

Lina Abou-Habib Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 08:09] [Session one: 7 January 2013]

[00:00] Lina Abou-Habib [LAH] born Baghdad, Iraq, 1962. Story about father taking three months to register birth because of disappointment of having girl. Family's return to Beirut, Lebanon when LAH toddler. Reflects on Catholic schooling and rebelling against nuns. Discussion of abuse of power and formatting of girls, disempowerment and subordination linked to institutions, as instruments of patriarchy.

[05:50] Discussion of confessional system in Lebanon, role of clergy and faith based schools. Describes recent research on faith based health and education institutions in Lebanon and impact on citizen-state relationship. [pause to check equipment]

Track 2 [duration: 1:16:06] [Session one: 7 January 2013]

[00:00] Reflection on trauma of catechism class as child, dynamics of minority religions in Christian areas. Onset of civil war, 1972 and heightening intolerance and divide.

[07:35] Explanation of religious family court system in Lebanon.

[09:27] Home life, enrollment at American University of Beirut, start of war age 12, description of shelters and subjection to artillery fire.

[14:00] Mentions absorption in English books and music despite Francophone environment, discovery of Somerset Maugham and Graham Greene. Relationship with younger brother. Mention of grandparents.

[19:42] Describes family time as food-oriented. Mentions never doing housework, though only done by women. Focus of household conversation dominated by 15 years of war.

[21:27] Describes leaving school and study of Biology and Masters degree in Public Health. Exhilaration at university atmosphere and diversity. Describes partying in the midst of war, going to club, Lord Byron positioned by roadblocks and exposure to danger. Comments on 1980s' music. Mentions Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin.

[26:28] Discussion of French culture and what it represents to Arab identity.

[28:38] Describes social activism at university as major turning point, first introduction to reading about feminism by epidemiologist interested in reproductive health and women's health.

[36:00] Description of educational system in Lebanon and opportunity for daughter to attend secular international school system. Remarks that catechism waste of time for children when they can be doing Maths or P.E (Physical Education). Explanation of change in school system during war and LAH's girl's school suddenly becoming co-educational. Reference to parents' and grandparents' arranged marriages. Describes

working as Researcher for Ministry of Health while at university then for international organization where met husband. Civil marriage in Cyprus to avoid religious ceremony. Family's response and added difficulty of Muslim-Christian union. Motherhood while in full-time employment, and writing 'Gender and Disability: Women's experiences in the Middle East' in 1997 while on maternity leave.

[46:02] Describes findings of research and testimonials in book from Palestine, Yemen, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan. Post at university teaching research methods in Public Health faculty.

[50:22] Discussion on first work in the field of women, excitement and learning process and start of understanding intersections. Describes finance as main obstacle, who decides what is valuable in research and where money should be spent. Detailed description of approach to and research on faith-based schools in Lebanon and discovery of funder's interest.

[1:01:20] Second example illustrating gap in recognizing importance of research to acknowledge women as economic actors in the home, ramifications of this in divorce courts. Explanation of approach for placing monetary value on housework by calculating time and measuring skills.

[1:04:55] Reflection on three United Nations (UN) conferences as the golden era of the women's movement, World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993 (Vienna), International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo 1994 (Cairo), and Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995 (Beijing).

[1:07:35] Discussion of issue of cultural relativism and real threat of Islamist fundamentalism to women. Story about attending international conference in Brussels, Belgium, 2012, with Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) to discuss position and threats to women after periods of radical change, and attitudes found in international community that undermine universality of rights.

[1:12:25] Remark on the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and danger that in 2012 no concluding observation made because of cultural specificities. Observation regarding conservatives and fundamentalists attending CSW at each annual session. Reflection on strength of position as partnership (WLP) to not dilute message, unlike history of doing so in women's movement.

Track 3 [duration: 25:31] [Session two: 8 January 2013]

[00:00] Description of lead up to founding of Collective for Research and Training on Development Action (CRTD-A) in 1999. Remarks that cannot be an activist while working with an international organization. Intention to build on momentum created by Beijing. Comments on working with Oxfam GB. Describes relationship with L'Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM). Mention of ADFM conference in Casablanca, Morocco. Start of collaboration with WLP and network with Egypt and Bahrain. Remarks that rare working relationship that built up organically, not donor led.

[07:26] Description of intellectual exchange and collaboration and solidarity within WLP partnership and unique approach to creation of materials for dissemination. Discussion on mutation of contexts, intensity and invisibility of labour involved.

[12:05] Observation on impact of training on women. Description of CRTD-A's nationality campaign to change existing law that does not allow women to transmit their nationality, using WLP manuals for training on political participation.

[19:20] Feedback from rural women. Significance of changing faith-related mindset of fatality and destiny. Comments on capacity building and universality of 'Leading to Choices' tools across countries and cultures.

[24:25] Comments on frustration of diversion from valuable work created by fundraising.

Track 4 [duration: 36:29] [Session two: 8 January 2013]

[00:00] Description of work for Oxfam, in Beirut during war, then as Researcher in the Gender Team in Oxford, with husband. Highlight of meeting Indian feminist Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, as mentor and time of learning peak. Reference to husband as feminist, co-parenting enabling LAH's work and travel. Mentions British feminists Ruth Pearson, Diane Elson, Henrietta Moore, Tina Wallace.

[03:50] Reflections on working environment and personal experience of racism at work.

[05:55] Discussion of downhill turn after Beijing, mainstreaming of gender at Oxfam, corporatization of NGO world, significance of understanding North-South inequality, injustice between men and women. Describes incidence of racism at Oxfam.

[13:13] Story about arrival of emergency humanitarian teams in Lebanon following Israeli attack, 2006 and ignorance of security advisor.

[16:14] Discussion of corporatization and use of un-adapted models. Story about interviewing executive of multi-national company illustrating attitudes and effect on employment policy. Observation that public sector better employer for women.

[22:47] Remarks on experience of partnership with WLP.

[25:29] Explains involvement with the Global Fund For Women, and the Association For Women's Rights In Development (AWID). Remarks on effect of participatory methodology on way of LAH's thinking. Comments on money given for interventions in crises without developing understanding and trust.

[31:12] Story about start of Arab Spring and position and perspective of the partnership. Comments on importance of working with women to have a voice.

Track 5 [18:32] [Session two: 8 January 2013]

[00:00] Detailed description of current work and main focus of CRTD-A.

[11:38] Comments on mixed marriages today. Remarks on equation of feminism with challenging dominant model of patriarchy, capitalism, corporatism, militarism. Discusses compromise of religious marriage if feminist. Remarks on notion of Islamist feminists. Discusses all religious institutions as reproducing social hierarchy where women are at bottom. Perspective on Islam and the West and importance of differentiating issues, danger of complacency regarding inequality.