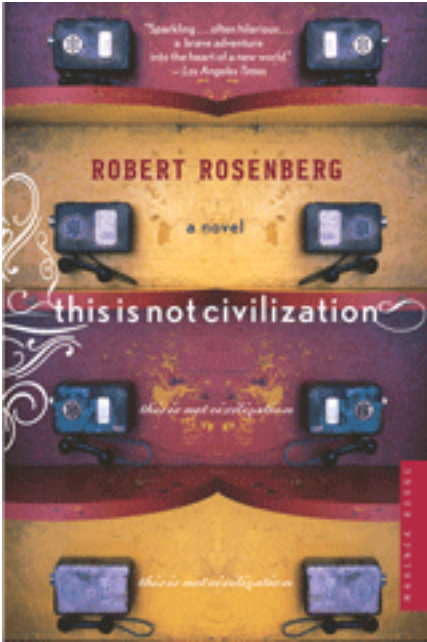


A Reader's Guide



This Is Not Civilization

by Robert Rosenberg

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About *This Is Not Civilization*

With captivating insight, realism, and humor, this stunning debut novel tells the parallel stories of two native villages, each facing cultural extinction. It's the end of the twentieth century, and in the towering mountains of post-Soviet Central Asia, Anarbek Tashtanaliev is single-handedly providing for his small village in the face of a collapsed economy. But the cheese factory he manages no longer produces any cheese, and his favorite daughter has been stolen in an ancient nomadic courting ritual. When he is ruthlessly blackmailed, Anarbek finds himself at a crossroads between the traditional past and the uncertain future. He stands to lose everything he loves. Half a world away, in the high canyons of Arizona, Adam Dale is a young Apache basketball star and the future hope of his tribe. He struggles to keep his family together amid the pressures of reservation poverty and the corrupt rule of his increasingly bull-headed father, the tribal councilman. Anarbek and Adam seek out the one person they think will be the solution to all their problems: a peripatetic American aid worker who'd once volunteered in both of their villages. Now working as a refugee resettlement officer in Istanbul, Jeff Hartig must suddenly play host to first one, then both of these men from his past. Soon, Anarbek's disgraced daughter joins them and the unlikely foursome find themselves sharing an apartment in the magical, sprawling city. Equally fascinated and perplexed by one another, they discover hope, then friendship, then love, unaware that they will soon face one of the most disastrous earthquakes of the century. Yet it is only in traveling so far, and surviving so much, that each person realizes his or her own capacity to endure. Sweeping, compassionate, and deeply moving, this novel celebrates the power of human connection in a largely unsettled world. Robert Rosenberg is an original and important new voice in contemporary fiction.

"A sensitive story about the cost of trying to do good. Rosenberg is an expert at registering his characters' moral quandaries; there are no polemics here . . . A wonderful work." — *Library Journal* (starred)

"An ambitious, bighearted . . . and highly readable first novel." — *Kirkus*

"I fell in love with Robert Rosenberg reading the first sentence of this book. What a precise, smart, elegant writer he is . . . Beware: you're likely to stay up all night to finish it." — Phyllis Rose, author of *Parallel Lives*

"Audacious and understated, exotic and intimate. Every line . . . rings with authenticity, every moment breathes with love and life and heartache." — Brady Udall, author of *The Miracle Life of Edgar Mint*

"A remarkable novel that illuminates the most important struggle of our times: to find a self and to find kindredness in a world where our shared humanity is often lost to the claims of our superficial differences . . . Not only a wonderfully readable work of fiction but also an important one." — Robert Olen Butler, Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*

About Robert Rosenberg

Robert Rosenberg recently finished his M.F.A. at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he held Maytag and Teaching-Writing fellowships. Previously he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in newly independent Kyrgyzstan. He lived there for two years, and afterward the Peace Corps awarded him a fellowship to teach on the White Mountain Apache Reservation in Arizona while he completed his master's in education. He lived in Cibecue, a small Apache village, and as one of the four original teachers he helped establish the village's first high school. He also founded and edited a community magazine devoted to preserving the culture of the White Mountain Apache tribe. In 1999 he took a teaching job in Istanbul, arriving there five days before the August 17 earthquake.

Questions for Discussion

1. Civilization explores two very different struggling cultures: the people of Kyrgyzstan and the Apache Native Americans. Both populations face the repercussions of globalization as they attempt to adjust to the pressures of the modern world while maintaining their traditions. What parallels do you see between the two villages? In what ways does globalization affect each of these peoples — their cultural identities, their languages, their ways of life? What did you learn about the conditions in Central Asia and the plight of American Indians that you did not know before? Can you think of other examples of a people affected by the pressures of globalization?
2. In the first half of the book, Rosenberg alternates between the story of Jeff in Kyrgyzstan and the story of Adam on the Apache reservation. How does the structure of the novel change throughout? In what ways do you think this structure affects the stories being told?
3. Turkey, because of its strategic location, is often thought to be a bridge between East and West. Jeff's girlfriend, Melodi, says that the Turks "don't trust Europe or Asia — we don't know which direction to look. We want both. We want everything" (page 158). How does

Turkey compare to Kyrgyzstan and the Apache reservation in the kinds of identity problems the people face? What point do you think Rosenberg is making by bringing all of his disparate characters together in Istanbul?

4. On Jeff's last night in Kyzyl Adyr-Kirovka, he thinks that "the farther from the village he got, the more he dreaded America, massive wealthy modern America" (109). What role does America play throughout the book? How do the various characters and cultures perceive it? Do characters' attitudes change over time, in different situations? How does Jeff perceive America? Does his attitude toward a "motherland" differ from those of the other characters? Did reading this book change the way you think about America?

5. *This Is Not Civilization* explores family, specifically father-child relationships. How would you describe the dynamics between Adam and Larson Dale, between Nazira and Anarbek? How do you think these two relationships compare to each other? Do these relationships change over time? Do the parents want different things for their children than the children want for themselves? Did you ever experience such parent-child tensions in your own life?

6. What role do you think the theme of escape plays in the novel? Why does Jeff leave his home and live in different countries? Why does Adam? Anarbek?

7. As the father figures in their villages, Anarbek and Larson Dale struggle with the outside pressures on their villages. When Anarbek leaves his village to find Jeff in Istanbul, do you think he is being selfish or selfless? Do you think he changes while he is in Istanbul? When Larson Dale destroys the makeshift white dome that was to house a new school in his village, do you think he is destroying the possibility of progress or preserving his culture? Does he change throughout the novel?

8. Discuss the themes of violence and anger in the novel. How do Larson Dale and Levi's recklessness define them? In what ways do their behaviors affect them and those around them?

9. The traditions surrounding love and marriage play an important role throughout *This Is Not Civilization*. In what ways is the Kyrgyz view of marriage unique? How do Nazira's and Jeff's attitudes toward love and marriage compare? How do you think their personal and cultural beliefs affect their relationship?

10. In what ways, if any, does Melodi's cultural background affect her relationship with Jeff? What are the attitudes toward love and marriage in Turkey? How do they differ from those in America?

11. At the end of their time in Istanbul, long after Nazira has been romantically involved with Jeff, she and Adam fall in love. What brings these two seemingly different characters together? What similarities do you see between them? Does either of them change as a result of their relationship?

12. Food and drink are important in both Kyrgyz and Apache cultures. What roles do festivities and gift-giving play in the novel? How does the Kyrgyz tradition of being a good host differ from other cultures, both in the book and in the world? How do such traditions compare to your own? Do you think Western societies place the same kind of emphasis on sharing festivities with friends and family?

13. At the end of the story, a giant earthquake hits Istanbul and kills thousands of people. What role does this tragedy play in the book, and why does Rosenberg include it? How does this tragedy affect the characters and Turkey as a whole? Does the attendant chaos reveal any truths for the characters? In what ways does the tragedy connect Istanbul to Nazira's and Adam's villages?

14. The words of the book's title appear early on, when Yuri, the eccentric Kyrgyz vodka maker, says to Jeff, "Moscow is halfway across the continent. Here, your America exists only in our imagination. This is not civilization" (59). In what ways does this theme echo throughout the story? Do you think Jeff experiences this sentiment during his travels? How do the indigenous people feel about their own culture —; in what ways do they feel shame about their traditional culture? In what ways do they feel pride?

15. At the end of the book, when Adam rents a hotel room with Nazira in Istanbul and they experience the luxury of soft beds and pillows for the first time, he says, "I used to sleep on an old mattress on the floor. I thought it was the most comfortable thing in the world. I'm glad I never tried one of these" (244). Do you see a "Pandora's box" theme recurring throughout the novel? What role do you think it plays for the characters and their villages? Have you ever experienced this feeling in your own life?

A Conversation with Robert Rosenberg

Q) Your novel has a wide geographical sweep, from the mountains of Central Asia, to an Apache reservation in Arizona, to the urban sprawl of contemporary Istanbul. How did it occur to you to try to tie such distant places together into a single novel?

A) Though these places are, in fact, quite far away from each other, in our globalized world they are not nearly as distant as they once were. A century ago the mountains of Kyrgyzstan might have been one of the most isolated places on the planet. But nowadays all it takes is money for a plane ticket, and it is possible for a villager from Kyrgyzstan to visit the U.S. on a vacation. A number of my former students from Kyrgyzstan have studied abroad here in the States. Quite a few Apaches I know have made trips to Israel, or to the Vatican. Where I now live, an entire classroom of Apache children has spent the last two summers studying Tae Kwon Do in South Korea. I find this amazing: how quickly the world has become connected, how straight forward it is for even relatively impoverished people to search out a new home. It no longer requires an epic journey across the sea, or a year's trek across a continent.

I wanted to write a novel which reflected this reality, this flux and interconnectedness.

Q) You have lived and taught in Kyrgyzstan, Arizona, and Turkey. How much of the novel is autobiographical?

A) Very little. The settings, of course, are taken from places I know well, but the characters and their stories are completely imagined. Even the character Jeff's experience as a Peace Corps volunteer is vastly different from my own. Life does not play itself out in novel form, with a beginning and end, suspense, contrasts, and parallels. The writer discovers these

things by getting to know his characters and by endowing them with enough life that their true stories unfold.

Still, living in these exciting places, at important moments of change, was inspiring. I am a teacher, and through my students I learned a great deal about the Kyrgyz, the Apaches, and the Turks. In class discussions with my students, and in reading their journals and essays, I learned so much about the way they thought, the intricacies of their languages, idioms, prejudices, jokes, and tales. Teaching like this, then, was vital in order for me to write confidently from the perspective of foreign characters.

Q) Your characters are all searching, in their own way, for a new home and a new life. How does this differ between the character of Adam, coming from the reservation, and Anarbek, coming from Kyrgyzstan?

A) Having lived in both Kyrgyzstan and on an Apache reservation, I was struck by a disturbing irony. In Kyrgyzstan, as life grew harder in the years following independence, more and more the people dreamed of emigrating West, especially to America. I cannot count the number of people who asked me to help them get to America. It was truly an obsession. In the village where I served as a Peace Corps volunteer, they were convinced that I was going to marry one of the local women and bring her home with me. The teachers even cowrote a satirical song at a school concert in which, one by one, they sang a comic chorus, each begging me to fly them back to the United States.

A few years later, on the troubled reservation, it was painfully obvious to me how much America — the very same America — had let the Apache people down. In the midst of poverty, alcoholism, suicide, many Apaches, like the Kyrgyz, dreamed of living elsewhere, off the reservation. But in an ideal world they would have nothing to do with the U.S. as we know it. Two indigenous peoples, with dreams of escape, but in utterly opposite directions — one to the America of riches and hope and opportunity, the other away from the American nightmare that had consumed them.

I imagined, at first, writing a book in which a young man fleeing the Apache reservation, meets an older man fleeing Kyrgyzstan. Neither would get where they intended, but both would find themselves, as so many refugees and exiles do, in a place far different from what they could have imagined. I chose Istanbul as that mid-point, for all its resonance as a meeting place of East and West.

Possibly because I feel so rootless myself, I have a great concern for how people understand their homelands, for their idea of their place in the world. Who are you? Where do you come from? Do you belong there? When I travel, I try to get a sense of people's happiness, of their satisfaction with their lives. I am amazed and envious when people talk about a sense of belonging, because I don't know if I've ever felt it myself. I grew up in New Jersey, my parents were from the Bronx, their parents from Eastern Europe. Each generation moves. So in a typical, suburban American way, I don't feel rooted to one particular place in this world.

For this reason, I'm especially interested in what is happening nowadays to people, like the Kyrgyz, who still believe in a homeland, or to those who have important ties, like the Apaches do, to the land they live on. The Turks in many ways are a homogeneous culture. They have a definite sense of what it means to be Turkish. But even that is fading. In a

strange way, though I can proudly claim to be American, I also get the nagging feeling that as an American I've lost something — that we're all losing something — important to the sense of who we are.

Q) What is the significance of the title?

A) *This Is Not Civilization* comes from a moment of dialogue early in the novel. A Russian man, one of the few Russians left in the Kyrgyz village, tries to forge a connection with Jeff, the American volunteer. As the other white man, a fellow intellectual, he feels they share a superiority to the Kyrgyz people, and denigrates their culture. He scoffs at their traditions: the eating of sheep eyes, the drinking of horse milk, the lack of education in the local population. "This is not civilization," he says at one point in their conversation.

I like the way the statement hangs over the novel, and colors the reader's experience with the various settings. The reader does not have to agree with Yuri Samonov's statement (certainly Jeff Hartig doesn't agree). In many respects the traditions and sense of community in the isolated villages of Red Cliff and Kyzl Adyr are more civilized than the traffic and corruption and capitalism of modern day Istanbul, or even of America.

Milan Kundera once said, "The wisdom of the novel comes from having a question for everything." To me the title asks, "If this isn't civilization, then what is?" It's my hope the novel is provocative and raises questions of this kind.

Q) Can you talk about the 1999 Istanbul earthquake, and its role in the novel?

A) In August, 1999, I took a job teaching in Istanbul. A few nights after I arrived I was shaken out of sleep, like the rest of the city, by the magnitude 7.8 earthquake. The floors of my apartment were bucking, and I looked out the window at the city. At that instant all electricity and lights were cut off. It was a terrible moment, and it's painful still to remember. According to the government, at least 17,000 people died around me. Outside estimates put the number at something like 40,000. The neighborhood I lived in, on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, withstood the shaking pretty well. But the city and country were devastated, and my experience in Turkey over the next two years was colored by the disaster.

I wondered how the characters I was beginning to envision would react, faced with a tragedy of these proportions. How would it affect their motivations to find a new life? How would seeing great numbers of people in a developing nation suddenly homeless, jobless, and without family affect their own understanding of the native lands they had left?

The earthquake came at a significant time, in my mind. The early and mid-nineties, the time of Jeff's service in the Peace Corps, were a time of great hope for the nations of the former Soviet Union. The people were convinced they had shaken off the tethers of a flawed system, and would now join the world in a fresh system of liberty and democracy that would lead to prosperity. And it was a moment of great optimism for Americans abroad as well. The Cold War was over; it was a lucky time to be a Peace Corps volunteer in the former Soviet Union. You were befriending your once arch enemies. There was a definite sense that just being there made a difference.

But so much of the change has stalled or gone wrong. A decade later former communist

leaders still rule like dictators over all of Central Asia and their economies are in dire straits. In this way the earthquake reflects the political reality of the character's lives in the novel, the seismic shifts in their cultures. It was somehow an appropriate ending to the close of the century, and of the novel. Now, looking back after 9/11, the nineties seems like a brief age of innocence — much like the 1920s must have seemed to someone looking back during the Great Depression.

Q) Who do you read? What writers have had an influence on your writing?

A) I was influenced by some of my own favorite writers, who include E.M. Forster, Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham, V.S. Naipaul, Graham Greene, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Paul Theroux. I am drawn to these writers because of their broad world view, their exotic locations, the ways in which their characters are often displaced, geographically, in situations that illuminate the clash of cultures and values. These novelists also write about periods of tremendous historical, political, or economic change (the end of colonialism, the Cold War, African independence, etc.) and their characters are cast adrift in history, struggling to stay afloat. *This Is Not Civilization* follows a similar formula, in that my characters are facing the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, the desperation of saving a native culture in the midst of globalization, and the tragic consequences of the earthquake in Turkey.

Q) When did you begin writing?

A) The letters I wrote home from my Peace Corps service in Kyrgyzstan, I think, were my first real attempt at serious writing. It was essential, and therapeutic, to sit down at night over a cup of tea and attempt to make sense of that strange land on paper: the sights and sounds, the idiosyncrasies, the generosity, the pressures, the foods. I wrote by hand, a slow, deliberate, and meditative process which I still go back to when the computer keyboard fails me. In writing those letters I discovered a number of things — narrative techniques, humor, style — but the most valuable was the need for discipline in the writing act. Henry Miller claimed that an aspiring author must write a million words before he finds his voice. I was living in solitude, I wrote home to friends or family every day for two years, and I think those daily letters were my own million words, my apprenticeship to the craft.

A Reading Group Feast with Recipes

One of the most colorful threads woven through this novel is the cultural connection of the characters through food. Here are some recipes and commentary about rituals of the countries featured in the book. Enjoy, and keep an eye out for your "fortune" in the Turkish coffee!

Kyrgyzstan

Food — especially meat and bread — lies at the heart of Kyrgyz culture and forms the cornerstone of the nation's ritualized hospitality. The obligation to serve and eat a bounteous meal, and drink a bottle of vodka, takes precedence over any business or pleasure (or literature!) that your guests may have come to discuss. And there are many delicious meals that don't require the eating of a sheep's eye. The following recipes reflect some personal

favorites. Ingredients are for the most part simple and easy to find. Remember, some degree of trial and error, of tasting and tweaking, may be required. Here's a quick guide, then, to how to throw your own memorable Kyrgyz feast.

In Kyrgyzstan meals are eaten while sitting on the floor, where one or more tablecloths are spread in the center of the room. On the tablecloth the hosts set out hard candies, a variety of fruit jams, bowls of raisins, butter, honey, sugar (for tea), plates of cheese (provolone works well), slices of cucumber and pickle, bowls of beet or carrot salad, and rounds of flatbread (Turkish flatbread or pita may be used). The symbolic effect is that of a table overflowing with food. Guests sit cross-legged or recline around the perimeter on rugs, mats, or pillows. Generally the most important person — often the oldest — sits the farthest from the door, a sign of respect. The meal begins when bread is broken. The host tears the bread into chunks and places pieces within reach of the guests. Guests should continually nibble, and anything goes: bread may be dipped in butter or honey or jam, candies may be eaten before dinner, and so on.

Tea is usually served from the head of the table. The hostess prepares a large pot of boiling water and another pot of concentrated black tea (nowadays, often made of Indian tea leaves), then pours a little of the strong tea in each cup, dilutes it with the water, and the cups are passed around. When a guest finishes, his cup is passed back to the head of the table to be refilled. There is usually a constant procession of cups back and forth. If somebody stops drinking tea, the hostess will say, "Chai eech!" ("Drink tea!") to show her willingness to keep serving the guests.

Vodka is the drink of choice in Central Asia. In rural areas it is often brewed at home and then placed in empty bottles of familiar brands, such as Stolichnaya or Absolut. During a meal, often after each course, the host will fill everyone's shot glass with vodka (or, on special occasions, champagne) and call for a toast. Throughout the evening each guest takes a turn offering a toast, and the others lower their heads respectfully. A typical toast will call for long life, good health, friendship, a full table, or peace. At the end of the toast everyone drinks. If somebody does not finish the shot, the host will chide him or her good-naturedly: "Apak!" ("Small finger!" — meaning, drink until your little finger is all the way in the air; in other words, "Finish!"). Vodka shots may be chased with anything from a spoonful of butter to a slice of sausage to a salty chunk of cucumber. Many Peace Corps volunteers preferred to chase theirs with tea, which provided a convenient place to spit out the vodka when the drinking got out of control. Once a bottle of vodka has been opened, as a rule it is very rude for a guest to leave before it is finished.

Other drinks popular in Kyrgyzstan include cognac (offered with toasts, in the same way as vodka) and beer (often used as a vodka chaser, though this isn't recommended). There are outdoor piva (beer) stands throughout Kyrgyzstan, many consisting of a giant keg on a donkey cart. Men sit at rough picnic tables and down a quick beer or two out of big, thick glass mugs. Chinese bottled beer has become increasingly popular since independence. Kumyss — fermented mare's milk — is a prized delicacy across the country, but may be difficult to find in the United States. If you ask for it at your local liquor store, be prepared for disbelieving looks!

Kyrgyz Recipes

Okroshka

This cold Russian soup is popular during the warm months in Kyrgyzstan, but it is hearty enough to serve any time of year.

2 bottles buttermilk
2–3 cups boiled potatoes, diced
6 radishes, sliced
½–1 cup chopped dill and/or cilantro
1 cup diced ham or sausage (optional)
1 bunch green onions, chopped
3 hardboiled eggs, chopped
1 cup sour cream
2 cucumbers, cut in slices
salt to taste

Mix all ingredients and refrigerate. Serve cold.

Lagman

A traditional Kyrgyz mutton stew, served over noodles.

1¼ pound mutton (or beef), cut into small pieces
½ cup vegetable oil
2 large onions, chopped
2 medium carrots, chopped
1–2 cloves garlic, chopped
3 large green radishes (daikon, found in Asian markets), chopped
½ tsp red pepper
2–3 tomatoes (or 2–3 Tbsp tomato paste), chopped
salt and pepper to taste
noodles or pasta (linguine works well)

Sauté the meat in the oil in a wok or heavy-bottomed pot. Add the red pepper. After about 5 minutes add 1/3 cup cold water. Bring to a boil and add onions, carrots, garlic, radishes, and tomatoes. Simmer 30 minutes. Turn up the heat and stir for 5 minutes. Add 1½ cups cold water for each person, and bring to a boil again. Lower the heat and simmer for 30 minutes more. In a separate pot, cook the noodles. Put noodles in individual bowls and cover with a serving of the stew.

Plov

This pilaf is popular throughout Central Asia, especially in southern Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

5 Tbsp oil
2 cups rice
5–6 large carrots, cut in long thin strips
¾ cup raisins
2–3 large onions, chopped

5–10 cloves garlic, whole
2–3 fresh peppers, chopped
1–2 pounds beef or mutton, cut into cubes
salt and pepper to taste

Wash the rice. Heat oil in a wok until hot, and add the meat, cooking until brown on all sides. Add the carrots, onions, and peppers, and cook until tender. Add 5 cups hot water and then the rice; the water should completely cover the rice. Push the cloves of garlic just under the surface of the rice, making sure they don't pop up. Cover and lower heat a little. After 10 minutes, add the raisins. Do not stir. Cover and cook until done, about 30 minutes.

Note: Plov is usually eaten with the hands. Mash the rice into a small ball over the plate and slide it with the thumb into your mouth.

Apache Recipes

Meals are less of a ritual on the Apache reservation than they are in Kyrgyzstan, though good food and hospitality are important for family gatherings and on special occasions, such as tribal fairs and Sunrise Dances. In fact, the importance of traditional foods can still be seen in the sixth phase of the Sunrise Dance (the *kéni naayiziid*, or "candy, it is poured"), in which a burden basket of sweets, corn kernels, and acorns is poured over the head of Changing Woman, sanctifying the food and promising bounty for the tribe. You may not want to dump food over anyone's head in your reading group, but you might want to try a few simple Apache recipes, which reflect both traditional ingredients and modern life on the reservation.

Traditionally, Apache adults planted their crops each spring, and it was then the responsibility of the children and elders to tend the beans, corn, and squash. The men went off to hunt, while groups of women left camp to gather wild grapes, banana yucca, and acorns. Once horses were acquired from the Spanish, the range for these hunting and gathering expeditions greatly increased.

Today, though Safeway and Wal-Mart are just a short drive away, squash still grows wild on the reservation, and many elders still tend personal corn crops to keep tradition alive. In preparing and eating the following recipes, it is important to remember how limited the variety of food once was in the high-desert Southwest, and how hard the Apaches worked the land. The pleasure of these dishes lies both in their simplicity and in their ability to fill you up.

Fry Bread

Fry bread is used in Apache tacos, Apache burgers, and dessert.

4 cups white flour
½ teaspoon salt
1 Tbsp baking powder
Lard or shortening

Combine all ingredients. Add about 1½ cups warm water and knead until dough is soft but not sticky. Shape dough into balls the size of a small apple. Flatten into patties by hand; dough should be about ½ inch thick. Fry one at a time in about one inch of hot lard or

shortening in a heavy pan. Brown on both sides. Drain on paper towels and serve hot with honey or jam.

For tacos: top with beans, tomatoes, onions, shredded cheese, shredded lettuce, and salsa.

For burgers: use fry bread as a bun.

For dessert: serve with honey or powdered sugar on top.

Acorn Stew

This traditional family recipe is for the more adventurous.

2½–3 pounds round steak (elk or venison), cut into bite-size pieces
sweet acorns (enough to make ¾ cup of acorn flour)
salt to taste

Cook meat in about 1 quart of water. Let it simmer for about 3 hours or until meat is fully cooked. Shell acorns and finely grind them until you have approximately ¾ cup flour. Strain the broth from the meat and reserve. Shred the meat, place it in a wooden bowl, and mix in the acorn flour. (Note: a metal utensil or bowl will discolor the flour.) Pour hot broth over the mixture and stir. Serve in individual bowls. Usually served with fry bread or tortillas.

(from the Whiteriver Unified School District Web site: <http://www.wusd.k12.az.us/Apchcult/food%5Cfood.html>)

Fry Bread with Pinto Beans

2 cups flour
1 tsp salt
1 Tbsp baking powder
¼ tsp black pepper
2 cups pinto beans with broth

Place the pinto beans in a bowl and mix in the salt, baking powder, and black pepper. Add enough of the flour to make a thick mixture. Heat a frying pan and add a tablespoon of lard. Spoon in mixture as if making small pancakes. Brown on both sides.

Pickles and Kool Aid:

Whole dill pickles are popular anytime in the trading posts, but especially during the Tribal Fair and the local rodeos. Children dip their pickles in Kool-Aid powder to sweeten them. Give it a try!

Turkish Recipes

Everyone I know who has ever visited Turkey returns home with epic tales of memorable meals in restaurants overlooking the sea or a mosque or palace. (When my mother visited me in Istanbul, she was so taken by the taste of the food and the view of the city that she broke into tears.) Turks justifiably consider their cuisine among the finest in the world, on a par with Cantonese and French. Thanks to a favorable climate and geography, for centuries the Byzantines and Ottomans were blessed with an abundance of produce, spices, game, and seafood; creative dishes were constantly being invented to please the demanding and

finicky royal courts. Here are a few favorite Turkish recipes with which you can impress your equally demanding reading group friends, and, with any luck, move them to tears.

Today a Turkish meal is every bit as luxurious as those once prepared for the sultans. A relaxed meal takes a full evening, often including hors d'oeuvres (meze), pastries filled with meat, cheese, and vegetables (borek), stuffed vegetables and vine leaves (dolma), broiled and roasted meats (kebab) or grilled fish, rice dishes (pilav), and vegetables served in olive oil (zeytinyali). Finally, there are a wide variety of desserts, highlighted by sweet milk puddings and baklava, many with evocative names such as "lady's navel," "beauty's lips," and "lady's thigh" — which gives some indication of what was on the sultan's mind after he ate. A rich meal is often finished off with a small cup of Turkish coffee, similar to a shot of espresso. For Turks, coffee is more important as a symbol of friendship and conversation than it is for the actual drinking.

As each dish is served, the hostess always says, "Affiyet olsun" (Bon appétit, or literally, "May you digest it well"), and the wish is offered right back to her, so there is a continuous stream of Affiyet olsuns around the table throughout the evening.

In restaurants, raki (an anise-flavored apéritif similar to ouzo) is served with mezes. Two fingers of the drink are usually poured in a thin glass over a cube or two of ice, then the glass is filled with water, turning the liquid milky white. For this reason, Turks call it "lion's milk." It goes especially well with mezes and seafood, and is often served with roasted pumpkin seeds, roasted chickpeas, almonds, and other nuts. Raki is available in many liquor stores in the United States.

Turkish wine (sharap) is worth a try. Look especially for the Villa Doluca, Kavaklidere, and Turasan labels. Turkey also produces a few brands of beer. Efes Pilsen and Efes Dark are popular, as are Troy and Turbog. Some of these may be found in large American cities.

Crushed Tomato Salad Spread (Ezme)

½ pound ripe tomatoes
½ cucumber
1 green pepper
2 stalks green onions
1 tsp dried mint
salt, pepper, paprika
1 Tbsp paprika paste (optional)
1 tbs olive oil
2 tbs vinegar

Peel tomatoes and cucumber. Remove stalk and seeds from pepper. Remove outer layer of green onions. Chop them all very fine without pulverizing them. Mix well all ingredients. Serve with bread for dipping.

Yogurt with Cucumbers (Cacik)

2 medium cucumbers
1 tsp salt
1 pint plain yogurt

1 cup water
1 clove garlic, crushed
2–3 sprigs dill
1 tsp dried mint
2 Tbsp olive oil

Peel cucumbers and cut into very small thin pieces. Sprinkle with salt and set aside. In a bowl, beat yogurt with a fork, slowly adding one cup of water. Add salted cucumbers and garlic. Sprinkle with chopped dill and dried mint. Serve chilled and drizzle olive oil on top.

Sultan's Delight

Puréed eggplant topped with meat.

2 pounds lamb, cut in small pieces
2 Tbsp margarine
3 medium onions, chopped
2 tomatoes, chopped
1 Tbsp tomato paste
2 tsp salt
½ tsp pepper

3 large eggplants
2 Tbsp margarine
2 Tbsp flour
1½ cups warm milk
2 ounces grated cheese (provolone or mozzarella)
2 tsp salt

For meat: Saute the onions in margarine. Add the meat and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes, stirring. Add the tomatoes and cook until the juice evaporates. Add salt, pepper, tomato paste, and 2 cups warm water. Cover and cook over low heat for 1½ hours until meat is tender.

To make eggplant paste: Grill whole eggplants over gas flame until they are burned outside and very soft inside. Hold by stem under running water for a few seconds, then peel skin with a knife. In a bowl, mash the flesh with a fork, add flour, and repeat with all eggplants. Over medium heat, cook eggplant mixture in a saucepan for 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Slowly add milk, salt, and grated cheese. On a platter, spread eggplant mix and serve with meat on top.

Sutlac

Rice pudding.

8 cups milk
1½ cups sugar
1 cup rice
¼ cup rice flour
¼ cup potato starch
½ tsp salt
cinnamon

Cook the rice in 1½ cups water. Put milk, cooked rice, and salt in saucepan. Boil and let simmer. Put the rice flour and potato starch in a bowl. Slowly add ¾ cups of water, stirring constantly, to make a smooth paste. Add it to boiling milk mixture. Cook for 10 minutes, stirring constantly. Add the sugar and cook until it thickens, stirring constantly. Serve in individual bowls. Sprinkle with cinnamon.

Turkish Coffee

Traditionally prepared in a cezve, a long-handled pot, and served in exquisite Turkish coffee cups, but it can be made even without this equipment. Into a pot, pour one cup of water for each person, one rounded teaspoon of coffee (this should be a very fine grind, almost a powder), and one rounded teaspoon, or less, of sugar. Stir well. Over low heat bring slowly to a boil. As the coffee boils, a froth forms on top (it isn't Turkish coffee without the froth!). Just before it overflows, remove the pot from the heat and pour the froth into espresso cups. Bring the rest of the coffee to a boil again and pour it into each cup as well.

After drinking, when nothing but muddy grounds remain, Turks sometimes read their fortune in the cup. Cover the cup with its saucer, swirl it clockwise three times, turn it upside down, and let it settle and cool. Supposedly, your future will be revealed in the pattern of the grounds around the cup. Use your imagination, but keep an eye out for traditional symbols: a chair (an unforeseen guest will arrive), a sword (your enemy will be defeated), an eye (watch out for envy or jealousy), a sun (success), a ring (marriage), or a broken ring (your marriage is in trouble).

For Further Reading

The following books may be of interest to readers of *This Is Not Civilization*:

[The Book of Salt](#) by Monique Truong

[Everything Is Illuminated](#) by Jonathan Safran Foer

[The Calligrapher](#) by Edward Docx

[The Namesake](#) by Jhumpa Lahiri