity and social practices.

An important aspect of the vegan morality, is being against speciesism. Speciesism is a form of discrimination that places human animals above other animals and considering certain animals (like dogs or cats) more important than others (like pigs or cows). It is a form of prejudice against nonhuman species, comparable to sexism and racism. Speciesism underestimates the similarities between the discriminator (humans) and the discriminated (animals), and shows disregard for the interests of the other and their sufferings (Ryder 1983, 5 in Cole and Morgan 2011, 135). Speciesism is thus the assumption of human superiority and can lead to the exploitation of animals. Cole and Morgan (2011, 135) state that veganism is understood, by most vegans themselves, as an aspect of anti-speciesist practice. This connects to the Chthulucene perspective of living with nonhuman beings instead of seeing them as commodities.

Most of us are not born as vegans. The Netherlands is a country where eating meat and dairy is considered normal and something most of us grew up with (Nederlandse Vegetariërsbond 2018, 5). As such, it is interesting to question how and why someone decides to become vegan. Cherry (2015, 63) states that to become vegan, many people need to have a “catalytic experience”. Often, this is the first time they learn about animal cruelty in the food industry. By having conversations with other vegans and sharing their stories, they slowly change their actions and practices to match their own ideals. Young people are especially sensitive to this, because they are in a “search for ethical consistency” (Que’niart 2008, 220 in Cherry 2015, 55). The individual process of transitioning to veganism is often very personal and shaped by one’s own experiences (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991 in Larsson et al. 2003, 64). Self-perception can also influence food choices (Sneijder and Te Molder 2009, 622). Veganism can provide consumers with the means to construct individual and collective identities, in an attempt to go against the structural forces of animal exploitation (Ulusoy 2015, 421-422). Moreover, Larsson et al. (2003, 62) state that even self-identity is collective, which means that when someone describes the meaning of veganism, she or he provides a personal view, which simultaneously tells us something about the collective identity of vegans in society. Hence, self-identity is determined by lifestyle and people’s practices, but the characteristics of the people around them can also have an impact (Sneijder and Te Molder 2009, 621).

¹¹ Source: <https://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/definition-veganism>. Accessed on 12-4-2019.

Many scholars see veganism as a cultural- or a social movement (Cherry 2006; Larsson et al 2003; Ulusoy 2015). A social movement is a form of collective action, based on solidarity, carrying on a conflict and breaking the limits of the system in which action occurs (Melucci 1984 in Cherry 2006, 155). Cherry (2006, 156), however, states that while traditional social movements often define success in terms of legislative changes, veganism measures its success in terms of cultural and lifestyle changes. She claims that the success of veganism is very personal and is mainly visible in a person's choices in everyday life, such as the food they eat and the products they use. As such, vegan practices in everyday life are extra important. Therefore, scholars now tend to see veganism as a *lifestyle movement* (Haenfler, Johnson and Jones 2012; Cherry 2015). A lifestyle movement is "a type of social movement focusing less on traditional political mobilization and more on people's everyday lifestyle choices" (Cherry 2015, 55). Participation in lifestyle movements is relatively individual, ongoing and aims to change cultural and economic practices, rather than targeting the state (Haenfler, Johnson and Jones 2012, 6).

1.4 Vegan animal rights activism

Larsson et al. (2003) make a distinction between three types of vegans; the Conformed Vegan, the Organized Vegan and the Individualistic Vegan. 'Conformed Vegans' mainly socialize with vegetarians and wish to share the main attitudes and behaviours of this group. 'Organized Vegans' are very committed vegans who base their behaviour on ideology, characterized by animal ethics, equality and solidarity. They protest against the exploitation of animals and mainly associate with like-minded people. Performativity is very important for Organized Vegans, since they really carry out their vegan lifestyle towards others. This is considered vegan animal rights activism. 'Individualistic Vegans' are, just like Organized Vegans, very convinced of their decisions, but they do not feel the need to unify and associate themselves with other vegans. They do not participate in demonstrations or protests and respect omnivores (i.e. people who eat meat, see the vocabulary list above), but they are certain that they will always be vegan themselves. Larsson et al. (2003, 64) state that these three identity categories are not solid. People can shift from one type of vegan to another during their life course.

As said in the previous paragraph, veganism can provide consumers with the means to construct individual and collective identities. This is because identity work and identity formation go hand in hand with community feelings and a sense of belonging (Counihan and Van Esterik 2012; Larssons et al. 2003). Therefore, participation in activism can be a place for identity formation and learning active democratic citizenship. Activism is also a valuable way to claim community and public space (Counihan and Van Esterik 2012, 588, 599). Organized Vegans, i.e. vegan animal rights activists,

do this by taking action to spread their ideas and views, which is also a way to connect with likeminded people. Moreover, through different online platforms, vegans form a large transnational community. The fact that vegans are part of something that big, can contribute to a sense of belonging as well.

The methods activists use to make others go vegan typically involve some attempt to change their recruits' belief system, through "the quick punch to the gut of moral shocks", which functions as a catalytic experience (Cherry 2015, 63). This can be done by showing people footage of the cruelties that happen in industries that in their view exploit animals for food, clothing or the testing of cosmetics and medication. Usually, the goal of this technique is getting veganism to become a key feature of a person's identity (Cherry 2015, 59).

According to Giraud (2013, 104), vegan activism is "a complex and concrete challenge to the naturalisation of contexts in which human and animal exploitation intersect under capitalism". This explains that vegan animal rights activism goes beyond the focus on individual daily practices. Vegan animal rights activists strive for a societal change of behaviour towards animals, without speciesism. For that reason, their activism can be seen as a transition movement, because they question how we should associate with nonhuman beings from a Chthulucene perspective.

2. “You can always be a vegan activist”

To explain the context in which this research came about, and answer the subsidiary question: ‘What is vegan animal rights activism?’, this chapter illustrates the most important information about the different types of protests and activist organizations, the population and the participants of this research. The different activist organizations and the way they perform their activism is described, showing how several activist organizations in The Netherlands use ‘moral shocks’ to recruit new members (Cherry 2015, 63), and that these transition initiatives have the potential to be successful, because almost all of the organizations have outreach projects such as education and awareness-raising (Feola and Nunes 2014, 245). After that follows a presentation of the research participants, to show who vegan animal rights activists are.

2.1 Activist organizations

As stated in the introduction, there are about twelve different vegan activist organizations in The Netherlands. This paragraph describes the organizations I learned the most about during my fieldwork, by participating in actions and demonstrations and by what participants told me during interviews and conversations. All of these organizations have at least two main ethical principles in common. They fight for animal *rights*, which means that animals should have their own rights, just like humans, and therefore humans should not use them for their own needs. Secondly, they make a point of distinguishing from believing in animal *welfare*, which means that you think it is all right to use animals for human interest, as long as the animals are treated well and *humane*. In sum, the organizations adhere to the anti-speciesist perspective. However, the organizations can be divided into three groups based on the way they are organized and their kind of activism. The first group consists of organizations that specialize in street activism and doing outreach. Another kind of activism is more politically oriented and organizes campaigns and marches. The last group of organizations focusses on human-animal relationships. Most organizations work together during large actions, and the activists usually participate in several – if not all – kinds of activism and feel connected to more than one organization. This means that someone who is active for an outreach organization, can also join campaigns and work on their relationship with animals. It does not exclude one another. Additionally, many vegan animal rights activists try to carry out their message as often as possible, by ‘swiping’ products in supermarkets (i.e. placing plant-based products on the shelves of animal products), sticking stickers in public places and on meat shelves in supermarkets, writing blogs, handing out flyers, calling restaurants to ask if

they have vegan options (also when they do not even want to eat there), etc. Alice¹², an activist who also has her own blog, expressed this by saying: “I think you can always be a vegan activist. In any situation, you can always bring the conversation to that” (interview, 30-3-2019).

2.1.1 Outreach organizations

There are two organizations in The Netherlands that specialize in street activism to raise awareness for the practices in several animal industries by doing outreach conversations. These organizations are Anonymous for the Voiceless and Earthlings.

Anonymous for the Voiceless (AV) is an animal rights organization that performs street activism. The organization was founded by two people from Australia in April 2016, and is active in The Netherlands since the end of 2017. AV operates through Facebook. They call their members for new demonstrations by posting Facebook events and updates in private groups. Every city that organizes Cubes is called a *chapter* and has its own Facebook group. The Netherlands also has one larger group for information about all chapters together. To enter an AV Facebook group, one must answer the questions “Are you vegan? If so, why?”, “Where did you hear about Anonymous for the Voiceless?”, and “Do you intend on volunteering at a Cube of Truth demonstration?”. In the time of my fieldwork, the Facebook group of AV:Netherlands had a little over a thousand members. Worldwide, AV has about 147.000 members, spread over one thousand chapters in different countries. The transnational ties are thus very important.

The ‘voiceless’ to whom the name Anonymous for the Voiceless refers, are the animals, because they cannot speak up for themselves. On the website of AV is stated that they “hold an abolitionist stance against animal exploitation and promote a clear vegan message.”¹³ Abolitionism is the belief that animals have their own rights and that use of animals should be banned completely. As stated in the YouTube video ‘Thought of the Day: Introduction to the Abolitionist Approach’: “for the same reason that we reject human slavery, we have to reject the status of nonhuman animals as property.”¹⁴ This includes the idea that veganism is the moral baseline and that we have an obligation to be vegan. Other principles of the abolitionist approach are rejecting speciesism and embracing non-violence.

¹² Alice is a 33 year old woman. She is active for AV and TSM and has a popular blog and Instagram account, where she posts about veganism, activism and her kitchen garden.

¹³ Source: <https://www.anonymousforthevoiceless.org/>. Accessed on 6-6-2019.

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isWR5Ax8zHg&t=304s&fbclid=IwAR2es2Xgs1-tApitwKKJFR5DQJDo3Rg57FYTwTgrhaWUoHZrV1q2MTOO730>. Accessed on 6-6-2019.

An action of AV is called a *Cube*, or *Cube of Truth*, and it is in their words a peaceful demonstration. The activists stand in a square formation, holding signs with the word TRUTH and screens displaying footage of animal exploitation, indicating that these clips show the truth about what is happening in all kinds of industries, like animal agriculture, fishing and testing. These clips are usually quite confronting and worrying to see. With this, they intend to get the attention of bystanders and arouse their interest by means of the ‘moral shock’ the footage can cause (Cherry 2015). Once there are bystanders looking at the screens, an activist who walks around the Cube will start a conversation with them about animal exploitation and veganism, which is an example of education and awareness-raising (Feola and Nunes 2014, 245). These conversations are called *outreach*, and so, the activists are *outreachers*. When an outreachers had a good conversation with a bystander and feels like he or she takes veganism seriously and might take steps towards a vegan lifestyle, they count it as a potential new vegan. At the end of the Cube, the organizer asks all the activists how many they counted and announces the total amount of people they reached. This is called the *tally*. After that, the activists usually take a picture together and then go to a restaurant or have a picnic at a park to socialize with each other.

There are some strict rules for volunteering in an AV action. Only vegans are allowed to do outreach conversations. When you are a vegetarian or an omni, you can stand in the Cube holding a sign or a screen, but officially this is allowed only three times. After the third Cube you attend, AV expects you to either go vegan yourself or stop volunteering. During Cubes, the activists wear only black clothes, combined with a white Guy Fawkes mask (see photo 1 and 2 below). In a video on Facebook¹⁵, AV states that they wear these masks because they stand for anti-repression and anti-totalitarianism. The masks are also against discrimination, corruption and war and they help the activists to remain anonymous. Another more simple reason why the AV activists wear a Guy Fawkes mask is because it adds an aesthetic look to the demonstration.¹⁶ During the Cubes, AV always plays music in the background by using a big wireless music box in the middle of the Cube (this is visible in photo 1 below). The songs are often melancholic and sad. This illustrates that performativity is an important aspect of the AV demonstrations.

¹⁵ João Løbo. “The Cube of Truth”. Accessed on January 6, 2019.

¹⁶ “Why the masks? A reflection on Anonymous for the Voiceless”, Adam Cardilini. Last modified on September 17, 2016.

<https://adamcardilini.wordpress.com/2016/09/17/why-the-masks-a-reflection-on-anonymous-for-the-voiceless/>



Photo 1: Cube of Truth Hilversum, 17-2-2019.



Photo 2: Cube of Truth Utrecht, 9-3-2019.

A smaller outreach organization is Earthlings. This is a grassroots animal rights action group that currently has five local *chapters* in The Netherlands. Comparable to how AV organizes itself, a *chapter* is a city that organizes their own actions. In addition to this, their actions are also highly similar to the Cubes of AV. Although they do not always stand in a certain (cube) formation, actions of Earthlings are also about showing footage of animal cruelties and having outreach conversations, and the activists wear a plain white mask and black clothes (see photo 3 below). Earthlings state that “the use of the masks is to get noticed and that it is not about us, but the footage we are showing. We are here for the animals.”¹⁷ The images they show of animal exploitation on farms, in barns and in slaughterhouses are claimed to be made undercover in The Netherlands and Belgium, by Animal Rights and other organizations (described below). To promote veganism, they hand out cards from their own group and brochures from Plant Power. Accordingly, Earthlings works closely together with Animal Rights. Caren (interview, 2-4-2019) told me that a few years ago, Earthlings did not play music during their actions, but used sound fragments of animals in pain, like shrieking pigs. For that reason, she did not want to attend these actions at first. Now that they have music in the background, just like AV, she does like to participate in these actions as well.



Photo 3: Demonstration of Earthlings, date unknown.¹⁸

¹⁷ Source:

<https://davidharley0.wixsite.com/earthlingsnl/earthlings?fbclid=IwAR1HM67JurbEqctkr3TtVqCtg7WBCWBM0uLZbSuc8UpNJHL-wEVaLEmT-Gk>. Accessed on 6-6-2019.

¹⁸ Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/earthlings.nl/photos/a.618262641951309/618262851951288/?type=3&theater>. Accessed on 16-7-2019.

2.1.2 Politically oriented organizations

Animal Rights and Bite Back are two examples of organizations that are active for animal rights in a broader sense, to combine street activism with more political campaigns. Animal Rights is a Dutch foundation that started in January 2009 as action group against animal testing. In Belgium, they operate as a non-profit association since 2015. In that year, they also started with campaigns and petitions against hunting, fur, slaughter and animal testing. Additionally, Animal Rights provides information about plant-based nutrition with their foundation Plant Power, from which Earthlings hands out flyers.

The foundation runs on donations and besides their focus on political change, they do occasionally co-organize activist events. During my research period, I went to one of these larger demonstrations of Animal Rights, which was a march against animal testing on World Day for Laboratory Animals, April 20, 2019 (see photo 4 below). The march was also supported by AV, TSM, Bite Back, Partij voor de Dieren Rotterdam, NVV and Een DIER Een VRIEND, which shows that even though all organizations have their own type of activism, they do work together on major events.



Photo 4: Speech of PvdD Member of Parliament Frank Wassenburg during the march against animal testing, 20-4-2019.

Organization Bite Back was founded in 2003 in Belgium and since 2015 it is also an official foundation in The Netherlands. They organize different kinds of campaigns geared towards the general public, in which they aim to “make the public, media and politics in Belgium and The Netherlands enthusiastic about the interests and rights of animals, and move them towards making choices that are not at the animals’ expense.”¹⁹ An example of such an action is protesting in front of the Dolfinarium in Harderwijk. Once every month, a few activists stand at the entrance of this Dutch dolphin aquarium. They hold up signs with pictures of dolphins and questions like ‘Will I ever be free?’, and hand out informational flyers about dolphins in the wild to the people who come to visit Dolfinarium (see photo 5 below). This is a way of educating the community about the living conditions of dolphins, which indicates that it can be a successful movement (Feola and Nunes 2014, 245).

Dan is an activist who has already demonstrated five times for the closure of Dolfinarium. He told me that these actions have been taken place for about ten years, which makes it one of the older campaigns. According to Dan this action is peaceful and in silence, because they do not have outreach conversations and do not show cruel images (conversation during dinner, 21-3-2019). The perception of a peaceful action is thus different from how AV sees it.



Photo 5: Action for the closure of Dolfinarium, 23-3-2019.

¹⁹ Source: <https://www.biteback.org/over-ons/>. Accessed on 6-6-2019.

2.1.3 Organizations focussed on human-animal relations

The Save Movement (TSM) is an international grassroots movement founded in Toronto, Canada in December 2010.²⁰ The first time I heard of TSM was during a conversation with Gwen (19-2-2019). She told me that TSM is now operating worldwide and in The Netherlands, there are 22 groups that organize Saves. These groups have strong transnational ties, because they keep in touch with the head office in Toronto and also rely on them for donations with which they finance things like flyers. Gwen organizes one of those groups at a small slaughterhouse for halal sheep and non-halal pigs and sheep. At the head of all the groups in The Netherlands is one main organizer, Elliot, who is usually present during the actions as well. An action of TSM is called a *Save* or a *vigil*. The word *Save* stands for a spiritual way of ‘saving’ animals before they go to slaughter, because the activists do not literally save animals, but they give them attention and water before they get killed. They do this by standing outside of slaughterhouses to see the trucks with living animals that will go inside (see photo 6 below). During some Saves, the activists are given time to stand next to the trucks and associate with the animals, but other slaughterhouses do not cooperate or stop the trucks for the activists. In those instances, the activists stand outside with banners or signs to raise awareness for the fact that living animals are being killed. In these two ways, the animals are ‘saved from being unknown’ and they “have literally been given a face” (interview with Dominique²¹, 19-3-2019). According to Gwen (Whatsapp message, 12-3-2019), Saves are also called vigils, because the activists are ‘mourning the animals at a slaughterhouse’.

At the end of a *Save* I attended, the head organizer of TSM The Netherlands quoted PvdD politician Esther Ouwehand, saying: “Bearing witness is an important aspect of shaking up the world”, followed by her own words: “That is why we are here and why we need to keep doing this” (Elliot, 1-4-2019). This shows their cultural critique and that they wish to change the hegemonic perspective on animals. The activists try to achieve this by making videos and photos of the animals inside the trucks, and posting them online. That way, they can show others what really happens when animals go to a slaughterhouse, hoping it will cause a ‘moral shock’ and triggers the need to become vegan (Cherry 2015). They invigorate this by going live on social media (mostly Facebook and Instagram) while they are there, so that others know these are authentic testimonials. TSM calls this way of taking action ‘love based activism’²², which illustrates that they aim to speak to your emotions and senses.

²⁰ Source: <http://thesavemovement.org/the-save-movement/>. Accessed on 5-6-2019.

²¹ Dominique is a 42 year old woman who has been a vegetarian since age 13, and she has been vegan for five years. She is active for animal rights since July 2017.

²² This text is written on TSM flyers, handed out during Saves and distributed in cities.



Photo 6: Pig Save Vigil of The Save Movement, 1-4-2019.

For more ‘disruptive’ activism, there is Direct Action Everywhere (DxE). This movement organizes animal rescues and ‘disruptions’ in supermarkets and restaurants. During an animal rescue, activists get inside a farm or a barn (usually at night) to take animals and bring them to, for example, a local sanctuary, to rescue them from slaughter and/or abuse.

Austin²³, an activist who is also the head organizer for a chapter of AV, told me about a time he joined a disruption in a Dutch supermarket. Together with other activists, he held a minute’s silence at the meat department with signs saying ‘It’s not food, it’s violence’, to mourn the animals that were lying there. He also went to McDonalds that day to do the same (informal conversation, 21-2-2019). This type of activism raises awareness in society too, which makes it potentially successful as a transition movement (Feola and Nunes 2014, 245).

2.1.4 Other organizations

The activist organizations and foundations described above were the ones I joined and/or learned about the most. There are, however, some other groups of which I heard, but do not know enough about to further elaborate on. These are:

²³ Austin is 32 years old. He has been a vegan for 16 years and is active since 2017. He organizes Cubes of AV and joins almost any other activist organization.

- PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). PETA Netherlands was founded in 1993 as an international sister organization of PETA US, which was founded in 1980 in the USA to fight for animal rights. With their three million members, they are the largest animal rights organization in the world.²⁴
- Meat the victims. This is an action group that breaks in, and occupies farms to make footage of the practices inside and spread this knowledge. They consciously decide to stay inside the farm until they are taken away by the authorities, so that they create more publicity. Meat the victims operates under Martin Luther King's quote: "One has the moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws".
- 269Life.
- Een DIER Een VRIEND.

2.2 Activist population

People who participate in these types of activism are considered Organized Vegans (Larsson et al 2003, 64), because they feel the need to carry out their lifestyle (and belief system) onto others. The group of vegan animal rights activists in The Netherlands is very diverse; both in gender, age, and social and cultural background. The youngest person I met was a 15-year-old girl and the oldest was a 62-year-old woman, and all ages in between are fairly equally divided. Gender diversity, on the other hand, is not completely equal among animal rights activists. About two thirds of them are female. The biggest differences are visible in their social and cultural backgrounds. Most of the younger activists (teenagers and early twenties) are still in school or studying, so they do activism in their spare time. In the ages of 25-30 and older, most activist combine activism with their jobs, but here are large differences as well. A few activists live from social benefits or state welfare and join demonstrations and actions as their main activities. Others choose to work part-time so they have enough time to spend on activism, and some activists have full-time jobs, thus they only partake in actions during the weekends. Although many activists would like to make a living out of activism and fight for the animals as their paying job, this is only reserved for a select few. This is because (almost) all kinds of animal rights activism is done on voluntary basis, but there are exceptions. Elliot, for example, the head organizer of TSM in The Netherlands (as explained in paragraph 2.1.), and the board members of Animal Rights get paid for their work, because the organizations are run on donations.

²⁴ Source: <https://www.peta.nl/over-peta/>. Accessed on 6-6-2019.

Having had a 'catalytic experience' (Cherry 2015, 63) is very common in the vegan activist community. Most of the research participants describe some kind of trigger moment that gave them a sudden realisation of animal cruelties and made them want to become vegan. These trigger moments usually come from visual images, either by watching videos or first-hand experiences. For example, two research participants told me that they saw an animal getting slaughtered by family members when they were really young, which made them become a vegetarian right away. When they were older they became vegan by learning more about the use of animals in the dairy-, and egg industry. Not every vegan, however, had a catalytic experience. A few activists started with veganism as a plant-based diet for their health. They say that being part of the 'vegan community' and having conversations with other vegans, mainly online, gave them more access to information about animal suffering. That slowly lead to a change in their motivation, from being on a healthy diet to someone who is against animal cruelty and wants to make others go vegan too. Some of the research participants became vegan 'overnight', which means they made the decision in a day and immediately stopped the use of all animal products. However, about three fourths of the activists I spoke to went through a process of cutting down on animal products and slowly becoming completely vegan. This can take a few weeks up to several months.

Not only my research participants have had a catalytic experience that made them become vegan. As explained in the introduction, I started my fieldwork as a vegetarian who did not have the intention to become vegan. However during a vigil of TSM, I experienced a catalytic experience myself. The vignette below describes this situation.

With about 30 activists, I am standing on the terrain of a large slaughterhouse. The next truck with pigs arrives and stops before us, which enables us to come close. We wear latex gloves and a visitors pass, handed out by the slaughterhouse personnel, and we carry bottles of water for the pigs. Most of the activists wear sweaters or hats from their organization, with words like 'Save lives, Go vegan'.

Everybody is quiet. We stand next to the truck and try to comfort the animals by petting them and giving them water. The pigs in the truck are restless. They shuffle around, but because of the small space, they step and stumble over each other and are covered in their own excrement. Many pigs have scratches all over their body. Slowly, they start to notice that we are giving water and they move towards our side of the truck. In no time, the pigs chuck all the water and the bottles are empty. Five activists take the empty bottles and start walking up and down to the big blue water

tank that is located at the gate of the terrain. They fill up the bottles and bring it back to the activists who are standing next to the truck, so they can give more water to the pigs. In the background, I hear screams. “Those are the animals that go into the gas chamber right now”, says one of the activists. “Their lungs are being burned from the inside. That’s why they are in so much pain that they are shrieking”. Not only the screams are striking, but also the smell. Around the entire terrain is an indescribable smell that penetrates the nose. The odour is sickly and way worse than the smell of urine and poo of the animals inside the truck. After a while, one of the slaughterhouse employees walks up to us and tells us this truck has got to go. The activists all know what this means. We step aside from the pigs and I see many activists with sad facial expressions. The engine starts and the pigs begin to stumble and scream. It is as if they know what is coming. The truck drives away and disappears inside the walls of the slaughterhouse. Some activists wave the pigs goodbye, while the next truck is already waiting for us.²⁵



Photo 1: Pig Save Vigil of The Save Movement, 1-4-2019.

²⁵ Pig Save Vigil from The Save Movement, 1-4-2019.

Photo 7 above shows me giving water to a pig inside one of the trucks in front of the slaughterhouse. Being there and seeing the animals right before they were being slaughtered for consumption, made me feel extremely uncomfortable. This experience affected me morally, but also sensorial, because of the strong smell, sounds and visual images. I realised that even as a vegetarian, I was contributing to these practices, and I did not want that anymore. For that reason, I decided to go vegan as well, three days after going to the Pig Save.

3. 'I know, therefore I am vegan'

My own 'catharsis' described in the previous chapter, is not enough to understand vegan animal rights activists completely, because reasoning and knowledge also play a crucial role in their political engagement. This chapter gives empirical data on the relations of vegan animal rights activists with nature (animals and the bio industry) as part of the Chthulucene epoch, to answer the subsidiary question: 'Which scientific and/or academic debates are followed and used by activists to sustain their cultural critique of current human-animal (capitalist) relationships, and form the base of their activism?'. The history of the domestication of animals and the construction of 'the animal' from a cultural and anthropological perspective is explained first, followed by the phenomenological and ethological discussion on whether animals are sentient beings. The current notions of commodified human-animal relationships are discussed afterwards. By means of examples from the field, this chapter shows how vegan animal rights activists not only criticize current society where animals are commodified, but the history of (Western) human culture.

3.1 Humanity and animality

The very first signs of human-animal collaboration lead back to 17-15.000 years BP or even earlier, circa 20-30.000 years BP, when wolves were held by European and Asian hunter-gatherers. This led to small changes in hunting strategies and techniques, but major differences started to occur when several other species of animals and plants began to be domesticated from around 12.000 years BP. This process is characterized by a shift from hunting-gathering to food production based on cultivation and animal agriculture, but also by a strong demographic transition combined with profound social and spiritual change (Vigne 2011, 171-172). Tanner (in Ingold 1994, 11) argues that the domestication of nature can be seen as an identifiable 'first step' towards culture. This not only produced the human-but also the animal general categories and thus created an ontological other. Therefore, Ingold (1994, 11) argues, even "the anthropological view of culture appears to rest upon the idea of the human symbolic appropriation of nature and hence on an assumption that the 'creation of meaning is the distinguishing and constituting quality of all men – the "human essence" of an older discourse"'.

Traditionally, any speechless being, from animals to infants and deaf-mutes, was considered to have only the most basic mental capacities (Howes and Classen 2014, 68). Moreover, until the 20th century, animals were taken to be insensitive to pain in Western society (Howes and Classen 2014, 74). This explains why there is still an extended scholarly debate about whether nonhuman animals may be regarded as self-conscious subjects with thoughts and feelings, just like humans (Ingold 1994, 6). Ingold (1994, 38) claims that to understand the 'species-barrier' between humans and nonhumans, we

need to consider numerous emotional and intellectual factors, which can be seen in the phenomenology of perception. This is a philosophical approach in which the bodily experience of one particular person is extended to apply to all people everywhere. Phenomenologists in psychology found out that the processing of sensory stimuli enables individuals to understand and interact with the world (Howes and Classen 2014, 9-10). This means that sensation is at the centre of human perception, and sensation can only be realised in relation to other elements (Merleau-Ponty in Pink 2015, 29). An example of this, is that vegan animal rights activists claim that just by looking an animal in the eye, you can see that all animals have a soul, and can think and feel. Therefore, being at a Save of TSM or visiting a farm is a very sensorial experience. This is why animal rights activists hold on to the phenomenological school of ecology and ethology. Ethology is the study of animal behaviour, which has shown that animals are sentient beings. Panksepp (2005), for example, argues that in a study of brain systems, emotions in animals can be revealed. Hence for vegan animal rights activists, all animals are individuals.

One of the videos AV names as a 'Must See' for inspiration to become vegan, is 'The Best Speech You'll Ever Hear' by Gary Yourofsky. In the speech, Yourofsky tells a group of college students about veganism, starting with the sentence: "Today we're gonna talk about the world's forgotten victims. Animals" (Yourofsky 2010). Less than a minute into the speech, he mentions the Bible's "Do unto others, as you would have them do unto yourself", followed by "Animals qualify as others". By saying this, Yourofsky places animals as equals next to humans, and thus breaks through the 'species-barrier' that is traditionally present in the Western world. Yourofsky gives an example of why humans, in his idea, are not real carnivores and that true 'human nature' is not to kill and eat animals. First, he states that real carnivores eat animals raw; with hair, fur, bones, nails, organs and everything on it, without cooking it. For his second example, he sketches a case where you would give a two-year-old child an apple and a living bunny rabbit, joking that if the child eats the rabbit and plays with the apple, he would buy everybody a car, because it would never happen. Of course this is true, but human behaviour is not based on nature alone. Nurture is just as important, if not even more. Ingold (1994, 5) shows this by explaining the difference between 'animality' and 'humanity'. Animality characterizes a state of being, known as 'natural', in which actions are driven by innate emotions unguided by reason or responsibility. Human beings 'in the raw' are in this perspective untouched by the values of culture or civilization. 'Becoming human', then, is equivalent to the process of enculturation, which all children of our species undergo. This makes that humanity is formed in opposition to animality. Therefore, characterizing the human being stripped of from humanity, reveals an animal residue (Ingold 1994, 5). Serpell (1986, in Ingold 1994, 50) argues that in the early years of life, children cannot make a distinction between humans and non-humans. Two-year-olds will begin responding socially towards

animals and treating them as if they were persons. This explains why a child would play with a bunny instead of seeing it as a meal. By using this speech as a source of information, AV contributes to the discourse of humanity, ethology, and human-animal relations. This is expressed in their activism through outreach conversations in which they spread this knowledge.

3.2 Critique on animals as commodities

“I think we should invest in making people aware that animals are not products. In fact that is the basis. An animal is an animal and not a product. It is not up to you to kill that little animal and use it for food” (Caren, interview 2-4-2019).

With this statement, Caren made clear that she criticizes the fact that animals are seen and used as commodities nowadays. Some activists even compare the way animals are currently used and treated to slavery and to the holocaust. This paragraph elaborates on this extended critique.

Ingold (1994, 11) states that the idea of human control over animality is an essential part of a more inclusive ideology of the human domination, or appropriation of nature, whose roots lie deep in the traditions of Western thought. Vegan animal rights activists denounce this tradition and see the domestication of animals as the start of slavery. Ingold explains this by stating that “[...] the domestic animal is no more the physical conductor of its master’s activity than is the slave: both constitute labour itself rather than its instruments, and are therefore bound by social relations of production” (Ingold 1980, 88 in Ingold 1994, 52). During an informal conversation, Chloe²⁶ (26-2-2019) gave me an example of such a critique on animal domestication. She said that she does not fully agree with the use of guide dogs for the blinds. Chloe tolerates it, because she can understand the profits, but she would still “rather look away when [she] sees one, because the dogs are used as a *slave* to make a human’s life easier”. An interesting point is that, while being against animal domestication, quite a lot of vegan animal rights activists have pets, including Chloe. Most of them say that they would never buy a pet that is bred, because “that is animal cruelty”, but adopting one from a shelter is considered as helpful, because the animal will have a better life with them than they would have inside the shelter.

Most domesticated animals nowadays live inside farms, stables or ranches. Beef cattle, pigs, chickens, sheep, ducks, goose, laying hens, milk cows, etc. are all tamed animals that are used for human consumption. These animals are not treated as social beings anymore, they are commodities.

²⁶ Chloe is a 21 year old woman who has been a vegetarian since she was 10 and vegan from age 16. She is organizer for an AV Cube since November 2018.

According to Jim²⁷ (interview, 22-3-2019), we kill 56 billion land animals per year, which he thinks is “unnecessary and wrong”. He says that: “there's no right way to do the wrong thing”. Jim supports the abolitionist approach, which means that animals should not be exploited for our purposes at all. He states that with a welfare approach people say “okay, well we should treat them better before we kill them or before we take their milk”, but he believes we should take the animal’s best interest in mind. “Just like we wouldn't exploit humans, like women, black people, minorities for our purposes. So, why should we exploit them?” (interview with Jim, 22-3-2019). Hereby, Jim places the use of animals in bigger discourses of racism and sexism, which shows how deep his cultural critique goes. This point of view is shared by almost every vegan animal rights activist. The term *abolitionism* itself comes from the movement for the abolition of slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. According to Jim, vegan animal rights activists are trying to free the animals from oppression. This oppression is not just compared to slavery, but also to the holocaust of the Second World War. Dominique (interview, 19-3-2019) states that “if you compare the facts, you can only see similarities. The animals are robbed from their freedom, go on transport to ‘gas chambers’ and their stables are similar to concentration camps if you look at air photos. They are innocent, just like the Jews were, and are only being killed because of their nature”. Jim (22-3-2019) even thinks that it is important to make this comparison, because “the suffering is equal”. He says that “from the animals' perspective, it is definitely a holocaust. An animal holocaust. Objectively looking at it, we suffer as equals” (interview with Jim, 22-3-2019). Dominique extends the comparison to the holocaust by expressing her critique on the carnist culture. She says: “of the gassing of Jews, the ‘normal people’ said: ‘that is not allowed, that is not right, that is wrong’. This was done by a limited group of people and the whole world turned against it. But this mass murder, on those animals, we pay for that. And we think that's normal. And then they say that vegans are extreme!” (interview, 19-3-2019).

3.3 Animal rights activism in the history of civil rights movements

Howes and Classen (2014, 77) argue that for many civil rights movements, an important first step was to increase their public visibility. For example, people with physical disabilities demanded more access to public spaces and black people in the USA occupied ‘whites-only’ zones. Since animals cannot speak for themselves, vegan animal rights activists want to be this voice for them, and give the animals a public image. Ian²⁸ (interview, 13-3-2019) states that vegan activism is an ‘evolution’. He explains that

²⁷ Jim is a 31 year old vegan activist who, at the time of the interview, had only been vegan for five months. He became vegan overnight and started with activism right away.

²⁸ Ian is a 22 year old activist and organizer for AV. He stopped with his study to be able to fully focus on activism. He works at a vegan café three days a week to come by.

changing the norm of human slavery and discrimination took hundreds of years, but now this is punishable. “This is how it will ultimately be with animals as well” (interview with Ian, 13-3-2019). Another example some activists give, is the comparison with the women’s rights movement. Gwen explains that for years, female oppression was not an issue, until some ‘extreme activist females’ revolted (informal conversation, 6-4-2019). This came back during the Animal Rights march against animal testing as well. One of the board members of Animal Rights gave a speech in which she said: “You know what it is? Children’s rights did not come because everybody remained on their ass. Women’s rights also did not come because everybody remained on their ass. Animal testing will be abolished, because everybody stood up!” (20-4-2019). Accordingly, animal rights activists give resistance for change in society, just like other civil rights movements in the past.

Gwen says that “it is truly necessary to be an activist”. She thinks she can bring about a major change, and therefore she says she is “on the right side of history” (informal conversation, 6-4-2019). During an interview with Anna²⁹ (8-4-2019), she told me that the ones who do know about the animal suffering, and who made the connection with slavery and the holocaust, should act upon that. She states: “Knowing immediately gives you the responsibility to act”. Both Deborah (interview 28-2-2019) and Ian (interview 13-3-2019) think that eventually, everybody will realise this. This connects to the ideas of the Chthulucene, which stands for living in responsibility with the damaged earth (Haraway 2016, 2). For this reason, I named this chapter ‘I know, therefore I am vegan’.

To conclude, at the basis of current human-animal relations in bio industries lies the ontological distinction between humans and animals, based on the (late modernity) premise that animals are non-sentient beings, and have no subjectivity. Subsequently, people believe(d) that animals do not feel individual pain, in contrast to humans, and therefore animals can be unlimitedly used. Vegan animal rights activists criticize this cultural belief, and therefore use the phenomenological school of ecology and ethology to shape their activism, showing that animals are sentient beings. They see the domestication and commodification of animals as slavery and compare the way animals are treated in the food industry to the holocaust of WWII. Understanding the history of animal domestication gives vegan animal rights activists future expectations and makes it possible for them to engage in actions for the change of the present, by referring to a process (historical, cultural and social) at the origin of the problem. In other words de-naturalizing the hierarchy of human-animal relations.

²⁹ Anna is a 44 year old woman who has been active for animal rights since 1997. With that, she is the longest running activist I met. She joins almost every type of activism there is.

4. “I’m married to the cause”

Chapter 2 of this thesis looked at the importance of a catalytic experience to embrace veganism, because emotional shocks often underlie a vegan lifestyle. Seeing and personally attending practices in which cruelty against animals is considered a normal routine, like in the bio industry, is crucial in this process. The previous chapter explained which theories and academic debates are followed by vegan animal rights activists to sustain their cultural critique. Vegan activists are aware of the fact that they face a difficult task, changing a fundamental cultural domain of current society. Consequently, this chapter discusses the ways in which activists want to intervene this problem to be able to make a substantial change. It shows how vegan activists use the experienced connection between intense sensorial stimuli and emotions, and the development of emotional connection, with the suffering of animals during their outreach demonstrations. This chapter also elaborates on the effects this strategy has on the activists themselves. Feelings like anger, frustration and sadness can run so high, that activists think that eating a vegan diet and standing up for the animals in activism is a logical stance and something they ‘have to do’. Vegan animal rights activism can become such a major part of life, that it starts to serve as a life purpose. Hence, the subsidiary question to answer here is: ‘How do senses and emotions shape and influence the practices of vegan animal rights activists?’

4.1 Senses and emotions

Classen (1997, 401) states that senses are not only means of understanding physical phenomena, but also serve as a means for the transmission of cultural values. Sensorial stimuli can be so intense, that they create emotions, which can be seen as a cultural mode of expression to deal with social problems (Lutz and White 1986, 407). For this reason, sensorial and emotional experiences – just like my own encounter at the TSM Pig Save – are important for a grassroots movement like animal rights activism, to convey their message.

4.1.1 Sensorial marketing

Howes and Classen (2014, 126) show that a 1998 study on senses in the marketplace proved that ‘the more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable it can be’. From a marketing point of view, the way products are presented to be appealing to the senses is very important as well (Howes and Classen 2014, 141). Many organizations and companies use this marketing technique to make animal products attractive, because they want to sell more of it. For example the brand La Vache Qui Rit (the laughing cow) makes it look like the cows that gave milk for their cream cheese are happy

and smiling. This manipulates our senses and makes the product more attractive, while we do not know where this milk actually came from.

In The Netherlands there are several organizations committed to animal welfare, that want to better the living conditions of animals in the bio industry. These are *Dierenbescherming* (organization for animal protection) and foundation *Wakker Dier* (Awake Animal). In 2007, *Dierenbescherming* launched a quality mark for animal welfare, called *Beter Leven* (Better Life). On labels of animal products like meat and eggs, they show consumers how the living conditions were of the animals they are buying products from, based on 1, 2 or 3 stars. No stars (seen as regular products) is the worst, one star is better and products with three stars have the best living conditions for the animals. Alice (interview, 30-3-2019) thinks that the *Beter Leven* quality mark is ‘the worst thing there is’, because “*Dierenbescherming* is promoting to kill animals”. She says that if you would visit the stables, you would see that those stars are ‘fairy tales’, and that it is all just a marketing technique. “It is really just to appease your conscience, and to sell meat. If anything may be abolished, for me it may be those stars” (Alice, 30-3-2019). In two interviews, I used video elicitation (Pink, 2007) to ask participants about this system of ranking how ‘animal friendly’ meat is. I showed Austin and Caren a clip made by *Dierenbescherming*, of a three-starred laying hen farm.³⁰ Caren (interview 2-2-2019) responded to this video by claiming that the use of the words *Beter Leven* works counterproductive, because when people buy these products, they think that they are doing something good, since *better* sounds positive, and so does *life* (or living). “That is the power of language”, Caren says, “but it is just a dead animal”. Austin (interview, 4-4-2019) says that if there were only these three-stars farms in the world, he would consider the situation to be much better, because he sees that the chickens live in a “somewhat decent environment”. However, just like Alice, he believes that *Wakker Dier* and *Dierenbescherming* try to redeem the conscience of citizens. Austin says that the animals may live a good life, but that we do not really let them be animals. “Humans determine what is a good life for them, which should not be the case” (interview, 4-4-2019). Caren and Austin both think that we should be ‘real’ and ‘honest’ about what happens to the chickens inside these farms. According to them, *Dierenbescherming* should also show that male chicks ‘get grinded alive’ or ‘are gassed’, because they are of no use on egg farms, and that chickens who do not produce enough eggs anymore get loaded in crates and are brought to the slaughterhouse. The quality mark on animal products does, respectively, manipulate our senses in a way that leaves the cultural assumptions of the bio industry intact, or at least does not criticize it enough.

³⁰ Source of the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7T8k4ksrnS4&t=4s>.

On the other hand, vegan animal rights activists make use of senses to advocate veganism. This is an explicit ideological strategy, because activists manipulate the known relationship between senses and emotions to convey their ideological message. Their actions are, accordingly, focused on deconstructing the mainstream idea that consuming animal products is connected to welfare and happiness. AV and Earthlings stimulate the senses by showing footage of different animal industries, often made undercover, and playing melancholic and sad music. The clips or images display cruelty and are unpleasant to watch. This can break the existing premise to make way for the idea that animals are sentient beings and that we should have empathy for their fate in society. Jim (interview, 22-3-2019) expressed this by saying: “You don't see it as food anymore, you see it as a dead corpse. A piece of flesh. It makes you uncomfortable, like sick a little bit, even.” By calling meat a *corpse* or *flesh*, and cow's milk and dairy products *breastmilk*, it loses its appeal, because it is sensuously unattractive when food products are presented as something humane. With the use of these words, activists do not distinguish human bodies from animal bodies, which makes eating animal products taboo, as it is presented as cannibalism. At the beginning of this thesis, a vocabulary list can be found of words that vegan animal rights activists use regularly. These words are used to enhance the brutalities in, and hate to animals in the food industry. With these terms, activists embody their morals and it shows how their political engagement relates to the larger political activism of transition movements. Hence, vocabulary and words are of great importance.

During actions of TSM, all senses are heightened as well. The smell of death around slaughterhouses and the excrements of the animals. Hearing their shrieking sounds, seeing their wounded bodies and frightened faces, touching, petting and watering them. Being at a Save is an extremely bodily sensorial experience, which is in the forefront of the phenomenology of perception. For that reason, it enables individuals to interact with, and connect to, animals (Howes and Classen 2014, 9-10). This happened to me as well, because I felt so uncomfortable about what was happening to the animals inside the trucks, that I had to become a vegan too. I can say, therefore, that I agree with what Howes and Classen (2014, 126) say about an experience being more effective and memorable when it engages more senses.

Aside from using marketing techniques and vocabulary in their activism to change people's view on animal products, it is even more common that activists use words like 'corpse', and 'dead animal' when talking about meat in day-to-day conversations. For example after a Cube of Truth on March 2nd, 2019, we went to a pizza restaurant where they served vegan pizzas. Since the owner knew the group of vegan activists would come, she gave us a special place at another part of the restaurant, so that we would not get in contact with the non-vegan products they served.

When we all finish our dinner, some activists ask if they can pay because they want to leave. The owner of the restaurant looks at us a little worried, and explains that if we want to pay by card, we do need to go to the other side of the restaurant, because she does not have a pin machine here. An activist walks up there and comes back with a disgusted look on his face. “You seriously do not want to go in there”, he says. “They have those huge kebab skewers spinning around, presenting all the dead animals they serve”. All the activists look disturbed. “Oh no!”, says somebody else. “We really need to stand in that corpse smell?”. Since there is no other option, the activists alternately go to the other side of the restaurant to pay their vegan meals, and hurry back as quickly as possible.³¹

4.1.2 Sadness, anger and frustration

The vignette above illustrates that being at a restaurant with visible meat skewers is not only a sensorial, but also an emotional experience for vegan activists. They express this by showing their discomfort of being nearby prepared meat, and using emotionally charged words like ‘corpse smell’ and ‘dead animals’. This way of presenting animal products as humane, like explained in the previous paragraph, deconstructs Western societies’ vision on eating meat. Hence, sensorial experiences are connected with, and can lead to emotions.

It is common that vegan animal rights activists expose their senses to animal cruelty in many different ways. Even though activists want to give non-vegans a ‘moral shock’ (Cherry 2015) by showing footage on the streets and sharing clips of animal abuse and suffering online, hoping that it will change their thoughts and behaviour, they obviously need to watch these images themselves first. Sometimes this happens first-hand, when activists are present at the place to film or photograph what happens to animals, like during actions of TSM. Like I stated before, some activists even go undercover to achieve this. During my fieldwork, I indirectly got in touch with Jade³², a young woman who does undercover actions. Through an encrypted app, I was able to contact her and she answered some questions. Jade told me that she goes undercover in stables to make the footage for Animal Rights and she recently liberated turkeys from a farm. Another, less illegal, example of gaining first-hand experience of the practices in animal industries, is visiting a ‘viewing stable’. These stables are open for public, so that people can see and learn how animals live. Austin and Dominique both went to such stables. Austin

³¹ Fieldnotes after a Cube of Truth in Zaandam, 2-3-2019.

³² Jade is a 22 year old activist who has been vegan for two years. Only a month after transitioning to veganism, she started joining Saves and Cubes and now she is doing activism almost fulltime.

told me that he did not see one happy pig, which he does often see in sanctuaries. He also learned that sows are in a constant process of insemination, bearing piglets and breastfeeding them for three weeks, and immediately being inseminated again. When her body is done, she gets her “well-deserved retirement to slaughter” (Austin, 17-3-2019), which he clearly meant sarcastic. Dominique made a video³³ of her visit to a viewing stable, which was also on a pig farm. In the video, she was frustrated and emotional. At some point, she cried and screamed: “We live in such a *fuck* country! I honestly cannot believe this!”. With tears in her eyes she said “This cannot be farmers who love animals. Get real!”. Since vegan animal rights activists know so much about cruelty in animal industries, many activists believe that veganism is a ‘very rational and logical stance’ that everybody should take (Dominique and Deborah during a Cube, 23-2-2019; activists during a discussion round, 24-2-2019).

Lutz and White (1986, 406) argue that emotions can be seen as a cultural mode of expression to deal with the persistent problems of social relationship. Emotions are also linked to power and social structures, and therefore seen as ideological in aspects of consciousness linked to class and domination (Lutz and White 1986, 407). It is, therefore, not surprising that this is especially present in relationship to animals, in which both social- and power relations are at stake. Getting sad after witnessing animal cruelty happens a lot among vegan animal rights activists. Jim, for example, says that after coming home from a Save, it ‘dawns on him’. He also linked this to the bodily experiences and senses, by saying: “You looked them in the eye and now they are wrapped in plastic. So that takes a few days to process” (interview, 22-3-2019). Other emotions that many vegan animal rights activists deal with, are anger about the fact that our society still relies on animals, and guilt towards the animals who need to suffer for it. The worldview of vegan animal rights activists is so different from the norm, that it is frustrating for them to live in this world, because they are constantly reminded of the fact that other people ‘do not see it’ (fieldnotes, 27-2-2019). This can lead to feeling gloomy and even depressed (informal conversations with John³⁴, Abigail³⁵, Austin, and Dan). Dominique told me in an interview (19-3-2019) that the visual images of animal cruelty “touches her deeply”, but the fact that it is normal and not an exception, makes her realise that she does not live in a vegan world. Therefore, she says: “sometimes I really feel like I come from a different planet”. Based on these expressions, it becomes clear that vegan animal rights activists feel powerless, lonely and misunderstood. All these emotions strengthen their idea that something has to change and that therefore, activism is very important. This

³³ Source: <https://www.veganonwheels.nl/videos/video-hoe-varkens-leven-in-een-nederlandse-varkenshouderij/>. Accessed on 21-6-2019.

³⁴ John is organizer of an AV Cube and has been vegan for a little over two years.

³⁵ Abigail is a woman in her twenties. She is mainly active for AV.

can lead to the formation of new, activist identities based on the traumatic sensory experiences, and in some cases mental health problems.

Some activists consciously choose not to expose themselves to a lot of animal cruelty, because of the emotions it brings up. While Deborah³⁶ and I were talking on after an interview, she told me that she does not participate in actions of TSM to prevent herself from getting a burnout, because she sees a character in every being. Knowing that the animals at a slaughterhouse will get killed, causes her insomnia and high emotions, and therefore comes at the expense of herself, which makes that her activism would be less effective (28-2-2019). Anna, Caren and Chloe are also very active on the streets, but do not want to expose themselves to animal cruelty first-hand. For Anna, this is one of the reasons why she does not outreach during Cubes of AV. She mainly stays inside the Cube holding a sign or a screen, so she does not have to see the images.

4.2 Willingness to do the right thing

As stated in paragraph 3.3, vegan animal rights activists think that “knowing gives you the responsibility to act” (interview with Anna, 8-4-2019). However, since I just showed the importance of senses and emotions, *feeling* is another motive for activism. Jim (interview, 22-3-2019) expressed that in his statement: “I think everybody who is an ethical vegan feels the need to do activism. It is the right thing to do”. This connects to Haraway’s (2016) idea of ‘staying with the trouble’ of the world we live in right now, and the responsibility we need to take. She calls this ‘Just Transition’ (Haraway 2016, 96), referring to the fight for justice and positive activism. Getting active for animal rights specifically, is also in line with Haraway’s (2016, 58; 71) reflection that humans and nonhuman beings need each other, as *sympoiesis* (‘making-with’), because vegan activists fight for living next to animals without seeing them as properties.

4.2.1 Getting active

Some research participants claim that their activism is not just to make people vegan, but to break the social norm (interview with Ian, 13-3-2019). Austin (interview, 4-4-2019) explained that it may look like vegans are against farmers, but that is actually not the case. He states: “My battle is way more against a sort of tradition”. With this, Austin meant that he does not just battle food traditions, but the whole system of the bio industry, as he speaks about how farmers are trapped inside the system as well.

³⁶ Deborah is a 44 year old activist who has been a vegetarian since she was three. At the time of the interview, she was vegan for 4,5 years and joined actions for a little over a year.

However, changing society's status quo can take years or even centuries (see paragraph 3.2.1). Because of this, vegan animal rights activism can become such a major part of life that everything else feels unimportant. For some activists, taking action is what gives meaning to their lives, and therefore serves as a life purpose. I heard this for the first time during an activist outing at a donkey sanctuary (27-2-2019), where I was talking to Dominique. She asked me about my research and wanted to know why I was so interested in this subject and what I wanted to know from them. I explained that I was interested in their lifestyle and what activism means for them. Then she immediately replied: "well, then we should really do an interview, because I truly believe that I was put on this world to be an animal activist. This is really my mission". Obviously, this triggered my interest and we had an interview three weeks later. She told me again that animal rights activism is what she has been placed on earth for. Her feeling on this went deeper than I expected, because after that, she said:

"It is such a big injustice that is going on in the world, yes I would really give my life for it. If someone says today: 'Well, if you let yourself be killed and the world will be made vegan', I would do it immediately" (interview with Dominique, 19-3-2019).

For Dominique, it is so hard to live in a non-vegan world, that she would only quit activism when it is not necessary anymore, which, she says, "will probably be until my death". Anna, who is 44 years old, shares this point of view and told me in an interview (8-4-2019) that if there would be no more animal cruelty in the world, she would not know what to do with her life, because she does not have a husband or children to take care of. Therefore, she says "I'm really just married to the cause". In her ideal world, it would be perfect if it was not necessary to take action, but since animal cruelty still happens, she also thinks she will do this until she dies. Other activists who state that they see animal rights activism as a life purpose, are Ian, Deborah, Alice and Jim. Both Deborah (informal conversation, 23-2-2019) and Alice (interview, 30-3-2019) said that it is the only thing they can think about and that they 'go to bed with it and get up with it'. A few months after Ian started with activism – he was 22 years old at the time –, he quit his studies because he felt like it did not give him enough satisfaction in life anymore. He told me that taking action has more and more become his 'goal' and that he wants to *veganize* the world (interview, 13-3-2019). This feeling of dissatisfaction was also mentioned by Jim (interview 22-3-2019). Jim recently graduated as a physical therapist, but he says that every time he tries to think about finding a job as a physio, he feels like he is wasting his time. He states: "activism is so important that anything else I do just seems like a waste of time. [...] I mean, what am I going to do? Go work on, like, shoulder problems with people? While, you know, animals are just being stabbed in the throat and tortured?". This demonstrates why he states that being a vegan animal rights activist is 'the right thing to do'.

4.2.2 Staying active

It is now clear why, and how, vegans get active for animal rights. Maintaining a vegan lifestyle is somewhat different. According to Cherry (2015, 70) and Larsson et al. (2003, 61), two elements are required to stay active for veganism: social support from friends and family, and cultural tools to provide skills and motivation, such as music, media, books or stories and dinner parties like potlucks. Animal rights activists get this social support mainly from each other through the large social network they share. For example, some activists follow a vegan 'role model' online or read vegan blogs (Caren, Ian, Jim). Usually, this role model is one particular vegan activists who posts on social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube about their vision on why animal rights activism is important and what kinds of activism they do and why. This can work supportive. The cultural tools that are required to stay active are provided by the activist community as well, because they usually have a socializing event after an action or demonstration, and they often organize potlucks as a vegan get-together. However, there is another reason why, for animal rights activists, the vegan lifestyle (i.e. eating plant-based food and staying away from animals in entertainment or other products) is not so hard to maintain. Alice stated in an interview: "When talking about animal rights, I cannot cheat. It wouldn't cross my mind when I see an egg or cheese... I immediately see flashes of... I think I have seen too much the past two years" (30-3-2019). She refers to the visual images of animal cruelty, which in her opinion makes it unthinkable of eating animal products again. Joyce³⁷ gave me a similar response when I asked her how she stayed active. She explained that she has some friends who 'call themselves vegan', but do eat animal products occasionally, because that makes it 'easier for them to maintain'. "Well, I do not understand that", she said. "I would never be able to do that" (interview, 15-4-2019). Accordingly, knowledge about animal cruelty and the emotions this evokes does not only make them get active, but is also a motivation to remain active. Some activists purposely expose themselves to animal cruelty in videos or by going to Saves of TSM, in order to get new motivation to stay active. This can be necessary, because doing street activism can be tough, for example during Cubes in the winter when standing still in the cold is challenging. When I asked activists how they persist in these moment, they say that "[their] suffering is very negligible compared to that of animals" (Joyce, Austin, Caren). Jim also states that after going to a Save, he: "had to take some time to process the emotions. But after that, it turns into this motivation. Like, I have to do something. Right now, the urgency of it, hits home. [...] That spirit turns into action" (interview, 22-3-2019).

³⁷ Joyce is a 24 year old activist who has been vegan for over three years. She started activism in October 2018.

This chapter provided an answer to the subsidiary question: ‘How do senses and emotions shape and influence the practices of vegan animal rights activists?’. In conclusion, vegan animal rights activists use the experienced connection between intense sensorial stimuli and emotions to develop an emotional connection to the suffering of animals, and consequently deconstruct the cultural assumptions of the bio industry. They do this by making use of sensorial marketing through visual images, sounds, smell and vocabulary. These sensorial stimuli can also have major impact on themselves, because activists can get emotional about the animal cruelty they face, and even suffer mental health problems. However, feeling angry and frustrated about the practices in the bio industry and the social norm, is one of the main motivators to get active and remain active for animal rights. For some activists, this is so important that animal rights activism is their mission, their life purpose, and something they would give their lives for.

5. “Welcome to the family”

The previous chapter explained how sensory experiences cause emotions, which can form a strong motivation to get active and fight for a change. This chapter discusses how becoming a vegan animal rights activist also comes with a new identity, which is often performed through connections with animals and with embodied expression in the form of looks, clothes and tattoos. This can create a community feeling and the vegan activist community is thus a place to feel at home and connect with likeminded people, to make belonging. These notions of community feelings are used to answer the subsidiary question: ‘How do vegan animal rights activists function as a community?’. Like every organization or group, animal rights activists also face some internal struggles. They argue about ‘vegan rules’ and whether they exist or not, and the effectiveness of different types of activism is contested. These internal disagreements are discussed in the final paragraph of this chapter.

5.1 Embodied relationships with animals

Most vegans feel an intrinsic love for animals (conversations and interviews with Anna, Jade, Joyce), but forming a new, vegan activist identity, comes with high levels of performing these connections with animals as well. This is visible in the way they react and respond to all nonhuman beings, from their sense of justice and the idea that they should have compassion for all living things (interview with Caren, 2-4-2019), and how they express this love for animals through symbols like tattoos, clothes, and accessories. These are both examples of embodiment of love for animals.

5.1.1 Humanizing animals

During my fieldwork, it happened several times that an activist called an insect ‘cutie’, ‘baby’, or ‘sweetheart’. Treating and talking to animals as if they are babies, humanizes these nonhuman beings, and presents them as if they are part of the family. This is how vegan animal rights activists increase and strengthen their love for, and the importance of, animals in their lives. While in a conversation with Kim³⁸, an insect landed on her arm. She looked at it and said: “Come baby, please fly away” (2-3-2019). This kind of performance was also clearly present during the Animal Rights march against animal testing (20-4-2019). One of the activists brought his dog with him to the march. Everybody wanted to pet the dog and said he was “so cute”, using high voices. Moreover, before the march began I was talking to Deborah when she suddenly said to me: “Wait, stand still, you have a fly in your hair. I am

³⁸ Kim is a 32 year old female who has been a vegetarian since she was 11 and is vegan for three years now. She is very active for AV, TSM and Animal Rights.

going to blow so it flies away, I won't kill him". During an activist outing at the donkey sanctuary in Zeist, I witnessed a similar situation, illustrating that performing love for animals is very important for vegan animal rights activists.

On an exceptionally sunny day in February, we are at a donkey sanctuary as an activist get together, to connect with the animals and with each other. While we are enjoying our lunch, we hear a ticking sound coming from the little house behind us. I look over my shoulder and see a bumblebee on the inside, flying at the window. Olivia³⁹ jumps up to liberate the bumblebee, completely forgetting about her lunch. When she comes back, another activist says: "It is so delightful to see that there are more people who would interrupt their lunch to set an insect free". When a few moments later another bumblebee gets stuck, she is the first to jump up and catch the bee with an open Ziploc bag, to release it outside. The third time we hear the ticking sound, it is Charlotte⁴⁰ who gets up. She catches the bumblebee with her hands and walks up to us proudly, as it does not fly away immediately. The bee stays on her finger for a few moments, while she gives it air kisses and Austin takes pictures of her with the bee. When eventually it flies away, she looks happy and proud.⁴¹

5.1.2 Printing symbols

Many vegan animal rights activists also embody their vegan identity through looks, like tattoos, clothes and accessories connecting to veganism or the organization they are active for. By wearing such printed symbols, they identify themselves as activists in the public space. Alice (interview, 30-3-2019) states that this is not only a way of connecting to the activist community, but also being active on its own. She has a button on her backpack with a picture of a pig. It asks the question: 'Do you love meat or do you love animals?'. By showing and talking about this emotional distress – which is also embodiment – vegan animal rights activists experiment with confronting structural acts of cruelty. Alice told me about a time when she was riding a train and someone responded to the button. They had a conversation about veganism, which for her meant that she put a person to thinking and 'planted a seed' in his head.

³⁹ Olivia is an activist who is committed to politics, as she is very active for PvdD. She also joins AV Cubes and animal rights marches.

⁴⁰ Charlotte is a 36 year old activist who has been vegan for over two years and is regional organizer for AV Netherlands.

⁴¹ Activist outing at the donkey sanctuary in Zeist, 27-2-2019.

The first activist I met with a tattoo about veganism was Gwen. She had the word 'VEGAN' tattooed on her wrist, which shows for her that she is a 'diehard vegan' (informal conversation, 19-2-2019). Anna and Chloe make it a little less explicit, by having a tattoo of the sunflower of the vegan quality mark logo (see photo 8 on the right). Another popular tattoo is the number '269'. As stated in paragraph 2.1.4, 269Life is a vegan activist organization. The number is based on an ear tag of a young calf that went to slaughter. Anna (interview, 8-4-2019) told me that for her, 269 purely stands for that calf, and not so much for the organization. "It is a symbol for all animals that are being used and abused". She also says that 269 stands for unity, because everybody who has a tattoo of the number knows from each other what they stand for in life. It is a kind of code language. Olivia also has a 269 tattoo, and told me that she has the tattoo so that only other vegans who know the story behind the number know that she is vegan. Furthermore, Kim has a big part of her lower arm dedicated to vegan tattoos with the 269 number, a footprint of her dog and a purple ribbon against animal cruelty, through which runs a heartbeat. To her, this stands for her love for animals (informal conversation, 2-3-2019). In an informal conversation during a Save (1-4-2019), Jade told about another time she was at a Pig Save where she spent a lot of time with one particular pig inside a truck. She showed a picture of him on her phone, and with tears in her eyes she spoke about how she wants to get his face tattooed on her body, because it means so much to her.



Photo 2: Vegan quality mark logo.

5.2 Vegan activist community

When I arrive at the café where we would meet, Anna is already waiting for me. She welcomes me with a smile and a hug, and we immediately start chatting. I tell her about the Pig Save I went to last week, and explain what it did to me. The moment I pronounce that I decided to go vegan, she gets tears in her eyes. She grabs my hands and says: "Oh wow, this makes me so happy! This is what we work so hard for, to make more people see the light! You have no idea how important this is to me. Welcome to the family!".⁴²

The vignette above shows from personal experience that it can be emotional for vegan activists to see the number of vegans growing. Other activists gave me similar responses after I became vegan. For

⁴² Fieldnotes about the interview with Anna, 8-4-2019.

example, during the march against animal testing (20-4-2019), I saw Elliot again, the head organizer of TSM. When I told her that I became vegan after I went to the Pig Save where I met her, she also got tears in her eyes and said: “Wow! That deserves a hug!”, after which she embraced me tightly. I could feel that from that moment on, my fieldwork became easier and more comfortable. Especially with participant observation during actions, I felt that the vegan activists saw me as one of them and became more relaxed when talking to me. Some of them said, jokingly, that this was the only reason they let me join their actions from the beginning, because they knew I would become a vegan myself.

5.2.1 Sense of belonging

In paragraph 1.4 is stated that identity work and identity formation go hand in hand with community feelings and a sense of belonging (Counihan and Van Esterik 2012; Larssons et al. 2003). Activism is also a valuable way to claim community and public space (Counihan and Van Esterik 2012, 588, 599). Vegan animal rights activists claim their community through eating what they consider to be ethical food. Since they have a worldview and belief system that is different from the majority, and they isolate themselves by stopping their consumption of animal products, it is necessary for them to appease their emotions and therefore it feels good to be around people who think, feel and eat the same. The vegan activist group is thus constructed by intimate proximity, just like they construct their proximity with animals (as explained in the previous paragraph). This is not common to activist groups or grassroots social movements in general. Animal rights activism is particular in this way. One of the reasons for this, is that sharing a way of eating is usually the case for families. This explains why in this community, ideas are expressed at the emotional level, through tears and hugs. By referring to the activist community as ‘family’, Anna (interview, 8-4-2019) also invigorates the exclusiveness and emotional connection of this group.

Jim told me in an interview (22-3-2019) that when he went vegan, he did not know any other vegans. He explains: “I just had this transformation overnight and you feel completely isolated. Like, you feel separate... Like 'wow, the world is crazy'. And you wake up into this thing and you have this need to connect with others that think the same”. At first, it was social media that helped Jim connect with fellow vegans. To him, this was healing and came as a relief, because he felt understood. He even says that the activists understand him better than his family does (interview, 22-3-2019). For Jim, it was also the fact that he became part of a ‘global network of likeminded people’, all working towards the same thing, that ‘expanded his world’. Animal rights activists have often already been vegan for some time before they became active. Just like Jim, many of them felt lonely and even gloomy before

participating in activism, because they were not understood by the people around them. Hence, the change in identity makes them want to connect with other people.

During a Cube of Truth, Abigail told me that she thinks every vegan is 'kind of an outsider'. According to her, many vegans struggle with depressions, but they find each other in activism. "Here, it is really a community" (Abigail, 23-2-2019). Deborah told me that she has a bigger social life since she is a vegan activist. Going to Cubes, for her, is also about the socializing afterwards. This feels relaxed, because connecting and communicating is easier since they share the same opinions. They do not have to think about what they are saying when they are with other activists, which is the case when they are among non-vegans. Deborah (interview, 28-2-2019) expressed this by saying "What connects us is the mission". Basically every vegan activist agrees on this. According to Alice, it is empowering that there are so many people who think the same. She sees that the activist community is growing, also online, and that this community has a lot of love for each other. "That gives strength". Therefore, she thinks the socializing after actions is very important, because it is a form of teambuilding (interview with Alice, 30-3-2019). However, it does not necessarily mean that they connect with every vegan activist. Alice and Joyce both told me during interviews (30-3; 15-4-2019) that they only see a few fellow activists as friends with whom they hang out outside of the actions. Anna says that that she sees the other activists as her colleagues, and also has friendships with only a few of them (interview, 8-4-2019).

Another example of creating and maintaining this sense of belonging, is through expressing support for other vegans, which is also what Alice meant with the love they feel for each other. The second time I was at the donkey sanctuary, an activist found out that the woman who was working in the souvenir shop was vegan too. Therefore, Austin ran up to the the shop and gave her a high-five. When he came back he said: "Got to support my fellow vegans, right?" (2-5-2019). Being supportive towards other vegans goes as far as becoming unwilling to be in a love relationship with a non-vegan. I experienced this first-hand when I was having an informal conversation with Max⁴³ after a Cube (2-3-2019).

While we walk towards the train station after a long day of activism, Max asks me about my relationship, and whether my partner eats meat or not. When I tell him that my partner is not a vegan nor a vegetarian, he looks disgusted and asks if I do kiss him. Surprised by this question, I say: "Of course I do", after which he responds: "But then you still get that meat inside your body, right?". I ask him what he would do when his

⁴³ Max is a 42 year old activist who has been a vegetarian for over ten years and was vegan for only six months at the time of the conversation. He lives from social benefits and occasional jobs as a freelance journalist.

loved one ate meat. He answered: “I would never ever date a girl who is not a vegan. No matter how beautiful or lovely she is. I even think that you and your partner would grow apart eventually if he doesn’t stop eating meat”.

This experience showed me that the aversion of eating meat and the intimacy of the vegan community cannot be seen separately. The fact that Max was truly convinced that my partner and I would not stay together if he kept eating meat, emphasizes how food and relationships are intertwined in the activist community. This is how they make their belonging.

5.2.2 Vegan bubble

Although being part of the vegan activist community can feel pleasant and relaxing, it can also lead to isolation from the rest of the world, which is referred to as the ‘vegan bubble’. Ian said that being in the community can feel as if the whole world is vegan, while if you look beyond, you realise that this is definitely not the case and vegans are a minority (informal conversation, 9-3-2019). Dominique explained in an interview (19-3-2019) that she worries about this. She feels so good in the vegan community, that she is sometimes afraid that she ‘stays inside the bubble’, and therefore ‘gets disconnected from the world’. This is also visible in their connections online, because animal rights activists usually have many other vegans as friends on Facebook and follow them on other social media platforms, creating an online bubble in which a lot of animal cruelty and hate is shared (interview with Austin, 4-4-2019). Austin, thence, recommends all vegans to interact in a friendly way with non-vegans, including farmers, to get a better understanding of their situation too. Caren said that she stimulates vegans to stay in contact with non-vegans, because being in the vegan bubble can be bad for your mental health (interview, 2-4-2019).

The vegan bubble is per definition a border, and evidently creates the ‘other’ immediately. Among themselves, vegan animal rights activists often express about their disapproval to omni’s and vegetarians. Though some activists (Austin, Joyce) see that vegetarians make their decisions from the same kind of values and compassion towards animals as they do, many vegans think that vegetarians still contribute to animal cruelty and suffering. In the episode ‘The animal lovers’ of Dutch tv program *De Hokjesman*⁴⁴, the presenter followed some animal rights activists too. One of them told him that he feels ashamed for the period when he was a vegetarian, because he ‘so clearly opposed one type of animal cruelty, but fully contributed to another’⁴⁵. In an informal conversation, Dan told me the

⁴⁴ This is a satiric program about an ethnologist who ‘categorizes’ different social groups in The Netherlands.

⁴⁵ Source: <https://www.vpro.nl/programmas/de-hokjesman/dierenvrienden.html>.

same (21-3-2019). He says that he does not understand vegetarians, because the dairy industry involves “the most cruelty of all industries”. This kind of normativity creates a “them and us” rhetoric, which also causes vegan animal rights activists to disconnect from their friends and family. Some activists lost friends in the process of becoming vegan and joining activism (informal conversation with John and Dan, and interviews with Deborah and Alice). This is also because vegan activists do not want to share a table with people who eat meat, and therefore never join family dinners, since “all [they] see is animal suffering” (Dominique, Joyce, John).

5.3 Internal contestations

Despite the fact that animal rights activism creates a loving community where vegans feel at home, not everybody naturally agrees with each other on every level. Accordingly, there is a profound discussion around ‘vegan rules’, questioning what a vegan is allowed to do and what not. Another contestation inside the community is about the effectiveness of different types of activism. This paragraph elaborates on these internal struggles of the activist community.

5.3.1 Vegan ‘rules’

“I wouldn’t hurt a fly. I’m not even allowed to do that as a vegan” (Anna, interview 8-4-2019).

According to Anna, hurting a fly is not allowed because vegans do not hurt or kill animals, and flies are animals too. She claims that the NVV has some clear ‘rules’, or guidelines, about what is vegan and what is not, referring to a webpage where this is supposed to be explained.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Ian says that there aren’t any vegan guidelines at all and everybody just does what is best for them. “There isn’t a thing that we follow or something, like a religion saying this is or isn’t allowed according to the Holy Spinach” (interview with Ian, 13-3-2019). Yet, there is an extensive discussion going on about whether vegans kill mosquitos or not. Vegans agree on the fact that harming a nonhuman being *unnecessarily* is wrong, but for mosquitos that bite, it is somewhat harder to decide if it is wrong or not. The problem is defining when it is a necessity to kill a mosquito.

During the first Cube I attended, Nancy⁴⁷ said that mosquitos are where she ‘draws the line’ (17-2-2019), meaning that she would kill them if it were necessary. Joyce also stated that “when an animal actively attacks you, you would protect yourself too. I think that is the same with mosquitos”

⁴⁶ Guidelines by the NVV: <https://www.veganisme.org/veganisme/>.

⁴⁷ Nancy is a woman in her thirties who became vegan overnight. Quickly after that, she started doing activism and usually goes to Cubes of AV and actions from Bite Back.

(interview, 15-4-2019). During another demonstration of AV (9-3-2019), an activist asked me about my research and what struck me the most about the vegan community. When I explained that I thought this discussion on whether or not to kill insects is interesting, he responded with: “What?! There are vegan who kill mosquitos?!”. I was surprised by the fact that he was so shocked and asked him about his opinion. He said that he would – just like Anna – never hurt any innocent being so when his house is full of mosquitos, he would grab a glass and catch them to be released outside. He said that he even watches the ground under his feet, in order to not step on ants or other insects. Milou⁴⁸ thinks that these issues are something to think about when you are vegan for a longer period of time. She has only been vegan less than a year, and is therefore still figuring out how to do certain things and which products are vegan or not. For her, thinking about insects is a little too much all at once.

5.3.2 Effectiveness of activism

Which kinds of activism are effective is another heavily discussed issue within the vegan activist community. For example, some online activists like Joey Carbstrong and Gary Yourofsky are very aggressive in the way they approach non-vegans or non-vegan subjects. They do use words like slavery and holocaust in outreach. In my entire period of fieldwork, I did not hear anyone say this offline. Those comparisons (explained in paragraph 3.2) are spoken about among each other, but not in conversations with non-vegans. Austin, Alice, Dominique and Caren told me that they think mentioning slavery or the holocaust in an outreach conversation would probably lead to more distance between them and non-vegans and would work counterproductive. However, not just the way of approaching others, but also the strategies, or in other words the kind of action in which this happens is contested. Caren and Joyce both told me in interviews that they would, for example, not demonstrate for the closure of Dolfinarium, because they think this will not make other people go vegan. These actions are referred to as ‘Single Issue Actions’, as they only target one goal and do not speak about veganism in general. Anna, on the other hand, thinks all kinds of action are important. When this subject came up during our interview (8-4-2019), she got frustrated and told me that she cannot understand why during actions of AV and TSM there can be twenty to thirty people, while at the Dolfinarium, there are only five or six. Hence, for both the vegan ‘rules’, as for the effectiveness of activism, there are no clear guidelines. Activists try to figure out what works best, and what feels good for themselves.

⁴⁸ Milou is a 19 year old woman who slowly transitioned to veganism when she moved out of her parents’ house a year ago. She is now active for AV and TSM, and tries to live a zero waste lifestyle.

In conclusion, vegan animal rights activists function as a community through their embodied relationships with animals (in the form of looks and vocal expressions), and the way they eat. They make their belonging through referring to the vegan community as 'family', and creating a border between themselves and non-vegans. This distinguishes vegan animal rights activists from other activist groups who do not share a way of eating. They do, however, struggle with some internal disagreements, just like any community or social group. As such, there is a discussion on when it is necessary, and therefore, permitted to kill mosquitos. Furthermore, vegan animal rights activists struggle to agree on which kind of activism is the most effective.

Concluding remarks

With this research on vegan animal rights activism, I wanted to contribute to the academic debates on the Chthulucene and the rise of transition initiatives, and increase general knowledge of veganism and animal rights activism. Based on three months of ethnographic fieldwork and a thorough theoretical analysis, this thesis was written to provide an answer to the research question: *'How can vegan animal rights activism in The Netherlands be understood as a transition movement in the era of the Chthulucene?'*

Conclusion

Starting with the theoretic debates, this thesis showed that according to Brown et al. (2012, 1608), 'transition' stands for processes of change towards a precarious future. The notion of transition is used to contextualise discourses of community development and environmental change, which must try to 'hold the future together' (Brown et al. 2012, 1607). This is of increasing need in the current epoch where human and nonhuman are inseparably linked (Haraway 2016, 55), because humans 'made a mess' of the world in the Anthropocene era (Tsing 2015), and now need to create a new way of living with nature. Haraway (2016), therefore, refers to the current post-Anthropocene epoch as Chthulucene. The Chthulucene is characterized by the rise of grassroots initiatives in order to build a more resilient future. Since these initiatives strive for (environmental) change, they can be referred to as *transition movements*.

An example of a transition movement is vegan animal rights activism, because these activists have a profound critique on hegemonic notions of human domination of nature, and strive for a societal change towards living next to animals instead of with them as properties. Vegan animal rights activists hold on to the phenomenological school of ecology and ethology, showing that animals are sentient beings. Therefore, they see domestication and commodification of animals as a kind of slavery. Vegan animal rights activists extend their critique to the time when domestication of animals became part of human communities, 12.000 years BP (Vigne 2011, 171-172), because in cultural terms, humans did not become humans until they domesticated nature. It was at that moment in history that the dichotomy between nature and culture was formulated (Ingold 1994, 11). Understanding the history of animal domestication makes it possible for vegan animal rights activists to engage in activism, because they refer to the process at the origin of the problem. Vegan activists are aware of the fact that changing something so rooted in society is a difficult task, but they show that it will take time to achieve this transition by making the comparison with ending human slavery and getting children's-, and women's rights.

Through many organizations, all with different types of political and cultural protests, vegan animal rights activists want to make people aware of the cruelties in animal industries, hoping to change notions and behaviour towards animals. A common way to do this is by showing visual images of animal cruelty in a variety of industries, which can be a “quick punch to the gut of moral shocks”, and functions as a catalytic experience (Cherry 2015, 63). Since most actions are outreach projects which try to educate people and to raise awareness, vegan animal rights activism has potential to be successful (Feola and Nunes 2014, 245). Including sounds like melancholic music or the screams of animals in pain makes these sensorial experiences even more memorable (Howes and Classen 2014, 126). Senses also play a role in the way vegan animal rights activists represent animal products. By calling meat a ‘corpse’ or a ‘dead animal’, these products lose their appeal. Through the connection between sensorial stimuli and emotions, activists try to make others connect emotionally to the suffering of animals, and consequently deconstruct the cultural assumptions of the bio industry.

A downside of showing these visual images during demonstrations, is the fact that the activists need to watch it themselves too, and that the footage needs to be made. Therefore, some activists must go undercover to farms, stables and slaughterhouses and film the practices inside. Also, during Saves of TSM, activists are confronted with a lot of animal cruelty. These sensorial experiences cause strong emotions, and in some cases may become traumatic experiences and lead to mental health problems. For this reason, some activists consciously choose not to watch the footage during street activism, nor go to Saves. However, feeling emotional is one of the main motivators to get active and remain active for animal rights. Veganism and standing up for the animals is often considered a logical stance, and animal rights activism can become such a major part of life that it is seen as a mission and serves as a life purpose.

Becoming a vegan animal rights activist also comes with a new identity, which is often performed through embodied connections with animals, in the form of vocal expressions, clothes and tattoos. This can create a community feeling, because they know that they all think and feel the same. Vegan activists also make their belonging by the way they eat, and referring to their group as ‘family’. Animals are in a way included in this family, because they are humanized by the way they are treated and talked to. This evidently creates a border between vegans and non-vegans, and comes with processes of othering. Vegan animal rights activists are in this way distinguished from other activist groups, who do not share a way of eating. However, the vegan activist community does deal with some internal contestations. They argue about ‘vegan rules’, and discuss the effectiveness of different types of activism.

To answer the research question stated above, I argue that vegans engaged in 'The Battle Against Tradition', can be considered a transition movement, because vegan animals rights activists want to change the dominant worldview and behaviour towards animals, based on the question how we should associate with nature from a post-Anthropocene perspective. This also explains why veganism and animal rights activism has grown so fast the past twenty years.

Discussion

Since I conducted only three months of fieldwork and active engagement with the research participants, it is clear that I could not touch on all aspects of vegan animal rights activism as deeply as I wanted to. For that reason, I want to give some recommendations for future research. First of all, I have seen and heard that many activists are engaged in the political party PvdD. I know that the activists support what the PvdD does, and that they are often closely involved in the steps they take towards political change (in the way society treats animals), but I did not have enough time to raise this topic during interviews. That is why further research can be done to get a better understanding of what this political party means for vegans, and for animal rights activism. Furthermore, doing participant observation during undercover actions would get an anthropologist closer to how activists feel when doing this, and understand what it means for them to break the rules in order to reach their goals. Unfortunately, I was unable to do so, but the illegality of animal rights activism surely is something to be researched further. Lastly, it would be interesting for sociologists to research the actual effectiveness of activism, and show numbers of how many people became vegan after getting confronted with online-, or street activism. Animal rights activists could use these numbers in order to work more efficiently, and perhaps solve some of their internal disagreements.

Reflection

As is the case for most anthropologist, reflexivity has been very important in this research. When I started this research in December 2018, I knew what veganism was in terms of what vegans eat, and I knew that some vegans participate in street activism to make others go vegan too. I never realised though that vegan animal rights activism had so many different facets. Since the topic of this investigation is delicate, the beginning of my fieldwork has been a bumpy road. As stated before, entering the vegan community as a vegetarian did not immediately make my participants see me as worthy of their trust and respect. I made mistakes and I did not know what questions to ask at first. As DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 65) state: "Mistakes in fieldwork are probably unavoidable. We just can't

learn local expectations quickly enough to avoid them. [...] However, making mistakes is often a vehicle to a deeper understanding of behaviour and meaning.” With this in mind, and with a good dose of perseverance and patience, I learned from my mistakes and built stronger relationships with my research participants, by having informal conversations, joining them in activism, listening to their stories, and exposing myself to the sensorial experience of a Save. I knew I was going in the right direction when I had a conversation with my key informant Austin. I was at a his home and we were chatting about my research and what makes anthropology different from other sciences, when he said to me:

“I like it so much how you approach this research so personally. Once I did an interview with a journalist for a magazine, and she only asked very fierce, nasty question without knowing who I am. I could not properly answer those questions, but with you, it feels completely different. You really try to get to know me” (informal conversation with Austin, 21-2-2019).

This is – in my opinion – the best compliment an anthropologist can get. For me, it was not just a professional, but also a personal confirmation that I am an anthropologist who pays attention and listens to others, and who is genuinely open to what they have to say. That strengthened me in the remaining fieldwork period. Slowly, I started to understand animal rights activists better and I began to appreciate them. This sentiment grew when I decided to become a vegan myself and felt a different energy surrounding my presence at actions. Only at that moment I began to understand the importance of the ‘vegan community’, and how emotionally connected vegan activists are to each other. What struck me the most during my fieldwork period, was the fact that some vegans take activism so far that they see fighting for animal rights as a mission, and that some activists honestly said that they would give their lives in exchange for a vegan world.

It is for this reason that I would plea for more people to listen to what vegan animal rights activists have to say, because once you know the basic senses and strong emotions they get confronted with, it is easier to understand why they do what they do, instead of getting angry because they take away your delicious barbecue, your day out at the zoo, and/or your beautiful farm you worked so hard for. This would create more empathy in the world, which is also of great importance in the Chthulucene era of ‘making-with’, because a future where we live together with nature would not stand if us humans are unable to properly interact with one another.

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Appendix: Summary in Dutch / Samenvatting in het Nederlands

Since I conducted my fieldwork in The Netherlands, most of the research participants speak Dutch. To provide them with a clear, legible idea of the research findings, I include a summary of the thesis in Dutch. This summary is written in the form of a blog post, because I plan on sending it to NVV or ProVeg, both organizations that bring veganism to a broader public. Hopefully they will post it on their websites, so that the whole vegan (activist) community can read the outcome of this research in non-scientific language.

De Strijd Tegen Traditie

Een analyse van de culturele kritiek van vegan dierenrechten activisten in Nederland

Voor mijn master studie Culturele Antropologie aan de Universiteit Utrecht heb ik van februari tot en met mei 2019 onderzoek gedaan naar vegan activisme. Kort gezegd houdt dit in dat ik me in die maanden helemaal heb ondergedompeld in het leven van activisten, om erachter te komen waarom zij dit doen en wat het voor hen betekent om de straat op te gaan voor veganisme en dierenrechten. Ik heb meegedaan aan Cubes van Anonymous for the Voiceless, ik ben naar een Save van The Save Movement geweest, heb actie gevoerd voor de sluiting van het Dolfinarium en ik heb meegelopen in de mars tegen dierproeven. Daarnaast heb ik veel mensen persoonlijk gesproken en/of geïnterviewd, om belangrijke vragen beantwoord te krijgen. De afgelopen twee maanden heb ik mijn scriptie geschreven over deze veldwerk periode, waarin ik het vegan activisme heb uitgelegd aan de hand van grotere wetenschappelijke theorieën. In deze blogpost wil ik jullie op een toegankelijke manier uitleggen wat ik in mijn scriptie heb beschreven en wat de uitkomst is van mijn onderzoek.

Toen mijn veldwerk in februari 2019 begon, was ik zelf vegetariër. Hoewel ik gefascineerd was door het veganisme en specifiek het activisme, had ik zelf niet de intentie om vegan te worden. Dit heeft in het begin nog wel wat moeilijkheden opgeleverd, omdat ik soms het gevoel had dat ik mezelf moest verantwoorden ten opzichte van de activisten, en moest aantonen dat mijn interesse oprecht was. Gelukkig ging dit gedurende het onderzoek steeds beter en bouwde ik een goede band op met veel activisten. Ik leerde over speciesisme, abolitionisme, en het verschil tussen dierenwelzijn en dierenrechten. Deze theorieën heb ik uitgebreid uitgelegd en beschreven in mijn scriptie en ik heb daarmee aangetoond dat de kritiek die vegan activisten hebben op de maatschappij en de manier waarop er met dieren wordt omgegaan, teruggaat naar 12.000 jaar geleden, toen de mens voor het eerst dieren ging gebruiken tijdens de jacht en later in de landbouw. De huidige maatschappelijke visie op dieren komt dan ook voort uit ideeën dat dieren geen individuele gevoelens hebben en dat mensen

hen dus onbeperkt en onbegrensd mogen gebruiken (voor onder andere voedsel, entertainment, kleding, en het testen van producten). Door vegan activisten wordt dit echter gezien als een vorm van slavernij en zij vinden dat dieren, net als mensen, hun eigen rechten hebben en dat deze 'slavernij' moet worden afgeschaft. Vegan activisten zijn zich ervan bewust dat de culturele veronderstellingen ten opzichte van dieren diepgeworteld zijn in de huidige maatschappij en de economie, maar door de link te leggen met de afschaffing van menselijke slavernij en het verkrijgen van kinder-, en vrouwenrechten, laten ze zien dat ze de tijd moeten nemen om deze substantiële verandering tot stand te brengen.

Door middel van verschillende soorten acties, zowel cultureel als politiek georiënteerd, proberen vegan dierenrechten activisten mensen bewust te maken van het leed in industrieën waar dieren worden gebruikt, in de hoop dat dit hun gedachten en gedrag ten opzichte van dieren zal veranderen. Vaak zijn deze acties prikkelend voor de zintuigen (door middel van heftige beelden, geluiden, en zelfs geur bijvoorbeeld tijdens Saves), waardoor veel emoties worden losgemaakt. Dit is belangrijk om de ervaring memorabel te maken en dus tot niet-vegans door te dringen. Daarnaast worden dierlijke producten door vegan activisten vaak onaantrekkelijk gemaakt, door te praten over 'dode dieren' en 'lijken' (vlees), 'moord' (slacht), 'borstvoeding' (melk), etc.

Het tonen van heftige beelden op straat en op internet heeft als keerzijde dat activisten dit zelf ook moeten zien, en dat de beelden natuurlijk gefilmd moeten worden. Hiervoor moeten activisten soms stallen bezoeken, waar zij zichzelf dus ook blootstellen aan veel dierenleed. Dit kan leiden tot heftige emoties en zelfs problemen met de mentale gezondheid, zoals trauma, depressie en burn-out. Om die reden kiezen sommige vegan activisten er bewust voor om niet naar de beelden te kijken of niet naar Saves van The Save Movement te gaan. Echter werkt het voor anderen juist motiverend om de beelden te zien, omdat ze eraan herinnerd worden waarvoor ze zo actief strijden en waarom ze het willen blijven doen. Voor veel vegan activisten is het opkomen voor de dieren dan ook een 'logische keus' en iets dat ze 'moeten doen'. Een aantal noemt vegan activisme zelfs een 'missie' en ziet het als een doel in zijn of haar leven.

Vegan dierenrechten activisten delen door hun wereldbeeld een deel van hun identiteit, die versterkt wordt wanneer ze in de 'community' terecht komen. Deze identiteit wordt uitgedragen door het tonen van hun liefde voor dieren (door met hoge stemmen tegen dieren te praten alsof het kinderen zijn) en het hebben van tattoos en bepaalde kleding of accessoires gerelateerd aan veganisme en dierenrechten activisme. De vegan gemeenschap wordt ook wel een 'familie' genoemd, omdat ze zich onderling erg verbonden voelen en iets heel intiem delen: samen eten. Dit maakt dierenrechten activisme uniek ten opzicht van andere burgerrechten bewegingen. Echter creëert dit wel automatisch

een grens tussen henzelf en niet-vegans, waardoor er soms een wij-zij cultuur heerst. Dit heb ik persoonlijk ervaren, maar ik kreeg het inzicht van het belang van de 'vegan familie' pas nadat ik zelf bij een Pig Save was geweest. Toen ik daar bij het slachthuis stond en de trucks vol met varkens één voor één langs zag komen op weg naar de slacht, realiseerde ik me dat dit ook gebeurt met de koeien uit de zuivel industrie en kippen uit de ei-industrie. Dat gaf me een knoop in mijn maag, en ik voelde dat ik er niet meer aan wilde bijdragen. Drie dagen nadat ik bij de Save ben geweest, ben ik dus vegan geworden. Dit heeft mijn onderzoek een interessante nieuwe wending gegeven en dus ook nieuwe aspecten van de vegan gemeenschap aan het licht gebracht, omdat ik voelde dat ik vanaf dat moment op een andere manier benaderd werd en er meer 'bij hoorde'.

Mijn scriptie heet 'De Strijd Tegen Traditie', omdat vegan dierenrechten activisten vechten voor een verandering van iets dat heel diep geworteld ligt in onze maatschappij; het gebruik van dieren. Om die reden beargumenteer ik in mijn scriptie dat vegan activisme gezien kan worden als een *transition movement*, wat betekent dat het een beweging is die strijd voor een overgang. Dit is kenmerkend voor het huidige tijdperk waarin aandacht voor de natuur en het milieu steeds belangrijker wordt.