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# THE CHALLENGE OF AFRICAN POTENTIALS

Conviviality, Informality and Futurity

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Edited by

**Yaw Ofose-Kusi & Motoji Matsuda**

In collaboration



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### Itaru Ohta: The *Palaver* Sauce and *Juju* of the African Potentials Network

*Francis B. Nyamnjoh*

#### 1. Introduction

As one of Chinua Achebe's proverbs on invisible power goes, 'When we see a little bird dancing in the middle of the pathway we must know that its drummer is in the near-by bush'.<sup>1</sup>

Since 2011, the research network of Japanese and African scholars known as African Potentials has danced acrobatically, with surging energy, creativity and confidence, in the middle of pathways across the African continent (in Nairobi, Harare, Juba, Yaounde, Addis Ababa, Grahamstown, Accra) and in Japan (Kyoto, Tokyo, Osaka). Who has been the drummer animating the network?

There have been many.

In this essay, I focus on one of the many drummers – Itaru Ohta – who is very much of a composite being, just like Africans and their realities are, and very much in the spirit of incompleteness and conviviality championed by the concept of African Potentials. He is a Japanese Turkana with a fascinating capacity to open up to and be opened up by creative diversities. Upon his retirement, Itaru is a 40-year-old archive of rich research including academic, scholarly and humanistic conversations on, with and around Africa – on the dignity of being human without the compromise of contrived hierarchies induced by ambitions of dominance. He is instructive in his commitment to and quest for truth beyond tradition, beyond definition, and beyond the prescriptions of the powerful and the privileged. Itaru's distinctive contribution to the study of Africa in its dynamism has been a consistent persistence in the conviction that there is much more to the African bush than the appearance of 'primitive savagery' and 'reluctant progress'. His perceptions are in

contrast with the judgemental eye of a passing tourist from ‘the civilised world’ or of the social researcher caught in the web and imperative of modernisation theory and its propensity for sharp and abstract dichotomies. With him, not everything is what it seems. I suggest that, as a drummer enamoured by the thrills and surprises of African bushes (from Namibia to Kenya and beyond), open to improvisation, privileging conversation over conversion, and humbled by the humility of doubt and the reality of incompleteness, Itaru has taken on the attributes of the Ghanaian *palaver* sauce and the Nigerian *juju*.

What do I mean?

## 2. *Palaver* Sauce

Itaru excitedly became aware of *palaver*<sup>2</sup> sauce, a very popular stew among most of the ethnic groups in Ghana and in much of West and Central Africa, during the December 2018 Accra forum of African Potentials. In an online recipe, Freda Muyambo, a food writer and blogger who specialises in African cuisine, describes *palaver* sauce as:

... a Ghanaian green leaf stew which often consists of a mixture of meat and dried fish, cooked in one pot along with lush green leafy vegetables such as taro leaves, spinach or amaranth leaves (callaloo). The ground seeds of bitter melon are also added. These seeds are known as *agushie* in Ghana or *egusi* in Nigeria. All of these ingredients combine to give this stew a distinct flavor.<sup>3</sup>

Muyambo also provides a rich menu of ingredients and steps to make *palaver* sauce, which I have reproduced in the footnote above, in the interest of keeping the tradition going. *Palaver* sauce is a very inclusive sauce in terms of ingredients and is open to improvisation as well. If one of the central ingredients – *agushie*, for example – is lacking, Ghanaians improvise by using garden eggs or eggs from chicken instead. It is a versatile sauce that is usually served with boiled yam, cocoyam, rice, cassava and other dishes. Commenting on an earlier draft of this chapter, Louise Akanlu, a Ghanaian doctoral student at the University of Cape, thinks that: ‘*palaver* sauce in its

contemporary character is a cross-cultural (may be cosmopolitan) sauce that may have evolved from the humble traditional Akan *abom* and *ampesie* – that is, mashed steamed leafy greens (usually cocoyam leaves), with pepper, tomatoes/garden eggs, anchovies or salted or smoked fish and palm oil (*abom*), eaten with boiled plantains, yam, cocoyam or cassava (*ampesie*)’.

In his own reaction, University of Cambridge doctoral student, Charles Prempeh, confirms the status of *palaver* sauce and food, in general, as being much more than just a material substance – a *potpourri* of multiple ingredients. He reminds us that food is also a social construct that provides a vector for humans to make sense of the world when he observes that ‘the stories constructed around *palaver* sauce show how humans can deploy creativity and the power of imagination to construct a narrative with the obvious intention of lubricating social relations.’ He elaborates:

The whole gamut of food preparation is located within the lore of a people. Who cooks and how one cooks, as well as when one cooks are all located within a particular worldview. Who cooks a *palaver* sauce for a certain class of people is as important as how the sauce is used to reinvent social relations. For example, an Akan chief or religious functionary will have extensive views about who prepares his food and when the food is prepared. *Palaver* sauce (like any other food) is used to forge group solidarity. In many Akan groups, who one shares a meal with is as important as who prepares a meal. And in a society made up of people of diverse and disparate backgrounds, it is food like *palaver* sauce, among many other factors, that is used to engender sociality and reconstruct relations.

If *palaver* is part and parcel of being human, so should *palaver* sauce be. Not many modern day Ghanaians in Accra who prepare *palaver* sauce know why the stew came to be called as such, although some of those I have conversed with on the theme have readily agreed with my suggestion that the name might have had something to do with using the sauce to settle conflict and disputes, to discuss and agree on a way forward on burning issues, and to celebrate or mark important events in the life of a family or a community. In a world

where relations are sometimes conflictual, where human beings dispute and disagree every now and then, it pays to gather around a good meal from time to time to discuss, mediate, resolve or iron out issues in the interest of sociality and a shared humanity. *Palaver* sauce is a stew to encourage talking things over, easing tensions and forging consensus or agreeing on the way forward. It is *palaver* sauce that is most likely to be used by the living to invite their ancestral spirits to attend and participate in the festivities of social renewal. With *palaver* sauce, one could open one's heart and door to a passing stranger, and start conversations that could result in the cultivation of intimacies, the forging of lasting bonds, and the building of new communities.<sup>4</sup>

On this capacity of *palaver* sauce and food in general to cultivate, reaffirm and extend sociality and humanity, Prempeh draws on his knowledge of the Akan to argue that food is used to settle disputes, just as it is used to determine who counts as part of the society and who does not:

For example, if a visitor is invited to share a meal with his guest, it is a mark of being temporarily incorporated into the guest's family. In the same vein, if a visitor is denied an invitation to share a meal, it is a mark of hostility and alienation. Also, sharing a meal, like *palaver* sauce, is a way of testing the wit and the growing process of a child. It is part of the socialisation process. The Akan proverb that 'a child who knows how to wash his hands well eats with elders,' is emblematic of how seniority and juniority are socially constructed. In the same way, eating food – like *palaver* sauce – is one way of enforcing ethical values. A young man eating with an adult should not be the first to leave the dining table. Even if he is full and unable to eat anymore, he should wait for the elderly person to first wash his hands.

Given his 40 years of ethnographic scholarship as a student of society, social relations, conflict resolution and coexistence in Africa, especially among the Turkana of Kenya, and in light of his interest in the very notion of *palaver*,<sup>5</sup> it is easy to understand why Itaru should be drawn to *palaver* sauce. As he put it in a comment at the Accra forum, *palaver* sauce is a stew in which a rich variety of spices and other ingredients are brought into conversation with one another to

resolve differences and blend them into as perfect a meal as possible for those seeking to satisfy their hunger and spice up their lives and existence with a collective resolve and vision. Indeed, as Louise Akanlu remarks in agreement:

As a cross cultural sauce which is highly nutritious and also somehow cosmopolitan, with an amalgamation of spices and condiments from diverse communities, one can consider *palaver* sauce as a sauce embodying histories of African encounters and experiences, not only among themselves but with the outside world.

She speculates that, ‘perhaps it is the same potential of enabling discussions, deliberations and resolving issues that the people of Edina exploited in their dealings with the Portuguese in the colonial days’.

In his comment on the same draft I circulated, Professor Yaw Ofose-Kusi, Dean, School of Management Science, University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani, Ghana, and keynote speaker at the Accra Forum concurs:

I do agree with your attempt to draw *palaver* sauce into our daily interactions. Curiosity pushed me to look at the formal definition of the word, spelt as *palaver*. My Webster Comprehensive Dictionary says it is: 1. ‘empty talk, especially that intended to flatter or deceive; 2. a profuse parley, hence public discussion or conference ....’ Taken literally then, *palaver* sauce could be a conference of ingredients, each striving to push the other to exhibit its strongest characteristics and potential for a collective outcome; an outcome whose quality lies in compositional deficiencies and strengths. If taken as empty talk then obviously its role as a sauce for lunch or supper when the difficult subjects and topics of this world are laid to rest for a while will be spot on. But in its metaphorical sense, it is a depiction of the complexity of the world we live in. In Africa, there is no such thing as a simple matter, because while we gladly accept the conveniences and sensible explanations of science and technology, we never rest until we turn those scientific explanations into imponderables.

In this regard, *palaver* sauce invites those who sit together to enjoy it to contemplate and provide for, in the course of their meal, the possibility and reality of a world and existence in which emphasis is on combinations, interconnections, negotiability, flexibility, diversity and interdependence, and getting along. It inspires intimacy even among strangers.

Dela Quampah, lecturer at the Pentecost Theological Seminary, Gomoa Fetteh, Ghana, echoes and elaborates on the subtle flexibility implicit in the metaphor of *palaver* sauce, as follows:

The *palaver* sauce metaphor is a subtle and flexible approach of expressing the benefits of interconnectedness, relatedness, and interdependence of individuals in constructive and productive socio-economic engagement. Similar to the components of a system whose individual pieces cannot function separately, or may do so with limitations, the blending of a variety of ingredients in the *palaver* sauce facilitates the unleashing of valuable nutrients from various sources for a balanced diet of protein, fat, vitamins, minerals, and roughage in the body building project. This negotiated beneficial product of rich nutritious value is instructional of the benefits of compromise and tolerance in a productive co-existence and fruitful interaction for human progress.

The community of ingredients interact to empower each other and enhance potential by overwhelmingly diminishing the peculiar shortcomings of individual items. The adaptability of *palaver* sauce is manifest in its unstable and malleable recipe, which is never rigid in the choice of ingredients; just as one can improvise ingredients to reflect one's social status, *palaver* sauce is a meal for all social classes and ethnicities.

Dela Quampah agrees that the networking of African scholarship has the potential of releasing the strength and creative capacity of individuals who cooperate and negotiate their capabilities for a combined productive outcome. Indeed, in terms of academic pursuits, collaborative research and a scholarship of inclusivity, *palaver* sauce is suggestive of co-creation and intellectual nimblefootedness. It is a recipe for convivial scholarship. Dr

Edmond Agyeman,<sup>6</sup> a sociologist and senior lecturer, Centre of African Studies, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana, concurs:

Thank you for sharing your paper with me. It is indeed an excellent piece. The Ghanaian palaver sauce is creative and symbolic culinary representation of the African culture of accommodation of difference, conviviality and hospitality. Not only is the African pot receptive to diversity and difference, but so too is the belly that consumes the palaver sauce. The ingredients are neither predetermined nor fixed, and thus make room for additions, innovations, creativity and diversity of taste. It is out of this that the African soul and body are nourished to meet complexities and vicissitudes of daily existence.

The fact of being receptive to diversity and difference should not be taken to mean that *palaver* sauce has no central basic ingredients that give it a distinctive character. As Dr Audrey Gadzekpo, Associate Professor at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, observes:

The one constant is the base ingredient – the green leaf. It cannot be *palaver* sauce if the base is not a green leaf whether from cocoyam, cassava, sweet potato, taro, spinach, etc. The significance of that is not lost on me. Green leaves symbolise fertility, renewal, growth, revitalisation and freshness, attributes very much accordant with the aims of a new network, which is harnessing the potentials of African scholars and scholarship from different locations. The variability of the leaves used is contextual, depending on what resource there is to marshal in a given locale, situation and at a particular time. The harvest yields and regenerates cocoyam leaves in Ghana, cassava leaves in Liberia, sweet potato leaves in Sierra Leone – assuring a constant supply of *palaver* sauce, no matter the season and place.

In his accommodating humility and conviviality, scholarship and scholarly practice, Itaru has helped make the African Potentials network a *palaver* sauce. Since the Nairobi forum in 2011, the network has grown from strength to strength through the creativity and improvisation that Itaru and his colleagues have brought to bear by

their willingness to experiment with new ingredients (persons and ideas) and, with every new forum, to explore additional dimensions of preparing the stew for the best possible effect. His disposition to accommodate improvisation and innovation in the ingredients and preparation of his *palaver* sauce of African Potentials is in tune with yet another Achebe proverb, from his novel *Arrow of God*: “The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place.”<sup>7</sup> The idea of *palaver* sauce as a dancing mask is suggestive of its potential to become a truly universal stew that continues to enrich itself through its open-ended encounters and conversations with the creative diversity of spices and ingredients of a truly universal humanism.

### 3. *Juju*

As a drummer in the nearby bush, Itaru could also be likened to a *juju* using the music of his drum to activate the African Potentials network to excel in its scholarly and related ambitions. In his reading of an earlier version of this chapter, Charles Prempeh drew my attention to what *palaver* sauce and *juju* have in common by sharing the following comment, again drawing on his knowledge of the Akan:

It is interesting to note how food coheres with cultic practices – *juju*. It is widely said that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. In the same way, many Akan people believe that it is through food that a woman can influence and cajole her husband to acquiesce to her demands. In many Ghanaian cultures, food provides the easiest ingredient for the potency of *juju* to materialise. Popular movies in Ghana show how women put potions in foods to either win a potential lover or cause an existing lover to stick to her alone. The connectivity between food and *juju* in Ghana, particularly among the Akan, feeds the performance of rituals.

I consider *juju* as a technology of self-activation and self-extension – something that enables us to rise beyond our ordinariness of being, by giving us potency to achieve things that we otherwise would fall short of achieving, were we to rely only on our natural capacities or

strengths. It is true that our bodies, if well cultivated, could become phenomenal *juju*, enabling us to achieve extraordinary feats. But even such technically trained, programmed or disciplined bodies are likely to encounter challenges that require added potency. In other words, while our bodies have the potential to be our first *juju*, they eventually require additional *juju* for us to be efficacious in our actions. As *juju* for the African Potentials network, Itaru has relied on his natural talents and cultivated himself, and also sought extensions and connections or *juju* external to himself to maximise his potency and efficacy. His capacity to reach out, network, fund raise, encourage and facilitate the negotiation and navigation of myriad disciplinary and identity margins has been a formidable enabler for the network.

Any of us remotely familiar with Amos Tutuola's writings would know what I mean by *juju*, as well as understand the ubiquitous presence of *juju* in the universes which Tutuola choreographs and depicts.<sup>8</sup> The following passage, from Tutuola's *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town* on how the brave hunter of the Rocky Town prepares for the long and dangerous journey to see the Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town for a cure to his wife's barrenness, captures remarkably the centrality of *juju* as a great activator in Tutuola's universe and its rites of passage:

I entered my room and I first drank one keg of the palm-wine. Then I wore my hunting dress, I wore many kinds of juju in my loin, I wore many on my neck, both on my elbows and limbs. Several others which were the skulls of snakes, birds of prey, lizards, etc. were tied on my huge cap and I put it on my head. Having dressed like that, I took my bow and the poisonous arrows. Many kinds of juju were tied on every part of the bow as well. Then I hung the bow and arrows and my long and heavy matchet on my left shoulder. Then I put the juju ring which could make a person invisible on one of my left fingers.

... Having equipped myself like that, again I drank one keg of the palm-wine ... then I staggered from my room to the outside of the house ....

As I knelt down before the people, and as I began to shake from feet to head for the intoxication of the powers of all the juju which I wore and as well for the power of the strong palm-wine which I had

drunk in the room, so they all prayed for me. After the prayer, each of the people including my mother, father, my wife, her mother and her father, hung several kinds of juju gourds all over my dresses, head, neck, breast, loin, etc. After all these juju gourds were offered, I did not waste time at all but I stood up and I started my journey immediately.<sup>9</sup>

To Tutuola's quest-hero narrators such as the brave hunter of the Rocky Town, things such as *juju* (spells, charms, magic, etc.) can make a difference by enabling the heroes or heroines to transform themselves into something else when hard pressed by their adversaries or the formidable challenges facing them, and to revert to their forms of origin after the danger, challenge or adversary has been overcome. Tutuola's characters employ the technique of metamorphosis extensively as a means of self-protection and as a facility to display the potency of their *juju* when confronted by other beings with overwhelming powers or *juju* of their own.

The more *juju* a person has at his or her disposal the better his or her chances of being efficacious, for not only does *juju* work best in combination, it tends to disappoint or to let its owners down when the latter needs it the most. Even with our purportedly perfected modern *juju* (technologies built to perform with scientific precision and reliability), there is no absolute guarantee that, however potentially powerful such *juju* is, it will work when one summons it to enhance one's potency. The fact that *juju* often relies on a complicated network of interconnections to function properly is an added and humbling complication and a deterrence to any propensities for hubris. Equipping or extending oneself with purportedly more scientific and technical *juju* such as computers (desktops or laptops) and cell phones (basic or smart) and other mobile devices (tablet, iPad) is still no guarantee that these will not freeze or deactivate themselves just when one needs them the most. It is perhaps for this reason that, as Louise Akanlu remarks, 'most *juju* men and women do not shy away from the use of modern/scientific technologies (smart phones, tablets, etc.) alongside their "African electronics" for self-activation and extension, as this enables them to meet and attend to clients outside their villages, towns and even in other continents.' Just as one needs

*juju* to activate oneself, some *juju* equally needs activation by other *juju* to be effective. Hence the need to constantly lubricate relations with one's *juju* supplier – witchdoctor, soothsayer, diviner, manufacturers, service providers or whoever has supplied one the *juju*, which are almost always accompanied by strict instructions to be followed scrupulously. Tutuola's universe of prevalence of *juju* and interventionist supernatural forces is a universe in which everything is possible, and thinking the unthinkable is currency.

Although set in his native Yorubaland, Tutuola's *juju*-centred stories are common throughout Africa, where the belief is widespread that there is a lot more and a lot less to people and to things than meets the eye, just as there is much more to life than logic. Many an ordinary African credits people with an ability or a capacity to be present in many places at the same time, and to be able to see, feel, smell and hear things that are not tangible and visible in ordinary terms. Put differently, they believe in the human capacity to decipher the multiple spices and ingredients in a well-prepared *palaver* sauce and to discern interconnections despite an appearance of discontinuities. In religious circles, we would capture this ability to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time as a godlike ability for presence in simultaneous multiplicities. God the omniscient and omnipotent is also omnipresent – something which human beings, in their singular and unified ordinariness and in their obsession with completeness and superiority, cannot be.

To be able to claim such godlike attributes, humans must seek to enhance their ordinary selves with extraordinary activators – *juju* – defined as techniques and technologies of self-extension. Hence, the widespread belief in Africa that, ordinary though we are as humans, our ability to be omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent can be significantly enhanced by *juju* (which includes but is not confined to charms, spells, concoctions, potions, etc.). Such *juju* is usually specially prepared by clairvoyant or spiritual experts who are known in different contexts by different names (in parts of Cameroon these are people of *ngang*; in parts of Nigeria they pass for *babalawo*; and in parts of southern Africa, they are *sangoma*). Reliance on *juju*, charms, spells and clairvoyance might seem primitive and irrational, but these are part of the potency repertoire from which we draw agency in view

of the fact of our incompleteness. In this regard, *juju* is not much different from the supposedly more scientific, rational and modern technologies of self-extension with which we are familiar (photos, computers, internet, cell phones, smart phones, mass media, social media, books, electricity, washing machines, artificial intelligence, nuclear weapons, etc.).

Life would be very ordinary, predictably standardised and routinised without the exciting sense of adventure and ambition that the ever-unfolding creative effervescence in *juju* (technics and technologies) brings. The very idea of creative innovation would be dead, as individuals and societies would lose the ability to improvise and reinvent themselves. This highlights the importance of *juju* in society and social relationships. Individuals and collectivities use *juju* to influence, persuade and control situations and others, and to overcome and complicate adversities in ways that would otherwise not be possible without their repertoire of *juju*.

With the ubiquity of *juju* should be associated the idea that power, far from concentrated in the hands of a few, is actually something that comes and goes, often without warning. However powerful a person is, he or she is always seeking to enhance him- or herself with extended body parts and extra senses on the one hand, and *juju* (technics and technologies) on the other. One cannot be too sure, so one must never rest on one's laurels. Complacency is a dangerous thing in a world of impermanence, where there is always more or less to things and people than meets the eye, ear, nose, mouth, heart or any other of our sensory organs. This should sensitise us more to the need to cultivate and champion a *palaver* sauce disposition to take the outside in and inside out.

Reacting to this section of the essay in an earlier version, Dela Quampah shared his understanding of the *juju* metaphor thus:

The *juju* imagery indicates the limitless power of the imagination and its unrestricted potential to invent, process, and improve upon output and identity. The *juju* concept is inspired by a realistic view of life which acknowledges the limitations of time, space, and other apparently insurmountable human challenges. However, *juju* is upbeat, and 'does not take it lying down'. *Juju* does not magnify problems, it

rather attempts solutions, whether logical or otherwise. In the world of *juju*, problems are not invincible hindrances, they exist to trigger and activate human creativity. *Juju* therefore is versatile and dynamic, adapting and transforming in response to contingencies.

Just as life is full of hierarchies informed and sustained by inequalities, so too are there inequalities and hierarchies among *juju*. The more powerful one's *juju*, the better one's chances of being, seeing, doing, feeling and smelling things, tangible and intangible, as well as of influencing and controlling other people, things, events and phenomena. *Juju* can be used either alone or in combination with others, in order to maximise their potency. With a good *juju* (take the case of drones), one does not need to be physically present to be efficacious with those one is seeking to influence for good or bad, in love or in hate. Nothing brings this home better than the capabilities of a well-resourced (with applications and contacts) smartphone – one of the most sensational kinds of *juju* in vogue – with access to wifi, a hotspot, or bluetooth, in the age of social media, supra connectivity and the growing imperative for conviviality.

#### 4. Parting Gift

Even in his retirement, as he is sure to remain active in the African Potentials network he has helped bring about worked tirelessly to consolidate, Itaru's *palaver* sauce disposition and *juju* capabilities provide a useful template forward for current and upcoming generations of Japanese and African social scientists and humanists keen on collaborative international research and scholarship. Itaru's persistence and insistence on interconnections and interdependence suggests a perception and an approach to life, sociality, encounters and relationships that is cognizant of the importance and centrality of charging, discharging and recharging. One can only stay permanently charged if one is in splendid isolation, disconnected, aloof and inactive. Even then, one's charge risks leaking or wasting away (draining itself out unproductively for lack of interactivity) and with that, one's life eventually also drains away with little to bequeath to society and to the world, which have given so generously to one.

To be social and in relationship and interaction with others requires and simultaneously makes possible actively charging, discharging and recharging oneself as well as the others involved. Discharging within relationships is not a wasteful exercise as it entails charging others (energy expended is not necessarily energy depleted), just as recharging entails drawing from the charge of (or being energised by) others. Symbiotic relationships and sociality are full of charge, discharge and recharge. As long as one loses one's charge to others in a social relationship, that cannot be considered as sterile leakage or wastefulness, as long as recharge or reactivation is possible.

The goal of being alive everywhere at the same time requires being human and being convivial as suggested by Itaru Ohta through his person, his sociality, and the African Potentials network. It requires cultivating and nourishing an active and constantly reactivated disposition to be everywhere, everyone and everything at the same time – an open-ended composite – just like *palaver* sauce, and just like someone with a rich repertoire of *juju*. This resonates immensely, with the disposition among Africans big and small, to accommodate myriad influences in their mobility, dynamism and histories of encounters with familiar and distant others. Such open-endedness makes it possible for the formal and informal to find each other in the interest of incompleteness and conviviality as encapsulated in the concept of African Potentials.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Achebe, C. (1974[1964]) *Arrow of God*, Oxford: Heinemann (African Writers Series), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes spelt *palava*.

<sup>3</sup> See Freda Muyambo, 'Palaver Sauce Recipe', [www.thespruceeats.com/palaver-sauce-recipe-39553](http://www.thespruceeats.com/palaver-sauce-recipe-39553). Ingredients include: '1 1/3 pounds of rump steak cut into 1-inch cubes; 2 to 3 tablespoons of palm oil; 1 onion; 3 cloves of garlic; 1 generous inch of fresh ginger, finely diced; 4 to 5 ripe tomatoes, crushed or chopped; 1 scotch bonnet pepper; 1/2 cup of ground bitter melon seeds; Optional: 1/2 cup of dried salted anchovies or crayfish; 1 pound chopped frozen spinach or canned callaloo;

Salt and pepper to taste.’ Steps to make it consists of: ‘Finely chop the onions, crush the garlic and grate the fresh ginger. Place your pot on the stovetop, add 1 to 2 tablespoons of palm oil into the pan and fry the onion, ginger, and garlic. When the onions begin to brown, add the diced steak and allow to brown for only a couple of minutes. Add the chopped tomatoes and scotch bonnet pepper. Scotch bonnet peppers can add quite a lot of spicy heat so if you wish to tone it down, add the pepper into the stew whole. Mix half a cup of the agushie powder with water, enough to form a paste. Set aside for a few minutes. After the tomatoes begin to break down, 5 to 7 minutes, pour in the agushie paste without stirring. Cover the stew and simmer on a low to medium heat for about 20 minutes. For those who are adventurous and wish to use dried anchovies, soak them in warm water for about 10 minutes. Agitate the water, pour out and rinse the fish. After 20 minutes, uncover the pot. You will notice that the agushie has cooked and created a solid cake similar to bean curd or tofu. You may now break this apart and stir into the stew. Add the fish, followed by the spinach and allow to simmer for 10 minutes. Check seasoning prior to serving. This dish can be enjoyed with rice or a more traditional side of boiled yams. If using crayfish, these are not usually as salty and can be added straight into the stew. If you cannot get a hold of the dried fish or crayfish, but would still like to replicate the flavor of palaver sauce, this can be achieved by adding some canned anchovies.’ Accessed 27 December 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Reacting to this paragraph, Louise Akanlu conjectures as follows: ‘If lore about how it acquired the name *palaver* is anything to be considered, it may have been the sauce that the people of Edina (present day Elmina) shared with their Portuguese guest which inspired them to call it *palaver* sauce. Thus, even in its humble state, the sauce held the potential of “opening up the hearts and doors” of the Edina people to strangers/outside (the Portuguese), and engaging them in conversations that helped to forge new bonds and build new communities.’

<sup>5</sup> See Itaru Ohta, (2017), ‘The Power to Speak, Listen, and Negotiate in the Local Meetings of Africa: The Palaver of the Bakongo, Clan Gathering of the Borana, and Bridewealth Negotiation of the Turkana’, in Yntiso Gebre, Itaru Ohta and Motoji Matsuda (eds), *African Virtues in the Pursuit of Conviviality: Exploring Local Solutions in Light of Global Prescriptions*, Bamenda: Langaa, pp. 249–74.

<sup>6</sup> Relevant to this discussion of creativity, adaptability and networking is Edmond Akwasi Agyeman's paper, 'African migrants in Japan: Social capital and economic integration', *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 2015, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 463–86.

<sup>7</sup> Achebe, C. (1974[1964]) *Arrow of God*, Oxford: Heinemann (African Writers Series), p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> I cherish my Japanese editions of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, a special gift from Itaru Ohta, and I look forward to reading them the day I acquire the *juju* to activate my competency in Japanese.

<sup>9</sup> Tutuola, A. (1981) *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town*, London: Faber and Faber, pp.23–4.