

Kadidiatou Diallo

Interviewed by Aissatou Diallo, April 20, 2013, translated from Fulani

Kadidiatou Diallo was born and raised in Guinea, a country in West Africa. She moved to the United States in the 1990s.

AISSATOU DIALLO: Who taught you how to cook?

KADIDITOU DIALLO: [thinking] There was an older lady in my neighborhood, and she loved me so much because she always said I am a harder worker, all her children were married. I would go to her every morning before going to the market to ask the ingredients I should buy, and she will explain to me how to mix the ingredients. She was so patient.

AISSATOU DIALLO: But why didn't your mother teach you how to cook?

KADIDITOU DIALLO: My mother hated to cook, but I think it's because she was a horrible cook. She would make a gumbo sauce and there will be chunks of peanut butter inside the soup. What's funny everybody thinks it's pieces of meat, and they get so excited until you see the sour look on their faces, and they realize it's chunks of peanut butter. [Laughs]

AISSATOU DIALLO: How old were you when you learned to cook?

KADIDITOU DIALLO: I was young. I think I was 13.

AISSATOU DIALLO: Did you learn because you wanted to or were you required to?

KADIDITOU DIALLO: O I was required, It is not like now days when young kids do not care about such things [looks at the interviewer and shakes her head] and we parents can do nothing about it. I had to help my mother when she went to her store, and she does not come back until very late. So I had to cook for my father and siblings.

AISSATOU DIALLO: Did you have to buy ingredients each day?

KADIDITOU DIALLO: Yes. We didn't have a refrigerator, so we have to make sure to buy enough for just one day. And I make a lot because that is what we also have for dinner. To keep the food warm we put it under a lot of clothes in the draws because we didn't have microwaves.

AISSATOU DIALLO: How does cooking from your home country different from cooking in the United States?

KADIDITOU DIALLO: Oh it is way different from here. I used to wake up at six in the morning, and I will pray first, then I will go to the stream and get water, and then I will get the wood and start the fire. I will pick out the tomatoes, and peppers, and all the other vegetables I needed that we had in the garden and wash them up. By 8:30 a.m. I will be on my way to the market, and I start cooking by 10 o'clock. But here, I do not have to get water or wood. [Laughs]. And even though I cook every day I do it in the

evenings and most of the times the ingredients will already be in the refrigerator. The fact that I do not have to start a fire saves me a lot of time. Technology makes the biggest difference though.

AISSATOU DIALLO: How did your role as a mother and wife change from back in your home country to that from the states?

KADIDITOU DIALLO: In my country, I didn't have a job. I will wake up and go get water from the stream. My husband will leave the money for the market on the coffee table before he leaves for work. I wash the children outside and brush their teethes. My youngest was three and the oldest was nine at the time. I will feed them breakfast then we go to the market. I finish cooking by 12 p.m. and I clean up the house. Basically, the women just do chores, take care the kids, and we all sit down and tell stories when we finish with our chores. But in the states, I go to work and my older children takes care the little ones and do the chores [looks at the interviewer and roll her eyes]. But most time I still come back and clean up, take care the kids and cook because my older children are just plain lazy. [laughs]

AISSATOU DIALLO: How does African foods relate to Southern foods?

KADIDITOU DIALLO: Some ingredients are the same for the sauces but the way the ingredients are mixed are different.

AISSATOU DIALLO: Which do you like better, African foods or foods from the states?

KADIDITOU DIALLO: I like my country food, but I'm accustomed to the foods here so sometimes the food from my country does not taste the way it used to.

AISSATOU DIALLO: Do you think food defines us?

KADIDITOU DIALLO: The food we eat sets us apart and traces our history. It's not just the ingredients that we use but the way we mix those ingredients. Even though there are African American foods that resemble African foods, it is still not the same because the two cultures are not exactly the same.