



Dining for Women

Making Connections
August 2008
Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

*One woman can change anything.
Many women can change everything.*

-Christine Karumba, WfWI Country Director, D.R. Congo

“The heart of darkness”—it’s a phrase that has been repeated many times since novelist Josef Conrad first applied it to what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Then it was the Belgian Congo and in other past lives the Republic of Congo and Zaire. No matter the name, the stigma of the dark karma to which it alludes has continued to plague its people. Some say unfairly; literary scholars debate Conrad’s intent. Is his novel a product of colonial and racial prejudice, another in a long series of “dark continent” dramas that have stereotyped Africa? Or is it an indictment of imperial culture, of the dark side of human nature? What’s in a name? Not an unimportant question—names can perpetuate attitudes and shape realities.

In the past few years, we’ve been likely to hear other descriptions of DRC. It’s a land of “seemingly endless resources” yet “one of the poorest countries in the world.” Home to “the deadliest conflict since World War II” and “the largest peacekeeping operation in history.” And more recently and increasingly we’ve heard, a land where “rape is the norm.” A land where rape is a weapon of war. A land where in some villages 90% of the women—some as young as 3, some as old at 75—have been raped by soldiers, militia, random rebels, relatives forced by the others, and even “peacekeepers.” Whatever we think of Conrad, whatever we think of how his phrase has been used, we can’t deny that where the victimization of women is concerned, it’s appallingly apt.

I had heard about rape as a weapon of war in DRC and knew much about it elsewhere last October. I was working on materials on Bosnia for our upcoming support of Women for Women International’s projects there. But Jeffrey Gettleman’s article in the *New York Times* that month, his interviews with an heroic Congolese physician, Dr. Denis Mukwege of Panzi Hospital, and Dr. Mukwege’s patients, all victims of rape, made the

enormity and horror of this tragedy all too real. I forwarded the article to Marsha and, being Marsha, she immediately got on her blog: “We have to do something about this.”

This month, we can do something about it by supporting Women for Women International once again. When looking for possible projects for us a few months ago, I was thrilled to see DRC as the new focus on WfWI’s homepage. It isn’t that WfWI hasn’t been working there for a while, but I think you all will be thrilled—and at the same time horrified—by the information and resources they’ve just made available to us on DRC.

Can we stop rape in DRC? Frankly, I doubt it. Perhaps knowing, perhaps paying attention, perhaps encouraging our political leaders to pay attention and act accordingly, will help. But what we can do is so very important. We can acknowledge other women’s pain, we can be “with” them and hear them. And further, we can be part of the light in the darkness by supporting work that helps them, as WfWI puts it, “move from victims to active sisters.” And active sisterhood, well, to paraphrase Christine Karumba, What can’t it do? That may seem overly optimistic, naïve. But women in the Congo—the women in Panzi hospital who wake up to sing together first thing in the morning—have enormous hope in the face of grave darkness. Let’s support their hearts of hope.

To see the NYTimes article, go to the following link. You will be asked to register (it’s free) or log in if already registered on the site.

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/world/africa/07congo.html?_r=4&oref=slogin&oref=slogin&oref=slogin

FYI: Why Soldiers Rape

“This is the monstrosity of the century.” That’s how Dr. Denis Mukwege sums up the situation in *The Greatest Silence*, Lisa F. Jackson’s documentary about rape and war in the DRC, as he ponders why soldiers would be so brutal to noncombatant women, why rape is a weapon of war on such a massive scale there. Surrounded by his patients, seeing the physical and psychological damage he sees on a daily basis, knowing the extent of the violence, Dr. Mukwege could hardly conclude anything else. Even for those at more of a distance, “monsters,” “freaks” (from a UN official), “barbarians” (common in international press reports) have been the words that have come to name the perpetrators of this horrific tragedy. And yes, the “heart of darkness” has been recalled too.

While “the greatest silence” may have been the lack of acknowledgment of this tragedy until recently, the silencing of victims by their own culture and the international community, another silence exists as well. It is so hard to listen to the accounts of Congolese women’s suffering; they are so disturbing, so painful. But it may be even harder to listen to what we are about to hear—the voices of their rapists.

After extensive interviews and investigation into the motivations and explanations of DRC soldiers who have committed rape and other atrocities, two Swedish researchers, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, concluded, “This silence is problematic, both because it makes it harder to understand such violence, but also because it reinforces stereotypes of African warriors as primitive and anarchic, driven by innate violence and tribal hatred.” We stare into the heart of darkness and it stares back at us, at the way we have learned to see, to name.

Let me be very clear: Neither these researchers nor I want to lend the impression that we’re looking for excuses for these men. Indeed, there is little in their accounts that makes them sympathetic; there is little expression of remorse. Nor do I take lightly the dark irony of giving voice to the perpetrators of violence against women when it is *their* voices we most urgently want to hear—fortunately, the WfWI resources give us ample opportunity. But as Drs. Eriksson Baaz and Stern point out, if we don’t listen to these men, we cannot understand why this happens or get close to finding ways to stop it. As I tried to listen to the accounts of soldiers in their report and others, four themes kept repeating that I think the rest of world should hear.

1. What being a soldier should be and isn’t. The soldiers studied by Eriksson Baaz and Stern neither idolize the “violent primitive” stereotype of the African warrior or the “macho-Rambo” fighter of western movies. For them, the ideal soldier is disciplined, educated, and has a desk job. But they see little in the army of their ideal. They talked much about their great disappointment with army life—officers not worthy of respect, chaos instead of organization, lack of respect for their roles among civilians; not getting paid. A twenty-one year old soldier tried to explain:

“According to the rules we are supposed to get rations, food, medical care, but now there is nothing. I will tell you one thing so that you understand, so that you understand our situation. A few months ago I had to bury my son. Why did I have to do that? Because they refused to give me medicine. He had diarrhea and fever – many days. I kept going to my superiors everyday to get the money [for medical care] which I am entitled to according to the rules. But everyday, they said, come back tomorrow. Then he died. I had no money to bury him and that is also something the Army is supposed to pay for. So we put him in the morgue. I asked again for money so that we could bury [him], but only tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Nothing. He was three weeks in the morgue, and I had no money to get him out and bury him. Eventually I made a deal with some people – with guns. I got some money and the rest I borrowed. And I buried my son. So tell me, how can we be disciplined? They all cheat us. Our superiors cheat us. We die and our children die. They send their children to Europe, but our children die.”

2. *What is right and what is wrong.*

Unlike the stereotype of the barbarian with no sense of morality, soldiers clearly indicate that they know rape is wrong. They even say that their military code tells them it is wrong: *“Rape is forbidden. It is forbidden for us soldiers.... They tell us that we cannot take other people’s things and we cannot take other people’s women.”* They state that rape ought to be punished, but they know they have immunity in the army—and out. There is only one official who investigates rape in eastern DRC where most of the violence has taken place.

3. *We are victims.*

One soldier told Lisa Jackson that he “makes women suffer” because he “is suffering.” They connect rape primarily to their own poverty but also to their inability to act appropriately as men—as providers in charge of their own property, families, and especially their wives, who they fear are prostituting themselves in order to survive. An exchange between Dr. Stern and an army corporal:

Corporal: We soldiers commit rape, why do we commit rapes? Poverty/suffering.... When we are not paid.... We are hungry. And I have a gun. In my house my wife does not love me anymore. I also have a wish to have a good life like you.

Dr. Stern : But that is a different thing, no? I asked about rape, not stealing.

Corporal: I understand, I understand. I am getting to it. I am not finished yet. Rape, what is that? It is connected to all that – stealing, killing, it is all in that.

Maria : So, it is anger then or what ?

Corporal: Yes, it is anger, it is creating, the suffering is creating ... You feel you have to do something bad, you mix it all: sabotage, women, stealing, rip the clothes off, killing.... It is suffering which makes us rape. Suffering. If I wake up in the morning and I am fine, I have something to eat, my wife loves me, will I then do things like that? No. But now, today we are hungry, yesterday I was hungry, tomorrow I will be hungry. They, the leaders/superiors are cheating us. We don’t have anything.

4. *“Other people’s property, other people’s women.”*

Soldiers know that rape is wrong but there is little evidence they see it as a wrong primarily against women. It violates another man’s property. They rape, they take, because other men have taken from them (their superiors, the army, etc). They have no control over their women because they cannot provide for them, thus they take other’s men’s women. The order they know—men in charge of their own—is perverted for them; thus, they act accordingly.

WfWI has initiated programs for men in some areas, paralleling the human rights training that it provides for women. In reading its reports, it is striking that a basic notion of human rights for women is *a revelation* for many men in the program. One that leads to a revision of that “order” they once understood and of a different way of understanding rape among many other things. One former soldier who participated in the training expressed it this way:

The training has helped us to develop the awareness, that, everyone has rights. Since the training, our perceptions have changed... I apply what I learned during the training to my family life...my brother's wife and my own sister were raped. When the news got to me, my immediate reaction was the temptation to go into a relapse and continue with the acts of rape. However, the training has helped me to perceive such incidents as accidents which were beyond the control of the women involved. They did not desire what had happened to them, neither were they as victims blamable. It was therefore wrong for the community to continue to stigmatize and marginalize them.

Perhaps I should not be shocked that human rights would be a foreign concept for these men. The western world likes to think of human rights as an achievement of its own Enlightenment. However, when one knows the story of how western colonizers and those with a political or economic interest in the Congo have treated the Congolese (see Wong in *Recommended Books* or Dummett in the resource list below), one sees how the idea could come as a surprise. When one realizes that only since the Rwandan Genocide has rape been officially acknowledged as a war crime by the international community, it becomes more comprehensible how far we all have to go before human rights is really an achievement and how dangerously close we are to the heart of darkness.

Resources used in preparing FYI: Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, “Making Sense of Violence: Voices of Soldiers in the Congo (DRC),” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46, 1 (2008), pp. 57–86. Mark Dummett, “King Leopold’s Legacy of DR Congo violence,” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/3516965.stm> WfWI, *Ending Violence Against Women in Eastern Congo: Preparing Men to Advocate for Women’s Rights*, <http://www.womenforwomen.org/mltdrc.htm> Lisa F. Jackson, *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo* (2007)

Recommended Books and Documentary

Several choices this month. Whenever we support WfWI, I like to remind you about WfWI founder Zainab Salbi’s *The Other Side of War: Women’s Stories of Survival and Hope* (National Geographic, 2006). I’ll refer to ways to use the section on DRC in your meetings below. I highly recommend that you get a copy at least to display at your meeting—but it’s quite a read too.

Page Walter, a member of Sandy Slavin’s chapter in Charleston asked the travel agent who’s guided her way around the world for a recommendation on DRC. Chris Kean of Solaris Expeditions suggested

Helen Winternitz's *East Along the Equator: A Journey Up the Congo and Into Zaire* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994). As "Zaire" in the title suggests, Winternitz's travelogue is not recent, but her insights as a journalist and traveler into the country under Mobutu and her experience of the people and land, I'm assured, are still very much still worth reading. I'm disappointed because my copy didn't come in time for me to read it before writing this, but I can't wait. I did however read journalist Michela Wong's account of strong man Mobutu's rise and downfall, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in Mobutu's Congo* (HarperCollins, 2001). As this title indicates—Mr. Kurtz is the villain in Conrad's novel—truth can be stranger and more horrific than fiction. And finally, if it's fiction you want: One of the most celebrated "anti-colonialist" novels by an American writer of recent vintage is Barbara Kingsolver's story of a missionary father's cultural blind-sightedness mistaken as divine vision and the tragedy into which it leads his family as the Congolese endure their own (as told by the women in the family), *The Poisonwood Bible* (HarperCollins, 1998).

I also want to mention again the documentary featured on the WfWI website currently, Lisa F. Jackson's *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo* (2007). It played on HBO in the Spring and won the Sundance Special Jury Prize in Documentary. At 76 minutes, it's long for a chapter meeting, but you might consider a special viewing. It's something to see with other women; you'll want to talk about it.

<http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c709.shtml>

Socially Responsible Shopping

It's important to pay attention to what's beautiful about Congolese culture too. There is much, but among its treasures is the tradition of Kuba cloth. The Kuba peoples are from the Kasai River area of DRC. For centuries, they have made intricate cloth weavings from raffia. It's a lengthy process traditionally involving the entire family. But only women complete the most labor-intensive and desired form in which the woven raffia is cut into a fine pile decorated with intricate embroidery in geometric designs. Kuba cloth is woven into squares called *mbal* and also made into long pieces of fabric that the Kuba wind around themselves as skirts for ceremonial dancing. A woman's skirt might take as much as 9 yards of cloth.

Kuba cloth has been highly prized by European nobility and some of Europe's greatest artists were inspired by it—Picasso and Klee, for example. Matisse had an extensive collection and anyone whose seen a piece of Kuba cloth and seen a Matisse would be hard pressed to say which is the greater masterpiece. He was clearly impressed.

For the Kuba, the designs and the cloth are not just aesthetically pleasing; they are full of meaning. The cloth is used in religious ceremonies and the patterns involve a highly sophisticated symbolic language that sends messages to the living and those who have passed beyond. Families pass the cloth down through generations, believing that the patterns connect them to their ancestors. In funeral rites, they help the ancestors recognize relatives entering the domain of the dead.

African tribal groups have used geometric patterns as a symbolic language for ages. According to Congolese scholar Clémentine M. Faïk-Nzujî, “they represent a gift from God to be used as tools to disclose hidden truths.” Among the meanings of some geometric images for Congolese tribes are the following:

a circle scored inside in a tic-tac pattern: welcome and integration
a circle with a point in the center: “the beginning”; God
a circle with dots inside: the creation scattered into multiple beings
5 concentric circles: family relations—nuclear, extended, lineage, clan, tribe
broken lines: spirit messengers from beyond, the breaks symbolizing their status as mediators
crosses, cardinal points, crossroads: life/death, stages of life, living/dead, blessing and good fortune (often marked on the soft spot of infants’ heads)
coils: union, many cultures of the world
chevrons: mediation, communication
equilateral triangle: God, equilibrium, common sense, knowledge, 3 dimension of human life
V: man or power; M: woman Or, (*sigh*): power and powerlessness
diamond with diamond inside: a woman accomplished in marriage
X: marriage; XXXXX means difficulties in marriage
squares inside a square: the cosmos

Today for the international market, Kuba squares are made into wall hangings and pillows primarily. You can take a look at examples in the links below. Don’t try to read the symbolism too literally. In order to understand it, you’d need to know how the geometric “alphabet” forms a language. And anyway, the patterns in items made for export are more for decorative impact than sending messages. One message is clear, however. Given the right circumstances, the Congolese can create beautiful things.

Kuba cloth items aren’t cheap here, but given the process and artistry, they shouldn’t be if the artisans are getting a fair wage. I’ll list a few sources for Kuba cloth below in case you’re in the market for a spectacular pillow or wall hanging. But first is something very practical, reasonably-priced, ecological and timely these days when more and more supermarkets are encouraging us to bring our own reusable bags:

The Congo Woven Carry-All is “handmade from naturally-dried grasses in the Congo. Handwoven by village artisans, each bag provides a vital step to restoring the artisans' livelihood. The earthy colors are hand-dyed into the grass fibers using all-natural local vegetable dyes. Light and flexible yet extremely durable, these totes can carry everything from your groceries to your workout gear.” Available from the following sources:

<http://www.globalgirlfriend.com/gifts/item.do?itemId=32792&siteId=344&sourceId=344&sourceClass=StoreSearch&index=1> GGF also carries items that are made through and support WfWI programs, but not any from DRC.
<https://shop.thehungersite.com/store/item.do?itemId=32792&siteId=220>
HS donates to hunger relief with every carry-all purchase

Fair Trade Sources for **Kuba cloth**:

http://www.swahili-imports.com/home/si1/page_2307_63/african_textile_change_purse.html

<http://www.habanahaba.com/index.asp?page=products.asp&category=Kuba%20Cloth&start=1>

<http://www.anansevillage.com>

And don't forget the **WfWI Bazaar**. You can see what's on offer these days at <http://www.womenforwomen.org/bazaar.htm> There's nothing from DRC projects unfortunately, but it might be nice to display something from one of the other country projects, perhaps something in honor of a WfWI sister-sponsor (see more below on that).

For more on tribal art traditions in DRC and elsewhere, see

http://www.anthro.psu.edu/matson_museum/congo/congo.shtml

http://www.forafricanart.com/Kuba-Textiles_ep_60-1.html

Clémentine M. Faïk-Nzujî, *A Glossary of Graphic Signs and Symbols in African Art and Culture* (Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996)

Dining with Women

This month, we're highlighting the WfWI Sponsorship Program. You'll read all about it up next in *Voices* and hear from DFW members and their WfWI sisters in Afghanistan, DRC, Rwanda and Bosnia. To honor these connections and more potential sisters in the Congo, we have a “sister” menu this month. For each traditional Congolese treatment of an ingredient, we have a “sister” recipe from one of our members featuring the same ingredient(s). Most rely on seasonal ingredients you might find at your local farmers market or maybe in your or a friend's garden. Feel free to supplement our menu with other dishes based on seasonal ingredients we share in common with women in DRC (just look through the heading and recipes below). Or, you might bring a dish from Rwanda, Afghanistan or Bosnia to help us remember those sisters too. Recipes from those cultures

are featured in *MCs May 08, November 07, April 07 and October 06*. Thanks so much to our contributors!

Two of the sources of our recipes this month (and often) are worthy of some explanation. *The Congo Cookbook* is an on-line labor of love constantly updated by Ed Gibbon, former Peace Corps volunteer in Central Africa. He says it “is a contribution to the ‘third goal’ of the Peace Corps, which is ‘to help promote a better understanding of people of other nations....’” It contains a bounty of interesting cultural-historical information as well as recipes. <http://www.congocookbook.com/>

Joetta Handrich Schlabach’s *Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook* (Herald Press, 1991) was commissioned by the relief branch of the Mennonite Church to honor the food traditions of cultures in which Mennonites provide aid. If any group is an antidote to the uninformed and arrogant missionizing portrayed in Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*, this group is. Often on the frontline of disaster relief, it does a lot to promote cultural understanding. You may be more familiar with its other cookbook, the best-seller *More-with-Less*. This book is in the same spirit and I’ve included some great information about Congolese foodways as well as recipes from it.

Nsoso ya Mumaba (Chicken with Peanut Sauce)

Adapted fr. Extending the Table

This is the unofficial national dish of the DRC—the special stew that Congolese hope to be able to serve at weddings, baptisms, or when visitors come. It’s a lot of work made in the traditional manner. Peanuts must be roasted and hulled, then pounded and ground into a paste. And then you catch the chicken. Congolese hospitality is such that any visit by a guest calls for a feast, which means serving “meat with blood.” It’s a sacrifice for a special occasion. The whole chicken would be served to an important guest and any leftovers sent home with him or her.

I’ve seen many versions of this dish from Congolese now living in the States and they’ve certainly adapted it to our convenience culture. I’ve mostly followed the one in *Extending the Table*, as my husband did when he was testing the recipe for me. (Thanks Jon!) He says it needs a good bit more water than the recipe calls for, but you can add it gradually to get a not-too-thick-not-too-thin sauce. See my note below for an even easier “buffet” version. Central African food in general doesn’t have the spice or heat that similar dishes elsewhere in Africa might. I really do like a little hot pepper in this, a squeeze of lime over it before serving (or at table), and something green for color. You could add chopped spinach (well-drained if frozen/thawed) or thin blanched green beans in the last few minutes of cooking and be not that far off from Congolese tradition. Or, as I like, add some chopped cilantro before serving. This is a rich dish. Congolese might

serve it with *bidia*, a white cornmeal porridge similar to polenta. Cornbread or polenta would do as a substitute but rice definitely works well with this stew too. Serves 8 at a potluck anyway—unless you have special guest!

2T vegetable oil
3lbs chicken parts (Jon used boneless thighs)
1 large onion, sliced thinly or chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 c diced tomatoes, canned (with juice) or fresh
1/4 c tomato paste
1/2 c chunky peanut butter (or more if want)
1 c plus water or chicken broth
1 bay leaf
2T chopped celery leaves or diced celery, opt.
1t salt or to taste
generous dose freshly ground black pepper

In a large sauté pan or Dutch oven, saute the chicken until lightly brown and remove. Add more oil if needed and cook the onion, garlic, and diced celery (if using) and cook to soften a few minutes.

Return the chicken to the pan. Add some of the water and scrape up any bits on the pan bottom. Add everything else and stir well to make a smooth sauce and coat the chicken well. Cover and simmer until the chicken is done, checking to see if the sauce needs more water and stirring occasionally. (It can stick, so stir it up from the bottom, don't let it boil, and make sure it isn't too thick.) For boneless thighs, it takes about 20 minutes. NOTE: I haven't tried this, but I'm betting you could lightly sauté boneless chicken breast pieces, place them in a casserole dish, make the sauce as above (with a little more water) and bring to a simmer, pour it over the chicken, cover it with foil, and bake it until the chicken is done—say 350 for 20 minutes or so.

Shannon's Family's Peanut-Chili Barbecue Sauce for Chicken

Shannon Gordon, one of my trusty recipe consultants and a member of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Chapter sent in this barbecue sauce recipe—a great twist on the usual summer chicken grilled. She says, “This is a family recipe we make every summer. My Mom doesn't remember where this recipe came from but it's a tradition in our family.” I am treading on sacred familial ground here, but I am such a peanut butter-head that I added gobs more. Forgive me Shannon, but it was good! It's good anyway—a spicy, vinegary, tasty basting sauce.

1/2 stick (1/4c) butter

1T peanut butter (or more!)
1T chili powder (If you're timid about heat, use part sweet paprika. If you love it, well, you know what to do.)
1T salt
1T black pepper
1t celery seed
1 1/2c vinegar (I used apple cider vinegar)
juice of 2 lemons
2-3 lbs of mixed chicken parts, chicken wings, whatever you like to grill (see baking option below)

Melt the butter with the peanut butter and stir until smooth. Add the spices and stir. Carefully add the vinegar (don't put your face over the pot—this amount of vinegar can be overwhelming to eyes and noses). Heat and mix well. Cool and add juice of two lemons. Brush over chicken as it's grilling. Alternative: Line a baking sheet with heavy duty foil. Coat the chicken parts in the sauce, place on the sheet and bake until done, turning once. You can use bone-in or boneless chicken. You could even use boneless breast pieces on skewers with vegies.

Congolese Baked Fish & Eggplant

fr. The Congo Cookbook

Fruits of the *genus solonaceae* (for you horticulturalists out there) are popular in DRC as well as here. And there's no better time for most of us to enjoy them than right now. This Congolese recipe features three of our favorites: eggplant, tomato, and pepper. Eggplant cooked with chile pepper is a common side dish in Central Africa. Here fish is included to make a main dish.

1 lb. white fish filets (catfish, tilapia, flounder, etc)
1 large eggplant, peeled and diced
1 c. diced onion
2 c. diced fresh tomatoes or 1 15oz can
1 c. water (or fish stock)
salt and pepper to taste
red pepper flakes to taste

Preheat oven to 350.

Combine eggplant, onion, tomatoes, spices, and water in large pot. Cover and simmer until vegetables are tender. Remove from heat and mash. Lightly oil a baking pan. Place half of the vegetable mash into pan. Layer fish over vegetables. Top with remaining mashed vegetables. Cover and

bake until fish is fully done. Check at 15 minutes and every few minutes thereafter.

Mchuzi wa Biringani (Eggplant Curry)

Adapted fr. The Congo Cookbook

Carolyn Mayers, Eastern Shore of Virginia Chapter Leader and our Socially Responsible Shopper, made good use of what she had on hand with this recipe. She says, “This is actually an East African recipe, as *Biringani* is the Swahili word for eggplant. Eggplant is widely used throughout Africa, though, and this recipe is simple, flexible and very good, especially at room temperature after sitting for a little while. I had so many eggplant coming out of the garden I had to make an eggplant recipe so here it is! Sometimes ground or minced meat, cooked separately with lime juice or vinegar and the same spices, is added along with the eggplant.”

3-4T cooking oil of choice (I used red palm and ghee, anything you have is fine)

2 onions, chopped

2t curry powder or make your own mixture of cumin, coriander, cardamom, turmeric – whatever you like best. I used some tandoori seasoning. Be bold!)

2 cloves of garlic, minced

2T fresh ginger, grated or minced

2 jalapenos or hot chili peppers, seeded and minced (or 1/2t cayenne)

2 large eggplants or several small ones, chopped into 1 inch pieces

4-5 good sized plum tomatoes, chopped, or up to 1c of canned

Salt and pepper to taste

parsley or cilantro for garnish

*The following ingredients are all **optional** – I used only the tomato paste*

3 smallish red skinned potatoes, chopped into cubes smaller than the eggplant pieces

2T tomato paste (helps thicken and enriches flavor)

1c coconut milk or milk

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Sautee onions until they start to get soft, then add whatever spices you have chosen, along with the garlic, ginger and chili peppers or cayenne. Cook for a few more minutes, stirring. Add eggplant and potatoes, if using them, and stir fry for about 5 minutes. Reduce heat to medium low and cover. Simmer for about 10 minutes, checking and stirring occasionally to prevent sticking. Add the tomatoes and paste, if using and simmer over low heat until sauce is thickened and vegetables are tender, covered for the first part then with the cover removed to facilitate thickening of the sauce. If desired, stir in up to a

cup of coconut milk (makes it MUCH more rich) or milk (I didn't use either for this "summer" version) and heat gently. If serving at room temperature, remove from heat and allow to sit for a couple of hours if possible. Serve with rice or chapatti.

Serves 8-10 (at least 10 if you use the potatoes and/or coconut milk)

Millet in DRC

Millet is one of those "good-for-us" grains that North Americans are just discovering. It's indigenous to both Africa and Asia. The Congolese have appreciated it for a very long time, although not without going to a lot of trouble to do so. This from *Extending the Table*: "During the millet harvest in Zaire, women manually cut the heads of grain, pound them with a large wooden mortar and pestle, and then winnow to remove the chaff. For all this work, they return home at the end of a long, hot, dry day carrying one dishpan of grain on their heads."

I thought of that when I read one of the quotations from a Congolese WfWI participant in *The Other Side of War*. In response to being asked what she wanted most in life, she said: "I wish for an automatic pounder. I am too tired to pound everything with my own hands now."

Congolese use millet in many ways. They pound it (further!) into a flour. They make beer from it. Carolyn Mayers not only used millet but several other mainstays in the Congolese diet in her summery salad below. Note what she says about grilled corn—another summer treat that we might share in honor of DRC.

Carolyn's Congolese-ish Millet, Corn and Bean Salad

Carolyn says, "This recipe sprung from a recipe I make all summer long out of quinoa and black beans, with southwestern seasonings. Millet was used extensively in the DRC before the Europeans brought corn there from America, and their Congo beans are similar to our black-eyed peas. Grilled corn is a popular snack there. It is critically important that you follow the instructions for cooking the millet or it will be like mush and not very appealing in a salad. Feel free to use canned or frozen, or, if you can find them, fresh black-eyed peas – whatever suits you! All amounts are very flexible – if you like the salad cornier, by all means use more corn, or whatever ingredient you like best."

3/4c dried black-eyed peas, soaked overnight, or about one can, rinsed, or about 1 1/2cups fresh

scant 3/4c millet

1 3/4c boiling, salted water (I used 1/2t)

4T oil – a light oil is best, like corn or canola

1 1/2t cumin

1/2t cardamom
4 or more ears fresh corn
2 jalapenos or other hot peppers, seeded and diced
5-6 chopped fresh plum tomatoes
juice of 1 lime, more if you like your salads wet
3-4 scallions, chopped
salt and pepper to taste

Drain the beans, if using dried, place in a saucepan and cover with water by an inch. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium-low and cook, partially covered, for about 25 minutes or until beans are tender. Drain and let cool. Otherwise, drain canned beans, or cook frozen beans according to package instructions. Put salted water on to boil whether in a small pan or in the microwave. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in another saucepan and heat over medium heat, add millet, 1 teaspoon of the cumin and the cardamom and cook, stirring, until the millet begins to crackle and becomes fragrant. Carefully add boiling water, it will splatter!! Bring back to a boil, reduce heat and simmer, covered, for about 30 minutes, checking after 25. When the water is absorbed, turn off the heat and let the millet sit, covered for 10 minutes. It should be fluffy when stirred after that. Cook corn, husks and all, in microwave on high for 5-7 minutes, depending on your microwave. Allow to sit for 10 minutes or so to cook more in the husk and cool. Chop remaining vegetables and juice the lime. Husk the corn and oil lightly. Grill over low heat for 10 minutes, turning frequently, until it is slightly charred. This step is optional, and you could even use frozen corn, but the charred corn adds a great flavor. Let the corn cool and then cut the kernels off. In a large bowl, combine millet, beans and all vegetables, lime juice, remaining cumin or more to taste, and the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil. Toss to combine. Add salt and pepper to taste. Enjoy!!

Serves 8-10

Greens in DRC

Greens of various sorts are nutritional and common fare for Congolese. One of their favorites we dismiss as a weed. “Red Root,” as they refer to it, or what we gardeners curse as “pigweed,” is a type of amaranth native to Central America. Maybe we ought to reconsider it. The leaves are quite nutritious. Congolese women pound them to a paste with palm oil—sort of like a pesto. It’s hard work, but “lots of hands” as the old saying goes—preparing the greens is a social activity for women as well as making dinner.

I didn’t have quite enough pigweed in my yard to experiment with (I surely could have substituted crabgrass), but spinach will do as a reasonable facsimile to Congolese greens. Anne Capestrain, Chapter Leader

in Springfield, Illinois, contributed this lovely spinach salad recipe that is somewhat reminiscent of Central African cuisine. Central Africans love fruit as a treat and use seeds to make sauces too. Any of you who picked blueberries or blackberries this summer for fun think of Congolese women foraging for berries to add some sweetness (and nutrition) to what can be an otherwise bland diet when money or resources are scarce.

Anne's Blueberry-Peach Spinach Salad w/Poppy Seed Dressing

Anne says, "This is a wonderful dressing and would be complementary, along with the spinach, with other fruits, nuts and cheeses, such as strawberries, cashews and Swiss cheese." If the season for fresh blueberries and peaches has already passed in your area, you might try blackberries, raspberries or melon, even early apples or pears.

4 cups baby spinach, rinsed and dried
2 ripe peaches, peeled and sliced or cubed
1/3c blueberries
3/4 c toasted pecans (see note)
1 c Brie cheese, cubed
For the dressing:
1/4 c honey
3T cider vinegar
2T olive oil
1 small shallot, minced
2t Dijon mustard
1t poppy seeds
Salt and pepper, to taste

Make the Dressing: Shake all the ingredients in jar until well-mixed. Combine spinach, peaches, blueberries, pecans, and cheese with the dressing in a large bowl; toss well.

Note: To toast pecans, bake 7-10 minutes in preheated 350-degree oven, then cool before using. Watch them carefully; they can burn quickly and will continue to darken out of the oven if left on a hot baking sheet.

Watermelon in DRC

Watermelon probably comes from the Congo region, although it was first cultivated in Egypt. Now there's a great variety of melons in Africa and Africans make use of the seeds as well as the flesh (much like we might use pumpkinseed). The favorite way to eat watermelon in DRC is just like it is here, get a ripe one and slice it. But while honoring the Congolese with their indigenous fruit, I'm going to give a nod to Egypt too with the recipe below. In Egypt, it would be breakfast food but I love it (and often make it with

cantaloupe from my garden) for a light lunch or a picnic. To me it's salad or dessert.

Corrie's Watermelon With Feta

When I was kid, we used to put salt on watermelon. But I didn't know why until recently. Like acids (lemon juice), salt in moderation brings out the sweetness in fruits and makes them taste livelier. Well, I'll be. The Egyptians have known that for a long time—so does their salty cheese.

3 cups diced, seeded, chilled watermelon

8 ounces crumbled feta (if it's watery, drain it on paper towels a bit)

3T fresh chopped mint (or torn fresh basil if you prefer—a purple basil and mint combination is pretty too)

coarsely ground black pepper

coarsely ground coriander seed (opt)

1/2 c finely diced or thinly sliced Vidalia or other mild onion or red onion (if it's strong, soak it in cold water for 30 minutes, drain, rinse, dry), opt.

1/2 t smoked paprika (opt)

3 tablespoons balsamic or raspberry vinegar

6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Whisk the vinegar, oil, and paprika into a smooth vinaigrette. Put the melon and feta in a pretty glass bowl, along with about half of your chopped herbs and a pinch or so of pepper and coriander. Mix very gently. Drizzle the vinaigrette over the salad and toss very gently again. Sprinkle on the rest of the herbs. If you're brining this to a potluck, I recommend packing the melon, onion (if using), cheese, herbs, and vinaigrette in separate containers and throwing this together at the last minute—takes seconds. Much prettier that way.

Voices after page break.

VOICES

We're all about making connections—further and deeper. WfWI offers a particularly compelling way for DFW members to connect with the women it serves. For \$27 a month for one year, an individual or DFW chapter can sponsor a woman in one of WfWI's training programs, correspond with her, get to know her, be her "sister." Several already have and they've shared their experience with us in the excerpts from letters and reflections below. More information on sponsorship appears at the end.

Thanks so much to our contributors. Learning about you all as well as your sisters abroad was a moving experience for me. Whether about pets, planting flowers, or serious problems, women talking together can be a very powerful thing.

From the Eastern Shore to South of Sarajevo

After our November 07 meeting, the Eastern Shore of Virginia Chapter sponsored a Bosnian woman, Murada Tukulic, who lives with her husband, Ferid, and their two sons, Aldin (18) and Emin (14). Carolyn Mayers corresponded with Murada on behalf of the chapter. You can see Murada's handwritten letter in her own language in a PDF document on our program schedule page (scroll down to August 08) of the DFW website:

http://www.diningforwomen.org/?page_id=12/ Here's a translation.

Dear Carolyn

I would like to thank you and the women from your group for the letter I received. That is the first letter that we received in my Women for Women International group, and we were all so happy because of that. I'm a housewife and live in a town of 50,000 inhabitants. The town is situated 60km south from the capital, Sarajevo. It is an industrial town.

I like working in my garden, planting flowers. That makes me very happy. As far as the biggest works are concerned, my entire family helps me. I also like handiwork which was the basis for my joining Women for Women International. There are 20 women in this organization and we meet every 15 days. I'm looking forward to your letter and photos of you and the women from your group. I wish you and your family all the best. Best regards, Murada Tukulic

Carolyn: "Receiving Murada's letter was such a thrill—to actually get a letter from someone you are helping is very powerful. I would warn anyone that it makes you want to do even more. I keep trying to think of people that I could sponsor sisters for as big occasion gifts like landmark birthdays. I gave a sponsorship to my mother-in-law for Christmas and my sister-in-law for Mother's Day."

Postcards and Perspective

Maria Chianta is a member of the Town and Country, Missouri Chapter. She learned of WfWI while reading a magazine article about its founder, Zainab Salbi. The mission of WfWI “resonated deeply” with Maria so she went on-line and signed up to be sponsor.

Maria: “I sponsored a woman named Latifah in Afghanistan who has a small child (a girl). Latifah cannot read and lives in extreme poverty. I have written to Latifah many times about my family and my life here. I sent her stickers for her little girl in my correspondence. Latifah would communicate back to me through WfWI. I keep one of the postcards in my office. It puts my “bad days” into perspective. Sponsoring Latifah has been a very rewarding experience.”

“I am delighted to inform you that there are many positive changes in my life...”

Melanie Moore, a Chapter Leader in Atlanta has been a WfWI sponsor since first learning about the organization on Oprah (as Marsha did). She’s sponsored 3 women so far, including Adrienne from DRC. She sent me a full page of excerpts from their letters with her favorite parts highlighted. Imagine, a Rwandan woman praying for your safety. Not an idle sentiment.

Virginie Mukandekezi is a 47-year old widow living in Rwanda.

To my Beloved Sister,

*I am fine and was very happy to receive your letter. Life here in Rwanda is very difficult, we usually lack water and have to buy it, whereby a jerrycan costs a hundred francs. Electricity is also a problem. I live in a house, which has three bedrooms and a sitting room, which my husband built in 1987. In my children, the eldest is sixteen while the second born is fourteen and the last born is twelve years old. In the girls I bring up, they are orphans. My husband died in the 1994 genocide.... I am a widow, but somehow I manage to take care of them and all are in school. I love singing and guiding my children with their studies. Here in Rwanda, we have different customs. As for me, I like to weave baskets, make decorations and other handcrafts that are decorated in the house. I pray for you my dear and I hope you continue to be happy and safe.
Your sister, Virginie*

My dear friend, How are you? I hope this letter finds you well and happy. I was thrilled to receive your letter and I wanted to thank you so much for taking your precious time to write to me. I treasure your letters and you have given me courage to keep reaching out. I pray that we women stick together and love one another!... I have much joy and my

children are happy for you and wish to see you personally. They are in school and I am enormously grateful for your support, which enables them to attend school. Here in Rwanda, it has been summer season, but recently we got a lot of rain and we are to start growing crops like beans and others! Do you grow crops in America? How are your husband and family? Please, say hello to them and tell them their sister from Rwanda loves them so much! Until next time, bye-bye!

May God bless you and watch over you and yours, Virginie

Adrienne M'ganywamulume is 40 and lives in DRC. She is raising 8 children on her own. Adrienne and her family were forced to flee their home. She is renting a small home that does not have water or electricity.
Dear Sister Melanie,

Hello to you and to your family. I am delighted to inform you that there are many positive changes in my life since you started to assist me. My whole family's health is good because we no longer miss food and clothes. Thanks to your assistance, my children resumed class and now they are making good progress at school.... Thanks to the financial assistance you are sending me, I sell kerosene and gain income that allows me to support my family. I am also grateful for the trainings I am receiving. I was happy to learn about women's rights and DRC constitution; women and family law, role of education and literacy in gaining economic independence, health is a human right, how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and so on. May God bless you.

Yours, Adrienne

For “The Best Women” in the Land of Lincoln from Bosnia

Anne Capestrain's chapter in Springfield, Illinois has sponsored two Bosnian women. It's a real group project. Anne explains, "Every month one of our members writes our sister. We read any communication we receive from our sister at the meeting. I also like to read occasionally from WFWI newsletter, so the members will understand the organization that is helping our sister, and how important the communication is to her. I probably have about 25% of my membership participating in writing the letters." The Springfield Chapter hasn't heard from its new sister yet, but it carried on a lively exchange with Sacira Kozlic, a recent graduate of her WfWI program. What do women in Springfield talk about with a woman in Bosnia? Family, work, where they live, current events, the weather, good times and bad, husbands, and sisterhood. Just what women in Springfield talk about with each other. And what women in Bosnia talk about with each other. And what connects them all. Here are excerpts from the letters of Ayten Welch,

Paula Ryan, Wanda Tracy, Mary Gail Galle, Karen Nachtwey, and Sacira Kozlic.

Honored Sister,

My name is Sacira Kozlic and I was born in 1960 and I live with my husband, my son and my daughter. My son was born in 1987 and my daughter was born in 1991. Other two daughters are married. One of them has two sons... and another has one daughter. They are housewives. I am a housewife, too. My son works in a company and my husband works in a railway company. My daughter goes to first grad of high school. I have one cow. That is my life. And I have never been to Sarajevo, our capital city. --Sacira

“Do you get to read newspapers often? I love to read different newspapers from other places. Our news has been full of the primary elections for our next President.... An African-American man Barack Obama is running for the office. He is currently the senator for the state I live in, Illinois. Abraham Lincoln, our 16th President, was from Illinois and had a home here in Springfield. Lincoln freed the African-American slaves during the Civil War. Springfield is home to many tourist attractions regarding Lincoln. Our license plates even say ‘the home of Lincoln.’” --Ayten

“My husband and I own our own business; we build houses for people here in Springfield. We both love what we do, and enjoy providing people with a beautiful home. At first it was difficult to work with my husband, but after 18 years of marriage and working together we have managed to work things out!” --Paula

In the first place, let me ask you for your health. I will say something about myself. I live in a small village called Zmajevicka Cesta. It is near Zenica. I am a housewife and I have 70 chicks. I am so happy that I am a member of Women for Women. I understood that there is a lot of good people everywhere. I would like you to send the photos of you or you can come to visit us. --Sacira

“I am sending you this letter in a Christmas card.... On the front is a picture of my family. In the picture are my husband Ray, our son Tim, and our daughters, Katy, Jenny, and Julia. Our dog is Reilly and he is a family pet and golden retriever.... Sending Christmas cards is for many people a tradition. I don't always get to see my friends very often so I enjoy seeing pictures of their family once a year. Children change so much and it is such a joy seeing them grow up.” -- Anne

“We are a diverse group of women, but also very similar in lots of ways. We have a lot of professional, working women in our group and a lot of stay-at-home moms.... I am a nurse. I work part-time. I mainly take care of my family. I have 4 children. I know... you are 4 years younger than I am and you also have one son and 3 daughters, like me.” -- Wanda

“I do not think I have seen this much snow in 20 years. Do you have cold winters with a lot of snow? Is it hard for your daughter to travel to school in the winter cold? Of course by the time you receive this letter we all may be seeing signs of spring. Is spring a good time at your home? Does your life change in the spring? I like to work in the garden and care for the plants. I enjoy watching the green come out of the earth. I love to get my hands in the dirt! This is very funny because I grew up a city girl.” --Mary Gail

It was very hot here. The temperatures were higher than 40C but it is a little bit colder now. It is good. I was not able to provide an education for my daughter last year but now she will go to the first grade of high school. I am ready to deal with every situation. But please, sorry for this letter and my problems. I can pray that God gives all the best to all of you in the organization. That would be all from me for the best women in the world.
-- Sacira

As always, let me ask about your health. If you want to know, I am well, thank God. I feel a little embarrassed because I wrote to you about my problems in the last letter. May I ask you to forgive me because I have bothered you with my misfortune. --Sacira

“We all feel we know you because we share your letters.... Always know that we are interested in the good and the difficult in your life. It is the fact that we have experienced the good and the bad that we want to be part of Women for Women and support other women.” – Mary Gail

*Honored Sister,
I joined to this organization with other women because I believe it will be very helpful for me. I would like to thank you since you decide to help me during my membership... That means so much to me. It is very good to know that someone so far from me understands our problems and our wish to live good lives like other women in the world.
With best regards from your friend, Sacira*

Dear Sacira,

I became involved in this group because I wanted to learn more about what life is like for people in other parts of the world and I want to make a

difference even it is small. I am inspired by women like you. You have made a difference in our lives by writing to us. By now you have graduated and I want you to hear, across the many, many, many miles from Springfield, Illinois to YOU, a very sincere and joyous CONGRATULATIONS! I think I represent every woman in our group in saying we are very proud of you and wish we could have been there for your graduation celebration to hug you! It must have been a fun and happy time for you and you can be proud of your achievement. It had to be a real commitment and anything but easy for you to take all the classes and skill training and at the same time continue your everyday responsibilities with your family and home.

It is wonderful that you connected with other women who have shared this experienced with you. I hope that you will continue to encourage each other and gain strength from each other. We hope that you will have new opportunities that will allow security and personal well-being for you and your family. Women should support each other that way worldwide, so please don't ever be embarrassed or say you are sorry about having problems. We are not any better. In talking openly, listening and offering support, we can learn much from each other and be healthier in mind, body, and spirit.... You have goodness in your heart and such determination... Hold your head high.

Yours truly, Karen

For more info on being a sponsor-sister/chapter, click on the link below. Please let DFW (corrie@diningforwomen.org) know if you do and please let WfWI know your connection to DFW when you sign up.

<http://www.womenforwomen.org/scintro.htm>

Other ways to support Congolese women through WfWI:

Send a **Message of Peace** to women in the Congo to let them know you're thinking of them. This might be a good activity during your chapter meeting. <http://womenforwomen.dircksny.com/>

If you run (or walk) and live in the following areas: Morrison, CO, Portland, Chicago, NYC, Tempe/Phoenix, St. Louis, or Atlanta, you might consider participating in the **Run for Congo Women** that supports WfWI projects. A chapter might sponsor its star athletes. Or sponsor a run/walk. Check the website—there are updates about new events regularly. And while there, see the video about the young woman who started this project. Pretty inspiring. www.runforcongowomen.org