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INTERVIEW WITH ALINAH MALEKGOSI OBIE

Dale McKinley (DM): If you could state your full names just for the record please?

Alinah Malekgosi Obie (AMO): My name is Alinah Malekgosi Obie.

DM: Alinah, how old are you?

AMO: 39 years old.

DM: How long have you lived here in Rammolutsi?

AMO: I have been born here.

DM: .You have been born here and lived here your whole life, so you are the a girl? Ok so if you are almost 40 years old ... we just want to get a little bit of your personal history before we talk about the present period ... Tell us a little bit of what it was like growing up here in Rammolutsi in the 1970s and 1980s? As a child what was life like here in this community?

AMO: It was an apartheid era I grew up under difficult circumstances because my mom was from the farm and got married here in the township. So, in many cases because she was regarded as a farm woman she was supposed to leave us and go and live on the farm although she was legally married.

DM: So does that mean you were living by yourself or with your brothers and sisters? Were your parents on the farm or were they living here?

AMO: We used to stay here at the township but when my mom went back to the farm and she was not around, as my father was working far from home, we used to stay with my grandmother ... me as the eldest and my younger sisters.

DM: At that point in the 1970s how big was Rammolutsi ... how many people were living here at that time?

AMO: When I was growing up here the township was not big. The people were not exceeding six thousand because they were about 500 houses.

DM: Was it 500 or 5000?

AMO: It was 500.

DM: So it was very small. Were you living in this area or where were you living at that point?

AMO: At the location and the house number was 64.

DM: In the old location. So was this whole area here (where she is now living) all fields?

AMO: Yes.

DM: Tell us a little bit also about going to school at that time. How was it for you as a student here in Rammolutsi? Because in the 1970s and 1980s was a time when lots of things were happening with the students and the struggles and those kinds of things?

AMO: In the 1970s it was ok for me, because there were no uprisings here in Rammolutsi but they occurred in the 1980s and I was attending school at Qwa Qwa at that time.

DM: So you had left the community at that stage?

AMO: Yes, I was at school and I came over during the holidays.

DM: When you were living with your granny here and growing up, were the services like water, electricity ... what was it like, the house you were living in ... what was the situation like?

AMO: There was no electricity in the houses and there was no water in the yards. We used to go to the communal tap and fetch water and we were using the bucket system.

DM: When did you get your matric? Did you graduate from high school here? How far did you go in school?

AMO: I completed my matric in 1991 in Qwa Qwa.

DM: Ok, so when you left here in the 1980s to go to school in Qwa Qwa . What were the reasons for leaving and studying there?

AMO: I left school in 1983 and worked from 1983-1986 and then went to school in Qwa Qwa. But the reason why I left was that there was no Std. 9 in Rammolutsi, the last standard was Std. 8. So we were forced to go to other areas to complete school.

DM: When you left the school what kind of work were you doing when you got your first job?

AMO: I worked at a pottery company as a labourer.

DM: You were working there for three years?

AMO: Two years – 1984/85.

DM: And then you decided to go back to school again?

AMO: Yes, back to school, because I was working hard.

DM: And were you not satisfied with that work and the pay you were getting?

AMO: Ooh, I was getting R24 a week.

DM: When did you come back after finishing schooling, did you come back here immediately after finishing school. That was 1986 or 87 ... when was that?

AMO: 1992.

DM: So you came back was there any difference for you than when you left?

AMO: Yes there were changes when I came back. There was electricity and the water was now in our yards.

DM: When you came back did you stay with your granny or did you move somewhere new in Rammolutsi?

AMO: I stayed there again.

DM: When did you move into this place that you live in now?

AMO: It was 1995.

DM: This is your own stand that you have been allocated?

AMO: I stay with my husband but we are not legally married (lobola).

DM: And you have children?

AMO: Yes we have children.

DM: How many children do you have?

AMO: Three.

DM: Where do those children stay, do they stay here with you?

AMO: Here with me.

DM: What ages are they?

AMO: The first one is 8, the second one is 5 and the third one is 3.

DM: When you came back in 1992 things were beginning to change politically. What did you feel about that time period with the coming elections, the new democracy in 1994 ... Were there any changes in your life as a result of that?

AMO: Heh ... this thing of politics stresses, because I saw no changes because the whites were still discriminating. Like where I'm currently working there is discrimination because we as the blacks are expected to go eat outside even when its dusty or raining while the whites eat indoors. Even now there are no changes and it hurts because we are all the same the only difference is our skin colour, so why don't we treat each other equally?

DM: So in the mid 1990s, what were you doing right here?

AMO: I was doing nothing.

DM: So you were living by yourself or with your granny?

AMO: No, I was living with my husband.

DM: Were you trying to get jobs in this area ... were you looking for work?

AMO: Yes.

DM: What kind of work were you looking for?

AMO: Because I finished Std 10, I wanted to be a nurse.

DM: What qualifications did you have ... educationally?

AMO: It was strictly matric.

DM: Did you try to get into further studies, because if you want to be a nurse ... did you try to apply to colleges or other schools?

AMO: I did try to apply, but I was not accepted due to my low points.

DM: In terms of the living conditions that you found when you came back here in the 1990s. Were they an improvement since when you had lived here?

AMO: I did not see any improvement. It is only the councillors who have better lives even if they say they give people the RDP jobs. Jobs are given to their relatives - the general public is still suffering because people don't even get enough money to sustain their livelihood. Most people are not even earning R1000 (per month) ... maybe R200-R300 per fortnight and they have families, so they are still struggling.

DM: When you were living here in the 1990s - this place clearly from the time that you were living here was growing - people were coming in from all over the place. What happened ... was your mother still on the farm and the rest of the other members of the family did they come and live here as well?

AMO: By then she was tying here. In 1980 she got permission to stay as a community member in Rammolutsi..

Ahmed Veriava (AV): Earlier you said that when you came back in the in the 1990s there was now water and electricity and that they had moved the standpipes into the yards. How did that change your life?

AMO: When I came back it was better. I was happy because I can now get water in my yard and electricity. It was good as compared to having to go and buy coal and paraffin, so it was a bit easier and quicker for us - for example when you want to boil water you just take the kettle and plug it in so it's quicker than making fire and so forth..

AV: Were you finding now that you were needing more money ... like to pay for electricity

AMO: People of the informal settlement (squatter camp) are suffering more than we do because with when I buy R10 electricity I can use it for days. I'm better than those in the informal settlement who use more money to buy coal and paraffin or whatever to make fire. In my house, I'm using a two plate stove and a kettle even though I don't have a fridge and many other electrical appliances.

DM What year did you get married when you said lobola was paid ... what year was that?

AMO: It was in 1994.

DM: You had come back in 1992? How was it for you living in this community as a single woman when you had just come from school ... how was that, was it very difficult for you?

AMO: It was not hard because I was staying with my mom and I told myself that I don't want to get married. But I finally got married because when you ask something from the parents they will tell you that people of your age are working. This man was asking me to marry him, so I agreed to marry due to my situation even though my intention was not to get married.

DM: That's interesting because that's not the usual kind of perspective. Why is it that you did not want to get married? Because most young women, that's what they see ... leave school, get married and start a family?

AMO: My father was cheating on my mom.

AV: You mean he was having an affair with someone?

AMO: Yes

AV: How did your mum feel about that?

AMO: My mom was a cool person. My father would tell her about his cheating and it was a small house so we could hear what my father is saying to my mum. That was not good and it hurts me, so that's why I told myself I didn't want to get married.

AV: Is this something that you see a lot. where men basically cheat on their wives here in Rammolutsi?

AMO: Yes that is why I don't want to go to the marriage offices.

DM: So after 1994 ... you were talking earlier on about we are all human beings and every body should be treated equally ... and the same applies to the men and women. The new government was saying they have passed legislation saying that women must be equal to men, they must be able to get the same things and everything. Did you experience any of that as a woman in Rammolutsi, being able to be treated equally?

AMO: No they are not treated equally because you find that when a woman is working and needs to travel with regard to her job, her man will not accept that. Men want to be always the head of the home and they are not willing to be headed by the women. For example, at this present moment I have applied for a bursary at Vaal Med and it has already caused friction in the house because my husband says he is not going to tolerate a situation whereby his wife will sleep out for some days away while he is here at home.

AV: I want to ask you a more general question. Do you think that when women get married they give up some of their freedom or equality ... and how?

AMO: My husband doesn't like me to go work outside. He's always complaining about how our Mayor used to have her own husband but when she became a councillor she

divorced. And those younger women who are working there as councillors, they don't consider their man. So that's why many men are complaining, saying my wife can't go there and work and only come home occasionally.

AV: You were talking about you have applied to Vaal Med? When did that happen?

AMO: It was earlier this month.

DM: When you got married to your present husband, it's the same husband since 1994? Did your life change after that ... for the good, for the bad?

AMO: When I started staying with my husband it was bad, especially about communicating with my husband's family and I even had an idea of killing myself but I thought that I would be a coward. But now it is better because my young kids are even telling him not to do fight with me (when he is drunk) ... if you want to chase our mum you must go to your home, this is our home.

DM: When you got married did you move out from you grandmother's house and moved in to a separate place with your husband ... is that right?

AMO: Yes.

DM: And where did you move to? Was it a house or a mukhukhu?

AMO: To his parents' place.

DM: Where is that, another side of Rammolutsi?

AMO: It is another section of Rammolutsi.

AV: Was it a shack or stand?

AMO: It was a shack at that time, but now they have built a RDP house.

AV: So he still stays there?

AMO: The parents are no longer staying there because his sister chased the parents from the stand claiming that it was hers. They found a new stand in another section and they have an RDP house.

AV: And your husband what work does he do?

AMO: He is a bricklayer.

DM: Has he been employed all this time ... does he get work regularly?

AMO: Every year he gets some part-time work. But the person who is assisting us is my granny.

DM: So after the time that you got married, you moved from the new place and his family ... you were basically for most of the time being supported by the parents?

AMO: By my granny.

DM: When did you start working for yourself ... when did you get a job?

AMO: In 1998, I started as a volunteer.

AV: Where did your granny get the money to support you?

AMO: It was her old age pension money and at that time it was R495.

DM: So everybody was surviving on that?

AMO: Yes.

AV: When you say all of us it was your granny, your husband and yourself?

AMO: Yes.

DM: When you started volunteering in 1998 ...what did you volunteer to do?

AMO: I was a care giver.

DM: How did you come to get into that programme, that volunteering programme. How did that happen?

AMO: I was informed by friend about the place where they wanted people to volunteer, so that's why I went there.

DM: Where was there?

AMO: It was a hospice.

DM: And this hospice is in Rammolutsi?

AMO: Viljoenskroon.

AV: When you say you were volunteering, were they giving you any kind of stipend when you started?

AMO: No.

AV: Did they give you any training?

AMO: Yes.

AV: What kind of training?

AMO: First aid and home-based care courses.

DM: So this hospice, is it private or public ...who runs that hospice?

AMO: It is private.

DM: How long were you volunteering there for?

AMO: It was five years, because they started to register the volunteers as permanent in 2005, but in 2000 they gave us a stipend of R400 per month.

AV: So the first two years you worked as a volunteer and then five years on the stipend and afterwards full time?

AMO: Yes.

AV: When you started working or agreed to volunteer, why did you volunteer?

AMO: I realised the way in which people suffer, especially those with HIV-AIDS ... there were so many people in the township who were suffering and in need of help. There were 5 permanent workers at the hospice plus a white lady. The lady who informed me told me that we were to get training so we can be able to help the HIV positive people in the township. So that's why I went to volunteer.

AV: Were you thinking that this might be a way for you to get into nursing?

AMO: Yes.

AV: As volunteers, how were you treated by the people at the hospice?

AMO: They were treating us very well. Like when they came back from the training course they will come and share with us what they got from the course. But now we are not involved and not told of courses or any developments within the hospice. Even when they need new staff we are not even informed, and we now have to buy our own uniforms. So it is no longer the same.

AV: Earlier you were saying that at the hospice when you eat you are forced to eat outside and that is because you are black. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

AMO: It happened yesterday when I had gone and bought food for myself at the shop and went to eat in the kitchen I was told by the hospice manager that there had been a meeting and that some rules had been given to the hospice workers not to eat in the kitchen but outside since the workers make noise.

DM: Do you know who owns the hospice? You said it was private hospice ... do you know who the owners are?

AMO: Yes I think it is private because the one who lady who started this place is the wife of Jeffrey Allen (?). But she left although I don't know why. Now there are two men – Jeffrey and Rolf Evans – they are the ones who are the decision makers and are in charge of the firing and hiring of the people. So this is why I say it's private.

DM: So I just want to go back. When you got this stipend from 2000 to 2005 ... tell us exactly when you started on a stipend of R400 a month, what kind of work you were doing, what work were you doing everyday?

AMO: The very same as I'm doing now. At that time, the hospice did not have its own building so we were starting at PAX and I was then going to the sick ones in the townships and bathing them and so forth.

DM: Have you been working with people in Viljoenskroon ... like white people ... and people in Rammolutsi? Or it was mostly in Rammolutsi?

AMO: It is only black people in Rammolutsi, no white people.

AV: I know it is difficult but when you talk, try to look at the camera?

AMO: Ok.

DM: When you became a permanent worker in 2005 what did you get paid?

AMO: It was R947.

DM: You mentioned earlier that one of the reasons you joined, why you became a volunteer, was because you saw all the people in particular those with HIV-AIDS. Tell us about the HIV-AIDS situation in Rammolutsi?

AMO: I think 80% of the people are HIV-AIDS positive.

DM: How do you know that?

AMO: Most of the people come to the hospice for testing.

AV: Are you saying 80% of the people who come for testing are HIV positive?

AMO: Yes.

DM: And how many people everyday would you say come everyday to the hospice for testing?

AMO: 4-5 everyday.

DM: What sections of the community ... is it young people or women mostly or is it across the board?

AMO: Most of those coming for the test are women.

DM: And the age group?

AMO: Between 35 and 50.

AV: Are you basing the figures on the fact that more women come and test? Do a lot of men also come and get tested?

AMO: Yes, but women are more than men.

DM: Are there any other hospices, the hospitals, the health institutions that are doing this kind of work in Rammolutsi beside the hospice you work for?

AMO: I don't know how to put this but ... previously there were two hospices, the Viljoenskroon hospice and the Rammolutsi hospice. But the Rammolutsi hospice no longer exists and the other people who are doing the home-based care are working at the local clinic called PAX – they are volunteers and each has three patients; one HIV, one TB and one elder person.

DM: What I was asking is ... not just the hospice but the public hospital or a public clinic ... is anyone else doing this work besides that other hospice?

AMO: No, there is no one because at the clinics their job is just to give those people tablets, they are not doing the job we are doing.

DM: Are people charged to get the home-based care services ... or is it free?

AMO: It is free.

DM: On a daily basis when you are working how many homes do you visit ?

AMO: Six.

AV: For yourself, how many houses are assigned for you to visit on a regular basis?
Those six, do you go back and visit the same people everyday?

AMO: Yes

AV: Okay, so how many people are under your care?

AMO: Between 42 and 45.

AV: How often do you go and see a particular person?

AMO: Once a week.

DM: The access and the availability of the necessary medicine - is it a good situation is it bad? – i.e., the necessary medicine for those people who are sick, including the ARVs for the HIV-positive people?

AMO: What we are doing so that our patients can have access to get the medications and get them quicker/in time ... we send someone from our staff who lives near the PAX clinic to go and queue for the patients. We take our own ambulance to get the patients and then when they come to PAX they are just going to get in the queue where that worker is waiting, so it's easier for them to get their medication. They don't stand in long queues.

DM: Is PAX the only place in Rammolutsi where you can get these medicines?

AMO: Yes.

AV: Are people using anti-retrovirals – ARVs - now?

AMO: Yes.

AV: When you started using the ARVs were people reluctant to take them?

AMO: Yes.

AV: Why?

AMO: My opinion is that people were thinking that the ARV's were the cure. But now we are attending the clinics and telling people that they must know that the ARVs are not a cure.

DM: Have you been supported at the hospice by the local government and the public healthcare sector?

AMO: Yes.

DM: In what ways do they do that?

AMO: In 2005 we were trained by the Department of Health. Some our care givers are getting paid by the Social Development Department.

DM: I want us to go back to your original comment about men. You were saying that the infection rate of HIV-AIDS is high. Do you think there is a connection between that high rate of HIV-AIDS infection and the relationships between men and women? What you were talking about earlier on?

AMO: I don't understand.

DM: For example, you told us that one of the reasons you didn't want to get married was because the men were cheating on their wives. Do you think that is a contributor to HIV and AIDS here?

AMO: Yes, I also don't trust my husband. I take the HIV test every month because these things are happening a lot in the places where people are boozing/drinking. Women who are drinking just have sex with men without any condom.

AV: This is a difficult question and you don't have to answer it in relation to yourself. If for instance ... like you said you were afraid of your husband ... what will happen if you say to him that he must use a condom?

AMO: He cannot have a problem because we normally use condoms for a period of a year after the birth of the baby.

AV: I just want to ask about the Vaal Med thing. When did you apply?

AMO: This month.

AV: And what did you apply for?

AMO: To enrol as a nurse.

AV: So it is a course?

AMO: Yes it is an enrolling nurse and after two years they get ... (certificate?)

AV: Are you going to be able to do that now, because you were saying earlier that your husband is not happy about you going?

AMO: It is a problem, but I don't want to talk much about it now because I have even had counselling with a social worker.

AV: Ok.

DM: Just last couple of questions. What do you think ... because you have been working at the home-based care, you have seen the people suffering particularly the people suffering with HIV and AIDS ... what do you think needs to happen in this community to deal with the medical and health problems which are obviously quite a lot? If you were the MEC for health in this province what kinds of things would you do to deal with the health problems and medical issues here in this community?

AMO: I'm thinking that if I was the MEC I would say this thing of confidentiality of the status of HIV/AIDS should be stopped, they should just publish it so that many people can come up. People are afraid that their friends will laugh at them if they know they have HIV. So we should just say clearly that a person has this disease. People should be encouraged to do the test so that they can get the ARVs, because they help.

DM: One last question .. it's actually not a question necessarily. We ask everybody that we talk to at the end of the interview if there is something that you would want to say ... there's going to be people watching this or reading that you had to say ... something that

we have not asked you about that you would like to say about your work or your community - please feel free to say so?

AMO: I would be glad to see that all of us here in Rammolutsi have the RDP houses. But the most important one is for there to be a clinic around her. Most of our people, especially the pregnant women, they are afraid to attend the far away clinics. So I think all of the sections should have their own clinics. Our people must encourage their kids to attend the clinics.

MINUTES: 73:07