

# **‘Frack off’**

**Towards an anarchist political ecology critique of corporate and state  
responses to anti-fracking resistance in the UK**

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## Abstract

This paper puts forward an anarchist political ecology critique of extreme energy extractivism by examining corporate and state responses (or ‘political reactions from above’) to anti-fracking resistance in the UK. The planned drilling for unconventional gas and oil through hydraulic fracturing has triggered unprecedented opposition, with protest camps, direct actions, and legal challenges disrupting operations and slowing down planning and exploration development. Drawing on green anarchist thought, critiques of extractivism, statism, and industrialism, and a (corporate) counterinsurgency framework, I examine the strategies adopted by drilling companies and state actors to manage resistance and win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the population, deploying tactics from greenwashing in local schools to harsh policing of dissent. The latter has included the criminalisation and stigmatisation of land defenders, targeting campaigners as ‘domestic extremists’, physical abuse, targeting protesters with disabilities, and entering public-private security partnerships with local police forces which involve the ‘outsourcing’ of police communication to drilling companies. Such actions are complimented by the contracting of PR firms, lobbying, sponsorships of sports clubs and school competitions, ‘astroturfing’, and influencing local so-called democratic procedures. This has gone hand in hand with political efforts to classify operation sites as ‘Nationally Significant Infrastructure projects’ to facilitate the suppression of protest. These strategies are embedded in a recently well-documented history of police infiltration and corporate spying, laying bare an unapologetic commitment to sacrifice human and nonhuman wellbeing for industrial growth, commitment to extractivist ideology and centralisation of power at the cost of further eroding local autonomy and control.

## 1. Introduction

In England, the drilling for unconventional gas and oil through hydraulic fracturing, or fracking,<sup>1</sup> has become the newest extreme energy frontier. The British government has been blunt about its support for fracking – despite local protest and only 13% of the British public opinion favouring fracking (BEIS, 2019, p. 3). While the government implemented a temporary moratorium on some fracking operations in late 2019,<sup>2</sup> exploratory drilling and the development of acid stimulation continue. Until 2018, the only successful fracking operation in the UK had taken place in Blackpool, Western Lancashire, in 2011. Two earthquakes in the Fylde coastal area, caused by the operation (de Pater & Baisch, 2011), triggered a temporary ban on fracking. In 2013, this ban was lifted under the condition of strict seismic controls, and in October 2018, Cuadrilla announced the beginning of its fracking operations at Preston New Road (PNR), now cancelled. In addition, about a dozen sites are in different stages of testing and exploration across the country; delayed by hundreds of anti-fracking groups taking direct and legal actions at every step of the planning process. While in 2013, consultancy firm Ernst and Young had estimated that 4000 horizontal wells would be drilled by 2032, not a single well operates commercially in 2020, and in

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘fracking’ is politically contested and defined differently across political contexts and European countries. The UK government’s definition of fracking is very narrow, excluding many drilling projects. However, I use the term to refer to the wider process of unconventional oil and gas exploration processes (including acidisation).

<sup>2</sup> The moratorium only includes those operations which meet a specific definition in the 2015 Infrastructure Act, namely those which injected more than 1000 cubic metres of fluid at each stage of the process, or more than 10,000 cubic metres of fluid in total, excluding exploratory drilling and acid stimulation (Hayhurst, 2020a, Hayhurst, 2020b).

2019, following a 22-months Freedom of Information (FOI) campaign, the government released a confidential report demonstrating that “[p]ublic opposition [is the] root cause of slow progress of UK fracking” (Hayhurst, 2019).

Fracking involves the high-pressure pumping of water, chemicals, and sand into the ground to fracture the rock formations in which oil and gas are enclosed. Fracking has triggered unprecedented resistance across England, with unlikely alliances between protesters, environmentalists, farmers, and wealthy landowners. Protest camps and the disruption of planning and exploration at all stages through direct and legal action to slow or shut down operations and development have substantially increased costs and alienated investors. Meanwhile, continued support by the British government in the face of local resistance and local council opposition has increased mistrust vis-à-vis political institutions. Drilling companies and state actors have engaged in a diversity of tactics – derived from counterinsurgency – to manage resistance and win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the population, from ‘greenwashing’ in schools to the brutal policing of dissent. Such policing has included the criminalisation of land protectors, targeting campaigners as ‘domestic extremists’, physical abuse, and entering public-private security partnerships with local police forces which involve the ‘outsourcing’ of police communication to drilling companies. Such actions are complemented by the contracting of large public relations (PR) firms, sponsorships of sports clubs and school competitions, and influencing local so-called democratic procedures. This has gone hand-in-hand with political efforts to classify operation sites as ‘Nationally Significant Infrastructure projects’ to justify the coercive policing of protest, and the centralisation of power away from local councils towards the national government. These tactics are embedded in a recently well-documented history of police infiltration and corporate spying (Austin, 2002; Dinan & Miller, 2007; Lubbers, 2012; Rowell, 2007), laying bare the British state’s commitment to extractivist ideology and unapologetic commitment to sacrifice human and nonhuman wellbeing for industrial growth.

Drawing on, and further developing, an anarchist political ecology critique (Dunlap & Brock, forthcoming; Springer, Locret, Mateer, & Acker, forthcoming) as well as recent work on corporate and state counterinsurgency strategies and tactics (Brock & Dunlap, 2018; Dunlap & Fairhead, 2014), and engaging with postcolonial scholarship on (neo)extractivism (Acosta, 2013; Willow, 2016) and statism (Ince & Barrera de la Torre, 2016), this paper examines “political (re)actions ‘from above’” (Geenen & Verweijen, 2017) to resistance against ‘extreme energy extractivism’. It focuses on the relationship between fracking, state power/statism, and political violence, and how it shapes corporate-political, socio-cultural, and biophysical landscapes in the UK. An anarchist political ecology critique allows us not only to examine the close relationship between the British state and the fracking industry, but also uncovers the extractivist interests of the state at the base level, and how the logics of extractivism and statism intersect. It does that by examining how anti-extractive resistance threatens the state and how anti-extractive and anti-state resistance are co-opted and suppressed, by pointing to relations of power and domination, hierarchies, and quantitative and reductionist epistemologies underlying both logics.

An anarchist political ecology critique can offer a framework for studying the relationship between social and ecological conflicts, their hierarchical orderings and the power relations that shape these orderings. Ecological problems, Murray Bookchin (2007, p. 19) argues, “originate in deep-seated social problems ... [E]cological problems cannot be understood, let alone solved, without a careful understanding of our existing society and the irrationalities that dominate it”. An anarchist political ecology approach explores how the relationship between oppression, so-

cial degradation, and loss of local democracy shapes geographies and imaginations of the countryside, ecological degradation, and climate change. Drawing from green anarchist ideas, and contesting Marxian views of techno-industrial development, this framework thus points to the role of industrialism and technology as central to ecological conquest.

Employing an anarchist political ecology perspective, I argue that fracking exemplifies the state-extraction-ecocide nexus in the UK. Central to the state-extraction-ecocide nexus is the inseparability of the British state from extractive interests, and therefore, the need to look at the state itself as manifestation of these interests, and as a structural obstacle to sustainability. Contributing to the political ecology of the Global North (Schröder, St Martin, & Albert, 2006; Dunlap, 2020), this article uncovers the repressive activities that are central to engineering extraction and legitimising the industrialisation of the English countryside. I map out these strategies and show how these are interlinked, and fundamental to the political, financial, and practical feasibility of fracking in the UK. This shows, I argue, the inseparability of ecological destruction and lack of autonomy and erosion of ‘democracy’. Ecological destruction is thus the direct outcome of hierarchical ordering, authoritarian social relations, social erosion, and power.

The state is not a unitary actor, but consists of diverse, overlapping, and changeable interests and forces working together and against each other – as reflected in the fact that support for fracking varies across governmental departments, political parties, and individuals. While this diversity will be examined elsewhere, here I focus on the strategies that have been pushed from key state actors and their industry partners, through legal, planning, and policing activities. Through its civil and repressive institutions, the state enforces a particular social order (Dunlap, 2014) in which extractive operations – including fracking – are embedded. The British imperial state has historically relied on extractivism in its colonies and at home, for its economic success and the very legitimacy on which state building depends (e.g. Dalby, 2004). The history of empire thus illustrates the need to go beyond critiques of capitalism, and focus on industrialism, state violence and extractivism, which lie at its heart – less visible but just as entrenched in so-called ‘developed’ countries in the Global North. Rather than focussing on the ‘nature’ of the state itself, however, the main focus here lies on the social relation of *statism* that the state is grounded in, and its relationship to extractivism.

This work it is based on ongoing field research in England, 20 semi-structured interviews with members of the anti-fracking resistance, and ‘observant participation’ (Sullivan & Brockington, 2004). It also draws on secondary literature, specifically investigative work by the anti-fracking community, DRILLORDROP?, and NETPOL, mapping corporate and state responses against the anti-fracking movement. Much of the empirical material draws on the anti-fracking resistance at PNR in Lancashire, where fracking firm Cuadrilla attempted the first frack of a horizontal shale gas well after years of testing and exploration. The research is also based on long-term participation in, and commitment to, the anti-fracking movement in the UK. Neutrality, Kirsch has argued, might not be possible when researching extractive conflicts (2002). The need to take sides and overcome positivist mythologies of objectivity goes hand-in-hand with a commitment not to make legible structures of resistance, and their ways of living and organising.

The paper proceeds by first outlining the situation of fracking and anti-fracking resistance in the UK. Second, I introduce the framework of analysis by exploring some of the literatures on the relationship between extractivism, industrialism, statism, and anti-extractivist resistance. Based on this review, I then, thirdly, outline how an anarchist approach to political ecology can help understand state responses – or counterinsurgency strategies – to anti-fracking resistance. In the

second half of the paper, I map some of the corporate and state counterinsurgency strategies that have been deployed to make fracking legally possible and financially feasible, and to suppress and criminalise legal and direct actions against the industry. This section also focuses on collaborations between security, state, and corporate actors that join to defend extractive interests, followed by some conclusions on the relationship between social and ecological erosion and the state.

## **2. Fracking for ‘clean growth’**

The direct links between UK government advisors, energy multinationals and investments firms – including Centrica and Riverstone, who bought up a 25% stake of fracking firm Cuadrilla (Harvey, 2013) – are well documented. Immense amounts of research have been conducted by anti-fracking campaigners revealing the depths of politico-economic fracking connections. Fracking is embedded in a complex web of personal and institutional relationships and vested interests that transcend state institutions, fracking firms, and investors. In 2013, under David Cameron’s government and at the height of the governmental push to develop a fracking industry, Mobbs mapped some of these links (Fig. 1; Mobbs, 2013). The figure illustrates the revolving doors associated with the political economy of energy and shows the intimate connections between the cabinet, international finance, and the fracking industry.

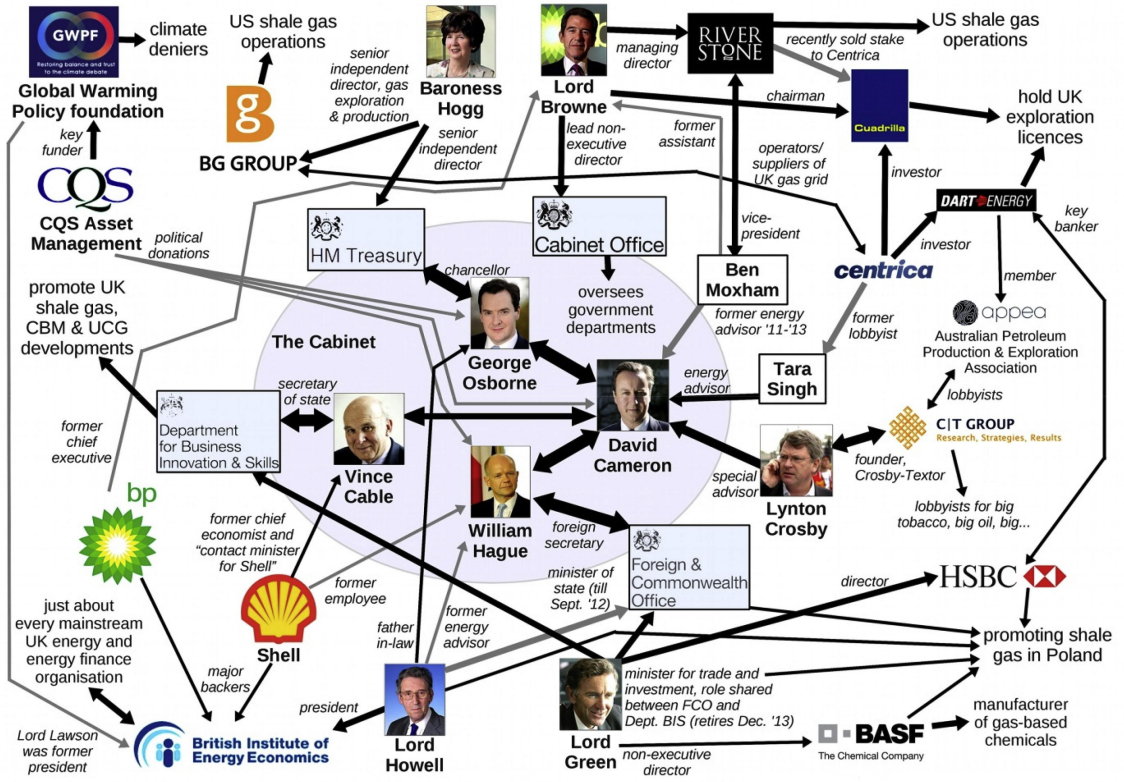


Fig. 1. The political economy of fracking in the UK (Mobbs, 2013).

Exemplifying these relationships is the most influential UK fracking advocate: Lord Browne, a former British Petroleum (BP) executive who was with the company for over 40 years. Lord Browne was Cuadrilla's chairman from 2007 until 2015, he became managing director of Riverstone LLC in 2007, and was president of the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAE) from 2006 to 2011. He further sits on seven advisory boards, half of which are involved in oil and gas companies. While owning 30% of Cuadrilla, he was appointed in 2010 to work inside the UK government as the lead Non-Executive Director to the Cabinet Office tasked with "appoint[ing] Non-Executive directors to the board of each government department" (Cabinet Office, 2010). He oversaw the appointment of four non-executives in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and three at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, whose jobs included the granting of oil and gas licenses and overseeing the industry (Frack Off, 2012). In 2012, he co-authored the RAE's fracking report, the basis of the government's fracking policy. FOI requests revealed that Centrica maintained a close collaboration with the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) – meeting over "high-level dinners" and "post-dinner drinks" to speak about "managing national and local stakeholders" and sharing "a list of stakeholders" (Carrington, 2014). Centrica further "emailed [DECC] a figure of 74,000 potential jobs linked to shale gas development, a number later repeated by Cameron and ministers despite [DECC]'s own study estimating a peak of 16,000 to 32,000 jobs" (Carrington, 2014). Similarly, fracking companies regularly meet privately with police forces to discuss drilling plans and get advice from their counter-terrorism officers (Hope & Scott, 2018) and to share information about protesters (Scott, 2017).

Fracking opposition is fuelled by this display of corporate power, as well as disillusionment about the lack of democratic decision making, resource control and the role of the police in protecting extractive interests. Anti-fracking resistance really took off in Balcombe in 2013, when mass protests involving mass arrests made the headlines and politicised the fracking debate. Since then, hundreds of local community groups have formed, at times working with national groups (including Frack Off and Reclaim the Power), raising awareness among residents and the media. A number of local councils rejected and continue to reject exploration and drilling applications on noise and traffic grounds. However, recent legal changes have made it easier for the national government to overturn such decisions upon companies' appeal. Cuadrilla's PNR fracking operation was the first example of this – the planning application had been turned down by Lancashire County Council following a 15 months-review, but given green light in October 2016 by the national government. PNR has been among the most hotly contested sites, with daily protests and blockades for over 600 days, two permanent protest camps and a number of legal challenges until the site was decommissioned in 2019. Other major protests have taken place in Barton Moss in Greater Manchester, Fylde in Lancashire, West Newton, and Crawberry Hill in Humberside. Across the country, protesters have taken legal and direct action, including slow-walking (in front of delivery lorries), blockading sites (e.g. with lock-on devices, or 'lorry-surfing'<sup>3</sup>), demonstrations, and marches, as well as legal challenges targeting corporate activities and government decisions to issue and extend permits (e.g. Hayhurst, 2016a). Anti-fracking resistance has significantly delayed and slowed down exploration and drilling operations. In evidence that was submitted during a court case in 2018, Ray Fellows, security consultant for fracking company INEOS, said that "the fracking industry was 'becoming increasingly concerned at the risks posed by mili-

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<sup>3</sup> Encouraging lorries to stop moving by standing on top and 'surfing' them.



tant activists” (Evans, 2018). Despite these multifaceted contestations, the government remained committed to supporting the industry at all costs, in turn feeding discontent and protest. To understand this commitment, and the way the British state is responding to these contestations, the following section will be exploring the relationship between extreme energy extractivism, resistance, and the state.

### 3. Extreme energy extractivism, resistance, and the state

Historically, the extraction of metals, minerals, and fossil fuels has been central to the consolidation of industrial civilisation, capitalism, and state power. Extractive infrastructures bind the state-extraction-ecocide nexus together. They are often (co)financed by governments, while many minerals and fossil fuels are central to key state interests – such as growth and security – and the exercise of state control (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2014). At the same time, few industries are as socially and ecologically destructive as extractive industries, as resources are being exploited with little or no regard for the social and ecological impacts on local communities or the global climate, often entailing mass displacement and pollution (Evans, Goodman, & Lansbury, 2002). Fracking constitutes a recent frontier of ‘extreme energy extraction’, a term first coined by Klare (2011) to describe “a range of relatively new, higher-risk, non-renewable resource extraction processes that have become more attractive to the conventional energy industry as the more easily accessible supplies dwindle” (see also Short, Elliot, Norder, Lloyd-Davies, & Morley, 2015).

Postcolonial scholars, predominantly from Latin America, have developed the concept of (neo-) extractivism (Gudynas, 2009), broadly defined as the “remov[al of] natural resources from their points of origin and dislocate[ion of] the emplaced benefits they provide” (Willow, 2016, p. 55). Extractivism, they argue, is itself a colonial ideology bound to state power and a mechanism of (neo)colonial “plunder and appropriation” (Acosta, 2013, p. 63; see also; Willow, 2016). Closely linked to settler-colonialism, it prioritises and values resources and growth over human and ecological health (Preston, 2017). Scholars have problematised the relationship between extractivism, developmentalism, and ‘progress’, and the role of corporate and state actors in extractivist ideology and policy (Savino, 2016; Uzendoski, 2018). The extractivist ‘mode of accumulation’ (Acosta, 2013) includes not only the mining and extraction of hydrocarbons, metals, and minerals, but also industrial monoculture; conceptualised as ‘agrarian extractivism’ (McKay, 2017), ‘green extractivism’ (Brock, 2020), or ‘total extractivism’ (Dunlap & Jacobsen, 2020). Indeed, Preston argues, “[t]he trans-Atlantic slave trade was the largest extractive project in human history” (2017: 355). What matters here is the *hierarchical logic* of extractivism; the social and labour relations based on human and nonhuman domination and exploitation that are inherent in extractivist ideology and practise. This extractivist logic is usually seen to characterise the relationship between the industrialised ‘North’ and the developing ‘South’, based on “colonial coercion and post-colonial ‘consent’ via political-economic institutional arrangements” that facilitate the “exploitation, control and export of raw materials from the latter to fuel the industrial development of the former” (McKay, 2017, p. 199). Others describe settler-colonial contexts in the global North (e.g. Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2014; Willow, 2016). Preston analyses “racial extractivism” as part of white settler colonial violence in Canada, pointing to the ways in which race and colonialism inform structures of resource extraction, Indigenous life, and anti-colonial governance systems which oppose and disrupt statist logics (Preston, 2017, p. 371). Extractive politics in England are not comparable to

the colonial violence, the deadly response to resistance and the (cultural) genocide that often accompanies anti-extractivist struggles in settler-colonial contexts. Yet, while careful not to appropriate the experiences of colonised peoples, I suggest that the concepts may help understand extractive logics in the centre of empire – England – too. The concept is analytically and politically useful to dissect the power relations and patterns of inequalities associated with fracking, the uneven ecological and social impacts and dependencies, and the creation of sacrifice zones for industrial development.

The extractivist framework directs critique beyond capitalism towards large-scale industrialism; complex mechanised systems of production built upon centralised power structures and the exploitation of human and nonhuman nature (Black Seed, 2014; GA, 2012). Industrialism, while not commonly critiqued in political ecology scholarship, is “inherently authoritarian”, green anarchists have long argued; industrialism

*cannot exist without genocide, ecocide, and colonialism. To maintain it, coercion, land evictions, forced labor, cultural destruction, assimilation, ecological devastation, and global trade are accepted as necessary, even benign. Industrialism’s standardization of life objectifies and commodifies it, viewing all life as potential resource* (Black Seed, 2014, p. 11).

Industrialism requires constant conquest, colonisation, and subordination of natures for objectification and consumption (Black Seed, 2014). It goes hand-in-hand with alienation, separation, and dispossession of people(s) from their land (Gelderloos, 2017; Perlman, 1983; Sale, 2000; Dunlap & Jacobsen, 2020). It is also inherently patriarchal, objectifying the very nature of human and non-human – and especially women’s – lives for material gain, based on the same mechanistic world view that excuses their domination (Federici, 2004; Merchant, 1980). The ideology that underlies extractivism and industrialism, legitimising land grabs in the name of ‘progress’ and ‘development’, upholds and secures private property, capital power (cf. Preston, 2017), and state control. It is grounded in claims of control over human and natural resources, and often informs resource nationalist discourses and practices. Extractivism and statist ideologies of development and power go hand in hand, with states pushing ideologies which naturalise ‘capitalistic extractivism’, imposing modernity, and undermining sovereignty and Indigenous (anti-statist) values and ways of life (Uzendoski, 2018, p. 370).

Statist governance, or *statism*, refers not only to the existence of state structures, but a “a pervasive, historically contingent organisational logic that valorises and naturalises sovereign, coercive, and hierarchical relationships, within and beyond state spaces” (Ince & Barrera de la Torre, 2016, p. 10). The state is only one manifestation of this logic; “emblematic of a particular mode of (violently-maintained) authoritarian relations; part of an interconnected set of power asymmetries (including gender, race, class, dis/ability, etc.) that allow certain groups to dominate others” (Ince & Barrera de la Torre, 2016, p. 11). Analysing statism invites not only the examination of the phenomenon of the state itself, but the asymmetrical social (power) relations that are justified and institutionalised by the state (Ince & Barrera de la Torre, 2016). In 1946, Kropotkin described this logic as including “not only ... the existence of a power situated above society, but also of a territorial concentration as well as the concentration in the hands of a few of many functions in the life of societies. It implies some new relationships between members of society which did not exist before the formation of the State” (1946, p. 4). The relationship relies

on processes of making populations legible and governable (Scott, 1998); to colonise humans and land for statist goals such as industrial growth. This already suggests that statist relations are not only based on exploitation and domination of human societies, but also on ecological hierarchies between humans and nonhumans, economic systems and ecosystems, corporations and ecologies. Statism institutionalises the ongoing binary conceptualisation, separation, colonisation, exploitation, and extraction of nature through objectification, quantification, and commodification. The accompanying alienation of nature informs hegemonic ideas of development and value, captures imaginations, and kills visions of alternative futures that do not rely on extraction and exploitation of humans and nonhuman ecosystems. Sale paraphrased Bookchin's thought: "Societies that dominate nature also dominate people" (2000, p. 122). If statism and extractivism share these underlying ideological premises, it should come at no surprise that the extractivist mode of accumulation seems to be at the heart of both neoliberal and progressive governments (Acosta, 2013, p. 63). State forces rely on political violence and everyday social war (Dunlap, 2014; 2019) to manage resistance against extractive models of development. In fact, Grove has shown, the world we live in is made by war; political violence is the main driver of ecological crisis, genocide, extractivism, and slavery (2019). He points to the way states have enforced a hyper-modernist European-led state systems and highlights the violence inherent in processes of homogenisation. The spread of the state has always relied on colonialism, genocide, and invasions, going hand-in-hand with the development of state-oriented knowledges such as ecology, biology, and anthropology, to make human and nonhuman state subjects legible and dominatable (Scott, 1998; Ince & Barrera de la Torre, 2016). Pacification of anti-systemic resistance (highlighted by Huff & Orengo (2020), this special issue) are thus fundamental to maintaining extractive and state legitimacy. By drawing attention to the way the state 'sees' dissidents (Scott, 1998) – as threats to the political economic order, as domestic extremists, or eco-terrorists – we can explore how it manages, pacifies, and suppresses resistance: through a range of counterinsurgency measures targeting those who are questioning and opposing extractive developments.

The counterinsurgency framework integrates military/policing tactics and civilian responses to manage conflict by winning "the hearts, minds and acquiescence of the population" (Kilcullen, 2006, p. 29). It assembles "practices that connect violence to order, force to persuasion, civil to military power" (Bell, 2015, p. 18). The British army manual defines counterinsurgency as "military, law enforcement, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken to defeat insurgency, while addressing the root causes" (British Army, 2009, pp. 1–6). It addresses different political, social, cultural, economic, and security dimensions of conflicts, emphasising intelligence-gathering to understand social structures, networks and practices; psychological operations, PR, manipulation, and social development to maintain legitimacy (British Army, 2009). Divide-and-conquer strategies are meant to "win over the moderates and isolate the extremists" (Kitson, 1971, p. 83). Britain has a long history of counterinsurgency strategising, that Rich and Duyvesteyn attest is a "product of decolonisation" and the empire's major struggles in Malaya and Kenya, among others (2012, p. 13). British counterinsurgency strategy, revived after the rise of domestic social unrest in the 1960s (Dunlap & Fairhead, 2014), is informed by experiences with colonial policing, including 'counterterrorism' operations in Northern Ireland in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ellison & O'Reilly, 2008). A central characteristic of counterinsurgency is that it sits "at the intersection of battle and order, war and police" (Bell, 2015, p. 19), rendering the very distinction between military and police irrelevant (Neocleous, 2015). Colonial policing, like fracking policing, was concerned with the maintenance and legitimacy of a particular (imperial/extractive) social order, rather than crime

prevention (Andersen & Killingray, 1991). The goal of counterinsurgency is thus to manage internal and external conflicts, to deal with violent and non-violent ‘insurgencies’ including civil disobedience and to prevent violent eruption. Miller and Sabir show how counter-terrorism legislation itself constitutes a form of counterinsurgency in the UK domestic context (2012). Domestic community policing and police militarisation play into counterinsurgency planning (Williams, 2004), contributing to securing social control, oppression and pacification.

States and (resource extraction) companies use counterinsurgency strategies to legitimise and render invisible the violence inherent in their operations, and to deal with ‘insurgencies’ questioning their legitimacy and actions (Brock & Dunlap, 2018). In the US, gas executives work with psy-op experts to deal with anti-fracking resistance and have recommended PR specialists to download the US counterinsurgency manual to manage unruly landowners (Javers, 2011). In the UK, fracking corporations employ private security companies with experience in counterinsurgency operations in Iraq (Hope & Collett-White, 2018). Counterinsurgency technologies have been exposed around Rio Tinto’s operations in Bougainville (Lasslett, 2014) and at Standing Rock (Brown, Parrish, & Speri, 2017). Such technologies include the extensive use of surveillance and legal tools, as General Kitson suggested early on: “the law should be used as just another weapon in the government’s arsenal, and in this case it becomes little more than a propaganda cover for the disposal of unwanted members of the public” (1971, p. 69). Key to these operations is divide-and-conquering by declaring certain actions as legal, and others as illegal, based on scientific frameworks and moral categorisations that uphold the liberal social contract. The study of state and ‘corporate counterinsurgency’ strategies (Brock & Dunlap, 2018) to manage anti-fracking resistance thus investigates how state forces and corporations mobilise resources to make fracking feasible, and to pre-empt, co-opt, and manage resistance. The diversity of techniques needs to be analysed as comprehensive system of management of dissent and control. More ‘subtle’ strategies, such as PR and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and psychological operations, make extractive activity appear ‘green’, ‘sustainable’ (Brock, 2020), and ‘of national interest’; and co-opt and pacify resistance. They further serve to invisibilise the violence inherent in more coercive strategies, as well as the violence integral to industrialism, extractivism, and growth, exacerbated by the habitat destruction and climate change they cause. The counterinsurgency concept thus illustrates the structurally indispensable role of state forces in preserving the extractive social order within which fracking is embedded.

### **3.1. Towards an anarchist political ecology critique of fracking**

This paper approaches fracking in England through what could be termed an anarchist political ecology critique of extreme energy extractivism. This approach builds on anti-authoritarian critiques of power that are fundamental to the field of political ecology, its close relationship with social movements and its concern with, and often outspoken commitment to, ecological and social justice (Robbins, 2012[2004]; Dunlap & Jacobsen, 2020). An anarchist political ecology approach, following Reclus, Kropotkin, Bookchin and various green anarchists, recognises the violence at the heart of extractivism and statism, while facilitating a systemic focus on the coercion inherent in extractivism, industrial development and the state itself. Recent work by critical geographers (Springer, 2013; Springer, Ince, Pickerill, Brown, & Barker, 2012; White, Springer, & Souza, 2016; White & Williams, 2012) has re-invigorated the anarchist traditions of political ecology and reminded us of its anarchist roots, most notably the work of 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchist

geographers Kropotkin and Reclus (Springer, 2016; Robbins, 2012[2004]). This body of work has re-politicised environmental challenges (e.g. Clough & Blumberg, 2012; White et al., 2016), challenging environmental determinism (Kropotkin, 1885), and going beyond domination and unfreedoms associated with capitalism, statism, patriarchy, and racism to include the domination of nature and the struggle for animal liberation (Reclus, 1876; Springer et al., forthcoming).

What distinguishes anarchist thought, most fundamentally, from other critical approaches is its rejection of all types of hierarchy, oppression, leadership, division of labour, and authority in different manifestations beyond that of capital (Springer, 2016; 2012a). Building on the critique of statism outlined above, anarchists see the state, in its present form, its 'essence' and other historical/future incarnations, as an obstacle to social and ecological insurrection, equality, and justice; designed historically to preserve a particular social and ecological order (cf. Kropotkin, 1898). The state is then viewed as an instrument of oppression (see also Dunlap, 2019, this special issue), founded on coercive power, or organised violence, to manage human and non-human populations alike. While the state must be explained historically, Kropotkin argued, it cannot be justified morally (1898). The state is thus tantamount to violence (Springer, 2012a, p. 1606), inextricably linked to aims and practices of industrial progress, capitalist growth and extractivism (Brock & Dunlap, 2018; Dunlap & Jacobsen, 2020; Perlman, 1983). Like extractive companies, it depends on a legitimacy and credibility that cannot be manufactured through force alone but relies on the engineering and maintenance of consent and curtailing of protest. The term 'violence' is itself a highly problematic idea; a moral concept that defies universal definition and can be mobilised politically for various purposes (Gelderloos, 2013). Geographers have pointed to the spatial nature of violence (Springer & Le Billon, 2016) and the need to view it as processual and unfolding, rather than 'act' or 'outcome' (Springer, 2012b). They highlight the multiple forms of slow (Nixon, 2011) or structural (Galtung, 1969), exceptional, structural, and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001) that are often neglected as we tend to focus on more visible use of force. These less visible forms of violence include the violence intrinsic to habitat destruction and climate change, capitalist and statist social relations, extractivism, and industrialism.

Through analysis of corporate and state counterinsurgency strategies, this anarchist political ecology critique illuminates these different forms of violence and the threat that anti-extractivist resistance can pose for capitalist and statist systems (e.g. Ballard, 1997). In the European Union, governments and international institutions have been classifying and targeting animal rights, environmental, left-wing, and anarchist individuals and groups as 'insurgents' and 'terrorists'; Europol reports have repeatedly classified anti-extractive protest as 'single-issue terrorism' (Europol, 2016, Europol, 2008). The anarchist political ecology critique further examines the public-private security partnerships that are fundamental to dealing with anti-extractive resistance and sheds light on the protection of extractive activities through legal and planning systems. It goes beyond a mere critique of the manipulation or abuse of these systems, as if these were politically neutral and merely *mobilised* and *corrupted* in support of fracking interests. Instead, it investigates how these systems are rooted in enlightenment thinking and shaped by ideologies of progress, techno-optimism, modernity, and in-built oppression (Ellul, 1964[1954]; Scott, 1998; Dunlap & Jacobsen, 2020); designed to facilitate (extractive) growth. They are grounded in quantitative abstractions, universal epistemologies, and anthropocentrism which anarchist thought contests (Franks, 2014; GA, 2012). Such a framework overcomes the liberal heritage that continues to position the state as protector, to which all authority and 'natural rights' are to be ceded. An anarchist political ecology approach should thus not be a narrow framework to understand

ecological conflict, but a set of ideas and thoughts that aim to overcome statism in academia too, to challenge the state hegemony in political imaginations, and to problematise and question some of the underlying categories and relationships such as between statism, extractivism, and ecocide.

## **4. Facilitating fracking, policing land protectors, and dealing with dissent**

*The key question [for the energy sector] is ... not how to avoid protest, but how we can manage protest – Sebastian Schwark of Hill + Knowlton (Mayer, 2019).*

Counterinsurgency strategies to facilitate fracking, police protesters, and deal with dissent include a variety of tactics. They range from legislative actions over the shaping of public opinion through PR and CSR, manipulation and manufacturing of consent, to surveillance, the creation of informant networks, astroturf groups, and the criminalisation and suppression of resistance through violent policing, verbal abuse, and manipulation (analysed below, see also Brock, 2020). In the first section, I explore how the planning system itself is continuously transformed to overrule anti-extractivist resistance, to secure state power, and to ensure the feasibility and profitability of fracking.

### **4.1. The state in action – fast-tracking approvals and removing legislative barriers**

*“We’re going all out for shale” – David Cameron (Watts, 2014)*

The most important legislative battleground contesting fracking has been the national planning framework, modified to curtail the power of councils to reject planning decisions, in addition to financial incentives for the industry. In 2012, just before the temporary ban on fracking was lifted, then Chancellor George Osborne had announced the British government’s ‘Dash for gas’ plans, shortly followed by its new ‘gas generation strategy’, and David Cameron’s speech to the CBI, the UK’s most influential business association. Cameron outlined the government’s strategy to cut back on judicial reviews, reduce government consultations, streamline European legislation, and stop the ‘gold-plating’ of domestic legislation (2012). Fracking development fit too well into this agenda. The following year, George Osborne announced the “most generous tax breaks in world” for fracking firms, reduced from 62% to 30% (Abdo, 2013; Revenue & Customs, 2013), in addition to eligibility for full tax relief on capital expenditure (reducing their taxable profit) (Gosden, 2013). Plans were discussed to grant local councils 100% of business rates from fracking (Watts, 2014), suggesting “that revenues generated by shale gas companies could be paid directly in case to homeowners living nearby” (Watts, 2014).

In January 2014, secondary legislation came into force which meant that homeowners no longer needed to be individually notified of planning applications to drill or frack under their homes. The government introduced a new voluntary community payment scheme and blocked EU proposals to regulate the fracking industry while publishing plans to “simplify deep underground access” for fracking firms (DECC, 2014), making fracking easier, cheaper, and less time-consuming. A comprehensive overhaul of the Infrastructure bill allowed fracking companies to

pass “any substance through, or putting any substance into, deep-level land or infrastructure installed in deep-level land” (UK Parliament, 2015: c.7, PART 6, 44(1)(d)), making it impossible for land owners to block fracking and disposal of toxic waste under their land.

In a leaked letter to the Economic Affairs Committee, George Osborne asked cabinet ministers for “rapid progress” on a number of actions to support fracking development, including intervening in local planning processes on behalf of fracking firm Cuadrilla, supporting Cuadrilla in case their fracking permit was turned down, offering public land for potential future drilling, and to report back on progress (Fig. 2; Osbourne, 2014). He suggested contacting the Ministry of Defence over granting Cuadrilla vehicles access to military land, improved fracking-PR work, “tailored” public engagement such as education campaigns and drawing in “neutral academic experts”, EU lobbying, and strengthening of supply chains for fracking equipment (Osbourne, 2014) – in other words, to invest in the social engineering of fracking, by enhancing its social acceptability, shaping public opinion, and buying consent.

Recommendations on reducing risks and delays to drilling the first well:		Indicative timescales	Lead department
1. Respond to the asks from Cuadrilla over which government has influence and that will impact on first well	a) Communicate to Lancashire County Council and others the intention behind the Planning Guidance requirements, specifically to address Mineral Planning Authority concerns that they must satisfy themselves that regulators are doing their job.	Nov 2014	DECC
	b) HSE to continue providing comprehensive responses to planning applications, outlining their role and the range of issues which have been considered.	Ongoing	DWP
	c) Clarify the commitment to publish chemical composition of fracking fluid – Cuadrilla has now supplied information to the EA on the chemical composition of fracking fluid and this will be provided as part of the second public consultation.	Sept 2014	Defra
	d) Clarify the use of MOD land for truck movements at the Roseacre site – terms are being considered subject to SoS approval of operational impact.	Oct 2014	DECC/MOD
	e) Establish whether boreholes for groundwater monitoring are allowed under permitted development rights.	Oct 2014	DCLG
	f) If permission is granted, work with Lancashire County Council and Cuadrilla to ensure that planning conditions are discharged as quickly as possible.	Nov 2014 onwards	DCLG
2. Be prepared for the risk that permission is turned down or progress injuncted	a) Consider whether to provide additional technical support to Lancashire to help determine current planning applications.	Oct 2014	DECC

Fig. 2. Government action points (Osbourne, 2014).



Industry representatives had repeatedly complained about long planning delays (Vaughan, 2015a), so the government took various steps to fasten planning processes and empower the state secretary to overrule council rejections. In 2015, the government announced that it would ‘step in’ if councils did not ‘fast-track’ fracking applications (Vaughan, 2015b). New planning guidance strongly encouraged councils to meet 16-week deadlines to approve applications, therewith making rejections more challenging, according to research participants, as it became “impossible” to consider health and safety evidence. Some steps of the fracking process, such as water monitoring, had previously required planning permissions and now only necessitated the notification of local councils (Vaughan, 2015b).

In the following year, the Department for Energy and Climate Change was abolished – the budget of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had already been cut from £3.1bn in 2008 to £1.5bn in 2020 (Kay, 2017) – and commitment to fracking was re-emphasised in the Conservative election manifesto in 2017. The manifesto proposed classifying fracking sites as nationally significant infrastructure, allowing for the deference of decision-making power from local councils to government-appointed planning inspectors. These steps became government position in 2018, when, after seven of eight shale drilling plans had been rejected by local councils between January and March, the government announced “new measures to back British shale gas exploration” (MHCLG, BEIS, & Claire, 2018). The proposed alterations to planning laws included abolishing the need to apply for planning permission for test drilling, the classification of operation sites as nationally significant infrastructure, and a £1.6 million shale support fund to speed up fracking applications. Current government plans involve streamlining and ‘improving’ regulation processes to ensure ‘timely’ decision making, thus pressuring and disempowering local councils which are more likely to reject planning permits. “If you know that the government is gonna overturn your decision – why even be bothered to work through mountains of paperwork?” asked a research participant from a local council.

The industry was angered by the new ‘New North Yorkshire Joint Minerals Plan’, which had imposed a 500m fracking buffer zone around homes and schools, and included a wider definition of ‘fracking’ than the government’s (Hayhurst, 2018c). In May 2018, the Energy and Local Government Secretaries issued a written statement re-emphasising the important benefits of the fracking industry, to be taken into account in local planning decisions. The government further announced consultation on the classification of “early stages of shale exploration” as “permitted development”, which abandons the need to apply for planning permission (MHCLG et al., 2018).

In response, the two secretaries re-emphasised the government’s commitment to “making planning decisions faster and fairer” and stated that local plans should “not set restrictions or thresholds across the plan area that limit shale gas development without proper justification” (Clark, 2018). They proposed, once again, the classification of early stages of shale gas exploration as “permitted development” and the inclusion of shale production projects as Nationally Significant Infrastructure projects. They further reiterated their commitment to a single Shale Environmental Regulator to replace various health and safety regulators and planning authorities and to the £1.6 million shale support fund. In July, the government published its revised National Planning Policy Framework, which requires local councils, despite overwhelming public rejection during the consultation process (Hayhurst, 2018a), to recognise the benefits of fracking for energy security and a “low-carbon economy”, and to “put in place policies to facilitate ... exploration and extraction” (MHCLG, 2018, p. 61).

## 4.2. Controlling discourse and knowledge – propaganda and PR

*There's no love for shale in the UK ... There needs to be an industry-wide offensive campaign with a fresh new narrative giving more of a brand feel to shale gas developments. Fracking needs a re-brand, perhaps with a 'kitemark' for safe developers' – Whitehead, managing director of Hill + Knowlton (Probert, 2012)*

In 2016, a letter by three cabinet ministers to Chancellor George Osborne was leaked, in which they outlined strategies to facilitate fracking operations, including to overcome “hurdles” such as developing “a more favourable public attitude” (Rudd, Clark, & Truss, 2015, p. 3) and to classify commercial fracking as ‘Nationally Significant Infrastructure’ (Hope, 2016). The shaping of public perception and controlling the narrative are important counterinsurgency elements. At the same time, plans were being discussed for a new “Armed Infrastructure Constabulary Force” to protect the UK’s infrastructure, combining three major police forces into “a specialist unit protecting infrastructure and responding to terror attacks” (Rigby, 2016). The framing of infrastructures as “critical” is used by governments to profile protest as extremists and potential ‘insurgencies’ (Europol, 2016, p. 8).

Government support for fracking rests on a narrative of fracking as ‘clean’ and of ‘national importance’ to secure the country’s energy needs. Fracking has been promoted as part of the government’s ‘clean growth’ strategy, discursively situated as ‘green’, based on a 2013 study (MacKay & Stone, 2013) which was criticised as “fundamentally flawed” for its methodology and data collection (Mobbs, 2017). The framing as ‘clean’ and ‘low-carbon’ ignores peer-reviewed literature on the risks and dangers of fracking – including the government’s own report, which was suppressed for almost three years and published quietly just days after fracking firm Cuadrilla was given permit to frack in Lancashire, on the final day of the parliamentary year (Carrington, 2018). Another report on health/environmental risks (DEFRA, 2014) was deliberately delayed until a council decision on Cuadrilla’s application was reached, and only released after repeated FoI requests. The second main narrative around fracking rests on energy security and independence; to reduce Russia’s “leverage” and as being “good for our country”, as then prime-minister David Cameron claimed (The Guardian, 2014). This reasoning was reiterated by Cuadrilla officials announcing fracking as “nationally important priority” for “energy security and balance of payments” (Hayhurst, 2018b). In 2015, the government released a statement on the national need to explore and develop shale gas and oil resources in a ‘safe and sustainable and timely way’.

This framing operates in conjuncture with the labelling and stigmatisation of anti-fracking protesters as extremists and eco-terrorists – which the industry has been quick to embrace. Leaked documents have shown how the British government categorises environmental campaigners as terrorists alongside Al-Qaeda and far right extremists (Taylor & Evans, 2010; Dodd & Grierson, 2020). Terrorism labelling remains a common tactic to undermine environmental activism and land defence (Austin, 2002). Police forces have consistently labelled anti-fracking resistance as domestic extremism and included campaigners in counter-terrorism strategies, such as ‘Prevent’, the government’s counterradicalisation programme (e.g. BBC, 2016). In 2014, a protest camp was raided under the Terrorism Act 2000 (Netpol, 2014). In 2009, it was revealed that British police had been gathering personal data of thousands of campaigners that were classified as domestic extremists (Lewis, Evans, & Taylor, 2009). Such classification often justifies mass surveillance, the infiltration of movements with undercover police and informants, criminalisation, and

the tailoring of terrorist charges for social movements (Monroy, 2011, Lubbers, 2012). Counterinsurgency thus takes centre stage to undermine and manage opposition to shale gas extraction.

### **4.3. Buying consent: Corporate sponsorships and tax handouts**

*It's like a chessboard. You need to play their game with them. And you want to stand outside and not play it ... But you can't – Local resident*

Extractive industries create local dependencies to facilitate access to resources, and industrial mining is frequently associated with poverty exacerbation and inequalities (Gamau, Le Billon, & Spiegel, 2015). To secure a 'license to operate' and buy the 'hearts and the minds' of local communities, extractive industries employ 'softer' counterinsurgency approaches to complement policing and criminalisation. Such approaches involve corporate sponsorships and CSR initiatives, which "target ... areas of social life and the desires, wants, and dreams of a better future for those living within resource-rich regions" (Holterman, 2014, p. 61). Cuadrilla's engagement in Lancashire illustrates this point. The company has been "paying off dozens and dozens of clubs" (interviews; Rankin, 2017), including the local football club, which in return featured Cuadrilla's logo on its football shirts and team photos. Cuadrilla employees attended training sessions and tweeted pictures with children holding a "banner with Cuadrilla's logo that reads 'Unlocking Lancashire's energy'" (Rankin, 2017; see Fig. 3). Such sponsorships draw on society's positive perception of sports and detract from the threat to kids' health that fracking represents, demonstrating how the slow violence of vested interests is eroding public health.



Fig. 3. Cuadrilla's sponsorship (Cuadrilla, 2016).

Cuadrilla's engagement extends into the classroom – through school competitions, prizes, and presentations by Cuadrilla geologists. The company also engages with local business associations and industries, as visible in the example of Cuadrilla's relationship to the Lancashire Chamber of Commerce and the North West Taskforce (which will be explored elsewhere). Furthermore, it is involved in astroturfing activities—the creation of 'fake' grassroots initiatives to lobby and speak up for corporate interests (see Austin, 2002; Brock & Dunlap, 2018)—which have long been used by extractive industries to legitimise their operations and deal with resistance. Other forms of 'buying consent' are more direct: through its 'community fund', Cuadrilla pays out local residents and sponsors local groups and community infrastructure.

#### **4.4. Policing protectors and dealing with dissent**

*I think, they seek to fracture communities – Local resident*

“The extractivist State depends upon legal violence”, scholars of extractivism have shown (Uzendoski, 2018, p. 377). While protest-policing in the UK is alleged to have moved towards a human rights-based “consensual policing” style in the last decade, Gilmore and colleagues have shown that this shift was mainly rhetoric (2016, 2017; Jackson, Gilmore, & Monk, 2018). Instead, fracking policing illustrates how “[o]utside of the forum of democratic debate and accountability, and using a perceived fear of a terrorist threat, the State is slowly tightening the legal framework within the UK to criminalise many forms of activity and expression that were previously permitted as ‘normal’” (Mobbs, 2009). This involves legislative changes: The Security Services Act 1996 and the Police Act 1997 (which allow for regarding minor infractions carried out “by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose” as ‘serious crime’), the Terrorism Act 2000 (which criminalises ‘non-violent’ motivations “to influence the government”), and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (which allows for surveillance and disclosure of information about individuals in the interest of national security to prevent or detect serious crime, and to safeguard the economic well-being of the UK) (Mobbs, 2009). The latter has repeatedly been used in the anti-fracking context. Policing is thus inseparable from the labelling of protesters as ‘extremists’ and domestic terrorists (and resistance as ‘anti-social behaviour’) which itself constitutes a counterinsurgency measure to protect the operations against which resistance is being policed. “[I]t is police, rather than the Home Office or parliament who decide how to categorise campaigners as ‘domestic extremists’” (Jones, 2018); and police themselves have sought to (re)define what is, and is not, legitimate political action (Gilmore, Jackson, & Monk, 2017; Jackson et al., 2018). Fracking policing confirms Bell's observation that “the base of any state's police power is discretion rendering mythical the ideal of law enforcement as impartial ... By definition, ‘the police power is undefined, residual, very broad, and so forth’” (2015, p. 21, citing Dubber and Valverde).

On-the-ground policing is characterised by the systematic targeting of the most vulnerable protesters and described as ‘unpredictable’, excessive, and brutal by land protectors, frequently involving aggressive use of physical coercion and ‘preventive policing’ (see below, also Szolucha, 2016). Policing at PNR, for instance, has led to dozens of physical injuries and hospitalisations caused by police officers and private security personnel. Research participants have recounted (and often filmed and live streamed) almost daily instances of police violence, assaults, inappropriate “grabbings” of female protesters, and unjustified arrests that never go to trial. These arrests, protesters describe, are “random” and “unpredictable”, often targeting the most vulnerable: “They

arrest anyone, including camera people, and then charges get mysteriously dropped ... They arrest people for swearing ..., just to be able to bail them away". "They try to break the young ones", someone else reports. Many reported being "grabbed and thrown into the bushes" when 'slow walking' trucks carrying fracking equipment. While the arrests may appear random, individuals seem to be carefully selected, as radio discussions between police officers have revealed.

Everyday policing is key to upholding statist relations and defending state interests. Bell has pointed out the various form that 'police' can assume: "it is not always clear who precisely the police are. The uniformed officer is but one figure of the police, while the presence of many other embodiments of police-type authority cast doubt on who is and who is not 'police'" (2015, p. 20, citing Valverde). 'Fracking police' thus not only includes uniformed officers at the fracking gates, but also Police Liaison Officers (PLOs), undercover agents, private security guards, and government officials working in social services systems. Lancashire police has admitted passing on details of disabled fracking protesters to the Department for Work and Pensions – who then questioned them about disability benefits claims (Rahim, 2018) and partake in the policing of dissent.

An integral part of fracking policing exercises is intelligence gathering including routinely filming and photographing individuals. "[S]ophisticated and advanced intelligence-gathering is seen as central to the police's planning for anti-fracking protests. This includes the collection of personal information of a large number of people and tools to build profiles on potential 'targets'" (Netpol, 2016). In its guidance on "Policing linked to Onshore Oil and Gas Operations", which draws on domestic extremism policing experience, the Association of Chief Police Officers explains: "Social media is a vital part of any Community Impact Assessment (CIA) and intelligence picture" (ACPO, 2011, p. 19). Policing further draws on intelligence provided by the National Domestic Extremism and Disorder Intelligence Unit (ACPO, 2011, p. 10), which indicates that fracking-resistance is managed as national extremism. Although regularly denied by police forces, PLOs who are employed long-term at protest sites also contribute to intelligence gathering, as the review of "Operation Mansell", the policing of protests in Balcombe, showed (Hertfordshire Constabulary/Essex Police, 2014). A key objective of counterinsurgency is "establishing a presence and deterring insurgent activity (Bell, 2015, p. 23). Soldiers are expected to "liv[e] in close proximity to the area they seek to control ... sleep in villages and connect with the locals through routine interactions" (Bell, 2015, p. 24). Similarly, PLOs are usually stationed at fracking gates long-term, having to be there "every day, regardless of the weather" (interviewee) and develop close relationships with protestors. "Of course we know them, and they know us ... We know each other quite well" (interviewee).

Fracking corporations deploy specialist security teams for mass social media surveillance, as court hearings in relation to applications for injunctions revealed (see below). INEOS, UK Oil and Gas (UKOG), and Europa Oil and Gas employed Eclipse – a risk management firm that on their home page claims to be "Protecting People, Assets, Information and Business Reputation: Enabling Operations in Complex Environments"<sup>4</sup> – to gather intelligence to be used as evidence in court cases (Hope & Collett-White, 2018). This data is collected through infiltration of private Facebook groups and hundreds of pages of screenshots. Investigations revealed the privileged access of these security teams to UK police. Eclipse's director Ray Fellows, who worked for government agencies in the past, maintains close ties to police and military forces as well as fracking

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.eclipse-strategic-security.com/>.

companies, and ‘warned’ the UK Counter Terrorism Intelligence Unit of risks associated with “militant activists” in 2017 (Hope & Collett-White, 2018). Other Eclipse consultants have worked for the British Army and private military and security company Aegis Defence Services, which was involved in counterinsurgency work in Iraq (Hope & Collett-White, 2018).

Corporate-state security collaborations are institutionalised in Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), more common in the earlier years of anti-fracking policing. “People ... kept making FoI request so they stopped doing these [MoUs]”, a legal expert who monitors fracking policing explains. The MoU between the Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and drilling company IGas, for instance, showed that the company had insider access to police command meetings at the highest (gold command) level, with “daily briefings or video conferences” to discuss information and intelligence (GMP, 2013, p. 6). IGas was tasked to “[l]ead on all media communications” (GMP, 2013, p. 10), in liaison with GMP’s “40 strong Corporate Communications Branch” (Netpol, 2014). Similar provisions can be found in the Sussex-Cuadrilla MoU and the Barton Moss MoU, which included a “CCTV feed into silver control room” and commitment to information sharing (GMP, 2013, pp. 10–14). Their collaboration is very close on the ground, research participants report, with security forces frequently “telling junior police officers what to do”.

In May 2018, a security guard from Northern security, employed by Cuadrilla, was found guilty of assault and criminal damage after attacking a protester with a camp bed (Hall, 2018). Other security guards have been documented to exercise violence on public land, outside of the company’s property, including “punching people in the face”, interviewees report. Hours of video material document this violence, including the police officers assaulting wheelchair users by pulling them to the ground. In 2018, a female protester lost consciousness and was hospitalised following assault by police forces who dragged her across the street and then pressed her against a fence at PNR, an assault that had been live streamed by other protesters. Other violent policing tactics involve painful ‘pressure point’ restraint techniques. Such violent policing is exacerbated by “mutual aid policing”, one interviewee explains,

*They bring in police forces from Nottingham, Wales, Sussex and elsewhere ... They compete with each other ... and they have this thing called ‘free kicks’ – ‘If I [a police officer] come to Lancashire and police [violently], the complaints end up with Lancashire police, not yourself.*

This police violence is often gendered and sexualised, with officers grabbing women by their chest. “They play with us”, a protester tells me, “They attack the females to make males aggressive”. “They hold us really tightly, from behind, with their arms around our breasts, for up to 10 min, while trucks come in”, a female protester reports, “it’s disgusting” (see also Gilmore et al., 2017, 2016; Jackson et al., 2018; Szolucha, 2016). Police violence, protesters report, gets normalised, entrenched into trauma. “Of course we are all traumatised”, one respondent tells me, “who wouldn’t, if you are exposed to this violence every day?” (see also Short & Szolucha, 2019).

On-the-ground policing further feeds into divide-and-conquer strategies by the police. “Their strategy”, a land protector explains, is always “to make us look really bad” and “to piss off the public against us”, primarily by arbitrary road closures during protests that trigger long traffic jams and annoyance of other residents. Others report “deliberate lies” and misinformation by police, often concerning ‘outside protestors coming in’ and displaying allegedly ‘violent behaviour’. The UK police force is known for its use of undercover police officers to deal with environmental and animal rights activists in the past decades. Until today, police refuse to rule out using

undercover officers at anti-fracking protests (Netpol, 2016). Undercover informants are integral to counterinsurgency: “Nothing is more demoralising to insurgents than realising that people inside their movement or trusted supporters among the public are deserting or informing on them” (British Army, 2009, pp. 2–8). Unpredictable and violent policing goes hand-in-hand with the criminalisation of protest, explored in the next section.

#### 4.5. Criminalisation of dissent

*Bit by bit, our freedom to protest is being curtailed*—PNR protester.

The British legislative framework has always been grounded in the need to protect ‘private property and private profit’ (Anderson, 2013). This is not the result of “pre-planned, coordinated and coherent construction”, Anderson argues, but based on tacit agreements and shared values which evolve over time, resulting in a “a legal system which overwhelmingly reflects corporate and elite interests, and serves to demonise and repress those who challenge them” (Anderson, 2013, p. 234). Over the last three decades, the country has seen a range of new police powers and criminal laws which helped redefine lawful and unlawful dissent, criminalising some forms of collective action while promoting forms of collective action that don’t threaten industrial activity (Anderson, 2013). Anti-extractive protest is increasingly criminalised (e.g. Brock et al., 2018). This is accomplished through harsher sentencing for direct actions, the granting of corporate injunctions (criminalising resistance a-priori), and the potential inclusion of anti-fracking protesters under PREVENT programmes. Protesters have accused police forces of using mass arrests (over 300 at PNR alone), oppressive bail conditions, and section 14 notices under the Public Order Act 1986. The latter allows police to restrict protest in terms of space, numbers, and time as a means to criminalise protest at the Balcombe protest site. Police acted “like an injunction by the back door” (Dagostino in Laville, 2014). Criminalisation is based on the application of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), extensive use of bail conditions, and use of terrorist legislation, with protesters being identified as ‘domestic extremists’. Initially, arrests rarely led to convictions (Laville, 2014), but over the years, the criminalisation of dissent intensified. Hundreds of protesters have been charged with a variety of offences including aggravated trespass, obstruction of the highway, and preventing entry to a fracking site obstruction of legitimate acts under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act. Most recently, this culminated in 15/16 months prison sentences for three protesters in September 2018 (later overturned), shortly before Cuadrilla’s commencement of fracking operations at PNR. In 2017, they stopped, climbed onto, and sat on a convoy of trucks (‘lorry surfing’) that were carrying drilling equipment, thus halting the trucks for four days. Subsequently, they were charged with causing a ‘public nuisance’ and – the judge emphasised – for not expressing regret for their actions. The judge himself had close ties with the oil and gas industry through his family business (Frack Off, 2018) – illustrating again the links of the industry deep into the structures of the British state.

The second dimension of the criminalisation of dissent involves the increasing use of preventive policing through the granting of injunctions – court orders to stop particular acts, breaches of which may result in prosecution for contempt of court and imprisonment. Encouraged by senior counter-terrorism and public order police officers (Netpol, 2018a), fracking companies applied for injunctions against ‘persons unknown’ – i.e. everyone – to pre-empt protest, including ‘lawful’ activity. At PNR, for instance, the injunction outlaws direct actions including trespass, slow walking, lock-ons, obstruction of the highway, and lorry surfing. For many years, injunctions



“were toothless and ignored by protesters ... However, from 2003, the Government supported the bringing of injunctions under the Protection from Harassment Act 1999 (the ‘Stalkers Law’/ PPHA), which had much tougher penalties and wider powers” (GBC, 2016). Injunctions act as deterrence mechanisms and operate on the basis of fear of ‘contempt of court’ – fines, asset seizing, and prison sentences – and have been criticised as assaults on the human right to meaningful protest under sections 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act 1998. The Network for Police Monitoring has warned of an emergent “industry-wide legal strategy” which involves “portray[ing] the anti-fracking movement as violent militants, prowl[ing] campaign groups’ Facebook groups for comments that might support this message and then seek[ing] the widest possible injunction against the greatest number of people” (Netpol, 2018a).

Another preventive policing strategy involves the classification of protesters as ‘potential extremists’ under the government’s PREVENT strategy. This strategy involves police profiling and police advice to schools, linking anti-fracking campaigners to domestic extremism and identifying environmentalists as being at risk of being drawn into terrorism. While the government continues to deny such links, leaked confidential documents such as the report by Merseyside Police Special Branch (2017; see Fig. 4) make them very clear. “Domestic Extremism”, under PREVENT, includes environmental protest (anti-fracking), animal rights and far right/extreme right wing (Sussex CLTP, 2016).

## Types of Terrorism / Extremism

- International – Jan 2015 65 Int. Groups
- Extreme Right Wing- EDL, NW Infidels
- Extreme Left Wing- Anti-Capitalist
- Irish Related- Republican & Loyalist 14 NI
- Domestic– Animal Rights, Anti-Fracking



Fig. 4. Types of terrorism/extremism (Merseyside Police Special Branch, 2017).

Anti-fracking protesters have been linked to domestic extremism by counter terrorism officers (Netpol, 2018b), which facilitates intelligence gathering and interventions. Individuals, including children, have been referred to the PREVENT anti-extremism scheme for fracking activism (Pidd, 2018), and numerous schools have “included information or links on their websites which list anti-fracking as a type of extremism that could potentially draw children into terrorism” (Hayhurst, 2016b). The story of a 14-year old student who allegedly engaged in anti-fracking resistance was included in a report of the Greater Manchester Tackling Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission (2018) as a case study to illustrate ways to pre-empt alleged ‘radicalisation’. As part of the “Counter Terrorism Local Profile Questionnaires”, municipalities are asked to fill out questionnaires, collated by police and partners. They, which include questions around fracking (Fig. 5) and aim to map social relationships (Fig. 6).

**Fracking**

- Is there any information regarding individuals or groups who are engaged in fracking protests which have the potential to become more radical and disruptive in nature?
- Have there been any suspicious sightings around the proposed fracking areas within North Yorkshire?
- Is there any information regarding protests to be held in the North Yorkshire?

Fig. 5. Counter Terrorism Local Profile Questionnaire 2016, North Yorkshire (CAGE, 2017, p. 2).

**In terms of community disputes and grievances, are there instances where community leaders or people of influence in the community resolve issues, rather than the local authority or equivalent body?**

Fig. 6. Counter terrorism local profile Questionnaire 2016 (cage, 2017).

PREVENT and other such counterterrorism legislations play into the ‘militarization of ‘the social’’ (Wiuiff Moe & Müller, 2017), and the intelligence that they gather is frequently shared between corporate and state security services, as discussed above.

## 5. Government fracking democracy

In the early days, anti-fracking resistance in England was largely triggered by concerns around local ecological impacts including water pollution and earthquakes, motivating appeals to government actors to listen to local concerns and protect citizens from ecological harm – through petitions, letters, and participation in governmental consultations. Quickly, however, resistance became less localised, with people voicing concerns against the ‘industrialisation of the countryside’ across the country (interviews, see also Hayhurst, 2017). Many became disillusioned with the liberal social contract as they came to see the prioritising of extractive interests over ecological and community health, and the disregard of their demonstrations, letters, and petitions. As more and more people engaged in direct action to stop activities on (planned) fracking sites, they came to experience the coerciveness with which police forces protected systems of private property sanctioned and enforced by the state.

Industrialism is authoritarian, requiring constant colonisation of people and nature, upholding relations of power and hierarchies. “Government Fracking Democracy” has become a popular slogan to describe and critique government actions. For many, living near roads and fracking sites, exposure to daily police violence, and personal experience with state forces protecting extractive interest quickly turned former ‘liberal’ fracking opposition into anti-capitalist and anti-state resistance. Many came to see, as interviews show, that “the state’s sole purpose is not only to stabilise and facilitate capitalism ... capital and state developed in tandem as a mutually-reinforcing system of social organisation” (Ince & Barrera de la Torre, 2016, p. 12). Changes to the planning system, including re-definition of fracking in order to avoid public resistance and the classification into political categorisations (e.g. ‘(un)conventional exploitation’ or ‘acidicisation’), feed into this social organisation. This epistemology is also reflected in cost-benefit analyses, environmental and social impact assessments, and the quantification of damages that are unquantifiable (Sullivan, 2010). People’s experiences, on the other hand, are channelled into (ineffective) consultation processes and subordinated to ‘expert’ assessments.

Through the explicit permission and even ‘facilitation’ of (pre-announced) protests at certain times and in certain spaces, while criminalising other forms of protest, the state continuously (re)draws the lines between legitimate and illegitimate, legal and illegal, good and bad protest(ers). Anti-extractivist dissent is co-opted and oppressed through this separation into ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’, or legitimate and violent (see also Dunlap, 2019, this Special Issue). The former is used to illustrate the state’s efforts to uphold human rights to protest – on designated protest zones, stewarded by PLOs, and for certain amounts of time, – the latter is “criminalised and rendered illegitimate, pernicious and therefore deserving of repression” (Anderson, 2013, p. 275). Democracy and rule of law are used as ‘ideological weapons’ to justify repression (Anderson, 2013). Laws are presented as a mechanism designed to serve the community for which they are applied and rely on consent that is grounded in an ‘artificial system of morality’ (Jenkins, 2016). This system of morality, fracking experience shows, is being upheld (though crumbling) by the diversity of counterinsurgency strategies, facilitating ‘legal’ protest while framing more combat-

ive opposition as ‘radical’ and ‘terrorist’. Consent in this system of morality is grounded in “the belief in authority, in the necessity for it. At its base is the doctrine that man is evil, vicious, and too incompetent to know what is good for him. On this all government and oppression is built”, Emma Goldman, along with many other anarchists, wrote (1940). Experiences of fracking policing illustrates how the state continuously redraws the lines between lawfulness and unlawfulness to exploit this alleged morality and to ensure control over human and ecological systems. Police forces are empowered to make decisions about the legality of protest in specific situations, courts decide on the legality of injunctions without criminal activity, and legal and planning frameworks are amended to accommodate the needs of elite groups.<sup>5</sup>

Anti-extractive resistance represents a threat to the state because it questions the very ideology of the state – the belief in growth which forms part of the (neo)liberal economic consensus, the need for social control, the (gendered, racial-colonial) hierarchies and power relations, and the willingness to exploit nature for the sake of ‘progress’. The ‘threat of insurgency’ in ecological movements thus lies in their understanding of these connections and their recognition (and often first-hand experience) that the state grants ‘concessions’ (and allows protest) only as long as it does not disrupt extractive operation, let alone questions the system itself. ‘Extreme’, Mobbs has argued, “is not a matter of the *mode of action* of the protesters but rather the point they are trying to highlight ... the challenge to the political consensus” (2009). This leads to a realisation that it is up to people’s own (direct) actions to work for the change they want to see. Anarchist critiques of domination and hierarchy have been hugely influential in ecological social organising – but so have Anarchist beliefs in mutual aid, direct action, and prefiguration. Both confront statist social relations and are key to much anti-extractivist organising. While protest sites are shaped by trauma and abuse, they are also places of community building, prefiguration, and solidarity, where people relate differently to each other and their natural environment. Many actively resist alienation, individualisation, consumer identity, and marginalisation, instead organising according to principles of solidarity and conviviality, renegotiating questions of private property and space, while trying to dismantle hierarchies. If we see the state as particular pattern of social relations which we form parts of, then we can see how imagining and living alternatives can challenge the state as well as liberal views of individual liberty. “[V]oluntary co-operation, care, and mutual aid are, on the contrary, products of non-authoritarian relations that endure *despite* capital and state” (Ince & Barrera de la Torre, 2016, p. 11). This research illustrates, in other ways, how direct action, prefiguration, and the rejection of hierarchies and domination challenge the very central pillars of both extractivism and statism.

## 6. Conclusion

*The State is in fact structurally indispensable for this predatory model to succeed, as it has the power to make it legally possible – by adjusting the rules of the game – but also socially justifiable – by allowing it in the name of a ‘public interest’ that is reframed so as to equate with private profit. This way, entire territories that are most targeted*

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<sup>5</sup> The offence of aggregated trespassing is an example of this. Lobbied for by hunting associations to criminalise hunt saboteurs, by scientific lobbies to protect pharma companies from animal rights activists, landlords to get rid of squatters, police pushing for more powers and corporations to deal with protest, the legislation serves to protect private property (Anderson, 2013) and is now used to criminalise entering extractive sites, among others.

*by extractive companies become also subject to repressive militarization, leaving little room for discussion and let alone opposition* —Franchi (2017, p. 27).

This paper illustrated, through an anarchist political ecology critique of anti-fracking resistance, how the logics of extractivism, statism, and industrialism intersect and come together in the state-extraction-ecocide nexus in the UK. It pointed to the hierarchies, domination, and violence that are central to all three, and revealed the links between repression and co-optation, lack of local autonomy and ‘democracy’, and ecological destruction caused by industrialisation of the British countryside – in other words the domination of human communities and ecological systems. In order to develop this argument, I mapped out the diversity of counterinsurgency strategies and showed how these are interlinked, and fundamental to the political, financial and practical feasibility of fracking in the UK – integral to the project of engineering extraction – and based on an imperial history of colonialism and extractivism. The political ecological landscape itself is itself shaped by UK government and corporate policing and security collaborations, legislative action, and criminalisation, stigmatisation, and repression of dissent, playing into colonisation and control of minds and bodies. The violence inherent in the latter, I argued, is inseparable from the violence inherent in the ecological destruction that fracking is part of.

Extractivism not only lies at the heart of industrial production, but also at the heart of modernist ideology and the state-system, and involves not just the mining of (fossil) resources but also the capturing of hearts and minds of the population. The latter is becoming increasingly difficult in England, where the ‘industrialisation of the countryside’ and the ever more extreme extraction processes trigger intensifying resistance, making fracking ever-more costly financially and politically. As liberal environmentalists have become disillusioned with ‘government fracking democracy’, it is important to recognise how anti-extractive resistance threatens the statist system itself. Corporate and state actors are thus resorting to increasingly repressive legal means, aggressive policing, and erosion of local autonomy.

The various ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ counterinsurgency strategies illustrate the usefulness of an anarchist political ecology framework to analyse ‘responses from above’, highlighting the very connections, collaboration, and collusion between state and extractive interests, and the impossibility to separate them. This problematises the way the state itself acts as system of oppression tied to ecological destruction. The social hierarchies upon which the state is built require ‘distinctive (over)consumption’ to confer status or prestige and to make social inequality tangible; in other words, it needs material inequality for hierarchical stratification (Gorz, 1980). This hierarchical stratification continues to rely on extractivism – both for fossil fuel extractivism and renewable energies (Dunlap & Brock, forthcoming; Brock, Sovacool, & Hook, forthcoming) – and on centralised power and coercion, making social and ecological justice impossible. This paper thus illustrates the need for a more fundamental problematisation of the role of the state, statism, and its relationship to extractivism and industrialism in political ecology. It demonstrates the emancipatory potential of an anarchist political ecology approach to support anti-authoritarian resistance and overcome the theory-praxis divide so wide-spread even in critical social analysis (White et al., 2016).

The violence at play in the state response to anti-fracking resistance in the UK is minor to the increasing repression that environmental defenders across the world are exposed to (see also other papers in this special issues). Yet, some of the fundamental dynamics are similar, and



the ‘responses from above’ in so-called Western ‘democracies’ certainly require much further research.

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