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Coming Together Over Table: The Role of Food in Georgian Conflict Resolution Practices

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Coming Together Over Table: The Role of Food in Georgian Conflict Resolution

Practices

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Josef Korbel School of International Studies

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Raisa Wells

August 2021

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Title: Coming Together Over Table: The Role of Food in Georgian Conflict Resolution Practices

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Degree Date: August 2021

Abstract

Conflict resolution efforts seek to de-escalate conflict dynamics to bring conciliation and/or reconciliation to a conflict. One strategy to de-escalate a conflict is to use food during conflict resolution efforts. So, what specifically does consuming food and beverage do to break down conflict escalation cycles? Food-sharing brings several aspects to conflict that the literature suggests address how and why conflict escalates. This paper focuses on three prevalent aspects: how food-sharing signals vulnerability and trust building, perceived commonality, and a change in the conflict from competition to cooperation by providing new norms, changing the tone, and shifting frames. Because of the centrality of food in Georgian culture, I interviewed Georgian mediators to study their perspectives and experiences with the role of food in both traditional and contemporary Georgian conflict resolution efforts. The findings concur that food is used to shift the tone and frames of the conflict.

“After a good dinner one can forgive anybody, even one’s own relations.”

- Oscar Wilde

“Nothing so unites us as gathering with one mind to murder someone we hate, unless it is coming together to share in a meal.”

- Margaret Visser

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Introduction

Conflict is complex and results from many intersecting sources and dynamics. When conflict resolution practitioners and academics examine a conflict, there are many factors that need to be taken into account. As they take on the role of a third party to help move a dispute towards resolution, they must acknowledge the relationships, histories, interactions, emotions, information, communication (or lack of communication), and structures that serve as sources of the conflict.¹ These factors can hinder or help the resolution of a dispute depending on the conflict and the parties involved.² The dynamics of a conflict include aspects that escalate and de-escalate the conflict.³ Ultimately, practitioners and academics want to know how to change the prognosis of a conflict. They want to know how to stop a downward conflict spiral and transform it into a peaceful resolution.

Conflict theory suggests that bringing parties together under the right conditions (contact theory), building trust, and improving communication addresses these breakdowns.⁴ To implement these strategies, conflict resolution experts use a variety of

¹ Christopher W. Moore, *The Mediation Process*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 110- 16.

² Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 111-12.

³ Dean G. Pruitt and Sung Hee Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2004), 101, 151, and 171.

⁴ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 181.

tactics and tools. For example, many practitioners use exercises that encourage parties to work together towards a common goal to build trust, improve communication, and bring the parties into contact with one another.⁵ Activities such as playing a sports game together or putting on a talent show are common practices. Another typical activity is to have the parties meet over a meal or coffee break. It is customary for official diplomacy to include state dinners. Back-channel, or unofficial, dialogues and workshops often include coffee breaks where participants can talk informally or meet over a meal.

Many scholars mention or allude to using food during conflict resolution efforts. When describing back-channel contacts, psychologists Pruitt and Kim write that “such discussions usually involve a small number of people and often take place in relaxed and neutral settings, such as over a shared meal.”⁶ During mediation, third parties (in this case the mediator or mediators), help the parties identify the emotions “sympathetically and realistically... while discouraging heavy emotional display.”⁷ Sometimes, the mediator helps the parties vent their emotions as a release. Pruitt and Kim mention that the mediator can change the mood of the situation with appropriately placed humor. By developing

“...a good mood in the midst of angry displays..., it may place the disputants in a state of mind that makes them more amenable to reaching agreement... a good mood fosters genuine concern for Other, which can reduce retaliatory behavior, encourage concession making, and facilitate creative problem solving.”⁸

⁵ Ibid., 181-83.

⁶ Ibid., 210.

⁷ Ibid., 241.

⁸ Ibid.

Much like humor, having food or shared mealtimes can change the atmosphere in a positive way. Having a more laid-back session over snacks or a meal can boost creativity, build cooperation, and even encourage helping behavior.⁹ When parties share a table and eat together, it is possible that concern for the other can develop and the parties may see one another as human.

Serving food throughout the conflict resolution process can meet biological, hospitality, and psychological needs which will be explored in the next section. Sometimes food is best used to meet a need for low blood sugar when stress is high; sometimes a shared meal strategically scheduled can help parties foster trust between themselves and third parties. Other times, it is not so much the food itself, but rather the physical atmosphere that eating produces that can affect the process. Moore writes that during option-generation procedures of conflict resolution, an open discussion can help parties create options.¹⁰ In order for the parties to feel safe in option-building (i.e. presenting ideas without needing to commit to those ideas) and creative (i.e. thinking of options that may not have been previously explored), sometimes it is helpful to hold these sessions “during breaks or specially called meetings.”¹¹ He gives an example:

During the civil war in El Salvador, an intermediary invited representatives of the involved parties to come to her house for snacks and discussion at the end of a workday. Negotiators were invited to identify, discuss, and explore potential options that might be

⁹ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰ Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 401-02.

¹¹ Ibid., 402.

acceptable, but with one ground rule- no final agreements could be reached in informal discussions.¹²

There are times when it is best to change the scenery of a negotiation, mediation, conciliation, or reconciliation session to stimulate ideas. Going somewhere different to eat snacks or meals is a natural change of scenery that can produce informal discussions and inspire new options.

The most common role of food, however, has been as a culturally appropriate ritual to “symbolically indicate termination of a conflict.”¹³ These rituals can include toasts, shared food and beverages, banquets, and feasts.¹⁴ Once an agreement has been reached and the end of the conflict has been symbolically recognized, food can also play a role in the implementation and monitoring of the agreement.¹⁵

To better understand how food addresses the dynamics of a conflict, a review of the relevant literature is needed. By first looking at what causes conflict escalation and what dynamics prevent conflict resolution, conflict and conflict escalation theory is summarized. Then, this review looks at how conflict resolution theory seeks to de-escalate conflict. With this in mind, a review of how food addresses these dynamics is then explored.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 474.

¹⁴ Ibid., 474 and 476.

¹⁵ Ibid., 484.

Literature Review

Problems that Prevent Conflict Resolution- Review of Existing Literature

Conflict resolution efforts seek to de-escalate various conflict dynamics in order to bring conciliation and/or reconciliation to a conflict. In conflict, escalation occurs because trust is severed, cycles of breakdowns reinforce themselves, group members become polarized, communication breaks down, and relationships are strained. In other words, the parties are more competitive than cooperative.¹⁶ There are different strategies used to break these cycles and de-escalate tensions.¹⁷ Conflict resolution is a “complex process of de-escalation and reconciliation that develops over time to the point where new qualities and mechanisms exist in the relationship to allow for the constructive settlement of disputes.”¹⁸ Some of these mechanisms include bringing parties together under the right conditions (contact theory), building trust, and improving communication addresses these breakdowns. To implement these strategies, conflict resolution experts use a variety of tactics and tools. For example, many practitioners use exercises that encourage parties to work together towards a common goal to build trust, improve communication, and bring the parties into contact with one another.

¹⁶ Peter Jones, *Track Two Diplomacy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 45.

¹⁷ Ronald J. Fisher, *Interactive Conflict Resolution*, 1st ed. Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 6-7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

When considering the dynamics of a dispute that prevent resolution, it is important to examine the sources of the conflict in order to determine which exercises are most effective in implementing conflict resolution strategies.¹⁹ These sources can be connectors or dividers during the dispute, meaning that they do not necessarily only contribute to either the escalation or only to the de-escalation of a conflict, but rather it depends on the situation whether the factor connects the parties positively or divides them.²⁰ The tools and tactics that a conflict resolution practitioner chooses to employ can be focused on these sources, and thus address them accordingly. The first factor that contributes to the sources of a conflict is the histories, relationships, and interactions of the parties involved.²¹ Parties may have a long history with one another filled with both positive and negative interactions. In this case, there may be past cooperation that can be built on and also possibly deep hurts. Other times, parties may have a short history with one another where there is little to forgive or build on. The future of the parties' relationship is also important because it can determine what is necessary to resolve (and is perhaps irrelevant due to parties going their separate ways). Techniques such as building a shared history among the parties or creating expectations for how the parties will interact in the future can initiate resolution.

¹⁹ Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 119-20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

The next factor to consider is the emotions that each party is feeling. Emotions cannot be ignored or “resolved.”²² Instead “they can only be experienced, physiologically released, reconsidered, and understood.”²³ Mediators, negotiators, and facilitators have a variety of tools for parties to express their emotions while helping the other side effectively hear what is being said. Information is another especially important factor when looking at data conflicts (conflicts that are caused by misinformation or missing information). There are many tools for gathering, sharing, and presenting data during a dispute including collaborative data collection or having the parties jointly choose an expert to present information.²⁴

Identity conflicts, on the other hand, are often protracted conflicts and are “on-going and seemingly unresolvable conflict[s].”²⁵ Protracted social conflicts have aspects that do not easily produce solutions due to “enduring features such as economic and technological underdevelopment, and unintegrated social and political systems.”²⁶ In addition, because basic human needs are not met on either side, identity becomes a central dynamic of the conflict.²⁷ Azar further states that:

“Protracted social conflicts universally are situations which arise out of attempts to combat conditions of perceived victimization stemming from:
1. A denial of separate identity of parties involved in the political process;

²² Ibid., 139.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 118.

²⁵ E. E. Azar, “Protracted international conflicts: Ten propositions. *International Interactions*,” *International Interactions* 12, no. 1 (1985): 59.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 61.

2. An absence of security of culture and valued relationships; and 3. An absence of effective political participation through which victimization can be remedied.”²⁸

Because of the nature of these conflicts, no amount of data or statistics will resolve the underlying root identity issues. Instead, it must be asked during the conflict analysis, what information and/or data are parties using to form opinions, make judgements, or reach agreements?²⁹ While protracted conflicts may have elements of data conflicts such as collecting data or bringing in experts, these disputes go beyond misinformation or missing information and therefore require different tools for resolution.

Communication between the parties is another key aspect in the conflict.³⁰ The approaches, procedures, and strategies of each party determine how each group believes they will meet their goals.³¹ Like the other factors that contribute to the sources of disputes, communication is a double-edged sword. It can produce understanding, clearing up misinformation, and bring the parties together, or it can cause further hurt and misunderstandings.³² ³³ To increase positive communication that brings conciliation and

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 141.

³⁰ Ibid., 143.

³¹ Ibid., 146.

³² Ibid., 143.

³³ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 108.

reconciliation, practitioners use strategies like reframing,³⁴ preventing interruptions,³⁵ and cultivating a climate for positive communication.³⁶

Structural factors can be anything from the context of dominant narratives in which the conflict resides, to the physical landscape and buildings where the conflict is occurring, to the timing of the conflict, to the “political, economic, social” structures in place during the conflict.³⁷ There are different ways to mitigate structural factors that hinder resolution. It is common to hold mediations, negotiations, and other talks in neutral locations to distance the parties from some of the dominant narratives, political and social pressures, and away from the physical location of the conflict. Certain structures can be used to effectively pressure parties towards resolution, however. For example, political or economic pressure from the international community might encourage parties to meet when they would not otherwise. Timing can also be positive or negative. The timing of the conflict itself in a historical context is important, but the timing of the intervention is also critical. Zartman writes about ripeness theory where a point is reached in the conflict where the parties believe that there is more cost than benefit to continuing the conflict (mutually-hurting stalemate).³⁸ Initiating conciliation or reconciliation when the parties are not ready could negatively impact resolution.

³⁴ Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 346.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 337.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 338.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁸ I.W. Zartman, “Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond,” in *International Conflict Resolution After the Cold War*, eds. Paul C. Stern and Daniel Druckman, (Washington D.C.: National Academies Press, 2000), 228.

Regarding intangible structures, Moore writes that,

“Beliefs, values, and attitudes are tenets, convictions, or states of mind that are trusted and relied upon by people to inform and guide their interactions in the world and with each other. They are commonly used and applied as standards and criteria to evaluate or judge their own views and actions and those of others, and to assess the viability and acceptability of various approaches and procedures used to resolve a conflict and potential outcomes that may result from them.”³⁹

All these intangible states of mind contribute to the conflict because the parties are embedded in them and are generally very difficult to change. It is important for any interveners to conflict to take these into account and understand their strong influence on the parties. Then, they can adopt techniques to navigate these structures in a way that moves towards resolution.

Sources of the conflict are not the only factors to examine when developing strategies and tools to resolve conflict. Escalation (and de-escalation) of conflict is also essential to the dynamics of a dispute. Delegitimization also plays a major role in the escalation of conflict. Delegitimization is defined as

“The categorization of a group, or groups, into extremely negative social categories that exclude it, or them, from the sphere of human groups that act within the limits of acceptable norms and/or values, since these groups are viewed as violating basic human norms or values and therefore deserving maltreatment.”⁴⁰

When this occurs, both parties view the other party as outside humanity in a way that justifies violence towards them. This becomes an absence of empathy towards the other group and a lack of differentiation between the members of the other group. In other

³⁹ Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 158.

⁴⁰ Daniel Bar-Tal and Phillip L. Hammack Jr. “Conflict, Delegitimization, and Violence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Conflict* ed. Linda R. Tropp, (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2012).

words, negative characteristics or actions of some individuals are applied to the group as a whole.⁴¹

Using the Structural Change Model found in Pruitt and Kim's *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, psychological, group, and community changes cause escalation of the conflict.⁴² The structural changes include emotional changes such as blame and anger. Both sides reduce "inhibitions against retaliation" because they perceive to be threatened by the other side further escalating the conflict.⁴³ Another aspect to consider is group polarization, where "the average group member on each side becomes increasingly hostile towards the other side."⁴⁴ But as with the sources of a conflict, the dynamics of escalation can also be put into reverse to de-escalate a conflict. For example, community structures can aid or inhibit conflict escalation depending on the "bonds across the members of a community."⁴⁵ If there are overlapping structures between members, where people are connected through mutual links, there is more likely to be efforts to reduce escalation.⁴⁶ The challenge for practitioners is to cultivate (or help create if they do not already exist) these bonds as a tool to promote resolution. This can be done in many ways such as emphasizing similarities between party members during a mediation or promoting friendships during a dialogue retreat.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 103.

⁴³ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 139.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 139.

Why Food in Conflict Resolution Efforts- Review of Existing Literature

Food and mealtimes have been a part of the human experience since before recorded history. Food is a reflection of our identity including our culture. Mealtimes are sacred and provide opportunities for us to communicate this identity as well as spend time with others. There are psychological, biological, physical, and social reasons why having food can help in the process of conflict resolution. Historically, food has been used in conciliation and reconciliation efforts including the symbolic meanings of feasting and sharing food in general. There are several aspects that food-sharing brings to conflict that the literature suggests addresses how and why conflict escalates.

Biological Aspects

The biological aspects of including food in conflict resolution efforts may be the most obvious aspects for the parties to recognize and have the most immediate results. Having food during conflict resolution sessions raises blood sugar levels which can help the parties clear their thinking. Emotions can become exaggerated with low blood sugar levels and some tension can be reduced simply by maintaining stable blood sugar levels through eating.⁴⁷

In addition, oxytocin, a hormone believed to be responsible for building relational and social trust bonds, can influence the direction of conciliation and reconciliation efforts.⁴⁸ Trust is important for increasing the likelihood of problem-solving between the parties

⁴⁷ "Serving Food At A Negotiation Meeting," Negotiation Experts, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.negotiations.com/questions/meals-food/>.

⁴⁸ Stephen Lagoy, "Cookies And Compromise: The Role Of Food In Mediation," *Unruh Turner Burke & Frees Attorneys at Law*, December 12, 2015, <https://www.utbf.com/mediation/2015/12/cookies-and-compromise-the-role-of-food-in-mediation/>.

rather than resolving the conflict through contending (competing) or yielding (giving in to the other party).⁴⁹ Oxytocin expert Dr. Joseph Verbalis at Georgetown University states that “studies in animals and people show that oxytocin rises... when we eat. Moreover, when we share a meal with others – feeding and bonding at the same time – perhaps still more oxytocin floods our brains, creating the fraternity of the table.”⁵⁰

Physical Aspects

How the room and meals are set up as well as the schedule of the conflict resolution process offers opportunities for connection. Having food available “should mean less risk of rushing the meeting or stopping short due to hunger or low blood sugar levels.”⁵¹ Specialty food stations (instead of plated meals) gets people moving around and talking.⁵² In her article “The True Role of Food & Beverage in Meetings and Events,” Luppino-Esposito recommends setting up the meal process in a way that brings the parties together and provides opportunities for potential connection. First, she recommends making mealtimes interactive: “let guests get in on the action either through cooking demonstrations or ‘make your own’ bars.” Next, she suggests serving “throw-back” meals, or food that parties may have had growing up. “Nothing gets guests talking quite like nostalgia” she writes.⁵³ Finally, she recommends serving “meals family style: By

⁴⁹ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 50-53.

⁵⁰ Lagoy, “Cookies And Compromise: The Role Of Food In Mediation.”

⁵¹ “Serving Food At A Negotiation Meeting.”

⁵² Amanda Luppino-Esposito, “The True Role of Food & Beverage in Meetings and Events,” *Socialtables*, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.socialtables.com/blog/catering/role-food-and-beverage/>.

⁵³ Luppino-Esposito, “The True Role of Food & Beverage in Meetings and Events.”

literally sharing a meal from a common platter, guests will be sure to start conversations with one another.”⁵⁴

Hospitality

The idea of sharing food as hospitality is as old as history itself. In the Hellenic tradition, “the guest was not asked to reveal his name and credentials until after eating the host’s food, and therefore transformed to a state of belonging. The most powerful gesture for transforming the outsider to an insider and cementing the guest/host relationship was the shared libation or sacrifice.”⁵⁵ This concept of bringing an outsider, or member of the outgroup, into an insider, or ingroup member helps build trust among the parties.⁵⁶ Also a value in the Jewish scriptures, hosts would open their homes to strangers and serve them meals. These mealtimes “led to shared conversations, shared ideas, shared fellowship.”⁵⁷

Additionally, food as hospitality can play a role in crossing cultural boundaries if the parties are of different cultures. In “Talking with our Mouths Full: Performance and Feasting as Intercultural Dialogue,” Strang writes that “the acts of shared eating and storytelling are central motifs in... hospitality protocols and the extension and perception of hospitality are keys to crossing cultural borderlines.”⁵⁸ Learning about the other side can begin by tasting their cultural foods and sharing one’s own dishes.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Hilary Strang, “Talking with our Mouths Full: Performance and Feasting as Intercultural Dialogue,” PhD diss., Royal Roads University (2015): 20.

⁵⁶ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 51.

⁵⁷ Luppino-Esposito, “The True Role of Food & Beverage in Meetings and Events.”

⁵⁸ Strang, “Talking with our Mouths Full: Performance and Feasting as Intercultural Dialogue,” 8.

When parties engage in problem-solving behavior, contact and communication are some of the first approaches parties engage in.⁵⁹ Contact and communication can have positive influences on the parties during de-escalation of conflict. These include improving trust, building understanding, and developing positive social bonds.⁶⁰ “Hospitality protocols may smooth the difficulties of the ‘self’ meeting the ‘other’” during the contact and communication stages by providing processes and procedures that “offer established means to negotiate through tricky relations or to establish belonging.”⁶¹ When a host brings the parties through a meal with ritualized norms, the parties can feel more at ease knowing what to expect next and how to act. This may not be as effective with parties from different cultures but can be highly effective for conflicting parties coming from similar cultural backgrounds.

Psychological Aspects

Arguably most important to the effects food can have during conciliation and reconciliation efforts are the psychological aspects. The American Psychological Association reports that stress is known to create a need for sugar as a quick fuel for a surge of energy.⁶² Parties that find themselves in conflicting situations are often stressed and this stress can increase when they meet for mediation, negotiation, conciliation, or reconciliation. Having foods that are known to relieve anxiety such as bananas, dark

⁵⁹ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 181.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 181-2.

⁶¹ Strang, “Talking with our Mouths Full: Performance and Feasting as Intercultural Dialogue,” 18.

⁶² Scott J. Silverman, “Food for Thought: How Food Might Serve You at a Mediation,” *JAMS Alternative Dispute Resolution*, October 23, 2018, <https://www.jamsadr.com/blog/2018/food-for-thought-how-food-might-serve-you-at-a-mediation>.

chocolate, and coffee can provide the psychological need for fuel while also allowing for a small distraction for parties to gather their thoughts or take a moment to breathe.⁶³ Kahn writes that “an unpleasant mood state may be reduced by concentrating solely upon food” and this “self-titration can be an individual dynamic as well as a group dynamic.”⁶⁴ There may be times when it is beneficial to pause the meeting and allow the parties to take some time to process their emotions, thoughts, or simply distract themselves with a bite to eat.

When parties are ready, motivated, and optimistic about resolving their conflict, it is possible that they will turn to problem-solving to manage or resolve the conflict instead of using coercive, yielding, or avoidance tactics.⁶⁵ Pruitt and Kim note that “at its best, problem-solving involves a *joint* effort to find a mutually acceptable solution.”⁶⁶ When food is present during the problem-solving stage of conflict resolution, this joint effort is coupled with meal participation. Eating is a participatory act in and of itself and just by eating, parties begin to participate in the process.⁶⁷ Sharing a meal together can contribute to a collaborative atmosphere and can get people talking.⁶⁸ “Humans are social feeders...

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Sharon Kahn, “Reflections upon the Functions of Food in a Children’s Psychotherapy Group,” *Journal of Child and Adolescent Group Therapy* 3, no.3 (1993): 149.

⁶⁵ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 178-9 and 190-1.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 190.

⁶⁷ Silverman, “Food for Thought: How Food Might Serve You at a Mediation.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

people simply like to eat with others” and when they eat together, there is a greater chance they will feel comfortable with one another.⁶⁹

In her study “Reflections upon the Functions of Food in a Children’s Psychotherapy Group,” Kahn examines how having a snack during group therapy revealed certain psychological aspects to the therapists:

“The inclusion of snack as an essential component in group psychotherapy... offers members a means of self-titrating their anxiety, it provides an opportunity for direct interaction related to symbolic familial conflict, it creates a positive psychosocial climate, it provides a physical mode of behavior, and it provides a means of abating biological and psychological hunger.”⁷⁰

She found that “the feeding experience serves as a tool to elicit clues as to where psychic conflicts may lie.”⁷¹ Certain triggers were unveiled during the snack time that would not have otherwise been noticed. For example, food served as a symbolic manifestation of concerns about trust.⁷² Because the children needed to trust the adults giving them the snack and believe them when they made remarks such as, “you may have seconds after everyone has finished their first serving of snack,” when the children were distrustful of the adults, it was most evident during snack time.⁷³ This could also potentially reveal similar concerns about trust between conflicting parties. Most applicable to mediators and other third parties, serving food could reveal triggers of the

⁶⁹ E.N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 125.

⁷⁰ Kahn, “Reflections upon the Functions of Food in a Children’s Psychotherapy Group,” 145.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 145.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

primary parties. These can vary in nature and manifestation, but an astute mediator may pick up on triggers that may need to be explored further in the mediation process.

Serving food also helped children learn and use valuable skills.⁷⁴ Sharing snacks “offered the opportunity for conflict resolution via negotiation and sharing..., a vehicle for pro-social learning within the group... [and] served as an incentive for group conversation.”⁷⁵ When there was only enough second helpings for some of the children, or when the children did not like certain foods, they were able to use conflict resolution skills to divide the extra food or trade food in a peaceful manner.⁷⁶

Regarding reparations, Kahn discovered that “providing and sharing food [can become] an avenue for one [group member] to reintegrate into the group after having been rejected.”⁷⁷ For example, if someone makes an offensive comment or hurts another group member during mediation, negotiation, dialogue, etc., a mealtime can be the opportunity for the other group members to allow them back into the space. This could be done by offering to serve the offending group member, allowing them to sit at their table, or engaging in conversation about the food. The other members may choose not to do so, but mealtimes can provide the opportunity for them if they want to reintegrate the offending member. This is consistent with the signaling model of reconciliation as described by Long and Brecke.⁷⁸ In this rational choice model of reconciliation, “the best

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 140.

⁷⁸ William J. Long and Peter Brecke, *War and Reconciliation*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 18.

strategy for breaking a pattern of hostile interactions is by sending signals that provide a measure of commitment to the pursuit of improved relations.”⁷⁹ Mealtimes offer the opportunity for signaling and potentially bringing that member back into the folds of the group.

History of Food Used in Conflict Resolution

There is little doubt regarding “the importance of family mealtime... Major holidays are occasions for family reunions, inevitably defined and structured by food.”⁸⁰ In fact, “companion” in Latin literally translates to “a person with whom we share bread.”⁸¹ Sharing food alone does not resolve conflict, but it can serve as “ritual relaxation (a “break” in the working day), our chance to choose companions and talk to them, the excuse to recreate our humanity as well as our strength, and to renew our relationships.”⁸² This next section looks at how food has historically played a part in conciliation and reconciliation efforts including feasts and food as symbols.

Feasts

Feasts are defined as “any sharing of special food... by two or more people for a special... event.”⁸³ Feasts are highly symbolic and hold “elaborate social messages.”⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Anderson, *Everyone Eats*, 126.

⁸¹ Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2015), 19.

⁸² Ibid., 46.

⁸³ Brian Hayden and Suzanne Villeneuve, “A Century of Feasting Studies,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40, no.1 (2011): 434.

⁸⁴ Anderson, *Everyone Eats*, 126.

Hayden and Villeneuve explore this in “A Century of Feasting Studies” where they examine the “...importance of feasting in relation to village dynamics and social integration...”⁸⁵

In some of the earliest known literature from Shang, China, there are references to worshippers offering their ancestors food presumably to appease them (and thus avoiding conflict with their ancestors) and to ask for good harvests.⁸⁶ Traditional feasting has a long history in historic records and literature. It has been described as a way to “even out local temporal variable subsistence production..., [for] redistributing resources from different specialized production areas,” and to establish and maintain “social links and alliances, increased production, and political negotiations.”⁸⁷

There is a difference between feasts and eating together as during a mealtime. Both represent people coming together, but for different reasons: “feasts are prominent in rites of incorporation, where commensality, the act of eating together, is an archetype of union.”⁸⁸ In some situations, the primary function of the feast was “to bring people together and affirm their solidarity” such as to build political alliances, make trade deals, or to cultivate relations with foreign dignitaries.⁸⁹ In efforts to improve trust between

⁸⁵ Hayden and Villeneuve, “A Century of Feasting Studies,” 434.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 436-37.

⁸⁸ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Playing to the Senses: Food as a Performance Medium,” *Performance Research* 4, no. 1 (1999): 23.

⁸⁹ Anderson, *Everyone Eats*, 127.

groups, feasts had “the purpose of affirming the host’s generosity.”⁹⁰ The fact that feasting inherently implies a public nature, sheds light on its purpose for celebrating relationships.⁹¹

While some feasting was intended to create social unity, some feasting was viewed as “conflict-oriented” in order to “increase individual prestige or status.”⁹² Competitive feasts or conflict-oriented feasts (feasts given to contend with a rival or rivals), were a means of conflict resolution because the competition did not need to involve violence. Instead of fighting for “prestige, prestigious marriages, and ancestral blessings,” tribes would host feasts to win these valuable honors.⁹³ The cost of fighting for honors was much higher than displaying worthiness through holding a feast. In addition, there is some evidence that feasts also helped redistribute food to the members of the community that may not have had enough.⁹⁴ This redistribution may also have been “conflict-oriented” to prevent the poor from rising up against the wealthy.

In North America, “feasts in ritual structures [kivas] in the Pueblo period could reflect ranked social groups and could have served to promote community unity and defuse social conflicts.”⁹⁵ In addition, “Hopewellian charnel house feasts... were probably intercommunity events” that are assumed to have included the redistribution of foods,

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Strang, “Talking with our Mouths Full: Performance and Feasting as Intercultural Dialogue,” 18.

⁹² Hayden and Villeneuve, “A Century of Feasting Studies,” 436.

⁹³ Ibid., 438.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 436.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 439.

forming alliances, and for “communitarian social integration,” an important element of conciliation and reconciliation.⁹⁶ While there is little documentation of these feasts used as conflict resolution, there is evidence that by integrating the community, building relationships and alliances, and redistributing resources may have been attempts to prevent conflict and establish formal structures to reconcile when conflict arose. In the Americas during colonial times, traditional feasting was prohibited by colonizers, most likely due to their community-building effects, in order to decrease unity among the Native Americans and stoke conflict among the tribes.⁹⁷

Food as Symbol

The act of hosting feasts has been shown to be highly symbolic, but the food itself is also representative and endued “with values, ideologies, religious beliefs, and prestige.”⁹⁸ “Reaching back to Plato’s Symposium, there is a historical relationship between food, meals and philosophical discourse, but also food, meals, and storytelling” and in the Jewish scriptures and Christian scriptures, “eating is consistently represented as a metaphor for the taking in of knowledge or for learning.”⁹⁹

Food has long symbolized the resolution of conflict. From celebratory meals after the signing of an agreement to the Arab notion that one cannot perceive another as an enemy

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 435.

⁹⁸ Kahn, “Reflections upon the Functions of Food in a Children’s Psychotherapy Group,” 144.

⁹⁹ Kyla Wazana Tompkins, “Literary Approaches to Food Studies: Eating the Other,” *Food, Culture & Society* 8, no. 2 (2005): 246.

after having shared a meal,¹⁰⁰ food and the rituals that surround it are symbolic to the ending of conflict.¹⁰¹ Visser explains that,

“Since friends and families share food, the action of eating together can ritually express what is held, shared, and enjoyed, after all, in common; it therefore signifies the dropping of hostilities. The Gogo of Tanzania reconcile people after a bitter quarrel, as when a father curses and disowns his son, by first slaughtering a goat and removing its liver. Each of the parties bites on the goat’s liver; the priest then cuts it in two. When each has eaten his half of the meat, peace is officially restored. Only food— all-necessary, visible, divisible, an external object which becomes internal, and which then turns into the very substance of the eater— could give rise to such a clear yet mysterious and effective ritual.”¹⁰²

Even table manners are employed to symbolize the significance of shared meals.

Visser gives an anthropological perspective stating that “eating is aggressive by nature, and the implements required for it could quickly become weapons; table manners are, most basically, a system of taboos designed to ensure that violence remains out of the question.”¹⁰³ Because the act of eating is violent (killing of an animal, chopping vegetables, cooking with heat, as well as slicing, cutting, and chewing food), rituals must be put in place “to keep the lid on the violence” so that the individuals sharing the meal remain “a diner, not a dish... We do not treat people as though they were the swine or the oxen slaughtered for the feast: we do not get the guests mixed up with the dishes. For the point is that we so easily could. At table we are both armed and vulnerable...”¹⁰⁴ Having

¹⁰⁰ Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners*, 130.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 130-131.

¹⁰² Ibid., 128-129.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 20 and 137-38.

these taboos that prevent violence and yet at the same time being incredibly vulnerable, parties begin to trust one another at the table.

Table manner rituals also provide predictable behavior. This predictable behavior can comfort uneasy parties because in a moment of difficulty, they know what comes next: “when we all ‘know what to do’ on a given occasion— say at a wedding, or a death— we are all enabled by convention to interrelate, to play our often pre-ordained roles, just where having to make choices and think up scenarios would be most difficult and exhausting.”¹⁰⁵ The next section will investigate historical uses of shared meals in negotiations to identify the role of food in these specific cases.

Historical Cases of Shared Meals

Conducting negotiations and other conflict resolution practices over meals and scheduling shared mealtimes with various parties is long practiced in diplomacy. Deciding who sits by whom often matters more than the menu and represents more than just a dining experience. But all these factors can give opportunities for power plays that directly impact the outcome of discussions. The following examples showcase these dynamics and the role of food in historical conflict resolution efforts.

The Arab world has a long history of using food and drink during negotiations, mediations, and other conflict resolution efforts. Once an agreement has been reached, a public *musalaha* takes place. In the *musalaha*, the parties engage in rituals that confirm their commitment to the agreement, reconcile the relationship, and shake hands. Finally, “the family of the offending party goes to the house of the other party and drinks bitter

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 44.

coffee with members of the offended family; and the family of the offending party follows the visit by sharing bread or preparing a meal for all concerned.”¹⁰⁶ Practices of gift-giving and serving tea as part of dispute resolution are also found in Asian societies such as Chinese, Malays, and Indian cultures.¹⁰⁷ These types of “non-confrontational social mechanisms” help parties move towards agreement and solidify the resolution of the conflict.¹⁰⁸

In the 19th century, after Napoleon I’s reign, Europe’s political and state structure needed to be redesigned. As a result, European leaders and diplomats met at the Congress of Vienna to negotiate structures and systems and establish a post-war Europe. Vienna was chosen as the site for these negotiations because of its reputation for high society and sophisticated cuisine. The Congress of Vienna became a major cultural occasion and “for ten months, Vienna entertained more than 200 delegates from all over Europe with a marathon cultural calendar” including balls, hunting parties, and lavish dinners.^{109 110} These banquets and *soirées* were often the places of informal negotiations.¹¹¹ One dish often served at these events, called *backhendl*, consists of breaded chicken and is believed to be the precursor of *wiener schnitzel*, Vienna’s most prominent cultural

¹⁰⁶ Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 64.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰⁹ “Congress of Vienna,” *Book of Days Tales*, <https://www.bookofdaystales.com/congress-vienna/>.

¹¹⁰ Mark Jarrett, *Congress of Vienna and Its Legacy: War and Great Power Diplomacy after Napoleon*, (New York City: I.B.Tauris, 2013), 95.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

dish.¹¹² It is debatable whether serving such elaborate meals promoted agreement among the European officials. Some argue that the meals and entertainments served “to cater to the vanities and emotional well being of its top guests,” keeping them engaged in the negotiations and refreshed.¹¹³ French negotiator Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Prigord believed that serving fine food and sharing meals was an integral part of diplomacy. He brought his personal chef to Vienna during the Congress and many of the dishes served continue to be national favorites in Austria.¹¹⁴ Others argue that by making the process so enjoyable, delegates delayed agreements in order to continue enjoying Vienna’s hospitality. Some delegates became so distracted by various amusements that talks were feared to be prolonged.¹¹⁵

In a similar way, arms control negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States have usually been held in large cosmopolitan European cities such as Helsinki, Geneva, and the island of Malta. These places are enjoyable to stay in with fine dining, luxury hotels, and a wide variety of entertainment options. Other times, talks are held in more convenient locations such as Washington D.C. or Moscow, though these cities also have much to offer visiting dignitaries.

In the mid-1990s, The Dayton Peace Accords were negotiated at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. The chief mediator, Robert Holbrooke from the United

¹¹² “Congress of Vienna,” *Book of Days Tales*, <https://www.bookofdaystales.com/congress-vienna/>.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Mark Jarrett, “10 Things You Didn’t Know About the Congress of Vienna that Influence Us Today,” History News Network: Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/158263>.

¹¹⁵ Jarrett, *Congress of Vienna and Its Legacy*, 96.

States believed the location was crucial to the success of the negotiations, and Dayton was a small city with very little to offer in terms of entertainment and fine dining.¹¹⁶ Holbrooke chose this location because it was private from the media, and he also wanted a complete change of scenery for the parties. Completely out of Europe, the parties had less excuses to leave the negotiations when they got difficult and less pressure from secondary parties. It was also convenient and cost effective for Holbrooke to travel back and forth between the party members.¹¹⁷ Holbrooke utilized shuttle diplomacy “by foot” while leaders met over meals in Dayton and even when the leaders were in the cafeteria on base, Holbrooke wrote messages on napkins to bring to each side at their respective tables calling it “napkin diplomacy.”¹¹⁸

In 2016, during heightened racial tensions between police forces in the United States and the organization Black Lives Matter (BLM), one group of BLM protesters and police officers met for a barbeque “to open communication and build trust between police and the communities they serve.”¹¹⁹ Members of the BLM protest met with the police chief the week before but the talks were not fruitful so the group decided to meet again the next week for a barbeque. Using meal sharing as a catalyst for dialogue, community members of different races sat with police officers to get to know one another and share experiences. After the meal, the police chief conducted a question-and-answer forum to

¹¹⁶ Leon Hartwell, “Case Analysis: Conflict Resolution: Lessons from the Dayton Peace Process,” *Negotiation Journal* (2019): 462.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 464.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 463.

¹¹⁹ “Black Lives Matter protest in Wichita changed to cookout with police,” *The Wichita Eagle*, July 18, 2016, <https://www.kansascity.com/news/state/kansas/article90247307.html>.

address the concerns of the community, one of which was “whether the black community was being bought off with food.”¹²⁰ Those who participated in the “cookout,” however, reported feeling “surprised” by how many issues the police officers and protesters mutually cared about and how much they felt heard by the other side.¹²¹ One police officer described that without face-to-face dialogue and meetings such as this one, “we start to view people as a generalization instead of understanding people as individuals.”¹²²

Meal sharing is often utilized in negotiations and other conflict resolution practices to increase communication and build trust but has been rarely investigated empirically. In the above examples, who is invited to meal sharing events is as important as how often they occur. What happens over these meals can include dialogue, trust-building, and communication efforts. The next section looks at examples of how food is currently being used to aid conflict resolution efforts.

Examples of Food Currently Used in Conflict Resolution

Gastrodiplomacy

Gastrodiplomacy, also known as culinary diplomacy, is a relatively new concept to the public diplomacy field. Public diplomacy is defined as “an international actor’s attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

public.”¹²³ “Using food as a tool to foster cultural understanding among countries,” gastrodiplomacy works as a form of conflict prevention.¹²⁴ Thailand conducted the first successful gastrodiplomacy campaign with its “Global Thai” campaign. Aimed at promoting Thai restaurants abroad and branding Thailand as a culinary destination with a rich culture, “Global Thai” worked to build understanding between Thai citizens, the Thai diaspora, and foreign publics.¹²⁵

During her time as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton headed the Diplomatic Culinary Partnership in 2012. The partnership recruited 80 food professionals from across the country to cook for foreign diplomats and travel abroad.¹²⁶ The goal was to “engage foreign audiences” in public diplomacy programs by “elevate[ing] the role of culinary engagement in America’s formal and public diplomacy efforts.”¹²⁷

The US and Thailand are not the only countries engaging in gastrodiplomacy. In Northern Europe, the gastrodiplomacy campaign is called “Nordic Food Diplomacy;” in Japan, “Japanese Restaurants Overseas;” Malaysia has “The Malaysia Kitchen Programme;” Peru’s gastrodiplomacy campaign is “Perú Mucho Gusto;” South Korea launched “Korean Cuisine to the World” which became known as “Kimchi Diplomacy;”

¹²³ Cull, Nick, *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past*. USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (2009): 12.

¹²⁴ “Eight Great Gastrodiplomacy Nations,” *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*, accessed December 1, 2020. <https://www.uspublicdiplomacy.org/story/eight-great-gastrodiplomacy-nations>.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Linda Poon, “Gastrodiplomacy: Cooking Up A Tasty Lesson On War And Peace.” NPR, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/03/24/291980375/gastrodiplomacy-cooking-up-a-tasty-lesson-on-war-and-peace>.

¹²⁷ “U.S. Department of State to Launch Diplomatic Culinary Partnership,” *US Department of State*, accessed December 1, 2020. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/09/197375.htm>.

Taiwan has “All in Good Taste: Savor the Flavors of Taiwan” which became known as “Dim Sum Diplomacy;” and in Australia, “Restaurant Australia” included a dinner for 250 people called “Invite the World to Dinner.”¹²⁸ All these campaigns worked to bring people together over food to build understanding between cultures and thus improve relations.¹²⁹

Culinary Tourism

Culinary tourism is when individuals from one group chooses to eat the food of another culture or group (regardless of physically traveling to another culture). Often, the motives behind cultural tourism include curiosity of the other group, a desire to learn new cooking techniques or try new food, or to extend group boundary lines. In doing so, culinary tourists employ conflict resolution techniques. “By participating in unfamiliar forms of eating, the culinary tourist displays cosmopolitan characteristics of openness to difference and competence in other cultures... ‘through listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting’” all aspects needed in conflict resolution.¹³⁰ Culinary tourists take “a stance towards diversity itself” and demonstrate “an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It is an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness... a search for contrasts rather than uniformity.”¹³¹ By using aspects of mediation, negotiation, and dialogue,

¹²⁸ “Eight Great Gastrodiplomacy Nations,” USC Center on Public Diplomacy.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Jennie Germann Molz, “Eating difference: The Cosmopolitan Mobilities of Culinary Tourism,” *Space and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2007): 80.

¹³¹ Ibid., 80.

culinary tourists attempt to learn about the Other and build understanding between their groups.

Social Gastronomy

Social gastronomy is “the use of food to promote the common good.”¹³² Focusing primarily on social justice and empowerment that comes from resilience, Mendelson-Forman studies food as a driver of both conflict and peace. She looks at diaspora cuisines through economic, political, and cultural lenses and their effect on those who have experienced violent conflict such as war and displacement.¹³³ In “Conflict Cuisine,”

Mendelson-Forman examines:

“... 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?”¹³⁴

Using food as a mechanism towards dialogue, Mendelson-Forman seeks to cross group boundaries to create peace among diaspora communities and their host cultures.

Conflict Kitchens

Conflict kitchens are restaurants and cafes that serve food made by immigrants and refugees from countries experiencing violent conflict. The goals of these kitchens are to popularize traditional food from these countries as well as to promote dialogue and

¹³² Johanna Mendelson-Forman, “Conflict Cuisine: An Introduction to War and Peace Around the Dinner Table,” *Conflict Cuisine*, <http://www.conflictcuisine.com/share-our-content/>.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

peacebuilding awareness.¹³⁵ Food serves as the catalyst that brings “people together in a room and engage[s] them in conversation about food and, subsequently, the cultures behind it.”¹³⁶ The ultimate goal is to humanize the people and culture behind the food. Culture seems to be at the center of so many conflicts around the world so it would make sense that culture (in this case, food) should be at the center of the solution.¹³⁷

For example, the Conflict Cafe in London invites a different chef each week from a region in the world suffering from conflict. The chef serves traditional dishes and engages the eaters in a dialogue about the current conflict in the region. The restaurant owner notes that “the Conflict Café isn't about creating a response to the Syrian crisis or any of the other global disputes it highlights... The Conflict Café is about creating demand for peace, which starts by creating awareness of what peacebuilding even means.”¹³⁸

In Pittsburgh, the Conflict Kitchen raises awareness about the countries the US is currently in conflict with by serving that country's food

“...complemented by artistic performances and educational outreach programs. ‘Our function is to bring cultures and viewpoints to our city that [Pittsburgh residents] don't often get, and that can be considered uncomfortable for people to hear,’ says Conflict Kitchen co-creator Jon Rubin.”¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Amy McKeever, “What Are Conflict Cafes and Can They Actually Change the World?” Eater, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.eater.com/2015/9/23/9374875/conflict-kitchen-cafe-culinary-diplomacy>.

¹³⁶ McKeever, “What Are Conflict Cafes and Can They Actually Change the World?”

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

By bringing people together over food, performance, and education, the Conflict Kitchen hopes to build understanding between cultural groups.

Dialogue Retreats

Dialogue is a process during conflict resolution where parties seek understanding with one another by actively listening to one another and building relationships across group boundaries. In the Seeds of Peace camp, teenagers from Israel and Arab communities came together for two weeks to live together, complete activities and play games, and dialogue with one another.¹⁴⁰ While the dialogues are formal sessions with trained facilitators, the camp retreats include shared meals where all the campers sit with one another and eat. Wallach writes that “simply allowing the youngsters to coexist and form community does not address... underlying attitudes and information” but by having the students share bunks and meals together offers them spaces to interact that they never would have had back home.¹⁴¹

In the filmed dialogue “The Color of Fear,” the participants met for a weekend to discuss race relations in the US.¹⁴² The men share meals together outside of the formal dialogue sessions and the film shows scenes of them eating and laughing together, implying that it is during these times that many of the friendships develop.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ John Wallach, *The Enemy Has a Face*, (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2000).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁴² Lee Mun Wah, “The Color of Fear,” *South U Video Production*, 1994.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

Community Relations

Food serves as a bridge builder in community relations as well.

“In the Big Coal River region of West Virginia during early spring, people gather ramps, or wild leeks, and eat them at ramp suppers and festivals that double as fundraisers for local causes... This is a deeply rooted and committed set of relations among people tied by kinship and friendship.”¹⁴⁴

By coming together for these food traditions, the community builds relationships and produces a sense of belonging.

Vancouver Moving Theatre hosted “a theatrical feast in which culturally significant food, art, and narratives were shared. The intent was to create a space for ‘coming together’... for members of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, a neighborhood with a diversity of cultures, social problems, and strengths” to feast while “building intercultural dialogue and understanding.”¹⁴⁵ The feast set the stage, so to speak, for dialogue and conversation to occur.

Patty Limerick, head of the Center of the American West and facilitator between big energy corporations and local communities writes about her strategy during community dialogues:

“Let’s sit down and eat. Will that solve everything? No, but... getting together over good food always delivers one “bedrock benefit”: Everyone has to stop talking long enough to chew — and thereby listen. That might not seem like much, but we have to start somewhere. Maybe over barbecue, both Sagebrush Rebels and fractivists can stop arguing long enough to re-discover their shared interests in controlling their own destinies and nourishing their passion for the West.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Playing to the Senses: Food as a Performance Medium,” 14.

¹⁴⁵ Strang, “Talking with our Mouths Full: Performance and Feasting as Intercultural Dialogue,” 4.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Larmer, “Something to Chew On,” *High Country News* (Colorado), February 22, 2016, 2.

Finally, in Italy, eco-villages have described food as “a symbol of a complex ethics and aesthetics constructed on which relationships are articulated.”¹⁴⁷ Food becomes “a sort of ‘contact zone’ where the interaction between different actors is deeply linked to the idea of closeness, mutual learning and creativity” and this space “help[s] to reinforce the idea of individual and collective well-being that is based on proximity and sharing, on emotional involvement, and creative expression.”¹⁴⁸ Here, food and the interactions that result from food practices provide the opportunities for community development.

There are plenty of examples of food used as a tool for conflict resolution, but these chosen cases give the reader an idea of the breadth and variety of how food can be used. The review of the conflict literature suggests that conflict escalates because certain dynamics and cycles reinforce themselves. Communication breaks down which causes more communication breakdown, groups become polarized which causes beliefs to become even more polarized causing further division, and competition breeds more competition and less cooperation. Using various tactics such as reframing communication, identifying a mutually hurting stalemate, and increasing the social bonds of the conflicting groups can help to de-escalate the conflict and perhaps move it towards resolution.

Food can be used as such a tactic by meeting biological or psychological needs of the parties and thus helping to reduce tensions. Or it can be used as the context in which to build trust between the parties since eating together is in and of itself vulnerable. Food-

¹⁴⁷ Alice Brombin, “Faces of Sustainability in Italian Ecovillages: Food as ‘Contact Zone’,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 39, no. 5 (2015): 476.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

sharing is an ancient human act that is highly symbolic and signals important concepts such as hospitality and who the ingroup members are. Finally, eating together seems to give opportunity and context for speaking together and perhaps an increase in communication. The following study seeks to ask how food is used on conflict resolution using a cultural context.

Statement of the Problem

The literature reveals that conflicts have dimensions that need to be addressed in order to be resolved. Conflict and conflict resolution theory examines escalation and intensification, and what contributes to the duration of the problem. Practitioners and academics alike have sought practical methods to effectively de-escalate conflicts and build peace. Conflict resolution practitioners address conflict escalation by helping parties build trust, providing perceived commonality, and by using tactics to change the conflict from competition to cooperation by providing new norms, changing the tone, and shifting frames.

Theory suggests that de-escalation tactics and strategies can lead to reversing conflict escalation spirals. Just as the escalation cycle is continued by heavy tactics and structural changes by the parties, the cycle can also be reversed.¹⁴⁹ De-escalation can be positively reinforced, or in other words, de-escalation can lead to more de-escalation. De-escalation literature includes contact and communication, superordinate goals, and unilateral conciliatory initiatives.¹⁵⁰ These can help humanize the other party, build a shared identity, and form enough trust to reverse the conflict cycle.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 101.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 181-186.

There seems to be the general consensus that having food during these efforts has a positive effect on the parties. Does food address de-escalation dimensions similar to other conflict resolution tools and tactics? Many congresses and major international negotiations often include shared meals. But no studies currently exist confirming or denying these generally held sentiments that sharing meals increases the likelihood of reaching an agreement. The literature suggests several aspects that food-sharing brings to conflict that address how and why conflict de-escalates through food-sharing, but this

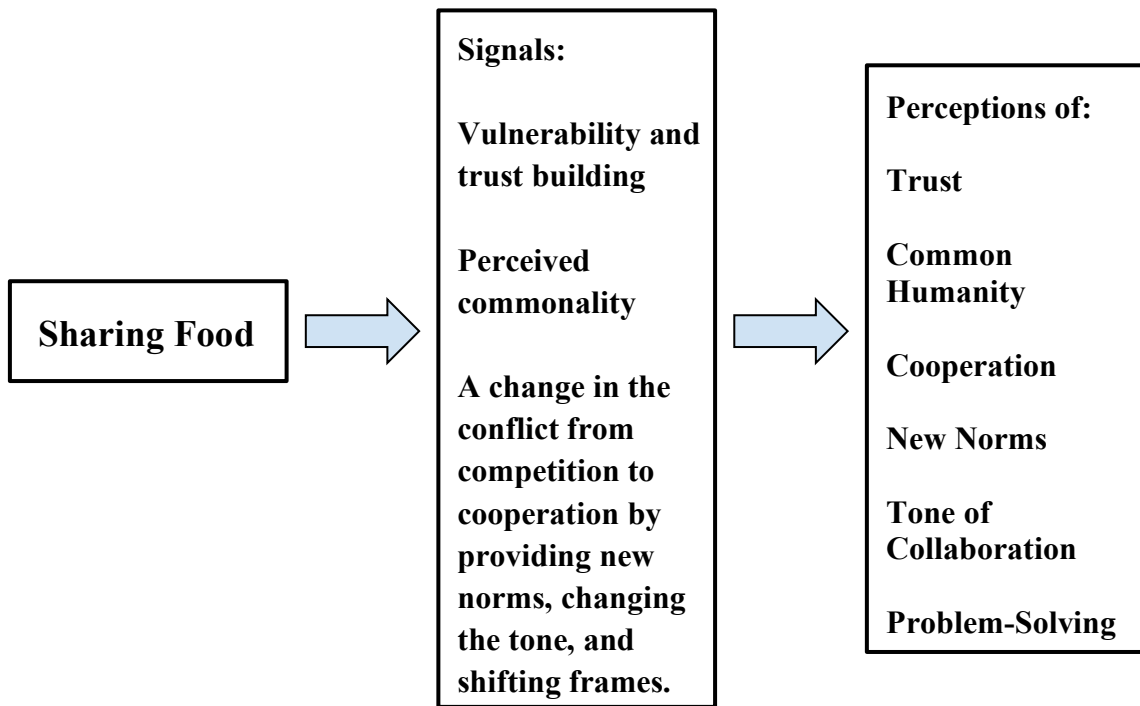


Figure 1: Signals and Changing Perceptions of Sharing Food

study will focus on three prevalent aspects. Specifically, these are how food-sharing signals vulnerability and trust building, perceived commonality, and a change in the conflict from competition to cooperation by providing new norms, changing the tone, and shifting frames. (Please see Figure 1 below).

How do practitioners understand the role of food and how do they believe it matters to conflict de-escalation? Interviews of third parties will be helpful by looking at how food is perceived during mediations, negotiations, and other conflict resolution efforts and what its impact has on the parties in conflict. Using qualitative data, this study will shed light on the effectiveness of involving food in various conflict situations. In order to better understand the effect that food can have on conflict resolution effects, the following qualitative study is proposed.

Strategy for Investigating Food as a De-Escalation Tactic in Conflict Resolution

One way to investigate this issue is through a phenomenological study of food and conflict resolution in the Republic of Georgia. Georgia has established informal and formal conflict resolution mechanisms and has a culture of food sharing used as a social lubricant.¹⁵²

Georgia has a long history of using conflict resolution methods and because food is such an important part of Georgian culture, looking at the role of food in Georgian conflict resolution is a valuable case study. Traditional conflict resolution ways are merged with institutionalized conflict resolution practices to provide insight into how Georgians incorporate customary food traditions into conflict resolution. Since “Georgians prefer extralegal approaches, especially in the mountain regions, making

¹⁵² Frederik Coene, *The Caucasus - an Introduction*, (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 201.

mediation a legal option allows for Georgians to engage in culturally preferred practices.”¹⁵³

Georgian culture also makes it a prime case study for examining the role of food in conflict resolution. Georgians place a high value on relationships and believe in a cyclical perspective of time (as opposed to a linear perspective of time).¹⁵⁴ This means that during conflict resolution, “the sides will emphasize hospitality, try to develop reciprocal exchanges, and ask about family members.”¹⁵⁵ They will also “more often multitask, combining business with socializing, eating with working, and so on.”¹⁵⁶

Georgians tend to express emotion and during the beginning of conflict resolution, there is a need “to address the heightened emotion or psychological pressure.”¹⁵⁷ Magradze and d’Estrée suggest beginning a mediation with a joke or humorous anecdote to reduce heightened emotions and mention that having “dinner before the mediation process will significantly improve the contending parties’ attitude toward one another.”¹⁵⁸ Moreover, “mediators in Georgia are also taught to potentially call a break and let parties calm down, or find other strategies for deescalating emotion before proceeding with negotiation” such as meeting privately with the parties so they can discuss matters in a

¹⁵³ Guguli Magradze and Tamra Pearson d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” in *Cultural Encounters and Emergent Practices in Conflict Resolution Capacity-Building*, eds. T.P. d’Estrée and R.J. Parsons, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 137.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 138.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 139.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

way that “is more face-saving.”¹⁵⁹ Traditionally, Georgian culture has been one of “high-trust,” but is becoming more “low-trust.”¹⁶⁰ Looking at how providing a meal before discussions, during breaks, and for building trust will provide a unique case to study the role of food in conflict resolution.

A Note on Georgian Conflict Resolution Practices

In the Southern Caucasus region, conflict resolution efforts have primarily centered around “state, Soviet, and multiethnic traditional practices.”¹⁶¹ Historically, communal cohesion was valued, and clan leaders were often the third parties that stepped in during conflicts:

Villages often had both community assemblies led by elected elders (*makvshi*) to make important decisions, and village mediators (*morval*). Mediators would reconcile disputing parties through facilitating an exchange of compensation, or in some cases, carry a recommendation to an offender’s family that the family needed to leave the village. This sort of ‘cooling out’ over time might allow the family or descendants to return in the future. Though the goal might be reconciliation, exile was always also a possibility. Mediators used moral suasion and shuttle diplomacy to bring about a resolution.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 140.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 141.

¹⁶¹ S. Voell and I. Kaliszewska, (eds.), *State and Legal Practice in the Caucasus: Anthropological Perspectives on Law and Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2015) as cited in Magradze and d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” 117.

¹⁶² Ibid., 118.

There was also what is called the “mediator-judge (*bche-judge*), a combination sanctioned by central authorities during the Kingdom of Georgia (prior to Russian occupation in 1801)” and the “*shuamavali*, literally someone who would ‘walk between’ to manage conflicts between sides” by meeting privately with the conflicting parties, conducting shuttle diplomacy or even assisting the parties with their arguments for court.¹⁶³ King Vakhtang VI of Kartli systemized these types of traditions and customs into law which led to modern official law.¹⁶⁴

While it is difficult to define what “traditional” conflict resolution practices truly are and how they impact modern conflict resolution in Georgia, “leading Georgian writers and scholars of the nineteenth century focused on ‘mountaineers’- people from Svaneti or Khevsureti- as embodying the traditional Georgian way.”¹⁶⁵ In these mountainous regions, there are historical accounts of third parties that would step in to resolve, or at least “respond to egregious violations such as killing in a way that would rebalance the harmony of the community.”¹⁶⁶ When the situation was resolved, the party members would publicly agree to uphold their end of the solution and swear an oath on a Christian Orthodox icon (*khatze dapitzeba*).¹⁶⁷ Magradze and d’Estrée describe this oath as “literally swearing before God, as well as before the community” because of the

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 119.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ S. Voell, N. Jalabadze, L. Janiashvili, and E. Kramm, “Identity and Traditional Law: Local Legal Conceptions in Sven Villages, Georgia,” *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 23, no. 2 (2014) as cited in Magradze and d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” 119.

representation of an icon as “God’s presence on earth.”¹⁶⁸ ¹⁶⁹ Swearing on an icon was also used to confirm honesty or truth telling, or to show a commitment to “uphold the laws of the community.”¹⁷⁰ They continue by stating that “even though traditional practices may no longer be used in most areas, recalling them gives a sense of identity and reinforces shared values and a sense of how to ‘properly’ resolve a conflict.”¹⁷¹

When the region was under Soviet authority, traditional means of conflict resolution were primarily used for local or private situations in which the Soviet state was not involved.¹⁷² For cases in which the Soviet state was involved, conflict resolution practices were often more of a “strategy of conflict management through force.”¹⁷³ This style of governance led to a lack of trust towards institutions in general and after the fall of the Soviet Union, “urban streets were managed by neighborhood networks of ‘thieves-in-law’ whose ‘street corner society’ had their own norms, hierarchy, and way of managing

¹⁶⁸ M. Herzfeld, “Pride and Perjury: Time and the Oath in the Mountain Villages of Crete,” *Man* 25, no. 2 (1990) as cited in Magradze and d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” 119.

¹⁶⁹ Voell, et. al., “Identity and Traditional Law: Local Legal Conceptions in Sven Villages, Georgia” as cited in Magradze and d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” 119.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ S. Voell, “Moral Breakdown Among the Georgian Svans: A Car Accident Mediated Between Traditional and State Law,” in *State and Legal Practice in the Caucasus: Anthropological Perspectives on Law and Politics*, eds. S. Voell and I. Kaliszewska, (London: Routledge, 2015) as cited in Magradze and d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” 120.

¹⁷² N. Jalabazde, and L. Janiashvili, “Traditional Law and Blood Feud: Svan Legal Practice in Soviet Times and in Contemporary Southern Georgia,” in *State and Legal Practice in the Caucasus: Anthropological Perspectives on Law and Politics*, eds. S. Voell and I. Kaliszewska, (London: Routledge, 2015) as cited in Magradze and d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” 120.

¹⁷³ V. Kremenyuk, “Conflict Management in the Former USSR and World Experience,” in *Ethnicity and Power in the Contemporary World*, eds. K. Rupesinghe and V.A. Tishkov (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1996) as cited in Magradze and d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” 121.

conflicts.”¹⁷⁴ After the Rose Revolution, which opposed election fraud, more voices opposed corruption in the government and as policies changed, people began to have more confidence in institutions and law.¹⁷⁵ As more people relied on these systems and structures, there was less of a need for traditional conflict resolution ways though they are still present in Georgia today.¹⁷⁶

This cultural history gives perspective and context to this study. Since Georgians have a history of conflict resolution and since food is central to Georgian culture, the following research questions can be asked.

Research Questions

Taking into account the common threads in the literature and the history of conflict resolution in Georgia, this study asks the following research questions.

RQ1: What are the experiences and perspectives of Georgian third-party practitioners regarding the role of food in mediations in Georgia?

RQ2: What are the experiences and perspectives of Georgian third-party practitioners with the role of meal sharing in historical or traditional Georgian conflict resolution practices?

¹⁷⁴ E. Zakharova, “The Tbilisi ‘Street’ as a Legal and Political Phenomenon in Georgia,” in *State and Legal Practice in the Caucasus: Anthropological Perspectives on Law and Politics*, eds. S. Voell and I. Kaliszewska, (London: Routledge, 2015) as cited in Magradze and d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” 121.

¹⁷⁵ L. Di Pippo, “Marketing Reforms: The Dimensions of Narratives in Georgia’s Fight Against Corruption,” in *State and Legal Practice in the Caucasus: Anthropological Perspectives on Law and Politics*, eds. S. Voell and I. Kaliszewska, (London: Routledge, 2015) as cited in Magradze and d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” 121-2.

¹⁷⁶ Zakharova, “The Tbilisi ‘Street’ as a Legal and Political Phenomenon in Georgia” as cited in Magradze and d’Estrée, “Cultivating Mediation in Georgia,” 122.

RQ3: What are the experiences and perspectives of Georgian third-party practitioners with the role of meal sharing in contemporary mediations?

Methods

This study is conducive to a phenomenological approach because it looks at the experiences of practitioners and describing the phenomenon of what they perceive food's effect on conflict resolution efforts to be.¹⁷⁷ Also, because the research questions look at Georgian culture, this study looks to understand the experience of food sharing during conflict. The phenomenological approach best helps discover the “what” and “how” (the essence) of this human experience.¹⁷⁸

Sample

A phenomenological approach requires purposeful sampling, meaning that the individuals that will best help to understand the context and lived experiences of this topic will be a group of intentionally selected people rather than a “probability sample.”¹⁷⁹ The purposeful sample for this study was to interview a small group of Georgian mediation practitioners for their experiences and perspectives of food sharing in Georgian conflict resolution efforts. Creswell and Poth recommend a sample size no more than fifteen for a phenomenological study and some experts suggest no more than

¹⁷⁷ John Creswell and Cheryl Poth, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2018), 75.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 148.

ten.¹⁸⁰ ¹⁸¹ A sample size of three gave me a window into Georgian mediator experiences to draw themes from and was also a realistic number of participants to interview in the time to complete this study considering the language limits faced. (Please see Appendix A for a list of interview questions).

This study did not take into account gender, sex, age, or race when considering participants, but did consider ethnicity, culture group, and conflict resolution experience because the study looks for Georgian practitioner experiences and perspectives. Participants with a range of mediation experience were sought, including those with little experience and those who have long careers in the mediation field. This sample provided different perspectives based on experience level. A series of demographic questions were asked before each interview. (Please see Appendix B for demographic questions).

Moreover, I wanted to know specifically what experiences and perspectives ethnic Georgians who are members of the Georgian culture group have regarding food-sharing in conflict resolution efforts. Because culture is a focus of the research, ethnic Georgians are the culture-group I looked at specifically, so I purposefully selected ethnic Georgians who practice Georgian culture. Due to time and resource constraints, I only selected English-speaking participants and did not have a translator available. Many Georgians under the age of 50 speak English as a second language so I did not anticipate this as a limiting factor for finding participants. As described more in the *Discussion*, this did turn

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 78.

¹⁸¹ A. Moser, and I. Korstjens, "Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection and analysis," *The European journal of general practice* 24, no. 1 (2018): 9-18.

out to be a limiting factor and future studies could include participants that do not speak English.

Data Collection

To collect data, I conducted an approximately hour-long, open-ended interview with each Georgian practitioner over the video conferencing platform, Zoom.¹⁸² Due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions, I was not able to travel to Georgia to interview. I asked each participant permission to interview them as well as to record our sessions.¹⁸³ Both during the interviews and while watching the recorded interviews later, I took electronic notes and stored them digitally.¹⁸⁴ The common data collection and field issues I anticipated were any internet connectivity issues during the virtual interviews, COVID-19 and not being able to travel to Georgia, and some language barriers.¹⁸⁵ The data collection and field issues I did encounter were conducting interviews in the virtual environment including coordinating time zone differences and less than perfect sound quality. Another issue I encountered was that one participant did not feel comfortable speaking in English over the video conference platform. This participant chose to write out the answers to my questions and send them to me as an email attachment. The benefit to this was that I had direct quotes in written form, but the downside to this method was that I was not able to immediately follow up with further questions.

¹⁸² Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative inquiry and research design*, 150.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 149.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 150.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 150 and 171.

In all aspects of this study, I needed to keep in mind “respect, reciprocity, deciding who owns the data,” and any other concerns participants have.¹⁸⁶ Because I am not of this culture-sharing group, I needed to show respect for the culture and Georgian people. Ultimately, this is their culture, and I am an outsider.

Analysis

Analyzing the data involved “organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them.”¹⁸⁷ Specifically for a phenomenological approach, I needed to analyze the data for specific quotes and significant statements that I then used to form clusters or themes.¹⁸⁸ First, I decided to mask the identities of the participants by coding their interview responses with their demographic information (taken before the interview during the consent to participate phase).¹⁸⁹ Next, as mentioned above, I managed and organized the data electronically and stored it on a secure University of Denver server so that it will not be lost.¹⁹⁰ Next, I summarized the notes I took both during the interviews and during the playback of the recorded interviews by clustering common experiences among all the interviewees.¹⁹¹ I then described, classified, and

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 93.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 181.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 201.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 183.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 187.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 187.

interpreted the data by “forming codes or categories.”¹⁹² I categorized themes by “what the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon” as well as looked for any mention of the three themes I drew from the literature review.¹⁹³

Proposed Writing Strategies

Using textural and structural descriptions, I then wrote a “composite description” of the “essence” of food sharing in conflict resolution efforts in Georgia.¹⁹⁴ This comprised an “exhaustive description of the essential invariant structure (or essence) of the experience[s]” the mediators had with food sharing in this context.¹⁹⁵ To write up the report, I decided to organize and present the information thematically, examining the “essential aspects of the phenomenon,” analytically.¹⁹⁶ I started by describing the essence of the phenomenon and then used specific examples of the third parties’ experiences to demonstrate this larger theme.¹⁹⁷ Finally, I cross-referenced the bottom-up data from the interviews with the themes that surfaced through the literature review.

¹⁹² Ibid., 189.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 201.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 238.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 239.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Results

For this study, I interviewed three (3) Georgian mediators and assigned each an anonymous participant code: P1, P2, and P3. From the demographic questionnaire responses, there were two (2) self-identified males and one (1) self-identified female. Two (2) of the respondents reported 6-15 years of conflict resolution experience and one (1) reported 26 years or more of experience. Two (2) participants reported being 46 years old or older and one (1) participant reported being between 31 and 45 years old.

After analyzing the data for clusters, or themes, I found that the data fell into two main threads: 1) important pieces for de-escalating conflict through mediation, and 2) how food does and could contribute to this de-escalation. From these two threads, I coded significant quotes and points made during the interview, giving more weight to points that all three participants made and lesser weight (though still important) to points only made by one participant. There were no major coded themes that only two out of the three participants discussed.

The responses of these three Georgian mediators tells a story of the perspectives and experiences of using food both in traditional Georgian culture but also contemporary mediations in Georgia. The essence of food sharing in conflict resolution efforts in Georgia comes from traditional conflict resolution efforts that still exist today, mostly in the “high mountain regions of Georgia” (P3). Though used mostly as celebratory and/or a formality, it is common for the elected elder of the community to host a traditional

mediation “around a small table of wine and snacks” (P3). P3 went on, “if the negotiation is not about murder issues, the table is lasts longer with many foods and drinks. The sides swear to follow the agreement. Both parties are managing such tables, where all participants of mediation (mediators, parties) are invited. Emotions are lowered, parties are more open, and food is delivered from one party to [the] other.” Also, the participants all mentioned that food could serve as a celebration of settlement or agreement.

Traditional mediation in Georgia can include a meal to mark the closure of the mediation and “swear to follow the agreement.” P3 stated, “the host of [the] mediation propose[s] a small table with wine and snacks... mostly [for] etiquette [purposes].”

P1 described how this traditional process of bringing conflicting parties in a community together before an elder continues in various forms today. In general, Georgians gather around food for celebrations, “communication” which the participant described as both “we haven’t seen each other in a while” situations as well as “we need to talk” situations, birthdays, promotions, among other events. More common than institutionalized mediation, there are also times when parties in conflict such as a divorcing couple are invited over for a meal by a family member, neighbor, or friend. Or, if there is conflict in an office, the manager might organize a picnic, birthday party, or meal for bringing the parties together. This person doing the inviting usually has an affinity, or skill for bringing people together for the purpose of building a “warm, close, confident” atmosphere. The host might first notice the tension and then invite the parties and maybe others as well over for food. This type of context allows for trust-building, contact, and gives the parties an opportunity to meet in an informal, low-stress

environment. “Businesses do better when they get together over [a shared] table. The colleagues feel closer and trust one another. This can happen in the home or at a restaurant,” shared P1. If, throughout the meal or event, their relationship improves, then the host might initiate a follow-up conversation that addresses the conflict more directly.

Today in Tbilisi, what the participants described as “professional mediation” occurs both through the court system and privately. Though meal-sharing does not occur in these professional mediations, all the participants discussed that they offer coffee, tea, and cookies for breaks and intervals between caucuses in institutionalized mediations. P2 emphasized that the mediator must “create a non-formal atmosphere” because “you want the parties to be comfortable.” P2 went on to say “You want a confident, confidential atmosphere. Treat the parties non-formally [*sic*], trust, giving them time to talk and express themselves. Never interrupt the parties. Explain their rights to them, explain the process, explain to the lawyers that this is a different process- it’s not competitive, but rather they are here to settle [through cooperation].”

Without this type of atmosphere, emotions run high, parties can get overwhelmed, and they stop thinking clearly. Serving coffee and cookies “allows time for the parties to be more relaxed and comfortable... and they can think more openly” (P1). Moreover, P2 noted that parties can “have coffee and cookies, while others are in caucus, to relax” giving them time and space to think clearly. P1 suggested that “food helps the parties stop talking and emotions go down. Food and [gathering around a] table are important because parties can talk while they’re eating, they are more relaxed, and respond better to the

other side.” Below are the themes coded from the interviews: Breaks and Food as Transition, Food and Mediation, Context, Emotion, and Trust and Relationship-Building.

Breaks and Food as Transition

The participants all responded that they do not currently serve meals or food during their mediations, but all mentioned having coffee, tea, and cookies for breaks, caucuses, or to create a space and time to relax. P3 mentioned “it is also very useful to have small lunch during the break in [the] mediation process” to help the parties calm down if need be and to take a moment to relax, though the respondent did not mention if the mediator provides or coordinates the meal. It is important to note that according to P3, the purpose of this meal is to have a strategic, separate break from the mediation and conflict rather than having the parties come together over a meal.

Breaks from the mediation sessions allow the parties to step into a different space where they can gather their thoughts, calm down heightened emotions, and self-soothe with a piece of food or a hot cup of drink. P1 stated that “when emotions run high, sometimes stop the session, insert an appropriate joke, give an anecdote about another mediation, or caucus. You can also take a break for coffee or tea.” The physical act of stepping away from the mediation table, chewing, and/or taking a sip of a drink allows the parties to break from the emotional conflict for long enough to shift into a place where they can restart the discussion. In this way, food as a break serves as a transition into a frame of mind that can continue mediation in cooperation.

Food as Mediation

Having food can put parties in a frame of mind that lends itself to cooperation over competition, an essential component to resolving conflict. The participants responded that food could contribute to building trust, having a relaxing atmosphere, and lowering emotions just as a mediator does during mediation sessions. Even the act of sitting around a table may be helpful even if there is no food because the parties are physically at the table and ready to cooperate. P2 mentioned using food to increase creativity in brainstorming options because there is less pressure on the parties to maintain positions when they are eating a meal together. Moreover, regarding food-sharing, P1 mentioned contact as a reason for bringing conflicting parties together for a meal among other reasons such as “confidence building” and discussion of the conflict though this participant stated that food is not essential to mediation, but food and gathering may be extra to help parties relax and “build better emotions.” P2 described “the need to be together” as a reason for gathering over a shared table. Just as mediation brings parties together, works to build better emotions, and ease the process, so can food play this role.

P2 also described how one of the most important elements in mediation is creating a “non-formal atmosphere” that allows the parties to become “more relaxed, talking over coffee, not in court or a formal office.” One of the advantages to mediation is that it takes the conflict, and therefore the parties, out from a courtroom to a less formal mediation office. In this context, the parties can focus more on cooperation rather than competition because they do not need to worry about standing before and convincing a judge but can take ownership of their own conflict and resolve it within their autonomy. Having these

conversations over coffee or a meal relaxes the parties even further by taking yet another level of stress away from the situation. In this way, food primes the parties to have difficult discussions with a cooperative frame of mind rather than a competitive one. This frame of mind as well as the context the parties are in create an overall atmosphere of cooperation. This context that the respondents refer to is further addressed in the next section.

Context

All participants also mentioned creating a “comfortable,” “non-formal [*sic*],” and “relaxed” atmosphere as one of the most important parts of mediation. The implication of creating such an atmosphere is to change the conflict from competition to cooperation by changing the tone of the conflict.

P2 and P3 mentioned how food allows the parties to be more open and P1 said that it helps “parties... respond better to the other side.” In fact, P3 stated that “there is a saying in Georgia: ‘there is no conflict which can’t be solved with a glass of wine.’ If the negotiation is not about murder issues, the table is lasts longer with many foods and drinks.” Food and drink act as a social lubricant bringing the parties together for some time and the informal atmosphere of having a meal or snack can prompt openness and creativity in finding solutions.

In other words, it is important to set up a context in which parties can move from attitudes of competition to ones of cooperation. Third parties take care to prime the setting for cooperation by shifting frames and norms. Food and meals help prime the

conflict resolution setting for cooperation and shifting these frames and norms by serving as the reason to bring parties together and creating an informal atmosphere.

Emotion

One reason for priming the parties and the context for cooperation is that it can assist in keeping emotions from getting too heated and getting out of control. P1 listed helping the parties “to relax emotionally” as one of the most important roles of the third party. P1 described that “at the beginning of the process, emotions usually aren’t that high, but as the parties discuss more, emotions can run high.” Therefore “when emotions run high, sometimes stop the session, insert an appropriate joke, give an anecdote about another mediation, or caucus. You can also take a break for coffee or tea” because “food helps the parties stop talking and emotions go down.” This respondent stated that “food and table are important because parties can talk while they’re eating, they are more relaxed, and respond better to the other side.” P3 reported that with shared table, “emotions are lowered” and “parties are more open.”

When parties are gathered over food, whether around a shared table or not, there are opportunities for communication, listening, and flexibility of thinking thanks to a reduction in high emotions. This also helps increase problem-solving by promoting creativity. More than reducing heated emotions, the respondent shared that food and gathering together help parties relax and “build better emotions” to build relationships and trust which will be discussed in the next sections.

Trust and Relationship-Building

All participants mentioned trust-building as one of the most important pieces of the mediation process. “A trustful atmosphere” makes the parties more likely to reach some sort of an agreement. This trust includes trusting both the mediator as well as the other party. Building trust leads to building a relationship between the parties which in turn leads to greater trust contributes to a closer relationship and so on. P3 reported, “There may be different ways to build trust between the parties: It may be useful to have meetings between the authorities from both sides. During the individual meetings, it is good to reach some agreement about small issues, like the agenda and etc. Then, to begin the main mediation process. It is very useful to first discover the parties’ expectations toward the mediation and toward each other.”

Building trust begins with signals of vulnerability which contributes to an escalation of trust. In other words, trust breeds more trust. Food and meal-sharing plays a role in building trust by providing a context of vulnerability. In the situation where the community member invites conflicting parties over for a meal or party among friends and family, the parties enter a state of vulnerability as guests of this social event. P1 detailed the significance of sharing a table, “to share a table is extremely meaningful and important. To share a table, especially in someone’s home, means to become like friends and become closer. There is trust if someone comes to your home. After you share a table, there’s an obligation like being part of a family.” Even “businesses do better when they get together over table. The colleagues feel closer and trust one another.”

Of course, meeting with someone in their home holds greater significance because there is greater vulnerability and therefore greater opportunities for building trust but building relationships can occur in someone's home or in a restaurant. P1 went on to say that gathering together is so important for relationship-building in Georgia that "even during the pandemic, people still gathered together."

Another important piece when considering relationship-building is the future relationship of the parties. P1 stated that a future relationship is more important in Georgia than in the US because "Georgia is a small country where everyone knows everyone else." Parties cannot simply go their separate ways and expect to never interact again like in a large country. Because of this, the respondent described the main goal of mediation is to "reduce the tension" between the parties even if there is no resolution because the parties will more than likely interact again in the future. P2 expressed needing to "help the parties understand where the relationship will go in the future. Even if they never want to see each other again, conflict only happens to people in relationship- at least a small part." The assumption here is that the parties got into conflict because of a past relationship and even if there is no future relationship, there is something that bound them together once and this might come up again at some point. Therefore, if a small amount of trust can be built during the mediation, the chances for an improved relationship (wherever the relationship may be) increase.

In summary, the respondents suggested that food could play a role in conflict resolution efforts, specifically in mediation, by helping to prime the parties and create a relaxing atmosphere for cooperation, reduce tensions and emotions, build trust and

relationships, and promote creativity. The respondents only discussed mediation when describing their experiences and perspectives of food and food-sharing. They provide coffee and cookies and the opportunities for parties to have a meal between sessions to have a break and position the parties to shift into a cooperative frame of mind. Informal third parties in the community take a more active role in preparing a meal and hosting in order to bring the conflicting parties together, build trust, and signal vulnerability for relationship-building and potential resolution. Again, this was primarily in the context of mediation (even community, informal mediation), though there is potential for applying these themes more broadly, beyond mediation.

Discussion

The themes that surfaced through the literature review were how food-sharing signals vulnerability and trust building, perceived commonality, and a change in the conflict from competition to cooperation by providing new norms, changing the tone, and shifting frames. Considering these themes, the participants in this study addressed how food can change the tone of a conflict by promoting more positive emotions, provide a shift in norms and frames, and contribute to trust-building. This addresses the first research question asked in the beginning of the study: *RQ1*: What are the experiences and perspectives of Georgian third-party practitioners regarding the role of food in mediations in Georgia?

The respondents described how food can relax the parties, be used as a social lubricant to invite conflicting parties into contact and change the tone of the conflict to one that begins to build trust (or continues to build on any existing trust). For example, the participants mentioned how taking a break for coffee and cookies helps change the tone by allowing the parties to relax and “emotions go down.” This confirms the themes from the literature review that food can change the atmosphere of the conflict from competition to cooperation by changing the tone and shifting certain frames. It also confirms that food can potentially signal aspects of trust- and relationship-building. Changing the tone, frame shifting, and trust-building are important components of

conflict de-escalation¹⁹⁸ and if food can have a role in bringing these components to a situation, it is possible that food can be a tool in conflict de-escalation.

Regarding the second research question: *RQ2*: What are the experiences and perspectives of Georgian third-party practitioners with the role of meal sharing in historical or traditional Georgian conflict resolution practices, the traditional process of electing an elder from the community as a type of mediator for conflicts and bringing parties together over a small table with snacks and wine was described. In this case, food is used more as a celebratory tool to commemorate the resolution and signal to the community that the parties will uphold their ends of the agreement. This supports the anthropological literature describing food as symbolic, especially feasting. The literature describes similar situations where food is meant “to bring people together and affirm their solidarity”¹⁹⁹ and publicly celebrating relationships.²⁰⁰ By emphasizing and promoting these communal relationships, the third parties are strengthening the social bonds of the parties in the community which further de-escalates the conflict and can even help prevent further conflict.²⁰¹

Through inference, it is possible to understand how perceived commonality could be implied in some of the responses, though the respondents did not claim as much directly, and this would need to be confirmed. For example, being invited by a community

¹⁹⁸ Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 139, 346, and 338.

¹⁹⁹ Anderson, *Everyone Eats*, 127.

²⁰⁰ Strang, “Talking with our Mouths Full: Performance and Feasting as Intercultural Dialogue,” 18.

²⁰¹ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 139.

member to a dinner may remind a party of common interests and relationships. Food and meal-sharing could help parties re-humanize one another by reminding parties that everyone eats and when we all eat around one table, we are unified. Because of this, I expected common ground to be a point that the respondents would address. Only one respondent however, mentioned that common ground is an important part of the mediation process and none of the respondents mentioned that food could play a role in building common ground between the parties. This finding might suggest that food is not the best tactic for building common ground. More questions regarding building common ground would be beneficial to the study.

The final research question asked for this study is: *RQ3*: What are the experiences and perspectives of Georgian third-party practitioners with the role of meal sharing in contemporary mediations? As described in the *Results* section, the respondents do not currently promote food sharing in their mediation efforts, though each stated that it could be an asset for conflict de-escalation. P3 stated that “there are some cases when negotiation and agreement happen over a meal. Usually, such an agreement is stronger than an agreement in an official space. The sides have more commitment to follow such agreement.” The respondents suggest that when parties gather together over a meal to discuss a conflict or negotiate, there is a deeper connection, but this could be because closer parties are willing to gather over a meal while parties that are not a close relationally, are more likely to gather in an official space. It is difficult to conclude whether it is the food and food-sharing that make the agreement stronger or if the parties more likely to make a strong agreement are more likely to share a meal. Because of this,

the respondents noted that any efforts over food would need to consider the parties themselves and if food-sharing is appropriate for them and their situation.

Food and meal-sharing can provide the basic components for setting up a context in which mediation is primed for cooperation. This occurs through the shifting of frames and norms such as reducing tensions and lowering heated emotions, helping the parties feel more relaxed causing flexibility in thinking, and signaling vulnerability that leads to trust- and relationship-building.

There is a reason why when a difficult conversation needs to happen, it often occurs over a cup of coffee or during a meal. The people having this difficult conversation are able to look at the food on their plate when they cannot meet the person in the eye. Holding a hot drink in one's hands has a comforting effect that keeps the person grounded during an emotional moment. As discussed in the literature, having a familiar ritual during an emotionally difficult time helps a person focus on the ritual, allowing for more mental and emotional capacity to deal with the tense situation.²⁰² Focusing on dipping a tea bag into a teacup allows the person "ritual relaxation,"²⁰³ or physically experiencing a familiar ritual while allowing the mind to process the tense moment or think of creative options during brainstorming.

The parties could also be signaling vulnerability when they are willing to come into contact with the other party. Vulnerability can address the breakdown of relationships

²⁰² Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners*, 44.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 46.

and lack of trust between conflicting parties as suggested by the literature.²⁰⁴ One respondent said this choice to come together for mediation rather than stand before a judge can be the common ground needed to help the parties “see that they can solve this [conflict] jointly.” But coming together and sitting at a table with the other party (whether it is the mediation table or the dinner table at a community member’s home) involves its own risks. These risks can include anything from risks of conflict escalation by being in contact with the other party²⁰⁵ to eating the food that someone else has prepared.²⁰⁶ As Long and Brecke describe how sending reconciliation signals to the other party can improve relations, signaling vulnerability can lead to trust-building and improved relations between the parties.²⁰⁷ Knowing these risks and choosing to come together anyway creates vulnerability.

Moreover, when parties are gathered together in the home (or restaurant) by a community member they see a community that cares about them and their conflict. They feel the support of a loving group of people who want to see the conflict resolved in agreeable ways. Food and meals help prime the conflict resolution setting for cooperation and shifting these frames and norms by serving as the reason to bring parties together and creating an informal atmosphere. Contact theory suggests that under the right conditions,

²⁰⁴ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 101.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners*, 135.

²⁰⁷ Long and Brecke, *War and Reconciliation*, 18.

parties can be brought together.^{208 209} Food and food-sharing can help create these conditions when bringing parties together. Contact and communication allow for explanations and understanding between parties, problem solving, rehumanizing, and for building relationships.²¹⁰ It can also signal commonality and “since friends and families share food, the action of eating together can ritually express what is held, shared, and enjoyed, after all, in common; it therefore signifies the dropping of hostilities.”²¹¹ Food helps shift frames and norms so that basic contact and communication can occur by changing the context into an informal, relaxed process.

There is more to discover with this topic. By only interviewing professional mediators, this study does not include the perspective of community members who conduct family and friend mediations in their homes or in a restaurant. To interview this population would shed light on the processes and reasons behind them during traditional mediation efforts. Asking the professional mediators why they consider a shared table helpful and how it could be incorporated into their own practices could reveal more of the strategies they use to set up a cooperative context for conflict de-escalation.

What is important to take away from this study is that there are specific ways third parties can use food to prime parties and set up an atmosphere of cooperation rather than

²⁰⁸ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 181.

²⁰⁹ The four conditions described for bringing parties together are 1) equal-group status within the situation; 2) common goals; 3) intergroup cooperation; and 4) institutional support. For more information, please refer to Allport, Gordon W. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley Publications. Boston: 1955.

²¹⁰ Pruitt and Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 181.

²¹¹ Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners*, 128.

competition by shifting the frames and norms of a conflict, reducing tensions, and building trust and relationships. There are many strategies and tactics in conflict resolution literature that suggest how to de-escalate a conflict and bring resolution, and food has long been held as an important piece to establishing the context to de-escalate conflict. The respondents in this study described using food in similar ways in informal, community conflict resolution though interestingly, they do not strategically include meals or meal-sharing during professional, or institutionalized mediations. They did describe their strategy of including hot drinks and cookies during breaks to reduce heated emotions and help put parties in a cooperative frame of mind. They described traditional mediations and their descendent, the community mediation that often centers around a meal or party. Perhaps the power of gathering over food and bringing parties together around a dinner table has been lost during the institutionalization and professionalization of mediation. Does modern professional mediation overlook the long tradition of breaking bread together that contemporary traditional mediation does not? Is there a way to add this piece back into third party interventions and efforts?

The respondents distinguished community, informal conflict resolution from more formal, professional mediation efforts, and described the need to consider that in Georgia, on-going relationships are important. Perhaps a deeper study of how each community and professional mediations in Georgia address this future relationship among parties is needed. Can food play a greater role in a culture where the future relationships of parties are key during conflict resolution?

Caveats and Opportunities for Further Research

The sampling method I used to find participants (a purposeful sample of English-speaking ethnic Georgian mediators) was partly successful. It was successful because the participants fit all criteria and answered interview questions with relevant, useful information. What was not as successful was how many participants responded. Though a sample size of three gives me enough of a perspective to study the experiences and perspectives of Georgian mediators towards this phenomenon, it would have done well to have a few more participants to interview. Future research could address this problem by having a translator present so that the sample could include non-English speakers as well as English speakers.

One important caveat to this sample is that I asked a local source and resource for potential participants to interview. So, all participants in this study were recommended by this source. Future research could find other local sources for participants.

While the Georgian mediators interviewed addressed some of the themes found in the literature, they did not address them all. Notably, they did not suggest that the role of food contributes to signaling vulnerability and perceived commonality. Future studies should study more in depth at why these themes were not mentioned by these Georgian practitioners. Future studies should also research more broadly by studying the role of food in the conflict resolution efforts in other cultures and contexts.

Empirical studies using hypothesis testing and quantitative research would be valuable to this topic as well. Studies that test whether the presence of food in a mediation, negotiation, or other conflict resolution efforts changes the outcome of the

session could be conducted using simulated sessions. The sessions could be analyzed quantitatively to determine if food influences outcomes of the sessions.

Moreover, this study could serve a pilot project for a study looking deeper into the experiences and perspectives of Georgian conflict resolution practitioners with food. More qualitative research could be conducted to study the mountainous regions of Georgia and the role of food in historical traditional mediation. In addition, more qualitative research could be conducted to study the strategic use of food in contemporary mediations rooted in traditional processes.

Critiques and Cautions

The most obvious caution when promoting food in any conflict resolution effort is that food can become viewed as a blanket solution to all conflicts. McKeever writes that “among chefs and food writers, it can be tempting to portray the power of food as something almost mythical. If two sides of a conflict could only just share a meal, there would be peace between them.”²¹² In addition, meals and meal-sharing may instead be distractions to the conflict resolution process. Instead of helping the parties set a tone of collaboration, going out to eat and attending lavish meals could prolong the process and allow parties to avoid the difficult work of talking to one another.²¹³ One participant from the study mentioned that flexibility is key and serving food may not be appropriate in all cases stating that “when deciding whether to have food or not, you must ask, who are the parties? Are they business-oriented? Maybe they are too focused on business to eat... if

²¹² McKeever, “What Are Conflict Cafes and Can They Actually Change the World?”

²¹³ “Congress of Vienna,” *Book of Days Tales*.

they need a future relationship, maybe food would be beneficial.” Another respondent encourages practitioners to ask, “are the parties ready to join [around a shared] table?” before attempting this type of contact. Being flexible to various situations and contexts and knowing the parties is key to knowing what might be beneficial and what may stall the process. So, the writer and researcher of food use must be sure to recognize that eating may be one small tool among many in the tool kit for conflict resolution.

Another caution is to remember that parties come from a plethora of cultures and backgrounds and food may hold different meanings for each party. For example, “...there are the questions: ‘if nationals and foreigners sit down at each other’s table [do] the two groups become closer?’; can cookbook recipes ‘make the friendship between... two countries stronger?’; or ‘is the success of ‘ethnic’ food... a model of successful reconciliation, a signifier for a shared future...?’”²¹⁴ In asking all these questions, it is important to step back and remember that foods and the groups they come from have often been “commodified.”²¹⁵ Cook cautions in assuming ““a kind of pure Past, out of which “ethnic” [and “traditional”] cuisines emerged, fully formed.””²¹⁶ “Taking the boundaries of the body as a fundamental heuristic tool, eating thus comes to be understood as an important metaphor for social and political difference” and this metaphor can be a driving factor, a divider, or a connector in conflict resolution

²¹⁴ Ian Cook, “Geographies of Food: Mixing,” *Progress in Human Geography* 32 no. 6 (2008): 823.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

depending on the situation.^{217 218} One participant from the study expressed concern for this as well, stating, “the mediator must know the cultural peculiarities. The mediator should be sensitive over proposing a meal to these people since they might have religion [*sic*] restriction[s]. It is necessary to know what kind of meals are acceptable for that ethnical group.” It is vital that these differences be analyzed in the context of the specific conflict to determine their effect on the development of the conflict.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the power dynamics that can be associated with food.²¹⁹ Coleman writes that “conflict is often a means of seeking or maintaining the balance or imbalance of power in relationships” and much like food, conflict can be seen as “a symbolic expression of one’s identity and right to self-determination.”²²⁰ Food narratives and practices may convey power dynamics in a way that could potentially hinder conflict resolution efforts.²²¹ For example, a high-power group may eat the cuisine of a lower-power group to create an image of acceptance without “address[ing] broader issues of multiculturalism.”²²² High-power groups may also use food to “exclude and marginalize” lower-power groups by suggesting that one is outside the mainstream group

²¹⁷ Tompkins, “Literary Approaches to Food Studies: Eating the Other,” 246.

²¹⁸ Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 111.

²¹⁹ Sarina Pearson and Shuchi Kothari, “Menus for a Multicultural New Zealand,” *Continuum* 21, no. 1 (2007): 53.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²²² *Ibid.*, 50.

if one eats certain foods.²²³ To overcome these critiques and heed these warnings, it is key for mediators and facilitators to research the situation carefully and conduct a full conflict analysis to understand the parties' dynamics before bringing them together.

²²³ Ibid., 53.

Conclusion

By looking at the role of food in conflict resolution efforts I hope to add a small tool in the tool kit of conflict resolution. Many strategies and tactics exist to resolving conflict and discernment becomes essential to knowing which ones are most appropriate for the situation. This paper states the problem that there is a lack of studies supporting the widespread belief that food is a positive element in conflict resolution efforts. The literature provides a backdrop for the argument that food can be a tool in mediation, negotiation, and other conciliation sessions by meeting psychological, biological, physical, and hospitality needs. History seems to suggest that the role of food in feasts and meals provides symbolism. Through food-sharing, building trust, providing perceived commonality, and changing the conflict from competition to cooperation by providing new norms, changing the tone, and shifting frames, food can act as a de-escalation tactic during conflict resolution efforts.

By interviewing Georgian conflict resolution practitioners to look at how practitioners perceive and strategically use food-sharing in mediations gave a cultural context to these conflict de-escalation questions. This study found that the role of food during traditional and contemporary mediation efforts in Georgia is one of helping to build trust, changing the tone of the conflict by creating more positive emotions, and shifting norms and frames of the conflict.

“Sometimes, in the deepest moments, there are no words. There is only food.”

- Roy Choi

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Questions

- What tactics and strategies do you use in conflict resolution processes?
- How would you set up a conflict resolution process to achieve what you are looking for?
- Why do you set up a conflict resolution process to achieve what you are looking for?
- In your experience, what has helped in conflict resolution processes generally?
- What have you seen as most helpful for parties during conflict resolution processes?
- I want to talk to you about some hypothetical situations that you might encounter as a practitioner. If you were to bring together your neighbors to discuss an issue, what are the most important pieces you would want to have during the process?
 - If food is mentioned, ask why that was considered an important piece.
- If you were to bring together a recently divorced couple to discuss child custody issues, what are the most important pieces you would want to have during the process?
 - If food is mentioned, ask why that was considered an important piece.
- If you were to bring together two groups of people that are experiencing a historical, identity conflict, what are the most important pieces you would want to have during the process?

- If food is mentioned, ask why that was considered an important piece.
- In your experience, what has helped build trust between parties in conflict resolution efforts?
- In your experience, what has helped parties feel more relaxed in conflict resolution settings?
- What does it mean to you to eat from a shared table?
- What are the emotions, behaviors, etc. that come with meal-sharing for you?

Appendix B

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Experiences of Conflict Resolution Practitioners in The Republic of Georgia

IRBNet #: 1754913-1

Principal Investigator: Raisa Wells, MA Conflict Resolution Candidate, raisa.wells@du.edu

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Tamra Pearson d'Estrée, tamra.destree@du.edu

Study Site: Online via video conferencing platform

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not you may want to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

Purpose

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to be interviewed over video conferencing for approximately one hour. You will be asked a series of questions related to your experiences and perspectives as a third-party conflict resolution practitioner. You may refuse to answer any question and/or terminate the interview at any time. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences and perspectives of third-party conflict resolution practitioners in The Republic of Georgia.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

Benefits

There are no benefits to you as a result of participating in this study.

Confidentiality of Information

All data collected will be confidential and stored on secure University of Denver servers. The link between your identifiers and the research data will be destroyed after the records retention period required by state and/or federal law. There are no plans to release the data to the subjects.

Limits to confidentiality

All of the information you provide will be confidential. Your name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be password protected.

Your responses will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in an encrypted and password protected file. Only the research team will have access to the file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed.

With your permission, I would like to videorecord this interview so that I can make an accurate transcript. Once I have made the transcript, I will erase the recordings. Your name will not be in the transcript or my notes.

Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

Information collected about you will not be used or shared for future research studies.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

Participation in research may cause a loss of privacy. The researchers will keep information confidential as possible, but complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Use of your information for future research

Your information collected for this project will NOT be used or shared for future research, even if we remove the identifiable information like your name or date of birth.

Consent to video / audio recording / photography solely for purposes of this research

This study involves video/audio recording, and/or photography. If you do not agree to be recorded, you can still take part in the study.

- YES, I agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.
- NO, I do not agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

Questions

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Raisa Wells at raisa.wells@du.edu.

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at 303-871-2121 or email at IRBAdmin@du.edu.

Agreeing to Participate in This Study

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by agreeing to participate in this study. I may keep a copy of this form.

Please check the correct box below:

- YES, I agree to participate in this study.
- NO, I do not agree to participate in this study.

If you Agree to participate in this study, please complete the questionnaire on the next page.

Thank you.

Demographic Questionnaire

- What gender do you identify as?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Other: _____
 - Prefer not to answer.

- What is your age?
 - 0 - 15 years old
 - 16 - 30 years old
 - 31 - 45 years old
 - 46+
 - Prefer not to answer.

- Please specify your ethnicity. Check all that apply.
 - Georgian
 - Azerbaijani
 - Armenian
 - Russia
 - Ossetians
 - Yazidi
 - Ukrainian
 - Greek
 - Assyrian
 - Jewish
 - German
 - Other/Unknown
 - Prefer not to say.

- How long have you been mediating conflicts as part of your work?
 - 0 - 5 years
 - 6 - 15 years
 - 16 - 25 years
 - 26+
 - Prefer not to answer.