Chapter 6

Sustainable Faith and Livelihoods: Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief in Development*†

Rifqah Tifloen[1] and Matome Jacky Makgoba[2]

1 Introduction

In 2016, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) hosted a National Hearing to investigate the underlying socioeconomic challenges of mining-affected communities in South Africa. The report's findings revealed a significant potential for the infringement of cultural and other human rights as a result of inappropriate practices that are carried out by mining companies (SAHRC 2016: 84–85). The removal of ancestral graves during the development of Medupi Power Station in Lephalale in the province of Limpopo drew outrage from faith communities and civil society who regarded the process as a violation of people's human rights, and shines a light on the contested nature of the development of South Africa's coal industry. Freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is a fundamental human right guaranteed in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 106 of 1996, and it underlies peaceful, stable, and inclusive societies. However, such recognition is often overlooked and undermined by current mining practices in the country, despite its regulatory framework[3] and international industry guidelines for development projects. The Medupi Heritage Impact Report commissioned by Eskom in 2015, which drew on the professional judgement of experts, concluded that 'financial compensation alone cannot adequately deal with emotional issues and belief systems. It may be considered alongside a package of other measures including good communication, education and healing programmes for trauma' (Mbofho Consulting and Projects 2015: 21–22). In this study, land dispossession, and mining-induced dispossession is explored through the lens of FoRB and its intersection with other human rights.

The mining sector and the government of South Africa point out that mining is essential for economic development, but they fail to acknowledge that mining comes at a high environmental and social cost, and often takes place without adequate consultation with, or consent of, local communities (groundWork, Centre for Environmental Rights, Human Rights Watch and Earth Justice 2019). The removal of graves as well as the related land ownership debates surrounding mining communities bring up for scrutiny developments that could be religion-blind through the disregard of African religious or cultural beliefs. Further, this study focuses on the

experiences of faith communities in Lephalale, Limpopo and the extent to which the coal-mining industry and development is sensitive to religious rights. This research is situated in relation to the international debate on 'religion-blind development' and the shift towards more religion-aware or inclusive development (Tadros and Sabates-Wheeler 2020). Contemporary debates surrounding FoRB have assumed greater public significance as religious communities struggle with – and at times fight over – not only their identities in religiously competitive public spheres, but also their very survival in the context of fragile states (Hackett 2011). Tadros and Sabates-Wheeler (2020) argue that the relationship between FoRB and development continues to be severely underexplored in the literature, despite the copious body of scholarship that distinctively deals with each separately.

This enquiry is guided by the central research question: 'what are the struggles and opportunities for integrating freedom of religion or belief into development or humanitarian programmes?'. Earthlife Africa[4] and the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)[5] are well positioned to conduct this study as both are already involved in education and advocacy work that aims to advance the plight of coal-affected communities in Limpopo. Against this backdrop, this research is complementary to the fieldwork, training, and policy interventions organised in collaboration with the Life After Coal campaign,[6] of which Earthlife Africa is a founding member.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, we state the problem, then in section 3 we review the background and historical context of coal mining in South Africa, and in section 4 we outline the methodology. In section 5 we examine the challenges of mining within the context of FoRB and section 6 explores the opportunities for integrating FoRB, including reference to the national Just Transition. Section 7 presents a concluding summary.

2 Statement of the problem

Human rights debates in Africa have largely excluded the question of religious freedom, and even the question of whether this category includes indigenous or minority religions (Hackett 2011). During the public meetings hosted by Earthlife Africa's coal campaign to push back coal developments in Limpopo, issues regarding religion and belief surfaced. Earthlife Africa's Education Officers learnt that faith communities from Lephalale and the surrounding areas of Limpopo, were experiencing challenges because they were unable to exercise or practise their rights of FoRB. This has manifested through challenges of access to sacred land[7] and natural resources[8] being depleted by coal developments, therefore impacting cultural rituals and practices of African traditional religious communities. The findings of our fieldwork proved that various faith communities in Lephalale were not fully consulted on decisions taken regarding the ongoing coal development projects in the area. Coal development has been deeply contested and debated globally, and despite recognising its economic contribution in the country, there is still a disjuncture between its intended impact and the lived reality of many of South Africa's mining-affected communities (SAHRC 2016: 7). The value of documenting and analysing the possible impacts of coal developments on faith communities is critical to the broader study of

Medupi Power Station in Lephalale, Limpopo.
Photographer: The Dollie House. © IDS.

religion, and its intersections with race, class, and socioeconomic issues, as it allows us to better understand concepts such as political agency or freedom and questions of how agency is imagined and who gets to imagine political agency in the context of FoRB. Moreover, this study questions who decides what kind of beliefs deserve state protection. Further, this research enquiry is an effort to drive real change in the industry, particularly in a time where the world seeks to phase out fossil fuels, and to meet the nationally determined contributions agreed between 194 countries in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 2015 Paris Agreement.[9]

3 Background and context

Lephalale is considered the heart of the Bushveld and a major tourist and game-farming area. Before coal mining was brought to the town, the agricultural sector was the biggest employer. Interestingly, communities of Lephalale do not describe the town as a mining community; rather, they dismiss the claim that the Waterberg is the next coal frontier in South Africa.

At present, the major economic activity in Lephalale is attributed to coal mining (Exxaro's Grootegeluk mine) and electricity production by the country's power utility, Eskom. Lephalale hosts two of South Africa's major power stations: Matimba Power Station and Medupi Power Station. In South Africa, over the past few years, there has been an increase in resistance to mining development from workers, trade unions, small-scale farmers, civil society, and environmental activists due to health concerns, low wages or limited job prospects for locals, poor living conditions, inadequate community consultation, and a lack of accountability within the sector. The SAHRC's report found that the government was responsible for the harm done to mining-affected communities because of its 'failure to monitor compliance, poor enforcement, and a severe lack of coordination' (2016: 81). We remember the 44 lives that were taken in the Marikana Massacre in August 2012. In this light, the Marikana Commission of Inquiry

identified the need to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying causes and lived realities of mine workers and communities, which contributed to, and provided the broader context to, Marikana (*ibid*.: 8). However, it was also recognised that these challenges were not limited to Lonmin's Marikana Mine, but were illustrative of systemic issues in the industry and related to more deeply entrenched social, economic, cultural, and political realities faced by mining communities in South Africa (*ibid*.).

In their previous and current practices in Lephalale, through the issue of grave removals, coal-mining enterprises display a general disregard for cultural and religious rights, and the African traditional religions' affiliation to land that grounds social relations and livelihoods. Over the past 23 years, South Africa has established a comprehensive regulatory framework to enable its mining industry to operate in a manner that protects and promotes the wellbeing and safety of communities affected by its operations (*ibid*.: 1). In agreement with the SAHRC, 'the framework is designed to facilitate sustainable and equitable development of South Africa's mining industry, while enabling and promoting inclusive growth and prosperity' (*ibid*.).

Coal-affected communities are already vulnerable, due to the lack of access to basic resources, clean environments, and the negative health impacts of coal mining. According to the Living Conditions Survey (LCS), Limpopo was listed as one of the provinces with the highest headcount of adult poverty at 67.5 per cent, with the poverty gap and severity of poverty measures being larger for female-headed households (Stats SA 2018: 15). *Boom and Bust in the Waterberg*, a report published by the environmental justice non-governmental organisation (NGO) groundWork and written in collaboration with Earthlife Africa, tracks the development and environmental injustice of the Grootegeluk mine and Eskom's Matimba and Medupi power stations in Lephalale over more than 50 years (Hallowes and Munnik 2018). It reports that rather than creating jobs and stimulating economic development in the region, these 'development projects' entrenched poverty and unemployment. Section 5 of this chapter, which analyses mining within the context of FoRB, will reveal possibilities as to why these developments failed and what can be taken away from that experience.

People's lives are threatened by the health impacts of coal mining and the threat of violence against those who oppose coal mining. During the research-initiated meeting held in Lephalale on the second day of the fieldwork, community activists raised some of the issues they had personally experienced. One participant said:

> *I have personally received death threats as a way of discouraging my advocacy about community struggles. By God's Grace the threats so far have not been actualised. The threat to life as a result of emissions from the power station is real. One just needs to go to the clinic and you will find the most common complaints are related to respiratory infections. In my opinion, threatening influential local leaders is part of the plan to ensure development of mines and building of more power stations continues through the 'backdoor'. Therefore, public representatives agree to ensure the*

> *process commences with no signs of protest and resistance from affected communities.*
> (Community activist, Marapong meeting, 3 March 2020)

Community activists, especially, continue to live in fear, as well as those at the mercy of corporations, which provide them with jobs, and people who are living on privately owned land.

The State of the Province Address by Limpopo's premier, Chupu Mathabatha, identified mining, agriculture, and the proposed Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone (MMSEZ) as the key upcoming economic drivers, stating that 'mining and ancillary services dominate our provincial economy at a 25 per cent contribution to the GDP' (Ledwaba 2020). However, Mathabatha also said,

> despite a dominant sector in the provincial economy, jobs in mining had decreased from 106 000 to 86 000 between the 4th quarter of 2018 and the 4th quarter of 2019. The province had recorded a marginal improvement with regard to economic growth. Statistics show that the economy has been growing at an average rate of 1% in the recent past. (*ibid*.)

The Waterberg District was projected as a key growth point in Limpopo, with a focus on economic growth and employment creation. Furthermore, Limpopo hosted a Provincial Stability Summit in Polokwane last year. The main objective of the summit was to ensure stability in the province during elections, and to review current strategies and plans to ensure provincial stability. The summit was held under the theme, 'An Industrialisation Path towards Creating Sustainable Jobs and Poverty Reduction for Limpopo Province', and it aimed to review recommendations from Working Groups (a consortium of representatives of labour, business, and civil society) as a basis for adopting a detailed Limpopo Action Plan, towards job creation and poverty reduction. The result of these summits shows a clear over-prioritisation of economic transformation at the expense of local culture, and the subsequent undervaluing of the informal sector/business development skills and experiential learning. In addition, social capital and social connectedness is considered a meaningful factor for vulnerable and marginalised groups to buffer against deeper vulnerability, and foster belonging, learning, and assisting, which could be mutually beneficial to the government and the general public (Townsend and Wilcock 2004). From this standpoint, informal economy occupations have the potential to contribute not only to economically viable livelihoods, but also to meaningful livelihoods and wellbeing for society's most marginalised individuals. Government support and development programmes ought to echo the principle 'nothing about us, without us'.[10] The injunctions of the constitution on human freedoms as articulated in the Bill of Rights (Chapter 2), Act 106 (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa) outlines that 'everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion'. The bill further echoes the necessary imperatives of any developmental agenda.

It is within the context of this economic strategy that the disregard for freedom of religion and faith practices, including indigenous culture and traditions, occurs. New coal developments continue to be proposed within the government's Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) despite the global commitment to a legally binding agreement to phase out fossil fuels and limit global warming. This case study research is based on the geographical region of Lephalale and involved the participation of members from six faith communities that were interviewed. The interviews revealed that communities are still not fully consulted and included in remedial development public processes. The interviewees consist of participants who identify with the Zion Christian Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Apostolic denomination, African indigenous traditional cultures, traditional healers and mainline Christians. The selection of participants for our interviews was based on their geographical proximity to the mines and coal fields with a particular focus on community activists already involved in NGO work, volunteers interested in the topic who were identified during our communications with groups prior to the fieldwork, and representatives of faith-based organisations. These communities will be elaborated on in section 8.

4 Methodology

The overall design of this research is a qualitative case study based on the partaking faith communities' experiences in Lephalale, using an intersectional conceptual framing and cultural mapping as a methodology. Intersectional analysis is characterised by an analytical shift away from the dichotomous, binary thinking about power that is common (Symington 2004: 3). The value-laden and normative concept of development is not traditionally analysed through its intersection with religion and human rights. Often frameworks conceptualise one person's rights as coming at the expense of another (*ibid.*: 4). In contrast, for this study we try to think about development from the perspective of intersectionality, which allows the focus on Lephalale as a specific context, and the intersection with religion as the distinct experiences of faith communities who were interviewed, and the overarching qualitative aspects of equality, discrimination, and justice, permitting this study to address multiple issues.

The study engaged with different faith communities living in Lephalale and its surrounding villages (see Annexe 1). Researchers applied cultural mapping as a methodological tool to guide participants in mapping sacred sites, green spaces, and water sources (used for rituals) as a starting point for identifying sites that are of religious/cultural significance. An introductory research meeting was held in Marapong on the first day of the fieldwork and was attended by 45 people from six faith communities. Research-initiated individual interviews were conducted with participants selected from the community meeting. A series of cultural inquiry workshops was planned using mapping, surveys, and individual interviews that were held during our one-week fieldwork trip conducted in March 2020. The cultural mapping workshop consisted of three groups of seven participants each. The groups were divided according to three coal development topics: water, land, and grave removals; faith/religion; and natural resources. This consisted of participants from each group mapping on poster charts the

various assets from their community, guided by the topic of their group. Thereafter, groups presented their learnings and had discussions with the other groups about the struggles and opportunities.

The aim of the cultural mapping workshops was to assist the community in identifying cultural assets and collectively decide on appropriate care and governance of the assets. Participants from the African traditional religions reflected on grave matters and the rituals surrounding the graves. Participants acknowledged that there were processes toward redress, for instance the Eskom-initiated Medupi Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) (Mbofho Consulting and Projects 2015); however, one participant reflected, 'The consequence of our inability to perform cultural, faith and other practices makes us go on with our lives being unfulfilled.' Participants from Vangpan also expressed that due to land ownership struggles, some families were moved to a small part of the land with limited access to water and no electricity, making it near impossible to sustain their cultural beliefs.

During March 2020, the South African president announced the National Covid-19 Preparedness and Response Plan, which placed the country on level 5 lockdown involving restrictions on movement and travel. This decision had a huge impact on our planned fieldwork, which consisted of more engagements with local and traditional authorities that acted in the capacity as custodians of local cultural and natural assets. As a result, the lockdown shifted our study to adopt more detailed desk research between March and July 2020. The participants of this study had not previously been brought together in a mapping workshop with the intention of sharing challenges using a religion-aware lens and to identify opportunities in realising FoRB on the ground and to strengthen local stakeholder relationships. From this perspective, 'cultural mapping is regarded as a systematic tool to involve communities in the identification and recording of local cultural assets, with the implication that this knowledge will then be used to inform collective strategies, planning processes, or other initiatives' (Duxbury, Garrett-Petts and MacLennan 2015: 1). Nancy Duxbury, W.F. Garrett-Petts and David MacLennan define 'cultural mapping as a mode of inquiry and a methodological tool in urban planning, cultural sustainability, and community development that makes visible the ways local stories, practices, relationships, memories, and rituals constitute places as meaningful locations' (*ibid.*). The authors identify self-reflection and sharing as central to the ethos of cultural mapping in indigenous communities, 'for the impulse here is both political and pedagogical' (*ibid.*).

The action element of this research is the ongoing resistance by the Lephalale communities in the fight against fossil fuels and various legal submissions from the Earthlife Africa coal campaign on new proposed developments. The group Concerned Citizens of Lephalale, with whom we consulted, is part of the coal campaign and is actively campaigning in the area by monitoring Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes and lobbying for legal rights education workshops to be part of public education.

The Amazon Conservation Team's *Methodology of Collaborative Cultural Mapping* manual argues that 'when a community is able to systematically articulate and represent its knowledge of its lands, it gains the necessary tools to establish laws, manage productive systems, implement protection methodologies and improve its quality of life' (2008: 4).

These assets are:

> both tangible, or quantitative (e.g. physical spaces, cultural organizations, public forms of promotion and self-representation, public art, cultural industries, natural and cultural heritage, architecture, people, artefacts, and other material resources) and intangible, or qualitative (e.g. values and norms, beliefs and philosophies, language, community narratives, histories and memories, relationships, rituals, traditions, identities, and shared sense of place).
> (Duxbury *et al.* 2015: 1)

Previous case study research in the area of community-based research[11] shows that cultural assets help define communities (and help communities define themselves) in terms of cultural identity, vitality, sense of place, and quality of life (*ibid.*).

In this study, cultural inquiry informed our participatory action research approach, which relied on qualitative data analysis consisting of research-initiated individual interviews and cultural mapping workshops. Cultural mapping's participatory dimension has heightened its attractiveness as a community engagement methodology.

Through open informal conversations, themes and issues were raised by residents, which further informed the research design and outline. The central issues included access to land, the removal of graves, and access to water, which will be discussed in section 5. This helped to gain an understanding of what the community was experiencing, and which sites the researchers should visit. The site visits were based on referrals from our community guide and activist, Elana Greyling, resident and member of the Concerned Citizens of Lephalale group. She is also a member of various community-based organisations. The sites were informed by their proximity to the coal mines and power stations, water sources identified as 'sacred natural sites', and the gravesite where some Medupi graves were relocated to. At the time of writing, we had entered the first Covid-19 national lockdown, which restricted mobility and travel. This abruptly stopped additional planned fieldwork and the short documentary video to accompany this chapter. Based on the footage and visuals recorded during this fieldtrip, a short film will be released as part of this case study research in the near future. In this regard, Covid-19 had a significant impact on data collection, and desktop research helped to close the gap where more stories/narratives were originally intended to be included. Additionally, researchers reviewed secondary sources – including academic research, media reports, and relevant South African laws and policies – to corroborate some of the information provided by community members.

The sites included Marapong, Shongoane village, Steenbokpan, Vangpan, Mohlasedi village, Mahlakung Informal Settlement and Elandsbosch Farm (see Annexe 1). Researchers interviewed over 50 participants during the fieldwork trip. Participants comprised women, youth, and community leaders. We also engaged faith leaders from the Dutch Reformed Church, the Zion Christian Church, and an African traditional healer, and interviewed municipal figures such as Councillor Agnes Basson, who is the ward

Participatory mapping workshop held at Marapong.
Photographer: The Dollie House. © IDS.

councillor of Lephalale, and Chief Seleka in Mohlasedi village. Follow-up visits to the communities will be done once the pandemic has eased.

5 Challenges: mining and FoRB

The current debates and literature about coal mining in South Africa focus on the economic and environmental impacts of mining. There has not been any research which adopts an intersectional lens that explores how the coal-mining industry and its related developments may impact FoRB. This section documents the relationship between faith communities' experiences and understandings of 'land', and how these shape people's notions of belonging, memory, and sense of identity.

Based on the data collected during the fieldwork, the main challenges to FoRB raised by the participants in this study were: (1) access to land, (2) the removal of graves, and (3) access to water. Sections 5.1 and 5.2 introduce the context of the laws that perpetuate the apartheid geography and which displace indigenous vulnerable faith communities in South Africa. Section 5.3 maps faith on the ground and its connection to natural resources and section 5.4 reviews the issue of grave removal.

5.1 Apartheid dispossession and contemporary dispossession

The advancement of British colonialism, which was formalised by the establishment of the colony of Natal in 1843, imposed the dispossession of land, new forms of taxation, and radically disrupted the indigenous African patterns and rhythms of political, social, and religious life (Guy 1979; Keegan 1996). South Africa's history reflects the dispossession of land through a series of colonial and apartheid laws that intended to deepen segregation as Africans became alienated from the land of their birth by settlers and colonial administrations. The first serious discussions and analyses of capital accumulation and the conditions for the expansion

Aerial view of Lephalale Town with the Matimba and Medupi power stations in the background.
Photographer: © ICUC Productions.

and reproduction of capitalist accumulation emerged during the late 1800s with the release of Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* and later, *Das Capital*. David Harvey's theory of 'Accumulation by Dispossession' is widely accepted as a critical extension of Marx's writings on 'primitive accumulation' (Harvey 2003). Harvey defines neoliberalist capitalist policies that result in a centralisation of wealth and power in the hands of a few by dispossessing the public of their wealth or land. He describes,

> the privatization of what used to be public services into profit-making enterprises: water, education, health care, and in Eastern Europe the selling off of entire national economies, the use of the international credit system (especially the IMF [International Monetary Fund]/ World Bank) as a means of forcibly transferring wealth from the Global South to the economies of the North, and the use of intellectual property rights to commodify what was once knowledge held in common (for instance, terminator seeds).
> (Harvey quoted in Bailey 2014)

Harvey includes the displacement of peasants from their land, and places an emphasis on the theft and transfer of value from one class to another:

> Displacement of peasant populations and the formation of a landless proletariat has accelerated in countries such as Mexico and India in the last three decades, many formerly common property resources, such as water, have been privatized (often at World Bank insistence) and brought within the capitalist logic of accumulation, alternative… forms of production and consumption have been suppressed. Nationalized industries have been privatized. Family farming has been taken over by agribusiness. And slavery has not disappeared (particularly in the sex trade).
> (2003: 149)

Many scholars have framed dispossession in South Africa in terms of the amount of land lost and the numbers of families affected; however, not much attention has been given to coal-induced dispossession in Limpopo province in post-apartheid South Africa or to its religious or spiritual implications.

In her work on the relocation of the Ogies community[12] (from white agricultural land) to Phola township,[13] Dineo Skosana explains that:

> it illustrates that dispossession is not only historically rooted, it is also a perpetual post-apartheid experience in African communities; that it has underlying layers of loss; and that it not only encompasses the loss of material things such as land and property, but also include[s] the loss of intangible possessions, such as the connection with ancestors, identity, memory and belonging.
> (2019b: 3)

The economic rationality that informs coal mining only acknowledges physical things, which are moveable and therefore subject to economic transaction. It fails to acknowledge people's lived experiences and undermines their expression of or access to FoRB. Furthermore,

> to rethink dispossession also means to acknowledge, as Cock (2018) maintains in her recent book about the history of Kowie River in the Eastern Cape, that history and memory are tied to the landscape and the environment. The connection of landscape and history helps to show that dispossession is also the loss of attachment and belonging.
> (Cock, quoted in Skosana 2019b: 3)

During an interview with residents of Mahlakung settlement,[14] one resident explained how her faith practices have 'adapted' due to being dispossessed:

> *Our need and right to practise our religions and faith practices is hampered in this settlement and beyond. For instance, because we do not have water ponds, streams, and facilities of running water in this settlement, rituals that are required to be performed at home or baptism and other cleansing ceremonies in line with our beliefs, are not taking place. We are then forced to go out of this settlement (our homes) and travel to other areas, sometimes far away, in Lephalale for our religious needs to be fulfilled. It becomes expensive and difficult for us. The consequence of our inability to perform cultural, faith, and other practices makes us to go on with lives unfulfilled.*
> (Anna Molekwa, Mahlakung Informal Settlement, 5 March 2020)

Anna's reflection brought to light the intersection between class, race, power, and religion. For instance, she further explained that one needs money to perform religious practices. On the other hand, Chidester argues, 'building a home was essentially a religious project, a project centred in the production of ritual space for sacrifice, healing, protection from evil, and ongoing spiritual relations with ancestors, the linkages between rural and

urban have inevitably been negotiated in religious terms' (2012: 25). Many interviews from the Mahlakung settlement highlight the lack of access to land, and by extension the idea of how stability and belonging affect people's sense of direction, as though they are unable to know or contemplate where they are going. This has many other sociocultural impacts, and yet, people living in Mahlakung remain hopeful, relying on their faith[15] to carry them through times of crisis.

During colonialism and apartheid, land dispossession was geared towards the destabilisation and eradication of an African agricultural economy, to force Africans into the cash-based economy and wage labour in mining and other, white-controlled industries. In the new political context, dispossession has had similar objectives: 'The relocation of the families who lived on white agricultural farmland (rural) to the township (urban) compels communities to shift from land-based modes of living to the township-based monetarised economy' (Skosana 2019b: 4). By contrast, in the post-apartheid context, it is evident that land dispossession has deeper spiritual implications and as a result, 'new indigenous religious meanings are being produced, a migrating sacred moving between rural and urban realities and a hybrid sacred situated in urban townships, that have recast the religious significance of urban space' (Chidester 2012: 25). As argued by Cock (2018), the loss of memory and skills contributes to the loss of culture and ways of being or belonging.

5.2 Mining-induced dispossession

The coal industry provides 90 per cent of South Africa's electricity (Minerals Council South Africa 2019: 16). Coal is the third ranked source of employment in mining after gold and platinum group metals. In 2018, at least 86,919 people with total annual earnings of R24.7bn were employed by the coal mining industry (Minerals Council South Africa 2019). Coal mining-induced dispossession, as in the apartheid period, is geared towards a market-driven mining economy, as well as state-led capitalism (Skosana 2019a).

During an interview with a resident of the Vangpan community (Lephalale), the effects of the mines and forced removals were captured, as he recounted his experience of being removed from his original place of residence and work. His family was displaced and settled on the outskirts to make way for the new Boikarabelo coal mine owned by Research Generation (ResGen) South Africa:

> *I grew up on this farm and established my family here. All my children were born here, and they do not know any other place they can call home. This changed after the death of the farm owner and the farm* [was] *left to his sons. As time passed, tensions arose, we then began to experience a forced removal which left us perplexed. As we were still trying to find the sense of it all, Boikarabelo Mine came into the picture as the new landowners. From that point our lives changed for the worst. We are now confined to this small portion of land without water, decent sanitation facilities, and any means to sustain our livelihood. We further do not have electricity or any means of clean energy sources. We are somewhat stateless as the municipality also cannot come in to provide us access to*

> *basic services because the land belongs to a private entity. We are struggling and* [the] *worst is that we have no security of tenure. Each day we are becoming apprehensive about our future.*
> (Ntate Sebina, resident, Vangpan community, 4 March 2020)

It is difficult to think about land without addressing the history of segregation or economic racialised zoning as they extend the politics of race and class in South Africa. During our fieldwork and the ongoing Earthlife Africa's coal campaign, community consent, or lack thereof, and communities' exclusion from decision-making processes pertaining to developments, specifically mineral extraction legislation, is seen as the most urgent problem in mining-affected communities. As more and more information about non-compliance and disregard of existing environmental legislation is unveiled, Earthlife Africa encourages communities to consider legal action against environmental injustices as an important element of their struggles. In 2017, Earthlife Africa and SAFCEI successfully challenged a government decision to permit the construction of a proposed coal-fired power station, arguing that the proper climate change impact assessment had not been carried out. This resulted in South Africa's first climate change court case (Centre for Environmental Rights 2017).

5.3 Faith on the ground

This section introduces the major faiths in Lephalale, and describes the main practices relating to natural resources, as well as how those are impacted by mining developments.

> *There is a fair blend of various religious orientations. The majority practise Christian religion and there are those that practise traditional indigenous belief systems. Those that practise Christian faith have organised themselves in various denominations ranging from African indigenous churches (Zion Christian Church, Apostolic Confessing Churches) and mainline churches (Charismatic orientation of churches). Traditional healers or practitioners originate from African traditional indigenous systems of belief* [and] *involve the rigorous training and involve the guidance from ancestral beings. These different practitioners of faith orientations coexist harmoniously.*
> (Chief Seleka in Mohlasedi village)

Religion is important in South Africa. According to a 2010 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life study, 74 per cent of South Africans regard religion as a very important aspect of their lives. Owing to the deep African religious heritage, and the country's post-apartheid governmental campaign 'united in diversity' by the African National Congress, to manage religious diversity in the national interest, South Africa can be seen as a country that embraces all the major world religions (Lugo *et al.* 2010: 5–6). 'At the same time, many South Africans draw their understanding of the world, ethical principles, and human values from sources independent of religious institutions' (Chidester 2012: 7). The focus of this section is not to define religious communities traditionally, but to advocate,

> religion as an open set of resources and strategies for negotiating a human identity, which is poised between the more than human and the less than human, in the struggles to work out the terms and conditions for living in a human place oriented in sacred space and sacred time.
> (Chidester 2012: 3)

This approach has informed the use of cultural inquiry as a methodological tool. The aim was 'to make visible the ways local stories, practices, relationships, memories, and rituals constitute places as meaningful locations' (Duxbury *et al.* 2015: 1).

During the participatory mapping workshops, water sources in the town were mapped and connected with practices performed by various faiths and traditions. On the theme of water, one participant shared:

> *Access to flowing water from the rivers and fountains has been disturbed by diversion made during the construction of power stations. A sacred fountain that is found in Bahula Mountain has been fenced off and as such those that require making use of the fountain water for the practice of faith and observing of rituals are disempowered and denied the right to practise their beliefs holistically.*
> (James Moloantoa, participatory mapping workshop, 5 March 2020)

These practices include baptisms by Christian congregants, cleansing, and healing by African traditional healers. Furthermore, water is a critical element to offer as a sacrifice to the ancestors. Other participants also expressed that, as land became more privatised, access to natural 'shrubs' was more challenging and required people to travel far from home to access available herbs.

The participants then discussed environmental challenges at these sites and noted the changes, recognising the progressive destruction of the natural environment owing to pollution from industry, climate change, and the drying-up of water sources in the town. On the theme of religion and natural resources, one participant mapped the Mogol River and its uses, stating:

> *The flowing of Mogol River was facilitating the growth of shrubs and herbs that we utilised as medicine to heal ailments our communities suffer; now as a result the land is deliberately dried up and such is no longer happening. Finally, the drying of Mogol River has now hampered the cleansing and baptism ceremonies that are prescribed as sacred and essential to practitioners of African indigenous churches.*
> (Dora Letsita, Ithuteng Women's Group, 5 March 2020)

Many participants from the different faith groups indicated that nature was God's creation and they used 'shrubs' to brew traditional medicines that could heal different ailments. Further, on the theme of pollution and climate change, one 27-year-old participant reflected:

> *My future as a young person is threatened by the perpetual environmental damage that is currently being pursued by coal-powered stations. The pollution of water and air becomes our generation course of daily struggle. This we must take action to ensure sustainable environment has to be achieved for our sake and future generations to come.*
> (Plantina Mosima, participatory mapping workshop, 5 March 2020)

Next, the participants mapped green spots to represent sites where medicine for traditional healing can be harvested. Mogol River and Lephalale River were both mapped as central water sources in the region. Participants discussed how communities in the past relied on small-scale subsistence farming as a source of their livelihoods and compared it to the land reserved for growing food now. They further linked this to food insecurity and highlighted the need for equitable access to land for communities to grow food.

Participants also mapped places of worship including gravesites that represent sacred places and discussed access to these sites. Some of the graves are located within the Medupi Power Station campus and access is gained through requests and appointments that are granted sometimes, and the presence of armed security personnel creates a hostile environment. Moreover, the use of participatory mapping created a conversational entry point for the communities to identify hindrances or obstacles to faith practices based on their own experience and local knowledge.

The use of water and appreciation for nature expressed in these workshops showed the importance of the natural environment to the various faith traditions and their connection with a higher power.

5.4 The removal of graves

The SAHRC (2016, 2008) has reported that grave relocations are one of the most sensitive and potentially contentious issues arising from the relocation process in mining-affected communities. The moving of graves by mining corporations has taken place in many socially and economically marginalised communities, resulting in further investigation through a National Hearing by the SAHRC. The findings show a callous disregard for the spiritual and cultural beliefs of affected communities by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) under the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA) and mining companies in this regard, undermining any opportunity to integrate local knowledge and the recognition or opportunity of FoRB.

During the research-initiated interviews for this chapter, an African traditional healer from Marapong expressed his concerns about the role of coal mining and how related developments affected his community:

> *My greatest concern, worry and pain is the behaviour of industries that have come to work around here. Take into consideration that these industries and companies enter into agreements with the municipality on variety of issues affecting our lives. These companies once they are granted permission to operate within this area tend to undermine the cultural and traditional way of life*

> *of us local communities. The case in point is the process of graves relocation carried out by Medupi power generation facility. Due to some unfathomable reason in those years, these companies did not properly consult the relatives of those* [whose] *graves were to be dug up and relocated. Some are still unresolved. The worst misdeed was to not involve the traditional practitioners of faith to guide the process.*
> (Lazarus Seodisa, traditional healer and resident, Marapong, 3 March 2020)

Earthlife Africa and SAFCEI recognises that the issue of the graves is still a sensitive matter among the community and affected families in Lephalale, and we acknowledge that the interviews reveal subjective reflections, based on these narratives. We were mindful that the purpose of our interviews was not to investigate the accuracy of personal accounts, but to listen to stories of family members who described a deeper element of spiritual insecurity that still informs the legacy of coal-mining development today.

Furthermore, *Boom and Bust in the Waterberg* (Hallowes and Munnik 2018) revealed that Exxaro's reburial policy included covering all the costs associated with the exhumation and reburial of the graves and the relocation of the graves' dressings. But what they would not do, is pay compensation for emotional distress for the removal of the graves. Such compensation had been paid by other developers, the consultants noted, but there was no basis in the South African National Heritage Resources Act No. 25 of 1999 (NHRA), which is in place to regulate what constitutes heritage, what is to be protected, and how (*ibid.*).

While scholars recognise that grave relocations are a common phenomenon in contemporary South Africa, Dineo Skosana (2017: 1) examines the limitations of this Act, and the democratic government's need to adhere to progressive international legislative standards while its external legal influence has its basis in Christian values. She argues that the legislation does not sufficiently provide for intangible heritage and indigenous beliefs. This, in turn, permits the disturbance of graves from land with contested ownership rights and undermines the cultural rights of the previously disadvantaged communities which are endorsed by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (2017: 1–2).

In 2015, Eskom commissioned a HIA by a task team (Medupi Graves Task Team), which was a response to reports filed by communities on the disturbance and desecration of graves located in the construction zone of Medupi Power Station. 'Using heritage management tools, the research tried to mediate a positive relationship between Eskom and the local people' (Mbofho Consulting and Projects 2015: 10). The report outlines that 'heritage experts had not been involved in a parallel public participation programme conducted within the ambit of the EIA, but if heritage resources were to be discovered, during the development phase, a heritage expert would be called in and appropriate mitigation measures would be taken' (*ibid.*).

The recommendations of the HIA report disclose that 'sustainable management of both disturbed and undisturbed graves as sacred heritage is proposed as part of a future Heritage Management Plan… Drawing

on the professional judgement of experts, financial compensation alone cannot adequately deal with emotional issues and belief system[s]. It may be considered alongside a package of other measures including good communication, education and healing programmes for trauma… Local communities must be allowed to organise rituals at the graves and proposed shrine. Reasonable access should be granted to the graves and the proposed shrine' (*ibid*.: 21–23).

Finally, the report underlines that it is necessary to establish an independent monitoring mechanism for the implementation of recommendations and to organise long-term future protection of heritage resources (*ibid*.: 23–24).

In 2017, The High-Level Panel on the Assessment of Key Legislation and the Acceleration of Fundamental Change, chaired by former President Kgalema Motlanthe, published its report on key themes, of which social cohesion and nation-building were priorities. The report analyses the trajectory of South Africa's development, at the heart of the post-apartheid project of building an inclusive society. It provides comprehensive analysis of the rural and urban land questions, rural governance, and the different dimensions of the land reform programme. It also addresses poverty, spatial inequality, and mining-induced dispossession. A review of the key findings and recommendations include addressing the legacy of mining and accountability of communities and mining companies (LARC 2018). The report recommends that:

- The most urgent task in the current context is to provide meaningful protection to vulnerable groups faced with external mining or other investment deals that will negatively impact on their land rights. Such rights holders must be properly consulted, and their consent obtained for others to use the land they occupy and use. If they withhold their consent, the investment company must be required to apply to court for the expropriation of their rights, and the court must then balance the interests of the rights holders with those of the investment company within the parameters of Section 25 of the Constitution. The Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act No. 31 of 1996 should be amended to make this explicit (*ibid*.: 2).
- The MPRDA must be amended to ensure that both revenues from mining-related activities and opportunities generated by such mining activity are shared in an equitable and transparent manner among people whose land rights are directly affected (*ibid*.: 3).

Despite these efforts and amendments in the legislation, mining rights and licences continue to be granted in protected areas. At present, the government is planning to develop a R145bn[16] Chinese-controlled energy and metallurgical industrial complex at the Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone, which is situated in an area of cultural and heritage significance (Sole 2020). Since governments around the world began rolling back on basic rights and freedoms in order to flatten the Covid-19 curve, Kevin Bloom wrote that,

> whatever was happening at the hyper-local level of the EMSEZ project, its ultimate driving forces were the international economic system and closed-door, top-tier geopolitics. Whether or not the ordinary citizens of South Africa would be able to prevail against these forces depended on a circumstance that nobody could have foreseen, being the outbreak of a global pandemic and its implications for the powers of the nation-state.
> (Bloom 2020)

Despite prior evidence, the SAHRC strongly cautions against prioritising the immediate economic benefit of mining activities over the maintenance and protection of the environment, particularly in those areas that are crucial for sustaining ecological biodiversity, natural heritage, cultural significance, and life (2016: 25). Furthermore, the SAHRC is particularly concerned by the DMRE's inability to provide information about the monitoring of mining activities in protected areas. The issue of the graves is still a sensitive matter among the community of Lephalale, as reflected by the voices of the participants:

> *My own son is buried in Medupi Power Station Complex as we speak and the most painful part is that I do not have the right of access to his grave to perform the necessary rituals that are of critical necessity as required by my traditional practice.*
> (Dora Letsita, Ithuteng Women's Group, 5 March 2020)

> *What are we going to do in case of our ancestors, like a grandfather visits me and request appeasement of some kind? How am I going to accede to his demands because his grave is inaccessible to me? Being a community that has its foundations on African spiritual paradigms, consultations and appeasement of our departed ancestors is paramount. This is the result of the poor execution of the earlier proposals around removal of graves made to our traditional leaders that resulted with others being able to remove their graves in time whilst others were unjustly denied such opportunity.*
> (Member of Ithuteng Women's Group, 5 March 2020)

From these reflections, which describe the sacredness of graves from an African traditional religious perspective, it is understood that a grave is a site of connection between the living and the dead. Beliefs around it are intangible, however, and access to some graves (Medupi precinct and privately owned land) in Lephalale is still a contentious matter for communities.

In summary, the disregard for African traditional religious systems in the process of removing graves promotes conditions for the commercialisation of the sacred, in that all parties involved throughout the development process benefit and profit from that which causes communities to suffer. In the next section, we explore a vision that integrates economy and ecology, towards a more religion-aware development agenda.

6 Opportunities for integrating FoRB

6.1 Religion, development, and the Just Transition

This section looks at the opportunities to integrate FoRB in development and the Just Transition,[17] by exploring the potential for more 'religion-aware' or inclusive development. Additionally, the learnings and findings from our case study recognise how faith or faith communities can strengthen social and economic capital. Thus, we refer to the national Just Transition, identified by the global labour movement as an emerging platform and tool that informs future development in the country.

At this critical moment, as the world attempts to transition to a more just and sustainable economy, South Africa must recognise FoRB as a human right on a par with other rights. In this light, religion is understood as a system of knowledge, practice, and human agency that can make a meaningful contribution to the emergence of a global citizens' movement. One key recommendation towards that path is to build counter-power (Cock 2019) through multiple entry points. When looking at strategies that support more meaningful participation of faith communities in decision-making processes, this idea is useful to this analysis.

Building counter-power as an entry to integrating FoRB in development can involve 'using different types of power: structural, associational, social and institutional to disrupt the dominant social order' (Schmalz *et al*. 2019). Environmental justice organisations, such as Earthlife Africa, in partnership with community-based movements in Limpopo (Waterberg District), already draw on different forms of power; for example, public meetings and demonstrations, marches, and social media, which target institutional powers to make policy interventions. Cock explains 'judicial activism is using institutional power as a source of agency, appealing to human rights, labour laws and procedures such as environmental impact assessments and the constitutional rights to a safe and healthy environment' (2019: 7). As the founding members of the Life After Coal Campaign, Earthlife Africa in partnership with the Centre for Environmental Rights and groundWork, draw on judicial power for climate change litigation.

Another opportunity is provided for, at legislative and policymaking levels, by engaging with multilateral actors. Throughout this case study, researchers engaged with the Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), and as a result, the committee scheduled their annual programme of engagements and interactions with the religious sector, on matters of national importance, through the South African Religious Forum (SARF). SARF is recognised at the policymaking level and acts as the representative body of all religious and faith bodies in South Africa. COGTA offers a unique platform to galvanise the opinions and views of the religious sector in matters of socioeconomic development of society, and these engagements are anticipated to be replicated at provincial and local government levels. Once this model is replicated at the local level, it is anticipated that the views of faith communities will be considered in all societal development processes. There is great opportunity to promote FoRB-sensitive education which targets the various stakeholders in municipal and community-based organisations, and the urgent need for more education on FoRB can be met by delivering workshops in local communities.

In the context of promoting FoRB as part of a broader agenda, 'those engaged in peacebuilding work on the ground have often used interfaith dialogues as the entry point for consensus building around a new social contract' (Tadros 2020: 3). 'CREID has placed inclusive community development practices as central to its approach to addressing intersecting inequalities while using other entry points, like monitoring and countering hate speech' (*ibid.*). For this case study, researchers used communities' heritage and sacred natural sites under threat as an entry point for the promotion of FoRB in development projects, specifically the continuing coal-mining development in Lephalale, and therein lies an opportunity to integrate FoRB into facilitation processes by considering the cultural and religious associations and significance of places. While the EIA and SEA (which is the parent policy that informs HIA) can be identified as entry points to access institutional or judicial transformation for communities, there are still shortcomings of relying solely on this form of power. As observed through the Medupi HIA report (Mbofho Consulting and Projects 2015), heritage management is still an emerging field of practice, particularly in South Africa.

In *Resistance to Coal and the Possibilities of a Just Transition in South Africa*, Cock explains that 'new grassroots organisations are drawing on associational power – meaning organizing to increase numbers, build social networks, formal or informal alliances and a collective identity through an emphasis on shared everyday experiences' (2019: 7). But generating counter-power involves connecting different struggles. Herein lies an opportunity for FoRB to be utilised as a unique entry point to building counter-power in the Just Transition in South Africa.

6.2 The Olive Agenda as a process towards promoting FoRB

In Southern Africa, SAFCEI has a long-standing reputation of working with multi-faith leaders and religious actors to promote the values of what can be understood as Green Religion[18] movement building. We point to Steve de Gruchy's Olive Agenda (2017), which proposes a 'metaphorical theology of development' that can be used as a strategy to further FoRB on the ground. The Olive Agenda provides a theory which inspires possibilities to facilitate more religion-aware development and illustrates how theology might serve democracy and public life. De Gruchy proposes a theological engagement with a metaphor that could transcend the duality between the 'green' environmental agenda and the 'brown' poverty agenda that has disabled development for the past 20 years:

> The mix of green and brown suggests an olive agenda; which in turn provides a remarkably rich metaphor – the olive – that holds together that which religious and political discourse rends apart: earth, land, climate, labour, time, family, food, nutrition, health, hunger, poverty, power and violence.
> (*ibid.*: 1)

De Gruchy's choice of the olive as a metaphor is deliberate, in that it is not an either/or (green or brown agenda) but both, and it is through the blending of the two that he brings the need for an Olive Agenda to the

foreground. When considering such a metaphorical theology, what might this mean for the context of faith communities in Lephalale?

Civil society has argued that there is currently no blueprint for the Just Transition away from fossil fuel capitalism.

> *Economic developments in our area should have managed other needs (faith, culture, and tradition) more effectively. The development that we witnessed with the construction of Medupi Power Station should have provided safe spaces for all to benefit from. It should ensure that those who wish to utilise nature and all that it offers are able to benefit whilst at the same time it satisfies those who stated employment was high on their list of needs. The undisputable fact remains that we look forward to creation of employment opportunities but on a more holistic, sustainable manner. There were mistakes in the way the development of Medupi was carried out. Needs analysis of the communities surrounding the enterprise was not done hence today various components of this society are frustrated.*
> (James Moloantla, activist and community representative from Mohlasedi, 5 March 2020)

When researchers held cultural mapping workshops during the fieldwork of this study, issues of faith that were not previously recognised through development participatory engagements were brought to the foreground, as well as their intersection with environmental challenges. Interviewees expressed that the cultural issues were not raised but rather an emphasis on the economic benefits and jobs that these developments would bring to communities. The value of applying the Olive Agenda also allows for the recognition of the role of women in social and economic production at household and community levels through paid and unpaid work such as care and domestic work.

The principles of the Olive Agenda find application through a multitude of means that consider social, ecological, and economic production. Within the context of Lephalale's faith communities, any development process needs to promote holistic facilitation processes that deliberately account for both 'green' and 'brown' concerns.

This manifests as social factors, such as poverty, FoRB, and cultural production, carrying equal footing and importance as environmental sustainability, as well as local and national economic imperatives like job creation; in doing so, narrowing the 'chasm' which divides economy and ecology (de Gruchy 2007: 1).

De Gruchy (2007: 5) notes that to realise the Olive Agenda development, Africa cannot replicate the ecologically and socially exploitative model for development undertaken by the Global North and the Industrial Revolution which has birthed our modern global economy (*ibid.*: 2). The Olive Agenda might then look to localisation as a means to socially and economically uplift communities in the long term, as such, driving a greater appreciation for the contribution that individuals and communities make to sustaining ecologies while uplifting and contributing to a sustainable economy.

Restructuring the local, national, and global economy to emphasise the localisation of production within communities addresses the 'brown agenda', which centres on the elimination of poverty through sustainable employment, and creates a model for ecologically sustainable systems and processes that fall 'within the borders of nature's regeneration' (*ibid.*: 2). Simultaneously, this would address the 'green agenda' through a reduction in fossil fuel reliance, greenhouse gas production, soil erosion, pollution, and deforestation.

6.3 Reconciliation of spiritual insecurity and stakeholder engagement

> *Part of the explanation as to why there is resistance is based on the false notions by some community members who hold a view that our involvement as faith practitioners is a way of denying prospects of job opportunities and livelihoods. There should be a process of reconciliation between the companies that work around here with the communities. The reconciliation I am talking about must enable a new path of engaging each other on a platform of mutual respect of each culture, faith, and religious beliefs. Mutual understanding of both the community and the companies working here will provide an opportunity for sustainable development and prosperity for people in in Lephalale and beyond (Waterberg District as a whole). The understanding I am talking about will give the communities new direction to the path of prosperous life.*
> (Lazarus Seodisa, traditional healer, Marapong, 3 March 2020)

During an interview with Reverend Daan van Wyk of the Dutch Reformed Church, he acknowledged that there is a notable social divide in Lephalale. However, he further expressed solidarity with other communities and a willingness to venture out of the bounds of his Afrikaans-speaking community to explore opportunities for FoRB as a faith leader.

Religious agency provides a lens through which we can better understand how communities and individuals claim and practise religious or spiritual identities, and FoRB opportunely fits within the discourse of development, as it refers to a range of articulations of agency that encompasses both intangible and tangible dimensions like practice and teaching, etc. (Tadros 2020: 9), but also embodies other human rights freedoms.

Although separating religious agency from the broader political agenda of governments presents a challenge, the potential for FoRB to contribute to local and foreign policy is marked, and when considered as part of an inclusive and holistic development agenda, can bridge gaps between divided communities by proposing alternative frameworks and pathways for community building and discourse in a way that includes women and youth representation and addresses 'on-the-ground' power dynamics within and across groups (*ibid.*).

We have already acknowledged SAFCEI's work with multi-faith leaders and religious actors in Southern Africa to promote the values of Green Religion movement building. However, insufficient recognition and support are assumed to the potential of religion, including its frameworks, tools, and strategies to participate in the Just Transition narrative; and how

religion can open new pathways to guide policy and the integration of FoRB on the ground needs to be given more consideration.

The resilience and agency of women in the communities visited by the researchers, including other mining-affected communities in South Africa, is displayed through their active participation in socially, culturally, and economically productive activities despite the challenges of 'everyday life'. These challenges – for example, insufficient access to basic services such as water and sanitation, as well as exclusion and lack of access to basic human rights – are the most prevalent in these marginalised contexts where people are still actively striving for a democratic, just, and community-focused world. These characteristics must be acknowledged by taking into account their specific perspectives and concerns during facilitation processes, noting their multiple roles in sustainable development, and implementing economic and social policies that specifically aid and uplift women, as well as increase their economic participation.

During an interview in Marapong with Francina Nkosi, resident of Shongoane and local human rights defender, she shared her hope for future developments in Lephalale, that 'land be made available for farming', as a gateway to poverty reduction by uplifting women's participation in agriculture, as well as reducing food and intergenerational nutrition security. Nkosi further described how 'land is sacred in African traditions; therefore, it not only nourishes us with food, indigenous seeds and livelihoods, it is through the land that we are able to dream and connect with our African spiritualities'. She also said that as women play critical roles in sustaining cultural production and traditions, ensuring that they have adequate resources, such as land, water and food, to do so is paramount. From this reflection, it is possible to assert that access to land is a crucial element to realising FoRB in Lephalale. Other women that we engaged with from the Ithuteng Women's Group continue to save indigenous seed as an act of resistance, and farm on a small scale. The communities' seed-saving preserves and counteracts the over-extraction of natural resources, and the resultant ecological degradation by preserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable use of natural resources. It also preserves traditional seeds which form part of cultures and contribute to ensuring food security.

Finally, in a 2018 case of Xolobeni, the High Court ruled in favour of a community during a mining rights case.[19] This could disrupt the current precedent and empower communities on communal land with the right to reject new mining projects. These perspectives, within the context of religion and development, illustrate that alternative models and possibilities for better, nuanced, and sustainable development do exist.

7 Concluding summary

This research enquiry was guided by the central research question: 'what are the struggles and opportunities for integrating freedom of religion or belief into development or humanitarian programmes?'. The action element of this research continues as it forms part of the ongoing resistance by the Lephalale communities in their fight against the extraction of fossil fuels, and various legal submissions from Earthlife Africa's coal campaign on new proposed developments to the area. The group Concerned Citizens of Lephalale, with whom we consulted, and which is part of the Earthlife

coal campaign, actively campaign in the area by monitoring EIA processes and lobbying for legal rights education workshops to be part of public education.

In this chapter, we reviewed the background and historical context of coal mining in South Africa, then examined the challenges of mining within the context of FoRB, and lastly, explored some of the opportunities for integrating FoRB into development, with reference to the national Just Transition. Owing to the new pathways mapped by this research, Earthlife Africa and SAFCEI are positive that more similar thinking will be held in public spaces and meetings as the community becomes increasingly aware of their rights in this regard. From the interviews and reflections shared by participants, it is evident that education around FoRB is needed. Currently, there is a strong, existing, environmental advocacy movement on the ground, to which much attention is paid. However, as observed by the researchers regarding the removal of graves (see section 5.4), this aspect is still very sensitive as people were not well informed on their rights regarding FoRB, nor were they familiar with the NHRA, which is in place to protect the cultural and religious rights of people in South Africa. In summary, we recognise that people mobilise around the rights which they know they have. Finally, based on the footage and visuals recorded during this field trip, a short film, forming part of the case study research, will be released in the near future.

Annexe 1

The sites include:

Marapong

A settlement established with the exploration and first excavations of coal mines to provide residence to workers of both the mines and Matimba Power Station, largely from villages far from the mines. This settlement provided accommodation even for workers from neighbouring countries such as Botswana and is concentrated with African communities of various social standing. The older part of it has modern housing and 'extensions', which are characterised by shacks (informal housing). In terms of religion, there is cocktail of orientations: a large concentration of mainline Christians followed by those who belong to indigenous African churches, such as the Zion Christian Church and Apostolic Church. Practitioners of African indigenous cultures also exist in smaller numbers. The first language of the residents is Sepedi and the population is over 90 per cent black African. The research team interacted with nine members of the community of Marapong. Participants in this group comprised youth, men, women, and community-based organisations.

Shongoane village

One of the largest villages in Lephalale, under the traditional chieftaincy of Shongoane. It is claimed that large parts of the former Ellisras Town formerly belonged to Shongoane. The first language of the residents is Sepedi and a smaller percentage speak Setswana; the area is 90 per cent black African. A visit to Shongoane for the purpose of this research was not undertaken; however, members of the community were engaged with by the research team through workshops during the fieldwork. The research team interacted with nine members. Participants in this group comprised youth, men, and women.

Steenbokpan

A farming area owned by a consortium of farmers. Some farms have been sold recently to coal-mining enterprises, thus changing the mode of production from an agricultural hub into coal mining. The majority identifies with Christianity with blends of African traditional belief systems in place. Residents interviewed for this research had been allocated a piece of land for residential purposes. One resident gave an impression that this community observes multiple religious practices.

> *In this area and community, we have a fair blend of various faith practices and orientations being practised around. The situation has always been like that ever since the establishment of this settlement and relations are generally harmonious and cordial.*
> (Letta, 4 March 2020, Steenbokpan)

The research team met one member of this community, a community leader and a presiding elder in the Apostolic Church.

Vangpan

For many generations this was a white-owned farm holding. However, the enticement that comes with the expansion of the coal development mines saw this farm being sold some years ago to Resource Generation (ResGen) South Africa, which intends to transform the agricultural farm from food production into a mining hub for coal to supply the growing needs of both Medupi and Matimba power stations. The main spoken languages are Afrikaans and Sepedi. Few black families remain on the land because their deceased elders are buried on the farm and they remain destitute, without security of tenure and other rights that ordinary South Africans are granted in the country's constitution. Speaking on behalf of the families still remaining in the area, Mr Sebina spoke about the living conditions on the farm:

> *The set-up we are in now makes it difficult for us to gather as we used to in the days before Boikarabelo and forced removals. We used to have multi-denominational services to celebrate common religious and significant days as a united body of Christ Church. The services used to involve members of Apostolic, Zion and mainline churches. We still yearn for those days where we were able to pray together but as you can see the current situation is not conducive for that, others have also left this farm.*
> (Mr Sebina, 4 March 2020, Vangpan)

The research team interacted with seven members of the community. Participants in this group comprised youth, men, and women.

Mohlasedi village

Named after its traditional founder Mohlasedi who originally hails from Botswana, several generations have settled in this far northern part of Ellisras Town. The first language of the participants is Sepedi and 90 per cent of the community is black African. It is a religious community of various blends of Christian orientations, with pockets of those practising traditional spirituality. Confirming this background, Chief Seleka mentioned:

> *There is a fair blend of various religious orientations. The majority practise Christian religion and also there are still those that practise traditional belief systems. Those that practise Christian faith have organised themselves in various denominations ranging from African indigenous and those defined as mainline churches. All those different practitioners of various faith orientations coexist harmoniously.*
> (Chief Seleka, Mohlasedi village, 4 March 2020)

The research team interacted with 11 members of the community. Participants in this group comprised youth, men, and women, and the Ithuteng Women's Group.

Mahlakung Informal Settlement

The settlement is built on Eskom-owned land and came into existence because of employment opportunities from the construction of the Medupi Power Station, in particular. It is a poorly serviced settlement with one communal tap and non-existent ablution facilities. Due to its overpopulation, residents indicate their difficulty in practising their faith. A resident of the community reflected on FoRB:

> *Our need and right to practise our religions and faith practices is hampered in this settlement and beyond. For instance, we do not have water ponds or streams that are required to perform baptism and other cleansing ceremonies that are necessary in line of our faith practices. We are then forced to get out of this settlement and travel to other areas of Lephalale for our religious needs to be fulfilled.*
> (Anna Molekwa, Mahlakung Informal Settlement, 5 March 2020)

During the observation of Easter and other religious holidays, people often migrate back to their homelands. The research team interacted with eight participants from the settlement, comprising a majority of women.

Elandsbosch Farm

A private farm holding owned by a few white families who maintain farming of crops and hold game animals as their key activity. We received a tour of the farm and in our interviews, they discussed their resistance to the expansion of coal mines and energy generation plants in the area. We also recorded visuals on their farm to show the range and scope, and to assist different understandings of land redistribution in the country. The landowner of Elandsbosch Farm (Hardus Steenkamp, a Christian farmer) has resisted temptations to transform their agricultural lands into mining hubs, based on the understanding that care for the natural environment must be maintained for the generations to come.

Notes

* This book has been produced as part of the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) programme, funded with UK aid from the UK government. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views or official policies of our funder or IDS.

† The authors would like to thank the staff of Earthlife Africa – Thabo Sibeko, Elana Greyling and Nthabiseng Matsoha – for their contribution to the fieldwork trip and support throughout. We would also like to acknowledge Lydia Machaka from the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) who contributed to the initial draft proposal to CREID, and Lebogang Mashego for her time, discussions, and review of this chapter. We would like to thank all the participants and community partners who participated in the interviews, site visits, and workshops during the data collection and fieldwork of this research. Additionally, we would like to thank CREID for making this research possible and for its support throughout the process. In alignment with the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the ethical commitment of this research is an expression of dedication to push back coal developments in Limpopo, towards the development and implementation of solutions capable of promoting and ensuring intersectional transformation and religion-aware development on the ground.

1 Rifqah Tifloen, Operations Manager, Earthlife Africa, South Africa.

2 Matome Jacky Makgoba, Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute, South Africa.

3 National Environmental Management Act (umbrella Act) (NEMA); Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA); National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (NEMPAA); Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA); Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA).

4 Earthlife Africa is an environmental justice, anti-nuclear non-profit organisation, founded in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1988. It espouses the idea that the most marginalised in society suffer the worst impacts of environmental destruction caused by industrialisation, destructive lifestyles and practices, and the irresponsible growth paradigm. Since its inception, Earthlife Africa has aimed to create a platform that supports economically and socially excluded communities to participate in environmental decision-making processes so that their quality of life is protected. Earthlife Africa's work assists and supports the participation of individuals, businesses, and industries to reduce pollution, minimise waste, and protect our natural resources. For further information, see **Earthlife Africa website**.

5 The Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) is a multi-faith organisation committed to supporting faith leaders and their communities in Southern Africa to increase awareness, understanding, and action on eco-justice, sustainable living, and climate change. It was launched in 2005 after a multi-faith environment conference which called for the establishment of a faith-based environment initiative. SAFCEI emphasises the spiritual and moral imperative to care for the Earth and the community of all life. It calls for ethical leadership from all those in power and speaks out

on issues of eco-justice, encouraging citizen action. For further information, see **SAFCEI website**.

6 See **Earthlife Africa's coal campaign webpage**.

7 For example, gravesites and accompanying rituals performed at the sites by African traditional religious communities.

8 Land, water, and indigenous plants for medicine.

9 See the UN's **Paris Agreement webpage**.

10 The title of a **book by James Charlton** (California Scholarship Online, 2012).

11 As per **Creative City Network of Canada website**; also Clark, Sutherland and Young (1995); Martin (2002); UNESCO (n.d.); Young (2003).

12 Ogies community (Tweefontein) is in Mpumalanga province.

13 Phola is a township 8km from Ogies.

14 Mahlakung Informal Settlement was established to provide accommodation for the growing number of people who flock to Lephalale because of the opportunities that Medupi Power Station and coal mines provide. The land is owned by Eskom and it only has one communal tap with no permanent structures, aside from the hundreds of homes constructed from corrugated iron and wood pallet materials.

15 Here faith is used broadly, within the specific context of the place, to express belief in a higher power, spirit, and multi-faith perspective. This is owed to a mix of Christian and multiple indigenous beliefs expressed by participants from different cultures living in Mahlakung.

16 The quoted price-tag at the time of the Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone's launch was R40bn, and has now ballooned to R145bn (Bloom 2020).

17 The 'Just Transition' concept, advocated by trade unions, is a response to the UNFCCC Paris Agreement. Just Transition strategies should be understood as a package of policies and actions aimed at anticipating the impacts of climate policies on employment, protecting and even improving workers' livelihoods (health, skills, rights) and supporting their communities (Rosemberg 2017: 149).

18 Green Religion posits that environmentally friendly behaviour is a religious obligation (Taylor 2010: 10).

19 In November 2018 the Gauteng High Court, Pretoria, ruled that consent must be given by communities living on ancestral land before government can give the go ahead for mining rights (see Venter 2018).

References

Amazon Conservation Team (2008) ***Methodology of Collaborative Cultural Mapping***, Brasília: Equipe de Conservação da Amazônia Edições

Bailey, G. (2014) '**Accumulation by Dispossession: A Critical Assessment**', *International Socialist Review* 95 (accessed 12 January 2021)

Bloom, K. (2020) '**Killing the Holy Ghost: Inside the R145bn Plan that Would Destroy the Limpopo River**', *Daily Maverick*, 1 April (accessed 12 January 2021)

Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*, Thompson, J.B. (ed.), trans. by G. Raymond and M. Adamson, Cambridge: Polity Press

Centre for Environmental Rights (2017) '**Victory in SA's First Climate Change Court Case!**', 8 March (accessed 20 January 2021)

Chidester, D. (2012) *Wild Religion: Tracking the Sacred in South Africa*, Los Angeles CA: University of California Press

Clark, I.; Sutherland, J. and Young, G. (1995) *Mapping Culture: A Guide for Cultural and Economic Development in Communities*, Canberra: AGPS

Cock, J. (2019) *Resistance to Coal and the Possibilities of a Just Transition in South Africa*, Working Paper 13, Johannesburg: Society, Work and Politics Institute, University of Witwatersrand

Cock, J. (2018) '**Contesting the Colour of a Just Transition in South Africa**', *Medium*, 23 April (accessed 17 December 2020)

De Gruchy, S. (2007) '**An Olive Agenda: First Thoughts on a Metaphorical Theology of Development**', KwaZulu-Natal: University of KwaZulu-Natal (accessed 1 September 2020)

DEAT (2004) ***Strategic Environmental Assessment***, Integrated Environmental Management Information Series, Pretoria: Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (accessed 20 January 2021)

Dinham, A. (2009) *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society: Problems, Policies, Controversies*, London: Palgrave Macmillan

Duxbury, N.; Garrett-Petts, W. and MacLennan, D. (2015) *Cultural Mapping as Cultural Inquiry*, London: Routledge

groundWork, Centre for Environmental Rights, Human Rights Watch and Earthjustice (2019) ***'We Know Our Lives are in Danger': Environment of Fear in South Africa's Mining-Affected Communities***, groundWork, Centre for Environmental Rights, Human Rights Watch and Earthjustice (accessed 12 January 2021)

Guy, J. (1979) *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom*, London: Longmans

Hackett, R.J. (2011) 'Regulating Religious Freedom in Africa', *Emory International Law Review* 25: 853–79

Hallowes, D. and Munnik, V. (2018) ***Boom and Bust in the Waterberg: A History of Coal Mega Projects***, Pietermaritzburg: groundWork (accessed 12 January 2021)

Harvey, D. (2003) *The New Imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

High Level Panel on the Assessment of Legislation and the Acceleration of Fundamental Change (2017) ***Report of the High Level Panel on the Assessment of Key Legislation and the Acceleration of Fundamental Change*** (accessed 20 January 2021)

Keegan, T. (1996) *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*, Claremont: David Philip Publishers

LARC (2018) ***Mining***, High Level Panel Summary Sheets: March 2018, Land and Accountability Research Centre (accessed 20 January 2021)

Ledwaba, L. (2020) '**Ray of Hope for Limpopo as Sopa Reveals Grand Plans for Jobs**', *Mail and Guardian*, 9 March (accessed 20 January 2021)

Lugo, L. *et al.* (2010) *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Washington DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

Martin, J. (2002) *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain*, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications

Mbofho Consulting and Projects (2015) ***Medupi Power Station Development Phase II Heritage Impact Assessment*** (accessed 12 January 2021)

Minerals Council South Africa (2019) ***Facts and Figures 2018 Pocketbook*** (accessed 12 January 2021)

Petersen, M. (2020) *Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief and Gender Equality in the Context of Sustainable Development Goals: A Focus on Access to Justice, Education and Health*, Copenhagen: The Danish Institute for Human Rights

Rosemberg, A. (2017) 'Embedding Just Transition in Long-Term Decarbonization Strategies: Why, What, and How', *Policy Analysis Brief*, Stanley Foundation

SAHRC (2016) ***National Hearing on the Underlying Socio-Challenges of Mining-Affected Communities in South Africa***, Johannesburg: South African Human Rights Commission (accessed 12 January 2021)

SAHRC (2008) ***Mining-Related Observations and Recommendations: Anglo Platinum, Affected Communities and Other Stakeholders in and around the PPL Mine, Limpopo***, Johannesburg: South African Human Rights Commission (accessed 12 January 2021)

Schmalz, S.; Schiller, F.; Ludwig, C. and Webster E. (2019) 'Power Resources and Global Capitalism', *Global Labour Journal* 10.1: 84–90

Skosana, D. (2019a) 'Grave Matters: The Contentious Politics of Gravesite Removals in Contemporary South Africa – The Case of Tweefontein, Ogies', unpublished PhD Thesis, Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand

Skosana, D. (2019b) *Moving Graves: Dispossession and the Desecration of Ancestral Graves by Mining Corporations in Tweefontein (Ogies), South Africa*, Johannesburg: Society, Work and Politics Institute, University of Witwatersrand

Skosana, D. (2017) '**Protecting the Dead: The South African National Heritage Resources Act in Context**', in M.C. Green, R.I.J. Hackett, L. Hansen and F. Venter (eds), *Religious Pluralism, Heritage and Social Development in Africa*, Stellenbosch: Conf-RAP (accessed 20 January 2021)

Sole, S. (2020) '#Earthcrimes: Limpopo's Dirty Great White Elephant (Part One)', *Daily Maverick*, 7 April (accessed 12 January 2021)

Stats SA (2018) ***Men, Women and Children. Findings of the Living Conditions Survey***, Report 03-10-02, Statistics South Africa (accessed 20 January 2021)

Symington, A. (2004) 'Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice', *Facts and Issues in Women's Rights and Economic Change* 9, August, Association for Women's Rights in Development

Tadros, M. (2020) '**Promoting FoRB in Fragile Contexts: Emerging Lessons from CREID**', *CREID Learning Briefing* 1, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies (accessed 17 December 2020)

Tadros, M. and Sabates-Wheeler, R. (2020) ***Inclusive Development: Beyond Need, Not Creed***, CREID Working Paper 1, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies (accessed 17 December 2020)

Taylor, B. (2010) *Dark Green Religion*, Los Angeles CA: University of California Press

Tomalin, E. (2015) 'Introduction', in E. Tomalin, E. (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development*, London: Routledge

Townsend, E. and Wilcock, A. (2004) '**Occupational Justice and Client-Centred Practice: A Dialogue in Progress**', *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy* (accessed 1 June 2020)

UNESCO (n.d.) *Cultural Mapping*, Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

University of Minnesota Human Rights Center (2016) ***Freedom of Religion or Belief Study Guide***, University of Minnesota Human Rights Library (accessed 20 January 2021)

Venter, Z. (2018) '**WATCH: Xolobeni Community Scores Huge Victory against Mining**', *IOL* (accessed 20 January 2021)

Young, G. (2003) 'Cultural Mapping in a Global World', keynote speech at the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI) Cultural Mapping Symposium and Workshop, Adelaide, South Australia