

Fatou Jaiteh interviewed by Tigida Fadiga
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170 Third Ave Bronx, NY

Tigida Fadiga: My name is Tigida and I am interviewing today Fatou Jaiteh. Do you give me permission to record this oral history.

Fatou Jaiteh: Yes!

TF: Thank you! Our first question is where did you grow up

FJ: I was born and raised in America but my parent are from Gambia and when I was 15 years old I went to Gambia for about one and half years and then I came back.

TF: Describe your favorite meal growing up?

FJ: My favorite meal growing up was Sameh.

TF: Why was it significant to you?

FJ: It's significant to me because most of the time like it's not mainly cooked, it's mainly cooked like baby showers and weddings that's when we really eat it.

TF: So it's mostly eaten on special occasions?

FJ: Yes

TF: Oh okay

TF: So was there any meaning behind the food?

FJ: Not really but back in the days, they wouldn't really eat Sameh but, when it's eaten, everybody is really happy because it's once in the while when it's eaten because they couldn't really afford it.

TF: Okay

TF: Does certain food remind you of loved ones?

FJ: Yes! Huto and Yelingue remind me of my grandfather because he really likes it.

TF: What is Huto?

FJ: Huto is corn made dish that's made with spinach stew, meat, chicken, or fish and just put it over the cornmeal.

TF: Do you still eat that today?

FJ: Yes but like barely.

TF: Do you have any memory in regards to prepare a meal with an elder?

FJ: Yes! When I went to the Gambia in 2015 I used to prepare meals with my grandmother and my aunt. We will all sit a side of the porch and just cook together.

TF: Oh that must be a really good memory to remember especially now that you live in America. Thank you for sharing.

TF: Is there any food that you will not eat?

FJ: I eat like almost all of my traditional foods except Takhakaye Buti which is a peanut dish mixed with rice and pork because it's forbidden from my religion.

TF: Are there certain food that you will only eat on special occasions?

FJ: Yes during special occasions we eat Ebbeh, Onjho, Sameh, Huto, and Thiakry.

TF: That's my favorite Thiakry.

TF: So why is that occasion significant to you?

FJ: Those occasions are usually bridal showers, weddings, baby showers, and those occasions usually happen once a while it's not like frequently.

TF: So who in your life cooks the best meal?

FJ: I'll say my mom and my aunts, she cooks really good with some spice.

TF: And what about your mom?

FJ: My mom cooks mold food but also good, like last night she made some Sammeh.

TF: Describe why is it the best food?

FJ: It is the best food because it's a rice dish but it's also mixed with tomato, tomato paste, little of onions, black pepper, and you can choose whatever type of meat you want to put whether it's fish or chicken. But, I like mine with fish because inside of the fish they put solancho with spices inside of it.

TF: That sounds so yummy.

TF: So what does eating well mean to you?

FJ: Eating well means when you're gathered with your family and everybody enjoys the food and everybody gets full and have a great time.

TF: Do you have a favorite place to eat besides your house the meals that have been cooked by your mother.

FJ: When I was in Gambia, my favorite place to eat was outside the porch but, in America, my favorite place to eat is in a restaurant call KeurCoumba she cooks just like my mother.

TF: So when you go over there does the place remind you that you're still eating at home.

FJ: Yes because the music that we traditionally listen to, the background dislike them of the restaurant it brings home to me.

TF: When you go over there what kind of food do you order?

FJ: When I go over there I usually order Sammeh.

TF: So does that mean that every-day you eat Sammeh or what?

FJ: Sometimes I order meat with achieke.

TF: Is achieke like food from your country?

FJ: Achieke is not really from my country, it's from the Ivory Coast but my parent were born in the Ivory Coast, and that's where they grew up for some of their lifetime. That's a famous dish for them.

TF: So how does the food you eat or cook makes you who you are?

FJ: The food I eat and cook makes me who I am because in America we usually eat pasta or something else. But, I never saw those kinds of stew. Those food shape me as I grow up since childhood that's what I have been eating.

TF: Is there a food that reminds you of home and why?

FJ: Home like America or Gambia?

TF: Whichever you prefer.

FJ: I mean food that reminds me of home in Gambia is Huto because in Africa we eat that every night and also hundeh because we eat that every morning at 7 o'clocks.

TF: Do you observe certain rules or traditions in regard to food or drink?

FJ: Yes because when we are eating or drinking we have to remain seated and we shouldn't speak. Also when you're eating, you can't eat unless your elders say you can start eating.

TF: How does it feel every day being in that type of situation?

FJ: It feels fine it's like that she shows them respect. It's just showing respect.

TF: So it's just another way of showing respect to your elders?

FJ: Yes TF: So is there anything you eat because of your culture or tradition?

FJ: Yes the stew we eat are different we eat like spinach stew with palm oil and peanut soup and in America we don't really eat that or sometimes we will eat thiakry which is made out of sour cream and you know America we don't just eat plain sour cream we eat jorga but, it is different.

TF: The way they make it right?

FJ: Yes TF: If you could go anywhere in the world to try new food where would you go and why? FJ: I would go to Bangladesh.

TF: Interesting tell me about it.

FJ: I'll go there because I always heard about the food Biryani and it seems much similar to Sammeh. So I'll like to know what it tastes like.

TF: So you're really into Sammeh right.

FJ: Yes I am TF: What is a meal, snack can you eat all the time and never gets tired of it?

FJ: A snack I will eat all the time is Nehme, Samosa, and bobo juice.

TF: What is bobo juice?

FJ: Bobo juice is similar to thiakry but instead it's just sour cream with fruits.

TF: How does your environment or the community impact the way you eat, like the food you eat every day?

FJ: Excuse me

TF: How does where you live now impact the food that you eat?

FJ: My community impacts the food that I eat because some people in their neighborhood they can't get the type of food that I eat. It's hard to shop for it but since I am in wild neighborhoods that has lots of supermarkets and African markets they sell the Same stuff that we use in our dish.

TF: Have you ever experienced? This question you can answer it, but you don't prefer answering it we can move hunger on to the next question.

FJ: I haven't really experienced hunger, but it was once when I was in Africa they cooked tehakaye bute and I don't really like that and we were going to a wedding and we decided not to eat. When we get to the wedding, and when we got there it was really late and they were like there is no more food and we were starving and it was a bunch of us.

TF: How do you feel about fast food?

FJ: Fast food it depend on what type of fast food like Chinese fast food I don't eat certain fast food. I don't eat Chinese fast food, burgers. But, I do eat food from the halal cart and sometimes McDonald but that's like once in a while.

TF: What is your general point of view about fast food? Is it a good thing?

FJ: Sometimes it's good in money wise because some people can't afford certain things but sometimes I think that it's not good because they're selling unhealthy food to people that shouldn't be so. Sometimes they use the Same oil and it's really bad for your health.

TF: What do you think about health in terms of food?

FJ: In terms of food well in my tradition there is lots of food that we eat that aren't healthy but it's because of tradition and culture they will eat it. But, in America, there is also a lot of fast-food restaurants that sell very unhealthy food but because of financial issues we just buy it because that's what we can afford.

TF: It's like a lack of choice so you just buy whatever is there for you.

TF: Have you always had access to food in your life?

FJ: Yes I had always access to food unless in the month of Ramadan because it was my choice to fast and I was obligated to fast for a month. But, that's just to see how people who can't afford food and see what they go through. I still get to eat at the end of the day.

TF: Does the food you eat have a relationship with your culture?

FJ: The food that I eat most of them have a relationship with my culture and some of them are from different cultures.

TF: Can you give an example of the one that is related to your culture specifically?

FJ: Like I said huto, yelenge, and bougnetrie those are what's mainly eaten. It's not rice but it's like what older people like to eat.

TF: Does this new generation still continues to eat the Same traditional food or it has changed?

FJ: It has changed a lot because those food requires a lot of work and nowadays the younger generation they have become so lazy to do that. They don't want to waste so much time doing it. It's hard to learn so they just usually make unhealthy food. Like those kinds of food from back in the day were more healthy but now they just like to cook with lots of oil.

TF: How your income affect your food choice?

FJ: If I didn't have enough money during the day I'll just get what I can afford which is go get soda which is \$1 and not good for my health, Mcdonald, Wendys those are not healthy food but, if I had a lot of money I'll go-to healthy restaurants that will be better for my health.

TF: Last but not least is there anything that I didn't ask that I should ask you?

FJ: Not really but I was also thinking about you didn't really ask about beverages from my culture.

TF: Yes please go ahead.

FJ: So famous beverages are ginger, onjo is a made out of fruit, and ginger is made out of ginger with pineapple juice, water, and sugar. It's all-natural.

TF: Those beverages do you still make them here in America?

FJ: Yes it's made often in America more than the foods.

TF: Alright

TF: Well thank you for your time I really appreciate it

FJ: No problem thank you and have a good day.