

Zenebework Tadesse Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 33:28] [Session one: 13 January 2013]

[00:00] Zenebework Tadesse [ZT] born Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to Catholic family. Family history, one of three children, two brothers. Early life, travelling through provinces with father's work as government employee. Comment on better schooling in urban areas, attending all girl Catholic school with cousins living in household. Mention of games played, going to movies, and introduction of television in the country when ZT at high school, American TV programs and influence on value system. Parents strict about schooling, supervision by brothers and father of homework and additional reading.

[07:00] ZT first person in family to attend English school with additional tutoring in French spoken by rest of family. Amharic and other ethnic languages spoken in household.

[08:50] Parents engaged in anti-Italian occupation activities during Second World War, father liberation fighter. Describes harassment of mother by Italians prompting move to rural areas with ZT's three sisters, subsequent death of all three from disease. Return to Addis Ababa after the war, starting new family, and loss of additional three children after ZT born.

[10:10] First schooling in Ethiopia by missionary Catholic priests, mention of parents meeting at adjacent schools, early marriage. Describes courtship and marriage tradition and parent's wedding. Describes family coping with death of siblings and companionship with cousins.

[15:40] Describes relationship with father and unusual focus on ZT's education, norm was to anticipate early marriage for girls, start of change in cultural value system.

[17:56] Recollection of stories told about Italian occupation and resistance movement fresh in the minds of nation as ZT growing up. Remark on destabilization of country and killing of educated people in Ethiopia at the end of the war, division in three groups of collaborators and dominant discourse of the time, and impact on ZT's consciousness. Describes forms of struggle against Italian occupation, father involved in armed struggle, use of gender assumptions, story about mother carrying bullets in clothing.

[25:18] Describes change in expectations of ZT as a girl in spite of liberal household when reached adolescence, restricted movement and contribution to domestic chores, unlike brothers; introduction of sexually coded terms and references to pregnancy and other transgressions. Story about scandal in household. Comment on lack of sexual education. [interrupted]

Track 2 [duration: 58:38] [Session one: 13 January 2013]

[00:00] Discussion on oppressive practices against girls as related to lack of information. Describes subjects emphasized at school, teachers all nuns. Remarks that nuns 'more enlightened' than society at the time.

[06:27] Describes world of cinema as an adolescent in the 1960s, influence of Italian and American movies. Arrival in the United States of America (USA) in 1968 at height of civil rights and feminist movements. Mentions Vietnam war and Iran. Comments on sheltered schooling from politics. Story about brother returning home from France extremely politicized as ZT preparing school debate on USA and Vietnam.

[13:33] Catholic college as basis for parents allowing ZT to study in USA. Remarks that parents had not anticipated that Catholicism affected by 'effervescence' taking hold of the country, with nuns leaving the ordinance.

[15:36] Story of journey to USA via Germany, and arrival in Minnesota, then Indiana, cultural impressions and most shocking differences.

[25:00] Reflections on responsibility as an adult woman and decision-making based on information not social convention and fear. Story about visit to gynecologist in Ethiopia in 1970s. Observation that study of Journalism in USA not relevant with lack of press freedom at home, and change of course to International Relations. Story about presentation by Emperor Haile Selassie on ZT's school leaving. Observations on US perspective of study of International Relations.

[32:08] Move to Chicago and involvement in student political and civil rights movements, including Black Panthers. Mentions solidarity between Ethiopian and Iranian student movements, demonstrating against Emperor and Shah.

[34:10] Start of ZT's questioning of Catholic teachings on women and reproductive health, and rejection of fatalism of environment raised in.

[35:42] Move to New York, description of Harlem. First opportunity to meet and work with feminists in international group. Describes issues of the time. Discussion of perspective on gender equality and class.

[39:30] Women's access to land first subject of ZT's focus, addressing women's engagement in agriculture in Ethiopia but lack of key resource as tied in to all oppression including maternal mortality. Remarks on changes since 1990s.

[44:35] Undertaking in coffee producing area of Ethiopia to understand migrant labour coincided with 1974 revolution, leading to work on rural development project and land reform agenda. Observations on field work and realities of life vs. theories on development. Educational impact on ZT. Comment on assumptions regarding rural areas by home economists trained in cities.

Track 3 [duration: 16:38] [Session one: 13 January 2013]

[00:00] Story illustrating disparity between development model from Sweden and reality in Ethiopia where implemented. Discussion on 1950s and 1960s' US home economists and assumptions on how to modernize the household, relation to consumerism. Resistance from policy makers with exclusion of women from training in agriculture, keeping male bias intact. Describes intervention during military rule with institution seen as anti-military, detention of colleagues. Return to Addis Ababa for security, subsequent killing of both ZT's brothers by military. Decision to leave for Zambia, comments on learning about colonialism.

[12:45] United Nations Decade for Women, presentation of ZT's paper on land rights. Initiative by African women to set up African women's research centre, in response to resentment of their issues being discussed by foreigners.

[15:40] Explanation of family standing at time of military rule, brothers' governmental positions.

Track 4 [duration: 1:26:48] [Session two: 14 January 2013]

[00:00] Describes Zambia in mid-1970s as hub for liberation movements of southern Africa, ZT's recognition of complexity of social change. Comments on oversimplification of transformative process when in USA. Describes working for United Nations Institute for Namibia involving observation of governmental structures in Tanzania, Botswana, Swaziland and constraints in post-independence reconstruction.

[04:21] Mentions setting up nucleus of Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD). Observations on contradictions within liberation movements, example of South Africa and apartheid.

[07:53] Describes development of comparative point of view in context of gender, in Ethiopia, USA, Southern Africa.

[10:38] Describes work of AAWORD and motivation for African women to study for capacity building. Own return to USA to study Sociology before establishing office in Senegal, identified as African country where ideas restrained in other places, could be articulated.

[14:56] Describes joining the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and significance of work at the time.

[16:25] Return home to Ethiopia after 16 years, reflection on hardships friends had endured during military dictatorship. Death of father shortly after. Launch of first policy think tank in Ethiopia for the population's involvement in formulating and debating policies. Explanation of setting up process and advocating minimum 40% female board membership and gender component in all activities. Reconnection with international feminist movement, mentions Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) and DAWN.

[26:40] Describes liaisons in New York and Senegal, ZT founding member of DAWN, meeting Mahnaz Akhemi, mentions Sisterhood Is Global Institute, and WLP discussion forums, serving on Board of Global Fund for Women. Describes decade from 1995 as period of opening towards civil society activities in Ethiopia and women taking advantage of opportunity to set up organizations, public debate on issues. Discusses positive impact on women including in rural areas. Mentions Association of Ethiopian Lawyers. Discusses paternalistic approach of government.

[34:35] Discusses negative impact of microcredit.

[37:24] Mentions radio programme 'Sheger' that promotes gender discussions. Describes undertaking to contribute to society through writing that documents social change in Ethiopia from female perspective.

[40:35] Describes mother as role model, metaphors and lessons imparted regarding economic empowerment, poor women as greatest role models in society.

[46:38] Reflection on experience with WLP enabling rejection of Western notion of Muslim women and Islamic society. Comments on creativity of women in overcoming obstacles, non-rigidity of culture, complexity of society, sustainable change from the inside. Mentions Womankind and holistic approach to development, discusses success stories of direct empowerment.

[59:47] Discussion of donor-recipient relationships. Example of experience working with International Labor Organization in Senegal.

[1:04:35] Discusses microfinance and gender biased assumptions of scheme.

[1:11:15] Reflects on achievements and disappointments of original mission of AAWORD and gender research in Africa. Discusses education and reproductive health and rights, economic power and equal pay. Comments on limitations of global hegemony and technocracy. Introduces important chapter in book on migration of women.

[1:23:35] States what focus of mission would be today and necessary clarifications.