Conflict Cuisine:
An Introduction to War and Peace around the Dinner Table
www.conflictcuisine.com

Professor Johanna Mendelson Forman
Scholar-in-Residence
johannah@american.edu

“You can always tell where the conflicts are in the world by what restaurants are opening up.”
Washington DC proverb

Course Description and Objectives:
During the Cold War Georgia Senator Wyche Fowler was once quoted as saying that he had wished that the Russians had sent tanks down the Champs Elysee in Paris so that Washington would be guaranteed a good French restaurant. The good Senator was not red-baiting when he made that statement. He was speaking a truth about how Washington, D.C., the nation’s capital and the nexus of global power and politics, had benefited from the conflicts of the Cold War in terms of culinary choice.

Washington had long been a wasteland of substandard, overpriced steakhouses and other uninspired eating establishments. This is not true today in part thanks to the diversity of new residents who come to this metropolitan area from countries that have experienced conflicts. They come as refugees, as economic migrants or as victims of war. Many use their culinary memory to help them build a new life. In the process, they have given us the conflict cuisines of their homeland, while making their way to the American dream.

Over the course of the Cold War, it gained not only a huge number of new residents from places where the U.S. had been engaged in warfare, but also new eateries that served their Diasporas. Washingtonians grew accustomed to the fusion of new flavors and now take for granted the evolution of this city’s food culture. Even twenty years after the Cold War ended, Washingtonians continue to benefit as the Diasporas of war-torn nations continue their exodus to our town. As many anthropologists have noted, if language is the first thing to disappear in a group’s assimilation to its new home, food is often the last. And it is precisely this factor which motivates me to teach this course about conflict cuisines. How better to learn the history of a country’s conflicts than around the table?

In this course we will examine the nexus between food and conflict. We will
focus on learning about particular conflicts that drove diaspora populations to Washington, and how those populations, through their food, became the inadvertent gastro-diplomats. These new residents used their cuisines to create an international food culture in Washington arising from the conflicts that brought them here. Oftentimes, the only engagement we have with immigrant populations is at restaurants, tasting foods either familiar or foreign to us. How can we use that entry point, the dinner table, to look beyond the cuisine to what drove a particular group to their new home? The countries we will study (Vietnam, Iran, but also other countries of the region, Ethiopia, and Central America and others that form part of your final assignment) have all been involved in significant conflicts in the last forty years, either with the United States as a direct combatant or an indirect influencer.

Questions to be addressed throughout the semester:
· Does the United States have a conflict cuisine?
· How does food serve as a driver of conflict?
· How have global concerns like climate change, energy, and urbanization affected food security? What does the current refugee crisis tell us about food and conflict?
· Concerning food, how does the cuisine of one’s homeland differ from the cuisine that is served in the United States? What has been preserved or modified upon arrival in the United States? What changes have been made, if any, to accommodate recipes to different tastes and the availability of food supplies?
· How has the population used food as a community focal point, and how as a tool to get to know their neighbors?
· How has food served as a tool of communication of a specific culture?
· How do today’s policies about food security and food assistance impact global conflicts?
· And finally, what impact have recent conflicts had on the expansion of new culinary experiences in Washington?

Learning Outcomes:
1. Students will be able to identify the manifold complex causes of conflict and assess the impact that such events have on the lives of people living in affected environments.
2. Through readings and other material, and through sharing a communal table students will analyze how the histories of conflicts studied in this course are expressed through the cuisines by diaspora chefs.
3. Students will have an opportunity to interact with culinary practitioners and other experts in classroom and restaurant experiences.

4. Through written assignments students will learn to synthesize diverse, interdisciplinary materials. They will work collectively in the preparation of a final project that will involve written materials, videos, and interviewing techniques that are incorporated in this exercise.

**Requirements and Grading:**

Attendance and class participation are requirements for this capstone course. Classes will consist of lectures, attending hosted meals off campus, and class discussions. **Completing the readings before each class is essential for productive and informed understanding of each country’s conflict cuisine.** Each student must therefore do the assigned readings and be prepared to participate. Failure to demonstrate familiarity with the readings and subject matter for each week will affect your final grade. There were will also be recommended readings each week which could strength your understanding of the week’s topic, but are not required. **Participation will count for 10% of your final grade.**

In addition to weekly readings, you will be asked to submit two short blog posts, each worth 15% of your final grade, 30% of your grade. Each student is required to complete the first blog topic and then may choose from a second topic based on the list provided on Blackboard. These posts will show a thorough understanding of the concepts presented through the literature, lectures, and your personal perspective on the topic chosen. Blog posts will be due at the beginning of class and MUST be submitted both electronically and in hard copies. All blog post must show the students name on both the electronic file and on the hard copy. All blog posts MUST be paginated. The first required blog post will be due on **February 4th, 2016.** The second blog post will be due **March 31st.**

Specific instructions about format and footnotes that reflect class readings and inclusion of other materials will be listed on the section Blackboard page. There will be an opportunity for the best blog submissions to be published on the official Conflict Cuisine website. Therefore, when choosing topics you should focus on something that you are passionate about.

**The final project will be worth 60% of your grade. This project will be completed in**
two parts. Part one will be due March 3rd. Part two will be due April 14th. The second part will include a short presentation of the project to the class. You will choose a country from the “Harmonized List of Fragile State Situations FY 2016. A copy of this list will be available on the Blackboard page and will also be distributed on the first day of class. There are more countries than students, but please choose one country that is considered to be in conflict or on the verge of conflict or in reconstruction mode. Thirty-four countries and one territory appear on the list. Your assignment is as follows:

1. When you have chosen you country you will write a short overview of the history of the conflict, why it is listed as fragile, and also identify the food security issues that the country has faced? For example, has there been a drought, flooding, natural disaster or war. Describe how the fragility of the state affects the country’s ability to produce food, to distribute food, etc. What is the rate of malnutrition? This profile of your chosen country will be due on March 3rd. Ensure that your research examines the relevant sources such as the databases of the multilateral development banks, development agencies, and UN agencies responsible for these issues.

2. Part two of this assignment requires you to make an appointment with an embassy official of the country you are studying and speak with a staff member who manages the issue of food security, or culture of both. Many countries on this list are small states, or have limited embassy staff. But with patience and good timing you can visit the embassy. Your job will be to interview the person who manages food, cultural relations and political affairs. We will provide you with a standard letter of introduction. Note that small embassies often do not answer emails, but they will take phone calls. So you will also have to do some research on whom to call. Once you get the appointment you will visit the embassy, interview the person, and report on the following: the state of food supplies in the country, whether there are many diaspora from their homeland in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area; whether there are any restaurants in the area that feature the cuisine of the chosen country; whether special ingredients – spices, raw foods, or types of international food projects are readily available in the Washington area. After you compile the report you will present your findings to the class during the last two weeks of the semester. (We will discuss all of these issues and alternative approaches which include interviews with NGOs working in the country or officials from the international development banks.)
Course Assignments and Readings

Week 1: 1/14/16  Introduction to Conflict Cuisines:
This week we will discuss the course, its goals, and its requirements. We will introduce the concept behind the course: Why study conflict cuisines? What you learn will go far beyond the specific conflict cuisines you will try. We will look at whether food can build peace or drive conflict. Students will introduce themselves and talk about why they are interested in conflict cuisines. We will start to answer the question of why these conflict cuisines may be part of something bigger than a local phenomenon, but rather a manifestation of globalization, a reflection of larger issues that we face – climate change, urbanization, and food security.

Required Readings:

Week 2: 1/21/16  Can Food Build Peace? Food as Soft Power:
This week we will focus on a major component of the course, food. We will look at the ways food has been used to project national power. We will discuss how food is a way to project a national identity or promote diplomatic goals that dates back to the Romans. We will read about the anthropology of food, one of the best-studied angles to understand it. We will finally look at one of the newest fields of food studies, the idea of culinary diplomacy, that food can be used as a tool of soft power, both for diplomacy and for conflict resolution. And of course, we will look at gastrodiplomacy, the use of food as a symbol of national identity. There will be guest speakers for one of the hours.

Guest: Yael Luttwak, Filmmaker and Founder of SlimPeace; and Laura Bernstein of the State Department

Required Readings:
- Dictator Dinners: Hitler, Kim Jong-Il’s Foodie Foibles Revealed,


Week 3: 1/28/16 Can Food Drive War?:
We will focus our third class meeting specifically on the study of food and conflict. Research shows the connection between natural events such as climate change and conflict. Droughts, natural disasters that ruin agricultural production, and growing urbanization all underlie tensions that can erupt into violent conflict. This week we study of the unintended consequences of conflict, including the relationship between displacement and hunger, as well as food as a driver of conflict. From the current conflicts, to the ultimate conflict cuisines, meals ready to eat that militaries use in the field, you will learn and also sample the ultimate conflict cuisine.

Required Readings:
- “Rethinking human security: the nexus on the ground.” In Want, Waste or War? The global resource nexus and the struggle for land, energy, food, water, and minerals.” Phillip Andrews-Speed, Raimund Belischwitz, Tim Boersma, Corey Johnson, Geoffrey Kemp, and Stacy D. Van Deveer, pp. 79-105
- World Development Report 2011, Read Executive Summary and Conflict Chapter 1 and the World Bank Conflict and Development blog
- Jeanne King (2016). Soldiers’ ration kits tell us a lot about their nation’s. Before
Week 4: 2/4/16  Culinary Diasporas: Global Conflict at our Door:

*BLOG ENTRY ONE DUE BEFORE CLASS (electronic submission)

This week we discuss the culinary diaspora within the United States beginning with the Vietnamese culinary community. We will look at both the history of the conflict itself and the impact on the Vietnamese populace, both in Vietnam and those who joined the Diaspora. We will discuss the DC-area Vietnamese community, and preview the visit to Minh’s the following week. We will also discuss the way that food becomes an important connection to home when refugees are forced to flee.

**Guest: Gina Costante from the U.S. Dept. Defense Humanitarian Assistance Program**

**Required Readings**
- Mary Pipher *In the Middle of Everywhere: Helping Refugees enter the American Community*, pp.69-82.

Week 5: 2/11/16  Smithsonian Food Exhibition (out of classroom – meet at 3pm):

An overview of American Food with the curators of the Julia Child Exhibit, Innovation and a discussion about why we study food as part of our culture.

**Required Readings**
- Gillian Crowther, Eating Culture (selected two chapters)

Week 6: 2/18/16  Vietnam’s Diaspora: A Forty Year Journey (out of classroom):

This week we will visit Minh’s to taste Vietnamese cuisine and understand how it
fits into the narratives of the conflict-driven diaspora population. We will have
the opportunity to speak with the proprietor, Boi Chi, and learn her story and
how she connects food and conflict.

**Minh Restaurant:** 2500 Wilson Blvd, Arlington, VA 22201 (703) 525-2828

**Required Readings:**

  “Introduction” and “The Roots of Vietnamese Cooking.”

**Week 7: 2/25/16  Food Security and Conflict Cuisine: Crisis in the Middle East:**

As the war in Afghanistan winds down, conflict in the Middle East continues to rage, forcing people into refugee situations in Turkey and Lebanon. The Middle East represents a situation of conflict where people who are middle-class are suddenly thrown into warfare. Food shocks are as much a part of conflict in the Middle East as food creativity among the displaced. We will discuss how the Middle Eastern cuisines have played an important role among the Diasporas who come to this country. We will discuss the impact of conflict on refugees, how the Middle Eastern cuisines have traveled, not only to the United States, but to Africa, Latin American and the Caribbean. We will end with a brief discussion of the war that has occurred over the past decade, and how it has not created a sizable diaspora in the US due to visa restrictions. This will preview our conversation in the last class on current and future conflicts.

**Guest: Allan Jury, Senior Advisor, World Food Program USA**

**Required Readings:**

- Anna Ciezadlo, *Day of Honey: A Memoir of Food, Love and War* Chapter 6, Iraq has no Cuisine, Chapter 7, Becoming Human, Chapter 12, Chicken Soup for the Iraqi Soul and Part IV, Eat, Pray, War.
· ‘Children Are Eating Leaves Off The Trees’: The Nightmare of The Siege of Madaya, Syria | VICE News from Gareth Bayley FCO’s
· Yeganeh Torbati, Iran Stirs War Memories at Home, Reuters (2012).
· Sam Masters, Iraq Crisis: Starving, Desperate but Safe from ISIS, “The Independent (2014)”.
· International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Food Assistance to Families affected by ongoing conflict in Syria.
· Anthony Bourdain’s, Parts Unknown, Iran (CNN)

Week 8: 3/3/16 The Economics of Conflict Cuisine – How wars, climate change, urbanization and trade all impact on food security
*FINAL PROJECT DRAFT DUE BEFORE CLASS (electronic submission)

This week we will look at the linkage between global conflict, urbanization, and its impact on the future supply of food. We will discuss how women are the major producers of food in the global south and what that means in an ever-urbanized world. Will we all end up eating meals of insects? The nexus of food and peace, of security and development is central to the future of global stability. Finally, as we discuss newer conflicts, we will also ask why we do not see as many new Diasporas arriving in Washington. Is the age of Washington’s conflict cuisine bonanza over?

We will also discuss the food security challenge in Africa. That continent has remained a central focus of international food assistance programs. Countries such as South Sudan, Central African Republic, and Somalia have all suffered not only from agricultural failure but also on the impact that war has on agriculturalists. Even the recent Ebola epidemic has wreaked havoc on urban food systems in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau; as people are unable to travel from rural farms to market, thus limiting access to vital commodities.

This week we will study the Ethiopian Civil War of the 1970s and 1980s, another conflict driven by the Cold War. One important aspect of the war in Ethiopia was famine, a lack of access to food, which affected many more people than just those involved in direct conflict.

Guests: Dr. Emmy Simmons, Consultant and Former Assistant Administrator, USAID and Victoria Kao, U.S. Department of Commerce
Required Readings:


SPRING BREAK: March 6-13, 2016

Week 9: 3/17/16  Persian Cooking with Chef Masiar Fariar (out of classroom):

We will continue the discussion of the Middle East and Central Asian conflict, as well as learning a bit about the cuisine of Iraq. It is much less well known than the other cuisines we are studying this semester, as well as that of its neighbors, Pakistan and Iran. What makes up Iraqi cuisine, and how has it been preserved in the US?

Peacock Café restaurant: 3251 Prospect Street NW Washington, DC

Required Readings:

- Christine Fair, Cuisines of the Axis of Evil and other Irritating States: A Dinner Party Approach to International Relations, (Lyons Press, Guilford, CN 2008) Chapter on Iran and Iraq, pp. 30-84. (You do not have to cook the recipes, but they are amusing to read!)
- Munchies 3- part video (for class on Iran’s culinary traditions) Munchies Guide to Tehran... "When it comes to Tehran, it's impossible to avoid politics and easy to overlook the Iranian city's thriving culinary scene. In our first installment of The MUNCHIES Guide to Tehran, our host Gelareh Kiazand introduces us to the bustling street food offerings in the city."

Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svJc13oEBM&feature=player_embedded
Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUJdBqhGZlk&feature=player_embedded
Part 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKd4JQnOGDw&feature=player_embedded
Week 10: 3/24/16  DAS Ethiopian restaurant (out of classroom):

Required Readings:
· Harry Kloman, *Mesob across America*. Read through the “Chapter Excerpts” on the sidebar.
· Explore the recipes on the Ethiopia page of Food in Every Country.
· Marcus Samuelsson, “Making Ethiopian Food for Saveur Magazine.”

Videos:
· Episode from the *Simpson’s twenty-third season*, Food Wife Clip.

Week 11: 3/31/16  Central American Diaspora: Refugees old and new
Culinary Diplomats: (out of classroom - Carlos Rosario Charter School)
*BLOG ENTRY TWO DUE BEFORE CLASS (electronic submission)*
This week we will look at the wars of Central America of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, focusing in particular on the country from which DC’s largest Latino population originates, El Salvador. These conflicts, Cold War proxy wars, drove millions of people north to settle around the United States. We will review the nature of the wars in Central America, focusing on how these events set the stage for peacebuilding that followed in the region. We will also look at the changing face of the new immigrants from South of the border as Mexican cooking becomes part of United States’ regional cuisine. This class will include a visit to the District’s largest public training program that serves so many new immigrants at the Carlos Rosario Charter School.

Required Readings:
· Johanna Mendelson Forman. *Conflict Cuisines: Central American Cooking*
Is Thriving On 14th Street The DCist, August 25, 2015.


Videos:

- Anthony Bourdain-CNN, Parts Unknown, Detroit (illegal restaurant clip).

Week 12  4/7/16  First Class Presentations

Week 13  4/14/16  Class Presentations Part II, 4

Week 14  4/21/16: Final Class – Wrap Up and special event to close the semester

* FINAL PROJECT DUE (electronic submission)

Suggested Readings

(A complete list of these resources will be updated on Blackboard for the class throughout the semester.) We are building a website, www.conflictcuisine.com. Stay tuned for more information and recommended blog posts on this site.

More on Conflict Resolution

- Carnegie Commission on the Prevention of Deadly Conflict, (skim this important work and its thesis about drivers of conflict)

More on Conflict and Cuisine

Articles

- Paul Collier – The Bottom Billion (New York: Oxford University Press,
2007), Chapter 2 (pp 17-37)

Videos
• Anthony Bourdain, Parts Unknown. CNN. Some videos available on the CNN News YouTube channel,
• Stefan Gates, Cooking in the Danger Zone. BBC. Some videos available on the BBC Worldwide YouTube channel.

More on Culinary Diplomacy

Articles

Books
• Kenneth Kirkwood, The Diplomat at Table (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1974).
• Cita Stelzer, Dinner With Churchill: Policy-Making at the Dinner Table (New York: Pegasus, 2013).

More on Global Cuisines and Culinary History

Articles
• Zaheda Ghani. Afghan Cookbook blog.
• Felicia Campbell, “Hearts and Minds.” Saveur, July 2013.

Books
• Lynne Christy Anderson, Breaking Bread: Recipes and Stories from Immigrant