

Asma Khader Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 05:21] [Session one: 17 December 2012]

[00:00] Asma Khader [AK] Born 1952, West Bank, Palestine, eldest child. Mention of father being obliged to leave work in Jaffa, Israel for Amman, Jordan because of war. Description of circumstances of parents' marriage and mother's pregnancy and return to West Bank for AK's birth, warm welcome in spite of AK being a girl as first child of the family, Christian family, poverty directing choice of family members to become priests and nuns, preference for modern schools in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Beit Jala where Church taking good care of children educationally. Description of father's open-minded, secular nature, interest in literature, work as English-Arabic interpreter, library part of simple home, importance of reading to family. Family discussions in AK's home dominated by news, radio, newspapers, mainly political, the Palestinian question, and regional events. Mention of popularity of Abdel Nasser's leadership of Egypt, unity between Syria and Egypt, Israeli occupation, Palestinian refugees in Jordan, daily demonstrations. Story of 1956 attack on Egypt, AK aged under four, vivid memory of running to shelter.

Track 2 [duration: 20:20] [Session one: 17 December 2012]

[00:00] Story of shelter from bombs and protective measures on windows, AK's early memory of mother's application of blue paint on windows and first involvement with war, discussions in family home and father's respect for diverse ideas and beliefs systems through mixed friends, Nationalists, Communists, Islamists, AK's exposure to different arguments on public issues through extremes of conservative, liberal, political and non-political family members.

[2:20] Description of AK's exposure family discussion on parents having three daughters and no son, father's side of family pushing for another child, father's content with situation and positive remarks. Story about clash with school teacher and father's support of AK, and ensuing sense of justice from early age while described as a trouble maker, father's guidance on how to negotiate, to be polite while carrying individual opinion.

[05:47] Description of shock of convent school in Nablus, West Bank, separation from parents, lack of individuality of experience, washing clothes aged nine, missing freedom enjoyed at home, learning to eat with a knife and fork and story of return home with AK's need for the utensils and uncle's angry response. Comment on damaging impact of divorce on children, AK's anger on reflecting on this difficult year at boarding school. Description of second life shock of celebration at mother's pregnancy AK age 11, hearing collective desire for a son.

[12:00] AK's impression that she did not count as a girl. Birth of boy to the family, father's inclusion of daughter's in choosing name. Description of tradition of naming of father and mother after first child, traditionally after male child, and immediate change upon birth of AK's brother, AK's shock and anger and resolve to behave as a boy on observing that boys allowed to play on the street, girls not, boys not helping in the house as girls do, AK wearing trousers and refusal to wear skirt, cutting hair short, refusal to help mother in the home. Father's recognition of AK's behaviour and his

amusing and effective response with discussion about Jordanian society, AK's description of ensuing sense of empowerment. Story about mother going to cinema, normally only for boys and men, neighborhood's angry reaction to father allowing this.

Track 3 [duration: 1:23:52] [Session one: 17 December 2012]

[00:00] Mentions 2012 slogan for 16 days of activism on Violence Against Women, 'Peace from Home to the World'. Discussion of significance of home environment observing growth of movement from the home in logical, calm way. Story about home theatre aged 12-14. Mentions 1967 Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, street demonstrations AK on shoulders, shouting, "feeling like a politician", first involvement in political public efforts, arrival of friends and relatives in Amman, Jordan, becoming refugees. Description of humanitarian aid efforts in community, school shelters, observation that when women pushed in conflict situations, take on responsibility and serious work, resulting in empowerment.

[05:25] Mentions establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), 1965, AK first heard about in 1968 through activities of Fedayeen and attack of military bases. AK's involvement with the Palestinian Women's Union in Jordan, and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinians in the Near East (UNRWA) training in First Aid and handicrafts to support PLO, young girls like AK called 'Zahrat', 'Rosebuds'. Mention of Black September, 1970. Discussion of personal conflict of taking sides as Jordanian-Palestinian, situation not understood by majority of the people.

[08:18] Description of AK's involvement in small clinic initiatives for one and a half years. Mention of Doctors Without Borders (MSF). Story about girl shot in the groin and AK's shock at cultural importance given to virginity over life. Another story about angry conservative response from relatives to AK's work at the clinic as a young girl staying out overnight, father's continued support of AK. Mention of father's work as interpreter for Jordanian Army. Story about mother journeying through shooting to reach clinic to check AK's welfare. Discussion of confrontation with tradition and parent's unwavering support.

[16:20] Explanation of clinic being set up by AK and small group of young women with furniture from their houses.

[17:28] AK's invitation to visit United Arab Emirates (UAE) with Jordanian Women's Union during Black September, while still at school. Story about clinic's closure during absence and AK's confrontation with authorities. Mention of Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS). Story about passing university entrance in spite of eight-month absence from school, AK's father's illness and lack of funds preventing going to university, AK working until supported by uncle to study Law. No Faculty of Law in Jordan, study in nearest place, Damascus, Syria, and objection from extended family. Translates card from father received in first year at university.

[27:05] Comment that women who make it in conservative communities must have support from male member of the family. Story of mother's death one month before becoming Minister, AK's surprise as had been seen as the opposition. Mention of first

official recognition when invited to become member of the Royal Committee to draft the National Charter.

[29:17] Description of meeting with Prime Minister to discuss issues and concerns of differing view and affirmation of AK with beliefs. Comment on mother's thinking as visionary. Move to Damascus and full engagement with university studies. Subsequent entry into university of two sisters and financial pressure on father, return to help family, eventual graduation in 1977 after father's death. Describes relationship with siblings. Mentions youngest sister's activism as student and government intelligence refusal of position in Ministry of Health, ongoing discrimination in airport restrictions in job with Dutch airline KLM due to link with AK and political record. Collective effort to support mother financially in raising two brothers. Describes youngest brother as feminist, working together at Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI). Four daughters and two sons in family.

[35:12] Describes childhood household. Mentions work as teacher on return from Damascus. Story about starting a clothes shop to create work for mother. Mentions small businesses for women unusual in Jordan in 1970s, now very common. Describes heated family discussion as not traders and AK's determination. Describes steps taken to achieve plan, euphoria at first cash in hand, father waking the household and acknowledgement of AK's initiative.

[44:58] Describes meeting husband, marriage and first daughter born same year. Recounts father's death six months later. Remarks that shop became resource for education of rest of family. Describes buying land in family partnership. Close of shop upon youngest brother's graduation.

[49:30] Story of parents, cousins. Describes father, well known writer in Zababdeh, Palestine and Jaffa, Israel. Mentions Salma Tuba. Description of villagers waiting to greet bus carrying family from city at Christmas and Easter. Mentions own Christian faith. Describes boxes of books signaling father on bus. Describes mother's beauty and education outstanding in village. Mentions girls carrying jars of water back from the well for bathing and washing of items. Describes father setting mother educational tasks between visits during courtship. Mentions use of spiritual healer and potent tea and spells. Mother's sense that the book was father's second wife.

[1:03:20] Describes uncle who became priest, conservative mentality, critical of AK. Uncle priest of Al Husun and Ajlun, Jordan, Jenin and Gaza, Palestine. Describes spending summers with grandparents staying with uncle. Describes grandparents as traditional, grandmother telling fairy stories into night, grandfather as tough and conservative. Observing uncle's role and behaviour in community as priest, doubts of young girl. Story about being beaten for playing with neighbouring Muslim children. Story about overwhelming guilt for happiness at grandfather's illness so could play freely. Hatred of discrimination since. Remarks on father's family of seven brothers and one sister, and mother's family of seven sisters and one brother.

[1:09:53] Story about grandfather emigrating to Argentina 1930s, leaving wife behind with two young sons for 15 years. Comments on grandfather's clothing on return, singing and dancing at port to welcome, grandmother's refusal for many months, to take him back.

[1:12:11] Describes influential books growing up. Mentions Agatha Christie, Goethe's 'The Sorrows of Young Werther', Emily Brontë's 'Wuthering Heights', Victor Hugo's 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame', Ihsan Abdul Ghuddus, Naguib Mahfouz, Vishnu Sharma's 'The Panchatantra'. Describes attack by conservatives on Lebanese writer Layla Baalbaki, author of 'Safinat Hanan ila-l-Qamar' for openly writing about love. Mentions Laila al-Atrash [LA], Layla Beguili, Rose Shomali. Story about journalist LA's defence of Layla Baalbaki's writing and subsequent attack on her in Jordan. Women in late 1960s. AK's father writing letter to editor to defend freedom of speech and women's rights, newspaper refusing to publish, but beginning of correspondence between two. AK's invitation to speak on television in Gulf States, on Violence Against Women, meeting LA.

[1:19:41] Remarks on convent school, sole gain of music. Recollection of piano being played all the time, singing. Comments on violence there. Acknowledges learning to clean and self-reliance. Comments on need for emotional and physical love at young age, advising against sending children to boarding school. Describes collective punishment at school, hatred for imposition of religious teachings. Attributes secular beliefs to reaction from school experience. Remarks that God AK knows is not same God they work for, nuns and sheikhs as tough agencies. Describes feeling of solidarity and empowerment when plotting against nuns at school.

Track 4 [duration: 20:52] [Session one: 17 December 2012]

[00:00] Describes taking on role of go-between as the only one among friends allowed to speak to young men openly. Ironically no relationships of own, risks taken by contemporaries on whom restrictions placed. Remarks that father's trust instilled self-respect. Story of role played between two lovers. Discuss male-female relationships and striking balance with possible misunderstandings, model tried to instill in community and difficulty of assumed relationships.

[07:32] Representing men as lawyer and non-acceptance by some. Discusses cultural assumption that woman needs protection, and wanting to prove that can protect herself, even within relationship with husband, all responsibilities and decisions taken equally. Remarks that hates all signs of weakness of a female, in any situation. Describes husband's sense of paying price in untraditional marriage, and AK's feelings of guilt at life style imposed on him. Describes husband as open-minded and supportive.

[11:29] Story of meeting husband and major reason for relationship being sense of certainty that with him could be activist and lawyer. Describes previous engagements and conservatism and attitudes becoming barrier. Freedom to make decisions, and be trusted paramount. Story about betrothed's upset at male hairdresser touching AK's hair. Reflects on experiences helping to understand women.

[18:25] Describes relationship with mother-in-law and her role in Palestinian film for Michel Khleifi 'Galilee Wedding'.

Track 5 [duration: 05:29] [Session one: 17 December 2012]

[00:00] Shows collection of objects with stories surrounded with in office. Typewriter given by Emily Bisharat, Jordan's first female lawyer and first to fight for women's legal rights. Paintings, including work by Mohammad Aljaloos, photographer Ibrahim Nasrallah. Photograph of friends and their story leading to double suicide. Photograph of uncle, PLO representative in Belgium, killed aged 40. United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Award for Poverty Eradication.

Track 6 [duration: 49:46] [Session two: 18 December 2012]

[00:00] Reflects on difficult period of 1970s in Amman, Jordan, when as teenager involved in humanitarian relief work for Palestinians and those suffering from armed clashes between Jordanian Army and PLO, as important period for teaching about politics and prevalent issues. Mentions university and student's political movement. Describes realization when working as teacher that approach different, more practical with free thinking, encouraging teenage pupils to read newspapers, question all information received. School administration's response that encouraging disobedience. Mentions taking pupils to see 'The Sound of Music' showing in the big cinemas.

[04:24] Describes working as relief Art teacher and initiative to produce play, 'Karakhash', enlisting help of Ministry of Culture. Noted as first school play in history of Jordan. Contribution of Zuhair Nubani, now famous actor. Story about school director enforcing strict adherence to curriculum, pupils' response in support of AK. Comments that if stopped working as lawyer would return to teaching. Story about violent punishment of young child by head teacher and AK's resignation from teaching.

[14:00] Job writing column for 'Al Akhbar' newspaper. After one year husband's work in Saudi Arabia, income enabling return to begin training as lawyer. Active membership of Women's Union, 1974. Discusses women's movement at time for charitable work, aid and assistance to poor, disabled, not civil or rights based work. Pursuit of interest through membership of Bar Association and involvement in Public Freedom and Human Rights Committee. Describes discontent of trainees, working together to establish Trainee's Committee, AK elected as first President.

[17:44] Jordanians living under martial law and reports of human rights violations coming to AK, subsequent familiarity with work of Amnesty International [Amnesty], International Commission of Jurists. Comments that much of work done illegal at time, 1980s. Establishment of Amnesty groups in Jordan. Recognises 1989 as beginning of real democratization process. Story about holding meetings at home and 11 year old daughter's curiosity about Amnesty, leading to initiative to start teen Amnesty group and host first children's conference in Jordan after country signed Children's Rights Convention (CRC), early 1990s. Mentions King Hussein and Queen Noor, Ian Martin, Secretary General of Amnesty International. Discusses impact of one event and activism of participants in Women's Rights and Human Rights today.

[22:41] Election as President of Jordanian Women's Union, 1993 further to establishing Children's Rights Committee, initiating Children's Parliament, now represented in every school. Describes engagement with movement and beginnings campaigning for public freedoms, understanding as lawyer significance of freezing a constitution, or Rule of Law not respected, journey to awareness that cannot build real democracy if women not on par with men. Remarks that fifth female lawyer in Jordan at start of career. Discusses discrimination of female lawyers and other women witnessed in court, men continually at forefront. Describes developing better understanding of gender discrimination.

[25:38] History and re-democratization of Jordanian Women's Union. Mentions Emily Bisharat. Describes efforts to institutionalize Union, overhaul of approach and attitude, building programmes for women, hotline, shelters., legal literacy, focus on women's human rights, expansion to branches in all governorates. Discusses impact on society. Mentions invitation to United Nations World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, Austria, 1993. Parallel involvement with Arab Organization for Human Rights. Describes establishment of Committee on Women's Affairs by Arab Lawyers Union and being nominated as Rapporteur, 1982, as one of most interesting experiences of AK's life. Opportunity to meet Arab women lawyers, and working together to review constitution from gender perspective, presenting papers. Mentions United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Exposure to experience at regional and international level. Mentions participation at United Nations Third World Conference on Women, Nairobi, Kenya, 1985. Remarks on shift in Jordan from charitable, political work to right-based, establishment of various women's organizations.

[30:27] Move to West Bank, 1997, becoming Director of Al-Haq. Describes previous work with Palestinian women, project with Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), writing book 'Law and the Future of Palestinian women', 1998. Explains West Bank laws same as Jordanian, some laws in Gaza based on Egyptian law, laws in Jerusalem, Israeli law. Work comparing rights with laws and international law and making recommendations. Describes encounter with Women's Learning Partnership (WLP). Mentions SIGI. Meeting Mahnaz Afkhami [MA] at conference, AK speaking on different interpretations of Islam within 22 Arab countries. WLP Board membership and working on manuals 'Claiming Our Rights' and 'Safe and Secure'.

[34:10] Story of establishing SIGI Jordan. Mentions Inaam Abu Jdeir. Mentions overcoming problem of not being able to register as a Society by registering as non-profit company, finding article in law, hundreds of others following idea. Establishing Mizan Law Group for Human Rights at same time.

[38:30] Discusses appreciation of MA's perspective and vision of WLP partnership. Remarks that one of the few organizations that respects partners, voices of local women heard at international level and vice versa. Comments that MA opened path for women in Global South. Discusses belief in change over time, example of campaigning against honour crimes, or first Helpline, first shelter, as pioneering initiatives.

[45:19] Description of one initiative in detail from start to where is today, campaign against Violence Against Women, stage by stage in detail, including law for protection of women and children from domestic violence, drafted by AK, adopted by government. Describes regional project Selma, involving 5 countries, to develop legal framework using Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women model, process involved before submission of draft to Ministry of Social Development. Mentions current proposal to make further amendments to law. Remarks first Arab country to have this law, beginning with women victims to reaching national strategy and law.

Track 7 [duration: 32:39] [Session three: 8 March 2013]

[00:00] Describes first international conferences attended. Reflects on experience at youth conference in Amman, Jordan in late 1960s, discovery of new world, different people and ways of thinking, solidarity shown, at time regarding occupation of West Bank and Gaza, empowerment from witnessing and becoming part of larger community fighting for rights and other campaigns around world. AK invited as member of Executive Board of Student Union. Mentions second gathering in Kuwait, and building relations, many participants returning to support Jordan in conflict, 1970s, also Palestinian Territories. Mentions other conferences in Albania, Egypt, Lebanon.

[06:05] Describes involvement in United Nations Third World Conference on Women, Nairobi, Kenya, 1985 [Nairobi] as Arab Lawyer's Union's Rapporteur of Women's Affairs Committee. Organization of African Arab Women's Summit, Cairo, 1984, to prepare for Nairobi. Mentions other conference attended for Arab Lawyer's Union in Tunisia, Kuwait, Syria. Impressions of Nairobi. Mentions Angela Davis. Describes experience among Jordanian delegate and knowledge brought back to work together. Mentions Abderrahmane Youssoufi, Farouk Abu Issa.

[12:00] Describes re-activation of Jordanian Women's Union, establishment of Bar Association's Women's Committee, as one of recommendations that each Bar Association should have committee on women's issues, AK's involvement with League of Jordanian Writers. Working with United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinians in the Near East (UNRWA) and establishment of Legal Literacy Programme in all refugee camps, and many Bedouin areas, villages and cities in Jordan, covering Personal Status Laws, Labour Laws, Penal Code, court procedures. Establishment of first counselling centre for women in Jordan, in Al Wihdet refugee camp. First shelter established in later years by Jordanian Women's Union, and first hotline in 1994.

[17:42] Described use of media and previous membership to re-activate interest in Women's Union, civil society and activism. Discusses work towards next international conference. Describes United Nations (UN) as very active at time, with many benchmark conferences organized. Mentions first International Conference on Human Rights, Tehran, Iran, 1968, World Conference On Human Rights, Vienna, Austria, 1993, [Vienna]. Member of Jordanian delegation of Arab Organization for Human Rights at Vienna, establishment of National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations in preparation. Describes previous engagement with Human Rights issues through Amnesty International [Amnesty] since 1980s, founding first Amnesty

group in Jordan, and first Teen Amnesty Group. Member of Executive Board of International Commission of Jurists (ICJ).

[20:40] Impressions of Vienna and presentation of Women's Rights Are Human Rights. Mentions Charlotte Bunch. Comments that historical conference for women. Violence Against Women issue also raised in powerful way, resulting in UN Declaration on Violence Against Women. Describes Jordanian Amnesty groups sending artists and musicians to perform with theme of human rights. Mentions Mohammad Nassrallah. Discusses importance of hearing about human rights violations from Japan to South Africa, Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, and the European countries, commonality of challenges and dreams, dignity as core of all values. Remarks on learning and exchange of experiences as valid benefit of being part of international community.

[24:18] Discusses experience of UN International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Egypt, 1994 [Cairo], and tough battles around Reproductive Health and Rights. Discusses individual rights within family and differing views presented. Describes preparation for UN Fourth Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 1995 [Beijing] and discussion around Family Law, view that problem not religion, but interpretation of God's teachings by some religious people. Discusses problematic trend after Cairo that need to focus on feminist issues, leaving democratic issues, development issues and major crises in world aside, when women affected by all, market economy rules, environmental crisis, political conflict. Remarks that percentage of women directly impacted much higher than men in these circumstances.

[29:55] Describes Beijing focus on actions where Nairobi on recommendations, Beijing Platform for Action on 12 critical areas of concern, AK in official delegation, also representing non-governmental organizations (NGO). Describes initiative of Princess Basma bint Talal of Jordan, sending commission of some 150 Jordanian women to Beijing plus 45 from Jordanian Women's Union, important for connecting with local issues as commission included Bedouin women, women from refugee camps.

Track 8 [duration: 32:37] [Session three: 8 March 2013]

[00:00] Describes importance of learning experience attending and listening at Amnesty International's International Council meeting, Yokohama, Japan, 1991. Describes attending preparatory meetings for UN Fourth Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 1995 [Beijing], organizing a public hearing on Violence Against Women, entitled The Arab Court For Women, 1994, AK elected as Chief Judge, members of jury elected from different parts of region, hearing 33 testimonies on cases of violence. Discusses breaking silence in Arab region, on violence against women, and honour crimes, milestone with cases subsequently acknowledged in Syria and Egypt. Start of questioning many issues. Explanation of inheritance under Islamic system. Remarks on economic violence of some laws, violence of Personal Status Laws. Describes problem of sexual harassment at work, issue of rape where perpetrator unpunished if marries victim. Mentions Morocco.

[04:56] Describes important activities witnessed at Beijing. Mentions demonstrations for Jerusalem, against settlements. Member of jury in Women's Court, hearing case of

Comfort Woman. As Christian woman from Muslim majority country, elected as Chairperson of Parliament of Muslim Countries, powerful indicator of outlook of feminists on religion and how can be citizens with respective beliefs. Mentions visiting factories in China. Discusses impact of Beijing on women's movement and encouragement to be more effective. Remarks that UN not doing work on women's behalf as some believe, women at grassroots level need to be part of international affairs to make it effective, international exchange enhances development and progress, confronting challenges.

[09:56] Discusses response from conservatives, patriarchy. Mentions Iran, Al-Qaeda, Saudi Arabia and Wahhabi system. Describes Islamic political groups keeping Muslims behind borders, not allowing interaction in attempt to present new model. Discusses initial adoption of international human rights to defend right to exist, discarding for women's rights when in power, but retaining for activism. Discusses support from other movements but Islamic groups uniting in fight, comparing to Church's role in Europe until people protested.

[14:50] Discusses start of women's movement in Jordan as charitable activism for by healthy middle class and upper class women to the poor, later same group for social activism, widening of circle as people became citizens, poor women and other women joining to fight for civil rights, cultural issues with better education and voice in society, then discovered need to be politicians. Describes issue now as protecting from corrupt politics, building ethical involvement in politics. Remarks on many women reaching power by repeating models of patriarchy. Mentions Arab Spring. Discusses need for model based on Human Rights principles, and strength of these values Calls for participatory method.

[20:55] Discusses state responsibility as another issue need to work on, risks when private sector gaining benefits and control, tools of economy in hands of big companies, indication of control in world. Discusses technology and citizenship movement as valuable indicator. Remarks that people need to know they are, as citizens, a political figure in their country. And that means they are part of a political group, which is the people. Calls for a feminist white revolution based on values for benefit of men and women.

[25:43] Discusses fight in the world as fight for resources but power of people more significant, should not rely on aid and donors. Comments that donors sometimes have own agenda for country. Describes experiences, projects started and stopped by funders with changing agenda. Need for sustainable plans for NGOs and civil society at local and national levels.

[28:09] Discusses achievements on personal level, choices and decisions made, importance of having dreams.

Track 9 [duration: 07:49] [Session three: 8 March 2013]

[00:00] Describes first encounter with details of international conferences on women. Mentions International Women's Year, 1975, UN World Conference on Women, Mexico, 1975, UN World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, Copenhagen, 1980 [Copenhagen]. Story about visiting uncle who was

leading Palestinian delegation at Copenhagen. Mentions Leila Khaled, PLO. Describes Emily Bisharat's appealing to Prime Minister that Jordan needs re-activation of Women's Union to face occasion. AK's appointment to establish Women's Committee of Arab Lawyers Union two years after Copenhagen.

[04:07] Describes first organizations of women in Jordan, University Graduated Woman's Society, AK legal consultant for Business Professional Woman's Association, 1978-1985, Tadamun, established in 1940s, Women's Union. Describes appointment of first female minister, Inaam Al-Mufti, as Minister of Social Development, established The General Federation of Jordanian Women (GFJW), Jordanian Women's Union taking GFJW to court and winning case, AK proposing that keep individual membership for Union only, Federation membership of societies and organizations, to promote unity between two. Mentions Tajamoh Alijan, National Forum for Women as very active. [Ends]