



Dining for Women

Making Connections
May 2008
Afghanistan

Many western organizations that have interest in Afghan women seem to think they are in need of rescuing. And while they do need help, what we tend to forget is that those most knowledgeable about Afghan women are the women themselves. It is our obligation, first and foremost, to listen.

Lana Slezić, *Forsaken: Afghan Women* (Powerhouse Books, 2007)

We last supported the work of Parwaz in Afghanistan in April, 2007. In that edition of *MC*, I began with a list of restrictions implemented against women under the Taliban. You've surely seen similar lists, but if not, go to our Program Schedule page on the DFW website to read it. *FYI* surveyed the challenges that Afghan women continue to face after "liberation." I've repeated that discussion here, along with much of the rest of that edition, because it is, unfortunately, still all too relevant. You'll see updates on that and other topics throughout this month's *MC* as well as new recipes and recommendations. And we begin with an admonition to listen to Afghan women; we end by hearing from some in a new *Voices*.

FYI

We've all seen the "before" and "after" scenes of Afghanistan on television: women completely veiled in blue burkas pushed back into their houses by men fast-forwarded to women in western dress attending class or doing jobs. If only women's empowerment in Afghanistan could be as easy as a change of clothing or scenery, if only it really could be "fast-forwarded." Women are re-emerging, coming out of their burkas and homes. At least, some women are. In some areas, resurgent fundamentalist militias still enforce many of the Taliban's restrictions. In others, the reign of local warlords (usually involved in drug trafficking) makes going outside too dangerous for women, especially young women targeted for kidnapping. In some homes, men still enforce severe restrictions on their wives and daughters. In others, they don't have to because women have so internalized the restrictions placed on them that they limit themselves. And for women who do venture forward, there are still plenty of roadblocks—even landmines—that prohibit many from proceeding at an adequate pace.

The roadblocks and landmines are both figurative and literal. For example, although Afghanistan has two women in top ministerial positions (public health and women's affairs), women's movement into government leadership has been slow. The

loya jirga (the national counsel) had only 9% representation by women. (Compare to the Rwandan Parliament or even the *loya jirga* prior to communist and fundamentalist rule when women were 15% of members.) While the *jirga* approved a constitution declaring that women have “equal rights and duties before the law,” some fear this may be turned against them because the “law” includes religious law. The Taliban’s interpretation of women’s “duties” under religious law might be legitimated because of the vagueness of the clause. Threatening to impede women’s progress even more is the possible reinstatement of the Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Vice proposed just last summer. This is the government office that administered the bans and punishments during Taliban rule.

And some forces are literally throwing bombs in the paths of girls trying to attend school. Girls have returned to schools in large, but not large enough, numbers. Approximately one-third of the children in Afghanistan’s schools are female. Overall, 70% still do not attend classes and in some areas, only 1-2% of girls go to school. One-third of Afghanistan’s districts do not have girls’ schools. A tradition of not educating females and marrying them off very young (more than half are married before their eighteenth birthday), poverty, lack of teachers, and poor facilities make a girls’ chances of getting an education difficult at best. In the past year, however, it has become even more difficult and dangerous. According a Human Rights Watch report summarized in *The LA Times*, there were over 200 “attacks on teachers, students, and schools” in 2005 and already more by July 2006 than in the entire previous year. *The LA Times* article featured the story of one woman, a determined teacher and mother of six, whose students discovered a landmine in her classroom after Taliban members had placed a threatening note in the local mosque. She vowed to continue teaching even though her family worries for her and her students’ safety. Not without reason: teachers and principals have been assassinated before students’ eyes since the “liberation.”

For some women, the circumstances in which they find themselves bind them in ways that far surmount any impositions on their movement or clothing. They have no homes from which to emerge because they were destroyed by the Taliban, the bombings, or warlords. There are no men to enforce restrictions (or provide support) because they were lost to war or drugs. Numbers of Hazara women, for example, have been trying to eke out an existence for themselves and their children in the caves of northern Afghanistan since the Taliban killed their menfolk and destroyed their homes, with little outside attention to their plight. The second highest maternal mortality rate in the world and an increasingly alarming suicide rate among women, indicate two factors that still hold back women’s empowerment and well-being: the slow progress toward meeting basic needs such as healthcare and the slow progress toward creating a culture in which women can have hope that they might thrive if they make the effort. A third factor is security. Availability of education, services, and jobs means little if women cannot access them due to the threat of retaliation at home or in the streets. Activists and some government leaders have repeatedly called for stronger domestic violence laws and enforcement, but the government at various levels has been slow to act. Nor can it seem to thwart the rising number of threats and outright attacks on women in schools or in the streets.

Some Afghan women remember that a decade ago, half of the government employees and doctors and even more of the educators in Afghanistan were women.

Some kept working underground, at great risk, even when silenced. Others, young women now attending university and wearing what they like, look forward to a future in which Afghan women take equal and open part in their country's rebuilding. But far too many others are left standing still, that past unknown and the future unimaginable.

Update: The only thing that seems to have improved in the last year for Afghan women is their own and the international media's awareness of their plight. More women are taking to the streets in protests and prayer vigils on behalf of victims of gender-related violence, getting involved in activist groups that demand that the laws put in place to protect women be enforced, and speaking out about atrocities against women and against new threats to limit the freedoms they've obtained (at least on paper). Some specifics:

1. 2007 brought a ban on marriage under 16 by the Afghan government; however early marriages of girls are still taking place and human rights officials estimate that 60% of marriages are forced.
2. Last June, Zakia Zaki, a 35 year-old mother of six and a radio journalist was murdered in her home near Kabul. That same month, two women Members of Parliament revealed that they had been advised by the government of evidence that they are in imminent danger of being targeted by suicide bombers. No security is provided them by the government; they've simply been told to "be careful." All three women had been outspoken against warlords and Taliban resurgence. Another woman journalist, a television reporter, was murdered in June by male relatives in what has been characterized as an honor killing. Speaking or living out against the rule of male family members or radical conservative politicians and militia continues to be deadly for even the most powerful women in Afghanistan.
3. And for those with much less or no power? The Independent Human Rights Commission in Afghanistan documented "over 1500 cases of atrocities against women last year," according to the BBC. That's estimated to be just the tip of a very large iceberg.
4. Women are speaking out more. But who is listening to them? Women's rights activists working in Afghanistan complain not only about the challenges of working to change Afghan culture but also of the culture of outsiders who are there to "help." Audrey Roberts, a Peace Fellow working with the Women's Advocacy Network in Kabul, writes in her blog, "Prior to my arrival to Kabul, I envisaged myself providing support for campaigns for Afghan women's rights directed at Afghan society and the Government of Afghanistan.... I have spent 90% of my time and energy advocating for the importance of gender considerations and Afghan women's rights, not to the Government of Afghanistan or to Afghan society, but to the international community in Afghanistan. I have been pushing NATO-ISAF, PRT Commanders and the Civil Military Working Group that is drafting the new Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Guidelines for Afghanistan to understand the importance of gender." The general response she receives? "Laughter."
5. An international outcry sprang up earlier this year over the sentencing of an Afghan journalism student (a young man) to death by an Islamic court. His crime? He downloaded a pamphlet on Islam and women's rights from the Internet. Initially, his sentence was upheld by the government although most recently it looks as though the outcry has swayed the government to spare him. But the story is a dramatic example of what is being called the "re-Talibanization" of Afghanistan by conservative politicians and religious leaders. Just last month, a group of Parliamentarians presented legislation

that would implement a number of restrictions effecting women, including a ban against women and men mingling in public and cultural restrictions on clothing, music, and video. Many analysts, according to the Christian Science Monitor, view this as a way of pandering to the fears of people, especially people in rural areas, in a time of great social transition. And indeed it is. Just recently, a young woman placed third in Afghanistan's wildly popular version of "American Idol." (Yes, they have it too.) This was the first time a woman had placed so high. It was terribly exciting for many in a culture where women singing in public (within men's hearing) has been frowned on (if not considered outright blasphemy) in the past. It was terrible for those who still hold that opinion. The young "idol" was indeed that to some, but harassment and threat eventually caused her to disappear from the limelight. She sings in public no more.

Recommended Books

Several books about Afghan women who grew up under Mujahidin or Taliban rule and escaped to the West have appeared in recent years. (Some are listed in the Resources section at the end of *MC*.) I'm recommending, however, three books that focus on life in Afghanistan after September 11 and the fall of the Taliban. All are well-written and focus on the stories of "ordinary" people. While none intend to be about Afghan women exclusively, all in the end are haunting accounts of women's lives after "liberation." Perhaps that's because all three were written by women (two distinguished journalists and a well-known feminist writer). Or perhaps it's because among the things most striking about Afghanistan today is the paradox of just how much and yet how little has changed for women so far. Christina Lamb gives a poignant account of women who risked their lives during Taliban rule to carry on with their writing and studies in meetings disguised as sewing circles and how they are coping with the slow progress now. Asne Seierstad, while writing about a remarkable bookseller who managed to spare rare texts from Taliban destruction, can't help but concentrate on the women of his family. The contrast between his attitude toward censorship and the restrictions still placed on "his" women leap out. Most recently Ann Jones, who went to Kabul to teach English after the bombing ended, has described the various factors that impede women's empowerment, including sometimes the misunderstanding of those who intend to help. If I had to pick one, I'd chose *The Bookseller of Kabul* for its fascinating insight into the distinctive personalities of the women of one family. But Jones's chapters on women's prisons and schools in *Kabul in Winter* are among the most enlightening pieces I've read on Afghanistan and the letters of a young Afghan women reproduced in *The Sewing Circles of Herat* are unforgettable. (Bibliographical information is in the Resources section; all are widely available "bestsellers.")

Also Recommended: The documentary *Afghanistan Unveiled* follows the journey of several young Kabul women training to be photojournalists by traveling Afghanistan to talk to women about their lives. These students' hope and courage are impressive, but our eyes become as wide as theirs as we encounter with them a remarkable range of women from parts of Afghanistan as foreign to them as to us, some from ethnic groups that were almost exterminated by the Taliban. (See Resources for more information.)

Update: Afghan women continued to be the subject of fiction and non-fiction in 2007; however, after reviewing several new books, I was left far less impressed than with the works recommended last time. I do suggest a look at a couple of new photojournalism

volumes for their stunning photography and direct quotations from Afghan women: Lana Slezić, Forsaken: Afghan Women (Powerhouse Books, 2007) and Katherine Kiviat and Scott Heidler, Women of Courage: Intimate Stories From Afghanistan (Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2007) (see quote at top and Voices).

Socially Responsible Shopping (New!)

Unfortunately, we still can't readily access products related to Parwaz projects since it doesn't have a vehicle for import right now. However, we do have two very good sources to recommend this month.

1. Lovely shawls and scarves (some of which might double as table runners), pillow covers, and a very reasonably priced variety pack of 4"x5" embroidered and beaded gift pouches made by Afghan women artisans are available from the Feminist Online Store. 100% of the proceeds support the women who are being aided by the Feminist Majority's Campaign for Afghan Women and Girls.

<https://store.feminist.org/index.asp?PageAction=VIEWCATS&Category=11>

2. Well, these aren't exactly impulse purchases (especially in this economy!), but if you're in the market for a stunningly beautiful, artisan-made rug, we may have found your source. Arzu Rugs ("arzu" means "hope" in the Dari) is a non-profit that provides sustainable income to Afghan women by sourcing and selling the rugs they weave. The rugs are made using environmentally sustainable materials and processes as well. Won't hurt to look anyway: <http://www.arzurugs.org/pages.php?pageid=80>

Dining with Women

Modern Afghanistan occupies an area that was integral to the ancient silk routes and this history is reflected in its reliance on Indian spices, Chinese tea, and traditions borrowed from Persia (Iran) and other neighbors. Afghan dishes may remind you sometimes of Indian fare, certainly of the foods of Middle Eastern countries, and even of Asian cuisine. Afghanistan is, according to food authority Helen Saberi, a culinary "melting pot" and yet its many ethnic groups retain distinctive foodways as well. Even with all this diversity and blending, some things are "givens" when it comes to eating in Afghanistan. According to Ms. Saberi, naan and tea (*chai*) are the "basic diet" of Afghans and served at every meal. So essential is *naan*, she explains, that the word means both "bread" and "food." Rice and stews are common as well. How as well as what Afghans eat is a shared tradition and a tradition of sharing. Seated on cushions on the floor, Afghans usually eat from common platters of food, using their right hands (never left!) to pick up bites or to scoop up bites of stew with pieces of naan. Another common tradition is the balancing of foods according to the ancient Persian system of *sardi-garmi* (cold-hot). Our menu reflects this. It includes "hot" foods (generally higher calorie, rich, or sweet) such as naan, lamb, nuts, onions, and spices. These are tempered by "cold" (lower calorie, often acidic) ingredients such as lemon and apricot, herbs and spinach, chicken, and yogurt.

Yet with war and poverty even the givens can't always be counted on. There is a haunting photograph in Christina Lamb's book (see above) of children begging for naan on a street in Herat. The UN's World Food Program reported in 2005 that over 6 million Afghans don't get enough food. More than half the children under five and half the women in Afghanistan are iron-deficient (which helps account for the shockingly high

maternal and infant mortality rates there). War has increased Afghanistan's environmental troubles and reduced agricultural productivity. A grain shortage due to severe drought in 2006 put naan out of reach for many.

Update: Afghanistan is among the countries recently placed on the United Nations' "high emergency" list due to the intensifying world food crisis. Afghanistan must import much of its wheat for bread. Rising wheat prices and increasingly limited access (imports from Pakistan, for example, have been severely curtailed in recent months) are making a difficult situation even worse. The UN estimates that in Kabul, many working families are now spending up to 60% of their income on bread alone.

Visitors to Afghanistan always remark on the hospitality they experience there, even during the most difficult times. Sharing food with strangers, for Afghans, is the most basic symbol of their honor and culture. If we could be there, they would share their best with us. They are, in a sense, with these recipes that come from their prized food traditions. By helping to empower women to feed themselves and their families through Parwaz, perhaps we are returning that hospitality in our own way.

Menu (*new recipes)

If your space and the weather allow, you might consider doing the meal portion of your meeting *al fresco*. Some of the recipes (new and old) are best done on the grill—a favorite way of cooking in Afghanistan.

Afghan Chicken Street Kebabs on Herb Salad (serve with naan, yogurt sauce, onion relish)

**O Be Peyaz* ("Onion Water" Grilled or Broiled Meat)

Afghan Home-style Naan (flatbread)

Mint and Yogurt Sauce

Onion Relish

**Kartoff Mumulay* (Stuffed Potato Fritters)

**Bouranee Baunjan* (Eggplant with Yogurt Sauce)

Afghan Lamb Stew with Spinach (serve with rice and/or naan)

"Persian" Rice with Pistachios and Dill

* *Sheer Yakh* (Afghan Ice Cream with Rosewater and Pistachio)

Apricot Almond Shortbread

For other Afghan recipes see

http://www.inmamaskitchen.com/FOOD_IS_ART_II/food_history_and_facts/afganistan_cooking/afghan_cooking.html and Helen Saberi, *Afghan Food and Cookery* (Hippocrene Books, 2000).

Afghan Home-Style Naan

adapted fr. Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid, Flatbreads and Flavors: A Baker's Atlas (William Morrow and Co., 1995)

Thick and soft, with a slight tang, this is the type of bread that Afghan women make at home in a tandoor (outdoor clay oven). It's not difficult to make and well worth the effort—much better than commercial flatbreads. The recipe makes 6 8" rounds which you could cut into smaller pieces for serving. Afghans just tear off a piece of naan from a communal basket to sop up a sauce or to fill with pieces of meat and vegetable. You can

freeze it. You can reheat it, wrapped in foil, in a warm oven. It's best served warm, but room temp is good too. Naan in Afghanistan is most often shaped into rectangles. Here, I've suggested circles that fit on our commonly available pizza stones—but feel free to shape them as you wish, making them larger or smaller (adjusting baking time). If you make larger breads, you'll probably need a baking peel or floured sheet pan for transferring them to the oven.

1c cold whole milk plain yogurt
1 c boiling water
1 packet dry yeast
1/2 c lukewarm water
5 1/2 c whole wheat flour (or a mix of whole wheat and bread flour)
2 T vegetable oil
2 t salt
6 T sesame seeds (nice but optional)

Stir the boiling water slowly and carefully into the yogurt and allow to cool to lukewarm or no more than 110 degrees. In a large bowl, dissolve the yeast in the warm water—again no hotter than 110 degrees or you might kill the yeast. Once the yogurt mixture is lukewarm, add it to the yeast mixture. Stir in 3 c flour, half a cup at a time. Once it's all in, stir in one direction for two minutes. You should have a pretty smooth mixture—your “sponge.” Allow it to sit, covered with plastic, 30 minutes. NOTE: If you have a stand mixer and dough hook, by all means use them and make even quicker work of this step.

Sprinkle the oil and salt on the sponge and mix in enough of the flour, half a cup at a time, to make a dough. Knead on a lightly floured surface until smooth and elastic, about 10 minutes. (Again, a mixer and dough hook save some time and elbow grease here.)

Wash out, dry, and lightly oil your bowl. Put the dough to the bowl, turning to coat it with the oil. Cover with plastic and allow to rise until double in volume (a finger stuck into the dough will leave a hole that doesn't fill), an hour or so.

Place an oven rack in the lower third of the oven and place a pizza stone or quarry tiles on it if you have them. Or, place a large baking sheet on the rack. Preheat the oven to 450.

Punch down the dough and divide into six pieces. Flatten each to a 5” round and cover them with plastic. (You can use a little flour on your hands and the work surface to keep the dough from sticking if necessary.) Allow to rest 10 minutes.

Sprinkle a little flour around your work surface and flour your hands. If using sesame seeds, sprinkle 1T in the center of your work surface and spread out slightly. Place a dough round on top of the sesame seeds and press. Roll or stretch the dough to an approx. 8” round. Turn the dough over (sesame on top) and make four or five 1” long slashes, radiating from the center of the dough (you don't need to cut deeply). Fold the dough in half onto itself (don't press down), carry it to the oven, and place it onto the pizza stone

or baking sheet. Unfold it so the round lies flatly and smoothly on the baking surface. Bake five-six minutes until the top begins to brown. While it bakes, form your next flatbread. If the bread sticks to the baking surface, just loosen it with a knife or metal spatula. Cool the bread on a rack or serve immediately.

NOTE: If you have a convection option on your oven, bake the flatbreads at 450 for 4 minutes—I had very good luck with them that way. Make sure to preheat your pizza stone thoroughly (30 minutes).

Chicken Street Kabobs

fr. Flatbreads and Flavors

This is “street food,” sold at stands throughout Afghanistan, but also enjoyed in homes. Rolled in pieces of naan with accompanying sauces, relishes, and salad herbs or by themselves, these kabobs are quite tasty. I like chicken thighs here, but breast meat probably makes for more even pieces—and chicken tenders make this quick work if you don’t mind paying extra for the convenience.

2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken thighs or breasts

salt

Marinade:

1 c plain yogurt

1/8 t saffron threads, crushed and soaked in 2 T warm water

1/4 t turmeric

1/2 t black pepper

1/2 t salt

1 c fresh mint leaves, finely chopped

12-15 small wooden or metal skewers (if using wooden ones, soak them in water for 30 minutes before cooking)

A serving platter lined with fresh salad greens (finely torn or chopped) and/or fresh herbs such as basil, flat-leafed parsley, mint, and cilantro

Trim any fat, sinew, or tough connective tissue from the chicken and cut it into 1/2” pieces. Sprinkle the chicken with salt, but keep in mind that some salt is in the marinade. Combine marinade ingredients and pour over the chicken. Stir to coat well. Cover and chill for 3-4 hours.

Thread the chicken pieces on skewers, placing only 3-4 pieces on each skewer with ample space in between pieces. Broil or grill 5 minutes or so, turning halfway. (If broiling, lightly oil your broil pan first.) Remove the chicken from the skewers if you like. Place chicken over the salad/herbs. You can serve this hot off the grill/out of the oven or at room temp. Count on a skewer per person for a buffet.

***O Be Peyaz* ("Onion Water" Grilled or Broiled Meat)**

Adapted fr. Steven Raichlen, The Barbecue Bible (Workman, 1998)

The marinade’s the thing here. Raichlen says that onion juice is a common marinade throughout the Islamic world—it tenderizes meats and lends a subtle, enticing aroma (not nearly as strong as one might expect of onion juice!). The original recipe is for lamb chops, but a butterflied lamb leg or flank steak would be heavenly grilled after being

bathed in this marinade. I tried it with chicken thighs which I cooked in my oven—quite delicious over the Persian rice with Carolyn’s eggplant dish below as a side. But this would be great with any of our side dish recipes and naan.

8 loin lamb chops, trimmed of fat (each 4 to 5 ounces and 1-1/2 inches thick or 2lbs
butterflied lamb leg, flank steak, or boneless chicken)
1/4 teaspoon saffron threads
1 tablespoon warm water
1-1/2 pounds onions, peeled and quartered
1 to 3 serranos or other hot chiles, minced
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Place the saffron in a small bowl and grind it to a fine powder with a pestle or the end of a wooden spoon. Add the warm water, stir, and let stand for 5 minutes. Place the onions in a food processor and process, in batches if necessary, until the onions are puréed and quite watery. Transfer puree to a fine-meshed strainer and set over a large, deep nonreactive bowl and drain, pressing the solids with the back of a rubber spatula or wooden spoon to extract the juice; you should have about 2 cups. (If not, add some water.) Discard the contents of the strainer. Add the chile, turmeric, salt, pepper, and the dissolved saffron to the onion juice. Whisk until the salt is dissolved. Add the meat and turn to coat thoroughly. Cover and let marinate, in the refrigerator, for 2 hours, turning several times.

Preheat the grill or broiler to high. When ready to cook, remove the meat from the marinade and blot dry with paper towels (if grilling; leave a little marinade on the meat if broiling). Oil the grill grate or broiler pan. If grilling, arrange the meat on the hot grate and grill, turning with tongs, until cooked to taste, about 6 minutes per side for medium beef or lamb. If using the broiler, it will take about the same amount of time, but watch carefully. I actually baked my chicken in the marinade at 375 degrees to partially cook it and then finish it under the broiler for a couple of minutes. This helps prevent the outside of the meat from overcooking before the inside is done and keeps down the smoke in the kitchen. Allow steak or lamb to sit a few minutes before slicing into strips.

Sweet Onion Salad-Relish

fr. Flatbreads and Flavors

A little of this rolled up with Chicken Street Kabobs and Mint and Yogurt Sauce in a piece of naan makes for a great “sandwich” and is a bit more delicate than raw onion.

2 medium red onions, thinly sliced (about 2 c)
1 T coarse (kosher) salt
3 T cider vinegar
1 t sugar
1 c loosely packed cilantro, coarsely chopped (optional—substitute: flat leaf parsley)
1/4 t cayenne pepper (optional)

Place the sliced onions in a colander over a bowl. Sprinkle with salt and toss to distribute the salt well. Allow to stand 20 minutes, rinse under cold water and dry well, either with a tea towel or in a salad spinner. Mix vinegar, sugar, and pepper and pour over the onions. Add cilantro and toss everything together. Serve at room temp. (Can be made ahead and kept in the fridge.) Note: You could add other vegies to the onion before salting—very thin slivers of cucumber, radish, carrot, etc.

Mint and Yogurt Sauce

fr. Flabreads and Flavors

Great as a dip for Naan or a sauce for the Chicken Street Kebabs. Once again, I highly recommend Phage (Fage) or another thick, creamy natural yogurt here. Makes 2 cups.

1 1/2 c whole milk plain yogurt, drained if liquidy (use a cheesecloth-lined colander)
1 c packed fresh mint leaves, finely chopped
2 finely minced or pressed garlic cloves (or 1 if the cloves are large)
1/2 t salt
1/2 t coarsely ground black pepper

Combine everything and chill. You can make this several hours ahead. Stir it again before serving. If you like just a whiff of garlic and no more, use a whole smashed clove, make the sauce ahead and remove the garlic clove before serving.

Kartoff Mumulay (Stuffed Potato Fritters)

Adapted fr. Copeland Marks, Sephardic Cooking: 600 Recipes Created in Exotic Sephardic Kitchens from Morocco to India (New York, 1992) found at <http://users.erols.com/magi/Recipes/AFGHAN.txt>

For perhaps over a thousand years, Jewish communities thrived in Afghanistan. Now only a few families remain, most Afghan Jews having emigrated in the last century to Israel or elsewhere. The foods they developed are a remaining testament to their culture just as surely as the remains of synagogues they built in Herat and Kabul. This is a Passover Recipe, made originally with matzo meal. Miriam reports, “Kartoff Mumulay is fun from the start- it's name. I can't imagine how in the world these combinations have gotten together. I am talking about two worlds emerging. *Kartoff* is from German for potato, *Mumulay* is "filling- stuffed" from the Hebrew word *Memulla* and we are speaking about Afghanistan! What a joy it was to make these stuffed potatoes! Very easy to make.”

STUFFING

1/4 c oil
1-1/2 c chopped onion
1 lb Ground beef
2t each finely chopped garlic, parsley, and cilantro
1t Salt
1/2t Pepper

FRITTERS

3 lb Potatoes

1 Egg, beaten
1t Salt, or to taste
1/2t Ground cinnamon
1/2t Pepper
1c Matzoh meal (or dried bread crumbs or saltine cracker crumbs but cut back on the salt in the dough if using salted crackers and use slightly less of either bread or cracker crumbs at first to make sure the dough isn't too dry)
Oil for pan frying

For Stuffing: Heat oil in a skillet & stir-fry onions over moderate heat until golden. Add beef, salt, & pepper, garlic, and herbs. Stir-fry until mixture is dry and the liquid has evaporated. Cool.

For Fritters: Cook the potatoes in their skins in boiling water or in the oven until soft. (If you boil them, make sure to drain and dry them well when done). Peel and mash them well. Mix together all fritter ingredients to make a soft, cohesive dough.

Shape 1/2 c of potato dough into a circle in the palm of your hand. Place 1 generous T stuffing in the center and fold the dough over it into a slightly flattened sausage shape 3-inches long, 1-inch wide, & 1-inch thick. Pinch the edges to make sure the filling won't escape during frying.

Heat about 1/2" of oil in a frying pan (you can test the heat with a little piece of the potato dough—if you put it in the oil and it sizzles, the oil is ready). Put a few fritters at a time in the oil and pan-fry over moderate heat, turning once, until brown on both sides. Drain on paper towels & serve warm. Makes about 25 fritters.

Bouranee Baunjan (Eggplant with Yogurt Sauce)

Adapted from a recipe on www.morselsandmusings.blogspot.com/2006/11/afghani-eggplant-with-yogurt.html

This is a great dish that Carolyn adapted for us after she, Barb, Marsha and I had something similar at a Persian restaurant here in Greenville. It's among the many Persian dishes that have happily found their way into Afghan cuisine. As Carolyn says, it's "absolutely delicious and very pretty on a platter any other color than white!"

2 medium sized eggplants
2 medium onions, halved then thinly sliced
14 oz. can chopped tomatoes
1/4t hot red pepper flakes
2c thick Greek yogurt (like Fage)
4 cloves garlic
Chopped mint
Salt
Olive oil

Cut unpeeled eggplant into 1/2" inch thick slices and sprinkle with salt. Let them sit in a colander for about 1/2 hour to draw out some of the moisture. Pat dry with paper towels. While the eggplant is sitting, mince all of the garlic. Mix 1 clove of minced garlic and salt to taste into the yogurt. Set aside.

Heat enough oil to cover the bottom of a large, deep frying pan over medium flame and cook the eggplant in batches, just a two or three minutes a side. It does not have to be fully cooked, just golden. You will need to keep adding oil to the pan as the eggplant will soak it up like a sponge. Alternatively, you could brush both sides of the eggplant with oil and either bake in a 400 degree oven for 8 minutes, turning once, or, even better, grill it. Set the partially cooked eggplant aside.

Add another tablespoon or two of oil to the pan, and over medium-low flame, cook onions until soft, about 10 minutes. Add the rest of the garlic, the tomatoes and the chili flakes and cook about another 10 minutes. Taste and add any salt or more chili if desired. Remove most of the sauce from the pan, leaving a little in the bottom. Place a layer of eggplant in the pan, and top with some of the tomato and onion sauce. Continue adding a layer of eggplant, then sauce, ending with sauce. Cover and simmer for about 10 minutes, making sure the eggplant is tender.

To serve, spread some of the yogurt sauce all over the bottom of a nice platter, and place the eggplant slices, carefully, on top of it. Put dollops of yogurt sauce all over the top and sprinkle with just a little chopped mint. If serving individual plates, spread a small amount of the yogurt sauce on plate, put one eggplant slice in the middle of it, put a dollop of yogurt sauce on top, and sprinkle with mint. Beautiful!

Serves 4 as a main course, 8 as a side dish.

Afghan Lamb with Spinach

Adapted fr. Chef Phil Soroko in Phyllis Meras, The New Carry-Out Cuisine (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986)

Very flavorful with the spices and touch of lemon at the end, but not “spicy.”

2 1/2 lb Lamb stew meat in small pieces, sprinkled with salt and pepper

1/3 c olive oil

1 large onion, chopped

3 garlic cloves, chopped

1 t salt

2 t turmeric

1/4 t nutmeg

1/4 t ground cardamom

scant 1/2 t red pepper flakes (a little spice but not hot)

1/2 t cinnamon

2 14 1/2 oz. cans diced tomatoes; drained slightly

1 c lower-sodium beef or chicken stock

6 oz. fresh spinach, washed, dried, and cut into strips if leaves are large

1/2 c whole milk yogurt

1 T freshly grated lemon peel

1/4 c pine nuts, toasted until golden (in a 350 oven for 3 minutes, watch carefully)

Note: Omit pine nuts if serving with Persian Pilaf.

Preheat oven to 350. Season the lamb with salt and pepper. Heat the olive oil over a medium-high flame in a Dutch oven or large oven-proof casserole with a lid. Brown the lamb pieces in the olive oil. Add the onions; cook for 2 minutes. Then add the garlic and cook for 1 minute, lowering heat if necessary so the garlic doesn't brown. Add all the spices and cook for 1 to 2 minutes more. Add the tomatoes and broth and stir. Bring to

boil. Cover the dish and place in the oven. Bake 1 to 1 1/2 hours, until the meat is very tender. Remove the dish from the oven and add the spinach stirring until the spinach is wilted and blended in. Allow the stew to cool slightly. Add the yogurt, lemon peel, and adjust salt if needed. Sprinkle with roasted pine nuts if using. Serves six. Reheats very well.

Persian Rice Pilaf with Pistachios and Dill

fr. Bruce Feiler in Gourmet Magazine via McCullough and Stevens, The Best American Recipes 2002-2003 (Houghton Mifflin, 2002)

This way of cooking rice is credited to Iran, but is much loved in Afghanistan too. There, the method of parboiling, draining, and steaming rice is called *sof*. In some ways, it's more foolproof than the boiling-steaming method most of us use and creates lovely fluffy, distinct grains of rice. If you're tired of the same old rice, give this a try. The crust that forms on the bottom the pan, called the *tie daygi* in Afghanistan, is a delicacy, not a mistake (and no, it doesn't create a pot-cleaning disaster). The dill becomes subtle in cooking while the pistachios add a nice crunch.

3 c basmati rice (1 1/4 lb)

3 T salt

6 T unsalted butter

2/3 chopped fresh dill

1 c (5 oz.) coarsely chopped natural (no dye) pistachios (salted are fine)

Bring 4 quarts of water and the salt to a boil in a large pot with a lid. Rinse the rice in several changes of water until the water runs clear. Drain in a strainer. Mix the nuts and dill together and set aside. When the water is boiling, add the washed rice to it and cook for 5 minutes. Drain in the strainer again. Wash out the pot and return it to the stove. Melt the butter in the pot on medium-low heat. Spoon some of the rice over the butter, then add a layer of dill and pistachios. Continue this layering, mounding loosely, ending with rice. Make 5-6 holes in the rice mound all the way down to the bottom of the pot with the handle of a spoon. Cover the pot with a towel and lid. (Tuck or tie the edges of the towel up over the lid so it won't burn!) Cook undisturbed 30-35 minutes. Rice should be tender and a crust should have formed on the bottom of the pot. Spoon the loose rice onto a platter. Dip the pot bottom in a bowl of cold water, wait 30 seconds, and scoop the loosened crust onto the rice on the platter. NOTE: Don't use an enameled cast iron pot (Le Creuset) for this: the enamel could crack when the hot pot meets the cold water. Stainless Steel is best for this.

Sheer Yakh (Afghan Ice Cream)

adapted fr. <http://www.afghan-web.com/culture/cooking/sheeryakh.html>

Ice creams of various sorts are much-beloved in Afghanistan. Here, we cheat a little with store bought ice cream. Quick and good and very pretty. Key here is the rosewater, an ingredient that adds a lovely aroma to a variety of Afghan dishes. You'll find it in Middle Eastern or Indian stores or sometimes in craft stores or even the drug store. If you have access to unsprayed rose petals, toss a few around the dish. Roses would be appropriate at the beginning of the meal as well as at dessert. Afghans often have a hand-washing

ceremony prior to a festive meal. How to do it: Fill a large bowl with warm water and a few drops of rosewater or oil. Pass the bowl with a nice hand towel to each diner. While one diner holds the bowl, another dips her fingertips into the bowl and dries them on the towel before passing the service to the next person. Of course, a lovely bouquet of garden roses for the table would be welcome and “in season.” (*Please use unsprayed or “eco” roses if you purchase them. The heavy use of pesticides in most commercial rose production is not great for us and utterly terrible for the laborers—mostly women—who are exposed to them regularly as well as the environment. Let’s help support the “healthy” flower industry.*)

Your favorite vanilla ice cream (I like Ben & Jerry’s Organic Fair Trade Vanilla)
A bottle of rosewater (found in Mediterranean or Middle Eastern Stores)
Finely chopped green pistachios (unsalted specified, but salted ones work if you don’t mind a little salty note in the ice cream—I sort of like it)

Put a couple of scoops of ice cream in a dish. Pour about 1/2t rosewater over the ice cream. Top with a sprinkle of pistachios.

Shortbread with Almonds and Apricot Jam

adapted fr. Cindy Mushet in F. McCullough, Best American Recipes 2001-2002 (Houghton Mifflin, 2001)

This is an “Afghan-inspired” choice. Afghanistan loves apricots—dozens of varieties grow there. And Afghan women make “short” crumbly cookies to have with tea and use almonds liberally in sweet dishes. So while not an Afghan recipe *per se*, this fantastic shortbread is a tribute to some of the sweet things Afghanistan has to offer. Make this a day ahead—it needs to rest before you slice it. If you can’t wait, it may crumble, but it will still be good (just put the pieces in a nice bowl and watch them disappear).

3/4 c unsalted butter at room temperature

1/2 c sugar

1/4 t (I actually use a little bit more) almond extract

1 1/2 c flour

1/8 t salt

1/4 c low-sugar apricot jam (not sugarless—Schmuckers Low-Sugar works well)

1/3 c sliced almonds

powdered sugar to finish

Preheat oven to 350. Use an ungreased 9” springform pan or collapsible-bottom tart pan. Or, use a 9” pie pan lined with foil, folding the overhang under the rim of the pan.

Beat butter and sugar at medium for 3-4 minutes (slightly longer with a hand-held mixer) until very lightly colored and fluffy, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Add the almond extract and blend. Whisk together flour and salt. Add to the butter mixture on low, just until combined. This makes a stiff dough.

Reserve 1/2c of dough. Form it into a thin disc on a plate and place in the freezer. Press remaining dough into the pan evenly—it can be a little higher on the sides, but the center shouldn’t be elevated. Spread the jam over the dough to within 1” of the edge. Crumble the frozen dough over (some of the jam will remain exposed). Sprinkle on nuts.

Bake for 40-50 minutes (it's 40 in my oven) just until golden brown. Cool completely on a rack. Let it sit overnight. Remove the pan rim (or lift the aluminum foil liner with the shortbread out of the pie pan). Dust with powdered sugar. I slice it carefully into thin wedges with a sharp knife, but you can serve it whole and allow guest to break off pieces. Keeps very well in an airtight tin (if you hide it). Serves about 8, but there's never enough of this; make two if you can.

Voices (new!)

As Lana Slezić puts it in the quote with which we began, our work starts with listening to Afghan women. And so at the end of this (and every) *MC*, we try to listen very closely. In last year's *Voices* from Afghanistan, we heard defiance and despair in women's poetry, hope and fear in the story of one woman's attempt to go to school, and about what author Ann Jones calls the "schizophrenia" of Afghan women's experience. If you haven't read these or maybe if you have, I hope you'll go to our Program Schedule page (http://www.diningforwomen.org/?page_id=12/), scroll down to April 2007 and that month's Making Connections, where you'll find them at the end of the document. They give us a lot to ponder, again and again. And while you're there, open the document "Fawzia's Story" and read the interview with one of the women Parwaz is aiding, a widow who runs a carpet-making business. You'll also see her photo on our homepage this month. Here we have excerpts from more interviews with Afghan women. These come from Kiviat and Heidler, *Women of Courage: Intimate Stories From Afghanistan*, where you can read more from them and see their photos too.

What do *you* hear?

Nadera is a reluctant bread baker who managed to work in a bakery set up in another woman's home during Taliban rule (when work for women outside the home, as well as schooling, was forbidden). She is now unemployed.

I would like to work in an office, but I can't read or write... I hope that I can become literate; I hope that I can get a better job and then a better life, but I don't know if that will happen until it happens.

...Things are getting better, girls are going to school and that will help them have a better future. And having educated women can only help all of Afghanistan in the future.... It is very important that all young girls go to school. Because I did not go to school, I don't have a good job. I tell them this and encourage them to go to school. I tell them to look at me, I will never get any other work than in a bakery so they should go to school and learn as much as they can....

...I think that the government should do something for the women who are illiterate. Make programs like factory work or something like this, so those who can't read or write can feed their family. Things are moving forward, but don't leave behind those who still suffer from the past.

Marzia Tamaski is a saleswoman in a supermarket.

Women can now have high positions, so it is their right to work if they can. We wanted to set an example and show this to the people who come to our store. We wanted to show women that their fellow countrywomen can work and that they can do many

things with their lives.... (M)any people come to our store to see this, to see women working.

...My husband had no problem with me working here. He can't read or write, so he does not have work. It was a simple decision for the family. We need money and I can work. My husband is happy that I can work.

...Some fathers and husbands still do not allow their daughters or wives to work. This is a problem.... Men need to change their minds about women learning and working. They need to realize that for the betterment of the country, women should study and work. If this happens, the country will improve and not be like it was in the past.

Mahmooda Hoseini is a mullah, a Muslim religion teacher, who as a woman can instruct very young children and older girls and women.

My father was an important mullah and he taught me many things... I am teaching women and children the Holy Koran while I still take care of my family and my house. My father is happy about this... I am happy because I am teaching women the Holy Koran, some of them are even schoolteachers and they come to me to learn the Holy Koran. I am very proud of this.

...Some of my girl students are already good enough to help me teach the other students. I tell my girls that they should learn as much as they can—many languages, including English—and they should go to university. I'm not the type of mullah who tells girls and women to stay in their house. My husband feels the same way; he is open.

...I think that all women should have the right to work. Religion should not prevent a family from living a good life.

Mahgul makes belts and carpets to sell in the local bazaar and is also involved in community action work.

The women here need to work. Not like the work I do at home, getting what I can get done here and there, but proper jobs.... The only way to improve the situation for all women here is for the younger generation to become more independent. The way to do that is through earning their own money and improving their skills. They need to start getting out of the house more so they can see and understand the world, but also teach the men that they are able to contribute while outside the home.

...I helped give polio vaccines. I went from door to door to give them to the children. My husband realized that this work is very important and encouraged me to do it.... I did this work because it helped bring money in for the family, but I also did it because it helps the community.

...I explained to the women who were voting how to cast their ballot so it would be counted and how important it is for them to vote. This was a very important step for Afghanistan, especially the women, so I had to help out any way I could.

...Some of the work I do is to earn money to help feed my family; the other work is to help feed the success of my country. I love to make carpets and do embroidery work, but if I can help my country by working I will do whatever it needs.

Abeershad is a widowed mother, and fortune-teller.

Things will get better for Afghan women. The world is developing; Afghanistan is developing. Women are working, they are going to school, but the situation will only

continue to get better if our leaders stay on the right path. If they are good the future will be good.

Resources

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Sunita Mehta, ed., *Women for Afghan Women* (Palgrave, 2002)

*Christiane Lamb, *The Sewing Circles of Herat* (HarperCollins, 2002)

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*Ann Jones, *Kabul in Winter: Life without Peace in Afghanistan* (Henry Holt and Co., 2006)

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*Asne Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul* (Little, Brown and Company, 2003).

*Lana Slezic, *Forsaken: Afghan Women* (Powerhouse Books, 2007).

*Katherine Kiviat and Scott Heidler, *Women of Courage: Intimate Stories From Afghanistan* (Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2007).

*Recommended Books and Documentary