

Abena Busia Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 1:35:50] [session one: 18 March 2016]

[00:00] Abena Busia [AB] Born in Ghana. Describes spending most of childhood in exile, living in The Netherlands, Mexico. Move to Standlake, Windrush Valley, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom (UK) aged nine. Attendance of Standlake Church of England Primary School. Mentions Headmaster, Gordon Snelling for teaching that 'everybody could be a poet'. Describes love of poetry, music, words in household. Mentions Witney Grammar School (now The Henry Box School), Headington School. Father, Kofi Abrefa Busia, Leader of the Opposition to Kwame Nkrumah during Ghana's Independence. Mentions father university professor on sabbatical, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. Anecdote about father as 'praying person'. Describes father as staunch Methodist with purely Methodist education from primary school in Wenchi, Ghana, to Oxford University, UK.

[05:08] Story about fleeing Ghana by ship aged six with mother and three siblings, borders closed in search of AB's father. Remarks on mother's bravery. Mentions Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, Freetown, Sierra Leone, Clarks shoes, British Press, Elder Dempster Line.

[11:14] Reflects on excitement of journey as a child. Mentions Rowntree's Fruit Gums, learning to dance the Twist, films 'Dr. No', 'She didn't say No!', 'The Blue Angel', 'The Ten Commandments', Elder Dempster Line SS Accra 3, SS Apam.

[15:00] Recollections from early years in Ghana, growing up on University of Ghana campus. Mentions Fuchsia, Gladioli. Story about recurring memory of friend Susan Niculesku, Akwaaba doll. Describes having two exiles, first returning in 1966 after living in The Netherlands and Mexico. Mentions The International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Hague, friends from The Philippines, AB's father fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford University, UK.

[20:15] Describes father's return to Ghana as hero, gaining biggest electoral victory in history of country, becoming Prime Minister 1969-1972. Story leading up to house arrest of AB and mother following coup d'état. Mentions Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting, Edward Heath, Oxbridge, Colonel Acheampong, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, Scrabble, Jimi Hendrix's 'Electric Ladyland'.

[30:43] Describes circumstances of release, and journey to Paris France. Mentions Claude Ennin, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, British Caledonian, Union de Transports Aériens (UTA). Story about father's illness, grandparents. Mentions packet boat, Freetown, Sierra Leone, Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting, Harley Street, London, UK.

[37:04] Describes father's vision at time of Ghana's Independence. Mentions Kwame Nkrumah. Describes family meals growing up. Describes household responsibilities, learning to cook, sew. Remarks that both parents enlightened. Story about cooking

family Christmas dinner aged 14. Mentions Harrods. Describes brothers' responsibilities, gender separation of roles.

[42:50] Describes first impressions of England. Mentions Woolworths, Southampton. Describes Standlake Church of England Primary School. Mentions Gordon Snelling, Demonstration School, Ghana, British International School, The Hague, The Netherlands, American International School, The Hague, The Netherlands. Anecdote about never learning The Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag. Mentions British National Anthem.

[47:06] Describes home-schooling with father's supervision while in Mexico. Father founding director of Center For African Studies at El Colegio de México, Mexico City. Describes father introducing AB and siblings to poetry anthologies, children reciting poems learned. Declares love of poems learned, reciting from 'Clifton Chapel' by Henry Newbolt, 'Everyday Things' by Jean Ayer, 'The Rolling English Road' by G.K Chesterton. Describes Standlake, UK, ease of integration as only foreigners in English country village. Mentions Henry VIII, Anne of Cleves, City of Cleves, Tudor Rose. Expresses admiration for headmaster Gordon Snelling. Story about teaching method and lasting impression on AB. Mentions Cotswold Stone, Robinia pseudoacacia, John Keats' 'Ode to Autumn'. Describes realization 'that great poetry comes out of a connectedness to the world in which you're living' attributing to headmaster.

[56:05] Describes favourite subjects, secret ambition to be bridge builder. Mentions Industrial Revolution, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Clifton Suspension Bridge, Bristol, UK, Newark Liberty International Airport, USA, LaGuardia Airport, USA, John F. Kennedy International Airport, USA, New Jersey, USA, Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, St. Anne's College, Oxford University, England. Study of English Literature at St. Anne's, Oxford University, then DPhil in Anthropology and Geography. Discusses Structuralism and Semiotics changing approach to English Literature. Describes acceptance of visiting lectureship at Yale University, United States of America (USA), leading to offer to teach Black Literature at Livingston Campus, Rutgers University, USA, remaining in country since. Remarks that intellectual transformation to becoming a feminist occurred at Rutgers, mentioning that current Chair of Women and Gender Studies.

[1:01:30] Reflects on time at Oxford University, father's death. Story about last gift from father. Describes small African community at Oxford University, joining Africa Society. Mentions Olara Otunnu, International Peace Academy, Yoweri Museveni, Muriel Odunton, Hugh Quarshie, William Shakespeare's 'Othello'. Describes life-long friendship between fathers, Hugh Quarshie's father becoming Minister of Trade Industries and Tourism under Kofi Abrefa Busia. Describes lack of political engagement during university, family's preoccupation with events in Ghana. Mentions Oxford Society, Oxford Union. Describes invitation to Cambridge, Massachusetts, leading to International Fellowship at Brandeis University, USA, study of American and African-American Literature. Mentions Kitsie Ewer.

[1:09:12] Discusses favourite books growing up, AB class librarian at school in The Netherlands, reading all Jane Austen novels except 'Emma' by age 15. Describes essay written for Oxford University entrance. Mentions Headington School, Georgette

Heyer, Bath, UK, 'A Portrait of World Literature', The Bible. Describes love of Methodist hymns, King James Bible, Dylan Thomas, T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', reading love stories. Story about reading 'The Green Bronze Door' by 13-year old Lynne Ellison. Mentions Enid Blyton, Georgette Heyer, Jane Austin, 'Little Women' by Louisa May Alcott, reciting 'chunks and chunks of 'Hiawatha' by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Mentions discovering African writers later.

[1:14:00] Describes own feminism ignited by 'growing up and looking at the world.' Advocates single sex education for girls, regretting male intake at St. Anne's College, Oxford University, UK. Remarks on own environment at Headington School Oxford as empowering. Discusses racism in USA comparing to England. Describes joining civil rights movement against enforced racial segregation in public transport system while at Brandeis University, USA. Describes impact of African-American Literature classes. Discusses personal consciousness of race pre-dating question of being female until 'realised space and tools to interrogate assumption', now central to all AB does. Discusses race and class in daily life England as compared to USA.

[1:21:20] Acknowledges involvement in African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) since foundation, as life-changing. Describes admiration for Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi. Mentions Charlotte Bunch, AB on board of Center for Women's Global Leadership. Story behind Charlotte Bunch's involvement with Rutgers University, USA as Laurie New Jersey Chair at time when no Women's Studies department, leading to establishment of Center for Women's Global Leadership. Mentions Mary Hartman, Douglass Residential College, Institute for Women's Leadership, Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University, USA. Describes Young Women's Leadership Institute for 'creative middle ranking' run by Charlotte Bunch every summer, AB's role selecting African participants.

[1:25:34] Anecdote about meeting Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi. Mentions United Nations World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, Austria, 1993, Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMWA), New Brunswick, USA. Describes invitation to join AWDF board, collectively choosing Ghana for headquarters. Mentions previous work with prison missionaries, Riverside Church, New Jersey, USA, Uganda. Describes cocktail party raising \$13,000 in 90 minutes, quoting sums, organizations, countries involved today. Discusses key to success.

[1:30:22] Describes focus of organisation as linked to enabling autonomy. Mentions Joanna Foster, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), Hilda Tadia, Zimbabwe, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Describes areas of focus including Health and Reproductive Rights, Economic Empowerment, Political Participation and Peace. Addition of Arts, Sports and Culture on tenth anniversary as avenue for girls' leadership. Explains conditions of grant, including female board, expectation from grantees. Explains seven-year role as Programmes Committee Chair with example. Describes network of female grant officers, capacity building unit, Continent-wide advisory board.

Track 2 [duration: 35:25] [session one: 18 March 2016]

[00:00] Discusses work of Center for Women's Global Leadership, describing Women's Rights Are Human Rights campaign, The Vienna Tribunal resulting in United Nations (UN) resolutions on human rights. Describes background of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign. Mentions Charlotte Bunch, Laurie New Jersey Chair, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Human Rights Day, Turkish women's organizations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Describes Center's organisation of tribunals at United Nations World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, Austria, 1993, and World Conference against Racism (WCAR), Durban, South Africa, 2001. Comments on importance of international instruments to recognise distinctive gender issues. Discusses lack of focus and support for women in cases of male freedom fighters' arrests. Mentions Amnesty International, Nelson Mandela, Winnie Mandela. Remarks on Center's key contribution in changing international landscape.

[06:00] Describes attending Global Fund For Women's 25th Anniversary Gala, announcement of Charlotte Bunch Human Rights Defender Award. Mentions Hillary Clinton. Describes involvement with women's organisations radically transforming own teaching, informed by feminist pedagogy. Describes focus of forthcoming Comparative Feminisms course will be African and African-American, African and Afro-Caribbean feminisms, around women of Global South recognising distinct historical engagement, trajectory, history of power and displacement informing work.

[10:00] Mentions work and writings of Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi and importance of teaching in American classroom. Remarks on African women's engagement, that ideas of freedom, liberty, justice need not come from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Michel Foucault, interest in how foremothers survived, indigenous engagements, exploring how embedded in language and traditional practice, enabling achievements. Discusses sisterhood as blessing, own learning to think differently, difficulty of work. Remarks on superficial nature of lip service paid to openness and egalitarianism. Comments on distinct characteristic of AWDF as foundation that funds organisations, only one founded by African women, run by African women to fund African women's movement. Reflects on articles written becoming more like creative non-fiction, change of previously separated poetry and pedagogical practice now informed by AB's unified sensibilities.

[15:04] Describes writing poems in place of prefaces for Social Trends Institute essay collection, 'Frontiers of Globalization: Kinship and Family Structures in Africa', and 'African Women Writing Resistance'. Mentions being founding member of African Feminist Forum, 'Women Writing Africa'. Describes organising conference at Rutgers University, USA for collaboration of editors, final roundtable discussion of event becoming final chapter of book. Describes collaboration with University of California, Riverside, USA on retirement of P. Sterling Stuckey for Volume 91 (2006) - The Journal of African American History. Story behind internship programme at Rutgers University, USA, enabling undergraduates to work with women's rights organizations in Ghana. Mentions Joanna Regulska.

[20:00] Describes implementation of programme. Mentions AWDF, Buduburam Refugee Camp [for Liberians], Ghana, Peace Corps, Columbia University, USA. Describes background of involvement with African Feminist Forum and its focus on individual feminists, development of Charter of African Feminist Principles to maintain open feminist spaces, resist patriarchal structures within organisations.

[25:00] Describes background of work, 'Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women'. Mentions Routledge, Stanlie M. James. Describes diversity of content relating to women's reproduction rights, rape, gendered experience of widowhood. Mentions Loretta Ross, Dalkon Shield, Andrea Benton Rushing, Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

[30:50] Discusses being board member of Women's Learning Partnership (WLP). Describes impact of WLP's leadership training, AB using for, Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program, and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) transformative leadership initiative. Mentions Carnegie Corporation, Ousseina Alidou, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. Describes learning curve of helping to found AWDF USA and continue to raise funds from diaspora community.