

# Kadriye's Kısır

*When my mother talked about the past, she always mentioned that most of the things that were cooked with bulgur, she learned from her Alevi neighbours who lived in the opposite apartment to hers for several years. But this time for some reason, she was inclined to focus on a different part of her past and revealed a different side of it, and she said she learned the kısır recipe from everyone who came into her life at the time. As she was reluctant to ask women around her to prepare her some kısır, which she loved, she decided to make it herself.*

## **Akarsu Demirkol**

I have been eating her kısır all my life, and all those who taste my mother's kısır say that it is the best they had. Frankly I don't know if what they say is true, because I don't remember eating kısır made by someone else than my mother. When I was a child, guests coming to our house used to say things like that, but I think I was not paying much attention to them. Kısır, börek and such, these were only nice surprises I had when I came back from school; those leftovers of my mother's friends' daytime gatherings. That is why they were not of much importance to me.

When, as a source to recipes we were going to collect for this project, I only chose my mother's recipe, things were already different for me. After four years studying history, I knew in my heart that these "women's daytime gathering foods" that my mother learned from her mother and all the things she learned from other people were going to be meaningful for social memory and cultural history, and also for everyone who cook or eat, beyond our "unique family history". Still, I've come across a lot of things I couldn't foresee. During this journey, which I started with the enthusiasm to place in social and cultural context, and to learn to make a meal or two, our mother-daughter relationship was strengthened. The importance of intergenerational learning, which is very likely to be ignored, also hit me hard in the face.

When I asked my mother about the kısır recipe, she said that she learned it long after she got married to my father and moved to Istanbul, so I knew already that it was not, as she said, "the kısır of Thrace". When my mother talked about the past, she always mentioned that most of the things that were cooked with bulgur, she learned from her Alevi neighbours who lived in the opposite apartment to hers for several years. But this time for some reason, she was inclined to focus on a different part of her past and revealed a different side of it, and she said she learned the kısır recipe from everyone who came into her life at the time. As she was

reluctant to ask women around her to prepare her some kisir, which she loved, she decided to make it herself.

The kisir recipe is updated with each new person entering my mother's life. Aunt Saniye kneads the bulgur too much, Aunt Fatma likes it that way. According to what she says, it is something people from Adıyaman do (although Aunt Saniye is from Adana and Aunt Fatma from Malatya, but who knows?). My mother, willing to keep her kisir recipe up-to-date in her new circle of friends, finds a new way: she puts some onions in the bulgur and she cooks this mixture for a while. When she gives the recipe to me, she also quickly adds an anecdote with kisir. During a visit to the family of my cousin's ex-wife who was from Antep, my mother sees that they all eat kisir for dinner from the same plate, and drink ayran with it. For my mother who went to Ankara for the first time in her life just a few years ago, a kisir recipe always brings the region and city of the person who cooked it to the table; maybe this builds the Turkish geography in her head.

While she was telling me all this, we also prepared a kisir together. I was so surprised that it was this easy to make. My mother gave me the recipe of kisir she always makes for her guests. Maybe this is a reflection of the fact that this meal is "an indulgence", eaten during "late afternoon", and also a meal "for women". In the late afternoon, I brought this big kisir bowl and two spoons to the living room, we ate it with appetite. At first my mother was reluctant to eat from the same plate, but when I said: "Mom, as Dad is not eating, you and me can eat from the same bowl", she was at once convinced. While we were eating our kisir, as if to tease all those fathers who are against this dish, who think that this has no nutritive value, I felt that my mother felt a secret pleasure.

While waiting for the bulgur to be ready, you chop all the greens. Once you mix the bulgur with greens, you add things like spices, lemon juice etc. (For those who, like me, are not very fond of cooking: onions are initially mixed with bulgur when it is being soaked, and spring onions are added with the greens). The rest of the "fantasy" ingredients all depend on your palate.

### **My mother's kisir recipe**

1 cup of bulgur (fine bulgur used to make köfte)

*Bulgur is soaked in hot water for about 30 to 60 minutes according to your sense of proportions, then the ingredients listed below are added.*

Salt

One onion (mid-size) chopped very small

Spring onions (quarter of a bundle)

Parsley (quarter of a bundle)

Tomato paste (bitter and sweet, homemade)

### *Spices*

Chili flakes

Black pepper

Sumac

Thyme

Mint

### *According to preference*

Iceberg lettuce

Tomatoes (can be used to add moisture and to decorate)

Cucumber

Lettuce

Fresh mint

Watercress

Rocket

Fennel (optional)

Thin green pepper

**P.S.** The quality of the tomato paste and olive oil are paramount.

### **Tips and anecdotes for cooking kisir**

From Aunt Saniye: “Don’t put onion inside soaked bulgur and crush it.”

Adıyaman people prefer to cook the bulgur. Aunt Saniye kneads too much. Aunt Fatma likes it this way.

My grandmother learned it later. My mother learned it in Istanbul “In Trakya<sup>1</sup>, we didn’t have kisir.”

Garlic is optional. You must take into account the guests’ preferences.

Kisir has a uniting effect.

My mother: “If you are going to have guests, you can chop all the greens in the evening and save them for the next day.”

Bulgur will suck up the oil.

My mother: “Your mental state at that moment is also very important.”

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<sup>1</sup> Known as *Thrace* in English, *Trakya* refers to the part of Turkey that’s on the European continent in colloquial Turkish.