



TASTE THE WORLD RECIPES



Mefrisa

Mariem Hassan (Western Sahara)

BACKGROUND

The majority of the Saharawi population live in exile, in refugee camps in the Algerian Hamada during the last 34 years. For the population here the main source of food supply is lentils. There are constant food shortages of the governmental food aid and the population in the refugee camps rely heavily on the support and food aid that has been provided by small NGOs, especially from Spain, but also from Italy and UK, who have consistently offered help in one form or another over the years. Without this help the situation would be even more serious than it is today.

The Hamada is one of the most inhospitable desert regions offering little in the form of shelter, water, or sustenance. There are four refugee camps with over 180,000 inhabitants. Algeria has granted asylum to the Saharawi, allowing them to set up refugee camps in the Hamada Desert, where they have been able to escape from the Moroccan attacks. In order to survive, people have had to develop self-help projects, establishing small vegetable gardens and goat husbandry, located on the outskirts of the refugee camps.

These projects ensure that the basic nutritional needs of the young and elderly are met. A small-scale chicken farm has been set up by Austrian Aid projects, near to the Smara refugee camp.

But the Saharawi people live from day to day in the hope that they will one day be able to return to their homeland, which has been occupied by Morocco in 1975, when the independence procedure from Spain was already started by the United Nations.

The Saharawi are a nomadic people whose communities in the past have travelled the Western Sahara with their camel and goat herds searching for fresh pastures. Their living, both in terms of survival and the establishment of social groups are intrinsically linked to moving their animal to fresh pastures as the seasons change.

INGREDIENTS

Camel meat

Stock cube vegetable

Olive oil (before they used camel lard)

Onions

Garlic

Salt

Bread without yeast

Meifrisa is a traditional festive meal, which is prepared on the occasion of family celebrations, important events, market days and holidays, in fact whenever large groups of people come together.

The tradition of preparing and eating meifrisa has survived in many of the refugee camps in the Saharawi in spite of all the difficulties that the inhabitants face on a daily basis. Even if only once or twice a year they can buy and slaughter a camel, families and friends will come together to prepare this traditional meal. In the absence of camel meat, either a lamb or a goat will be slaughtered and the food will be shared in the traditional way. Everyone celebrates with music, singing and dancing and for a short while the suffering of living in exile is forgotten.

For the Saharawi the camel is a revered animal. It is extremely well adjusted to the life in the desert and as well as transportation, provides milk and good meat, being exclusively vegetarian. There will always be meat left over from a feast and this will be dried and cut into long strips and hung over a line or stretched out over the acacia shrubs (when available) where it is held in place while it is drying, by the long spines. At the hottest times of the year the meat will dry out within a week but in colder weather it can take up to two weeks.

Meifrisa normally goes with bread, called 'leftir' which is unleavened and baked without any yeast. The tradition of baking bread has always been important to survival in the desert.

Traditionally, it is baked in a small hollow in the sand on glowing charcoal ashes and covered with desert sand. The heat from below and the heat of the desert sun, bakes it very quickly and the taste is fresh and delicious.

METHOD

1. Cut the onions and the garlic and the camel meat into pieces and roast it in a pot, and while letting it stew in the necessary quantity of vegetable stock, prepare the bread.

The meifrisa will be served on small plates with forks.

