

IS THE KITCHEN THE NEW VENUE OF FOREIGN POLICY?



IDEAS ON FOOD AS A TOOL FOR
DIPLOMACY, BUILDING PEACE
AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

A REPORT OF THE CONFLICT CUISINE® PROJECT,
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICE



CONFLICT CUISINE

'KÄN-FLIKT KWI-'ZÈN, NOUN

Conflict Cuisine examines the nexus of food and war. Included in this study is the practice of culinary diplomacy and gastrodplomacy by governments and citizens of countries that have experienced war or conflict. In diplomatic terms, Conflict Cuisine and the use of food to persuade and educate is a form of soft power.

There are two forms of Conflict Cuisine. The first is food in zones of conflict – a phenomenon that encompasses access to food, food security, and the impact fighting in the field has on existing food supply and provisioning of goods to markets. Food is often studied in the context of humanitarian aid and post-conflict development. At present, over 60 percent of all foreign assistance given by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) goes to humanitarian purposes and development in conflict or post-conflict countries. Yet even today we do not fully understand what levels or aspects of food insecurity are most likely to directly contribute to or cause conflict. It is an area where there is little interdisciplinary academic research – especially as it relates to political governance issues that are the basis for many conflicts.

The second form of Conflict Cuisine is the food of diaspora populations that transfer their national foodways to new countries, an extension of their culture. Immigrants use their food culture as a means of creating a new life in their adopted country – both as a means of remembering their homeland and to earn a living. Immigrants also serve as culinary diplomats. Through their cooking they transfer elements of their own culinary culture to the diversity of our own foodways.

Today we live in a world where the presence of fragile states creates the backdrop for a discussion of food, war, and conflict. Conflict is multidimensional, as is the concept of food security. Even though there has been a dramatic reduction of global poverty over the last 60 years, we are now living in a period with repeated cycles of political and criminal violence. There are still more than 1.5 billion people who live in conflict-affected, post conflict, or fragile states. And today there are over 60 million refugees who have wandered the globe, the result of ongoing turmoil in many parts of the world.

There is growing research confirming the connection between the changing climate and its impact on food supply that drives many of the conflicts affecting many parts of sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Increasingly, water is emerging as an issue, with the potential to be as precious as oil – and an equally contentious commodity.

Conflict Cuisines will remain a feature of the American culinary and diplomatic arenas for decades to come. Food remains one of the strongest links that diaspora have with their native lands – the taste and flavors that remain indelible even when transferred to another country. We have not seen the end of tragic conflicts. But the prospect of more individuals coming to new lands bringing with them a culinary heritage that is novel and untested remains the one silver lining in an otherwise tragic set of events. As immigrants use their food to integrate themselves in their new homes we all become the beneficiaries of this cultural transition.



Left to right: Gary Weaver, Tara Sonenshine, Kimberly Reed, and Paul Rockower

Photo Credit: American University

INTRODUCTION

Johanna Mendelson Forman, PhD, JD

Adjunct Professor,
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Three years ago I embarked on a journey to connect the work I had done on post-conflict reconstruction with the role that food played in driving conflict, but also a tool that helped to build peace. Coming around a table and sharing the food of another culture could demonstrate the humanizing effect that breaking bread has on dispelling stereotypes or disinformation about different cultures.

The spark that ignited what eventually became a course entitled Conflict Cuisine: War and Peace Around the Dining Table, was a luncheon at the State Department where bloggers had been invited to learn about various outreach programs on public diplomacy that had been initiated by then Secretary of State Clinton. One program they highlighted was culinary diplomacy and the creation of an American Chefs Corps, an inspired dimension of Smart Power.

As luck would have it I was seated across from a young man, the creator of the term gastrodplomacy, Paul Rockower, who led me to the conclusion that the time was ripe to connect foods of the Washington diaspora with the formal study of war and peace. I also met Professor Craig Hayden, an expert in cultural diplomacy, who invited me to another event at American University that actually discussed the broader dimensions of food in diplomacy, from nation branding to export strategies to culinary diplomatic engagement. And it was also my good fortune to meet one of the speakers, another rising star in study of culinary diplomacy, Sam Chapple Sokol, who had written an excellent study on this topic. Within weeks the idea of teaching students about conflict through the kitchens and chefs of the diaspora came together. When I proposed the idea to American University's School of International Service, they were willing to take the risk of indulging me in this proposal, scheduling a capstone course in the spring of 2013. I was even luckier to have had Chapple-Sokol as my first research assistant, and Paul Rockower as an adviser.

The course featured classroom study about the way conflicts, post-conflict reconstruction, and food security were components of the study of conflict cuisines. But the course also had the unique quality of allowing students to get out and meet diaspora chefs, taste their food, and share a meal. After all, wasn't this city the home of so many immigrants who had fled the fighting in the places that conflict raged? From the first generation of Vietnamese immigrants, to the Afghan refugees of 1979, to the asylum seekers from Ethiopia's horrific civil wars to thousands of immigrants from Central America's conflicts it was clear that their presence was evident by the rise in ethnic eateries that dotted the streets of the Washington metropolitan area.

This spring marks the third time we have offered the course. Students continue to be surprised about the connection of food and international relations and development. They enjoy the ability to learn about fragile states, to explore the conflicts that are so much a part of the news cycle, but also find the ability to talk to people who have left these conflict states in the setting of a dining room to be as instructive in learning how the everyday act of eating can also be a teaching moment. They have even been able to sample the ultimate food of war – MREs – meals ready to eat – that our soldiers carry into battle and HDRs- humanitarian daily rations – the sustenance of refugees fleeing conflict.

The Kitchen as the New Venue of Foreign Policy is a report about a conference we hosted on April 21, 2015 that tried to draw together the themes of the work on conflict cuisine, to offer those who attended a taste of the foods of conflict cultures, and to use the time to discuss with chefs, diplomats and food security experts the various threads of ideas and concepts that make teaching about food, war and the capacity for food to build peace to reflect a compelling story about the world in the 21st century.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Many people have made the Kitchen as the New Venue of Foreign Policy conference and report possible.

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Caterer Carlos Cesario, chef and visionary, has also made it possible as the impresario of eating, getting our conflict cuisines ready for lunch

Special thanks are due to the American University branch of Spoon University. <http://american.spoonuniversity.com/> and in particular Mai Someya, its Director of Marketing and Business Development who created the art work for the conference poster and program, but also provided us with wonderful food to share with participants.

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WHY CONFLICT CUISINE? WHY NOW?

Johanna Mendelson Forman, PhD, JD

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My earliest memories of conflict cuisine are the stories my mother told me. Sitting in our kitchen in New York, I heard how many, many women came to the United States to escape the Nazis. Those were stories of horror and a world gone wrong, but they were also stories of hope, of sacrifice, of perseverance. Of survival. In part what kept these women going is their desire to keep alive the memory of their homelands through their foods. Meals around which their families gathered to celebrate the great moments and to seek solace in dark times. The chocolate cakes of Hungary. The butter cookies of Austria. The desserts of Vienna. Warmth. Joy. Love. My mother, a wonderful cook and writer, was also an “American.” She became the translator of recipes for this generation of women. While all our family’s friends told harrowing stories of their journey to America they also carried their culinary baggage. Special recipes passed from generation to generation. All those secrets – how long to knead the dough, how to braise a brisket, what gave those butter cookies that texture and taste. All these things, and in these things that they lived to share of their personal histories embodied in their recipes – my mother helped them memorialize all of this in English. Joan Didion wrote a famous line, “we tell ourselves stories in order to live.” These recipes were their stories.

Little did I realize that I was actually learning about the principles of Conflict Cuisine. And so my curiosity about the relationship between war and food began.

We know that food’s relationship to conflict is complex and multidimensional. But it is only recently that the world of food – agricultural sciences, war, and diplomacy in providing humanitarian aid and building peace – have all become a part of a larger inquiry about how food is both a tool to communicate culture, but also central in shaping conflicts and their impact on civilians. It is neither anthropology nor history nor development nor economics, but a field that is emerging as an interdisciplinary approach to the nexus of food and war.

There is no doubt about the centrality of hunger and war. But we

have learned from recent times that rebuilding states after the fighting has stopped stimulates innovation, trade, and resilience by survivors who rebuild their farms, their communities and their lives. Food connects people who fled their homelands. It enriches our memories. The taste of home, the memory of a dinner with a loved one, the ingredients of a national dish that inspire our souls, that bond us to history, that help us to define ourselves.

This conference will reflect on three different ways in which cuisine affects conflict and also how it becomes a tool of foreign policy as a form of soft power. Ironically, it is the hard power of states and rebel groups that leads to this conversation about conflict cuisine. But today we set out on a journey to look at food through the lens of diplomacy, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and national identity. Sure, there are other dimensions of food that we could address and are equally important – food security and sustainability, humanitarian assistance, agricultural production including genetically modified vegetables nutrition, food waste, and more. But with limited time I thought we could start with those aspects of food to whet the appetite to other themes.

My course, “Conflict Cuisines: War and Peace Around the Dinner Table,” looks at the diasporas that emerged in the Washington, D.C. area not only to make new lives but to make new friends through their kitchens. Immigrants who have been displaced by the conflicts of the Cold War to those who have arrived more recently, fleeing Syria -- all have in common the desire to succeed in a new country through the use of their respective cuisines to feed their own compatriots, but also those of us who live here, to build and sustain a community that sustains and grows all it embraces.

Food is a tool of economic resilience. It may be hard to learn English immediately, but it is possible to cook, to open a restaurant, and to help support one’s family. My goal when I first conceived of this project was to have students learn about wars past and ongoing conflicts today to seek out both the histories of these events, but also to put these conflicts into a more tangible, more relevant context by

meeting restaurateurs, interviewing immigrant chefs, and studying entrepreneurs, and tasting their cuisines. I also wanted to see whether this type of course could become a template for use by other schools nationwide. What better way to build understanding in a community than by meeting those who have newly arrived and begun sharing their culture – and their stories -- through the kitchen.

We start this program with a conversation about culinary diplomacy. One of the oldest forms of foreign policy is the use of food to bond, to persuade, to cajole, and to convince. Even though the French claim to be the inventors of this type of diplomacy, (Last December French Minister Laurent Fabius declared that the French invented culinary diplomacy, causing much discussion in the culinary diplomatic world). This practice of hosting dinners with national leaders – the State Dinners at the White House -- for political ends has deep roots, from biblical times, to the Roman Empire, to Renaissance Italy and beyond.

In the United States culinary diplomacy has also gained greater notoriety. In 2012 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton inaugurated the American Chef Corps to demonstrate our nation’s culinary prowess and showcase our best chefs – so many who themselves were immigrants – to other nations. A more recent area of this type of diplomacy is what is now called gastrodiploamacy, or what I like to think of as people-to-people eating – food trucks, market stands, and more. The rise of food blogs, the TV chefs who travel the world to become the new interlocutors with communities around a dining table --all attest to the growing awareness of the role food can play in letting down one’s guard and speaking truth to power. Some may even conclude that chefs have become some of the most trusted individuals. If you are willing to eat what has been cooked by someone who you have never met, you are demonstrating a high degree of trust and legitimacy in that chef by eating that food.

If diplomacy fails, what role will food play in conflict? That is the subject of our second panel. Our talented speakers will provide you with illuminating stories on ways in which food has been used to build peace, to win hearts and minds, and to build economic resilience with immigrants. The flip side of this issue, whether food drives conflict, will also be explored as we know that climate change, environmental degradation, and warfare all threaten agriculture and the access to food, and thus impact lives. Refugees from Syria now comprise a third of that country’s population, creating one of the greatest humanitarian feeding problems that the United Nations World Food Program has ever faced. Yet food can also be seen as a form of resilience – just watch videos of Syrian women in camps preparing recipes from the food they get from vouchers provided by aid agencies. Adaptability and innovation are all part of the discussion about food, conflict and the connection of both.

Conflict cuisines have been a feature of Washington’s restaurant scene for decades. I can recall how the old Washington refrain – telling where we were at war by what new restaurants open – was evident with each new ethnic cuisine that emerged in our city. Today the changes in our immigration policies have constrained this part of our culinary scene. Tim Carman of the Washington Post, who has so ably documented the “cheap eats” of our city, has also become the unofficial culinary ambassador of ethnic food. He will be interviewing some local chefs – not the big names, but people who cook and teach others – about how they view these international foods in the midst of high-end Washington restaurants. In his stories, he recounts these chefs emerging from their histories of conflict and strife in their homelands to live out the American dream.

Nations have recently discovered that food can be the perfect hook to elevate their standing in a world of competing economic interests. Middle powers like Peru and Mexico have taken advantage of their great cuisines and their chefs to promote their food to the pinnacle of their national brand. Today Peru is the number one culinary destination according to Travel and Leisure magazine. And, Peru, shows too, the vast migration worldwide, its cuisine reflecting Asian and African influences. Thanks to the work of UNESCO, which deems certain cuisines intangible world heritage designations, we see how food becomes something that we must not only eat to survive, but also consume to celebrate the best of a culture. So why hasn’t the United States been a party to this important treaty?

Food is also a powerful tool of chefs who want to use their skills to help people in need. The work of programs like World Central Kitchen underscore the way the modern chefs like José Andrés and his team can give food and comfort in places like Haiti. They can also become the face of education about food when chefs combine their skills to help eliminate food waste or manage food deserts. Culinary tourism, nation branding, and food as a way to provide relief are all considered in this last panel.

Finally, a conference on food would not be complete unless we talked about food memories. What do people remember about their past? The Kitchen Sisters have been regaling us for years with their stories of hidden kitchens. We end this meeting with a conversation with sister Nikki Silva about what she has learned from the conversations we have held today as a way to expand our understanding of three subjects that were often treated in depth separately, but not considered together: food, war and diplomacy.

I hope you enjoy this day as much as I enjoyed putting this program together.

Thank you.





LIFE AROUND THE TABLE: CUISINE AS A POINT OF ENTRY FOR DISCUSSIONS ABOUT GLOBAL ISSUES

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Anita Bevacqua McBride

Photo Credit: American University

When my daughter at 2-years-old sat in her highchair grabbing the last bits of my homemade macaroni and meatballs and joyfully exclaimed, "I love food!" my then 87-year-old Italian immigrant father was witness to this delicious moment and put his hands together in prayerful thanksgiving to the Lord as if to say, "my work here is done!" As a child and grandchild of immigrants who came to the US and opened a small Italian grocery store and a neighborhood Neapolitan pizzeria, I understand the concept of a food culture – or gastro diplomacy as it is called now – the use of food as symbol of national identity as well as a tool to assimilate into an adopted country.

We were part of a large ethnic diaspora in Connecticut, many of whom left their homeland for reasons of poverty – and I can identify with that aspect of creating a food culture that Johanna Mendelson Forman teaches here at American University in the Conflict Cuisine course.

I also had the memory of moving here to Washington in 1981. I could not find decent Italian food but I quickly became acquainted with exotic restaurants that featured the cuisine of other cultures and immigrants to this area – restaurants such as Vietnam in Georgetown, or Mama Ayesha's Middle Eastern restaurant in Cleveland Park, the Red Sea Ethiopian restaurant in Adams Morgan, or El Tamarindo and also Omega – the El Salvadoran and Cuban restaurants in Adams Morgan.

All of them are countries and populations that had seen their share of conflict and resulting migration. These were the culinary diplomats who used action-forcing events in their countries to create traditions that are now part of our culinary destiny.

Much later, while working at the State Department and the White House, I saw first hand the use of food as a tool of diplomacy – quite literally a delicious use of soft power through the art of culinary diplomacy.

For example, In the planning of State Dinners for foreign heads of state we are eager to showcase our food culture and cuisine, while also giving a nod to the cuisine culture of our foreign guest by utilizing a guest chef, or incorporating a symbol of our guest's national identity in the menu.

But, also during those years I saw the nexus between food and disease and food and conflict. In my travels to nearly 70 countries including many post-conflict nations in the Middle East, Central America, Africa and South Central Asia I saw first hand how the ravages of war -- and the resulting food insecurity -- are a great threat to sustainable development.

Even in the poorest countries - hardest hit by the most challenging circumstances - our foreign hosts were always eager to share their culture through their food and offer whatever they have on their table as a tool of communication about their way of life.

I can distinctly remember tasting the juice of pomegranates in Afghanistan, or of cassava in Liberia. And I definitely have vivid recollections of being offered warm, fermented goat's milk when sitting in a yurt in 18-degree weather in Ulanbatur, Mongolia. That drink might have a hard time finding a place on a menu here at home --- and certainly was far less appealing to me than the Pisco sours I was offered in Peru!

But they all had the same effect. They told a story about how food is essential to understanding how people relate to each other. That's why this discussion is so exciting. The experts participating in this discussion are sharing their knowledge on this all important topic of food and what we can learn about history, culture -- and conflict -- by examining life around the table.



CULINARY DIPLOMACY, GASTRODIPLOMACY, AND CONFLICT CUISINE: DEFINING THE FIELD

In the United States, culture is popularly defined by the public parameters of art, music, literature, cinema, theater, and food. Those are the most visible signs of a culture. But real culture resides internally; it is the beliefs and worldviews that are instilled by family and community and passed down from generation to generation.

The visible differences are what most often engage us but cultural clashes often occur with the internal differences at the value level. “You wake up one morning and it occurs to you, they’re not playing cards with the same deck you use back home. They don’t think the way you do; they don’t share your worldviews, your values. You’re disoriented, you’re confused, but that’s when you’re really learning culture,” said Dr. Gary Weaver. It is through questioning “why” and placing one’s self in another’s psychological and cultural shoes that understanding begins about one’s self and one’s culture. Cultural clashes are disorienting but it also brings understanding.

The best way to understand one’s culture is to leave it. “By understanding the value or motive behind one behavior, we now open the door to explaining many behaviors,” said Dr. Weaver. Using food as a cultural resource example, Dr. Weaver details the example of a Greek woman picking up breadcrumbs, and assuming her underlying values are cleanliness or thriftiness. Such an assumption would be an insult the woman. For many Greeks, bread is a sacred object that deserves the utmost respect. Once you understand the value the woman places on bread, you understand her actions, you understand a little of her background, and you understand an aspect of her culture.

A discussion of culinary diplomacy, gastrodiplo-

mac- y is essential to understanding the values and intentions behind everyday actions and how those values affect foreign policy.

FOOD AS A FORM OF ENGAGEMENT

With a background in both academia and diplomacy, Tara Sonenshine, Professor, George Washington University, and former Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy started the discussion by detailing how food is used as a form of engagement.

Sonenshine noted: We all like to eat and we all like to eat all kinds of different foods. Diplomacy is about finding common ground. It is about figuring out where people intersect in the most human of ways so that they might be able to set their differences aside and find some way to get along.

Greeks and Romans would invite their enemies to the table to get to know them. They would “break the ice.” In modern times, Hillary Clinton brought “smart power” to the table. It was meant to include...the notion of being smart about how you use power. Asking what could we have in our toolbox of diplomacy that may help our overseas audiences connect to us? Using food in a formal way in the field of public diplomacy. Deploying chefs and bringing in new chefs to the US, drawing on the power of the people who prepare food as a way of reaching out across the table.

Food is both fun and serious. It comes down to those who can eat and those who cannot eat. It is about war/peace, too much (obesity)/too little (malnourishment). We need to be cognizant that food can be used as a weapon and as a war mechanism,

but it is also a bridge builder. It is emotional, it triggers memory, it explores history, and it defines you who are.

THE ROLE OF GASTRODIPLOMACY

Bringing more than a decade of experience in the field of communication and public diplomacy to the discussion, Paul Rockower of Levantine Communications, is a leading expert in the burgeoning public diplomacy field of gastrodiplo-

mac- y. He delineated what gastrodiplo- mac- y is and its role in the arena of diplomacy and cultural relations. Rockower explained: gastrodiplo- mac- y is the nexus of food and foreign policy and how countries communicate their culture through food. It is the use of restaurants as foreign cultural outposts. Gastrodiplo- mac- y is how you communicate your culture through your food, how you reach out to a foreign audiences and share your culture, history and heritage through your food. It is the idea that the flag can follow the fork.

Gastrodiplo- mac- y is edible nation branding. For many years it was middle powers, such as Thailand, Taiwan, Peru or South Korea that would practice gastrodiplo- mac- y to create a larger nation brand for themselves and increase understanding for their culture. Recently, larger powers like the US and France practice gastrodiplo- mac- y as well, but in a very different fashion. We see nuance and a focus on regional varieties and distinctions between cuisines.

The beauty of gastrodiplo- mac- y is that it is a medium that inspires many people and empowers diaspora communities to share their traditions and cultures.

DEFINING CULINARY DIPLOMACY

Sam Chapple-Sokol, @culinarydiplo Blogger, is a research consultant and culinary diplomat. He participated in the discussion by video to provide a definition of the expanding field of culinary diplomacy.

Chapple-Sokol presented: culinary diplomacy is the use of food or a cuisine as a tool to create a cross-cultural understanding in the hopes of improving interactions and cooperation. Hillary Clinton said this is the oldest form of diplomacy.

At the official diplomatic level there is, of course, the ceremony of state dinners, but there are also interpersonal connections such as official state chefs exchanging recipes or engaging with traditionally secluded communities like the Amish. At

the next level of public diplomacy, we see countries actively promoting their national cuisine as Thailand did with their government-funded initiative, Global Thai. The United States is also utilizing cuisine through their American Chef Corps, which sends American chefs to foreign countries to cook and interact with the local population. The 2015 World Expo in Milan, Italy, is focusing entirely on food and will offer an exciting opportunity for countries to brand themselves with their food.

Culinary diplomacy means to further diplomatic protocol through cuisine and it can take place at the citizen level. By eating at a diaspora restaurant, and engaging with the owners or the community that frequents it, we can employ a deeper level of understanding...World leaders can share meals, but it won’t create lasting peace. That has to happen at the citizen level. But it is becoming clear that using food as a means of engagement can produce important connections between nations and people.

“It is not the food that is important, it’s the gesture and values behind the food that’s important...It’s not just an invitation to a dinner, it’s an invitation to a relationship.”

–Gary Weaver
Professor
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THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND FOOD SECURITY

With nearly 20 years of public and private sector experience in the science of health, nutrition, and food safety, Kimberly Reed, Executive Director, International Food Information Council Foundation brought the voice of the global food, beverage, and agricultural industry to the discussion. She expounded on the importance of environmental sustainability and food security to culinary diplomacy.

Reed detailed: Expo Milano is the largest and most historical gathering on food for sixth months in Italy. Theme: Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life. 144 countries are participating,

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which represent 94% of the world’s population. Each country will have a pavilion to showcase their own theme on how they plan to practice sustainability in the future. Biotechnology and food sustainability is important for the future of our planet. Why? In 2050 there will be 9.6 billion people on the planet who will need 70% more food than what we are producing today. The American pavilion is designed to resemble a grain elevator and the exterior walls will be planted with vertical gardens from which acrobats will periodically harvest produce to serve as part of the meals available for consumption inside. Visitors will be able to experience a traditional American Thanksgiving dinner within the pavilion as well as an assortment of food trucks placed around the city of Milan.

The American pavilion focus is on American Food 2.0: United to Feed the Planet. Why American Food 2.0? Because the United States is intelligently and thoughtfully engaged in food and global food security and we want to be focusing on responsibility, the importance of international relationships, science and technology, nutrition and health, and culinary culture.

During the Q&A segment, audience members were given the opportunity to engage with the panelists on topics not covered in their presentations. Among the key issues raised was the importance of culinary authenticity, food fusion, and gastrodiploamcy and the private sector.

CULINARY AUTHENTICITY AND GASTRODIPLOMACY

The first question asked was how important authenticity of food to a culture when practicing gastrodiploamcy?

Paul Rockower explained: It is important to strike a balance between authenticity and accessibility. It would be difficult to serve spicy Indian food to American consumers who enjoy mild salsa. But there is a lot of room to play with the cuisine, such as fusion foods like Korean Tacos.

Tara Sonenshine pointed out: In this discussion drinks must also be considered, as well as food and the branding that accompanies wine. Cheers and toasts within our social customs are important... Cultural sensitivity around what we eat and drink has a positive and negative side of respecting peoples strongly held views about food and drink. For example the ongoing hummus debate between Arabs, Israelis, and Palestinians over who has the most authentic hummus. That is a healthy debate.

IS CULTURAL HYBRIDITY OF FOOD A FORM OF COLONIZATION OF CULTURE?

Another question introduced the idea of cultural hybridity or the blending of multiple cultures into something different and new and whether this is a form or colonization of culture?

There must be a balance between creating something familiar and being entrepreneurial. International chefs coming in and using local ingredients creates a notion of food experimentation, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Food is an open-minded field that dares to not always be exactly what you were looking for, explained Tara Sonenshine.

Kimberly Reed noted: There is a beauty of using traditional foods, but in this world there is room to explore and experiment.

CAN GASTRODIPLOMACY BE PERCEIVED AS TOO AGGRESSIVE BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR?

An audience member asked when gastrodiploamcy is practiced by the private sector can it be perceived as too aggressive? Is there a tightrope to be walked between respecting a culture that already exists and bringing the American experience abroad?

Paul Rockower explained: Gastrodiploamcy is a little bit different from the private sector. Starbucks is not an actor in gastrodiploamcy because they are a private company expanding to new territories whereas gastrodiploamcy is a government initiative to educate foreign populations on the nuances of a countries food and culture.

WITH FOOD FUSION, WHICH CULTURE CAN LAY CLAIM TO THE NEW CREATION?

As fusion cooking has become an increasingly utilized element of the culinary landscape, one audience member asked, for creations that are a mixture of different cultures, which gets to lay claim to the new creation? For example, who owns Korean Tacos?

Paul Rockower declared: Both cultures should take ownership and recognize what stems from each culture because these mixtures and new creations are more interesting as a marriage between cultures.



DOES FOOD BUILD PEACE OR DRIVE CONFLICT?

- Yael Luttwak**
President & CEO of Slimpeace, and Filmmaker
- Christine Fair**
Associate Professor, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, and Author of Cooking in the Axis of Evil
- Manolia Charlotin**
Director, Feet in Two Worlds Program, The New School
- Roger-Mark De Souza**
Director of Population, Environmental Security, and Resilience, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
- Moderator:**
Louis Goodman, Dean Emeritus, School of International Service, American University

DOES FOOD BUILD PEACE OR DRIVE CONFLICT

Food cannot be separated from the human experience. Access to food and water are essential to human survival. When food is scarce it can become a source of conflict. Withholding of food has also become a tactic of war, with starvation of enemies a means of repression. Sharing food has also been a way that people can communicate by sitting around a table and breaking bread. Food has become a tool for driving both peace and conflict, depending on how it is utilized. Food can be a powerful tool for educating and humanizing conflicts. The foods we eat in this country and around the world are reflections of history and culture food. The globalization of the palate has also served as a platform for understanding discord over larger political issues. Food brings a cultural vibrancy to a community by serving as a means of integration of new immigrant groups. But we also know that food insecurity even in this age of plenty can be a major force for inducing local conflicts.

“If you want to bring people together and think about what people have in common, how they can come together, or celebrate the kinds of struggles that diaspora peoples go through to build their lives in a new place, food is a wonderful place to do that,” said Louis Goodman.

A discussion of food as a place for peace or conflict is essential to understanding the role food plays in building community, economic empowerment, and effective development policies.

THE ROLE OF FOOD IN HUMANIZING ISSUES

The discussion opened with a presentation from Yael Luttwak, Filmmaker and President & CEO of Slimpeace, a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women to improve their eating habits and adopt a healthy lifestyle through a group support system run by certified facilitators. Showing a clip from her film, A Slim Peace, and offering brief remarks, Luttwak demonstrated how food can be a powerful tool for humanizing issues of conflict and culture even in the most intractable of conflicts.

Luttwak remarked: A Slim Peace is a film about a weight loss group amidst the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the end of the Second Intifada in 2005. Members of this weight loss group were chosen from Israelis, Palestinians, Jews, Christians, Muslims, settlers, and Bedouin women. For several weeks these women came together to discuss their weight loss issues, dieting issues, and nutritional issues. Through the process of a health education program, they were able to meet the other as a

human being...The most inspiring result of this process was that eventually the women started to connect with the humanizing aspects, disregarding the toxic political divisions that should have caused the group to splinter. Despite immense political changes, the women continued to meet and form bonds with one another.

After the film was presented at various film festivals, Dame Hilary Blume reached out and urged the creation of more chapters of Slimpeace. At present, there are thirty cohorts, or weight loss groups, in the Middle East and ten in the United States, including a teen cohort in Portland, Maine. These groups use food as a tool to build confidence, to help integrate newcomers to communities, and also through sharing of experiences around eating find common ground for coexistence.

“Food is a very powerful, personal thing. If there are reasons that you want to point out that there is injustice and get people thinking around conflict, you can go with food.”

—Louis Goodman
Dean Emeritus
School of International Service
American University

DECONSTRUCTING THE RELATIONSHIPS AND POLITICS OF FOOD

For Christine Fair, Associate Professor, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, and Author of Cooking in the Axis of Evil, food is a battlefield. Who you eat with and what you eat is defined by your religion, gender and status. She brought to the discussion a look at the politics of food and the power relationships behind cooking.

Fair explained: In South Asia, who you eat with depends largely on who you are and what social group you fall into. Often different religious communities will not dine with each other and different genders will almost never break bread at the same time. Although women are the primary producers of food in these cultures, they are expected to serve the men first and be



Yael Luttwak and Christine Fair

Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo

content with the leftovers. For me, food is not the opportunity for kumbaya, it is the opportunity to express these, often primordial, divisions.

How many of these cuisines reflect imperialism, colonialism, slavery, or other politics of history?...It is impossible to separate cuisine from the political background from which it originates. For example, the food that we traditionally think of as Caribbean is largely influenced by the North Atlantic slave trade and the large presence of Chinese restaurants in America is due to the Chinese workers in the railroad industry.

Food is an important part of diaspora culture, as people will lose their language but they will not lose their food.

FOOD AND COMMUNITY

As a multimedia journalist and strategist with experience in print, broadcast, and online publications, as well as a deep understanding of the Haitian-American community, Manolia Charlotin, Director, Feet in Two Worlds Program, The New School brought a unique voice of diaspora communities to the discussion. Charlotin presented a short video produced by Feet in Two World that highlights the resistance and often discrimination that many street vendors in New York – largely women immigrants – are facing and then made remarks on how immigrants build a new life and a new community through food.



ALBUM OF THE DIASPORA CHEFS IN THE NATION'S CAPITOL LUNCHEON

For anyone who has ever read a cookbook, reading and talking about food yields important insights but actually tasting food brings a new level of understanding. To complement the conference's lively discussions, the Diaspora Chefs produced a luncheon of their native cuisines. Guests at the conference tasted the cuisines of Vietnam, Thailand, Ethiopia, Lebanon, and El Salvador. The luncheon allowed attendees to interact with the chefs and experience for themselves how food drives connections and conversations.



Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo



Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo



Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo



Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo





Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo



Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo



Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo



Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo



Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo



TASTING CONFLICT CUISINES: A CONVERSATION WITH DIASPORA CHEFS

- Benjamin Velasquez**
Chef, Sonia Gutierrez Center, Carlos Rosario Charter School
- Mariano Ramos**
Chef, Sonia Gutierrez Center, Carlos Rosario Charter School
- Carlos Cesario**
Chef & Owner, Q Caterers
- Sileshi Alifom**
Owner, DAS Ethiopian Restaurant
- Moderator:**
Tim Carman, Washington Post Food Writer

Chefs are the vital center of the discussion on the kitchen as the new venue for foreign policy, yet they are often a hidden voice. Their impact can be tasted in every dish but they are a behind the scenes influence -- in the kitchen doing the hard work of creating and cooking the food that tells the story of their culture and their experiences.

In a discussion led by Tim Carman, Washington Post Staff Food Writer, who has made a reputation as Washington’s ambassador of ethnic food three diaspora chefs and a restaurateur examine how they use their culinary influence to connect people to their culture and their food.

Tim Carman, Moderator, began the discussion by asking each chef to share what brought them to the United States and what got them into food?

Chef Carlos Cesario, Q Caterers: It actually was conflict that brought me to the United States – my family didn’t want me to come. I was an architect in Venezuela. During a semester abroad in Belgium, and traveling around Europe, I became interested in food. Building your own plate is a type of architecture in itself. I had the opportunity to apply for an architectural job but ended up getting one in cooking. I had a very good teacher; she was the assistant to Roland Mesnier, the White House pastry chef. Working in that type of international and American high-end cuisine helped to expand my horizons into other types of cuisine – particularly Mediterranean and Asian -- and later to open my own business as a caterer. The catering business is always a learning experience about the mix of different ingredients and countries.

Chef Mariano Ramos, Sonia Gutierrez Center, Carlos Rosario Charter School, Washington, DC: My parents came to the United States from Mexico. They worked as professionals -environmentalists who worked with the World Wildlife Fund and the World Bank managing projects all over the world. My turn to food was an identity question to myself: how I wanted to represent myself and what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I have a degree in computer engineering, but found that it was food that included all of who I am. I switched paths and studied at L’Academie de Cuisine with Roland Mesnier as well. Now I am teaching at Carlos Rosario international public school, helping immigrants to better their jobs and better their lives.

Sileshi Alifom, Owner, DAS Ethiopian: I am an Ethiopian by birth. I came to the United States in 1970 to go to school. Nothing to do with food or beverage. I attended SUNY-New Paltz. During that

time I was recruited by Marriott. I moved to California to basically work as a caterer, a food person in general. My first job with Marriott was a banquet manager. At that time, I really got into the food. Since I first came to America, I’ve worked as a waiter or a dishwasher, or something in the food industry. What I appreciated most was pleasing people, seeing people smiling, and hearing how great the service and food was. I retired after 23 years with Marriott. I briefly went into financial services and then returned to the restaurant business in Washington DC by purchasing a restaurant called Zed’s in Georgetown. I transformed it into an establishment for high-end Ethiopian cuisine. My mindset was to share Ethiopian cuisine with everyone. I believe that restaurants are about wanting to talk with people, to engage with people, and to educate them on food that they’ve never had before.

Chef Benjamin Velasquez, Sonia Gutierrez Center, Carlos Rosario Charter School, Washington, DC: I grew up in El Salvador. I always wanted to be a lawyer and I worked at a courthouse. In a conflict region, being a young person is a crime. Communist guerrillas were hunting young people, and the government was recruiting them, by force. My only choice was to flee. We had to migrate illegally. Going north to the United States of America was the best choice. Once here, I was without family, friends, roots, and people spoke another language. To me, the Americans were speaking everything upside down – it didn’t make sense. Once I realized I was on his own and I had to survive – a fundamental immigrant experience -- I took a job as a dishwasher. Promoted to assistant prep cook, I worked my way through the positions of line cook, shift supervisor, sous chef, chef, to trainer. That’s how I got into training people in the food service industry. However, due to limited English, I was training people that would eventually become my boss. I attended a culinary school for three years, where I realized that culinary arts and food services is the largest industry in the world. It’s the only industry that never shrinks. When people mention the oldest profession in the world, of course it’s cooking! Where there are people, there is food. I have worked for 29 years at the Carlos Rosario School in Washington DC, where I serve immigrants from all over the world. It doesn’t matter where you go in the city, there is an immigrant working in every hotel and restaurant. Because of this, resident and visitor to DC have the opportunity to experience the richness of different flavor profiles from all over the world.

Tim Carman: It is a mystery how the United States has a reputation of imposing its will on different countries, but so accepting of other cuisines and flavors of other cultures. Why is your native cuisine popular and where it’s at in the United States.



Left to Right: Tim Carman, Benjamin Velasquez, Sileshi Alifom, Mariano Ramos, and Carlos Cesario
Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo

What helped, push it into the mainstream?

Chef Mariano Ramos: Mexican cuisine’s popularity today has a lot of its presence due to the availability of ingredients. Authentic Mexican food stems from the indigenous roots. As this cuisine moved north and entered the American diet, it has changed a lot. Now people are now searching for authentic Mexican food, and the techniques and ingredients that make up this authenticity. So a lot has changed in our approach to eating and creating Mexican cuisine in the United States.

Sileshi Alifom: The most important parts of a restaurant are the flavor, cooking style, and smell of the cuisine. The menu of my restaurant, DAS, does not have prices outside the door. I want people to come inside to look for the price, so they get to smell and experience. The best customer is the person who has never been to an Ethiopian restaurant before, because she doesn’t know what she will be getting to eat. Because there is no real “recipe” per se, the experience is all about the hand of the chef who is making the food. The most unique aspect of this experience is that Ethiopians eat with their hands, and for some people it is very difficult. The hand is the integral part of the enjoyment. I try to personally talk to people to make sure they really understand what they are eating and how it’s made.

Chef Benjamin Velasquez: I love American customers. It doesn’t matter what you give them, they never complain, they never give it back, and they pay the bill with tip. People who are familiar with the food expect authenticity, and expect that you deliver on

quality. Until the late 1990’s, Salvadorian restaurants had to rely on other major cuisines to create fusion. In order to be attractive, you had to rely on something already popular. The dish that has really made an impact on the global spectrum is the pupusa. Today there are distributors that can ship authentic Salvadorian food products to the United States, making them easier to access.

Chef Carlos Cesario: When I moved to DC 15 years ago, there were not many Venezuelans in the area. I have seen the number increase since then. When you start an ethnic restaurant, the first people that come to eat your food are the people from that place. It takes time for it to become popular in the general population. When Venezuela expanded its oil production, the country became a melting pot. The oil economy attracted so many different nationalities. The country’s cuisine reflected the fusion of many different cultures from the Americas and elsewhere. Because of this, there are not many true “Venezuelan” dishes. The main ingredient that is traditionally Venezuelan would be the dough for the arepas (Venezuelan pupusa), a corn-based dough which you can now find at any supermarket.

Tim Carman: Is it easier to go to another country and find a receptive audience for your cuisine, or is it easier to promote your cuisine within your own country?

Sileshi Alifom: Within the Ethiopia market it is already saturated. More of the client base at DAS is travelers and tourists. However, there is a great demand for Ethiopian cuisine globally. Even within the United States. It is easy to promote ethnic



foods because humans all like to discover new tastes and ways to prepare everyday staples like cabbage or beans. Taking the cuisine outside of the country would be best for popularizing the tastes of Ethiopia.

Chef Mariano Ramos: Preparing food must take into account the market. It is also has to do a lot with what social class you're tailoring your food to. For example, if you're trying to sell food in Mexico in a street cart, you have to compete against all the other vendors who have already made it. If I were to go back to my own country, I would have to reinvent myself because of the classical French technique and American style I've learned, as well as the Mexican palate. I would be well positioned to use the strengths I developed in the United States to create new things.

Chef Benjamin Velasquez: Promoting a country's cuisine also depends on what is happening in the region. The conflict in El Salvador and the large migration to the United States made Salvadorans one of the largest colonies of immigrants in the Washington metropolitan area in the 1980s. Those who fled the civil war worked in the area so that could send money back to their families. Many people in El Salvador wanted to be Americans because of the freedom and higher standard of living of this country. Now, two decades since the fighting stopped in El Salvador there are about 20 different culinary academies, which have opened in the last six years, making it the biggest country in Central America with culinary education.

Tim Carman asked the final question: Can the authenticity

of a cuisine be preserved when a cuisine moves from one country to another?

Chef Mariano Ramos: Does it matter if it is authentic? What separates us from any other species in the world is that we use fire to cook, and we all use it. How a group of people has interpreted the flame and uses products that are geographically available to them is what makes the study of food and cuisine interesting. The definition of cooking is heat applied for a certain amount of time through some sort of medium on a set of ingredients. Cooking techniques, technology, and the ingredients come together forming the food culture of the country. When food moves from one culture to the next, the cooking techniques come with them; what changes are the ingredients. When it comes to bringing these cuisines to another country, certain restrictions in technology or tools can make traditional techniques impossible. For example, you cannot cook food underground and serve it to customers in the United States. However you can use a tandoor, and use the Mexican knowledge of ingredients and flavor to make a similar cuisine. We need to embrace change to grow.

Sileshi Alifom: The making of the traditional bread, the injera, depends on teff flour. For a long time you could not grow this in the United States, so it takes multiple ingredients to imitate the same product. This causes it to be heavier and no longer gluten free. But this innovation is what makes cuisine interesting! Today, the United States is growing the teff grass in Michigan and Idaho, making this important food product available to the large Ethiopian communities around the United States.



Benjamin Velasquez and Sileshi Alifom

Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo



CULINARY DIPLOMATS AND NATION BRANDING

Counselor Adriana Velarde

Head of Cultural Diplomacy, Embassy of Peru, Washington, DC

Ambassador David Killion

Senate Chief of Staff, U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and former U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO

Patricia Jinich

Chef, Mexican Cultural Institute, and Cookbook Author, and Host of Pati's Mexican Table, PBS

Brian McNair

Executive Director, World Central Kitchen

Moderator:

Ambassador Anthony Quinton, Diplomat in Residence, American University



DC’s changing culinary landscape illustrates how food is a reflection of culture and is increasingly an essential tool for diplomatic engagement. Forty years ago, the only ethnic cuisine to be found in the nation’s capitol was Chinese and Mexican and neither was an authentic representation of the native cuisines. Today, DC offers a vibrant diversity of cuisine and celebrity chefs, which has strengthened the city’s own cultural fabric. Cold War conflicts produced the diaspora, starting with Viet Nam to the current immigrants from Iraq and Syria. These people opened up the community to the tastes and smells of their homelands. They also opened restaurants to offer a platform for showcasing a culture’s cuisine and a chef’s perspective, as well as better telling the story of a national culture. For the diplomatic corps the new cuisines of Washington provide a compelling venue for engagement on their individual cultures and politics.

A discussion of how food is utilized by diplomats and who can also serve as culinary ambassadors is vital to understanding how cuisine defines a culture and its role in international relations.

CHEFS AS GASTRODIPLOMATS

As Head of Public Diplomacy at the Embassy of Peru in Washington, DC, First Secretary Adriana Velarde launched the discussion by speaking on the unique culinary brand of Peru and its public diplomacy initiatives employed to promote the brand abroad.

Velarde noted: Peru’s unique brand and national identity is vital to the national culture because Peruvians view themselves as a fusion of cultures that have blended many regional tastes to create a new flavor. Peru has started an initiative to increase the reputation of Peruvian cuisine. Their chefs are now recognized as gastronomic diplomats. This is especially relevant as there are often one or two Peruvian restaurants in most major cities in America. This was not the case twenty years ago. Each chef that prepares his national cuisine abroad is a gastronomic representative of his country.

Peru is receiving rising prominence as a major food travel destination. Peru was recently voted the best culinary destination in South America and currently preparations are underway for Peru Mistura, a national food fair in Lima

that lasts for ten days and is anticipated to draw more than thirty thousand foreign visitors. Proud of its tradition as a significant part of the cultural heritage of the Americas, Peru promotes a national identity that embraces multiple cultures.

The rise of Peruvian cuisine as a central feature of Peruvian public diplomacy also demonstrates the power of food to transform a country’s negative image. In the early 1990s, Peru was plagued by an internal guerrilla force that terrorized the population. Sendero Luminoso was feared, with tourism declining because of the insecurity caused by these armed rebel groups. Today, with the end of that conflict, Peru has transformed itself into a center for regional Latin American cooking. It uses its chefs to promote the natural resources of indigenous crops such as quinoa. And Peru has been skillful in promoting its own ethnic Diasporas as part of the mix that makes for modern Andean cooking. This includes the cuisines of Japan and China that are now integrated into the diets of so many residents of the country.

“The distinctiveness of national cultures is reflected in the food and in the way that food is presented to other cultures.”

–Ambassador Anthony Quainton
Diplomat in Residence
American University

FOOD AS A VITAL TOOL OF DIPLOMACY

Having previously served as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Ambassador David Killion, Senate Chief of Staff, U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, contributed anecdotes of the obstacles and successes he faced will serving on the frontlines of culinary diplomacy in Paris.

Killion detailed: Culture is the currency at UNESCO. The delegates at UNESCO expected to be entertained.

Therefore, American cuisine could be a great weapon for the U.S delegation. As the U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO, I insisted that people enjoy the openness of American culture, including the openness of American cuisine.

Committed to providing the “homey” food that my wife and I love about America, we encountered one major problem: French chefs. Rather than exporting an American chef, the State Department hires chefs from the local population. It was difficult to cajole, persuade, bribe, or even blackmail the chefs into cooking the typical (and often messy) American comfort food that we wanted to serve at official events. The chefs’ professional sensibilities gave them very clear ideas of the types of food served at official events and neither fried chicken nor hamburgers made the cut. However, once the chefs were finally convinced to try American cuisine, the results were a rousing success. The egalitarian food put people at ease, and created a much more pleasant environment, one conducive to diplomacy and cooperation.

A CULINARY MOSAIC THAT BRIDGES DIVIDES AND CONNECTS COMMUNITIES

Although she launched her career in Washington as a political analyst, Patricia Jinich gave up being a policy wonk to pursue her love of food. She is a cooking teacher, food writer, and official Chef of the Mexican Cultural Institute in Washington, DC. She is a culinary ambassador that has promoted the best of Mexican cuisine. Having grown up in a diverse culture, Jinich brought to the discussion ideas on what is authentic cuisine and how food bridges divides and connects communities.

Jinich explained: Mexico struggles to define its identity and to blend each aspect into a cohesive “Mexican cuisine.” Visiting Cuba a year ago, I was incredibly disappointed with the asphyxiation that has starved their cuisine. With the decades long embargo, Cubans can’t even purchase the groceries to make their traditional dishes. There is a loss of tradition and culture that will hopefully be revived with future trade relations.

It is a situation I keep in mind when people ask, “What is authentic Mexican?” People rarely think I can answer that question. Before appearing on the TV show of Paula Deen, the Southern chef looked at me and said, “You don’t look

Mexican at all.” After I assured her that I was born and raised there, Deen questioned, “What is that last name? Jewish?” While I understand people’s confusion over the diversity of Mexican culture, I am 100% Mexican.

One model that helps to envision Mexican history and culture is to picture it as a loom. The different cultures come together to weave different colors and textures together. Does your country have a cuisine that can withstand the changes of time? Do you have basic ingredients and traditions that have been passed down through generations? Although most people see Mexican culture as a mixture of indigenous and Spanish cultures, there is also a long tradition of African culture, which is often overlooked due to cultural prejudices, as well as French and Asian. They are all threads of Mexican culture, but there is something that makes it Mexican.

Once you lose the fear of knowing that now food is global, the borders are porous, you can recognize that something is Mexican, not because a Mexican made it but because there is the love and purity of intentions.

FOOD AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

As a social entrepreneur, Brian McNair, Executive Director, World Central Kitchen, Chef Jose Andres’ international food NGO, has been using the power of food to change lives for twenty years. McNair shared his experiences in Haiti and how chefs are using food as an agent of change.

McNair expounded: Focusing on health, hunger, workforce development, and social enterprise, the World Central Kitchen works to empower impoverished and hungry communities to act as a catalyst for change in the lives of people. One recent project is expanding an orphanage in Haiti to be self-sustaining. A tilapia farm and chicken huts have been installed, from which the orphanage can raise revenue from selling excess food. Clean cook stoves have been installed that require little to no charcoal to cook. In addition, a bakery has been built to teach the children a trade as well as provide their daily bread. The chefs of the World Central Kitchen seek to provide a holistic approach to smart solutions for hunger. This is especially important in cultures where access to food has been a defining part of the nation’s history.





A CLOSING CONVERSATION: THE KITCHEN AS THE NEW VENUE FOR FOREIGN POLICY

Nikki Silva

*Co-Host, The Kitchen Sisters
and Producer, NPR's Hidden Kitchens*

Dr. Johanna Mendelson Forman

*Scholar in Residence and Creator of Conflict Cuisine,
School of International Service, American University,
Washington, DC*

Why are stories a defining component of conflict cuisine? Stories were woven throughout presentations in each segment of the conference and whether told by immigrant chefs or of streets vendors, many of the stories noted that some form of hunger drove a need to use food as a means of communication, as a form of personal expression. These stories are not only about hunger, but also about survival and resilience. Immigrants to come to America are all about surviving. Food becomes a means of earning a living but also a way of connecting people back to their homelands.

To conclude the day's events, Dr. Johanna Mendelson Forman, Scholar-in-Residence, School of International Service, American University had a one-on-one conversation with Nikki Silva, co-host, The Kitchen Sisters; and Producer, NPR's DuPont Award winter series Hidden Kitchens, on the essential role of stories in defining conflict cuisine and building awareness by the public and policymakers of the key issues that comprise conflict cuisine.

FOOD AS A CONVERSATION STARTER

The discussion began with Nikki Silvia noting that one way to start a conversation about food is to ask, "What did you have for breakfast today?"

Silva explained: Asking this non-threatening question is the easiest way to loosen people up because it is a question everyone knows the answer to. It can open people up to conversation in a way you might never expect.

One of the first pieces I did for the Hidden Kitchen series on National Public Radio was about the George Forman grill. My partner Davia Nelson and I found that it has become an underground kitchen for homeless people and new immigrants to the country. There are people who hide the grill under their beds because they live in apartments where they are not allowed to cook or don't have kitchens, and there are homeless who plug the grill straight into a streetlight for electricity. As part of the story, I interviewed George Forman to see if he knew how the grill was being used. He was astonished. That surprising start to a conversation led him to share his own story of growing up hungry in Houston, Texas. He recalled that when the other children in school would go in for lunch and he couldn't afford to have any. Instead of buying lunch for 27 cents, he would blow up a paper bag to look full and take it into the

lunchroom to throw away to pretend he had eaten that day.

He then spoke about how "hunger makes you angry." As a young kid he turned to the streets robbing people. What pulled him out of this angry place was the Job Corps. Later, when he lived with a family in Seattle he noticed he was eating every meal as if it were his last until he realized "I'm going to have three meals a day no matter what."

USING FOOD TO CHANGE PERCEPTIONS

Silva noted that the conference included a wonderful fusion of academics, chefs, and storytellers, and was truly struck by the unexpected stories that came up, such as the histories of street vendors. This fusion with storytelling is the way to ignite the message of conflict cuisine to reach the masses.

Mendelson Forman pointed out in countries that had experienced internal conflicts such as Peru it was important to see how food had helped create a transformation in the public perception of a once war-torn society. She detailed: Since the end of the guerrilla movement, Sendero Luminoso, Peru has created a new persona as a culinary destination. It was moving to hear an earlier panelist talk of travelling back to Peru, and who was in tears describing this transition from a conflict torn nation to a place that people were clamoring to visit. For Peru this new image has called attention to a very important cultural heritage that includes making the potato an indigenous crop of the Andes and quinoa, a central part of the new Andean cuisine. You get passion when people recognize that food is a bond.

Silva's storytelling format of collecting and sharing information about poverty, hunger, and access to food that we all need to be well-informed, said Mendelson Forman.

Silva responded: People tend to turn their ears off when hearing about homelessness or conflict, so using food as a tool to explore difficult issues gives a reporter a way in without putting pressure on the person being interviewed.

Storytelling about conflict is the hook to get people interested in these issues, such as Israel and Palestine and the Hummus Wars. For example, during the Does Food Build Peace or Drive Conflict? session that discussed cooking in conflict countries, the cookbook was a stealthy





Nikki Silva and Dr. Johanna Mendelson Forman

Photo Credit: Sophia Pappalardo

weapon that not only provided recipes, but also provided the story behind the acquisition of the foods included in the collection.

Mendelson Forman asked how our globalized food system is a bearer of culture, noting it was interesting that during the conference the word “globalization” was not used at all in the panel discussions.

Silva suggested: the chef’s conversations on an earlier panel that discussed food traveling and changing as it arrived in the United States is something that reflects the globalized nature of food in this century. For chefs this is exciting. It allows them to transcend borders and talk about creating a new cuisine that integrates the influences of many nations.

Food is a dynamically changing issue. It is affected by climate change and agricultural practices. We know so much about conflict and food, but we don’t put them together. Because learning about food is really so

multidisciplinary, it’s difficult to place it into any “pigeon hole” or to study it through only one lens.

FOOD AS A NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE

In the final question of the conversation, Mendelson Forman asked if food will become a national security issue?

Silva responded: Food is already a national security issue, and the conversation we began today through this conference underscores this reality. Access to food is essential to survival. Today it is in the interest of the United States to ensure that no matter how conflictive a place exists food will be important to the stabilization of any situation. Beyond bringing people together, food must be considered a tool of peace-building by providing for the needs of those affected by conflict.

Food is a wonderful way to bring people together to talk about difficult issues in a globalized age.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES
IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Anita Bevacqua McBride Executive in Residence, Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies, School of Public Affairs

With White House service spanning two decades and three administrations, Anita Bevacqua McBride holds a wealth of governmental and international expertise. She served as Assistant to President George W. Bush and Chief of Staff to First Lady Laura Bush from 2005 to 2009. She directed the staff’s work on the wide variety of issues in which Mrs. Bush was involved — including education, global literacy, youth development, women’s rights and health, historic preservation and conservation, the arts, and global health issues including efforts to end pandemic diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS. Currently, she serves as the Executive-in-Residence at the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies in the School of Public Affairs at American University in Washington, DC. She directs programming and national conferences on the legacies of America’s first ladies and their historical influence on politics, policy and global diplomacy.

Johanna Mendelson Forman, Scholar-in-Residence, School of International Service, American University

Johanna Mendelson Forman is a Scholar in Residence at American University’s School of International Service where she teaches Conflict Cuisine, An Introduction to War and Peace around the Dinner Table. An expert on the post-conflict transition and democratization issues, she has regional expertise in the Americas, with a special focus on the Caribbean, Central America and Brazil. She also has had extensive field experience in the U.S. government on transition initiatives in Haiti, Iraq, and Sub-Saharan Africa. She holds a J.D. from Washington College of Law at American University, a Ph.D. in Latin American history from Washington University, St. Louis, and a Master’s of International Affairs, with a certificate of Latin America studies from Columbia University in New York.

Gary Weaver, Professor, School of International Service, American University

For forty-five years Gary Weaver has been a member of the faculty of the School of International Service at American University. He is the Founder and Executive Director of the Intercultural Management Institute. Professor Weaver was a member of the University’s Board of Trustees (2006-09) and served as the Chair of the University Faculty Senate (2007-08). He created and directed various academic programs including the Seminar on Managing a Multicultural Workforce, the Fulbright Pre-Academic Program, and the Community Studies Program, an academic program intended to meet the needs of inner city students attending American University. He has also taught courses on multicultural management for the National Training Laboratory’s (NTL) graduate program at American University.

Tara Sonenshine: Professor, George Washington, University, and former Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy

Tara D. Sonenshine is a professor at George Washington University. She is

the former Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs for the Department of State and previously served as the Executive Vice President of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). Ms. Sonenshine served in various capacities at the White House during the Clinton Administration, including Transition Director, Director of Foreign Policy Planning for the National Security Council, and Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of Communications. Prior to serving in the Clinton Administration, Ms. Sonenshine was an Editorial Producer of ABC News’ Nightline, where she worked for more than a decade. She was also an off-air reporter at the Pentagon for ABC’s World News Tonight and is the recipient of 10 News Emmy Awards for coverage of international affairs.

Paul Rockower, Levantine Communications

Paul S. Rockower is a graduate of the University of Southern California Master of Public Diplomacy program. He has worked with numerous foreign ministries to conduct public diplomacy, including Israel, India, Taiwan and the United States. Rockower is the Executive Director of Levantine Public Diplomacy, an independent public and cultural diplomacy organization.

Kimberly Reed, Executive Director, International Food Information Council

Kimberly Reed is Executive Director of the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation in Washington, DC. She also serves as Senior Vice President for Membership, Communications, and Strategic Initiatives at IFIC. In addition to leading the development of the Foundation, Kim oversees IFIC’s Media Relations, International Relations, and Trends and Consumer Insights Programs. She currently serves on several boards, including the National Board of Directors of the Alzheimer’s Association, American Swiss Foundation, and West Virginia Wesleyan College, and Advisory Council of the International Center of Excellence in Food Risk Communication.

Sam Chapple-Sokol, Blogger, @culinarydiplo

A food and beverage professional with experience serving as the Pastry Chef at the Executive Residence of the White House for 22 months, Sam Chapple-Sokol is a leading scholar, author, consultant, and practitioner in the emerging field of Culinary Diplomacy, which is based on the idea that food is an important tool of international relations. His writing has been published in academic journals as well as online news sites, and his work has been featured on The Splendid Table, NPR’s The Salt, Le Figaro, and The New York Times. He earned an M.A. in Law and Diplomacy from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

Louis Goodman Professor and Dean Emeritus, School of International Service

Louis Goodman is Dean Emeritus at American University School of International Service where he carries out research on social change and politics in Latin America and in Asia. His current research focuses on public goods, regional alliances and development. He has published widely on

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

civil-military relations in Latin America, on foreign investment in developing countries and on determinants of career success for blue-collar workers. He has researched and lived abroad in Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Singapore.

Yael Luttwak, President and CEO of Slimpeace, and filmmaker
Yael Luttwak is a filmmaker and founder of Slim Peace, a non-profit organization that emerged from her documentary film, A SLIM PEACE, portraying the drama of Israeli and Palestinian women in the first-ever weight-loss group involving Jews and Arabs. Yael directed and co-produced A SLIM PEACE. Her film was broadcast worldwide and on the Sundance Channel in the US. At the end of 2012, the 20th Slim Peace cohort launched in Jerusalem and in January 2013, the first cohort launched in the US, and has expanded in 18 months to 8 active cohorts in 4 US cities, specifically, Boston, MA, Washington D.C., Chicago and Portland, Maine. Slim Peace was featured in the New York Times and on NBC’s TODAY Show. She is currently in post-production on her next film, ALEX, about an American who joins the Israeli military.

Christine Fair, Associate Professor, Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service, author of Cooking in the Axis of Evil
C. Christine Fair is an Associate Professor at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service. Her research focuses upon political and military affairs in South Asia. Prior to joining the School of Foreign Service, she served as a senior political scientist with the RAND Corporation, a political officer to the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan in Kabul, and as a senior research associate in USIP’s Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention. She has authored, co-authored and co-edited several books and serves on the editorial board of Current History, Small Wars and Insurgencies, Asia Policy, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, and India Review. Her publications are available at www.christinefair.net

Manolia Charlotin, Director, Feet in Two Worlds Program, The New School, New York, NY
Manolia Charlotin, the Managing Editor at Feet in 2 Worlds, is a multimedia journalist with experience in print, broadcast and online publications. She hosted Caribbean Spotlight on BK Live, headed The Haitian Times and served as Editor and Business Manager at the Boston Haitian Reporter.

Roger-Mark de Souza, Director of Population, Environmental Security, and Resilience, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Roger Mark De Souza is the director of population, environmental security, and resilience for the Wilson Center. He leads programs on climate change resilience, reproductive and maternal health, environmental security, and livelihoods, including the Global Sustainability and Resilience Program, Environmental Change and Security Program, and Maternal Health Initiative. Before joining the Center in 2013, De Souza served as vice president of research and director of the climate program at Population Action International, where he provided strategic guidance, technical oversight, and management of programs on population, gender, climate change, environment, and reproductive health. From 2007 to 2010, as the director of foundation and corporate relations at the Sierra Club, he led a multi-million dollar foundation and corporate fundraising program. Mr. De Souza holds graduate degrees in international relations and development policy from George Washington University and the University of the West Indies.

Tim Carman, Food Staff Writer, The Washington Post
Washington Post food writer Tim Carman has been nominated for two James Beard Foundation awards, winning one in 2011 for Food-Related Columns and Commentary. His work has appeared in four editions of the “Best Food Writing” collections as well as the sixth edition of “Cornbread Nation.” He’s written for various publications, including Food Network magazine, Men’s Journal and Maxim. In 2012, he also launched a weekly cheap eats column for The Post called The \$20 Diner. He was previously the food columnist and food editor at Washington City Paper for five years.

Chef Carlos Cesario, Chef & Owner, Q Caterers
Chef Carlos Cesario brings an international flair to Washington’s culinary scene. He studied urban planning, with an emphasis in the Art Nouveau movement of the early twentieth century, while attending the La Cambre Institute in Brussels in 1995. Today, Chef Cesario has embarked on his most exciting professional adventure in creating Q Caterers. His vision is grounded in his travels through Europe where he embraced the flavors and textures of Italian and French cuisine. He returned to his native city of Valencia, Venezuela where he and embrace the enrolled in the I Culinary Academy to embrace the skills required of a “chef de cuisine.” His education in classical architecture can be seen in the the preparation and attention to detail of his cuisine. Chef Cesario has made Washington his home since 1998 and he has worked with a number of distinguished chefs and caterers in the mid-Atlantic region, preparing his signature cuisine for distinguished clients including First Ladies and other Washington notables. He is known for creating memorable, once-in-a-lifetime events for Maryland’s Eastern Shore elites and concocting delectable cocktail elixirs in breathtaking venues from Vancouver, Canada to weddings on the sugar sands of Florida’s exclusive resort destinations.

Chef Mariano Ramos, Sonia Gutierrez Center, Carlos Rosario Public Charter School
Mariano Ramos, Culinary Arts Instructor, for Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School-Sonia Gutierrez Campus, brings a world of experience in the food service industry. He recently left the Inn at Little Washington to return to Carlos Rosario as an Advanced Culinary Arts Instructor as well as a Baking and Pastry Instructor. Aside from his role as a lead cook at The Inn, Chef Ramos worked as a line cook for Michael Richard at Central Bistro and as Sous Chef for Chef Patrick Orange of La Chaumiere. Chef Ramos also worked as Executive Sous Chef at Fonda San Miguel under Chef Miguel Ravago and as Sous Chef at Rosa Mexicano at the F Street location in DC. Chef Ramos obtained his Culinary Arts Training at L’Academie du Cuisine’s professional program. His approach highlights the flavors of local, seasonal ingredients developed through sound technique and straightforward presentation.

Sileshi Alifom, Owner, DAS Ethiopian Restaurant
Sileshi Alifom has over two decades of management experience in the hotel, hospitality and food and beverage industry. He has resided and worked in this industry across several states, as well as internationally. Aside from his long experience in hospitality/hotel management, Sileshi worked in senior leadership positions in the retail finance industry in Virginia. Overseas, Sileshi was recruited to consult on a small African resort hotel development project, where he worked closely with the owners. He oversaw the project through the hotel’s successful opening, including setting up the employment and labor manual, participated in the menu development, and conducted recruitment and training of the senior hotel staff. His most significant professional

transition – after leaving his long-held corporate post with the Marriott International Corporation – is to currently run the day-to-day operation of a bustling two-level restaurant in Georgetown, Washington, DC, which he and his wife acquired in 2011.

Chef Benjamin Velasquez, Sonia Gutierrez Center, Carlos Rosario Public Charter School
Executive Chef Benjamin Velasquez immigrated to the Washington, DC area from his native El Salvador in 1982 at the age of 19. In the U.S. Chef Velasquez quickly made his way up the culinary arts ranks starting his training as a dishwasher, prep-cook, line cook, front line assistant chef, and kitchen manager. In 1986, Chef Velasquez enrolled in a weekend culinary arts program for three years while simultaneously working two full-time jobs during the week. The formal culinary arts training has been enhanced by 12 years working in the Washington Hilton Hotel, 3 years at the Cosmos Club and 10 years El Torito Mexican Restaurant. Currently, Chef Velasquez is working at the prestigious Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School in Washington, DC, where for the past 29 years he has been at Executive Chef, Chef Instructor, Culinary Arts Academy Director and currently the Food Service Director. During his time of service at Carolos Rosario, the Chef has trained more than 500 adult immigrants from all around the world in the disciplines of culinary arts facilitating their journeys to become more productive members of society.

Chef Velasquez collaborates with the Embassy of El Salvador on cultural culinary projects.

Anthony Quainton, Diplomat in Residence, American University
Ambassador Anthony Quainton is the Diplomat-in-Residence and a professor of U.S. Foreign Policy, having previously served in the United States Foreign Service and held ambassadorships to the Central African Republic, Nicaragua, Kuwait, and Peru.

Counselor Adriana Velarde, Head of Cultural Diplomacy, Embassy of Peru, Washington, D.C.
Having served with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peru since 2003 in an array of countries and capacities, Adriana Velarde holds a deep understanding of the power and potential of diplomacy to connect cultures and address global challenges. She has served at the Embassy of Peru in Washington, DC since 2013, and has also served postings in two cities well regarded for its culinary scene: Atlanta and Geneva. Counselor Velarde holds a Bachelor’s degree in Law from the Universidad de Lima. She has also earned two graduate degrees, the Professional title of Attorney from the Universidad de Lima and a Master’s degree in Diplomacy and International Affairs from the Diplomatic Academy of Peru.

Ambassador David Killion Former U.S. Representative to UNESCO
Ambassador David T. Killion was nominated as U.S. Permanent Representative to UNESCO with the rank of Ambassador on June 25, 2009 by President Obama and was sworn into office on August 12, 2009. Prior to his appointment, Mr. Killion served as a Senior Professional Staff member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and was the Committee’s top expert on International Organizations and State Department Operations. Mr. Killion served as top UN advisor to the previous Chair and Ranking Member of the Committee, the late Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA). Prior to serving on

the Foreign Affairs Committee, Mr. Killion was an appointee of the Clinton Administration in the Department of State, in the bureau of Legislative Affairs (1996-2001), and as a legislative assistant to Congressman David Skaggs (D-CO) (1994-1996). Mr. Killion holds a B.A. from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, and an M.A. from the University of California at Los Angeles.

Patricia Jinich: Chef of the Mexican Cultural Institute, Washington, DC and host of Pati’s Mexican Table, PBS, and cookbook author
Patricia (Pati) Jinich is the host of the public television series Pati’s Mexican Table, which premiered nationwide in April 2011. She is a cooking teacher, food writer and official Chef of the Mexican Cultural Institute in Washington, DC. Pati was born and raised in Mexico City, and comes from a family of accomplished cooks. Before moving to Washington, Patricia hosted Mexican cooking classes in Dallas, Texas, and was a collaborator on the public television series New Tastes from Texas. After moving to Washington, Patricia served as a political analyst, and completed a Master’s degree in Latin American Studies at Georgetown University. Upon graduating she worked at The Inter-American Dialogue, a policy research center.

Brian McNair: Executive Director, World Central Kitchen
Brian has worked in Development in the non-profit sector for more than 20 years. Having a passion for cooking all along, Brian switched careers in the middle to be a professional chef. Clinging to his love for ‘life changing’ programs, Brian found DC Central Kitchen, was hired into DCCK’s Development Department, and built a team there that more than quadrupled annual revenue while developing new social enterprise. At DCCK, Brian was responsible for the Communications, Marketing and Fund Development of both DC Central Kitchen and Campus Kitchens Project, managing a staff of 6 and raising more than \$5 million per year. Continuing to focus on empowerment programs and sustainable options, Brian has joined his long-time friends, Jose Andres and Rob Wilder to lead World Central Kitchen into the future with Smart Solutions to Hunger and Poverty.

Nikki Silva, Co-Host and Producer, The Kitchen Sisters
Nikki Silva and Davia Nelson, better known as the Kitchen Sisters, have been producing radio stories for NPR since 1979. Along with Jay Allison, Nelson and Silva are the creators of the Peabody Award winning “Lost & Found Sound” segments on All Things Considered and the Peabody Award winning NPR series, The Sonic Memorial Project. Currently, they produce “Hidden Kitchens,” an ongoing series of radio stories exploring the world of street corner cooking, kitchen rituals, and how communities come together through food, heard on NPR’s Morning Edition. The Kitchen Sisters began their radio lives producing a weekly live radio program in the late 1970s on KUSP-FM in Santa Cruz, Calif. Over the past twenty years, Silva has worked as history curator at the Museum of Art and History in Santa Cruz, Calif., and as a freelance curator and exhibit consultant specializing in regional history. She and her husband, designer and artist Charles Prentiss, have produced dozens of exhibitions for museums throughout California including long-term exhibits chronicling the histories of Santa Cruz County, San Jose, Campbell and San Leandro. Some of the special exhibits Silva produced include: “California Indian Basketweavers”: a look at historic and contemporary Native American weavers and their work; “The World Famous Tree Circus”: the saga of a California roadside attraction; the history of the Chinese in the Monterey Bay Region; “Never a Dull Moment”: the story of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, the last of California’s early 20th century coastal amusement parks, and many more.



ABOUT CONFLICT CUISINE®

Conflict Cuisine® began as a course at American University's School of International Service, which looked at how food of the diaspora communities in Washington reflected the state of conflicts around the globe. The course also examined why food is a form of Smart Power, but could also be a driver of conflict even in the 21st century. Through this course we have grown a lively discussion on why in zones of conflict food becomes central to both survival and resilience. We have also recognized the power of food to create dialogue among communities who come to the United States by providing not only sustenance but also understanding of the diverse cultural roots that have created new tastes and appetites in the American palate.

For more information on the program, recent press, and upcoming events, **visit: conflictcuisine.com**

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