

food monthly

NORTH AFRICAN  
FOOD

Ethiopia and great food seem like an anomaly. But, as **CHINE MBUBAECBU** discovered, chef at the Global Cafe at Reading International Solidarity Centre Tutu Melaku is wowing Reading with her spicy North African fare



# TUTU'S food out of Africa is a hot favourite

Pictures David Bearne and Peter Bloodworth



TUTU Melaku, the larger than life chef at the Global Café in Reading, cooks her hearty hot, spicy international cuisine for up to 100 people each day and the Ethiopian-born culinary goddess wouldn't dream of using scales or a measuring spoon.

"When you know how to cook, you don't need to measure. I don't measure, I just use my intuition," she says as she effortlessly creates her Doro Wot and Misr Wot – simply translated from the Amahric language as chicken sauce and red lentil sauce.

While some might find it difficult to cook for large groups of people, Tutu says large-scale catering is a piece of cake.

The chef said: "Doing a big bulk is no different from doing a small event.

"I come from a family of nine brothers and sisters. I'm number two.

"In Africa, it's not just your family who's in the house. Sometimes people just come in from the village and you have to feed them."

At the Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) in London Street, where



**Popular – Tutu Melaku and her North African cuisine**

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For Tutu, who moved to England in 1992 with her then husband, eating with your hands was not just an action





**Exquisite from Ethiopia – above, Doro Wot chicken or chicken sauce; below, long grain rice, and Tkel Comen (white cabbage) and inset, the red lentil sauce in preparation**



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At the Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) in London Street, where the 40-year-old has been dishing up her culinary delights since last October, she also has help from enormous pots and pans, as well as a tall wooden stirrer imported from Africa known as a 'maya seya', which is used so the cooks do not burn their hands.

Tutu – like her north African fare – is going down a treat with the clientele at the Global Cafe.

Tutu says her food is transforming her customers' views on food, opening their eyes to a variety of exciting dishes and even transforming the way they eat it.

She said: "Most of my customers – 99 per cent of whom are white English – eat with their hands now. They get instructions as to how to eat it."

"People appreciate good food – especially people who have been brought up on a good diet. They say it's just like Mum's cooking. It's a compliment. People don't expect you to cook this kind of food for a business but more at home."

Tutu says some of her customers tell her they have even got "addicted" to her red lentil sauce and regularly drop in to the chilled London Street café to get their fix.

"Everybody loves the lentils," she says. "People have it here and then go



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For Tutu, who moved to England in 1992 with her then husband, eating with your hands was not just an action for trendy show-offs but a mere necessity in her homeland of Ethiopia.

She said: "My customers get instructions on how to eat my food, but in my country, we eat with our hands because no-one can afford to buy a fork and knife."

"In reality, that is why. I even used to eat pasta with my hands."

As well as cooking her dishes for the café each day, she also puts on a buffet on Thursday nights, where food lovers can drop in and eat their fill from a selection of eight meat dishes and six vegetarian dishes at £8.50 a head.

Because of Risc's ethical beliefs and Tutu's concern for the environment, all her dishes are locally sourced, free range, organic and healthy.

Tutu's two young children's culinary tastes reflect the fact that they have been brought up in England by an international chef.

While they love the hot spiciness of their mum's cooking, they are also not averse to bog-standard English fare.

She said: "My kids love sausages and burgers. No food's unhealthy as long as you eat it appropriately."

To try Tutu's delicious cuisine, visit the Global Café Tuesdays Saturdays.

For further information, call (0118) 958 3555.