

The Telegraph

Dominique Strauss-Kahn accuser builds restaurant and new life in New York

As the pimping trial of former French presidential favourite ends in Lille, the Guinean hotel maid whose sexual assault claims started his downfall has quietly set up an African restaurant in the Bronx

By [Philip Sherwell](#), New York 8:02AM GMT 20 Feb 2015



The "Chez Amina" restaurant in New York's Bronx. Nafissatou Diallo recently opened the restaurant, two years after she settled her civil case against French economist, lawyer and politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn for an undisclosed amount.

She was the African immigrant chambermaid whose brief encounter with Dominique Strauss-Kahn in a Manhattan hotel suite precipitated his spectacular fall from grace.

For the 65-year-old once expected to become the next president of France, the ignominy culminated with the [prostitution pimping trial that ends in Lille today](#) after three weeks of revelations about his tawdry sexual proclivities.

But four years after her [accusations of attempted rape by the former French high-flyer](#) thrust her into an unwelcome media maelstrom, Nafissatou Diallo, 36, has quietly rebuilt her life in New York by opening a restaurant in the heart of the Bronx.

While Mr Strauss-Kahn's [penchant for "rough sex"](#) was dissected in a the French courtroom, Ms Diallo was overseeing the preparation of West African specialties such as tiepu yap (a traditional lamb and rice dish) at Chez Amina, her new business.

She bought and refurbished the restaurant with money from the undisclosed settlement in a civil case against Mr Strauss-Kahn for assault and battery. Ms Diallo also resolved a separate case against the New York Post, which reported that she was part of a prostitution ring – claims that she vigorously denied. Her restaurant, a modest, clean 60-seat establishment with flat-screen televisions along the walls, is located in a red brick building on a busy Bronx street, beneath the "God is Great" signs of the Masjid Sidiki mosque and next door to a money transfer outlet.

A serene figure with a ready smile, she politely greeted a visitor from The Telegraph – "hello, how are you?" - but resolutely declined to talk about her new life or the events playing out in the Lille courtroom.

"Sorry, no, no," she said, before heading through the swing doors into the kitchen where a cook was stirring large pans of jollof rice and the popular cassava dish of fufu.

Ms Diallo has maintained her silence and low-profile, turning down several book offers, since her lawyers reached the civil settlement with Mr Strauss-Kahn, who resigned as chief of the International Monetary Fund a week after the sordid sex scandal erupted.

Part of the deal was a confidentiality agreement for both parties, but French media have reported that Ms Diallo received up to \$1.5 million.

By the standards of her roots, a divorced Muslim single mother of a teenage daughter from the impoverished West African nation of Guinea, opening a



restaurant in New York with that sort of money might seem like the epitome of the American immigrant dream.

Douglas Wigdor, her lawyer, insisted that her new existence had come at a price.

“If she had to do it all over again, I know she would have chosen to remain working as a maid at the hotel,” he told The Telegraph.

“She arrived here from a country where she had no value or standing and she was very happy in a job that allowed her to live her life and provide for her daughter.”

The lives of Mr Strauss-Kahn and Ms Diallo both changed irrevocably after she entered the presidential suite at the Sofitel near Times Square on a Saturday morning in May, 2011.

She believed the room was empty, she told investigators, but said that she was confronted unexpectedly by the portly Frenchman wearing only a towel and that he then forced her into a sexual act.



His arrest that afternoon could not have been more dramatic. He was led out of the first class cabin of an Air France jet by detectives, just minutes before the plane was due to depart for Paris.

The former French finance minister and respected economist,

who was favourite to secure the Socialist party nomination for the 2012 presidential election, suffered the humiliation of being detained at the notorious Rikers Island prison, with his police mug-shot published around the world.

Mr Strauss-Kahn denied her claims, insisting their encounter was consensual. He was indicted by a grand jury but prosecutors soon dropped the charges because of their doubts about Ms Diallo’s credibility as a witness – to the fury of her legal team.

At the time, there was widespread speculation in France that Mr Strauss-Kahn was the victim of a political conspiracy as he was the frontrunner to replace Nicolas Sarkozy, the conservative president. A

married man at the time, his womanising was an open secret but by the moral codes of French public life it was not considered an obstacle to the highest office in the land.

The subsequent revelations about his sexual habits and allegations about his participation in orgies with women who have been identified as prostitutes finally left his career in ruins. Mr Wigdor insisted that his behaviour has vindicated his client, but the Frenchman's one-time accuser has kept her counsel.

At Chez Amina this week, few diners were aware that the restaurant's owner had been at the centre of an international controversy. For the clientele, largely drawn from the local West African community in the Croton Park district of the Bronx, the lure was the food and the affable owner.

"This place is great," said Moussa Camara, 38, a taxi driver, from the Guinean capital of Conakry, eating the baked fowl and cassava. "The food is just like we'd eat back home and Nafissatou always makes us very comfortable. The case with the Frenchman? I remember the story but I had no idea she was involved."

Chez Amina boasts that it serves "the best African food in New York". This week, Ms Diallo was letting that food do the talking.