# “We cannot eat copper dust!”: An ethnographic study of the perceptions of copper mining in Concordia, South Africa

by

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# Abstract

This master's thesis explores the diverse and contradictory perspectives on the renewed copper mining activity in Concordia, a small town in Namaqualand that was once at the centre of a booming mining industry during the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, now marked by vast socio-economic and ecological challenges. By examining the diverse perspectives surrounding the reinvestment in copper mining on Concordia's communal land, this thesis highlights the hopes, aspirations, fears, anxieties, and ambivalence that frame how community members and mining representatives envision the town's future influenced by this renewed interest . These perspectives are situated within the historical 'boom-and-bust' legacies of Namaqualand's historical copper frontier, and interpreted through the conceptual framework of collective imaginaries, particularly dreamscapes and riskscapes.

This thesis employed a qualitative research method that combined unstructured and semi-structured interviews with ethnographic observation, immersing me in the town. My findings suggest that these perceptions highlight tensions which are diversely articulated as community members either expressed: (1) complete support for copper mining, (2) total opposition, (3) support for copper mining but in opposition to the manner in which it is currently being practised, or (4) no opinion.

Understanding how these perceptions are shaped through the conceptual framework of dreamscapes and riskscapes, this study highlights the juxtaposition of these coexisting realities. For some, copper mining is part of a 'development corridor' driven by the global energy transition, which promises 'sustainable development'. However, for others, copper mining is a site of contestation with uneven impacts and risks. These contrasting perspectives highlight the current tensions surrounding reinvestment, thereby exposing fractures that characterise contemporary 'sustainable' frontiers. This study concludes that Concordia's social landscape is reconfronted by (re)emerging extractive frontiers in light of the global energy transition.



**Keywords**: Copper mining, Concordia, Copper Dreamscapes, Copper Riskscapes, Extractive frontiers

# Opsomming

Hierdie meestersgraadverhandeling ondersoek die uiteenlopende en teenstrydige perspektiewe vanweë hernude kopermynbouaktiwiteite in Concordia – ’n klein dorpie in Namakwaland wat tydens die mid-negentiende tot die twintigste eeu die kern was van ’n florerende kopermynbedryf, maar tans swaar gebuk deur sosio-ekonomiese en ekologiese uitdagings. Deur die ondersoek, blootlegging, en navorsing van die diverse perspektiewe rakende die herbelegging van die kopermyn bedryf in Concordia se grond, wat in die gemeenskapsbesit is, onthul hierdie verhandeling die aspirasies, verwagtinge, hope, vrese, en tweestryd wat die raamwerk vorm volgens lede van die gemeenskap en verteenwoordigers van die mynbou industrie die rol en impak van die hernude mynbouaktiwiteite op die toekoms, asook die voortbestaan van die dorp, sien. Hierdie perspektiewe is diep gesetel in die historiese ‘boom and bust’ nalatenskap van kopermynaktiwiteite in Namakwaland en word geïnterpreteer deur die konseptuele raamwerk van gemeenskaplike denkbeeldige sienings, spesifiek in die vorm van ‘dreamscapes’ en ‘riskscapes’.

Hierdie verhandeling het die toepassing van ‘n kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodiek behels , wat ‘n kombinasie insluit van gestruktureerde en semi-gestruktueerde onderhoude, sowel as toepassing van etnografiese waarnemings, wat behels het dat ek myself in die gemeenskap moes verdiep. My bevindings dui daarop dat hierdie persepsies van die mynbouaktiwiteite konflik uitlig wat op uitlopende maniere geartikuleer word, aangesien gemeenskapslede of (1) die mynbou ten volle ondersteun, (2) dit geheel en al teenstaan, (3) die mynbou wel ondersteun, maar die manier waarop dit geïmplementeer teëstaan, of (4) geen opinie daaroor het nie.

Deur te verstaan hoe die persepsies gevorm word deur toepassing van die konseptuele raamwerk van ‘dreamscapes’ en ‘riskscapes’, lig hierdie studie die jukstaposisie uit van die parallelle realiteite. Vir sommige mense is die kopermyne ‘n komponent van ’n ‘development corridor’ met beloftes van geleenthede, vooruitgang en groei, gedryf deur moontlike globale belegging. Daarenteen voel ander dat die kopermyn bedryf ‘n twispunt is met oneweredige impakte en risiko’s. Beide hierdie uiteenlopende perspektiewe beklemtoon die huidige spanning rondom herbelegging en ontbloot frakture kenmerkend van ‘extractive frontiers’. Dus bereik hierdie tesis tot die gevolgtrekking dat Concordia se

sociale landskap weer herkonfronteer word deur opkomende ‘extractive frontiers’ met inagneming van die globale energietransisie.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

In early April 2024, I joined seven members of the SARChI Cosmopolitan Karoo research group on a field trip to Namaqualand to explore a wide range of fascinating socio-ecological issues – including plant poaching, intensified surface erosion resulting from historical overgrazing and mineral extraction, and emerging tensions driven by the renewed copper mining ventures. On the second day of this trip, our group met Vincent[1], a representative from a leading copper mining company in Springbok – the largest town in Namaqualand – who shared insights into why renewed mining operations could foster significant socio-economic benefits for surrounding communities, many of whom were reportedly unemployed and eager to work. His approach centred on building positive relationships with these communities through several empowerment initiatives. After our discussion, Vincent guided the group to the entrance of Flat Mine, a historical mine in Nababeep – an old mining town 20 kilometres from Springbok. There, he explained that many of the dormant mines across Namaqualand are believed to contain high-grade copper, thereby offering both access to valuable primary copper resources and an opportunity to rehabilitate these historical sites – a crucial process that has been repeatedly overlooked in the past.

After the discussion and tour, I remember feeling relatively optimistic about the benefits Vincent and his company promised the region, and the future of renewed copper mining in Namaqualand seemed particularly promising. However, later that day, we met Johan, a conservationist residing in Springbok, whose work in rangeland conservation brought us to Concordia, a quaint town 15 minutes from Springbok. Here, we met Michael, a resident, who appeared curious about why our white Toyota Hilux SUVs were driving through their town. At first, Michael seemed apprehensive about our presence, but his demeanour soon relaxed after Johan explained that we were a research group from Stellenbosch University. Initially, I found this interaction somewhat peculiar. However, it later made sense when Michael explained that he had mistaken us for employees of Copper 360 – a copper mining company operating in the area. This moment marked my first direct encounter with the tensions surrounding copper mining in Concordia.

[1] All names of research participants have been anonymised using pseudonyms.

While I knew there was some form of conflict from articles on the Internet, I had not fully understood its nature or the extent to which it materialised in the community. During our conversation, Michael noted how Copper 360 had allegedly overlooked the community while obtaining its mining rights, creating divisions within the community. However, what struck me most about this discussion was his final remark: he was not opposed to mining per se, but against the manner in which Copper 360 was conducting its operations. The following day, our group met two influential members of Concordia's community, who shared how Copper 360 had allegedly attempted to discredit local opposition by labelling several members as "terrorists". They argued that the copper industry offered little to the surrounding communities in the past and questioned why these renewed ventures would provide different outcomes. Over the course of those two days, I encountered three remarkably different perspectives on the renewed mining investments, each grounded in its own logic and experience.

With this in mind, I set out to explore the motivations behind the diverse and contrasting perspectives in Concordia. Through interviews and observational fieldwork, I noted visions of hope, aspiration, fear, anxiety, and ambivalence about the future of the town under the influence of copper mining. However, only after researching the historical 'boom-and-bust' legacies of the copper industry in Concordia and Namaqualand – a region that was once at the centre of a bustling copper frontier in the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but is presently defined by socio-economic and ecological challenges – did I begin to understand why these contemporary perspectives exist.

Kemp and Owen (2024:167) define 'frontier' as a space that is "opened for development as more accessible locations are exhausted or resources become scarce". Frontiers become a space where capitalist "visions and vines and violence", which, as Anna Tsing (2003:5100) maintains, transform "global supplies" – most often natural resources – into narratives for 'development'. For Howe (2019:6), these frontiers become "extractive" when such natural resources from less affluent countries in the Global South are "possessed and sold and the proceeds are divided, often in inequitable ways". These qualities are evident in Namaqualand, a rural region that has undergone extensive forms of 'development' driven by the copper and diamond industries since 1852.

Understanding these varying perspectives as potential hallmarks of contemporary extractive frontiers raises questions about the narratives that drive these interventions, particularly in rural regions with reportedly significant socio-economic challenges. Therefore, it is first necessary to understand how these narratives are shaped and how they contribute to processes of future-making by building upon the frameworks of 'dreamscapes' (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015; Müller-Mahn, 2019; Swancutt, 2024) and 'riskscapes' (Müller-Mahn *et al.*, 2018; Müller-Mahn & Everts, 2018). These frameworks allow us to conceptualise the various perspectives through collective imaginaries and, in doing so, illustrate how an individual's actions, responses and expectations are shaped by their imagined futures.

This approach implicitly reveals how members of Concordia's community perceive and experience notions of 'development' and 'progress'. In this context, 'development' and 'progress' are terms that carry significant weight within the extractive frameworks. While they are traditionally associated with notions of growth, improvement and stability, influential work by Escobar (1995) and Ahmann (2024) reveals how these narratives – at the hands of dominant forms of knowledge and power – are becoming less convincing, and often perpetuate the opposite effects. Therefore, I use these concepts to reflect my interlocutors' expectations: a stable future that far exceeds the present conditions.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the term 'community' carries a long and complicated history in South Africa. During apartheid, concepts such as 'community', 'culture', and 'tradition' were weaponised through what Shepherd and Robins (2008:6) describe as "state-driven political and historical construction" – producing forms of ethnogenesis that organised and classified people according to race, class, gender, and education. This framing promoted a false sense of homogeneity, which Thompson *et al.* (2018:2) argue, legitimised white Afrikaner rule in South Africa. It also led to essentialist racial classifications of 'Black', 'Coloured', and 'Indian' populations, which sought to legitimise "ethnic and racial segregation" (Thompson *et al.,* 2018:2). Therefore, it is crucial to re-evaluate the terminology and recognise that languages, as Shepherd and Robins (2008:2) note, can be used to constrain agency or "open up fields of possibility and suggest daring new formulations of self and society." With this history in mind, this thesis uses the term 'community' to refer to individuals who were historically subjugated to racial segregation, but now live in close geographical proximity, while recognising that

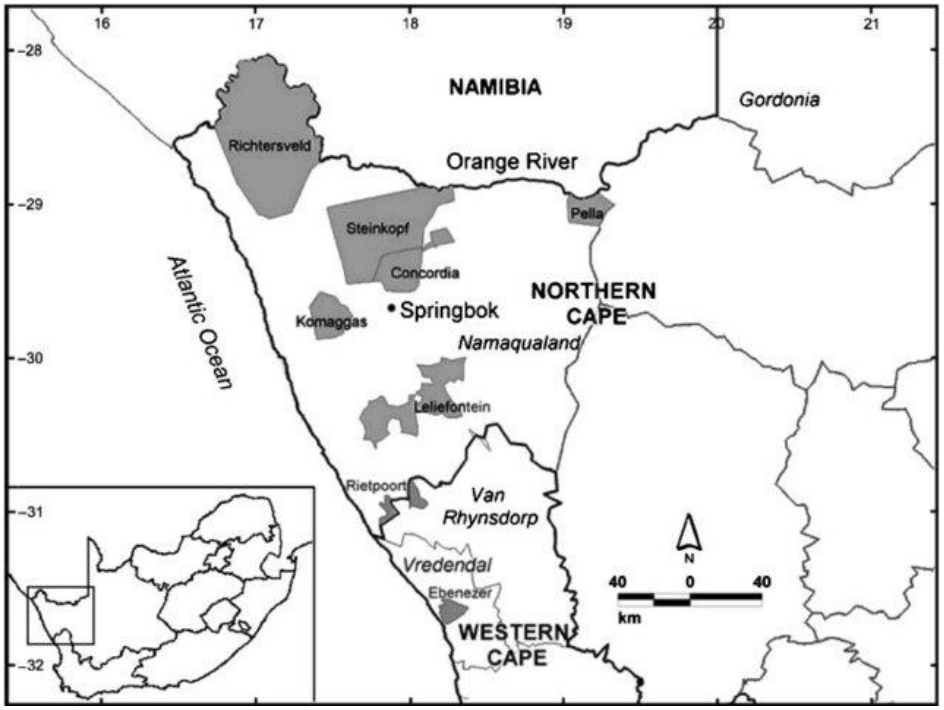
they hold contrasting perspectives on the potential influence and impact of copper mining on the town's future.

**Background**

Concordia falls under the jurisdiction of the Nama-Khoi District Municipality (NKDM) and comprises predominantly Afrikaans-speaking residents, many of whom were classified as 'Coloured' under South Africa's apartheid regime. However, many of these residents do not identify with this classification in present-day South Africa, rather choosing identities, such as "Nama" or "Namaqualander". A significant proportion of Concordia's residents live in low-income households, of which 44 percent reportedly earn less than R3,200 per month (SPP, 2025), and the majority of these residents are within the working-age group of 15 to 64 years. However, a considerable portion of the population remains unemployed amid fluctuating employment opportunities in the mining, quarrying, and agricultural sectors, which are the primary sources of economic activity in this region. Small-scale subsistence farming is also an essential part of the town's livelihood, as many households use inherited dryland plots (known in Afrikaans as *saaipersele*) to rear livestock, such as goats, sheep and occasionally cows, and cultivate crops, often oats and *mielies* (maize/corn).

According to Smalberger (1969, 1975), Dunne (1986), Kelso (2010) and Bregman (2010), the town is one of six communities in Namaqualand that were classified as 'Coloured Rural Areas' or 'Coloured Reserves' during the colonial and apartheid periods (see Chapter 3) – alongside Steinkopf, Pella, Komaggas, Leliefontein and Richtersveld, as shown in Figure 1.1 below. Today, Concordia and Richtersveld are the first communities in Namaqualand to have successfully registered their land rights through a Communal Property Association (CPA), under the Transformation of Certain Rural Areas Act (No. 94 of 1998) (TRANCRAA).

Figure 1.1: Map of Namaqualand and the historical communal areas shaded in grey



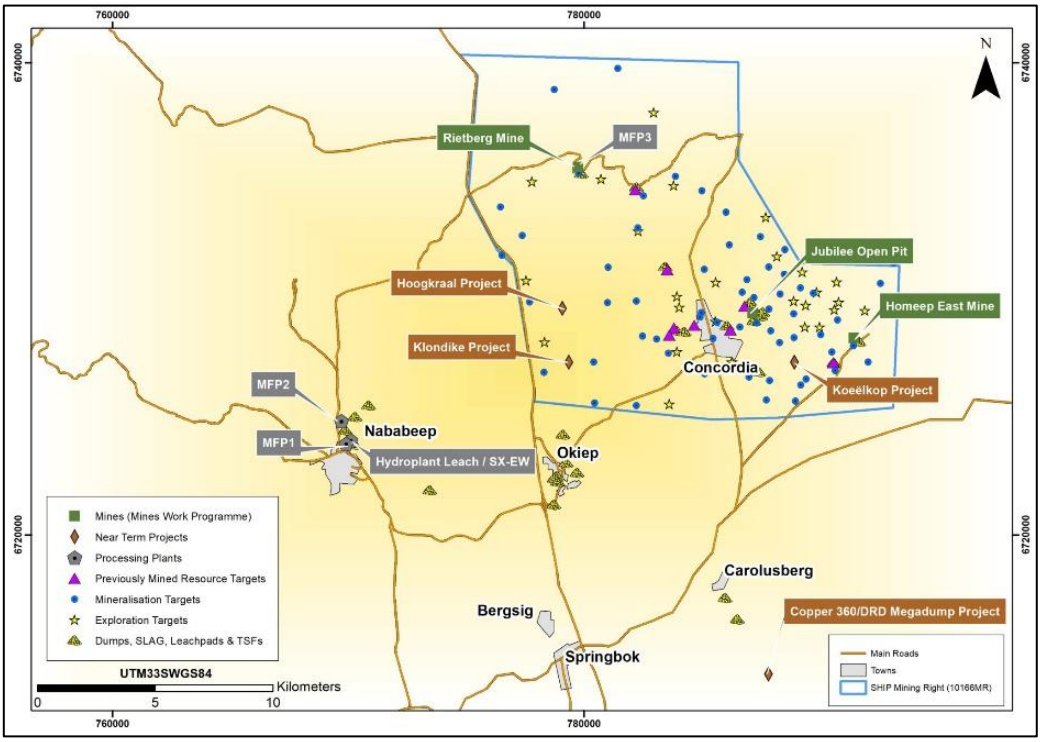

Source: Benjaminsen *et al.* (2006:525)

The TRANCRAA legislation replaced the Rural Areas Act (No. 9 of 1987), which stipulated that residents living on communal land held only limited rights of occupation, as they neither privately nor communally owned the land. According to Wisborg and Rhode (2003:1), the TRANCRAA legislation aims to uphold human rights by enabling people to make decisions regarding future land ownership through the transfer of certain land to either (a) a municipality, (b) a Communal Property Association (CPA), or (c) another body approved by the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD). In 2015, Concordia's community opted to register the town under a CPA, as the land had been held in trust by the DALRRD since 2001. However, the CPA only received the title deeds to Concordia's land on 14 February 2023.

While the land was held in trust by the DALRRD, several mining companies were granted mining rights to extract copper, granite, sand, and rare-earth metals. One particular company, South-African owned and JSE-listed, Copper 360, and its subsidiaries, Shirley Hayes-IPK (Pty) Ltd. (SHiP Copper) and Big Tree Copper, received the mineral rights to 19,000 hectares of communal farmland on 8 December 2022. These mineral rights include the excavation of three historical mines situated on Concordia's communal land:

Rietberg, Homeep East, and Jubilee. Copper 360's long-term plan is to develop a contemporary version of the 'cluster mining model' employed in the O'kiep Copper District following the beginning of successful excavations in 1852, which sparked modern industrial copper mining in the region. According to Copper 360 (2025a), this contemporary model proposes to develop 12 opencast and shaft (underground) mines located on Concordia's communal land, as illustrated in Figure 1.2 below. This mining strategy centres on a hybrid model that invests in revitalising these historical mines and processing of their tailings, while simultaneously developing new mines within the boundary. According to Shirley Hayes, founder and CEO of SHiP Copper and Non-Executive Director of Copper 360, this model for extraction is planned to increase flexibility, reduce capital expenditure, and increase production by establishing a single processing and tailings facility in Nababeep (eNCA, 2023).

Figure 1.2: Copper 360's proposed cluster mining model




Source: Copper 360 (2025b)

The challenge surrounding the title deeds under the TRANCRAA legislation highlights recurring disputes over mineral rights and land ownership. In the South African legal system, mineral rights and (surface) land ownership are separate. In terms of Section 3(1) of the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act (No. 28 of 2002) (MPRDA),

the State remains the primary custodian of all minerals beneath the earth's surface, and it has the power to grant prospecting and mining rights (Republic of South Africa, 2002:18). This means that mineral rights owners do not require the landowner's permission to commence prospecting or mining operations. As a result, Davhana (2002:3) maintains that land owners cannot "veto" the granting of prospecting or mineral rights.

However, informal landowners in communal areas remain protected under the Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act (No. 31 of 1996) (IPILRA), which preserves the surface rights of people who do not hold formal titles but do hold customary, traditional, communal or beneficiary rights of occupation. As a result, land owners still hold rights over the surface of the land, thereby giving them the right to oppose any activity that could displace them or harm the land. Held in tandem with the TRANCRAA legislation is the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which is governed by the National Environmental Management Act (No. 107 of 1998) (NEMA). This legislation aims to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources for the present and future generations, which, under Section 2(1), includes consulting with interested and affected parties (Republic of South Africa, 2017:260). However, the Minister of Mineral Resources (and Energy) is responsible for implementing and overseeing the EIA process.

Fanyane (2023:41) argues that this serves as a conflict of interest as the main objective of the DMR(E) is to "promote mining and not to administer environmental concerns". Consequently, mining companies lack sufficient compliance with the EIA process, which is evidenced by the increasing number of unrehabilitated mines and the lack of genuine communal consent in South Africa. As a result, the EIA process has arguably become less of an environmental justice system and more of a procedural checklist. Therefore, the MPRDA's control over land's mineral resources clashes with TRANCRAA/IPILRA legislation, resulting in ongoing disputes between affected communities and mining companies.

In Concordia, this tension is reflected in two cases involving the local municipality and the Copper 360. The first concerns the contested ownership of land allocated to Copper360/SHiP Copper, whereby the Nama-Khoi Local Municipality claims ownership, despite TRANCRAA legislation granting these rights to the CPA. The second involved

escalating tension between community members and Copper 360 on 9 August 2023 – South Africa's national Women's Day – when several residents protested outside the gates of the Jubilee mine in Concordia about the mining company's inadequate consultation and the reported lack of proper communal consent. This included the company's inadequate precautionary environmental measures – namely, conducting extractive operations on a site that encroaches upon a residential boundary[2]. According to Human (2023), this protest led to altercations between residents, mine workers and the South African Police Service (SAPS) later that evening. In response to this incident, Copper 360's CEO, Jan Nelson, maintained that the company had "followed all the regulatory processes to get [their] mining license", in addition to passing an audit from the Department of Mineral Resources (Copper 360, 2023). However, this incident left a sour mark for many in Concordia, including WoMin African Alliance[3], who continue to advocate for adequate communal consultation and proper informed consent in Namaqualand.

This incident highlights two issues: (1) the disputed relationship between TRANCRAA, EIA, and the MPRDA, and (2) how tensions surrounding this legislation reinforce perspectives that resist the renewed copper mining. Therefore, as South African mining laws prevent communal land rights holders from opposing mineral rights, the CPA's legal claim to the land reinforces the community's insistence on proper consultation and environmental protection, which is essential to their livelihood (see Chapter 5). This public dispute raises concerns about environmental injustice and neglected human rights, as residents reported increased dust pollution, damage to natural aquifers, and limited access to communal land. This marks the beginning hallmarks for what this thesis argues to be the (re)making of extractive frontiers within Concordia's landscape.

**Problem statement and rationale**

The copper mining industry in Namaqualand has been at the forefront of cycles of economic growth and decline for over 150 years. Today, the renewed copper mining activity in Concordia is positioned as a driver for local, regional, national and global

[2] According to Section 48(1)(a) of the MPRDA, no reconnaissance permission, prospecting right, mining right or mining permit can be issued in respect of "land comprising a residential area" (Republic of South Africa, 2002:50).

[3] WoMin African Alliance is a Pan-African ecofeminist NGO which partners with women and communities who are impacted by large-scale mining and extractive industries.

'development'. While the scale of the region's copper industry does not compare to that of the Palabora mine in South Africa's Limpopo province, renewed mining ventures could place Namaqualand back on the global map, potentially creating a new era of copper mining that South Africa has not yet seen. However, this reinvestment raises concerns about the nature of these new mining ventures, particularly in a region that is reportedly eager for new opportunities.

Considering this, the revitalisation of Concordia's historical copper mines is met with vastly contrasting perspectives – some are hopeful about the opportunities that this industry could bring to the town. In contrast, others are either ambivalent or refuse to accept this image of 'progress', arguing that it could lead to dispossession, exploitation, and environmental destruction. Therefore, as technological innovation spurs global and national investments into revitalising Namaqualand's copper industry, of which Concordia is the first site of many projects, I argue that these efforts position Concordia as a telling site for (re)making historical extractive frontiers.

Academic research, such as Lewis *et al.* (2017), Gamu and Soendergaard (2024), and Dehkordi *et al.* (2024), and policy discourses, such as the World Bank's Policy Research Working Paper No. 7263. (Aragona *et al.,* 2015) focused on political, economic, and technical concerns rather than examining how communities imagine the future of their towns in the context of renewed mining activity. As a result, I observed that less is known about how these different perspectives are formed and practised in relation to people's lived experiences. Here, I argue that, without considering perspectives, there is a substantial chance that new mining frontiers could follow historical extractive patterns marked by socio-economic turbulence and environmental destruction.

Here, I raise the question: what information can we gather from these contrasting perspectives and expectations? I argue that behind each of these voices lies an implicit need for change. Changing current circumstances, changing 'old' mining methods, and changing the future to be more inclusive. Consequently, focusing on the rationales of the perspectives reveals tensions surrounding the visions of copper mining in Concordia – one that is both an optimistic symbol of 'progress' and opportunity (a dreamscape) and a dystopian site of unequal development and risk (a riskscape). These different

perspectives not only highlight current socio-economic and structural issues prevalent in Namqualand, but also reveal hallmarks for contemporary extractive frontiers.

**Aims and objectives**

Considering the various contradictory perspectives arising from renewed copper interest, as influenced by global copper transitions, this thesis aims to understand how these perspectives can be framed and articulated through notions of utopia, risk and ambivalence. Understanding how these three aspects overlap demonstrates how historical legacies of Namaqualand's copper frontier are reconfronted and rearticulated within Concordia's contemporary landscape. This framing focuses on three aspects: (1) Namaqualand's historical copper frontiers, (2) dreamscape analysis that understands how perceptions of hope and optimism contribute towards visions of a 'utopian' future, and (3) a riskscape framework that situates fear, apprehension and ambivalence towards the influence of copper mining on the communal land's future.

This analysis of the current reinvestment in copper mining in Concordia highlights three implicit structural issues within the global and national discourses. Firstly, it contributes to the academic literature on extractive frontiers and moves beyond policy and economic analyses by focusing on collective imaginaries of local actors and their lived experiences. Secondly, the theoretical frameworks of dreamscapes and riskscapes expose the present socio-economic and environmental inequities that are embedded within Concordia's community. Lastly, it offers diverse insights into the structural flaws in government legislation, which may inform researchers, policymakers, mining representatives, and local communities as they navigate the contested nature of mining frontiers in Namaqualand.

**Research Questions**

My overarching concern is to capture what people in Concordia think about the renewed copper mining operations in the area. Using the town as a case study, this thesis addresses two main questions:

1. How do the community members understand the impact of the renewed copper mining interests on the historical mines on their land?

2. What opportunities does this reinvestment offer to the community, and does this have any influence on the perceptions of people in the town?

While these two questions seek to capture a broader understanding of the reintroduction of copper mining in the region, additional sub-questions seek to capture the nuanced nature of these perspectives:

i. What are some of the hopes/aspirations/optimisms or concerns/apprehensions/fears that members have regarding the mining activity?
ii. How can we understand these feelings of optimism/apprehension/ambivalence in relation to the socio-economic and environmental impacts of Namaqualand's copper mining legacy?
iii. What is driving copper mining on a global, national and local scale?
iv. What are the roles of the South African government and the local Nama Khoi Municipality in securing the renewal or granting of prospecting rights, mining rights and mining permits?

**Methodology and fieldwork reflection**

During my fieldwork, I interviewed 19 residents, six local subsistence farmers in Concordia, one representative from Orion Minerals and another from Copper 360. While I planned to interview local government officials, arranging these interviews was particularly challenging, and after considerable effort, I ultimately decided to do without this component of the research. Many of my interlocutors in Concordia were referrals from people I met during my initial visit in April 2024, and contact information for the mining representatives was available online, and while I had initially planned to use a snowball sampling method for the interviews, I quickly realised that it would be unsuccessful. Most of my participants in the town referred me to others who shared their opinions, mostly those who were equally critical/supportive of the mining activity. This approach skewed the diversity of perspectives in my initial data and to counter this, I adjusted my approach to include 'random selection', broadening the range of perspectives by interviewing strangers in shops and on the streets. Initially, this method proved difficult, given that many of the individuals I approached were sceptical of my presence in the town – as an unfamiliar white woman driving a conspicuous unmarked SUV with a

Gauteng Province number plate, asking 'sensitive' questions, I was, according to several of my participants, the epitome of an '*inkomer*' (outsider). To navigate this, I started the interviews by asking people about their lives, why they live in the town, what keeps them there, and what their plans are for the future, and I found that this approach often broke the initial awkwardness of the conversation. As I spoke to more people, members of the town slowly started to accept my presence and even showed interest in my research. However, I was still aware that I was a woman travelling alone in an unfamiliar town, which initially made it difficult to apply an ethnographic approach of data collection, but as I spent more time in the town and spoke to various people, I became more comfortable going to areas I was previously anxious to visit, such as the Wheal Julia mine on the town's periphery.

During the course of these interviews, I identified four perspectives on the renewed copper mining projects: (1) complete support for copper mining, (2) total opposition, (3) conditional support of copper mining but in opposition to the manner in which it is currently practised, or (4) no opinion. I initially interpreted the absence of opinion as a lack of awareness of the mining activity in the town. While this assumption held for some, I later observed that many deliberately chose to withhold their opinions, fully aware of the community tensions arising from these conflicting perspectives. From the beginning of this research, I anticipated engaging with very real people who are navigating significant challenges. However, what I had not fully considered was the expectation that would accompany my position as a student from Stellenbosch University. I vividly recall moments when my participants – particularly those who opposed the renewed mining operations – expressed gratitude, believing that I was there to 'help them push back' against the mining company. Despite my repeated insistence that I was not in any position to advocate for or represent any particular side, my academic presence was nonetheless perceived as support, which made navigating these perspectives particularly challenging – especially when I interviewed people with different views. Given this experience, navigating the various perspectives was especially challenging, particularly after seeing these old historic mines left unrehabilitated and hearing former mineworkers accounts of working in harsh environments. As a result, after my first period of field work in September 2024, I noticed that my interlocutors' lived experiences and values influenced my personal perceptions of the tension surrounding the mining activity. This resulted

from speaking mostly to residents who strongly opposed the mining, as well as residents who were also members of the WoMin activist group (see footnote 2). After my first phase of fieldwork, my position of remaining impartial was particularly challenging. These accounts hindered my efforts to explore all avenues of these tensions, leading me to focus solely on 'anti-mining' literature. However, during my second phase of field work in April 2025, I intentionally sought out more people who supported these ventures.

**Research Ethics**

This study adheres to the ethical regulations set out by Stellenbosch University's (SU) Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) and the International Sociological Association (ISA). This includes taking measures to protect the identities of all participants by using pseudonyms and removing any information that may be used to identify them. The proposal (Project ID #: 30781) for this research was submitted to the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC) and the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Stellenbosch University in 2024, which was approved as a low-risk study on 25 September 2024. The local perceptions surrounding the renewed copper mining operations in Concordia, as well as the information collected from representatives of Orion Minerals and Copper 360, were not deemed to be sensitive in nature under ethical guidelines.

Either written or verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants before I conducted structured and semi-structured interviews. Here, participants were provided with documents explaining the purpose of my study and their rights as participants. These documents were provided in both English and Afrikaans, with each participant receiving a copy in their language of choice. Additionally, I used the Stellenbosch University-approved verbal consent form for participants who were unable to read or write.

Data security involved ensuring the information I collected in the field remained confidential. This involved securing the information on my SU OneDrive account on my password-protected laptop. Throughout this study, I have used pseudonyms to refer to my participants to ensure their privacy and dignity are respected. In addition to this measure, I have removed all information that may be used to identify them. I have also respected SU protocols for interviewing staff members of Copper 360 and Orion Minerals.

Furthermore, while my original proposal indicated that I would recruit mine workers through Copper 360 and Orion Minerals, I ultimately conducted the interviews independently, meeting participants after work hours in their homes. Therefore, 'Gatekeeper' permission forms, as stipulated by REC, were not required.

**Chapter outline**

This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapters 1 to 3 serve as framing chapters that reveal the contemporary issues, the historical legacies, and the theoretical framework of collective social imaginaries, respectively. These chapters form the foundation that arguably allows us to navigate the diverse social landscapes of Concordia, which is introduced in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 frames how aspirations for the future of the town and the region form a 'utopian' landscape (a dreamscape) that far exceeds the present conditions. In contrast, Chapter 5 explores how fear and apprehension shape a landscape of risk (a riskscape) that is entrenched in historical, yet apparent, extractive frontiers. Additionally, this chapter discusses how ambivalent perceptions are also entrenched with these landscapes of risk and, as a result, becomes a pivotal point in reimagining how discourse shapes the ways in which local livelihoods are contingent on large, multi-scalar extractive industries amidst a potentially new copper frontier.

# Chapter 2: Understanding the historical legacies of copper mining in Namaqualand

"And how we do construct the past and our memories of it, building on archives that are continuously reconstructed through negotiation and dispute, bears on how we do see our future".
– Appadurai (2013:16)

Understanding the different perspectives on copper mining in Concordia as visions of the future invites a critical reflection on the past. History cannot simply be disregarded because it offers a lens through which to view the present and understand the future. Within this framework, the cycles of 'boom and bust' of Namaqualand's copper frontier emerge as a prominent theme, framing the diverse and contrasting perspectives of optimism, apprehension, and ambivalence that are presently evident in Concordia. Peak periods within this legacy reveal cycles of prosperity – which primarily favoured mine owners and international investors – that reshaped Namaqualand's industrial landscape for many years to follow. These periods of growth had a transformative influence on the surrounding mining towns and their infrastructures in ways that predominantly benefited the mining industry. For example, Bregman (2010:72) notes that by the end of the nineteenth century, capital from the copper industry in O'kiep[4] financed the construction of new roads, the introduction of the town's postal service, and the development of the railway line to Port Nolloth, all of which propelled the region into a new phase of industrialisation. I argue that this sense of prosperity, while prejudiced towards white mine owners, continues to inspire narratives of hope and opportunity that exist in Concordia today. However, frequent periods of decline throughout this copper legacy illustrate how these very opportunities became obsolete when mining companies could no longer provide socio-economic support. Revisiting these historical legacies provides a unique lens through which to view and situate the current contrasting perspectives surrounding the renewed mining ventures in Concordia.

The history of copper mining in Namaqualand is neither linear nor uniform. Rather, it reflects complex interactions between colonial expansion, industrial modernisation, apartheid influences, and the challenges of an unforgiving landscape. This history has

[4] Over the years, the spelling of the town has changed. In this thesis, I use the modern spelling, O'kiep, to refer to the town today, but older texts, such as Cairncross (2004), use the older spelling, 'O'okiep'.

been extensively documented and occasionally challenged by scholars – such as Smalberger (1969), Dunne (1986), Cairncross (2004), Kelso (2010), Bregman (2010), Cloete (2024) and many more – whose contributions provide valuable insights into the evolution of the region's economy and social structures. Drawing on these works, this chapter examines the historical expansion of extractive frontiers in Concordia, and the broader Namaqualand region – from tracing its origins as a missionary station to its emergence as a thriving copper mining settlement and, later, its designation as a State-owned 'Coloured Reserve' under colonial and apartheid governance. This historical framework, therefore, lays the foundation for understanding how residents imagine their futures in Concordia, as narratives of hope, apprehension, and ambivalence are arguably inseparable from the dreamscapes of opportunity and the riskscapes of uncertainty.

**Early history of copper mining in Namaqualand**

Many believed that copper mining in Namaqualand was solely a product of European influence during the nineteenth century. However, Cairncross (2004:290-296) challenges this notion, proposing that Namaqualand's copper legacy dates back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with well-documented evidence suggesting that "[t]he local Namaqua people were wearing copper bands on their arms and ankles when they first met the Dutch explorers in the 1660s…" (Cairncross, 2004:290). Smalberger reinforces this claim, citing a letter in Jan van Riebeek's journal from the Danish explorer, Pieter van Meerhof, who noted the elaborate copper adornments worn by the Namaqua,

> Their dress consists of all kinds of beautifully prepared skins…gorgeously ornamented with copper beads…Their locks they thread with copper beads, covering their heads all over. Around their necks, they have chains, slung around them 15 or 16 times. Many have round copper plates suspended from these chains. On their arms, they have chains of copper and iron beads which go around their bodies 30 or 40 times. Their legs are encased in plaited skins, ornamented with beads…Their only industry is working in copper and iron, from which they make very neat beads and chains (van Meerhof in Smalberger, 1975:11).

This evidence suggests that the Namaqua and Khoikhoi possessed knowledge of working with copper long before European expansion into Southern Africa. Cairncross (2004:291)

explains that van Meerhof's interaction with the Namaqua was most likely the catalyst that motivated six unsuccessful expeditions for copper, the last effort ending in 1664. This changed in 1684 when the Dutch explorer Izaq Schrijver and his team joined a group of Namaqua on their return to Namaqualand. While their preliminary expedition to "Copper Mountain" was unsuccessful, Smalberger notes that Schrijver and his team "did manage to barter a sack of copper ore from a party of Namaquas which they brought back with them" (1969:1), leading to Simon van der Stel's visit to the region in August 1685. However, after persistent exploration and mining in an area they called *Koperberg* (copper mountain), the copper deposits proved far less substantial than anticipated and insufficient to justify the immense effort required to extract and transport to the Cape.

While these initial expeditions to discover copper and gold were unsuccessful, Smalberger (1975:13) maintains that they served,

> important in many ways as pioneering contact between white and brown in the north-western part of the Cape. Thereafter, hunters, livestock traders and others journeyed to the territory in increasing numbers…

News of a world untouched by colonial influence quickly reached Europe. In 1761, following yet another unsuccessful expedition to the Orange River (today known as the Richtersveld), Afrikaner explorer Hendrick Hop pioneered a new journey into the area but was once again unsuccessful. The hunt for copper had reportedly stalled until 1836, when British Army officer James Alexander led an expedition on behalf of the Royal Geographical Society. The efforts of Alexander and his team spurred interest in Namaqualand's mineral resources, which Rawson (2022:19) argues, put Namaqualand on the map as a "meeting point and melting pot of many different groups and cultures" - most influentially, European missionaries.

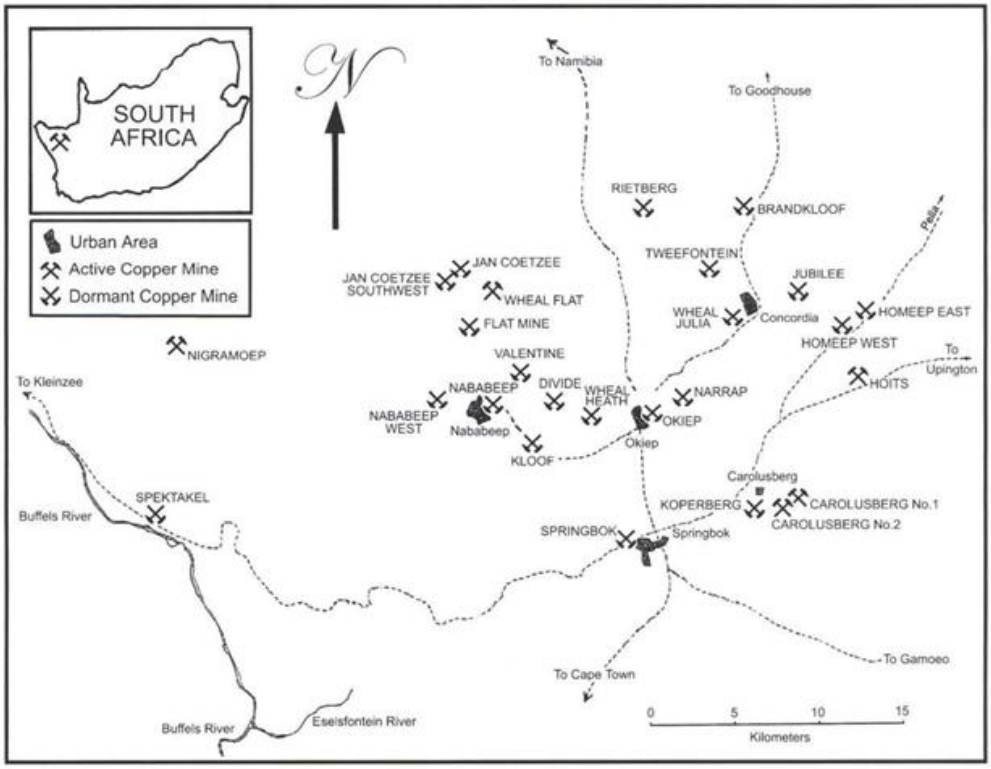
Between 1841 and 1909, missionaries from the German Rhenish Missionary Society (RMS) travelled into present-day Namibia, Namaqualand and the Greater Karoo region (Dunne, 1986:28). According to Dunne (1986:29), members of the RMS established several stations across the Namaqualand region in an effort to introduce Christianity to the local Namaqua and Khoikhoi, a process that was deliberately aimed at disrupting their "nomadic lifestyle". At the same time, the region faced immense pressure from the encroachment of Dutch colonists known as *trekboers*. By 1847, missionary influence

collaborated with Namaqua leadership to secure control over certain territories through the acquisition of "Tickets of Occupation", which, as Dunne (1986:33) maintains, were legal instruments that granted communal land ownership under the authority of the missionaries and chiefs.

However, though initially presented as a way to 'protect' the Namaqua and Khoikhoi land from the Dutch colonial authorities, this form of land ownership ultimately became a tool of 'coercion'. As Kelso (2010:197) explains, the British colonial government's granting of legal rights bound the missionaries to State policies that reinforced imperial interests. These policies were "designed to coerce people into labour through the means of hut tax and attempts to privatise lots of land to remove 'unproductive people'" from the land (Kelso, 2010:197). In practice, those deemed "unproductive" – reportedly the Namaqua and Khoikhoi – who, despite the supposed protection of the RMS missionaries, were forced into farming and eventually into wage labour within the local copper and gold mining industries.

Copper and gold mining erupted in the Namaqualand region with the first 'boom' in 1852 in Spektakel and Springbokfontein – present-day Springbok (Cairncross, 2004:299). Bregman (2010:65) maintains that news of high-grade gold and copper deposits took the country by storm, sparking a national 'copper fever', and two years later, 22 mining companies were established in an area now known as the O'okiep Copper District (illustrated in Figure 2.1 below). According to Ronaldson (1905:268), during the first major copper boom from 1852 to 1862, mines in the region extracted an average copper grade of 29.5 percent. However, an English mining journalist cautioned against the rapid investment in mining companies in the region, stating an overall lack of knowledge about the land, questionable agents who "knew nothing of mining or labour previous to their arrival", insecure leasing periods, and unfavourable financial conditions for foreign investment (Dunne, 1986:42). This somewhat understudied area, flooded by 'copper fever', marked the beginning of a long extractive frontier in Namaqualand.

Figure 2.1: The legacy of the O'okiep Copper District in Namaqualand




Source: Cairncross (2004:290)

Concordia – which remained part of Steinkopf's Missionary boundary until 1909 – played a key role in the rapid copper expansion within the region, hosting three mines – Tweefontein, Hester Maria, and Wheal Julia – all of which produced successful reserves during their lifespans. The establishment of copper mining in this area began in 1853, when Concordia Consortium, part of the Namaqua Mining Company (NMC), conducted exploration work in the area following its competitor, Phillips & King, who reportedly acquired rich deposits at 'Blue Mine' in Springbokfontein (Smalberger, 1975:55; Cairncross, 2004:302). According to Smalberger (1975:57), the Missionary Institute in Steinkopf owned the land on which Concordia currently resides, and NMC was, therefore, required to lease it from the Church for a period of 10 years. Mining operations only commenced in 1854, supported by £60,000 in funding from a group of Scottish investors. By 1973, the Tweefontein mine had created employment opportunities, which "ranged from 150 to 500 persons, depending upon circumstances" and by 1875, there were reportedly 10 houses and 219 huts and tents with a population of 961 people (Smalberger, 1975:97). Therefore, this information illustrates that international investments, and collaborations with the State and the RMS largely drove the mining

ventures in the Steinkopf/Concordia territory. These efforts to connect this region's copper reserves to global production networks reveal an expanding extractive frontier – one that continues to be reimagined in the present.

Despite this booming industry, Concordia rapidly declined in just two years as production dropped due to transport and shipping costs, resulting in socio-economic consequences, illustrated by Smalberger (1975:97-98),

> …in August 1875, the mines in Concordia were still at work…but with a very small degree of energy…for in 1877, the village was described as very small…[t]he buildings could be listed on the fingers of one hand, being three shops and two houses. There remained then only the church, parsonage and school.

As a result, the NMC liquidated all of its assets and was bought by a new regional mining company, the Concordia Copper Company, which later became the Namaqua Copper Company. Smalberger (1975:98) notes that this change in management revived the mining industry in Concordia, and by 1891, the town's infrastructure, including the mining equipment, reportedly skyrocketed in value.

Ronaldson (1905:268) maintains that by the end of 1904, both the Tweefontein and Hester Maria mines produced successful copper yields of 138,683 tonnes and 3,500 tonnes, respectively. Kelso (2010:176) notes that during the second wave of copper mining in this area (between 1869 and the mid-1880s), the industry's workforce primarily consisted of migrant labourers, with "144 Europeans and 625 Africans". While copper mining appeared to offer employment opportunities, Kelso (2010:177) argues that the influx of migrant labour was largely influenced by coercive pressures from the Rhenish Missionaries, who promised fair wages and access to land. However, the decline in the global copper market exposed the consequences of the industry's reliance on migrant labour, resulting in widespread "job losses and declining demand for transport", followed by resistance from the Namaqua, who refused to exchange "insecure wage labour" for their "primary obligation of pastoralism" (Kelso, 2010:177). This history reveals the precarious and disruptive nature of extractive frontiers – a characteristic that Tsing (2003:5100) refers to as "a climate of chaos and violence". Without the mass

exploitation of migrant labour – driven by duplicitous efforts from the RMS – Namaqualand's copper frontier could not have achieved the level of success it did.

However, dynamics within this frontier dramatically shifted during the South African War (1898-1902). During this period, all mining operations ceased due to the conflict between the British Empire and the Boer Republics, when General Jan Smuts launched a raid on the Copper Fields in the region (Fleminger, 2020:103). In 1902, Concordia – then under British rule – surrendered to the Boer Republics, who later transformed the town into a base for hunting springbok (Fleminger, 2020:103; von Zeil & Thomas, 2011:244). Kelso (2010:177) notes that the war coincided with a long global decline in copper demand, and as a result, encouraged residents from the mission stations to gradually migrate to the Cape, bringing opportunities for waged labour with them. This migration, resulting in the decrease in both wage labour and copper demand, "increased the risk of the population and exposed them to broader economic threats" (Kelso, 2010:177). The result of little to no wage labour reportedly exacerbated poverty, hawking, and theft in the region, leaving few opportunities for socio-economic development. To thwart these social ills, Dunne (1986:36) notes that in 1896, the governing Committee of Namaqualand invoked Act 29 of 1909, which stipulated that adult males living in these State-owned communal areas were required to pay tax. This policy functioned as an incentive designed to force (Namaqua, Khoikhoi, African and Coloured) men into waged labour to eliminate "the idle and lazy" (Dunne, 1986:35).

**Copper mining trends throughout the twentieth century**

Due to the South African War, typhoid fever in the mines (Kelso, 2010:176) and prolonged drought (Bregman, 2010:78), the copper industry experienced a significant decline in the early twentieth century. Consequently, these factors limited everyone's access to arable land in the region, resulting in the introduction of the Mission Stations and Communal Reserves Act in 1909. Bregman (2010:78) notes that this legislation was "aimed at benefiting poor white [farmers]", as it placed these missionary stations under government control, forcing their members to retreat to rockier, less fertile land unsuitable for farming (Bregman, 2010:78). Consequently, missionaries and members of mission station communities lost jurisdiction over the civil affairs of their territories and

were compelled to comply with stringent government laws that heavily favoured the Afrikaner minority.

As Bregman (2010:80) notes, this shift in land policy "enforced [racial] segregation by creating homelands for the [B]lack population of the country whereby 87% of the land fell into white hands, while the majority of South Africa's inhabitants were left with a mere 13%". Additionally, these new legislations introduced a "head tax for each adult male" living on these reserves, which Bregman (2010:79-80) claims to have prompted an influx of (cheap) waged labour into Namaqualand, thereby forcing local subsistence farmers to resort to working in the mines. In 1907, this influx of exploitative labour led to the beginning of yet another copper 'boom' and by 1908, the Namaqua Copper Company – which operated the Tweefontein mine in Concordia – reportedly employed a total of 669 people and by 1908, the company exported 33,428 tonnes of copper, the highest the area had ever recorded (Smalberger, 1975:103,128).

However, the period just before the First World War (1914-1918) was likely the most lucrative for the copper industry. During this time, copper production increased tenfold due to its use in bullet jackets and shell casings (Jowell & Folb, 2004:71) and in telecommunication equipment, such as telegraphs and telephone wires (Brooks, 1918:527). However, all mining operations were suspended in 1919, due to the "post-war slump", and the South African government's decision to cease all copper shipments to Britain (Dunne, 1986:47; Smalberger, 1975:104).

During this dormant period, both the Namaqua Copper Company and the Cape Copper Company were forced to retrench majority of their workforce (Dunne, 1986:47). The social consequences of which are vividly captured in a letter to the Editor of the Cape Times newspaper,

> On Friday, 23rd May [1920], all day men [were] dismissed at once, weekly men [were given] a week's notice, monthly a month, contract men three months. Daily men means coloured labour, about 1,000. Paid daily, their wage was daily spent on today's or yesterday's food. Their wage had recently been reduced to 3 [shillings] per day, and before the crisis some families were actually starving… But, for men with families to maintain, there was little margin for saving… (T.G. Le Mesurier in Smalberger, 1975:112).

This socio-economic slump in Namaqualand persisted for more than a decade. During this time, Namaqua, Khoikhoi, Black, and Coloured workers were still forced, under the Mission Stations and Communal Reserve Act, to engage in wage labour to pay the 'head tax,' despite scarce employment opportunities outside the mining industry. This insecurity displaced many workers, with some migrating to other mining centres, such as Kimberley or the Rand gold mines, while others turned to forms of *pluriactivty*[5]. This displacement deepened the socio-economic marginalisation of these communities, who, as Bregman (2010:80) notes, were already living in poverty.

Following the post-war slump in copper demand, the Great Depression in Europe (1929-1939) led to the permanent closure of the Namaqua Copper Company in 1931. As author Carel Birkby observed in a letter, this closure left Concordia "a place of slumbering silence, peopled only by one or two workmen, who…watch the corpse of the mine they once saw alive…" (Smalberger, 1975:104). Consequently, more families moved to these State-owned 'Coloured Reserves' where subsistence farming became a vital source of livelihood. However, these allocated farmlands were insufficient to sustain the growing population. Hongslo *et al.* (2009:64) highlight the severity of this issue, noting that the communal areas "provided each individual farmer with less than a tenth of the amount of land per individual" compared to the (white) commercial farmers on private farmland in the area. By the mid-twentieth century, approximately 30,000 people resided in these communal areas, which together comprised only 23 percent of the region's land (Benjaminsen & Sjaastad, 2008:266). Hongslo *et al.* (2009:72) note that this increased population density placed significant pressure on these environments, resulting in a "major decline in vegetation cover and species composition in the communal areas before 1939", a period that coincided with the widespread closure of mines in the region. In 1937, Namaqualand's O'okiep Copper Company (OCC) received financial support from several American and Canadian investors, and by 1939, the OCC had purchased all mineral leases held by the Namaqua Copper Company, which owned all the mines in Concordia (Smalberger, 1975:123-124). However, large-scale production only began in 1940 with the start of World War II (1939-1945), which again generated an urgent copper demand.

[5] Anseeuw and Laurent (2006:660) define *pluriactivity* as the method "when people combine several occupational activities over a period of time", such as combining mining and subsistence farming, "due to a lack of income resulting from a single activity, and may be only temporary."

By 1945, the region had once again returned to full production, attracting workers and opportunities to the mining towns and by 1951, the Wheal Julia mine in Concordia was back in production, once again boasting successful copper production (Dunne, 1986:139).

Smalberger (1975:125) notes that the OCC was consequently one of South Africa's most prolific copper producers, not only restoring the country's visibility on the international market, but also serving as a major source of employment. Between 1940 and 1972, the OCC had produced 889,467 tonnes of copper, and by 1982, this figure had risen to 1,632,960 tonnes (Dunne, 1986:141). Smalberger (1975:125) attributes this success largely to the company's extensive mobilisation of (exploitative) labour, employing a "large number of Whites (1,036), Coloureds (1,996) and Africans (2,080)…". Simultaneously, the OCC created a dependent local economy by providing a market for "local agriculturists", who were otherwise "too distant to supply national markets" (Smalberger, 1975:125). However, when the mines ceased all operations, these narratives and opportunities for 'development' once again caused more damage to people who depended on them.

For this reason, Cloete (2024:46) highlights that one of the overarching reasons for the OCC's permanent closure in 2003 was the "notable shifts" in the political and legislative landscape of a newly democratised South Africa. New labour laws that prioritised Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) reshaped both the "makeup of the workforce and the ownership structure of mines" (Cloete, 2024:46). Consequently, the majority of White-owned mining companies, such as the OCC – which resisted or failed to adapt to these legislative and socio-political changes – were unable to remain viable within the transformed industry. This observation reveals the precarious nature of Namaqualand's economy, emphasising how this extractive frontier controlled the region's socio-economic stability. These effects serve as a persistent reminder of the past injustices inflicted by the region's extractive frontier. In this sense, Namaqualand's extractive frontier not only generated patterns of exploitation but also reinforced social and economic dependencies in Namaqualand. This narrative questions the outcomes of the renewed mining ventures in Concordia today.

Additionally, McCulloh's research on the then-predicted closure of Namaqualand's largest diamond mining company, De Beers Namaqualand Mines (DBNM), in 2002 highlights the

severity of these socio-economic dependencies. According to McCulloh (1994:1), during periods of low copper demand, diamond mining became the region's focal industry, generating employment, creating and supporting secondary industries with stable markets, and improving infrastructure. However, much like the copper industry, diamond mining also faced periods of fluctuating commodity prices, leading to worker retrenchments and eventual closure. For McCulloh (1994:8-9), mine closures have a substantial impact on the local environment and economy, including rapid depletion of non-renewable resources, loss of jobs, and declining secondary and tertiary businesses. McCulloh's work demonstrates that mine closures not only affect the workers and their dependents, but also the broader society, which relies on these workers' wages, and the local economy, which receives stipends from the company. Recognising this dependency as a reality in many small towns, whose primary investments come from mining companies, contextualises the residents' fears and apprehensions surrounding the renewed mining ventures in Concordia, as discussed in Chapter 5.

**Chapter conclusion**

This chapter highlighted various dimensions of Namaqualand's historical copper frontier. Through this history, we observe the constant – yet unreliable – networks of foreign investment driving mineral exploration in the region's rural landscape. On one hand, this network produced opportunities that improved people's lives. However, it also demonstrated the 'violent' nature of the copper industries – namely, the exploitation of cheap labour, dubious connections with the State and mine owners, and power ambiguity. These networks also revealed the industry's dependence on volatile global markets, which reinforced its success. While copper mining has generated significant opportunities in the past, the 'boom-and-bust' legacies discussed in this chapter expose the darker underbelly of the industry. These memories reveal deep socio-economic dependencies embedded within this extractive frontier – consequences that are still strikingly evident today. I contend that these troubling mining legacies are central to shaping narratives of fear and apprehension surrounding the current copper ventures in Concordia, and which shape the contemporary copper riskscapes. These notions relates to Appadurai's argument that how we construct the past shapes how we see the future (2023:16). Therefore, I argue that any attempt to understand the contemporary perspectives on copper mining needs to consider both the socio-economic and

environmental impacts of the industry's extractive legacies, which continue to shape local imaginaries of hope, optimism, fear, apprehension and ambivalence. Through this conceptual framework, I argue that the history of copper mining in Namaqualand does not simply belong to the past. Rather, it actively frames dreamscapes and riskscapes through which the future of Concordia is imagined.

# Chapter 3: Conceptualising collective social imaginaries

We live in a world flooded with information that is transmitted through social media, news outlets, and interactions with people from diverse backgrounds. These recurring interactions significantly influence our lives by shaping our perceptions of the world, as well as influencing how we think, act, and associate ourselves within society. These streams of information contribute towards a collection of frameworks called 'imaginaries', which are shared ways of understanding reality and viewing possibility. I suggest that imaginaries are particularly useful in understanding how local perspectives of Concordia's copper mining ventures are shaped. For many residents, mining is framed as a pathway to an improved, stable future that exceeds present conditions. At the same time, others view these mining ventures through imaginaries of sacrifice, exploitation and environmental degradation. These contradictory possibilities, or 'imaginaries', not only shape how individuals and the community interpret contemporary copper mining but also explain how they envision the future of their community and its environment. Given that the concepts of dreamscapes and riskscapes are central to this thesis, the following section briefly explores a genealogy of social theories that have engaged with the concept of 'collective imaginaries' – which encompasses the dreamscapes and riskscapes framework.

## Tracking theories of collective social imaginaries

Traditional social science discourses offer insights into the organisation of various social and cultural customs. From Charles Montesquieu's formulation of 'social phenomena' to Emile Durkheim's theory of 'social facts', each framework represents separate devices to observe and explain specific social dynamics. This includes understanding the formation of particular social and cultural behaviours and how they influence individual experiences, values, opinions, and beliefs. These social theories form the foundations for the frameworks of 'collective imaginaries', which posit that an individual's experiences and perceptions are shaped by interactions with the external world, rather than solely by personal insight. These frameworks do not suggest that an individual is solely devoid of autonomy. Rather, they acknowledge the various forces – namely, historical, social, cultural, political, and economic – that significantly influence how people form personal beliefs, values, and opinions about themselves and their external world.

Charles Wright Mills' theory of the "Sociological Imagination" (2000 [1959]) provides the foundational framework connecting an individual's inner world to their external social experiences. For Mills, the 'Sociological Imagination' is a means by which an individual "can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period…by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances" (2000:5). In other words, Mills posits that people can only understand their realities through broader historical moments and social structures they belong to. As a result, the term 'imagination' is employed as a tool connecting personal experiences to larger social structures. Therefore, for Mills (2000:9), our individual experiences are not merely personal constructs, but products of social structures that shape our lives, such as families, religious organisations, or political affiliations. In saying this, Mills' theory postulates that individuals can only understand themselves through the historical contexts and social structures to which they belong.

Building on Mills' argument that an individual's experience and worldview are shaped by social structures, Benedict Anderson's theory of "Imagined Communities" (2006 [1983]) explores how nations emerge as imagined entities that collectively foster a sense of unity. For Anderson (2006:44-46), 'imagined communities' are constructed by "unified fields of exchange and communication" – namely, common language and print media, such as newspapers. In other words, the linguistic and literary conventions that individuals frequently encounter – in Anderson's case, the elite – collectively shape individual worldviews around their identity and their community. Here, Anderson (2006:12,46) argues that the convergence of capitalist institutions controls language and print media, therefore, creating a "possibility of a new form of imagined community" – more specifically, a group of elites that are politically and ideologically bound under nationalism. As a result, he concludes that a nation is an elitist, collective 'imagined' social construct whose members – though vast in number and mostly unknown to one another – nonetheless share a sense of connection and camaraderie rooted in a common language and history. However, Anderson's argument does not suggest that nations are merely products of imagination or delusion. Rather, he uses the term 'imagined', maintaining that communities are mental constructs connected through language, media and collective experiences.

Building on this foundation, Arjun Appadurai (1990:589) expands on the concept of imaginaries, arguing that globalisation has intensified the movement – what he refers to as "flows" – of various stimuli that shape individual perceptions of the world. As globalisation expands, formerly 'homogeneous' economies, cultures, and social groups are becoming progressively less integrated and harmonious. Here, Appadurai (1990:588-589) argues that with intensifying global flows of technology, media, migration, and capital, an individual's experience of their position in the world becomes increasingly "complex, overlapping, and disjunctive" in nature – compared to formerly homogeneous or unified societies under nationalism. These dimensions emphasise what Appadurai (1990:588) calls "disjunctures", or gaps, between economy, culture and political factors, which together characterise globalisation. For Appadurai (1990:589), globalisation produces "imagined worlds" shaped by conflicting and overlapping global "flows", such as technology, media, migration and capital. Through these external 'flows', these imagined worlds form "a constructed landscape of collective aspirations… mediated through the complex prism of modern media"(Appadurai, 1990:587). In other words, global flows of information, technology, media, global capital, and people shape how people imagine themselves and what type of future they aspire to create and live in. It is important to emphasise that these imagined worlds are not fantasies. Rather, they are a myriad of stimuli that shape how people envision themselves, their external realities, and their futures.

To understand how an individual's imagined world is shaped by the global cultural economy, Appadurai (1990:589) employs a theoretical framework of '-scapes' to explore the different dimensions constructing individual imaginaries. Here, Appadurai (1990:589) introduces five dimensions of '-scapes', namely the ethnoscapes (flows of people), mediascapes (flows of information through images and media), technoscapes (flows of technology), financescapes (flows of capital), and ideoscapes (flows of political ideas). Each dimension forms a 'building block' of globalisation, and together they reveal a complex way of framing how people imagine, experience, and dispute the influence of globalisation. This framework offers a conceptual foundation for the later discussion of dreamscapes and riskscapes.

Extending on Appadurai's framework of 'imagined worlds' and '-scapes', Charles Taylor's concept of 'modern social imaginaries' (2002) explores how people's interactions in a

shared social and cultural context within the contemporary world shape their experiences. For Taylor (2002:106), 'modern social imaginaries' are,

> ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.

In other words, imaginaries are shared understandings of how individuals make sense of their social surroundings. These shared understandings are framed through "images, stories and legends" – which, in themselves, are forms of social imaginaries of other people (Taylor, 2002:106). As a result, he argues that dimensions shaping an individual's social imaginary are remnants of other people's imaginaries, thereby rendering them 'collective practices'. Therefore, Taylor's conceptualisation of 'imaginaries' highlights how individual experiences are not purely personal nor private perceptions, but are shaped by external forces and collective imaginaries.

**Chapter conclusion**

This chapter highlights the various conceptualisations of 'imaginaries' within a theoretical context, drawing on the insights of four theorists to explore how broader forces shape individual beliefs, values, and opinions. Mills' concept of the 'Sociological Imagination' (2000) sets the foundation for understanding how an individual's personal experience is deeply connected to larger social structures and historical contexts. Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities' (2006) highlights how identities are collectively constructed through shared narratives, language and media, emphasising the role of imagination in producing a sense of belonging to a wider national community. Appadurai's framework of 'imagined worlds' as building blocks for global '-scapes' (1990) extends on Anderson's analysis by highlighting how the flow of people, media, ideas, technology, and capital shapes individual imaginaries within a globalised world. Lastly, Taylor's theory of 'modern social imaginaries' (2002) highlights how people interpret their world through shared interpretations of reality. Together, these theories offer a framework for understanding how individual worldviews are not merely personal opinions but are embedded within, and shaped by, collective social imaginaries informed by history, culture, space, politics, and the environment. Therefore, these theories set the

conceptual framework for understanding ‘dreamscapes’ and ‘riskscapes’ – which reveal how contrasting imaginaries emerge within a community that shares both history and context, illustrating that hope, apprehension, and ambivalence coexist within the same social landscape.

## Chapter 4: Dreamscapes of hope and optimism: an analysis of perspectives that support copper mining in Concordia

One of the mining industry's most appealing qualities is its capacity to generate opportunities that foster socio-economic stability by creating employment, providing infrastructure – such as paved roads, schools or clinics – and contributing to the local economy. When considering the renewed copper mining activities in Concordia – a town with reportedly high youth unemployment, failing infrastructure, and a virtually crumbling local economy – several participants expressed keen interest in the opportunities proposed by Copper 360 and Orion Minerals. I observed that these perspectives convey a 'utopian' sense of hope and desire about the town's future, while simultaneously revealing current socio-economic challenges. The following chapter draws on literature from Jasanoff and Kim (2015), Swancutt (2024) and Müller-Mahn (2019) concerning the dimensions of "dreamscapes" as a desirable and (somewhat) collective vision of hope for the future and 'development' among many residents of Concordia. Therefore, if we accept that dreamscapes are visions of an improved society or social landscape, then we can apply this notion to the perspectives of hope and optimism surrounding the reinvestment in copper Concordia, which envision a future of stability and 'development'.

### Conceptualising 'utopianism' in the social sciences

The term 'utopia' was first introduced to literature by English lawyer Thomas More in 1516, to understand how individuals imagine prosperity outside of the present conditions. However, More did not use the term, utopia, as it is used today. Instead, he used the term "*Nusquama",* which Sargent (1984:200) maintains is the Latin equivalent, meaning "Nowhere", emphasising an illusion of hope for a perfect society characterised by equality, peace and morality. For More, this illusion is grounded in the need for change and transformation – a notion that seemed profound under the British monarchy at the time (Fischer, 2023:171). More's conceptualisation of imagining a future different from present reality prompted additional literature, which incorporated the translated version of his term.

Engels (1975:39) offered one of the most profound conceptualisations of the concept to describe the emergence of socialist thought in nineteenth-century England, France and parts of Germany. Here, scholars began to recognise and dispute the "class antagonisms" between the wealthy upper class (the bourgeoisie) and the poor working class (the proletariat), arguing the need for 'social equality'. However, Engels (1975:44) challenged these visions of early socialist thinkers, arguing that their demand for 'social equality' was "pure fantasy", because they overlook two key features: (1) the historical conditions in which these class struggles are rooted, and (2) the material realities that shape the organisation and evolution of societies, namely the socio-economic circumstances that control class development. Given this 'unrealistic' thought, Engels refers to the early socialist thinkers as 'Utopians' because – despite their admirable efforts to aspire for a "perfect" society free of class struggles – their failure to consider the historical, and consequently material, realities of society lacks feasibility. Thereby, characterising these notions as "utopian pictures of ideal social conditions" (Engels, 1975:41). Given this 'irrationality', Engels conceptualises 'utopianism' as an unrealistic vision of the future that cannot be achieved because it is completely separated from historical and material realities.

Wallerstein, however, rejects Engels' argument that a 'utopia' represents a 'perfect' alternative, and maintains that it is rather a vision of a future that is "credibly better, and historically possible", through the combination of science, politics, and morality (Wallerstein, 1998:2). Here, he introduces the concept of 'utopistics' to describe the rational and realistic visions of a possible future that encapsulates historical experience within the present social realities. History, for Wallerstein (1998:35), reveals social, political, moral, and economic structures that construct the "existing world-system". As a result, he emphasises the importance of understanding how these systems relate to one another in order to envision a realistic, improved, or alternative future. In this sense, 'utopistics' centres around "sober, rational and realistic evaluation of human social systems" that recognises both the opportunities and potential for limitations, therefore, making the vision of the future all the more realistic and attainable (Wallerstein, 1998:1). As a result, utopistics allows for social groups to reimagine realistic alternatives, and to construct valid narratives of the future of society. Therefore, for Wallerstein, 'utopianism'

is not a vision of a perfect society, but is rather an alternative way of imagining a new and achievable future grounded in society's historical structures.

Building on these different notions of utopianism, Żuk (2020:1057) offers a modern understanding of the concept that emphasises "collective imagination and social sensitivity". For Żuk (2020:1057), utopianism is a progressive vision of the future that "can pave the way to emancipatory and democratic solutions" through tangible political and technological possibilities. Therefore, unlike More, Engels and Wallerstein, Żuk (2020:1052) conceptualises the concept as a force that encompasses revolutionary ideologies and emphasises collective action to facilitate social transformation. Therefore, these different conceptualisations share one prominent theme: the need for change. Understanding this core aspect, the concept of utopia is conceptualised as a collective vision of an improved and more equitable future, which facilitates social transformation. This understanding aligns with the 'dreamscapes' framework, broadly conceptualised as a set of utopian imaginaries of a future framed by hope and aspirations.

**Understanding the different layers of dreamscapes**

Dreamscapes, as proposed by Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim (2015:19) in their book, *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, illustrates how imaginaries operate across national and global scales by advancing technology, science and power. While this book does not define what dreamscapes are, its use alludes to a broader conceptualisation of the term relating to a future envisioned through the union of science, technology and "social progress" (Jasanoff, 2015:5). According to Jasanoff (2015:4), 'dreamscapes' are situated within "sociotechnical imaginaries", which are visions of "desirable futures" shaped through science, technology, and modern society. This understanding explores the role of policies, public narratives and infrastructure – as controlled by larger-scale institutions, nations and global social orders – in shaping individual imaginaries. Jasanoff and Kim's approach is central to understanding how desired futures are imagined and legitimised through powerful institutions, such as governments, large corporations, and even non-government organisations (NGOs).

Detlef Müller-Mahn (2019:3) builds on Jasanoff and Kim's conceptualisation of 'dreamscapes' to examine how 'utopian' visions of the future are shaped by institutions of power – such as governments and large corporations, and political-economic

narratives – to promote principles of growth. These visions of growth are established through "development corridors", which Müller-Mahn (2019:2) defines as "planning tools for spatial development" that seek to establish and improve linkages between "rural peripheries and urban growth poles". In other words, development corridors are pathways for 'development' narratives that warrant infrastructural expansion – such as paved roads and permanent facilities – to stimulate economic activity. These corridors contribute towards sociotechnical imaginaries by facilitating "particular practices of future-making" within certain landscapes. Examples of these development corridors, according to Muller-Mahn (2019:2), are roads and train tracks which facilitate the transportation of trade and progression across these rural-urban spaces. Therefore, these corridors cast a vision of a 'utopian' future facilitated by industrial growth and economic expansion, and as a result, become symbols of progress that later require rationalising capital expenditure on infrastructural and technological 'development'.

Copper mining depends on continuous external support to sustain its operations, from initial exploration and physical extraction to the transport infrastructure to deliver minerals to global markets. Drawing on these concepts, I argue that copper mining constitutes a branch, or node, within a broader development corridor that simultaneously justifies and legitimises the vision of 'development' that the industry promises to deliver. Müller-Mahn (2019:2) argues that permanent physical infrastructures – such as smelters, refineries and transport routes – function as a "performative aspect of future-making", as they frame 'utopian' visions of improved livelihoods. In other words, these fixed structures – which are vital for operating specific nodes – symbolise elements of a desired future that has materialised in the present. Therefore, these structures create the illusion that promised opportunities – such as employment, education, and local economic growth – are already within reach. When these infrastructures become geographically fixed, they confer a sense of legitimacy – that is further reinforced by political influence and capital returns. Mining can be understood as a node within a broader development corridor through these physical infrastructures, as they connect rural areas to global markets. These 'nodes', therefore, become components of individual 'dreamscapes' (and later, riskscapes) that reinforce aspirations of stability and 'development'.

While Jasanoff and Kim (2015) conceptualise dreamscapes as visions of the future shaped by science and technology, which Müller-Mahn (2019) builds on by emphasising their

spatial and infrastructural dimensions, these theories do not account for the social and cultural dimensions within a landscape. In this regard, Swancutt (2024) offers an anthropological and philosophical approach to conceptualising dreamscapes, emphasising both individual and collective reflections on the world. Swancutt (2024:112) conceptualises dreamscapes as,

> a space of epistemological (ways of knowing), ontological (ways of being), and ethical deliberation that opens up to activities of self-cultivation, emergent sociability, and, ultimately, the worldmaking act of creating new worlds or shaping familiar ones.

In other words, a dreamscape is a space where individuals and community members reflect on their visions of current realities and take actions to understand their place in the world with the aim of transforming their worldviews. Space, in this sense, does not necessarily refer to a physical location as in Müller-Mahn's conceptualisation, but rather a symbolic or spiritual zone. This approach seeks to explore the individual and collective dimensions of dreamscapes, which, according to Swancutt (2024:112), contribute to "collective acts of worldmaking". Therefore, within this context, dreamscape is influenced by transforming individual or collective worldviews through "culturally specific, historically contingent and socially situated forms" (Swancutt, 2024:113). This philosophical approach is essential for examining how social groups organise and contest their visions surrounding particular dreamscapes.

Combining these three perspectives of dreamscapes offers an extensive analysis of how imagined futures are created, disputed, and understood. Together, these perspectives encompass global and national visions, social dynamics, and personal reflections. The combination of these perspectives allows for a deeper analysis of how dreamscapes are both imagined and legitimised, and how individuals engage with these narratives in their everyday lives. Considering dreamscapes as constantly evolving spaces – where technology, science, politics, ethics, culture, and lived experiences intersect – provides a robust framework to examine how individuals perceive and respond to the various imaginaries that shape their worldviews. Therefore, I argue that incorporating this dynamic, multi-layered conceptualisation of dreamscapes provides a critical lens for

analysing perspectives of hope and optimism regarding renewed copper mining activity in Concordia.

## Exploring the dreamscapes of copper mining in Concordia

With the rising demand for copper driven by technological innovations, such as renewable energy, electric vehicles and artificial intelligence (AI) systems, global copper mining dreamscapes – hereafter known as 'copper dreamscapes' – are becoming increasingly popular as a means to attract investment and expand copper production. To understand this influence, the following section explores the narratives behind these copper dreamscapes by focusing on: (1) copper's role in the global energy transition, (2) copper mining as a driver for national and regional 'development' and (3) mining companies' corporate commitments to social responsibilities.

### The role of copper in the global energy transition

Copper's conductive properties make it a vital element in renewable energy systems, particularly in wires, cables, and heat transfer for electrification. Climate strategist Marielle Remillard estimates that achieving global climate policy targets requires approximately 42 billion solar panels and 1.3 million wind turbines (TED Talks, 2022). To contextualise the quantity of copper within each system, the Copper Development Association Inc. (CDAI) (2022) reports that a solar panel contains approximately 5.5 tonnes of copper per megawatt (MW) of solar power capacity, and a 3MW wind turbine contains approximately 4.7 tonnes of copper. Therefore, our reliance on these technological innovations for a 'greener' future positions copper as a key component to sustain the global energy transition – an essential task to achieving net zero[6] goals by 2050. As a result, copper has been positioned as a 'critical mineral' by leading global corporations in the energy transition, including the International Energy Agency (IEA), the United Nations Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals, the European Union (EU) and the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP).

This global transition offers a 'utopian' vision of a sustainable, low-carbon future facilitated by clean technology. This vision is a key feature behind significant investments

[6] Net Zero posits drastically reducing global greenhouse gas emissions to slow the rate of global warming.

in the copper industry, focusing on establishing new sites for copper production and reinvesting in old copper mines that are believed to contain deposits.

Copper's role as a 'critical mineral' in the green transition highlights the surge in large-scale investments aimed at increasing its production – and, in doing so, projects a dreamscape of a sustainable future on the horizon. Given this reinvestment into copper mining, I argue that the energy transition constitutes a form of 'development corridor', connecting Namaqualand's copper resources to global initiatives, national narratives, and local infrastructure, aimed at creating a 'clean', 'sustainable' future. To illustrate this, Figure 3.1 (below) depicts a copper processing plant in Nababeep that appears operational – as suggested by the large grey mine tailings, the extensive space it occupies, and the visible machinery. I argue that this site functions as a 'performative aspect' that, despite being minimally active at the time, conveys a narrative of a fully functional copper industry – thereby, enforcing a vision of a stable and progressive future.

Figure 3.1: Copper processing plant in Nababeep, Namaqualand

Source: Photographed by S.Maree, August 2024

### Copper mining as a precursor for national and regional expansion

As stipulated in Chapter 2, Namaqualand's historical copper industry was central to various forms of 'development' in the region – namely, foreign investments, infrastructural expansion, and establishing trade networks. In light of the renewed copper ventures in Concordia, the industry's potential to revitalise such opportunities within the 'rural peripheries' of Namaqualand continues to be a defining feature, particularly as framed in political narratives. South African Minister of Mineral Resources (and Energy), Mr Gwede Mantashe, expresses such a narrative through his endorsement for copper mining in the region, stating that,

> …the Northern Cape is a growth point for mining in South Africa…Orion [Minerals] is important to me because it reflects the interest of foreign direct investment. It's an Australian company that is very interested in producing copper here [in Prieska and O'kiep], and we want to encourage them to do that. And it is important for South Africans to appreciate that, to attract an investor is quite a huge effort, and it's very important for society to have this investment… (SABC, 2025).

Minister Mantashe's public support for Orion Minerals illustrates a narrative of foreign investment that marks the beginning of a new State-driven era of prosperity for the region. This narrative can arguably be considered a "performative aspect of future-making", to quote Müller-Mahn (2019:2), because it politically legitimises this development corridor between Australian investment and the Northern Cape's mineral resources, thereby promising prosperity for the region. I argue that this promise promotes a 'utopian' vision of anticipatory development for the actors involved, particularly the surrounding communities, and in doing so, shapes a 'copper dreamscape'. However, these political narratives arguably reinforce the (re)making of contemporary extractive frontiers in Namaqualand.

### Mining companies as institutions for 'development' in the local communities

On my seventh day of fieldwork in Concordia, I visited the largest general store in the town. It stocks everything from food essentials and toiletries to men's and women's clothing. The owner was not from the region, so I asked if I could talk to her employees,

who, she informed me, were residents of the town. I was directed to the back of the store, where three young ladies – aged 28 to 35 – sat chatting while folding and attaching price tags to clothes. I apologised for my interruption and introduced myself, explaining why I was there. At first, I noticed they were notably shy when I asked them about their lives in Concordia and what keeps them there. One of them, whom I will call Claudia, explained that her parents and grandparents lived and worked in the town, and that she wanted to continue this custom. When I asked about the renewed copper mining activity in the area, Claudia shared that her cousin had recently started working for a mining company in the region. Before, he had struggled to find work and, as a result, spent time "*met die verkeerde mense*" (with the wrong people). Now that he is employed, she said that he seems to be better off, even if it was "*al vir 'n bietjie brood oppie tafel*" (all for a bit of bread on the table). I understood this metaphor to mean that, even though the wage was poor, it was at least income. Claudia spoke with a quiet certainty that the copper mining industry could bring real benefits to a town where opportunities are scarce. While I had observed people express support for the mining operations prior to this discussion, hearing an actual account of how these opportunities are currently benefiting people in Concordia reframed my understanding of the scope of this support. This reflection introduces a key narrative shaping individual and collective visions of copper dreamscapes in Concordia.

Reinforcing narratives of hope and optimism through Social and Labour Plans

In the South African mining industry, these narratives are reinforced through mandatory Social and Labour Plans (SLPs), which companies are required to submit under Regulation 42 of the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (No. 28 of 2002) (MPRDA), to obtain a mining right. According to the Minerals Council South Africa (MCSA) (2025), Social and Labour Plans are,

> comprehensive human resources development programmes, mine community development plans, housing and living conditions plans, employment equity plans, and processes to save jobs and manage downscaling and/or closure of operations.

These programmes are not only essential to ensure that surrounding communities benefit from mining operations, but also to protect their long-term resilience and the sustainability of their environment once mining activity ceases. It is important to

emphasise that I do not contend that SLPs function as tools for fabricating personal and communal fantasies. Rather, I argue that because SLPs are publicly accessible legal commitments, mining companies are obligated to fulfil the promises outlined within them. In turn, these commitments shape personal and collective narratives through expectation and anticipation, rather than fantasy.

Veronica's support for the local mining activity because of SLPs.

SHiP Copper/Copper 360's Social and Labour Plans (SLPs) states the company is committed to "promote small business development", provide "much-needed financial support" to local livelihoods, and address housing and living conditions in Concordia – only once the mines have become financially operational (Republic of South Africa, 2022:26). In addition to these plans, Copper 360 aims to provide bursaries to prospective local students to pursue studies in engineering, geology, metallurgy or environmental management positions (Republic of South Africa, 2022:23). Therefore, I argue that in Concordia, these expectations outlined in Copper 360's SLPs reinforce the town's 'copper dreamscape' by transforming abstract promises into formal commitments. Although Copper 360 is yet to become financially operational, the social commitments outlined in its SLP serve as a 'performative act', promoting a vision of a 'utopian' future wherein these commitments seemingly become a reality.

In this case, SLPs directly frame perspectives of the mining industry's potential influence on everyday life. My discussion with Veronica, a young mother of two, illustrated this sense of hope. Veronica is an influential member of the 'Women for Mining' initiative in Concordia – and quickly expanding to surrounding towns – that aims to empower women to become more involved within the local mining industry. Although the initiative was newly formed when we met in September 2024, it has reportedly grown exponentially since then and has sought to include Copper 360 and Orion Minerals in these efforts. When I asked Veronica about her reason for being part of this initiative, her response was incredibly insightful,

> *…baie voel hulle weet nie rerig wat om met hulle-self te maak nie. Ons soek mos almal werk. Die myn is mos in die grooi process…dit is belangrik dat ons die geleenthede raak sien, en weet wat die myne eintlik verplig is om vir ons te bied… Ek is 'n honderd persent vir die myn, want dit gaan goeie ontwikkeling bring.*

> *Daar is potensiaal [vir] ekonomiese grooi. So, ek gaan nie terugstaan nie. Ek gooi my volle gewig daarin*.//…many feel that they do not really know what to do with themselves. We are all looking for work. The mine is in the growth process… it is important that we see the opportunities, and recognise what the mines are actually obliged to offer us… I am one hundred percent for the mine because it will bring good opportunities. There is potential [for] economic growth. So, I am not going to stand back. I am throwing my full weight behind it (interview, Concordia resident, September 2024).

Veronica's optimism about the copper reinvestment as a precursor for 'development' reveals how these promises shape an idea of the future that is more prosperous than its current reality. However, her support extends beyond these formal commitments, establishing efforts to foster positive relationships with local mining companies through community-driven initiatives aimed at empowering women – a historically marginalised group within the mining industry.

<u>Kristof's vision for Copper 360's 'School of Mining'</u>

In September 2023, Copper 360 established the 'School for Mining', a training facility in Nababeep, to address the issues of an ageing workforce and high youth unemployment in the region. According to Kristof, a representative from Copper 360, the mining school was created in response to the reported global skills shortage in the mining sector, where experienced workers are retiring or leaving the industry faster than younger replacements can be trained,

> What we've realised is that there's an exodus of skilled miners. They're getting older, they leave the profession, and we don't attract the necessary skills in mining… so, we've decided that we're going to start a mining school and conscientise young people from high school to get involved in mining… we have a lot of young unemployed people [in Namaqualand] that are not employable – they don't have the skills. So, what we have decided with a mining school is to offer those courses. We started with the geological course, where we trained over sixty [60] people, and we have employed thirty [30] of them… (interview, Copper 360 representative, July 2025).

By educating and training young people in skills relevant to the mining industry, the school positions itself as contributing to Namaqualand's socio-economic development. Copper 360's mining school epitomises Müller-Mahn's notion of "performative aspects of future-making" because it promises a degree of economic stability, thereby transforming an abstract narrative of mining prosperity into reality. Furthermore, this school promises to attract socio-economic transformation to the region by highlighting Copper 360's investment in the surrounding communities and the region as a whole.

Vincent's account for Orion Minerals' community engagement

Alternatively, Orion Minerals' approach to community engagement prioritises fostering opportunities that move beyond the mining industry. Vincent, a representative from Orion Minerals, emphasised the importance of working *with* the community rather than merely directing efforts *at* it. For him, the egg-laying project centres on this approach, as it seeks to address food security challenges, while promoting communal self-sufficiency in O'kiep and Nababeep,

> …in terms of capacity, developing and giving information yields more benefits than providing money…You can't give people money for the sake of giving them money…If you want to apply the principle of development, *true* development, you need to have a holistic approach and say: What are the issues here? What can we do?... I'm busy planning the implementation of an egg-laying and vegetable project…because there is no poultry business here [in O'kiep and Nababeep]. The other thing is, I know if we are successful, it will be a sustainability project. It speaks to employment [and] it speaks to food security and women and youth empowerment (interview, Orion Minerals representative, September 2024).

According to Vincent, once this project is established, Orion Minerals intends to expand it into broader chains of production within the communities, namely, poultry farming and selling chicken manure. While this approach may seem unremarkable to some, Vincent maintains that this egg-laying project serves a dual purpose: it fosters positive community relations while addressing current socio-economic challenges.

This vision frames Orion Minerals as a precursor to local transformation, and in doing so, inadvertently positions the local copper mining ventures as a catalyst for long-term community growth. In essence, Vincent's project arguably functions as a 'copper dreamscape' because it focuses on building a future of prosperity and sustainability beyond the lifespan of the mining company's lease – a salient improvement over the practices of historical mining companies. Furthermore, this vision feeds into a shared dream of transformation and prosperity for those who believe that these mining ventures will follow through with their commitments proposed in their SLPs in the future.

**Chapter conclusion**

This chapter illustrated the interplay between aspirations of hope and optimism that constitute a copper dreamscape and the narratives for 'development' across global, national, regional and local scales. Copper dreamscapes emerge as multi-layered visions of a sustainable and prosperous future, articulated by mining companies, global investors, national governments and international agencies. On a global scale, copper is framed as an essential component for renewable energy and 'clean' technologies necessary for a low-carbon future. This global vision cascades into national contexts, as seen in Minister Mantashe's public endorsement of renewed copper mining as a driver of regional growth. This political support legitimises and encourages corporate actors, such as Copper 360 and Orion Minerals, to expand their mining operations in rural communities in Namaqualand. These interventions further reinforce the 'copper dreamscape' through the legal commitments embedded in the Social and Labour Plans, which promise employment, education, infrastructure and long-term investment. In doing so, they embody a local vision of 'development' and embed future aspirations within everyday life.

Viewed together, these dynamics reveal how 'copper dreamscapes' cascade across the various scales, with each level projecting visions of hope and prosperity that appear both desirable and attainable. I argue that this cascading effect of 'copper dreamscapes' shapes the hopeful perspectives surrounding the renewed copper mining activity in Concordia. Residents expressed total support for copper mining because it aligns with their own aspirations: employment, prosperous livelihoods, and improved infrastructure. For them, these mining interests and the commitments made within the Social and Labour Plans appear to offer a future that is seemingly tangible and attainable. As a result, global and

national dreamscapes are not merely abstract fantasies because they actively shape local imaginaries of prosperity. However, this dreamscape remains inseparable from the legacies of past injustices caused by the region's historical extractive frontier. These trends remind us that visions of hope and prosperity are contingent and not guaranteed.

# Chapter 5: Riskscapes and their influence on perspectives that oppose copper mining in Concordia

When contrasted with dreamscapes, perspectives that outline fear and apprehension demonstrate how a single place can hold contesting futures, encompassing contradictory imaginaries of both hope and fear. The dreamscape of a stable, modern future – reinforced by visible infrastructure and the Social and Labour Plans – remains inseparable from past socio-economic collapses and environmental destruction caused by the extractive legacies. These trends remind us that visions of hope, stability, and prosperity are conditional and are therefore not guaranteed. As a result, dreamscapes are always entangled with local riskscapes, reflecting both hope, apprehension, and ambivalence defined by Namaqualand's historical extractive frontier and the current socio-economic challenges.

**Conceptualising risk**

Risk is inherently difficult to define precisely because perceptions of what constitutes a risk are subjective and can therefore be controlled or manipulated by authorities of power. Understanding this notion, Ulrich Beck (1992:21) conceptualises risk as "a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernisation itself". In this sense, Beck (1994:22) views risks as consequences of modernisation and globalisation, which create ecological and technological hazards that have "unknown and unintended consequences". In other words, risk is a product of human activity with broader consequences on all forms of life on Earth. However, these consequences are only evident when we see physical signs within our environment. Therefore, Beck argues that the concept is not universal across different societies, but is influenced by structures of power and authority. These governing forces, Beck (1992:30-31) notes, rely on "scientific and social rationality" to define risk, resulting in a subjective and pluralist scope of the term, which inherently constitutes a crucial feature within the riskscape framework.

Holton (2004:22) extends Beck's argument that risk is institutionally defined and subjective in nature. However, he argues that the conceptualisation of risk "depends on the notions of exposure and uncertainty, neither of which can be defined operationally"

(Holton, 2004:22). In other words, a person may be exposed to a hazard[7] without being aware of it. In keeping with the theme of extractive frontiers, an example of an invisible hazard is evident when a person living near an abandoned, unrehabilitated mine may unknowingly be exposed to heavy metal contamination – such as arsenic and lead – that has leached into the surrounding soil and groundwater. In such instances, the hazards remain invisible, yet health effects become apparent over time.

The theory of "slow violence" by Rob Nixon (2011:1) attests to a hazard's invisibility, but argues that it is a result of power and authority. For Nixon (2011:2), power controls what level of a hazard, or in this case 'violence', constitutes as an immediate need, stating that "politically and emotionally, different kinds of disasters possess unequal heft". Therefore, violence that does not occur instantaneously – such as climate change or the effects of deforestation – is frequently overlooked in public discourse and interventions because it is not considered to constitute a theoretical immediate need. Given the authoritarian and pluralistic nature of conceptualising risk, Holton (2004:24) maintains that we cannot "operationally define risk", but we can define our "perception of risk". Therefore, viewing risk as a 'perceivable' outcome creates space for subjective interpretations, collective imaginaries, and power relations to interfere. Understanding this dimension is essential for the conceptual framework of riskscapes, which vary across actors based on their conceptualisations of risk.

**Understanding the multi-layered nature of riskscapes**

Similar to dreamscapes, riskscapes provide a framework for envisioning the future through collective imaginaries. However, Müller-Mahn *et al*. (2018:197) emphasise that riskscapes focus specifically on the "collective imagination of 'landscapes of risk'", which depicts the future through uncertainty rather than aspiration. Broadly speaking, Müller-Mahn & Everts (2018:87) describe riskscapes as "risky territories, safe pathways, no-go areas and secured places" that are framed by "the perceptions and practices of the people who fill them with life". This understanding highlights three vital dimensions that shape riskscapes: space, time, and social practices. Riskscapes are formed in specific places within a fixed point in time, and as a result, embed themselves within social practices.

[7]A hazard is an event that has the potential to harm human and non-human beings, while risk is the probability of a hazard that may cause harm.

Understanding these essential features, Müller-Mahn *et al.* (2018:197) define riskscapes as "socially produced 'temporalspatial phenomena'", which are perceived differently by different groups of people.

Given this understanding of the term, Müller-Mahn *et al.* (2018:203,206) maintain that riskscapes are "intertwined with social practices" and differ according to an individual's social position. In other words, they are socially defined through perceptions, communication, and practices of social groups, and people's perceptions of risk depend on their social role, values, and experiences. For example, a community member's perception of a risk may differ significantly from that of a geologist or State official. These varying social positions are what Müller-Mahn *et al.* (2018:209) refer to as "power geometries", which play a key role in the "prioritization of risks", in which the State is a powerful driving force. For Frick (2016:14), this form of power geometry that creates risks is embodied through "international conventions, bodies and funding, through national and local governments, and through academic framings". These entities govern the legitimisation of risk management – often done in an unscrupulous manner – by influencing people's ability to "engage, interfere and inflict change" (Müller-Mahn *et al.* 2018:207). In essence, power becomes a driving force that underpins risk management by determining whose lives are exposed, what knowledge is valued, and whose futures are prioritised.

Gabrielle Hecht (2023) demonstrates how these power dynamics shape riskscapes on the Witwatersrand gold mining plateau (the Rand). Here, Hecht argues that the State and mining corporations created, facilitated, and managed the visibility of risk in this extractive landscape. One particular example in Hecht's work draws our attention to the racialised spatial planning during the apartheid period, whereby "mining companies, urban planners, and the state worked together to site white suburbs upwind of the mining belt, and Black townships downwind and downstream" (Hecht, 2023:88). This strategic spatial planning, Hecht (2018:97) maintains, was utilised by the government to discriminate against Black mine workers and people living in 'townships' under the apartheid system. These forms of socio-spatial segregation disproportionately exposed Black populations to environmental and physical risks – including air and water pollution,

contaminated soil and airborne diseases, such as silicosis.[8] This is one of many examples in Hecht's work that highlight the role of power relations in producing, facilitating, and governing riskscapes.

Hecht's example illustrates a principal dimension of riskscapes: plurality. For Müller-Mahn *et al.* (2018:205), riskscapes are "fluid, multiple and subjective", and are therefore far from being universally experienced. Different actors frame risks differently due to personal imaginaries, power relations, and subjectivities. What a community member living near a large-scale mine may perceive as a risk may differ from how a politician or a policymaker defines it. As a result, Müller-Mahn *et al.* (2018:205) argue that perceptions of risk produce differentiated riskscapes that challenge one another, and create multiple, contested pluralities of riskscapes.

These pluralities lead to the "emergence of new combinations and dynamics of risks" as Müller-Mahn *et al*. (2018:205) assert, which coincide, interact, and challenge one another across time and space. This multi-layered understanding of riskscapes is evident in the different perspectives that oppose or show ambivalence towards the renewed copper mining in Concordia. Here, farmers' perceptions of risk differ from those of former mine workers and town residents. This chapter demonstrates how the perceptions of fear, apprehension, and ambivalence towards the renewed copper mining activity can be understood through the riskscapes framework.

## Riskscapes and perceptions of fear, anxiety and apprehension towards copper mining in Concordia

If we accept the notion that (1) risks are socially produced 'facts' that are unevenly distributed, and (2) riskscapes are collective imaginings of landscapes of risks shaped by social perceptions, practices, and temporal-spatial contexts, then we can apply these concepts to understand individual fears, apprehensions, and anxieties regarding the cluster mining model in Concordia. By exploring the different perceptions of risk expressed by subsistence farmers, former mine workers, and town residents, it is possible to understand the contours of a multi-layered riskscape within the town – hereafter

[8] The American Lung Association (2025) defines silicosis as "a type of pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease caused by breathing in tiny bits of silica, a common mineral found in sand, quartz and many other types of rock".

referred to as the 'copper riskscape'. This collective riskscape is shaped by the region's historical extractive frontier, the community's livelihoods, environmental impact, and socio-economic and infrastructural vulnerabilities – all of which arguably demonstrate how these very frontiers are presently being (re)made within the town.

1. '*Die Agterdeur*': Perceptions of risk expressed by farmers in Concordia

My first exposure to the various perceptions of risk came from two subsistence farmers in Concordia, who were concerned about the impact of copper mining on communal farmland used for livestock rearing and crop cultivation. Nadia, a resident in Concordia, explains that Concordia "…is not a rich community. This community has to survive on what's available to them" (interview, Concordia resident, September 2024). As a result, many of the local community members describe farming as "*die agterdeur*" (the backdoor) of the town's survival during difficult socio-economic periods.

Given this reliance on the land, Francois, a lifelong resident and subsistence farmer, expressed concern about the environmental impact of the cluster mining model and the threat to the community's livelihood,

> … that's going to be barren land… and that is our grazing land. We are farmers and farming is our way of income… if the mines are going to take over, where will I get the land to do that?... We *cannot* eat copper dust! (interview, farmer, September 2024).

Francois views the cluster mining model as a threat to both the environment and the community's livelihood. For him, the risk lies in the invasive mining techniques, such as blasting and digging, that threaten to disrupt the surrounding biodiversity and compromise both cultivation and grazing, thereby undermining farmers' ability to sustain themselves and the community. In addition to this concern, Francois questions the subsistence farmers' access to communal land, as large areas of communal land are being fenced off for extraction. For him, these changes in land use could prevent pastoralists[9]

[9] According to Samuels (2013:1), pastoralism is a system based on livestock mobility that enables herders to adapt to resources, access clean water and grazing areas, avoid diseases and encourage socio-economic benefits.

from seasonally migrating their livestock across communal land, which is a crucial way to prevent overgrazing, overcrowding and animal disease outbreaks.

In addition to Francois' perceptions of risks, Neil, a young farmer who recently inherited his family's *saaiperseel*, voices his anxieties around the impact of the cluster mining model on water availability, livestock grazing pastures, and agricultural produce,

> We don't depend on just rainfall in order to wet our fields and provide water to our livestock… We have underground waters, aquifers… and they still provide water… So, [by] them blasting and doing what they are currently doing, it's disrupting our lives in more than just one way… (interview, farmer, April 2025).

For Neil, invasive mining techniques would not only threaten the surface but could also disrupt and pollute the underground aquifers[10], which are crucial for livestock and crop cultivation, particularly during periods of low rainfall. However, in Concordia, there is limited access to these water pumps because it is reportedly costly and technical to install. Therefore, for Neil, threatening the quality of the aquifers (locally referred to as '*boorgate*' in Afrikaans) means threatening the land's long-term water supply and overall food security.

Considering the risks outlined by farmers is pertinent to understanding their concerns about the potential impact of the cluster mining model on their ability to provide for themselves and their community. Both Francois and Neil's perceptions are framed by memories of trauma and discontent, rooted in the region's extractive legacies, particularly those of the O'kiep Copper Company. In the past, mining companies would move into an area, extract all the resources and depart without implementing essential ecological measures, namely, rehabilitating the mines and the surrounding land – the consequences of which are evident today. Therefore, these perspectives highlight how the disruption to farming and the environment is not merely an abstract possibility, but rather a pragmatic

[10] Aquifers are underground water reserves that are found in bodies of rock or sediment. In Namaqualand, farmers use these aquifers as additional water reserves to feed their livestock and water their crops.

risk that could threaten their environment and economic security, which forms a crucial component of the 'copper riskscape' framework.

2. Perceptions of risk expressed by Concordia's residents

The second component of the collective copper riskscapes in Concordia is expressed by the town's residents, whose perception of risk centres on the potential forced displacement and loss of heritage that could result from the mining operations at the Wheal Julia and Jubilee mines, located on the town's periphery. Sylvia – whose family has lived in Concordia for more than four generations – expressed her concern about the town's structural stability, particularly the historic underground tunnels of Hester Maria and Wheal Julia, which are directly under the town. In our discussion, Sylvia recalled a childhood memory of her mother waking the family in the middle of the night in a panic during a small earthquake that was believed to have been caused by a collapsing mine shaft,

> *…ek het nooit verstaan hoekom my ma een nag ons wakker gemaak: "ons moet uitgaan, die myn val!". Dan kom ons uit en kyk ek mos reg op die myn, dan vra ek myself: is my ma nou mal? Die myn staan! Hoekom maak mamma vir ons wakker?". Maar nou is ek groot, besef ek dat die myn het nie* daar *geval, die myn het onder my ma se huis geval. In daai area…baie mense het by ons gekla dat 'n sekere tyd in die nag, hoor hulle hoe klippe val onder hulle se huise. Dit beteken dat daai hele area staan op 'n spelon…* //… I never understood why my mother woke us up one night: "We need to leave, the mine is collapsing!". Then we go outside and I am looking directly at the mine, and I'm asking myself: "Is my mother now crazy? The mine is still standing! Why did Mother wake us up?". But now that I am older, I realise that the mine did not collapse there *[points in the direction of the Hester Maria mine],* the mine collapsed under my mother's house *[points to the ground].* In that area…many people have complained to us that at a particular time in the night, they can hear stones falling under their houses. That means that that entire area is above an underground tunnel… (interview, Concordia resident, September 2024).

Sylvia's reflection on risk reveals her anxieties about the structural integrity of the underground tunnels beneath Concordia. For her, these tunnels represent both an

immediate physical hazard and a tangible reminder of the region's historical copper mining legacy. Sylvia's apprehension about the renewed mining ventures – particularly at the Wheal Julia and Jubilee mines – stems from a fear that invasive large-scale mining operations could exacerbate landscape instability, reinforcing the physical risks and the destructive impact of copper mining in Namaqualand.

Adding to these physical risks, Sylvia reflects her concerns about the social repercussions if the town were to become uninhabitable as a result of the invasive mining activity,

> *…dit gaan oor my kinders se toekoms. Gaan daar 'n dorp vir my kinders wees? Gaan daar 'n huisie wees waarnatoe my kinders kan terugkeer?... Ek is nie bereid om vir Concordia op te gee nie. Ek het 'n ma verloor, ek het 'n pa verloor…almal rus in Concordia se stof. As ek moet toelaat dat die mynbou-aktiviteit vir my verdryf uit my dorp uit, waarheen gaan ek?... Ek is nie bereid om geld te vat om iewers anders 'n lewe te skep nie* //…it is about my children's futures. Will there be a town for my children? Will there be a house that my children can return to?... I am not prepared to give Concordia up. I lost a mother, I lost a father…everyone rests in Concordia's dust. If I have to allow the mining activity to push me out of my town, where will I go?... I am not prepared to take money [from the mining companies] to create a life somewhere else (interview, Concordia resident, September 2024).

For Sylvia, losing her home would not only mean losing an imagined future for her children but also the severing of ties to her heritage. This concern demonstrates that place is not simply a geographical location, but rather a landscape that embodies memories and a sense of belonging, and thus, creates meaning by connecting individual identities to the land, the community, and to the scars of the past. In this sense, this perception of risk towards the renewed mining operations extends beyond material risks articulated by farmers, Francois and Neil. Instead, Sylvia highlights her fears about potential displacement and loss of heritage and sense of belonging. Together, these perspectives form critical components of a larger collective 'copper riskscape' in Concordia, one framed by the historical, environmental, and socio-economic legacies of copper mining.

3. Risks expressed by former mine workers in the town.

The final component of the 'copper riskscape' in Concordia focuses on the perceptions of retrenched and retired mine workers, whose experiences in the Northern Cape mining industry offer unique insights into the realities of promised work opportunities and the socio-economic impacts of mining in rural areas. Albert – who was recently retrenched from a mining company in the province – reflected on his experience of working in an environment that neglected workers' health and safety in addition to offering little compensation,

> *…die werksomstandighede is baie onveilig…ons se* overalls *was opgeëet en hulle kom met daai* overalls *huis toe…Dis later siektes vir jou kinders en jou omgewing… en die salaris op daai stadium was ook maar swak, R4,300 'n maand* …//…the work conditions are very dangerous…our overalls were eaten up and they come home in those overalls…It's later hazards for your children and your environment…and the salary at that stage was also rather poor, R4,300 a month… (interview, mine worker, September 2024).

This testimony highlights the harsh realities of working in the mining industry, revealing how the risks of copper mining are embedded within the material and social realities of exploitative labour practices, including physical harm, unfair compensation, and a sense of being undervalued as a mine worker. These perceptions of risk not only shape local anxieties and apprehensions about the renewed mining ventures in the town but also evoke the region's historically extractive industry built on exploitative labour practices.

In addition to Albert's testimony, Nicky – a retired mine worker in Concordia – expressed his concern that the renewed reinvestment into Namaqualand's copper resources could bring new social hardships to the town, which, he remarks, is already constrained by limited basic services. Drawing on his personal experiences working in several mines across the Northern Cape and North West provinces, Nicky fears that this reinvestment could attract an influx of people seeking employment to the town, placing strain on the town's basic services, including sewage systems and electricity supply. Nicky further explained that higher disposable income among residents and newcomers could contribute to social challenges in the town, including increased drug use, alcohol consumption, and even illegal mining activity.

These concerns reflect the social dynamics of extractive frontiers in other rural towns exposed to mining and other large-scale development projects. Anthropologist, James Ferguson (1992:82) observed similar dynamics in the mining towns of the Zambian Copperbelt, where the influx of "foreign" capital created a "moral contrast between an immoral urban work of money and an authentic, morally pure community of people…". For Ferguson, these disposable wages facilitated a space where mineworkers engaged in "immoral" urban practices – such as drug use, alcohol consumption and prostitution – on a scale previously unseen in the Copperbelt towns and rural villages. Similarly, Borchardt (2023:234) observed a related situation in De Aar – a small town in the Northern Cape – which has become the site of numerous solar and wind farm developments. Borchardt maintains that the influx of people into the town with disposable income reportedly increased the extent of "social ills", such as "crime, alcoholism, and the illegal drug trade" (2023:234-235). These findings present a compelling case study illustrating how large-scale interventions often intensify social consequences in small rural towns, such as Concordia.

Together, Albert and Nicky's perceptions of risk offer unique insights into the potential social challenges that renewed copper investment potentially poses for the town. Both of these perceptions are rooted in personal experiences of past extractive landscapes and continue to shape the town's future expectations. For Albert, the risks of copper mining include working in an unsafe environment and receiving unfair compensation. On the other hand, Nicky's apprehensions reveal the potential socio-economic consequences that may hinder the very objectives of stability and 'progress'. Together, these testimonies broaden the collective copper riskscape, highlighting both the physical and social dimensions of the community's apprehensions regarding the future of renewed copper mining operations in Concordia.

### Exploring ambivalent perspectives as a point of convergence between dreamscapes and riskscapes

Thus far, the various perspectives have focused on the binary tensions surrounding the copper reinvestment in Concordia: support or opposition. However, a critical, yet occasionally overlooked, perspective centres on ambivalence, which incorporates these contradictory tensions, thereby highlighting the complexity of the current debates on

extractive landscapes. Myburgh's research on the marine seismic surveys in Hondeklipbaai – a small town on the West Coast of South Africa – demonstrates how ambivalence coexists alongside perspectives that support and oppose large extractive projects – in this case, proposed oil and gas exploration and mining activities off the coast of the town. Here, Myburgh (2022:17) observed that the majority of residents – many of whom are generational fishers – expressed ambivalence towards the oil and gas industry. For them, there "was a desire to have a more developed town with better infrastructure and opportunities, however, there was also a concern about how that would come about" (Myburgh, 2022:17). Similar to the copper industry in Concordia, the prospective oil and gas industry in Hondeklipbaai was conditionally supported, aware of the possible social and environmental consequences that this industry could produce.

Similarly, Howe (2019:xii) notes how ambivalence appears within the global energy landscape, stating that such perspectives are "both anticipatory and unknown, where hope and caution are equally gathered". Here, the significance of this perspective revealed how "distinct imaginaries of environmental care and environmental harm conflicted, effectively diagnosing the deeply rational qualities of energy and environment" (Howe, 2019:xii-xiii). In other words, ambivalence, for Howe, not only reveals contesting values between environmental awareness and sustainable energy production but also fissures within energy narratives, highlighting how anticipation and conflict coexist within a landscape.

These observations serve as an essential link to this study by highlighting the multi-layered and nuanced nature of contemporary perceptions of the extractive industries, which, on the one hand, promise 'development' and opportunities for improved livelihoods, but on the other, address broader concerns about the notion of 'development'. During my fieldwork, I observed that the majority of my interlocutors expressed conditional support for the activity, stating that they strictly opposed the current manner of implementation – namely, the mining company's reported lack of communal consultation and informed consent, and the acquisition of mining rights to the community's farmland. I argue that these ambivalent perspectives expose the deeply contested nature of copper mining in the town, thereby highlighting cracks within the dreamscape and riskscape frameworks – and possibly within broader extractive narratives.

In Concordia, those who expressed ambivalence were primarily farmers and residents with *saaipersele* (individual plots). I suggest that land ownership heightens their awareness of the potential impact of extractive operations, because they are at the forefront of witnessing these consequences. Willem, a resident and local subsistence farmer, was one of my first participants to express his ambivalence, stating that,

> …we are not *against* mining… we are against the *method* they use. They want to misuse our land – that's what we are against… if the mining companies come to the table… and we can have our say and they can have their say and we can agree on something, I think it will be a much different case… (interview, Concordia resident, 17 September 2024).

Here, Willem reveals both the optimism and the tension of this reinvestment by implicitly acknowledging the potential of opportunities but also recognising the extractive methods of implementation. This conditionality reveals shortfalls within the 'development' narratives, highlighting the reality of global energy interventions.

Similarly, Neil voices his concerns surrounding the lack of adequate consultation, explaining that,

> getting them [the mining companies] to stop is out of the question… We would actually like them to come and speak to us. That's all we want. We just want to be recognised as a community that has been there for years, for generations, so we can come up with a way that we can actually live in harmony… (interview, farmer, April 2025).

For Neil, the aim is not to oppose the renewed mining activity but instead to collaborate with the relevant mining companies, on the condition that they engage with the community and acknowledge their claims to the land. This perspective highlights the ambivalence surrounding the 'copper dreamscape' that, while he accepts the broader vision of this industry as a precursor to 'development', Neil's full support is hindered by his frustration with the mining company's inadequate transparency, a recurring sentiment within the extractive frameworks.

Therefore, ambivalence, when viewed alongside the copper dreamscape and riskscape, reveals how Concordia becomes a landscape that encompasses a future that is both contested and uncertain. On the one hand, the copper dreamscape envisions a renewed mining frontier in Namaqualand as a node in a 'development corridor' connecting the region to the rest of the world, thereby legitimising visions of a prosperous future that far exceeds its present reality. However, copper riskscapes interpret these same frontiers as hazards to livelihoods, the environment, heritage, and safety. Here, development corridors can be considered a *source* of risk that threatens communal displacement, environmental degradation, access to land and resources, and the community's well-being. In this sense, all extractive industries are considered key nodes of 'development corridors' because they rely on some form of risk to function.

Furthermore, ambivalence reveals an implicit distinction between dreamscapes and riskscapes, that of visibility. Dreamscapes are visible proclamations addressed to the public through well-prepared government reports and institutional presentations that include maps and infographics, media reports, documents from globally recognised markets (such as the JSE), and nationally broadcast speeches by government ministers. However, riskscapes are less visible and manifest through the silenced fears and anxieties of surrounding communities and environmental degradation, which national and institutional actors typically overlook and deny, prioritising mining interests. In Concordia, the silencing and invisibilisation of local risks led to social tensions between the community and Copper 360.

Therefore, it is essential to consider how the surrounding communities and environments bear the brunt of these interventions. Given these processes, ambivalent perspectives reveal the necessity of understanding how dreamscapes and riskscapes operate alongside one another, as these dynamics highlight how space, lived experiences (knowledge), and power operate in proposed 'developmental' contexts. As a result, I argue that ambivalent perspectives serve as points of convergence between dreamscapes and riskscapes, as illustrated in Figure 5.1 below. Here, ambivalence manifests when optimistic perspectives on 'development' cannot be isolated from perceptions of fear and apprehension about the region's historical extractive frontier. While Willem is confident about the mining company's proposed 'development' and future prosperity, he remains sceptical given the current lack of accountability from the mining company. Similarly, Neil envisions a future

in which the mining company collaborates with the community. However, this vision is paired with trauma from the region's historical legacies of extractivism. In saying this, ambivalent perspectives question visions of prosperity and optimism, revealing underlying notions of risk and, consequently, riskscapes – which may have always existed but remained dormant. Therefore, I argue that this ambivalence exposes the conditionality of dreamscapes, as they exist only so long as they are effectively supported by personal beliefs and tangible aspects.

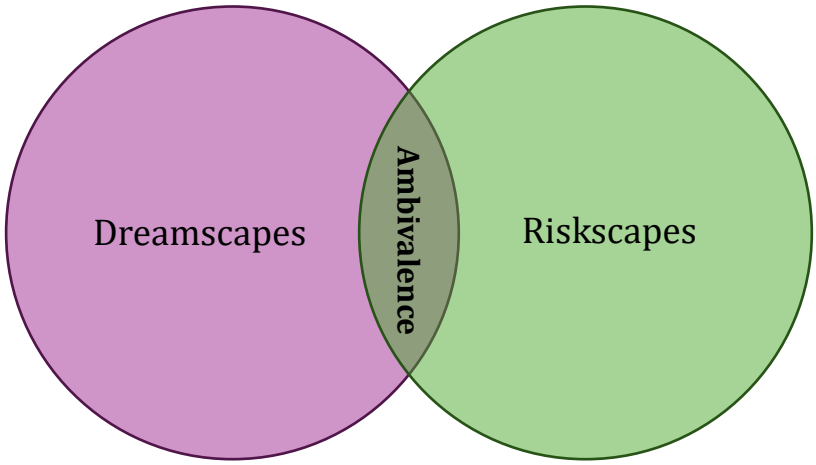



Figure 5.1: a Venn diagram illustrating how ambivalence becomes the point of convergence between the dreamscapes and riskscapes frameworks

**Chapter conclusion**

Individuals in different positions hold diverging perspectives of risk based on their values, livelihoods, and experiences. Given the nature of risk, this chapter builds on Müller-Mahn's argument that different conceptualisations of risk form part of a broader collective riskscape. As a result, Concordia's 'copper riskscape' can be understood as both a conceptual and ethnographical framework that integrates historical, environmental, economic, social, and infrastructural dimensions. Farmers express concerns about the environmental and socio-economic risks, whereas town residents outline social and cultural risks resulting from potential forced displacement. Lastly, retired or former mine workers' concerns about the social and material realities highlight the economic, labour-related, and infrastructural dimensions of risk. Therefore, these diverse perceptions of risk highlight that risk is a socially produced understanding of hazards, embedded within

different subjectivities and positionalities. As such, understanding diverse perceptions of risk offers unique insights into the fears, apprehensions, anxieties, and ambivalence held by community members regarding the proposed cluster mining model. Furthermore, ambivalent perspectives in the town form a point of convergence between these dreamscapes and riskscapes, exposing conditional visions of optimism, paired with fears and anxieties. In doing so, ambivalence reveals that optimism cannot be separated from apprehension, thereby highlighting the fragility of the dreamscapes framework, and by extension, the narratives employed to promote new extractive frontiers.

# Chapter 6: Conclusion

As we move into a future driven by 'sustainable development', it is pertinent to acknowledge that environmental sustainability cannot be justified or equitable if it benefits the few at the expense of the many. Drawing on the perspectives of residents in Concordia, this study provided insight into (1) local, national, and international power dynamics and asymmetries that are frequently overlooked, and (2) how to transform the developmental futures of Concordia. These local perspectives reveal how Concordia's social landscape becomes a contested space – through contradictory visions of the future – that is forced to confront contemporary articulations of histories of extractivism. In doing so, the town becomes a telling case study, revealing the possible (re)making of historical extractive frontiers in an area characterised by prevalent socio-economic and ecological challenges.

I argue that South African legislation – particularly the MPRDA, as stipulated in Chapter 1 – establishes conditions that enable the (re)emergence of these historical extractive frontiers by prioritising mineral exploration over local socio-economic and environmental needs and priorities, despite well-developed mitigation frameworks. Therefore, these perspectives reveal how mining companies and/or regional governments continually overlook surrounding communities and ecological protections, thereby revealing the damaging consequences of historical frontiers in South Africa's contemporary mining industry. These conditions are exacerbated by the global energy transition, as international 'green energy' narratives position copper as an essential component for renewable technologies, spurring investment and driving commodity prices. Nationally, these global narratives are also promoted as a critical key to fostering opportunities for local 'development'.

These interventions – which facilitate the expansion of these (re)made extractive frontiers – are classified as 'development corridors' (as discussed in Chapter 4), because they connect Concordia's rural periphery to global interests in order to further sustainable 'development'. Copper 360's JSE (Johannesburg Stock Exchange) listing has contributed towards attracting foreign investment to Namaqualand's copper resources and legitimised the company's vision of progress and profitability. However, based on the various perceptions discussed throughout this study, I propose that the focus is not solely

on the development corridors themselves, but rather on the narratives they produce and endorse. In other words, the question is not only about how these corridors function across space and time – as Müller-Mahn emphasises – but also about what narratives and forces are driving the (re)making of extractive frontiers in Concordia, and across the globe.

Here, I propose that literature on "green washing" – by Cock (2011, 2014), Scott and Smith (2017), Tornel (2023), and many more – provides an indispensable framework for understanding this dynamic and further questions the legitimacy of (re)made extractive frontiers in the global development discourse, which is increasingly focused on advancing 'sustainable' movements. For Dunlap and Brock (2021:108), "green washing" is a marketing strategy whereby corporations claim their actions are 'sustainable' to hide or distract from the continued exploitation of resources to obtain a profit. In this context, narratives that label copper as "green," "critical," or "transition" and therefore essential to the global energy transition, expose instances of 'green washing'. These discourses are a key incentive for the global rush to discover new high-quality copper sources and, in doing so, create new avenues for evolving extractive frontiers that focus on 'green' initiatives.

Although new large-scale extractions have not yet commenced in Concordia, I argue that efforts to extract 'green' copper – under the guise of "environmentally friendly" mining – follow from colonial and apartheid histories of copper mining legacies, which produced racial labour exploitation, environmental degradation, and the displacement of people, as demonstrated in Chapter 2. The cluster mining model (discussed in Chapter 1) is a prime example of this rearticulation. Irrespective of its capacity to reduce its environmental footprint through a central processing plant, rather than multiple processing facilities, socio-economic and environmental impacts persist, as demonstrated in Chapter 5. These efforts repeatedly demonstrate that mining is inherently destructive, and no amount of sustainable development intervention can change this nature.

Therefore, as Concordia's social landscape reveals both the benefits and drawbacks of copper mining's influence on the town, it is crucial to consider Namaqualand's historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid as cautionary tales rather than as past experiences that have no impact on the present and the future of the town. I concur with the local

perspectives suggesting that mining can foster positive growth through the creation of employment, improved infrastructure, and possibly support the local economy, as demonstrated by Smalberger (1969, 1975), Bregman (2010), and Kelso (2010) in Chapter 2. However, this more optimistic view needs to be tempered by the realities of Concordia's mining history. Furthermore, I question the unpredictability of global markets, which have historically led to unpredictable, cyclical copper production, referred to as 'boom-and-bust' cycles. As stipulated in Chapter 4, mining companies can only provide these opportunities once they become financially operational – an ambiguous stipulation without a definitive deadline. Here, I argue that mining companies invest in a context of unpredictability, which renders mining communities and ecologies vulnerable in the long term.

Extending on this notion, the varying perspectives in Chapter 5 implicitly reveal potential sacrifices arising from the (re)making of these extractive frontiers. Drawing on the notion of 'green washing' as a rationale behind this reinvestment, I argue that the different notions of 'risk' described in this chapter are emerging hallmarks of a potential 'green' sacrifice zone in Concordia. For Zografos and Robbins (2020:543), 'green' sacrifice zones refer to the mentality that, as green-washed rationales drive large-scale mineral extraction for 'sustainability', surrounding communities and environments are inevitably sacrificed in the process. Stories and experiences from farmers, residents, and former mine workers in Concordia demonstrate their growing fears that this reinvestment will compromise the community's way of life and their environment.

Despite their differences, these perspectives are joined by a single implicit theme: the need for change. Change in the current socio-economic realities through opportunities that promise growth. Change in the landscape and the imagined future of the town, and lastly, change in the manner in which mining is pursued on communal land. Concordia is the first site in the broader cluster mining model in Namaqualand. Here, I suggest that mining companies operating in the region need to recognise these tensions and develop more inclusive approaches that prioritise long-term social and environmental sustainability. Copper mining industries need to (re)imagine new and inclusive modes of mining that do not reproduce the historical extractive frontiers, but rather, seek to usher in futures that are genuinely equitable, sustainable, and that take local perspectives and historical experiences seriously.

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