



Being a Muslim vegan in Türkiye: a phenomenological analysis of the “Both vegan and Muslim” YouTube video

Jale Karhan¹

Received: 18 April 2025 / Accepted: 1 December 2025 / Published online: 9 December 2025
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Abstract

This study aims to understand the perceptions, attitudes, opinions, and experiences of individuals in Türkiye who identify as both vegan and Muslim, as well as how they reconcile these two identities. In this context, the study analyzed the video titled “Both Vegan and Muslim”, published on the “Animal Save Türkiye” YouTube channel, in which three women share their perspectives and experiences, using a phenomenological approach. The vegan decisions of the individuals sharing their experiences in the video were influenced by ethical, ecological, and religious values, as well as documentaries, their circles of friends, and feminist thought. They emphasized that the practice of sacrifice is not obligatory and evaluated this issue from a critical perspective. Due to the perceived contradiction of being both vegan and Muslim, they have encountered various social reactions and questions. Due to the limited research on Muslim vegan individuals, this study makes an important contribution to the related literature. However, the nature of the phenomenological approach and the fact that the data were obtained from only one video and three participants significantly limit the generalizability of the research findings.

Keywords Muslim · Vegan · Türkiye · Phenomenological approach

Introduction

Vegans oppose the consumption of all animal-derived products; moreover, they reject the use and exploitation of animals by humans in areas such as cosmetics, clothing, entertainment, film, cleaning, experimental research, and the pharmaceutical industry. Therefore, they make an effort to avoid animal exploitation to the greatest extent

✉ Jale Karhan
jalekarhan@artvin.edu.tr

¹ Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Sociology, Artvin Coruh University, Artvin, Türkiye

possible (Francione and Charlton 2021 [2013] 2024; Giraud 2023 [2021]; Hawthorne 2019; The Vegan Society n.d.).

Looking at recent history, vegetarianism -not veganism- has been common in Türkiye. It is estimated that the first vegetarian communities in Türkiye emerged in Istanbul in the 19th century. Under the influence of westernization and modernization movements that gained momentum in the last years of the Ottoman Empire, a group of intellectuals adopted vegetarianism (Güçlü and Asil-İncekara 2023, p. 27). Born in Istanbul in 1891, vegetarian Turkist Hasan Ferit Cansever was a member of only the “Hygienic Vegetarians Association” apart from the Turkish Hearth. Thanks to his deep knowledge of vegetarianism, sound logic, and persuasive power, he persuaded some of his Turkist friends to give up eating meat (Ayvazoğlu 2011, pp. 40, 46). According to Cansever (1952), instead of saying “dead sheep,” “dead cattle,” or “dead fish,” people use the expressions “mutton,” “beef,” or “fish meat.” Thus, with a play on words, we feel like we are eating meat instead of eating a dead body. However, in reality, we are eating the dead bodies of animals. According to him, meat consumption can easily turn into cannibalism, and those who consider eating animal flesh the greatest happiness in the world can readily resort to cannibalism in the face of poverty and hunger (pp. 7–45). Today, the Vegan Association Türkiye (TVD), which was founded as a platform in 2006, gained official status and became an association in 2012 (TVD n.d.). Today, veganism in Türkiye is becoming increasingly widespread, influenced by social media.

In this study, the perceptions, attitudes, opinions, and experiences of individuals in Türkiye -where the majority of the population is Muslim- who identify as both vegan and Muslim will be examined through a phenomenological approach based on the video titled “Both Vegan and Muslim” published on the “Animal Save Türkiye” YouTube channel. In this context, the study aims to understand how individuals who identify as both vegan and Muslim experience, interpret, and reconcile these two identities. Moreover, due to the limited number of studies on Muslim vegans, this study also aims to contribute to the literature and provide a foundation for future research on the topic.

The Qur’an’s approach to animals

Animals are included in the sacred texts and teachings of Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and many other religions, and their ontological position and relationship with humans are discussed in various ways. Each religion has different understandings and approaches regarding animals. Even among individuals who adhere to the same religion, religious views regarding animals are interpreted in different ways across various sects and cultural contexts, leading to diverse perspectives.

There are many verses in the Qur’an concerning animals. Some of these verses explain that animals can communicate with Allah (An-Nur, 24/41; Al-Isra, 17/44), that animals can be trained (Al-Maidah, 5/4), and that animals communicate among themselves; that is, they have their own language, which humans can learn (An-Naml, 27/16–22) (Koşum 2018, p. 45). On the other hand, although the Qur’an does

not humanize animals, it defines them as a community (ummah) with their own rules and values (Koşum 2018, p. 46). Verse 6/38 of Surah Al-An'am, which mentions that animals are a community like humans, states: "All creatures that walk on the earth and all birds that fly in the sky with two wings are communities like you. We have not omitted anything from the Book. Finally, they will be gathered and brought before their Lord" (Karaman et al. 2020b, p. 398). According to Demirci (2019), the expression "they are a nation like you" in verse 6/38 of Surah Al-An'am categorically equates the existence of animals with the existence of humans. This perspective is an approach that will bring about a positive view and a profound change in ways of thinking towards animals. This perspective is an approach that addresses the issue from its deepest point, from its foundation, and within the framework of an ontological understanding (p. 4794).

In the Qur'an, the verses in Surahs An-Nahl (16/5-6-8-14-66-80), Al-An'am (6/142), Al-Hajj (22/36-37), Fatir (35/12), Al-Mu'minun (23/21-22), Al-Mu'min (40/79-80), and Yasin (36/71-73) state that some animals were created for the benefit of humans. The Qur'an's emphasis on animals being created for the benefit of humans demonstrates its perspective on this issue within the context of animal rights and animal welfare debates in the West. In this context, it can be said that the perspective of the Quran overlaps more with the idea of animal welfare. According to the Quran, in the name of protecting animal rights, people cannot be expected to be vegetarians or vegans, nor can they be asked to abandon the religious practice of sacrificing animals (Koşum 2018, pp. 45-52). The ritual of sacrifice is not only in Islam; it is a phenomenon seen in many religions, cultures, and societies throughout history (Baumgarten 2002; Burkert 1983 [1972]; Erginer 1997; Evans-Pritchard 1954; Weddle 2017). In the Qur'an, it is stated that the two sons of Prophet Adam offered a sacrifice to Allah (Al-Ma'idah 5/27); in another verse, it is indicated that the practice of sacrifice has been established as a rule within each of the divine religions (Al-Hajj 22/34). The Hanafi school of thought holds the view that the Qur'anic command addressed to Prophet Muhammad, "Establish prayer and sacrifice to your Lord" (Al-Kawthar 108/2), encompasses the entire Ummah and signifies a necessity (Karaman et al. 1998, pp. 1-2). The Prophet Muhammad consistently maintained the practice of sacrifice; in many hadiths, those who are financially capable are either commanded or encouraged to perform the sacrifice. On the other hand, according to those who argue that animal sacrifice is a Sunnah, there is no explicit command on this matter in the Qur'an; the Prophet's regular practice of sacrificing animals, however, established this practice as Sunnah (Karaman et al. 1998, pp. 2-3).

Methodology

This study aims to examine in depth the perspectives and experiences of individuals who identify as both vegan and Muslim, revealing how they interpret and reconcile these two identities, and for this purpose, the phenomenological approach, one of the qualitative research methods, is utilized in the study. According to İşeri (2025), phenomenological research focuses on the subjective perspectives of individuals who directly experience a phenomenon and seeks to understand the intrinsic nature

of these phenomena. This method enables a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of phenomena (p. 37). The phenomenological approach provides an appropriate research foundation for studies that aim to examine phenomena that are, on the one hand, not entirely unfamiliar to us and, on the other hand, whose full meaning we cannot fully grasp (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2005, p. 72). In this context, the phenomenological approach allows us to go beyond our limited knowledge about individuals with vegan and Muslim identities and to understand their experiences from their own perspectives. According to Sanders (1982), the phenomenological approach is based on the idea that the researcher, when questioning certain issues or posing questions, generally operates from various biases and preconceptions. This mental burden prevents the researcher from understanding the essence of phenomena. Accordingly, the basis of the phenomenological approach lies in the temporary suspension of all personal biases and assumptions in order to grasp the essence of a phenomenon (p. 355). In this context, as a researcher born into a Muslim family in Türkiye, all thoughts, beliefs, and biases related to the subject were temporarily suspended throughout the research process.

The most important rule for researchers using the phenomenological method is this: Increasing the number of individuals included in the study does not necessarily increase the information obtained. Quantity should not replace quality, and the researcher should be capable of conducting an in-depth analysis with a limited number of individuals. The number of participants may vary depending on the research topic, but having too many participants can make the situation difficult to manage. The researcher can gather sufficient data by working with 3–6 participants (Sanders 1982, p. 356). The data collection phase generally involves interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon; however, this is not mandatory in every study, and some phenomenological research may also utilize data sources such as poetry, observation, and documents (Creswell 2013; s. 79). In light of this information, a phenomenological analysis was conducted in this study based on a single video and the perspectives of three women. The data source for this study is the video titled “Both Vegan and Muslim” published on the “Animal Save Türkiye” YouTube channel. In the video, three women named Zeynep, Seda, and Rümeysa, who identify as both vegan and Muslim, share their experiences and perspectives. The “Animal Save Türkiye” YouTube channel, established on December 9, 2019, describes itself as follows: “It organizes actions and events as part of the global Save Movement to promote animal justice at a grassroots level.”¹ The video titled “Both Vegan and Muslim” on the channel was published on July 13, 2021.² The YouTube video used in this study was publicly shared and, although it was analyzed under the “fair use” principle, permission to use the video was requested via email from the “Animal Save Türkiye” YouTube channel on December 4, 2024. On January 26, 2025, they kindly replied as follows:

¹ Animal Save Türkiye [YouTube channel]. YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/@AnimalSaveTürkiye> Accessed December 4, 2024.

² Animal Save Türkiye (2021, July 13) Both vegan and Muslim [Video]. YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwUk3verX5c> Accessed December 4, 2024.

We unfortunately saw your email very late. We apologize for this. We did not receive any notification because it went to the spam folder. We are aware that it is very late, but if your study has not been published, of course, you may use all the information included in our videos. If your study has already been published, congratulations. We apologize again for the delayed response to your email.

Accordingly, since the video was publicly shared, the names of the women appear in the video, and permission was obtained via email from the channel that published it; no additional privacy measures were applied in the study. The screenshot of the relevant YouTube video is shown in Fig. 1.

Phenomenological data analysis begins with narrower units of analysis, progresses to broader units, and subsequently follows a systematic process aimed at providing a detailed description of what and how individuals have experienced (Moustakas 1994, as cited in Creswell 2013, p. 79). During the video analysis, the speeches of Zeynep, Seda, and Rümeysa were repeatedly listened to and manually transcribed. Subsequently, themes were identified, and through these themes, the perspectives of Zeynep, Seda, and Rümeysa were analyzed in detail. The researcher set aside personal opinions, beliefs, and biases regarding the topic and analyzed the data from the perspectives of Zeynep, Seda, and Rümeysa. However, considering that the study is limited to a single YouTube video and three participants, and taking into account the nature of the phenomenological approach, the generalizability of the findings is quite limited.

Themes and findings emerging from the analysis of the YouTube video

Reasons for becoming vegan

Vegans choose to become vegan for various reasons, such as health, religion, ethics, ecology, circle of friends, animal rights, and watching documentaries (Francione and



Fig. 1 Screenshot of the video “Both Vegan and Muslim” on the “Animal Save Türkiye” YouTube channel

Charlton 2021 [2013] 2024; Giacomani et al. 2021; Greenebaum 2012; Güler and Çağlayan 2021; Hirschler 2011). When the narratives of Zeynep, Rümeysa, and Seda are examined, it is understood that their decision to become vegan cannot be attributed to a single reason but arises from the interaction of multiple factors.

Documentary, circle of friends, ecology, ethics

Rümeysa states in the following way that, in addition to her circle of friends, ethical and ecological reasons were influential in her decision to become vegan:

My adventure began when my best friend told me that she was a vegetarian and wanted to become vegan in the future. (...) The effects of animal food consumption on climate change and the climate crisis have led me to reduce my consumption of animal products. (...) After I started meeting people who were reducing or completely cutting out their consumption of animal products, I realized that this had an ethical dimension and saw a different perspective, and my adventure began to turn much faster and towards a much different point.

In the literature, it is emphasized that animals are subjected to serious cruelty and exploitation in industrial animal husbandry. It is also stated that industrial animal husbandry has numerous adverse effects with global implications, such as air and water pollution, floods, droughts, extinction of plant and animal species, deforestation, the spread of infectious diseases, climate change, and global warming (Foer 2012 [2009]; Hawthorne 2019; Masson 2015 [2009]; Singer 2018 [1975]). Rümeysa's choice to become vegan was initially shaped by her circle of friends and later influenced by ecological and ethical factors. In Rümeysa's narrative, it is seen that the process of becoming vegan occurs gradually.

Seda explains that she became vegan overnight after watching a documentary: "I came across veganism three years ago. That is, I suddenly came across the documentary 'Earthlings'. (...) I decided to cut everything off overnight." Seda's decision to become vegan overnight was the result of sudden ethical and moral awareness after watching the documentary *Earthlings*; this indicates that her process of becoming vegan did not occur gradually. Seda's narrative demonstrates that documentaries directly addressing animal exploitation can play an important role in fostering change in individuals.

Communication with animals and the impact of feminism

According to Adams (2010 [1990]), animals become absent referents in slaughter processes. Patriarchal values are institutionalized through the absent referent system. Similarly, just as the dead bodies of animals disappear from our language when talking about meat, women are often absent referents in cultural narratives of violence (pp. 66–68). Zeynep explains that her communication with animals and her feminist identity were decisive in her process of becoming vegan as follows:

I decided to become vegan when I began to communicate with animals. (...) Like Seda, I also made my decision overnight. Well, of course, there was also a kind of political side, a subtext to this. I used to define myself as a feminist. Even when I defined myself as a feminist, I did not do so without giving it substance. It was also evident that I had an issue with capitalism while doing this. Similarly, I also had an issue with the system and patriarchy. Naturally, veganism never seemed strange to me. After reading *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, the scope of this issue became much clearer. And the human relationship with blood scared me a lot. The war, or rather that sense of war, along with blood, meat, and consumption, really scared me. And I said that I didn't want to be a part of it. (...) Because I believe that this is an ethical and conscientious issue.

Like Seda, Zeynep also became vegan not gradually, but overnight. The main determinant of this sudden decision was the communication she established with animals. Zeynep's statement, "A living being, we're talking about a cow with tears flowing from its eyes; we're talking about a goat; accustomed to humans, living with humans, knowing how to love humans," demonstrates that this communication with animals allows her to feel their pain and thereby enhances her empathy and awareness of animal exploitation. Subsequently, her feminist identity, her criticism of capitalism and the patriarchal system, her reading of the book *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, and her ethical and conscientious concerns were the determining factors in Zeynep's becoming vegan. Similarly, Rümeyşa's statement: "I began to realize the extent of exploitation and domination in industrial animal husbandry, especially how the dominant male domination manifests itself in the animal husbandry sector" shows that she is also influenced by feminist values.

Religious

Rümeyşa states that her religious values played an important role in her becoming vegan:

It is not something that is right from the perspective of my own religion. Because my religion is what makes tolerance and equality special to me, that is, the point that made my religion special. It was being tolerant and having a perspective on every person, in their uniqueness, and towards every being, more precisely, respecting their individual characteristics. And I realized that we completely lose this framework of respect in industrial animal farming. There is exploitation.

Rümeyşa emphasized that her religion encompasses not only the values of tolerance and equality but also respect for all living beings; however, she points out that this understanding of respect has been lost in modern industrial animal husbandry. In this context, the cruelty inflicted on animals in modern industrial animal husbandry conflicts with the principles of tolerance, equality, and respect at the core of Rümeyşa's religious beliefs, and this has emerged as another decisive factor in her process of becoming vegan. In this context, it appears that Rümeyşa's process of becoming

vegan was shaped not only by her social circle and ecological and ethical considerations, but also by her religious values.

The Islamic view of animals

According to Singer (2018 [1975]), some may consider the concept of animal liberation to be unique to the West and not applicable to all societies; however, animals have also been valued in many significant ancient ethical and religious traditions. According to him, if a comparison is made, the texts in which references to the condition of animals are most difficult to find among the major religious traditions are the sacred texts of Christianity. By contrast, in Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Ancient Chinese, and Islamic texts, it is possible to encounter numerous interpretations on this subject (pp. 11–12). Seda states the following regarding Islam's view of animals:

In Islam, it is said to show compassion to animals, which is something I have always known. So, oppression for any purpose is forbidden, as we all actually know; eating meat is not obligatory either, and we know that too. So, eating animals is described in very broad terms; in other words, it is actually limited. (...) Treating animals fairly, not causing them to suffer, and treating them like humans is actually a topic that is constantly mentioned in the Quran. (...) In Islam, it is also said, 'Protect Allah's camel and its right to drink water. But they denied it and slaughtered the camel. As a result, their Lord destroyed them for their sins and laid them waste'; I believe this is in Surah Ash-Shams.

In Seda's narrative, it is emphasized that animals should be treated in accordance with the principles of mercy and justice in Islam. According to Koşum (2018), in Islamic law, showing compassion toward animals and respecting their rights is considered a religious duty; that is, this act is regarded as a form of worship and a means of attaining God's approval. Any behavior contrary to this is regarded as rebellion. In this context, it is very important that fiqh attributes a religious dimension to animal rights (p. 208).

The concept of "halal"

According to the Quran, the most basic condition for a food to be eaten is that it is halal. In this context, this issue is addressed in the Quran in Surah Al-Baqarah (2/172), Surah Al-Ma'idah (5/88), Surah Al-A'raf (7/157), Surah Al-Anfal (8/69), Surah An-Nahl (16/114), and Surah Al-Mu'minun (23/51). According to Islam, animal foods considered haram include dead animals, pigs, flowing blood, and animals slaughtered in the name of anyone other than Allah. In addition, all foods that are toxic, lethal, narcotic, or harmful to human health in the short or long term are also considered either makruh or haram (Türker 2020, pp. 89, 95). Seda states the following on this subject:

There is a concept called 'halal.' But right now, everything is being processed in a factory-like manner, and we can never be sure of it. (...) That is, even as

a Muslim consuming it, we can never be sure that it is carried out under the proper conditions. (...) It says, ‘Eat from the pure things on earth, and from what is halal.’ [In the Qur’an] But right now, I cannot see any animal product that we could eat as halal after seeing those atrocities.

Regarding the concept of halal, Seda referred to verse 2/168 of Surah Al-Baqarah in the Quran: “O people! Eat of the lawful and pure things found on the earth; do not follow Satan, for he is your clear enemy” (Karaman et al. 2020a, p. 253). Seda addresses the concept of halal as a determining criterion in Islam within the context of food consumption. According to Seda, due to the cruelty inflicted on animals in modern livestock farming and industrial production processes, there are currently no animal products that Muslims can consume in accordance with halal standards.

The perspective of important figures in Islam

The primary sources regarding animal rights in Islam are the Qur’an and the Sunnah; additionally, the views, lifestyles, and biographies of prominent figures in the religion are also considered as references on this matter. In this regard, Zeynep, drawing on the practices of dervish communities affiliated with the Sufi tradition, states the following:

I suggest they look at the dervish communities in the Islamic world. When they want to enter a period of purification, the first thing they do is cut out animal-based food. A period of purification is being mentioned. (...) For a clean period and a fresh start, something that will not enter the body is mentioned; in other words, it is also stated somewhere that this will pollute the body. (...) Actually, there is a book by Ahmet Karamustafa called *God’s Unruly Servants [Friends]*; [in the book] we can see these very often in those dervish communities.

Zeynep points out that in the practice of purification, one of the Sufi traditions in Islam, dervishes eliminate animal products from their lives, thereby purifying themselves both materially and spiritually. In the work of Karamustafa (1994), to which Zeynep refers, dervish communities such as the Haydarīs, Abdālīs of Rūm, Bektāshīs, Jāmīs, Qalandars, and Shams-i Tabrīzīs are mentioned. Gülten (2019), in his work “*Vegan Sufis in Ottoman Lands Within the Context of Old Turk Beliefs and the Kalendiri Order: Etyemezler (the Meat-Abstainers)*” states that the dervishes affiliated with the Kalendiri order, who aimed to resist the desires of the self, refrained from consuming meat because they believed it would negatively affect their character, and for this reason, they came to be known as “Etyemezler” (pp. 29, 39). Today, in Istanbul, there is a street named “Etyemez Tekkesi (the Meat-Abstainers Monastery)” (see Fig. 2).

Seda, drawing on the sayings of two of Islam’s four great caliphs, Caliph Umar and Caliph Ali, as well as the hagiography of Rabia, expresses Islam’s understanding of compassion, responsibility, and moderation toward animals as follows:



Fig. 2 Photograph of the street sign for “Etyemez Tekkesi Sokağı”, located in the Fatih district of Istanbul. Photograph taken by my son, Ömer Berk Şahin, on November 28, 2024

Hız. Umar also said something like, ‘Meat is addictive.’ (...) Hız. Ali also (...) said: ‘We should not turn our stomachs into animal cemeteries; do not make your stomachs an animal cemetery.’ (...) While Rabia was wandering in the mountains, one day a group of animals consisting of roe deer, gazelles, mountain goats, and wild donkeys was seen gathering around her. When a person named Hasan al-Basri [an important figure in Islam] arrived, the animals ran away in fear, and Rabia did not like this. He asks her, ‘O Rabia! Why do they act friendly toward you but run away from me?’ Rabia then asks him, ‘What did you eat today?’ He replies, ‘Onions fried in internal fat.’ Rabia responds to him, ‘You ate their fat, so why wouldn’t they run away from you?’

Approach to sacrifice and Eid al-Adha

The act of sacrifice in Islam begins on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah according to the Hijri calendar and is performed during the first three days of the four-day Eid al-Adha (Erginer 1997, p. 152). In addition to the animals sacrificed during Eid al-Adha, there are also other animals sacrificed for worship purposes. These include the votive sacrifice, the aqiqah sacrifice, the *hady* sacrifice offered by those performing the *qirān* and *tamattu* ‘types of Hajj, and the expiatory and penalty sacrifices required in case of violations of the prohibitions during the Hajj (Karaman et al. 1998, p. 3). Eid al-Adha is considered an important religious holiday in Türkiye and is declared a public holiday throughout the country during this period. Seda states the following on this matter:

The Directorate of Religious Affairs constantly states that ‘things going through the slaughtering machine are halal if done with the Basmala.’ They’re trying to somehow brush off this situation. (...) Actually, Eid al-Adha has now become

a traditional event celebrated as a holiday. So, in fact, the sacrifice is not an obligation; it is not something we are required to do. Only at that time [during the early period of Islam] could animals help in that way because people were regarded as their possessions. So, the word ‘sacrifice’ actually means a form of help, a self-giving. (...) Actually, there is a difference in meaning here. I noticed this in the interpretations [and] translations. (...) We can help by somehow buying food with money or by assisting a family, but we are not obliged to slaughter an animal.

Seda’s emphasis on the early period of Islam regarding the sacrifice ritual shows that she approached the subject from a historical perspective and took into account the social and economic conditions of the period. Seda states that the sacrifice is not a religiously obligatory act of worship. In Seda’s account, it is emphasized that there are differences in meaning between exegeses and translations regarding the concept of sacrifice, that the concept of sacrifice fundamentally signifies help and selflessness, and that, consequently, individuals can support others in various ways. Furthermore, Seda critically questions the statement of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Türkiye, the country’s religious authority, that “animals entering the slaughtering machine are halal when slaughtered with the recitation of Bismillah,” and she regards this as an attempt to gloss over the issue. Rûmeysa states: “I think there are options where we can help by sacrificing from ourselves and by sacrificing from our money.” Zeynep, on the other hand, states the following regarding the sacrifice:

They used to very often bring and recite a verse from Surah Al-Kawthar to us, and to me, honestly. When we look at the traditional text, the translation says, ‘So, pray for your Lord and sacrifice [an animal].’ But when we look beyond the traditional text, at what the exegetes have written, it conveys the meaning: ‘So turn to your Lord, seek support, and face difficulties with resilience.’ Now, religious interpretation also becomes something shaped together with culture. As culture becomes more intertwined with religion, we inevitably, of course, also see that patriarchal, male-oriented form of religion. (...) First of all, the sacrifice is not obligatory; even if it were, I would think like this: (...) I would look at the historical conditions of the period. The Quran also takes historicism into account; a historical perspective also exists among theologians.

Zeynep, by using verse 108/2 of Surah Al-Kawthar as an example in the context of the sacrificial ritual, demonstrates that sacred texts do not have a single interpretation but are, on the contrary, open to multiple interpretations. Zeynep emphasizes that the act of sacrifice is not a mandatory form of worship, and even if it were obligatory, she states that she would approach the matter by taking into account the historical conditions of the period. Moreover, in Zeynep’s narrative, a perspective also emerges that patriarchal culture influences and shapes religious practices and their interpretations.

Questions and reactions they encountered

Vegans are often associated with various negative traits such as ascetic, fashion-driven, extremist, fanatical, radical, spoiling the joy of social gatherings, hostile, obsessive, unconventional, challenging established norms, intolerant, overly sensitive, nonconformist, elitist, boring, or deviant and are thereby marginalized (Buttny and Kinefuchi 2020; Cole and Morgan 2011; Greenebaum 2018; Twine 2014). Vegans are often asked various questions, such as: “Don’t plants feel pain?”; “What about animals that die during harvesting?”; “If everyone went vegan, what would happen to farm animals?”; “Isn’t vegan eating very expensive?”; “Should we address human rights issues first?”; “Isn’t veganism an elitist trend?”; “My neighbor’s cat died naturally; would making a hat from its fur go against veganism?”; “How do you get enough protein, iron, and calcium?”; “Can pregnant people be vegan?”; “Isn’t being vegetarian enough?”; “Animals eat other animals too, right?”; “What if I’m stranded on a deserted island and starving?”; “What about vegetarians like Hitler?”; “Isn’t eating animals a divine command?”; and “What about products from animals raised in good conditions?” (Colb 2020 [2013]; Francione and Charlton 2021 [2013], pp. 35–126; Giraud 2023 [2021], p. 11; Hawthorne 2019, pp. 145–156). According to Giraud (2023 [2021]), the source of these questions posed to vegans may be genuine curiosity, a desire to challenge what is perceived as moralizing, or simply the wish to make a joke (p. 11).

Social pressure and the trivialization of individual choice

Zeynep stated that people reacted to her by saying, “Oh, come on, are you going to change the world?” In this reaction, Zeynep’s sense of responsibility and moral awareness toward the cruelty and injustices against animals is being trivialized. The idea that a single individual cannot change the world is, in fact, a form of social pressure indirectly exerted on the individual. Such approaches not only diminish an individual’s sensitivity and willingness to act in the face of any injustice but also contribute to the perpetuation of systems that cause oppression and injustice by preventing these systems from being questioned. Seda states the following:

I live in Şanlıurfa, by the way. I was assigned there. It’s been two years. I had become vegan in Istanbul. Of course, there is a big difference between the two. In Istanbul, a more well-known concept is veganism. So, when I say it, they can immediately understand what I can and cannot consume. But in Urfa, (...) they don’t quite understand because the culture of eating meat is more prevalent. So, that’s why I try not to eat out much and avoid that situation; but of course, when necessary, I have to explain.

Seda has compared her veganism experiences in Istanbul and Şanlıurfa. According to Seda, veganism is a more well-known phenomenon in Istanbul, so people can easily understand what she can and cannot eat. However, unlike in Istanbul, in Şanlıurfa, the fact that veganism is not a well-known phenomenon and the dominance of a meat-centered food culture make it difficult for people to understand her vegan lifestyle. In

this case, Seda resorts to a strategy of not eating out to avoid difficult situations and conflicts she may encounter in social settings.

Questions and reactions from secular and Muslim groups

Zeynep specifies the questions and reactions she received from both secular and Muslim groups after becoming vegan as follows:

After becoming vegan, not only the Muslim community but also the secular community wondered, ‘How can one be vegan and Muslim?’ Well, your religion says that sacrifice is mandatory. But there is a violent religion that tried to sacrifice [Ishmael], and instead, it sacrifices the animal. There is a God who intended for one of the two to be sacrificed. I have seen such mocking reactions; I’m not saying I haven’t. But looking back, there were also Muslims who reacted to me with verses. (...) One of the criticisms is, ‘How can you not fulfill something that is obligatory [sacrificing an animal]?’ (...) They say, ‘You’re coming to us with too much Western terminology; well, veganism is just a recent thing, anyway.’ (...) This is not the case at all. There are human societies that have not consumed animal products for centuries. I wish they would do a little research.

Both Muslim and secular groups consider the coexistence of Muslim and vegan identities to be contradictory and inconsistent. According to Ardiç (2022), the intersectionality critique of understanding identity-based struggles or approaches solely through independent categories such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, class, and religion, while acknowledging that these different categories are shaped interactively within a historical, cultural, political, and economic context, approaches single-dimensional identity politics with skepticism (p.100). One of the criticisms directed at Zeynep is that veganism is perceived as a Western-origin movement. However, Zeynep emphasizes that throughout history, different communities have adopted similar lifestyles without consuming animal products and points out that this criticism stems from a lack of knowledge. This situation indicates that similar practices have existed in different cultures for a long time. Zeynep states that when they persistently questioned her about the sacrifice, she eventually responded as follows: “In the background and culture of all religions and teachings, yes, there is the issue of animal slaughter; but we do not have a duty to uphold or sustain every culture.”

Conclusion

This study examines, through a phenomenological approach, how individuals who possess both vegan and Muslim identities make sense of and reconcile these identities, based on the narratives of Zeynep, Seda, and Rümeyza featured in the “Both Vegan and Muslim” video published on the “Animal Save Türkiye” YouTube channel. The findings revealed that the three women’s decisions to become vegan stemmed from various factors, including ethical, ecological, and religious values, as well as

documentaries, feminist thought, and social circles. They explained Islam's view of animals through the principles of compassion, justice, moderation, and responsibility. The narratives of Zeynep, Rümeyşa, and Seda reflect an approach that questions and critiques the traditional understanding of the sacrificial practice. However, nowadays in Türkiye, despite these types of modern religious interpretations offered as alternatives to traditional religious interpretations, the tradition of sacrificing animals during Eid al-Adha continues. In the study, the reactions and questions from both secular and Muslim communities, which regarded the coexistence of Muslim and vegan identities as contradictory, emerged as a significant finding. These reactions and questions are particularly related to the sacrificial tradition and the perception of veganism as Western in origin. Here, it is essentially concluded that stereotypes about Islam and veganism influence the behaviors and attitudes of both secular and Muslim groups. However, such approaches not only lead to prejudice, stigmatization, and discrimination, but also result in a group being perceived as homogeneous; yet, neither Muslims nor vegans are a homogeneous group.

In conclusion, this study makes a significant contribution to the field due to the limited number of studies on the perspectives and experiences of Muslim vegan individuals. However, the analysis of only a single video and the experiences of three women limit the generalizability of the findings. However, future studies on this subject that include participants of different ages, genders, cities, and sects, and employ various qualitative and quantitative methods, may contribute to obtaining more comprehensive and generalizable data on Muslim vegans.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank Zeynep, Seda, and Rümeyşa for sharing their views and experiences in the “Both Vegan and Muslim” video, and the “Animal Save Türkiye” YouTube channel for enabling this study, for which I express my gratitude and appreciation. I would also like to thank my dear son, Ömer Berk Şahin, for taking the photograph used in this study.

Author contributions The study was conducted by a single author, who was responsible for all stages of manuscript writing.

Funding No funds, grants, or other support were received.

Data availability The primary data source used in this study is the publicly available YouTube video titled “Both Vegan and Muslim,” published by the “Animal Save Türkiye” YouTube channel. The link to the video is provided in the study.

Declarations

Ethical approval No human participants were directly involved in the research process; therefore, ethical approval was not required for this study. The YouTube video used in this study was publicly shared and analyzed under the “fair use” principle; however, permission to use the video was requested via email from the “Animal Save Türkiye” YouTube channel on December 4, 2024, and subsequently, a response granting permission was received from the channel via email on January 6, 2025.

Conflict of interest The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the content of this article.

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