

# THE LAYERS OF AN ONION

## Food and nation in Turkey

*John William Day*

### Introduction

The ‘father of food anthropology’, Sidney Mintz, once noted that just as food is, for some individuals, a more important part of life than for others, for some societies, too, food—its preparation, presentation, sharing, and enjoyment—is simply made more of. Such is certainly the case in Turkey, where, for instance, discussing subtle differences between two takes on the same dish—across regions,<sup>1</sup> or from one relative’s delicate touch to another’s—is something of a national pastime. If Turkish food ranks among such renowned cuisines as French or Chinese, an estimation Mintz shares with many food writers in Turkey (e.g. Halıcı 2002), this is likely because, says Mintz, enough people ‘[assign] a “first place” to the real pleasure of consuming food’ (1996, p. 104).

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that food, so socially central, is also often put to uses in Turkey beyond the strictly alimentary—that food is, to borrow that well-worn phrase from Lévi-Strauss (1963), not only good to eat, but ‘good to think’.<sup>2</sup> Of the many forces, at many scales, that inflect food and its pragmatics in Turkey, this chapter focuses on food’s entanglement with basic questions of community, of how people do and do not live together. Specifically, since the ways in which community is conceived of and performed is, in Turkey as elsewhere, shot through with the conceits of the nation-state form, any exploration of the everyday politics of food must address the always-unfinished business of nation-building. The ongoing effort, at once material and meaningful, to produce—and reproduce, as natural, as given—a viable national community out of the variegated human geographies and political histories of Anatolia has left little of social life untouched in Turkey. This includes food, which is examined here as an important, if often overlooked, site where central questions of national communality are debated, and whereby people come to understand the world and their relationship to it: What is a people? What is Turkishness? Which stories of the past and present are sayable and hearable, and which are left unsaid or censored? Who belongs to the nation state and how?

To this end, three paths of the interweaving of food and political life are explored. First is the banal politics of localism centred on famous produce, conspicuously materialized in the curious statues of fruits and vegetables found in cities and towns across Turkey. Produce pride is here explored as a way of rendering national affect and national conceits more idiomatic, immediate,

tangible, and taste-able. Second, nation-building as damage is explored through anthropological portraits of the aftermath of forced displacement in Kurdish Turkey. Here, ordinary talk about eating and food takes issue with the national order of things, raising questions about injury, injustice, and Kurdishness as a fundamentally differential form of belonging in Turkey. Third, recalling, with poet-farmer Wendell Berry (1992, p. 374), that “eating is an agricultural act”, recent public anxieties over food price inflation are examined for what they might say both about meaning in the analysis of economic and political life, and about the future of food scholarship in Turkey.

Cutting across these paths of inquiry is a concern with how the nation state’s contingent understandings of the world are naturalized, and rendered a seemingly ordinary and unremarkable part of everyday categories of thought and action. Nation-building, here as elsewhere, involves what, to borrow a term from anthropologist Clifford Geertz, one can think of as a ‘struggle for the real’, which for Geertz names the ‘attempt to impose upon the world a particular conception of how things at bottom are and how men are therefore obliged to act’ (1973, p. 316). Because nation states are historical, and not natural, entities, all projects of nation-building entail an attempt—or more accurately, *attempts*, to engage different groups with different visions of a national real, in contentious relations at different conjunctures—to make their subjects believe in the reality, in the firmness and fixity, of what Michael Billig calls a ‘whole way of thinking about the world [...] implicated’ in nationalism (1995, p. 61). This chapter explores how such implicated worlds are ‘transformed into familiar common sense’ (Billig 1995, p. 63) through the ingredients food provides.

### ‘Just food’

‘Ideology never says, “I am ideological”’

-Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*

‘The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building’.

Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*

Framing Michael Billig’s classic work on nationalism (1995) is an apparent conundrum. Though exceptional events like revolutionary wars or coups are the stuff of many state rituals meant to sustain a collective investment in nationalism, most of the time, of course, life is not so eventful. And yet, nationalism goes on functioning; people still speak of their affective and intellectual ties to the nation state, still insist on the reality and vital importance of its key conceits. The reason, says Billig, is that these conceits are constantly indexed, in so many mundane, often barely noticed instances. Precisely through such repetitive re-membling, nationalism’s theses end up having ‘seeped into the corners of our consciousness’ (Billig 1995, p. 12).

And seep they do. But how is it that, as Bourdieu asks, the ‘state manages to impose itself so easily’ (2014, pp. 162–4)? How, that is, do the state’s claims to a ‘monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognise [...] [its] divisions of the social world’ (Bourdieu 1991, p. 223) actually stick, actually take on a reality and importance for subjects? The answer would seem to lie in a double movement. States posit a reality: in this case, that there is a coherent people called the Turks, with a shared origin story and destiny, coinciding with a territory, language, and culture all conceived of as more or less homogeneous and singular. The state then stamps its claims onto social reality, rearranging spaces, ways of talking and daily comportment, and institutions in line with its posited conceits, such that these

conceits reappear to subjects not as historical artefacts of one particular contingent struggle for the real, but as the real itself.

In Turkey, the struggle to naturalize one group's contingent vision of community has taken many forms, from building roads, schools, government buildings, and new neighbourhoods in the new capital (Kezer 2009) to the regulation of bodily adornment, lexicon, and even (as if taking a cue from Plato's Kallipolis (1992)) musical modes (Tekelioğlu 1996). Though perhaps not the object of such deliberate state efforts of social and semiotic engineering as those noted above, as a testament to the capacity of the conceits of the nation to suffuse so much of social life (sometimes to absurd effect<sup>3</sup>), food in Turkey—thought about food, talk about food, acts around food—is deeply enmeshed in national theories of how the world is.

But might food be something more than just one more example of the surprising reaches of the national cosmology? Might there not, that is, be something peculiar to food that has made it a particularly potent site for national reproduction? The answer may lie in the fact that food does not seem overtly political; it never says, 'Here I am, to remind you of the nation's conceits'. On the contrary, by a politics of significance that transcends Turkey, food is frequently passed over as a base act, unrelated to the more important matters in life (as when, for instance, Plato contrasts those who do little but 'feed, fatten and fornicate' with those devoted to the life of the mind (1992, p. 257)).<sup>4</sup> Food, by this logic, is simply taken to not matter much<sup>5</sup> when it comes to the 'serious' stuff of politics. Yet here, in food's seeming insignificance, may lie the answer to why and how practices around food reproduce political ideas. In other words, inasmuch as food appears as something 'mere',<sup>6</sup> something basic, inasmuch as, like Billig's flag, it goes unnoticed—it works, in silent efficacy, to reproduce the nation state's claims to the legitimate definition of reality. We turn, then, to some of the ways this works.

### **'Oranın nesi meşhur?': the banal politics of localism**

In rendering the nation, as Kezer (2009) puts it, 'imaginable', the role of writing is well established (Anderson 1983, and specific to food and nationalism, Appadurai 1988). Much of the writing on food in Turkey in Turkish is shot through with the implicated worlds of nationalism. To be sure, some echo Revel's (1992) or Mintz's (1996, pp. 92–105) doubts about the meaningfulness of 'national cuisine', as when, for example, Dağdeviren (2019, p. 10) writes, 'food has geography not nationality'. However, most of this discursive field treats food in Turkey as though its national origins and character were obvious and beyond debate: thus, for instance, an essay on local foodways in a village outside of Sivas that traces the origins of Turkish cuisine to a monumental inscription to the Central Asian Turkic ruler Tonyukuk (Özen 1996, p. 71), or a Sun Language Theory-tinged approach to the history of Turkish farming (Özçelik 1990) that attributes the initial cultivation and dissemination of many common foods to the pioneering agricultural efforts of Turks in Central Asia.<sup>7</sup>

As important as writing is for the reproduction of national claims on reality, though, it is neither the only such site nor perhaps the most salient. A short intercity bus trip in Turkey is enough to familiarize one with a curious subgenre of statues, found in main squares and thoroughfares in towns and cities across Turkey, of fruits, vegetables, and sometimes local dishes: a pistachio in Siirt, watermelons in Adana, hazelnuts in Giresun, or a giant meatball on a fork in İnegöl, to name but a few. That such statues, most of which seem to have been built relatively recently, are at least as common as the more familiar figures of monumentality—scenes from the Independence War, for example—raises the question, why their ubiquity? And what social and political work might these fixtures of cityscapes and townscapes be doing? In one sense, these statues concretize something hardly unique to Turkey: the association of

produce with place. This association informs political economies and semiotics of *terroir* around the world, at work in the marking and marketing of wine (Trubeck 2008) or cheese (West et al. 2012), for instance, and touching down in Turkey's ongoing efforts, under the concept of *coğrafi işaret*, to adopt a system similar to the European Union's protected denomination of origin (Oğuz et al. 2006; see also the Turkish Patent and Trade Office's list of protected foods (n.d.)). Nor, in Anatolia, is this association especially new; the Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi, for instance, writing over 300 years ago, took careful note, in his journeys, of cities' renowned fruits (Yerasimos 2014, pp. 152–81).<sup>8</sup>

Something does not have to be peculiar or new, however, to do social work. One reading of these statues, the products of so many anonymous bureaucrats, is to see them as attempts by local politicians, city planners, and business councils to tap into the growing internal markets in Turkey of gastro-tourism, of people taking day trips out of big cities into surrounding towns to see the sites and sample local foods. And so they are, in part. But beyond their status as somewhat gauche efforts to catch the attention of tourists, these statues can also be read as monuments to a mode of subjectivity (in the basic sense of a subject who acts, and who has certain feelings about how to act) tied to pride in local products of the soil. These statues concretize and ask their viewers to recollect associations between foods and locality, to think about how they relate to themselves, to a locality, and to others, and they do so in a way that is particularly sensual, particularly immediate and embodied. Thus a bean stew with oxtail (*pöç*) brings an Armenian woman to tears as she recalls childhood visits to the family's village outside Kayseri (Küçükkarca & Yılmaz 2018), while across the globe, a writer in China asks, 'What is patriotism but the love of the good things we ate in our childhood' (Yutang, cited in Fine 2009, p. 1). One need only recall how people caught up in Turkey's many overlapping histories of mobility (rural-urban labour migration since the 1950s, violent forms of displacement and dispossession across Kurdish geographies in the 1990s), in longing for places left behind or lost, speak with great pathos of the fruits or vegetables their birthplaces are known for (see Day 2013). What I wish to call further attention to here, though, are the ways in which these strong associations of place, produce, senses, and subjects are refracted through nationalist orders of classification. In what sense, in other words, is a carrot statue in Beypazarı's central square—a privileged stage, as noted, normally reserved for the monumental in its more familiar senses (Lefebvre 1991, pp. 220–8)—indeed a national monument? In the imagination of locality in Turkey, in addition to certain distinct features of the landscapes or cityscapes of certain geographies (the mountains of Dersim, say, or the basalt city walls of Diyarbakır), few cultural objects rival food's centrality. Food is metonymic of place, and acquires its potency as a sign both through its indexical associations with the soil, the lay and look of the land, the seasons, as well as through the many positive moral valuations carried by soil, cultivation, and a valorized rural life more generally (as in the foundational ideology's praise of the peasant as a key symbolic carrier of nationalist meaning); produce stands, in simple but rich terms, for what is truly good, both gustatorily and morally, about a place. As such, nationalism finds in the affective clustering of topophilia and pride around local produce rich, morally suffused grounds for naturalizing at least one of its key tenets: that Turkishness is naturally tied to the soil of Anatolia, with soil here laden with senses of blessed fertility, so much so, for instance, that in the 1950s, when a film in Turkey about the life of the folk bard Aşık Veysel containing a scene of wheat fields some 30 cm high went before state censors for review, this scene was flagged for removal, as it was felt to incorrectly portray the state of agriculture as backwards, and to not capture the mythic blessedness of Anatolia soil (Sabah 2012). In sum, through monumentalized fruits and vegetables, nationalism's somewhat abstract conceit of a meaningful and natural coincidence between people and territory are given palpable, taste-able evidence, suffused with affect and the sensual.

Pride in local produce not only links subjects to places in tangible ways. It also offers people a language, translatable across contexts, for talking to others about how one's beloved locality fits into and feeds, literally and symbolically, the national whole. With palpable ingredients, this particular idiom of localism renders the nation imaginable across scales. In the stereotypical question between strangers sharing the fleeting intimacy of a bus ride, 'oranın nesi meşhur?' (what's that place famous for?), the ability to explain one's place of origin in terms of produce provides both a familiar reference (Turkey has been, across most of its history, a country of largely rural producers) to imagine and communicate one's place within the abstract national whole, and does so through a morally suffused idiom tied to ideas of fertility and sustenance (and, one should not ignore, pleasure). While localist attachment might seem to present an obstacle to nationalism in Turkey, in a way perhaps analogous to how so many particular wills within a body politic represent, for Rousseau, possible obstacles to the functioning of a general will—and indeed, one may further assume this to be so given the fierce monism informing Turkish nation-building, and the acts of erasure (through denial, through violent suppression) of cultural and linguistic differences deemed outside the acceptable range of the national classificatory social order (Oran 2018)—in practice, one finds no such contradiction. Passionate attachment to the local is allowed, even celebrated, within what remains a deeply singular logic of nationalism in Turkey precisely when such localism is an affirmation, and not an affront, to national unity.<sup>9</sup> In other words, topophilia is encouraged, and does social work, because it has, as it were, two arrows: one pointing with affection to the peculiarities of place, and one to the nation, in which such peculiarity is nested, and which it literally and metaphorically feeds.

The forms of localism involved in this distinct monumental practice<sup>10</sup> thus provide an everyday site for the re-entrenchment of the theories posited by the nation state: specifically, that a 'we' exists who, despite or precisely through such local differences, finds a place within the national whole. And the seeming unremarkability of produce seems important, here, to its social work towards reproducing national reality. As banal bits of everyday material culture, statues of tomatoes or carrots, alongside everyday talk about famous foods, sit in the unremarked background like still flags. To be sure, love of the local is not only about the reproduction of nationalism; it may also be something richer, more ambivalent, even potentially subversive. But that one often finds, across the political semiotics of food localisms in Turkey, love of the idiosyncratic and local having been asked to sing in a key of love of the nation underscores how morally charged landscapes and their products work to bring the nation home, as it were, to the intimate practices of daily routines (homes, kitchens, tables, and family rituals).

Yet as often as the nation state is successful in imposing its conceits, there are limits.

### **National damages**

In Corrigan and Sayer's (1985, p. 3) memorable pun, 'states [...] state', but who listens and how remain open questions. States label and name; they refashion landscapes and everyday materialities in attempts to recruit subjects to reproduce nationalism's conceits. Yet they are not necessarily able to compel people to accept these conceits across the varied human geographies states contain. Here, again, food is illustrative, and provides powerful moral ingredients for contesting these conceits—for example, that all citizens belong equally to the nation. A starting point here is the metaphor of sitting at the same table, of commensality.

Many students of food have noted the social and political work involved in the act sharing (or not sharing) food. Bloch (1999) states this unequivocally: 'In all societies, sharing food is a way of establishing closeness while, conversely, the refusal to share is one of the clearest marks of distance and enmity' (p. 133). What the sociocultural analysis of hospitality (Pitt-Rivers

2012) illustrates particularly well are the deep ties between the sharing of food and the pragmatics of recognition, the working out of relations between friend, stranger, and shades in between.

In carrying out ethnographic research in the late 2000s in Diyarbakır on the afterlives of displacement, which so remade country and city across Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast in the 1990s, I frequently heard the image of sharing food deployed to raise questions about whether the state and the rest of Turkey really understand Kurds as equal social agents, as citizens with the same rights as anyone else. This research, it should be said, took place at one peculiar conjuncture in the historically shifting terrains of politics and political subjectivity in Kurdish Turkey—on the heels of the violent 1990s, almost a decade into an uncertain peace process involving reformulations of the Kurdish movement's horizons and experiments in legal politics and decentralized municipalism and the ruling Justice and Development Party's (JDP) experiments to constitute its own vision of a Kurdish subject of politics largely through Islam, and before the violent end to the peace process in the mid 2010s. A little over a decade prior to my research, villages across south-eastern Turkey were evacuated and property destroyed or seized by military and paramilitary actors, and entire households were uprooted to urban centres such as Diyarbakır, where the echoes of dispossession, of lost lifeways and ecologies of work, still very much reverberated, then as now. Close experiences with state damage meant that many of the people I spoke with gave little credence to official claims of formal equality in citizenship. Thus one young man, in his early 20s at the time, after recounting a fairly representative history of working life after displacement (selling ice cream and tissues on the street as a kid, then working in teahouses and restaurants), addressed an imagined rest of Turkey in our interview as he said, 'we want to sit at your table, we want to eat from the food you eat, and you too eat from the food we eat', and wondered aloud why 'Turks [...] always exclude us' (then ongoing JDP attempts to hail a particular Kurdish Muslim subject of politics around the *iftar sofrası* notwithstanding). His words should be read carefully, however. This was not a plea for inclusion; rather, in a discourse I heard often at this conjuncture, here the openness of Kurds to engage in dialogue, and to be open to sharing and exchange, is contrasted with an unchanging position of violence and exclusion on the part of the rest of Turkey. This became clearer as the conversation drew on, when my interlocutor went on to compare the hospitality that he said any Kurd would show a Turkish visitor to Kurdish Turkey with the treatment—in reference to not just stories of violent attacks and lynching carried out against Kurdish migrant workers in the west of the country, but to his family's experiences as migrant labourers as well—he said Kurds receive when they travel beyond Kurdish geographies. In this context, at one point, when describing the lengths his family had gone to, to get by after moving to Diyarbakır, he seemed to slip and call south-eastern Turkey a country (*ülke*), only to pause and, instead of correcting this, double down: 'The southeast is really a very poor, er, *a country*, yes, it's a country, because it's outside of Turkey. Turkey doesn't embrace it'. That Turkey seemed to him not only to have no place for Kurds but to actively discriminate against them, carrying out violent acts of damage and injury on Kurdish geographies and bodies, furthermore struck this young worker, like many other ex-villagers I spoke with in Diyarbakır, as all the more unjust and unconscionable in light of the crucial labour that his own family had supplied, as seasonal agricultural labourers, in harvesting the food that fed the rest of the country:

If we didn't do their work, they would die from hunger. Really! If we didn't do the Turks' work, they would die from hunger. Because, today, er, be it their hazelnuts or their pistachios, their cotton, their this or that, Kurds do it all.<sup>11</sup>

In writing about the phenomenology of state violence and damage in another context, philosopher Adi Ophir notes, ‘many struggles—political, economic, legal, and others—are waged over the question of who can or cannot be damaged and what counts as expressible depreciation’ (2005, p. 127). And much of the cunning of damage lies in the intricacies—sometimes impossibilities—of its expressibility. Again Ophir:

The discourse in which loss is expressed, the exchange system in which damage is assessed, the translating machine that determines compensation, all draw the line between loss that is expressible and assessable as a damage, due to which compensation can be claimed, and damage whose existence cannot be expressed, let alone proven.

(p. 162)

The damage involved in having been violently cut off from the familiar rhythms, landscapes, and subsistence practices of the countryside left many of the people I spoke with struggling to find a semiotic system to express this loss. References to sharing food, as above, but also to certain foods as symbolic of past riches, of life in the village remembered (from vantage point of post-dispossession livelihoods) through a rural idyll of stability and even relative abundance, served to underscore what many perceived as the fundamental amorality of displacement. An older man I interviewed thus summarized life before and after displacement pithily, saying, ‘In the village we made breakfast every day of honey and butter, here we can’t even see an olive!’<sup>12</sup> Rural rhythms and ecologies punctuated daily by luxurious goods in the rural economy of foodstuffs (butter, cream, honey) here stand in contrast to a lone, shrivelled fruit. In this and similar accounts of past riches, when, for instance, older men would break into tears in the middle of an interview at the memory of the delicious fruit in villages they were no longer allowed by the state to return to, food is indeed doing a great deal of semiotic and political work. In memories of village life via fruits or dishes, food, wed to locality, works as a refuge of sorts, a moral space where the damaging reach of the state can at least be imagined as kept at bay for a bit. Food also incurs meanings of unpayable political debts, as thorny, crucial questions of the nature of justice, belonging, and sovereign power are turned over in this litmus test of citizenship and belonging in Turkish nation-building.

### **The layers of an onion: peeling food inflation**

Much of what has been discussed so far can be read as an argument for the importance of practices of meaning in understanding the overlapping lives of food and nationalism in Turkey. This final section sustains this point—that meaning is not, as worn out ontologies would have it, something floating ethereally above more important matters (rarefied superstructural icing atop the base), but is in fact very much *material*, in both senses of that word. To enrich this point, as with many a good dish, we begin with onions.

In 2018 and 2019, onions were the object of a great deal of public anxiety in Turkey. Due in part to their symbolism—alongside a loaf of bread, a poor man’s humble meal—and in part to the simple and striking fact that onions, doubling and tripling in price, registered among the highest rates of food price inflation at the time (TCMB 2018), the high price of onions caught the attention of ordinary people and politicians alike. Government officials thus called for raids on depots in one onion centre in Turkey, Polatlı, and in speeches-as-spectacle afterwards, blamed prices on unethical stockpiling and promised, through more raids, to get more stock to the market soon (Hürriyet 2018). As politicians competed over who could carry out more raids, one observer noted that the ensuing reporting looked more

like something out of the pages of anti-narcotics or counterterrorism news than of agriculture (Yıldırım 2019, pp. 126–9). Tariffs were soon dropped on imported onions, eliciting no small amount of grumbling from opposition politicians and writers, and touching the nerve of a widespread political emotion that equates agricultural dependency with a betrayal of certain core Kemalist principles—at once economic and affective—of self-sufficiency and independence. ‘The onion has become more valuable than the dollar’, said then–Republican People’s Party presidential candidate Muharrem İnce, as he continued in a swipe against the ruling Justice and Development Party and the neoliberal reforms to state–capital relations it has overseen, ‘because it’s a Turkey that doesn’t produce’ (Sözcü 2018). Meanwhile, beyond political spectacles, photos circulated on social media of onions as engagement rings or onions displayed alongside gold in jewellers’ windows,<sup>13</sup> as papers ran no shortage of puns about tears (Milliyet 2018) and bitterness (Cumhuriyet 2018).

Meanwhile, in the aisles and bazaars, worry was real. Food prices were high across the board, and stayed in the radar of politicians, such that some supermarkets even began pulling vegetables from their shelves, fearing they might become the target of government investigation into price manipulation (Yackley 2019)—understandably so, perhaps, after President Erdoğan spoke of eliminating the ‘terror in the marketplace’, just as, he said, his government had eliminated terror in Cudi (Takvim 2019). One seasoned journalist predicted that the March 2019 local elections would be fought and won on the issue of food inflation (Sönmez 2019a). The ruling party, having staked so much on delivering economic improvement, did indeed lose key contests, and the immediacy of the price of a week’s groceries may have brought home the severity of the economic situation.

Beyond its importance for any single election, though, the soaring costs of basic foodstuffs pointed to a fundamental problem in Turkey’s system for the production and distribution of food and Turkey’s shrinking agricultural sector (Sönmez 2019b), with fewer and fewer young people remaining in a difficult and precarious line of work. When such conditions as crop failures and rising production costs due to a spike in the price of inputs such as fuel and fertilizer combine, many see in such stop–gap measures as turning to imports and temporarily lowering tariffs to weather such instabilities, signs of failed policy. Agricultural dependency and the opening of markets to global agriculture are now a part of a normal trip to the supermarket in Turkey, where one finds garlic from Iran and China, avocados from Kenya, pulses from Canada, and meat from Serbia.

In the work of journalists like Sönmez and Yıldırım is a clear sense of alarm at the future of food security in Turkey, of the ability (in the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization’s definition of food security) of ‘all people, at all times, [to] have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle’.<sup>14</sup> There is indeed work to be done to understand not only the discourses and practices of the government’s biopolitical management of food, but also other responses to emergent food anxieties, some of which take place within the questionable imaginative parameters and politics of consumer choice, but with others (e.g. emergent forms of cooperatives; see Aykaç 2019) calling into question the dynamics of power and inequality structuring people’s differential access to food, allying these assemblages more with food sovereignty activists (Patel 2009) than with the discourses and practices of food security.

Emergent food anxieties further underscore the need to take seriously the structuring work of meaning in every social and political field. In the layers of onion price inflation are questions of not just the political economy of neoliberal agricultural markets, but also of the historically sedimented forms of imagination that shape how opposition parties articulate other political and economic possible futures at such times of crisis. And here, it is important, of course, to



keep in mind that the country's political history is not the story of a single nation unfolding smoothly, but of multiple groups with different visions of the nation vying, through projects marked by contestation and struggle, to impose their particular definition of the real. Thus, the shift under the JDP's neoliberal and Islamist national vision away from agricultural self-sufficiency has shaken Kemalist imaginaries, left and right, of economic independence so central to Republican visions of national economy building, leaving many (e.g. Yıldırım 2019) nostalgic for the dream world of the İzmir Economic Congress. From such a viewpoint, it seems a slippery slope from importing pulses to capitulating to foreign powers and thus betraying the Kemalist principle of resisting forms of foreign intervention framed as menacing meddling. Such a structure of feeling also shapes the solutions to contemporary impasses in the political economy of food that oppositional voices are able to articulate. One can question whether longing for a return to statist policies of subsidy and support as *the* solution is indeed creative enough to think at the many scales of action—from municipal budgeting about food and the right to the city up to global decisions about transboundary water use, for instance (Patel 2009, p. 49)—that many on the frontlines of food activism see as necessary. Even in the tedium of inflation rates and agricultural markets, then, meaning has critical material consequences for the structuring of human futures.

This chapter has called attention to the ordinary, often unremarked acts of meaning whereby nationalism's conceits are indexed and made to seem real, as well as thrown into question. Food is but one such act, but a potent one, due both to the repetitiveness of food rituals (we cook, eat, and think about food daily) and to the fact that, unlike an anthem, say, food does not announce itself as political, perhaps making it all the more effective. If it is true, as many argue (e.g. Oran 2018), that the occasionally violent monism at the heart of nation-building and maintenance in Turkey must be critically dissected if a viable community is to be forged, then understanding the banal sources—the *pazar*, the dinner table, the unremarked statue—for the reproduction of national categories of thinking and feeling is an important step. In a way broadly similar to the need for a shift away from the carefully policed epistemic borders of what can and cannot be said about history and society in and of Turkey (Ünlü 2018) and towards a more salutary engagement with grounded realities, there is a clear need to move beyond all forms of unthinking, toeing-the-nationalist-discursive-line in food writing in and on Turkey to clear a space for the analysis of rapidly changing assemblages: of the tensions of community, of contested politics and histories, of transforming political and semiotic economies of food, and more.

For the future of food research in Turkey, to those areas explored above, others will be added. New work in the social history of food in Anatolia like that of Singer (2011) or Trepanier (2014) will continue to add to our understanding of the complexities of food and society in the past, and, as effective histories of the present, push against both contemporary popular, ahistorical neo-Ottomanisms and selective multiculturalisms (e.g. Eksen 2001) romanticizing certain culinary pasts (Armenian, Rum, Jewish) while silencing or condescendingly dismissing other extant social differences. Still other work will turn to emergent assemblages of the legal, economic, and semiotic involved in the attempt to institute a practice of geographical certification similar to the French *appellation d'origine contrôlée* for local and regional agricultural and culinary products in Turkey or related gastronationalist (DeSoucey 2010) projects; or to the forms of governmentality and dissensus at play in state welfare policies and practices (Koç 2014, Görmüş 2019); or, inspired by Roland Barthes's psychosociology of food (1997 [1961], the semiotics of 'foreign' foods in changing middle-class practices of cooking and dining out; or else to new modes of ethics that the threat of food and water insecurity may incite, and the possibility of new forms of community built on a radical embrace of social vulnerability, interdependence, and care, and an invigorated politics of the commons (Butler 2004, The Care Collective 2020,

Federici 2019). The futures of food research in Turkey, like those of food more generally, are many and complex, and will require careful untangling.

## Notes

- 1 There is much work to be done on regional cuisine in Turkey: on its differential commodification in the semiotic economies of international and intranational tourism, for instance, or on emergent assemblages of market and meaning in practices of geographical indication (*coğrafi işaret*) led by the Turkish Patent and Trademark Office (2020). On regional cuisine more generally, see Revel (1992). On region as an object of political struggle, see Bourdieu (1992).
- 2 On the uses and misuses of this phrase, see Garber (2008).
- 3 See Amberin Zaman's inspired reporting (2000) on cats and nationalism.
- 4 See Onaran (2015) on the gendered dynamics of power that distinguish between and hierarchically value men and women's cooking labour.
- 5 Scholars of food often seem to feel compelled to address questions of significance head-on, as Belasco's title, 'Why Food Matters' (1999).
- 6 On the politics of significance and mereness, see Herzfeld 1997.
- 7 So ingrained is this cosmology that critics of the impasses of nation-building in Turkey also occasionally reproduce its conceits, as when Oran (2010, p. 3) sees a taste for grilled meat and flatbreads in Turkey as traces of Central Asian nomadism. For a critique of spurious culinary and botanical histories, see Uhri (2014)—e.g. its criticism (pp. 68–71) of Perry's (1994) essay on baklava.
- 8 It is interesting to compare Çelebi's notes to today's associations, called out in vegetable markets across Turkey ('Finike oranges!' 'Bey pazarı carrots!'). E.g., Bursa is today synonymous with peaches, though not for Çelebi (perhaps because, Yerasimos speculates (p. 158), orchards then would have been used for mulberries and silk production, with peaches only coming in to take their place after the decline of the silk industry).
- 9 This echoes Herzfeld (2003), who in exploring the 'nesting of local pride within the production of an externally unified and culturally homogeneous patriotism' for folklorists of Crete, detected 'no practical contradiction between that patriotism and the most aggressive pride in the local culture of Crete' (p. 308).
- 10 See the playful *spektakuler şehir heykelleri*.tumblr.com, which documents food statues and notes, 'Every day, we pass in front of them. Most are what result from enlarging a city's most important symbol by a hundred. They are so ugly that most of the time, we prefer to overlook them'.
- 11 Author interview, winter 2008. See also Day 2013.
- 12 Author interview, spring 2009. See also Day 2013.
- 13 Thanks to Bahar Şimşek for keeping an eye on social media.
- 14 [www.fao.org/3/y4671e/y4671e06.html](http://www.fao.org/3/y4671e/y4671e06.html)

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