

Advisor Report for Kemal Dincer's Thesis
for the Gender Studies MA Program at Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

Kemal Dincer's thesis, entitled "Experiences of Vegan and Vegetarian Men Living in Turkey," describes the ways in which being vegan or vegetarian questions Turkish understandings of masculinity and what it means to be a man. By interviewing twelve men of various ages, backgrounds, geographical locations, and sexualities, Kemal gives us some insight into what not eating meat means in regards to social acceptance, focusing preliminarily on questions of sexuality. He pays attention to scenarios specific to Turkish culture, like the role of fathers in the family, and highlights how homosocial traditions, like barbecuing and others, create social tensions in the lives of vegan and vegetarian men. Kemal grounds his research in theoretical discussions of hegemonic masculinity, constructions of Turkish (hegemonic) masculinity, and feminist writings on patriarchy and the eating of animals.

Being a Turkish vegan man himself, Kemal positions himself within the experiences of these men, describing the ways in which he could understand them better given shared experiences and the ways in which his positionality allowed the men to open up more about their lives. Given Covid, he is very upfront with the fact that he wished he could have had more participants but reasons that less participants means that he can focus more on the particularity of their stories. Kemal concludes that while there are not many Turkish men who are vegan or vegetarian, those who are often deal with being feminised, regularly undergo comments about not being strong enough due to their lack of meat consumption, and regularly have their sexuality questioned. Kemal sees most of this as efforts on the parts of other men to remain within the confines of a Turkish hegemonic masculine identity. Regarding sexuality, some of the men cope by eating meat in homosocial settings, when the threat of being outed has significant social consequences for them. Yet, most of these men disagreed with the ways in which being vegans and vegetarians questions their masculinity within Turkish society; they seem to wish to belong.

In general, I find the thesis well-researched. There are times when he discusses hegemonic masculinity and feminist discussions about eating animals where I wish that he would have dedicated more space to details and descriptions. I often struggled with how one could summarise the theories and ideas of an entire book or article in one paragraph or even one or two sentences! On the opposite end of the spectrum, I often found his quotes from participants very long and not always analysed enough. There are many times where the thesis tends to be descriptive, fitting into Sociology more so than Gender Studies. In addition, Kemal also stressed the impact of Westernisation in Turkey (38, 56, and 70), but unfortunately did not include a discussion of this in his literature review. His material about the construction of Turkish masculinity is quite thorough and clear however.

I think an interesting research question (or perhaps follow-up question upon further reflection) would have been: do these men see themselves as masculine (if they do)? How do they construct their masculinity? In other words, how do they understand and perform their masculinity and how is that different (or not) from Turkish hegemonic understandings? Do they wish to challenge Turkish standards or would they rather just fit into societal expectations? Do they hope that societal expectations change? I believe that this would allow a further area of analysis to open up, as to how

much these men do or do not position themselves within the Turkish understanding of hegemonic masculinity and why, especially given that most would be automatically excluded given its definition because they are gay or bisexual. These questions would be especially poignant given how often Kemal points to his participants just wanting to fit in (62). Again, why? Please comment on this in the defense. Also, as a point of clarification, could Kemal explain what is meant by the wording of the title for section 4.6 (page 63)?

In conclusion, Kemal presents a comprehensive survey of the experiences of Turkish vegan and vegetarian men. It is clear from what he presents us that in Turkey there is a clear relationship between meat and masculinity, and if a man were to not consume animals, there are specific and tangible social consequences. This is well done and I commend Kemal for this. Nonetheless, the thesis lacks some detail in its research and could be more solidly grounded in Gender Studies.

The thesis is very good, and I would recommend a grade of 2.

Submitted by Ivy Helman, Ph.D., on 15 September 2022