

**“One Bite and All is Forgiven”:
Paths to Gastro-Diplomacy and Conciliatory Foodways in Cyprus and Turkey**

**Febe Armanios
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This report summarizes the research activities for the project “One Bite and All is Forgiven,” which explored contentious and comparative food traditions between different ethno-religious communities in Cyprus and Turkey. Funded by the Kathryn Wasserman Davis (KWD) Collaborative in Conflict Transformation Grant (2023-24), this project examined how food conflicts, gastronationalism, and varied efforts at “gastrodiplomacy” may reveal windows for political and cultural reconciliation in these conflict and post-conflict locales.

Research Activities 2023-2024:

1. Cyprus Research (May-June 2023):

Initial fieldwork in Cyprus explored gastrotourism, gastrodiplomacy, and culinary differences between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Research focused on Cypriot villages as well as the Green Line and the Büyük Han area in Lefkoşa (Nicosia), a historic structure now housing galleries, restaurants, and cafés. Of particular interest was a group nicknamed “the traitors’ club,” consisting of Greek and Turkish Cypriots who meet weekly for coffee to discuss a united Cyprus [see figure 1 on p. 4]. These gatherings offer insights into grassroots reconciliation efforts and cross-community dialogue. My research involved visiting markets, restaurants, museums, and food production sites on both sides of the Green Line to observe how food reinforces or challenges national identities. I also collected several cookbooks in Turkish and English about Cypriot food. Additionally, I explored various cafes along the Green Line, such as the Home Café at the Home for Cooperation, which serve as neutral spaces for cross-community interaction and informal diplomacy.

These gathering spaces reveal a rich tapestry of interactions, from shared tables to the sensory experience of coffee and desserts. Diverse conversation topics and culinary elements foster novel social bonds. The informal atmosphere and historical significance of the locations allow for serious discussions about Cyprus’ future and highlight the potential of shared culinary spaces to bridge deep-seated divides. From my research experience, the “architecture” of gastrodiplomacy in Cyprus became clearer and has emerged as an important site for further inquiry as my project develops.

2. Istanbul Research (Summer 2023):

In Istanbul, I explored the fading memories of Greek and Armenian food cultures. Accompanied by a Greek Istanbulite food tour guide, I visited remaining Greek and Armenian establishments in the Kurtuluş district, Beyoğlu, and the Princes’ Islands. These areas, once home to significant minority populations, still bear traces of their culinary influence, albeit often in hidden or transformed ways. My tour of Kurtuluş revealed how this diverse neighborhood serves as a living repository of minority food traditions. Learning about certain dishes affiliated with the Greek or Armenian heritage demonstrated how food acts as a medium for cultural memory and identity maintenance. This experience deepened my understanding of the interplay between culinary traditions, urban change, and the memory of a multicultural Istanbul in modern Turkey.

3. Adaptation to Unforeseen Circumstances:

Due to the February 2023 earthquake that prevented my planned visit to Antakya, I met with scholars and food purveyors in Ankara and Istanbul to learn about Antakya Christian food traditions. I also initiated a collaboration with Dr. Anna Maria Beylunioglu, focusing on the food of Antakya's Christians. This partnership aims to document and analyze the endangered food traditions of this community, specifically as related to religious celebrations and practices. I should note that this period was also spent gathering documentary and photographic sources relevant to the project.

4. Gaziantep (June 2024):

In Gaziantep, I explored the city's complex culinary landscape, focusing on the fading memory of its once-vibrant Armenian community. I observed how some old Armenian homes have been repurposed into coffee shops and restaurants, creating a unique intersection of past and present. A 19th-century Armenian mansion now serves as a café and a vivid repository of cultural memory; its preserved frescoes and Armenian engravings offer a tangible link to the city's multicultural past and show how repurposed food spaces can serve as living archives of history. Unlike the cross-community interaction spaces in Cyprus, these transformed locales in Gaziantep primarily serve local usage. In Gaziantep, I also attended a food conference and met with Turkish academics studying the country's diverse and rich food heritage. This research overall provided insights into how food spaces can serve as silent witnesses to histories of displacement and genocide, while potentially offering opportunities for dialogue about the city's multicultural past.

Preliminary Findings and Emerging Questions:

As I delved deeper into my research across Cyprus and Turkey, I found myself immersed in a complex culinary landscape that both divides and unites communities. In Nicosia's Büyük Han, I witnessed how the simple act of sharing coffee—its national identity (Greek, Turkish, Cypriot) irrelevant—becomes a powerful tool for dialogue between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. In Istanbul's Kurtuluş neighborhood, I explored the revival of minority food cultures, learning about Armenian *topik* and Greek pastries (*Paskalya Çöreği* in Turkish or *Tsoureki* in Greek) that speak to the city's multicultural past. The repurposing of Armenian homes into trendy cafes in Gaziantep offered a poignant reflection on how communities might neglect and whitewash difficult histories through food spaces. As I informally spoke with chefs, food writers, tour guides, and food scholars, I uncovered a nuanced story that both celebrates diversity and grapples with dominant nationalist narratives. The contrasts between Cyprus and Turkey—in how they approach their culinary heritage and use food in reconciliation efforts—have opened up fascinating avenues for comparative research. On a more informal level, through each meal shared and every kitchen visited, I gained deeper insights into how food serves as a powerful lens for examining conflict, memory, and the potential for reconciliation in these societies.

Future Research Directions:

The project's future research directions will focus on four key areas: spatial transformations and memory, the role of culinary professionals in shaping food narratives, comparative analysis of “food amnesia,” and food as a tool for conflict transformation. These areas will explore how repurposed spaces affect community memories, how food professionals influence national food narratives, how food and memory manifest differently in Cyprus and Turkey, and the potential of shared culinary

experiences in fostering dialogue. Future research will also involve a combination of field observations, interviews with culinary experts and community members, analysis of historical documents and cookbooks, and examination of food tourism materials.

Conclusion:

As I reflect on the progress of the “One Bite and All is Forgiven” project, I’m struck by the profound potential of food as a tool for conflict resolution and cultural bridge-building in Cyprus and Turkey. Through this project, I have observed firsthand how culinary traditions can serve as powerful vehicles for fostering understanding and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

My findings underscore the complex interplay between food, identity, and politics in the region. From my observations of repurposed spaces in Gaziantep to my participation in weekly gatherings at Büyük Han in Nicosia, I have witnessed how shared culinary experiences can create neutral grounds for dialogue and community building. These instances have reinforced my belief in the potential of gastrodiplomacy to promote conversation if not always reconciliation.

However, I have also encountered challenges inherent in studying food as a diplomatic tool. My research into “gastronativism” or culinary nationalism and the potential for culinary traditions to become sources of conflict reminded me of the delicate balance required in navigating food’s role in identity politics. As I continue this project, I aim to further explore how gastronomic practices can be leveraged to bridge divides while remaining sensitive to the complex histories and identities they represent.

Through this examination of food’s role in conflict and reconciliation, I hope to contribute to the growing scholarly conversation about gastrodiplomacy as a valuable tool in international relations. Moving forward, I hope that my ongoing articles (which I have been writing over the past year) not only enrich academic understanding but also inform practical approaches to using culinary traditions as a means of fostering peace and understanding in divided societies.



Figure 1: From the weekly "Coffee Club" nicknamed the "Traitors' Club" in Lefkosa/Nicosia, held in Buyuk Han. Photo by Febe Armanios, May 2023.