

The Meatless Revolution: *Çiğ Köfte* as an Affordable Survival Food for Working-Class and Low-Income Groups

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Abstract

Traditionally prepared through a labor-intensive hand-kneading process and embedded in religious, social, and gendered practices, *çiğ köfte* was historically a symbolic food with clearly defined social boundaries, until recent decades. Changing economic structures combined with large-scale internal migration to transform the role of *çiğ köfte* in Turkish society; it moved from domestic rituals onto the streets of urban centres as fast-food culture. The removal of raw meat intervention as well as its subsequent legal codification by 2008 government regulation increased the shelf-life of *çiğ köfte* and facilitated its standardization, commodification, replication through franchising thus aligning it further with industrialized fast-food logics and broader processes of McDonaldization. In this article, I examine how a ritualistic' meat-based regional dish changed into a vegan product that is not only consumed by low-income groups en masse in Turkey but also serve those who identify as part of the global movements such as vegans.

Keywords: *Street food, vegan food, McDonaldization, working classes, çiğ köfte*

Introduction

Çiğ köfte, Middle Eastern and Anatolian culinary traditions trace back several thousand years. One widely known narrative situates its origins in Urfa during the era of the Prophet Abraham. According to one account, a hunter brought a gazelle he had caught to his house and told his wife to cook it. In the meantime, however, Nimrod had collected all the firewood in the vicinity for the pyre he was going to build in order to throw Abraham into the fire for denouncing idolatry and advocating belief in one God; since there was no firewood available, people were unable to light fires. As a result of this prohibition on making fires, the hunter’s wife could not cook the meat. She came up with her own unique solution; she ground the meat until it turned into a paste, kneaded it together with various spices until bulgur was added, and continued kneading. The end result is similar to that which is now referred as *çiğ köfte*.

A separate legend attributes the dish to Abraham’s mother, who is believed to have ground bulgur and gazelle meat between stones during a period of hardship to provide sustenance for her children—an early form of *çiğ köfte* that has allegedly persisted into modern culinary culture (İnternetHaber, 2021). Archaeological evidence reinforces the antiquity of similar foods: a 3,000-year-old relief uncovered in the Hittite settlement of Karatepe—destroyed by the Assyrians in 68 BCE—depicts King Asativatas consuming a dish comparable to *çiğ köfte* as a servant offers him a leaf of lettuce.

Cultural significance: Beyond its everyday role as a food, *çiğ köfte* features in religious ceremonies, festive events and community celebrations where it is made in situ to the joy or amazement of many participants. It is this performative quality that lends cultural symbolism to the preparation of food, and indeed, food is an important means through which collective memory and a sense of continuity is pro-

duced (Demossier 2015). Preparation involves hand-kneading all ingredients in a specially designed copper tray. A commonly mentioned practise is throwing a small piece of the mixture onto the ceiling; so well-kneaded *çiğ köfte* should be solid enough to stick. The use of raw meat determines the ultimate legitimacy of this version. The other ingredients are bulgur, isot pepper and spices like cinnamon, cloves and black pepper (Önganer & Erecevit 2009).

Historical texts vaguely suggest that the serving of *çiğ köfte* was either directly in the hand or wrapped in a leaf lettuce, but how do these dishes appear? Although its roots are not clear within academic literature, this morsel is known to have made a mark on the cultures of Şanlıurfa. It soon spread out to other regions (Karakapıcı & Sağlam, 1985). Adıyaman began making similar comments in reference to the first time the dish was prepared.

Despite the mythical and historical narratives surrounding it, the consumption of uncooked meat is not exclusive to Anatolian cuisine. Many cultures around the world have long incorporated raw meat or fish into their gastronomic traditions. Examples include French Steak Tartare, Italian Carpaccio, Ethiopia’s Kitfo and Gored Gored, Amsterdam Ossensworst, Korean Yukhoe, the Pittsburgh rare steak in the United States, Japan’s Sakuraniku and Sashimi, Germany and Poland’s Mett, Italy’s Bresaola, China’s Kuai, and Japan’s raw-egg-topped Gohan. Other raw fish and meat preparations include Ceviche and Esqueixada. In contrast to *çiğ köfte*, however, dishes such as Steak Tartare and Carpaccio typically appear in fine-dining venues or wine-focused establishments. Carpaccio, for instance, consists of very thin slices of meat served with greens, balsamic vinegar, salt, pepper, and olive oil—often paired with red wine.

Many analogues can be found in different

places of the world however Among several others *çiğ köfte* is one of the most familiar street foods of Türkiye. It's no wonder to see why it has become immensely popular since it started being used constantly with döner, fish sandwiches, stuffed mussels, grilled meatballs in bread, kokoreç, chicken with rice, simit, syrup-soaked ring pastries and tantuni, because these are what constitute Türkiye's street-food culture. This also means that there was a significant switch from the old preparation which was meat based to a new formulation now known as modern-day meatless *çiğ köfte* which makes its outdoor-friendly preparation and distribution possible.

Focusing on this transformation, the present study explores the historical, cultural, and socio-economic evolution of *çiğ köfte* from a ritualistic traditional dish to a modern fast-food commodity. While legends, rituals, and traditional practices offer necessary cultural context, our introduction is designed firstly to place the dish in relation to larger processes of social change, urbanization, and economic transformation in Türkiye. Therefore we use historical accounts as narratives that frame subsequent analytical sections concerning class dynamics, poverty, inflation and meatless version.

Within this analysis, emerge a set of questions: how *çiğ köfte* changed from being a ritualistic, meat-based communal food to become a commodified, veganized and class-significant fast-food in post-modern Türkiye? Therefore, we used a qualitative and conceptual research design based on structured literature review related to sociological studies of food and gastronomy, as well as food policy literature. The lack of academic works on *çiğ köfte* are identified as one of the major limitations of the study. For this reason, defining *çiğ köfte* merely as a type of food is not sufficient by itself; instead, its historical background is also questioned within this particular context while its socio-econom-

ical and cultural transformations throughout time are elaborated on. In other words, underlying the focus of this work lies an enquiry into the concept of commodification along with that concerning the marketization process subsequent to turning into meatless version by using the model known as McDonalidization developed by Ritzer. From there it proceeds analyse distinctly identify how understand relate kinds people defined social classes working-poor addition culture/product/consumption McWorld.

This study is qualitative in nature and is based on literature and conceptual analysis. Instead of acquiring new empirical data, existing sociological, gastronomic, and food policy literature was synthesized to see how *çiğ köfte* has undergone changes as a result of urbanization, class relations, and market rationalization within a larger context. McDonalidization in this study is not used as a grand theory but as an auxiliary explanatory principle to understand processes related with standardization, calculability, and commodification. An examination of the cultural and gastronomic dimensions of *çiğ köfte* reveals that its place in urban food consumption has been substantially reshaped by recent socio-economic transformations. Especially during the last decade after post-pandemic period, notable factors like rapidly increasing food inflation, widening income equality as well as expanding precarity have caused significant transformation of eating-out habits in Türkiye.

As a result of this restructuring process, depending on which class or income level one belongs to, *çiğ köfte* can no longer be seen as culturally integrated street food since now for some people it has become their only option for sustenance while others continue treating them selves with better options. This more specifically oriented research suggests approaching circles insisting upon earlier overlooked debates by focusing at present day context being more afflicted mostly because there exist recurrent

economic crises post-pandemic cycle instances that could further reinforce certain forms vegan foods replacement non-ideological practices becoming factor spread normalization.

Historical and Cultural Background

In regions where it has appeared and subsequently become an addendum to daily life, meals have always been eaten sitting on the floor. A distinct feature of this eating practice is that it involves a kind of communality, i.e. food is placed on a piece of cloth that acts as a kind of collective table, or one round metal tray placed atop another low trestle is used. In the eastern hemisphere, sharing food out of a central pot placed onto a round metal tray or eating from large common plates form parts of culinary ritual. This pattern of communality in dining was not confined to households alone; it extended to wedding feasts, festive meetings, shows and even mourning ceremonies where people are expected to exhibit high sense of community consciousness through their love for shared plate meals. As such this collectivist food culture seen in the eastern hemisphere sees that men and women ate at separate tables.

The most well-known examples of such communal traditions in Urfa (the known birthplace of çığ köfte) are probably the *sıra* nights. These are weekly meetings that rotate from one member's house to the next, with food, music and conversation if everyone feels chatty or inspired enough, they can go on until dawn. According to the group dynamics or preferences, they might be organised indoors as well as outdoors if the weather allows it. They serve to create a spirit of social learning and professional exchange between friends who belong to different occupational groups. But also, those who don't; people of similar age or social class or professional interests get together under a topic (it could vary from politics to literature but usually focuses on everyday social issues), all viewpoints are aired within an implicit structure that insists

on traditional rules of courtesy and respect. Furthermore, *sıra* nights are often referred to as a cultural practice, acting in the name of protection of the values of the Ahi-order belonging to history of which goes back until 13th century (Aslan, 2014, p. 7); with the entertainment and social meetings of local tradesmen that also has been a tradition for nearly 250 years (Tayanç, 2021, p. 37). A kind of early version of current communal—meeting places; coffeehouses, cafés and local social clubs.

The term *sıra* night derives from the distinctive seating arrangement, in which participants sit in a single line or row. In Turkish, *sıra* refers to people or objects positioned side by side or aligned in a straight sequence. While men gather for these meetings in the evenings, women hold comparable gatherings during the daytime. Coffee (specifically *mırza*), tea, and *çığ köfte* constitute the principal refreshments of the event. After the conversation portion ends, an individual skilled in preparing *çığ köfte* approaches the tray of ingredients and kneads the mixture to serve all attendees (Can, 2009).

Despite uncomplicated ingredients, the complexity of the taste and texture mean that specialist knowledge and skill is required for its production, so that it is a kind of ‘woman's work’ that men do. The preparation of raw meat, which involves a prolonged kneading process, until the grains disappear as well as absorbance of water in hand tissues (Chambers et al., 2001), requires much physical labour. Such work is done exclusively by women in *liké*, who are supported by their brothers during food preparation. Upperbody strength is developed through such activities as clamp carrying that provides the equivalent male service to grain milling among our domestic group. Men grind grass seeds using old *metates* (*matoles*) whose mealing face defines masculinity in knowledge matters also make these *metates* and control access to them. Knowing how and having mate-

rial wealth were the means of achieving status among individuals (Kanık, 2016)

During preparation, ingredients are gradually incorporated as the kneader works the mixture to the desired consistency. It is customary for assistants to wipe the sweat from the forehead of the master preparing the dish a gesture that forms part of the ritual. The meat and other components are kneaded by hand on specially crafted copper trays featuring a textured surface.

Although *çiğ köfte* is typically served with ayran, consumption alongside rakı is also common. Cacık, salads and seasonal greens accompany the dish. Refusing *çiğ köfte* once it has been served is traditionally interpreted as a sign of disrespect (Kürkçüoğlu, 2019, p. 545). This section shows how ritualized food practices set the cultural and symbolic bases which later were reorganized under urbanization and market dynamics. Although the historical and cultural roots of *çiğ köfte* as a food product highlight its ritualistic and communal character, this paper will show that processes of modernisation, migration and urban transformation have been central to the reshaping of its meanings.

Modernization and Urban Transformation

Despite its long rooted traditional features, the expansion of *çiğ köfte* beyond its local context was mainly formulated by Türkiye's economic restructuring and internal migration in which January 24, 1980, is a landmark day where a package policy declared by state that aimed diverging from direct production to free way toward private sector. Those economic transformations especially on 1980s facilitated migration flow from rural to larger cities In Turkey; İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir, Bursa. Transition to free market economy and prospering influence of private firm transformed daily life in Türkiye as speed, efficiency, consumption-oriented were introduced as core values in

the world dominated by international capital. Hemmark events such as launching McDonald's branch in Taksim Square/Istanbul (1986), incorporating country's first private TV Channel (Star TV) 1990 and establishing Türkiye's first modern shopping mall in 1988 contributed significantly transform cultural practices into what it become today (Sever, 2019).

The increasing weight of the private sector also reconfigured labor markets, turning metropolitan areas into major hubs of both employment and cultural activity. As migration from numerous provinces intensified, the demographic profile of these cities especially İstanbul became increasingly diverse. After 1980, the rapid growth of the permanent urban population was accompanied by a substantial rise in food and beverage establishments. Alongside the introduction of ethnic restaurants serving French, Italian, Chinese, and Japanese cuisines, pub-style venues and contemporary eateries began to proliferate. Concurrently, restaurants specializing in regional Turkish dishes such as Black Sea cuisine, Adana and Urfa kebabs, Gaziantep specialties, steakhouses, and venues offering Konya-style etli ekmek and tandoori dishes spread extensively throughout İstanbul (Gürsoy, 2013, p. 143).

Large-scale migration not only reshaped the social composition of cities but also was central to changes in patterns of consumption. The commodification of traditional food by migrants for economic gain was one of the earliest manifestations of this transformation. *Çiğ köfte* provided a striking example. Easily integrated within street-food outlets, it was vended at places of entertainment, on street corners, and from mobile stands, wheelbarrows, or trays. Vendors circulated nightclubs, bars, and gazinos and offered *çiğ köfte* by going directly to customers' tables. Besides functioning as a livelihood for people with limited means, small-scale migrant entrepreneurs also introduced *çiğ köfte* at their

convivial gatherings. Increasingly served with ayran or rakı, *çiğ köfte* found a place on the tables of the newly affluent urbanites along with whiskey and other expensive alcoholic beverages that symbolized prestige in the burgeoning consumer culture.

Beyond its economic significance, *çiğ köfte* also gained symbolic visibility in Turkish popular culture. The dish appeared in several landmark films of the 1980s, including *Banker Bilo* (1980), *Züğürt Ağa* (1985), and *Muhsin Bey* (1987). In these films, *çiğ köfte* often represented the cultural elements that migrants carried with them into the chaotic milieu of the metropolis. During this period, traditional communal eating practices—such as consuming food from floor-based setups began giving way to individual consumption patterns characteristic of modernized societies (Sağır, 2012).

The nationwide rise of Sıra Nights in the 1990s also propelled *çiğ köfte* to a wider audience. Famed singer İbrahim Tatlıses from arabesque and folk music used to invite Kazancı Bedih, who was a significant figure within the sıra night tradition of Şanlıurfa, to his television show. During the show, he would also present the sıra night concept live by having *çiğ köfte* prepared and eaten on air. By this way, not only all Türkiye but also other countries were made acquainted with this tradition that turned into a touristic attraction in time at Şanlıurfa (Baldan & Tabak, 2015).

In contemporary touristic performances, *çiğ köfte* is frequently accompanied by local music. This indicates that *çiğ köfte* being performative and labour-intensive product is not simply a local readymade, but it is performed as if in a work of art (Abbott, 2005). The best-known performance to the tourists consists of taking something from the mixture and squeezing it with the palm in order to shoot it to the ceiling. If it sticks then the product is ready to eat

(Çelik & Aksoy, 2017). The 1990s saw the *çiğ köfte*'s entry into political symbolism, too. One rather amusing example was how at the Turkish parliament, as a response to its voting for the deployment of soldiers to Somalia; members of the ruling Doğru Yol Partisi prepared *çiğ köfte* there and then, to the extent that they even threw pieces to the ceiling as part of their celebration. The act was widely condemned by society because it was considered not only funny but also disrespectful and irrelevant to parliamentarianism. In conclusion, migration, media visibility, and market integration were among processes through which *çiğ köfte* transformed from a traditional food product into an urban one. As a continuation of this transformation process through urban integration and commercialization, next we highlight the regulatory as well as technological milestone that caused *çiğ köfte* to be transformed at its core, namely expelling meat from its traditional recipe.

The Meat-Free Breakthrough: Regulation, Industrialization, McDonaldization

Building on the historical and regulatory background outlined above, the following section highlights how the exclusion of meat radically altered *çiğ köfte* in relation to production practices, food safety, and socio-economic location. McDonaldization is not used as a theoretical linchpin in this study but, rather, as a secondary concept to help elucidate particular changes—ie. standardization and franchising/efficiency. Rather, at the centre of analysis are questions concerning class/poverty and everyday forms of consumption.

The introduction of *çiğ köfte* into nationwide daily consumption has faced several problems because the product, which contains uncooked meat, has a very limited shelf life and it is not durable after preparation, i.e. 1-2 hr. minced meat that forms a major part of the traditional composition supports growth of micro-organisms. Spices incorporated into the mix have

antimicrobial properties to a certain extent, yet they are not enough for destruction of pathogenic organisms. Moderate rise in pathogens content (with no incidence of toxin formation) takes place if the product is held longer at ambient temperature during its service or display. Therefore, for an increased shelf-life removal of uncooked meat was an essential modification. Government regulations further accelerated the transition to meatless *çiğ köfte*. As part of the EU harmonization process, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Livestock issued a directive in 2008 prohibiting the use of meat in commercial production. A subsequent regulation in 2013 banned all additives except citric acid. The main rationale for this restriction was the widespread use of flavor-enhancing bouillons, which replicated the taste traditionally provided by meat.

The shift to meatless production significantly extended the shelf life of *çiğ köfte* and therefore opened doors for its use beyond households. With time, the manners in which it is consumed have also changed. After being hand-eaten or placed between lettuce leaves on small plates, lavash encountered *çiğ köfte*; lavash is a characteristic of East Anatolian food culture and the product 's place of origin. Through the introduction of tortilla-analog flatbread, *çiğ köfte* could be served as a wrap and started to meet need for fast food that can be eaten not only in dining rooms but also on streets. Today people generously pour lemon juice and pomegranate syrup over it; serve it with ayran (salty yoghurt drink) or Şalgam (turnip water). Changing gender role in food preparation has also contributed to product 's discontinuation with animal flesh-content, as a result new-franchise producers multiplied, establishing points of product sale at almost every region of Türkiye (GastronomyGoTürkiye 2020). Adıyaman 's meatless *çiğ köfte* received geographical indication in 2018 while Şanlıurfa has been granted long before since 2008.

Although the elimination of raw meat greatly diminished decay-related problems and facilitated widespread production, such products are not completely free from spoilage risks. Being a non-heat-treated high-moisture product, microbial contamination, fermentation processes and mold growth are still possible under low hygiene conditions or extended storage (FAO, 2009; Jay et al., 2005). However, there is now a greater need for standardization of hygiene protocols instead of total reliance on manual shaping, room-temperature display and long distribution chains; for standardized preservation methods rather than just overnight holding under ice; and for acidic quality control rather than acceptability defined by white-coat chemists with pH meters (Mortimore & Wallace, 2013; James & James, 2010).

In practice, standardization in meatless *çiğ köfte* production is sustained through a combination of formulation control and process management rather than artisanal skill. Commercial producers rely on controlled acidity levels (such as predefined pH targets), standardized ingredient ratios, and regulated storage conditions to ensure consistency in taste, texture, and safety across outlets (FAO, 2009; Jay et al., 2005). Hygiene protocols, including centralized production, limited in-store handling, and routine sanitation procedures, further reduce variability that might otherwise arise from manual preparation (Mortimore & Wallace, 2013). In addition, cold-chain logistics play a critical role in maintaining product stability during transportation and distribution, especially given the absence of heat treatment (James & James, 2010). While this study does not provide primary laboratory measurements, these practices illustrate how standardization is operationalized at the level of everyday production and distribution, aligning meatless *çiğ köfte* with fast-food logics of predictability and control (Ritzer, 2016)

The longer shelf life, and the increasing dis-

tance between the place of production and point of sale, have made *çiğ köfte* a capital-intensive product instead of a street-vendor item. In small-scale tradespeople gradually accumulated capital since the 1990s and many *çiğ köfte* ventured to establish new facilities with even more industrial production processes in person or through pot-boiler business. Turkey's food consumption has become global followed by entry of firms as it was started with McDonald's in 1986. Then, not only do *çiğ köfte* artisans or entrepreneurs implement this franchising model in their own brand like this emerging global brand everyone uses but also from the portable equipment franchise outlets known as band-down around Turkey a few artisanal mobile vendors were formerly conglomerates owners who operated many franchises yet now appear to have remained piquing such trend if somehow that is still happening-hence The man will soon come prodding as nobody seemed too keen then or ever before.

Ritzer (2016) contended that McDonaldization applies to a wide variety of system-based products. In line with examples such as IKEA and Pret A Manger, *çiğ köfte* shops increasingly feature identical spatial and operational elements at all branches both in Türkiye and in multiple other countries internationally. Factory-produced *çiğ köfte*, generally produced in enormous facilities in Istanbul, is distributed across the nation and to foreign markets—sometimes even crossing great distances before it arrives at the consumer's hand.

Depending on the regional market and customer demand, a single entrepreneur can operate a *çiğ köfte* shop independently. Entry costs are relatively low, often ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 TL. Moreover, employees require neither specialized training nor expertise. Because the product is delivered pre-made and requires no heating, customer service can be completed in less than one minute- reinforcing its suitability

ity for fast-food settings.

The transformation of *çiğ köfte* into a meatless commodity that has a long shelf life, and thus can be produced in mass quantities, has not only been responsible for the product's explosion in popularity among all social classes of Türkiye today, it is also illustrative of how this particular characteristic implies calculability – e.g. measured service speed, portion sizing and pricing is standardized. This regulatory and technological transformation affected production practices, but it also transformed the social meaning and consumption patterns of *çiğ köfte*. In the following section, the class-based perspective is adopted to analyze these changes.

Social Classes, Street Food and Changing Consumption Patterns in Türkiye

Building on the discussion of standardization and commercialization, this section situates *çiğ köfte* within broader debates on social class, poverty, and everyday consumption practices in contemporary Türkiye. Research on street food emphasizes its role not merely as a culinary category, but as a socio-economic survival strategy shaped by class position, income insecurity, and urban labor conditions (Arman et al., 2019; Henderson, 2017). Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) concept of class-based consumption, street foods can be understood as everyday practices through which economic constraints, cultural habitus, and material necessity intersect. Within this framework, affordability, accessibility, and speed of consumption emerge as key determinants shaping street-food preferences among working-class and low-income groups (Henderson, 2017).

As a fast-food item integrated into contemporary urban food culture, in Turkey, *çiğ köfte* has increasingly occupied a visible position within the eating practices of diverse social groups. Its availability through dine-in shops, small kiosks and takeaway counters enhances its ac-

cessibility across different urban settings while its relatively low price makes it particularly attractive for economically vulnerable consumers (Bourdieu, 1984; Henderson, 2017).

Widening income inequality and prolonged economic instability in Türkiye have further shaped eating-out behaviors, especially among working-class populations (OECD, 2022). According to official data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), food inflation exceeded 100% in 2018, significantly reducing household purchasing power. Under these conditions, expenditures on eating outside the home have declined sharply, and even globally standardized “budget” menus offered by multinational fast-food chains have become increasingly unaffordable for large segments of society (OECD, 2022). Similar affordability constraints apply to other forms of street food, positioning *çiğ köfte* as one of the most economically accessible options within urban foodscapes (Arman et al., 2019).

The portability and rapid preparation of *çiğ köfte* further reinforce its appeal among students, workers, and low-income employees who require inexpensive and time-efficient meals (Henderson, 2017). Beyond individual consumption, its sale by weight and inclusion of accompaniments in a single package allow it to function as a shared and cost-effective food option for households and informal social gatherings, reflecting broader patterns of class-based consumption under conditions of economic constraint (Bourdieu, 1984).

Another important property of *çiğ köfte* is its vegan nature. Due to stipulations in the regulations, the use of bouillon containing meat was banned and therefore the product can be classified as vegan. In Turkey, most street foods contain meat and/or meat derivatives; hence, many Turkish companies offer few choices for vegans but *çiğ köfte*. Many firms that operate on an in-

ternational scale are proud to present this characteristic on their branding labels for *çiğ köfte*. The general trend towards less consumption of meat (Graça et al., 2020) and transitional diets also favours this feature.

As *çiğ köfte* enters into international market, it increasingly raises both the predetermined features and the impacts coming from “external” cuisine. Even though the practice of *çiğ köfte* is labour-intensive, it was one of the dishes that was distant to culinary creativity for a long time as it was not a “tabletop” presentation and therefore, tastes included in its repertoire were limited (Kaya & Stamataki, 2020). However, things began to alter with the expansion into new markets where fascinating types of “presentations” were designed by increasing number of food entrepreneurs.

Sushi-like presentations on boards...picture-perfect wooden platters...and wraps made with Doritos... (Ray & Srinivas 2023). This refers to the fact that in parallel to other products or recipes through the transformational process of globalization within gastronomy; here too, transformed or hybridized forms have been introduced to our consumption. While accessibility and affordability make *çiğ köfte* a street food that is consumed by many, the significance of its consumption increases especially in times of conditions experienced as economic crisis and deepening inequality.

For this reason, in the next section I will analyze how poverty, inflation and consumption interact with the product under such circumstances. In the context of a class-based consumption pattern therefore veganization of *çiğ köfte* appears neither as an ideological preference nor consumption for the sake of consuming but as an embeddedness to/into economy and hence into everyday life (I will further discuss this in next section).

Poverty, Inflation and The Transformation of *Çiğ köfte* Consumption

Sociological literature shows that the patterns in which people consume food depends on inequality of income, inflation and how economy is unsteady (Bourdieu, 1984; Drewnowski & Specter, 2004). When there is an economic crisis then for the working-class and low-income people, the cheap and filling foods become more important. This part uses studies about poverty and consumption to determine how the rise in food inflation in Türkiye changed practices related to eating-out as well as how *çiğ köfte* became a street-food with a view of subsistence. Food and drink habits are an important field of study in terms of its intersections with social class, income and cultural practices. As Bourdieu (1984) argues, consumption preferences do not serve only to cover biological needs; they also embody social class habitus, economic capital and cultural positioning. In this sense, food culture acts both as a sign of distinction and as a tool to reproduce hierarchical order. The escalation of economic crisis, income gap, and inflation rate in Türkiye over the last decade has influenced most notably the eating-out habits of the low-income groups. Under these economic conditions, *çiğ köfte* s have become of the common consumption practices of different social classes for several reasons.

Firstly, they s are cheap. Secondly, they these are easily accessible. Thirdly, and very importantly for some people, it is vegan . Finally, these kinds of food do not take long time to be consumed eat . The unique flavor & nutrition value makes *çiğ köfte* be liked by every individual group. Besides the abovementioned , in all Türkiye , *çiğ köfte* has won a trade mark position on the streets and boulevards such that the convenience tendencies make it as a fast food consumed preferentially by low income persons and students in particular thus showing clearly the direct interaction between social class position-by consumer goods preferred.

This study analyzes how *çiğ köfte* has become a consumption object in the context of social classes and poverty in Türkiye. The study addresses poverty, veganism, the cultural position of street foods, the impact of inflation on consumption practices, and new presentation forms of *çiğ köfte* in the globalization process.

The deterioration in income distribution and the decline in purchasing power among lower-income groups in Türkiye have a decisive impact on food consumption. According to OECD (2025) reports, Türkiye ranks among the countries with the highest income inequality. The increase in the proportion of the population living on the minimum wage has led to restrictions in basic consumption patterns and a decrease in the frequency of eating out.

According to TÜİK data, food inflation was 102 % in 2022; independent studies indicate that this rate has risen to 150% (ENAG, 2022). This situation has led the working class, precarious workers, students, and poor households in particular to turn to low-cost foods. This has been the case not only in Türkiye but also around the world after COVID-19 (Reis & Lopez, 2022) The literature shows that inexpensive carbohydrate-heavy foods feature more prominently in the dietary practices of poor classes (Drewnowski & Specter, 2004). In this context, *çiğ köfte* stand out as both a nutritious and economical option.

Street food historically has a significant impact in the dietary practice of low-income groups (Arman et al. 2019). Even if street foods such as simit, döner and kokoreç have been encountered for many years in Türkiye, increasing costs lead to exorbitant prices of these traditional products. For example, fast-food chains’ cheap menus are perceived as not “cheap” under the economic conditions in Türkiye.

However, street foods may even sometimes be interpreted as not hygienic by consumers. Es-

pecially *çiğ köfte* can be given an example regarding this subject. It is also important that *çiğ köfte* is shaped by hand and spread onto the flat-bread by hand. Lack of hygiene issues are much more considered on street vendors by general public (Yeşilyurt, 2022).

At that time, *çiğ köfte* is a product consumed by few groups because of its uniqueness and becoming cheap and suitable for everyone. The reasons for this transformation are following; *Çiğ köftes* were sold from baskets or in low-quality places, where small businesses ejected verily with small capitals nearly 50.000-100.000 TL (Bayram, 2011). At present, people consume more *çiğ köfte* by the several millions daily.

Fast Service was provided at a fixed price of 25 kuruş until mid-2000s to customers standing on the street corner. With lots of branches that have been opened since 1986, everyone was now able to open their own business through profit sharing with a capital as little as not considering its franchisee. The most important reason why it is the subject of interest of the masses is its being an economical product (Yılmaz Safra and Ozguven Silver; 96). Dürüm (wrap), gram or kilogram sale option is an economical chance both for individual eating out and house gatherings.

Price level makes it very attractive for students' workers and lower segment in cities as it doesn't necessitate sitting down to eat, then carrying leftover food when they're ready to go again." So people who adapt themselves to urban life eat walking. Eating on the run is actually a crime against time especially in crowded cities-indeed many call this city's plague; however, there is nothing they can do against work discipline. Rise in the production velocity has resulted in eating quiche's etc., not hot dishes anymore from café let alone meatballs or bean foods.

The fact that *çiğ köfte* shops can be opened with little capital has meant there has always been a high demand for them during troubled economic times, such as the country's 2001 economic crash when thousands of street sellers emerged to sell the product to make a living. As all you need is some basic ingredients and an outdoor table or stall, it came to be viewed as a kind of "subsistence economy" product in times of economic hardship.

Street food in Türkiye is mostly meat-based, which limits access for vegan individuals. However, the ban on meat in *çiğ köfte* has made them an "approved vegan street food." This provides a significant marketing advantage for both local consumers and brands entering global markets. The global increase in demand for vegan products (The Vegan Society, 2020) has led to Turkish *çiğ köfte* being positioned as "vegan fast food" in European and American markets. Thus, the product has begun to establish itself in international gastronomy networks with both its economic and cultural capital (Aksoy, 2022). When globalization is in question, *çiğ köftes* also have met with the new presentation styles. Such as preparing it with sushi which belongs to the different culinary culture, serving it aesthetically on a wooden plate or even including it as an ingredient in modern snacks such as Doritos can be regarded as examples of gastronomic hybridization. These presentation forms have helped the cross-class popularity of *çiğ köfte* by enabling middle class consumers to buy and eat it. Thus, *çiğ köfte* has turned into a multi-layered gastronomic entity where low-income class's economic necessity meets with globalising food culture.

Veganized *Çiğ Köfte* as Street Food: Sustainability, Class Dynamics, and Cultural Transformation

Studies on veganism and plant-based diets often associate vegan consumption with middle-class moral identities and lifestyle choices (Ruby,

2012; Greenebaum, 2012). However, the case of *çiğ köfte* challenges this assumption by embedding vegan consumption within economic necessity rather than ideological commitment. However, the fact is that in most of studies veganism/vegan consumption have been conceptualized as a form of reflexive (resistance) consumption and lifestyle. They are often linked to identification and position taking (cf. Bertuzzi, 2017; Cherry, 2006). This type of vegan consumption highlights the practice’s implications, the process of morals in practice and the cultural capital it involves. Many empirical studies on meat reducing consumers show that they are based on a variety of concerns: ethics together with health issues, moral motivations (helping others), norm motivated motives or structural factors blocking/incentivizing alternative food consumption (Graça et al., 2015; Graça et al., 2020). Following these insights in this paper on *çiğ köfte* case study I use plant-based eating not as an ethical/political commitment but as part of a set of survival strategies to manage economic constraints governing everyday decisions and practices.

In this context, veganized *çiğ köfte* represents a form of what may be described as pragmatic or incidental veganism, in which plant-based consumption emerges not from ethical reflection, environmental concern, or political identity, but from affordability, availability, and survival-oriented food choices. For working-class individuals, students, and economically marginalized urban populations, *çiğ köfte* is consumed not because it signifies moral distinction, but because it offers a filling, inexpensive, and widely accessible meal. This reverses the dominant narrative in vegan studies that frames plant-based diets as culturally exclusive or class-privileged practices. Instead, *çiğ köfte* demonstrates how vegan consumption can be normalized within everyday life through structural economic conditions rather than through conscious ideological alignment; thereby positing veganism as a

materially grounded practice embedded in poverty precarity and urban food insecurity.

The transformation of *çiğ köfte* from a meat-based, ritualistic food to a vegan street food consumed mainly by working-class poor and students is a particularly emblematic case for understanding the implications of these global dynamics in contemporary Türkiye. Generally, street foods are considered as reflections of local culinary norms and socio-economic structures (Henderson 2017), but since the mid-2000s vegan street foods have become more than ‘local,’ appearing all around the world as part of new consumer habits concerning environmentalist nutrition, as well as alternative politicized agri-food movements (Cherry 2006; Greenebaum and Dexter 2017). The veganization of *çiğ köfte* following the logic of health-related rather than ideological motivations has placed this iconic ritualistic dish within these global trends.

Research on street foods shows that they often function as everyday survival resources for working-class and low-income groups while simultaneously serving as markers of identity, heritage, and cultural expression (Zukin & Kosta, 2004). In Türkiye, where meat-heavy street foods such as döner, kokoreç, and köfte dominate the urban foodscape, *çiğ köfte* stands out as an affordable vegan alternative symbolizing a broader cultural transformation and, in another sense, an economic shift. While veganism is frequently associated with middle-class lifestyles and moralized food practices (Povey et al., 2001; Ruby, 2012), *çiğ köfte* reverses this pattern by offering a plant-based street food accessible to workers, students, and the urban poor which groups typically excluded from vegan markets due to price barriers.

From a sustainability and public health perspective, plant-based foods are increasingly presented as a way to reduce environmental degradation and lower the carbon emissions of food

systems (De Backer & Hudders, 2014; Graça et al., 2015). Even though the legal ban of meat from *çiğ köfte* in 2008 was not an ecological issue but a question of food safety, through this legal dictate the dish became associated with environmentalism. The meatless version of *çiğ köfte* is now one of most consumed street foods in Turkey. Research on meat reduction points out that cultural familiarity and affordability significantly increase their adoption (Graça et al., 2021). *Çiğ köfte* is such example which shows that how even a traditional food may contribute to large scale reduction of meat consumption without the need for ideological adherence to veganism.

The rise of this meatless variety of *çiğ köfte* corresponds with the worldwide veganization of fast foods, and illustrates increasingly commercialized, branded and standardized plant-based street foods being incorporated en masse into world markets. These processes are visible in the *çiğ köfte* franchises (which have several locations, a recognizable layout, few employees, quick service/product delivery time, low costs/prices for products for consumers, and identical flavors/types of food) which reflect George Ritzer's (2016) theory of McDonaldization; only here fast-food logic is applied not to a Western-origin product, but to a traditional food which has been made vegan. Vegan *çiğ köfte* fits within everyday veganism, a term used to describe plant-based eating practices that are not overtly connected to the identities of being vegan or activist (Greenebaum, 2012). For many consumers, the rationale behind their purchase of *çiğ köfte* can be far from responsible for they do not consider issues related to ethics, environment, or animals. The only rationale for its preference is cheapness and easy access. In those circumstances, it is possible to consider *çiğ köfte* as the product allowing as many people as possible become vegans without having such an intention.

In conclusion, the entry of vegan *çiğ köfte* into international (predominantly European) markets is an example of the globalisation of street foods; this aligns with several companies' recent practice of opening branches throughout Europe. International consumers' increasing use of the health, sustainability and production ethics criteria to evaluate vegan food products (Vinnari & Tapio, 2012). In these contexts, *çiğ köfte* is often presented mainly through its vegan aspect and sometimes overshadowing its cultural background and history. Consequently, outside Türkiye -the Turkish territory-, *çiğ köfte* will gain a new identity since it works as a culture export and a globally marketable vegan fast food at the same time. Taken together, *çiğ köfte* shows how even a historically meat-based food can be transformed through regulation and health concerns, economic factors, global food trends into something characteristic of the vegan street-food movement. The phenomenon highlights the fact that local food identities are constantly being renegotiated and redefined in response to current social, economic and environmental pressures. Its availability serves as an alternative approach that goes against the association of veganism with class privilege and moral superiority, allowing lower-class poor people as well as students to become part of plant-based eating practices.

Conclusion

Çiğ köfte, mythical storytelling and collective ritual being its basis, post-modern period process, migration, urbanization and market relations dynamics dominated the economic entrepreneurial function of the food market. As myths in food culture living entities charming transformations ended trade areas, production places uniting travelers settlers possible transition spaces creating bridges world religion commercial product "space" street foods as well official institutional ceremonies. Today surfaces masses including vegetable protein type gladly ingested both marginal gypsy settlements ve-

gan groups. The exclusion of meat from the recipe, which was a regulatory intervention largely arrived at with reference to health concerns, facilitated an easing of production conditions and longer storage stability alongside enacting the possibility for franchising that in turn led çİğ köfte to travel far beyond its locality. This shows how McDonaldization dynamics can be fruitfully analysed even in relation to such traditional and localised food products. Yet I will not present McDonaldization as the main analytical category but rather insert it as relevant analysis side by side with class analysis into poverty and everyday consumption.

The fact that the vegan products became popular among lower-class consumers before they gained any significant visibility or appeal points to this broader reading. The meat and animal-based product shortages, high inflation rates (leading to a constant reduction in real wages for the majority of workers), scarcity and rationing of certain foodstuffs particularly in the 1960s/70s, and severe poverty for many working-class people are all factors hard to reconcile with a consumer-cultural focus.

Finally, this study emphasizes the relevance of integrating several socio-economic variables, including poverty, class-based consumption and food inflation in all gastronomic and food studies. A locally grounded, affordable and culturally embedded example offered may involve questioning the western perspective on sustainable diets and vegan cultures of food in an unanticipated way thus highlighting the dynamics classified under house of food sociology. The assertion developed through this study as they apply class based-consumption pattern especially motives behind plant based diet likely need to be tested empirically by means of quantitative research using tools like survey-based statistical analysis or SEM/PLS modeling.

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