

Migrating from Keimoes to Karlien Park: Stories from “Coloured” South Africa

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Abstract

During the 1970s and 1980s, many “Coloured” people migrated from Keimoes in the now Northern Cape Province to Rustenburg, which is situated in what is now the North West Province. Rustenburg was the nearest large “city” to Keimoes and the distance these people travelled is about 800 kilometres. They did not migrate *en masse*, but as individuals or families, or individuals later joined by their families. Initially, they resided amongst Blacks in what is now Phokeng. Through the assistance of the then deputy mayor of Rustenburg, Mr Johan Beukes, a white man who had established a *Werkskring* (Working Circle) for doing missionary work among “Coloureds,” they obtained land to build a church near the “white dorp” of Rustenburg. They built the church as a congregation of the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church, with their own hands, without spending money on contractors. The church was inaugurated in 1976. Around the church, the “township” of Karlien Park developed in what was set aside for “Coloured” inhabitation by the amendments to the Group Areas Act 41, which had already been proclaimed in 1950. Questions raised are: Why did the people migrate to Rustenburg? What was the impact of this migration on their mental health? Do they regret migrating? Do they want to go back? This article shares the findings of a study conducted to address those questions. Information was gathered through interviews with people who shared their stories of migrating from Keimoes to Karlien Park and still live in Karlien Park. The themes emanating from the information gathered are as follows: Families were torn apart by migration; those who migrated were skilled labourers; in Karlien Park, the migrants retained a strong “Coloured” identity; the relationship with non-migrants in Keimoes is complicated; and the Church took a central place in the migrated community.

Keywords: URCSA Rustenburg-Karlien Park; migration; “Coloured” migration; Keimoes; trauma of migration; Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa; Dutch Reformed Mission Church; Phokeng

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Introduction: Aim and Background

Aim

This article aims to share stories of migration by some “Coloured” people during the 1970s and 1980s from Keimoes in the now Northern Cape Province. They migrated to Karlien Park, the “Coloured township” of Rustenburg, in the now North West Province. This is a distance of 789 kilometres. One covers this distance in more than nine hours using private transport. Travelling such a long distance in the 1970s and 1980s was arduous because a gravel road was mainly used, and the place was not accessible using public transport. Even today, there is no direct public transport linking Keimoes and Karlien Park.

Why did these people take on this difficult journey to live in often dismal circumstances? What were the effects of this internal migration on their mental health? Was migrating to Karlien Park worthwhile? This article addresses these questions by interviewing people from Karlien Park who migrated from Keimoes and are still living in this “township.”

Literature Overview

Studies on Internal Migration in South Africa

Internal migration is under-researched in South Africa. This is probably because previous research focused mainly on forced removals when people were forcefully removed to townships and homelands following the promulgation of the Group Areas Act Nr 41 of 1950 (and amendments).

As far as internal migration from rural areas to cities is concerned, Victor Mlambo, an economist from the University of Zululand, published an article titled “An Overview of Rural-urban Migration in South Africa: Its Causes and Implications.” In this article, he asks why it is projected that in 2050 a massive 80 per cent of the South African population will be residing in urban areas (Mlambo 2018, 63). Pointing out that the South African government has neglected to develop infrastructure in rural areas, he indicates that one of the primary factors causing people to migrate from rural to urban areas is the availability of better employment opportunities in cities and towns.

Rustenburg is, of course, famous for its platinum and chrome mines. Platinum mining started in Rustenburg in 1929 with the discovery and commercialisation of vast platinum and chrome reefs in Rustenburg by Dr Hans Merensky and his companies, leading to the largest platinum mines in the world (Hans Merensky Holding 2024). However, as will be demonstrated in the interviews in the following sections, the people did not migrate from Keimoes to Rustenburg to work in the mines. They were builders, artisans, and domestic workers who were exposed to fewer employment opportunities in Keimoes during the 1970s and 1980s. They migrated to Rustenburg because of the employment and business opportunities created by mining communities.

Oumar Bouare, from the Human Sciences Research Council, published his research titled “Determinants of Internal Migration in South Africa” in 2002 (2001–2002, 13). The results of the research show that the determinants of internal migration are “the relative GDP, the relative unemployment, the relative number of reported crimes and kinship.” His research is of only relative importance to this study since it focuses on internal migration after the apartheid laws which restricted people’s movements were recalled in 1994 while this article deals with migration in the 1970s and 1980s.

Chukwuedozie Ajaero and co-authors, Odimegwu, Chisumpa and Nmehielle, from the Demography and Population Studies Programme at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, published an interesting article entitled “The Influence of Internal Migration on Mental Health Status in South Africa” (2017, 1–10). Their study yielded that, although migrants’ mental health is determined by a variety of socio-demographic factors such as marital status, income, province of residence, and race, the non-migrants in this study displayed a significantly better mental health status than those who migrated.

This finding is relatively useful to this study. Although the research population of this research sample is small, some interviewees confirm that they want to go back to Keimoes, as other migrants have done. However, from this small sample, there is also evidence that participants are well-established in Karlien Park and are relieved to be “liberated” from aspects of the Keimoes life which they found unbearable.

Studies on Migration to Rustenburg

Direct references to Karlien Park in the literature—both in academia and municipal reports—are limited. Two articles that refer to Karlien Park, albeit cursory. The first is Andries Bezuidenhout and Sakhela Buhlungu’s 2015 study, “Enclave Rustenburg: Platinum Mining and the Post-apartheid Social Order.” In the article, the authors analyse the situation in post-apartheid Rustenburg and their findings are of limited use for this study. In the decade between 2001 and 2011, Rustenburg’s population increased from 400 000 to 550 000 (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu 2015, 526). Since the “Coloured” population does not primarily work in the mines, their remark (2015, 529) that jobs in manufacturing have declined from 12 000 in 1995 to 7 000 in 2009 is significant since female interviewees reported working in clothing factories after migrating to Rustenburg. Also important to note from Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu (2015, 529) is their quoting from the 2011 Rustenburg Local Municipality Report (2011,35), pointing out that 41.5 per cent of Rustenburg residents live in shacks, many of which are in the backyards of houses. To a large degree, this is still the situation in Karlien Park. According to the 2011 census, there are 4 862 “Coloureds” living in Rustenburg, constituting 0.88 per cent of its population, of which 785 live in Karlien Park and speak Afrikaans (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu 2015, 532, 538). The continuing and even worsening poor conditions in the “townships” of Rustenburg alluded to in the remarks by Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu (2015) may be the reason for some of the interviewees

expressing their wish to return to Keimoes, as will become clear from the interviews provided in this article.

The second is Moses Kibet's 2013 study on "Migration into Rustenburg Local Municipality between 1996 and 2001." This study is only of relative importance for this study since it analyses the patterns of migration into Rustenburg between 1996 and 2001, which, again, is a period later than the one this article focuses on. Kibet indicates that migration to Rustenburg is mainly (65 per cent) from the North West Province itself, largely by Black Africans, and that unemployment and crime are the main reasons for migration (Kibet 2013, 9). During this time, very few Whites, Indians, and "Coloureds" migrated to Rustenburg, with "Coloureds" being the fewest. Also, these population groups migrated to Rustenburg mainly for blue-collar jobs or manual work (Kibet 2013, 10,12). The "Coloured" population of Rustenburg, then, is not growing.

Studies on "Coloured" Identity

Many publications on "Coloured" identity have seen the light lately. Reference will be made here to only two rather recent publications. Firstly, Fabian Oliver's 2024 article, "'Not White Enough, Not Black Enough': On Black Theology and Coloured Identity in South Africa," is important. While calling on a "Coloured" identity that is independent of black or white and not an in-between, he advocates for Black Theology as a site of resistance and liberation in the plight of "Coloured" people.

Secondly, Ismael Lagardien's 2022 publication, *Too White to be Coloured, Too Coloured To Be Black*, should be mentioned here as a narrative of a "Coloured" person who suffered from Black, white, and "Coloured" prejudice in a country where racial essentialism still reigns.

For purposes of this article, the designation "Coloured" will be placed in inverted commas. The people interviewed have been referred to as "Coloured" in line with *apartheid* laws. However, they have not expressed the wish, or lack the leadership, to either problematise, reject or embrace the designation "Coloured."

Background

Keimoes and Rustenburg Today

Today Keimoes falls within the Kai! Garib Local Municipality in the Northern Cape Province. This municipality covers a large area of 26 358 square kilometres with only three large towns, Keimoes, Kakamas, and Kenhardt (Kai! Garib Municipality, Draft Annual Report 2022/2023,13). The municipality has a population of 68 929 people of which 44 600 are "Coloured," that is, 64.7 per cent (2022/2023, 4). The Keimoes population, today, still consists of more than 90 per cent "Coloured" people.

Rustenburg, according to 2023 statistics, on the other hand, is the most populous city in the North West Province. However, only 2,67 per cent of the population in Rustenburg can be designated as “Coloured” (0.88 per cent in 2011 as indicated above). Although Rustenburg is one of the richest municipalities in South Africa, in terms of income, 46.7 per cent of its population earns less than R3 000 per month, with 43,5 per cent of the “Coloured” population living in poverty (Rustenburg Spatial Development Framework 2023, 73).

Informal Conversations with Early Migrants

In an informal conversation (23 October 2022), auntie Susan Masisi described how “Coloureds” from Keimoes first lived in Lefaragatlha, between Tlhabane (the “Black township” of Rustenburg) and Phokeng which at the time was called “K*****kraal.”

Already in 1961, a white man, Mr Johan Beukes, started “missionary work” amongst the “Coloureds” who were living in Tlhabane (Tlhabane means “spear” and is named after a local chief). Mr Beukes started a *Werkskring* with 12 “Coloured” families. At the time, this was not recognised as a legal structure by the (white) Dutch Reformed Church (Beukes in VGK Rustenburg-Karlienspark, Gedenkuitgawe met 30ste bestaansjaar 1976–2006, 6).

Mr Beukes owned a shop that sold lights (“Ludo”); it was situated next to the municipality buildings. He was not only a businessman but also the *Onder-Burgemeester* (deputy mayor) of Rustenburg. As such, he acquired land on which a church for the “Coloureds” would be built, in what is now Karlien Park. Karlien Park was supposed to be at Donkerhoek, far from the (white) city. With this land given by the municipality to the “Coloured” people to build a church, the “Coloureds” moved here from “Black” areas after they finished building the church in 1976 with their own hands, not making use of any contractors. At first, they put up and lived in *sinkhuisies* (small houses made from corrugated iron) in Karlien Park, but soon the municipality provided them with brick houses in which they still live (informal discussions with congregants).

This *Werkskring* was established as a congregation of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) in 1980, and in 1988, Mr Beukes was licenced by the (white) Dutch Reformed Church to become a minister of the Word, although he had no theological training. In the same year, he was ordained as the “dominee” of DRMC Rustenburg-Karliens Park.

Auntie Eva Riekert (76, informal conversation 10 August 2024) grew up in Pella, which today still is a (96.1 per cent) “Coloured” community in the now Northern Cape Province. It is situated on the Namibian border, 250 kilometres to the southwest of Keimoes. Pella is a hot and dry place and is located near the Orange River, with an average annual temperature of 40 degrees Celsius. Between Pella and Keimoes lies Kakamas, where Auntie Eva’s boyfriend, Jan Riekert, worked and lived. On weekends

the young man would cycle 150 kilometres on what then was a dirt road to visit Eva, the girl of his dreams. He later accepted a job on a date farm, Klein Pella, just outside Pella, to be near her, and they got married on 6 May 1967 when Auntie Eva was 19 years old. Jan resigned from his job because his boss did not want to give him leave when his young son died, and he and his wife and three children moved to Rustenburg in 1972, where he took up a variety of jobs as a builder, mechanic, and driver of heavy vehicles, among others. There was no Karlien Park then, and they stayed in Phokeng. For Auntie Eva, living among Black people was a new experience. However, from there the migrants from Keimoes were very active in building the church in Karlien Park which was finished in 1976. In 1977, they moved to Karlien Park and built themselves a permanent house there, where auntie Eva still lives. Oom Jan died in 2021 during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Auntie Frieda Bok, now 72 (informal conversation 31 August 2024), tells an almost similar story about the early days after moving to Rustenburg and eventually settling in Karlien Park. Only she and her husband Koos migrated from Johannesburg, although oom Koos has strong roots in the Richtersveld in the west of the Northern Cape Province. Why did they come to Rustenburg in 1972 when Auntie Frieda was 20 years old? *Die Kleurlinge was die bouers daardie tyd wat van oraloor gekom het om hier as bouers te kom werk* (“Coloureds” were the builders of the time who came from everywhere to come and work here as builders). They too constructed themselves a *sinkhuisie* (zink house), helped to build the church in 1975/6, and received a house from the municipality in 1977. Auntie Frieda still lives here. Oom Koos died in 2023 after contracting a virus while in hospital. Auntie Frieda remarked that their early years in Karlien Park were a wonderful time. Everybody worked together, nobody gossiped about anybody, and life was not so expensive. Also, there no drugs, making the place safer.

Lanie Coetzee, neé Nel (informal conversation 24 August 2024), a woman in her forties was sent to Rustenburg by her parents in 1997. She lived with her sister Lien, who was already residing in Karlien Park with her husband. Lanie wanted to study to become a teacher but ended up working in shops and pre-schools. She married and had three children who are now in secondary school and tertiary institutions. She sometimes wishes that she could return to Keimoes as other members of her family and friends have done. Life in Keimoes looks easier and more fulfilling. One can open a business there and make a good living.

The above informal conversations give some insight into what Rustenburg looked like—and felt like—when “Coloured” people migrated there during the early 1970s, mainly from Keimoes and worked usually as builders and artisans. With the help of Mr Beukes, a missionary, they obtained land to build a church, thereby securing an area near the “white” city which became Karlien Park, a township designated for “Coloureds.” They lived in harmony as a close-knit Christian community.

Methodology

Data Collection

Three “Coloured” people, who were purposively selected, were interviewed for this study. The criterium for their selection was their long stay in Karlien Park, where they still reside. It turned out that all three of them have a lifelong identification with the Karlien Park congregation of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), which makes them a homogenous group and provides the study with a focus.

A qualitative research method was used in this study. In terms of sample size, the researcher followed the guidelines to select a smaller sample, not only due to their availability, but to collect more “extensive detail” on a smaller homogenous group of individuals (Creswell 2013, 356).

Since 1994, the new name of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) has been URCSA. In this year, the DRMC underwent a unification process with the (Black) Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) to form the URCSA. Rustenburg-Karlien Park URCSA, then, is originally the DRMC church around which Karlien Park was developed since 1975/1976.

A semi-structured questionnaire was used which, apart from personal details, consists of the following open-ended questions:

- Please tell the story of your childhood in Keimoes.
- Please tell the story of how, when and why you came to Karlien Park.
- How is the church in Karlien Park different from that in Keimoes? How did your belief change with the trek to Karlien Park?
- How are the people different in Keimoes than in Karlien Park?
- Would you go back to Keimoes if you could? Why (not)?

Each participant provided signed consent to be interviewed and permitted the use of their actual names and biographical details, which included those of their families.

Data Analysis

In terms of interpreting the interviews, the author remains within her methodological philosophy that “Interpretation is colonisation.” The interviews are therefore not interpreted according to an interpretative agenda but organised under themes relevant to migration. The themes are extracted from the stories, and the words of the interviewees themselves are presented in an unmediated manner (see Landman and Pieterse 2023, 2).

Interviews

For this study, three interviews were conducted with Desmond Thys, Rina Oliver, and Drika du Plessis.

First Interview: Desmond Thys

Desmond Thys (interviewed on 8 June 2024) is a 50-year-old male, born in 1974, and a leading elder in the church. He has been married to Loretta for 21 years. The couple has a son and a daughter (and a granddaughter). Loretta has two children, a son and a daughter, and two granddaughters from a previous marriage. Desmond's mother is Kyta Thys, who is now deceased. Desmond took his stepfather's surname, Thys. He knows that "Chris" is his biological father, but he has never met him.

Desmond was born in Springbok, in now Northern Cape Province. He and his brother Quintin were from the same father. However, his brother died at a young age from jaundice and was buried at Vyeboseiland, one of the islands of Keimoes in the Orange River. His mother went to Rustenburg to work in a factory making clothes, and he was raised by his grandmother and grandfather, Pieter and Johanna Strauss until he finished Standard 2 (Grade 4) at Môreliq, in Keimoes, after spending two years in Standard 1 (Grade 3). In 1987, as a boy of 13, he was sent to Karlien Park to join his mother and to finish Standards 3 to 5 (Grades 5 to 7) at Karlien Park Primêre Skool (primary school), where he completed his primary schooling. While in Keimoes, his aunt—his mother's sister—worked at Spar, a retail store, and financially supported him and his grandparents. He calls her his *grootmaakma* (the mother who raised me). She died recently, and Desmond and his wife travelled with the author to Keimoes to attend her funeral.

Desmond was sent back to his grandparents in Keimoes to do his secondary schooling at Hoërskool Oranjezicht (high school). He finished Standard 6 (Grade 8) but when he failed Standard 7 (Grade 9), he was sent to the hostel of Hoërskool Alabama (high school) in the "Coloured township" where he was expected to finish Matric (Grade 12). However, he could not finish Matric because his stepfather died. Desmond does not like the idea that somebody should be called a stepfather. It reminds him of his childhood when he could never find a safe place where he was accepted. Even today, although he is very involved in raising his wife's still very young granddaughters, he detests to be called their step-grandfather.

Desmond claims that Keimoes was not for him. There was no progress or a future there. There was only seasonal work to harvest grapes on the islands in the Orange River. The "Coloureds" were builders, but there was no more building to be done, and they left for Rustenburg. After secondary school which he did not finish, Desmond was then sent back to Karlien Park where he started working. He worked at CMGM, a construction company run by oom Kenny Gradwell, and at Snyders Piping under his beloved oom Christo Snyders. He then worked for some time at the dry cleaners. His favourite job is

working at a company that produces signs, and he worked 10 years and again for five years for similar companies, which he left after he was treated badly. He was unemployed for eight years, from 2015 to 2022. During this time, he only did piece jobs (casual and part-time work). In 2023, he started working at Bojanala Batteries, a shop owned by Jolene and Solly Gearicke. He had good working experiences in businesses owned by people who are (or were) members of URCSA Rustenburg-Karlien Park congregation.

Desmond derives meaning and joy from his membership of the church. When he was a child in Keimoes, a minister of the now URCSA refused to bury his grandfather because he did not come to church oftenly. However, this did not steal Desmond's dream to become a minister of the Word one day.

When he was in the secondary school hostel in Klerksdorp, in North West Province, people tried to convince him to attend charismatic churches. But when he finally came to Karlien Park in 1994 as a 24-year-old, the before-mentioned Mr Beukes (then Rev. Beukes) convinced him to return to the URCSA. "This is where my heart is," Desmond says.

Desmond met his wife, Loretta, in Karlien Park in 2000. On 24 August 2002, their daughter Janique, *n voorkind* (child before marriage) was born. Loretta converted from the Roman Catholic Church, and they got married on 7 June 2002, that is, on a Saturday, before Janique was baptised. Rev. Beukes insisted that they should be married for him to baptise their child. These were and are still the values of the URCSA.

Desmond does not want to migrate back to Keimoes. As a youngster in Keimoes, they called white people "*baas*" (boss) and "*miesies*" (mam), but that did not bother him. What bothered him was that there was strict class differentiation between "Coloureds" themselves, as there is today. The reverend and the teachers stayed "up there," while the middle class stayed in simple houses. The low classes live in small houses made of reeds or corrugated iron (*riethuisies*, *sinkhuisies*). Karlien Park does not have these classes amongst "Coloureds."

However, the residents of Karlien Park today are suffering because of corruption in the municipality, and people who come into the country to damage children with drugs. The place is falling apart. This is why Desmond voted for the Arbeidsparty (Workers' Party) in 2024 elections and not the Democratic Alliance (DA), which runs Karlien Park.

He insists that he will not return to Keimoes because the cost of living there is quite high. Keimoes reminds him of how he was beaten as a child because he was a dark "Coloured." Also, for most of his young life, he was frequently migrating between Keimoes, Karlien Park, and Klerksdorp without a safe place of his own. He had nowhere

to go and felt he had been thrown away. One of the things that made him happy was getting something to wear from Pep stores.

Second Interview: Rina Olivier

Rina Olivier (interviewed on 14 June 2024) is a 60-year-old female, married to Boeta (Andries Jacobus Olivier). They have three adult children. Rina's mother was Mary Theron, now deceased, and her father was Bennett Coetzee.

Rina was born on 23 February 1964 in Keimoes. Her mother, Mary, worked in the Cape and Rina was raised by her grandparents, her mother's mother and father. She went to Môrelië Laerskool (primary school) en Senior Sekondêre Skool Oranjezicht (secondary school) until Standard 8 (Grade 10). At the age of 16, she was taken out of school to go and work. She first worked for Spar, a retailer and then as a salesperson in a shoe shop until it went bankrupt. In 1984, at the age of 20, she was sent to Karlien Park. Desmond's mother (see Interviewee 1 above) got her a job in a clothing factory. Two years later, in 1986, she married Boeta, on a Friday in court, and received the blessing from Rev. Beukes in the church.

People needed to adapt to Karlien Park. One simple example is that the people of Keimoes eat lamb and those in Karlien Park beef. However, Rina was able to finish Matric when she came to Karlien Park. She studied with Damelin College, through correspondence and eventually became an accountant, working in this capacity for 17 years until 2017.

However, Rina sometimes wishes to return to Keimoes. The people who remained behind in Keimoes are much better off now: The municipality functions well and the buildings and public lawns are well-kept. The "Coloured" people there are getting compensation for the land taken by whites. And nowadays you can sell anything there without a licence. Her sister has moved back to Keimoes where she manages a baking business and lives in their mother's old house.

Third Interview: Drika du Plessis

Drika du Plessis (interviewed on 6 July 2024) is a 57-year-old female born in 1967 in Keimoes. Her mother is Petronella Strauss, aged 83. Her father, Hendrik Strauss, is deceased. Drika was raised by her parents and had a happy and tranquil childhood. At school, she excelled in athletics and enjoyed going to church. Almost everybody belonged to the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (now URCSA). Her grandpa, who could not read or write, was on the church council. Sometimes Drika would cycle to church for five kilometres. She was confirmed by Rev. De Klerk. Her pet was a sheep called Siekieman.

She grew up in a time when children did not cause trouble for their parents. They listened, and there were rules. For example, after sunset, the children had to be in the

yard. Their parents held *huisgodsdienst* (house religion). Her mother worked in the house and her father in the lands.

Drika went to Môrelië Laerskool (primary school) en Senior Sekondêre Skool Oranjezicht (secondary school) finishing Standard 6 (Grade 8).

When she was 19, she was sent to Rustenburg, where she lived with her uncle, oom Frikkie Losper, and worked at “Bubbles,” a local shop selling plastic ware. She met Kobus, whom she married three years later in 1989 when she was 22.

Drika shows a yearning for Keimoes which she cannot fully express in words. Furthermore, her experiences have made her conclude that children in Karlien Park are prone to disobedience and are vulnerable to drugs and that men contract diseases because of their work in the mines. Monthly, Drika still receives a copy of the *Gemsbok*, a local newspaper.

Themes on Migration

The research population for this study is limited. From this small group it is evident that for every topic on migration that was expressed and storied, there was an “on the one hand” and an “on the other hand.”

The following identified themes will be discussed below: Families were torn apart by migration; those who migrated were skilled labourers; in Karlien Park the migrants retained a strong “Coloured” identity; the relationship with non-migrants in Keimoes is complicated; and the church took a central place in the migrated community.

1. Families Torn Apart by Migration

After a church council meeting of a “Coloured” congregation (details withheld), the author asked the members about their descent. All of them had white grandfathers or great-grandfathers. All these white ancestral fathers were German, except one who was Irish. Also, through pre-marital counselling, the author has observed that in “Coloured” congregations, the father (often white) is missing, not willing to acknowledge fatherhood, or is unknown.

Interviewees related that their grandparents or other family members raised them because their mothers had already migrated to Rustenburg or elsewhere and that they did not know their fathers or that they were absent.

On the other hand, others share their stories about growing up in strong families, where both the mother and the father were “Coloured” and were committed to marriage. However, as young people, they had to leave their families and look for opportunities in Rustenburg. This tore families apart, with some of them reuniting in Karlien Park at a later stage.

2. Skilled Migrants

The “Coloured” men who migrated to Rustenburg were skilled builders and some were artisans. They even used their skills to build the church and did not ask for any compensation. However, the women were less trained and worked mainly as salespersons or acquired skills in a textile factory. These opportunities are dwindling and above, I related that in recent decades, manufacturing jobs in Rustenburg have been lost.

On the other hand, the author can testify to the fact that the women in Karlien Park have excellent mothering and cooking skills, from which the church too benefits. The women acquired these skills as young girls in Keimoes. In Keimoes, they learnt how to cook “in seven colours,” and how to mother children. The *oumas* (grandmothers) in Karlien Park play an important role in raising the young and often walk to school to pick them up and look after them until the mothers return from work. The pastor has resolved not to involve grandmothers in church activities at a time when their grandchildren need them.

Employment in Karlien Park has become scarce. Those who have jobs are mainly skilled labourers who rely on short, fixed-term contracts that take them away from home if they manage to get contracts at all. The main source of income in Karlien Park is social security grants for children under 18 and pensioners over 60 (see Landman 2024)

3. Migrants Retaining a Strong “Coloured” Identity

Migrating from Keimoes, where more than 90 per cent of the population has been and still is “Coloured,” to Karlien Park, where they are part of the just more than 2 per cent “Coloured” population of Rustenburg, might have taken its toll on the “Coloured” identity. And yet, the “Coloured” people of Rustenburg retained their identity. In 1994, those who could afford moved from Karlien Park to the previously white suburbs of Rustenburg. However, on Sundays, they attend “Coloured” church(es) of Karlien Park. Even at parties, to which the author was invited, one finds that the family and friends invited are “Coloured.”

The three interviewees did not express their “Coloured” identity overtly although there were concealed allusions to the suffering of “Coloureds” in Rustenburg while this was not the case in Keimoes which was/is predominantly “Coloured.” In informal discussions, the author was often told that “Coloureds” had been/are treated badly by employers who belong to other racial groups, and that their children find it difficult to get into “good schools.”

4. Relationship with Non-migrants in Keimoes

More than one of the interviewees expressed their wish—or rather a longing that comes and goes—to return to Keimoes. In present-day Keimoes, the municipality is taking good care of the land and its people. There are great self-employment opportunities

since it is easier to get a licence to start a small business. In Keimoes, the children have better opportunities and enjoy a more carefree childhood without drugs and an unsafe environment which is keeping the Karlien Park community captive. According to some interviewees, this is the dream of many people living in present-day Karlien Park.

On the other hand, interviewees also have bad memories of Keimoes, cruel people, and a classist community to which they do not want to return.

5. Centrality of the Church

The central role played by the Church in the stories of the interviewees needs to be noted. The buildings of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (now URCSA) were built even before the “Coloured” people moved to Karlien Park. The interviewees fondly remember that in 1975/6 everybody worked together to build the Church, and the Church became part of their identity.

They also relate how, sometime after the death of Rev. Beukes, there was a schism in the Church, and that many people then, and today, have left the URCSA to join charismatic churches, some founded by previous URCSA members themselves. However, when people die, or a child is baptised, or when young people need to be confirmed, the families bring them back to the URCSA—evidence of how the people still relate to their “roots.” The people of Karlien Park often talk about this.

Conclusion

During the 1970s and 1980s, “Coloured” people migrated from Keimoes, in the now Northern Cape Province, to Karlien Park in Rustenburg, in the North West Province. They were mainly men with their families who moved there as builders. Young people also migrate as teenagers to look for employment after leaving or completing school. The migrants organised around the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Karlien Park and were eventually forced by law to stay in this “Coloured township.” They have retained their identity as “Coloured” although they constitute, in the whole of Rustenburg, less than 3 per cent of the population. Many have left Karlien Park after 1994 to live in houses in the more affluent areas. Some of those who remained in Karlien Park long to return to Keimoes which they idealise as safe, well-kept, drug-free, and affords opportunities for self-employment.

Those who originally migrated from Keimoes remain deeply religious, although some at times attend non-Reformed churches.

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Thys, Desmond. Interviewed in the pastorie of URCSA Rustenburg-Karlien Park on 8 June 2024.

Oliver, Rina. Interviewed in the pastorie of URCSA Rustenburg-Karlien Park on 14 June 2024.

Informal Conversations

Bok, Frieda, house in Karlien Park, 31 August 2024.

Coetzee, Lanie, Karlien Park, 24 August 2024.

Masisi, Susan, URCSA Karlien Park, 23 October 2022.

Riekert, Eva, house in Karlien Park, 10 August 2024.