

Stories

of

Jah Lemon

part nine

In Orange Vanilla Sauce

Celebrating Citrus in East Africa

Natty Mark Samuels

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Dedication

to

Dan-I

co-founder of Field Frequency Sound and editor of The Dub

for his support of my herbal writings

and to

Jules Dalitz

long-time roots supporter and Patron Saint of The Dub

for her gift of books to the African School library

In Orange Vanilla Sauce

Although he doesn't eat flesh, Jah Lemon admits that a look at citrus culinary use in East Africa, will be very appealing to those that do.

Through his past research into the ancient kingdom of Axum in Ethiopia and the later, medieval city states of east Africa, he knows he's on a journey of culinary wonder. All along the coastline or just off it, from Somalia to Mozambique, the city states of East Africa were located. Such as Barawa and Mogadishu in Somalia; Lamu and Pate near Kenya; Zanzibar and Kilwa, off the coast of Tanzania; and Sofala, the gold emporium in Mozambique.

He has written before, about the east coastal cuisine, when writing of the Somali scholar Sheikh Abdul al-Amawi, in a piece called the '*Old Man of Barawa*.'

Old Man: And as I smell the frying of chapatis, it reminds me again, that with the traders and scholars of the Indian Ocean zone, came their food also – especially the spices! All along the East African littoral, you can indulge yourself in culinary wonders, but in Zanzibar, you reach culinary apogee!

2nd Voice: Shark with black pepper.

1st Voice: Pilau rice and cardamom.

Old Man: Meat stew of ginger and chilli

2nd Voice: Spice cake of cloves and nutmeg.

1st Voice: Cinnamon in Octopus curry.

Old Man: I remember that after each meal, during my Zanzibari sojourn, I'd wash it down with cane juice, embellished with lime and ginger, or coffee with cardamom seeds. May God continue to bless the Zanzibari, with their great cauldron of culinary alchemy.

It makes sense then, as he digs deeper into East African cuisine, to start in Zanzibar: with Fried Pomfret in Coconut Sauce. Why this one you may ask, amongst the array he could have chosen from. One, because it has a citrus contribution; the second reason is coconut! Ingenious, when you think that the boats were sewn together using coconut fibre. For the smell of coconut oil – the choice of carrier in his Jah Lemon products – and for the range of health benefits, that the coconut offers us. The first thing to do in this recipe is to "*Cut the fish in half and sprinkle with the lemon juice.*" Whatever comes after, there will be lemon juice first. And what an a range of items to come after; ginger, black pepper, green chilli, red onion, garlic and coriander. Jah Lemon gets the impression that for lovers of pomfret, you've got to try it in its Swahili version: Zanzibar style.

From the island to the mainland: to Tanzania and a relish...

Red onions, carrots,
Tomatoes and green chilli:
Cut them all very finely.
Cucumber, black pepper,
Juice from a lemon:
Time to make Kachumbali.

Another relish is offered - in the book by Josephine Bacon and Jenni Fleetwood – with coconut, but without the input from black pepper, red onions or green chilli. Jah Lemon wonders if the Tanzanian Independence hero, Julius Nyerere, would have had a preference for either one of them: the spicier, or the milder version.

Leaving Tanzania, Jah Lemon goes south-east to another island: to Madagascar. And since he's in the land of vanilla, it makes sense to have that distinct embellishment, alongside that of the citrus one. Now that a main course and a relish or two have been suggested, what will come next? In the further indulgence of his sweet tooth, he is attracted by a Banana and Melon in Orange Vanilla Sauce. Although he's not a fan of melon, Jah Lemon has to admit that it sounds good. He's curious about the taste of the chopped banana and melon, with the lemon juice addition: it might go down alright! Even if he doesn't eat it, he'd love to be in the kitchen at the making of it: to smell the simmering of orange peel and juice with vanilla . What a smell to take with him, as he begins the celebration of the trail-blazing Madagascan herbalist, Albert Ratsimamanga.

From the island back to the mainland, going north-west to that country whose capital is Addis Ababa, meaning New Flower. And in the city called New Flower, the old plant still carries importance: the one called lentil. In his brief time in Ethiopia, Jah Lemon remembers buying a lentil samosa from two children, selling these and other little goodies, from a spot around Lake Tana. Lentils, in the form of *Misr Wat*, one of the traditional accompaniments to injera, the national bread of Ethiopia. Next time he visits that monumental country, he's going to try a Green Lentil Salad. Its good to know that amongst all the other ingredients that normally accompany lentils, that there is the contribution from lemon juice also. Lemons, possibly grown in Melkassa or the Upper Awash Valley, with the support of Haramaya University.

South-west of Ethiopia, into Rwanda, to another encounter with banana. As far as desserts go, Jah Lemon thinks that Africa may have reached its culinary height, with this and the previous dessert. When it is one that includes banana, peanuts, cashew nuts, coconut, cinnamon, nutmeg, demerara and orange juice, it has got to be one of the most requested desserts, whenever and wherever it is on the menu: Spiced Nutty Bananas.

Going directly east of Rwanda, across Lake Nyanza, to a dish the Kenyans call Kuku. Reading a paragraph from the recipe page, Jah Lemon thinks that for the meat lover, this recipe must be a winner..."*In the same pan, fry the onions and garlic for 5 minutes, then add the chopped tomatoes and green chilli and cook for a further 1-3 minutes, stirring all the time. Add the mashed mung beans and lemon juice.*" Ginger, coconut milk, black pepper and coriander, also make their contribution to this dish." Kuku is the Swahili word for chicken.

Now south of Kenya, returning to Tanzania. With all the influence from the east, there must be a version of curry, especially when we remember that cloves and nutmeg first came from Indonesia; black pepper from India; cinnamon from what was known as Ceylon, now known as Sri Lanka: and the ancestral roots of the citrus fruits, are found in Asia also.

1st Voice:

Chop the onion

And crush the cloves.

2nd Voice

In the time for snapper,

Take peanut butter,

As well as green pepper;

For a Tanzanian Fish Curry,

With the addition of juice from a lemon.

1st Voice

Chop the coriander

As well as the tomatoes

2nd Voice

In the time for snapper,

Take fresh root ginger,

As well as curry powder,

For a Tanzanian Fish Curry,

With the addition of juice from a lemon.

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The Old Man of Barawa

Natty Mark Samuels

Muslim Heritage, Foundation for Science, Technology and Civilisation

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