

Soraida Abed Hussein Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 20:07] [Session one: 20 December 2012]

[00:00] Soraida Abed Hussein [SH], born Bogotá, Colombia, 1962, one of ten children to Palestinian immigrants. Describes father as revolutionary man, committed to Palestinian cause. Explains history of region and British mandate. Describes background of parents' marriage. Father's encouragement of daughters to stand up for themselves as girls, SH's belief in self, instilled by father.

[05:55] Reflection on governmental school system, 1970s' Bogotá, freedom and development of critical thinking. Move to Maicao, Colombia. Describes conservatism of village, girls in family sent to convent school, social restrictions as young Arab girl, positive connotations of Arab culture at school.

[10:00] Describes father educating children about Palestine, level of politicization at home, and emphasis on importance of studying. Describes parents as not religious, growing up observing Christmas and Ramadan, with freedom to participate or not. Description of family home, and role play with siblings.

[15:18] Describes annual visit from Feddayin from Lebanon, welcomed in home. Mentions film about Algerian fighter, Jamila Jazayeria. Describes personality among siblings, SH seen as 'special', hardworking, understated. Story about sister's illness and family move to retreat.

Track 2 [duration: 41:39] [Session one: 20 December 2012]

[00:00] Describes parents' attention to care when children not well. Story about mother teaching SH verses from the Koran while treating an infection. Describes role of domestic helpers and relationship to family, impression on SH, story about encouragement to write.

[05:05] Describes few family members in Colombia, all in Palestine, meeting grandmothers age 15. Describes father's death and circumstances leaving for Palestine, 1978. Moving description of journey to Palestine and being greeted by village.

[11:00] Describes emotions on journey and arrival. Describes first impressions of Palestine.

[15:00] Discusses positions of responsibility at school and lack of questioning norms, impact on SH's life. Discusses religion. Describes shared value system recognisable in siblings, justice, generosity, respect for children.

[21:22] Describes relationship with siblings. Story about uncles suggesting girls in the family marry their cousins, mother standing firm against.

[25:25] Describes paternal grandmother as strong, outspoken, contrary to maternal grandmother. Discusses clarity regarding identity.

[30:00] Story of mother's ten-year fight to get legal papers for children to stay in Palestine. Mentions Jewish communist lawyer, Felicia Langer. Describes experience of the first intifada. Reference to father using analogies to educate SH and siblings on Palestinian question. Links intifada to sense of belonging. Describes detail of court cases to gain legal recognition, reaching Higher Court of Israel, mother's deportation to Jordan and return via Red Cross. Mentions imprisonment of brothers.

[36:07] Describes emotional journey, reference to raid of family home by armed soldiers, growing determination, joining popular committees. Describes success of popular education initiative started by SH with brother. Discusses community action, observation that struggle predominantly about humanity. Describes influence of writings of Fanon, Paolo Friere and effort to not internalise violence.

[40:26] Describes earlier influences.

Track 3 [duration: 41:29] [Session one: 20 December 2012]

[00:00] Story about different reading of history encouraged by teacher in Colombia. Discusses 'colonization' process all party to. Mentions Facebook.

[05:18] Describes learning as a student of Islam. Mentions Omar Khattab. Story about questioning religious teaching in class. Observation on 'closed' nature of education in Palestine. Discusses awareness of being a girl as different in family home, remarks on matriarchal household, respect according to age and SH's brothers being younger.

[10:06] Describes expectations of others on arrival in Palestine, different dress code, society's protection of women as weaker sex. Describes exception during intifada. Describes responsibility towards family after father's death, working several jobs to contribute to income. Describes first encounter with women's committee through translation work and impressions, working in a team with American and Palestinian American, growing recognition of importance of women's issues.

[16:45] Mentions working in public relations department of Birzeit University (BZU), Palestine. Describes first awareness of domestic violence and disbelief, subsequent incredulity at concept of hotline. Invitation to join women in establishing women's centre. Mentions work in Human Rights Programme of BZU, allocating lawyers for students imprisoned by Israeli Military Authority.

[20:40] Story of first case of woman coming to centre with son. Remarks on feelings at time and sense of natural resourcefulness.

[25:47] Story of pregnancy of special needs girl and SH's identification with case. Observation that Palestinian society, without resources, laws, culture, 'protecting ourselves from ourselves'.

[30:15] Comments on the Gulf War and United States of America's support of Israel, changes witnessed on street and intensification of attacks. Story about working with

Spanish journalist in the region, analysis of Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) position in Lebanon. Mentions closing of BZU by military order.

[35:00] Story of meeting husband, political analyst. Mentions Marcel Khalife's music.

Track 4 [28:40] [Session one: 20 December 2012]

[00:00] Describes approach to marriage and dowry. Story of wedding, witnesses for ceremony from among demonstrators. Describes mother's character and influence, emphasis on educating girls over boys.

[08:50] Describes work of women's centre. Story about working in factory and introduction to influential books. Mentions Ghassan Kanafani, Sahar Khalifeh, Nawal El Saadawi and earlier exposure to writings becoming relevant. Describes studying Law and Development at Warwick University, United Kingdom on scholarship from The British Council, paper on Palestinian Women in Legal Reforms.

[14:08] Explains effect of Oslo I Accord on women's movement, effort to present laws to new legal system towards Palestinian state. Describes Legal Literacy Programme led by SH. Mention women's movements in India, Africa, The United States of America. Relays atmosphere during transitional period as 'golden age' full of enthusiasm and hard work.

[18:52] Discusses impact of religious political groups on Personal Status Law, Family Law. Reflects on time when possible to declare group as secular women, and voices heard. Refers to invasion of cities by Israeli Military Forces in 2000, building from zero in context where women's movement now weaker. Describes previous image of 'We Can', with internal structure in society, police force, Palestinian schools for first time.

[23:25] Discusses impact of 2003 invasion, disintegration of father to son protection and familial authority. Difficulty of demanding rights in this context, loss of united voice as women. Describes today as period of 'recollecting ourselves', impact of Hamas, SH opposed to. Discusses impact of boycott of Hamas by Canada, The United States of America, European governments, loss of meaning of democracy, ensuing radicalization of Hamas. Mentions violence in Gaza. Remarks on women's movement losing priority.

Track 5 [duration: 24:13] [Session one: 20 December 2012]

[00:00] Discusses denial of space for development of internal dialogue, focus dominated by immediate issues from Israeli attacks. Describes learning from other women's movements that women's issues integral not separate to society. Describes recent development, finding new ways of coordinating, following division between Palestinians since 2005. Mentions Arab governments, Iranian, Turkish, Syrian forces and Lebanon with Hezbollah. Describes organisations now partnering,

[04:58] new dialogue and exchange in women's movement revealing lack of clear vision. Remarks that feminism and nationalism are 'married' for Palestinian women, contrasting with American and European writers' assertion that incompatible.

[07:19] Describes love of education and reputation as effective trainer, simplicity of approach, importance of engaging with heart before discussing conventions. Mentions The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Describes first encounter with Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) when delivering training for Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), WLP manual 'Leading To Choices', developing evaluation tools. Mentions Rose Shomali.

[10:40] Describes aspects of learning tools relevant to community, opening spaces in society. Discusses similarities between women of different cultures, differentiated only by laws that do or don't protect them. Story about Sri Lankan domestic worker.

[16:30] Expresses disdain for intellectual theorists writing about a 'Third World'. Observes shared values beyond culture, religion, identity. Discusses community response to work for women, media reaction.

[22:00] Describes learning to document success, impact of work on individual women, setback of negative impact from media, religion, politics.