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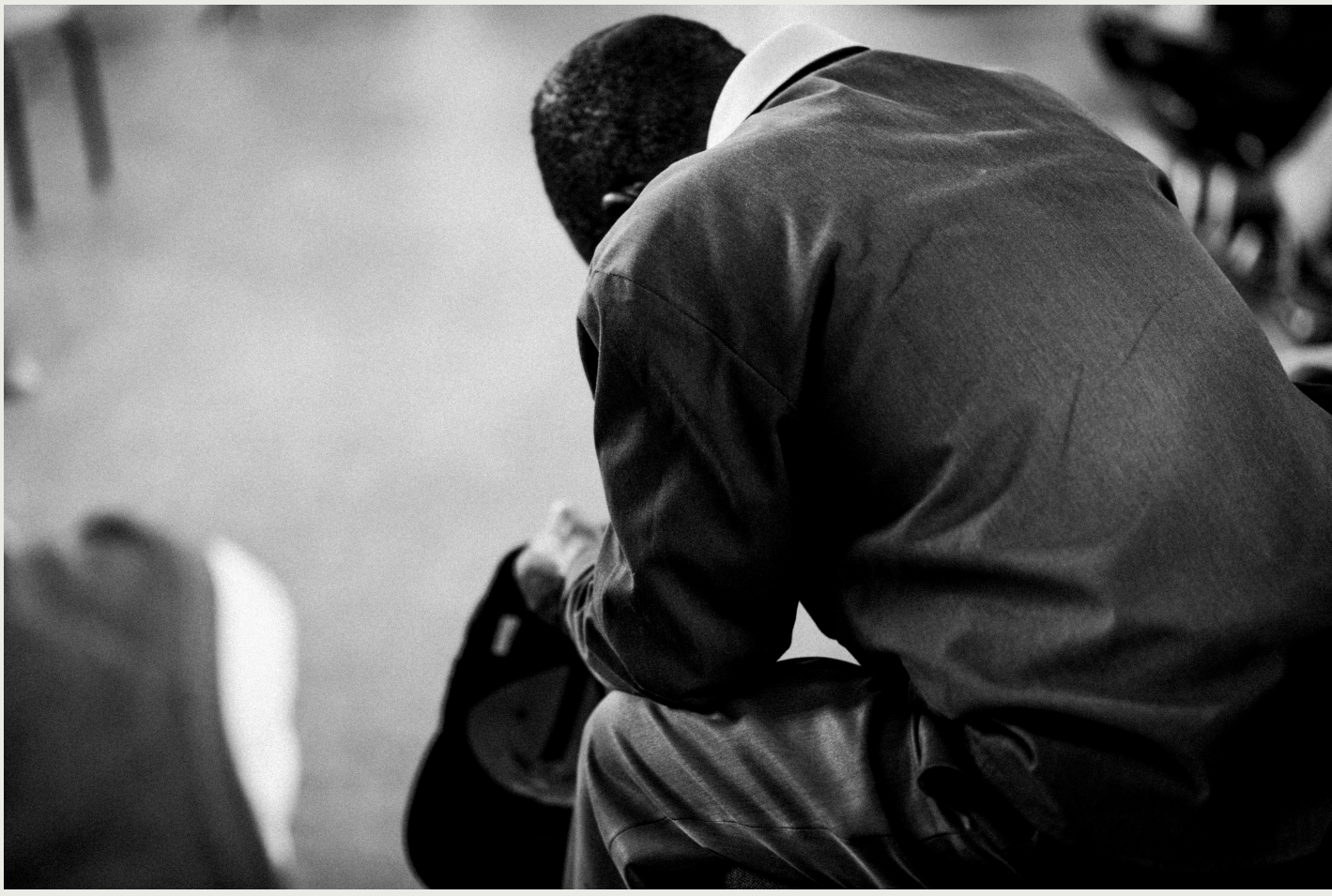
Attorneys for climate and environmental justice

Psychological Report

"Land or Life": The Continuous Traumatic Stress of Proposed Opencast Coal Mining on Ophondweni and Emalahleni Residents in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.



By
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30 May 2024

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In remembrance of Ma Fikile Ntshangase, who lives on in the lives of all those whom I interviewed.

1. Summary

1. My expert opinion is that most Ophondweni and Emalahleni residents (seventy-eight percent) whom I interviewed are experiencing continued traumatic stress reactions owing to the ongoing atmosphere of violence associated with the operation and proposed expansion of opencast coal mining in Somkhele in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
2. *Continuous traumatic stress* is a psychological reaction to persistent insecurity, chronic stress, being unsafe or living in a high-risk situation[1]. Continuous traumatic stress reactions may include intrusive thoughts, nightmares, flashbacks, avoidance of distressing thoughts or external reminders, heightened anxiety, increased sense of arousal, and changes in mood and thinking patterns. The continuous traumatic stress of those interviewed can also be identified as a collective trauma as the experiences are shared as a collective. The collective in this summary report are those individuals and families interviewed who share experiences of ongoing threats and chronic stressors owing to the proposed extension of mining in and around Ophondweni and Emalahleni villages.
3. My expert opinion is that these experiences of continuous traumatic stress have adversely influenced how people have engaged in public participatory processes and negotiations about relocations.
4. This summary highlights some of the main traumatic stressors shared, describes how this has adversely influenced engagement, and presents an overview of clinical findings. The findings indicate that most of those interviewed experienced continuous traumatic stress reactions and high levels of psychological distress that they attribute to the atmosphere of violence associated with the operation and proposed extension of opencast coal mining.

2. Credentials

5. I, Garret Barnwell, am an independent practice clinical psychologist registered with the HPCSA (PS0128317) with over a decade of clinical experience and community psychology practice. I hold the following degrees from Nelson Mandela University in South Africa: PhD in Psychology (2021); M.A. in Clinical Psychology (cum laude, 2016); M.A.in Conflict Transformation and Management (2013); Honours in Psychology (2009); B.A. in Psychology (2008). Additionally, I hold a Professional Diploma in Humanitarian Assistance from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in the United Kingdom and a Certificate in Ecopsychology from the Pacifica Graduate Institute in the United States of America. I have relative professional expertise on the psychological impacts of mining, climate change and environmental injustices. This expertise is based on my experience as a clinical psychologist and researcher working directly with communities affected by large-resource development projects in South Africa. As an expert on the psychological dimensions of climate and environmental justice issues, I am professionally active locally and internationally, holding various leadership positions, lecturing, publishing, editing, and extensively reviewing this area of expertise. I also provide psychotherapeutic services for those affected by the above issues.

[1] Herman, 2015; Stevens et al., 2013; Straker, 2013

3. Methodological Approach

6. I, Dr Barnwell, was commissioned by All Rise to provide an expert opinion on the psychological impacts of mining on Ophondweni and Emalahleni community members in KwaZulu Natal that All Rise is representing. The central question from All Rise that this report responds to is: "What are the current impacts of the proposed mining on the psychological wellbeing of community members interviewed?" The report's findings were based on a combination of my clinical experience and a mixed-method approach that involved utilising various sources of information. This approach included conducting in-person, comprehensive clinical assessments, administering psychometric tests, conducting collateral interviews, examining documents, and integrating relevant psychological literature. The aim of this report is not generalisability but rather to spotlight the psychological experiences associated with the operation and proposed mining expansion for those All Rise represents.
7. Between Saturday, 04 March and Saturday, 11 March 2023, in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-six individuals (14 female; 12 male) from 18 families. All interviewees provided written and verbal consent, and bilingual consent forms in English and isiZulu were used. The participants were between 16 and 84 years old, with an average age of 52. All but one participant were adults. All were able to provide firsthand accounts. Apart from three people in hiding owing to ongoing death threats, all interviews took place at the participants' homes, which allowed me to gain insight into their living conditions that would be affected by opencast coal mining. All interviewees are residents of Ophondweni and Emalahleni, and their identities have been anonymised. The reason for anonymising is to protect those who shared their experiences, as several I interviewed expressed that they feared for their life. People I interviewed also explained that certain families have been targeted for not signing agreements to move. A timeline of these threats has been documented[2]. It is also essential to state that this report summarises the views of those interviewed, describing experiences of continuous traumatic stress. To be clear, it does not seek to investigate legal responsibility. Rather, the report describes the main traumatic events reported during interviews, their traumatic reactions, and discussed how this impacts on public participation and decision making in relation to the approval of mining and relocations.
8. All interviewees were current or former residents of the two areas, and their identities have been anonymised by stating "Resident #," where # indicates a random number assigned to the interviewee. The reason for anonymising the quotes is to protect those who shared their experiences, as it is common knowledge that those raising concerns about mining have been violently targeted[3].
9. Most of those interviewed identified themselves as members of the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation (MCEJO), and all were introduced to me by All Rise. Although they did not necessarily refer to themselves as such, MCEJO can be viewed as an embodied health movement[4] in which members are united by their shared experiences of managing the stressors associated with opencast coal mining. Additionally, members of this movement support one another in navigating the

[2] Youens, 2021

[3] Youens, 2021

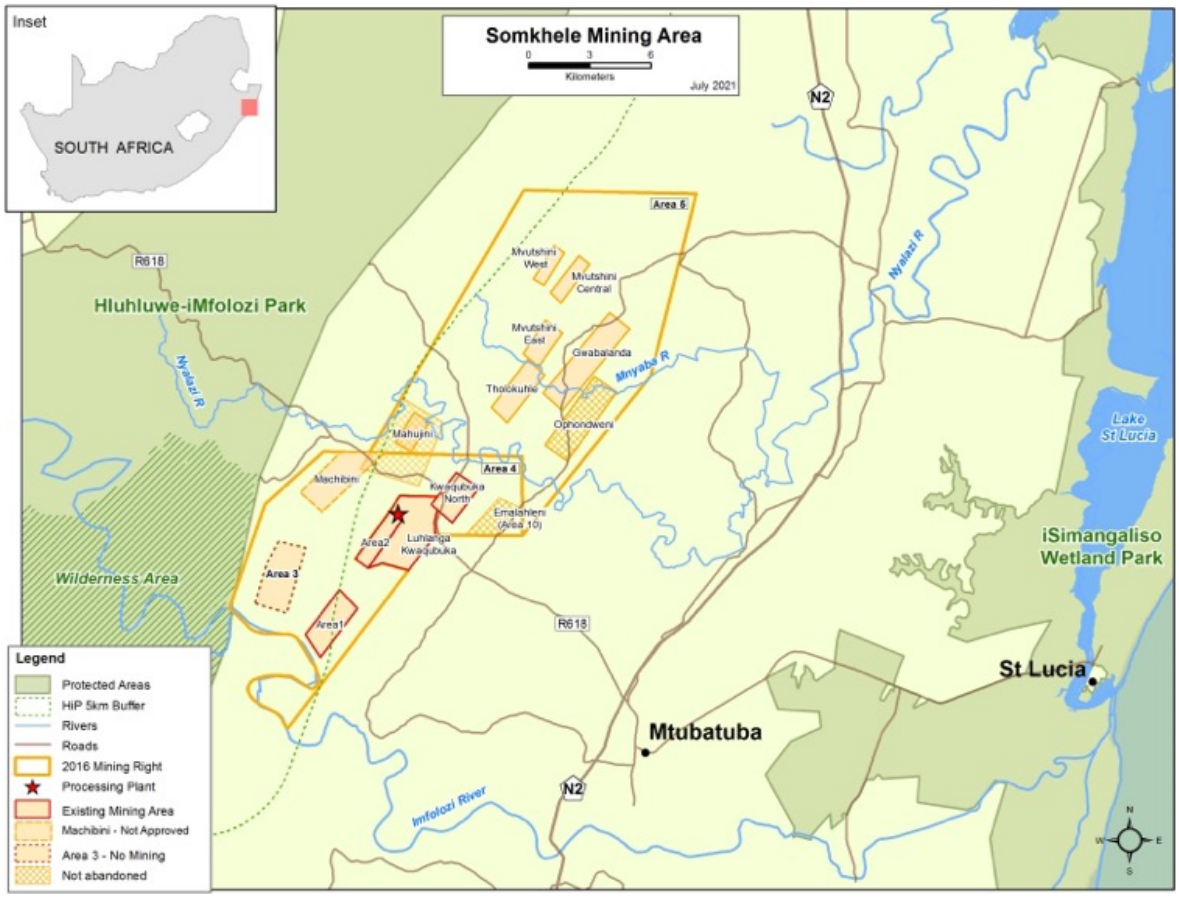
[4] Brown et al., 2011

ongoing experience of continuous traumas and stressors. Individuals exposed to dangers and trying to mitigate future stressors may feel disconnected from the larger community and seek out others who share their views, values, emotional responses, and offer different forms of support, including psychosocial accompaniment, the sharing of information, physical safety, and material support[5]. These shared experiences can lead to forming groups – such as MCEJO – united by a common set of struggles, perspectives, associated moods and mutual acts of accompaniment.

10. Those interviewed were from Area 4 (Emalahleni) and Area 5 (Ophondweni), which the image below depicts.

Image 1. Somkhele Mining Area *(Source: map provided by All Rise)*

	The areas outlined in red are where mining is currently taking place.
	The red star shows the position of the processing plant complex.
	The 2016 Mining Right – Areas 4 and 5 - is outlined in orange, with smaller orange areas depicting the proposed mining pit areas.
	The three areas within the 2016 Mining Right, which Tendele has said it will not be abandoning, are indicted with orange cross-hatching.



11. The in-depth interviews followed a semi-structured clinical assessment that comprised of history taking (before and since the proposed mining operations) and an assessment of mental status, which included

[5] Erikson, 1995

the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) and the PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder) Checklist for the DSM 5 (Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition) (PCL-5) psychometric assessments. The PHQ-9 is a psychometric assessment to assist in diagnosing major depressive disorders and is also a reliable indicator of the severity of psychological distress[6]. The PCL 5 is a reliable indicator of post-traumatic stress reactions. The cut-off scores of between 31 and 33 out of 80 indicate a probable clinical diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder[7]. Although residents' conditions are continuously traumatic, meaning that the stressors are ongoing in the same or different forms, the PCL5 was used to identify common traumatic symptoms. These assessments played a complementary function in supporting the overall clinical assessment. Some residents completed these psychometric assessments themselves, while I verbally administered others. Where required, English-isiZulu-English translations were performed by Ms Mbokazi, a cultural interpreter, lay counsellor, community organiser and All Rise employee. I worked well with Ms Mbokazi, and before the interviews, Ms Mbokazi verbally agreed to the terms of reference for this translation, outlined in Annexure 1.

12. In June 2023, I organised a group meeting with the assistance of Ms Mbokazi, where we gathered representatives from the majority of the families interviewed. During the discussion, I presented the key findings and conclusions of the report to the participants. Furthermore, I reiterated my request for their consent to share results. While the clinical findings of the report were reached independently, this process validated the report's contextual accuracy[8] (i.e., how well the findings and conclusions were seen by those interviewed to reflect their subjective reality). Two of the families living in exile and who participated in the study were also visits personally and provided with feedback.

4. Limitations

13. This section summarises the main limitations of the report.
14. Even though this report outlines a range of personal traumatic experiences, it is impossible to capture the full extent of what people I have interviewed have gone through over the last several years since the operation and proposed extension of opencast coal mining. People also have diverse reactions to trauma. Singular experiences of trauma that may not fit well within standard notions of traumatic reactions may have been overshadowed by more typical symptoms emphasised in this report.
15. In recounting traumatic experiences, it is widely understood that the time delay in the recalling of certain details, as well as the recounting of something that was traumatic and is for most still traumatic today, may lead to some incompleteness or memory distortions[9]. This is a limitation generally accepted in working with trauma survivors as it may reflect the severity and incomprehensibility of the trauma itself.
16. Language was a barrier that was overcome by working with an English-isiZulu-English cultural interpreter. This said, the depth that one can reach at times in these types of conversations can be

[6] Bhana et al., 2015; Cholera et al., 2014

[7] International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS), n.d.

[8] Watkins & Shulman, 2008

[9] Herman, 2015; B. A. Kolk & Fisler, 1995; B. van der Kolk, 1998

limited, and some cultural idioms of distress may not have been described in the fullness of depth and meaning. Despite this barrier, people described significant traumatic and stressful experiences that included great detail and breadth.

17. Most people I interviewed were adults, and there is a clear gap in understanding how children have experienced the operation and process surrounding the proposed extension of opencast coal mining. Children have also been impacted by the atmosphere of violence and exposed to complex, traumatic situations, including the murder of Ma Fikile Ntshangase and neighbourhood shootings and harassment. For example, several adults I interviewed raised that their children were "passed messages" by mine proponents, and they were concerned about the impacts.
18. Although the report highlights certain vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, people living with chronic illness, and children, it does not delve into specific details. It is highly recommended that further investigation be conducted into the needs of vulnerable groups. At the time I conducted interviews, several families reported that they were concerned about individuals in their family's particular needs and were unaware of any plans that cater to potentially vulnerable groups' specific needs if they were to be relocated.
19. It is important to state that this report only focuses on the traumatic experiences, the events and psychological reactions. The report does not speak about the solidarity that is actively created between members, the hard work that has gone into organising and raising the level of human rights literacy within the broader community to address issues that directly affect the community, the courage and strength that it has taken to show up at public participatory meetings, or the emotional support members give to one another. I am encouraged by the various acts of mutual accompaniment and how members continuously work towards creating conditions for flourishing despite the tremendous challenges – and continuous traumatic events – that they encounter.

5. Expert Opinion

20. My expert opinion is that most Ophondweni and Emalahleni residents (seventy-eight percent) whom I interviewed are experiencing continued traumatic stress reactions owing to the ongoing atmosphere of violence associated with the operation and proposed expansion of opencast coal mining in Somkhele in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
21. Furthermore, my expert opinion is that the atmosphere of violence, and its traumatic consequences, adversely influenced how people make decisions and engage in discussions about mining and relocations.
22. *Continuous traumatic stress* is a psychological reaction to persistent insecurity, chronic stress, being unsafe or living in a high-risk situation[10]. Continuous exposure to trauma can cause a range of stress reactions, such as recurring and unwanted thoughts, nightmares, sudden flashbacks, avoiding anything that reminds one of the trauma, increased anxiety, heightened alertness, and alterations in mood and thinking patterns.

[10] Herman, 2015; Stevens et al., 2013; Straker, 2013

23. Moreover, the continuous traumatic stress of those interviewed can also be identified as a collective trauma. *Collective trauma*[11] refers to the psychosocial effects of shared traumas and stressors on a collective, such as a family, community or group. The collective I am referring to in this report comprises individuals and families interviewed with shared experiences of threats and chronic stressors owing to the proposed expansion of mining in and around Ophondweni and Emalahleni villages. This group of people who have experienced continuous traumatic stressors is within the broader community as a whole.
24. The complex nature of the traumatic stress discussed in this report may be clearly heard through the testimonies of multiple continuous collective traumas and stressors that those I interviewed have been subjected to (i.e., *5.1 Main Continuous Collective Traumas and Stressors*) and their continuous traumatic stress reactions (i.e., *5.2 Continuous Traumatic Stress Reactions*) that will be outlined in the following two sections.

5.1 Main Continuous Collective Traumas and Stressors

25. In my expert opinion, residents whom I interviewed have had exposures to multiple traumas and stressful events over several years.
26. A traumatic event is a highly stressful event involving serious injury, the threat of serious injury or death, and a sense of horror or helplessness[12]. These traumas can be experienced as direct exposures to a traumatic event, witnessing a traumatic event, learning that a relative or close friend was exposed to a traumatic event (e.g., the murder of Fikile Ntshangase), or indirect exposure to aversive details of trauma (e.g., care workers, activists or affected families providing mutual care and support to one another are exposed to traumatic details). Traumatic events that are experienced, seen or heard of may have profound psychological impacts (see *5.2 Continuous Traumatic Stress Reactions*). We can consider trauma or stress as continuous when certain threats accumulate and reoccur[13]. For example, residents described that they had experienced multiple forms of threats over time that are perceived as acts of terror and silencing associated with mining. For instance, some of these traumas that have accumulated include the killing of Ma Fikile Ntshangase, publicly identifying those who have not signed, stigmatising MCEJO members and those who have not signed, veiled threats, disruptions of meetings, men walking through the streets chanting and signaling threats at specific households, people waiting on homestead fencelines, stones thrown onto the roofs of homes, and gunshots fired at a family home.
27. The following seven subsections detail some of the main traumatic and stressful events that were described to me that have influenced how people engage with mining and the relocation processes. The different forms of traumatic and stressful events can be categorised as the murder of Ma Fikile Ntshangase, acts of terror; experiences of epistemic violence; damage to the sense of communality; uncertainty and stagnation; the anticipated trauma of the relocation; and the anticipated trauma of

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11 Erikson, 1995, p. 191

12 Herman, 2015; Lingiardi & McWilliams, 2017; World Health Organization, 2022

13 Herman, 2015; Kaminer et al., 2018; Stevens et al., 2013; Straker, 2013

being left behind. The first main traumatic event that has affected everyone interviewed is the murder of Ma Fikile Ntshangase.

1. The Murder of Ma Fikile Ntshangase

28. In my expert opinion, Ma Fikile Ntshangase's murder on 22 October 2020 is one of the main traumatic events experienced by all of those whom I interviewed. The loss of Ma Fikile Ntshangase has had ripple effects through the collective and broader community.

29. At the time of this horrific event, Ntshangase was MCEJO's subcommittee deputy chairperson and, it was explained to me, a formidable force in their struggle for environmental justice. She was also an elder, a businesswoman, a friend to many, a mother and a grandmother.

30. In 2019, Ma Fikile Ntshangase started receiving direct threats via text messages and in person. I was told that not all these messages were shared with her family. However, people who knew Ma Fikile Ntshangase said her husband "feared for her life". Some of those closest to Ma Fikile Ntshangase noted that proponents of mining spoke aggressively to her in meetings and that there were quarrels between MCEJO members and others who wanted mining. After these encounters at community meetings, I was told by people close to Ma Fikile Ntshangase that she started receiving more threatening phone calls and text messages. Her family found messages on her telling her to "back down". Those I interviewed believe that Ma Fikile Ntshangase started being ostracised because of being vocal about concerns over mining. For instance, her family explained that on top of the threats, she began not being invited to community events, such as funerals. Despite these threats, her family said she didn't panic about the death threats she received and stood strong. Yet, people around her said that they also did not know that these threats were happening so intensely.

31. Her murder on 22 October 2020 came as a horrific shock to those whom I interviewed. The moment before she was killed, a witness expressed that she had said: "Oh my son, it has come to this that you need to kill me?" People understand her murder as a assassination owing to her vocal resistance to mining in Somkhele.

32. The transgressive act of killing someone who raised concerns about human rights associated with mining ruptured the sense of solidity in the social fabric, which was already tethered at this point. Those interviewed also viewed this event as symbolic – it was not only an elimination of someone who was perceived as a threat to mining, but a message to others. Prior to the incident, stones had been thrown onto her roof (as others have also experienced in their lives). Those whom I interviewed said that waste, like wrappers, was also found in the bushes as if her home had been staked out over some time. Moreover, her family and MCEJO members added that they had found footprints of people who they believed were monitoring her routine. What unsettled many today was the fact others have experienced similar things in their lives. For example, some of those I interviewed reported seeing unidentifiable figures or young men in the bushes around their home since this incident and found waste in the bushes. Others have had stones thrown on their roofs. People see her murder as an assassination connected with their own struggle, being directly associated with her resistance to the mining in her community and her broader struggles for land and environmental justice. They did not take for granted the fact that their lives may also be in danger as they continue to struggle to make the

situation with mining more favourable. For instance, Resident 1 said that Ma Fikile Ntshangase's death also shook him as many of the experiences that he had Ma Fikile also experienced before her death: "We were together in the struggle".

33. On an individual level, Ma Fikile Ntshangase's murder was also devastating for those I interviewed. For instance, Resident 9 said: "Losing Ma Fikile Ntshangase finished me and stopped all my happiness. We were so close to one another. We used to go to church together, meeting for prayer. Her death changed me. No one will ever be like Ma Ntshangase." Additionally, her family expressed that it was painful not to have her around and that this issue could have been avoided if mining had not put so much pressure on the community[14]. Several people I have spoken to believe that the murder of Ma Fikile Ntshangase was orchestrated by those who are "militant" for mining.

34. The police investigations have been inconclusive, and people believe this was not by accident to protect those behind the killing. People feel betrayed, expressing that "there is no justice system" and that "people could be paid off not to do their work [in the investigation]". This sense of injustice and institutional betrayal can complicate and worsen the communities' experiences of trauma[15], as it signals that killing someone goes unpunished. This experience of corrective injustice also made people feel more at risk and marginalised, as they do not feel protected by the systems that are supposed to be there to protect them if they need. Furthermore, people expressed feeling "discouraged and disappointed". A person's encounter with what has been described as failures of the justice system can also be traumatic. This kind of trauma in psychology is otherwise known as *betrayal trauma*[16].

35. The killing of Ma Fikile Ntshangase was not able to extinguish the struggle for land and environmental justice. Conversely, people coalesced around Ma Fikile Ntshangase's death, and there was a public uproar that also saw a spotlight being placed on the violent atmosphere that was being created around mining.

36. Nevertheless, the transgressive act of killing Ma Fikile Ntshangase – together with other acts of violence details in the next subsections – remain in community consciousness, is traumatic and has caused a rupture in the social fabric. There is still fear of retaliation if the mine cannot operate. People whom I interviewed expressed considerable concern about the build-up and current pressure for families to accept mining and to sign the offers.

37. Thus, Ma Fikile Ntshangase's murder was a catastrophic event on multiple fronts. It is a clinically significant traumatic event that was directly experienced, witnessed or heard[17]. All of those I interviewed expressed that they have somehow been influenced by the traumatic nature of this event, which affected how people engage in the decision-making process.

2. Acts of Terror

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[14] This event has severely impacted the family. I have collected further details and the specific impacts of the family but have decided to keep this information out of the report to mitigate any possible reprisal.

[15] C.Smith, 2017; C. P. Smith & Freyd, 2014

[16] See *betrayal trauma* in the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual – 2nd Edition (PDM-2) (Lingiardi & McWilliams, 2017) and Smith, 2017; C. P. Smith & Freyd, 2014

[17] Herman, 2015

38. In my expert opinion, those I interviewed have been subjected to what may be described as extreme and insidious acts of terror. Those interviewed associate these experiences with the negotiations that are taking place. Several of those I interviewed fear that they or their families will be killed, or their property will be damaged if they disagree with being relocated owing to not accepting the current offer as it stands. This fear is directly related to events that have taken place in the past and threats that are still said to be occurring today.
39. For example, all those interviewed mentioned Ma Fikile Ntshangase's death as an act of terror to silence opposition and pressure people into signing. For illustration, Resident 13 said: "I feel terrified and not comfortable at all". "We, as MCEJO, do not feel like we have equal speaking opportunities. They speak about us and talk at us but will say to us: "If you have a lawyer, go to your lawyer"," she said. Resident 13 explained that they are now identified as "those with the lawyers," and this misrecognises their grievances and only contributes to the community's polarisation that has led to violence and the killing of Ma Fikile Ntshangase. She said, "I no longer feel free living in our own home". She said that threats are still circulating. For instance, she relayed, "My son was going to school, and someone told him 'Hello, little MCEJO' to my son". Several other members mentioned that such labelling of family members and children experiencing such identification in the context of violence is particularly concerning. Resident 13 also said, "The children are scared". They [the children] said, "What is MCEJO?" and wanted to know if the mine was coming. She continued, "That man, after he said that… we were told to phone the police station…but the [local] police never did anything. Durban police then took it up and phoned the [name of the person associated with tradition authorities withheld to protect identity]" and the police allegedly said, "if anything happens to this child, it will be on you [the person who made the threatening remark]". She also explained that she has since had nightmares about the experience.
40. There have also been other extreme acts of terror before Ma Fikile Ntshangase's murder. These acts of terror include, on 24 April 2020, the gunning of one grandmother's home while she and her family – including a young child – were in the house. This traumatic event has had a lasting adverse psychological impact on the family and broader community. The family does not see this event as a warning but a failed assassination.
41. Another person in hiding also told me that he received several threats for his activism and was confronted at a petrol station by several armed men. He said that he was fortunate enough to get away as the man who was said to have a gun did not pull the trigger. It is difficult for me to triangulate this event, but what is clear to me is that people I interviewed fear that their life is threatened owing to raising concerns about mining, the fact that they have not yet signed, or the position taken on mining.
42. Several people I interviewed also reported death threats – some direct and others more veiled. A document prepared by All Rise has recorded many other extreme events that have contributed to this atmosphere of violence[18].
43. Most residents interviewed believed that systems (e.g., traditional authorities) that are supposed to protect people were failing to do so. For example, Resident 22, who experienced shootings, said that it was clear that the shooting was associated with the non-signing of the offer as she had experienced

[18] Youens, 2021

text messages after the event saying: “We were not there to kill you but to threaten you to tell you to sign”. She said that the text was sent via a number that they did not know. She had a friend try to call a number, but the phone was off. The family said that they had reported receiving this message to the police. However, they said that nothing had come of the case, which exacerbated their sense of institutional betrayal. She was also allegedly told not to report the issue again. In another incident, she said that she received a message from someone associated with the traditional authorities and the mine who said she had been accused of bewitching someone and should report to traditional leaders. She was told that she must pay a fine. She saw this as also being linked to ongoing ostracising. Several people whom I interviewed expressed that they have lost faith in institutions that are supposed to protect them, such as the local police and traditional leadership. Again, this compounds the experience of betrayal trauma[19].

44. Several interviewees said they had experienced other insidious threats suggesting that they would be physically injured. For example, some people have received direct warnings from friends who overheard conversations or received phone calls or text messages.
45. People fear further reprisals. Some of these threats were as recent as the week of interviewing, and those I interviewed attributed these threats to the renewed emphasis on mining in Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages. At least one person reported receiving death threats during the same week of interviewing. Understandably, people see these threats as the potential that there could be further critical incidents, such as shootings, harassment or killings.
46. Moreover, in the lead-up to Ntshangase’s death, people close to her also said that she had received several verbal threats and had stones thrown onto her roof. Her family and friends said that she and her family would find strange objects around her home's parameters and hear people in the bushes observing the house. Some of those I interviewed reported similar experiences and fear for their lives. For example, two grandmothers reported having young men stand outside their homesteads in the evenings. They had also found random objects around their homes. Several people also said that young men, seemingly intoxicated, would stumble down the road, making statements that those who had not signed would have to move. These acts alone were terrifying, yet in the context of the killings, shootings and death threats, these incidents should not be taken lightly and only compound the experience of continuous traumatic stress.
47. For example, Resident 13 also explained that people tried to get into her property, which she attributed to those putting pressure on others to sign. She said, “My daughter worked late and heard someone is trying to get onto the property.” She explained, “I could hear someone” several times messing with the lock on her gate, and after the third time, she looked outside to see if she could see anyone but saw nothing. The fourth time it happened, she switched on the lights. She was suspicious of the local traditional authorities, saying they would send “small children to terrorise the people by making noises” at the gates and fences. The next day, she walked around the property and found things that she believed were not there before. She also discovered a few times that her gate had been opened without knowing who had opened it and worried about their intensions. She said that this was similar

[19] Lingiardi & McWilliams, 2017; C. Smith, 2017; C. P. Smith & Freyd, 2014

to what had happened to Ma Fikile Ntshangase, who also had “small, minor things” that warned about Ntshangase’s death. She said these issues were deeply concerning: "We are surrounded by people who want the mine.”[20]

48. People explained that they had also moved their beds away from windows, fearing they would be killed in the middle of the night. Resident 9 explained: “When the dogs bark, I start getting scared and will become worried, feeling like I am going to die”. “I feel very vulnerable.” Resident 9 emphasised: “When the lights go off owing to load shedding, I feel very unsafe, and when there are lights, I feel like they can see me. I never feel safe.”
49. Furthermore, Resident 21 reported that young and older men are “troubling the neighbourhood”. Before, she said, the men were aggressive, but since the public attention that the killings and shootings received, they have been more friendly. However, she said this is not everyone’s experience, and she heard others have different experiences.
50. Resident 19 said, “We are also worried we are being identified as people resisting mining. People in the community are speaking. Sometimes we hear people speaking about our house, saying that we are resisting” (Resident 19). She said that some of the traditional authorities are friendly with young boys and men who will go out drinking and then harass her family, saying, “What do they know?” mentioning names and surnames of families that have not signed. She said that everyone in the community knows who has and has not yet agreed, as this information was mentioned in community meetings[21], thus identifying different households and inadvertently making them a target.
51. People were trying their best to prevent, mitigate and manage these threats differently. Yet, this required significant energy, and much focus had been placed on managing a threat rather than making a free informed decision about the relocation without undue pressure. For instance, at least two people I interviewed had gone into permanent hiding, while one person kept moving from place to place, spending very little time in their homestead owing to the fear of being killed. Vignettes from these three cases are emphasised below.
52. For example, the first person I interviewed in hiding, Resident 1, explained: “I refused to take the offer. It is my democratic right”. “I was unhappy listening to Tendele...there were many problems”. He continued: “I was threatened by force...People told me that if I do not want to sign, I will get the gun”. Resident 1 explained that they were told there would be retrenchments if the households that had not yet signed the offer, including him, didn’t sign, which in turn created considerable community tension.
53. He explained that because he was not able to provide for his family, it caused his marriage to break down. His son also had to flee owing to the multiple threats: “he was unsafe” (Resident 1). He also explained that his son used to receive messages at school saying that his father should sign, and this also made his son unhappy, who would ask him to sign. I was told that since going into hiding he has not been back home owing to these threats.

[20] Here it is important to note that some residents have already been paid to move.

[21] The name of the person who released this information in the meeting was not disclosed to me at the time of interviewing.

54. Before this incident that led him to go into hiding, he said that he received “pressures” like having “stones thrown on the roof of his home”. Residents who have experienced such incidents do not miss the fact that such incidents also occurred in the lead up to the murder of Ma Fikile Ntshangase. “I didn’t have protection and felt insecure. I prayed for my life” (Resident 1). He also believed that people used witchcraft to intimidate him, explaining that black chickens were left in his yard: “They tried to kill me in a traditional way”. Additionally, he explained that he was “afraid” and received messages and calls from unknown numbers. For example, he once received a call telling him: “We will kill you…do not block the mine.” Resident 1 continued: “I heard from people speaking about the hit squad,” attributing the threat to not signing the offer.
55. He then said, “They sent a hitman, but they failed to shoot me. It was in the evening, and the person hid behind the tree…I felt that something was wrong. I saw two guys in the shadow of a tree next to a pothole. They tried to take the car, and I instead sped up. When I did this, they lost their gun and ran away.” He continued, “I charged home. I felt like I had lost my mind. I was so lost at the time. I went to my brother, who was in security, and he came with me to check around the house. I could not sleep that day, and my brother walked around with a gun.”
56. When he fled, he took some valuables with him, including his television, clothing and other small things, but explained that he had to leave many of his belongings. There were many things that he said were sentimental that he left behind, including pictures of his family.
57. The house was still standing when he fled, but in 2019, it was broken into, and his furniture was destroyed. “The home that I left was burnt down. It has significance as if you burn down a home in our culture, you are burning the ancestors. You are supposed to follow the ancestors.” He did not know who did this but also attributed it to the community conflict associated with mining.
58. He also explained, “The hardest thing for me was leaving my job. I used to work for the [names government department] and worked with contractors…I was active in my community”. He said that he was seen as a leader in his community. He explained that uprooting himself from his home, family, and work was “painful” and the change “hurt”. Today, he said, “I don’t have money and can’t buy food”.
59. These incidents have had long-lasting impacts on his and his family’s life. It negatively impacted the relationship with his wife and son. “The relationship with my wife and son was good before then. A lot has changed. Our communication changed. My mind changed. I was blamed for what happened [the breakdown] to my family. It placed much pressure on my family”.
60. Resident 1 described traumatic reactions. He said, “Since that night, I haven’t slept well…I am f*cked up.” He also explained that he currently has memory difficulties. Before, he explained that he was “sleeping well” and had “good dreams,” where today he only sleeps for a few hours and only during the daytime. He explained that he also has nightmares, fearing being taken, would feel like he is fighting someone, and would wake up crying.
61. Resident 1 also experiences somatic complaints, describing muscle pains and a sense of betrayal: “They failed to meet my requirements, and I felt that I was not listened to but demanded that I listen to them”. This sense of being unheard and misrecognised is similar to what others have described. For example, Resident 2 expressed her frustration with being talked to instead of heard: “They cannot come into my house and not listen to what I am saying (cries). It is too frustrating.”

62. Today, Resident 1 explained that he had to be constantly “cautious” (i.e., hypervigilant). Since being in hiding, he said, “I don’t know what to do. I have no direction…it is a f*ck up. I am dead. Mentally, body-wise…If I was a garage, I am now a scrap yard…when you come to the world, it is once off.”
63. He also explained that he worries about his health owing to the perceived toxic contamination from the mine. “I cough most of the time”. Here, it should be noted that he also smokes. However, what seems particularly important is the sense of fear, not only for his life in hiding but also the sense of intrusiveness from the perceived toxic contamination from living in an area with mining.
64. He explained that he currently moves around frequently to avoid being found. He explained, “I have no shelter and am in constant fear, hiding” from those he believed want to kill him. “It is not easy to stay safe.”
65. Resident 2, the second person I interviewed in hiding, explained her situation. One evening when she was not at home, she said she received a call from someone she knew saying someone was on the property. She adamantly expressed in present tense: “They are trying to kill me, just like what happened to Fikile”. After hearing this, she said that she fled from Somkhele and now resides in another location in the country where I interviewed her. She expressed: “I was sad, and it was painful… I left clothing, furniture, everything behind.” After quite some time after fleeing, “people eventually broke into my house and burnt the place down”.
66. Resident 2 further explained that she had not returned to eMalahleni as she feared for her life. She said she was scared and did not want to see anyone from the mine. She expressed that she would “only speak with her lawyers”. Although she believes that the negotiations are going relatively well, she is not working and now relies on “the kindness of others”. Since the incident, she said that she is living a life of “poverty” and “everything has changed for the worse”. Even with her children, she said, “They do not respect me anymore as a mother,” as she cannot feed or support them. “My children are doing anything to survive [cries]”. “I have no life at all… no life [holds face crying]”.
67. She said at first, she could stay with her family, but this also became too much as her family is poor. The house she is currently looking after for someone else was sold at the time of the interview, and she was highly anxious about what would happen next. She had to move around often and explained that this was highly “stressful”, “difficult”, and “painful”. Without explaining things in detail, she described that, trying to take care of her children, she has been placed into dangerous situations and expressed a sense of shame. Resident 2 explained that she felt stuck in a “tin” and “life is not going well”.
68. Resident 23 was the third person I interviewed in hiding. He said that he moved from place to place to evade any possible detection from those he feared would kill him. Resident 23 said he had experienced threats “many times” over the years. “We were fine in the area [before mining started]. We were able to move and meet with people. However, people are easily divided between those who will and will not be relocated.” He said, “Those who are not relocated asked about health and safety concerns”. He reported that people who were considered “affected” were resentful and said that “non-affected” were “blocking them from being rich”. “People have been torn apart” (Resident 23). “When we started speaking about our rights, we were told that we were blocking development. Development, it is not development. There is no development for us” (Resident 23). Therefore, he explained, “The threats are very related to mining”.

69. “Before Ma Fikile Ntshangase was killed in 2020 when we used to have meetings, many of the questions we asked were not answered. We sometimes stood up and felt that they were trying to fool us. Speaking out made us the enemy” (Resident 23). Not long after this, in 2021, “I was chased around” by another car. They [whom he could not identify] found him at the petrol station, stopped, and pointed a gun at him. Security and attendants ran away. “I was left alone with these people”. There were three people, he said. According to Resident 23, “One of the people told the other that he must shoot me, but the person who was meant to shoot me replied that he was afraid and told the group they should take my car instead.” Resident 23 said that he attributed this event to the killings and shootings that took place over the last months targeting different households of people that had not yet signed or were raising concerns about the process of approving mining or mining itself.
70. Resident 23 said that before Ma Fikile Ntshangase was killed, a hit list of people who had not signed was circulating. Before Ma Fikile Ntshangase was murdered, he also received warnings. More recently, in February 2023, he said that he had heard a gunshot outside his gate, and he perceived this as a warning shot owing to the new pressures of mining that sought to extend the mine. He also said that he had recently received calls from the business community saying that he must meet with them about the offer but fears this as a possible trap to kill him. He said, “If you are a member of MCEJO then everyone in Mtubatuba sees you as an enemy of the town”. He said he fears being killed and does not go to Somkhele anymore: “I am homeless”. He said problems are starting again now that there is pressure to start operations. “I do not sleep anymore… I can’t go to functions or do things that I used to love (specifics excluded to protect identity)”.
71. These individuals have lost their livelihoods and sustained significant material and psychosocial losses. While in hiding, two of these members had their homes burnt down to the ground, which they attribute to their resistance to signing the offer that was on the table and the repercussions of the home not being occupied. In addition to these families, others interviewed have also moved their family members – like children – to other places to protect them from the excessive pressures and dangers. Thus, families have been torn apart.
72. Some of those who have remained said they have no option but to sign as any resistance could threaten their family, including being killed. For example, Resident 26 described to me that he was put into a position where he was placed into an impossible choice: if he chose to protect his ancestral land and graves and keep his current pastoral way of living that is connected to ancestral land, he would be putting his family in danger of being killed, if the negotiations do not go in the mine’s favour. He emphasised that it was his “land or life”.
73. Resident 26 further explained that he was stressed because he did not know where they were moving. He also explained feeling “broken” because people would exhume his family members. “It is unfair. I still visit the graves. I still speak to them. I speak to my father, who is buried there.” Yet, he explained, “I [also] worry about my family’s safety. What happened to Ma Fikile Ntshangase could happen to any of us. He also described the alleged hit list passing around. “I don’t know the merit of this… However, the picture in people’s minds is that if the mine is shut down, we are causing it. That is the song people are singing. I do not want to move, but I fear what will happen if we do not move. I have received no direct threats, but the atmosphere in the community is horrible at the moment”.

74. Resident 26 still dreams of what happened to Ma Fikile Ntshangase and the shootings that have taken place. He said he sometimes dreamt of someone attacking him and his family. With anguish, Resident 26 said, “I will rather face the stress of exhuming my family…I would rather deal with the pain of exhuming them (i.e., his family members who have been buried on ancestral lands) than with the fear that my family may be in danger or killed. Sometimes, you must take something you don’t want because the thing you see is coming on the way (i.e., the potential risk of the family being in danger). I would say that if there were no threats, I would not move, but if my family is not feeling safe, you need to decide to protect them ‘cause you feel you are jeopardising their lives”. He continued: “Whenever your life is in danger, it is hard to feel free and you cannot be happy”. He felt that his freedom and rights were being encroached on through these broader dynamics that also influenced his decision-making process. Before concluding the interview with Resident 26 he explained: “I am not anti-mining. I am fighting for my rights. They must follow the process, and I will follow what they tell me to do”.
75. Another interviewee, Resident 10, also said that he had received death threats: “I heard in the last three days that I would be killed. My friend, who is a …[personal information left out to protect identity]…told me this information so I could get out of this situation. He said, “I don’t want you to get shot”. Resident 10 explained that the direct threats affected him, explaining that he is “not himself anymore”. He said that he used to “be free” but now fears being poisoned, so he does not share a beer with others (an example of hypervigilance to mitigate the risks of being killed). “No activist dies without knowing,” he said. I was told that he brought his concerns up to the police, and they did help him to investigate certain issues. This report purposefully leaves out certain details as the inclusion of these issues would identify him. However, he was also worried as he said that he does not necessarily trust all the police, explaining that some are “rotten” and seek to protect those in power. He said he did not fear death but was afraid of what would happen to his family and children. When I spoke with him, he seemed certain that there were people who wanted to kill him owing to his position of being vocal about his discontent at public forums. He said that this unease was pervasive in his life and related to the perceived threat of mining. He explained that he also has distressing dreams about the situation, and his wife is also affected, having dreamt that he would be killed. He described at times waking up anxious after recurring nightmares about trying to chase the mine away.
76. Resident 10 was adamant that threats were continuing and described the situation as a tinder box, ready to ignite violence. He also described that either way, people were vulnerable and that even if mining did not operate in the area, it would take years for the community to heal from this process.
77. Targeted violence can be profoundly traumatic. For example, Resident 7 had a near death traumatic experience with her home being shot up while she was in it with her daughter and grandchildren. She explained what had happened to her family that night: “A car was revving outside of my home. I went to cover the mirrors and close the window. I looked out of the window and saw a car idling,” which was followed by multiple gunshots towards the house. The police who came the next day, she explained, found 21 bullets, and she said she found another five more in the days to follow. Although no one was physically hurt, this was a major traumatic event for her and her family “Everyone was scared and terrified,” she explained. “For me, my mind was gone. I was terrified that someone tried to kill me. Of course, they were trying to kill me,” she explained. Going into the details of her acute traumatic

response is unnecessary, but it is clear that she and her family struggled after the event. For example, she explained that her granddaughter traumatically repeats, "I will be the police and shoot you," to strangers. They still had dreams about the event or about people coming onto her property aggressively insisting she signs, saying, "Why are you not signing?". These dreams repeat the main traumatic significations of the night when she and her family's lives were threatened. She explained that she is stressed by needing to think about ongoing negotiations and moving. She also worried that her family is still at risk of being killed as they feel labelled by the event.

78. Those interviewed also expressed that the community has changed the way of relating to them. For example, those who have not yet signed have been treated in demeaning ways, which makes people feel lesser than others and at heightened risk. For instance, Resident 22 said that she had been tormented in the community by people associated with local traditional authorities asking her whether she had drunk her "crazy tablets" and then bringing up the amount that her family was asking for. When I asked her how people knew about the amount the family was asking for, she said, "Everyone knows" because after the shooting targeted against her family, a traditional leader publicly spoke about the figure on television. Even though these amounts are supposed to be confidential, the information was shared and confidentially breached without her family's consent. When asked what it was like to be broadcasted on television, she said she was hurt and that the event brought much unwanted attention and animosity from the community.

79. Resident 3 also experienced a shooting explaining that his initial non-acceptance of the offer had detrimental consequences. He explained, "I have become the enemy of the people working for the mines". "I have not agreed to the offer". He explained that he witnessed his neighbour, who had also not signed at the time, being shot at. Resident 3 lives nearby, and the bullets were flying around his homestead. He said that his neighbour signed after the shooting. He expressed that his neighbour signed under duress, fearing being killed. Ma Fikile Ntshangase was also murdered around this time, and he said: "Now they also realised that people were dying". "I know I was also a target because there was a hitman". "I ran away to hide in the bush for over a month – sleeping in the bush". However, he has since returned.

80. In my expert opinion, these experiences are major traumatic events.

3. Experiences of Epistemic Violence

81. My expert opinion is that part of the continuous traumatic stress people have experienced is an insidious form of violence referred to as *epistemic violence*. From a community psychology perspective, epistemic violence is a form of violence where people's way of knowing and being in the world is silenced, excluded, marginalised or misrecognised in such processes[22].

82. In light of the above vignettes, it is evident that many of those I interviewed believe that they have been placed in a position of a false choice where raising concerns or saying "no" to mining is perceived as not being a viable option and, instead, labels one a threat, in turn, sanctioning violence. This

[22] Kidd et al., 2017; Menton et al., 2021; Santos, 2015; Sonn & Stevens, 2021

dynamic is similar to other extractive zones where land and environmental defenders are mislabelled or misrecognised as a threat to be eliminated by proponents of extractive projects[23].

83. For example, those interviewed described having meetings disrupted by pro-mine proponents, feeling sidelined in meetings by not having questions answered, or feeling excluded by not being notified about meetings. The inability to freely participate, also in light of community-based violence, significantly limits the sense of control that one has over a highly stressful situation.
84. For example, Resident 15 emphasised: “The relationship with the mine is very sour…The mine makes that they do not know about other people's rights”. He continued to explain that he was upset at the process and felt that the mine never engaged fully with the community, instead relying on traditional authorities.
85. Another example was given by Resident 26: “People are still experiencing many death threats”. He thought the threats originated from those associated with the traditional authorities, which he saw as also causing conflict by putting pressure on communities. For instance, he was in a meeting when several people disrupted it, and a truck closed one of the entrances[24]. The people who disrupted the meeting were said to be men supporting the mines.
86. Resident 15 also said he had received multiple threats. For instance, this was as recent as November 2022 when he received a call threatening him. He said that he was going into hospital at the time, and the person over the call said he might not come out of the hospital if he continued “arguing with the big pieces [those who hold power in his community, he interpreted]”. He said that he did report this incident. He also said that at a stage, he suspected that there was a hitman after him and that the police were able to help him. He attributed this incident to his role in raising awareness about human rights in the community.
87. Another example is Resident 2, who also explained that those who did not sign were somehow identified to the community through the meetings. For instance, she explained that those who had not signed were asked to stay behind in one meeting. They were then asked why they were not signing. She explained that she felt tremendous pressure for her to sign and reported that after the meeting, she received threatening phone calls [a woman’s voice] saying: “If you don’t sign, then you will see what happens to you”. She reported that this phone call came directly after the meeting. It was someone that she did not know. “I did not want to give away my land” " she reported, explaining that she fled Somkhele after this meeting. Today, she lives an insecure existence, explaining that there are also gunshots at night and that she does not have money to survive. She feels afraid for herself and her children.
88. Additionally, when I asked Resident 7 how she felt about the negotiation process, she replied: “it is painful. I don’t attend meetings anymore. My blood boils,” expressing anger and feelings of injustice. She explained: “I don’t attend meetings because they do not talk straight about the move and always tell lies”.

[23] Global Witness, 2019; Gómez-Barris, 2017; Menton et al., 2021; Menton & Le Billion, 2021

[24] See Youens, 2021

89. Resident 8 also expressed frustration with the process: “In meetings, we never get the chance to express ourselves…We have just been told that the mine will come…When they send invitations, they will send a person who is friends with the traditional authorities and the mine. They will tell you that you can come, but you must just listen and that if you say anything negative, they say there will be trouble. I experienced it. It happens whenever there is a meeting, and it is unwelcoming. When I attend the meetings, people speak about you…they don’t listen to us…There is no participation, and there is not even a small chance to express myself in meetings. It has been difficult to attend public meetings.” She explained that she received threats, saying that people would say, “You must be careful. There is anger for you”.
90. The closing down of public participation within this atmosphere of violence has apparent consequences for mental health. For example, Resident 9 said she has nightmares about the meetings, especially after being told they “must run to court”. She was visibly distressed, fearing that “people will do anything to our family to get what they want”. “I dream of people coming into the homestead. I also dream about people talking about me. I am always living in fear.”
91. Resident 8 further expressed that leaders in her community have also explicitly said: “Run to your lawyers. The mine will come”. It is not only the multiple threats that people experience as highly stressful and traumatising but also the complete absence of compassion during the process and the sense of injustice that people feel that worsens the traumatic experiences. “I do not sleep at night. If the dogs bark, I am afraid. If I am at the bus stop, I am afraid they will catch me [meaning that she would be hurt or killed]”. She also reported they are still afraid, saying, “There may still be threats. We are scared, very terrified about those words that make us the bad people”.
92. Resident 16 expressed, “We are allowed to attend [meetings] but are not allowed to speak with people from the government”.
93. Resident 21 also expressed: “I would like to attend meetings, but there is too much conflict and debate”. She said that because of this conflict, she felt uncomfortable in meetings (~early 2022), so she left in the middle of the last meeting. She has not since gone back to the meetings.
94. Resident 20 also explained that the labelling of those who “are with the lawyers” made it harder for her to engage in the public participatory process, fearing that she would be overly exposed to undue pressure in the meetings. “For me, I want them to give me the offer that I wanted. I have not signed. I do not want to move. I feel like my life is in danger. They want me to get hurt. I was told to come to meetings, but they have identified me with the lawyers and will confront me with difficult questions,” Resident 20.
95. It is challenging for those I interviewed to participate meaningfully in the process with ongoing threats. For instance, Resident 20 described serious threats: “Sometimes I will go to the bathroom and find people in my yard. I feel like I am in danger owing to being identified as someone with lawyers. We do want to move, but we are still discussing the offer.” She explained that she “always feels terrified having strangers in my yard. They would stand there, not saying anything to me. This is terrifying…Just last week, I went to the bathroom, and people were standing in my yard,” she explained. She said the people were young men, and others had also been harassed. She attributes these events as being attributable to her not signing. She said that she also feels more vulnerable because the process of

ostracising her has made her family more isolated and vulnerable within this atmosphere of violence. In November or December of 2022, she said she was also verbally threatened, being told: “If you do not sign, then something big may happen to you”. She said in response that she would sign. She also noted that others had told her that “Why don’t you move” and used dehumanising comments, such as “Your ass stinks” (a derogatory saying). She said these comments came from people associated with local traditional authorities. She said that it makes her feel “not human.” is “hurtful”, and that “she feels abused for what is happening”. She said she was also afraid for her young grandchildren, saying, “Who will look after them if I die?”. She explained that she felt “terrorised in a way that I do not sleep well”.

96. “I have had dreams after the meeting that they will come here, force themselves in and kill me. I woke up with my heart pounding and felt dizzy” (Resident 20). She explained that she is living with “high stress” and felt alienated, not walking to the shops or taking taxis to avoid exposure to potential threats. She said that in the past, she had had comments at the taxi stop, with a young man saying, “Here you are, you don’t want to move?”. She said she worried they will wait for her when she went to town and feels unsafe. “It is not nice,” she said, “it terrifies me”. She said she tried not to stress her family out as they need to work and are not living in the area. She felt guilty and, therefore, did not tell anyone. She said this had negatively impacted her relationship with the place, explaining that she used to walk around and loved working in the field. However, she is isolated now and believes that she is highly vulnerable.
97. Resident 22 also expressed that people feel vulnerable and that she may be identified as someone to be killed if she participated in meetings. After the shooting incident, she said that she still gets traumatic flashbacks, what she refers to as “images” that come to her and has “fears of walking in the road or even going to bed”. She said she avoids mine-related meetings. She was also worried that her family would be killed if the offer was refused. She also had nightmares but said this had improved over time. She said that she still is afraid, and in the meeting, she did not want to say who was responsible. However, she believed that local traditional authorities were complicit in creating the atmosphere of violence that is plaguing the community still.
98. Resident 14 also expressed: “I live in fear. It is so scary. Any noise will scare me. I live in fear every night.” Notably, the killing and acts of terror directly impact experiences of silencing. For example, these horrific acts have created fears that they will be targeted if difficult questions are brought up in meetings. Families who have not signed offers are known to the community and, for this reason, feel particularly vulnerable.
99. This sense of vulnerability is exacerbated by the pressures that mining must begin, where the rhetoric is that people will otherwise lose their jobs. There are also high expectations that have been created. For example, in the week I interviewed people, rumours were circulating that the mine was rehiring to start with preparing Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages. Community members’ expectations were said to be high. A letter had also circulated a week before saying that Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages would be the focus of the mine’s attention to prepare for mining. During this week, I saw surveyors who were also preparing to expand the roads in the area (I confirmed this by stopping and asking the person conducting the assessment). Community members explained that this signals to them that mining is moving forward and, in turn, raised expectations amongst some. Understandably, people were scared

that if they said no to mining, the community would turn against them, blaming them for the jobs lost. In this situation, people feel unable to speak freely in places where decisions are made, feel scared to attend meetings and, consequently, have become alienated through the process. This, in turn, has adverse psychological implications and can cause significant distress. Feeling free to participate in the processes is particularly important as it means that a person can find coordinates to make an informed decision and, thus, able to handle a meaningful part of the process. Instead, today, most people whom I interviewed felt extremely betrayed by the process, authorities in power and the mine.

100. Additionally, those I interviewed said obtaining information about the mine had been difficult. For instance, Resident 10 explained that there had been tremendous uncertainties as they were first included in the affected area and later fell outside. However, he explained that no one told them how close the mine would be to his house. “I was always trying to get information as I knew little about what was happening. I was very confused. No one had an answer to what was happening. No one was attending to us.” Some of those who were also said to have been deemed as non-affected said they were left out of meetings. At the time of interviewing, the issues of boundaries are still apparently unclear, and this has created much uncertainty and tension.
101. Resident 10 also explained that they asked for more information in meetings, such as what the “mining license” said about air pollution and other environmental issues. He said, “We asked for everything”. Resident 10 told me they received a response saying, “You think a big company can operate without these licenses?”. He said that nothing was provided to them, and it was later revealed that the mine did not have all necessary documentation to operate in the new areas.
102. Nevertheless, Resident 10 explained that those not deemed affected residents were “sidelined” in meetings: “We brought issues up, but we were shut down”. He also expressed feeling misrecognised and ignored, “mining management was pushing questions away”. Many raised this significant concern, believing the community was splintered by the distinction between those affected and those deemed not. Many people said they felt “despondent” to attend meetings due to these experiences of exclusion and misrecognition. Resident 10 explained that only around 2017 was a broader meeting with the whole community held. Everyone, he explained, felt “frustrated” at the time, and the mine wanted to put coordinates around the villages. Traditional authorities asked people to agree to this, but there was resistance owing to ongoing frustrations about feeling excluded from the process. “The coordinates were put down the next day despite us not agreeing”. He explained that the coordinates were put down “without our consent”. “It was here that the pot really started boiling ‘cause we disagreed with what was happening”. “People started to take the coordinates out”, and “they were left out” (Resident 10). “The atmosphere has been bad up until now”. He explained that there has been much infighting and discrepancies in meetings.
103. It was also explained to me that some residents were privileged over others regarding specific outreach activities. These activities were seen to be divisive. For instance, Resident 22 explained: “In December 2022, those who had signed were given R400 vouchers. We were not given a voucher”. She said that she asked why some people received a voucher and others did not get any money. She apparently received a response that those families with lawyers do not get coupons. This adds to the feeling that they are being directly targeted and that there are attempts to punish those accessing legal services.

Resident 22 expressed that she was “angry about this voucher story”. It was said that people received these vouchers after the vote, also suggesting that there may have been inducements. She said that at the time, many people did not want to vote and therefore did not go as not to legitimise what was perceived to be an undemocratic process.

104. It was clear that many of those I interviewed felt disillusioned by the public participatory process for authorising mining in the area. For instance, Resident 12 explained: “I do not talk to the mines. These people are liars. They call a meeting and say one thing and then [later] say something different…I don’t take them seriously anymore.”
105. People interviewed also had other experiences of misrecognition. For instance, those interviewed mostly had similar experiences of consenting to the relocation, explaining that they would potentially move considering the adverse situation in the community, yet felt extremely misrecognised in the process and offer. For example, Resident 13 said: “I am not saying that I do not want the mine. What I am saying is that they must do things accordingly. We must be better off than before”. Resident 7 said: “I’m not happy about the offer. I haven’t agreed to move.” Resident 9 expressed: “I haven’t agreed to move. I’m not happy at all with the offer…if it were up to me, I would not move and do not see anywhere where I want to go”. Moreover, Resident 13 emphasised: “No, I do not want to move because I do not know what will happen when I move and what will happen when I am there”. Resident 13 explained that she had never been told where they would move them to or when they would start operating, creating significant uncertainty. She expressed frustration and a sense of mistreatment: “I feel like they are playing with us” and “They are lying to us.” “I just tell them now, “don’t talk to me, talk to my lawyer”,” Resident 13 explained.
106. Only one person I interviewed said she was happy with the original offer but described that several years had passed since that time, and inflation issues must be considered. Resident 6 noted that she was happy with what she would initially sign after considerable negotiations but said that much time has passed and inflation must be included. She desperately wants to move and is waiting for the offer. Even though she was happy with the original offer, I asked her what she thought about the letter that she mentioned she had received about the mine moving forward with work in the area. She said she would not stop them, explaining: “There is nothing I can do about it… but they should finish the process”. She referred to the negotiations, signing the offer and paying people out. She explained: “They can start, but they must not leave us behind. I feel that the negotiation process should be complete by signing an agreed-to offer. They also need to give us time so that we can plan”.
107. Most of those being proposed to be relocated said they would only move if they were satisfied with the offer. Some expressed that the offer was not enough for the suffering that the dislocation from their land entailed, did not account for the pain they had been through, and did not account for all the intangible losses. For example, the destruction of the Izibaya (i.e., cattle kraals), the exhumation of ancestral graves, and other aspects integral to who they are. Further, those interviewed described the potential exhumation of graves as potentially traumatic. I would agree with this, as there is evidence to

suggest that such unwanted exhumations may produce collective traumas, as I have witnessed in other areas where mining has taken place in Somkhele[25].

108. Similarly, there was said to be a misrecognition of the cultural importance of the home versus its monetary value. For instance, Resident 10 explained that different houses in the homestead have different meanings, and there is an integration between the material and ancestral domains. For example, it was explained to me that if you have a home, a rondavel must be constructed for specific ancestors, including one for the head of the household's great-grandmother and another for the great-grandfather. These spaces are used for different purposes, reflecting cultural ways of organising social and personal ancestral relationships. For instance, the rondavel identified with the great grandfather is a space where judgement comes. In contrast, the space identified as the grandmother is attributed to more freedom, joyfulness, and an ability to mitigate conflict. In this space, we conducted the interview, and it was said that his "Gogo's spirit" [grandmother's spirit] lives there, while the other rondavel held his grandfather's spirit. After explaining, he expressed: "The mine does not ask about anything. They don't understand the importance of these spaces." He explained that these spaces would just be evaluated, saying "it looks old" but not recognising that "one of the ancestors owns it". He expressed: "the monetary value doesn't meet up" with the symbolic system that brings unity to the homestead, "I do not think it will ever meet up with the symbolic". Thus, there is a sense of misrecognition of how the mine operates within this world. Some people see the offers as failing to meet on these grounds.
109. Some residents also complained that they felt disrespected as heads of households. For instance, Resident 10 explained that the mine employees came to assess his house without letting him know and asked his wife if they come onto the property. "They made the assessment. I felt treated like a child."
110. Additionally, several people interviewed said that when the evaluations were being done for the offers, they had experienced unwanted acts, such as people walking into their homesteads without permission and taking notes of what was on the property without their consent. People felt unseen and disrespected in this process.
111. For example, Resident 7 said: "[Names person from the mine] came and asked to agree [to the offer]. I was told to estimate what I need for the property. Afterwards, someone came to me saying, "Why am I refusing to allow them to measure the house? I was told that someone was shot, and if I refused, I would be shot". The person she mentioned who told her was apparently not in his official capacity but was a mine employee. Again, after this incident, she explained that people came to her house "demanding" to measure the property and she said "they were not polite". "[Names mine employee], who was white, would walk all over. When I asked him not to, he would not listen. I feel better now because he is no longer with the mine. I wanted the ground to swallow him." She explained: "I felt disrespected, and he wasn't friendly."
112. Another example comes from Resident 9, who said that when her husband died, she was still in mourning, and people came to say that she must "take the money that the mine offered you". She said this was "painful," expressing, "What kind of human beings are we living within the area?". Concerning these experiences of misrecognition, people described feelings of anger, helplessness, fatalism and

[25] Barnwell, 2022

betrayal. For example, Resident 2 expressed her sense of betrayal: "I feel sold out" and "lied to". Resident 10 said that he also feels betrayed by the government. As described elsewhere in the report, this sense of betrayal can worsen experiences of trauma[26].

113. Nevertheless, several people felt that their families would come under attack if they did not make the extreme sacrifice and bear the misrecognition.

114. Thus, several people I interviewed do not feel like they have been involved in a fair process, and they feel like they do not have control of the process, having been silenced, excluded and misrecognised through the process. My expert opinion is that these experiences of epistemic violence only amplify the experience of trauma, and it could contribute to other traumatic experiences if the relocation takes place.

4. Damage to the Sense of Communality

115. In my expert opinion, the atmosphere of violence has also disrupted residents' *sense of communality,* which pertains to how a person's community – including the more-than-human world (e.g., animals, landscapes, waterways and trees) and ancestral connections to place – becomes an affirming part of their knowing and being in the world[27]. When there is a sense of communality, these mutually interdependent relationships have a positive influence on identity formation and is beneficial to psychological wellbeing[28]. Consequently, when that sense of communality is disrupted or destroyed, the individual loses a part of themselves and the emotional and other resources they have invested in their community and place of living to help them during challenging times.

116. Most of those I interviewed had fond memories of living in Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages. Several people I interviewed had lived in the area for generations. People came to live in Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages through different circumstances. Some were dislocated from their homes and sought refuge in the area, resisting the brutality of apartheid, while others moved away from more urbanised areas, seeking a rural lifestyle where they were able to herd cattle, grow food in fields and wild areas, and benefit from the natural bounty of the place including rivulets, natural vegetations, grazing area, climatic and soil conditions. Others moved to the area after getting married or finding work there. Several people were born in the place and decided to stay in their birthplace.

117. For example, Resident 23 said his "father moved to Somkhele for a more peaceful life". He explained that you could not have cattle where he lived, and he wanted to live a subsistence lifestyle with grazing land and saw Somkhele as having a strong sense of community.

118. Several people I interviewed described that they had spent many years creating a life for themselves and their family, turning what was once "only bush" into homesteads, including kraals and fields, to be self-sustaining.

119. Today, many of these livelihoods and ways of relating to places are still alive, despite ongoing threats from droughts, urbanisation and the expansion of mining. Several families I interviewed care for cattle,

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[26] Lingiardi & McWilliams, 2017

[27] Erikson, 1995

[28] Erikson, 1976, 1995

goats and chickens, which the family consumes, barters for other goods or sells on the local market to buy essentials for the home. These families rely heavily upon open access to streams so their animals can drink and the bountiful grazing land.

120. Today, families also benefit from indigenous plants, which have medicinal, nutritional (e.g., edible plants), and resource (e.g., firewood) uses. Most families also have some areas where they grow fruit, grains, leafy greens, and other nutritious fruits, vegetables, roots, and legumes. However, it was explicitly stated to me that some of these practices had been threatened owing to the increasing issues of drought and water scarcity that those I interviewed attributed partly to opencast coal mining[29]. The foods produced nevertheless provide sustenance for families and supplement income.
121. For some, these homesteads built by hand also became the resting places for their loved ones, who were traditionally buried on the homestead's grounds. Family members are purposely buried on the ancestral land, usually near the homestead, as they take on a new role as an ancestor to the family. Abaphansi (i.e., ancestral spirits) are seen to be critical to many families' wellbeing, and this closeness that is still practiced by many also allows for the ability to live in communion with them. Most of those I interviewed, if not all, had strong links to tradition and ancestral practices. These ancestral relationships are essential in daily life and customary practices, such as weddings and funerals. It was explained to me that certain rituals must be conducted at different times at the ancestral homestead and that communion with Abaphansi is central to these practices. It was also explained to me that it is the responsibility of the family and community to ensure that the ancestral graves are protected.
122. In light of the findings of this report, where graves are threatened, it is also important to state that those whom I interviewed said that no culturally appropriate practices exist for exhuming graves. Even though some people bury in westernised graveyards, exhuming graves is taboo.
123. Traditional leaders were said to have been important to the social fabric of the community. Before mining, people said they felt listened to and supported by traditional authorities. As with the homestead, traditional customs, laws, values, and beliefs were integral to community cohesion and traditional leaders had roles in keeping together this communal bond. Residents explained that they placed trust in the traditional authority for the flourishing of the community.
124. Those I interviewed described Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages, and Somkhele more broadly, as peaceful places of prosperity. Residents explained that favourable social and environmental conditions helped create security and stability for families. Relatedly, people described a strong sense of social cohesion and sense of communality as a result of the above. For those interviewed, Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages were places that people enjoyed being. When asked if there had been any targeted killings or harassment before mining that was similar to today, people said "no".
125. Thus, residents' views were that there was a strong sense of communality that allowed people to flourish.
126. Today, this sense of communality has been damaged by the atmosphere of violence created since the operation of opencast coal mining and its proposed extension into Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages.

[29] At the time of interviewing, there was already a three-week period where some households did not have access to any water from the taps. It was also reported that several of the streams have run dry, which some believe is attributable partly to infrastructural failures, climate change, historical droughts, and opencast coal mining.

This sense of communality has changed owing to the excessive pressure placed on Ophondweni or Emalahleni residents to accept mining. People saw this pressure as coming from the traditional authority, the business community, and the mine, which have also filtered into the community.

127. Residents who have concerns about mining see this atmosphere of violence (for example, the killing of Ma Fikile Ntshangase and ongoing threats described in previous sections) as part of a process of silencing, marginalising and excluding them from the process. Through these acts, an atmosphere of fear was created whereby residents are forced to make impossible choices.
128. For example, I was told that the violence associated with mining expansion has splintered Ophondweni or Emalahleni communities. Some tensions are between those who have accepted offers and those who have not. Those who have not accepted offers are mislabeled as being anti-mining and a threat to those who have signed offers. For instance, Resident 2 reported: “the mine created conflict in the community” and “it was not okay that we were shamed for not signing”. She explained that they were told that their views were “backwards”. She reported having people coming to her home at the time, putting pressure on her to sign. Across the interviews, people did not seem anti-mining but had legitimate questions and concerns about the logics of relocation, the impacts on livelihoods, and potential health issues. Regardless, this mislabeling has put many in danger as they are, in turn, deemed a threat. Having been identified as a threat, several residents have experienced death threats and have gone into hiding, fearing for their lives.
129. Furthermore, a distinction has been made between those identified as directly affected and those not. Killings, shootings, death threats and other violence were also associated with these various pressures and mislabeling between those affected and those that are not. For example, community members who are deemed directly affected may see the “non-affected” groups’ concerns as being redundant, unwanted and a threat to their ability to move. Residents view this distinction as artificial, as even those deemed “non-affected” will live on the mine’s fence lines and are likely to have significant parts of their community dismantled (e.g., people will move out, certain community resources will be closed or moved) and have concerns, such as health impacts.
130. Although many members of these villages have accepted their offers, there are still several families who, at the time of interviewing, have not signed. Those deemed as non-affected and those who have not signed believe that they are considered threats to those who have signed and, in turn, endure harassment, death threats, and violence.
131. When conducting interviews, I was also shown a notice letter given to several residents that said that the mine was preparing for operations. Resident 2 reported: “The mines continue to push us because we received a letter. The letter makes me angry because it doesn’t make any sense… They (the mine) came (to speak about the offer), and they kept saying the same thing. They never listen to me and keep telling me the same thing”. The situation is complicated by the fact that several people have not signed offers. Similar to Resident 2, Resident 11 also received an offer but said: “I am not happy with the offer.” Today, she explained that she is confused about what is taking place, specifically around the mine now saying that they will begin operations (referring to the letter circulated to the community). Considering the significance of such a letter, there also appeared to be breaks in communication. For example,

Resident 14 explained that they never received the letter and attributed it to willful acts of exclusion, saying, “They don’t send the letter to us because they don’t like us”.

132. At the time of interviewing, residents also said that there were rumours of new hiring occurring, which, together with the letter, they feared raised expectations amongst some in the community, putting them at greater risk of being targeted.
133. This possibility that mining was commencing again and that operations may extend to Ophondweni or Emalahleni communities was a cause for concern, contributing to psychological distress. The mine moving forward with plans was perceived as a significant threat to those who had not signed, as they worried their families would be hurt if they did not sign. As a result of this heightened tension, the people I interviewed felt fearful, mistrustful and said they were “always alert”. Psychologically, much energy was going into managing perceived threats, while also living with significant levels of ongoing stress. For example, Resident 7 said: “The mine writes the letter, but we are told through the traditional authority. Since the letter came, I am more aware and alert [of possible violence]”. She expressed that she is not feeling supported [by the authorities]. Resident 15 also explained: “I feel very bad about the letter. I feel terrible. That is what I am fighting for…people feel oppressed by this situation.”
134. People were afraid and worried about the recent build-up. Resident 10 explained that new people had been employed (he estimated ~100) to create a new workforce to expand into the new area. If the mine is prevented from operating, he worried that there would be a backlash on him. Nevertheless, people still hoped for a more inclusive process that respects the choice to say “yes” or “no” to mining.
135. It is not only the direct threats that damage the sense of community but also the experience of disconnection that this atmosphere of violence, the expansion of mining operations and the possibility of relocations may entail. For instance, some of those interviewed are more isolated and alienated within their community owing to the atmosphere of violence, not experiencing the same joy or meaning in things they used to (e.g., attending public gatherings, going to funerals, or church).
136. While anticipating future losses, this damage to the sense of communality is already a significant loss for those whom I interviewed, who, as I described before, said there was social cohesion between members of the community and a sense of trust in traditional leadership. The connection with people and place also brought significant meaning to their lives and shaped their sense of self and identity. Instead, this scaffolding that reaffirmed people’s sense of identity and self-worth was negatively transformed and in its place, an atmosphere of fear, conflict and violence was brought into being. It is also important to raise that several whom I interviewed believe that they can manage their traumas and heal by move away from the situation. Those who actively wanted to move away from the problem to start anew free from threats seemed more favourable to the negotiations.
137. In my expert opinion, the positive sense of communality has experienced a negative inversion due to the atmosphere of violence. To put this differently, the sense of communality that once was seen as affirming to people’s lives has become something associated with trauma and saturated with ongoing stressors.

5. Uncertainty and Stagnation

138. My expert opinion is that ongoing uncertainty and stagnation contributed to psychological distress. There has also been a sense of stagnation in people's personal lives where they would like to continue investing in their lives where they currently live or where they will be relocated. Still, they feel unable to do so owing to the uncertainty for the future.
139. For example, one man I interviewed expressed that he is in the process of lobola (a traditional practice of paying the bride's price that also creates a foundation for dialogue between families). "I feel that the mine is hiding something. I can't say I am okay with moving without telling us the full details". For instance, Resident 4 expressed that he wants to pay "lobola" but needs to know where he will bring his future wife. He cannot tell his partner's family any details about the move, which causes him significant distress. He explained: "The in-laws are worried because there is no way forward, which affects the negotiation process. It affects the trust, and they think I am playing with their daughter. [visibly distressed when speaking]". Thus, the process creates unnecessary discord in people's lives.
140. For example, it was explained to me that some people would like to continue building to expand their homestead, need space to grow their family, or just want to continue moving forward but have received pressures not to do so. I was told that any type of building would welcome unsettling comments from those who agreed to be relocated and, in the context of the atmosphere of violence, could invite unwanted attention. For example, Resident 8 said there is also "social pressure about building". She explained that it is "painful to receive pressure not to build". Nevertheless, she said that she had to build another home owing to her family expanding.
141. Another example is Resident 14, who said, "It was so lovely when I came here. We wanted to grow crops. We had children here…Now, we are told that we cannot build and that our loved ones will be exhumed…Even though I am old, my family must still move forward". She continued: "When we first came, we were welcomed. We used to go to the traditional authority to help." Now, she explained that she feels ostracised and scared where she lives.
142. Those I interviewed also reported that they were told that the mine would not consider any new buildings that have been built since the initial offer. This is a disincentive to continue working on the homestead, as one always expects that it will be time to move away. This creates enormous uncertainty and a sense of stagnation in a core area where people derive significant meaning – taking care of one's home and providing for the family.
143. Some people have gone ahead and built more on their property, needing to cater for changes in the family and wanting to move on with their lives, not knowing how long the process would take and if it would ever really go through. This they see as a risk that they are willing to carry owing to the unbearable sense of uncertainty and stagnation.
144. This also occurs for important traditional practices, such as burying loved ones in the homestead. Resident 10 explained, "We are being stopped from burying people [on his ancestral land]". "My whole life is there. My graveyard is there… Our graves and ancestors are significant…The grave, to me, is even more important than being alive. This is where we bury our forefathers. We believe their spirits are with us…We cannot speak to God directly, so we pray to our ancestors to ask God to help us."

145. People also felt neglected in this situation, fearing that authorities have disinvested in Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages. For example, there are frequent water outages in the area, and, at the time of interviewing, several houses in Ophondweni did not have access to water.
146. For instance, Resident 20 explained: “It was very nice to live here before the mine came. We have electricity now, but the water from the streams has now disappeared, and there is no water in the pipes,” explaining how some basic services have improved while others have worsened (Resident 20). “We do not have water”. “Now, also because of the challenges that we have started to have, we have gone back to collecting firewood”. Today, “the situation is awful,” she explained. “Water issues started around two to three years ago”. There is also no trucked water, except for those who can afford to buy water and JoJo water tanks. People have to ask for water from others who can afford it. When I interviewed people, they said water had not been running in some houses for the last few weeks. “Families are affected a lot. We need to wash and can’t cook some foods to eat. We need to walk a distance to get water.”
147. At the time of the interview, Resident 21 also did not have water and said that tap water had stopped running in January. They at least have a JoJo tank where they have been collecting water. However, these tanks were running out, and there have been no water tankers yet distributing water.
148. People see these infrastructural failures as a lack of care and a hesitance to invest in the community, knowing these households may be destroyed. At the time of the interview, the shortage of water was dire. People explained that they had to buy water, and those who did not have the finances to do so would depend on neighbours to provide water. People actively limited the amount they were washing with and felt humiliated due to the situation that compromised hygiene. Thus, people were understandably unhappy about this untenable situation.

6. The Anticipated Trauma of Relocating

149. My expert opinion is that the relocation is also experienced as an anticipated trauma.
150. The relocation is experienced as an anticipated trauma since people see the risk of saying no to the relocation as potentially putting themselves or their families in danger. Several people told me that if the situation was not what it was, they would have preferred keeping their land and way of being and would never exhume their ancestral graves, which is a cultural taboo.
151. Any damage done to ancestral graves is considered a sacrilege, and it was explained to me that it is not customary to exhume the dead. It was said to me that it was only until mining came that there were discussions about exhuming graves. No cultural practices exist that could meaningfully repair the damage caused by exhumations. The consequences are also spiritual, where the family experiences misfortune owing to disturbing the graves and not following tradition. For some, the exhumation of graves also marked an imposed change in burial practices. Families buried their loved ones with the intention that this was their final resting place. Some people explained that they would be disturbed and relocated to western-style graves, which are seen as not in line with culture and, therefore, worse when compared to those buried traditionally in the homestead.
152. Resident 17 said, “We have ancestral graves on our land”. The traditional authority was said to have told the family that the mine would create another (western-style) grave, and owing to the family being

loyal to the traditional authorities and subscribing to traditional beliefs, they felt they were not allowed to contest this decision despite not wanting to have the graves exhumed. He said, “I grew up in this area. My people are buried here. If the white people come, they want to exhume my family and mine.”

153. People also felt extremely upset that they were not guaranteed enough money to buy blankets and slaughter animals for each grave removed. This further amplifies the sense of anticipatory stress and recent experiences of misrecognition.
154. It is also important to understand who is being exhumed. They are loved ones, children, siblings, partners, grandparents and elders. The horror of exhuming loved ones without wanting to can complicate the grief process and be traumatising. For example, Resident 21 said they would also exhume her granny, who she “loved so much,” and that she “still misses them all”. She said it was not good that they wanted to exhume her family and grandmother.
155. Resident 8 emphasised the need for detailed and clear communication. She explained that they want to know how things will work, explaining, for example: “we have loved who are buried… they must sit down and explain exactly how they will exhume each one of them. We may then be okay, but they have not ever done this. We have no contact with the mine”.
156. Resident 11 also felt excluded, saying that the mine has never communicated with her about how things will happen or the specific issues of graves. Resident 11 said, “It makes me feel sad”.
157. Resident 17 also shared: “I came here as a young man, still single. I got married in this yard…It was bush when I first came here. It is not what you see now (several structures, cleared land, fruit trees, fields and livestock). It was hard work. We started from nothing.” Resident 17 expressed: “I do not want to move. I am being forced to move. If they move me to a new place, I do not think I would want to live anymore. I do not think I will survive.” “It took me far to get here,” and he said that he would like to die where he lives. “What is unclear is that we do not know when we will move and how the process will occur. So this is creating confusion for us” (Resident 17).
158. Resident 15 also expressed that his primary stress was “land dispossession”. “I was born and grew up here. I do not want to speak about the future and the possibility of my land being taken,” Resident 15 explained, visibly upset. “I know I avoid people and will rather spend my time in the field.” He explained that now he “fights for my children to prevent their land from being taken from them.”
159. Resident 7 expressed: “We have communal graves. The mining will impact the graves.” She explained that she was told that the graves would be exhumed and reburied in a western-style graveyard mixed with other families. Her grandparents, brother and two children will be moved. She explained that the idea of exhuming and reburial was “painful.” She explained that when you bury someone, you tell them that this is their final resting place, and you will be exhuming them. She expressed her sense of powerlessness repeatedly, “It is not right and not good to exhume but that there is nothing I can do… they will be digging a hole in that area. It isn’t right. I can’t stop them.” Culturally and religiously, she explained, “You are not supposed to move. You tell them that they will wake up on the last day,” reciting a Christian belief that the dead will rise on the last day once the Messiah returns.
160. Resident 14 had multiple graves. She explained that the ancestors gave guidance and direction to live, telling her what to do and not to do. She explained that they would tell us if [the mine] was wanted.

She was perturbed about the potential exhumation that would have significant spiritual implications for her and her family.

161. This will not be the first time graves may be exhumed for mining. Many of those I interviewed explained that they already felt disturbed by the exhumations that had taken place as part of the relocations for Tendele Mine's operations in areas 1 and 2[30].

162. For example, Resident 13 explained that her husband is buried on the property and that she did not want to exhume him. When I asked how she saw the process of exhuming and reburial, she brought up the case of Machibini, where several people were exhumed and moved into a western-style graveyard: "What happened was so painful. They explained their pain to us, how they exhumed and threw the bodies into trenches. Children saw these things." The potential repetition of this community-level trauma did not escape her.

163. People have been put in a tremendously stressful situation. Resident 11 had around 15 ancestral graves across her land that her family was given. She said that she still had a relationship with them. Many of those I interviewed "speak with their ancestors". When I asked Resident 11 how she felt about moving, she held her head and, looking anguished, repeated: "I don't feel good. I don't feel good. I don't want to move from or move those buried here". She elaborated, "It is not fair to take those that have died to go to a new home that they do not know," reflecting on the importance of being buried in a place that one knows in one's being – a person's homestead and ancestral land. Culturally, she explained that it is unacceptable, "I have never heard of it…even great, great, great ancestors never did this". I asked her again how she felt, and she kept repeating: "I don't feel good. I don't feel good [shaking her head]." "The ancestors will turn against us. If you remove the grave and if there is digging, they will be angry, and you will be told to leave their (ancestors) home."

164. Based on what I have witnessed in other areas and what people have described to me in Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages, I anticipate that the experience will be challenging to reconcile. There is also great shame and hurt for needing this process, and it is also said to be a point of tension in households, creating unwanted moral anguish and spiritual distress. Thus, there is the potential that the exhumation of graves may contribute to trauma further down the line.

165. People also worry about losing specific places of significance within the homestead. For instance, the loss of a person's isibaya (cattle kraal, plural: Izibaya) deserves special mention. While the Isibaya is where cattle and goats are kept, the significance of this stressor may also be overlooked by those who are not culturally sensitive to the importance of Izibaya to families. It has been explained to me that cattle are essential for the family as traditionally it is believed that they will get sick instead of families. For instance, if the cow gets sick, the family will consult with the ancestors. Thus, the cow and the sanctity of the Isibaya protect the family from becoming sick. They are also crucial in cultural practices, such as weddings and funerals. Livestock and the Isibaya are also identifiers of social status and are said to be fundamental for transferring intergenerational masculine identities.

166. Additionally, those who kept livestock felt bad for their animals and were concerned that the area they would be moved to would not suit the animals. Here, it is important to qualify that some of those I

[30] See the negative psychological impacts of grave exhumations documented in Barnwell, 2022

interviewed shared a deep connection with their livestock, and they felt a sense of shame, pain and hurt that they had to destroy their Izibaya and dislocate their animals from where they had been living. Several people also said they had spent several years or generations creating their Izibaya. The destruction meant a loss of this asset to the family that had played important livelihood, spiritual and cultural functions. I have documented elsewhere how I have witnessed this playing a significant role in the development of trauma[31]. It is essential to consider that this can contribute to trauma further down the line. It is also important to point out that those I interviewed explained that Izibaya were not adequately compensated for in the offers made by the mine.

167. People I interviewed also feared that there would be a loss of livelihood and that they may be unable to adapt to the changes. For instance, those who currently grow some of their food, harvest indigenous food, or rely on grazing land for their animals said they were uncertain that they could replicate these conditions. What surprised me was that several people I interviewed did not know the exact details of where they would be given land, and this unknown created distress for those interviewed.
168. People also expressed a tremendous sense of loss, needing to leave their ancestral land. For example, Resident 1 explained: “I worry about my ancestral land.”
169. Resident 3 also explained: “I asked where the land would be and when the money would be given.” However, he had not received a response after signing some years ago. He expressed: “They never gave me any details”. Concerning the move, he said: “It kills me not to know anything about what will happen”.
170. Resident 14 explained that she often dreams about being moved, which causes her tremendous distress.
171. People were confused about why the mine was moving ahead, explaining: “We haven’t agreed on anything. They left and never came back. We do not have to move. To go and start a new life in a new place with new people is not going to be easy…I do not know where we are going and how we will cope,” Resident 19.
172. I asked Resident 9 what it meant for her to leave this place. She said, “It would be painful. I am used to the area, and this is my husband's home. My husband and son are buried here. How can I leave this beautiful land and leave my husband’s home? How will I make it in a new place?”.
173. When I asked how Resident 9 felt about moving, she said that it made her “sad” and that she did not want the mine, but she could not resist because the community had been promised land and other things, and “they will kill us”. Nevertheless, she said, “I don’t feel fairly treated by the mine. I feel betrayed by the devil that has entered [names traditional leader]. The devil is the mine.”
174. Resident 5 expressed: “It is complicated. People need to know more. My father wants to move but needs to know where you are moving to, how he will be treated, and what his livelihood will be. It is unclear what is happening…It has never been clear [what will happen in the relocation process]…I feel anxious about the new living arrangement…there is no psychological support for people going through this process”.

[31] Barnwell, 2022

175. The relocation will also mean a complete dismantling of the community. For example, children may not be able to access the same schools that they were. Several people said that schooling was one of the reasons why they decided to move to the area. For example, Resident 9 said she first moved to the site as a newlywed to build a home. She had seven children and moved to the area because she liked "the size of the land that allows me to farm. The schools are also not far from here for my children." One of Resident 21's fears was that the move would place considerable stress on her family's children. "We do not know where the school will be," she said. "We haven't been told anything about the school. We think that the school they are currently going to will be affected, needing demolishing, and lots of trucks will put children in danger. Relocating to a new school will be hard. They will change teachers, for instance". Unwanted disruptions in schooling are known to have a negative impacts on children's social and educational outcomes.
176. Families may not be able to commune together as they did before. Unlike in western societies, people rely on their neighbours as crucial social support. Despite the conflict that is currently underway, people still find some support in one another's neighbourliness, particularly those who are common in this collective that I interviewed. It is feared that conditions will not be favourable and that they will lose critical forms of social support.
177. Nevertheless, several of those I spoke to still said they were not happy with what was on the table, as it did not account for some of the *intangible losses*[32] (e.g., the sacredness of the homestead and ancestral grave).
178. Most residents expressed that the process of relocation misrecognised their traditional beliefs. For instance, Resident 3 said he would need to call a gathering to move the ancestral spirits from the Indumba. "He said that his offer did not meet what he needed to pay respects to the ancestors." When I asked him how he felt about the mine, he reacted emotionally and explained, "The mine has abused me repeatedly". He said they wanted the development when the Induna first called a meeting. "We were happy because many people in the community would receive jobs". He explained: "At that time, they said that they were going to relocate us, as we're inside the plan." "In principle, I was okay with the development, but said that there must be good communication about it". When I asked how he felt about being moved today, he said: "I have been abused so much. I want to go somewhere, but it is important to move the Indumba in the right way". "I need money to gather all of the traditional healers, slaughter goats, conduct rituals and move the ancestral spirits. It must be an event that is nice for them." He explained specific steps that needed to be conducted and was adamant that these traditional rituals were required. In my opinion, the absence of these rituals and the relocation would translate to a form of epistemic violence – a violence against different ways of knowing and being in the world[33]. He said there was a conflict with the amount of money offered as he said it would not pay for the costs of the traditional ceremony. He noted that it was not fair. The relation did not account for the cultural significance he explained. "That was not fair what they did in other areas, and we are being strict here owing to what we saw [referring to the horrifying experiences of grave exhumations and reburials in

[32] See more on the concept of "intangible losses" by Skosana, 2022

[33] Kidd et al., 2017; Origgi, 2012; Sonn & Stevens, 2021

Areas 1 and 2]". When I asked whether he felt culturally understood in the process, he explained, "I thought that they understood," but when he looked at what was offered, he said he felt culturally misunderstood.

179. He said that his feelings of abuse were tied to the experience of cultural misrecognition that was reflected in how little he was offered, which he said did not cover the costs of the traditional ceremonies. He also said in the process that he felt that the mines saw him as a "stupid person" and that people told him that "he does not know the value of money".
180. Resident 3 explained that when the offer was presented to him, they indicated where the land could be, but he said he was not happy to go where they wanted him to. He said, "My expectations do not meet their offer". "I said I could sign, but this was not enough". He explained that one household member illegitimately signed the offer. "After signing, I was broken, dead, betrayed…I felt empty. I looked for a rope and came to this tree [points to a tree] to kill myself, but a voice came to me and told me "What are you doing?". "I went to explain to the mine what had happened but felt that they kept dodging me." After numerous failed attempts, he nevertheless said that he was able to resolve the issue. Subsequently, he said he withdrew from negotiations, saying that he would only continue if he could speak to the head of Tendele, as he wanted to relay his experience of abuse of process.
181. Some people also described that they were afraid that they or their family members would be unable to cope with such a significant move and would be highly vulnerable. For example, those interviewed described that they were generally afraid of being relocated and would come under attack owing to the stigma surrounding older women. This fear is particular to this area, where older women are sometimes mislabeled as witches. Thus, some women feared that the new community would not accept them and that these myths would be used against them to mislabel them and, consequently, they would be seriously injured or killed.
182. Similarly, at least one family I interviewed had a family member with an intellectual disability. They said that the community had been kind to him, and he is familiar with the setting, so he can walk around and find his way home without any major issues. However, they are concerned that the move would mean he would be dislocated, potentially experiencing stigma in the new area and risk the community hurting or alienating him. Resident 9 explained: "I have a child that is disabled. When the community finds him, they bring him back, but I fear he will be hurt or killed in a new place. He can't speak. No one will help me if I move. It is a heavy load, and I don't get peace".
183. Additionally, Resident 18, as an elder woman, feared being in danger with the move owing to superstition and stigma towards elderly women. She explained: "I am always worried and concerned about the people we will be living with…We also need to be moved to a place with proper healthcare." She explained that not knowing what will happen is stressful. "I would love to be buried next to my family, next to the homestead," where Resident 18 explained she had been living her whole life. When interviewing Resident 18, it is clear that she experiences difficulties owing to her health and age. It is unrealistic to think that people who are elderly with serious health-related issues could manage an entire move without specific considerations and a supportive process. Unfortunately, this process only adds to her and others' health issues, contributing to tremendous trauma and stress for families. Her daughter expressed: "I feel like it (the process of approving the expansion of mining and relocation is

being conducted) is abusing my parents. I worry a lot about my family and my elderly parents' health. Whenever they hear about anything related to the mine, they become incredibly anxious and bothered about it" (Resident 19).

184. Some people are particularly vulnerable owing to their age and health status and would prefer to stay in the area due to the difficulties that a move would entail. Several of those whom I interviewed were elderly living with serious health conditions, and I suspect that at least one person whom I met during clinical interviews may have dementia. Families with specific needs said that the negotiation process has not fully explored particular ways in which these specific needs could be catered for. This is an area I would highly recommend being addressed. For instance, some families care for people with severe intellectual disabilities, while others care for people with a restricted psychological ability to adapt owing to their health status (e.g., suspected dementia). Additionally, some of those interviewed are severely restricted due to mobility issues and would prefer continuing to live in the place they had built up over the years rather than being dislocated and needing to deal with the move – a major physically and psychologically stressful event – in their last years of life. Thus, some people view the possibility of being relocated as a significant threat. I am particularly concerned that older adults with care needs are at particular risk and unlikely to transition well without extra support and consideration. Additionally, the stress of the move may exacerbate underlying health and neurocognitive issues.

7. The Anticipated Trauma of Being Left Behind

185. My expert opinion is that those who do not fall into the category of those affected and will be living on the fencelines of the mine experience this scenario as an anticipated trauma. Simply, they will watch their community's slow deterioration and dismantling and the destruction of the ecology, in turn, needing to deal with all the consequences. Resident 16 emphasised: "People (deemed "non-affected") were left behind."

186. Several families I interviewed will not be moved because they have been deemed to fall outside of the affected area, and therefore, they do not even have the option to move if they want to. Most people I interviewed in these areas did not want to move yet, but they said they did not have the finances even if they did. They also believe they have been given less attention in the process, and their fears have been sidelined in discussions that focus primarily on those who will be moved.

187. They fear that there will be a complete dismantling of their community. As has taken place in Areas 1 and 2, they worry that resources, such as tuck shops, community halls, and small businesses, will move away, schools will be shut down, and little will be left that resembles the life that they once had in Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages. Those who will not be moved are experiencing anticipated loss for their friends and family who will be relocated from Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages. While I believe there is potential for some repair if mining had to not operate anymore in the area, mining in Ophondweni or Emalahleni villages is likely to damage the sense of communality irreparably.

188. Residents who now stand to live close to an opencast coal mine also fear the potential for ecological destruction. There will be a significant amount of indigenous ecology lost. People described that this would hurt the wildlife in the area, which people explained include bucks, birds, eagles, insects, snakes and other wildlife. I saw several bucks roaming and birds and eagles flying around while I was in

Emalahleni village. I also witnessed a fish eagle land on the fence as I entered one of the Ophondweni village houses. The destruction of indigenous landscapes also means that those left behind will not have access to a resource that they have used in the past. For example, to gather medicinal herbs or plants for specific cultural practices. Additionally, there is fear that water scarcity will worsen due to opencast coal mining. Some interviewed feared their animals would wander the mine or be hurt by blasting.

189. Resident 23 said that it was tremendously stressful for his family to find out that the expansion of the mine would impact them. They contested this by expressing concerns about blasting, noise and other environmental issues. His family is considered "non-affected" but lives a kilometre from where the mine will be operating.
190. Additionally, people also fear toxic contamination of themselves and their livestock owing to the introduction of mining. People explained to me that they already have issues with dust from the mine in the existing mining areas when there is blasting and are familiar with the adverse situation of others living around the coal mine. Some houses still rely on rainwater as municipal water is sporadic, or there is none. They explained that they are concerned that water will be contaminated and local sources will dry up. They also worried that dust would infiltrate their houses, as it has done in other areas and having this coal dust on their bodies or being breathed in would result in serious health issues. I had witnessed this in other places where the mine operates, where people had complained about "respiratory issues, asthma, sinuses, dry nose, itchy skin when it was windy (and therefore dusty), shortness of breath, headaches, and fatigue"[34].
191. Additionally, people feared the blasting would be untenable, and the noise of trucks and other operations would degrade their lives. Moreover, people worried that these issues would exacerbate other health conditions and trigger new health issues. Such adverse conditions can worsen mental health[35].
192. Resident 10 explained that he began worrying about the mining operation in Somkhele when it started. Before this, he was uncertain about the impacts as he said he knew very little about mining and had never seen one operate. However, this unknowing radically changed, "from my house, I could hear the noise. I worried about everything – the noise, my children being affected and our livelihoods. We used to have water from the rooftops, and now I was worried about what I was drinking (the dust from the mine was said to have changed water quality)".
193. He continued, "We were scared that an elephant (the mine) was coming, so we prepared. We had the option of running or stopping and facing it. I decided to stop as my ancestral roots are here. Together in the community, we tried to look at the way forward. We decided that what we would do is to write a request to bring our issues up to the traditional authorities…we were told that space would be created." He explained that they relayed, "We cannot live with the mine". He explained that either the mine is here and we are not, or the mine does not operate, explaining to me, "The mine operates its way. It is noisy. There is blasting, air pollution". He explained that the authorities said they would relay

[34] Barnwell, 2022, p. 31

[35] Boyd, 2022; Edelstein, 2003; Vyner, 1988

the concerns to the mine, but a meeting with the mine in response never came to fruition. “We went back to [the traditional authority] as we were worried. We said there has been no action, and the problem persists.” Several of the interviewees mentioned similar frustrations of a perceived lack of response.

194. My expert opinion is that those left behind stand to suffer if the conditions resemble areas 1 and 2[36]. Living in environmental conditions with uncertainties or actual experiences of toxic contamination can cause significant psychological distress and contribute to trauma[37].

5.2 Continuous Traumatic Stress Reactions

195. In my expert opinion, most of those interviewed present with continuous traumatic stress reactions and psychological distress in response to managing the ongoing traumas and stressors (detailed in *5.1 Main Continuous Collective Traumas and Stressors*).
196. Trauma theory delineates typical characteristics of how the mind and body respond to highly stressful, often shocking, horrific, and potentially life-threatening events[38]. These occurrences lie beyond ordinary daily experiences and are intolerable in their extreme horror or intensity, infringing upon physical and psychological wellbeing.
197. Most of those I interviewed expressed high levels of psychological distress in response to the continuous traumatic stressors. For example, seventy-four percent of people interviewed with the PCL-5 (n=22) – a psychometric measure for post-traumatic stress disorder – met the criteria for probably post-traumatic stress disorder. Seventy-eight percent of people clinically interviewed (n=23) experiences align with those consistent with traumatic stress disorders.
198. The experience of ongoing and chronic trauma necessitates using the term continuous traumatic stress disorder instead of post-traumatic stress disorder, which typically refers to a past traumatic event. Nevertheless, both conditions have a comparable impact on the mind, including neurobiological and psychological effects resulting from the distressing circumstances experienced[39]. Consequently, the influence of the traumatic process is so significant that it becomes the focus for the individual, and all subsequent stressful events are interpreted through the lens of the previous trauma. A tremendous amount of physical and psychological energy is redirected into managing ongoing traumatic stressors, as well as the experience of intrusive thoughts and the mind-body’s reaction to external triggers that are located in a person’s social environment and internal triggers that are related to traumatic or stressful memories, intrusive thoughts, reactive emotional responses or bodily sensations.
199. In the context of mining authorisation and relocations, external triggers may include specific events, such as public participatory meetings or discussions about relocations, or particular people that either pose a threat or are perceived to have betrayed those who have experienced significant levels of stress and trauma.

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[36] Barnwell, 2022; Benya, 2022; Edelstein, 2018; Skosana, 2022

[37] Barnwell, 2022; Edelstein, 2003, 2018; Erikson, 1976, 1995; Vyner, 1988

[38] Erikson, 1995; Garland, 2018; Herman, 2015; Stevens et al., 2013; Straker, 2013; van der Kolk, 1998; Vyner, 1988

[39] Herman, 2015; Kaminer et al., 2018; Straker, 2013

200. Internal triggers may include intrusive thoughts about previous traumatic events (for example, the murder of Ma Fikile Ntshangase, the shootings that have occurred or the ongoing death threats), anticipated stressors (such as the move or the horror of exhuming graves), or other traumatic responses (for instance, nightmares, anxiety, reactive anger, or overwhelming bodily sensations, such as increased heart rate, sweating and physical pain).
201. The following subsections outline interviewees' psychological reactions to trauma and severe stress. Including typical traumatic features, such as intrusive symptoms, avoidance, negative alterations in cognition and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity. These reactions are organised below according to clinical criteria for post-traumatic stress[40]:
    a. **Traumatic Exposure:** Most residents interviewed were exposed to an extremely threatening or horrific event (either short- or long-lasting). These events are outlined extensively in previous sections and traumatic events were experienced directly, witnessed, or heard, meeting the criteria for post-traumatic stress. All those interviewed attributed the traumatic and other highly stressful experiences to the atmosphere of violence associated with the operation and expansion of opencast coal mining[41]. It is vital to emphasise that this atmosphere of violence that has been created means that people do not have the opportunity to fully process past traumas, as there are ongoing threats and anticipated traumas still on the horizon that create significant psychological distress[42].
    b. **Experiencing Intrusion:** A key feature of trauma is persistent reexperiencing through unwanted memories, nightmares, flashbacks, emotional distress associated with traumatic reminders, and physical reactivity to traumatic reminders. Twenty-one out of the twenty-three people clinically interviewed presented with at least one experience of intrusion. Most of those interviewed experienced multiple experiences of intrusion, with repeated disturbing, and unwanted memories of stressful events and suddenly feeling or acting as if the stressful experience were happening again being the most common (20/22 on PCL-5), followed by feeling very upset when reminded of the experience (19/22 on PCL-5), having strong physical reactions when something reminded them of the experience (e.g., heart pounding, sweating or becoming shaky) (16/22 on PCL-5), and repeated, disturbing dreams of the stressful experience (13/22 on PCL-5).
    c. **Avoidance and withdrawal:** Twenty-one out of the twenty-three people clinically interviewed presented with at least one experience of avoidance associated with trauma-related thoughts and feelings and external reminders of the stressful experience. For example, most people I interviewed said they withdrew from or avoided discussions or meetings about the mine or relocations, including public participatory processes. Several people have also gone into hiding to escape what they have described as threats to their lives. Additionally, some have limited their exposure by not going to the shops as much as

[40] World Health Organization, 2022

[41] Outlined in section *5.2 Main Continuous Collective Traumas and Stressors*

[42] Herman, 2015; Kaminer et al., 2018; Stevens et al., 2013; Straker, 2013

before avoiding community gatherings and public transport. Avoidance and withdrawal are protective functions of trauma to help mitigate potential traumatic exposures and prevent the repetition of previous traumas.

d. **Negative alterations in cognition and mood:** Twenty-one out of the twenty-three people clinically interviewed presented with at least two experiences of negative alterations in cognition or mood. For instance, an inability to recall key features of the trauma, overly negative thoughts and assumptions about oneself or the world, exaggeration of self-blame or others for causing the trauma, negative affect, decreased interest in activities, feeling isolated, and difficulties experiencing positive affect.

e. **Alterations in arousal and reactivity**: Eighteen out of twenty-three people (seventy-eight percent) of people clinically interviewed presented with irritability or aggressiveness, risky or destructive behaviour, hypervigilance, heightened startled reaction, difficulty concentrating, or trouble sleeping.

202. For all of those interviewed, symptoms have lasted for at least one month and caused functional impairments in at least one domain of functioning. For example, most residents' social life has become more restricted (for example, see section of *damage to sense of communality*). In my expert opinion, the experiences of continuous traumatic stress have adversely influenced how people make decisions and engage in discussions about mining and relocations (see *5.3 Impacts on Decision Making*).

203. Psychological Distress: The PHQ-9 is a useful psychometric measure of psychological distress. Its use in the assessment confirms the clinical findings that most of those interviewed are experiencing significant psychological distress. For example, only two people described no psychological distress, as measured on the PHQ-9. Five people fell within the category indicating *mild depression*, suggesting that some depressive reactions were present, yet they were mild. Eight people fell within the category of *moderate depression*, suggesting moderate levels of psychological distress consistent with depressive reactions. Five people fell within the *moderate to severe depression* range, suggesting moderate to severe psychological distress levels consistent with depressive reactions. Three people fell within the *severe depression* range, suggesting severe levels of psychological distress. In summary, seventy percent of those interviewed expressed clinically significant levels of psychological distress, as evidenced by falling within the *moderate*, *moderate to severe*, and *severe* ranges.

204. Suicidality and Alienation: These clinical interviews are profoundly personal and usually involve topics such as mental health and suicidal thoughts that are seldom openly discussed in everyday conversations. Even though the pain linked with these life-altering events is not necessarily contradictory to various forms of resistance, solidarity, community adaptation, and resilience, emotional distress often remains a private matter. This could be due to several reasons, such as societal stigmas surrounding mental health or traditional gender roles (e.g., the notion that "men don't cry"). Because personal or cultural mechanisms are employed to conceal suffering, it is challenging to comprehend the full extent of pain that individuals experience. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that five people I interviewed in the last month expressed that they thought they would be better off dead or hurting themselves owing to the traumatic experiences of the past or the traumatic potential that the future may hold. The vast majority (21/23) also felt hopeless, unfairly treated and

largely alienated over time. It was explained to me that people with concerns have attempted to engage in the process but, as has been described, have not managed to resolve all of their concerns.

205. Sense of Betrayal: In psychology, there is a specific form of trauma called *betrayal trauma,* where those entrusted to protect communities fail to do so either by perpetrating wrongdoings or failing to act timely or proportionately to the situation[43]. By failing to act or prevent harm from taking place, traumatic outcomes can be worsened. It is evident that people felt betrayed by those in power, particularly the traditional authority and the mining authorities, and, in my expert opinion, this has complicated recent experiences of trauma and is likely to adversely impact the manageability of future stressors.

5.3 Impacts on Decision-Making

206. In my expert opinion, experiences of managing exposures to potentially traumatic events and continuous traumatic stress can significantly affect decision-making processes in public participatory processes related to the authorisation of mining and negotiating relocations, especially in mine-affected communities where individuals have faced death threats, violence, and harassment.
207. The residents I interviewed expressed a heightened sense of threat perception and safety concerns owing to the trauma experienced (for example, Ma Fikile Ntshangase's murder, death threats, the shootings that have taken place, and harassment), as well as ongoing threats. For example, Resident 9 explained: "Her death also changed how people organised".
208. People who experience continuous traumatic stress may associate specific triggers with their traumatic experience. In this case, those I interviewed attribute the threats experienced to the process of authorising mining and the associated relocations. Thus, incidents, discussions and decisions related to mining activities can act as reminders of past traumatic experiences and anticipated stressors, intensifying threat reactions and safety concerns. This can make it more challenging to make decisions or engage effectively in the process as mental energy is instead required to manage traumatic and stress reactions, such as hyperarousal, anxiety, and avoidance.
209. In public participatory processes, some residents have withdrawn and avoided discussions, did not attend meetings, refrained from speaking, and did not express their opinions about mining or relocations. Avoidance and withdrawal from potential traumatic triggers, which may include discussions, places and people, is a common consequence of having experienced continuous threats as it is an attempt to minimise exposure to reminders of the traumatic events and to prevent or mitigate future traumatic exposures (for example, discrimination, death threats, harassment or violence).
210. This avoidance and withdrawal are exacerbated by the fact that residents experience ongoing threats, such as being targeted in meetings, deemed to be "anti-development", or "with the lawyers," receiving death threats and harassment. Such targeting may, in turn, sanction violence towards residents as they believe that they have been labelled a threat to those who are pro-mining.
211. Even though traumatic stress reactions may amplify a person's sense of threat perception and safety concerns, the ongoing atmosphere of violence is a reality that requires considerable energy to manage the constant threats. For example, two residents interviewed found it impossible to engage in the

[43] Erikson, 1976, 1995; Lingiardi & McWilliams, 2017; C. Smith, 2017; C. P. Smith & Freyd, 2014; Vyner, 1988

discussions and decisions about the authorisation of the mine, as they were in hiding, fearing that they may be physically assaulted or killed if they were to return to their community. Additionally, some residents limit their exposure in the community, staying most of their time at home and have tried to fortify their homestead with gates, dogs and other preventative mechanisms, fearing that if they overexposed themselves in discussions or afterwards in the community, they might be more vulnerable to violence targeting. This redirection of time and mental energy into managing risks means they cannot engage freely in the authorisation or relocation process. Additionally, residents may prioritise their safety concerns in decision-making processes over other benefits or opportunities, in turn putting them at a potential disadvantage in the long term. For example, some residents said they just wanted to move to escape the situation. Thus, residents' focus has shifted towards assessing and mitigating the perceived dangers (such as threats, violence and harassment) within the community associated with mining.

212. The experience of trauma and institutional betrayal has led to a generalised sense of distrust and suspicion towards authorities. Some of those interviewed did not want to deal with the mine, worrying that further exposure to mine or traditional authorities could invite additional threats, violence and harassment. Residents are less likely to trust the authorities' intentions and assurances, impacting their willingness to engage in discussions and decision-making. This lack of trust can also hinder open communication during participatory processes, leading to further challenges in decision-making.
213. After experiencing trauma and institutional betrayal, there can also be heightened emotional reactivity, including anger and irritability. From those I interviewed, this heightened sense of emotional reactivity may be associated with a sense of betrayal, injustice, and powerlessness. This emotional reactivity may influence how one engages in decisions. For instance, if the facilitator of the public participatory process or negotiator of the relocations is not sensitive to this potential for emotional reactivity, emotions such as anger or a sense of powerlessness can be triggered, making it harder to engage in measured deliberations. For example, triggering anxiety or anger may close down the ability to speak or engage at a level of detail and consideration required in discussions and meetings associated with mining authorisation and negotiating relocations.
214. It is also possible that those living with trauma may be more averse to future loss and risks. The lack of details about mining and the relocations only amplifies this aversion to future loss and threats. For example, residents said that scant information about the relocation was shared (for example, where people can live when the move occurs and when the money will be transferred). This uncertainty only amplifies loss and risk aversion. This may, in turn, backfire on the mines as more value is placed on areas of life that are certain, stable and can be controlled. For instance, residents may prioritise stability and practical certainty in their current place of residence over the potential financial and social risks of being relocated. They may also be more averse to taking risks. For instance, residents may be more opposed to re-traumatisation, having previously experienced horrific and stressful grave exhumations in Areas 1 and 2[44].

[44] See Barnwell, 2022

215. A common traumatic reaction is also the experience of dissociation and a sense of disconnection. Dissociation is a traumatic reaction where a person's thoughts and feelings are disconnected from their surroundings to protect themselves from intrusive thoughts, such as reminders of the trauma or flashbacks, or overwhelming emotions, such as a sense of powerlessness, anger or anxiety[45]. Disassociation is a protective mechanism that makes one disengage. Thus, as a consequence of this disassociation, a person may feel numb or detached, which, in turn, may make it harder to be present in discussions and meetings, creating difficulties in contributing meaningfully to critical decisions.
216. Residents who have traumatic reactions, such as disruptions in sleep, challenges concentrating, memory difficulties or anxiety, may find it more challenging to focus or concentrate on the details of the process, such as the finer details in negotiations, the facts about the relocations and repercussions on themselves and their families. This difficulty with focusing on the details of decisions may, in turn, lead to an aversion to making a decision or making a decision that has not been fully fleshed out into its finer detail, including logistics and repercussions on their future.
217. In the context of authorising mining and negotiations over relocations, there are power dynamics experienced in the community that are also said to replicate themselves in public participatory processes. Individuals fear re-traumatisation through further silencing, exclusion, misrecognition, mislabeling and marginalisation. Engagement with certain people associated with the traditional authority or the mine, places related to mining (for example, public participation meetings) or where undue community pressure may be exerted (for example, taking the taxi to meetings where those who are for mining may be or community events) are being avoided to prevent further exposure to power imbalances, being re-traumatised or placed under significant stress.
218. Residents may be more sceptical about engaging, having already experienced silencing, misrecognition and other forms of epistemic violence – violence against speech and knowledge. Several residents I interviewed expressed that the pro-mining sentiment is strong in meetings, and their voices are not heard. This is exacerbated by the strong sense of polarisation within the community where the community seems split between those identified as having signed and those who have not, who are also labelled as being "with the lawyers". The latter position within this discourse makes it difficult for residents I interviewed to bring items and concerns to discussions without them being shut down as they are deemed against the mine. Moreover, this dynamic makes it difficult to raise legitimate concerns and closes down a more nuanced discussion. Most of those I spoke to felt despondent to engage in discussions owing to the painful experience of misrecognition of their questions and concerns. They expressed that they did not feel like they were treated equally and, thus, thought that their opinions were not heard. This atmosphere of misrecognition has influenced how people have disengaged from public participatory processes.

6. Conclusion

219. In my expert opinion, the vast majority of Ophondweni and Emalahleni residents interviewed present with continuous traumatic stress reactions and psychological distress in response to managing ongoing

[45] Herman, 2015

traumatic and stressful events owing to the ongoing atmosphere of violence associated with the operation and proposed expansion of opencast coal mining in Somkhele in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

220. My expert opinion is that this atmosphere of violence, and its traumatic consequences, have adversely influenced how people make decisions and engage in discussions about mining and relocations.

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Annexure 1: Translator/Interpreter Consent

TRANSLATOR/INTERPRETER CONSENT

I consent to translate for Garret Barnwell, PhD to assist with the data collection for the expert report about the psychological experiences of those of us living in the Somkhele area for All Rise Attorneys for Climate and Environmental Justice ("All Rise").

I understand that:

- During interpreting, I will refrain from expressing personal opinions or doing anything else that might be considered an activity other than interpreting.
- I agree to respect the confidentiality of any conversation I interpret. I will not communicate, publish, or share any information from the interviews with any individual or organisation other than Dr. Barnwell and or All Rise.
- To the best of my ability, I will execute a complete and accurate translation/interpretation, not omitting or changing anything discussed during the interview. I will not explain without a specific request from the interviewee or Dr Barnwell.
- At no time will my personal opinions be allowed to interfere with any communication, and any unsolicited comments or suggestions will be made strictly to improve the quality of communication.

By verbally agreeing, I indicate that I understand and agree to the nature of translation, the purpose of this assessment, the ways in which it may be reported, and the points described.