

Living in the land

An oiko-theological response to the amadiba crisis committee of xolobeni's struggle for ubuntu, land and ecology

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ABSTRACT

The central thesis of this article is that the network of living relationships between community, ecology and land as understood by the Amadiba people of Xolobeni may be recognised as an integral part of the wider context in which public and ecumenical *oiko*-theology needs to be practised, during a challenging time in South African society. It is dealing with serious challenges regarding mining, land, economic development and communities' struggle to control their own livelihoods and destinies. As part of this article, the story of the Amadiba Crisis Committee's struggle to resist brutal mining and road development is told. This leads to a search for some pointers to guide public *oiko*- theologians to participate in the struggle for human rights and self-determination for communities threatened by mining. These are: i) a contextual analysis of government's engagement with ecology and economy from the perspective of the *oikonomia tou Theou* (the economy of God); ii) ecumenical cooperation with the groundswell of community organisations and NGOs who are working for justice for mining-affected communities, and; iii) possible ways of deepening democracy and keeping government accountable.

Keywords: Amadiba Crisis Committee, ecology, indigenous knowledge systems, land, mining, Mpondoland, *oikos*, sustainable economy, "Right to say NO", ubuntu

This article is written in honour of Prof Nico Botha, my colleague in the Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology since 1995 at the University of South Africa (UNISA). I will always remember Prof Botha's criticism of the neo-liberal global economy and his concern about economic injustice and inequality in South Africa, as well as his deep unease with the South African liberation movement, which became a political power that to a great extent has sold out the tenets of the Freedom Charter while gaining power and wealth for a small elite. His consistent criticism of the old and new forms of political and economic injustices in South Africa influenced and conscientised me. His thought encouraged me to relate political and economic injustice to ecological injustice, as this again negatively impacts the lives of local and marginalised communities.

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1. Living in the land – doing oiko-theology as inspired by the Amadiba Crisis Committee of Xolobeni

In this article I will present the story of how the Amadiba community from Xolobeni on the Northern Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape took up their struggle to live sustainably and in terms of their Indigenous Knowledge Systems. I will explore the pivotal role of a leading activist in this story, and will take up his own description of their struggle as that of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were prepared to be thrown into the blazing furnace that the mighty king Nebuchadnezzar prepared for those who did not want to bow before him, knowing that whether they won or lost, they had witnessed to the righteousness of the Almighty God. I will use the prophetic witness of Mr Sinegugu Zukulu as my entry point to dialogue with both the struggle of the Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC) as well as with the *oiko*-theology practised by various South African theologians. I expand on this below. A narrative of the struggle of the ACC against toll road development and mining in Xolobeni will be followed by an analysis and reflection on doing public *oiko*-theology in a South African post-1994 context where many local communities are adversely affected by big-scale capitalist development and mining which threaten their land, sustainable livelihoods and human rights.

My central thesis is that this network of living relationships between community, ecology and land as understood here by the Amadiba people – but also by many other local communities – is a significant dimension of the wider South African context in which public and ecumenical *oiko*-theology needs to be practised, during a challenging period. Interrelated issues regarding land, mining, economic development and social change in South Africa must be re-explored and re-figured within a more sustainable paradigm than the current neo-liberal capitalist paradigm within which government is currently carrying out its socio-economic transformation agenda.

I argue that the activism of the ACC on the local and global level is exemplary and holds new approaches for *oiko*-theologians – approaches which may help us to re-interpret our theology to transform the theology that we do. This knowledge takes us literally into the open public spaces where development and mining threaten the livelihoods of many local communities in South Africa.

2. Understanding oiko-theology in relation to ubuntu

Oiko-theology may be understood as a re-interpretation of the Good News of the Kingdom of God in a time of ecological crisis². The New Testament term “Kingdom of

² *Oiko*-theology is practised by some South African theologians such as Warmback (2005:176-180), De Gruchy (2006:362-379), Conradie (2007:1-9), Van Schalkwyk (2008:8) and Mangayi (2016:512-567).

God” is interpreted by reading this central phrase through an endeavour to understand the ecosystems (natural, social, economic and political) of our planet better. In a similar vein, the feminist theologian Letty Russell (1987:24) reflects on God’s action to create the world as a household “where both humanity and nature can live in a community of responsibility and freedom”. Here *oikos* is no longer the patriarchal household of the Greek society, but a “Household of Freedom” in which all members of the household have the authority to participate in the household or home, and in re-building the home so that it can be a place of life and well-being. It is reassuring to note that the Christian church is not dissolved or diluted through such an ecological and ecumenical understanding of the Kingdom. I would rather argue that the Gospel as it is traditionally understood in the Christian church is contextualised, strengthened and “amplified” through these Biblical and ecological metaphors. In the understanding of *oiko*-theologians, the term “household” or “home” enables us to *bring home* the Kingdom of God within the ecology while also encompassing and embracing earth and cosmos; after centuries during which the Christian “Kingdom of God” was dualistically disconnected from an ecological understanding of the Gospel. *Oikos* is a Greek word used often in the New Testament, meaning “home”, “household” or “house”. The Diakonia Council of Churches in KwaZulu Natal (“Diakonia” in short), through the *Oikos* Study Group, published *the oikos journey: A theological reflection on the economic crisis in South Africa*. *The Oikos journey* (in short) assisted a few ecology and theology students to grasp the encompassing metaphor of God’s *oikos* as it interrelates with the Greek terms from which three English words are derived. To quote from the *oikos journey* (2006:24):

From God’s perspective therefore, economy – *oikos* – *nomos* – is directly related to ecology – *oikos* – *logos*. Both concern the earth as our *oikos*, our home. God’s economy concerns how the bounty of the world in terms of earth, water, air, plants, helps human life to flourish. It cannot be separated from ecology, from the intricate web that sustains life on the planet.

The *oikonomia tou Theou* (the economy of God) entails the rules of God for the economy of a human community which has to live sustainably within the ecology. *Oiko*-theology therefore denotes the Christian community’s mission to protect the whole living community of our home, the earth; in the face of ecological devastation and global economic realities which are destroying it.

In this article I will argue for a public *oiko*-theology in the sense that Christian theology “has to discern how to strategically engage in the public sphere of policy and governance so that the interests of the poor are protected” (Mangayi, 2016:114). *Oiko*-theology has to be public as it has no other option but to engage with those gov-

ernment policies and actions and economic forces which do not respect and enhance the integrity of the community of human beings and all natural living systems.

This *oiko*-theology is enhanced and corrected by scholars such as LenkaBula (2009: 375-394). She explores the African concept *botho/ubuntu* as the whole sacred community of humanity which is inextricably part of the systems of living creatures, earth and cosmos; in which the vibrancy of all living beings mutually supports and enhances the existence and livelihood of the *ubuntu* community. I concur with LenkaBula that this inherently African philosophy and way of life is an important source, together with Christian theological concepts such as the *oikos*, for developing a relevant Southern African ethic and theology for the protection of the ecology on which poorer African communities depend in particular for their livelihood. When in dialogue with *oiko*-theology, the *botho/ubuntu* concept contextualises *oiko*-theology in an African context and brings it home in the whole vibrant community of life as understood in African religious and cultural traditions. For the sake of this article, it is especially important that *oiko*-theology is re-interpreted through *ubuntu* to bring *oiko*-theology down to the soil of Mpondoland.

Ubuntu is understood implicitly by the Amadiba people. Sinegugu Zukulu³ (personal communication, October 11, 2018) explains the link between ubuntu, community, communal land, and the bounty of nature that must be shared without greed but through cooperation:

Ubuntu is central in a community that lives on communal land because people share resources such as grazing, water sources, forests for collection of firewood, medicine etc. On communal land there is no space for greediness. There are customary bylaws to ensure people use the land sustainably. For example, certain trees are not supposed to be cut down because of the role they play in supporting livelihood. All fruit bearing trees are not supposed to be cut down for firewood as they provide food to travellers. Firewood collectors are encouraged to collect only dead wood not green growing trees. Runaway fires ought to be attended to by whole villages, no one is supposed to start fires without inviting neighbours. People are encouraged and forced to share with all.

Moreover, ubuntu is understood in terms of living-in-the-land (Sinegugu Zukulu, personal communication, October 11, 2018):

In Mpondoland, people believe that you may not separate life from the land. The land people occupy is believed to be borrowed from future generations. According

³ Sinegugu Zukulu explained ubuntu to me in this manner in his comments on the rough draft of this article on 19 October 2018.

to the people, good development is such that does not degrade the land but allows people to use the land in a manner that would sustain it and leave it productive for future generations.

This network of living relationships between community, ecology and land as understood here by the Amadiba people is the context in which *oiko*-theology may be practised, and in which the struggle of the ACC may inform such theology.

3. The Amadiba, religion and land

For this purpose, I wish to learn from the ACC activists' struggle to protect the vibrancy and sacredness of a holistic indigenous AmaMpondo understanding of life, community, traditional belief systems, ecology, land and sustainable ways of life. There is a struggle to preserve the sacredness of life which is embodied in land and ecology and which is necessary for human community to survive and live well. As in other African communities, human community, land and ecology is sacred because God is creator, protector, and sustainer of life. The whole vibrant and enspirited earth community and cosmos is in close relationship with God (Mkondo, 2010:1). In the AmaMpondo traditional belief system and way of life, the whole human community makes their living *in* the land and in dependence on the natural bounty of the rich ecosystems of Mpondoland's coastal hills. Here, land and ecology hold the human community in safe-keeping for past, present and future generations. Kinship, language, cattle, agriculture, homesteads, traditional belief systems and governance, ancestors, soil and land are all part of this way of life.

The AmaMpondo's connection to land is similar to those of other African people, but there is good reason to say that the AmaMpondo have a special and fierce connection to their land, as their land was the last territory of the Xhosa people that was annexed by the colonial government in 1894, and because they rose up against the Apartheid government land betterment schemes and imposition of taxes through coopted tribal leaders, during 1959-1960 (South African History Online, 1960). This proud legacy lives on in the struggle of specifically, but not only, the Amadiba tribe. Their connection with the land also has deep religious roots. In the words of Mkenda (2010:3):

Africans have a strong connection with the land not only as an economic resource, but because they regard land as home, as a place of sacrifice and offerings. When traditional African people struggled or fought for land, they were not simply struggling or fighting for it economically but for social, moral and religious motives.

In this struggle, those who worship their ancestors, Christians, and the majority of people who believe that the two religions are complementary to each other, draw on

their beliefs as these are rooted in their connection to the land (Sinegugu Zukulu, personal communication, September 25, 2018).

The ACC activists' fierce protection of their land and way of life motivates their struggle against the brutal forces of development.

4. My research approach

An important motivating factor for this research is what I can only describe as my desire to learn from the AmaMpondo. As a white person who has some sense of identification with the African way of life, I hope to come home in the soil (*umblaba*) of my home (*ekhaya* or *oikos*) in the North Eastern Cape where I was born and grew up, by learning from the AmaMpondo, and specifically the Amadiba community. I wanted to be taught by indigenous people themselves regarding what their practical and dynamic knowledge of their way of life is, and how this motivates them to take on what seems to be overwhelmingly powerful forces of national government, multinational mining companies and parastatal entities. This rootedness of the Amadiba community in the soil and an indigenous way of life is a powerful motivation for their struggle and activism. It is also a source for the generation of new knowledge through their communal conscientisation and strategising; as well as new knowledge that is gained through the work of committed journalists and NGOs who report the story of the Amadiba to the "outside world". This new knowledge, which is available in the public domain such as on the Facebook pages of the ACC, as well as that of its sister organisation Sustaining the Wild Coast⁴, the websites of various NGOs such as Benchmarks Foundation⁵ and ActionAid South Africa⁶, the news agency GroundUp⁷, prominent articles in various South African newspapers and magazines⁸, international journals and publications of research institutions (Pearce, 2017)⁹, investigative television programmes on 50/50; and a long list of films and videos mostly produced by veteran social worker John GI

⁴ www.swc.org.za

⁵ www.bench-marks.org.za

⁶ <http://www.actionaid.org/south-africa>

⁷ www.groundup.org.za

⁸ Venter, Z. 2017. Lone ranger can fight the state to scrap Wild Coast toll road. Available from: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/eastern-cape/lone-ranger-can-fight-the-state-to-scrap-wild-coast-toll-road-11667640> (Accessed 9 December 2018). Nicholson, G. 2018. Community to have its day in court but Mantashe warns of the impact on the economy. Available from: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-04-19-community-to-have-its-day-in-court-but-mantashe-warns-of-the-impact-on-the-economy/> (Accessed 9 December 2018).

⁹ Pearce, F. 2017. A death in Pondoland: How a proposed strip mine brought conflict to South Africa's Wild Coast, Yale Environment _360. Published at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Available from: <https://e360.yale.edu/features/titanium-mine-conflict-south-africa-pondoland-rhadebe-caruso> (Accessed 24 August 2018).

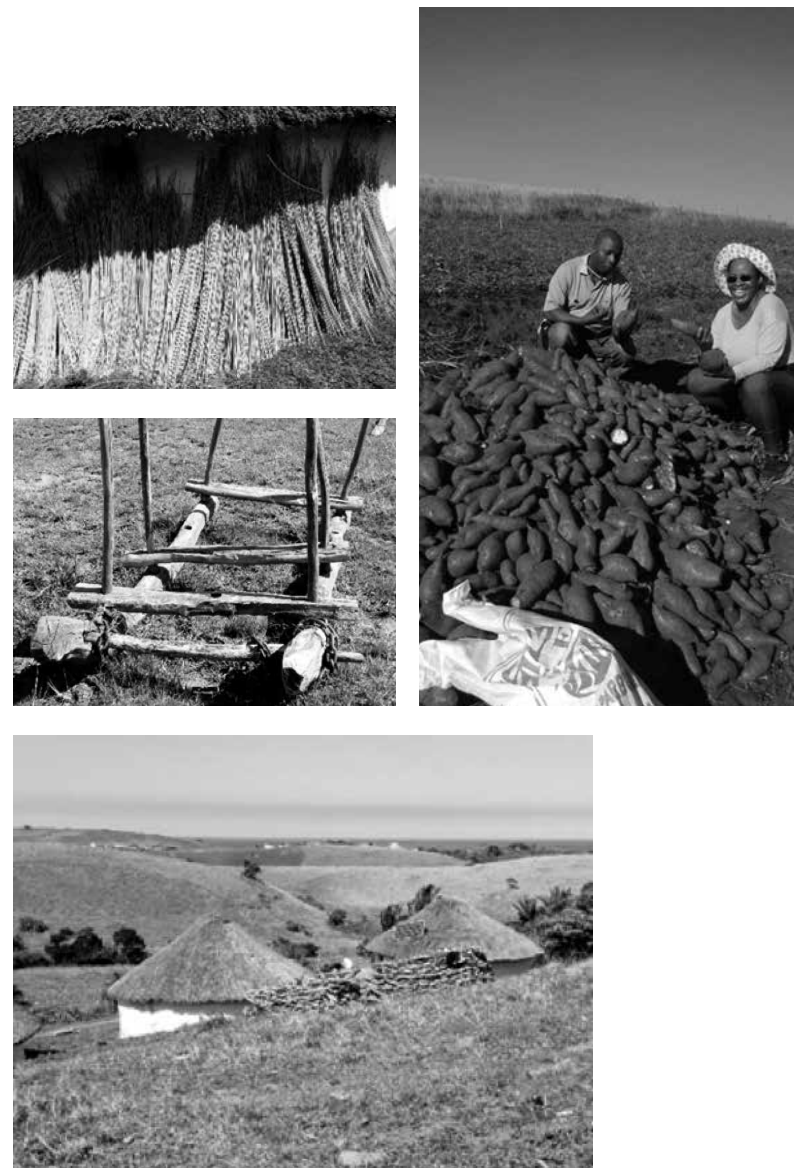


Figure 1: Incema grass, firewood, thatch grass, sweet potatoes and the sledge all come from the environment, at no cost (free of charge). Therefore, people are working hard to protect their land, so that they may continue to enjoy all that the ecology or land provides them (photographs courtesy of Sinegugu Zukulu).

Clarke¹⁰ who works closely with the ACC, would not have been possible were it not for the local, indigenous way of life and activism of the Amadiba people and the ACC. The ACC's struggle resonates with other narratives of indigenous communities who are vulnerable to mining, both locally and globally. As such, the ACC are engaging with many debates on decoloniality and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), economic and ecological sustainability, and indigenous land ownership; in a time during which the enhancement of decolonial knowledge systems and community-based research is becoming crucial (Kaya & Seleti, 2013:30-44; Smith 2012). In the wake of global capitalism, neo-colonialism and brutal development, the struggle of the Amadiba people is significant for the restoration of indigenous communities' ways of life as well as for the recognition of these previously silenced knowledge systems in the public domain together with institutions of primary and higher learning. In this context, it was necessary for me to leave my university office to go and visit Mpondoland and the Northern Eastern Cape. There I would meet Sinegugu Zukulu at his workplace in Matatiele, to learn from a "barefoot professor" who is grounded in the black soil in Mpondoland.

While I informally visited the Xolobeni district itself in July 2017 and had authentic encounters with some of the local tour guides, women running home stay guest facilities, and villagers, I made an appointment for a formal in-depth interview with Sinegugu Zukulu, one of the leading activists in the ACC and Sustaining the Wild Coast (SWC). Sinegugu is also an environmentalist, teacher and devoted Christian. I could only meet him at his work place in Matatiele on 21 March 2018 and not in Xolobeni. Unfortunately, the Xolobeni community is currently in an atmosphere of internal strife due to the influence of agents such as the South African National Road Agency Limited (SANRAL) and the Mineral Resources Commodities (MRC) mining company. I deemed it necessary not to venture into the community to engage, particularly with local women activists as this may have created further tensions. I could, however, rely on a wealth of information on Xolobeni available in the public domain, such as the very good films made by the television programme 50/50 and social worker John Clarke.

¹⁰ Documentary film by Guy, D. Introduced and uploaded on YouTube by Clarke, J.G.I. 2009. Pondo people, part 1 of 3. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XriyLxB6Z4> (Accessed 30 August 2018). - Documentary film by Guy, D. Introduced and uploaded on YouTube by Clarke, J.G.I. 2009. Pondo people, part 2 of 3. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXQmpSNqH40> (Accessed 9 September 2018). - Clarke, J. G. I. 2009. Part 3 reflections with Nonhle on Pondo people. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIDk33tAVpk&t=20s> (Accessed 30 August 2018). - Clarke, J.G.I. 2016. Pondo people power. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v+CMSW7qhwvDO> (Accessed 9 September 2018). - Clarke, J.G.I. 2015. Before the shore break: Xolobeni mining saga 2002 - 2008. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v+5jOnryDvllk> (Accessed 9 September 2018). - Clarke, J.G.I. 2016. Two bridges too far: Why mega bridges on the Wild Coast are obscene. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v+GdYKlrw9nXU> (Accessed 9 December 2018).

Sinegugu Zukulu played an important role in the formation of the ACC as well as SWC, the sister organisation of the ACC¹¹. The ACC is based within the rural Xolobeni community which is on the coastal side of the Bizana district. ACC consists of community members with vital interests in their tilling of the soil, the use of the land for cattle grazing; all in all, in the sustainable livelihoods of their homesteads and households. These are the "insiders", some who are from older generations. They are rural people with not much connection to the national state structures, legal resources, and other resources which are based more in urban centres. Even if they are geographically isolated, the Amadiba community are proud and independent and will not be dictated to even by friendly outside actors. However, since its establishment in 2007, the ACC and a few members have increasingly become strong players in national campaigns of communities affected by mining, of which Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA) is an important one.

Sinegugu Zukulu as a knowledgeable, well-educated and well-connected man is an enabling actor who can easily move from the "inside" local organisation to supporting organisations, and from there, to the larger society to assist the local community to convey the message of the ACC to government ministers and CEOs of mining companies; and to return to the Amadiba people to inform them how various role players, e.g. human rights lawyers, the press, NGOs and the like are taking up their cause on various levels.

5. Sinegugu Zukulu and Nebuchadnezzar

In my interview with Sinegugu Zukulu on 20 March 2018, I asked him what he would do should the ACC not win the battle against the SANRAL Wild Coast N2 toll road through the green zone of Northern Mpondoland and titanium mining in the red dunes of the Xolobeni coastline.

Sinegugu's (personal communication, March 20, 2018) response was:

If you go to war carrying your spears, and your spears are broken in the fight, you are still a hero instead of a coward.

We are standing up and we are inspiring so many communities. If we don't win, we will be like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Even if our God does not save us from the fire, then it will still be known that there are people who serve the living God. It will be known, even if we lose.

Here, Sinegugu Zukulu interprets Daniel 3 verses 1 to 30. This is the account of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who stand firm in the sight of Nebuchadnezzar

¹¹ For the purposes of this article, I had to focus on the ACC and could not also explore the story of SWC.

and his whole kingdom, when the powerful Babylonian king commands all people from every nation and language to bow down before the golden image of himself. But the three men send out a fearless message to the King and his whole domain that they will not bow before him but that they will have faith and follow the God they serve.

As I read Sinegugu's interpretation of this text, he is saying that even if his God does not save his community from the fire of brutal and undemocratic development, then his and his comrades' life work will stand as a witness to local and indigenous communities from South Africa and all over the world who seek ecological justice. Their voice will be heard, their sacrifice will not be in vain. People will be empowered to continue with the struggle for local communities' right to refuse mining and development.

Here, Daniel 3 is read from the perspective of an indigenous Mpondo activist who speaks from the perspective of the land. It is from this indigenous perspective that one has to re-interpret Biblical texts and practice decolonial eco-theology in South Africa (Nogueira-Godsey, 2018).

The above theological and methodological introduction now leads me into a narration of the story of the struggle of ACC. This will lead me to the final sections where I will present concluding remarks on a theology of *living-in-the-land* as a contextual and public version of *oiko*-theology.

6. Living-in-the-land versus brutal development: The story of the Amadiba's struggle against mining and a toll road¹²

6.1 The Amadiba clan of the AmaMpondo people

The Amadiba clan of the AmaMpondo people¹³ has lived in the Xolobeni area for more than three hundred years. This community own and govern their land according to customary law, and actively made their living from the land.

The Amadiba's lifestyle has for centuries relied on a close co-existence with the ecological resources of the coastal area of indigenous grasslands, rich soil, forests, ravines, rivers, estuaries, rich biodiversity on land and in the ocean, which is typical

¹² This account of the struggle of the ACC is by no means a full and complete version. I would like to refer those interested to the exceptional social worker John Clarke who has written a wonderfully detailed and rich personal account of his involvement with the struggle of the Amadiba people, *The promise of justice: King Mpondombini Sigcau's struggle to save the Kingdom of the Mpondo from unjust developments* (Published by Brevitas in 2014). His book also has a strong theological impetus.

¹³ The Amadiba people live between the Mthamvuna and Mntentu Rivers on the Northern Wild Coast and comprise one of the constituent chiefdoms of the Mpondo nation. The Amadiba area is divided into two administrative areas: a coastal one, Mgungundlovu Administrative Area number 24, and an inland one: Amadiba Administrative Area number 21. This whole area is known as Xolobeni because of an old trading store of that name in the area which no longer exists.

of the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape province. The Amadiba also has another historical resource: its heritage of resistance and revolt against the colonial and apartheid powers' incursions on their way of life (South African History Online, 1960).

The Amadiba tribal land falls within the Mpondoland Centre of Endemism, the 3rd most species-rich floristic region in South Africa after the succulent Karroo and Cape Floral Kingdoms, and which is also a biological hotspot for biodiversity. The Wild Coast is also a hub for eco-tourism (Pillay, 2015:1).

6.2 Mineral Resources Commodities versus the Amadiba clan

MRC – an Australian company based in Perth, with its local subsidiary Transworld Energy and Minerals (TEM), started its application process for a mining licence for the Xolobeni Sands Venture from the South African government's Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) in the mid-2000s. MRC wants to mine a stretch of 20 km of red dune sand for titanium (and other minerals such as zircon), which is mainly used in high-tech alloys and as a base element in paint, where one of the largest deposits of titanium in the world is to be found. These red dunes are on the coast in the Xolobeni area, on the northern Wild Coast (Pillay, 2015:1-2).

Over the last two decades, the Amadiba clan has mobilised en masse against the mining, stating unequivocally that MRC does not have its "free and prior consent" to mine on its land (Pierce, 2018:1-5).

6.3 The Amadiba community's risk of losing everything

If the mining licence is granted to MRC and its local subsidiaries, and Black Economic Empowerment partners, the Amadiba community stands to lose everything. This includes more than sixty homesteads. Hundreds more people will be cut off and displaced from their ancestral land, and people will be cut off from the river estuaries and from the sea where they fish and find seafood. The open cast mining will mean that precisely those minerals which hold down the soil of the coastal zone and enrich it, will no longer be able to keep the soil and sand in place. Dust pollution will be created, which will affect grazing, crops, water, and people's health. It will also destroy estuarine and marine ecosystems. It will force people to relocate the graves of their ancestors, a practice which runs totally against the traditional and religious practices of the Amadiba people (Pierce, 2018: 4).

6.4 An opportunity for debate on development approaches

In the Amadiba community of the Xolobeni area on the Northern Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape, this possibility of mining and toll road development brought about a period of community enquiry, education, activism and also conflict. Divisions in the community grew as the plans of MRC came under the public's eye. This presented

a unique situation, and opportunity for a debate regarding the type of development appropriate for a rural coastal community (Pillay, 2015:1-3).

6.5 Big-scale development – any solution to poverty?

The Amadiba way of life stands in stark contrast to the accepted modernistic, neo-liberal and top down development models of the South African government, SANRAL and transnational mining companies such as MRC. The Amadiba people in the Xolobeni community, are poor, with a high level of “formal” unemployment and illiteracy (Pillay, 2015:2). Road infrastructure is extremely poor, and it is difficult to reach far-flung corners of the coastal areas. The question however remains why this deficient infrastructure still exists more than twenty years after the first democratic election in 1994, and who is responsible for these conditions? On a local level, it can be understood that there are community members who are pro-mining and in favour of the development of a large toll road through the green zone between Port St Johns and Port Edward, as they might consider that there are economic advantages to such developments. However, the murky conditions which MRC created by means of allegedly bribing community leaders and traditional leaders with money, vehicles, and directorships in the Xolobeni Empowerment Company (XOLCO) and in their South African subsidiary TEM, cast too many questions on whether MRC has any intention of contributing to healthy community development (Clarke, 2016a).

The manner in which national and local governments imposed their pro-mining and pro-development plans on the local community without permission from the outset, and without engaging in sufficient and transparent consultations according to the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA) and the Constitution, casts many questions on the way government promoted its larger-scale pro-mining and pro-toll road development plans. It also seems that agents of MRC and pro-mining members of the community were involved in intimidation and victimisation of anti-mining community members and ACC activists, thereby creating conflict and tension in a once-peaceful community. MRC, on the surface, withdrew its activities from Xolobeni but handed over to its local BEE partner, XOLCO, whose directors are pro-mining members of the community. Thus, some traditional leaders and community members benefited greatly from MRC dealings while at the same time creating serious tension in Xolobeni. This happened with the knowledge of senior officials in the DMR and probably in the upper echelons of government. These shadowy involvements of government and MRC in the Xolobeni conflict are surely no recipe for any sound development (Clarke, 2016a).

These actions demonstrate the following: despite South Africa’s post-1994 democratic dispensation, the structural capitalist economy based on the apartheid economy was never set aside despite the new government’s National Development

Plan which promises to serve the needs of the poor and local communities. Large-scale development, the enrichment for the well-connected few and a disregard for environmental justice are the order of the day (Andrews, 2017:167-189).

6.6 “We do not go to school to be environmentalists, we are born like that”¹⁴ – land and ecological livelihoods

In contrast to the top-down development approach of MRC, the South African government and SANRAL, the self-organised and mass-mobilised ACC stands steadfastly against the mining development of the red sand dunes on the Xolobeni coast and the development of a toll road through a pristine natural area (Rhoades, 2016:2). Here, the Amadiba people insist that they themselves choose the way of life that satisfies their basic human needs. Quality of life for them involves depending on the local ecology and living responsibly from nature’s bounty. The Amadiba learn from the wisdom of their elders, who literally lived “in the land”, and who saved the land for later generations to live from (Sinegugu Zukulu, personal interview, Matatiele, 20 March 2018).

We do not live on the land, we live *in* the land. Take for example cattle: Livestock is dependent on grazing and good grassland. You plough the land with your cattle, and you fertilize your crops with kraal manure from these cattle. You get your water from the rivers flowing through the land, you get your food from the land. So the ecology, the ecosystem, provides goods and services. It makes life possible. Taking care of the land is therefore very important. Otherwise you interfere with life, the way of life. If you interfere with the way of life, you interfere with the cultural systems, the traditional leadership systems. Then the land will suffer, and the people will suffer. So, it is a very intricate, interwoven, interconnected system of people living within the land. . .

The ACC is not anti-development and anti-education. Its members claim their civil and social rights. They want the government to make development in the Xolobeni area more viable through the building of local roads, clinics, schools and so forth.

It is impressive to follow how the ACC has succeeded, through performing the roles of community elders, community leaders, facilitators of community meetings, and activists, in educating its own community members from the bottom up (Pierce, 2018:3-19):

- What kind of development they define for themselves;
- How they define wealth and happiness;

¹⁴ Clarke, J.G.I. 2009. Part 3 reflections with Nonhle on Pondo people. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIDk33tAVpk&t=20s> (Accessed 30 August 2018).

- How they rediscover their IKS;
- How they can revive their homestead economies;
- How their agricultural production and cattle farming can grow and flourish;
- How they can implement eco-tourism which benefits young tour guides and women's home-stay industries;
- How they empower themselves to engage with a modernistic and Westernised post-1994 government by strengthening their own traditional governance system.

6.7 The awarding of a mining licence to MRC in 2008

MRC was eventually awarded a mining licence in 2008 by then Minister Sonjica of Mineral Resources. Despite the fact that there was an internal inquiry within the DMR which raised important questions regarding the final issuing of a mining licence to the MRC, and whether consultation with the correct tribal authorities and communities had been carried out as it should have been (Van der Merwe, 2011:1-2), the mining licence was awarded.

The government, which was alleged to have vested interests in the mining development and the mining company MRC, received strong opposition and resistance from the ACC, environmental organisations and legal organisations. The lack of consultation with the relevant tribal authorities of the Amadiba community constituted the grounds for the appeal against the mining licence, which was submitted by the ACC in early 2009.

In the 2006 award-winning movie on the Amadiba community's struggle against mining, "The shore break", Clarke (2016b) who has been working closely with the ACC since the late 1990s asks: "Who exactly negotiated the deal where the MRC as the applicant was awarded the mining rights? What lies behind the Xolobeni Sands Venture?"

6.8 The South African National Roads Agency Limited and the N2 Wild Coast Toll Road

Concurrently with the application for the mining rights, SANRAL's plans for the N2 Wild Coast Toll Road got underway. Currently, the existing N2 main road runs more inland, through established towns such as Mthatha and Kokstad, and onwards to Durban. The planned new route will take the N2 from Mthatha to the coastal resort of Port St Johns, through the green area close to the Northern Wild Coast, right through the Xolobeni area, and up to the KwaZulu Natal boundary at Port Edward. This re-routing of the N2 Toll Road is regarded by big-scale developers and government as the key to unlock development in the northern Wild Coast. Although MRC, government, and SANRAL have denied this, there are strong reasons to suspect that this highway is being built to serve as an access road to the planned mines in the Xolobeni Red Sands.

The plans to develop the Toll Road are also opposed by the ACC. SANRAL, with the support of the Minister of Transport, forced the Toll Road route onto the community, without consulting the ACC. By imposing the Toll Road, the homesteads and farmlands of the area, established by traditional procedures over many years, will be split in two. Homesteads will have to be moved and graves relocated. Range lands for cattle grazing and agriculture will be disrupted. Despite promises from SANRAL to reimburse community members for all the costs of moving, these promises have not been kept (Sinegugu Zukulu, personal interview, Matatiele, March 20, 2018).

In 2012, ACC, together with a list of community applicants took on SANRAL in a court case to prevent the Wild Coast Toll Road from going ahead. SANRAL found ways to detract from the main charges and discredit numerous community applicants in the case against SANRAL. Eventually, on 12 October 2017, Mr Sinegugu Zukulu presented himself as the first applicant from the community and this was accepted by the judge in the Pretoria High Court (Venter, 2017:1-3; Ntongana, 2018:1-3). The matter was heard in the Court on 4 December 2018 and judgement is expected in February 2019. In March 2018, SANRAL began to build the access roads necessary for the construction of the Toll Road, despite the resistance from the community and the court proceedings (Sinegugu Zukulu, personal interview, Matatiele, March 20, 2018).

6.9 Divide and conquer – the re-issuing of mining rights in 2015

MRC's mining licence was withdrawn in 2011 by Minister Susan Shabangu of the DMR. However, in 2012, MRC was back at the Minister's office re-applying for a mining licence. Mining rights were re-issued by DMR in 2015 to MRC. This caused huge strife in what had previously been a peaceful community. Families were divided between those who are anti-mining and pro-mining. Fighting took place between the two sides, and death threats were made to some community members on the ACC's side. To distance itself from the conflict, MRC withdrew from the Xolobeni Sands Venture but transferred its shares to XOLCO, its Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) partner (Rhoades, 2016:3).

In March 2016 the Chairperson of the ACC, Mr Sikhosiphi Bazooka Rhadebe, was assassinated outside his home in the Xolobeni district. The outcome of the police investigation into the case is still pending. It is striking that Mr Rhadebe phoned Ms Nonhle Mubuthuma, another leading activist of the ACC, to inform her that there was a hitlist of people, opponents of the mining, to be killed, that he was first on the list, and that she was second on it. After the assassination of their Chairperson, Ms Mubuthuma stated openly that the assassination had motivated her to continue with her work to mobilise the ACC against the mining and the toll road development; and that she would not be stopped (Rhoades, 2016:1-7).

In 2017 Minister Mosebenzi Zwane postponed any mining activities for 18 months, citing unrest in the community as a reason (Van Wyngaardt, 2017:1). In August 2018 the new Minister of Mineral Resources, Gwede Mantashe, proposed a 24-month moratorium on applications for mining the Xolobeni Red Sands. This did not satisfy ACC as the moratorium means that mining licences could still be awarded and mining could go ahead in the foreseeable future (Reynolds, 2018:1).

6.10 Stand with the Amadiba Crisis Committee in the "Right to say NO" Court Case

The "Right to say NO" is a campaign organised by communities who seek to be at the forefront of the decision-making process that determines the type of development which can take place on their land. It is based on the internationally accepted right of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FRIC) which can be asserted by communities threatened by proposed projects on their land – a right recognised in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

On 23 April 2018, the ACC, represented by its lawyers Richard Spoor Inc. and the Legal Resources Centre, took the DMR to court over attempts to mine their land in Xolobeni on the Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape. The applicants requested the court to rule that the DMR cannot issue a mining licence without the community's informed and prior consent. On 22 November 2018, the ACC and the Umgungundlovu community won the court case against the DMR and Minister Gwede Mantashe. Judge AC Basson declared that it would be unlawful of the DMR to grant the mining licence before they got the full prior and informed consent by the community (Amadiba Crisis Committee, 2018).

The Xolobeni ruling meant that a radical move was made away from the legal dispensation where the DMR could decide, with only minor consultation with the affected community, to grant mining rights to a mining company. It is now in the hands of the affected community to decide whether mining will happen or not. This is a major win for democracy and for the human rights of marginalised communities in South Africa. It made international news and gave new hope to the struggle of mining-affected communities and indigenous people in other countries (IOL News, 2018).

6.11 What is Minister Gwede Mantashe's agenda for Xolobeni?

The new Minister of Mineral Resources' relationship with the Xolobeni community and the ACC did not start well. After proposing a 24-month moratorium against mining applications, the community and the ACC was expecting a meeting to discuss this matter and others face-to-face with the Minister. However, the Minister dealt with the community and the "Right to say NO" Court Verdict in an arrogant manner. On 23 Sep-

tember 2018 Minister Gwede Mantashe came to meet the community at the Xolobeni Junior Secondary School, with disastrous results. Social worker John Clarke was the first to report on the events in a Facebook post on Sunday 23 September 2018:

(Human Rights Advocate) Richard Spoor arrested and taken to Mpisi police station supposedly for causing a disturbance at Gwede Mantashe's meeting at Xolobeni.

The Minerals minister was supposed to engage with the Amadiba Crisis Committee and coastal residents to bear their concerns about mining the Wild Coast. However he arrived with Zanuzuko Sigcau the claimant king of amaMpondo, and the mayor of Bizana to impose what was clearly a "precooked meal" – a pro-mining propaganda exercise. The ACC objected to having Zanuzuko and Chief Lunga Baleni on the podium and in the program, because there is evidence that they have a financial interest in the mining company.

There is also a very heavy police presence, with full riot gear seemingly aimed at intimidating the ACC who were protesting peacefully but loudly, singing songs and toyi-toying against the mining. Richard Spoor tried to approach the podium to try and talk to Gwede and to Police Commissioner Swartz to try and defuse the situation but was forcibly removed from the tent which only served to escalate the conflict. Stun grenades and tear gas were then used to disperse the ACC supporters. They regrouped outside the tent and continued to sing and dance. The tear gas affected Nonhle Mbutsuma and other ACC members but no one has been injured. Some 400 people were bussed in to try and dilute the numbers of the ACC members present.

Richard Spoor has been taken to Mpisi police station presumably to be charged with some or other offence.

Sad sad day that the residents directly affected by mining are treated with such contempt.

The saga of advocate Richard Spoor's arrest and his subsequently being charged with assaulting a police officer is still pending.

Civil society groups say that Minister Gwede Mantashe's top-down approach to the meeting with the Xolobeni community is another example of government and the DMR's failure to engage communities (Nicholson, 2018:9).

Minister Mantashe bemoaned the North Gauteng High Court ruling on the Xolobeni dispute. The main gripe Mantashe has with the judgement is that it will mean that his ministry will no longer have the unlimited right to grant licences without the consent of affected communities, and that this will be to the detriment of mining and economic development in South Africa. He appealed the court ruling on 14 December 2018. However, the community leaders and ACC reiterated their stance of the past fifteen years, namely; that they do not want mining and that they

want to determine themselves how to make a living from the land that they have inherited from their ancestors (Phakgadi, 2018:1).

Mantashe, himself an old National Union of Mineworkers leader who fought for the rights of mine-workers in the 1980's (Harvey, 2018:1), now fails to realise that the Xolobeni victory has positive and inspiring implications for mining-affected communities.

7. The challenge of the ACC's struggle to oiko-theologians: Practice a public ecumenical public oiko-theology of living in the land

In light of the above narrative, I wish to conclude with three sections on a public *oiko*-theology of *living in the land*.

One of the best people to learn from regarding a public *oiko*-theology of naming, engaging and unmasking the powers in the struggle against the powers of the mining company MRC, DMR, and SANRAL, is social worker John Clarke. When combining Clarke's theology with Sinegugu Zukulu's understanding of the Amadiba's way of living in the land and with ACC activists like Nonhle Mbuthuma-Forslund's powerful and vocal public stance against government, and pro-mining and pro-development role players, one starts to develop a good understanding of what I will identify as the practical public *oiko*-theology of the team of activists working for the rights of the Amadiba.

John Clarke played an important role in establishing SWC, the sister organisation of ACC in August 2006. Sinegugu Zukulu engaged John Clarke and asked him to render his services as social worker to the Amadiba people. In this capacity, and together with the team of activists of ACC and SWC, he has played an invaluable role in engaging the media, lawyers, the South African Human Rights Commission and other 'external' role-players in the ACC struggle. While I leave it to Clarke to write about his own experiences, it is important for me as an *oiko*-theologian exploring the Xolobeni saga and the conflict between mining and the interests of local communities for the first time, to learn from his rich experience and from the resources that equipped him to play an important role in the service of ACC.

John Clarke was mentored by the Scottish writer and Quaker pacifist, Alastair McIntosh, who was deeply involved in successful civil society struggles of the communities of the Scottish Islands of Harris, Lewis and Eigg against mining, as described in his 2004 book; *Soil and soul: People versus corporate power*. To do justice to both John Clarke and Alastair McIntosh, I will directly quote from Clarke's (2014:28) book; *The promise of justice*:

McIntosh followed the wisdom of Liberation Theologian Walter Wink in developing the strategy. It involved *naming* the powers, then *unmasking* the powers and

finally *engaging* the powers, these being the titles of a trilogy of books by Wink which together set out a process for transforming the 'Powers that be'.

Clarke further quotes from McIntosh's book:

'Only when they have been named and unmasked can we start engaging the Powers. Engagement is a process of wrestling – seeking not to destroy, but to challenge (and accept being challenged) and to uplift. As Wink says: "The Powers are good. The Powers are fallen. The Powers must be redeemed". Engagement, then, is about action for transformation. It is not about terminal destruction. The Powers do have a rightful and necessary place in life. But when power ceases to be predicated on service, when it ceases to be carried lightly and held responsibly and accountably, its fallen nature shows. That's the corruption, and the role of redemption is to catch such fallen-crestedness and draw it back to its higher, God-given vocation'.

In this article I cannot engage sufficiently with the seminal "Naming the powers" books (1984; 1986; 1992) of the peace activist and theologian Walter Wink (1935-2012) and will leave that for another occasion. However, what is significant for me is the manner in which Clarke and colleagues have in an informal yet well-considered manner, named; unmasked and engaged with the powers that threaten the way of life of the Amadiba. By doing so, they are contextualising Wink's seminal work in a post-democracy South Africa and have thereby found appropriate theoretical and practical tools to wrestle with the powers that threatens the livelihoods of thousands of South Africans in Xolobeni and in similar communities. This approach, together with insights from *oiko*-theology, will form the basis of the following three sections on a public *oiko*-theology of living in the land.

7.1 Contextual analysis – naming and unmasking the powers

Undertaking a project such as this public *oiko*-theological exploration of the struggle of the ACC against mining and development in Xolobeni requires an analysis of the history of mining in South Africa as this has interfaced with the history of racism and the political and economic formation of society. In the words of the theologian Walter Wink, society has to "name" and "unmask" the powers that promote mining to the detriment of the welfare of communities and ecosystems.

To be able to identify a framework which may be used to analyse and address the ecological crisis from a socially and ecologically sustainable perspective, civil society, affected communities, indigenous people, *oiko*-theologians and other role players need to imagine and create new social relations, based on the deepest respect for fundamental human rights. What the Amadiba teaches us is that such social and economic relations which can serve to fulfill human needs and realise

human rights, can only happen when the ecology is respected as a system which in itself has the right to live and flourish. This respect and reverence are paramount as humanity depends on this living system for its survival (Andrews, 2017:1). It is *within* the living systems of the earth and the land that humanity can live sustainably in terms of their autonomous understanding of their human dignity and their interdependence with the land and the soil. When the economy is grounded in the activities and freedoms of local communities themselves (rather than as globalised neo-liberal capitalism), social and ecological well-being within the earth's biosphere and within local ecosystems may flourish (Mangayi, 2016:76-77). In *oiko*-theological language, this balanced interrelationship of ecology, economy and society is the *oikonomia tou Theou* (the rules of God for the economy of community-within-ecology). In this article *oiko*-theology's understanding of informed *oikonomia tou Theou* (the rules of God for the economy of community-within-ecology) is informed fundamentally by the Amadiba's way of life where *ubuntu* is deeply rooted *in the land*. With the help of this ecological understanding of society, one may critically analyse the context of the current political economy in which local communities are threatened by mining and ruthless development.

Jade Davenport (2014:2) writes that the mining industry in South Africa enabled "the introduction of an aggressively organized and racially dominated form of industrial capitalism, an economic system that dominated the South African socio-political and fiscal area for more than a century". This goes along with the ecological discourse used by the previous and the present political dispensations who understood the ecological systems of South Africa – and specifically minerals in the earth crust – as "natural resources" that can be used and extracted in the service of a growth-orientated capitalist economy. Under previous colonial and apartheid governments, black people, especially rural ones, were treated as a cheap labour pool which served the interests and the profits of racist mining-based capitalism in South Africa. Thus, the political and economic powers-that-be not only exploited the greater ecosystems on which human life depends but also dehumanised black people – men and women, urban and rural. The irony is that despite the liberation agenda of the democratically-elected post-1994 government which bases itself on the principles of the Freedom Charter and which commits itself to rectify the injustices and the inequitable distribution of economic resources in the past, the said government is still responsible for the destruction of the ecology, and the violations of the human rights, of communities affected by mining.

Andrews (2017:1-2) explains the interconnection of the destruction of the ecology and the exploitation of affected communities when she argues that "current ecological discourse internationally and in SA governmental and business circles risks entrenching conceptions of nature that will exacerbate the ecological crisis".

This situation of ecological degradation is worsening steadily and "the burden of the ecological crisis is ultimately placed on the poor and on communities affected by mining".

The new government adopted the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPDRA), a Mining Charter and BEE policies which have created a small black mining elite. Mining is regarded as central for South Africa's economic growth and transformation. As a result, new mining enterprises continue to mushroom, with seemingly little regard for communities, workers and their environment who are affected by mining (Edwards, 2017:84-117).

In the light of the above exploration and analysis of the history of mining in South Africa, civil society needs to talk honestly and ask critical questions about the effects of mining. This becomes increasingly important in a time where many communities affected by mining are raising their voices and are agitating for a deal with mining in which their ecological and human rights and the welfare of their communities should be of greater importance than mining at all cost. This does not mean that there is not a place in the economy for mining (Edwards, 2017:84-117).

7.2 Ecumenical

Doing a public ecumenical *oiko*-theology of *living in the land* can only happen together with, *but* under the leadership of the people of the ACC and their compatriots who march, sing and dance in the face of pro-mining political leadership who are, as yet, not engaging respectfully with the Amadiba and other communities who are saying no to mining on their land. Working in support of the ACC has to happen while respecting the uniqueness of the Xolobeni story and of the independence and leadership of the ACC in their struggle. *Oiko*-theologians may further act in support of Sustaining the Wild Coast, the sister organisation of the ACC, MACUA, other collaborative eco-justice organisations, responsible journalists, legal organisations and advocates concerned with human rights, social workers, anti-mining and anti-brutal development voices across the spectrum of South African and international society.

Such a public *oiko*-theology is committed to the Gospel and yet goes far beyond established church theology. It is a bold, yet a humble, theology that dissipates and flows into the ACC struggle and those of other communities affected by mining on various levels and in various spaces in the face of uncaring pro-mining politicians and their stormtroopers of state-captured local and tribal leaders.

Here the "ecumenical" in the *oikos* triad of the "ecological, economic and ecumenical" becomes as wide and open and all-embracing as the rolling green hills and the wild beaches of Mpondoland, the mountains and the grasslands of inland Eastern Cape, the vast landscape, and the dome of stars, the cosmic home, of South(ern) Africa.

Public *oiko*-theology which is *living in the land* of the ACC's struggle becomes a theology inspired by a struggle outside the acknowledged public spaces of our democratic but modernistic neo-colonial state and society. Here the public space is the soccer fields of the Xolobeni Junior Secondary School, where police and politicians confronted the ACC on 23 September 2018. It is also the space of the Mgungundlovu Traditional Council meetings or *imbuzo* which is the real democratic space in traditional governance for the AmaMpondo. It happens where women and men till the land and plant and harvest their *madumbis* (a root crop) and sweet potatoes to be sold in the fresh food markets of the big cities. Public *oiko*-theology meets the freedom struggle of the AmaMpondo which is grounded in their indigenous knowledge and belief systems.

The ACC's struggle is based in the AmaMpondo's indigenous belief systems and their deeply religious connection to the land. Here, public theology becomes an interreligious dialogue of liberation between Christian theology and Mpondo culture and belief – whether these can be called African traditional religion or a form of Christianity which merges with indigenous belief systems.

7.3 Engaging and transforming the powers

The struggle of the Amadiba Crisis Committee of Xolobeni to preserve the sacredness of land and ecology, so as to protect their livelihoods, is of great exemplary significance for the whole of Mzansi Afrika. Activists like Nonhle Mbuthuma-Forslund, Sinegugu Zukulu, John Clarke and many others are indeed like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who stand firm in the sight of Nebuchadnezzar and his whole kingdom.

Their struggle is now facing the forces of the African National Congress (ANC) government:

The next big fight..... won't be over the details of the Mining Charter... It will be in places like Xolobeni and other communities across the country who want the right to refuse mining to take place in their areas. (Nicholson, 2018:4).

In his very recent encounter with the Xolobeni community, the Minister of Mineral Resources, Gwede Mantashe, disregarded the anti-mining majority in the Xolobeni community and its interests. He demonstrated the same attitude and behaviour when meeting other communities around the country. It seems as though the Minister is embodying an ongoing failure of the government to engage communities. This is a continuation of the ANC government preference towards mining companies which is accompanied by investment, business deals and jobs for a select few (Nicholson, 2018:1-4).

Will it be possible for the ACC and their compatriots to engage with the voice of reason in Minister Mantashe's mind? Will more constructive engagements between

the Minister and the ACC be possible, from which the Minister will emerge with a clearer understanding of what "living in the land" and sustainability means for the Amadiba, and why this precludes the mining of the Xolobeni Red Sands? Will the Minister act on such an understanding?

How do public *oiko*-theologians engage constructively, prophetically and face-to-face with government on the interests, the sustainable livelihoods and the very survival of communities affected by mining? How do we put government under pressure when it disrespects the voices and choices of communities? How do we engage with mining companies and powerful agents who are responsible for brutal development? And, how do we engage and transform the powers?

What I learnt from the collective of community activists, lawyers, journalists, social workers, friends and supporters in the Xolobeni struggle will be instructive for public *oiko*-theologians:

- Upholding the Constitution and protecting Human Rights within an ecological framework – expanding our understanding of democracy and rights;
- Working through the Constitution, courts and relevant laws to upholding democracy and human rights for mining-affected communities;
- Working with the Chapter 9 institutions of our democracy, such as the South African Human Rights Commission;
- Engaging government departments and Ministers directly, whether in direct meetings or correspondence, in the media, or in the courts;
- Working through the media – engaging a spectrum of journalists to inform society on the Xolobeni struggle or similar struggles;
- Developing local community organisations, economies and leadership in communities that are directly affected by mining and brutal development. Letting local communities lead the struggle;
- Building solidarity and a groundswell movement among community organisations, national and international NGOs, indigenous peoples' movements, journalists and researchers.

These are just some of the practical approaches that the ACC and supporting role players used in the Xolobeni struggle. More insertion, analysis, theological reflection, and action on the side of *oiko*-theologians on how to engage and transform the powers are necessary. In this article I have adopted something of a more introductory, narrative and reflective approach to the story of Xolobeni and the ACC's struggle, as this is my first formal endeavour to engage theologically with this story and with mining-affected communities. It may be possible to work further with Prof Simangaliso Kumalo from the Institute for Religion, Governance and the Environment in Southern Africa (IRGESA) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal to discover answers to the question as to how *oiko*-theologians can engage the powers. This

Institute is searching for ways in which faith communities could develop a public *oiko*-theology further and could be trained to engage with government and with the wider public so as to influence government's policies and actions to be responsive towards the welfare of society and ecology (Kumalo, 2018). Other theological units which engage in public theology, such as the Centre for Community Ministry and Public Theology at the University of Pretoria and the Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology at UNISA, may also help to raise consciousness and to enable faith practitioners and students of theology, as well as other disciplines to become critical of government and the transnational and local mining sector's approaches to mining in rural and urban areas.

In the times of ecological crisis and economic inequality that we live in, an important aspect of the mission of academic theology, faith communities and public *oiko*-theologians should be the following: to be part of a network of concerned citizens – communities adversely affected by mining and economic inequality, indigenous people, NGOs, faith-based organisations and activists of various kinds – who imagine and create new social and economic relations which can serve to fulfill human needs and realise human rights within the living systems of the earth.

8. Conclusion

The thesis of this article is that the *ubuntu* concept of a network of living relationships between community, ecology and land as understood by the Amadiba people may help to widen and enrich *oiko*-theology. Public and ecumenical *oiko*-theology needs to be practised in a *kairos* in South African society during which it is imperative that interrelated issues regarding economy, development, ecology, land and mineral resources in South Africa should be reconfigured within a people-centred and ecologically sustainable economic and political paradigm.

Public *oiko*-theologians are challenged to engage with the powers of government and capitalism on the human rights of communities affected by mining – and all communities suffering under the impact of unsustainable and top-down development. Moreover, public *oiko*-theologians and practitioners cannot do so on their own but need to become active participants in the groundswell of community-based organisations who are fighting for their communities' right to reject mining and to have the right to determine their own sustainable livelihoods.

May we soon reach that point where the powerful king Nebuchadnezzar of our time confesses that the God of the *oikos* is the only true and living God and that the *oikos* economy is the rule of the land.

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Interview with Mr Sinegugu Zukulu held on 20 March 2018.

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