

Review of the thesis of Kemal Dincer “Experiences of Vegan and Vegetarian Men Living in Turkey”

Kemal decided to focus his thesis on masculinity in Turkey and concretely, on men who practice vegetarianism/veganism. Through this prism, he explores the construction of hegemonic masculinity in Turkey and the ways in which vegans/vegetarians have to negotiate their eating choices in the traditional society. He also aims to address the question “whether vegan and vegetarian men challenge this Turkey-specific hegemonic masculinity, and if so, how does the process take place.”

With respect to the formal requirements, the thesis is very satisfactory. There is a minimum typos and grammatical problems. I have not registered any problems with citations.

The structure of the theses is somewhat different than we are used to in our department. It starts with methodology, while a typical thesis starts with the theoretical part and continues with the empirical part, including methodology. This would be OK if it did not result in overlooking some important methodological issues. Unfortunately, it did.

The discussion of positionality is quite sophisticated. It shows great deal of reflection and awareness of researcher’s own limits. It also informed the research itself which is commendable.

However, it is confusing that the aim of the theses is worded differently in different places. In the Introduction, the aim is:

...to find out how vegan and vegetarian men in Turkey are positioned in hegemonic masculinity practices specific to Turkey, for what reasons they are exposed to negative experiences within hegemonic masculinity practices, in which areas they are having negative experiences or exposed to prejudices in terms of their masculinity, and which institutions that are effective in the continuation of hegemonic masculinity have a role in these prejudices and experiences. With the answers to these questions, I also aim to find out whether my participants challenge the hegemonic masculinity practices in Turkey by being vegetarian/vegan men and if they do, how they challenge to those practices. (p. 5)

However, in Chapter 2, it is more limited: “to evaluate the prejudices experienced by vegan and vegetarian men living in Turkey through the men's own statements” (p. 6). The main research question is again worded differently: “What is the relationship between meat and masculinity and how does this relationship affect the experiences of vegan and vegetarian men living in Turkey?” (p. 12). With this in mind, it was not clear to me how could research involving only vegans/vegetarians help understand the relationship between meat and masculinity?

The sample selection is puzzling. It is stated in the Introduction that “Most of the vegan and vegetarian men living in Turkey are perceived as gay and feminine the society and are exposed to various jokes and comments on this issue...Since heterosexuality has an essential place in hegemonic masculinity practices in Turkey, it can be said that many men tend to avoid being vegan and vegetarian in order not to be perceived as gay or feminine” (p. 3). With this in mind, I would assume that this would lead to research of heterosexual vegans/vegetarians. However, nine out of twelve communication partners are gay or bisexual, i.e. they fit the stereotype concerning Turkish vegans/vegetarians. The question arises how would one decide whether the expected stereotyping from others pertains to veganism/vegetarianism or to gayness/bisexuality? One may also ask to what extent does the research reproduce the very stereotype it wants to explore? In any way, this composition of the sample would deserve a separate discussion of the impact of sexual orientation on reactions of others. It should have also been mentioned among potential limitations of the research.

No discussion is offered with respect to semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection and relevant methodological literature is presented. The discussion of the method should also include author’s reflections on its limits and advantages compare to other available methods.

Unfortunately, the author apparently assumes that every reader is familiar with the method. No discussion is also offered with respect to analysis of empirical data. Did the author use coding? Which methodological literature inspired the analysis? What rules of transcription were used? Etc.

The interview guide in the Appendix I seems to contain leading questions. Questions concerning religion, traditions, sexual orientation etc. should have been preceded by open questions that would not contain these explicit themes. This would give the communication partners opportunity to answer without having already in mind these concepts. Also, questions pertaining to masculinity should have preceded questions concerning sexual orientation.

The discussion of masculinities tends to simplify Connell's arguments somewhat. For example, Connell (1995) talks about hegemonic (complicit, marginalized, subordinated) masculinities in plural and not in singular being aware that there are multiple masculinities of each category within one culture. Also, Connell does not limit subordinate masculinities to men with different sexual orientations: "*Gay masculinity is the most conspicuous, but it is not the only subordinated masculinity. Some heterosexual men and boys too are expelled from the circle of legitimacy*" (Connell, 1995, p. 79).

Some statements in the literature review chapter also seem contradictory. For example, on the one hand, the author wants to investigate "*to what extent vegan and vegetarian men can practice hegemonic masculinity practices and to what extent their experiences are related to these practices*" (p. 15), but on the other hand, it is explicitly stated that "*vegan and vegetarian men reject [hegemonic] masculinity values...*" (p. 15). Why would one want to practice hegemonic masculinity practices if he rejects them?

With respect to literature sources, I do not understand why the construction of masculinity at the beginning of chapter 3.2 is discussed exclusively based on Turkish sources and why is only masculinity discussed? There is plenty of feminist theoretical literature available pertaining to gender in general and most of the points attributed to Turkish scholars were adopted from feminist literature. For example, all the points made by Bozok had been made much earlier by Sandra Bem and others. The points made by Atay had been made by Connell and Mead etc. Similarly, general ideas about masculinity attributed to Barutcu (p. 18) were adopted from the masculinity studies literature. The same applies to Burgan and hunter-man narrative (p. 21) which was adopted from Adams. It is not clear why the original source is not used.

It would also be advisable to be more critical about the sources. For example, Barutcu is apparently mistaken when he argues "that a man in Turkey has to go through five stages in order to successfully complete the construction of masculinity... circumcision, sexuality, military service, having a job and marriage" (p. 18). It is quite obvious that sexuality or circumcisions are not stages and that they are not made of the same stuff as military service or marriage. Circumcision may be a precondition for having a socially acceptable masculinity, but in what sense it would be a stage? Also, Barutcu seems to suggest that there is only one construction of masculinity available in Turkey, hegemonic masculinity. What about other types defined for example by Connell? What about men who do not conform to five preconditions? And why is Barutcu not discussed in the subchapter Hegemonic Masculinity in Turkey?

Another example can be Ozekici (pp. 19-20) who argues that "hegemonic masculinity is not built on young men, old men, or men in need of care..." because "masculinity needs power in order to be hegemonic...and this is present in middle age" (p. 20). However, it is usually not the middle-aged men who wield the power in societies, but old rich men.

It is also puzzling to me why the association of vegetarianism/veganism with homosexuality is not discussed in sub-chapter 3.4? It is postulated in the Introduction, but it is not mentioned in the appropriate section of the theoretical chapter unlike for example religion. It is discussed later in the chapter devoted to analysis, but the proper place is the theoretical chapter.

The analysis is appropriately structured and clearly written. The author is methodical and does not jump from one topic to another as is sometimes the case. I also appreciate the effort to use the theoretical apparatus developed in the theoretical chapter when analyzing empirical data.

However, some conclusions seem somewhat forced. For example, Serhat and Kennan reported that they started to eat meat during the military service because they would starve otherwise, which is totally understandable. However, it is interpreted: "Since Serhat and Kenan hide that they do not eat meat, it can also be deduced that they have a fear of violating hegemonic masculinity standards in a homosocial space such as the military" (p. 49) and meat eating is presented as a coping mechanism. Why does not the author trust his communication partners that the reason was starvation?

I am also not sure about the conclusion that "vegan and vegetarian men in Turkey challenge hegemonic masculinity by continuing to be vegan and vegetarian despite all the difficulties imposed by hegemonic masculinity." Some communication partners indicate that they hide their vegetarianism/veganism. Do they also challenge hegemonic masculinity according to the author?

I did not quite understand the conclusion: "It can be said that Mert and Serhat tend to keep socializing without being homosexual by hiding their vegetarianism in their single house where their brotherhood is dominant" (p. 50). Mert and Serhat are gay. How can they not be homosexual?

Some interesting aspects of interviews seem to remain unexplored. For example, the word "traditional" is frequently used throughout the analysis, but it is never discussed in relation to "modern" or "modernity". This is interesting because according to some scholars, Turkey has been undergoing the process of re-traditionalization in recent decades. It would seem that vegetarianism/veganism is being perceived as something modern and, thus, problematic. It does not fit the re-traditionalization narrative. This would deserve discussion.

Overall, the conclusions are cogently presented, but not very original. The author cites a number of sources that offer the same conclusions (e.g. Sobal, Carpar and Adams) and he even says this himself (p. 57). This begs the question what is the original contribution of the thesis to our knowledge according to the author?

In the light of the above comments, the thesis meets the program requirements, but it suffers from a number of problems, especially concerning the methodology. I suggest the grade three (C).

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Reviewer

September 14, 2022