

# Book Review: Veganism: Politics, Practice and Theory by Eva Haifa Giraud

*In **Veganism: Politics, Practice and Theory**, Eva Haifa Giraud examines current vegan practice to unpack the emerging and complex forces at play for the vegan movement. The book's navigation of veganism's politics and its move into mainstream offers invaluable insight into the nuances of veganism's various manifestations and expresses hope at re-igniting veganism's radical political potential, writes Ruth Griggs.*

***Veganism: Politics, Practice and Theory*. Eva Haifa Giraud. Bloomsbury. June 2021.**

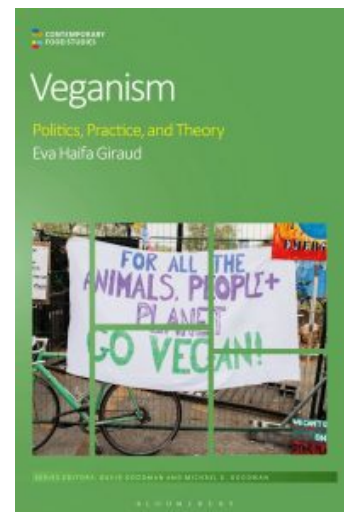
Whereas once veganism was seen as a marginal pursuit, powerful corporations are now beginning to dominate conversations around veganism. As I write this in October 2021, McDonald's new plant-based burger, '[the McPlant](#)', is holding centre stage in world media. Eva Haifa Giraud's book [Veganism: Politics, Practice and Theory](#) comes at a pivotal time for the vegan movement. Her work redirects veganism from its capitalist ventures and returns the focus to an academic exploration of veganism's broader political and cultural complexities. Giraud examines current manifestations of vegan practice to unpack the emerging and complex forces at play for the vegan movement.

Giraud refuses to shy away from the tensions in veganism and its politics. Her chapters untangle the complexities surrounding the various cultural, social and political debates around veganism, ranging from its gender and racial politics to its manifestation in activism. In so doing, Giraud champions a feminist process of self-interrogation and self-reflexivity, often bypassed in social movements prone to self-celebration and the refusal of self-critique. At the same time, Giraud maintains threads of hope for the vegan movement, identifying mistakes and criticism as important steps towards an ethical veganism.

In embracing conflict, Giraud reconfigures the vegan movement as a space of ongoing learning; she thus welcomes individuals who are also on this complex path of ethical growth. *Veganism* therefore works as a blueprint for navigating the complexities of ethical practices that so often deter individuals from engaging with veganism for fear of being seen to make 'mistakes'. Giraud encourages the reader to challenge engrained practices and probe deeper into the politics behind seemingly just attitudes. Consequently, we do not simply gain a deeper understanding of veganism and its nuances from Giraud's work; importantly the book also sets out a new approach to growth and learning for social movements, academia and individuals alike.

Giraud devotes a chapter to exploring the rise of plant-based consumerism and navigates the intricacies of contemporary veganism as it functions within a capitalist landscape. She draws on the concept of postfeminism to evaluate the commercialisation of veganism as it is drawn into the mainstream as a consumerist lifestyle. Giraud coins the term 'post-veganism' to describe veganism's growing concern with individualism and its turn away from collective movements. A post-vegan politics ignores the structural inequalities of capitalism as they relate to animal and human exploitation. Such ignorance denies the potential of veganism to enable alternative, just futures and removes veganism from the drive for radical change, a factor of great importance to Giraud.

While Giraud's engagement with postfeminism opens up an original and insightful lens through which to examine veganism, further attention to queer theory and its approach to identity could illuminate important aspects of the post-vegan context. Indeed, the queer community, in parallel to the vegan community, faces the loss of radical and collective practices of queerness, as queer identities and politics are warped to fit within heterosexual, capitalist society. The breadth of work in queer theory around these shifts has the potential to open Giraud's analysis up to a more far-reaching engagement with the politics at play in the vegan community's shift to the mainstream. Whilst Giraud's engagement with postfeminism allows for an analysis of consumerist policies as they interact with social movements, the queer community and queer theory's understandings of its movements offer a fascinating comparison for an examination of both individual and collective identities in communities at risk of commodification.



For example, one response from some in the queer community to marginalisation has been to downplay its 'deviance' and political potential in order to find a place of acceptance within mainstream society, as some have striven to become [the new normal](#). Perhaps this process has also occurred within the vegan community as it shifts into capitalism and vegans begin to enjoy the benefits of a more mainstream dietary identity. Examining these two communities side by side would open Giraud's critique up to an exploration of the desire for normality and pressures of conformity, not just in relation to capitalist policies but also to understandings of individual and collective identity.

Nonetheless, Giraud's *Veganism* traverses a significant range of critical theory, particularly in Chapter Two, 'Vegan Debates', where there is an overview of existing scholarship surrounding veganism, including animal studies and eco-feminism. In this sense, *Veganism* offers a genealogy of vegan literature, working effectively as a foundation of knowledge for those approaching vegan sociology for the first time. What is often a daunting process of engaging with a new field is made accessible by Giraud, with her book functioning as a map, guiding the reader through the key debates and histories of veganism and then finally turning to the current issues facing the vegan movement.

However, with such a broad reach and in-depth analysis, this style of academic text must often sacrifice detail elsewhere. For Giraud this loss is visible in the lack of space spent exploring veganism's future, both at a community and individual level. As the book ends, Giraud's style of covering the advantages and disadvantages of veganism's popularisation leaves the vegan or vegan-ally reader unsure of the next steps to take in order to tackle veganism's commercialisation. Although this critical approach works well in relation to the theoretical and historical complexities of vegan theory, it also prevents the formation of a potential path to reclaim from capitalism the radical potential embedded in veganism.

Undeniably, Giraud successfully supports a desire for change and expresses hope at re-igniting veganism's radical political potential. Despite this, Giraud's book, with its wealth of theory, case studies and sources, could have worked as a more explicit space of innovation, imagining and creating alternative paths for veganism's future. The conclusion itself could have dedicated more attention to the everyday practices that vegans, both in their individual acts and broader community spaces, could take as they begin to enact veganism's potential.

To conclude, Giraud's navigation of veganism's politics and its move into the mainstream offers invaluable insight into the nuances of veganism's various manifestations. Her work does not shy away from veganism's complexities and carefully tackles fraught politics and values. Yet we are left wondering: what lies ahead for veganism?

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*Note: This article first appeared at our sister site, [LSE Review of Books](#). It gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: [Pixabay](#)*

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