Title: Thinking gastrodiplomacy through a gastrological reading of conflict
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Abstract

The intersection between the fields of gastronomy and diplomacy has generated a growing body of valuable academic work that spans multiple dimensions of knowledge and social life. However, the potential of gastrodiplomacy to address conflict, or the possibility of its emergence, remains underexplored. This article seeks to fill that gap by complementing the concept of gastrodiplomacy with that of gastrology. In doing so, it examines the relationship between gastronomy, diplomacy, and conflict, understanding the latter as the zones of tension that arise between communities, identities, worldviews, or even differing understandings of the value and uses of gastronomy. Building on this perspective, and assuming that gastronomy is a constitutive element of every culture and therefore open to multiple meanings, ambiguities, and paradoxes, the article argues that gastronomy (and gastrodiplomacy), as a tool, practice, and discourse of mediation (and expansion) of estrangement, tends to oscillate between the ordinary, the sublime, and the grotesque. To illustrate this argument, the article refers to violent conflicts between minority and majority national groups. The aim is not to provide an in-depth analysis of each case, but rather to explore how gastronomy and diplomacy intersect with such conflicts. In doing so, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the potential of gastronomy and diplomacy to engage with difference, estrangement, and conflict.

Keywords: Gastrodiplomacy, gastrology, diplomacy, conflict.
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Introduction:

The concept of gastrodiplomacy has attracted considerable interest over the past decade, both within academia and across broader social and political spheres. At the level of political practice, gastrodiplomacy has become a mechanism serving the public diplomacy of states, regions, and major cities. On a more theoretical level, a wide range of ontological, epistemological, and methodological approaches has proliferated, aiming to understand the relationship between gastronomy and diplomacy (Cabral et al., 2024). However, when it comes to fully grasping the potential of both dimensions, individually and in relation to each other, a crucial aspect has been largely overlooked: conflict.

This claim may appear excessive, since most works analysing the multiple dimensions of gastrodiplomacy mention, at least implicitly, situations of tension or disagreement. Nevertheless, we argue that the predominantly apolitical and non-confrontational approach adopted by much of the literature has pushed conflict to the margins, treating it merely as a side effect of the political, cultural, or economic uses and abuses of gastronomy and diplomacy on the international stage. In this view, conflict appears as an unwanted contingency that the supposedly universal meanings of diplomacy and gastronomy are expected to remedy. Moreover, by privileging a state-centric conception of diplomacy, conflict tends to be understood solely as a phenomenon occurring between states or communities divided by territorial boundaries. Consequently, gastrodiplomacy remains framed within what Agnew (2008) termed the territorial trap.

This article seeks to address both of these gaps. First, it highlights the potential of gastrodiplomacy as a critical lens through which to analyse and understand conflict among subjects, communities, and, more broadly, diverse international actors. In contrast to approaches that interpret the relationship between gastronomy and diplomacy through a benign cosmopolitanism, this article delves into its political dimension, arguing that it is precisely in the intermediate, contingent, unstable, and often conflictual spaces where the link between gastronomy and diplomacy acquires its deepest meaning and value. These are the critical areas (Martínez de Albéniz, 2021) in which gastronomy and diplomacy, understood in their anthropological sense, reveal their full potential as theoretical and analytical tools for thinking about and mediating estrangement, or for working through difference (Conway, 2019). To advance this argument, we introduce the concept of gastrology, which allows for a more nuanced examination of the relationship between gastronomy, diplomacy, and conflict, and for the exploration of the multiple, often contradictory meanings of gastrodiplomacy.

Second, the article does not conceive conflict solely in state-centric terms, but rather as zones or spaces of tension with international repercussions. Dominated by state-centered conceptions of diplomacy and conflict, many existing case studies on gastrodiplomacy have focused on interstate or interterritorial disputes, aiming to demonstrate its analytical and practical relevance. By contrast, this article examines conflicts between majority and minority national groups within state borders. In doing so, it seeks to overcome the limitations of methodological nationalism (Braidotti, 2010; Faist, 2012) and to reconceptualize the relationship between diplomacy, gastronomy, and conflict through the analysis of interactions among individuals, communities, and international actors who share, and simultaneously negotiate, their differences on cultural, religious, identity-based, or culinary grounds.

Throughout the discussion, particular cases are evoked, sometimes provocatively, but always to highlight elements that, while seemingly anecdotal, possess both depth and scope. They allow us to uncover singular moments of the inexplicable that illuminate what Cubitt (2013: 8–9) calls "the margins of existing understanding of how the world works."

Following this introduction, the discussion is organized into three main sections. We begin with a brief conceptual shift from gastrodiplomacy to gastrology to illustrate the close interrelation between gastronomy, diplomacy, and conflict. The next section reads gastrodiplomacy through conflict, divided into three parts. The first addresses food diplomacy, presenting the relationship between the three dimensions not as an exceptional event but as an ordinary, though no less conflictual, connection. The second, drawing on culinary diplomacy, explores the meanings of gastrodiplomacy, sometimes sublime, sometimes grotesque, in the context of peace negotiations. The third examines gastrodiplomacy in post-conflict situations, when opportunities arise for the (re)production and (re)presentation of new identities, both within and beyond communities, dynamics that are, inevitably, contested.

The final section reflects on the broader implications of these debates, emphasizing the need to harness the analytical potential of gastrology to understand and negotiate conflict and difference. Along the way, the conflicts discussed illustrate how, within gastrodiplomacy, a concept with multiple facets (Sorondo, 2023), the ordinary, the sublime, and the grotesque intertwine. Gastrology thus emerges not only as a framework for analysing conflict, but as a means of grasping the diverse, often disputed contours, some virtuous, others less so, of gastrodiplomacy itself.

From gastrodiplomacy to gastrology

The shift from gastronomy to gastrology, though uncommon within academic disciplines, is not entirely new. Iñaki Martínez de Albéniz (2023), in his article *"In Praise of Complexity: From Gastronomy to Gastrology,"* justifies this move as a necessary broadening of the social imaginary surrounding gastronomy, an effort to move beyond common sense and analyse the intersections between its material, scientific-technical, and cultural-anthropological dimensions. Earlier, Costas M. Constantinou (1996), in *On the Way to Diplomacy*, had already made a similar move, arguing that diplomacy "is not only gastronomic; it is also gastrological" (p. 137).

Although these two authors have not engaged in direct dialogue, at least not publicly, their approaches share clear commonalities. Both emphasize the conceptual value of gastrology and the need to complement gastrodiplomacy with this notion. In both cases, the move seeks to embrace complexity and engage with uncertainty, confusion, and the critical zones or cosmopolitical spaces (Stengers, 2005) in which conflict and politics must be negotiated, mediated, and managed. Yet, the analysis of conflict and complexity arising from the intersection of gastronomy and diplomacy remains largely absent from most approaches to gastrodiplomacy.

As Martínez de Albéniz (2021) argues, this absence is largely due to a cosmopolitan and celebratory vision of gastronomy, one that presents it as a universal language of global conversation capable of overcoming all differences and conflicts between states and societies. This reading strips gastronomy of both its political dimension and its inherent tensions. In contrast, Martínez de Albéniz reclaims the political nature of gastronomy, understanding it as a tool or medium through which we make and cook the world as we wish to live in it.

A similar claim is found in the work of Costas M. Constantinou. The Cypriot author insists that food is neither a purely private activity nor merely a vehicle for socialization. Nor is it "irrelevant or peripheral to political representation" (Constantinou, 1996, p. 126). On the contrary, food is intrinsic to politics: it operates as both a means of communication and a site for the attribution of meaning and identity, as well as a practice and discourse that mediates or amplifies estrangement within and between political communities.

In this sense, gastrology represents a recognition of the need to think (logically and critically) about the practices and discourses of gastronomy in relation to diplomacy, in order to negotiate the differences and tensions inherent to both social domains. Gastrology thus expands the scope of gastrodiplomacy, enabling the exploration of the interrelations, overlaps, and frictions between gastronomy and diplomacy, while recovering the anthropological foundations of both practices and discourses.

To begin thinking about gastrodiplomacy through gastrology, we can turn to the works of James Der Derian and Paul Sharp. Both, in different ways, emphasize diplomacy as the mediation of estrangement. Der Derian (1987), in his renowned genealogy of diplomacy, argues that what we now call diplomacy originated in the attempt to mediate the distances separating human beings and social groups since ancient times. Paul Sharp (1999) similarly maintains that diplomacy should be understood as a "response to a common problem of living separately and wanting to do so, while having to conduct relations with others" (p. 51). Both perspectives share a crucial insight: an awareness of the Other as something strange and different, coupled with the desire to relate to that Other, despite or even because of that difference.

More recently, Philip R. Conway (2019) has revisited the relationship between diplomacy, difference, estrangement, and conflict. Confronting affirmative ontologies that treat difference as a mere caveat, he draws on Isabelle Stengers' work to illuminate those spaces "between affirmation and negation, the compositional and the oppositional" (p. 2) in which diplomacy both exists and is performed. Rejecting theories that, in opposing negative ontologies, downplay contradiction in favor of a moral and ethical pluralism that takes "worldly cohabitation as a given" (p. 1), Conway instead focuses on the intermediate spaces where diplomacy's fundamental concern, emerges. These are spaces where diplomacy, understood as a political ontology, "exists poised upon a precipice between" (p. 21) multiple in-betweens. In other words, he highlights the complex zones in which ambivalence, paradox, and tension arise, recognizing conflict as an inevitable feature of human action and social organization, and as something that diplomacy must engage, not eliminate.

Over time, this anthropological logic of diplomacy has become obscured. This is not because diplomacy has lost its humanist ethos, but because traditional and conventional approaches have overwhelmingly focused on **s**tates and the international organizations or regimes they constitute. Beyond critical perspectives, diplomacy is rarely understood today as a logic of mediating distance or negotiating difference and conflict among non-state actors. As a result, the state has secured a monopoly over diplomacy, transforming it into a tool, practice, and discourse that justifies a state system predicated on territorial borders separating one state from another. In this process, diplomacy's original anthropological meaning, and its humanistic aspirations, have been largely eclipsed.

It is therefore time to return to the underlying logic shared by diplomacy and gastronomy: their ethos, rooted in the potential to think and work through difference, conflict, and estrangement, that is, to explore how we might live with and in relation to others (Ho & McConnell, 2017).

Thinking gastrodiplomacy through conflict

Thinking gastrodiplomacy through the logic of critical zones requires an understanding of the conflicting dimensions of gastronomy itself. Merely listing the sources of tension surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food would go beyond both the purpose and the scope of this article. However, it is useful to examine the three general approaches to gastrodiplomacy outlined above and place them in dialogue with the traditional stages of conflict,

in order to explore the ambivalences, paradoxes, and tensions that emerge around gastrodiplomacy.

The three approaches are as follows: (i) Food diplomacy, or gastronomy stripped of traditional or cultural content and conceived in terms of food's primary and basic function, nourishment; (ii) Culinary diplomacy, or the use of food in diplomatic encounters and negotiations as a means to mediate distance and facilitate conflict resolution; and (iii) Gastrodiplomacy, understood both as a contested process of identity (re)production and (re)presentation through the demarcation of traditions and cultural traits, and as an art form that redefines the social functions assigned to food, generating new tensions in the process.

As for the stages of conflict, while linear models cannot fully capture their complexity, they are useful for analytical purposes, allowing us to break conflicts down into temporal phases. Accordingly, we focus first on the stages in which conflict takes shape and manifests itself; then on the resolution phase, corresponding to diplomatic negotiation; and finally on the post-conflict phase, in which reconciliation and reconstruction occur.

This framework allows us to trace the evolving relationship between gastronomy, diplomacy, and conflict through cases of both shifting and protracted disputes between majority and minority national groups within the territorial boundaries of a single state. In doing so, we not only escape the territorial trap, but also reveal the multiplicity of contested meanings surrounding gastrodiplomacy within communities that, while sharing certain bonds, display, at least among some of their members, a desire to live apart and in difference.

Food diplomacy: the exceptionality of the ordinary

Few things are more ordinary than food, yet few are more contentious. Indeed, its very essentiality is what makes it simultaneously simple and complex, both physiologically and socially. As Christine A. Hastorf (2017) notes,

> "food is a principal medium for social interaction, for human comfort and reassurance for anxieties and fear; is at the heart of ideological constructions. […] Food, curiously, also brings into focus the hidden aspects of power relations and social live, as well as the production of social facts and people" (1).

Like any other social phenomenon, food is inseparable from relations of power, and thus from conflict. This is not to say that food is only about power or antagonism: it can also serve as a medium for cooperation and as an instrument for improving food governance worldwide (Larsson & Sjöqvist, 2022; Nau, 2009). Yet, it cannot be ignored that shifts in the ways societies produce, distribute, and consume food have transformed social structures, enabling new power relations, and therefore new conflicts (Meyzie, 2010). Changes in agricultural practices, the rise of global communication and trade (and, with them, dynamics of colonization), and new consumption trends associated with contemporary lifestyles are all socio-historical transformations that shape how human beings interact with food.

Because food satisfies a universal human need, it often lies at the heart of social and national conflicts. As Lawrence H. Keeley (2015) provocatively observes, whether in small-scale societies or modern nation-states, war and violent disputes can be understood through the logic of "Food for War, War for Food, and War on Food." Without going to such extremes, and without claiming exhaustiveness, we may briefly examine two conflicts in which access to land and water, essential resources for food production, have become central issues of dispute. These examples will illustrate why conflict must be considered an integral element of gastrodiplomatic practice.

Access to and control over land lie at the core of Colombia's long-standing social conflict involving guerrillas, paramilitaries, drug traffickers, and the government (Rodríguez, 2015). The historical evolution of land ownership, concentrated in the hands of a small elite while peasants face limited access, has been crucial to this conflict. During the colonial period and the early republic, landowners initially prioritized labour control to cultivate vast areas; once these territories became pastures for livestock, however, elites turned to hoarding land, becoming rentiers and evicting peasants from their farms. This monopoly over land led to massive rural displacement and entrenched inequalities, forming the basis of what is now known as the *"*land problem*"* in the Colombian conflict (Machado, 2017).

The Land Restitution Law marked an important step toward recognizing and repairing the rights of victims of this armed conflict (Hataya et al., 2014). Yet, while Colombia has successfully promoted certain agricultural products, most notably Colombian coffee, as national symbols abroad (Kotler & Gertner, 2004), gastrodiplomatic strategies have often sidelined deeper social issues. Any meaningful public diplomacy effort aimed at promoting Colombia internationally cannot, and should not, ignore the enduring legacies of a 50-year armed conflict or the country's persistent inequalities (Valderrama & Andrés, 2022).

Access to water is equally central to gastronomy. It is indispensable both for agriculture and for human survival, and thus a frequent source of tension in regions where it is scarce (Ashton, 2008; Zeitoun, 2008). The Israeli Palestinian conflict offers a striking example. As Sharif S. Elmusa (1996) notes, "while water plays a role in Israel's territorial claims, the alienation of land has an impact on Palestinian access to water" (p. 69). Although religion and ideology are also key variables, disputes over water access have profoundly shaped the processes of territorialization and deterritorialization through which Israelis and Palestinians define their spaces and their relations with one another.

Beyond symbolic disputes, such as the so-called "wars" over ownership of dishes like falafel or hummus (Ferry, 2016), the gastrodiplomatic strategies of both communities are inseparable from their broader political practices and narratives. These strategies can either contribute to conflict resolution or, conversely, reinforce antagonism (Baron & Press-Barnathan, 2021).

These cases, while limited, illustrate the importance of recognizing **conflict** as an inevitable aspect of gastrodiplomatic practice. Most approaches to gastrodiplomacy acknowledge conflict but frame it within an idealized narrative emphasizing consensus, cooperation, and peace, prioritizing agreement over dissent. This tendency likely stems from a state-centric conception of both gastronomy and diplomacy, which treats diplomacy as an exceptional practice deployed by states to solve contingent problems through cooperation. Consequently, gastrodiplomacy is often reduced to a tool for building international relationships around food, rather than a practice embedded in everyday negotiations of power, identity, and tension.

Yet, diplomacy, like food, is not exceptional. It is a daily practice, performed in multiple settings beyond the formal arenas of state or institutional interaction. It is both ordinary and vital, operating in contexts of peace and conflict alike. Above all, it is a mechanism for continuously negotiating tensions, differences, and disagreements. A way of keeping the possibility of peace and consensus alive while acknowledging the persistent reality of conflict.

Thus, rather than grounding gastrodiplomacy in an idealized or distorted image of diplomacy, it is more productive to understand it through the very reality that underlies gastronomy: the human necessity to eat daily in order to survive. Seen this way, diplomacy, and by extension,

gastrodiplomacy, ceases to be an extraordinary activity and becomes an everyday practice, essential for coexistence.

This perspective does not diminish the value or potential of gastrodiplomacy to imagine better worlds through the mediation of estrangement and the labor of difference. On the contrary, its very **o**rdinariness, its daily necessity, is what grants it value. Like eating itself, gastrodiplomacy's exceptionality lies in its capacity to negotiate, again and again, the fragile, conflictual, and interdependent conditions of human coexistence.

Culinary diplomacy: sublime and/or grotesque food in diplomatic negotiations

In academic literature, it is within the context of diplomatic negotiations that the exceptional, almost sublime, qualities of food and gastronomy have been most emphasized (Neumann, 2005). These qualities are often said to facilitate agreement and mutual understanding between opposing parties (Celik, 2018; Taher and Elshahed, 2020). Throughout history, lavish summits and high-level diplomatic meetings have been common settings where political leaders and state representatives negotiated critical issues of their time or advanced peace processes (Cetin, 2023; King, 2024). In such encounters, food and drink served to sustain conversation, restore energy, and, not least, impress the Other with the culinary achievements of each country. It is precisely in these settings, defined by their exceptional and even sublime character, that the value of gastrodiplomacy as a tool for peace negotiation has been most celebrated.

By contrast, this article argues that the exceptionality of gastrodiplomacy does not lie primarily in these highly publicized encounters, but rather in the ordinary and mundane spaces far removed from cameras and protocol. To illustrate this, we will refer to the peace processes in the Basque Country and Northern Ireland, two distinct conflicts in which majority and minority national groups, coexisting within shared state borders, were in confrontation for decades. In both cases, participants in the peace processes have recalled the significant role that food played during negotiations. These accounts highlight gastrodiplomacy's value as an interpersonal act that can help enable the resolution of violent conflict.

The Txillarre farmhouse in Elgoibar, in the Basque province of Gipuzkoa, has entered the Basque imaginary as the site where Jesús Egiguren, then president of the Basque Socialist Party (PSE-EE), the Basque branch of Spain's Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), and Arnaldo Otegi, leader of Batasuna, regarded as the political arm of the terrorist organization Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), held talks for six years, between 2000 and 2006. These informal talks laid the groundwork for the definitive cessation of violence in 2011 (Egiguren and Aizpeolea, 2011). As Imanol Uria (2010) notes, the negotiators shared countless meals at Txillarre, enjoying vegetables freshly picked from the garden or eggs just collected from the chicken coop.

While it may be tempting to overstate the influence that individual personalities can exert on decisions as complex as the dissolution of a terrorist organization or the negotiation of peace, it seems unquestionable that without the daily conversations that took place in Txillarre, accompanied by food and drink served by the farmhouse's owner, Pello Rubio, the resolution would have been even more difficult (Ibaibarriaga and San Martin, 2025). The atmosphere created in that farmhouse dining room enabled these two figures, representing opposing sides of the conflict, to acknowledge their differences and, precisely because of them, to take steps toward mediating the estrangement that had separated them for decades.

In the case of Northern Ireland, Gerry Adams (2018), who served as president of Sinn Féin from 1983 to 2018, during the most violent years of the conflict between the IRA and loyalist paramilitaries, offers a firsthand account of what he calls "the negotiator's recipe." In his book *The Negotiator's Cookbook*, Adams underscores the importance of food in mediation processes, writing

that the reason for compiling the book was that "when the negotiations team meets, sometimes for days, occasionally for weeks, they need to be fed" (7). After criticizing the meagre provisions at 10 Downing Street, Adams praises Ted Howell, assistant to the Sinn Féin leadership, for ensuring that negotiators had wholesome, nutritious meals to "sustain the peace process" (12). These negotiations, more formal than those in the Basque case but equally modest in their material settings, as revealed by the photographs accompanying the book, demonstrate, as in the Basque experience, that during peace talks the presence or absence of "comforting food for the soul" (12) can shape the success or failure of the process.

These two cases, regarded as sublime for having contributed, directly or indirectly, to the resolution of armed conflicts, can also be read in reverse, casting the meaning of gastronomy in a more grotesque light. Critics of both peace processes have questioned the value attributed to such shared meals. In Northern Ireland, for instance, the so-called "pea process", a pun coined by Adams with debatable wit, was described by his detractors as "deeply unpleasant" (Meredith, 2018). Moreover, while food may indeed help smooth interpersonal relations between representatives of communities compelled to coexist in difference, it must not obscure the fact that food itself can also serve as a medium of struggle and resistance. Thus, the celebration of food as a vehicle for peace negotiations or intercultural understanding may appear grotesque when juxtaposed with the hunger strikes undertaken by combatants of armed organizations such as the IRA or ETA, acts of self-denial that formed part of the same cycles of violence that those meals sought to end. Although Adams himself appears never to have endorsed hunger strikes as a political tactic (Dolan, 2015), the memory of such acts, and their symbolic power within the IRA, remains deeply contested (Hopkins, 2014; 2016). In this light, the conviviality of Otegi and Egiguren's farmhouse meetings or Adams's cookbook may seem somewhat trivial when set against the sacrificial ethos embodied in those acts of fasting (Sweeney, 1903).

The importance of these parallel readings lies in showing that both modes of relating to food, its use as a means of mediation and its rejection as a form of struggle, constitute political and gastronomic ways of engaging with difference and conflict: in some cases seeking to reduce them, in others to amplify them. These concurrent and often opposing interpretations reveal, first, that the sublime and the grotesque are not as distant as they might seem when it comes to the political uses and refusals of food and diplomacy in conflict situations; and second, that gastrodiplomacy, far from being an uncontested concept, is a deeply ambivalent and contested practice that demands critical interrogation.

Gastrodiplomacy: negotiating the post-conflict agreement

Gastrodiplomacy, as previously mentioned, can be approached from many perspectives. In this article, however, it will be examined from two directions that are both opposing and complementary. That is, inward, looking at how gastrodiplomacy produces and reproduces both the culinary and national identity of a given community within the territorial borders of the state, and outward, observing how that identity is represented beyond those borders, with the aim of projecting a certain image of the country and thereby achieving specific objectives. Whatever the approach, gastrodiplomacy is by no means a consensus-building practice or discourse. On the contrary, it is highly controversial.

The (re)production of a territory's gastronomic identity and, with it, the national identity of the community inhabiting it, is not a unidirectional process. As Cabral et al. (2024) argue, this process is "twofolded: either departing from a community (bottom-up) or being State-led (top-down)." However, despite the growing socialization of diplomacy (Geis, Opitz and Pfeifer, 2022; Faizullaev, 2022), state authorities remain the main actors strategically using diplomatic channels, forums, and instruments with the aim of influencing and attracting global attention. It is therefore

not surprising that gastrodiplomacy has often been conceived as a form of public diplomacy through which states seek to win the favour of foreign audiences and thereby generate economic and political benefits (Rockower, 2012). Food thus becomes part of a state's specific gastronomic culture, which can be used as an element of national branding to "gain favour among and make connections with a foreign audience in a non-threatening way" (Wilson, 2013).

This approach, however, does not question how such brands are created or how gastronomic identity and culture are produced within states. Moreover, it assumes that the external representation of the gastronomic and national identity employed in public diplomacy strategies reflects the nation as a whole, a representation that is supposedly uncontested and mirrors internal identity as if in perfect reflection.

Yet neither external representation is a neutral act of mirroring, nor does national identity neutrally capture the specificities of the communities living within a given territory. On the contrary, both the internal and external representations of state identity are produced and reproduced through diverse mechanisms, practices, and discourses, including those of gastrodiplomacy. These processes often generate conflicts within the very territories that national brands and gastrodiplomatic strategies seek to present as uniform and, precisely, non-conflictive.

France, renowned both for its centralized political system and for its gastronomy, offers a useful example for analysing the controversial process of (re)producing national gastronomic identity. This will be explored through the relationship, sometimes organic and concurrent, and at other times manufactured and imposed, between regional cultural particularities and national centralizing dynamics. Given France's regional diversity, the analysis will focus on Corsica, a region that has experienced political conflict since the creation of the National Liberation Front of Corsica (FLNC) in 1976, a conflict that has fluctuated in intensity over time.

In analysing the relationship between region, nation, and gastronomy, Lauren Reches (2017) argues that what we now call French cuisine, "a recognizable institution based on some sort of essential national art de vivre", is the product of "a long political and social process embedded in French culture and in the struggles to define French identity" (1). Over time, the relationship between centralizing mechanisms and the promotion of regional cultures has evolved. In the nineteenth century, with gastronomy's consolidation as both a science and a daily practice that treated food as a source of pleasure rather than mere sustenance, French cuisine was characterized as haute cuisine, a concept under which national gastronomy was represented as uniform, ignoring regional specificities. As Reches (2017) notes, it was in the twentieth century, amid a growing interest in regionalisms, that "the great cuisine of the 18th and 19th centuries was left aside, and gourmets began to explore a new perspective of cooking: regional cuisine" (10).

The incorporation of regional gastronomies into the national cuisine enriched France's culinary repertoire but did not end debates about the (re)production of French national identity. The fusion of local or regional gastronomies into a national one effectively incorporated those regions into the territorial and institutional framework of the French state. In other words, incorporating regional culinary particularities into a broader French identity also meant integrating regions politically and symbolically into the state, often clashing with regional movements demanding greater decentralization and recognition of their political and cultural singularities. The Corsican liberation movement emerged precisely as a reaction to these centralizing dynamics of the Élysée. In addition to calling for greater autonomy, it challenged the notion of a uniform French national identity by asserting a distinct Corsican nation.

Corsica remains in an unstable situation. Although the FLNC ceased hostilities in 2014, the unrest that followed the 2022 attack on FLNC member Yvan Colonna, resulting in his death, served as a reminder of past violence. Both the identity issue, expressed in local gastronomy, and autonomist demands continue to resonate today.

If the creation of a national identity, political, cultural, or gastronomic, is inherently conflictive, its external representation is no less so. This is not only due to divergent conceptions of national identity or to tensions between national and regional identities. Even within specific regions, the gastrodiplomatic strategies governments deploy to pursue particular objectives, and the representations of regional specificities they promote in doing so, remain contested. In this regard, the Basque Country offers a paradigmatic case.

The Basque Country has a long-standing tradition in both gastronomy and political conflict between majority and minority national groups, two realities that have often intertwined. The New Basque Cuisine, for instance, was largely born out of the cultural revolution that took place in the Basque Country in the 1970s, in the final years of Francoism, as a response to the prohibition of Basque cultural and political expression in previous decades. This movement helped place the Basque Country on the global gastronomic map. The significance of this avant-garde movement, drawing on the tradition of the *guisanderas* (women who cooked for entire communities during festivals) and on French techniques introduced during the Belle Époque when the Basque coast became a summer resort for Spanish royalty, remains a matter of debate. Some limit this phenomenon to San Sebastián, thus reducing it to a local expression; others view it as the product of collective efforts by prominent Basque chefs, reflecting the cooperative ethos of Basque identity. These debates reveal broader disagreements about the very nature of Basque identity, whether national or regional, and what its defining features should be.
Despite these debates, gastronomy has become a central element of both public diplomacy and the gastrodiplomatic strategies promoted by the Basque Government in recent decades, often in collaboration with public and private actors (Lesh, 2019; Muñiz-Martínez and Florek, 2021).

The promotion of gastrodiplomacy in the Basque Country coincides with the end of the violent conflict that marked the region for decades. Following ETA's announcement of its definitive cessation of armed activity on 20 October 2011, and the decision to resolve the Basque conflict through exclusively political means, the post-conflict period offered an opportunity to (re)construct a positive Basque identity, one that left behind the trauma of violence and projected the Basque Country's attractions to the world. The 'Internationalization Strategy–Framework–Euskadi Basque Country' and the 'Strategic Plans for Gastronomy and Food in Euskadi' published since then reflect the Basque Government's aim to "foster policies and tools for the promotion of gastronomy and the food industry […] that promote sustainability, the creation of a quality tourism value proposition, and the international dissemination of the Basque Country brand" (Basque Government, 2024:6). These strategies continue the unifying momentum that New Basque Cuisine once provided, a shared reference point for a society seeking common ground beyond its divisions (Letamendia, 2000). They have thus been built around a cultural dimension, gastronomy, that has "won hearts and minds through stomachs," offering a more appealing and marketable image of the Basque Country internationally. Yet these seemingly harmonious gastrodiplomatic practices and discourses have also generated considerable discontent among Basque citizens.

Just as gastrodiplomacy can be approached from two complementary perspectives, internal and external, so too is discontent expressed in both directions. On the one hand, segments of Basque society critical of the government's gastronomic strategies argue that the version of Basque gastronomy projected abroad, now commodified and globalized under the logic of capital, no longer represents Basque cultural identity. On the other hand, they claim that the economic,

tourism, and social models promoted by these strategies are unsustainable and fail to foster coexistence, generating instead negative externalities such as rising housing prices, high living costs, and urban overcrowding. In short, many Basque citizens do not recognize themselves in the external representation produced by gastrodiplomatic strategies, nor do they identify with the lifestyle models these strategies promote internally.

Thus, gastrodiplomacy is neither a "comfort zone" (Martínez de Albeniz, 2021:6) nor devoid of politics or power relations. On the contrary, it encompasses politicized and conflictive practices, mechanisms, and discourses, even within communities where formal peace processes have succeeded in ending decades of violent conflict. This is not to say that gastrodiplomacy cannot serve as a practice or discourse for mediating differences and overcoming conflict. Indeed, much of its potential lies precisely there. But neither the practice nor the analysis of gastrodiplomacy can ignore its constant entanglement with conflict, or the possibility of its emergence, due to the multiplicity of meanings the concept can assume in the diverse contexts where it takes shape.

Conclusion: gastrodiplomacy between the ordinary, the sublime and the grotesque

This article has sought to broaden the scope of the concept of gastrodiplomacy by returning to the roots of both gastronomy and diplomacy. In doing so, it has emphasized their anthropological dimensions and their inherent connection with conflict. As critical and pluralist approaches to diplomacy underline, when the anthropological and humanistic substratum of diplomacy is taken into account, the state-centric conception of both diplomacy and gastrodiplomacy appears limited. What comes to the fore instead are the manifold, everyday differences and conflicts that arise among individuals, communities, and a range of other actors.

To this end, the article has proposed an initial shift from gastrodiplomacy to gastrology, in order to highlight the need to rethink gastrodiplomacy from the perspective of critical zones, that is, to reveal the many sharp edges of the concept.

Several of these edges have been illustrated throughout the text. First, it has been argued that gastrodiplomacy should not be understood solely as an exceptional practice or mechanism deployed in contingent moments, whether to achieve the objectives set by a state or other international actor, or to respond to crises involving food or water, but rather as a practice that, like the act of eating itself, takes place in ordinary and mundane contexts. An act as everyday as sharing a table and a meal with another person can, as the examples discussed have shown, become something exceptional, and perhaps one of the best illustrations of the virtues of gastrodiplomacy. Not as a state-driven instrument of public diplomacy or a means of establishing international relations, but as a routine act performed by individuals in their daily lives to engage with difference and estrangement.

Yet this same act is open to multiple interpretations: what is sublime for some may be grotesque for others, especially in contexts of conflict, where the very act of eating, or refusing to eat, can become a form of political action.

It is precisely in post-conflict settings that the multiple meanings of gastrodiplomacy become most apparent. Not because gastrodiplomacy is a non-controversial practice suited to moments of peace and consensus, but because it is in situations of relative peace that the intimate relationship between gastrodiplomacy and conflict becomes even more visible. Every society, even those where conflict seems to have subsided, remains traversed by underlying tensions. As shown by the cases of Corsica and the Basque Country, two regions that have recently emerged from violent conflicts, the gastrodiplomatic strategies of (re)production and (re)presentation of identity ad intra and ad extra have encountered resistance from segments of society. In these contexts, gastrodiplomatic

practices have generated new forms of conflict, perhaps less intense than past violence, but nonetheless situations in which difference and estrangement re-emerge. This is because gastronomy, conflict, and diplomacy, as practices and discourses through which tensions between individuals, communities, and multiple Selves and Others are mediated, remain closely intertwined.

In short, any practice, discourse, or analytical framework that seeks to interrelate gastronomy and diplomacy without overlooking conflict, as should be the case with gastrodiplomacy conceived from its anthropological foundations and its potential to engage with critical or conflictive zones, will inevitably be controversial. This, however, should not discourage analysis. On the contrary, it should serve as an incentive to approach the study of gastrodiplomacy from perspectives that have so far remained at the margins. The relationship between gastrodiplomacy and conflict is one such perspective.

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