



Dining for Women

MC PREVIEW
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 Slezic, *Forsaken: Afghan Women* (Powerhouse Books, 2007)

We last supported the work of Parwaz in Afghanistan in April, 2007. Here, I'll include the ideas and information from that *MC Preview* with new material in italics. I'll do the same for much of this month's *Making Connections* so that new members (and those who want to review) won't have to go back and forth between documents so much. That may make the new *MC* a little long. Let me know how it works for you and your members.

What to expect in MC this Month

FYI discusses the challenges that are slowing women's empowerment in Afghanistan. *Since the last FYI offered a pretty thorough overview, this time I'll update it with relevant news since last April.*

Recommended Books features three recent non-fiction accounts of women's lives in Afghanistan: Christina Lamb, *The Sewing Circles of Herat* (HarperCollins, 2002); Ann Jones, *Kabul in Winter: Life without Peace in Afghanistan* (Henry Holt and Co., 2006); and Asne Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul* (Little, Brown and Company, 2003). *Afghan women continued to be a hot topic for fiction and non-fiction in 2007; however, after reviewing several new books, I was left far less impressed with the new crop than with the works I recommended last time. So I'll stick with those and add a couple of new photojournalism volumes that allow us to hear directly from Afghan women as well as see some moving photography. So add to the booklist Lana Slezic, Forsaken: Afghan Women (Powerhouse Books, 2007) and Katherine Kiviat and Scott Heidler, Women of Courage: Intimate Stories From Afghanistan (Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2007). See the quote from Slezic at the top. Excerpts from Kiviat and Heidler will comprise this month's Voices section.*

Socially Responsible Shopping: *We didn't offer shopping tips last time because getting exports from Afghanistan is extremely problematic. 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 (5 for \$20) 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: I always try to recommend dishes that I find appealing as well as appropriate to our goals. Sometimes doing both is quite a challenge and admittedly some recipes I like better than others. But every dish this month is a winner in my book. I hope a bread maker or bread maker-wannabe in your group will try the naan. If your group enjoys cooking together, it might be fun to shape and bake it together and have it hot from the oven (dough can be made ahead). *This time, we have some great pictures of bread baking provided by Parwaz (see below) that you might want to display.*

You might also try eating as Afghans do if your space permits, placing communal dishes on a cloth or low table on the floor with diners sitting around it. Afghans would include a hand-washing ceremony prior to the meal. Fill a large bowl with warm water and a few drops of rosewater or oil (available at Middle Eastern food stores and places that sell aromatics and essential oils). Pass the bowl with a nice linen 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. More on Afghan dining practices is in *MC*. I'll repeat the *DwW* section from last time in the new *MC*.

The new recipes are all winners again; this culture has created such marvelous food! What a tragedy that among the places most severely hit in the intensifying worldwide food crisis is Afghanistan. I'll write a bit about that and offer four new recipes that we can eat in honor, gratitude, and hope for Afghanistan. If your space and the weather allow, you might consider doing the meal portion of your meeting outdoors this time. Some of the recipes (new and old) are best done on the grill—a favorite way of cooking in Afghanistan.

Along with the rose-scented water for hand washing I recommended last time, we'll feature an easy ice cream dessert that uses rosewater. If you have access to unsprayed roses, a few petals over the dessert and/or in the water would be nice, as would a bouquet of garden roses—hopefully a member or two will have some in bloom. (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.)

Voices includes selections from Afghan poetry and our recommended books that testify to the difficult paradoxes that Afghan women face. *This time a new Voices section features excerpts from interviews with Afghan women from the Kiviat and Heidler book recommended above.*

Chapter Meeting Ideas And Resources

As always, please feel free to choose among or adapt the suggestions I make for meeting format and activities. I know many of you come up with some great ideas too and we'd love it if you'd share them. Let me know what you do in your meeting this month and I can pass it on to everyone else in next month's MC Preview.

1. The selections in *Voices* (April '07) are very powerful and contain ideas to which I think many members may relate even in our vastly different circumstances. You might allow some time to discuss the selections after they're read aloud by participants. If they read *FYI* ahead, they'll have background information that will help with understanding the quotations more fully. *If you didn't use some of the material from Voices last time, I encourage you to consider it this time, perhaps using one of the excerpts (the one from Ann Jones, Kabul in Winter sticks out for me) to introduce your discussion. I may reprint that material as well as the new Voices in MC if there is space. If not, you can find it in the April 07 MC on the program schedule page. The material in the new Voices section may be more appropriate for members to read at home, although it can certainly generate interesting discussion as well. If you can access the book, displaying the photos of the women along with their interviews would make an interesting focal point for members before or after the formal portion of your meeting.*

2. If you'd also like to use testimonies that directly reflect our support of Parwaz, see the "client profiles" on the Parwaz website: <http://www.parwaz.org/casestudies.html>. You might read these aloud or print them on large cards to place around your meeting space. *Please note that Parwaz has recently updated its website so the links in last year's materials won't work. The one above is active. I find it a little frustrating that these case studies only give us the "before" scenario for Parwaz participants—that is, they describe the circumstances of six women's lives prior to their involvement with Parwaz. I wish we had information about them now. When I discuss the new visual resources below, I'll suggest a way in which you might use these together to help illustrate the impact of Parwaz.*

3. Two ideas for visual affect: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/interactives/afghanistanwomen/ contains video footage of Afghan women who run small businesses supported by another NGO that works similarly to Parwaz. You might consider showing a couple of examples (I especially like the story of the woman who started a gym for other women.) 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. It's an excellent vehicle for viewing the diversity of women and landscape in Afghanistan. Since it's shot in segments, you might consider, playing one or two of them in your meeting. More info on it at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/afghanistanunveiled/>. *(Both are still web-active.)*

4. Following up on a topic of grave concern that we've been covering in several places over the past few months, you might play the interview with a young girl that was featured recently on the BBC website with the article, "Child Brides Sold in Afghanistan" at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/7342902.stm> . Click on the audio link on the right to hear "A Child Bride Speaks."

5. Parwaz sent me three slideshows worth of images of the projects they support via the picasa web album program. I'll provide links below, along with some description. You can use the slideshows as they are, or download individual images to create your own slideshow or to print as photos. This is a wealth of material (and somewhat repetitive), probably too much to use all of it in a meeting, but here are some ideas for how you might use at least some of it:

--Play one or all of the slideshows as members arrive.

--Use one of the slideshows (or put together your own) as a feature of your formal program.

--Print out individual images for display or passing around. You might have members read the "before" case studies I discussed above aloud and then pass around some of the images as examples of "after" and the impact Parwaz is making.

Click on the links below to access the albums. To view an album as a slideshow, click on or copy the link into your browser. When the album comes up, click on "slideshow." To view an individual image and download it into a high resolution JPEG file for printing, click on the image. When it comes up, click on "download photo" to the right of the image. Most of the photos are clear and will print well, although a few are blurred so be sure to preview them before printing. If all else fails, I've downloaded several of the best images and can email some to you. But courage—this is very user-friendly. Parwaz didn't provide any explanation for the images. Fortunately, most seem self-explanatory, but I've put in a few notes on each album.

Album 1

<http://picasaweb.google.com/KabulBaheer/PARWAZ?authkey=1-8swtztv1q8>

You'll see images of a beauty salon, a family that makes candy for sale—include the gorgeous children enjoying some of the candies, great pictures of a mother and daughter with the mother's metallic thread purses, Parwaz participants receiving certificates, and some interesting images of a baker making naan bread in an in-ground oven. The dough is place up against (well, slapped up against) the sides of the very hot oven for quick baking. The particular naan here is known as "snowshoe" naan because of its elongated shape.

Album 2

<http://picasaweb.google.com/KabulBaheer/Parwaz2?authkey=aHEZISgH-oc>

Sewing, another beauty shop and some really nice photos of rug weaving.

Album 3

<http://picasaweb.google.com/KabulBaheer/Parwaz3?authkey=AfLpxBY-lvs>

A meeting of a micro-credit “solidarity” group (see their savings cards), flower making, yet another beauty shop and more sewing.

6. Please don't feel pressured to do this kind of thing, but since I know that some of you enjoy it and feel it adds a lot to your meetings, I'll suggest one way to make use of the shopping sources this time. The little pouches available from the Feminist Online Store are just large enough to hold a folded piece of paper on which you might place quotes from MC, the Parwaz case studies, or quotations from women found in the photojournalism books I've recommended. Depending on the size of your group, how much you're willing to spend, etc., you could “gift” everyone with one or just have a few as “door prizes.” (You could auction them off to recoup your expenditure or add to the DFW contribution to Parwaz or further contribute to the Campaign for Afghan Women and Girls from which they come.) Have members open them and read the contents during the formal meeting. Or put them at place settings for people to open and read during dinner.

7. And finally, some music. One of the important cultural traditions banned by the Taliban was music, even the classical traditions of Afghan music that go back centuries. Women have always been participants in musical culture but public performance has been (at best) a topic of debate. However, there have been and are well-respected women musicians in Afghanistan. You can learn more about Afghan music and hear some of them through the following sources:

<http://afghanensemble.calabashmusic.com/>

<http://www.afghanmusicproject.org/about.htm>

Perhaps before the formal portion of your meeting or during dinner, it's another great way to raise the voices of Afghan women and culture.

Questions, comments, etc: corrienorman1959@yahoo.com

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