

Governing the Rurals: Material-Discursive Configurations of the Local Food at the Margins

Helin Burkay

My project comprises two connected articles that examine local food as a socio-material encapsulation of changing ethical and political landscapes of food production and consumption at the margins of Europe. Building on my dissertation research on organic olive agriculture as an interface of the state-society-environment nexus in the border island of Gökçeada (Turkey), I will delve further into interrogating how food and food knowledge is produced, conserved, and contested against the backdrop of larger transitions from an ethos of national development to alternative local food projects. Using the olive as a lens to situate the historicity of local food in the violent history of state building and the contemporary politics of food in Turkey, my project engages in an interdisciplinary critique of the concept of the “local” in agro-food studies and extends the insights of the literature on settler-colonialism to the margins of Europe.

Reading Local Food Backwards: Making of an Organic Island from a Military Zone

In this article, I will look closely at the militarized history of the island of Gökçeada and explore how the physical and discursive militarization of the island changed two key threads of environment-society relations. First, exploring how connections between olives and goats changed under the influence of a military infrastructure, I will look at how the military areas not only contoured the island space as a border between Greece and Turkey, but also demarcated borders between species and changed the foodscape of the settlers. The second thread in this article will tackle the politics of gentrification of former military zones, conceptualizing the transition of these spaces to intangible heritage sites of traditional food production. I draw on theoretical perspectives from settler-colonial approaches to identify different actors and positions that negotiated the borders. In this way, I examine how military histories are incorporated into origin stories used by heritage conservation projects, a practice that introduces different mobilities and ethics of care to local understandings of food, memory, and the imaginaries of nature-society relations in places with a history of conflict.

Methodological Insights from the Margins: Participant-Oriented Narrative Analysis in Food Research in Ethnically Contentious Contexts

This article complements the first article and addresses the methodological implications of food research in places with ethnically contentious histories. I will draw on the tools from both material-semiotic analysis and decolonizing approaches (Smith 2012) in order to develop a framework for an interdisciplinary study of food. More specifically, I will ask: What are the possibilities of participant-oriented and interdisciplinary methodologies for unpacking the discursive and material layers that local food encapsulates and enacts? How can food be an archive of stories? Drawing on existing studies and interpretivist-constructivist methodologies, I will interrogate the opportunities that sensory, corporeal, and experiential stories of food bring to the textual, visual, and other media analysis.