

## **Aziza Abemba Oral History Content Summary**

### **Track 1 [duration: 57:37] [Session one: 21 October 2013]**

[00:00] Aziza Abemba [AA], born Baraka, Fizi, South Kiv, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Raised in polygamist family, mother second of five wives. Reflects on home environment. Describes abuse from extended family. AA second-born, first daughter, further to incidence of infant mortality. Describes father calling AA 'My first daughter' and first-born 'first son' to much criticism. Discusses violation of rights and hierarchal system of wives, with first wife considered owner of marriage, impact on offspring. Description of household, five wives in different bedrooms, girls in one 'cottage', boys in another, under same roof.

[05:20] Describes seeking ways to be rid of family set up, normalcy of spiritual attacks in African culture. Describes being ahead of elder brother in class, ensuing jealousy from step-mother and father's cherishing of AA, AA's realization that all equal, can make it as a woman. Onset of war, 1996, fleeing to Zimbabwe, 2001. Describes family moving from place to place in the bush during war, to protect girls from rape and intimidation. AA studying Economic Sciences at university in Bukavu, DRC. Mentions father's sacrifices to finance education. Describes looting of family home, second escape, from Rwandans, 1999, assassination of stepmother.

[11:36] Describes family history, AA named after paternal grandmother. Discusses common use of Arabic names in country, without Muslim faith. Makes spiritual observation about ancestry and repeated polygamy, rumours spread about AA.

[16:02] Describes siblings as 38 living and 14 deceased. Story about stepmother giving birth same day as mother, loss of mother's first-born. Describes mother and father's meeting, mother not knowing of father's existing marriage before entering polygamous set up. Describes mother's Christian background.

[21:00] Describes living with grandparents and normalcy in African context, father 'rotating' between wives. Describes distribution of food in family, mothers vendors in market, cooking and all household responsibilities laying with 'mother' accommodating father on shift basis, AA's appreciation of father's strictness in management of family.

[26:10] Describes sense of responsibility towards helping with household duties including for brothers, regarded as 'princes', 'small chiefs'. Describes self as lonely by nature, enjoying reading, interest in television news rather than films. Describes enjoyment of the Bible. Describes family circumstances, tenants, father as middle-class, carrying huge burden of educating so many children, as such envy of community.

[31:10] Describes relationship with father, mentions incarceration in Tanzania when AA young. Describes father's gathering of everyone and organizing feast for New Year's eve, buying identical clothes, for all mothers. Story about incidence of child loss in mother, grandfather's attitude towards mother. Observations about abuse in family, women at the hands of in-laws, legitimacy of first wife.

[36:52] Story about sister's name a derogatory reference to too many wives. Mentions singing in church choir. AA first in family to join church. Describes Bible as significant source of inspiration.

[40:28] Describes school years, French system followed in Congo, different system in Zimbabwe. Remarks that private school not as serious. Story about inappropriate attention from male teacher. Describes own response, confidence to reject advances.

[46:55] Describes favourite subjects, Mathematics, Sciences, dislike of writing. Recalls impressions of Simone de Beauvoir's 'La Maternite N'Etait Pas Mon Lot'.

[50:00] Discusses significance of grandmother's hard work as strong influence growing up. Explanation of dowry system paid by men. Describes influence of church, admiration for female preachers. Mentions Silvie Kinigi as Acting President, Burundi on assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, 1993. Discusses Hutu and Tutsi tribes.

## **Track 2 [duration: 1:11:49] [Session one: 21 October 2013]**

[00:00] Describes relationship with mother. Observations on polygamy, as not to be encouraged for next generation, describes as 'very bad' experience. Reflects on experience of family refuge in the bush during wartime, AA hunting for food, illness, adult sister carried up mountains on brothers' backs.

[06:27] Describes spiritual revelation. Story about family's evacuation, father risking return for AA during shooting.

[10:17] Describes first interest in working for women's rights following exposure to life women and girls subjected to in refugee camp, Zimbabwe. Mentions family scattered to South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique. Refers to United Nations (UN) 'sex- for food' scandal. Story of sexual abuse of mother and daughter by government official.

[15:01] Describes initiative with other women, making door-to-door enquiries, discovery of men using wives and daughters as sexual commodities for income.

[20:00] Provision of counselling services. Describes opportunity with Women's Learning Partnership (WLP)'s, translating 'Leading To Choices' manual into Swahili, effectiveness in community, promoting leadership among refugees. Describes financial limitations among women, introducing economic empowerment programme. Describes creating employment with animal breeding projects in Tongogara Refugee Camp, Zimbabwe, now supported by Action for World Solidarity Organisation (ASW).

[25:02] Explains founding Women's Self-Promotion Movement (WSPM) with six women and two men, from DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, challenges faced without official registration. Explains process of interviews on arrival as refugee at Tongogara Refugee Camp. Mentions United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), transit centre in Harare, Zimbabwe. Discusses political environment hindering registration, issue of land reform in Zimbabwe, land taken from whites to

black majority, ensuing sanctions imposed by international community, impact on non-governmental organisations (NGO). Explains difficulty for donors to give without registration, 2002. Describes WLP's support, enabling implementation of workshops.

[31:04] Describes mission and motivation for establishing WSPM, examples of collaborative approach. Describes workshops held. Praises participatory leadership methodology of WLP.

[35:20] Discusses benefits of women's collective work, power resulting from unity. Describes cultural adaptability and results and of WLP curriculum.

[40:08] Describes limitations experienced as refugee, lack of recognition of United Nations travel document by many embassies, example of Lebanese Embassy.

[45:20] Describes inspiration from other women in different countries, commonality of women's issues, applicability of diverse approaches to tackling problems. Describes experience of WLP partnership, solidarity, sisterhood, living methodology taught in manuals. Mentions trip to Nigeria.

[48:41] Describes context of work with target group of women refugees, workshop emphasis on importance of overcoming fear. Mentions Asma Khader. Discusses role of UNHCR, and link between WSPM and women speaking out.

[52:48] Explains three main countries hosting people from Zimbabwean as The United States of America (USA), Australia, Canada. Mentions rise in refugees from Afghanistan impacting policy in Australia. Specific emergency cases referred to Denmark, Norway, Finland.

[54:31] Discusses need for involvement of men at grassroots level, for men to understand women's power does not mean men's loss of power, women's fear of oppression from husband. Describes taunts from men. Describes political context of Zimbabwe today and assumptions made about hidden political agenda of NGOs. Explains WSPM's neutrality, AA not being Zimbabwean.

[1:01:37] Describes relationship with media. Explains requirement to invite government officials, mayor, governor to officiate programme and ensuing media interest.

[1:05:10] Describes moment of triumph. Story about invitation from member of opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change, to provide training on leadership and political participation. Attributes success to WLP material.

### **Track 3 [duration: 33:39] [Session one: 21 October 2013]**

[00:00] Describes organisational set up of staff and volunteers. Refers to financial restraints of sanctions placed on Zimbabwe, affecting donor support. Describes first funding received after WLP. Mentions Global Fund For Women, Sigrid Rausing Trust. Describes attending CIVICUS: World Alliance For Citizen Participation event, Glasgow, United Kingdom, blocks experienced from donors because working in

Zimbabwe because believed to be working with Government, conversely Government believing NGOs working with western governments.

[07:28] Describes increase in number of women represented in Parliament, House of Assembly, Zimbabwe through collective effort with Minister for Women's affairs. Mentions Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), Constitution Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC). Explains history of representation and current constitution, now highest in region.

[12:00] Describes ongoing setbacks of, women taking position and fulfilling role, and lack of regime change. Describes background of Minister for Women. Mentions The Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF), The Women's League, Minister for Higher and Tertiary Education.

[15:53] Describes increase in number of women's organizations active in Zimbabwe, attributes some to lack of employment for highly educated women with skills to start own organisation. Describes perceptions surrounding AA and marriage. Discusses views on marriage and love.

[21:18] Describes meeting husband, Christian wedding, parents wanting to push forward AA's education. Discusses motherhood, balance between work and raising one daughter, four sons.

[25:05] Describes daughter as behaving like boy. Discusses gender roles, comparing African and European contexts. Describes daughter's character. Describes raising sons to help with housework.

[28:26] Describes proudest achievement as involvement in bringing change to community, difference efforts make to family life. Describes sense of much more to do, only limitation monetary, belief in self to achieve more than others.

[31:00] Thanks interviewer. Thanks WLP. Reflects on WLP's help in organisation's growth. Thanks Mahnaz Afkhami.