

## **Yakin Ertürk Oral History Content Summary**

### **Track 1 [duration: 1:26:16] [Session one: 12 January 2013]**

[00:00] Yakin Ertürk [YE] born Mihaliççık, Turkey. Family history, grandfather mayor of town, father young, mother's death when YE age one, raised by paternal grandparents. Comments on grandmother as natural feminist. Uprooted by death of grandfather and father and stepmother's winning scholarship to go to the United States of America (USA). Move to Konya, then Polatlı, with grandmother. Travel aged nine with younger sister to live with parents in New York, United States. Mentions Pan American Airlines. Return to Turkey 1961 at time of coup d'état. Remarks that later learned that coup d'états are never something to applaud.

[05:30] Describes family set up, grandfather's political standing, grandmother as strong Ottoman woman and feminist home environment as source of YE's inner strength and independence as a woman. Story about local ball in 1940s and grandparent's relationship. Recollections of accompanying grandmother to village in agricultural seasons.

[12:01] Remarks that conservatism associated with Turkey today came with modernism. Describes playing in neighbourhood streets and creating objects to play with. Describes school life, father's recognition as philosopher, teacher and poet leading to YE being put on podium to recite poetry on national days.

[15:23] Describes reading emphasized at home, middle class saying that a diploma is a girl's gold bracelet, vs. traditional saying that gift of gold a girl's security. Story of parents' meeting and relationship, mother's death from typhoid. Story of grandparents' courtship and grandmother's many suitors.

[22:27] Grandparent's stories of difficult life during the fall of the Ottoman Empire and allied occupation. Story about grandmother putting animal dung on her face to deflect interest from Greek soldiers who were raping women. Father's childhood in days of scarcity, and new nation being created.

[27:58] Description of natural mother's family as merchants, religious household. Other women influential as YE growing up, mention of two teachers at US school and making link between childhood influences and feminist ideologies and value systems while studying at Cornell University at time of United Nations First Conference on Women, Mexico City, Mexico, 1975. Discussion of modernist ideology, YE's own background enabling demystification. Remarks that engagement with a system of thought accentuates meaning of own imprints.

[33:05] Describes airplane journey and arrival in USA to father, home life and accepting responsibility at young age. Story about going out with slippers and cultural misunderstanding. Comments on relationship between Global South and North.

[40:10] Discussion of the American Empire and liberal freedoms, role in the world, impact of Iran hostage crisis, Vietnam, 9/11 and use as pretext for removal of liberal freedoms. Reflection on America of the 1950s and 1960s.

[42:14] Life as a teenager and parents' notion of girls in Turkey. Refers to writing about immigrants living a frozen life. Comments that greater freedom on return to Turkey age 16.

[44:28] Living in Hyde Park, Chicago at the height of the civil rights movement. Reflects on attending Catholic school and importance in developing her perceptions. Story about challenging teacher on abortion stance. Mentions assassination of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King visiting Chicago. Remarks on an exciting time in United States where the fabric of the country was beginning to change. Civil rights movement as having the most impact on YE personally. Reference to hostilities. Describes Martin Luther King as one of idols.

[49:31] Discussion on rejection of dominant ideology in any form creating opportunities for other forms of oppression, linking women's movement to racial and class struggles. Mentions Rosa Luxemburg, European feminists coming from labour union movement.

[51:54] Attributes strong value of justice to grandparents and father. Describes father's imprisonment for reciting poem 'I Want Justice' when YE age three. Discusses faith equating to the environment you are born in and values instilled, difference between sense of justice and sense of power as determinant of path in life.

[55:06] Describes PhD dissertation on villages in Marden, Turkey following gut feeling something was wrong in this Kurdish area. Refers to 1963 in the United States as most formative, Catholic school and civil rights movement.

[58:39] Describes experience of modernization of Turkey where 80% of population rural when Republic established. Reflects on different sense of modernity to friends. Story about YE and aunt taking village man to Ankara and enjoyment of innocence of experience. Observation on modernity and tradition, that modern identity jeopardised by association with rural. Story about urban child's response to YE's grandmother. Comments on urban society when teaching Development in 1983. Remarks on sterility and limitations of middle class life.

[1:05:00] Description of fieldwork in Kurdish areas, living with polygamist family, local culture and eye-openers. Story about going to Saudi Arabia and preconceptions held. Mentions birth of daughter, 1978.

[1:09:13] Reflections on encounter there and integration with Saudis, segregated life giving rise to YE's appreciation of women, obstacles faced and chances taken for little. Suggests parallel with Iranian women. Observation that reality of life is in the nuances. Explains demographic at university, princesses, daughters of ministers, as no private school system. Remarks that as women denied privileges of their class. Story about invitation to Crown Prince Fahad's son's wedding.

[1:16:14] Return to Saudi Arabia as United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and observation that more integration between females of Royal Family and other women, many now professionals.

[1:17:15] Describes meeting husband in New York, USA. Mentions International House on Riverside Drive, marriage at Town Hall. Remarks on rejection of institutionalization and marrying without wedding and absence of family. Mention of daughter's traditional wedding in Turkey. Father's response to own wedding. Daughter born after five years of marriage.

[1:20:43] Reflections on interest in father's life after his death and more careful reading of his poetry. Remarks that people with strong religious belief handle death of close ones more easily, and YE not having that possibility so harder recovery.

## **Track 2 [duration: 1:19:13] [Session one: 12 January 2013]**

[00:00] Describes work with grass roots women as development sociologist in 1970s, referring to Women's Movement as limited middle class discussion at the time, acknowledging that paved way for larger mobilization. Discussion of modernization in third world development context, entering rural areas via men, because necessary elements possessed by men. Domestication of women pushed out of every day agrarian responsibilities by technology, elevated status to be women of the home. Explains rural development as paradigm within the movement in 1970s following formal equality, women suffrage, but intellectual engagement without actual work at grass roots level.

[04:22] Describes integration of language of women and development component into projects and YE's taking advantage of trend within United Nations (UN) agencies worked for - Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) - to ensure women's involvement in participatory way. Discussion on difficulty of participatory development, and YE's work to challenge biases of agencies, assumptions made regarding women in Middle East, intervention modalities that isolated. [06:50] Importance of concept of gender budgeting emphasized by the movement in the 1990s and YE's use as tool in work in rural areas and bureaucracy as project documents applied by people with no gender knowledge or sensitivity. Comments on proliferation of self-help modalities today insisted on by women. Remarks on dissatisfaction regarding micro-financing, as not bringing anything for women.

[10:00] Calls for development paradigm that connects Development, Human Rights and Security and further engagement across disciplines. Discusses paradigm of the 1980s, Violence Against Women, as most wide reaching across globe with every woman relating to dimensions of violence and oppression. Eventual recognition that gender issues cannot be confronted in isolation. Remarks that women challenging a system that wants to preserve itself, therefore parallel change in men necessary, contribution of paradigms in developing insight, YE's promotion of synergy of theory, practice, policy.

[14:10] Reflects on roots of her activism as motivation to making a wrong right, and rage. Experience of motherhood.

[15:29] Description of lead up to UN Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995 [Beijing] and YE's organization of two rural women's seminars in southeastern Turkey and mountain village in northwestern Turkey. Women unused to articulating their lives, reversal of normal format, groundbreaking event and response, opportunity for innovative models.

[18:59] First UN posting, as Director of UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), then Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women during period of Beijing +5 and difficulty of role. Comments on preference for challenges of academia not international bureaucracy, and return to teaching. Reflects on learning experience of UN and disappointment of inefficiency of system and difficulty to promote holistic approach to women's issues.

[23:05] Mentions marginal involvement of UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) during Beijing +5 process. Remarks on ramifications of compartmentalisation of women's advancement, as one of realisations behind creation of UN Women and missed opportunity of potential of building on one another. Acknowledgement of impact of UN agenda on women at local level, UN not as critical for promoting women's issues as in 1980s and 1990s. Remarks on energy and excitement of 1990s created by UN conferences.

[25:22] Approached by women's groups for UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women candidacy. Mentions Asma Khader and story of nomination. Mentions UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). Reflects on role as one of most wonderful things YE has done, independence of role. Description of mandate and discussion of balance and approach, use of dialectics. Mentions El Salvador, Guatemala, Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, The Netherlands, The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and work in 17 countries. Mention of Sweden and existing patriarchal world order and reproduction of structural inequalities in apparently gender equal society. Remarks that comparative work should be continual.

[31:00] Story about 'New York Times' article on incidence of domestic violence in Sweden, visit of Swedish parliamentarians to Turkey. Observations on subsequent mission to Sweden and mobilization of women and media and success when adopted at domestic level.

[33:25] Describes limitations of missions, example of DRC.

[34:42] Description of Iran mission, 2005.

[37:05] Description of UN rapporteur system. Mention of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International.

[39:38] Description of mission to Saudi Arabia and subsequent advancements. Remarks that sacrificing women is always easier in the course of negotiating political interests.

[45:10] Describes meeting Mahnaz Afkhami and appreciation for methodology of partnership, involvement as board member of Women's Learning Partnership (WLP). Remarks on the positive challenge of diversity, advantages of participatory leadership and solidarity.

[51:19] Discussion of women's movement as a global phenomenon and importance of maintaining global aspect but parallel re-examination of message. Comments on ideology being promoted in the West that women liberated, problem is third world and damaging impact of this message and divisive language. Importance of finding points of convergence.

[55:02] Discusses contradictions of women's achievements at public level and continuation of domestic violence and facet of ideology of equality that puts double burden on woman facing violence. Impact of shift of power and money from public to private sector and exclusion of women at executive level. Discusses backlash against women in Sweden since 2004. Remarks that change not sustainable unless patriarchal system dismantled.

[1:00:13] Discusses work with European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). Mentions Rhonda Copeland and highlighting what women face in private sphere. Describes use of legal concepts to present women's issues to Human Rights Council, broadening the four components of due diligence. Observation that any measures superficial unless women's status is changed.

[1:05:28] Remark that if states took women's rights mandates as seriously as CPT, things would progress. Example of Turkey. Discusses role and visit to Germany, The Netherlands and United Kingdom (UK). Remarks that immigration issue confronting Western Europe where standards sacrificed is major challenge to their own values. Mentions teaching course on globalization and population movements. Mention of 9/11 and Guantanamo Bay. Describes Immigration Removal Centres in UK. Comments on global nature of problem that is everybody's responsibility.

[1:11:02] Discussion on donor agendas and organization relationships. Story about opening of population research institute at university through funds made available for birth control.

[1:14:33] Talks about future engagements. Gives example of 90-year old Narmin Abadan Unat. Describes undertaking to write book about violence against women. Comments that discussion on violence has become emptied of its content.