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## SPICES - for Pandi (Mutuma)

Ama Ata Aidoo

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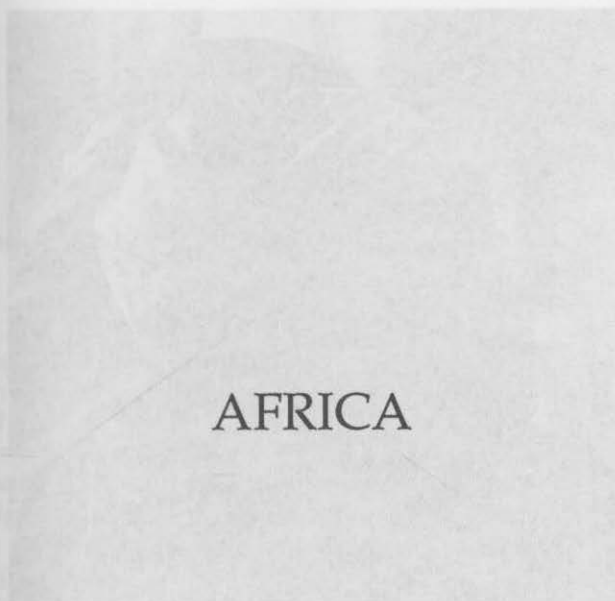
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## SPICES - for Pandi (Mutuma)

### **Abstract**

Actually, I could handle the matter of peppercorns really well since I can still see Mother leaving them to ripen on the odupon.



## AFRICA

Ama Ata Aidoo was born in Ghana and is a pioneer in depicting the role of African women. Until she was still an undergraduate at the University of Ghana in Lagos she was awarded a prize in a competition sponsored by the Medical Club in London. She has travelled widely in Africa, Europe and the USA and spent time in a number of medical centres. She was also Minister for Education in the Ghanaian government in the 1980s. Her writing includes two plays, *Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Home* (the latter had a very successful season in London in 1991), two volumes of poetry, *Sometimes Talking is Sweeter* and *An Agyei Letter* in January (published by Dangaroo Press in 1992), a collection of short stories, *No Sorrow Here*, and two novels, *Our Sister Joy* and *Changes* (1991). The latter won first prize for the best African region in the 1993 Commonwealth Writers Prize. Her writing is sometimes experimental and combines both African and Western traditions.

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Ama Ata Aidoo was born in Ghana and is a pioneer in depicting the role of African women. Whilst she was still an undergraduate at the University of Ghana in Lagos she was awarded a prize in a competition sponsored by the Mbari Club in Ibadan. She has travelled widely in Africa, Europe and the USA, and apart from a distinguished academic career she was also Minister for Education in the Ghanaian government in the 1980s. Her writing includes two plays, *Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa* (the latter had a very successful season in London in 1991), two volumes of poetry, *Someone Talking is Sometime* and *An Angry Letter in January* (published by Dangaroo Press in 1992), a collection of short stories, *No Sweetness Here*, and two novels, *Our Sister Kiljoy* and *Changes* (1991). The latter won first prize for the African region in the 1992 Commonwealth Writers Prize. Her writing is sometimes experimental, and combines both African and Western traditions.

# Ama Ata Aidoo

## SPICES

- for Pandi (Mutuma)

Actually,  
I could handle the matter of  
peppercorns  
really well since  
I can still see Mother  
leaving them to ripen  
on the *odupon*.

A proper parasite if ever there was one  
who vinily and shamelessly  
sprouted by giant roots  
secured itself to massive ancestral trunks and  
wove thin firm tendrils  
singing a long and difficult solo  
through the dappled undergrowths  
then

lay queenly and luxuriantly on the branches and  
on each wider, greener, thicker leaf,  
until up and up and up  
it reached its highest crescendo and kissed  
the glorious sun  
gloriously.

## II

My Sister,  
we shall not even discuss  
ginger,  
wild mint or  
its more delicate kin  
which acquired  
the anti-chicken name *akoko-besa*  
meaning *fowls-end*;  
when grown in

old chamber- and water-poets, and  
other closed-in spaces  
behind the bedroom wall.

Can you believe that?

### III

On the other hand,  
The Pepper-master's and  
The Pepper-mistress's  
pepper  
is another story.

There was a time when it was known only to  
priests, priestesses, prophets and  
sundry holy ones  
who ate the sacred stuff to sharpen  
their tongues

### IV

When you first dropped your  
artful reproof,  
startling me with  
its delicious wit and sweet censure,

I first and  
guiltily  
saw clear evidence of  
my westernization,  
or rather  
the ease with which  
the food-lover in me had taken to  
'foreign cuts' of meat:  
the steaks, the chops and

the briskets  
duly cased in  
condiments of exotic names and flavours;  
- never mind their origins -

cardamom  
organum

rosemary and thyme . . .

But then, because  
we try never to quite give in without a fight  
I quickly recall that from  
sweeping airports,  
driving taxis and  
cleaning rich old folks' bodies,

Cousin Kwaku, Bro Kofi, Sissie Yaa  
and the rest of the extended family  
go home to

New York's Flat and London's Shepherd Bushes  
Amsterdam and Hamburg to  
eat  
more authentically and richly  
than the kings and queens  
we left at home.

So whose bourgeois palate  
are we talking of  
taking care of?

Eh, My Sister,  
whose  
bourgeois palate?

their visions of the future and  
the immediate and urgent matter of  
their sexual prowess.

Which name do you know it by, My Sister?

Shito  
Piripiri  
Miripiri  
chili  
cayenne  
agoi  
???

We speak of  
the beginning and end of all heat . . .

Where I come from  
we called it wasabi  
its etymology  
completely lost in  
millennia into which  
barred wires  
ground and ground and ground  
the precious stuff . . .

If we insisted on counting  
we could end up with one hundred  
still not be done.

My Sister,  
when the pepper-person's pepper moved  
the shiner and the teacher,  
it stayed for a thousand more years  
in near-by habitats known only to locals  
Africa and Asia . . .

- another ancient and spicy secret  
valued in equal parts with gold dust  
then, but soon to be

just one more Third World exotic  
variously liked and apologized for.

These days,  
between the mildest and the most pungent  
green, red, yellow, blue, equal, full  
peppers  
grace supermarket stalls from  
Atlanta through London to

from which places  
we zero in  
on the issue of how  
we take care of our bourgeois palates.

Where I come from  
 we called it *muoko*  
 its etymology  
 completely lost in  
 millennias into which  
 harried wives  
 ground and ground and ground  
 the precious stuff . . .

If we insisted on counting,  
 we could end up with one hundred species, and  
 still not be done.

My Sister,  
 when The Pepper-person's pepper moved out of  
 the shrines and the temples,  
 it stayed for a thousand more years  
 in near-by habitations known only to locals in  
 Africa and Asia . . .

– another ancient and spicy secret,  
 valued in equal parts with gold dust  
 then, but soon to be

just one more Third World exotica  
 variously liked and apologised for.

These days,  
 between the mildest and the most abrasive,  
 green, red, yellow, thin, squat, full or hollow,  
 peppers  
 grace supermarket stalls from  
 Atlanta through London to Zurich . . .

from which places  
 we zero in  
 on the issue of how  
 we take care of our bourgeois palates.

duty raised in  
 treatments of exotic names and flavours:  
 – never mind their origins –

cardamom  
 organum