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**The Vegan Society from Seed to Fruition: A Case Study of Social Movement Professionalization,  
1944-2017**

**Abstract**

*In a qualitative content analysis of The Vegan Society's quarterly publication, The Vegan, spanning 73 years and nearly 300 issues, the trajectory of one of the world's most radical and compassionate countercuisine collectives is presented and critically assessed. The Vegan Society's history provides a case study on the ways in which social movements negotiate difference and conflict. Specifically, this paper highlights the challenges of identity, professionalization, and factionalism across the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. This research also puts into perspective the cultural impact that veganism has had on Western society, namely the dramatic increase in vegan consumers, vegan products, and the normalcy of vegan nutrition.*

**Keywords:** Animal Rights, Food History, Social Movements, Veganism, Vegetarianism

## **Introduction**

The Vegan Society (n.d.) defines veganism as, “a philosophy and 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 other purpose [ . . . ].” This definition is ambiguous enough that, in practice, there is no one working definition of *a* veganism, but rather there exists many *veganisms*. Vegan protest may be anti-speciesist, anti-racist, environmental, or health-centric. Some might not identify their veganism as political at all (Iacobbo and Iacobbo 2006, Kerschke-Risch 2014). For early members of The Vegan Society, veganism was inherently political given that it was primarily a matter of Nonhuman Animal rights (and also vegan rights), but individual wellbeing and public health were of high interest as well. As a *countercuisine* encompassing a large variety of meanings and interpretations, the vegan movement is in regular negotiation of conflicts internal to the movement as well as those associated with outside entities in the wider social movement environment.

The Vegan Society emerged in England in November of 1944 following a friendly but drawn-out schism within the British Vegetarian Society that had been simmering for some decades (Leneman 1997a, Leneman 1997b). While the fledgling organization was small, radical, and almost completely unfunded, it would manage to survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, influencing global food culture and challenging humanity’s relationship with food and other animals. As a

moral endeavor, The Vegan Society presented plant-based consumption as a solution to famine, war, environmental devastation, health, and, especially, Nonhuman Animal suffering. At the forefront of this crusade was the society's quarterly publication, *The Vegan*, which got its humble start as a roughly-typed leaflet that was painstakingly hand-bound by the organization's founder Donald Watson. This little publication usurped the majority of the society's meager funds (sometimes even placing them in arrears), but the importance that *The Vegan* held for establishing the movement's credibility and nurturing networks ensured its perseverance across the decades.

Unique among modern social movement organizations, since its inception, The Vegan Society has maintained a democratic leadership which invites members to take active part in decision-making. *The Vegan* was also democratic in structure and was historically member supported through individual essays, letters to the editor, and donations. As my analysis will uncover, this special quality has been under threat of erosion as professionalization envelops the social movement space. After so many years in the field, The Vegan Society is battle-worn. It has adopted a steady approach characterized by nonconfrontational moves that are designed to gradually infiltrate consumer culture, while social services (such as improving community nutritional knowledge, cutting carbon footprints, and providing plant-based fare to hospital and prison inmates) have replaced the cutting radical claimsmaking from earlier years that had centered nonhuman oppression and emphasized the need for societal restructuring.

Here "radical" refers to a protest style oriented towards societal restructuring over reform (Fitzgerald and Rodgers 2000). Szymanski (2003) furthers that radical activists are skeptical of moderation and pragmatism as strategies which would be capable of [ . . . ] challenging the broader political, economic, and social relations that constitute the status quo" (1). The presence

and persistence of radicalism depend on the wider environment, operating as part of a movement's many "waves of contention" (Robnett et al. 2015). My own previous research in the Nonhuman Animal rights movement has identified the neoliberal shift in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the resultant organizational shift to professionalize across the charity sector is correlated with the suppression of radical protest (Wrenn 2020). I suggest that The Vegan Society in perspective advances food studies and social movement studies by offering insight to organizational transformations of this kind. I unpack organizational negotiations by applying social movement theory of group identity (McGarry and Jasper 2015), factionalism (Benford 1993, Schwartz 2002, Schwartz 1969), and professionalization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, McCarthy and Zald 1977). From there, I conclude that the Vegan Society's professionalized transition has undercut the broader movement's aims to reorient societal treatment of Nonhuman Animals.

## **Literature Review**

### *Forging the Vegan Identity*

The Vegan Society emerged in 1944 following a lengthy debate in the journal of the British Vegetarian Society over the appropriateness of animal byproducts in the human diet (Cole 2014, Leneman 1999a, Leneman 1999b). Watson (1965) emphasizes that, although some vegetarians recognized the relatedness of "meat" and dairy production, veganism was taken to be an extreme and farfetched concept even by passionate movement leaders such as Henry Salt. The safety of vegan eating was concerning, but the diet's discredit, Watson explains, would be overcome with the help of influential medical lectures and essays on the healthfulness of dairy-free diets in the 1930s and 40s. Yet, as historian Leah Leneman explains, strategic practicality

eventually emerged as the pivotal issue: “No one in the inter-war period tried to plead that dairy farming was not cruel; the arguments came down to conscience versus expediency” (1999b: 25). The Vegetarian Society subsequently limited space to discuss the relevancy of veganism, concerned as it was that a vegan message would be off-putting to potential participants.

Given the tension and restriction, vegans had little choice but to splinter into a new collective in order to survive. With The Vegan Society thus established, it was better positioned to control the nature of the dialogue. The mission statement utilized in the 1940s emphasized the importance of a plant-based diet and the development of alternatives to animal products. Its primary aims were:

1. To advocate that man’s [sic] food should be derived from fruits, nuts, vegetables, grains and other wholesome non-animal products and that it should exclude flesh, fish, fowl, eggs, honey, and animals’ milk, butter and cheese.
2. To encourage the manufacture and use of alternatives to animal commodities.<sup>1</sup>

Although many health faddists, religious followers, and welfare advocates had experimented with living free of animal products (Shprintzen 2013), credit is due to The Vegan Society for both formalizing and popularizing the position. It also standardized the term “vegan” and its definition, which had previously been known in various incarnations by other labels such as fruitarian, vegetal, Pythagorean, and also vegetarian. Although, in America, vegan experiments also abounded, it would not be until the 1960s that Britain’s Vegan Society would inspire an American counterpart. Australia’s first vegan society formed in Victoria even later in 1973

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Vegan* 1 (2) printed in 1946 as an example of this regularly printed statement.

(Villanueva 2018). Even today, these societies remain eclipsed in cultural influence and authority by their British progenitor.

### *Veganism as a Social Movement*

Veganism entails the abstention from Nonhuman Animal products and represents what Belasco (1993) has identified as a “countercuisine.” Yet, despite its intergenerational persistence and its clear relevance to food studies, veganism remains relatively ignored in larger narratives. Miller (2017) and Kauffman’s (2018) recent sociological analyses of the 20<sup>th</sup> century natural food movement, for instance, make scant mention of veganism. Some specialist sociologists and scholars of the humanities have been advancing vegan studies in spite of this disciplinary oversight, examining veganism as relevant to food politics (Twine 2017, Wright 2015). Social movement scholars have also examined the adjacent (and often overlapping) field of Nonhuman Animal<sup>2</sup> rights activism as a case study in the manifestation of tactical decision-making, networking, cultural construction, and other mechanisms of collective behavior (Jasper and Poulsen 1993, Munro 2005). This political spirit is certainly evidenced in the aims of The Vegan Society. Watson and his predecessors felt sure that the way to humanity’s heart was through its stomach, and they leveraged veganism in hopes of revolutionizing social relations. The society’s ethical emphasis, particularly its desire to define new moral parameters through the implementation of scientific authority, might categorize vegans as what deviance scholar Howard Becker has conceptualized as “moral entrepreneurs” (Lindblom and Jacobsson 2014). Whether countercuisiniers or moral entrepreneurs, the vegan pioneers carried a radical agenda to challenge the power structures manifest in the state, science, industrialized agriculture, and the Nonhuman Animal rights movement.

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<sup>2</sup> This term is capitalized as a measure of respect to denote the shared oppression of other animals.

Social movement commentary (especially that produced by activists themselves) often describes movement struggles individualistically as a product of its organization's unique characteristics or isolated tribulations, failing to address the structural forces which so greatly influence group identity construction and decision-making. Sociological research in the Western Nonhuman Animal rights movement (Pendergrast 2014, Wrenn 2020) indicates that professionalization (a move to a corporate, bureaucratic organizational style) is correlated with significant organizational identity shifts, including deradicalization and the inflammation of factional disagreements. The Vegan Society's historical progress as documented in *The Vegan* exemplifies this effect. Professionalization, which emerged in response to the neoliberalization of the public sphere in the 1980s (Gilmore 2017), is often adopted by social movement organizations in an attempt to negotiate identity dilemmas, overcome resonance shortcomings, and maximize access to resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Glasser (2011) theorizes that professionalization in the Nonhuman Animal rights movement results from state repression and reduce potential for conflict. However, it is frequently the case that professionalization is simply a result of the global neoliberal turn in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and what Rodríguez describes as the state's "*ongoing absorption of organized dissent through the non-profit structure*" (2007: 23). Rather than reduce propensity for factionalism, professionalization incites additional tension vis-à-vis intramovement division.

## **Methods**

To unpack these correlations, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of The Vegan Society's quarterly publication, *The Vegan* (Winter 1944 through Spring 2017, 272 issues total). These issues are available from The Vegan Society free to download or view on [issuu.com](http://issuu.com). I examined each issue and coded for content and overall tone. I identified recurring themes as well



as points of conflict which were then logged in Endnote. My analysis was guided by a focus on major organizational trends, features, and campaigns, what inspired and sustained them, and what ultimately precipitated their abandonment or rebranding. I also looked for evidence of what motivated the society's strategy and structure and how these motivations changed in the context of historical political, economic, and social developments in the wider charity sector and society. Likewise, I paid attention to shifts in membership and identity, all with the intention of illustrating tensions associated with professionalization and factionalism. Because it was not possible to read each issue in its entirety, I paid particular attention to the table of contents, editorials, and letters from readers since these indicate topics that the organization deems important and relevant enough for inclusion. Editorials and reader submissions were especially illuminating in regard to debates and transitions. I examined other subtleties, too, given the message that they intended to convey to members and the general public. These included cover displays and reader surveys. I found that annual reports, which summarized the state of the organization as well as its aims and goal attainment, were also insightful, and these, too, were cataloged.

I should note that relying solely on one publication to determine an organizational narrative is inherently limiting given editor gatekeeping and the differing perspectives between editorial staff, membership, and audience. Although beyond the scope of this study, additional analysis into organizational outreach literature, meeting notes, and other such documents would be insightful, as would audience dialogues that could be easily accessed through social media. Furthermore, qualitative content analysis is inherently interpretive given its reliance on the coder's subjectivity. That said, *The Vegan* is a valuable resource not only for its basic reporting of events, but for its recording of ideas, dreams, debates, and disappointments. Interactions with

readers, members, countermovements, and the state are also recorded therein. In the decades before veganism was able to secure a cultural foothold, *The Vegan* was a vital and sometimes solitary voice in support of plant-based living as a remedy to Nonhuman Animal suffering.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Formative Years: War, Nutrition, and Networks*

The Vegan Society emerged, not only as a response to disagreement over the extent of humanity's responsibility to other animals and how that responsibility manifested in food systems, but also in response to larger social and political issues of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. War and changing food production offered obvious windows of opportunity that vegans hoped to exploit. Issues of *The Vegan* produced in the 1940s were preoccupied with recuperation from World War II, and the society advanced veganism as a means of overcoming food shortages, famine, and soil depletion (Ellis et al. 1965, Watson 1946a). Although some social movement theorists warn that having a finger in too many pies can weaken a movement's ability to resonate (Gamson 1990), The Vegan Society could not afford to focus singularly on Nonhuman Animals in postwar Britain. As the society found its footing, funding shortages were a consistent and primary problem. In fact, some issues of *The Vegan* in the early 1950s could not be published for this reason, and the society was almost completely staffed by volunteers until the 1970s. The concerns about social reform and national progress emerging after years of global crisis were many, and the society was obliged to accommodate. Repeated statements were produced in the first issues of *The Vegan* to remind readers that the systemic discrimination against nonhuman species (Cross 1955, Heron 1953, Watson 1946a), what would later become known as "speciesism" by theorists Richard Ryder and Peter Singer (1975), was the core emphasis of veganism, but a great proportion of articles from the 1940s and 1950s related to nutrition as well.

Rationing in Britain continued well into the 1950s, and concern with food access and good diet was daily in the national consciousness. While many British families had effectually gone without “meat” during the war and had even drastically reduced their consumption of other animal products such as milk and eggs, the concept of pure vegetarianism was still held with suspicion. The onus was on The Vegan Society to demonstrate that veganism was healthful and relevant. Exclaims Watson in an early editorial, “Those who have adopted a Vegan diet and have found themselves still able to work hard, play hard, sleep hard, bear children, and meet life’s other commitments, are naturally intrigued when told by high authority that it cannot be done. How paralyzing is the power of tradition!” (1946b: 2). Indeed, it would be *seven decades* after the society’s founding before the British Dietetic Association officially recognized veganism as healthy and safe (The Vegan Society 2014).

In another reflection of postwar values, there was a heavy focus on the family, public health, and child welfare in these early years. Every issue included a report from the Baby Bureau. The Summer 1947 issue, for instance, reads, “Several mothers have written to ask how a Vegan baby can be weaned without having cow’s milk [ . . . ],” and then proceeds to describe the diet and habits of one such vegan baby (Mayo 1947: 14). In a photograph adjacent, a chubby, naked toddler is shown contentedly exploring a backyard garden (nude sunbathing was prescribed along with plant-based foods). By way of another example, another submission to the Baby Bureau pictures three pudgy-faced children between 1 and 5 years old. To emphasize their energy and health, the author observes: “The children especially are on the go from waking till sleeping. [ . . . ] They all have bright eyes and clear skin and take a very intelligent interest in life” (Ling 1963: 8). Early vegans were keen not to be stereotyped as sickly hermits, but rather healthful and socially integrated contributors to the nation’s recovery. Images and stories of

healthy children were frequently spotlighted with parenting advice and the Baby Bureau persisted through the 1960s.

Also in the postwar years, The Vegan Society formed a Health Council to improve nutrition knowledge, collaborate with the medical community, and survey members to collect data on what was still mostly anecdotal evidence about vegan vitality (Drake 1952). Before veganism could be successfully advocated as a solution to society's ills, The Vegan Society recognized that it had to lay the groundwork to assuage the fears of consumers and anxious parents. The society emerged in an era of progressive reforms and heightened attention to public health, welfare, and social services. Parents and policymakers were coming to recognize that illness and premature death were not simply misfortunes but were instead related to environment and nutrition (Lindenmeyer 1997). Suffering and mortality, especially that experienced by children, were thereby malleable. Advocates insisted that intervention began with education. Caregivers were hungry for knowledge, and The Vegan Society was hungry to provide it.

### *Going Professional*

Vegans also looked inward to stimulate organizational development. As times were tight and the society was generally untested and lacking reputation, funding could not be relied upon to achieve growth. A sign of its pitiful financial state was its heavy reliance on the annual Animals' Fair where a booth was made available for the society to operate a beggarly bake sale beginning in 1947 and continuing into the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Society memberships and subscriptions to *The Vegan* became vital and editors regularly reminded readers of this point. There was a heavy focus on building up the organization and, despite earlier quarrels, cooperating with the

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<sup>3</sup> The fundraising importance of holding a bake sale at the Animals' Fair is mentioned periodically between the winter 1947 (p. 4) issue through autumn 1971 (pp. 7-8).

likeminded vegetarian movement. In fact, the Vegan Society was very internationally minded (a trait which remains today). *The Vegan* reported enthusiastically about International Vegetarian Union (IVU) meetings and regularly featured travel reports and letters from colleagues abroad. Membership with the IVU (itself founded in 1908 to promote transnational cooperation and international recognition of vegetarianism) was attained in 1947, proving a major point of legitimization for the society (even if Watson's acceptance speech was met with indignation from the British vegetarians in his audience) (Henderson 1947). Unfortunately, the funding problems that plagued the society throughout the 1950s did prohibit vegans' ability to participate in international networking opportunities (Johnstone 1951, Simmons 1956). Social movement organizations must pay to play, and this can be a serious deterrent to radical grassroots collectives which are far less likely to have the financial resources necessary to fund publications and literature, attend conferences, hire staff and consultants, rent headquarters and meeting spaces, purchase media coverage, and access other social change commodities.

The importance of resources to goal attainment is not lost on social movement organizations or social scientists. Resource mobilization theory posits that movement trajectory is predominantly a product of its bid to secure resources, and its ability to do so is dependent upon its relationship to other entities in the social change space (McCarthy and Zald 1977). As the social movement ecosystem becomes dominated by professionalized organizations, the ability for outliers to maintain their original grassroots structure becomes nearly impossible or at the very least undesirable (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Smaller, radical organizations must adapt or perish. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nearly all of the organizations competing with The Vegan Society had professionalized, adopting an institutional, bureaucratic approach that relied on a hierarchy of authority, transparency of behavior, collaboration with the state, and

reliance on fundraising. The society likely felt a strong temptation to assimilate. In the early 1970s, the society's budget remained very modest at just over £1,000, and the production of *The Vegan* was still creating a considerable burden on finances.

The society received a magnificent boost in publicity and resources in 1976 when covered by the BBC *Open Door* program (Jannaway 1977). The office received 300 phone calls, 9,000 letters, and a spike of several hundred new members. Its revenue multiplied several times. This growth allowed it to hire staff and rent a premise, but it also forced some complicating managerial decisions. In 1979, The Vegan Society (1979) changed to a Company Limited by Guarantee to relieve trustees of their growing duties. Some expressed concern that this bureaucratization would undermine the society's founding spirit. Thus, as the society launched as a registered charity in 1980, "Grassroots News" became a new section with emphasis on keeping a community and nurturing networking and local connection. The decision to bureaucratize could not have come sooner; the airing of *The Animals' Film* on UK's Channel 4 just a year later had a mobilizing effect similar to that of *Open Door* (Jannaway 1982, Main 1982, Sanderson 1982).

The changes following professionalization were many. First, the newsletters took on a new image, transforming from a homespun, newsletter-type production to a slick, rack-ready magazine. As evidenced below, there was also a renewed, almost obsessive interest in fundraising following this move. Nonetheless, for some members who were also active in competing Nonhuman Animal rights charities that had already bureaucratized, The Vegan Society's professionalization was too slow and incomplete. In 1984, these activists wrested control of the organization, and immediately thereafter, installed a fundraising campaign at the forefront of the agenda. The winter issue printed a general appeal: "Whether we like it or not,

money is an essential ingredient in any recipe for effective functioning, and of course is necessary in itself for the raising of more money” (Coles 1984: 2). The treasurer clarified in the next issue: “The cost of employing a full-time Secretary and obtaining and running office premises to replace the services previously kindly provided free of charge is expected to increase our costs by some £20,000 per year” (Cummins 1985: 11-12). In 1986, it issued a “renewed appeal” for member donations since its failed grant applications had risked the stability of the new professionalized structure: “A breakthrough is badly needed, for the overall response to date places in jeopardy the society’s ability even to sustain its present level of activity, let alone embark on the essentially modest expansion programme [ . . . ]” (The Vegan Society 1986). As these managerial justifications and fundraising pitches suggest, a commitment to a professionalized structure can create a reorientation of priorities.

### *The Impact of Professionalization*

Professionalization encouraged many developments that catapulted the society’s visibility and fundraising focus. First, the official vegan label launched in 1990, not simply to make vegan shopping easier for its constituency, but to gain much needed revenue from licensing fees, what it described as “the mutual benefit of both the Vegan Society and the vegan consumer (The Vegan Society 2000: 19). Second, in honor of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, World Vegan Day was announced in 1994 with the intention of garnering publicity by focusing activist efforts on November 1<sup>st</sup> (The Vegan Society 1994). Third, in 1996, the magazine transformed again, keeping many of the same columns, but adopting a modern look. The aim was to make the magazine palatable, not just for already vegan subscribers, but also to nonvegan shoppers with *The Vegan* now poised for mainstream access in natural foods stores and alternative book stores (Farhall 1996). Research in the adjacent natural foods movement stresses the pivotal role that the

market played in normalizing and accrediting alternative diets (Miller 2017), and The Vegan Society was likely aligning with this wider movement pattern.

As observed by McCarthy and Zald (1973), the shift to a bureaucratic structure brings with it greater emphasis on resource mobilization. Furthermore, the accompanying institutional ethic it entails comes to modify the organization's goals and limits its imagination for alternatives (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). These bureaucratic characteristics, for decades relatively foreign to the grassroots style of The Vegan Society, came to be described as "essentials" in the 1980s, as evidenced in the fretting of one treasurer: "Will we ask our staff to work for nothing from a tent, or perhaps just go into liquidation? There are more palatable alternatives" (Cummins 1985: 12). Following professionalization, fundraising became a consistent subject of editorials and articles (FitzGerald 1988, Rogers 1990, The Vegan Society 1990a, Wallis 1993), even becoming a regular article feature starting in 1990. Attempts to squeeze additional donations from readers were largely unsuccessful, likely due to the fact that the majority of its members were students, retired, or unemployed (The Vegan Society 1990b). These rapid and calculated changes did not go over smoothly. Several editorials throughout the 1980s specifically responded to unpublished complaints related to the restructuring (Howlett 1986, Kew 1989a, Langley 1985).

Another apparent consequence of professionalization was a renewed interest in collaboration. A common strategy for professionalized organizations is to normalize their approach in the social change space by pressuring other organizations to comply with their hegemonic agenda (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). They may also collaborate to increase bargaining power in the social movement space (Ashworth, Boyne, and Delbridge 2009). *The Vegan* began to regularly report on rights-based organizations such as Animal Aid (Kew 1987),



the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) (The Vegan Society 1982), and sometimes the U.S.-based People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) in the 1980s (The Vegan Society 1987a). A litany of cooperative campaigns, organizations, and events were spotlighted by the editorial team. The society had certainly collaborated with organizations prior to professionalization, but these early alliances were born primarily out of necessity given its limited power and access to resources and remained local and grassroots.

Indeed, the movement's influence on The Vegan Society was substantial. First, the youth group initiated in the 1970s to provide community for the new wave of younger vegans joining from the Nonhuman Animal rights movement was recommissioned in the 1990s (Rofe 1990). As with the Young Vegans of years prior (Williams 1972), this modern version reflected the renewed interest in political activism, especially among the under-thirties. Second, while The Vegan Society had always harbored a strong Nonhuman Animal rights vein, the revamped organization saw a marked increase in depictions of suffering. Beginning in 1985, *The Vegan*, new and improved, began a "News" feature that commonly reported on nonhuman rights violations. By the 1990s, this came to include disturbing images as well (Lybery 1993, Wallis 1991, Webb 1990). The inclusion of such images may simply have been made possible by *The Vegan's* transition from newsletter to magazine format which would allow for more images, but, more likely, it was a symptom of an organization that had professionalized and was strategically employing moral shocks to mobilize. Indeed, moral shocks have been a popular anti-speciesism tactic used when existing social networks have been exhausted. As the movement expands and comes to rely on the recruitment of outsiders, emotionally-compelling images can be an effective motivator (Jasper and Poulsen 1995).

### *Factionalism*

As The Vegan Society moved towards the new millennium, the radicalism of years before faded into the image of a stable, mature, and modern organization. Its heated debates, support for raucous street protest, and grassroots structure had given way to a society both professionalized and bureaucratic. *The Vegan* was now targeting the curious shopper, not the reform-oriented activist. It introduced The Vegan Readers' Awards, for instance, spotlighting foods, restaurants, and products. Editorials were tamed as well and began frequently discussing food and products. Of course, it was always the society's intention to make veganism more palatable to the mainstream, but this may have undermined its ability to advocate to society the critical thinking necessary to challenge speciesism. By way of example, one of the reader letters prominently spotlighted in the Postbag section praised The Vegan Society for remaining aloof from the Nonhuman Animal rights movement and encouraged more fundraising effort. "There is room in *The Vegan* to satisfy all tastes and ambitions," it offers, and this indifference would "help the Vegan Society enrol [sic] new members and increase funds" (Gillard 1999). Another published correspondence deemed a "star letter" complained about the "unrelated radicalism" of environmentalism and anti-globalization that had previously been discussed in the magazine (Daniel 2005: 35). As The Vegan Society's trajectory from an anti-speciesist collective to an intersectionally-minded lifestyle interest group demonstrates, professionalization not only impacts the structure and goals of the organization in question. When pivotal organizations experience structural change, this creates changes in the structure of the wider movement, too. One such consequence is the manifestation of an ideology of rationalization which begins to permeate movement culture (Dobbin 2001). This structural transformation in the movement field provokes schism.

Factionalism refers to movement discord which develops over frame disputes and strategy. It is a sort of meso-level disagreement over collective identity and locus of movement authority. While some research highlights the adverse effects of schism given its potential to waste resources on in-fighting and present a disjointed front to audiences (Benford 1993), others emphasize that factionalism may fuel innovation and increase resonance points with audiences (Schwartz 1969, Schwartz 2002). Indeed, factionalism can act as a seam allowance, providing room for ideological growth and tactical exploration while still maintaining the integrity of the larger collective. This element appears to be present in the development of The Vegan Society which experienced a painful transition from radical grassroots collective to professional colleague (recall that the society itself originated from such factionalism). In the 1990s, a brief tussle erupted between The Vegan Society and Britain's Vegetarian Society following a news piece produced in *The Vegan* which criticized a council member of The Vegetarian Society who was found to be selling "beef" in one of his catering establishments (Everett et al. 1987, Howlett 1987, The Vegan Society 1987b). The Society also lashed out at the Nonhuman Animal rights movement for its slowness to adopt veganism (Howlett 1988). Editor Barry Kew, for one, was frustrated at the movement's lip service to veganism that was not followed by financial support:

We can point to positive developments to balance against the lows but, among other things, one has to wonder when the 'movement' will be ready to espouse the vegan ethic and not just get tied in too much of a knot over how many centimetres the laying hen should have, for instance. Moreover, we (not just the Vegan Society) are desperate for big cash input from those best able to give more than their names (1989b: 3).

Grievances of this kind were a reflection of the turbulence created by professionalization and would not be characteristic of the society in general. In fact, both The Vegetarian Society (Lee

1987) and the British reformist organization Compassion in World Farming (D'Silva 1989) wrote to the editor to complain about the airing of dirty laundry, effectively educating the society on the rules of professional participation. Many readers were unhappy with this factional dispute as well and wished for peace (The Vegan Society 1990). By the end of 1990s, the society declared a renewed interest in cooperation over criticism (Kew 1989a, Savage 1990).

### *Identity Maintenance*

Despite the cooperative measures that are sometimes incentivized in the process of resource mobilization, disagreement lies just around the corner as professionalized organizations must inevitably compete for visibility and limited funding. In practice, therefore, a social movement organization's commitment to cooperation may simply reflect its commitment to protecting a hegemonic authority. In other words, I would argue that cooperation is available only to those professionalized organizations which are positioned to benefit The Vegan Society. In a strategic plan unveiled for 2013, for instance, the Chief Executive presented a telling three-point agenda. One of its goals emphasized empowering grassroots, but another pointed to avoiding factionalism. This combination is informative. While, on one hand the society wishes to support grassroots, on the other, its resistance to factionalism could be a strategy to squelch challenges to its power. Its motive to support grassroots might also be ulterior since grassroots collectives are usually those which harbor radical critiques contrary to the professionalized approach. I have observed this power maneuver in the wider Nonhuman Animal rights movement as well (Wrenn 2020).

As organizations bureaucratize, they adopt a hierarchical structure and an authoritative institutional culture. Subsequently, weaker movement entities that challenge an organization's hegemony may be villainized. This may entail a professional organization strategically aligning

insurgents with the movement's outgroup target in order to discredit them by association. This tactic is evidenced in CEO de Boo's warning to critics: "The only beneficiary of this negativity is the animal exploiting industries, who simply ignore our fragmented movement" (2012: 5). Again, this is a typical ploy in the Nonhuman Animal rights movement. By way of another example, the then CEO of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has lodged a similar charge of radical critics:

The only people who criticize HSUS more than these bloggers [radical vegans] are the leaders of the meat industry, who spend millions annually to attack HSUS. They even admitted under deposition that they pose as animal activists online to post criticisms of HSUS. That's right—the meat industry pays people to do what these animal advocates are doing (Pacelle 2016).

The ostracization of radicals as countermovement confederates allows for the consolidation of professionalized control. It is characteristic for the relative power of professionalized organizations to be conflated with authority, such that it is taken for granted that The Vegan Society's own position is the correct position and that others must concede to achieve the movement's desire for unity. It is less frequently considered that the society itself might alleviate infighting by addressing radical critique regarding the appropriateness of capitalist channels and reform-oriented tactics in vegan activism, nor is it acknowledged that professionalization itself aggravates the factional difference in question.

As organizations bureaucratize, their grassroots flavor dulls and consensus is manipulated if not outright manufactured. By way of example, the polemical nature of *The Vegan's* Postbag section withered to quips, observations, and neutral comments as the professionalized structure matured in the 1990s. The society encouraged contributions of this kind (what it called "star

letters”) with a small prize. Only rarely would debate bubble up, usually when it served *The Vegan*’s agenda. For instance, in 1999, readers responded to *The Vegan*’s subtly deployed decision to embrace apolitical, health-centric vegan claimsmaking. Observes one annoyed member:

Probably like most readers, I came to be vegan for ethical rather than health reasons.

Whilst there are other organisations covering this area, the Vegan Society tends to play down the animal rights connection and there is very little, if any, coverage of animal rights activities in *The Vegan* (Jacobs 1999: 30).

In the decades since the early debates between the vegans and vegetarians, the healthfulness of plant-based eating has been established. Now, backed by nutritional research, the society could legitimately promote veganism as a means for achieving better health, thus circumventing contentious political frames. Such an approach, however, marks a straying from the organization’s original anti-speciesist mission and runs the risk of overselling the diet’s curative powers. Writes member and society historian Leneman: “If the health benefits cause people to become vegan, then that is all to the good, but if that remains their sole reason for not eating animal products, then many of them will become disillusioned and give up” (1999: 34).

Corroborates another reader:

*The Vegan* needs to realise that a good deal of us are more concerned with the ins and outs of the animal protection movement than in how to grow organic leeks! If *The Vegan* better reflected the ethical concerns of vegans it would broaden its appeal [ . . . ] When I get *The Vegan* I get the distinct impression it has been written for someone else! (Plews 1999)

When given a platform, readers made clear that the society's identity thus refashioned under professionalization was not necessarily in line with the political identity of the organization's core membership.

In response to the contention, the editors published several letters from like-minded readers who cheered this apolitical approach. Submits one reader of the society's "new views," "I like the way *The Vegan* deals with all the issues surrounding veganism" (Lohrbächer 1999: 34). Submits another, "[ . . . ] I think the fact that *The Vegan* seems to be upsetting folk from all camps is a sign that the balance is about right" (Bennett 1999: 34). One reader simply advocates extending the magazine's size to accommodate the society's new multifaceted approach: "We are all in the same boat, but are still in need of more information to learn about, and understand the differences between us. [ . . . ] this is the perfect way of spreading our wings without going off the track (Marsh 2000: 34). The move away from ethics to a more intersectional framework which encompasses a variety of vegan paths that may or may not center speciesism is a pattern observed in the larger Nonhuman Animal rights movement. Importantly, it correlates sharply with an organization's decision to professionalize (Pendergrast 2014, Wrenn 2020). As has been observed in other professionalized organizations in the movement, "hardline" activism was stigmatized by The Vegan Society's editorial staff, despite regular reader surveys conducted over the years that have consistently demonstrated that almost all members are vegan because of their concern for Nonhuman Animal rights (Cole et al. 2011a, 2011b). Such difficulties illustrate what McGarry and Jasper (2015) have described as an identity dilemma. In its bid to cast a wide net to reach diverse audiences, a social movement organization risks diluting its identity and disaffecting existing members.

The economic logic of growth underpinning the move to professionalization emerges from cultural norms of a capitalist society, but many social movement scholars identify commercialization as a deradicalizing influence that funnels movements in line with capitalist structures and undermines their ability to affect social change (Chasin 2000, Zeisler 2016). The market, it is argued, is the root of inequality, and cannot be channeled for social justice. For better or for worse, the pressure to maintain funds is unrelenting for professionalized groups. By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for instance, *The Vegan* was reporting difficulties in staffing and worried about its ability to continue as an effective force for other animals (Bevis 2000). Approximately 40% of the 2001 strategic plan related to fundraising, indicating that a substantial portion of the society's activities were being diverted to sustain its bureaucratic growth (The Vegan Society 2001). Yet it does appear that professionalization has paid off for the organization in the end with regard to institutional stability. Its 2025 strategic plan decenters fundraising and prioritizes moderate aims such as vegan policy reforms and greater encouragement for consumers to choose vegan options. It can even afford to fund the efforts of smaller grassroots collectives (The Vegan Society 2017). This stability, however, likely necessitated that the society shelve the agenda for radical restructuring so characteristic of Watson's era in order to prioritize its now characteristic bureaucratic appeals for flexitarianism, increased efficiency, and organization.

## **Conclusion**

The Vegan Society exemplifies the difficulties an organization must navigate in a fickle and competitive social movement environment in which political opportunities are in constant flux, public reception varies, and resources are rarely sufficient for operational requirements. While a number of political opportunities such as the public's interest in natural foods and



environmental sustainability could be exploited to its advantage, the society also hoped to steady its course by adopting a professionalized structure. No social movement pathway is fully one-directional or uninterrupted, of course. The Vegan Society was also impacted by mobilizing film broadcasts, injections of politicized youth volunteers, and the wider influence of the radicalized Nonhuman Animal rights movement which was experiencing a new wave of contention in the 1980s and 1990s. Along this path, the society experienced spurts of radicalism that were eventually tempered by conservatism. As is true of many organizations that were pressured to professionalize and thus became dependent upon formal funding channels for survival (McCarthy and Zald 1973), moderation ultimately triumphed in the pages of *The Vegan*.

No longer a trailblazer, The Vegan Society had become a dependable and stable organization presenting as more attractive for grants, bequeathals, and veg-curious potential donors and members. Members aligned with the society's core anti-speciesism ethic, however, were troubled by these structural changes and felt alienated. The bureaucratic structure allowed a sense of impersonality and impartiality which may have helped it sideline identity tensions and factional schism. The authority yielded by a bureaucratic structure also granted The Vegan Society the power to curate a social movement favorable to its agenda. Glasser (2011) and Miller (2017) suggest that professionalization is a reaction to state repression and countermovement retaliation, but, unlike its counterparts in the Nonhuman Animal rights and natural foods movements, The Vegan Society did not report any such state and industry tensions. Its decision to professionalize is better explained by isomorphic trends in the larger movement and the hegemonic logic of growth that takes for granted the utility in bureaucratic inertia.

Defanged though it may be, this version of The Vegan Society is at least more accessible. The early years of *The Vegan* spotlighted vegan family life and religiosity, hoping to present

veganism as compatible with perceived postwar social values of the time. Vegan demographics today challenge this identity. For instance, vegans are more likely to be single than nonvegans (The Vegan Society 2016), and this contrasts starkly with the nuclear family vision the society once presented. Veganism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has not fully escaped stigmatization (Greenebaum 2017), but it is increasingly acknowledged as a legitimate lifestyle alternative. That said, vegan identities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are likely to present dilemmas for The Vegan Society. Older vegans as are easily overlooked and underserved. Almost half of the vegan population is under 34 (The Vegan Society 2016), but the average age of a society member is 51 (Cole et al. 2011a), suggesting that the ever-increasing focus on young people could backfire.

Race and ethnicity will also become an issue, as vegans of color have voiced criticism regarding their exclusion (Feliz 2018, Harper 2010). In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the society collaborated heavily with Jewish and Hindu vegetarian groups, but this multicultural effort does not appear as robust in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In fact, only twice has a person of color (the *same* person of color, Rastafarian poet Benjamin Zephaniah) been featured on a cover of *The Vegan*.<sup>4</sup> In its content, *The Vegan* takes care to represent veganism as it is engaged across the world, but cover images reflect the white-centrism of hegemonic vegan culture (Wrenn 2016).

As for women and gays, their inclusion in the vegan identity has been somewhat tenuous as well. For instance, openly sexist imagery and correspondence were published (and challenged) in *The Vegan* (Boyd 1986, Francis 1986, Peirson 1986, The Vegan Society 1985), and The Vegan Society even put to vote whether or not to allow homosexuals to advertise in *The Vegan* in the 1980s (Kew 1986). Szymanski (2003) warns that the radical strategy may be disadvantageous for a social movement it is often difficult to create a mobilizing radical ideology

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<sup>4</sup> See Winter 1998 and Summer 2011.

that is also inclusive, but The Vegan Society's professionalized structure demonstrates that moderates, too, can struggle with this point.

The Vegan Society was born of a radical split from the established vegetarian movement, but, after some decades, acquiesced to the moderate movement culture and settled into a path of conservatism. This was disrupted in the 1960s, 1980s, and 1990s when tactical innovations in the Nonhuman Animal rights movement and political opportunities in larger society reignited the liberatory nature of veganism, but professionalism gradually redefined the society beginning in 1980, breaching in 1984, and snowballing thereafter. By the end of this study's sampling period in early 2017, all semblance of radicalism had dissipated. The society today is a well-oiled, bureaucratic, consumption-focused charity that mirrors its contemporaries. One critical point of divergence, however, is the remaining decision-making power and potential for leadership reserved for its membership. In a 2016 member consultation, it was discussed as to whether moving the society to a Foundation Charity should be put to vote at the 2017 Annual General Meeting. Doing so would eliminate this precious democratic access. This was voted down by 95%, but the fact that the society's democratic structure is now being put to question suggests that the writing may be on the wall for this holdout organization. Most organizations abandoned this structure in the 1980s and 1990s in the transition to professionalization, and the pressure for The Vegan Society to follow suit is likely great.

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