



**Report from the National Scientific Conference**  
***“Święta Krowa czy stek? Weganizm i***  
***wegetarianizm w ujęciu społeczno-kulturowym”***  
***(“Holy Cow or steak? Veganism and***  
***vegetarianism in a social and cultural***  
***perspective”)***

Karolina MIREK

The National Scientific Conference: “Holy Cow or steak? Veganism and vegetarianism in a social and cultural perspective”, took place between the 26th and 27th of April 2019 in Collegium Broscianum (Krakow, Poland). The event was organised by the Student Research Group of Comparative Studies of Civilisations from the Centre of Comparative Studies of Civilisations at the Jagiellonian University. The project was inspired by the students’ interest in vegan and vegetarian diets, which have been becoming a more and more popular phenomenon in recent days. Because of its comparative character, the aforementioned student research group is interested in analysing and exploring each culture in the world in many various aspects. The case of diet and cuisine is an essential part of every civilisation, thus it is also an important topic to examine in a broader context – not only by natural sciences, but especially by humanities. Abstaining from meat and animal products is becoming something more than merely a diet, and in fact has a great influence on all aspects of life – it has become a social discourse. The main aims of the conference were examining the phenomenon of choosing veganism and vegetarianism as a diet in selected cultures, discovering motives and arguments for choosing these diets, as well as issues against them. An additional purpose of the conference was to explore attitudes towards animals, ways of treating them and the perception of animal products in various environments and societies. What is important to remember is veganism and veget-

arianism should not be seen as a contemporary thought – they are rooted in many traditions all over the world. The event was supposed to increase the level of knowledge about sources of cultural, religious and ethnic points of view on these manners of life. Academic approaches to the aforementioned cultural issues could help expand the understanding of why veganism and vegetarianism have become so popular, and how people in the world react to them. This would allow the participants of the conference to have a chance to work out their own position in regard to the matter.

All the presentations were divided into six panels, according to their adopted approaches, such as cultural, sociological, philosophical and religious. Thanks to that, it was possible to carefully analyse the phenomenon of veg(etari)anism and present diverse attitudes. Participants of the conference were mainly students from many various prestigious universities in Poland, such as: University of Warsaw, Poznań, Lublin and Silesia. In addition, students from the Jagiellonian University took part as well. To start the conference, an opening lecture was presented by Dr Agata Świerzowska, a member of the Centre of Comparative Studies of Civilizations, where the event was held. Likewise, during the conference, members of the *Open Cages* organisation: Maciej Otrębski and Jakub Stencel also gave presentations.

The opening presentation, entitled *Vegetarianism – a diet of the Polish nation* was an excellent introduction to problem of veganism and vegetarianism. The lecture outlined the situation of vegetarianism in old Polish society. The main raised cases were characters: Wincenty Lutosławski and Apolinary Tarnawski, who promoted vegetable-based diets as the most correct way to remain healthy, but, what was even more appealing, to rebirth the Polish nation too. Both of them created a whole diet system, which was the most proper from their own point of view, to help implement this diet in everyday life. The lecture gave an opportunity to learn how the phenomenon of vegetarianism, and then also veganism, began. Moreover, showed that the mentioned systems are not a new thing in Poland. Apart from the interesting introduction, during the conference, *Open Cages* members gave presentations. The first lecture concerned new, plant-based alternatives to meat – a little glance on a future free from animals' pain. The second one showed the position of vegans in contemporary society. Other lectures gave a chance to explore veg(etari)anism in a discourse on freeganism, also in ethical ways. Likewise, the position of animals and humans' attitudes to them were examined too, in regard to the Marxism theory and to Sadegh Hedajats' works. What



is worth mentioning is that the conference gave the possibility to deepen the knowledge about the aforementioned ways of life in cultural aspects. During the event, lectures about the Jewish approach to veganism, vegetarianism in Tibetan tradition and also the Japanese attitude to animals in the light of *Shintōism* took place as well. The issues of veganism and vegetarianism were examined in pop culture too: in the context of *youtube*, commercials and the internet meme phenomenon. Among these lectures, three were presented by students from the Centre of Comparative Studies of Civilisations: Katarzyna Węsierska, Ewelina Łącka and Karolina Mirek.

Thus far, the matter of attitudes towards animals and consuming them is quite a fresh topic. Likewise, the status of vegans and vegetarians has not yet been explored much by scientific approaches. Such a conference could bring reflection about a topic which is so needed and strongly connected with exploring cultures and social studies. In the face of the developing world, it seems to be important to take a look at the ways of treating living beings that exist all around people and are so similar to them.

#### Note about the author

Karolina MIREK is currently a bachelor degree student at the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations of the Jagiellonian University, Faculty of Philosophy, and a student in the Master's program in Editing, Faculty of Polish studies, at the same university. Her academic interests include cultures and beliefs of East Asia, especially those of Japan. Besides, she is interested in various forms of art and manual activities.

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