

Mma Odi Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 1:23:16] [Session one: 10 March 2013]

[00:00] Mma Odi [MO] born Nigeria, last of six children, to wealthy polygamous family, mother last wife. Of Igbo tribe, male preference, mother openly wishing MO a boy. Describes impact of competitive determination to be better than male children, academically and physically. Remarks that every effort in life is to show that can be better. Expresses love for mother. Story about using first salary to give scholarships to others to keep up with elder brother and prove point.

[04:27] Describes recognition in later years being invited to family meetings where women traditionally not present, fighting for rights of brothers and sisters and reputation of dealing with people. Strategy of making friends with people not knowing when may need them. Sense of no limit to what can do. Acknowledges God helping to overcome challenges.

[06: 24] Story about confronting Indecent Dressing Bill with mass mobilization of women from all over Nigeria, south east, north and Niger Delta, to National Assembly, Abuja. Mentions 'Punch' newspaper, Senator Ekaette, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). Mentions book written, 'The Power of Women's Collective Action', now writing second.

[11:30] Reflects on being a woman in patriarchal society, attributes recognition gained to financial ability, and generosity shown. Describes working for Heinrich Böll Foundation, suddenly earning seven times salary had as journalist, taking money to community to fund women's organizations, training women on economics and practical accounting skills, emphasizing importance independent income however small, and success of MO's effort.

[14:05] Describes family set up, death of two siblings, brother at early age before MO's born. Reflects on continual struggle with parents' disappointment that girl, but that now finally living for self and not to impress others. Comments on challenge of having integrity when working with people who lacking integrity, accountability, transparency. Mentions work as Secretary General of Movement Against Corruption, on steering committee of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Mentions organization receiving funds from Citizens 4 Change (C4C). Story about consultancy position for European Union (EU) project applied for by another with MO's CV, subsequent work mentoring civil society.

[18:32] Discusses contradiction of training women to fight for rights, when tolerating domestic violence in own lives and covering it up, violating rights of house help and colleagues. Mentions study for master's degree in Sociology but thorough knowledge of the law. Explains women in Nigeria not allowed to bail people from police custody or court, MO's challenge of this, accusing judge, or police officer of bringing own culture into the Law, and personal success in bailing people. Women expected to get permission for travel from husbands, MO's non-acceptance of enforcement. Discusses philosophy that good to insist.

[21:21] Work as National Project Coordinator for Heinrich Böll Foundation, empowering women economically and politically, story about corruption regarding hire of office space and MO's response chance to show how training can be put into action.

[24:53] Describes influences growing up, comments that highly religious but able to strike balance with reality of work. Impact of encounter with Women In Nigeria as graduate while working for Nigeria Union of Journalists. Mentions Ayesha Imam and male feminists in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Comments on necessity to read and be academically equipped to challenge men in the Union who had own agenda.

[27:21] Discuss writing and that had greatest impact on thinking. Mentions Frantz Fanon and Karl Marx. Mentions first meeting with Mahnaz Afkhami and getting to know Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) through BOABAB for Women's Human Rights (BOABAB). Mentions Asma Khader and Jacqueline Pitanguy and appreciation for intelligent, focused women.

[32:57] Describes demand for WLP training manuals as excellent materials, and adaptation for political training of women in Nigeria. Discusses belief that discrimination against women stems from patriarchy and organization's approach reorienting boys and men to embed culture of equality. Describes recent constitution denying women right to convey citizenship to foreign husbands unlike foreign wives where granted automatically. Describes impact of training boys and dissemination of learning by them.

[35:56] Describes peace-building project bringing Christians and Muslims together to discuss religious texts that relate to women, initial barriers and success of task. Mentions organizational partner. Continues on male re-orientation and age group targeted, describing process of access via the Commissioner of Education then Director of Schools.

[39:22] Reflects on own school life, taken very seriously, comparing with today and fallen standards. Mentions planned march to highlight women's human rights. Remarks that Gender is becoming serious. Describes participating in many demonstrations while at university. Story about importance of suitable clothing when taking to the streets. Mentions Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) president Ayo Obe. Two stories about collapsing from tear gas. Comments on enjoyment of marching, and saying what must be said.

[45:41] Describes women's movement when joined as strong because of women. Mentions presence of Women's International Networking (WIN), and government's respect. Describes evolving of first job with funding from Heinrich Böll Foundation, working in northern part of country in Bauchi, Gombe. Story about winning trust of local women. Turning point in life, with realization that can mobilize people. Reflects on passion and fulfillment in role changing women's lives.

[49:58] Describes women trained through own organization, Rural Women Empowerment and Development Network (RUWEN). Story about illiterate woman with children inspired to go school after training, now graduate. Remarks that women's movement now very weak, anecdote about high point in society when

worked with WIN. Now reduced to NGO work to get funding. Celebrates crisis in funding as ‘separating the women from the girls’. Describes issues as unchanged over the years, with Violence Against Women on increase, widespread incidence of incest. Mentions difficult case. Remarks that new phenomenon, and “abomination” in Nigerian culture. Discusses difficulty in reaches girls with current popular culture. Attributes to failure of school system.

[57:32] Describes BAOBAB’s system of outreach teams identifying issues from each state. Story illustrating soliciting attitudes of young girls.

[59:32] Describes BOABAB’s relationships with funders. Story about accusation of corruption and losing funders. Mentions Ford Foundation. Reflects on agreements and philosophy of communication and collaboration. Mentions Oxfam Novib.

[1:03:32] Describes work in The Gambia, 2000, understudying women’s human rights projects, particularly on female genital mutilation, innovative approach witnessed. Remarks that no longer a major issue in Nigeria, approached through Christianity. Reflects on Gambian trip as very positive learning experience, less vocal mode of working behind the scenes effectively, good economic empowerment of women. Describes attending meeting in Senegal, 2004, on Child Rights, changing MO’s perspective and focus.

[1:08:09] Discusses advancement of Muslim women, proactive gathering in restrictive societies as inspiring. Remarks that education not prerequisite for advocacy. Discusses example of working with illiterate women in Nigeria. Story about alternative approach in northern states where not interested in training. Discusses political representation of women. Reflects on own role and attitude to work. Story about attending Nigerian delegation’s programme at UN, approach of complementarity rather than equality. Comments on lies when in government, activism when out. Comments on highest maternal mortality rates while seventh highest oil producing country.

[1:18:31] Describes work with young girls, emphasis on importance of speaking out. Urgency of work when no engagement with the struggle from girls, priorities different, and they are next in line. Discusses aspirations among girls and focus on the body. Mentions new kind of Pentecostalism, ‘God will give you wealth’. [interrupted]

Track 2 [duration: 7:26] [Session one: 10 March 2013]

[00:00] Reflects that mother is proud of MO, though not expressed. Mutual respect shown, time fighting for recognition passed. Mentions father’s death shortly after MO born. Describes relationship with siblings, choosing friends. Mentions working for EU to monitor and combat fraud in two geo-political zones, making many enemies. Story about accountant and impact.

Track 3 [duration: 18:37] [Session one: 10 March 2013]

[00:00] Describes proudest achievement as making women question their position, find voice and bring change. Story about woman in Imo state. Story about National

Assembly and standing up to Indecent Dressing Bill. Training of women barely able to feed themselves, now with independent economic power. Story of women in Gombe choosing to buy foam for sleeping on.

[05:52] Describes training women to demand a place in ruling councils as paying development levies. Quotes Charles Dicken's 'Oliver Twist', demanding another and another. Remarks that women live for parents and brothers, helping with domestic chores, hoping to get married, upon marriage living for husbands and relations, then living for children, children graduate, husband finds another wife, by now she's become something else. Discusses Nigeria's Constitution with statement of equality and non-discrimination, which must be challenged. Describes signing bail bonds from age 18 with knowledge of law and illiteracy of police officers. Remarks that people afraid to step out of comfort zone and achievements when do.

[10:23] Criticizes activists who promote zero tolerance of violence, when own husbands are beating them. Story about female lawyer in Benin City in Niger Delta, Nigeria. Remarks on easy way out and that not no short cut is a short cut in reality. Mentions joining WIN, NUJ, establishing legal counsel for indigenous women in Lagos. Discusses importance of standing by women, comfort that someone cares. Remarks on rewarding and exciting nature of work and changes witnessed. Mentions illiterate woman trained, who was inspired to return to begin from elementary school to recent graduation from university. Discusses women's rejection of traditional culture, example of banana tree falling in village denoting adultery committed by one of its women. Story about effects of training in Akwa Ibom, Nigeria, women making demands in local government.

[15:56] MO's advice on protesting. Remarks on culture of doing workshops for workshops sake to spend donor funds, no longer about vision or determination for change, passion and sacrifice missing. Urgent need to connect with young people, to continue struggle. Acknowledges the great women who fought for liberties taken for granted today.