

Tolekan Ismailova Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 10:54] [Session one: 10 April 2013]

[00:00] Tolekan Ismailova [TI] Acknowledges importance of Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) oral history project for understanding past to evaluate and prepare better for future. Eldest of six children, five brothers. Describes father Asanali Ismailova as among best Russian language teachers in Kyrgyzstan, established during Second World War during country's support in fighting fascism. Describes Lake Issyk Kul where father from as special. Describes parents' focus on TI, recognising barriers as girl, encouraging sports and activities brothers involved in, mother encouraging reading books and newspapers. Anecdote about mother's assertion that books to be respected, never placed on the floor.

[05:56] Describes father's work after war, teaching orphans from Leningrad, former St. Petersburg, Russia. Mentions more orphans in Chun Saryoy, Kyrgyzstan. Describes interesting people in family home, including Its Rudolf Ferdinandovich friend of father, representing Jewish community. Remarks that good connection for alternative information, interesting work with scientists and intelligentsia as source, where father afraid to talk, as teacher targeted by Soviet Communist Party. Describes confusion and uncertainty of silence and discussion in controlled atmosphere. Describes documentary film made about family's historical involvement and contribution in society, being a child in wartime, TI witnessing support and solidarity between communities in hard times, instilling awareness of larger world. Father's encouragement of TI to learn languages, to be surrounded by books.

Track 2 [duration: 47:05] [Session one: 10 April 2013]

[00:00] Describes learning in Russian language and family's questioning this, grandmother expressing loss of "everything". Mentions epic poem 'Manas'. Describes authentically dressed maternal grandmother being targeted by Communist Party. Anecdote about her visits to family. Discusses loss of Kyrgyz culture under Soviet system. Acknowledges appreciation for Russian classical literature but loss of own heritage. Mentions Lermontov, Pushkin, Yesenin, Dostoyevsky. Describes family reading 'Manas' and discussing characters. Discusses learned friends excelling at Russian universities, returning home after independence, 1991, psychological impact regarding identity.

[05:15] Describes loss of historical documents, books, and maps from Central Asia taken by Russian researchers, now found in Moscow Library. Mentions villages Simyonovka, Grygorevka, city of Prjevalsk, and history rewritten by Russians. Describes discussion today as how to rebuild Kyrgyz language. Discusses importance of responsibility as citizens, empowerment from memory of things learned from grandparents and parents. Describes visit to refugee camp in Jalalabad, Kyrgyzstan to address emergency issues mass media propaganda calling refugees 'bandits' and 'criminals'. Mentions Madame Otunbaeva, Minister of Internal Affairs, Roza Isakovona, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

[09:40] Describes support for national minority groups and importance of historical memory as philosophical base to develop understanding and citizenship. Mentions Dungan people, Stalin. Reflects on childhood as source of power and responsibility to act to help others. Story told of grandparents during Tsarist regime witnessing families giving away daughters in exchange for food. Reflects on value of female sex and need for girls to be vigilant in patriarchal society. Discusses incidence of domestic violence in region today, male control of all resources, political participation, land. Status of women historically, story about Queen of the South, Kurmandjan Datka as example of responsible citizenship for Kyrgyz people. Describes hearing grandmother's story on lap

aged five. [17:00] Describes awareness of injustices between men and women growing up, mother's loss of career to raise six children and examples of domestic violations in community. Anecdote about expressing to father that does not want this life. Describes growing up with five brothers and mother's management of children's tasks around home, giving brothers non-traditional responsibility for cooking, bread making, all working as team. Describes harmonious household, beauty of natural environment and time spent with brothers in nature, swimming, horse riding. Story about parents' meeting and relationship.

[23:44] Describes pressures of patriarchal and cultural traditions and expectations in Kyrgyzstan, father's break from this with different vision from teaching about Russian culture during war. Describes husband's unconventional views after experience in Soviet Army, witnessing violence in Estonia and Armenia. Describes alternative family life spent in Bishkek, continuing education and going to ballet, opera, theatre, library. Describes husband as successful journalist, chief of cultural department in cultural newspaper and co-founding 'Bishkek Shamy' and 'Vecherni Bishkek' first newspapers after country's independence. Describes discussion with TI on importance of economic independence as well as moral independence, need for reform of system to avoid return to Soviet system or clan based politics. Remarks on loss of friends and relatives, becoming outsiders as family in spite of own happiness. Comments that message to relatives was that each should be responsible for their life, not reliant on help from family, and younger generation learning by TI's husband's example.

[29:11] Describes circumstances of husband's death, targeted as result of clan based politics. Mentions Janish Bakiyev. Describes coverage in opposition newspaper 'De Facto' featuring satirical poetry, subsequent closure of paper. Remarks that no opportunity to pursue husband's case with non-independent judicial representation in country.

[34:14] Discusses husband's views on having one daughter and being responsible, daughter's views on being woman in patriarchal society. Describes daughter's work as lawyer and single mother of three, to change legal system to counter victimization of women in society in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan through trafficking and polygamy.

[37:01] Story of how met husband. Anecdote about regular conversation with father, TI rebelling that as a woman she would be expected to change her name upon

marriage when five brothers wouldn't. Describes experiences of discrimination in Bishkek. Discusses clan based politics.

[42:12] Describes position as social worker with street children. Mentions working as French teacher. Describes interesting times and beginning of Persitroika, husband among first members of new party, in hope of end to authoritarian system. Describes herself becoming Human Rights defender through own experience of violation while working for social authority, TI first to refer to United Nations (UN) system. Mentions working for non-governmental organization (NGO) Interbilim, elected as Executive Secretary for NGO Forum, developing first NGO law in Kyrgyzstan. Founder President of NGO Coalition. Describes democratic structure and large horizontal network. Describes organisation becoming target of Akaev regime and (KGB) after civil activity and education of citizens through organisation of first independent observation at presidential and parliamentary elections, 2000. Describes working in mountains and villages and 500 people attending civic education programme.

Track 3 [duration: 27:30] [Session one: 10 April 2013]

[00:00] Describes organisation of peaceful demonstrations against election fraud, 2000. Story about local people from mountains quoting Article 17, widespread awareness of constitution. Describes violation by Akaev regime, of first real democratic movement, people tortured and sent to prison for peaceful demands. Mentions Taza Shailo. Describes return to clan based politics with 2005 election, 27 families killed by regime. Mentions presentation of information to international organisation in Sweden. Describes criminals joining parliamentary system, 2010, choice of money over intelligent people. Describes continuation of efforts. Mentions Azimzhan Askarov, Uzbek human rights defender. Describes profile of Human Rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan.

[05:00] Refers to Universal Declaration of Human Rights and good foundation of country's citizens educated in social justice, helping one another, creating new ideas for development. Identifies politicians as divided. Discusses roots of authoritarianism, giving Uzbek, Russian, Kazakh, Turkmen regimes as examples. Discusses human rights issues in China. Mentions Shanghai Population Network. Describes challenges of work and happiness at growth of members of NGO community. Describes own experiences, witnessing children at the mercy of the law and local authority prejudice. Initiative to establish council to monitor their work and challenge authority's rash decisions, creating forum.

[12:32] Reflects on difference between being a boy and a girl. Story about brother's goading of TI and horse riding accident. Need for operation but delayed by occupation with human rights activities and distrust of doctors in Kyrgyz clan based system.

[15:59] Describes circumstances around going on protest hunger strike and other arrests. Despite Soviet era prison, four to a cell, open toilet.

[22:50] Describes campaign by Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) network reaching The White House, United States of America (USA) and immediate response from Ministry of Internal Affairs in Kyrgyzstan. Describes tactic of refusing to be released without new hearing with judge, and extraordinary event of judge called in despite weekend and late hour. Describes other women met in prison and educating them on which Articles violated by prison service, resulting in release of 255 prisoners in one day.

Track 4 [duration: 1:01:23] [Session one: 10 April 2013]

[00:00] Describes experience of solidarity of Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) partners working for TI's release. Describes release of 255 citizens wrongfully arrested as result of police corruption and imprisoned with high bail for not carrying identification. Discovery of police racket labelling ordinary citizens as prostitutes for bribes, leading to investigation into management of prison, attempt to close institution. Reflects on husband's encouragement of TI to fight traditions or will continue to be violated. Describes patriarchal Kyrgyz tradition against single women with own experience and status following death of husband, not respected as widow with divorced daughter. Story about standing up to questions about property.

[06:56] Discusses background to work for women's rights, own experience of growing up surrounded by prevailing attitude that the best always saved for men, girls unimportant as marry and become members of other family. Story about sharing fears with mother and silence of response. Story about tradition of owning land as rite of passage when 16, overlooked for TI, again when became widow, legal right to husband's land and attitude of notary, questioning TI's pursuit as woman.

[10:25] Describes research undertaken and findings that violations against women in southern Kyrgyzstan double that elsewhere in country, and ongoing work to secure land rights for women and girls. Discusses link to economic power. Comments on impact of progress on women in Uzbekistan and that if not open to change will become closed society. Describes first work for women's rights at time of elections, demand for more female seats and an end to tradition of men in family taking women's passports and voting on their behalf. Tradition stopped by coalition TI involved with campaign of extensive civic education.

[14:57] Describes strategy of using international context when discussing justice. Describes lobbying and collecting signatures, uniting 2000 educated independent observers, impact on society. Describes first step taken at NGO Forum, identifying priorities, one, of having an NGO law, enabling growth of civil society organizations, from which coalition could be formed, two, to have an Election law enabling real participation and support for women, new leadership reflecting new generation. Describes women's parliamentary seats today, Human Rights report on new Parliament analyzing injustices, with references to how parliamentarian system managed in Africa, England, France, highlighting corruption of same system in Kyrgyzstan.

[19:40] Describes organisation being well known in Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, meeting Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva and introduction to WLP. Describes

fellowship – first fellow from Central Asia – at National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Mentions Sezim and Bubusara Ryskulova. Describes experience of partnership with WLP, breadth of consultation with partners in different countries, knowledge and education empowering different structures in work, reflection providing source of new ideas. New Human Rights Movement Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan.

[26:41] Describes first encounter with Mahnaz Afkhami's work and impression on TI. Mentions Green Revolution, Shirin Ebadi. Describes action for solidarity with Iranians leading to TI and group's arrest.

[31:00] Attributes use of international instruments as resource to WLP. Mentions going to Supreme Court for documentary film 'I Am Gay, I am Muslim'. Story about help from member of American Bar Association to illustrate violation of International Law by KGB and Kyrgyz authorities by prohibiting screening of Moroccan film. Mentions recent campaign to show solidarity with Syrians. Describes detail of film issue, threats and raiding of office, state campaign against TI. Reflects on experience as President of NGO Coalition, KGB attempts to crush organization, sending under cover professionals to work in office.

[39:36] Describes founding of Citizens Against Corruption (initially Society Against Corruption) as economic stability, to counter poverty and encourage people to take responsibility, demand transparency. Describes positive identity with citizens, anecdote about Taxi company. Discusses strategy of adopting opaque, security-conscious structure, different to democratic but easily violated structure of NGO Coalition, but deemed non viable for long term by donor agency. Describes step by step evolution to Human Rights movement Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan with Kyrgyz network worldwide.

[44:33] Discusses participatory governance. Mentions International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC), WLP. Describes diverse involvement as chosen by participants, evaluation of organisation rules each year. Discusses funding. Relationship with Hivos. Mentions Marcel van der Heijden. Describes work on prison service and new focus on life imprisonment and juvenile justice. Mentions Askar Akaev and Canadian mining company and substantial loss to country. Describes work for transparency in mining industry following 1998 violation by Canadian mining company with cyanide poisoning in five villages.

[50:30] Comments that small changes can have large impact. Example of applying to Constitutional Court to change law to allow peaceful demonstration in 2004 and pivotal impact on 2005 revolution, example of defending teachers, beginning with one case of local teacher and teachers throughout country standing for rights. Quotes President Bakiyev's response, balking at sums accountable for. Mentions lawyer Diana Makenbaeva and teacher Lilia Sipieva. Comments on empowerment of teachers for future collective demands. Discusses funding. Mentions Caritas Internationalis (Caritas) interest in juvenile justice.

[55:32] Describes work for women's rights of migrants, 'Central Asia on the Move', initiative of 25 NGOs from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Russia. Discusses issues of migrant families and children, early marriage as business. Describes

structure of work, groups of five organisations working on women and gender, migrant health, child migrants, Citizens Against Corruption working on migrant rights in Russia and Kazakhstan. Mentions funds from Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO). Describes substantial reduction in funding but opportunity for reflection, development of organizational and financial structuring. Mentions joining two women's groups for security of Chechen women. Discusses work, personal life balance. Mentions regional office in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. Remarks on growth of rural areas and national minorities.

Track 5 [duration: 42:32] [Session one: 10 April 2013]

[00:00] Discusses complexity of relationship with donors. Story about attitude of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Other cases mentioned illustrating importance of project initiative coming from grass roots activity not donor. Describes organisational weakness in applying for funding, not priority in environment and difficult times for civil society.

[06:24] Remarks on environment demanding tolerance, activity, intelligent quick thinking and that donor agencies should rethink policies, that sustainable civil society creates sustainable decision making processes where vulnerable rights concerned. Describes organisational structure enabling young leadership. Describes meeting organisation member Gulbarchin Djumabaeba.

[12:22] Discusses political and social climate in Kyrgyzstan. Remarks on nomenclatura, poverty, violation of women's status more than ever with rise of radical Islam and polygamy. Describes threats from surrounding countries, dependence on Russian politics, youth unemployment, trafficking of women in Kazakhstan. Describes work of 'Central Asia on the Move' initiative to influence decision making through independent research and reports. Describes parents with several daughters giving least educated daughter to become second or third wife. Statistics of incidence of girls trafficked from Kazakhstan, sexual exploitation, uncontrolled borders. Describes uneducated becoming officials post-revolution. Remarks on new law preventing Kyrgyz women leaving country before age 26 to protect them from violation, as violation in itself. Mentions chairman of Tax Ministry questioning funding of women business leaders.

[18:12] Discusses research groups creating post-revolution profile of country, revelations regarding conditions for women, demise of health institutions with corruption, loss of education through discriminatory system, trafficking of women big business for men. Remarks that education is constitutional right, and now meeting illiterate 16 year olds. Discusses migrant responsibility.

[24:38] Describes documentary film screened featuring young girl raped by Kyrgyz gang in Moscow, Russia, targeting young girls who create connections with other nationalities. Describes attendance of World Social Forum (WSF), Tunisia, 2013. Remarks on opportunity to reflect on Tunisian constitutional reform and transitional democracy. Human Rights Movement, Bir Duino-Kyrgystan's recommendations highlighted that migrant policy should be on donor agendas. Detail of three recommendations, including gender-focus.

[31:42] Describes participation in Civil Rights Defenders Conference, 2013 regarding human rights defenders at risk. Mentions Belarus, Alyas Belyaski. Describes Natalia Project, new technology alarm bracelet for human rights defenders, named after Natalia Estemirova of Chechnya, killed by authorities.

[35:00] Describes mother's response to TI's work. Describes father's service in Second World War and significance of condition. Discussion of cost of life and cost of liberty, and new generation, flight of intelligentsia.

[40:35] Discusses use of technology, support network, tragedy of human rights defenders in solitary confinement. Describes Women's Learning Partnership as among best think tanks.

Track 6 [duration: 14:13] [Session one: 10 April 2013]

[00:00] Describes background and detail of hunger strike, 2002.

[08:30] Describes physical experience of bloating and insufficient knowledge of doctors, impact lasting months. Reflects on naivety of going on hunger strike.

[12:03] Father's words to TI. Reflects on happiness with husband. Recounts charming exchange with grandson.