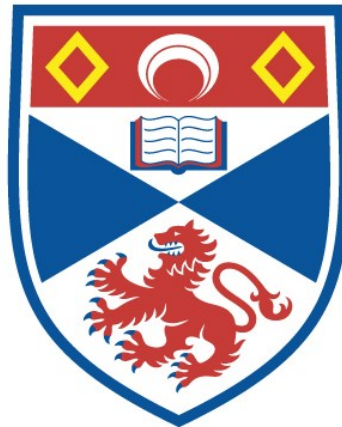


TRUTH, ACTION, AND TRANSITION ON AN ENERGY FRONTLINE  
IN LANCASHIRE, UK

Sarah O'Brien

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



2023

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17630/sta/340>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/27164>

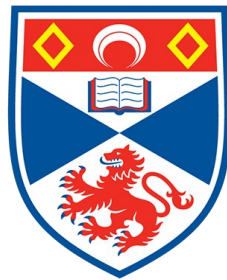
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Truth, Action, and Transition on an Energy Frontline in Lancashire, UK

Sarah O'Brien



University of  
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

at the University of St Andrews

July 2022

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I, Sarah O'Brien, do hereby certify that this thesis, submitted for the degree of PhD, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. I confirm that any appendices included in my thesis contain only material permitted by the 'Assessment of Postgraduate Research Students' policy.

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## University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee

08 November 2018

Sarah Grace Prudence O'Brien  
Department of Social Anthropology

Dear Sarah

Thank you for submitting your ethical application which was considered at the School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies Ethics Committee meeting on 8 November 2018 when the following documents were reviewed:

1. Ethical Application Form
2. Participant Information Sheet
3. Consent Form
4. Debriefing Form

The School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies Ethics Committee has been delegated to act on behalf of the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) and has granted this application ethical approval. The particulars relating to the approved project are as follows –

<b>Approval Code:</b>	SA13956	<b>Approved on:</b>	8 November 2018	<b>Approval Expiry:</b>	8 November 2023
<b>Project Title:</b>	Sustainable future(s): Exploring visions of energy transitions in the City and among environmental activists in the UK				
<b>Researcher(s):</b>	Sarah Grace Prudence O'Brien				
<b>Supervisor(s):</b>	Dr Mette High				

Approval is awarded for five years. Projects which have not commenced within two years of approval must be re-submitted for review by your School Ethics Committee. If you are unable to complete your research within the five year approval period, you are required to write to your School Ethics Committee Convener to request a discretionary extension of no greater than 6 months or to re-apply if directed to do so, and you should inform your School Ethics Committee when your project reaches completion.

If you make any changes to the project outlined in your approved ethical application form, you should inform your supervisor and seek advice on the ethical implications of those changes from the School Ethics Convener who may advise you to complete and submit an ethical amendment form for review.

Any adverse incident which occurs during the course of conducting your research must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee who will advise you on the appropriate action to be taken.

Approval is given on the understanding that you conduct your research as outlined in your application and in compliance with UTREC Guidelines and Policies ( <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/guidelinespolicies/> ). You are also advised to ensure that you procure and handle your research data within the provisions of the Data Provision Act 1998 and in accordance with any conditions of funding incumbent upon you.

Yours sincerely

Dr Stavroula Pipyrou  
Convener of the School  
Ethics Committee cc  
Supervisor

## General acknowledgements



This work is dedicated to my friends and interlocutors in Lancashire, in particular those with whom I shared a life on camp. I am deeply grateful to each person who shared their experiences with me and welcomed me into the vibrant constellation of people and activities at PNR. I learned much from my time with them, and their resilience on the frontline impressed me from the first day of fieldwork to the last.

I thank the European Research Council (ERC) for funding this project under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program, grant agreement 715146. Many thanks are due to Ros Wills, Debs Whiteside, and Maple Indie Media for sharing their pictures from the PNR frontline. A huge thank you to all my colleagues at the Centre for Energy Ethics, in particular Itay Noy, Emilka Skrzypek, Leyla Sayfutdinova, Pauline Destrée, Sean Field and Anna Rauter for insightful feedback on drafts and chapters – and for being such a wonderful group to be part of. I extend much gratitude also to Adam Reed for his support and comments on later drafts.

Thank you to all the friends and family who have patiently provided discussion and encouragement along the way. Thanks to Brett Scott, Tom Neumark, and Aneil Tripathy for introducing me to different dimensions of economic anthropology. Warm thanks to Negar Behzadi and Stephanie Postar for providing much inspiration, perhaps without knowing it. Many thanks go to Maeve, Rachel, and Arola for being part of my adventures in Scotland, and to the Oxford crew for keeping my sanity together during writing-up, in particular Ducky, Neda, Tom, Inês, James, Nina, Joe, and June – and of course, Jak and Lulu. Particular thanks to Emily for our perfect morning walks to stay motivated. Many thanks to Aurélien, Lily, Julie, and Damon for proof reading and comments. My heartfelt thanks also to Mavi for being a constant source of love and encouragement and for astute comments on two (huge!) chapter drafts, and to Anna for enduring support, empathy, encouragement and laughter. My deepest gratitude to Jakes, Niko, Andrew, Paul and Claudia for being the most supportive and loving family one could ask for. I cannot thank my dad Paul enough for patiently proofreading and commenting minutely on countless lengthy versions.

My deepest thanks are of course due to Mette High for accepting me on the Energy Ethics team, and for innumerable thorough comments on my work. Her caring, energetic and thoughtful supervision has been an enduring source of inspiration and motivation throughout this project. Finally, I am forever grateful to my partner Matt for his optimism and unwavering support in all shapes and forms, and for helping me get this thesis to the finish line.

## Funding

	<p>This project was funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program, grant agreement No 715146.</p>	 <p>European Research Council Established by the European Commission</p>
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## Abstract

Based on thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in the northern English region of Lancashire, this doctoral research focuses on practices of truth-making and relations of responsibility within a community resisting the development of a controversial hydraulic fracturing project at Preston New Road (PNR). I explore their lived experiences of protest and energy extraction at a time of anthropogenic climate change and intensifying calls for energy transitions. I examine how collective and intimate encounters with a perceived ‘system’ on the frontline lead my interlocutors to ask fundamental questions about the reality in which they live. Through everyday frontline practices, I show how interlocutors collectively establish, connect, and evidence different dimensions of truth as they resist the extraction of hydrocarbons and search for alternative ways to live. People enter, act through, and leave relations of responsibility to bring about a reality in which they want to live. I thus suggest that examining relations of responsibility and truth as a value that is realised through action can help us understand spaces of conflict and confrontation. Through protesting, monitoring, and maintaining a collective presence at PNR, interlocutors ethically and materially attempt to separate themselves from the hydrocarbon extraction. In doing so, they endeavour to create a rightful reality founded on the generative notions of truth, action, and responsibility. My ethnographic analysis therefore proposes that the energy frontline at PNR can be apprehended as an onto-epistemic frontline where matters of truth set the world in motion. I suggest that when scholars recognise truth as a matter of representation, creative transformation, and persuasive imagination, we can better identify and understand conflicts and possibilities for change.

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## ACRONYMS

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BGS – British Geological Survey

CLG – Community Liaison Group

DA – Deep Adaptation

DVLA – Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

EA – Environmental Agency

FOE – Friends of the Earth

GC – Greenham Common

GHG – Green House Gases

LCC – Lancashire County Council

NSTA – North Sea Transition Authority (*formerly the Oil and Gas Authority*)

OGA – Oil and Gas Authority

PEDL – Petroleum Exploration and Development Licence

PNR – Preston New Road

RTP – Reclaim the Power

TLS – Traffic Light System

XR – Extinction Rebellion

---

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

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### **Protagonists (recurring characters)**

- Aileen Lived on the camp full-time, and had participated in much direct action. Covered many monitoring shifts. Worked part-time towards the end of my fieldwork. Experience with other anti-fracking protest camps.
- Claire Lived an hour away from the site, worked full-time. Covered several weekly monitoring shifts. Took part in Women in White events.
- Claudia Mostly lived on the protest camp. Loyal to monitoring shifts, covered many of the night ones. One of the older members of the camp, had participated in much direct action.
- Iris Travelled frequently to PNR on annual leave. Had participated in much direct action at PNR and with RTP.
- Jack Lived two hours from the site. Travelled frequently to PNR and participated in direct action. When I started fieldwork, was very involved with XR in his home town and nationally.
- Josh Lived on the camp full-time since 2017. Had done much direct action, and had experience of other anti-fracking protest camps.
- Joy Lived close to the site. Teacher working full-time, covered weekly monitoring shifts.
- Patricia Lived close to the site. Retired, covered several weekly monitoring shifts. Regularly took part in Women in White events.
- Pip Local councillor, lived close to the site. Participated in much direct action, and regularly took part in Women in White events.
- Sabine Travelled frequently to PNR, then moved onto camp full-time. Had left camp when I started fieldwork, but visited frequently. Had participated in much direct action.
- Sam A young campaigner living on the protest camp full-time. Had lived on the camp since 2017, and participated in direct action. Experience with other anti-fracking protest camps.

### **Supporting roles (mentioned infrequently)**

- Audrey Lived two hours away from the site. Travelled to PNR infrequently but firmly supported the cause. Was very involved with XR groups locally and nationally.
- Charlie Lived full-time on the camp. Had experience with other anti-fracking camps, participated in much direct action.
- Clem Mostly lived on the camp. Loyal to monitoring shifts. One of the older members of the camp, participated in much direct action. Became involved with XR locally and nationally.
- Daisy Lived an hour away from the site. Covered frequent monitoring shifts and participated in Women in White events. Had taken part in Greenham Common protests.
- Harry Had lived full-time on the camp, had left when I started fieldwork. Became very involved with XR locally and nationally. Participated in much direct action.
- Lisa Lived close to the site. Retired, loyal to several weekly monitoring shifts.
- Martin Retired and lived close the site. Spent much time on the roadside and speaking to the media. Participated in direct action.

“What fracking truly is”

The sun set early on the roadside – the winter season meant shorter days and colder nights. Claudia sighed; she looked tired to me, but her eyes were sharp and wide open. She raised her voice to be heard over the passing cars: “You know, I just wish more people would open their eyes to what this industry truly is [emphasis added]”.<sup>1</sup> Claudia and I were sat on a makeshift couch, on the side of the busy Preston New Road (PNR) which links Blackpool to Preston in Lancashire, in the north-west of England. We were neither outside nor inside, as one of the sides of the modest patchwork structure that served as our monitoring station was always open – to face what lay across the road from us. The shelter was erected in 2017 tucked against the edge of a field on one side and opening up onto PNR on the other. It stood in the shadow of Cuadrilla Resources’ gas site – or the “fracking site” as most activists referred to it – and was a focal point of opposition to hydraulic fracturing in the UK at the time of my fieldwork in 2019.<sup>2</sup> From the shelter, commonly referred to “gatecamp”, I could see the top of the workover rig on the site (see Figure 2). It was partly visible through the thick hedge nestled behind the fences lining the road, and the two lines of high panelling further behind encircling the site, the rig and fracking pumps.

Claudia had moved to Lancashire three years ago to resist the fracking site. She now lived on one of the protest camps built further down the road, a kilometre away. Claudia was strikingly empathetic with people she met, and was admired by others on the protest camp for her care, tenacity and resilience. She had earned a lot of respect from many in the anti-fracking movement, including people like Patricia. A dynamic and sociable retiree living in the vicinity of the site, Patricia dedicated much of her time to the anti-fracking campaign. On one occasion, Claudia, Patricia and I were on monitoring duties together. Patricia was in a grumpy mood: “I didn’t sleep very well” she said, “and I started thinking about here [PNR] again... Look at them!”. She waved, frustrated, to the site beyond the fences. “How can they be allowed to keep going like this??”. Later, we chatted as we washed the crockery, balancing our plastic tubs on the edge of the table on the PNR pavement. “You know” she told me, “fracking is only the tip of the iceberg. The whole thing that says fracking is okay – the system that says fracking is okay, that's not right [emphasis added]”.

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<sup>1</sup> All names in this thesis have been changed to protect anonymity. In certain places, I have also altered elements of people’s backgrounds, or combined them in a fictional person.

<sup>2</sup> I describe hydraulic fracturing further on.



Figure 1: View from Gatecamp towards the entrance of the site, 2019. Credit: author's picture



Figure 2: Close-up of the workover rig, from the roadside, September 2019. Credit: Ros Wills

Patricia and Claudia were part of a community of people whose experiences form the basis of this research – and whom I will refer to as ‘my interlocutors’.<sup>3</sup> They were from a range of backgrounds and situations, all campaigning to stop fracking from taking place. I followed their involvement in the anti-fracking campaign in Lancashire from December 2018 to January 2020. I attended daily protests and helped with monitoring activities, lived on the protest camp, and accompanied people to events and activist gatherings across the country. As I will make clear in this introduction, opponents and supporters of fracking were providing very different accounts of what fracking *truly was* and whether or not it should be part of the UK’s energy future. In this polarised and polarising situation, I examine my interlocutors’ lived experiences and understandings of being on what they called “a frontline”. In doing so, I show how what *truly is* came to be experienced and realised. The notion of the frontline denoted the physical space surrounding the fracking site. Yet there was a pervasive sense amongst my interlocutors, captured in Patricia’s comment about the “system that says fracking is okay”, that the fight against fracking went beyond the site at PNR. My interlocutors experienced the physical frontline as the marker and the result of a climate crisis, and of a ‘system’ which was deemed historically exploitative and unfair. The frontline thus also marked a broader conflict about fundamental aspects of the world we live in, how we come to know our world, and how to lead a rightful life in it.

In a context of growing anxiety towards the local and global realities of anthropogenic climate change, my thesis thus explores the multiple dimensions and articulations of engagement with fracking on the frontline, and in particular how the notion of a harmful ‘system’ or ‘establishment’ comes to be formed. I examine how people took responsibility for making a world they want to live in. I show that the activists I lived with worked to evidence and witness this broken ‘system’ and took action to change it and disentangle themselves from its problematic aspects. In doing so, I discuss how truth was a matter of representation, creative transformation and persuasive imagination. Different dimensions of truth – technical, moral, emotional – were connected, established, evidenced and transformed by my interlocutors in their search for alternative ways to live and resist hydrocarbon extraction.

I start my own writing journey by examining the process of fracking technically. I will be using the terms hydraulic fracturing and fracking interchangeably throughout the thesis.<sup>4</sup> Whilst the term refers to one part of the extractive process in the oil and gas industries – i.e. the stimulation of a drilled

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<sup>3</sup> I will predominantly refer to the people I came to know at PNR as interlocutors throughout the thesis. However, after thirteen months living at PNR, I came to consider many of them as my friends. I will therefore also use that term occasionally, and discuss issues of positionality further in the introduction.

<sup>4</sup> Most of my interlocutors used the word fracking rather than hydraulic fracturing. Official speeches, reports or events, and pro-shale literature discussing the shale industry seemingly favour “hydraulic fracturing” to convey technical accuracy, yet also very commonly use the word fracking as a shorthand. Research has suggested that the use of the term fracking itself elicits anti-shale sentiments, and can lead to amalgamating or obfuscating extractive techniques and their repercussions (see Evensen 2016; Evensen et al. 2014). I will discuss how my interlocutors’ language and use of the term fracking was entangled with notions of morality in Ch.4, when discussing harm, morality and the legal justice system.

hydrocarbon well – the term has been used by supporters and opponents in the UK alike to refer to the shale gas industry as a whole.<sup>5</sup> I will also use it in the latter way throughout, unless indicated otherwise. I then outline the development of the site at PNR and introduce the physical frontline which constituted my field site. I describe my methodology on this frontline and discuss the ethical questions and issues of positionality which arise from my research. After examining the limitations of my work, I contextualise the frontline and the rest of my thesis by examining the polarised national debate around shale gas. I end the chapter by discussing my theoretical framework and key contributions, and by outlining the structure of the thesis as a whole.

### An unconventional resource



Figure 3: Map of the English region of Lancashire, outlined in red. The black circle indicates the location of the PNR site (Google Maps 2022)

The company operating at PNR, Cuadrilla Resources (hereafter ‘Cuadrilla’), set its sight and site on the upper Bowland-Hodder shale formation. Formed several hundred of million years ago during the Carboniferous geological period, it stretches across northern England, the Midlands and parts of

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Shale’ is the type of rock formation of interest to Cuadrilla at PNR.



Wales, trapping gas in its impermeable shale rock – an area of it is depicted in Figure 4 below, taken from a British Geological Survey (BGS) report.<sup>6</sup>

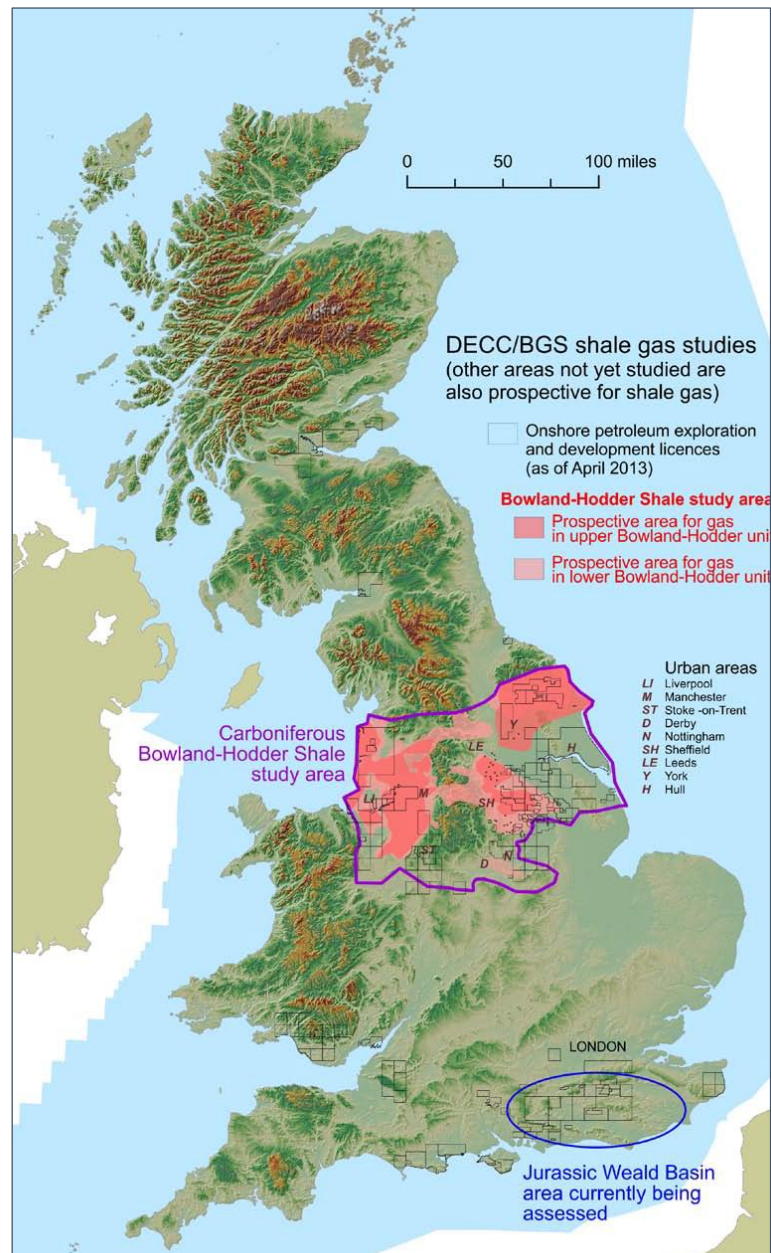


Figure 4: The upper Bowland-Hodder formation comprised in the BGS study outlined in purple, including the region of Lancashire (Andrews 2013: 2)

*Conventional* oil and gas resources are typically contained in a reservoir-like pocket, capped by a geological layer such as clay. Simply drilling a vertical well through that cap allows the oil or gas to flow to the surface through the well. Such production has existed in the UK since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>6</sup> The BGS is a research organisation specialising in geoscience and is a partially public-funded body.

and more than 2,000 conventional hydrocarbon wells have been drilled (Andrews 2013: 4).<sup>7</sup> The hydrocarbons in these reservoirs have ‘migrated’ from rocks referred to as ‘source rocks’, buried deeper underground. Exploration for *unconventional* deposits targets these deeper rock formations containing hydrocarbons which have not yet migrated upwards. Drilling into a non-porous source rock such as shale is not sufficient to extract its gas, stimulation is required to allow it to seep out and flow, or be pumped, to the surface. Source rocks targeted for onshore hydrocarbon exploration in the UK include coal seams (or coal beds), ‘tight sands’ in rocks such as limestone or sandstone, and shale formations – the latter being the deepest kind of rock formation (see Figure 5 below).

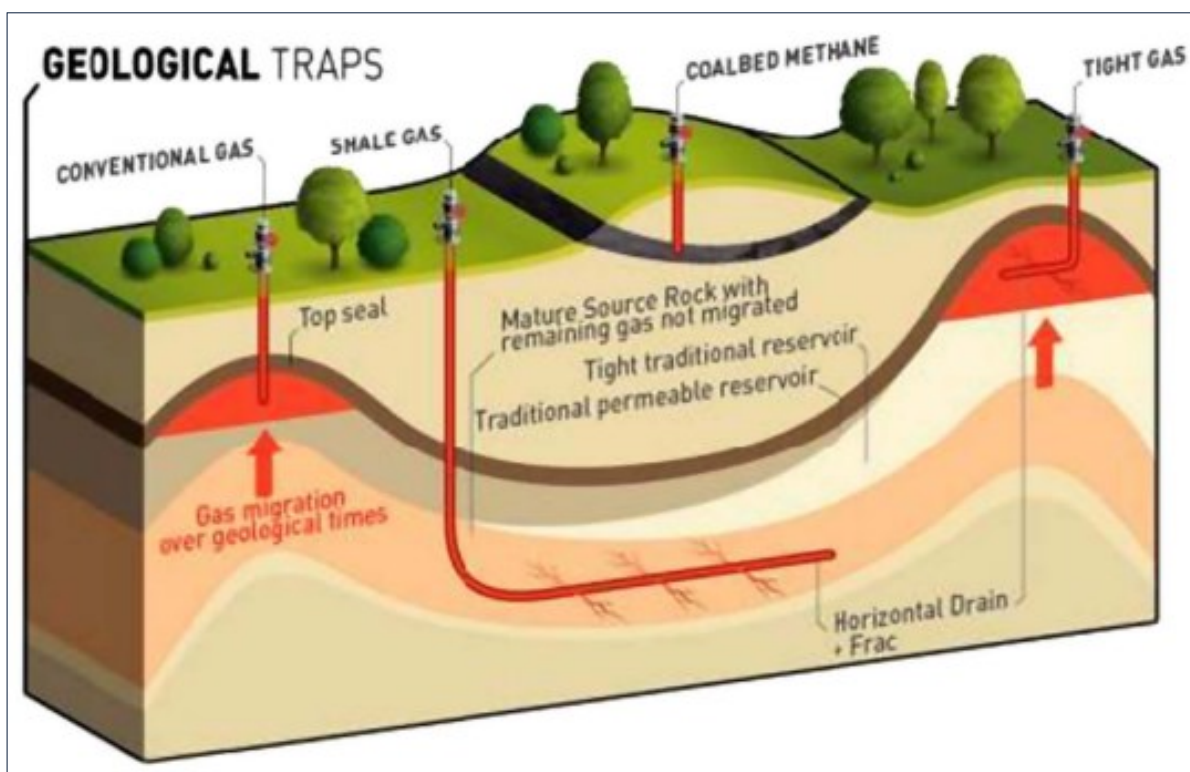


Figure 5: Types of onshore hydrocarbon extraction (Kenomore et al. 2017: 9).

Hydraulic fracturing – or fracking – is one such stimulation technique. It consists of injecting a mixture of chemicals, sand and liquids at high pressure into the well, fracturing the rock and allowing the gas to flow from the fissures towards the surface (see Figure 6). This technique has been used to stimulate hydrocarbon wells for decades, some accounts going back as early as the 1950s in the United States; however, using it to extract hydrocarbons commercially from large shale formations is novel, as until this century such deposits were too difficult and too expensive to exploit.

From the end of the 1980s and the 1990s onwards, hydraulic fracturing techniques were refined and combined with advances in horizontal drilling technology, lending a new life to old conventional

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<sup>7</sup> Onshore hydrocarbon production in the UK has been and is very small proportion in comparison to offshore extraction (see BEIS 2019a).

wells in the oilfields of Texas (American Oil & Gas Historical Society 2022; McLean 2018). Innovations in fracturing techniques and 3D geological mapping allowed large-scale exploitation of shale formations and led to the US ‘shale revolution’, reviving domestic hydrocarbon production and propelling the US to a top producer and “leading exporter” for oil and gas (IEA 2018). Shale supporters in the UK, including the national government, cited the US as an example to advocate the development of the shale gas industry at home (Field 2022a; Szolucha 2019; Whitton et al. 2017).

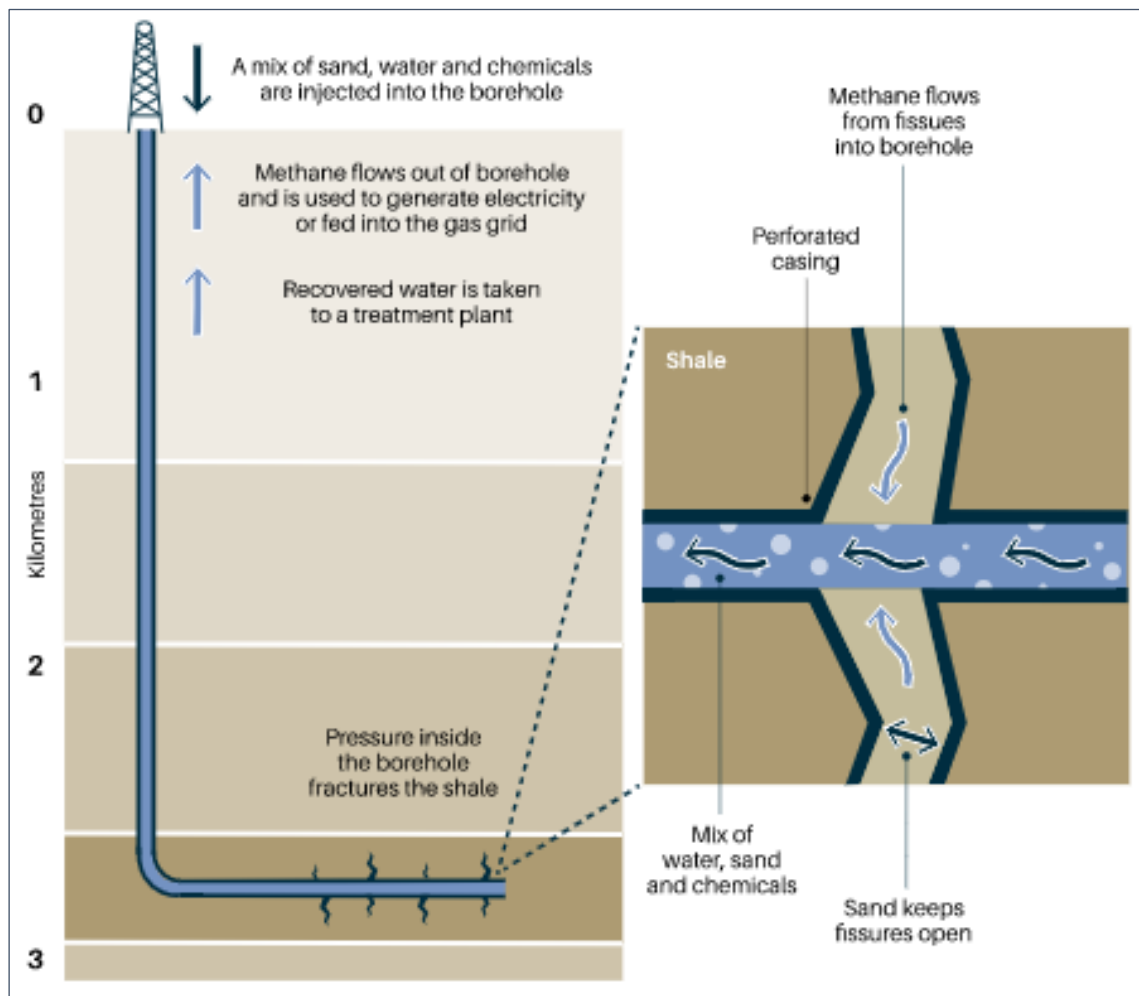


Figure 6: Hydraulic fracturing for shale (BGS n.d.).

These unconventional techniques are associated with the risk of pollution from the hydraulic fluid injected to fracture the shale and the subsequent risk of earthquakes or subsidence in the weakened rock. The existence of such risks is uncontroversial, but their size and importance are harder to establish, though they are essentially local. As I discuss further on, protesters, producers, consumers of hydrocarbons and governments had different truths about this; the resulting potential for conflict was embedded within a wider conflict over climate change and its links with production and consumption of hydrocarbons.

The development of and resistance to unconventional hydrocarbon extraction in the UK was not limited to Lancashire. In the years leading up to my fieldwork, the British government actively encouraged research on unconventional oil and gas production, investigating unconventional formations and assessing their viability. Campaigners were thus concerned with various forms of unconventional hydrocarbon extraction, such as deposits of coal bed methane. They were also wary of potential fracking “by stealth” or “under the radar”. For example in 2013, Cuadrilla applied for and drilled an exploratory oil well in Balcombe in the south of England. Cuadrilla left it open as to whether they would use fracking to recover the oil (Drill or Drop 2017b; Henley 2013). For many campaigners, Cuadrilla’s official position was a convenient façade to drill the wells ‘under the radar’.

As the number of awarded Petroleum Exploration and Development Licences (PEDLs) increased from 2013, a flurry of resistance movements grew across the country, involving mass rallies and at times land occupations and protest camps, widely documented in newspapers, resistance blogs and social media posts (see Bagnall 2014; BBC News 2014, 2019; Drill or Drop 2017a, 2018a, 2018b; Flanagan 2017; Fox 2018; Frack Off 2013, 2016, n.d.; Hayhurst 2019a; Leith Hill Protection Camp n.d.; Inglis 2017; RTP 2014).<sup>8</sup> Many of my interlocutors discussed these sites, either exchanging information and updates or recounting their own experiences. However, my fieldwork focuses on the site where I met my interlocutors: PNR.

### The frontline at PNR

Cuadrilla, a privately owned company established in 2007, has been at the forefront of developing shale gas production in the UK. As an onshore exploration company, it focuses on new areas for oil and gas production and drills wells to establish whether commercial production is viable. The timeline in Figure 9 below traces the development of Cuadrilla’s plans in Lancashire, focusing particularly on the site at PNR. The right-hand column gives a selective timeline of local responses to the industry’s development, focusing on events mentioned throughout this thesis.

Many of my interlocutors had been involved with anti-fracking campaigning in the years prior to the construction of the site in 2017. They had raised awareness across the region by organising public events and rallies, written to their Members of Parliament (MPs), or signed petitions. Public consultations were carried out to allow local residents to express their views, and many had also taken part in these (Drill or Drop 2020). When Lancashire County Council (LCC) refused Cuadrilla’s planning applications in 2015, the anti-fracking community celebrated this result as successful “local

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<sup>8</sup> To be able to explore any kind of onshore hydrocarbon deposit, companies must apply for a “Petroleum Exploration and Development Licence” (PEDL). A PEDL “does not give permission for operations but it grants exclusivity to licensees, in relation to hydrocarbon exploration and extraction within a defined area” (NSTA 2022a). As governmental support for unconventional extraction grew from 2013 onwards, the number of PEDLs applications increased (Cotton 2015: 1946; Whitton et al. 2017: 13).



democracy in action” (see timeline and Perraudin 2016). However, the subsequent overturning of LCC’s rejection by Westminster was met with much anger and disillusion by my interlocutors. They denounced it as an affront to and betrayal of local democracy, a key point which will be explored elsewhere in this thesis. I would regularly notice placards or banners with the slogans “we said no!” or “Lancashire voted no!” at the PNR roadside, as in Figure 8 below. Campaigners would often chant this motto during large gatherings, referencing LCC’s initial position and justifying continued protest at the roadside.



Figure 7: The PNR site in July 2019. Credit: Maple Indie Media



Figure 8: Placards fixed to gatecamp at PNR, 2019. Credit: author's picture

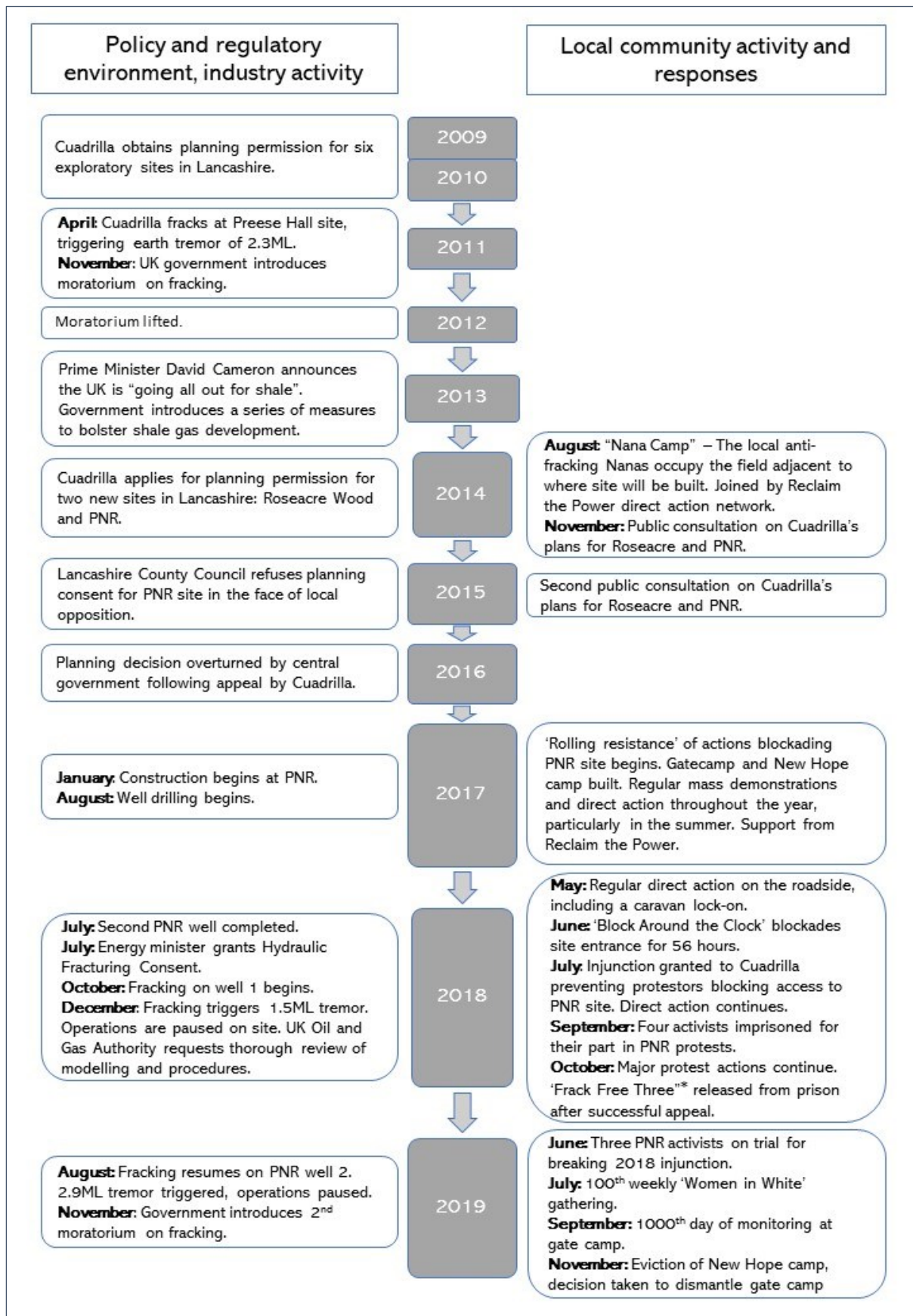


Figure 9: Timeline of events at the PNR roadside from 2011 to 2019. Credit: author's timeline

From January 2017 to December 2019, there was a constant activist presence on the roadside, as many protesters resolved to continue marking their opposition to an infrastructure they had not given consent to. After the moratorium on fracking was introduced in November 2019 (see timeline), the North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA), formerly the Oil and Gas Authority at the time of fieldwork, eventually instructed Cuadrilla to decommission the site. In March 2022, the NSTA withdrew this order giving Cuadrilla until June 2023 to “evaluate options for Preston New Road” (Ambrose 2022; Davies & Horton 2022; NSTA 2022b). I discuss this decision and its links to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 in the conclusion.

Josh was one of the longer-term protest camp residents, and known for his direct manners and unapologetic language, particularly when denouncing fracking. He had taken part in numerous protest events at PNR, as well as being involved with other environmental and climate protests in the UK, often against fossil fuel infrastructures. Josh referred to the ‘frontline’ – “an active site that you're actually getting in there [sic] and shutting down physically; that's the frontline.” For Josh, the frontline described the physical space at PNR, constituted by the energy infrastructure and the bodies resisting and challenging it. It also included the spaces occupied by the activists on the roadside, as well as the two camps further down the road; they are represented in Figure 10 and introduced below. Throughout this thesis, I use “PNR” to designate the ensemble of these locations, while “roadside” designates the entrance of the fracking site and the stretch of the road directly around it, including gatecamp.



Figure 10: Map of PNR locations annotated by the author (Google Maps 2022).

### *The roadside*

If they were on their way to the entrance of the site, my interlocutors would talk about “going roadside” or “going up to the gates”. Protesting, “being roadside” or “at the gates”, involved a range of activities which changed over time. When the construction of the site began in 2017, local residents



occupied space around the entrance of the site, which they called the “bellmouth”, in the evenings and throughout the nights. They hung banners across the bellmouth, and constructed pallet towers on each side of the entrance (see Figure 11). These became permanently occupied and small tents began dotting the grass curbs directly next to the bellmouth. In the summer of 2017, bailiffs removed the towers and the tents in collaboration with a local demolition contractor and monitored by the local police force.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 11: The bellmouth occupied with pallet constructions and protesters, summer 2017. Credit: Maple Indie Media



Figure 12: Pallet tower at the entrance of the PNR site, summer 2017. Credit: Maple Indie Media

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<sup>9</sup> In Ch.5, I examine the links between bailiffs and police officers at PNR to understand how these associations were perceived by my interlocutors.



Many of those protesting thought it was important to maintain a permanent presence and, shortly afterwards, cordoned off a section of the pavement opposite the fracking site; this subsequently became the location of gatecamp.<sup>10</sup> Interlocutors such as Aileen set up tents inside the cordoned-off area and slept next to the highway for a few months. Aileen had moved from another part of Lancashire to PNR to get involved with the anti-fracking campaign in 2017, and like Claudia, was now living on one of the camps down the road from the site. Aileen was a real story-teller who thrived on recounting tales from the roadside: blocking incoming site traffic, attempting to speak to drivers and workers entering the site, scrambles with security guards and tense interactions with police officers, monitoring the drilling of the wells by counting pipes through the night.

She explained to me how during her initial time sleeping on the roadside, she and others had started noting down what was going on at the entrance of the site and whatever they could see or hear coming from inside the site. A cut-out gap in the hedge lining the side of the site allowed campaigners to watch equipment movements and any signs of vapour or smoke (see Figure 17). Over time, activists established a rota system to maintain a 24-hour presence in order to monitor the site. This was one of the main activities I helped with, signing up to fill many shifts on the roadside. Luckily, by the time I arrived, it was more than a set of tents and the wooden shelter had been erected – my interlocutors referred to it as gatecamp, the monitoring station with which I opened the thesis. It is shown from different angles in Figures Figure 13, Figure 14 Figure 15 Figure 16 below.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 13: Placards and small wind turbine on the roof of gatecamp, 2019. Credit: author's picture

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<sup>10</sup> The area cordoned off displayed a legal notice which I include as Annexe 1. The notice is used for squatting non-residential properties; this is not illegal but is respected by local authorities under certain conditions.

<sup>11</sup> I will expand on monitoring duties in Ch.4 when discussing legal regulations around the fracking process and how my interlocutors kept track of whether Cuadrilla would abide by them. I will also detail the dynamics underlying gatecamp's enduring existence in Ch.6 on the work of activism – how the rota was maintained, how people on shift were supported by local residents through material donations, or how people divided their time between gatecamp duties and other activities making up the work of activism.



Figure 14: Gatecamp, 2019. Credit: author's picture



Figure 15: View from inside gatecamp, 2019. Credit: author's picture



Figure 16: Gatecamp, 2019. Credit: author's picture



Figure 17: Monitoring the site from gatecamp, autumn 2019. Credit: author's picture

When not on monitoring duties, people at the roadside engaged in different activities. Some sat in the bellmouth with placards (as in Figure 18), or held them standing on the pavement or central reservation. Others engaged in “bustling”, a term used by interlocutors to refer to physically resisting equipment entering the site, through various spontaneous, improvised or thought-through tactics to slow down the vehicles carrying it. People would attempt to speak to the delivery drivers. Planned



lock-on actions would also take place whereby, as people pointed out, “bodies are literally on the line”.<sup>12</sup> Bustling could get very physical particularly considering the interactions with the local police force deployed on the roadside. These interactions were at times very brutal – something I discuss in depth in Ch.5. Intervening on the roadside through bustling activities was often referred to as ‘direct action’ by protesters, media, and industry representatives alike. In common parlance, direct action is in contrast to strikes, rallies or marches. The latter are a form of pressure on an institution or an official body, pushing them to change practices or implement policies. Direct actions enable participants to directly stop something from taking place, without calling onto intermediaries to make the change. I further elaborate on the term “direct action” when discussing my theoretical framework later on.

Actions and activities on the roadside were documented by protesters. Particularly brutal interactions with the police or instances of arrest were noted down in the log books. These moments were also captured on phone recordings, pictures, or in livestreams, and circulated on social media platforms. Some interlocutors formed a media grassroots collective determined to systemically keep track of events on the roadside. They carried more sophisticated equipment and shared the footage online with additional commentary, short interviews of activists, and research about fracking. From previous experience, many protesters thought these visual recordings would help to keep the police in check as officers were scrutinised by cameras.



Figure 18: Interlocutors sitting in the entrance of the site with placards, 2019. Credit: author's picture

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<sup>12</sup> A lock-on refers both to an event where people are “locked-on”, as well as to the device used to do so. It is an item built for people to chain themselves to, typically by the wrist, and makes it hard for them to be moved on by security guards or police officers. Once a lock-on is successfully “deployed”, specialised teams are required to “cut out” the protesters. This type of action can be particularly effective in delaying deliveries to targeted sites.

Certain events were regular occasions at the roadside. The last Friday of the month, a group of Quakers organised an open-to-all “No Faith in Fracking” silent circle at the gates (Figure 19). Often the session would be followed by a long walk around the whole perimeter of the site, along the country back lanes. On “Green Mondays”, speakers invited by campaigners would come to address protesters at the gates, and on Wednesdays, local women would take part in the “Call for Calm” by dressing up in white and walking the distance from one of the camps to the external gates of the fracking site – participants would call themselves the “Women in White”. They stood in silence facing the site, and would then occupy the bellmouth with placards, dancing and chatting (see Figure 20). The Women in White overlapped with the Anti-Fracking Nanas: mothers and grandmothers known for wearing yellow tabards inscribed with a Nana nickname (as in Figure 21). they presented themselves as caring and active mothers, “rolling up their sleeves” to “get things done”. Ages varied in this group, and people who would call themselves “a Nana” changed over the course of the campaign. They were known for being a gentle but fierce presence at the roadside, carrying out intriguing direct action involving knitting and crochet making, as well as inscribing their children and grandchildren’s names on the roadside fences, or tying their bras to the fences. The Nanas had gained some media attention back in 2014 when they organised an activist camp, occupying the field adjacent to the one marked out for the PNR site (Cartwright 2019; Pidd 2015).



Figure 19: No Faith in Fracking session at the gates, 2018. Credit: Ros Wills



Figure 20: The Women in White holding hands in the bellmouth with the author first from the right, 2019. Credit: Maple Indie Media



Figure 21: One of the Anti-Fracking Nanas during the Call for Calm, summer 2019. Credit: author's picture





Figure 22: Series of placards at the roadside, 2019. Credit: all author's pictures

### *Maple Farm: the “Community Hub”*

Maple Farm, or “Maple”, was a 15 minutes’ walk from the site on the road towards Blackpool. The owner lent Maple Farm to the anti-fracking movement when the construction of Cuadrilla’s site started. A few live-in trailers were brought onto the land, a compost toilet and communal kitchen were built, and a portaloos was installed in the parking area. For large events at PNR, people gathered here before walking up to the gates. People described it as the Community Hub, where anyone was welcome to drop by for a chat to learn about fracking and the campaign against it. A large polytunnel hosted a range of protest materials, banners, printed out research, as well as a couple of couches, where I spent much time chatting to my new friends. I did not live on Maple during my fieldwork, and therefore whenever I mention “the protest camp” in this thesis, I am referring to New Hope Resistance Camp unless specified otherwise.<sup>13</sup>

### *New Hope Resistance Camp*

New Hope Resistance camp, or “New Hope”, is the protest camp where I lived and it was a five-minute walk from Maple Farm towards Blackpool. Tucked away on the side of the A583, behind a wooden door stapled with a Section 6 notice and anti-fracking signs, it was built on a discarded service station.

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<sup>13</sup> Since the moratorium on fracking introduced in November 2019, campaign materials and the live-in trailers were removed by my interlocutors from Maple Farm. As some of my friends told me, they were always keen to restore the site to its original purpose as a garden nursery and hand it back to the owner – which they did.



Figure 23: Entrance to New Hope, 2018. Credit: Maple Indie Media

The plot had been disused for some time, prompting a group of people to “take the land” in 2017 and set up a base for anti-fracking activists, building fences around the perimeter. The camp, named “New Hope Resistance – Centre of Excellence for Civil Disobedience”, included a large open area, hosting the compost toilets, the ‘communal’ (the camp’s living room), the kitchen, storage annexes, and a fire pit.<sup>14</sup> People often gathered either in the kitchen or in the communal, two sturdy buildings both hosting a woodstove – appealing places to be during cold winter days. Wood was collected from nearby forests or dry wood was donated by local residents or bought with camp funds. Water pipes connected the camp to Maple Farm, and an array of solar panels and a wind turbine adorned the roof of the communal space, enabling residents to charge phones and lights (see Figure 25). There was also a back-up diesel generator installed behind the communal, in case the wind turbine stopped turning and the solar panels were not able to provide sufficient energy. It was never turned on during my stay on the camp.

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<sup>14</sup> The typical description of this camp by local activists designated it as the “more activist-y” one, compared to Maple Farm





Figure 24: New Hope sign, 2018. Credit: Maple Indie Media

Ingenious and upcycled building contraptions gave an inspiring ‘do-it-yourself’ feel to the camp. Colourful paintings and banners also brought an active and joyous atmosphere to the spaces. At the same time, it could feel like certain areas were neglected as financial and material resources were not always readily available. Whilst some people had been living on camp for three years, others had come and gone. The space thus felt comfortable, but transient, where very little changed and the pace of life could feel very slow; “time does strange things on camps” one of the residents told me, commenting on the feeling that all days blended into one. In Ch.6, I explore some of the dynamics on camp, showing how people had to navigate various responsibilities and make a living for themselves outside of formal contracts of employment. I also discuss camp dynamics and issues of positionality in the next section.





Figure 25: View towards the New Hope communal with one the long-term camp residents in the foreground, 2019. Credit: author's picture



Figure 26: New Hope kitchen, summer 2019. Credit: author's picture





Figure 27: New Hope shower tower and cabin, 2019. Credit: author's picture



Figure 28: The New Hope guest shack with a painted Rumi poem titled "Guest House". Credit: Maple Indie Media

## Methods and research ethics

The fieldwork I conducted and the methods I used throughout partly emerged from my personal background and partly from practical access opportunities. The anthropologist Pina-Cabral (1992: 3), acknowledges that “individual experience is a condition of all ethnographic knowledge”, and that the knowledge researchers develop in the field is deeply marked by the social relations we form. Indeed, defining a research site depends on our access opportunities and constraints, as well as the affective experiences encountered in the field (see also Falzon 2015). In this section, I expand on my research methods and discuss my entry into and positionality in the field, examining the ethical questions raised by my research. In doing so, I provide context to the ethnographic knowledge and analysis offered in the thesis and outline the limitations of my work.

### *Choosing my field site*

During my undergraduate years, I was an active member of a coalition of students and staff calling on the university to align its social and environmental values with its financial investments.<sup>15</sup> I was aware of environmental issues and often discussed these with friends, and experienced being part of grassroots groups working on issues of climate change, but had never considered carrying out direct action. After graduating, I worked for a cancer charity for a year, but befriended people working in environmental organisations aimed at a socially and environmentally sustainable future (Good Food Oxford n.d.; People & Planet n.d.; Tandem Collective n.d.; Transition Network n.d.). I joined The Tandem Collective, which organised an annual music festival, and I oversaw the programming of workshops and talks. Introduced to Reclaim the Power (RTP) by a friend, I organised a workshop given by RTP on direct action. RTP is a grassroots network focused on direct action formed in 2013. It was founded on the principles of “tackling the climate, economic, and social crisis” and “fighting for social, environmental and economic justice” while “supporting frontline communities” (RTP 2019: 3, n.d.). They have mainly targeted fossil fuel sites across the UK, particularly focusing on gas extraction.<sup>16</sup> They supported local activists at PNR when Cuadrilla applied for planning permission

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<sup>15</sup> Positive+investment, formerly Positive Investment Cambridge, was a pivotal actor in triggering the foundation in 2015 of a working group reviewing the Statement of Investment Responsibility (positive+investment n.d.). This experience led me to explore the concepts of value(s) within the financial system for my undergraduate dissertation entitled “Searching for value(s): perceptions and interactions within a City investment fund”.

<sup>16</sup> The network emerged from No Dash for Gas, a group having famously occupied the West Burton Power Station in 2012 for eight days, camping at the top of the cooling towers and abseiling down into them (Coles n.d.; *Reclaim Power: The Story of the No Dash for Gas 21* 2013; Wainwright 2012). In 2013, RTP activists blocked the entrance to IGas’ “fracking test site” with a wind turbine in Greater Manchester, at Barton Moss (*Wind Turbine Fracking Protest, Barton Moss - YouTube* 2013). RTP members also set up a protest camp at Balcombe in summer 2013 to support the fight against Cuadrilla’s site (RTP 2013).



and returned regularly throughout the construction of the site and thereafter. At the Tandem Festival workshop I programmed, RTP presenters introduced forms of direct action carried out on fossil fuel infrastructures – I saw what a lock-on could look like for the first time. A friend from the RTP network subsequently convinced me to accompany them to PNR in June 2018.

I had already started my doctoral program and was deciding the focus of my research. My work at that time was examining fossil fuel divestment movements across the UK and Germany. I noticed the ways in which networks of protest and direct action were intimately linked to financial initiatives aimed at blocking fossil fuel industries, through personal relationships and organisational support. I also identified strong concerns about fracking in the environmental groups I knew. I thus travelled to PNR for a pre-fieldwork trip in June 2018 to join the “Block Around The Clock” action co-organised by RTP and the Lancashire-based anti-fracking activists. The aim of the event was to shut down the entrance to the site for a long weekend. Hundreds of people joined, and the police took the decision not to intervene for the duration of the three-day blockade.

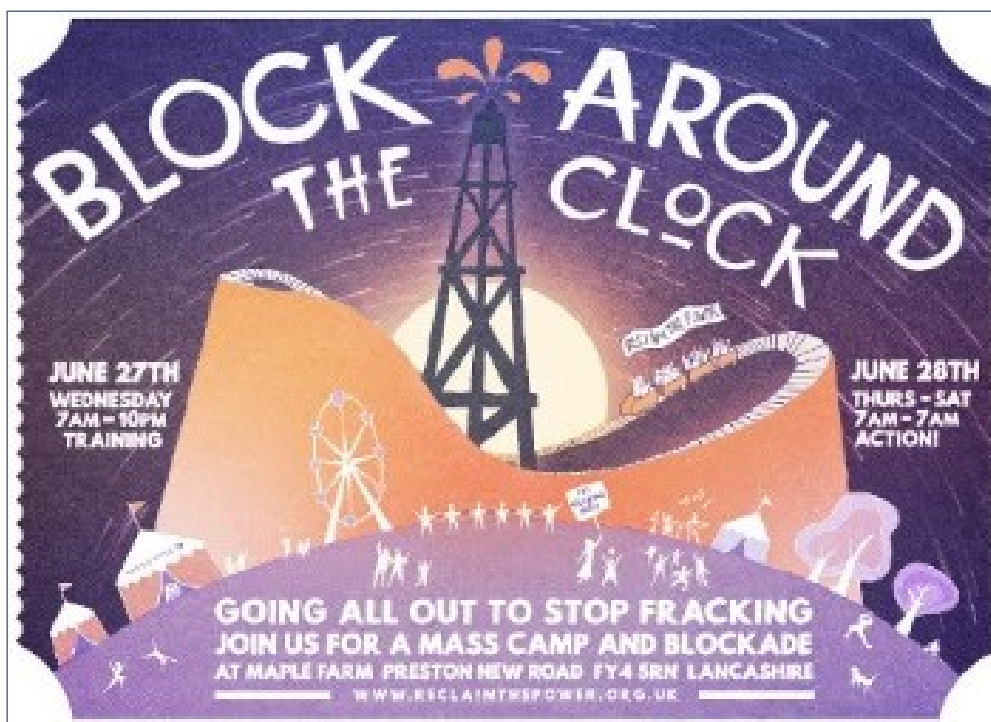


Figure 29: The Block Around The Clock flyer for an action at PNR (RTP 2018)

The atmosphere throughout the blockade remained festive and the warm summer made sleeping on the tarmac at the entrance of the fracking site relatively comfortable. The movement’s axiom “everyone is crew” was infectious and I was quickly involved with cooking, helping with setting things up at Maple Farm and on the roadside. I also noticed the monitoring station where people gathered across the road from the entrance to Cuadrilla’s site. I crossed the road and spent time at gatecamp for a few hours, meeting people, chatting, and learning about the monitoring system. I also learnt that “keeping numbers up” at the roadside was a big worry for the campaign and that, as I

describe in Ch.4, encounters with the police were typically not as amicable as during Block Around The Clock. I was struck by the longevity of the local campaign in spite of these difficulties and people's visible commitment to the cause. I was also intrigued by how some would travel to PNR for short stays, as many of those participating in the blockade were doing, while others would spend continuous weeks on the roadside. I resolved to return to PNR and immerse myself in the local campaign in order to understand what was at stake at this local point of energy contestation.

### *Fieldwork methodology*

I learnt from my pre-fieldwork trip that merely observing would not provide me with sufficient access to understand the dynamics of protests based on direct action. It seemed relatively straightforward to get involved with the movement, given its informal nature. As the gatecamp rota was in need of volunteers, I thought that signing up for shifts would help me to meet people and to understand what being on the roadside entailed. I returned to the PNR several times for protest rallies, and to cover monitoring shifts. I officially started my fieldwork in December 2018, having ensured as many people as possible knew of my intentions as a researcher. I decided to spend as much time as possible on the roadside and arranged to rent a small place to stay in Blackpool to store my belongings, sleep, write notes and process my fieldwork.

This arrangement lasted only a few weeks. I did not like the feeling of turning up opportunistically at the roadside and observing people, to then going back to my home comforts. It felt necessary to spend more time at the roadside, and I found myself wanting to get more involved, and appreciated meeting the increasingly familiar faces of camp residents. I began taking an increasing number of shifts at gatecamp, including nightshifts. The winter months were very cold, and the monitoring station and its stove provided a warm place for locals involved in the campaign – and for myself. When one of the camp residents said I would be very welcome to stay at the New Hope camp, I followed her suggestion and regularly stayed overnight in the guest shack. I gradually became friends with one activist who oscillated between a full-time job off camp and time spent at the PNR roadside during her annual leave. She agreed to let me use her small garden shed on the camp (see Figure 30). I moved out from the rented accommodation in Blackpool and onto camp around January 2019. In March, one of the long-term camp residents moved away and suggested I take the resulting empty cabin. After checking in with a number of camp residents, it seemed there were no objections to me moving into the insulated cabin – which I happily discovered had its own woodstove (see Figure 31).

I also became friends with a local couple of campaigners, Claire and her husband Matthew. Claire became one of my close interlocutors during fieldwork; I followed her and her husband's involvement with the anti-fracking movement, having first met them in June 2018 during my pre-fieldwork trip. Living an hour away from the site, they very kindly let me to stay at their home whenever I felt like a

break. I spent many cosy evenings in their house, enjoying interesting discussions as well as some headspace to write up field notes.



Figure 30: Author's residence for the start of fieldwork, 2019. Credit: author's picture

My main research method was immersive participant observation across the spaces constituting PNR. I divided my time between the protest camp, the roadside, the monitoring shifts at gatecamp, and time alone in my cabin or at Claire's house to write notes. I also accompanied interlocutors to other protest camps, as well as to activist meetings and gatherings locally and across the country. I was kindly welcomed into people's homes for meals and conversations, complementing participant observation with one-on-one interviews during the later stages of fieldwork. Interviews were also carried out on camp, at the roadside, or in nearby coffee places. The format ranged from planned semi-structured conversations, to open-ended discussions which I would record when given consent. I also conducted two group interviews – both of which had started as an individual interview but shifted into larger group sessions unexpectedly.





Figure 31: Author's residence on New Hope during the second half of fieldwork, spring 2019. Credit: author's picture

I was wary of my interlocutors' suspicions of police or industry infiltrators, as discussed in Ch.5. Some people were suspicious of me at first, and I was once told someone thought I was an undercover agent, but these suspicions quickly cleared. As a young small female, I believe I appeared less threatening to most people. Gendered attitudes and assumptions meant I felt comfortable asking questions and having things explained to me, without people assuming I had hidden nefarious motives. However, a culture of secrecy and "healthy dose of suspicion", as interlocutors would put it, was evident across the movement. I therefore avoided taking notes during spontaneous conversations, and would often text myself during the day via the encrypted app Signal to remember important details. I subsequently typed up notes on a password-protected laptop, encrypted to the standard set by the UK Data Protection Regulatory Authority – the UK Information Commissioner – to ensure sensitive information would be protected. Both my written and typed notes were coded at the point of entry, and a password-protected key was stored on the encrypted laptop. My notebooks and laptop were initially stored in my rented accommodation in Blackpool; after I moved onto camp, I kept them at Claire's house. Whilst it was not always easy to inform the people I met in large groups that I was conducting research, I strived to do so as much as possible. Therefore over time, I got verbal consent for participation in my research from all my interlocutors. For a majority of them, I also obtained consent in written form through the *Participant Consent Form Coded Data* (see Annexe 2). I chose to distribute this formal documentation towards the end of my fieldwork, when I felt most people trusted me and would not be suspicious of such official forms.

### *Ethical concerns and reflections on positionality*

I approached my fieldwork by taking an overt research position, whilst actively participating in my interlocutors' daily lives. As such, the dynamics of "building rapport" marked me out as a political actor in the "everydayness of [my] practice" (Jackson Jr. 2010: 284). Ethnographic fieldwork entails navigating people's perceptions and emotions, whilst continually untangling my own and acknowledging that my presence had an impact on the field site and the collected data, on my interlocutors, and on myself. I believe this to be inevitable in any kind of research project but it is exacerbated in and compounded by immersive ethnographic research. Being honest about and learning to grapple with the interrelation between the researcher and her fieldwork, and her relationships with interlocutors in the field can be destabilising, tiring and emotional, whilst also leading to fruitful research reflections.

I realised in my field site that the axiom "everyone is crew" was a practical necessity due to limited numbers of protesters, as well as an ethical appeal to adopt and practice as part of a community living together and acting for a common cause. As such, I readily adopted this attitude for access reasons, but also out of respect and care for the people I lived with. I thus tried to focus on the sincerity of my interactions and to act with and out of empathy for those I shared my time with, while also keeping data collection and research interests in mind (Jackson Jr. 2010). Understanding how to ask insightful questions sensitively requires trust and time. Asking them at the wrong moment or in the wrong way can mark the process of ethnographic fieldwork as emphatically extractive and inconsiderate. This concerned me during my fieldwork, particularly due to the significant number of journalists, as well as other researchers, gravitating around PNR to write up their own outputs. In her work with the local anti-fracking community in Lancashire prior to 2019, Anna Szolucha describes the strong emotional nature of the local resistance, the common feelings of anxiety and fatigue, and the collective trauma resulting from the campaign (Short & Szolucha 2017; Szolucha 2016a). These feelings were palpable in my own research, and one interlocutor also confessed that the level of attention PNR had received was overwhelming at times. "It's like we're mice in a box!" she said. I immediately felt guilty about my own research, and in my first few months of fieldwork often felt uncomfortable asking too many questions. The highly informal nature of my field site also meant that people willingly shared intimate and personal issues with me, and I tried to be respectful of people's boundaries when indicated. It is hard to deny that to some extent, ethnographic fieldwork leads to instrumentalising close and personal interactions in the field for the purpose of research outputs. However, the process is not necessarily one-sided, as researchers find ways to give back during and after fieldwork, or to co-create and collaborate on research outputs. At PNR, I felt like the right and considerate thing to do at times was not to ask questions, and instead focus on listening and helping with practical tasks – even if this meant not taking notes for extended period of time. In this way, the long-term immersive nature of ethnographic research can help to cultivate the *sincerity* described by Jackson Jr, as we come to learn

about our interlocutors' lives by taking part in them and giving them the space to live. Whilst I have shared written research with close interlocutors, I have not (yet) engaged in any form of collaborative research output. I decided I would 'give back' by staying empathetic and non-judgemental, helping to maintain the spaces at PNR, and trying to convey my interlocutors' worldview as best as I could in my thesis.

Cultivating 'sincerity' in the field meant the boundaries between researcher and "researched" were blurred; this blurring became integral to my work as I was confronted with my own assumptions. I structured my fieldwork around regular shifts at gatecamp, as I thought it would allow me some analytical distance with the bustling and other actions on the roadside. I quickly started to feel an obligation to fulfil these shifts and sign up for more – particularly amidst worries of not having enough people to cover the rota. This gave me one particular and very embodied perspective on the anti-fracking campaign, and it also meant I became a 'fixture' of gatecamp. New visitors would ask me about the activity on site, the history of the camp or its future, even as I stood next to my interlocutors of whom I was asking similar questions. My responses became part of the greater pool of knowledge about the campaign, circulated amongst activists locally and further afield. On one occasion, a journalist interviewed and photographed me alongside my interlocutors, and the resulting article was displayed at gatecamp (see Figure 32 below and Charlesworth 2019 for the online version).



Figure 32: Article hung up at gatecamp picturing the author second from the left, October 2019. Credit: author's picture

I recall feeling uncomfortable at being depicted as one of the movement's faces, and asked the journalist to edit her description of me as an "anti-fracking activist" to a "PhD researcher". However, I had to ask myself: what does 'being an activist' mean? Was I an activist by virtue of being on the roadside? Was I less of an activist because I covered monitoring shifts and I did not carry out direct action? I realised in my conversations with interlocutors that they held similar questions about themselves, and that there could be a vast difference between how people thought of themselves and how others described them. Some would refer to themselves as being "on the margins" of the movement, whilst others would say of the same person that they were crucial to it. Furthermore, some actions at PNR were more visible than others, such as planned lock-ons and intense bustling on the roadside. Yet they materialised as part of a vast network of shifting roles, including monitoring, holding placards, cooking food, and online research, to name just a few (see Ch.6 on the 'work of activism'). Membership of the anti-fracking community was not a formal or official status but rather a fluid and processual experience on the frontline. This fluidity was often commented on as interlocutors realised 'being an activist' could have a wealth of different meanings. Immersive research meant questioning my own positionality on the frontline and gained valuable insights into the articulation of resistance, ethical life and action. People took personal responsibility to create change as well as being part of collective witnessing practices, involving complex dynamics of commitment. Such reflections also inform my interchangeable use of the words 'activist', 'campaigner' and 'protestor', whilst favouring as much as possible the terms "people engaged in activism", "people protesting" or "people campaigning". Activism was less of an identity but more of a set of practices and actions.

In this way, the blend between my professional researcher status and my constant participating in camp life and at the roadside was difficult to navigate but also meant I could experience the implications of taking action. I recall conversations at gatecamp in the early weeks of my fieldwork; often people were friendly but seemed exhausted just by our discussion. Months later, after several nightshifts and weeks on camp, I too was exhausted and often found it hard to remember the day's conversations. I had little energy to plan spending time away from the roadside – as much as I craved doing so to sleep and type up notes. I had to remember that I had only been at PNR for a few months – some of my interlocutors had been involved in continuous years of campaigning. "Camp life really does my head in sometimes", confessed one of my interlocutors. They were not alone in feeling this, as many felt they needed breaks from the camp, and more generally from the frontline. The exhaustion could also feed into or come from tense relationships on the camp, as people from different backgrounds attempted to maintain the longevity of the camp whilst working together to resist fracking. Moreover, the protest camp and gatecamp were squatted land, and ensuring the presence of at least one person to "hold the section" could be a source of conflict. At times people could feel they were not able to leave the frontline even if they wanted to. Like me, my interlocutors could therefore feel exhausted and "stuck" at PNR in a space that was paradoxically transient and where activists often came and went.

I found myself wanting to be a responsible camp resident and gatecamp participant, and also a good friend as many of my interlocutors became such as time went on. As I watched them and helped to sustain the spaces at PNR, I came to care about them, their health and their worries. Although it was common for my interlocutors to spend time away from the frontline, I invariably felt guilty for my own trips away. Leaving PNR felt like abandoning them. When the protest camp was evicted and destroyed in November 2019, I recall feeling angry and crying alongside my friends as we watched machinery tear through the trees, flatten the communal spaces, and tip the solar panels to a heap on the ground (see Ch.5). Thereafter, as those of us who had spent time in the space walked past the now empty field, we were somehow united in the strong absence of a former presence. In this way, I jointly constituted the PNR and roadside landscape throughout my fieldwork.

### *Limitations*

Given this positionality, I found it hard to distance myself from life on the roadside and empathise with those with whom my interlocutors came into conflict. I also sensed that my interlocutors would find it hard to trust me had I simultaneously conducted fieldwork among people with whom they were in fierce opposition. Beyond practical reasons for limiting my research in this way, I follow Candea's reflections on the value of leaving some things "out of bounds" and pay close attention to how locality and peoples' lives are "laboriously constructed", even within what may appear at first as a narrow field site (Candea 2007: 174, 171). The daily lives of our interlocutors form rich tapestries of people, living and non-living entities (present or absent), affects, actions and relationships in earthly or spiritual spaces. Thus, restricting our research to a certain space or group of people need not be construed as a limitation or an exclusion, but rather enable the researcher to be surprised by and notice the otherwise taken-for-granted.

Nevertheless, insights into how interactions with protesters were experienced by individual police officers and security guards would be useful in conceptualising formations of truth, action and responsibility on an energy frontline. Much of the thesis is structured around instances of conflict and truth formations emerging from disruption and conflict. My interlocutors saw police officers as the prime upholders of the 'system', which they were in conflict with; but how did different officers conceptualise of the "system that says fracking is okay", and what were their theories of change? How did they experience conflict on the frontline?

Both police officers and activists were outside the fence surrounding the fracking site. What of those on the inside, the employees and contractors of Cuadrilla? How did they envisage energy futures, conceptualisations of responsibility and change? Where would their truth-making practices meet and part with police officers and activists? During my pre-fieldwork trip, I managed to attend the Third Onshore Oil and Gas Summit in July 2018 thanks to a discounted student rate, which the organisers had been very helpful in securing for me. The event was attended by journalists, researchers, and

representatives from different oil and gas exploratory companies (Cuadrilla, Third Energy, IGas, Rathlin Energy, INEOS). In a session led by a private security company, I gained a glimpse into how protesters were categorised and how this affected the advice given to security guards in how to treat them, from concerned local residents to professional activists “touring” round the country. A year later, I inquired with the events company to book attendance for that year’s summit but was never answered, despite contacting them several times. Did I have a profile as a protester stored somewhere, preventing me from attending? My own experience aside, many of my interlocutors felt excluded from ‘the other side of the fence’ and complained that communication with the company was either too slight or consisted of misleading PR exercises. The site with its multiple fences did feel exclusive to my interlocutors and me, contributing to my decision to centre the thesis around the activist experience and their conceptualisations of the frontline. Extended fieldwork with people within the industry would no doubt starkly contrast roadside experiences, and give a very different perspective on the role and actions of my interlocutors.

Focusing on my interlocutors’ perceptions of facing interlocking conflicts on the PNR frontline, I chose to “cut” (Strathern 1996) my field site with an exploration of truth, action, and responsibility, and an examination of how realities are brought into being. A “cutting” following analytical insights from the Anthropology of Britain, a vast literature covering themes such as identity, class, nationalism, migration, landscapes, urban life, and heritage, would offer an excellent path for future research (see Balthazar 2017; Evans 2012; Gillian Evans 2017; Green 2016; Knight 2017; Rapport 2002; Smith 2012). As I touch on in Ch.2 on histories of protest, my interlocutors’ drive for action could be further situated with attention to traditions and transformations in contemporary Britain. Whilst my theoretical and analytical framework focuses on the ethical dynamics of physical action and confrontation, another might emphasise the importance of regional literature. Such an approach could contribute to conversations within anthropology regarding conducting ‘anthropology at home’ and the delineation of geographical ‘regions’ (Chakrabarty 2007a; Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Knight & Stewart 2018; Marcus 1999; Shore 2012; Strathern 1987). In Ch.7, I offer further thoughts on avenues for future research tying what is “left out of bounds” (Candea 2007: 174) with the broader relevance of my work.

### A polarised reality: to shale or not to shale?

Cuadrilla’s CEO, Francis Egan, described the shale gas formation in Lancashire as “probably one of the largest gas discoveries ever made in Europe, never mind the UK” (BBC News 2013a), singling out the site at PNR as a crucial one for the British energy landscape. Gas is a significant energy source

for heating and electricity generation in the UK and has steadily replaced coal over recent decades.<sup>17</sup> About half of the UK's gas needs are currently met through imports – more than half of which come from Norway; a significant part of the rest is Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) (BEIS 2021). Domestic gas production, also known as 'indigenous', has declined steadily since 2000 (Baxter & Cox 2017; IEA n.d.). UK reliance on gas imports coupled with falling production fed into policy-makers' concerns around energy security at the time of my fieldwork – particularly considering the long-standing “tug of war between Russia and western European nations”(Field 2021a). The severe cold weather in March 2018 accentuated these concerns, as domestic power consumption rose sharply, coinciding with insufficient gas storage capacity due to certain facilities closing or being refurbished (Andrews 2018; Vaughan 2018).

In this context, domestic shale gas was considered an attractive energy resource by the government (Joffe 2013; Petts 2018; Watt 2014), improving the UK's 'energy security'. Whilst the notion refers to “reliable, affordable access” to energy for people across the country (IEA n.d.), the impact of a domestic shale gas industry on the affordability aspect was considered trivial by many commentators including pro-shale ones (Bassi et al. 2013; Bowden 2013; Joffe 2013). Much of the political narrative made the case for shale gas based on the willingness and capacity of the UK to reliably cater for its own energy needs, in addition to job opportunities and economic growth. Interestingly, such narratives gained traction at a time when notions of sovereignty and “taking back control” were integral to narratives around the UK leaving the European Union (Department for Exiting the European Union 2018; Vote Leave n.d.). Shale gas proponents depicted a “home-grown” energy source as a positive next step for a revitalised and self-sufficient British energy sector (Leadsom 2016).

Whilst state officials had always stated they were following scientific evidence and robust regulations to ensure fracking would be carried out safely, my interlocutors found these statements risible. For them, the scientific evidence testifying to the harms to the natural environment, to public health, and to the climate warranted a rejection of fracking altogether – as one of my interlocutors' put it: “I know a way to frack safely: don't!”. The combination of high population density in the UK and seismic activity linked to fracking was a concern and frequent topic of discussion for my interlocutors. During the first round of fracs between October and December 2018, more than 50 “seismic events” were recorded by the British Geological Survey in the vicinity of the site, and a total of 134 events

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<sup>17</sup>I will use the term 'gas' throughout the thesis. However, the term 'natural gas' can be used to distinguish it from 'liquefied natural gas'. Many environmental activists campaigning to end hydrocarbon production refer to it as “fossil gas”, to mark a clear link with decarbonisation efforts and ending fossil fuel reliance. Also signalling alignment with decarbonisation efforts, industry actors often use the term low-carbon gas” or “clean gas” as will be discussed further on.



were recorded during the second round of fracs in August 2019 (Hayhurst 2018a, 2019b).<sup>18</sup> In Ch.4, I discuss how my interlocutors kept close track of these numbers.

Industry regulations known as the Traffic Light System (TLS) required fracking operations to cease for eighteen hours should a seismic event above 0.5ML occur (BEIS 2020).<sup>19</sup> Yet my interlocutors held that the geological faults had been wrongly modelled by Cuadrilla, and that the company had failed to identify the implications for seismic activity linked to fracking. Seismic activity itself is not rare in the British Isles – what my interlocutors feared were “uncontrollable” seismic events induced by fracking, compounded by geological faults and with the potential to trigger irreversible underground damage to the drilled well. This could cause leaks of chemicals used in the fracking process combined with elements found naturally buried underground, leading to water and soil contamination with associated impacts on public health. Laboratory coats covered in the symbols for these elements hung on the roadside (see Figure 34).



Figure 33: Placard in the entrance to the fracking site, 2019. Credit: author's picture

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<sup>18</sup> These figures were reported by the independent journalist Ruth Hayhurst who created the Drill or Drop website in 2013. She reports on onshore oil and gas production in the UK and the campaigns protesting specific sites (Drill or Drop 2013). My interlocutors found Hayhurst's reporting very valuable and often used it to share news within the movement.

<sup>19</sup> "ML" means Local Magnitude scale, measured on the Richter Scale of Earthquake Magnitude (BGS n.d.; Encyclopedia Britannica 2020). The Richter Scale is logarithmic – an increase of 1 on the scale represents a tenfold increase in seismic amplitude. For context, the biggest earthquake triggered by fracking registered at PNR was of 2.9ML in August 2019.



Figure 34: Laboratory coats hung on the fences on the PNR roadside by activists, 2019. Credit: author's picture

The use of vast amounts of water for the fracking process was also denounced by activists. As my interlocutor Josh, fellow camp resident, gracefully explained:

Not only are they poisoning the shit we've got to drink, they're taking the stuff that we have to drink and they're turning it into toxic sludge and sticking it a mile underground where it's never going to be fucking part of the water cycle again (...) It's a massive, massive, *massive* waste of water [original emphasis]. Once they turn drinking water into fucking frack food that's it, you can't use it.

This trenchant opinion was based on meticulous research. Josh had compiled a large folder, partly based on the Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking, jointly written by the Concerned Health Professionals of New York and Physicians for Social Responsibility (CHPNY and PSR 2019). He later lent it to me, and I browsed through the carefully classified chapters and annotations marking the contents of the report. It outlined the environmental issues mentioned above, as well as potential air pollution from methane leaks occurring during the fracking process. The 2015 UK MedAct report was also part of Josh's bundle, a document outlining the potential risks to public health associated with fracking (McCoy & Saunders 2015).

Both the pro-shale industry and the anti-fracking community heavily drew on and sought to align themselves with the need for an energy transition to mitigate climate change. Fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas) underpin the energy, transport and manufacturing systems of industrialised countries, while releasing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other “greenhouse gases” into the atmosphere. Using *carbon* as a way of accounting for these damaging emissions, discourses from international, national and local environmental organisations call for a *decarbonisation* of human activities to address climate change (Brogan 2018; IPCC 2014, 2018). For climate scientists and policymakers, decarbonisation entails “rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems” (IPCC 2018: SPM-21). The UK’s adoption of the Climate Change Act in 2008 inscribed the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in national legislation, with an initial target of 80% GHG emissions reduction compared with 1990 emissions level by 2050; this target was revised in 2019 to net zero by 2050 (HM Government 2008).<sup>20</sup> The UK is also a signatory of the 2015 Paris International Climate Agreements which bind countries to outline emissions reduction consistent with keeping global warming under a 2°C threshold – a contested figure which many believe should be replaced by 1.5 °C – and the Glasgow Climate Pact which notes that most countries policies need strengthening if these targets are to be met (Buis 2019; Climate Watch & World Resources Institute n.d.; Fransen & Levin 2016; Hoegh-Guldberg et al. 2019; IPCC 2018; Schellnhuber et al. 2016; UNFCCC 2015, 2021). The carbon intensity of coal is twice that of as gas (Staffell 2017). The government and supporters of the shale industry therefore held gas as a *transition* or *bridge* fuel away from coal and towards renewables (BEIS 2019b; Third Onshore Oil & Gas Summit 2018). Research into the effects of a domestic shale gas industry on the UK’s GHG emissions also suggested that the lifecycle emissions of shale gas could be lower than that of imported LNG, a finding contingent on effective regulation of potential methane leaks from shale gas sites (Harvey 2014; Joffe 2013; MacKay & Stone 2013). Those advocating for shale gas aligned themselves with decarbonisation discourses and thus depicted drilling and fracking for gas as a low-carbon tool to combat climate change.

My interlocutors disagreed with the narrative that gas, as a cleaner alternative to coal, should be part of the UK’s energy future. A case brought to the High Court by the law firm Leigh Day on behalf of the campaign group Talk Fracking which was affiliated with the local PNR movement, revealed in the verdict that “key elements of the government’s national fracking policy” were unlawful (Leigh Day 2019). The ruling stated that the government had ignored evidence which challenged the assertion that gas had a “low carbon” potential. It also questioned the government’s failure to carry out a public consultation to revise the policy. Despite this ruling, fracking operations at the PNR were authorised

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<sup>20</sup> The IPCC defines reaching net zero emissions to be when: “*anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere are balanced by anthropogenic removals over a specified period*” (IPCC 2018: 555).

in summer 2019.<sup>21</sup> Martin was a pensioner living in the vicinity of the fracking site. He was a staple protest figure on the roadside, supporting and helping with events organisation, and often lending a hand on the protest camp as well. His humorous demeanour and reliable presence meant he was a trusted figure within the anti-fracking movement. During a conversation in late 2019, Martin passionately acknowledged his main motivation on the PNR frontline:

There is absolutely no reason we should be using fossil fuels. To me there has always been a bigger picture than fracking. They tried to say that fracked gas is not as bad for the environment as coal, but that's a bit like saying being garrotted isn't quite as bad as being stabbed! I never bought the argument that it was a bridge to a greener future, when this government was not only actively encouraging and subsidising fossil fuel, but it was also actively discouraging renewables, and reducing the tariffs and basically working against the solar and the wind industry. (...) We're not just making a fuss about one or two wells at PNR – this is the thin end of the wedge! If it goes to production there'll be hundreds of these sites, literally three or four miles apart.

Martin was opposed to the development of yet another fossil fuel extractive site in the context of an ecological and climate crisis and saw it as an expensive distraction amidst other options for decarbonisation. Whilst industry supporters spoke of “unlocking” or “unleashing” the potential of shale gas, Martin and other anti-fracking campaigners described fracking as “locking” the energy sector into unnecessary and damaging production of fossil fuels (Chignell & Gross 2013). The Chairman of the UK Committee on Climate Change Lord Deben echoed this concern in a quote in *The Independent*: “The real difficulty is you end up with a whole infrastructure that you use for gas, and then infrastructure drives policy” (Chorley 2012). That PNR was an infrastructure carrying a “locking in” potential, tying the country to a prolonged and damaging reliance on fossil fuels was a strong rallying point within the anti-fracking movement.

One of the BGS’s seismologist and project leader suggested that “to truly understand the risk of this process [fracking] we’ve got to try it in a few places (...) and try and get some data that we can use to constrain what the hazard is” (Hayhurst 2019d). Yet for my interlocutors, this drive for exploration was damaging and contributed to the ‘lock-in’ of a harmful reality. Martin told me, “The question is not whether there is gas or not [at PNR], or whether it’s safe to extract - but whether we need it or not. And no is the answer”. He elaborated:

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<sup>21</sup> This ruling has had at least some impact on policy. Wording in government planning guidelines directing local authorities to “recognise the benefits of on-shore oil and gas development” when deciding on planning applications was removed in 2021 (see Hayhurst 2019c).

It's really basically trying to get the last few drops out, so rather than just sinking a shaft and getting coal or gas that way, it's having to force it out by explosives or by acid or whatever, so I call it *extreme energy* [emphasis added] because it's what I would call the fag end of exploitation - and as much as we all know there's gas down there, it cannot be easily got. (...) It is just exploiting for the sake of exploiting.

In her book *This Changes Everything*, Naomi Klein (2015: 295, 310) ties the extraction of unconventional fossil fuels to the concepts of “high-risk extreme extraction” and “extreme energy”. She discusses the logic of extractivism which for her underlies such sites of fossil fuel production and extends the frontiers of a profitable fossil fuel industry (see also Jalbert et al. 2017). Klein discusses the harmful impacts of large-scale extractive sites and hydrocarbon production on the natural environment as well as the associated and widespread erosion of democratic institutions and local regulatory procedures, “sacrificing” the local populations “in the name of progress” and along racial and classist lines (Klein 2015: 310–311). She thus suggests that the people who are in more precarious positions are more negatively affected by the production of energy and other extractive industries such as mining. She identifies stark social inequalities as characteristics of many of these sacrifice zones, and also suggests the latter are now shifting to territories and communities previously deemed off limits, or who were not already reliant on extractive industries. In her work at PNR, Szolucha identifies a sense of social and collective trauma resulting from the development of the PNR site, as well as a strong mistrust of the industry, the government and democratic processes more generally (Short & Szolucha 2017; Szolucha 2015, 2021). She also discusses the post-industrial landscape of northern England and the sense of socio-erasure prevalent amongst those living near a site earmarked for extractive industries.

The area of Lancashire where Szolucha and I conducted our fieldwork included the socio-economically deprived areas of Blackpool and more affluent villages dotted around the Fylde.<sup>22</sup> While my interlocutors were to greater or lesser extents in precarious positions, they were all affected by the collective trauma identified by Szolucha and perceived the fracking site to be a harmful sacrifice of the “Desolate North”.<sup>23</sup> The anger was therefore palpable when, in an interview in 2019, the former BP CEO and Cuadrilla Chairman Lord Browne (who stepped down from his position at Cuadrilla in 2015) seemed to casually dismiss the PNR site as a failed experiment: “Fracking in the UK doesn’t make much sense. I think it was a test to see if it worked. We probably don’t need to do it” (Vidal

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<sup>22</sup>I will return to the inequalities in the Blackpool area in the following chapter on histories of protest.

<sup>23</sup> The *Desolate North* became a reclaimed slogan for many of the campaigners I met. In 2013, a Conservative peer used the term to describe areas in the North East he thought could be suitable for fracking purposes, as they were supposedly less densely populated and did not have any particular natural features to preserve (see BBC News 2013b).



2019). Whether failed or incomplete, this confirmed for my interlocutors that the area was being “sacrificed” by industry and government as a casual testbed.

My interlocutors did not consider unconventional gas extraction as an innovative resolution worthy of celebration. If anything, planning and building gas infrastructures was not innovative but rather part of perpetuating the “inevitability” of certain infrastructures (Hughes 2017). The lock-in concerned an energy source and also, more broadly, entailed a harmful systemic approach of “exploiting for the sake of exploiting” as Martin suggested in the earlier quote. Taking action and witnessing the harm became a way for my interlocutors to disrupt the ‘system’ and attempt to create their own rightful reality. In the words of a fellow camp resident, “*it’s all one big frontline*”. Thus, the frontline was one charged with meaning beyond a designation of the physical roadside. It was a political and onto-epistemic frontline that produced and revealed tensions personally and collectively, emphasising different articulations of what *truly is*.

### “One big frontline”: theoretical framework and key contributions

In this section, I outline the key theoretical frameworks that inform my ethnographic analysis of truth, action, and transition on the PNR frontline. I also discuss the key contributions of this thesis in relation to three areas: the recent literature of energy ethics, the anthropological study of resistance and social movements, and theoretical debates in onto-epistemology. By adopting an energy ethics approach and drawing on the anthropology of resistance and activism. I delve into perceptions of the “really real” and examine the ethical articulations of *what is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do* in my interlocutors’ engagement with fracking. My work engages in public debates over vexing, complex problems which extend well beyond the concerns of anthropologists alone, such as climate change, energy transitions, and local and national decision-making. My work suggests that paying attention to the ethical dynamics of truth, by approaching the latter as a value which is realised through everyday frontline practices and networks of responsible relationships, can help to better identify and understand conflicts and possibilities for inclusive energy futures.

#### ***The anthropology of ethics and energy: energy ethics***

How societies and ways of living are powered form central questions in global and local political debates. Humanities and social sciences have increasingly examined such issues, no longer leaving them to natural scientists, engineers and politicians (see edited volumes such as Appel et al. 2015; Maguire et al. 2021; Strauss et al. 2013; Szeman et al. 2017). In particular, the current and impending energy concerns discussed in the previous section – growing global demand for energy, climate change catastrophes linked to excessive fossil fuel production and consumption, possibilities for rapid

and just energy transitions – have been approached from an ‘ethical perspective’ in the growing field of energy ethics. Complementing critical research on energy and environmental justice, energy ethics studies investigate the “multiple [and] conflicting understandings of energy [that] animate how people encounter energy in their everyday lives” (Smith & High 2017: 2), inviting researchers to explore how energy projects are intimately linked with visions of a good, desirable life, and intertwined with local and global political, economic and material projects (Field 2021b, 2022a; High 2019; High & Smith 2019; Smith & Tidwell 2016; Wood 2019).

Research in energy ethics has drawn extensively on the anthropology of ethics. The latter, rather than investigating perceptions of right and wrong by relying on deontological notions of fixed moral codes or essential utilitarian outcomes, has shown that ethical life, in its articulations of *what is* and *what ought be*, is processual and indeterminate (High 2022). Values have often been examined in tandem with ethics, as that which gives meaning to and orients peoples’ imaginaries and actions in sometimes contradictory and messy ways (Miller 2008; Robbins 2013). Values have also been analysed as *emerging from* actions rather than providing actions with clear direction (Graeber 2001; Munn 1992). Other authors have stressed that ethical life and realisation of values can emerge from physical actions as much as internal deliberations, and can concern individuals, communities, or a collective of humans and other entities (Faubion 2001; High 2013, 2017; Keane 2010; Lambek 2010a).

I build on this literature by offering an approach which emphasizes that people and other entities reflect on and realise the articulations between *what is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do* in multiple and conflicted ways (Keane 2010; Lambek 2008, 2010b; Mattingly 2014; Schielke 2009).

Growing out of an interest in the anthropology of ethics and in particular ethics in relation to the energy industry, this research thus explores truth, action and transition on an energy frontline from an ethical perspective. What *is* the truth about fracking for my interlocutors? What *should be* the truth? And what do they think *ought to be* done, in the broader global and local debates around shifting energy infrastructures and climate change? In the context of polarised energy debates, my interlocutors were dealing with tensions and contradictions involved in establishing truth. Whether in court proceedings relating to fracking itself and to the protests around it, encounters with the police on the protest site, or in the diverse ways of making a living in contemporary Lancashire, my interlocutors re-configured their notions of personal and collective responsibilities, fashioning what they deemed to be the *right* way to apprehend fracking and positioning it as something which was *wrong*. They were protesting against activities undertaken by people who held a different truth about fracking; a direct confrontation of different “truths” could thus be found in the interaction between protesters, government representatives and the fossil fuel industry. In this sense, I examine truth on this frontline as a value with multiple dimensions, predicated on “enacting worlds in which or with which” we want to live (Blaser 2013: 552).

In exploring these questions from the perspective of my interlocutors in the anti-fracking movement, my research takes an original and ethnographically informed perspective within energy ethics.

Broadening the notion of energy infrastructures to include those who resist them, and approaching

them as disputed historical and ethical assemblages, I seek to understand forms of engaging and living with energy for anti-fracking activists, where ‘living’ includes “physical, social, spiritual, affective, and intellectual dimensions” (Narotzky & Besnier 2014: S6). Indeed my interlocutors’ resistance to fracking aspired to create “existence” without fossil fuels (Powell 2006, 2018). I take inspiration from Dana Powell’s work with the Navajo on issues of energy extraction and energy sovereignty. Powell traces the outline of the landscapes of energy emerging from settler colonialism and being re-claimed by the Navajo as they envision sovereign resource management. United by Navajo cosmology, different Navajo groups stake their claims to the rightful future of their people and the appropriate use of energy sources. Resisting one kind of energy extraction meant re-configuring a whole host of relationships, including establishing a rightful and good existence. My own interlocutors were resisting, existing, and transforming as they attempted to bring a reality they wanted to live in into being. They said *no* to fracking as a kind of energy extraction, but in doing so, they delineated what mattered to them in saying no, and what they felt should matter to everyone: the democratic right to, and rich history of, protest in the UK; existential fears of climate catastrophe and awareness of environmental harms; systemic socio-economic inequalities; and networks of responsible relationships. Whilst Powell focuses on “technologies” of existence and resistance by exploring her interlocutors’ active engagement with renewable technologies and infrastructures, I explore my interlocutors’ resistance as personal and collective ethical practices of activism, involving witnessing and forms of direct action which sought to establish truth on the frontline.

### ***The anthropology of resistance and social movements***

This thesis thus also contributes to and innovates on the anthropology of resistance and social movements by offering an immersive, long-term ethnography of a protest frontline and protest camp related to controversial energy infrastructures. How did my interlocutors come to personally and collectively experience being part of “one big frontline”? What did being designated as “activists”, “protesters”, or “protectors” – by themselves and others external to the movement – entail? What does ‘taking action’ mean and look like on the ground and on a daily basis?

Before Powell’s (2022; Powell & Draper 2020; Wall 2016) work on the recent encampments at Standing Rock Sioux Nation, and Stine Krøijer’s (2020) work with environmental activists protesting coal mining expansion in Germany, anthropologists such as David Graeber (2009) and Michael Taussig (Mitchell et al. 2013) examined the Occupy Wall Street encampments in New York City, and Anna Szolucha (2016b) the Occupy movement in Ireland. By adopting a reflexive collaborative fieldwork methodology, which I outline in my methodology section, I make a meaningful contribution to this mode of anthropological inquiry and offer an engaged and nuanced analysis of intra-camp dynamics and practices. I seek to show the ethical tensions and contradictions which the work of anti-fracking activism (a notion I explore in depth in Ch.6) entailed at PNR, as it drew in people from a

range of backgrounds, situations, and motivations. In doing so, I want to avoid a “pathologization” or “exoticization” of protest and resistance, as if the latter were “abnormal” (Theodossopoulos 2014) or denoted essential ways of being – rather than constituting shifting practices related to the realisation of a “wealth of human values” (Kusimba 2020, 173). My immersive mode of collaboration within the anti-fracking movement thus enables me to explore my interlocutors’ ethical world-making through shared quotidian and embodied elements of their activism on the frontline. The combination of interaction and observation (all with the knowledge and consent of my interlocutors) allowed stimulating explorations of ethics and truth-making in relation to historical, political, temporal and economic concerns in the “on-going flow of social life” (Eriksen 2010: 165), whilst also enabling sensitivity towards the distinctive embodied experiences which happen in protest spaces.

This thesis thus complements long-standing research on activism and social movements, seeing them as a “particular[ly] suitable arena” (Escobar 1992: 408) in which to explore tensions and contradictions in our societies. Researchers interested in activist and resistance spaces have shifted their analysis from a functional focus on social order and (in)stability to exploring people’s political agency, subjectivity, and practices (Wright, 2016). More recently, attention has been paid to notions of temporality and space (Featherstone, 2010; Juris, 2012; Szolucha, 2016); identity, representation, and political practice (Day & Goddard, 2010; Salman & Assies, 2017); and citizen science (Jalbert et al., 2017). Other authors have emphasized the centrality of ‘prefigurative dynamics’, showing the ways in which people carve out alternative spaces in the present, and examining how possibilities for change emerge from forms of resistance at different scales (Fians, 2022; Graeber, 2002, 2009; Krøijer, 2010; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Razsa, 2015; Razsa & Kurnik, 2012).

My work builds on and contributes particularly to this latter strand of research, as my ethnographic analysis centres around ethical articulations of *what is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do* through everyday activist practices of witnessing and forms of direct action. Such practices of activism, often described as prefigurative, explicitly fuse means and ends to bring about desired realities, particularly within groups that foreground direct action and physical protest as ways to establish that “another world is possible” through practicing it (Graeber 2002, 7). My research at PNR shows that, indeed, the physical frontline at PNR marks a broader conflict about fundamental aspects of the world we live in, how we come to know our world, and our responsibilities in changing and co-creating it. As interlocutors resist the extraction of hydrocarbons and search for alternative ways to live, they personally and collectively establish, connect, and evidence different dimensions of truth in ethical acts of realising “another world”; one they want to live in and with.

Witnessing has been examined by anthropologists in many campaigning and activist contexts (see Chua & Grinberg 2021; Dębińska 2021; Fryer-Moreira 2021; Redfield 2006) and problematises truth which is “grounded in detached observation” (Fryer-Moreira 2021: 20). In these field sites, witnessing “defines the truth of what is being witnessed” (Dębińska 2021: 450). For example, in her analysis of climate camps in Poland, Maria Dębińska (2021) suggests that part of the practices carried out during climate protests and activist gatherings are aimed at witnessing and thereby realising the existential

threat of climate change in the eyes of activists themselves, and the societies they are part of. Witnessing is not exclusively about representing reality but also an “on-going involvement” and transformational process regarding what reality is brought into being (ibid: 456). A witness in this sense is very much part of the truth being conveyed and does not “retire from view” in order to be truthful (Redfield 2006: 5). The witness is engaged in a persuasive dynamic, committed to the truth being conveyed and its impact.

Relations of responsibility are central to witnessing practices. Leshu Torchin (2012) examines witnessing dynamics in her work on documentary films, whereby films and videos are edited to convey the ‘truth’ about reality. The truth conveyed in these media forms implicates and is realised by the viewers as much as the ‘truth-teller’, resulting in the formation of ‘witnessing publics’ (ibid: 3). Laidlaw (2010: 163) suggests that acting responsibly, in a way that is recognisably appropriate to oneself and others, can be done “as a matter of relations that reach both into and beyond the individual by means of mediating entities”. He contends that people or things can act “on behalf of” other entities and thereby are responsible for these entities (ibid: 147, 151) – and that many practices or institutions work to either “proliferate connections that sustain attributions of responsibility or constrain them” (ibid: 159). In other words, documentaries such as those examined by Torchin, or witnessing practices such as those mentioned by Dębińska, can create connections of responsibility with others and towards issues which are “relevant to survival but outside of immediate observation and comprehension” (Vaughn & Fisher 2021: 387), challenging established webs of relationships and thereby open possibilities to bring different realities into being.

I build on such research on campaigning and activism, and examine truth and action as mutually generative concepts in my interlocutors’ protesting practices. I show the central role that witnessing practices can play in shaping contemporary energy debates – and find that witnessing can be taken as a form of truth-making *action* which is mutually constitutive of relations of responsibility. For this, I also critically draw on Hannah Arendt’s work. Arendt (1958: 22) suggests examining the range of activities making up the ‘vita activa’: “the human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something”. She theorises *labour* and *work* as life-sustaining activities, while also proposing a third category, *action*, which corresponds to the creative “beginnings” each “unique” human brings into the world: spontaneous deeds constituting a “web of human relationships” and giving meaning to the ‘vita activa’ (Arendt 2000 [1964]: 170–176, 179).<sup>24</sup> *Action* thereby marks the emergence of something at once individual and embedded in a “web” of human sociality, which can be radically different to anything that has happened previously. Actions can then inspire others as they are conveyed by “story-tellers” and “crystallised” into historical accounts (Passerin D’Entrèves 2004: 75).<sup>25</sup> Arendt’s conceptualisation of action as an immediate intervention on reality helps to examine possibilities for

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<sup>24</sup> I discuss issues of work as forms of ‘action’ in Ch.6 when examining life on the protest camp and outside of formal conceptualisations of employment.

<sup>25</sup> In Ch.2, I show how my interlocutors were indeed inspired by and felt an affinity with (hi)stories of protest and resistance in their own practices on the frontline.



creative transformation and “new beginnings” in protests and social movements (Day & Goddard 2010). She combines action with ethical notions of judgement and responsibility to understand how people’s interventions on reality are influenced by different moral orientations. She identifies a “breakdown” of morality and personal judgement when means are separated from ends and people thus fail to judge their actions responsibly, meaning in relation to the web of sociality they are part of (Arendt 2003 [1964]; Baehr 2000: xxv–xxvi; Kohn 1964: xxix).

The practice of witnessing foregrounds the ethical articulation of means and ends (or *what is* and *what ought to be*), and is thus a prime form of truth-making practice enabling ‘new beginnings’ – and so is the practice of taking direct action as part of an activist movement. Direct action implies collectively acting without going through any intermediary: acting to immediately bring the ‘end’ into being, “as if one were already free” (Graeber 2009: 203). On the PNR frontline for example, direct action aimed to prevent fracking by directly stopping deliveries or blockading the entrance to the site, rather than waiting for petitions to the government or writing to MPs to pressure the company.<sup>26</sup> David Graeber links direct action to the anarchist legacies of bypassing formal and centralised state institutions in organising alternatives to collective life (ibid: 201–203). Graeber (2004: 6) acknowledges that ‘anarchism’ has been seen as a form of social organisation, a “revolutionary strategy” or a body of theory. Much of his work examines “actually existing anarchism” (Razsa 2015: 686) as a set of principles and practices. An anarchist ethos in this sense can be found within different political and economic settings and in many revolutionary and activist groups, such as the alter-globalisation movement or the Occupy encampments (Fians 2022; Graeber 2009, 2010; Juris 2012; Maeckelbergh 2011; Razsa 2015; Razsa & Kurnik 2012; Szolucha 2016b) – and was indeed recognisable in some of my interlocutors’ reflections and practices on the frontline.<sup>27</sup> While there was no consensus amongst interlocutors in their identification as anarchists, my point here is that by drawing on such research, I can understand my interlocutors’ actions and experiences as a celebration of direct action in a broader sense: as a truth-making practice. They took responsibility for *what to do* to realise the necessary synthesis between *what is* and *what ought to be* in bringing about reality.

### ***The onto-epistemics of the PNR frontline***

In adopting an energy ethics approach and drawing on the anthropology of resistance and social movements, my work shows that matters of energy and energy transitions – and the technical truths they call upon – are not limited to the kind of energy extracted and consumed. Rather, the issues

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<sup>26</sup> As I explained in this introduction, my interlocutors engaged in all these practices.

<sup>27</sup> The anarchist ethos sets itself against forms and relations of oppression, hierarchy, domination, and thereby against formal institutions centralising decision-making. Mutual aid, collective consensus-making, diversity, and autonomy are highly valued. In Ch.6 I discuss how my interlocutors related to such principles and practices as they sought to make a living on the frontline.

extend to what *meaningful* personal and collective realities are being fuelled.<sup>28</sup> This approach can bring fresh insights into questions of onto-epistemology and ethics, from the perspective of activists fighting energy infrastructures on the ground – particularly at a time when “a concern about the erosion of objectivity and certainty” is often discussed as “a defining feature of our current moment” (Vaughn & Fisher 2021: 387).

Notions of objectivity were frequently invoked by pro-shale actors when justifying the development of the shale gas industry and in their depiction of protesters as ignorant, or as inappropriately moralising matters of energy (see Davey 2013). Such notions pivot on truth as a matter of representation in a process which Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004: 468) suggests pertains to a Euro-American ‘ontology’ in which “to know is to objectify – that is, to be able to distinguish what is inherent to the object from what belongs to the knowing subject and has been unduly (or inevitably) projected onto the object”.<sup>29</sup> Establishing truth through this process is a matter of representing what is and what is not: the ‘really real’ is discovered or represented (see Jensen et al. 2017).

However, in resisting against a controversial energy infrastructure, my interlocutors fundamentally questioned who the “custodians of the really real” were (Neiburg & Guyer 2017: 3), and which measures – in the sense of *actions* that can be taken, but also of how to *measure and evaluate* a situation – are deemed to be the right and appropriate kind. As they experienced adverse and close encounters with the legal, political and technological scaffoldings upholding the PNR site, my interlocutors increasingly felt part of a broader ethical endeavour of change-making, and took moral responsibility for generating the “really real” themselves. In this sense, establishing truth at PNR went beyond truth as representation. The conflicting accounts of what fracking “truly was” at PNR were matters of representation as well as indicative of the complexities of ethical life (see also Keane 2013 for a clear take on linking the study of ethics with that of ontologies). Thus by examining how what *truly is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do* were articulated in my interlocutors’ practices of direct action and witnessing, I suggest that the PNR frontline can be apprehended as an onto-epistemic space producing and revealing ethical tensions on the personal, collective and systemic levels.

In foregrounding the onto-epistemics of anti-fracking activism, my research project contributes to theoretical approaches which emphasise the multiple ways in which ethics, epistemologies, and the ‘really real’ are entangled. The notion of performativity for example, emerging from the discipline of linguistics (Austin 1962; Searle 1989), approaches truth as a matter of creative transformation.

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<sup>28</sup> I use ‘reality’ to convey the sense of “a shifting and pluri-scalar concept, which involves multiple agencies, agents, enactments and engagements, claims on truth and claims on justice, collective and personal lives, emergent and submergent personhoods, experiences, and feelings” (Neiburg & Guyer 2017: 274).

<sup>29</sup> In his work with Amerindian shamans, he contrasts objectification with subjectification: “To know is to personify, to take on the point of view of that which must be known (...) A good interpretation, then, would be one able to understand every event as in truth an action, an expression of intentional states or predicates of some subject” (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 468–469). It seems reductive to suggest that objectifying and subjectifying are the only “ways of knowing” or that these onto-epistemologies do not overlap. Viveiros de Castro’s point is relevant here to illustrate the range of dynamics which exist when it comes to establishing truth.

Applied to an examination of economics, the performative approach suggests that economic theories bring into being the entities and behaviours they describe (Callon 1998; Cochoy et al. 2010; Garcia-Parpet 2008; Mackenzie 2006; Miller 2002; Mitchell 1998). Performativity has also played a significant role in gender studies, offering a transformational approach to gender as processual and fluid, rather than essential and fixed (Butler 1990, 2010). Here, the truth about the “really real” can be enacted by its description. Early Science and Technology Studies (STS) research brought attention to processes and practices of objectification, pointing out how certain objects of knowledge have an aura of essential truth, whilst other entities are apprehended as agentic subjects able to make sense of the truth. Later studies within STS and other approaches such as Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) have continued to examine how agency is attributed to different entities, taking agency as the capacity to construct what truth and reality are.<sup>30</sup> Laboratories and accounts of socio-cultural life were studied as “sites of ontological transformation” (Jensen et al. 2017: 527) rather than tending only to matters of representation. Such lines of inquiry and modes of analysis have generated a rich literature for re-examining conceptualisations of bodies, species, landscapes and temporalities as entangled and open-ended entities which constitute and transform one another (Gan et al. 2017; Haraway 1991; Mol 2002; Navaro-Yashin 2009; Swanson et al. 2017; Tsing 2015). In this sense, claims to truth are matters of creative transformation: they can generate the ‘really real’.

That truth claims pertain to ontology and are not limited to epistemic representations is also a central insight of the ‘ontological turn’. Marilyn Strathern (1990, 2005) invites researchers to consider radically different emic conceptualisations of relationships, destabilising essential notions of self and personhood. Viveiros de Castro (2004: 482, 2011) explicitly regrets “the poverty” of representation and suggests that encountering conflicting and seemingly incongruous worldviews implies the co-existence of potentially distinct ontologies – not just distinct epistemologies of the same world. Analytical primacy is thus given to emic concepts and their generative force. Inspired by this body of work, Martin Holbraad (2012: 46–53) advocates for a “recursive anthropology” whereby emic concepts overhaul etic ones. In his work on Cuban divination, he examines truth claims as matters of ‘transformation’ which put the world in motion through creative “infinitions”, as opposed to representative definitions (ibid: xxiii, 220). However, some of this work has generated criticism by emphasising ‘radical’ alterity and difference at the cost of an “articulation of commonality” (Vigh & Sausdal 2014: 58). Henrik Vigh and David Sausdal also suggest that metaphysical ponderings and emphasis on radical alterity easily lose “sight of the power – routinized, habituated or directly imposed – at play in defining what is” (ibid: 63). For Vigh and Sausdal, theorists in the ontological turn seem to think that “ontologies are non-hierarchised planes of pure possibility”, whereas “‘being’ rarely just ‘is’ but is part of a larger struggle to define” (ibid: 63).

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<sup>30</sup> ANT aimed to enlarge and distribute the notion of agency, but was also criticised for emphasizing a "kind of flattened cohabitation of all things" (Thrift 2000: 215) in its account of reality, side-lining notions of imagination and creativity.

My work in this thesis takes on the challenge of examining this “larger struggle”, by paying attention to conflicts within interlocutors’ everyday interactions and socio-political context. Invoking peoples’ imaginaries, ideas, fears and aspirations, my interlocutors’ ways of worlding necessitated action, persuasive force, and responsible commitment in the “larger struggle” to define *what truly is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do*. By examining these dynamics on the PNR frontline, I find that truth was as an ethical, vital and political matter of transformation and imagination, where “the ultimate stake of politics (...) is to establish what value [and therefore truth] is” in different situations (Graeber 2001: 88). My interlocutors were seeking to destabilise representative truths that seemed immutable: the technical facts about fracking and the established ‘system’ in which they lived. They were also seeking to establish fossil fuels and environmental harms as an unquestionable moral wrong. My interlocutors were thus setting their world in motion through truth-making practices and networks of responsible relationships on the frontline: learning about histories of protest, engaging in forms of climate grieving, carrying out site monitoring and attending court encounters, dealing with police confrontations, and searching for ways to make a living as activists (as I explore in turn in my thesis chapters). Saliently, these practices entailed re-articulating *what truly is*, *what ought to be* and *what to do* through forms of witnessing and direct action – ethical practices which entailed truth as a matter of representation, creative transformation, and persuasive imagination.

My thesis thus contributes to the field of energy ethics, the anthropology of resistance and social movements, and debates in onto-epistemology by offering a locale that is at once – as I demonstrate across the chapters – a line of technoscientific contestation in relation to energy matters as well as a moving, trans-locale imaginary of frontiers of ethical action. In delaying the construction of a crucial energy infrastructure and providing constant monitoring of the site, in striving to keep the resistance against fracking in the public eye, and in disrupting the system “which says fracking is okay”, anti-fracking activists were taking action to redefine a normative ethics for energy futures, challenging, mediating and establishing truth through forms of action and witnessing on an energy frontline. In doing so, they jointly shaped the energy landscape in Lancashire, on a frontline extended in time and space and at which complex ethical realities were enacted. In the words of one of my interlocutors, it was “all one big frontline”. Throughout the thesis chapters, outlined in the next section, I analyse how on this frontline, such ethical realities are articulated and brought into being in relation to a controversial fossil fuel project.

## Thesis outline

**Chapter Two** (Ch.2) explores what my interlocutors meant when they claimed to be “on the right side of history”. I discuss two events which inspired my interlocutors on the frontline: the ‘Peterloo Massacre’ during the Industrial Revolution and the anti-nuclear peace encampments of Greenham

Common in the 1980s. By drawing on (hi)stories of protest in the UK, I examine how aspirations for formal representation and for change within the ‘system’ contended with emerging possibilities to create distance from the ‘system’. I show that truth-making practices in the present were predicated on recognising, celebrating, denouncing and acting on historical truths.

**Chapter Three** (Ch.3) builds on the historical contextualisation of the frontline by exploring truth-making in relation to affective temporalities of climate change. I examine notions of ‘climate truth’ and ‘climate crisis’ on the frontline, and how this informed what fracking *truly was*. Such conceptualisations fed into the capacity and willingness to take action. I also examine the apocalyptic terminology which many of my interlocutors used. By drawing on movements such as Deep Adaptation in the UK and Collapsologie in France, I suggest that this apocalyptic framing could be a way to deal with a sense of crisis and to firmly anchor responsibilities for rightfully articulating *what is, what ought to be, and what to do*. I also show how the systemic grievances explored in (hi)stories of protest influenced what people perceived as the stakes of climate action. I bring this chapter to an end by introducing my interlocutors’ notion of ‘the matrix’. This term was closely tied to conceptualisations of a harmful ‘system’ and served to make sense of people’s positionality in relation to the ‘system’. On the frontline, the climate-crisis-fuelling ‘matrix’ was challenged in order to bring into being a rightful reality.

**Chapter Four** (Ch.4) focuses on the concept of witnessing. Examining my interlocutors’ encounters with the legal system inside and outside the courtrooms, I show how my interlocutors’ representations of fracking through monitoring the site interrogated conceptualisations of harm, morality and reality. They questioned what and whose interests (the government, corporations, environmental activists, the natural environment) could legitimately claim to be ‘true’, and which took precedence over others in the legal and regulatory arena. I show that my interlocutors sought changes through the justice system yet struggled with their own criminalisation within it. ‘The matrix’ did not seem to recognise the harmful truths they were witnessing on the frontline. Feeling marginalised but morally justified, their collective struggles on the frontline resulted in conflicted aspirations to uphold the rules and to transform a reality they knew to be wrong.

**Chapter Five** (Ch.5) highlights conceptualisations of responsibility by focusing on the interactions between my interlocutors and the police force. The latter, commonly conceptualised as a public body duty-bound to uphold ‘law and order’, and which officially affirms its responsibility to protect communities, was despised by many of my interlocutors. I trace my interlocutors’ deep anger and antipathy towards police officers due to the brutality they experienced on the roadside, as well as the perceived lack of personal and institutionalised accountability – exacerbated by ambiguous responsibilities regarding the private and public interests upheld by the police force. My interlocutors learnt from their experiences and from one another to establish what the police *truly was*. They felt officers were directly responsible for upholding ‘the matrix’ and bringing it into being. They felt that the state, via the police force, were impeding possibilities for transforming articulations of *what is, what ought to be, and what to do*.



**Chapter Six** (Ch.6) explores the life my interlocutors were making for themselves on the roadside and the protest camp in relation to ‘the matrix’ with which they were in conflict. I examine my interlocutors’ perceptions of work, labour, and monetary compensation outside of common notions of employment in order to delve into the internal dynamics of the anti-fracking movement. I argue that life was made worth living through webs of responsible relationships. These relations were not easy to navigate but allowed people to ethically delineate *what to do* in relation to *what is* and *what ought to be*. Their livelihoods on the frontline could be forms of direct action in themselves, as people sought to withdraw their support for the “system which says fracking is okay” – even as they acknowledged their entanglement with it. Many experienced a transition away from certain “places of responsibility” (Arendt 2003 [1964]: 47) and forged ethical techniques of existence (building on Powell 2006) through their activism as they attempted to bring a rightful and meaningful life into being.

**Chapter Seven** (Ch.7) offers my concluding thoughts and the broader relevance of my work. Energy and climate change issues are not limited to the technicalities of energy infrastructures and the kind of energy source used to fuel our societies, they also concern the kind of society being fuelled. In summarising my ethnographic analysis, I emphasise that claims to truth are an integral part of determining the kind of society we live in, beyond the logics of representation. My interlocutors felt confrontation with the shale industry was necessary: in their eyes, fracking was unassailably *wrong*, particularly in the context of an intensifying climate crisis. It was wrong in how it was depicted technically, how it was defended by the government and the police force, and in how it impacted ecosystems. Developing the shale industry also meant wrongfully sustaining ‘the matrix’ fuelled by sacrifice zones. Engaging with protest and resistance thus resulted in existential realisations on the frontline. Roadside experiences also ‘activated’ possibilities for collectively creating meaningful lives away from hydrocarbon extraction. I suggest that truth, action, and responsibility enabled one another on “one big frontline”. My interlocutors’ truth claims were thus ethical matters, as they implicated matters of representation, creative transformation and imagination. I end the chapter and the thesis by identifying avenues for future research: examining conspiracy thinking in an age of multiple truths, understanding matters of spirituality in relation to climate change, exploring degrowth attempts and decarbonisation imperatives, and finally investigating the rise of ethical capitalism.

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## CHAPTER TWO – THE “RIGHT SIDE OF HISTORY”

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*Rise like Lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number.  
Shake your chains to earth like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you –  
Ye are many – they are few.*

*(Shelley 1819)*

“The right side of history”

“People think we just got given our rights, but everything we have now, we fought for it!!” exclaimed Claudia, as we sat on the train to Manchester in August 2019. We were heading to the bicentennial commemoration of a large-scale public demonstration which ended in bloodshed, commonly referred to as the “Peterloo Massacre” (an event I hereafter call ‘Peterloo’). Others from the anti-fracking movement would be joining us later. Claudia talked me through the historical event, a day which had prompted the English poet Percy Shelley to write the lines quoted at the beginning of the chapter: “*Ye are many – they are few*” (Shelley 1819). In August 1819, thousands of protesters marched to a public square to demand changes to the electoral system; local authorities responded with force and dispersed the crowd, resulting in 18 fatalities. Claudia kindly bought me a short pamphlet later, “to learn!” she said as she handed it to me. The pamphlet was entitled *Rise like lions – The History and Lessons of the Peterloo Massacre of 1819*. On the train ride back, Claudia echoed what I had heard from other interlocutors, after they saw the film reconstructing the events at Peterloo (Peterloo 2018): “not much has really changed”.

In conversations on the PNR roadside, ‘rising’ for change in the UK was learnt about and celebrated by my interlocutors. They discussed Peterloo, general strikes, the Suffragettes’ electoral struggles in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the confrontations between coal miners and the authorities in 1984, the anti and alter-globalisation movements of the 1990s, the Road Protests in the same decade, more recent anti-austerity demonstrations denouncing stark inequalities, such as UK Uncut or Occupy encampments, as well as anti-aviation campaigns and groups fighting fossil fuel infrastructures (see Conn 2017; Graeber 2002, 2009; Klein 2002; McKay 1998a; Museum of London n.d.; Street 2015). They would enthusiastically exclaim, “we’re on the right side of history!”. This expression circulated at the roadside at PNR, on online Facebook groups, at activist gatherings, and during direct action trials in courts. It would be said from one activist to the other on the roadside: “*We are on the right*

side of history – over there in the field, *they* are on the *wrong* one!". That expression would also be spoken to police officers on duty at PNR: "Just say no – we did! Be on the right side of history!".

From the vantage point of the PNR frontline, my interlocutors thought "not much has changed" since Peterloo, and yet that a "right side of history" was in the making. They recognised a proud and valued practice of taking action in British history, whilst also recognising the formation of a status quo that was wrong. Their own struggles on the frontline could thereby feel stagnant and demotivating: they considered people at large were still fighting for political rights and challenging the 'system', and when doing so, were considered violent agitators meriting repression by the authorities. At the same time, their activism felt historically significant and personally "life-affirming" in the new beginnings emerging from their activities (See Chari & Donner 2010: 77; Day & Goddard 2010; and the theoretical framing of *action* in Ch.1).

In this chapter I examine what is at stake when legacies are celebrated, denounced, or challenged by referring to particular "traditions" and when connections are established between different historical periods and events. Given that PNR was "one big frontline", an attention to historical protest movements in the UK helps to locate the "larger struggle[s] to define" to make sense of the frontline's reality (Vigh & Sausdal 2014: 63). I use two historical protest events, woven together through my interlocutors' accounts and audio, visual and written archival sources, to present a (limited) historical canvas. In addition to Peterloo, I focus also on the Greenham Common peace camps in Newbury from 1981 to 2000 in which some of my interlocutors were involved.

The parallels between these examples and PNR illuminate how the stakes on the PNR frontline were not solely related to energy, gas or fracking (issues irrelevant to Peterloo and Greenham Common). The stakes at PNR were manifold and concerned the ethical societies being fuelled by energy extraction. They concern the kind of (hi)stories we tell ourselves about ourselves – to paraphrase (like many others before me) the insight from Geertz (1973: 448). How do notions of representation, transformation and imagination inform attempts to historicise? Which occurrences in the past are considered as facts and which are deemed open to (re-)interpretation, and by whom? How is the "slow" pace of the historical scale reconciled with the "rapid appearances" of protest instances (Salman & Assies 2017: 408)? Who are designated as agentive forces in shared or conflicting imaginaries of the past? I explore such questions first by reflecting on the concept of history and historicising. I then describe the Peterloo Massacre in the context of the Industrial Revolution, retracing a brief history of the protest "mob" and associated issues of representation. Parallels with my own fieldwork show how my interlocutors were challenging a system which they perceived as historically "broken", whilst being part of it. I will then focus on the experiences of women protestors at Greenham Common near Newbury, marked out in the 1980s for hosting US nuclear missiles. In that section, I will emphasize the experience and outcomes from living on protest camps and taking action directly against an infrastructure. I will discuss the immediacy and collaborative feature of direct and collective action in terms of identity formation and affect. Thus, this chapter examines the formation of social and protest movements in the UK in relation to issues of representation and

identity, reflections on confronting an established ‘system’, ethical sensibilities towards protest and direct action, and a sense of responsibility in enabling possibilities to bring rightful realities into being. I hence show the ways in which historical truth can be represented, transformed and imagined.

### Historicising and traditions

An ethnographic attention to temporality revolves around exploring different relationships to time in our field sites, the temporal features of certain objects and the temporal perceptions of our interlocutors. Temporality is approached as an ethnographic and analytical concept to examine how “objects [of analysis] exist in time” (Ringel 2016: 395). The ways in which past, present and future are experienced and understood can be multiple and sometimes messy, as researchers have emphasized by pointing to co-existing temporal orientations in our field sites (Bryant & Knight 2019; Knight 2016; Munn 1992). Classical studies have interrogated typically western notions of temporality – including that of historicising – whereby understanding time equals making causal and linear connections between moments firmly situated in a past separate from the present (Chakrabarty 2007b; Hastrup 1991; Hirsch 2021; Lambek 2002). Such research has also cautioned against analytically assigning essential notions of temporalising to certain people and not others (Fabian 2014). More generally then, studies focusing on time have paid attention to how temporal meaning emerges ethnographically and analytically, and suggest caution in projecting unwarranted assumptions onto our interlocutors’ conceptual realities.

An interest in history invokes the temporal notion of the past. Mario Blaser (2013: 548) suggests there is no “intrinsic difference” between *history* and *stories*: both terms refer to narratives “about the unfolding state of the world told from the vantage point of a particular set of ideas about the world and its dynamics”. Blaser is bringing the terms history and stories together to challenge a common opposition between so-called historically verifiable facts having ‘actually’ happened, and narrative stories which in their subjectivity may not be ‘really’ representing what *truly was*. De la Cadena (2015: 28–29) discusses ‘modern history’, a category requiring facts and evidence and which others have discussed as the western intellectual trend of historiography or historicising (Lambek 2002; Palmié & Stewart 2016). This points to a particular conceptualisation of history, in which one builds a *meaningful* chronological framework from a timeline, by finding causal connections within that timeline, so as to understand why the present is a consequence of the past. This is one of the common justifications of the importance of a study of the past – “history is to society what *remembered experience* is to an individual [emphasis added]” (Brown 2002: 1). Historicising is akin to reflecting about the truth of *what was*. The historian Richard Brown further suggests that the study of history dispels subjective “myths [pervading] society” and helps to “remove” these myths (ibid: 1). Historicising can have the “power to certify the real” (de la Cadena 2015: 13). The narration of

(hi)stories in this sense implicate a vantage point from which to take action in the present and to imagine the future.

My interlocutors' impulse to *historicise* protest activities was noticeable. They would often talk about inscribing their own struggles in a documented 'right side of history'. They discussed placing a commemorative bench next to gatekeep's location to mark their continuous opposition to fracking. They marked occasions such as the 100<sup>th</sup> Call for Calm by the Women in White in July 2019, or the 1,000<sup>th</sup> day of physical protest in September 2019, reflecting on their activities to date and encouraging each other for the days to come. They dressed as suffragettes when protesting on the roadside or travelling to London to raise awareness about their campaign – and on such occasions, often met under the statue of the suffragette Millicent Fawcett in Parliament Square (see Howarth 2004). By proclaiming a 'right side of history', they recognised the impact of past protest in forming a historical reality which legitimised their present actions. They often lamented that protest movements were glossed over in school curricula, as if protest "exceeded" the category of verifiable history (de la Cadena 2015: 13). Discussing past protest movements and taking inspiration from them was narration which reconciled 'verifiable history' with stories of protest and their impact. Witnessing the significance of past protest movements became a way to make their own (hi)stories (Ortner 1984: 159) and to establish historical truths.

It is tempting to piece together a history of protest as a linear trajectory from one event to the other. But it is important to note that not all my friends at PNR coherently linked the same events together. Peterloo and the Greenham Women were not the two crucial UK (hi)stories of protest for all my interlocutors – some may not even feel an affinity with or know much about either of them. My aim in focusing on these two is not to ignore other influences, nor reduce an argument to historical consequentialism as a series of chronological steps leading one to another. Instead, it is to illustrate how the "right side of history" can be selectively constructed and drawn on by different actors, extending various protest frontlines in space and time. I find Pandian's notion of tradition useful to emphasise historical truth as a canvas in the making: selective (and selected) stories from different vantage points which people can draw on for inspiration, persuasion, imagination, or transformation. Pandian (2008) reminds us of the fragmentary dimension of traditions: they can be haphazardly drawn on, selectively constructed, fragmentary in their transmission, and nonetheless be inspiring, comforting, and inform our ethical orientations. Traditions are thus continuous and changing, and "a means of marking a historical experience and [as well as a means of] narrating the distinctive character of the present" (ibid: 468).

Peterloo and (hi)stories of protest



On Monday the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1819, tens of thousands of people from Lancashire and Yorkshire walked to Manchester to hear the political activist Henry Hunt speak about Parliamentary reform.<sup>31</sup> Manchester was a growing industrial hub of the unfolding Industrial Revolution. Despite its economic significance and its growing population, Manchester, like many other large and growing cities at the time, was not represented by members in the House of Commons. Only landowners owning land above a certain size could vote. Henry Hunt, from a prosperous background himself, became a popular leading figure of an ongoing movement asking for electoral change – supporters would be called Radicals, or Reformers – or even Radical Reformers. The people who came to hear Hunt were largely workers from the booming cotton industry, as well as from other manufacturing sectors. Workers and their families came dressed in their best Sunday clothes, some rising at early dawn to walk the several miles to the designated square in Manchester, St Peter’s Field.<sup>32</sup> In most if not all accounts of the demonstration, the assembly was reported as a vast, peaceful, and joyous crowd. Within a few minutes of Hunt addressing the crowd, magistrates sent the Manchester and Salford yeomanry to arrest him on grounds of sedition. The yeomanry and a hussars (cavalry) regiment were also ordered to disperse the crowd, which they did by charging it with drawn sabres. Within 20 minutes, the tens of thousands who had gathered at St Peter’s field fled through the city in panic, chased by cavalry through the afternoon; several hundred were injured from sabre slashes or trampled by the mass of fleeing people. By the end of the day, 18 people had been killed in what is described by the historian Robert Poole (2006: 254, 255) as “one of the defining events of its age”, “the bloodiest political event of the nineteenth century on English soil”. Journalists present on the day coined the term ‘Peterloo’ as a reference to the 1815 battle of Waterloo, still fresh in the public mind, where the British-led coalition defeated Napoleon’s troops. John Lees, an ex-soldier who survived Waterloo but who succumbed to sabre injuries from the yeomanry at Peterloo, reputedly declared on his deathbed: “at Waterloo it was man to man, but there it was downright murder” (Dowling 1820 [1819]: 74; Hernon 2006: 46).

In the months and years following Peterloo, journalists widely discussed attributions of blame and responsibility for the violence and the bloodshed, with most agreeing the authorities were to blame for the violence. Some witnesses differed, claiming that the Yeomanry were not aiming at the crowd with their swords until the crowd turned violent – at which point they were reacting rather than attacking. The historian Leventhal (1971: 11, 116) has pointed to this controversy as a “non-debate” stressing the absurdity of conflating “the force of a troop or cavalry, armed with swords and pistols, with that of an unarmed crowd”. Leventhal’s suggestion shows how differing conceptualisations of responsibility

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<sup>31</sup> I learnt about Peterloo in discussions with my interlocutors, through a variety of historical sources and from visiting the People’s History Museum in Manchester (see Bates 2018; Demson & Hewitt 2019b; Hernon 2006; Leventhal 1971; MMU 2019; National Archives n.d.; Peterloo Memorial n.d.; Peterloo Witness Project n.d.; PHM n.d.; Poole 2006).

<sup>32</sup> The square is now a smaller public area in front of the Manchester Central Convention Complex (previously the location of the Manchester Central, a railway station).

– the responsibility of those bearing arms, versus the responsibility of a large group of unarmed people – can result in different ‘historical truths’.

Poole also argues that the question of where the violence originated distracts from examining the content emerging from the protest, and the ways in which popular protest is conceptualised and legitimised – or not (Demson & Hewitt 2019b; Poole 2006).



Figure 35: Print by Cruikshank depicting the events at St Peter's Field, 1819. Credit: (Krantz 2011: 18)



Figure 36: Engraving depicting the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 (The National Archives n.d.)

At Peterloo, justifications for state repression centred on managing a dangerous, revolutionary, and unruly mob. The local authorities, alongside the established gentry and members of the British government, fearful of the “masses” and the potential for upheaval following the recent French and American revolutions, were “disposed to see bloody revolution lurking behind every plea for reform” (Leventhal 1971: 113). For some historians, this explains why the city magistrates saw it appropriate, even necessary, to use force to disperse the crowd at Peterloo, despite Henry Hunt’s repeated pleas prior to the mass meeting that people should come “armed with no other weapon but that of a self-approving conscience” (ibid: 114). The authorities felt they were acting pre-emptively to avoid violence, alarmed by what they perceived to be the intentions of the crowd and witnessing them in the context of the French revolution – and given the wider pattern of frequent rioting at the time (Demson & Hewitt 2019a: 5; Leventhal 1971: 115; Poole 2006: 271).

So-called “bread riots” had been commonplace during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the most notable ones being in the 1790s, as market fixing practices meant individual consumers were priced out from buying grain. In 1812, the Luddite movement had spread across manufacturing areas, including Lancashire. Textile workers destroyed new machinery such as power looms and mechanised knitting frames. Many accounts explain the collective machine-breaking by fear of unemployment due to the new ‘labour-saving’ devices; a ‘luddite’ came to negatively denote someone opposed to technological changes in general (OED 2022). In the years before Peterloo, manufacturing workers organised protests against harsh working conditions and cuts in wages, led by the weaver Bagguley. They petitioned the government and started a march to London to deliver their demands in 1817. The attempt was quickly and violently stopped by authorities.

After Peterloo, the government clamped down on protest and passed the “Six Acts” harshly restricting public demonstrations. Yet numerous riots punctuated the 1830s and 1840s, in parallel to the ‘Chartist’ movement campaigning for electoral reform (see Hernon 2006). Machine breaking occurred again, as field threshers became targets for destruction during the Swing Riots of 1830. Aggressive crowds of labourers frequently demanded food and money from farmers and landowners. In 1842, electoral reform spurred by the Chartists failed in Parliament for the second time and, in the wake of further wage cuts, a general strike ensued in collieries in the South and spread to factories in Yorkshire and Lancashire. Violent and sometimes bloody encounters with the military ensued. In comparison, Peterloo had started as the most peaceful large-scale popular demonstration of the time, yet became known as one of the “bloodiest”.

By situating themselves on the “right side of history”, my interlocutors felt inspired by protesters who, often facing violent repression, pursued social or political aims which are now widely celebrated. “It must be terrifying to stand and protest directly in front of people carrying weapons” I told Claudia, as we leafed through the pamphlet she gave me about Peterloo. “Well”, she said, “the police here could be like that if they wanted”. She was referring to our time spent at the roadside at PNR, facing the local constabulary. Claudia and many other interlocutors often discussed how protest was

criminalised, and the brutality they encountered on the roadside (encounters which I will expand on in Ch.5). While police officers did not carry weapons at PNR, it was not solely how violence was enacted that mattered to my interlocutors. They pointed to how the ‘establishment’ had historically treated and depicted protesters taking responsibility for societal change and attempting to change regulations ‘within the system’. Claudia reminded me of a memorial in front of the Preston Corn Exchange. The stone-carved memorial marks the spot in which the military shot four cotton workers demonstrating about wage cuts during the general strike in 1842, and depicts soldiers pointing their rifles at the workers. My interlocutors and I had stood in remembrance in front of the statues, holding “Frack Free Lancashire” banners, before proceeding to the council buildings as part of a “Friday for the Future” climate demonstration (see Figure 37/ Figure 38 below).

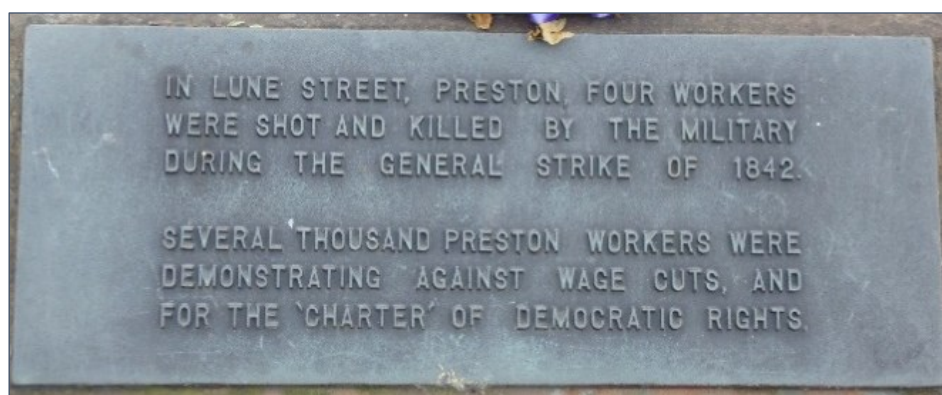


Figure 37: Plaque at Lune Street Memorial in Preston, May 2019. Credit: author's picture



Figure 38: Friday for the Future march stopping at Lune Street Memorial in Preston, May 2019. Credit: author's picture



Claudia also told me about the memorial being built in a corner of the former St Peter's Field (pictured in Figure 39 below), marking the names of the Peterloo victims, as well as the names of large-scale popular demonstrations across the world that were met with violent state repression – for example, the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, or the Gezi Park protests in 2013.



Figure 39: The Peterloo Memorial in Manchester in 2019 (The Peterloo Memorial n.d.)

Campaigners at PNR thus felt a significant affinity with protesters they saw as standing up against the establishment in a moral and political fight to only be met by state violence and repression. They found themselves depicted as unruly, irresponsible and radical, whilst they felt right in their fight to change the status quo: to re-articulate *what was* and *what ought to be*. It mattered to them how protesters were considered, perceived, depicted and treated. The extent to which protest actions were effective and deemed legitimate also mattered. Tensions among protesters, and between the latter and the authorities, would thus often hinge around political and moral representation, and the ability to create change: who can determine matters of common and public interest, who can represent themselves in public spaces through free assembly and protest, who can be represented in political institutions. My friends collectively identified with a tradition of protest and resistance, and by pointing out its integral role in the (hi)story of Britain, mobilised people on the “right side of history” to take action for change.

They thus countered generalisations about protesters forming ignorant mobs. “Mob” has often been used to describe instances of social and political upheaval. The journalist Ian Herson (2006: 267) combs through newspaper archives, memoirs, governmental briefings and documents, to argue that riots are an integral part of British society, a “manifestation of social inequality and political impotence” as well as part of fashioning British democracy. From a range of archival sources, the term mob emerges as the dominant descriptor of the riots Herson examines. He speaks of the mob’s



“ugly face”, even as he attempts to redeem it as “an “engine of beneficial social change” (ibid: 267). Thompson (1966, 1971) also recounts how mobs and riots are depicted and represented: disruptive, violent, spasmodic outbursts of hunger and desperation. He also notes how political figures, reformers or government officials, furthered their own interests by paying and manipulating crowds to cause disruption, thus providing reasons for legislative changes: “a mob was a very useful supplement to the magistrates in a nation that was scarcely policed” (Thompson 1966: 68; see also Rudé 1959 for depictions of mobs). To Thompson, the use of the term is often indicative of perceptions by the landed classes towards desperate and poverty-stricken workers. The propertied denigrated the “inarticulate” popular masses as being “out of steady employment” and surviving by illicit means (Thompson 1966: 55–56). Thompson suggests commentators, and also Reformers, often relied on a “lazy” use of the term *mob*, employed “to evade further analysis (...) or (...) as a gesture of prejudice” (ibid: 62). His work is a call to instead re-think the image of the masses at the time as “inarticulate” (Thompson 1966: 78) and examine the grievances and values animating protesters’ discontent. He suggests that:

Some of the bitter conflicts of these years turned on issues which are not encompassed by cost-of-living series. The issues which provoked the most intensity of feeling were very often ones in which such values as traditional customs, ‘justice’, ‘independence’, security, or family-economy were at stake (ibid: 203).

Thompson’s work sought to not only validate the multi-faceted grievances and experiences of protesters but also piece together the long and diverse British “intellectual tradition of dissent”, which “defies generalisation” (ibid, 51-52), emerging from religious reformation after the Civil War and morphing and mushrooming in different forms through the Levellers, the famine and food riots, the Luddites, Blanketeers, Reformers and Radicals, and the Chartists (Thompson 1966: 30–54). Thompson explored the customs, aspirations, fears and coordinated actions of the emerging working class that “made itself as much as it was made” (ibid: 194). He countered the notion that ‘mobs’ emerge mechanically from ignorance, scarcity and economic hardship, emphasizing instead the “dimension of human agency”, peoples’ fears, hopes and aspirations, and the socio-political context of people’s actions.

The crucial point here is the impulse to re-claim the (hi)story of the Industrial Revolution not as one of inevitable progress punctuated by ‘spasmodic’ popular unrest (Thompson 1971: 76–78), but one where protests and movements of ‘dissent’ were integral in making history. As new technologies changed industries and agricultural methods throughout Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, many sectors boomed and urban and rural spread of the population shifted<sup>33</sup>. Labour regimes and working

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<sup>33</sup> In 1790, Lancashire boasted 70% of the national cotton production; by 1835, this had risen to 90% (Brown 2002: 49). Preston in particular was a major hub in this booming industry (Awty 1974; Phelps et al. 2018), a

conditions also changed. Domestic production in textiles and other sectors, where conditions were harsh but work could be flexible, increasingly overlapped with large-scale factories, where time and work were intensely regimented. As competition from factories made domestic production increasingly harsh, many workers had to re-orient their skills and professions (Brown 2002: 64–67). Increasingly mechanised equipment also meant that manual tasks, whilst often made more convenient, were also becoming less labour intensive. Yet such technology did not necessarily reduce overall working time, but rather intensified production and working rhythms, for workers already surviving on meagre salaries and harsh working conditions. After the Napoleonic wars, which had built up significant government debt, ended in 1815, soldiers came back to scarce employment opportunities. Market practices was also shifting, as trade and exchange relied increasingly on the role of intermediaries between farmers and consumers (Thompson 1971: 80). Bypassing physical markets and increasing practices of “market fixing” occurred frequently towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: farmers would agree on a fixed price between them before goods reached the market, in addition to which sales with intermediary dealers would be agreed in advance (ibid: 86). In parallel to this, protectionist laws prevented import of foreign grain even in times of poor harvests; whilst this protected farmers and landowners, the price of staple products such as bread rose steeply. A “common sense of resentment and disillusion at the inequalities within society” was identifiable (Brown 2002: 195). “For workers, their capital was their skill which, unlike the resources of industrialists, could not easily be switched from one form of investment to another” (ibid: 195). In this way, alongside reports of industrial success and national wealth, it could be claimed that inequality was “the overriding characteristic [of British society between 1700 and 1850]” (ibid: 209). Protesters, coalescing around issues of consumer prices, wages, working conditions, and representation, engaged with the established ‘system’ and articulated themselves against the holders of wealth, land, capital and political power – the many ‘rising like lions’ versus the wealthy few. Thus the (hi)story of shifting economic practices, and the intensification of labour and production during the Industrial Revolution can be accompanied by a (hi)story of protests interrogating the articulations of *what is* and *what ought to be* in the context of a system experienced as unfair and exploitative. Thompson does not suggest that peaceful demonstrations, rallies turning into violent and brutal clashes with authorities, attacks on machinery and equipment or public buildings, are all the same forms of popular discontent – and nor would my interlocutors. The emphasis here is on a *tradition* of protest as an integral part of British (hi)stories.

### The “Many” and the “Few” in contemporary Lancashire

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factor in its being one of the first urban centres outside London to have gas lighting installed. An interlocutor once remarked on the irony of this piece of local (hi)story, while the community resisted gas extraction at PNR.

Whilst my interlocutors drew on protest traditions and recognised the historical struggle for universal suffrage, aspirations for political representation within the ‘system’ differed on the frontline. Indeed, Thompson (1966: 24) calls attention not only to “continuing traditions” but also the changing context in which these traditions are formed and followed.

The movement for enlarging the electoral franchise pre-dates Peterloo; the opposition to the “exclusiveness of politics as the preserve of any hereditary elite or property group” (ibid: 20) was mobilised by the London Corresponding Society and their attempts at Parliamentary Reform in the 1790s. Thompson traces this further back to the Putney Debates after the English Civil War in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, whereby the political movement known as the Levellers or the “Agitators” argued for universal suffrage.<sup>34</sup> After Peterloo, the struggle for parliamentary reform continued, famously taken up by the Chartists in the 1840s. Reform Acts between the 1830s and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gradually enlarged the franchise to vote until the Representation of the People Act in 1918 abolished all property qualifications for men over 21 years of age ; in 1928, property qualifications were abolished for women over the age of 21.

In Lancashire in 2019 then, my interlocutors had the right to vote. However, they were disillusioned with their capacity to effect change through this formal avenue of representation. They were also intensely frustrated and angered by central government’s decision to overturn LCC’s rejection of Cuadrilla’s PNR project (see Ch.1). Many of my friends cited this as their main reason for undertaking direct actions. Pip, a former local councillor who had taken part in a lock-on, explained how she realised direct action was necessary. As we cooked some meals for campaigners on monitoring duties at gatecamp, she explained:

When the council’s decision was overturned, I thought, right, this is an affront to democracy, I’m going to have to do something. I’d been under the naive impression that if you wrote enough letters to your MP and went to a lot of demonstrations, that somebody would listen to you. [She paused, laughing sarcastically] Then I realized that actually, nobody listens – money talks.

She explained how the PNR Community Liaison Group (CLG) was formed in cooperation between the local council, Cuadrilla officials, and police representatives, and this group met on a monthly basis. At CLG meetings, Cuadrilla representatives could present updates on the fracking site and receive questions gathered by the local councillors, and councillors could question officers on their policing strategies. However, Pip’s village was not initially granted specific representation, despite being less than 5km from the site and on its delivery route for Heavy Goods Vehicles.

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<sup>34</sup> The Levellers articulated their demands against the Grandee who believed the right to vote should be restricted to the landed propertied (ibid: 22).

I remember thinking this is absolutely outrageous. These lorries come down our roads, our bike paths. The impact on us is going to be potentially massive because of course, we were still waiting to hear about the Roseacre site as well. We would have been sandwiched between the two sites! (...) Anyway, after so much arguing, they finally gave the village membership to the CLG.

Pip was already against fracking but her opposition was amplified by her concerns over an inadequate representation of her views; she felt her views were ignored or treated as irrelevant. She had not only written to her political representatives many times, she had been a local political representative herself. Like many of my interlocutors, she felt she had “no other choice left” but to intervene physically on the fracking site itself. Protest was there when formal systems for representation were seen to be failing.

The general elections in December 2019 also brought up issues around the democratic system, namely the first-past-the-post (FPTP) election structure. In this system, the local candidate with the most votes in that particular area wins and the preferences of other voters are disregarded. Under FPTP, as has always been the case in the UK, the difference between the percentage of votes received and the percentage of seats gained can be quite significant. The 2019 elections were no different; “first-past-the-post elections did what they will always do in a multi-party system, favouring parties with spatially concentrated vote shares, discriminating against those whose support is spread more evenly across the country” (Dunleavy 2019). Therefore, whilst my interlocutors recognised the importance of voting, many found it difficult to vote or actively avoided it, given that they did not feel adequately represented in a FPTP system.

In this context, the right to assembly and protest was treasured by all my interlocutors, whilst many thought more ambivalently about the right to vote. For a significant number of people, this was a shift in their moral and political imaginaries due to their time on the PNR frontline. For them, it was evident that voting should be universal; yet as they re-claimed the long protest (hi)stories that helped secure universal suffrage, they realised that taking action for change had been essential in establishing that right as ‘evident’. What is deemed to be right and true can be experienced as obvious and inevitable, yet also resulting from much hard work and struggle. Szolucha (2016b: 26) re-traces forms of representative democracy and emphasizes that the “first representative institutions, then, appeared long before the arrival of the rights and liberties that we now consider to be an integral part of democracy. These rights were not handed out by those with power but had to be won through long, hard struggles” (ibid: 27). Szolucha’s analysis is a testament to Claudia’s statement at the beginning of this section: “everything we have now, we have fought for it!” in a historical “tradition of dissent” and of taking responsibility to act for change (Thompson 1966: 25, 36). Claudia and Pip’s experiences of conflict, contention and struggle when protesting and voicing their opposition to the development

of the shale gas industry seemed to increasingly push them towards direct action rather than aspiring to formal avenues of representation.

The resolve to act was felt even more keenly in the socio-economic context which my interlocutors lived in. Whilst the (hi)stories of protest described earlier related to the Industrialisation of Lancashire, the anti-fracking movement took place in a post-industrial landscape and in the vicinity of Blackpool, which is one of the most deprived areas of the UK (see Bowie 2019). My interlocutor Joy was born and grew up in Blackpool, and after having moved away for several years, had returned and settled there with her two children. She worked full-time as a teacher and did weekly shifts at the monitoring station on the weekend. For her, the weekend was time away from school, marking, and parental duties. She was appalled by the educational system in the UK. “It’s an absolute crisis, it’s on its knees”, she said, angered by the inequalities that children had to face because of where they lived, or what their background was. She was upset that no one seemed to care about “these kids”, and that high unemployment in the area over several decades, and consequent high deprivation in some areas of the town, meant that children had little chance of succeeding in school or having “much of a future” after it.

Joy was also an active Labour party member and had been very optimistic about the general election in December 2019, thinking things could “really be turned round” politically as well. “Something has to happen Sarah, it can’t go on this way”, she repeated. She used to have a Saturday school for disadvantaged children in the area. “The kids kept coming because of the food, even the older ones who weren’t supposed to be there”. She started crying when we discussed this, recalling children came with barely any clothes to wear, under the grey drizzly Blackpool weather. She believed the privatisation of the educational sector through “academy schools”, receiving funding from local councils, resulted in frequent misuse of funds, privileging some schools over others, whilst “people at the top” made money. She had issues with the curriculum as well, which she found to be elitist in its cultural references. “Cycling across the Alps and fly-fishing in Hartlepool as examples in the GCSE exam? Yeah right.” Joy felt kids in Blackpool were being abandoned by the government:

They don’t care about them. They don’t think they’ll live to see old bones (...) It cannot go on. I think I really understand now, for these years of teaching fucking Dickens, who I actually hate [laughs]. But I actually really understand now what he means by the ‘wretched poor’ - and we’re back to that. These children are wretched and people are wretched because they are so downtrodden, so poverty-stricken that they’re wretched.

Contemporary issues like those expressed by Joy mirror the grievances of the working classes grappling with the industrialisation of the region in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this way my interlocutors felt strong connections with Shelley’s verse “*Ye are many – they are few*”. In the socio-



political context of Peterloo, resentment in the industrialising North against “the establishment” ruling Britain emerged, through examples of Magistrates, government officials and landed classes clashing with the working “Many”. The former were seen to be colluding with “middling professions”, such as shopkeepers, publicans, tradespeople, all the while reluctant to acknowledge representation grievances.<sup>35</sup> In a similar polarising dynamic, my own interlocutors in 2019 drew on and experienced conceptualisations of the “establishment” and its harmful intentions against the Many of the “Desolate North”.<sup>36</sup> The more they felt marginalised and pushed to the side by the ‘system’, the more they would feel angry, frustrated and “radicalised” in their apprehension of the ‘system’. Being on the “right side of history” mitigated the sense of being marginalised and offered redemption through taking up the work of activism. Learning about and discussing Peterloo implicated them as a “witnessing public” of a double (hi)story of valuable protest and of an unjust ‘system’. This witnessing simultaneously represented and brought historical truth into being, as they drew on it to contextualise the need for action in the present and to persuade others to take action too.

Thus, positioning themselves on “the right side of history” lent strength to my interlocutors’ endeavours on the PNR frontline, as they claimed a history of valuable unrest, riots, dissent, protest and resistance. I suggest that in doing so, they felt part of (hi)stories *in the making*. Yet they also grappled with the perpetual *making of history* as a negotiation of agencies, interests, aspirations, and affects instead of as a determined path on which societies progress. Truth-making could be messy when challenging the history of the ‘system’ and celebrating the history of protest.

Thompson does stress that the focuses of popular demonstrations during the Industrial Revolution varied, overlapped, and at times conflicted. He emphasises the diversity in protest movements, even as he examines the collective class consciousness emerging from that period. “Radical” leaders came from a variety of backgrounds, some were driven by moral customs and romanticised notions of the “free Englishman”, whilst others were engaged in labouring politics and transforming workers’ representation through electoral change. Joshua Clover (2016) also explores forms of collective action during the Industrial Revolution; whilst he mainly focuses on uncovering historical narratives and shifts, he also cautions against making deterministic and “frozen associations” (ibid: 101) which would neatly delineate specific periods and different forms of collective action (as in McAdam et al. 2001 and Tilly 2005 for example). Clover warns that actions are not “transparent” and that forms of protests overlap and interlink, and so do reasons and motivations for taking part in them. Much of his analysis focuses on “emergence” and moments of formation (Clover 2016: 7968), and thus pays attention to people’s varied hopes and aspirations during the Industrial Revolution – rather than either

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<sup>35</sup> The Yeomanry responsible for charging the crowd at Peterloo was a force consisting of such men, local volunteers of middling occupations and many of them strong loyalists to the Crown. There was no such thing as a police force at the time (Leventhal 1971: 113; Poole 2006: 276).

<sup>36</sup> As discussed in Ch.1, The *Desolate North* became a reclaimed slogan for many of the campaigners I met. In 2013, a Conservative peer used the word to describe areas in the North East he thought could be suitable for fracking purposes, as they were supposedly less densely populated and with did not have any particular natural features to preserve (BBC News 2013b).

emphasising nostalgic affects linked to customs, or searching for causal patterns of change. The “defiance of generalisation” of many grassroots protest movements can be experienced as opening possibilities for people involved, particularly when sites of protest are permanent encampments, such as at PNR. In the next section I examine dynamics of emergence, beginnings, and possibilities that inform the tradition of direct action and protest which inspired my interlocutors.

Greenham Common: “The women were up to all sorts!”



Figure 40: Cover of The Observer on 12th December 1982 (London School of Economics' Archive n.d.).

“Have you heard of Greenham Common?” Daisy asked me, as she sat back down on the stool on the pavement to continue the interview, following yet another interruption during a busy and warm day on the roadside. Daisy was on a 12-hour shift at the monitoring station, and we occasionally stopped the interview to make sure the number plates of the vehicles leaving the site were noted in the logbook. On the third interruption, since the number of police officers grew and voices started getting louder, she hurried across the road to check on some of the people in the entrance to the site. I took a few pictures, then tried to film the interactions between the officers and the protesters. Members from the local grassroots media collective would always remind me that frontlines need cameras to keep the officers in check, or at least to have proof if they turn brutal. After a few moments, Daisy came back

with a friend; things had calmed down. The two women shared a joke, laughed, and hugged goodbye. Daisy settled back down on the stool:

Sorry! So, you were asking me how I first heard of Preston New Road. Well. I heard her [a prominent anti-fracking activist] speak at a public meeting, and it just caught my imagination that a bunch of old women, which I was, had spotted a dangerous thing. What a terrible legacy for our children! And they were ready to do something about it, and it just... Something in the back of my brain reminded me of my Greenham days and women taking responsibility for the earth and our future, and all that stuff you know. Have you heard of Greenham Common? I went there for the first time with my mother, then I kept going after I had my children.

Daisy suggested I look into the Greenham Common peace movement (hereafter GC), as she believed I would find interesting parallels with the anti-fracking movement. Her brief description of it closely echoed the accounts of Rebecca Johnson, interviewed by *The Guardian* in celebration of the historical movement: “there is not just one story of Greenham Common, but thousands” (Moore et al. 2017). I soon discovered that several of my interlocutors on the PNR frontline had been involved in the movement, which I describe below from their accounts, and a range of visual, written and audio testimonials (Greenham Women Everywhere n.d.; *The Greenham Effect* 2021; Mayer 2016; Moore et al. 2017; Powell 2021; Seller 1985; Snitow 2015; Topping 2021).

On a September morning in 1981, women chained themselves to the gates of the Royal Air Force (RAF) GC military base in Newbury, southern England. The airbase had been chosen to host US nuclear Cruise Missiles, during rising tensions between the “western allies” and the Soviet Union. The common had been “temporarily” requisitioned by the UK military during WWII and had since remained the location of an active air force base, making its very existence contentious for locals. The women who locked themselves to the fence were part of a group known as the “Women for Life on Earth”. More than 30 of them, accompanied by children and a few men, had just walked 120 miles from Cardiff in Wales to the Common, tired of traditional campaigning and rallies with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Much of their messaging centered on being mothers, worried about the long-term consequences for their children of pursuing a nuclear world. The ten-day walk was meant to garner public and media attention; but no media were interested. Frustrated by the lack of response, some women suggested direct action tactics upon their arrival at the base. They explicitly took inspiration from the actions of the Suffragettes back in the 1900s, when the women campaigning for the right to vote had chained themselves to the fences of Parliament to garner media and government attention.

The “Women for Life on Earth” took turns in the chains, as their first unexpected night at the foot of the fence turned into many more. The initial lock-on eventually ended, but encampments were formed and 19 years of continuous activist occupation at GC ensued. Women from around the UK and abroad joined, forming makeshift camps at each of the entrances to the military site. By February 1982, those living on the protest camps decided to make the resistance-space women-only. Evictions started later that year and became increasingly frequent. Yet the women stayed throughout it all, numbers dwindling and swelling as seasons and years went by. When evicted, they would simply move their camps somewhere else along the base perimeter, alternating between land belonging to Newbury District Council, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Highways Authority. In 1987, a treaty was signed between the Soviet Union, led by Gorbachev, and the USA, agreeing to cease the use and installation of nuclear ground missiles such as the Cruise missiles. The first missiles left GC in 1989, and the last left in 1991. Some women decided to stay on at one of the gates to continue the fight to reclaim the Common as public land, which finally occurred in 2000 and prompted the departure of the remaining protesters.



Figure 41: Encampment at Greenham Common in the 1980s (Wendy Morgan’s Archives n.d.)

When telling me about GC protests, Daisy chuckled at the memories: “the women got up to all sorts!”. The protest actions at the airbase varied, ranging from blocking entrances to the site, cutting through the airbase fence, tying yarns and other items to it, pulling down the fence, or entering the base. The deployment of the missiles required a launch from mobile secret stations; a “Cruise Watch” was therefore set up to track the missiles regularly leaving the base on test runs. Since “Cruise Watch” could follow the missiles, it challenged government assurances that they could be deployed in the



countryside with no risk of detection or hijacking. The women also organized larger demonstrations, inviting people from around the country to join: from dancing on the missile silos, to tens of thousands of women holding hands around the perimeter of the base in 1982, to more than 50 thousand women forming a 14-mile human chain from Burghfield (a nuclear warhead factory) to GC in 1983.



Figure 42: Women circling the RAF base at Greenham Common in December 1982 (Lyn Barlow's Archive n.d.)

“They have put the name on the map. But that’s all they have done.”

Once again, historical truth is in contention: there are different accounts retracing the (hi)stories of GC. The women’s presence at the RAF base drew support across the UK, but also disapproval and accusations of irresponsibility. After the Falklands war in 1982, defense issues were very much in the public eye. Michael Heseltine, Secretary of Defence, considered the women at GC to be irresponsible and to form “a small minority seeking to impose their will” (Lords Hansard Archive 1983). He also asserted that “they were a mob” (The Greenham Effect 2021) on a visit to the airbase; he recalled being pulled down by protesters, tripping and falling: “police had much difficulty protecting me and my wife (...) It completely destroyed their image as peace loving ladies”. In Heseltine’s depictions, GC women had “hijacked” the meaning of peace and were not “peace-loving”. In his eyes, the military stationed in Berlin near the Iron Curtain and the UK government pushing for nuclear deterrence were “the real peacekeepers”, enabling protests such as those at GC to go ahead in a “free” and democratic society (Burnet 2018 [1983]). He insisted the women had no influence on government decisions, nor on the 1987 treaty. Heseltine has said that the course of history was changed by “keeping nerve” and “applying a strong deterrent” against the Soviets (...) the Greenham Common



women would have stopped us from doing that” (The Greenham Effect 2021). The commander of the RAF base also claims the women had “absolutely no impact [on the Soviets negotiating]. They have put the word [Greenham Common] on the map. But that’s all they’ve done”.

On the one hand then, protesters are – once again – depicted as a dangerous mob, irresponsible agitators. Their supposed lack of understanding of world politics renders them irresponsible, threatening peace and freedom by meddling with security infrastructure. From this angle, the content of their anti-nuclear message which Heseltine considers to be dangerous “gamble-like” policies (Burnet 2018 [1983]), is wrong and unrealistic; so too is the form of their protest, deemed mob-like and disruptive.

On the other hand, they are brave women upholding their right to protest and taking responsibility to make a change; they expose the “reality of the nuclear state” (Seller 1985: 27) and lay bare the gamble underlying deterrent policies: pursue a race for nuclear weapons, rather than disarm to make nuclear war a material impossibility. “There were strong convictions on both sides” recalls the protester Lynn Jones in an interview with the audio-documentary maker Rebecca Morden (2021). Jones recalls the encounter with Heseltine very differently in her diary, explaining how some women decided to lie down in the track to confront Heseltine’s visit. Lynn says police officers, a hundred of which she recalls being present, decided to not drag them away but to “roll” protesters on top one another. They then forcefully tried to get Heseltine across the crowd, causing him to trip and almost fall – after which he was lifted and carried away. “The media went wild” said Lynn, “even without footage to back up their claims”.

As Clover (2016: 88) states in his work on social and protest movements during the Industrial Revolution, “the muddle is the truth of things”; analysing protest movements requires caution as we work to understand what influences the ethical sensibilities of interlocutors. An integral part of the “muddle” is how personal, collective, and social dimensions are connected through acts of protest that call into question how *what is*, *what ought to be* and *what to do* are articulated, represented and brought into being. When the GC RAF commanding officer asserts that the protesters have “only put the name on the map” and nothing else, the role of GC women seems marginal. The officer and Heseltine perceive the GC women to be wrong in their conviction that nuclear deterrence should be opposed, and also wrong in how they manifest their opposition through ‘mob-like’ behaviour. Moreover, Heseltine firmly states that protests had nothing to do with the eventual decision to remove the nuclear missiles from the base. For the women however, not only is the police force the trigger for any so-called mobbing behaviour, their actions are necessary because the damage from nuclear deterrence is unquestionable. Moreover, the visual, written and audio testimonials from those who participated in GC in the mass actions, or who lived there permanently, semi-permanently, or came and went from their jobs, domestic and household chores, also offer a rich and diverse picture of anti-nuclear and feminist actions. Putting the name on the map *is* making history, providing a space for “life-affirming social change” and for another world to emerge (Chari & Donner 2010: 77). Examining accounts of historical truths brings attention to imaginative potentials sparking “new

beginnings” and can help understand the theories of change that underscore forms of activism and social movements. Graeber (2002: 72) indeed suggests: “it’s one thing to say ‘another world is possible’. It’s another to experience it, however momentarily”. *Experiencing* another world can take the form of witnessing past (hi)stories and of drawing on the tradition of physical encampments. I suggest that such dynamics of emergence and imagination are shared across the GC grassroots movement and the PNR frontline. My interlocutors highly valued taking action and sustaining physical manifestations of protest. The next and final section focuses on the emergent possibilities of physical protest by bringing together the notion of ‘making history’ with the affective dimensions of taking action.

### Life-affirming changes: traditions and transformations

GC protests were decentralised, with no “ringleader” - making it hard for the authorities to manage and dismantle (Snitow 2015: 171). The campaigner Sue Saye recalls in her interview with Morden that “we were not a united front, so you can’t fight something coming at you from so many different ways!” (Morden 2021). Similarly to the frontline at PNR, people blocking the entrance of the site formed often a literal collective of bodies, harder for the police to displace than an individual. Moreover, multiple actions, from local to national, were arranged by groups of varying sizes, without one group necessarily knowing what other actions were planned. Recalling her experience, Ann Snitow puts it this way:

Unlike other political demonstrations I have known, peace camp occupations are frames that can give form to hundreds of individual acts of resistance. Energy flows like light because of the immediacy of everything, the constant, imminent possibility for self-expression and group solidarity (...) Greenham is a springboard from which actions that would usually take months of laborious planning can be dreamed, discussed, and performed between night and morning (Snitow 2015: 174).

Snitow describes the continuous presence of activists at GC as forming a unique space for possibilities for change. Other campaigners such as Jane Powell (2021) recall how daily protest actions intertwined with making a life in the encampments, constantly making – sometimes contentious – decisions on how to live together. For example, the decision to make the activist space women took several days of debating; some thought it would be too exclusive and limiting, whilst others saw the potential and necessity to create a space where people could experiment with their own identities as women and feel empowered to take responsibility for change, connecting and redefining the intimate and the political scales. For Sacha Roseneil, a GC campaigner who went on to become Professor of

Interdisciplinary Social Sciences at UCL, “personal change and growth were intimately linked to changing the world” (Morden 2021). These women recall the feeling of learning and liberation experienced in the permanent challenge of collective living in difficult conditions:

Those pictures preserved in aspic of women dancing on the silos or the huge ‘Embrace the Base’ action, those were two nanoseconds taken from what, 19 years? The reality is that there weren’t hundreds of women there every day, holding hands and singing (...) [it was] a challenging, liberating, squalid, joyful environment. Your status outside camp, your job (if any), your class, your education, none of these mattered unless you had other qualities. Like a heart. Supporting other women, showing how to listen. Knowing how to treat ant stings, advice on surviving prison and being arrested. Being prepared for the arguments and meetings (Powell 2021).

The continuous nature of the encampments created a space for people to experiment, to re-configure their way of being, relating to others, forging intimate and collective identities.<sup>37</sup> Whilst Snitow, Powell and Roseneil are specifically discussing activism in the context of anti-nuclear and feminist struggles, the affective experience they describe resonates well with other forms of direct action including those of my interlocutors at PNR. Direct action and physical occupation generate a sentiment of immediate empowerment and possibility; a unique beginning through *action* as discussed in Ch.1 through Arendt’s work (2000 [1964]: 179). Scholars examining contemporary protest movements in the UK have described this dynamic in terms of a “Do it Yourself” culture – or rather “Do it Ourselves” – whereby protesters take individual and collective responsibility for societal change, valuing immediate action and diversity (McKay 1998b: 27).

This dynamic is strongly reminiscent of theories of affect, initially developed in philosophy and geography, which pay close attention to the potentialities carried by different actions in time and space (Biehl & Locke 2010; Born 2011; Bryant 2016, 2018; Deleuze 1997; Hemmings 2005; Massumi 1995; Navaro-Yashin 2009; Thrift 2000). Whilst affects are often used synonymously with emotions, some have used this term to think more broadly about that which defies reflexivity, rationalisation and representation – of living and non-living entities. Affective intensities, a term not restricted to emotions then, emerge from and traverse bodies in a time-space, linking living beings to other-than-human entities and to the landscape in which these find themselves (Navaro-Yashin 2009; Thrift 2000). These affects can become “springboards” (Deleuze 1997: 144) where *what is* emerges from actions where *what was* and what people think *ought to be* collide. Jeffrey Juris (2012), for example, describes his experience of the occupy camp in Boston in 2011 as one where people got

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<sup>37</sup> I will explore shifting responsibilities on the PNR frontline throughout the rest of the thesis, and tying my various findings around this notion in Ch.6.

together to form an alternative space in an urban setting. The forms of collective organisation that emerged were a radical challenge to the systems surrounding the camp, as hundreds of people would gather in General Assemblies to discuss the affairs of the day, developing methods for dealing with lack of amplification and a desire for horizontal organisation. This could be interpreted as the production of affective intensities from which possibilities for different democratic futures are opened. Experiencing the possibilities of “another world” can thus be a very powerful affective experience.

The challenge for those practising direct action and aspiring to create sustained personal and social change is to turn such experiences into sustained change. McKay suggests that the “Do it Yourself” culture in many activist groups, whilst valuing creativity and diversity, can be frustrating in its presentist focus and professed aversion to historical reflection, as well as a certain resistance to organising structures (McKay 1998: see 12-14 and 45-46). However, the continuous dimension of much physical resistance and activist encampments lends itself to a tradition being built and celebrated amongst participants: an organic, and sometimes conflicting and contradictory structure emerging from daily interactions between protesters. Activists at GC formed networks which would circulate and sustain the impact of their actions within and beyond the physical. These networks gave enduring sense to the immediacy of direct action: “around the fires, women aged from 14 through to 90 sparking unlikely but unforgettable, illuminating conversations” recalls Jane Powell, recounting the protesters’ frequent debates on nuclear weapons, tales of direct action from GC and other movements, stories from wives of miner strikers, or stories of abuse at the police station. Intersecting convictions were formed, discussed, understood in lived experiences and embodied as people sat down in front of trucks. Convictions were also contextualised within protest communities and (hi)stories, as well as applied and circulated beyond the physical frontline. Some women explained they were “taking lessons *beyond the mud* [of the encampments]” in many of their testimonials (Morden 2021) – “Greenham women are everywhere” is the famous mantra of the GC peace camps. The website collecting women’s testimonials from the encampments is still very active and shows the different initiatives taken by participants once they left the camps: some founded women day centres, established themselves as leading researchers in cultural and gender studies, and others such as Daisy went to resist the development of the shale gas industry at PNR. For many Greenham Women then, *putting the word on the map* had huge effects on their own lives and on learning how to form networks of solidarity that went *beyond the mud*. Their actions have also coalesced into historical truths – or a “right side of history” – which are witnessed by protesters in other locations, as they put their own bodies on the line. In an explanation strongly reminiscent of statements I heard on the PNR frontline, Morden (2021) suggests in her audio documentary on GC:

You don’t just wake up one morning and say you’ll stand in front of a police truck. You go on a journey. I think many women would say they’ve gone on that journey (...) [The GC movement] is a huge marker in another history – suffragettes, Plane Stupid, Extinction

Rebellion – theatrical non-violence, drawing attention to the profound stupidity of some of the arrangements made on our behalf. It carries the life-affirming spirit: we are stopping your day to make sure that you pay attention to what is not being shown to the world.

For people involved in protests and direct action, repeated forms of direct action and witnessing can reveal the ‘really real’, as well as offer possibilities to transform the ‘really real’ by stepping into (even if temporarily) this other “history” mentioned by Morden. Attention to *action* in Arendt’s sense and to the affective intensities emerging from physical protest helps to understand the creative possibilities within grassroots movements – which Thrift also refers to as “lightning strike” moments (Thrift 2000: 214) – and how such affects can coalesce into people feeling that they are making history. Indeed, Thrift stresses that such creative moments are “constrained [and] have to take place within networks of power (...) constructed precisely to insure iterability” (ibid: 217), as I explore in subsequent chapters by examining the conflictual encounters with the “system that says fracking is okay” on the PNR frontline. People involved in protest thus seek to disrupt the iterability of a reality which to them wrongly articulates *what is*, *what ought to be* and *what to do*. I suggest that recognising and drawing on a *right side of history* is akin to a truth-making practice in that protesters “crystallise” (see Passerin D’Entrèves 2004: 76 as he discusses Arendt’s notion of action) the emergent potential of their practices. People celebrating and enacting rich (hi)stories of protest can thus simultaneously be representing the really real, morally assessing it, imagining alternatives to it and taking action to transform it.

## Conclusion

The disruptive aspect of social and protest movements means that they can be “particular suitable arena[s]” in which to explore tensions and contradictions in how our daily lives unfold (Escobar 1992: 408). Researchers interested in protest have shifted their analysis from a functional focus on social order and (in)stability, to people’s political agency, subjectivity and practices (Wright 2016). More recently, attention has been paid to imagination, and the ways in which people carve out alternative spaces in the present, and how life-affirming possibilities and changes emerge from forms of resistance at different scales. (Biehl & Locke 2010; Day & Goddard 2010; Fians 2022; Graeber 2002; Razsa & Kurnik 2012). Such research has much to gain from examining peoples’ orientations to the past, to (hi)stories, traditions and legacies in their practices of activism. As Szolucha (2016b: 29–30) suggests when discussing how democratic practices have shifted and been subject to continuous contention from different actors: “struggles are fought in the concrete, contemporary circumstances but are also deeply influenced by all that has already happened in the past, sometimes across vast spatial distances”.

My own interlocutors referred to many past protest movements in the UK and abroad, which influenced them in their embodied practice of anti-fracking activism on the frontline. I have chosen to focus in depth on two examples that featured noticeably in conversations at PNR. In discussing Peterloo I largely drew on Thompson's "history of dissent" and attention to protest "mobs" and showed how my interlocutors found affinities with "this other history". Remembering Peterloo was a way of witnessing the grievances of those fighting the establishment during the Industrial Revolution, as well as within the post-industrial landscapes of 2019. My friends experienced the establishment as a system of inflexible hierarchies, fuelling stark inequalities and benefitting the wealthy and the propertied. They also held the strong conviction that therefore, beneficial changes come from protest, dissent and resistance, from ordinary people being empowered to take responsibility for their own interests and representation. In this way, my interlocutors were grappling with a rich historical legacy of protest, as well as with the sense that history was repeating itself – or rather that "nothing has changed", and that public bodies find justifications to enforce public order through coercion.

I then explored the GC encampments to examine dynamics emerging from grassroots protests involving a physical occupation and aimed at a specific infrastructure. In this second example I focused more broadly on concepts of emergence, new beginnings, and possibilities and also emphasised the feminist legacy of the women-only space, where participants felt empowered to redefine who they were and how to live together in a collective aspiring for societal change. I discussed the combination of a sense of immediacy and the impulse to historicise struggles through building activist folklore and stories.

I conclude by emphasising that my interlocutors' experiences and encounters with the establishment made it challenging to think outside of a stark dichotomy: working with the 'system' or overhauling it. In campaigning for change, a tension existed between reform and revolution, between working within the system or the institutions of the establishment to transform it, or radically overhaul and overthrow it. This might be a false dichotomy, in that successful movements for change have encompassed a broad spectrum of participants, aims, motivations and means. They have included people weaving in and out of visible and official worlds, and in and out of grassroots, potentially more marginal ones – such as people living on protest camps during some parts of the year, supported by others who do not. Nevertheless, and as I explore as I move through the thesis chapters, this stark dichotomy was embodied as my interlocutors put their bodies on the frontline, either aware of the histories of protest that came before them or discovering them as they did so. The institutions of their country did not seem to be producing the outcomes they were hoping for, and certainly not at the right pace. Interlocutors could thus be caught between hoping for as well as fearing stark changes in the future, even while their daily life implicated them in many different aspects of the 'system'. Whilst I have here shown that my interlocutors' truth-making practices were predicated on recognising, celebrating, denouncing and acting on what *truly was* in the past; in the next chapter I thus consider how my friends' orientations to the future bore on emergent possibilities on the frontline.



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## CHAPTER THREE – CLIMATES OF FEAR, COLLAPSE, AND EXTINCTION

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*What is done is done / can't undo it  
What is lost is gone / can't get to it  
What is done is done / can't undo it  
And it's all in the palm of our hands...*

*We are the force of nature we cannot control / can control*

*And it's all in the palm of our hands...*

*(Moulettes 2017)*

“What use will a degree be when the shit hits the fan?”

It was a sunny August morning and one of Extinction Rebellion's (XR) co-founders, Gail Bradbrook, had come to show support to the anti-fracking campaign at PNR.<sup>38</sup> She was about to give a speech on the roadside. There were more people present than usual, many bearing XR badges and flags. I stood with some of my close interlocutors, as well as a few unfamiliar faces, waiting for Gail to deliver her speech. That is when I first met and struck up a conversation with Audrey, a young energetic woman carrying a sign which read “Tell the truth”.

I would hear Audrey rally many a crowd later on that year as I attended week-long XR actions in London. She would use her strong and melodic voice to lead assemblies into climate justice chants. Audrey was an undergraduate in anthropology starting her second year of university and was becoming increasingly active with her local XR group. After explaining that I was conducting fieldwork at PNR, I asked her enthusiastically about her anthropology course and what she thought of it. A shadow passed over her face and another side of Audrey came out – the worried and confused face of someone who was grappling with difficult thoughts. As XR had taken over most of her time by now, Audrey explained how she was thinking of quitting her degree for various reasons. She did not want to have her name next to that of a university investing in fossil fuels and “the world is burning” she added – “what use will a degree be when the shit hits the fan?”. Jack joined the conversation; I had first met him at PNR a few months earlier. He had spent many days at PNR throughout 2017 and 2018, balancing activism on the frontline with his job, a couple of hours away.

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<sup>38</sup> I explain more about XR later in this chapter.

He eventually gave up his work and became heavily involved with XR, travelling around the country to deliver XR talks and “train up” activists in non-violent direct action. With a background in philosophy, he described his activism very eloquently and often acted as a spokesperson for the XR groups he was involved with. Jack and Audrey discussed a few ideas around divestment activism at her university, and we then moved on to discussing the state of the world and of the UK environmentally and socially. “It’s so fucked”, Audrey said, sounding overwhelmed. “Sometimes I just want to let it happen”. Audrey was struggling to cope with the knowledge she had been acquiring about climate change and what this meant for her present and future. Jack seemed to relate to her feelings but stressed the importance of “not giving up”. “Taking a step back and letting it happen is a position of privilege, because we don’t have to deal with the materialities of it [climate change]. It’s not happening to us”. As I recalled conversations with Jack, I felt that although he had not added “yet” to the end of that sentence, I knew he often would. Audrey agreed with him, before our conversation ended as Gail started her address to the crowd.

My interlocutors at PNR often discussed their fears and anxieties regarding climate change. Global warming, climate change, climate chaos, climate collapse, climate crisis, climate emergency, climate breakdown; there have been, and are, many terms for this phenomenon which has preoccupied scientists for decades and has increasingly seeped into peoples’ lives through its varied manifestations. As I spent more time on the frontline and with XR groups, the affective weight of these terms for my interlocutors was noticeable. They bore the “truth” to be acknowledged, recognised and acted on. For some of my interlocutors, climate-related concerns felt like “old news” as they said; every year added its renewed share of high temperature records and catastrophes as well as disappointing climate conferences resulting in the tiniest incremental shift in global policies. Others were grappling with such concerns for the first time. Nevertheless, they were all united in recognising that things were very bleak. My fieldnotes were often full of sadness over my interlocutors’ fears for a terrifying future rippling into their current lives, intersecting with anxieties about making a living coupled with manifestations of climate change in the present, linked to their anger against the development of the shale gas industry with the government’s support. I was worried about the usefulness of my own work as well, in the face of what seemed to be looming environmental catastrophes and huge impacts on most aspects of our societies: “Do I believe how serious this is? Am I not ready to accept it? Am I letting ‘it happen’ as well?” I wrote down once, perched on the end of my bed in my little wooden shack, thinking through what the ramifications of “it” – climate change and its truth – were.

In this chapter, I thus want to focus on the ways in which the issue of anthropogenic climate change affectively mobilised my interlocutors on the PNR frontline. In turn a symptom, a cause, and a phenomenon that is at once natural, social, political, and cultural, my interlocutors apprehended the climate crisis through overlapping and intersecting issues, of which the continued production of fossil fuels was one. Building on my analysis in the previous chapter of the life-affirming possibilities for

social change that opened up in Britain's history of dissent, and the anti-nuclear and feminist direct actions at Greenham Common, my interlocutors took up the work of activism at PNR in large part to lay the groundwork for a future without fossil fuels.<sup>39</sup> How did my interlocutors perceive climate change? What did "telling the truth" about climate change entail? How did it inform their actions on the frontline? In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which climate truth was realised by my interlocutors. I show how truth was represented and circulated, and also felt, feared, embraced and disputed. I will show how realising climate truth was a personal, collective, and affective act which included scientific, moral, emotional and political dimensions. I will also show how apocalyptic narratives and the "claim to crisis" (Roitman 2016: 28) oriented my interlocutors' actions in the present, as grieving loss and witnessing historical harm became a way to take responsibility for change and transformation. I first briefly contextualise the XR movement, as it features heavily in this chapter.

## Extinction Rebellion

During my fieldwork, the XR movement grabbed much media attention globally through their road blocks and other protests in major urban centres. XR groups put forward three main demands from the UK government: 1) To "Tell the Truth" about the climate and ecological breakdown, 2) To "Act Now" and agree on binding policies to achieve carbon zero in the UK by 2025, 3) To be "Beyond Politics" and set up a citizens assembly that would be mandated to overlook and decide on climate policies (Extinction Rebellion n.d.). Their main strategy was non-violent civil disobedience and being ready to break the law. Groups therefore organised themselves between "arrestables" and "non-arrestables" depending on whether a participant, or "rebel" as commonly used amongst XR activists, is ready to purposefully break the law and potentially be arrested as a result. In 2019, the focus was on bringing major cities, such as London, to a halt by blocking roads, and overwhelming the police and criminal system. The theory was that this would force the government to respond to their demands.

Much of the initial vision for the movement was conceived by Roger Hallam, who quickly became a very visible figurehead for the group, among many others. He studied for a doctorate focused on effective civil disobedience movements across the contemporary world, research which inspired much of the movement's initial strategy. He drew heavily on scholars Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan (Chenoweth & Stephan 2011; Engler & Engler 2016: 123–125; Stephan & Chenoweth 2008; *The success of nonviolent civil resistance: Erica Chenoweth at TEDxBoulder* 2013) who quantitatively assessed the 'success' of contemporary social and protest movements. This quantitative work emphasised that non-violent movements worldwide were twice as likely to succeed in their aims

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<sup>39</sup> As discussed in Ch.1, there were some interlocutors who were concerned about earthquakes, ground water pollution, and political representation issues, independently of climate issues.

compared to armed campaigns, and that the campaigns which actively mobilised at least 3.5% of the population were all successful. Such findings lead to the ‘3.5% rule’ becoming widespread within XR: if 3.5% of the population of a given country participated in the movements and were willing to get arrested, critical mass would be reached and systems change would ensue. I had heard XR participants enthusiastically mention this research during my fieldwork. However, some criticised the inflexibility of that figure becoming the ultimate justification for XR behaviours and actions, and suggested that threshold might not apply to the demands made by XR within a ‘western’ liberal democracy (Chenoweth 2020; Matthews 2020).

There was some overlap between XR and the anti-fracking campaign at PNR. Some of the core PNR crew helped set up the XR Preston group during my fieldwork and participated in local and national XR actions. From time-to-time, XR groups also came to support the activists on the PNR frontline, with one bigger action organised in September 2019. However, the anti-fracking campaign was targeted directly at the physical infrastructure at PNR and elsewhere. In contrast, XR actions in 2019 were not focussed on infrastructure; instead they largely aimed at disrupting urban spaces to pressure the government and raise awareness about the climate crisis.

Many of my interlocutors (whether involved with XR actions or not) had mixed feelings about XR messaging and ways of operating. They thought it was led by an exclusive and small group of people in London whilst posturing as a grassroots initiative. Similarly to the anti-fracking campaign, ‘membership’ of XR was quite fluid, the “movement” being whoever is part of it at any given moment. Nevertheless, in 2019 there was a clearly identifiable “core team” guiding central XR logistics and guiding, albeit collaboratively, the actions of the mass gatherings. However it is important to note that XR local groups were independent for year-round regional actions, although they followed some core XR principles and values (see Extinction Rebellion n.d.). Many of my friends also considered the XR movement to be dangerously apolitical at times, and that many XR participants did not realise the broader crises underlying climate issues. As my interlocutors grappled with intersecting issues on the PNR frontline, they felt that the truth XR articulated about climate change was too limited in its focus on GHG emissions. Where XR messaging might emphasise lack of action around climate change in the political system, my interlocutors would stress issues with how the ‘system’ operates and its resulting socio-economic inequalities.

However, despite the flaws they identified, XR was also widely supported and celebrated for bringing climate change into increased public attention during 2019. As I conducted my fieldwork over that specific year, I do not know what my interlocutors would now think of how XR groups and messaging have changed. The recent film “Rebellion” explores the dynamics and frustrations within the core XR group during their first launch year in 2019 (*Rebellion* 2022). It shows there was a wide diversity within XR groups regarding their priorities in terms of actions and messaging. From 2019 onwards, more XR groups started to visibly build links with other grassroots environmental organisations, combining resources and planning an increasing number of direct actions outside of urban centres and targeted directly at various media and fossil fuel infrastructures.

## Fracking and climate change

I met Sabine at PNR during a three-day blockade of the fracking site entrance, organised by the national activist network Reclaim The Power (RTP) back in 2018, during my pre-fieldwork trip. She was very active with this group, travelling frequently to PNR and other extractive sites mentioned in Ch.1; she took part in direct action at these different sites regularly. She was a calm and soothing presence, but also did not hide her passionate anger and concern towards the current political and environmental situation in the UK. When she stood in the entrance of the fracking site, she would often tell the security guards and the police officers that “we are doomed” unless fossil fuels are kept in the ground. When I asked her about her main concern about fracking during an interview, she mentioned fears of the water and soil being “poisoned” but also that she was “massively terrified about climate change (...) I think about it all the time!”. When I asked her to elaborate, she apologised for being so “gloomy” and explained in a strained voice:

I think a lot about extinctions. That's really terribly sad. Stories pop up in my mind a lot. Last year, before all these bush fires in Australia, there was a story about extinction. One day, it was just so hot that all the fruit bats fell from the sky and died. All of them in a whole region. They were just flying, and then they just dropped, and they died<sup>40</sup>. Things like that are just unspeakably, terribly sad. Terribly sad. Yes. Just the collapse of ecosystem. It's a lot about the animals, all the things that make life worth living. (...) To see whole ecosystem just dying... and cascading effects. And death. That's what I think of, mostly. Also, I look to the future and I just don't see anything, any stability for my nieces and nephews. I think about starvation. Yes, those things.

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<sup>40</sup>In November 2019, a significant number of bats did die in Australia during a heatwave, although probably not while flying as Sabine said. A BBC article reported that “a third of one bat species” had succumbed to the high temperatures, and were found lying under trees in heaps (Mao 2019).



Figure 43: Sign on the fences at the entrance of the fracking site at PNR, 2019. Credit: author's picture

She smiled very sadly, in a very Sabine-like way. She and others would often position climate change in relation to fears of species extinction.<sup>41</sup> They also specifically discussed the extinction of the human species, as did Lisa. She was a dynamic retired local resident, living quite close to the fracking site. She was always active: running, swimming, campaigning with the Green Party, holding pop-up events with Amnesty in different local towns, or being a legal observer at different direct actions around the country. She was one of the core participants of the monitoring shifts at gatecamp, covering many shifts during the week and always making sure people had everything they needed when not on duty herself. After the protest camp was evicted in November 2019, Lisa generously welcomed some interlocutors from the camp and myself for a few nights in a row, feeding us and offering us a warm place to stay. A few days later, Lisa agreed for me to interview her over a cider in a nearby pub. I asked her what her main concerns about fracking were, to which she replied immediately and angrily:

The fact that I think it's absolutely absurd!! I mean that's why there is the meeting in Madrid now [The Conference of Parties held in Madrid in December 2019], we cannot continue the way we are. Otherwise, it's actually the extinction of the human race. I do believe the planet in its form and other creatures will survive (...) They will; we won't. That's the option we can make. We can kill ourselves off.

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<sup>41</sup>My interlocutors within XR and in the anti-fracking movement would often refer me to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report published in May 2019, to discuss the extent of the consequences of climate change on wildlife and biodiversity (IPBES 2019).



Sabine and Lisa's drivers for resisting the fracking site at PNR included a sense that we were "doomed" and headed for the extinction of species, including our own, due to fossil fuel impacts on climate change. Such concerns often took centre stage during speeches on the roadside and was also a rallying issue through which to support and create solidarity with other grassroots protest initiatives. Many of these fears are well expressed in slogans displayed by school students participating in Youth Climate Strike rallies that I attended in Preston: "Stop denying the planet is dying", "There is no planet B", "No jobs on a dead planet", "School won't matter when I am underwater", "The planet is dying in our lifetimes" (see Figure 44 below). Youth Climate Strike had taken off globally in 2018 and 2019, spearheaded by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg's solo strikes in Sweden. Such rallies mushroomed rapidly in different places around the world, also known as Fridays for the Future (Fridays For the Future n.d.). One of the anti-fracking Nanas made a speech during one of these strikes, which unexpectedly brought me to tears. It might have been the tiredness of a nightshift at gatecamp, but listening to her tearfully apologising for leaving the earth in such a state for the younger generations really got to me. She seemed genuinely distraught for the young people in front of her.





Figure 44: Signs and chalk inscriptions during the Climate Youth Strikes in Preston, spring 2019. Credit: author's pictures.

Jack and Audrey, with whom I opened this chapter, had also helped to organise some of the Friday for the Future marches in their own city, not too distant from PNR. They encouraged me to attend some of the sessions organised by their local XR group.<sup>42</sup> They thought it would help me understand what mobilised people around climate change. I thus travelled to their city for a weekend, and attended a session entitled “Climate Grief Workshop”; I had no idea what to expect. I came out of the workshop room an hour later with puffy red eyes, and so did the ten or so other young people attending, including Jack – we had all cried over the course of the workshop. People took it in turn to describe their fears and sadness around the climate crisis, the beauty of natural environments they were sad to be losing (birdsong, bees buzzing, biodiverse flower meadows), and their related anxieties over impacts on food and water security in the UK, and globally.

I stayed silent most of the workshop, until the moderator specifically asked those who had not spoken yet if they wanted to add anything – she turned to me with a gentle and inquisitive look. I did not think I would cry when I first sat down in the room. Yet listening to everyone else really did sound like people joining together in grief, mourning things they loved and which they were sure to soon lose. Their sadness and perceptions of the climate crisis made my throat tighten. I recall being anxious myself about the current and future social and political consequences of massive climate transformations, loss of homes and mass migration images going through my head, juxtaposed with other participants’ accounts of once vibrant and now lost ecosystems, and the immense guilt most people experienced of not being able to do enough. I also feared irreconcilable and damaging rifts between people, whether part of environmental groups or not, as people grappled with exacerbated inequalities and precarious livelihoods. If as Audrey said “the shit was hitting the fan” in terms of natural loss and breakdown, what did we have left to rely on when people were in conflict as well? My thoughts were not as clear as I recall them here, but in any case, when I opened my mouth to make a small comment, I felt a huge knot in my throat and started sobbing as I tried to express my

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<sup>42</sup> I keep the location deliberately vague here, to protect interlocutor anonymity.

feelings. My tears joined those of the rest of the group, and someone handed me a tissue from the fresh pile that had been put together at the beginning of the session.

Existential realisations around climate issues were thus resolutely tied to the anti-fracking frontline. People discussed such fears and concerns at gatecamp, displayed them on placards at the roadside, communicated them to security guards and police officers, learnt from one another when new IPCC reports came out, and supported environmental movements which carried these narratives beyond the frontline. They felt terrified by the future – by what would be – and I suggest that such a disruption of temporality was deeply intertwined with ethical articulations of *what is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do*. Being truthful about the climate crisis implicated affective temporalities which bound morality, science, and emotions together, and enabled possibilities for change in the present.

### The affective temporalities of climate change

Gillian Caldwell, a former lawyer having worked in conflict zones and on rape cases, and now environmental campaigner at the head of an NGO, writes in the opening line of her article “Coming out of the closet: my climate trauma (and yours?)”: “I have spent my lifetime face to face with some of the most brutal and inhumane acts ever committed, but nothing has been as traumatizing for me as trying to get action to tackle the climate crisis” (Caldwell 2009). She describes the existential scale of her anxieties, fears and angers associated when facing climate science and engaging with climate action. A recognition and exploration of such climate-related adverse emotional and mental responses has become a growing field in psychology and psychiatry, as well as literature studies, environmental humanities and social sciences. Terms such as trauma, grief, anxiety, distress, despair, depression, eco-sickness, and solastalgia have recently been used to refer to the fears and anxieties people experience in the face of climate and ecological loss (Albrecht et al. 2007; Askland & Bunn 2018; Bradley et al. 2021; Clayton et al. 2014; Craps 2020; Cunsolo & Ellis 2018; Hamilton 2019; Lertzman 2015; Randall 2009; Richardson 2018; Wardell 2020; Woodbury 2019). These terms have their clinical and medicalised definitions and connotations, as well as are used to describe “everyday registers of emotional experiences” (Wardell 2020: 191). Some have also found their way into various media outlets, as early as 1990 (BBC Ideas 2019; Leff 1990; Noble 2019; Pearl 2019; Rosenfeld 2016; Sarchet 2019; Shain 2021). I wish not to focus on clinical debates here, and instead take inspiration from the ways in which the prevalence of ecological and climate categories of distress (Wardell 2020) can help understand the temporal and affective “frames that go beyond the idea of individual pathology to acknowledge the impact of climate change on (individual and collective) ways of seeing the world and our task of being human within it” (2020: 91).

To understand the temporal affectivities linked to climate change in my fieldwork and how they can relate to notions of truth and truthfulness, I thus draw on research from Bryant and Knight (Bryant 2016, 2018; Bryant & Knight 2019). They have suggested that “future-orientedness is part of who we

are and how we experience everyday life” (Bryant & Knight 2019: 201) and discuss the ways in which the future is marked by different thresholds, which we can for example anticipate, expect, speculate on, dread or hope for. Different affective orientations to the future, and thereby to these thresholds, can dramatically alter our relation to the present moment, filling it with “hope and innovation” as well as with “exhaustion, hopelessness, and resignation” (ibid: 199). Their conceptualisation of a “time of crisis” in which the links between temporalities that are otherwise taken for granted are disrupted, draws on the notion of “critical thresholds”: reference points from which life will be radically uncertain or unknown, thereby interrupting the flow of how we “exist in time” (Ringel 2016: 295). In times of crisis, anxieties about the future cannot be planned for or resolved and thus result in the inability to “temporalise temporality” (Bryant & Knight 2019: 43). In the context of Bryant’s fieldwork in Cyprus for example, a strong sense of anxiety amongst her interlocutors arose when the border dividing the Turkish Cypriot North from the Greek Cypriot South, firmly uncrossable for decades for Cypriots on either side, was announced as soon to be relaxed in 2003 (Bryant 2016: 21). People on either side became anxious in the face of the unknown that this opening, a critical threshold, marked. The present became “uncanny”, a formerly familiar present turned awkward and strange, due to the inability to see past the critical threshold. Bryant and Knight further suggest such moments are uncanny in that the present is experienced itself as a threshold, a crucial node from which the “future [is] being made right now” (Bryant & Knight 2019: 46). Present time is experienced as “weightier”, as it bears “the burden” of the future and of the past, making daily actions crucial to reclaiming a coherent temporality and to laying the groundworks of a wanted future (ibid: 46).

I suggest that the way “climate truth” was discussed and learnt about in my fieldwork presented similar elements to Bryant’s experience of a crisis in Cyprus. The ‘truth’ of climate change was marked through climate thresholds, in statistical predictions or modelled scenarios – dreaded critical thresholds carrying worrying uncertainties and disruptions – as well as through targets and aims which constituted thresholds to be anticipated, carrying resolution and hope.





Figure 45: Chalk inscription in Preston during a Friday for the Future march attended by interlocutors, April 2019. Credit: author's picture

For example the Paris Climate Agreements marked 2°C and 1.5°C degrees global warming both as critical thresholds (see Ch.1), thresholds which according to leading scientists “would take humanity into uncharted and dangerous territory” (Watts 2018). In Autumn 2018, an IPCC report, widely discussed by my interlocutors on the roadside, re-iterated the importance of the 1.5°C threshold (IPCC 2018), stressing the GHG emissions reduction needed by 2030 to stay below that critical figure. “12 years left” became a common refrain at PNR and away from it, repeated with dread by activists (see Figure 45). These markers were “circulated” (see Appadurai 2013: 64 on circulation) on protest placards and signs, in reports, and in presentations.

One such presentation was the recurring XR one entitled: “Heading for Extinction and what to do about it”. This talk was organised regularly by XR groups across the country and Jack, mentioned in the chapter’s opening, would often travel to deliver them. I attended a session in the classroom of a local university, with 40 other people, listening to the science behind climate crisis warnings. The talk was presented to us by Jack and a friend of his who I had previously met at PNR. I was familiar with the broad threats posed by greenhouse gas emissions over the last decades, but when Jack and his presentation partner listed the reasons and consequences of climate change in just over an hour, it felt like a lot to take in all at once.

Jack prefaced the talk by stating we should not be talking about climate change anymore but instead of “climate breakdown”. The increasing likelihood of the Arctic Sea being ice-free in the near future was one of the possible climate “tipping points” – or thresholds to echo Knight and Bryant – triggering positive feedback loops with catastrophic consequences. Jack repeated, “climate change does not occur in isolation”. The ice has reflective properties, absorbing very little of the sun’s heat. With rising global temperatures, huge swathes of ice are melting, causing ice-free oceans to absorb

more heat. This, along with consequent changes in salinity, would have consequences for the various ocean currents, impacting in turn the climate. In parallel to this, deforestation happening at a mass scale in certain areas meant emitting stored CO<sub>2</sub> and losing 'carbon sinks'. The increase in temperature globally would destabilise climates as well as exacerbated the loss of crucial biodiversity, with a huge impact on agricultural systems. Jack listed increasing droughts and extreme weather events across the world, dwelling on the example of the persistent drought in the Syrian region since the early 2000s – what Jack referred to as “a perfect breeding ground for radicalisation and conflict”. It felt like the heat in the slightly overcrowded classroom was getting heavier by the minute, listening to Jack's interminable list of disasters. He continued explaining that the delicate balance between the climate system, biodiversity and soil fertility has been dangerously destabilised by increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as (and linked to) intensive and overuse of the planet's resources. He quoted former Environment Secretary Michael Gove warning that the UK had 30 to 40 years left until “eradication of soil fertility” due to intensive farming techniques, after letting us know that the UK's Earth Overshoot Day was the 8<sup>th</sup> May in 2019. Earth Overshoot Day marks “the date when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year” (Earth Overshoot Day n.d.).

Jack sighed heavily, looking gloomy, and opened a window to let fresh air in. His partner took over to explain the meaning behind XR's name: “We are experiencing the 6<sup>th</sup> Mass Extinction (...) we are still pumping CO<sub>2</sub> out into the atmosphere, contributing to mass catastrophe, high starvation (...) and human extinction”. Going through climate science and archaeological history, she explained the five major extinctions our planet has known, four of which were caused by increasing amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, the fifth being linked to the consequences of a massive meteorological impact with the Earth. The rate of the current loss of biodiversity is unprecedented in comparison to the unfolding of other extinctions events; in the same way that the sharp increase of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere is occurring at an unprecedented, rapid pace, in concurrence with human activity. She was thus outraged by a fossil fuel industry in the form of fracking. “This is so catastrophic! This is a crisis, the challenge of a lifetime (...) Our supposed 'leaders' aren't doing anything about it, they are actively making things worse!” she exclaimed. She shook her head angrily, going on to list the governmental push for fracking and the injunctions granted to fracking companies limiting protest activities around their sites, the plans for a third runway at Heathrow airport, the cut to subsidies to the solar power industry, and the dismissal of a tidal power plan in Swansea, Wales. “If states fail us, leading to our own extinction, we have a right to rebel!” she carried on, the pictures of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes being projected behind her. She apologised for taking the example of two white men, and explained that thinkers from the liberal strand of political thought as well as from the conservative side suggested we should stop obeying governments when they are failing in their duty. Rebellion against the government is needed, she repeated, explaining the second part of the group's name. “Tell the truth and act as if it is real!” exclaimed Jack, telling the audience they should demand the same of their politicians. The talk ended after an hour of relentless climate catastrophes being spelled out, and



the room started to buzz with students talking amongst themselves, stretching, digesting what they had just heard.

The ‘truth’ which Jack and Georgie were putting forward, and that was being carried around the country in XR sessions, had a palpable affective and transformational force. It centred on notions of crisis, urgency, extinction, as well as the need for action and “war time mobilisation”. Critical thresholds were marked via scientific facts blended with affective descriptions of current and future adversities, and circulated in anger and despair in conversations at the PNR roadside – or in climate grief workshops identifying the significance of the losses at stake. In these discussions and presentations, people were called upon to “act as if the truth is real”: to witness climate truth collectively, designating the present as a crucial node from which to take action for change. This constituted a moment of ethical delineation where *what is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do* were re-articulated. Here I draw on Janet Roitman (Roitman 2012, 2016: 28) who suggests that crisis narratives refer to “alleged ‘moments of truth’ [when] the ‘real’ is laid bare” and the delineation between right and wrong emerge. She returns to the ancient Greek etymology of the term in *krinô*: “to separate, to judge, to decide, to act, to choose” (Roitman 2016: 20) and identifies the crisis not as a “condition to be observed” but rather as a moment of ethical delineation which “produces meaning” (ibid: 27). Marking a crisis, through the XR talk for example, can feed into a disruption of temporality. Yet it can simultaneously correspond to attempts to align peoples’ orientations with one another, creating the sense of living in “the same world at the same time” (Guyer 2007: 418), with a present – and a truth – that are shared. In the next section, I suggest that apocalyptic narratives in my fieldwork became a form of ethical delineation, a way to deal with the disrupted temporality that the crisis effected and enabled certain of my interlocutors to “act as if the truth is real”.

### The lucidity of the Apocalypse

Claire, who kindly hosted me when I wanted a break from living on camp, had a gentle and understanding demeanour; I greatly enjoyed spending time with her. We would often laugh and sing along to songs when covering shifts together at gatecamp or working on her allotment – we would also often talk about our fears around climate change. On one occasion she mockingly signed her text with: “if you need some doom and gloom, you know where to find me”. From her vantage point in Lancashire, Claire often found herself dreading what was yet to come. We discussed the impacts of fracking through its associated methane leaks, as well as continued fossil fuel extraction more generally, increasing air and water pollution, repeated floods, food shortages, lack of basic necessities, people turning against one another; the list went on. As we once sat having tea during a break from working on her allotment, she closed her eyes and took in the sunshine, whispering “will people still say the weather is lovely when food crops fail and the moors are on fire?”. She stayed silent for a while, then sighed “I’m not ready for the Apocalypse”. Claire was not wondering whether the

Apocalypse would happen, whether it was ‘true’ or not; she was worried whether she would be prepared for such a truth to materialise.

Such apocalyptic thinking and narratives related to climate change frequently emerged during my fieldwork. Anna, a retired local resident who covered several shifts a week at gatecamp would repeat to anyone who would listen: “I have my van, my camping stove and my bike – I’m sorted for the apocalypse!”. When sat at gatecamp for a shift, discussions often jokingly started with “so, when the apocalypse comes”, followed by conversations about impending catastrophes, and the skills needed to survive through and beyond the catastrophes.<sup>43</sup> Another interlocutor said of her teaching skills: “I mean, who would you rather be around when the post-apocalyptic era starts, someone who can put an apostrophe in the right place or someone who can build you a roof??”. On another occasion on the camp, I was splitting logs with Josh – or rather, by his own description, he was awkwardly trying to tell me how to do things whilst not wanting to be sexist. The conversation then became about him teaching people how to shoot properly; “it might become something you would have to know how to do, you know” he said. “I don’t anticipate needing to shoot someone anytime soon” I laughed uneasily, to which he replied: “we are not going to all be nice when it becomes actual survival of the fittest”. I asked what he meant, to which he explained:

We need a stop to fossil fuels and a serious commitment to renewables, but companies and businesses have massive vested interests in continuing to use fossil fuels. So things probably won’t change. But, if nothing changes and keeps going like this, there will be a violent uprising. (...) To be honest, I would find my wife and children and find a place for them, keep them safe.

He added as a reassurance that in the choice between “ballots or bullets” to trigger change, he would always choose ballots, because “bullets suck and violence just breeds more violence”; but if “climate change won’t kill us, fascism will (...) You know, the EDL is very good at violence, they like the idea of a violent uprising.”<sup>44</sup> I could not always tell if the “apocalypse” people discussed required dealing with environmental damage to their surroundings (on land or water), climatic conditions and weather catastrophes, scarce resources, mass protests or conflicts between people. In Josh’s account, they all seemed interlinked. Much of the ambiguity and uncertainty in discussions about the apocalypse were less tied to the likelihood of an apocalypse materialising but rather pertained to what the apocalypse would entail, and what people should do when it came.

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<sup>43</sup> One of my interlocutors also went on to set up a survivalist or self-named “prepper” Youtube channel, sharing skills and techniques on how to live comfortably with minimal possessions and by making most of what you need yourself or within a small collective.

<sup>44</sup> English Defence League, a far-right group in the UK.

Kathryn Banks (2012: 361) suggests that apocalyptic terms and thinking carry a range of connotations, from the ancient Greek etymology of “uncovering” or “disclosure”, to theological moments of revelation whereby a “conclusion to history [and] divine justice” manifest in an ultimate moment of judgement which can both “inspire terror and hope”. However, the contemporary and secular usage of apocalyptic terminology has come to signify a chaotic moment of destruction and terror, a “disaster, awaited with dread” and resulting in “drastic, irreversible damage to human society or the environment, especially on a global scale” (Banks 2012: 361; OED n.d.). The theological religious connotations of *revelation* and *disclosure* lingered in my interlocutors’ discussions about the impending end of the world. People often discussed how others “do” or “don’t get it [climate change]”. Sabine, mentioned earlier on in the chapter, once recounted to me police officers and security guards seemed to be “blind to the reality of the climate and ecological emergency”. Another interlocutor vividly described how “we are all in a boat, paddling towards the waterfall”, and that once we “open [our] eyes” to this, “how can we carry on doing that?”. Independent from indicating specific religious orientations, apocalyptic narratives became a way of discussing moments when truths about ourselves, how we live and felt we should live in the world emerged, were recognised, were judged, and acted upon.

Knight and Bryant, much like Roitman’s proposition of the ‘crisis’ as an observation producing meaning, suggest that apocalyptic orientations signify anticipating “the destruction of the world *as we know it* and a *radical reorientation* of both time and space [emphasis added]” (Bryant & Knight 2019: 36), stressing the vantage point taken to declare the apocalypse, as well as the radical impact on *what is* in the present. For my interlocutors, discussing the climate crisis and the apocalypse entailed increasingly recognising intersecting environmental, political and social crises – in a kind of environmentalism which is mobilised not by “future-oriented optimism” but rather by acceptance and recognition of inevitable and already on-going catastrophe (Cassegård & Thörn 2018). Apocalyptic narratives in this way were “flexible and useful to both creating and managing diverse anxieties of the end” (Huber & Mould 2018: 213); yet I suggest my interlocutors were not discussing an ‘end’ but rather re-considering the present moment and their capacity and willingness to take action for challenging what ‘the really real’ consists of.

On one occasion on the roadside, I was chatting to Claire as she tied a few ribbons to some fencing at the entrance of the fracking site. Every few months or so, she would come up with a new idea about what to write with ribbons to help pass the time whilst on shift and raise drivers’ awareness. She had previously written “Green Energy Now” and “Another Fracking Failure”; that day, she was knotting the words “We must change to survive” (see Figure 46 below).



Figure 46: Claire's ribbon inscription at the entrance of the PNR site, spring 2019. Credit: author's picture

She went on to tell me about the workshop that she had attended the week before on climate change adaptation. She described the experience uneasily: “It was like being at a funeral... I think I am going through grief stages. Once you have accepted how things are, maybe you can reach a more peaceful state?”. She said she was realising just how much we are losing, and how much we need to adapt as a consequence. She was coming towards a kind of acceptance of the climate crisis, even though the feeling of grief and the anxiousness of what was yet to come stuck with her.

The workshop Claire had attended was organised by the academic Jem Bendell working in the area of sustainability and focused on the concept of Deep Adaptation (DA). Participants to Bendell's workshop had been asked to read his article entitled “Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy”, to prepare for discussions. I quote this article at length below, from the sub-heading “Apocalypse Uncertain”, to help contextualise Claire's feelings:

The evidence before us suggests that we are set for disruptive and uncontrollable levels of climate change, bringing starvation, destruction, migration, disease and war. (...) The evidence is mounting that the impacts will be catastrophic to our livelihoods and the societies that we live within. Our norms of behaviour, that we call our “civilisation,” may also degrade (...) When we contemplate this possibility of ‘societal collapse’, it can seem abstract. [It] may seem, subconsciously at least, to be describing a situation to feel sorry about as we witness scenes on TV or online. But when I say starvation, destruction, migration, disease and war, I mean in your own life. With the power down, soon you wouldn't have water coming out of your tap. You will depend on your neighbours for food and some warmth. You will become malnourished. You won't know whether to stay or go. You will fear being violently killed before starving to death. (...) I chose the words above as an attempt to cut through the sense that this topic is purely theoretical (Bendell 2018: 13–14).

Bendell's article discusses the extent of the climate breakdown that Jack earlier was trying to convey to the audience during his XR talks. First published in 2018, the paper was the result of Bendell's sabbatical from academic work spent reading the latest developments on climate science. The combined science to him rendered even untenable the premise of a discipline such as "Sustainability Studies" as if we could restore a world and way of life which were inevitably already lost. Whilst he supported mitigation strategies and emissions reductions, he also explicitly acknowledged that most catastrophes predicted by climate scientists were now inevitable. The "climate-influenced collapse of societies in most parts of the world" is something that he felt should be widely recognised, with far-reaching consequences on all contemporary infrastructures sustaining the livelihoods of millions. DA suggests a way forward in accepting the inevitable collapse, and in focusing on resilience, relinquishment, restoration, and reconciliation (ibid 2018: 22–23). Such was the process Claire felt she was engaged in, a process of radically re-orienting herself in the present as to *what is*, *what ought to be* and *what to do*. Recognising the truth about the reality she lived in entailed embracing the affective intensities linked to climate thresholds, and harnessing them to re-configure how to better live her life now.

Bendell's approach is very similar to, yet emerged independently from, the movement and literature around *Collapsologie* which appeared in France around a decade ago, creating much discussion in the French media (Bouanchaud & Garric 2019; Leprince 2019; Servigne & Stevens 2015).<sup>45</sup> The founders of the movement sought to embrace the approaching collapse of environmental, social and political systems rather than dismissing such issues as avoidable, unfounded scare-mongering or doomsday prophesising (Servigne & Stevens 2015; Stetler 2020). In their book *How Everything Can Collapse*, Pablo Servigne and Raphaël Stevens (2015) defended themselves from being alarmists, catastrophists, or pessimists. Instead, they suggested to "lucidly set out the facts" pointing to the "gravity of the upheavals that our model of industrial development triggers" (ibid: 7, 61). They described how exponential acceleration across the systems industrialised societies will inevitably lead to crossing 'thresholds' bearing irreversible consequences. Here the climate crisis involves intersecting political, financial, economic and social crises, as in a "series of [unpredictable] domino effects" (ibid: 91).<sup>46</sup> In an interview conducted during the pandemic, and five years after the publication of the book, Servigne regrets that the book was read as a harbinger of the end of the world, written by people who had "given up" (*Après le COVID-19 : L'Effondrement ? Avec Pablo Servigne* 2021). Blamed for promoting an "unscientific" approach and for not being able to confirm if and when the collapse will happen, he understands that the magnitude of what is being dealt with here seems crazy; yet,

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<sup>45</sup> I first heard about *Collapsologie* during the XR Spring Rebellion in London. One activist urged me to look at *Collapsologie* to "make sense of everything!" after hearing about my research. Minutes later, as I stood watching the gathering from a certain distance and reading through flyers I had been given, a passer by stopped to warn me "See those XR flags? Stay away, they are a death cult".

<sup>46</sup> Such contemporary interrelations have been widely observed in a range of cultural settings within the anthropological literature exploring an "overheated" and interconnected world (Eriksen 2016, 2019).

according to him it is not. He emphasizes that crossing the thresholds laid out in the book and across climate science – and in Jack’s presentation – means we enter the terrain of the unpredictable. The problem for Servigne and Stevens is that our livelihoods are systemically planned around certainty and risks. The unpredictable cannot be quantified nor given a probability, nor ‘risk managed’ (Servigne & Stevens 2015: 98). As such, multiple collapses will be heterogenous, happening on different levels and at different degrees and will not be confirmed with certainty. “The singular narrative and myth of the Apocalypse was woken up by our critics” says Servigne in the interview, “but our main message was about uncertainty, multiple collapses and the difficulty of studying complex systems”. A similar point was made in the introduction of the book: “the myth of the Apocalypse vs the myth of progress (...) just reinforces the attitude of uninhibited collective denial” (ibid: 5).

Indeed, such affective charges in “doom and gloom” narratives can often be an easy target for critics of campaigners who publicly announce or insist that crisis thresholds are imminent. They can be marginalised or ridiculed for the ignorance, bleakness and anger in their messages. Recently, Donald Trump mocked Greta Thunberg as having “anger management issues”, whilst the Canadian politician Maxime Bernier called her “mentally unstable” and a “pawn” used by the climate alarmist “mob” (McCarthy 2019; Zimonjic 2019). Both DA and Collapsologie have also been accused of exaggerated language, and wrongly extrapolating from the science with the result of fuelling catastrophism, denial and paralysis (Nicholas et al. 2020; Stetler 2020). My interlocutors on the roadside told me how frustrating it could be in their discussions with friends away from PNR, or at family dinners, to sound like they were the “whacky” ones always “banging on” about catastrophe. However, the reticence to discuss “the more worrisome possibilities” of climate change and characterisation of such discussion as of alarmism, fatalism or even “climate porn” can be worse for climate action than embracing bleak realities, according to David Wallace Wells (2017, 2019: 155), journalist and author of one of the most read New York Times article then turned into a book, “The Uninhabitable Earth”. Freezing political action and imaginative solution-finding, such reticence delays serious consideration of adaptive strategies for vulnerable populations (see also Hamilton 2022; Randall 2009). The writer Amitav Ghosh (2016: 20, 22) discusses how the extraordinary and improbable shifts in geological transformations have often been depicted through slow, gradual and processual models, establishing an accepted notion of reality which relegates catastrophic and dramatic change to a backward view. Yet current climate events “confound statistical models” and established frames of risk management, as if the “news was inventing a new genre of allegory” (ibid: 25; Wallace-Wells 2019: 7). As a consequence, the implementation of drastic measures is delayed, confirming for Ghosh that contemporary western politics and common sense have become greatly deranged (Ghosh 2016: 25).

In contrast, for many of my interlocutors and for those drawing on DA and Collapsologie, using inevitable collapse as an overarching heuristic frees up our collective and personal imaginaries to make the impossible thinkable, therefore opening up possibilities to “avoid its [the collapse] catastrophic consequences” (Servigne & Stevens 2015: 100). For them, being “truthful” about the



severity and extent of climate change implicates science, morality, emotions, and committed action in equal measures, in order to enable possibilities for change. Such conceptualisations of climate change blur what may appear as a straightforward delineation between so-called facts and emotions by embracing bleak realities reaching “right down into the core of your being” (ibid: 8). Such a conceptualisation of climate truth may sit uneasily with truth as only a matter of representing the ‘really real out there’. Instead, the apocalyptic narratives in my fieldwork, beyond representation, also invoked ethical articulations of truthfulness as matters of transformation and persuasive imagination. In this context, the XR Climate Grief workshop I described earlier was integral to witnessing the truth proclaimed by XR. Integrating a sense of collective and personal grieving to forms of climate activism – climate grieving in other words – became a way for my interlocutors to recognise that given that “climate tipping points are already occurring, the time is ripe for tipping points in how we respond to these issues” (Hamilton 2019: 172). Acknowledging the inevitable and catastrophic uncertainty of the future bore heavy on my interlocutors’ present, but as discussed by Knight and Bryant, such affective realisations could be experienced as liberating whereby possibilities for alternative realities to come into being were enabled (Bryant & Knight 2019: 44, 46). Disrupting the flow of traffic to put pressure on the government and raise awareness about the climate crisis, was nothing when compared to the impending catastrophes that would soon be unleashed. Likewise, continuously disrupting the activities of the fracking site at PNR by stepping out in front of delivery trucks, or chaining oneself to a lock-on for 60 hours (which Claudia had been highly praised for doing) would “not look as big anymore”. Taking on weekly day and night shifts by a busy highway for three consecutive years was sensible and could be endured.<sup>47</sup>

The burden of the future weighed heavy on my interlocutors’ present but also committed them to action. It also pushed them to reflect on what reality consists of and how it is *truly* established. I cite Ann Seller, one of the activists at the Greenham Common peace encampments described in Ch.2, as she examined what motivated her daily actions at the protest site:

I also want to avoid the reason/emotion split. (...) “Reason” tells me that the fate of the world lies in the hands of some immensely powerful men who are unable to break out of the structures that they work and think in. Therefore, it tells me, whether we have two years or twenty, our own lifetimes or the lifetime of the world, there is nothing we can do, so we should forget about it. Emotion, faced with this circumstance, gives us fearsome nightmares, a sense that there is no point in anything anymore. Intelligent feeling? Perhaps: however, we manage to live with the acknowledged fear, anger, powerlessness that, acknowledged, change in quality. Precisely: a generalized depression becomes a focused anger, and that, sometimes, shows us what to do (Seller 1985: 27).

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<sup>47</sup> I deliberately use the term *sensible* to convey the interrelation between meaning, reason, thought, temporality and affect – *sense* in its many dimensions.

Rage and anger were transformative forces, and were part of the affective intensities linked to conceptualisations of climate change. These were integral to establishing truthfulness about the climate crisis – activist newsletters I subscribed to during my fieldwork invariably ended with the greeting “Love and rage”. Conceptualisations of truth and how to establish it were in this sense linked to the affective temporalities of climate change, and grounded in harnessing affective states into action (Fryer-Moreira 2021). Forming a community around these affects validated their “private nightmares and anguish into [collective] action” (Seller 1985: 27) and established the truths they were witnessing and realising together.

However, affective temporalities and ethical life can be messy even within a group united by similar aims, with contentions and “ruptures (...) creat[ing] different trajectories”(Guyer 2007: 418). As examined in my previous chapter, the existential realisations of my interlocutors on the PNR frontline included confronting a ‘system’ which they felt had historically treated the “Many” unfairly, particularly along class lines. In this sense my interlocutors regretted the lack of reflection amidst certain XR activists regarding the ways in which climate anxieties “intersect with privilege, power and everyday experiences of climatic change” (Hamilton 2019: 171). Yet my friends also knew they could be guilty of the same accusation given their own entanglement with the ‘system’. Whilst crisis and apocalyptic narratives could open up possibilities for change in the present, for my interlocutors they were intertwined with a historical awareness of the “Few” against the “Many”, and of the harsh socio-economic realities of the region they lived in. Without this dimension, climate truth could be very contentious for my interlocutors.

### Whose apocalypse, whose crisis?

In the previous chapter examining (hi)stories of protest, I mentioned my interlocutor Joy, a school teacher in Blackpool. She was deeply dismayed and frustrated about the lack of opportunities available for her young students. Joy was proud of her working-class background and always felt a little on the outside of most environmental groups. She had told me she had felt more at ease with many from “the PNR crew”. She explained this was due to the large number of people from working class backgrounds at the roadside, including herself. Beyond the proportion of working class versus middle-class demographics, what was welcoming to Joy was an awareness about the issue. She understood the line was often blurry in determining to which class someone belongs to. “I ended up in a middle-class profession, teaching, but I come from a very different place than that”. Rather than a quantitative assessment of class then, she was more frustrated by a seeming lack of awareness around class issues in certain climate change narratives.

When I met Joy, she was considering quitting her job as a teacher in order to set up her own educational project. She wanted to have an outdoor project for children who had repeatedly been

kicked out of mainstream education, “the difficult kids – but they’re just kids at the end of the day”. Her plan broadly was to get the children to build their own school and learn about permaculture and plants, whilst also following an English and Mathematics curriculum. She explained how her project would be a way of bringing together her work as a teacher and her concern about the environment.<sup>48</sup> When the IPCC report came out in October 2018 (IPCC 2018), she explained how she had felt and how it had inspired her project idea:

I read it and I was like, "Oh my God." I was talking to my dad actually, and we were sat round the table and I was upset about this report. I was saying all these terrible things that I'd read and saying, "What have I done. Why have I brought kids into this world!" It was late at night, and I didn't know my son was standing at the door. He was only about nine at the time. He'd come in and he went, 'We're not going to die, are we mum?'. I was like, 'No. Don't worry.' I said, 'Mum's going to sort it out. Mum's going to sort it, don't worry.' And I always thought, 'Shit, I just promised my kid that I'm going to save the world!'. Obviously, it's a bit of a big ask. That always stuck in my mind, but I also feel very obliged as an educator (...). I'm really annoyed about education. I'm really annoyed about the environment, so that's why I've put the two together and I'm like, 'What can I do?' Come on. I promised my son I'm going to save the world, that's what happened. I'm worried about what kids are going to say when they grow up and they look back and go, 'I really liked that teacher but why didn't she mention that the planet was on fire?' I'm worried what they're going to think of the educators at the time and obviously the responsibility that comes with that.

Whilst Joy did seem worried about quitting her job for setting up her project, she was motivated because she cared and felt responsible for these children. She felt they were already in crisis and abandoned by the government; “they don’t care about these kids (...) They don’t think they’ll live to see old bones (...) But they will be the ones who save us, you’ll see” she would repeat, even though they might not “get it [climate change]”. She was confident her project was valuable and that the time was right for it, “a lot of people are waking up to the feeling of being genuinely worried about the future”. She mentioned the youth strikes, the rise in XR across the country and the impact that David Attenborough, a popular natural historian, had had with his documentary *Climate Change – The Facts*, presenting the catastrophic consequences of anthropogenic climate warming (*Climate Change: The Facts - narrated by David Attenborough* 2019). This backdrop, coupled with the failings of the educational system, and the social and economic inequalities she had experienced so many times,

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<sup>48</sup>Joy had had an “environmental awakening”, as she put it, after seeing a fiction-documentary set in 2055 called *The Age of Stupid* which follows a man living in a world devastated by climate change.

meant to her that she had to take responsibility for climate action, and necessarily link action with current instances of precarity.

She continued:

When I went to the climate strikes in Preston, the kids were absolutely lovely, they were so wonderful. But they're going to grow wonderful anyway. The kids that we need to get involved are the ones that don't care about the environment because their future is uncertain anyway (...). They don't need the ecological crisis to feel threatened, their lives are dangerous anyway!

Joy was anxious and terrified about the climate crisis, and would talk about the apocalypse with her friends on the roadside. Yet she also felt that those who were on the brunt end of socio-economic inequalities in the UK were already experiencing an on-going crisis and an uncertain future. They were not 'awakening' to a sense of crisis or apocalypse due to dire warnings about climate thresholds. In her role as an educator, Joy felt she was responsible for enlarging the 'criticality' of climate thresholds by expanding their significance to systemic issues making up the reality she and the children lived in. The climate truth she witnessed and took action on was indissociable from taking action on a 'classist' educational system.

Based on such experiences, many of my interlocutors came to see XR messaging and campaigning as conveying a limited understanding of the "climate truth". XR truths and commitment to action seemed kept distinct from what my interlocutors at PNR saw as intersecting crises within the broader British political and social landscape. During a two-week XR mass action in London in October 2019, Claudia and I attended a street blockade at the Bank junction of the financial district (see Figure 47). After walking around to check if others from PNR were there, we joined a group of people "holding" one of the streets leading off from the junction; they were blocking it off by standing and sitting in the road.



Figure 47: XR street blockade at the Bank junction in London, October 2019. Credit: author's picture

As the gathered group started to thin out, two young people decided it was time to deploy a large banner, held up towards the junction and away from the XR activists gathered behind us. As we stood there, we helped roll it out and ended up holding it up. The banner read “CLIMATE STRUGGLE = CLASS STRUGGLE”; a banner which would have resonated well with my friend Joy (Figure 48). Claudia did seem satisfied with the slogan and kept holding it up as she chatted to others around her.



Figure 48: "Climate struggle = Class struggle" banner at XR action in London, October 2019. Credit: author's picture


After a while, I noticed a worried looking middle-aged man bearing XR badges walking towards the banner. He proceeded to talk to each person holding it. He reached us and asked “have you seen what the banner reads?”. Before we could reply, he continued “And are you okay with that? Do you know those terms shout that we are Marxists – are you familiar with Marx’s arguments?”. Claudia nodded but before she could reply, he explained he was worried we would be alienating the people working in the City from joining the cause of climate change. He then started talking to the people holding the banner next to us, as Claudia looked at me with wide eyes, shrugged and continued her discussion with another activist. After a few minutes, we decided to walk round the junction again to check whether our friends from PNR had managed to join. As we headed back towards the banner, we saw it was being rolled up partially under the instructions of the man, and was now folded awkwardly to read “CLIMATE STRUGGLE”. At this point, the young people who had originally deployed the banner entered a heated discussion with the man, explaining it was their banner and that he could not “literally erase working class voices” from the space. The man, although sympathetic with their argument, was convinced this would dilute the message of the climate emergency and make them look like unrelatable Marxists to everyone else. A woman standing next to us shook her head, and when I asked her what she thought, she replied “I mean I agree with him! This is where all other movements have failed. We need to keep our message focused on the climate! What a shame...”. She was sad to see the two young people getting angrier, and ultimately asking for their banner back. They rolled it up, place it in their backpack, pulled another one out and together rolled it, this time facing it inwards towards the centre of the junction but still blocking the street leading off it. The banner this time read: “DECOLONISE XR” (Figure 49).

I later discovered that the two young activists had been part of XR Scotland. A few days after the end of the two-week long Rebellion, XR Scotland posted a summary of the gathering on their public Facebook page, of which an extract is captured in Figure 50 below.





Figure 49: "Decolonise XR" banner at XR action in London, October 2019. Credit: author's picture

 **Extinction Rebellion Scotland**  
19 October 2019 · 🌐

A core message of XR has been 'we are all in this together'. That climate catastrophe is coming for everyone, whatever class, race or creed, we can all be united by a common cause in the face of a shared threat.

**BUT:**

- People in the Global South are already experiencing floods, drought, famine and unbearable heat that won't affect the North in same way.
- They have been robbed of the resources to be resilient to climate change by the economic system that benefits the richest 1%.
- People living in poverty, in both the Global South and North, due to structural injustice (often people of colour and disabled people) are and will be adversely affected in ways the rich are protected from.
- Migration caused by impacts of climate and ecological emergency is met by hostile border policies that leave people to drown and keeps them in indefinite detention.

Yes, the crisis will come for everyone. But there are massively unjust ways this is damaging some people more than others. And when we erase that, when we ignore the voices of those on the frontlines and who have the most at stake, when we focus only on 'our children' and not the people who are dying now, we risk leaving space for eco-fascism. By refusing to name the causes of both the climate crisis and other social injustices—colonialism and capitalism—XR will continue to alienate the people who are already living at the sharp end of the system that is ultimately killing us all.

Figure 50: Extract from an Extinction Rebellion Scotland Facebook post (Extinction Rebellion Scotland 2019).

Such public messaging around race, class, colonialism and capitalism from an XR group was rare at that stage of the movement. Many of my interlocutors felt that this was due to the way in which XR's third demand – "Beyond Politics" – was interpreted by many XR activists. This demand involved going beyond "party politics" by setting up a citizens assembly mandated to overlook and decide on climate policies. The assembly would consist of a cross-section of the population selected at random

(Extinction Rebellion n.d.).<sup>49</sup> Yet many of my interlocutors felt this tagline was broadly encouraging people to separate climate and environmental concerns from other socio-political issues. The XR activist who folded the banner up in the vignette above was worried about conveying a climate truth too specific, too subjective and committed to a certain vision of the world. He feared this would alienate others and marginalise their climate campaign as one which was partisan to causes other than the climate. However, for many of my interlocutors, this meant his climate activism would not be truthful; it would be detached from intersecting systemic issues and convey environmental “truths from nowhere” (Fryer-Moreira 2021: 27, 28). This could unintentionally reproduce exclusive power dynamics by lacking critical attention to inequalities and vulnerabilities compounded by the climate crisis, instead of disrupting the ‘iterability’ (Thrift 2000: 217) of a wrongful reality. They thus welcomed the Facebook post from XR; the recognition of a crisis needed to be combined with the historical awareness of an unfair ‘system’, as discussed in Ch.2. Witnessing and *truthfully* conveying a sense of climate crisis for them corresponded to a commitment to ground it in such historical realities.

I bring this chapter to an end by introducing my interlocutors’ notion of ‘the matrix’. This term was closely tied to conceptualisations of a harmful ‘system’ and served to make sense of people’s positionality in relation to the ‘system’. It brought attention not only to systemic issues at stake on the frontline, but also to people’s practices and ways of living. It was ambiguous whether one was stuck in ‘the matrix’ and unaware, whether one chose to be stuck or not, or whether one was actively coerced to stay there. My departure from and return to the PNR frontline during fieldwork often prompted the comment “How was it, out there in *the matrix*? [emphasis added]”. Aileen once greeted me with a hug on my return and said “I was starting to get worried for you. It’s not good to be in the matrix for too long [emphasis added]”.<sup>50</sup> While these comments were often made in a joking tone, they were widespread within the movement, particularly amongst camp residents. A young campaigner from a nearby town who regularly came to the roadside and had taken part in forms of direct action explained what he meant by ‘the matrix’:

I've gotten in trouble for using the matrix analogy from some German activists who made a legitimate point that it's quite superior sounding (...) like you're saying that you're the only one who's seen the truth. But I do think it just really sums up. People who are in it don't even see it.

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<sup>49</sup> A Climate Assembly was indeed formed in June 2019 and published a report in 2020 (see Climate Assembly UK 2020; UK Parliament n.d.)

<sup>50</sup> The word was a reference to *The Matrix* films, where a group of enlightened rebels have woken up to the real world and fight to free others from the shackles of energy-hungry machines (Wachowski & Wachowski 1999).

From our conversations, I believe this activist considered himself to be part of ‘the matrix’ somehow, but that he was aware of his position and he could “see the truth” of ‘the matrix’. He was able to do so given his involvement with the anti-fracking campaign. The PNR frontline seemed to be a site where that truth was confronted, noticed, challenged – and witnessed. My interlocutors’ conceptualisations of the ‘system’ and ‘the matrix’ denoted the stakes at the PNR frontline. At stake was not just an energy source, it was a world they did not want to live in and which was sustained by sacrifice zones. It was a world where the climate crisis spelt impending apocalypse, where democracy was broken, where truthfulness was rare. Yet, they did live in this world. They often experienced dissonance or a sense of “being stuck” as it’s all “kinda linked” in the words of my interlocutor Aileen. ‘the matrix’ seemed to maintain itself through projects such as the PNR site – but also by those living in ‘the matrix’ whether they wanted or not.

Thus, in their daily lives and in their involvement with anti-fracking activism, they found themselves in conflicting situations with pro-shale supporters and with some fellow campaigners, conflicts which did not have easy resolutions outside of ‘the matrix’ – even as they tried to distance themselves from it on the frontline. Martin, Josh and others felt the necessity and the responsibility to disrupt the lock-in of a harmful industry, and thereby of a harmful ‘system’. Through their activism on the frontline, they were disrupting the climate crisis-fuelling ‘matrix’, ‘the system’ which says fracking is okay”, to bring into being a reality they wanted to live in.

## Conclusion

Werner Krauss (2009: 162) poses the question of where and how to “locate” climate change, approaching it as a “construction that needs to be handled carefully”. Distributed in space and time, it seems tentacle-like, reaching into every aspect of existence. Timothy Morton (2012) usefully suggests it is a “hyperobject”, a “real object” which we can never sense nor comprehend in its totality. One can see manifestations of a hyperobject, but not the hyperobject itself. It is part of our existence, “sticks” to us, expands in space and time, affecting livelihoods and questioning peoples’ ontological and epistemological foundations (Morton 2012: 100–104). Climate change as a hyperobject confronts humanity with a “super-wicked” problem “for which time is running out, for which there is no central authority, where those seeking the solution are also creating it, and where policies discount the future irrationally”(ibid: 135).

The magnitude and extent of this ‘super-wicked problem’ was deeply terrifying for my interlocutors. Struggling to understand it in any kind of totality, they apprehended and sensed it through thresholds marking the ‘truth’ of a crisis, markers which circulated in reports, sharing circles, presentations, the media or conversations on the frontline. These thresholds elicited terror and fear, but my interlocutors also sensed hope by taking action together and through practices of witnessing on the frontline, as I examine further in Ch.4. Affective intensities enabled possibilities for change to emerge, as

interlocutors re-claimed their ability to temporalise often by engaging with climate grieving and apocalyptic narratives. “Tell the truth and act as if the truth is real”, Jack had urged everyone in the room during the XR talk. I suggest that for my interlocutors, to *truly* realise climate science and act as if it were real meant fully embracing the temporal, emotional, political and moral predicaments of the climate crisis.

For a significant number of my interlocutors, existential realisations about climate change were described and experienced as revelatory, making *recognition* one of the crucial acts of protests on the frontline: recognition of catastrophe, recognition of extinction, recognition of the impact of fossil fuel lock-in, recognition of a need for grieving and transformation. Yet what was included in these acts of recognition varied. Far from being beyond politics, the act of recognition was contentious amongst environmental activists. Indeed notions of climate crisis and various temporal orientations generated “distinctions that (...) established the ground for the ‘is-versus-ought’” (Roitman 2016: 29) to emerge and to be transformed. Taking action to lay the groundworks for a fossil free future meant asking some questions “while others are foreclosed” (ibid: 28, 30), where certain people were included and others not, where certain (hi)stories were included and others were not. The apocalyptic and crisis talk around climate change in my fieldwork thus served to ethically appraise practices, identities, infrastructures, and ways of existing.

The fracking site, as the marker of a potential fossil gas industry, was not just seen as contributing to the climate crisis. It was recognised as the product of a system which led to the climate crisis, the “system that says fracking is okay” as introduced in Ch.1. Taking climate action thus meant resisting not only fracking but also the ‘system’. Bolstered by a tradition of protest and driven by on-going loss and crisis, they took responsibility for creating change on and beyond the physical frontline. They also had to reckon with their own entanglement with the ‘system’, a damaging ‘matrix’ they sought to challenge, transform, or distance themselves from. Conflict and tensions were thus experienced on a range of scales as I will examine in my next chapters: through engagement with the legal system (Ch.4), encounters with figures of authority on the frontline (Ch.5), and webs of responsible relationships at PNR (Ch.6). I will focus on my interlocutors’ practices on the frontline and examine the interrelation with conceptualisations of truth and responsibility, and harm and legality. I will examine how they identified a “legitimate place in the order of things” - and thereby also created opportunities and possibilities to transform that reality (Seller 1985: 28).

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## CHAPTER FOUR – “THE MARGINS OF THE LAW”: WITNESSING HARM

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“With a name like that, it can’t be any good!”

On a cold morning a few weeks into my fieldwork, I stood chatting with Angela in the bellmouth. Angela was a regular presence of the anti-fracking campaign in Lancashire. She and her sister had helped to mobilise local groups of women by coordinating camps, rallies, weekly marches, and group expeditions to other resistance sites. I had met her briefly during my pre-fieldwork trip, but it was the first time I had an occasion to get to know her better. She blew on her steaming cup of coffee; the scattering vapour was a satisfying sign of warmth in the crisp December air. After warming her hands for a few moments, she balanced the mug in one hand and raised the other to wave at a car driving past. The driver smiled back and honked the horn a couple of times, in support of Angela and the other protesters. She took a sip of her coffee, as she watched another driver gesturing rudely at her from his passing car. She shrugged it off and turned to me to recall the first time she had heard about Cuadrilla’s plans:

I read about it in the newspaper: *fracking*. Well, my first thought was, with a name like that, that can’t be any good! [original emphasis]

She laughed and waved enthusiastically at another car, stomping her feet together to keep them warm. The placards and signs around us carried messages such as: “Frack Off!” (Figure 51), “No Fracking Way!”, “the Fracking word is a dirty word!”, “Blackpool, or Frackpool?”. These signs and expressions were puns, meant to be catchy and grab the attention of those driving past the site.

Yet like other humorous terms in my fieldwork, I felt this word was heavy with the sense of something being *wrong*.<sup>51</sup> Fracking was a bad word, an insult, a word announcing harm and destruction, a term that was used as if it was almost self-explanatory, evidently indicating to those who used it that what it referred to *can’t be any good*, in Angela’s words. Reading back over my notes from my conversation with Angela, I noticed that she never explicitly told me what was so destructive about the technical process of fracking, and why she felt so strongly about it. She asserted that it was destructive through some brief keywords – “the land, the air, the climate...” – but did not discuss the

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<sup>51</sup> See Ch.2 for a discussion about my interlocutor’s jokes on an imminent climate and social “Apocalypse”.



details further with me. That she did not explicitly tell me about the technicalities of the contentious extractive process felt like an important omission to me. Surely, I thought, one should know what something consists of, to explain why to take a stand against it? To convince others to take a stand against it?<sup>52</sup>



Figure 51: Wool inscription at the entrance of the fracking site, 2019. Credit: Author's picture

It struck me during my first few months of fieldwork that people at PNR seemed to rarely discuss the technical and mechanical details of fracking. They would state that it was a harmful and destructive industry, but additional details only followed if I specifically asked. The prominence of climate anxieties on the frontline soon became apparent, as discussed in the previous chapter. It also eventually dawned on me that what “fracking” consisted of was precisely what activists were talking about – all the time. They conveyed this when using the word *fracking* and speaking about it in morally loaded terms. On multiple occasions, fracking was described to me as “raping the earth”, “poisoning the land”, as “injecting toxic sludge” underground. The convoys of equipment and machineries entering the site were “destructive weapons” or “weapons of destruction”. These words

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<sup>52</sup> I will add here that roadside protests at PNR had been ongoing for nearly three years by the time I started fieldwork in 2019. Angela had herself been campaigning against fracking for seven years, prior to the building of the site. She, and many others, had started their research about fracking years ago and in their vocabulary, fracking was well anchored as a “dirty word”. Additionally, in the years leading up to 2019, fracking and the campaign against it had garnered media attention. Journalists would often travel to resistance sites such as PNR to interview activists, and ask them about their objections to fracking – interview fatigue was palpable. Therefore, that Angela did not dive into her detailed objections about fracking during a casual chat with me is perhaps not that surprising. It was by then obvious to her that fracking was wrong, and she had explained it many times to many people before me.



formed central parts of the justifications for direct actions, actions which would land my interlocutors in the courtrooms. It also quickly became apparent that operational technicalities of the site were of great significance for my interlocutors. They learnt about legal rules and regulations, and from the monitoring station described in Ch.1, tracked closely what unfolded on the roadside. Different depictions of fracking indexed one another; the technical details and operations, and the visceral emotions and moral comments. These depictions were entangled and for my interlocutors, whatever language was being used at any given time, the truth of fracking did and *should* engage multiple dimensions. What happened when my friends were confronted with notions of legal truth then? What did evidence and witnessing mean on the frontline and in the legal arena?

In the previous chapters, I have explored fears of climate, environmental and social collapse, as well as the prevalent sense amongst interlocutors of a ‘system’ (closely linked to what they called ‘the matrix’) which they are intentionally or unintentionally challenging, changing, or evading in their involvement with anti-fracking activism. This chapter focuses on one of the spaces that make up the “system that says fracking is okay” – the legal arena. I will use the expression *legal system* interchangeably with *legal space*, or *legal arena*, as a broad way of describing the network of laws, regulations, courtrooms, legal institutions and legal professionals. In some places, I refer to *inside the courtroom*, or *outside the courtroom* to distinguish the different spaces in which my interlocutors encountered the legal system.<sup>53</sup> I will examine my interlocutors’ witnessing on the roadside and how they gathered ‘evidence’ about fracking’s harms. I examine how such evidence converged or diverged from notions of truth and evidence within legal frameworks. To do so I draw on conceptualisations of harm, legality and morality, notions which lead us to ask crucial questions against the backdrop of climate change and calls for energy transitions: what kind of political and environmental interests are recognised as valid in the eyes of the law? To what extent are interests of the natural environment separate from human interests, and how are these varieties of interests represented and recognised (or not) in courtrooms? I will bear these questions in mind as I explore my interlocutors’ hopes and frustrations in their encounters with the legal system.

In doing so, this chapter contributes to my suggestion that truth and truthfulness were not solely tied to notions of representation in my fieldwork. Truth was realised with others and in the eyes of various audiences (see Graeber 2001: 76, 78, 87). The legal arena did not seem to constitute the right ‘audience’ for many of my interlocutors. Indeed, some were reticent to engage with the legal system, seeing it as inaccessible and “two-tiered” in their words. They experienced stark inequalities in accessing fair legal representation in the courts. This contributed to an overall anger with the ‘system’, which they increasingly found untenable to live with. Yet, they also found it increasingly difficult to

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<sup>53</sup> In the next chapter I explore encounters with the police force. The latter is part of the criminal justice system, which draws on laws passed by the government; the police force, the government, and the legal system are closely linked. I therefore interrogate the broad links between them – as my interlocutors do – but attempt to keep them separate analytically, since they were at times experienced separately in my fieldwork.

live outside the ‘system’. They were “stuck in the matrix” in the words of one of my interlocutors, as they looked towards the legal system for achieving some of their campaign’s aims, whilst simultaneously finding it difficult to make the ‘system’ work for them and for the natural environment they were trying to protect.

### Regulating fracking, or witnessing harm?

As discussed in Ch.1, the polarised national debate around fracking technicalities revolved around seismic concerns, water and air pollution, public health impacts and methane emissions. Shale gas proponents and anti-fracking campaigners disagreed on safety concerns and conceptualisations of harm associated with the industry. Criminologist Rob White (2014) contextualises various instances of environmental law and regulations, indicating that concerns for varying degrees of environmental harm are often located in the regulatory sphere rather than pertaining to criminal law. He reports that the “broad tendency under neoliberalism has been toward deregulation (or, as a variation of this, ‘self-regulation’) when it comes to corporate harm and wrongdoing” (ibid: 1356).<sup>54</sup> White suggests that campaigners find themselves stepping “into the breach” between harm and crime, and are faced with moral and legal complexities when the only “bad” that comes to matter is the one “deemed to be legal” (ibid: 1354). In the next section I will further examine conceptualisations of harm. I focus here on notions of evidence and witnessing as they emerged in relation to regulations on the frontline.

“Stepping into the breach” on the frontline for my interlocutors covered a wide range of concerns. They wanted to defend that which was being harmed and prevent any further damage through using disruptive protest and direct action as other avenues appeared closed. They also cared about adequate regulations and safety standards, and despised what they perceived as hypocritical behaviour on the part of Cuadrilla and its regulators. Monitoring the site blended the former necessity for action with the latter concern about *what truly happened* on the roadside. Indeed, a strong rallying point for my friends on the frontline was the shared anger regarding Cuadrilla breaching the regulations in place without any serious consequences. As my interlocutor Martin put it: “they said don't worry, we're highly regulated. Well, it's nonsense, they're self-regulated. That's the truth of the matter, it's self-regulation, not regulation”. The campaigners at PNR had found the company in breach of environmental and planning permits on multiple occasions, as well as committed several noticeable mistakes. Between 2017 and 2018, Cuadrilla breached their water regulation permit three times due to surface drainage issues, their waste management permit, and low-level methane emissions were

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<sup>54</sup> See also Peter Benson’s and Stuart Kirsch’s (2010: 461) work on ‘harm industries’ which are “destructive or harmful to people and the environment: harm is part and parcel of their normal functioning”. Benson and Kirsch suggest that such industries respond to forms of social and governmental critique by actively managing harm rather than preventing it.

linked to their on-site storage tanks containing fracking flow-back (BBC News 2018; Hope & Scott 2018; Seaman 2018). In 2019, during my fieldwork, Cuadrilla were found in breach of another regulation, preventing them from cold venting methane, unless there are critical safety reasons requiring it. Despite having no such safety issue, Cuadrilla cold vented an estimated 2.7 to 6.8 tonnes of methane and failed to adequately monitor and report this to the Environmental Agency (EA) (Hayhurst 2019e).<sup>55</sup> None of these breaches resulted in any visible action against Cuadrilla nor halted its operations, which shocked my interlocutors.

Interlocutors took it on themselves to research the fracking process and monitor the site 24 hours a day for close to three years – if the EA did not hold the company to account for the harms they might cause, then my interlocutors would. On monitoring duties, people paid attention to smells, sounds, any movement coming from the fracking site. They regularly walked up the road towards Preston, to get a view of the site from a different angle and take pictures from there. Observations were written down in carefully kept logbooks, regularly replaced and stored in the home of one of the activists, then typed up in digital formats. In the logbooks, people typically noted a date and timestamp, the registration plates of the vehicles entering the site, and any indication of the vehicle's company (Figure 52). The movement of the cranes on site was often tracked to the minute, with records of which direction it swung to, how high the crane necks seemed to be. Activists would calculate how much liquid they estimated to have left the site by checking the volumes of the water tankers entering and leaving the sites. Other movements on the roadside were recorded as well, such as how many police vans were stationed on the roadside on a specific day.

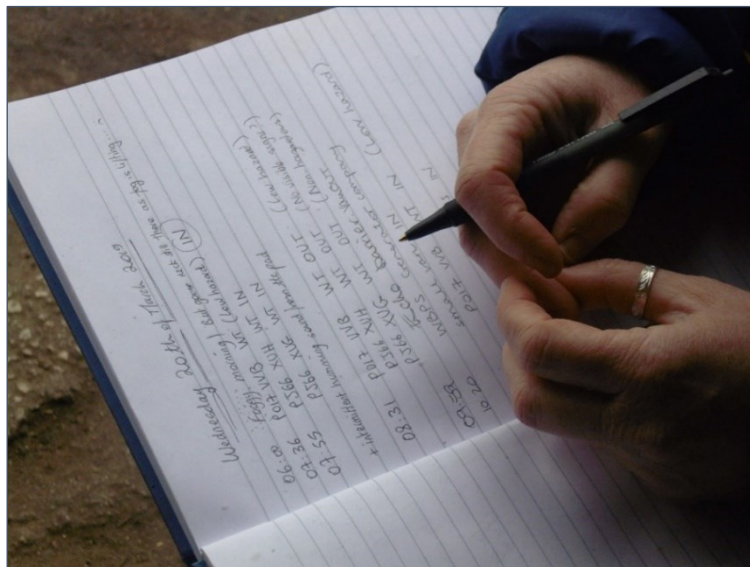


Figure 52: Campaigner on monitoring duties at gatecamp logging vehicle movement in the logbook, March 2019. Credit: author's picture

<sup>55</sup> This occurred after Cuadrilla had to revert to 'nitrogen lifts'; this procedure helped to recover the gas after the fracking phase. It diluted the concentration of methane in the recovered gas and made it harder to ignite in the flare stacks.

Throughout the well drilling phases, people meticulously counted the number of pipes being put down the well, and those coming back up. Aileen, who I spent many hours and nightshifts with at gatecamp, always proudly repeated: “We were only off by a few meters!!”. Those on monitoring shifts during this phase noticed that the drilling rig had some problems and observed through binoculars that attempts were made to get something out of the well. Cuadrilla disclosed months later that one of their drill heads detached itself and got stuck in the well. Unable to retrieve it, workers had to push the piece of equipment to the far end of the well – where it still is today. “We knew something was wrong, and they just didn’t want to say it. So I just call their operational announcements ‘lie o’clock’!” Aileen told me. During fracking phases and as mentioned in Ch.1, Aileen and others also closely tracked local seismic events via the British Geological Survey’s website, adding seismic updates to their observations noted down in the logbooks.

The monitoring was continuous from the first day of construction in 2017 until the day gatecamp was taken down by campaigners themselves in November 2019. Over time, activists decided to set up a rota system to avoid people “getting stuck” on the roadside feeling like they could not leave lest they miss something important.<sup>56</sup> Local supporters, some of which could not be at the roadside due to their schedule or caring commitments, also organised a food rota and took it in turn to cook, to ensure people on nightshift had warm vegan food every evening. Aileen once told me: “they say it’s the most monitored fossil fuel site in the UK – that’s thanks to us, not the Environmental Agency. They [Cuadrilla] would just be even more dodgy if we took our eyes off them”. The information collected through monitoring shifts could be used by campaigners to challenge the shale gas industry and its regulators - in Freedom of Information (FOIs) requests addressed to regulators like the EA, questions sent to local political representatives and the CLG meetings, asking for clarity or condemning the breaches observed.<sup>57</sup> Information was shared daily on social media to update those who could not be present at the roadside. Aileen and others also regularly checked investors forums online, where shareholders of AJ Lucas stocks, Cuadrilla’s main shareholder, would discuss the information reported by campaigners on the roadside.<sup>58</sup> Social media use also served to put pressure on Cuadrilla’s PR teams. Some interlocutors “called out” the company through frequent “tweets” and “tags” on social media, asking them to elaborate on what had been seen at the roadside, or pressing them about their “lies” in press releases.

My interlocutors’ style of reporting in the logbooks was distinctive and unlike information found in material published by the industry or regulators. Aileen commonly took the time to write narrative paragraphs describing the weather, the mood on the roadside, how she and others felt that day. She, and many others, also used their own terminology to describe the objects they saw. Aileen had

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<sup>56</sup> The monitoring rota also ensured there was always at least one person at gatecamp at all time. Gatecamp’s squatting status required this to avoid it being taken down by the council.

<sup>57</sup> The CLG was introduced in Ch.2, see p.77.

<sup>58</sup> AJ Lucas Group is an Australian firm and is Cuadrilla Resources’ majority shareholder (see AJ Lucas Group n.d.).

specific human-like names for different cranes and elements of the rig assembled on site and created short stories with equipment pieces as the main characters. Typically, the stories narrated how frustrated and sad the machinery felt at being deployed to the site to “destroy the land” (in my interlocutors’ words). A public Facebook page was even set up to narrate the life of ‘Rusty the Rig’, the drilling rig which operated on site throughout 2017 (see Figure 53 below, where Cuadrilla workers are referred to as “the hard hats”).

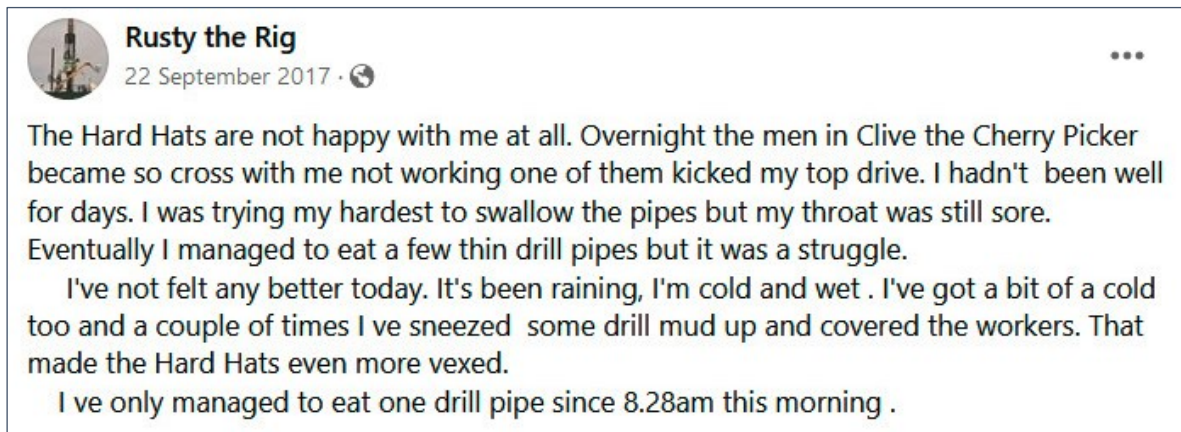


Figure 53: Social media post on the "Rusty the Rig" Facebook page (Rusty the Rig 2017).

When I asked Aileen about these stories, she explained:

Our own language, our vernacular! (...) If people don't know the name of the machine or what kind of equipment it is, they can talk about Rusty the Rig. That way, everyone can join in (...) It's our activist folklore.

Aileen insisted that through the logbooks, social media posts, and inclusive ‘folklore’, campaigners collectively had the ability to “shed light on what really went on; and when it’s needed, we’ll be able to say ‘they knew’”.

Szolucha (2021: 78, 89, 84) gives an insightful and detailed account of such monitoring activities on the PNR frontline as a form of engagement with infrastructures on people’s “own terms”, as a way of distancing themselves from the “corporatized state” and as a response to socio-political “erasure (...) and disenfranchisement”. Monitoring in this way can also be explained as a form of “citizen science”, an engagement with scientific and regulatory procedures and the building of expertise to challenge the industry on its practices (Wylie et al. 2017; Zilliox & Smith 2018). Powell (:181, 184) has also explored activist practices as forms of “affective politics” inscribed in multi-dimensional “landscapes”, practices which combined technical, emotional, and embodied forms of engagement with energy infrastructures. I suggest that Aileen and others saw themselves as witnessing, in their “own terms”, *what truly happened* on the roadside. The witnessing terminology offers crossovers with legal terminology, as a “witness” in a court of law is someone who provides formal or sworn evidence

and will “testify to, attest; furnish oral or written evidence of”; outside of the formal courtroom setting, a witness can be “a person who sees something happen”, and a person who shows “that something exists or is true” (OED n.d.). Such definitions offer a fruitful mirror to the double meaning of evidence discussed by Thomas Csordas (2004). He suggests an analytical object can be ‘evident’ for researchers and interlocutors alike, and also that evidence is that which needs finding, gathering, organising with an end of proving something. Both the ‘evident’ and ‘evidence’ in this sense can manifest through affective experiences, story-telling and ‘folklore, as well as through meticulous and detailed technical observations. Vaugh and Fischer (2021: 388) suggest that witnessing is an act which:

giv[es] recognition to those condemned from society. Others emphasize that witnessing is an ethical gesture or act of community building, at the same time that it anchors competing notions of observation and evidence.

My interlocutors placed a high value on “being there” (Fryer-Moreira 2021: 26) as a way of witnessing and gathering evidence about what fracking *truly was*. Witnessing on the roadside transformed immediate observation or experiences, to established ‘facts’ in order to ‘evidence’ the true reality of fracking operations (see also Hastrup 2004, for a discussion on how the line between facts and evidence can be artificially drawn to establish a sense of truth). Monitoring in this sense was perceived as a way of collectively gathering evidence about the *true nature* of the shale gas industry by tending to that which was obvious to them in their observations: the harm occurring on the roadside, the lack of competence of Cuadrilla, its lack of respect for legal regulations, and the necessity of preventing harm from being done. Logging her mood into the logbooks, and using her stories, was a way for Aileen to inscribe fracking with what she saw as its rightful meaning. The blend of accounts in these documents put together on the physical frontline conveyed the campaigners’ sense of what the industry and the fracking process consisted of, offering a record of what they deemed a truthful account (see also Riles 2006 on the insights that can be gained from studying documentary practices and the “artefacts” they produce). My interlocutors therefore cared about researching, informing themselves, they cared about establishing what “really went on” by using a range of registers in their evidence. They also cared about sharing with people why they saw fracking as wrong and finding a good way to convey this.

These practices of witnessing as a way of engaging with industry regulations show that the PNR frontline can be an onto-epistemic frontline whereby different truths and harms are witnessed and circulated. I also suggest that the need to witness fracking emerged from my interlocutors’ conceptualisations of historical and contemporary regional landscapes described in Ch.1 and 2, through the existential anxieties over the climate crisis and the adamant opposition to hydrocarbon



extraction as a result of this, through the brutal encounter with the local constabulary (as I examine in Ch.5), as well as through the conceptualisations of harm and morality which I turn to in the next section.

The disputed science and evidence outside of the courtrooms and in the regulatory space were met with what my interlocutors perceived to be “narrow” and technical legal debates inside the courtrooms. My interlocutors perceived the truths evidenced in the courtrooms to be articulated through a wrongful set of hierarchised rights. Whilst there seemed to be room for much interpretation of how things were in trials, my interlocutors experienced this flexibility to be seldom in their favour. They were angered that their sense of morality and their meticulous research was not taken into account inside the courtrooms, which pushed them to further question the ways in which harm is realised scientifically, morally and legally in the legal arena more broadly. Whose reality, whose morality and whose legality takes precedence in the legal arena?

#### Articulation of rights and the “margins of the law”

“I therefore find there is no case to answer”, the judge announced to the courtroom, and to the group of defendants who sat in their seats waiting for the verdict. Exclamations of joy and happiness, sighs of relief, and some tears started to appear from my friends on trial that day, and from the supporting friends and fellow activists who had come to watch. In March 2019, I spent two days sitting in Blackpool Magistrates’ Court listening to the prosecution’s arguments against the defendants. A few months earlier, my interlocutors had taken part in direct action at the entrance of the fracking site. In an elaborate formation, they had locked-on in pairs lying in the bellmouth, whilst two others sat out of reach on erected monopods as depicted in Figure 54.<sup>59</sup>



Figure 54: Lock-ons and tripods in the bellmouth, October 2018. Credit: Debs Whiteside

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<sup>59</sup> Tripods or monopods are designed to be erected swiftly, to stand alone and be stable enough to carry a person’s weight. Like lock-on devices, they serve to blockade a site by making it difficult for the police to remove protesters and can thus be particularly effective at delaying deliveries to targeted sites.

One of my interlocutors, a defendant on trial, had told me a few days earlier that I would be “better off doing gatecamp than coming for court support (...) it’s always so boring”, she sighed. This was not her first time in court for actions carried out at PNR, and she seemed fed up with the judicial process. Yet hearing the judge’s announcement in the courtroom that day, she seemed stunned. She stood up with the others to join the “court support” crew at the back of the courtroom, and as I took a step towards her, I noticed she was wiping a few tears rolling down her cheeks. I clumsily reached out to her with my hand; she sniffed and said “It’s okay, I’m fine. It’s just... Well, it’s not often you see justice being done”. I held her words in my head, and as people started pouring out of the room in a happy and emotional atmosphere, I joined Pip, the local councillor who was openly supportive of and involved with the anti-fracking campaign. She had also come to support those people on trial. We made our way towards the exit and when I asked her what she thought of the trial result, Pip echoed the words the defendant had said only a few minutes beforehand. “It was such poor evidence ... But then again, the Crown usually gets its way. Not this time though!” she grinned. We reached the outdoors steps leading into the courts, blinking in the afternoon sunshine. We walked out into the chilly Blackpool breeze, and after chatting with a few people, I took a step aside as all the defendants lined up for a proud photograph in the sunshine. Later that day, Pip posted the picture on social media, with an accompanying text:

Three years ago I never really questioned ‘systems’. I expected them to be flawed, but overall fit for purpose. Having experienced the CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] over two years I have a very different opinion. Therefore I was delighted that the judge ruled today that there was no case to answer because the case brought by the CPS was woefully lacking in evidence and therefore could not have proved the charges beyond reasonable doubt. The CPS are clearly under resourced and I fear may have got too used to having cases heard by magistrates who may apply less scrutiny to the burden of proof. Makes me wonder - how many times? Also, how much does all of this cost? (...) Today the right verdict was given. But there's a cost to all this quite apart from the monetary cost.

(Posted 26<sup>th</sup> March 2019, Facebook)

For Pip and my interlocutor on trial, the outcome of the trial was one they were pleased with, but also surprised by. Their comments expressed disappointment and anger with the ‘system’ we live with. More often than not, they had experienced a legal arena which did not recognise the “costs” to fracking and to prosecuting anti-fracking activists. Recognition could sometimes occur but remained frustrating as Clem told us that afternoon, when we got back to the protest camp.

Clem, who had also come to support her friends in court, was a staple and well-liked figure on the anti-fracking frontline. She lived on the protest camp most of the time, and occasionally travelled

back to her nearby home city to stay in touch with relatives needing caring for. She had been involved in countless direct actions at PNR and across the UK to raise awareness about the climate and ecological crisis. On one occasion, she travelled to London to attend a trial for an action she had participated in with XR with the aim of protesting fracking, as well as other environmentally damaging projects such as a third runway at Heathrow airport. Her and other activists had blockaded the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in Westminster by gluing themselves to the entrance doors, lying down in front of them, deploying lock-ons and spray-painting the windows. She told us she had received a guilty verdict at the trial – but also recounted the brief exchange she had had with one of the judges. They crossed paths outside the courthouse on the way to the Underground, and the judge had apparently bid her farewell by saying: “I’m sorry, but we have to operate within the *margins of the law*... But I think what you did is brilliant and needed – best of luck! [emphasis added]”. Clem, Pip and others found the judge’s comment to be both motivating as well as frustrating. It was motivating to be commended by a judge, and even encouraged to keep going. However, that she did not have the power, or chose not to exercise it, to shift *the margins of the law* was frustrating and revealed an articulation of legal rights which did not recognise the harms they were witnessing on the frontline.

Points of contention were articulated around whose and what rights take primacy in different circumstances and when defining harm. Contention thus also revolved around conceptualisations of the natural environment and who can speak for it – or rather “from it” (de la Cadena 2015: 45). Such reflections contextualise the contradictions experienced by my interlocutors and in many environmental movements around the world. How “seriously” are different worldviews treated in official and institutionalised settings, and what comes to count as evident truth (Blaser 2013; de la Cadena 2015)?

My interlocutors at PNR defended the right to protest peacefully against fracking, bolstered in their actions by the articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The articles respectively refer to “the freedom of expression” and “the freedom of assembly and association” (Council of Europe & European Courts of Human Rights 1953). However, my interlocutors were aware that by taking part in direct action and protest activities, they risked acquiring a criminal record and entering a process that was often draining. Dates were arranged by the courts for my interlocutors to attend plea hearings, case managements, and finally trials; these dates could often be changed on the day, or the location could change with little notification, even as people had already arrived to attend. Typically, people had to take sick days from work and pay the financial cost for travelling to attend administrative court proceedings. Iris, one of my interlocutors who did not live in Lancashire, appealed one of her convictions (obstruction of the highway, also at PNR) and had to travel several times to Lancashire for this. She eventually won the appeal, but was shocked by the magistrate’s repeated comments on her bad character, calling her a “troublemaker” who did not regret her actions. She told me:

I came out of there wanting to cry, even though I'd won! I just wanted to scream to the courts, how else am I supposed to save the planet?! (...) I think it's [the whole legal procedures] probably meant to make us stressed, to try and put us off from protesting.

Some interlocutors who had been in court for protest-related activities at PNR expressed similar views and pointed out how prosecutors often tried to make the defendants look unreliable, question their memory, and press them to say they had been lying. Whilst this might be common when arguing a case, it was nevertheless destabilising for my interlocutors, particularly when in court for the first time. Such experiences could impact their motivation to continue "going to the roadside". Yet, they also were conflicted; "how else [were they] supposed to save the planet"?

Knowing, or discovering at PNR, that they could be negatively impacted and criminalised for their actions did not necessarily mean my interlocutors embraced this. They were frustrated to find themselves living in a 'system' where their actions were condemned in the courtrooms. They felt they were taking responsibility for the knowledge and evidence they had acquired proving what fracking *truly was*. They felt they were acting out of a sense of morality and good conscience – particularly in their knowledge that they were seeking to prevent what they considered to be harm from being done to the vital ecosystems humans form a part of.

Josh combined multiple conceptualisations of rights in such a knowledge and in his experience of direct action and the legal justice system. He was one of the defendants in the tripod action mentioned above. As we travelled back to the protest camp on the day of the verdict, I asked him what he thought of the judge's decision. His reaction to her dismissal of the case was not one of victory: "well, it doesn't make what Cuadrilla is doing illegal". Josh had not been hoping for a non-guilty verdict or a dismissed case; he was hoping for a much more difficult win that the legal system could not offer him that day. Even whilst he recognised that the judge had applied existing laws in a "just" way for a change, he saw the 'system' as a whole as being flawed.

To understand this better, I probed Josh on this one afternoon on the protest camp. We were sat in front of the shack he had built in the anti-fracking camp, catching the intermittent warmth from the sun as it peaked out from its cloudy cover. I had asked how he had experienced the UK's legal system as an anti-fracking activist. Josh took a drag from his cigarette as he attempted to answer my question:

I used to think that going to court is just like paying the activist tax. It was just a thing that you had to do (...). The legal system is a given. If you are going to engage in activism that works, then you are going to get arrested some of the time. You're stuck with your involvement in that system, it's happening whether you wanted to or not. (...). So you can do nothing and just let things happen as they will, you can try and work within the system to get

yourself a case dismissed, or a not guilty verdict or whatever. Or, you can use the process to campaign for a change.

Josh explained he would often self-represent for his trials. Whilst potentially requiring more preparation and self-education about the law, Josh saw it as a way to “speak the truth” and to “campaign for a change”.<sup>60</sup> He explained to me that by standing up and representing himself in court, he could put forward to the judges his reasons for carrying out direct action, rather than pursue a tactical legal approach that would more likely get him acquitted. Perhaps it also aligned with his view of direct action – not expecting others to act on your behalf and to do something yourself – but he did not elaborate on this.

In Ch.1, I mentioned the bundle of documents Josh had, outlining the negative impacts of fracking on people’s health and the environment. He had gathered this ‘evidence’ to present in court and to justify his actions. He explained that he was attempting to convince the judges “that the science is what it is” and demonstrate why he could not in “good conscience” let Cuadrilla carry out fracking operations. Josh was questioning the law by wanting Cuadrilla’s activity to be considered illegal based on national and international scientific *evidence* that it was a harmful industry. As he put it:

It [fracking] is destructive, it’s going to put people out of work, it’s going to damage people’s health; yet, it’s fucking lawful. How can that even be? There’s a humongous great gap in the law, which is what Polly Higgins saw.

He indignantly reminded me:

How can this [fracking] be when Article 2 gives us the right to life? ‘Everyone’s right to life shall be protected by law.’ The government has a fucking legal responsibility to protect its fucking citizens’ right to life.<sup>61</sup>

Josh was a keen supporter of recognising “ecocide” as a criminal violation in international law, a campaign spearheaded by the late British lawyer Polly Higgins (Stop Ecocide n.d.). In a definition she

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<sup>60</sup> Josh would often be on trial alongside fellow activists who themselves had legal representation in court. This meant he could still benefit from legal advice as solicitors briefed their clients prior to stepping inside the courtroom, and he had the option to adopt their line of argument during the trial.

<sup>61</sup> Josh was referring to the Article 2 of the Human Rights Act adopted in 1998 in the UK, protecting the right to life (HM Government 1998). The UK’s Equality and Human Rights Commission state that: “Nobody, including the Government, can try to end your life. It also means the Government should take appropriate measures to safeguard life by making laws to protect you and, in some circumstances, by taking steps to protect you if your life is at risk” (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2021).

presented in 2010 to the UN Law Committee, Higgins defined ecocide as “the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished” (Higgins et al. 2013: 257). On the Stop Ecocide campaign website, it is stated that “activists and earth protectors” are invited to sign up to become a “conscientious protector” – i.e. someone who is putting themselves in a situation of potentially breaking the law as a matter of conscience, to prevent harm rather than cause it (Stop Ecocide n.d.). By signing up to the open trust fund (with a minimum donation of £5), activists gain access to a document legally recognised in court outlining their status as a conscientious protector. This document was also part of Josh’s bundle; he explained to me that the document had to be accepted as evidence by the judges, but they did not have to take it into account during the trial. In his experience, it never was taken into account, and environmental damage and climate change were not considered to be relevant to the charges he was prosecuted for (mostly the charge of obstruction of the highway).



Figure 55: Conscientious Protector sign on a drum at the PNR roadside, summer 2019. Credit: author's picture

Josh wanted his moral stance to be recognised as a valid part of the trial, and for the legal system to recognise environmental “harm” as a basis for legal criminality. Such concerns with harm, morality and legality in relation to the natural environment are discussed in the growing field of Green Criminology. Vincenzo Ruggiero and Nigel South (2013: 360) define Green Criminology as a “framework of intellectual, empirical and political orientations toward primary and secondary harms, offences and crimes that impact in a damaging way on the natural environment, diverse species (human and non-human) and the planet”. Developed from the 1970s onwards, the subject content of green criminology is broad. The literature covers matters of industrial waste management and



pollution, the impact of chemicals manufacturing for workers and non-humans, conservation issues around trafficking and poaching of wildlife, animal welfare in farming as well as in their natural habitats – and more recently, climate change (Higgins et al. 2013; South et al. 2014; White 2014a, 2014b). The interests of researchers in the field are broadened by their use of the notion of *harm* to go beyond the legal definition of what constitutes criminal activity. As my interlocutors did when apprehending fracking operations on the roadside, the notion of harm enables in this way a consideration of practices that may be lawful, but have destructive environmental consequences for the natural landscapes and their inhabitants.

However, bringing an environmental sensitivity to legal systems often clashes with rights which are already legally protected by these systems. Avi Brisman (2014: 1350) discusses this in his reflection on the notion of *environmental rights* – taken either as an extension to the field of human rights or as an additional category to draw on legally – observing that “environmental protection, regardless of whether it is couched in the language of rights, is frequently at odds with cherished property “rights”. My interlocutors difficultly accepted that such rights took precedence, as well as Cuadrilla’s right to work, over a more urgent need to legally recognise environmental harm. In a suggestion which my interlocutors would subscribe to, Brisman remarks that “proponents of environmental rights may find that property ownership and consumption have become so intertwined with Western notions of identity and personhood that the distinctions between the right to property and the right to freedom of expression and the right to life have collapsed” (ibid: 1350). In this context, taking action against environmentally damaging practices was not easy within most legal systems, mainly as a result of the rights they were set up to protect already.

For example in late September 2018, four anti-fracking activists were sentenced up to 16 months in prison on charges of public nuisance for lorry surfing: during a protest at PNR, they climbed on lorries delivering equipment to the site and caused an obstruction to the highway for 99 hours (Hayhurst 2018b, 2018c; Perraudin 2018). The judge passing the sentence stated the activists were:

motivated by an unswerving confidence that they are right (...) Even at their trial they felt justified by their actions. Given the disruption caused in this case, only immediate custody can achieve sufficient punishment (...) Although defendants were motivated by a serious concern for the environment, they saw the public as necessary and justified collateral damage (Perraudin 2018).

In his interpretation of the law on behalf of the state, the judge weighed up different rights and established the activists as the legal perpetrators of harm. The victims in this framing were locals impacted by the highway obstruction, the police force through the policing costs it incurred, and Cuadrilla through the impact to their lawful operations. The judge focused on the impacts on local people, and also drew on private property rights and the right to work. As a contrast, one of the

sentenced activists explained in a video released a few hours after the ruling that they were acting to prevent harm from being done – harm involving everyone, from the local environment and its inhabitants through potential soil pollution, and damage to the global climate through possible methane emissions from the fracking site – and therefore damage to all inhabitants of the planet. The activists were also defending the local council’s decision (representing local constituents) to refuse Cuadrilla’s planning application, as discussed in Ch.1. In the activists’ eyes, the perpetrators of harm were Cuadrilla and the government, and the victims (or the “necessary and justified collateral damage”) were the natural environment and all its inhabitants. For Josh and for the Frack Free Four, in the face of such a serious harm, Cuadrilla’s right to work should not take precedence over people’s right to life. In light of my interlocutors’ existential realisations about the climate crisis, they thought the remit of direct action trials should always include discussing the ‘nature’ of what activists were seeking to prevent.

On the occasion of the dismissed tripod trial described earlier, fracking was not discussed per se but the judge recognised my interlocutors’ aims in other ways. In previous similar direct action cases, the focus for the prosecution had been on proving there had been an “obstruction of the highway”. This charge was the source of the “boring” hours my interlocutor on trial had referred to when advising me to stay on camp rather than accompany them to court: hours spent discussing the official boundary between the public carriageway and private land. This time however, the judge had made clear at the outset of the trial that the case would be considered in terms of “reasonable use of the highway”, recognising the potential for defendants to argue they were using the highway reasonably to exercise their right to protest. This framing was based on a political protest case from 2019 at an arms fair in London, where anti-arms protesters used a lock-on on the highway. In the latter trial, the judges did not consider the obstruction of the highway to be a criminal offense, and found their use of the highway to be reasonable; “there is no primacy of the rights of road users over the rights of protesters” (Pritchard 2019). In my interlocutors’ tripod case, the state prosecution had spent a considerable amount of time questioning the boundary between the public highway and private land, prompting the judge to rule that the evidence they had brought forward was irrelevant to the matter at hand; she dismissed the case. Whilst the remit of the court did not include a close discussion of the activity they were protesting against and the environmental harm associated with it, the framing recognised the political nature of the defendants’ actions and their legal right to protest.

This shows my interlocutors’ activism as inscribed in a broader legal articulation of rights, harm, environmental protection and climate change. An increasing number of climate litigation cases have been recorded over the last decades globally, typically filed by individuals or organisations against governments or corporations (Setzer & Byrnes 2020). Some have focused on the responsibilities of nation-states in the face of climate change, in line with ratified international agreements such as the 2015 Paris International Climate Agreements, which bind signatories to outline emissions reduction consistent with keeping global warming under a 2°C threshold (UNFCCC 2015). A landmark case in this regard was won in 2015 by the not-for-profit Urgenda Foundation against the state in The

Netherlands. The judgement, upheld by the Dutch Supreme Court in 2019, ruled the state responsible for protecting its citizens against climate change, finding their current emissions reduction plans unlawful – the verdict legally required the state to instead curb its emissions by the end of this year by 25% compared to 1990 levels (Kaminski 2019; Neslen 2015). The human “right to life” inscribed in Article 8 of the ECHR was invoked to justify the ruling; an example of the increasing trend of invoking human rights to address environmental and climate issues (Setzer & Byrnes 2020).

In other cases, approaches led by indigenous movements challenge human-centric conceptualisations of legal rights. In 2008, the Ecuadorian state inscribed “rights of nature” in a chapter of its new constitution, and in 2011, the state of Bolivia announced the “Law of Mother Earth” which would grant equal rights to humans and nature (Government of Ecuador 2008; Vidal 2011).<sup>62</sup> Thus on the one hand, ecocide is the recognition of human-centric rights in relation to the defence of nature: humans have the right to life in a clean environment. In this reading, the natural environment in which humans live needs to be respected by virtue of its importance for human existence. On the other hand, ecocide could recognise the inherent importance of the ecosystems we are part of, without ranking human above all else. Many of my own interlocutors would have subscribed to the latter notion. They referred to themselves and other activists as “earth protectors” or “water protectors”, and shared the sense that humans were part of a broader ecosystem to be taken care of and protected from harm as a whole. “I don’t talk about it much because people might think it’s weird” Sabine told me during an interview – the interlocutor mentioned in Ch.3 who really worried about species extinction – “but I had a sort of experience at Maple”. I nodded, curious at her mysterious tone of voice, as she continued:

Well, I was just lying in my tent, you know taking a break from the gates. And I just *felt* the land under me. I really felt it. And I knew this is what I should be doing, protecting it. It was so bizarre, like it was calling me or something! Anyway, it’s silly I know.

Sabine excused herself in a giggle for sounding “silly”, but she was very serious about her experience, and said it was the first time anything like that had happened to her. On another occasion, a regular on the roadside monitoring shifts at PNR took me on a tour of Preston, to give me a sense of its history. He told me about the cotton mills, the old docks, and took me to Winckley Square where at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Edith Rigby, one of the Suffragettes, lived and founded an educational space for women to learn in after school (see Brown 2004). He was also adamant we should walk a vast stretch of the river Ribble which flows through Preston. As it was the beginning of spring, he kept stopping

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<sup>62</sup> The article in the Constitution of Ecuador reads as such: “Nature, or Pacha Mama, where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes” (Government of Ecuador 2008).

to marvel at the blossoming greenery along the way. He stopped a few times to sit on benches facing the river to just watch the bird life and the quiet waters. At some point, he reflected quietly: “Digging up all our fossilised ancestors to power the world we live in... Surely that’s not right. We’ve disturbed everything”. We continued our walk, and upon seeing some newly bloomed flowers along the path and bees around them, he stopped and exclaimed “Who told nature when to blossom? I mean, how can we think we’re the most advanced and intelligent species on Earth!?”.

The human right to life co-existed with rights for nature in my interlocutors’ account of their anti-fracking activism – sometimes in combination, sometimes overlapping, often converging together. Taking part in direct action at the roadside was therefore conceptualised by my interlocutors as a genuine act of protection and defence of the right “to life”, human life, as well as the right “of life”, the living ecosystem humans were part of. However, the human centric “right to life” seemed already inscribed in most European legal systems as opposed to a broader recognition of worthy and vital ecosystems that humans are part of and depend on.

In this way, witnessing what fracking *truly was* for my interlocutors – namely a harmful and destructive industry – called on multiple registers and different conceptualisations of rights. They held that the right thing to do was defending that which was being harmed and preventing any further damage through protest and direct action. When they thereafter found themselves as “defendants” in courts of law, they could not help but be angered that their motive to prevent harm did not often come to matter – nor did they find often their right to protest to be duly considered. In the legal arena, they felt that their prevention of harm was often a secondary motive and the main matter to be established was a technical discussion of what had happened at the roadside.

As I followed legal trials and their impact on my interlocutors, I noticed and heard their hopes of “shining a light on the truth” through the courts, as well as their disappointment, resignation and sarcasm about the legal process. My interlocutors often had to ask themselves, were the courts even supposed to be guarantors of life through a rightful articulation of rights? Was the legal system the space to prevent harm from being done, and was it the place to seek redress when harm had been caused? What truths were being fashioned in the legal system?

Professor at Cornell Law School Robert Summers (1999) suggests that different “truth standards” can operate together in a same legal system and suggest that:

depending on the relevant standard of truth, the very same evidence would warrant a finding of truth in one type of case but not in another. Thus truth varies with standards of proof, and standards of proof vary with what is at stake (ibid: 506).

Summers suggests that for ‘legal truth’ to emerge, rules and regulations are held as fixed anchors making certain ends meet and guiding a course of action. For the legal system to come to tangible and conclusive results for all parties involved, evidence (or proof) about the ‘really real’ - what Summers calls “substantive truth” – can sometimes be excluded.

My interlocutors’ ‘evidence’ to establish fracking as essentially and unquestionably wrong was simultaneously moral, scientific, and emotional. They drew on the technical, environmental and moral ‘wrongdoings’ witnessed on the roadside, the historical evidence about the ‘system’ and its damaging inequalities, and the affective charges of critical climate thresholds. This evidence formed part of fracking’s “substantive truth” in their eyes. Excluding some of this evidence in favour of sustaining legal structures seemed wrong and unreasonable to my interlocutors, and completely unadapted to a times of climate crisis.

Still, many interlocutors cared about effecting change in and via the legal system, as they firmly subscribed to the notion that “everything we have, we have fought for!” (see Ch.2 on histories of protest). Whilst some thought the legal system could be a strategic place to effect the change they wanted, others valued legal principles as central to addressing injustices, seeking redress and mediating different views on how one should live a good life (Pirie 2022). In either case, Laura Nader (2002: 169) suggests that the “direction of the law is dependent in large measure on who is motivated to use the law and for what purposes”. She identifies “dynamic” experiences of injustices as a “motor of change” within the law, as opposed to “contemplative” reflections on justice (ibid: 184–185). Given this transformational potential of the legal system in preventing certain iterative realities and enabling other realities to flourish, my interlocutors had hoped at least to use access to the courts to make their case for the truth. However, I came to realise that much of the disillusion with the legal system was a concern with fairness. Interlocutors were angered at the inequalities and asymmetries in access to legal representation – an exclusive dynamic which would preclude any kind of true and just outcome for many of my interlocutors, and which I turn to next.

### A legal system for whom?

As we attended a local public inquiry examining a proposed planning application from INEOS to drill a test well in Yorkshire, Pip once told me: “the real win will happen here and in the courts”.<sup>63</sup> Pip had slowly moved away from local politics as a councillor to, by her own description, become more involved with direct action. However despite this “journey” (in her own words) she was on, she seemed to recognise the significance both of taking physical direct action against fracking, and of the legal system for bringing about changes. She straddled official and unofficial worlds in her

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<sup>63</sup> INEOS Group is a global chemical company which also has an Oil and Gas business. It prides itself in being “the biggest player in UK onshore shale gas sector” based on the number of PEDLs it owns (see INEOS n.d.)

involvement with anti-fracking campaigning. Pip would very frequently tell me about how she was constantly angry at the ‘system’, as she traced its outlines in her multiple forms of political engagement. Her anger reflected that prior to her time spent on the roadside, she had imagined formal avenues for opposition to be effective to bring about change. As she encountered the legal system and figures of authority on the frontline (as I expand on in the next chapter), she however grew angrier and angrier.

One of her sources of anger was the inaccessibility and “collusions” which she thought rigged the legal arena. I had heard her and other interlocutors wish each other well for their respective direct action trials, often referring to the “wheel of luck” awaiting them. Their conversations revealed that they perceived it to be a “rigged” wheel of luck. People like Pip would often be caught between hoping for legal wins to create change and prevent harm and disillusionment with legal processes due to inaccessibility issues. A few examples during my fieldwork serve to emphasize the sort of contradictions that arose, and why interlocutors suggested a collusion of powerful interests was at work in the legal arena.

Direct action trials were the source of many discussions on the roadside. In particular, people criticised the judge who found the Frack Free Four guilty following his investigation due to alleged undeclared family ties (and therefore a conflict of interests) with the oil and gas industry (Farand 2018; Hayhurst 2018d). Moreover, the judge who granted a civil injunction to Cuadrilla to restrict protest activities around its PNR site (see the timeline of events in Ch.1) was the same judge to preside over the trial to determine whether three of my interlocutors had breached the said injunction. He also presided over an application to vary the terms of the injunction. In the latter case, it could be argued that the judge had the necessary knowledge of the injunction to be able to rule over these cases. Yet my interlocutors saw these instances as a conflict of interest; they thought the judge was operating on the basis that the injunction was drawn up the right way from the start. Some interlocutors saw both occasions as manifestations of a closed circuit of senior judges, able to decide which cases they rule over, even when they might have conflicts of interests.

Interlocutors would perceive this to be in stark contrast with the Crown Prosecution Service requiring activists to defend their honesty, their abilities, and their good character in court. Activists would also be piling up fines for minor offences they were found guilty of on the roadside. However, many of them did not have sufficient means to pay these fines and were regularly summoned to the courts to be asked to pay. When they explained in the courts, again, that their financial situation had not changed, they were left alone for a few months. Some of my interlocutors admitted they did not want to find salaried employment or employment with a larger revenue, as they could not face that most of the money would directly go into paying the fines. Those of my interlocutors who were not eligible for legal aid, as their financial situation was just above the income threshold, did not want to appeal convictions as this meant more expenses for slim chances of success – even when these convictions damaged their ability to work and volunteer in certain areas (such as care work and some teaching positions).



For my interlocutors, these financial issues were seen to reflect an imbalance in access to justice and legal representation. Perhaps an area where this was most reflected was the use of civil injunctions by fracking companies to restrict protest activities around their sites (Evans 2018; Rob Evans 2017; Hayhurst 2018e). Injunctions are court orders, granted by high courts, which restrict people from undertaking a specific activity. Breaking a court order such as an injunction means someone can be found in ‘contempt of court’. This is a serious offence, which can result in high fines and/or imprisonment. Injunctions are costly to take out and subsequently hard to challenge. The barrister Paul Powlesland, founder of a group called *Lawyers for Nature* elucidated in a media interview the disadvantages which protesters face in this regard (RT 2019).<sup>64</sup> He explained how companies manage to secure more rights than the general public through their wealth by accessing injunctions, even though the activities the company is seeking to restrict are already provided for under criminal law. Powlesland saw this as a serious threat to freedom of speech and peaceful protest. Three of my interlocutors were charged with breaching the injunction Cuadrilla was granted for its PNR site, after deploying lock-ons in the entrance of the site. The case was a high profile one for the activist community; it was the first time in the UK that protesters had been taken to court in this way by what they referred to as a “fracking company”.<sup>65</sup> My interlocutors had already been prosecuted under criminal law for obstruction of the highway (by the Crown Prosecution Service) and found not guilty, prior to facing trial for breaking the civil injunction. They qualified for legal aid to help defend themselves against the alleged breach of the injunction. However, they were refused legal aid for their parallel case seeking to “vary the terms of the injunction”; the Legal Aid Agency deemed they were “well organised and capable of fund-raising” (Hayhurst 2019f). The judge to whom this case was assigned (the one who granted the injunction to Cuadrilla in the first place) simultaneously refused to award “cost protection” to the organisation Friends of the Earths (FoE), who were supporting the three protesters in their legal challenge against the terms of the injunction (Hayhurst 2019g).<sup>66</sup> The case was considered to be a private litigation matter rather than one of public interest; FoE would therefore be responsible for paying up to £85,000 of legal costs should they lose the case, a price they could not afford to pay (Parveen 2019). FoE representatives as well as legal representatives called this “being priced out” of the legal system, reinforcing an imbalanced “David and Goliath” situation (Hayhurst 2019f; Parveen 2019).

My interlocutors were eventually found guilty of breaching the injunction. They appealed their sentencing and appeared in the Court of Appeal at the Royal Courts of Justice in London in December 2019. A group of us attended the appeal to support them. The main argument of the defence was that my interlocutors should not have been committed given the vague terms of the injunction, arguing

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<sup>64</sup> See [lawyersfornature.com](http://lawyersfornature.com)

<sup>65</sup> The previous protest trial that had gain traction in the mainstream press was the Frack Free Four trial I mentioned earlier.

<sup>66</sup>This decision came off the back of a successful legal challenge against the injunction granted to the company INEOS (Hayhurst 2019h).

that the injunction encroached on the right to protest enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights, and had a dangerous “chilling effect” on protest. Such an effect was experienced by many of my interlocutors in the weeks after the injunction came into place. The judges considered that their remit was only to consider whether or not the defendants were guilty of breaching the court injunction, saying that the balance between rights to protest and Cuadrilla’s right to work had been taken into account when the injunction was drawn up – if they had issues with the terms of the injunction, the defendants should have addressed that at the time of it being granted.

For my interlocutors, this was seen as ironic given the refusal of the Legal Aid Agency to grant the defendants legal aid in their bid to vary the terms of the injunction, as well as the courts’ refusal to award cost protection to FoE for the same matter. My interlocutors’ barristers argued that given the injunction’s lack of clarity, the fact that it was addressed to “people unknown” (two points on which the legal challenge to INEOS’ injunction was successful), and the costs associated to bringing a case to the courts, challenging the injunction at the point of its issuance would be extremely difficult for a member of the public. Hence, their trial was the first opportunity to address the terms of the injunction. In the end, my interlocutors’ appeal was rejected, and their sentencing remained in place.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, whilst experiences of injustices could be drivers for legal change, asymmetries in access to legal representation could not only prevent opportunities for change but also push my interlocutors to disengage with legal processes altogether. Several of my friends would endure the process of going through trial as a frustrating side-effect of their activism on the roadside, and otherwise distance themselves from the legal system. One of my interlocutors for example, who engaged in much ‘bustling’ on the roadside without having ever gone through court because of it, had been called to do jury service.<sup>68</sup> He seemed extremely reticent to do it and spent days trying to find reasons to be excused from it. When I pressed him about this, it was clear he did not want to talk about it much. He did reveal however that he was so disgusted at how the legal system had treated some of his activist friends that he just did not want to engage with courts at all. This reluctance seemed strange to me, as in principle juries enabled lay people to judge their peers and exercise perhaps more discretion than a judge would.<sup>69</sup> From his standpoint however, being treated as criminals and struggling through

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<sup>67</sup> The judges reduced the sentence of one of the defendants; they considered it excessive and emphasized that “greater clemency should be shown in cases of non-violent civil disobedience” (Doughty Street Chambers 2020).

<sup>68</sup> In the UK, any citizen over the age of 18 years old and on the electoral register can be selected at random to be part of a jury for civil or criminal cases. This is a compulsory duty; however certain conditions and exemptions apply (see Jury service n.d.)

<sup>69</sup> XR activists in particular aspired to be arrested and charged for damages serious enough to warrant a jury trial. They felt their peers would be more attuned to issues of climate change than judges having to work within the “margins of the law”. For example, in April 2019, XR activists broke windows, painted walls and climbed onto parts of the Shell headquarters in London. Activists purposefully caused damage in excess of £5,000 to be tried by jury in the crown court rather than a magistrate’s court. In April 2021, the jury acquitted them of charges of criminal damage, despite being directed by the judge that whilst they may find the activists’ actions to be morally justified, such actions had “no defence in the law” (PA Media 2021).

tortuous and complex legal proceedings, even as he felt and knew to be engaged in a highly moral, crucial and urgent endeavour, was compounded by the stark inequalities in legal representation. This made his resistant position even starker, reinforcing the sense of a ‘system’ which was not fit for purpose in a time of anthropogenic climate change. In his and in many of my interlocutors’ eyes, the legal arena was a damaging procedural space to the detriment of being a moral, fair and just one.

## Conclusion

The ethnographic material explored in this chapter shows the kind of complexities that emerge when conceptualisations of evidence and harm are questioned in relation to the *margins of the law*, outside and inside the courtrooms. In their moral depictions of fracking, my interlocutors were firmly establishing what fracking *truly was*: it was harmful. Establishing the existence and degree of harm in relation to the natural environment, delineating who exactly the victims and perpetrators were and rendering explicit who speaks for – or “from” to borrow from de la Cadena’s (2015: 45) – was a source of great frustration for my interlocutors in their encounters with the legal system. For them, monitoring the roadside was a form of witnessing, a way of gathering the ‘evidence’ that what fracking *truly was* was that it was wrong, technically, morally, emotionally – and legally in relation to Cuadrilla’s several permit breaches. However, they felt that their appearances in court following direct actions, or resulting from unexpected arrests on the roadside, provided little opportunity to discuss the matters that pushed them to protest in the first place. Cases were typically not framed in the context of peaceful political protest nor climate change, resulting in what they experienced as very narrow, technical legalistic discussions. Mention of the environment was almost always absent from the courtroom, and if not absent, seemed to be discouraged. My interlocutors were angered at this and challenged this through notions of human rights and rights of nature – rights which seemed ‘evident’ to them but which were not always recognised in the courts. Many developed ambiguous relationships with the entities and regulations forming part of the legal arena. They sought to uphold them as a way of being recognised and heard in their activism, yet there was a profound sense among my interlocutors that justice was not to be expected in the courtroom; a feeling rooted in large parts in the inequality of resources between protesters and Cuadrilla, and the resulting inequality in access to legal knowledge and court representation.

This rendered their commitment to witnessing and direct action on the roadside as even more crucial to their activism. As part of the “Many” who did not have sufficient wealth for fair representation in the courts, witnessing enabled them to carve out their own depictions of fracking and realise truth in its multiple dimensions, outside of the “narrow margins” of the law and of an unfair legal system. Their practices realised the multiple dimensions of what fracking *truly was* and marked *what is* and *what should be* as inseparable. In the next chapter, I explore another element of the “system that says fracking is okay” and which was central to encounters on the frontline: the police force. By focusing

on encounters with the police force on the roadside, I examine conceptualisations of responsibility which bring realities into being – a point I will subsequently develop in Ch.6 to bring findings of the thesis together.

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CHAPTER FIVE – POLICING REALITIES: ROTTEN APPLES OR  
SYSTEMIC ISSUES?

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*With all the clarity of dream  
The sky so blue, the grass so green  
The rank and file and the navy blue  
The deep and strong, the straight and true*

*(...) Well alas we've seen it all before  
Knights in armour, days for yore  
The same old fears and the same old crimes  
We haven't changed since ancient times*

*(Dire Straits 1991)*

“The police are not here to help us”

I was on an early morning gatecamp shift with Patricia, a local resident spending much of her current retirement on the roadside. It was she who had told me that “the system that says fracking is okay – that’s not right”. Patricia had always lived in Lancashire and was talking to me about the natural beauty of the region and recommending areas to walk and explore the landscapes. As she did so, she noticed a police officer approaching gatecamp. He was walking from a small clearance just off the main road, a two-minute walk from gatecamp towards Blackpool. Police vans regularly parked there; officers could take a break from standing on the roadside by going back to the vans. Walking towards gatecamp, the officer was wearing a light blue high-visibility vest; I had been taught by interlocutors to recognise this uniform as the “Police Liaison Officer”, or PLO (it was also written on the back of the vest). My interlocutors often called them “the blue bibs”.

Patricia grunted: “Ok alright, here it goes. What does *he* want? He’s not coming into gatecamp, let me tell you that!”. She firmly put down her cup of tea and stood up from the makeshift couch, to walk up the pavement to meet him there. I hesitated to leave gatecamp without anyone in it, but – to Patricia’s frustration – the officer had already reached the edge of the structure. He enthusiastically exclaimed: “Good morning, ladies! Beautiful day today, isn’t it? How are you all doing?”. I looked at Patricia, who rolled her eyes in exasperation and replied sharply: “What do you want?”. He held up his hands, and smiled, “No, nothing in particular, just checking in and seeing if everything is ok”. “Well”, Patricia replied impatiently, “you’ve checked, you’ve seen; now you can leave”. “No need to be rude now” said the PLO, still smiling. He looked up at the blue skies, “It’s a good morning today isn’t it? So, will you be expecting many people today then?”. Irritated, Patricia stared at him and folded her

arms across her chest. She replied, in a tone indicating the conversation was finished, “Goodbye then”; she turned her back on him.

Eventually the PLO said goodbye and left. Interactions such as these were commonplace on the roadside, this particular one being relatively mild. My interlocutors could seem completely exasperated and even “disgusted” by police attempts at engaging. Some would joke around, but most would not want to engage at all. My experience of the police up until then was very limited; as a privileged white person growing up in calm Parisian suburbs, I rarely came into contact with the police. I had never been stopped, searched or questioned. In my first few weeks at PNR, I was taken aback at first by the intensity of people’s sentiments towards the police force. When I started fieldwork, people told me the communication with the police was the worst it had been since the start of the site construction in 2017. There was a consensus amongst most activists that they would stop engaging with officers. I was told that people had in the past given the police “the benefit of the doubt” and tried to “build bridges”; but they had had enough. The only official line of communication they had maintained was the CLG meetings, where local councillors met with police and industry representatives. As Patricia told me after our shift, she seemed to have gone through a sort of transformation in her involvement with anti-fracking activism: “I came to realise that the police are not here to help us. They are here to protect the state’s interests. They’re here to facilitate the industry. Well, you know what? That was actually really hard to come to terms with”.

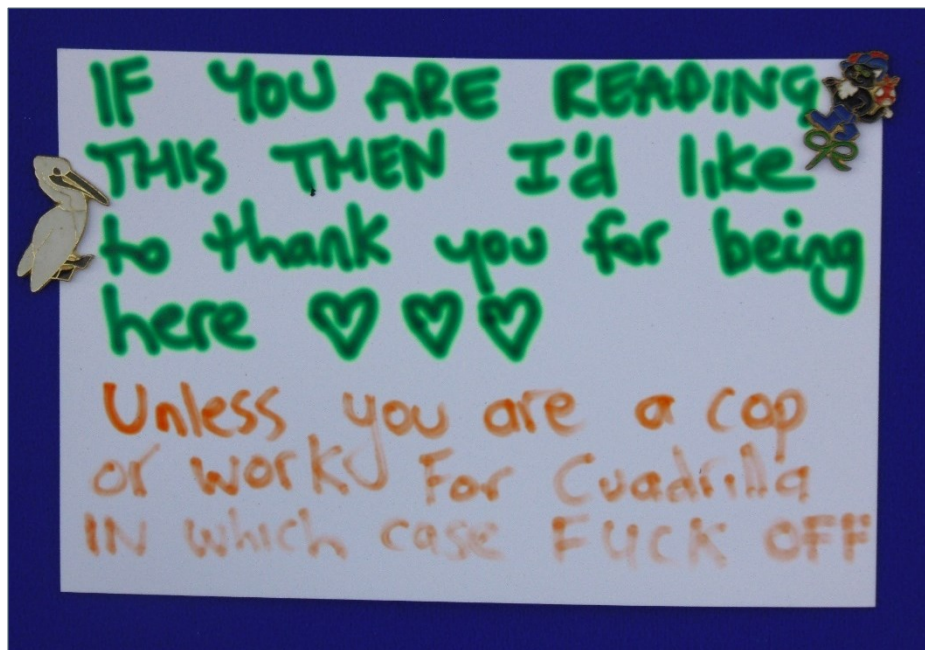


Figure 56: Sign hung up in gatecamp, spring 2019. Credit: author's picture

In earlier chapters I introduced the physical reality of the PNR frontline, outlined the interactions taking place in daily anti-fracking protests, and explored some of the motivations of my interlocutors, delving into conceptualisations of historical, climate, and legal truths. I also introduced my



interlocutors' notion of 'the matrix' to describe their reluctant inclusion in the wrongful realities they witnessed. The previous chapter showed how confronting such realities on the roadside meant questioning the "margins of the law", and resulted in a palpable distrust of official and institutionalised forms of authority. This chapter develops this last theme, as I explore encounters with the police force, and their impacts on my interlocutors' notions of legality, responsibility, and willingness and capacity to act amidst intersecting crises.

My friends felt characterised by the police force as deserving repression, rather than worthy of support. In parallel, they saw Cuadrilla, "out to make money through their fracking Ponzi scheme", being shored up by the government as well as by figures of authority ostensibly tasked with keeping the peace. Many were more upset with the police for enabling the fracking site to continue operating and for treating protesters badly, than with Cuadrilla itself. Their grievances with officers had much to do with how personal and collective responsibilities were negotiated on the PNR frontline, and the reality being brought into being through such webs of responsibility. As mentioned in Ch.1, Laidlaw (2010: 163) argues that being responsible to oneself and others is to engage in "a matter of relations that reach both into and beyond the individual by means of mediating entities" (2010, 163). People or things can act "on behalf of" other entities and thereby can be responsible for these entities (ibid: 147, 151). To whom are we responsible in times of anthropogenic climate change? How do we become responsible? Such questions intersected with broader systemic issues related to the increased criminalisation of protest in the UK.

I will first relate how my interlocutors experienced police brutality. I then show how, beyond the physical violence, the combination of lack of police accountability, their pre-formed notions about protesters, and the sense that they were enabling the shale gas industry, fed hatred and anger. I then show how interlocutors felt that officers were purposefully ambiguous about their responsibilities in the course of their duty. Protesters found themselves reluctantly upholding rules and regulations, in the face of a police force targeting those who were explicitly challenging 'the matrix' through their attempts at truth-making.

"I didn't really know this was what the police were like"

"Stay safe!" was the standard way to say goodbye to people during my fieldwork, in person or at the end of text messages and online. I came to understand where this came from when hearing about and witnessing "the bustle" on the roadside. I recall the first time I saw one of my interlocutors obstructing trucks coming into the site. The person in question stepped in front of a crane entering the site. I must have blinked or turned my head away for a moment, as the next thing I saw was the person lying down, part of their body under the front of the crane's cab. The police officers grabbed them and pull them across the tarmac, leaving their legs to dangle behind them, and pulling their pullover over

the head. They seemed to drag them for a long time - or maybe that was my shock at seeing bare skin being pulled along the tarmac.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the “bustle” was varied at the roadside: holding placards up to cars driving past or vehicles coming from the fracking site; shifting slowly from one side to the other of the site entrance, lingering for a few minutes and shuffling along slowly in front of incoming vehicles; or attempting to climb on top of delivery lorries to prevent them from continuing. “Slow walks” were also carried out, whereby people would walk very slowly on the road in front of an incoming delivery vehicle. People would also participate in lock-ons, or “lorry surfs”, climbing on top of the HGVs to immobilise them and prevent them from delivering the equipment to the site. In 2017, there were periods when actions were daily. Local residents involved in the campaign blamed the contraflows put up by the police or the excessive deployment as more disruptive than any of the actions themselves. They told me these were calculated moves by the police, designed to turn local opinion against protesters and thereby discourage people from being on the roadside. Police presence increased tremendously over the spring and summer of 2017, as police from different counties were called to help, in a ‘mutual aid’ system.<sup>70</sup> Kieran, who spent much time doing academic research of their own at PNR over the “Rolling Resistance” in 2017 explained the atmosphere in this way:<sup>71</sup>

It would be like this. Someone would see a lorry coming down the motorway, because you could see the motorway from PNR, and then someone would blow a whistle which meant (...) people would move into position, if they were stood around chatting or drinking tea. Then you'd get some people who'd start running down the road to intercept it, and then you would follow them, and then you'd get some people going to the bellmouth because everyone's getting ready. Then the police would come out their van and they were all in a line on the bellmouth in formation waiting to intercept people. It was like a strange game that took place every day. But then, it wasn't a game.

He elaborated on what he had witnessed on the roadside:

It was tough, seeing people get hurt and injured at the hands of police officers. But it was also hard seeing people get hurt and injured, or arrested, and then seeing the kind of visceral reactions from others. You know, you get all these mostly middle-aged women – that’s mostly the demographic – who are really upset and distressed.

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<sup>70</sup> Mutual aid refers to the “provision of policing assistance from one force to another. It is a formal arrangement and is similar to the provision of Special Police Services. As such, mutual aid is usually provided in response to or in anticipation of a major incident or event” (NPCC 2020: 3).

<sup>71</sup> The Rolling Resistance was a month of planned actions, organised in collaboration between anti-fracking campaigners local to PNR, and the national direct action network RTP. See the timeline in Figure 9 in Ch.1.

This “strange game” took place many times during my fieldwork. Almost all of my interlocutors, regardless of their background and demographic group, held very negative feelings towards the police. The first few weeks on the camp, I noticed scribblings on the walls, the ceilings, the old furniture: “A.C.A.B.” (see Figure 57 below). I asked what this meant on one occasion. “You don’t know?” came the reply. “All Cops Are Bastards!!”. People would carry such feelings away from the frontline too. When I spent time away from PNR, police cars driving past or officers in high-vis jackets walking down the streets would physically startle me. My interlocutors had described that sensation to me many times, and I finally understood it when I noticed myself becoming much more aware of officers in public spaces or stopping to talk to people. When this happened, I would catch myself thinking: “leave them alone!”. I had been well conditioned after months spent at the PNR roadside.

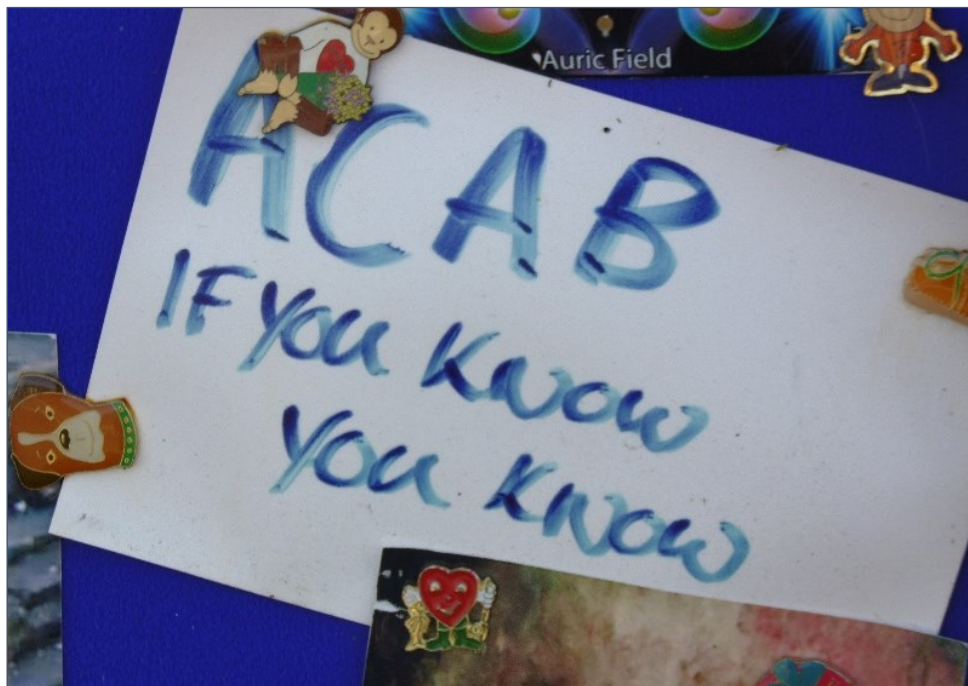


Figure 57: Sign hung up at gatecamp, spring 2019. Credit: author's picture

When my interlocutors said “A.C.A.B” (jokingly or not), it reflected people’s personal experiences and how they expected the police force to operate systematically in the UK. My interlocutors went to great lengths to share with me the deep shifts they had experienced in their attitude with and perceptions of the police. Some of them did feel sorry for officers working in strict hierarchies – but I very rarely heard positive feelings expressed about police presence and actions. I heard countless stories outlining police brutality towards people protesting at PNR. My interlocutors recommended me to watch and read reports and documentaries denouncing policing on protest frontlines. People mentioned the painful pressure points the police use to remove people, whether they were sitting or slow-walking. Others told me about intimidation tactics used to scare people away, like following

people's cars as they drove away from the roadside or targeting an individual repeatedly over the course of a few days.



Figure 58: Interlocutors protesting and police officers at the roadside, June 2019. Credit: author's picture

Sabine, an activist introduced in several prior ethnographic vignettes, was a gentle but strong presence on the roadside. She travelled to PNR during her annual leave, and I had met her there several times. We arranged to chat over an informal interview at her home in another English region during one of my breaks from camp. She welcomed me for tea in her cosy flat; she invited me in with a warm embrace, and spoke in a soft and smiling voice. Her tone changed distinctively when she shared her experiences of police brutality. She explained the huge shift she experienced when faced with police behaviour, and how she was “a bit traumatised” after her first week at PNR. One in particular had really upset her:

There was this elderly, elderly gentleman; he was brilliant, everybody loved him. We were down at Maple Farm once, and a lot of people were on the road just outside the farm. I think he'd seen officers do something that was out of order, like shove someone out of the way.

Sabine stood up, miming the scene to me:

So he stepped forward and said, ‘you shouldn't be doing this!’ He was bent over, you see, waving his hand a bit - just like an old gentleman you know, limping.

She imitated his strained walk, trying to convey how physically vulnerable she had sensed this gentleman to be.

He said that, and this policeman just went and pushed him ‘whomp!!’ Like, fully, on his shoulder. He whooshed back and whacked his head on the pavement!

She mimed shoving someone with both hands violently, pushing the air away from her abruptly. She sat back down, grabbed her cup of tea in both hands, and shook her head gloomily while concluding:

It was fucking awful. I’ve never been so shocked in my life. It was such a shocking act of violence against an elderly person. I would have been shocked if a drug addict in the street had done that, but to see a policeman doing that, to somebody who was no threat, well, it just *absolutely shocked me to the core*. I’ll never forget it [original emphasis].

We sat in silence for a while, until I asked her if she thought this was an exception, or to do with that officer in particular. She shook her head and said:

I think it was all of them. As far as I can tell, they were all like that. (...) It was also a really horrible introduction to the police. I had a complete meltdown by the end of the week. Yes, the police violence was - it shocked me to the core. I’m a white woman. I hadn’t really seen that before. I didn’t really know this was what the police were like.

Sabine spent a solid part of our interview describing her discovery of the police force, the brutality that she had never experienced up close before. She described how officers on the roadside repeatedly pushed people out of the way brutally and sometimes into fences or bushes lining the road; known as “thugging” or “hedging”. This terminology was shared at PNR – my interlocutor Aileen described running away from officers once: “I nearly hedged myself, just to avoid them doing it!”. Sabine echoed what I heard from countless others at PNR. I met people who had sustained injuries from such physical encounters with the police - broken collarbones, serious knee and shoulder injuries, concussions, broken wrists. Some of the injuries resulted directly from being physically removed by officers, others were the result of police “kettles”. In those cases, officers surrounded protesters and prevented them from leaving or getting to a particular space, which could lead to people falling and tripping over one another in the confusion. It seemed that, for my interlocutors, injuries were frequent and triggered by police intervention. The physical harm that interlocutors like Sabine witnessed became central to the negative perception of the police force at PNR and away from it.

Sabine was aware that such brutality might not come as a shock to other more marginalised demographics. She said that she had known that police violence was effected along class and racial lines – but had never experienced it herself. She confided that she was frustrated at some of the XR groups she was working with locally. “Always [the] older women, well known, well-connected, upper middle class, just dominat[ing] the conversation” were convinced they just had to rally numbers to speak up and share information. “Why do they think that just because they speak, just because they get their voices out there, people will listen and they will be heard? That’s just not how it works” She elaborated:

This idea that they just needed to appeal to the common sense of these people... There wasn't that awareness that there is really a whole class of people who just absolutely don't have your interest at heart and they will just grind you into the ground to make themselves rich. There was no understanding of that. It was more just ‘We'll just try to educate the police, we'll just explain why we're there’. They think if they are peaceful during the protests for example, the police will treat them well. As if we were not peaceful at PNR!! They [the XR activists] must think we're a bunch of violent activists! When you think about it all, that is class-based because it's all speaking from a position of relative privilege.

Although I was not sure of Sabine’s own socio-economic situation, I noted that on the protest camp she strongly related to those who proudly spoke of their working-class backgrounds. Nevertheless, her experience of police brutality on the frontline shocked her, and she mirrored other interlocutors in saying that everyone was treated the same on the PNR frontline: with violence and brutality.

My interlocutors’ issues with the police force went beyond physical brutality. They were angry and frustrated at what they saw as a lack of accountability. When protesters lodged complaints against officers for wrongdoing, there would be no follow up. Pip, one of the local councillors who suffered ligament damage as a result of a police kettle, shared her anger about this with me and explained this to be the reason for an upcoming class-type action against the Lancashire Constabulary, supported by lawyers working pro bono.<sup>72</sup> While some individual officers behaved particularly violently, activists’ anger was compounded when officers backed each other up and did not call their colleagues out for excessive violence. Aileen, loyal to her gatecamp shifts and prone to a bit of bustling herself, told me how she had kept a “roll call of shame” updated for months on the roadside in 2017. This was her small gesture towards holding the police to account for their behaviour, when no official explanations were forthcoming. She and other activists kept a clipboard next to gatecamp, exclusively used to note

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<sup>72</sup> A class action is a lawsuit whereby a group of people pursue a joint legal challenge against an entity. I was told that class actions cannot be filed against the police force; however, my interlocutors’ lawyers were collating all their incidents together to be able to submit individual cases all at once, making each case stronger as a pattern emerged.



down brutal police interactions. The date, identification number of the officer, and a description of what had happened was noted down for all those on the roadside to read when walking past (see Figure 59 below).

DATE AND TIME	WRONGDOING	ORGANISATION AND ID
FRI 14 <sup>TH</sup> SEPT 12:04 PM	GRABBED A YOUNG WOMAN BY THE NECK	LANCS POLICE OFFICER 2700
MONDAY 18 <sup>TH</sup> SEPT 08:13	GRABBED FEMALE PROTECTOR AND SQUEEZED UNTIL SHE CRIED OUT IN PAIN	LANCS POLICE OFFICER 5587
09:08	MALE PROTECTOR HEDGED AND ROUGHLY HANDLED. ENABLED BY A 2 <sup>ND</sup> OFFICER	LANCS POLICE OFFICER 4272 OFFICER 3212
09:40	BRUTALISED FEMALE PROTECTOR	LANCS POLICE OFFICER 890

Figure 59: The police “Call of Shame” stored at Maple Farm, autumn 2019. Credit: author's pictures

People protesting would talk about the officers that were recurring on the “Call of Shame”, telling each other to watch out for them. One in particular had been despised for his brutal behaviour and disparaging comments. When he returned a few months’ absence, people were outraged, taking it as an example that systemically, the police force was not concerned about its “bad apples”.

The sentiment that the police behaviour towards protesters was “triggering” was commonly expressed on the roadside. People would be “triggered” by seeing others getting hurt, or by the prejudices officers seemed to hold about protesters. I once stood next to an interlocutor in conversation with a PLO (Police Liaison Officer). My interlocutor was annoyed and sad that one of her friends had been “dragged” brutally across the road earlier. Although people did not often engage with officers, she ended up sharing her frustrations with this PLO. The PLO was nodding and had a compassionate expression on her face. She tried to show her understanding:

I understand, I understand. But of course, it’s not you we’re worried about you know, we know *you* are fine. But you have to understand, others just stand in the road and block vehicles – it’s *them* we are looking out for [officer’s emphasis].

My friend was getting increasingly frustrated and eventually turned her back and walked away. She seemed angry; she did not typically engage in bustling herself. However, contrary to the PLO's impressions, she had joined in slow marches, blockades, had sat down in front of vehicles in the bellmouth on multiple occasions. On one such occasion, she told me a particularly violent interaction with an officer had resulted in a painful injury to her shoulder, which was still hurting her to that day. "And they just always blame it on the protester! That *really* gets to me [original emphasis]", she said through gritted teeth. Kieran, mentioned earlier, also elaborated on his perception of police attitudes:

There are multiple occasions when it happened [people getting hurt by the police]. It's usually when lorries were coming in or about to come in, and activists were trying to get in the way of a lorry. But it was also because they [the police] knew that people were likely to do that, they would pre-empt it.

I experienced what Kieran was describing during my fieldwork. I often carried my camera with me, and had tried to make it clear by my behaviour I was interested in documenting events on the roadside, not in blocking the road. However on a few occasions, officers firmly grabbed my arm or shoulder as a Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) approached the site entrance, preventing me from moving even before I attempted to. "I'm just taking photographs" I said once, to which the officer had replied "We don't want anyone doing anything stupid". Although it was the case that people would step into the road and block vehicles, or "bustle around" in various ways, people found this pre-emptive police behaviour infuriating and "triggering": it would elicit and exacerbate their anger. In these instances, it was not necessarily the brutality or the violence that angered them, rather it was that they felt officers were both projecting intentions on them, and "taunting" them by calling them irresponsible or "stupid".

Towards the end of our interview, Sabine told me about the time she "surfed a lorry" at PNR partly because she had been so triggered by the actions of the police. "I was supposed to leave that day, I was on my way home and had my bags packed and everything!". I asked: "Was it partly because they *dragged* you around?", using her own descriptive terms. She replied:

Oh yes it was, yes. I got really angry. By the end of it, I was like, 'Okay, I'm having the lorry'. There were lots of violence at that time as well. There were lots of people being pushed and pulled and dragged really roughly across the road. There was a lot of that going on (...) There'd been steadily escalating police violence against perfectly peaceful people. That time, twice on the road, I've had my clothes removed. Would you believe that? Twice? I think they did it on purpose. Like, really, is that a coincidence? Twice? I was wearing my coat with a hood up, and they dragged me all the way across the road. During the process of it, they still pulled my big coat inside out, and pulled it up over me including all my clothes.

They dragged me across the road in my bra basically. It was really flipping. Then they brought me to the pavement, and they just dropped me. My back hit the corner of the pavement like that [she mimed a hard-hitting impact with her hands]. It really bruised me.

Sabine was getting visibly angered telling me this story, but she also seemed proud of her response. She continued:

I was flipping angry because they'd stripped me as well. I was furious! They dropped me there, and I got up. I managed to pull my coat off, put my jumper back down. I don't usually use this language, but I was so angry I was swearing so much. Someone was trying to calm me down, and then I saw the lorries coming in, and I sprinted up the road with a friend. We ran together, we linked arms, and we sat in front of it in the road to stop it from moving because that's what we've been doing the whole time. And the bloody lorry just pulled over to the other lane and kept going!

Sabine shook her head, and continued:

Then someone wandered in front of the lorry to slow it down. A policeman came running, and he saw the two of us, sitting on the ground. We got back on our feet; he could only capture one of us. So we both ran in different directions. He chased the other one and the lorry was just beside me there. I was just like, 'It would be rude not' and I climbed on the back. I had it! I guess that was an action... It wasn't really planned!

This was an example of a “triggering” situation on the roadside, whereby people protesting were angered by brutal police interventions and would either get hurt or want to respond to being treated in such ways. It was almost as if the focus was not the delivery vehicles to the site anymore, but rather a protest against the police force and their attitudes towards those engaged in anti-fracking activism.

I have shown in Ch.2 how debates around the violence at Peterloo in 1819 also implicated pre-formed notions about protesters and conceptualisations of ‘true’ evidence. Manchester authorities had argued that while the yeomanry acted brutally, they had good reasons for pre-empting the possible violent and riotous intentions of the large crowd. Information gathered by the authorities had shown ‘evidence’ of groups of people gathering in the hills, seemingly training how to work in a military fashion. To the authorities, this was people preparing an organised uprising. Instead, accounts from protesters described these walks as attempts to learn marching together in an ordered manner, to avoid being characterised as a violent and disorganised “mob”. In these circumstances, who was *truly* responsible for brutal encounters in situations of protest? My interlocutors certainly felt that the police

were responsible for escalating situations that were initially peaceful and treating protesters – physically or verbally – in such a way as to result in tense and brutal moments.

My interlocutors' anger and hate towards the police was compounded by the perception that the police force was biased: they protected Cuadrilla's right to work but not my interlocutors' right to protest. Police officers justified pushing or carrying people out of the way by stating how they were balancing campaigners' right to protest with Cuadrilla's right to lawful business. My interlocutors however rejected the police officers' standard statement "we are here for your safety and to facilitate peaceful protest". They saw the police as "facilitating a dirty industry"; "earthquake enablers!" they would call them on the roadside. This bias manifested itself in a range of ways, according to my interlocutors. Pip once said to me: "it was clear that they [the police] had an opinion about environmental protesters and we were going to not be treated fairly". She described how HGV drivers delivering to the site would sometimes display dangerous behaviour on the road, seemingly without any repercussions despite police presence at the time. HGVs stopped for too long in the middle of the road before turning off into the site entrance, or deliberately accelerated towards protesters holding placards in the central reservation. My interlocutors felt that the police never acted against this sort of behaviour. But the policing of protesters' behaviour was repeated and frequent, if somewhat unpredictable. Sometimes protesters were arrested by officers for obstruction of the highway, when no cars were present; on other days they were left alone. Swearing on the roadside on some occasions justified arrest under section 5 of the Public Order Act – other days, it did not seem to warrant an arrest. Some interlocutors were convinced this was a deliberate intimidation strategy, to dissuade people from coming to the roadside, as they would not know what to expect.

In contrast, my interlocutors never saw any repercussions for police officers' violent behaviour, just as no sanctions were ever taken against Cuadrilla's repeated breaches of environmental permits (see Ch.4) or against its contractors' dangerous road behaviour. In the words of a retired local campaigner, "the police claim that they were just the referee, when they were nothing of the sort. They were quite clearly there, openly and deliberately, to facilitate for the industry and against us. There's no doubt at all about that". Officers instead asserted that they were reacting to protesters' dangerous behaviours. As such, the affects emerging from repeated interactions between officers and protesters would crystallise into a diverging sense of reality. The 'obvious' and the 'evident' about what was right or wrong, and about what *truly happened* on the roadside, was in contention due to conflicting notions of responsibility.



Figure 60: Placards at the PNR roadside, 2019. Credit: author's picture

“I’m just doing my job”

I vividly recall two of my interlocutors, Sabine and Iris, standing in front of the site entrance gates, trying to communicate their fears to two police officers attempting to move them. They kept talking about “climate collapse”, with Iris raising her voice: “It is not a joke! We are all doomed!”. The officers were trying to remain silent, but eventually a policewoman replied “it has nothing to do with us, nor with you blocking the highway”. Sabine, visibly frustrated, countered: “All scientists are saying we are doomed unless we stop this!” she pointed to the fracking pad – to which the officer replied by once more attempting to move Sabine to the side: “I’m not here to save the world, I’m here to do my job”.

This was a standard response from officers on the roadside, who said they were there to prevent breaches of the peace and do “just do their job”. This did not go down well with my interlocutors, who in the face of terrifying existential realisations about the climate crisis (as I examined in Ch.3) highly valued the need for climate action, and felt a strong necessity to act; personal and collective responsibilities needed to shift to prevent devastating harm. In this sense, they were irritated by the constabulary defending Cuadrilla’s harmful business. Following an incident where someone had repeatedly been grabbed and “shoved” away from the bellmouth, as he repeatedly attempted to stand in front of vehicles, one of my interlocutors told me:

I’m protesting against Cuadrilla and the extraction of fossil fuels. However, I find it impossible to separate the police because they are enabling it to go ahead. It is environmental vandalism. In the future, it will be seen as ecocide, because it is harmful to the environment, what they’re doing. They are enabled to do it by them, and all they say is ‘I am only doing my job’.

She then continued and told me, “They could say no, they could refuse to be stationed here. It affects them too and they could say no, just like we said no!”. She and many others were disgusted that many officers seemed to be stationed on the roadside as part of their extra time, and did not want to engage with any of the issues being fought for on this frontline.

To contrast this, my interlocutors also often discussed the famous case of the North Welsh police force refusal to continue supporting police operations at PNR. It is common for regional forces around the country to support each other in a ‘mutual aid’ system. Whilst the North Welsh constabulary provided reinforcements for policing PNR during the summer of 2017, it eventually withdrew its support citing high policing demand in Wales over the holiday season. The elected Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales also cited “operational” reasons for this decision, but acknowledged his influence was part of the decision-making (BBC News 2017a; Hayhurst 2017). He is cited as having said: “Why should officers from North Wales be sent to police and facilitate an activity where the activity is more or less unlawful in their own country?”(Perraudin 2017). In a tweet from a now deleted account, he also reportedly asserted “Let them [Cuadrilla] pay for their own security”(BBC News 2017a; Hayhurst 2017). In addition to different legal standards, he highlighted his own opposition to fracking and said that “as individuals, as elected politicians, we all have our values and we all have our moral stand and ethical standards; I’m just expressing mine”(BBC News 2017b). My interlocutors commended him for his moral stance and his sense of responsibility; pro-shale groups condemned him for the exact opposite (Perraudin 2017).

Lambek (2008: 145) analyses the capacity for judgement as key in establishing or recognising responsibility, borrowing the notion of *phronesis* or “practical judgement” from Aristotle’s work.<sup>73</sup> For Foucault, practical and moral judgement stem from an ethical knowledge about ourselves and the world we live in – he directly relates his analysis to notions of truth through the ancient Greek concept of *parrhesia*; the *parrhesiate* is engaged in an ethical practice of speaking the truth, by re-configuring notions of individual and collective responsibility (Foucault 1983). My interlocutors, valuing the capacity and willingness to take action, felt practically and ethically compelled to respond to the knowledge they had gathered about the climate crisis and a wrongful ‘system’. Were the officers who were “just doing their job” not capable of exercising discretion about what ought to be and what to do? Or were they unwilling to take responsibility? As mentioned earlier, some interlocutors did feel sorry for those working in strict hierarchical settings; however there was no perceived willingness forthcoming from officers to engage with my interlocutors’ existential realisations, whether or not this reflected a lack of capacity. Moreover, these realisations concerned the world which both officers and protestors were living in. Thus, as my interlocutors spent more time on the roadside, they felt that police officers were not willing to exercise their personal capacity to be truthful.

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<sup>73</sup> See also Ch.1 and the section relating my theoretical framework, where I discuss Arendt’s work and her conceptualisations of judgement and moral failure.



Many of my interlocutors were therefore seriously reappraising the Lancashire Constabulary's claims of keeping "people safe and feeling safe and when needed, be trusted to consistently deliver a competent and compassionate service".<sup>74</sup> Police officers, tasked with protecting and upholding the safety of local residents, were forcibly and brutally removing people opposing Cuadrilla's work. In my interlocutors' eyes, this directly contradicted the constabulary's duty to protect communities from harm, not only through brutal interactions with protesters but also by supporting the shale gas industry and thereby harming the environment. Who were the officers truly serving? Who they were responsible *for*, and who were they responsible *to*? There was a widespread sense amongst my interlocutors that officers were ambiguous in enacting their responsibilities; "just doing their job" enabled them to blur the boundaries of legality, and the lines between private and public interests.

### Ambiguous responsibilities

Whilst protesters were condemned for not following the rules and regulations set out by the legal system, resulting in complex experiences in the courtrooms (as discussed in Ch.4), interlocutors pointed out that the police force did not follow the rules themselves. One event in particular exacerbated this impression, making my interlocutors further question whose interests the police was protecting.

In November 2019, the protest camp I was living on with a handful of other activists, was evicted at 6am on a cold morning; six people were on the camp and they were faced with thirty bailiffs and dog-handlers. I was not present on camp and woke up in Claire's house in Preston to several missed calls and a text from Aileen. She asked me what I would like to have salvaged from my shack; I called her back and she explained that the bailiffs had taken everyone off camp and were only allowing one person back at a time to retrieve personal possessions.<sup>75</sup> Claire drove me there herself to avoid the hour-long bus ride. When we arrived around 9am, both a bit shaken and in disbelief, my fellow camp residents were on the pavement outside the camp, standing in the cold alongside several other locals who had come by to witness and help if they could. Everyone had the same sentence on their lips: the eviction was being carried out illegally.

My interlocutors explained the legal situation as far as they knew it, and they were generally well-informed. Evicting the protest camp was a matter of civil law, as squatting is not a criminal offence. A legal eviction requires the owner either to go to court to get an "order of possession" or carry out a "common law" eviction. This latter requires the owner to formally ask the occupiers to leave the land

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<sup>74</sup> Statement on the official website of the Lancashire Constabulary (Our Commitment n.d.).

<sup>75</sup> Eventually, most of the people on camp that day agreed to walk out, faced with several bailiffs prepared to "manhandle" them out in their pyjamas, as I was told by interlocutors. One of our friends refused to leave, upon which the bailiffs body strapped her to a board in the few clothes she had on, and carried her out themselves.

and, if they refuse, to use no more than reasonable force to remove people. Landowners employ ‘bailiffs’, who are entitled to remove people provided the eviction is legal and that they have papers to prove they are acting on behalf of the owner, and the order of possession if this applies.

Details were hazy regarding who the landowner was. The context surrounding the initial occupation in 2017 remained unclear to me, and to many of my interlocutors. However, all seemed to agree that the land had been unoccupied for a prolonged period of time and used to feature a garage or service station.<sup>76</sup> I was told that one of the local councillors had been in touch with the owner, who did not seem to mind the land being taken by anti-fracking protesters. It seemed no one heard any mentions of nor comments from the landowner until mid-2019 when, on a day I was not on camp myself, someone had come to the site, claiming to be the landowner and accompanied by council workers and police. The supposed landowner asked to come on site – to which camp residents asked that he return with a deed of the land, on a day where all camp residents were present. He would then be allowed on camp, but without the police officers. Everyone I spoke to about this agreed on two points: they had no way of knowing whether that person was indeed the landowner, and he did not ask them to leave the land. The alleged landowner left that day without entering the camp, and no one had heard from him since.

On the day of the eviction, the bailiffs circulated copies of a “notice of eviction” an hour after I arrived, around 10am, informing the occupiers that the landowner (a land redeveloping company) was repossessing the site. Occupiers were requested to leave and take all their belongings away by four pm that day. These papers were distributed only after everyone had been taken off the camp, and therefore in effect, after the land had already been taken back. For my interlocutors, this made the eviction of the camp not only sudden, but also questionable in its legality since no formal request to leave had been made and correct documentation was not presented in advance.

Woken at 6 a.m. that frosty morning, the six people on camp had little chance to challenge the legality of the eviction notice by pointing out they had not received prior requests to leave by the landowner, and had not been informed of what was happening until they were forcibly removed. As soon as camp residents finished the escorted trips to and from their shacks to retrieve possessions and the cats living on camp, the rest of the site was bulldozed – the entrance to the site had already been flattened, the wooden fences and door crushed down, and the wooded area leading up to the main open space uprooted. We retreated to Maple Farm, a few hundred meters along the road, and sat around a small fire. People passed round the belatedly distributed official papers, all dazed from what had just happened so suddenly.

I was struck by how all three different kind of authority figures that day resembled each other. At the time, I found it confusing to understand who was who, and what particular rights and powers each of them (bailiffs, security guards, police officers) had. Enforcement officers, or bailiffs, were dressed in black uniforms, boots and gloves. Like police officers, they wore a bodycam on the front of their vest

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<sup>76</sup> This made the land unusable for commercial renting for a set number of years.

(which resembled police bulletproof vests), as well as a two-way radio. Official looking signs on the front and back of their vests indicated they were not police officers but “enforcement officers”. They were the ones who entered the camp to make residents leave their shacks, forcing doors open when people inside did not open them. Outside the camp and lining the pavement stood a handful of private security guards dressed in black and wearing high-vis jackets, alongside a line of police officers. Initially there were about ten police officers present; a few minutes before the digger contracted from a local business arrived, that number rose to more than thirty officers, all with in black and yellow high-vis jackets as well. The police officers justified the reinforcement as due to rising public unrest and high emotions displayed by the local residents. My interlocutors say that the arrival of so many police officers is what triggered increased frustration from camp residents and others from the local area.



Figure 61: The eviction of New Hope camp in November 2019. Left: enforcement officers and security guards. Right: police officers. Credit: author's picture

The day after the eviction, I returned to the site with several local residents (who had not been living on camp). Resolute on claiming back the stove from the kitchen, one of the local Nanas stated it was her private property which she had loaned to the camp. Whilst people discussed matters with the bailiffs (who had stayed on location overnight), one of the local residents and I spoke briefly with one of the security guards.

Local resident: How would you feel if you had been woken up in the middle of the night and forced out of your home in your pyjamas?

Security guard: Well... I guess the difference is that I own my house; this camp was illegal!

Local resident: I'm not talking about that; I'm asking how would you *feel* about it!?

Security guard (nodding): Yeah, that does sound awful...

Local resident: Doesn't it just. You know, there are rules and regulations to follow to get people off the land. And those haven't been followed. This eviction was done illegally!

Security guard: Hm... Well that's not what we were told. We were told everything was above board. And yeah, I guess if people [camp residents] had been warned in advance, they'd be ready for it right? They'd probably be locked onto something in there!

Local resident: Who's to say? And anyways, do you mean that for the operation to be successful, the bailiffs *needed* to act illegally?

The security guard: Well... But the police were there, weren't they? If it was illegal then they would have said something.

My interlocutor was stunned by the security guard's answer. His answer, and her disapproval of it, were indicative to me of the linkages between the different figures of authority present that day, and the differences in what people understood their remit to be. Several of us had asked the police why they were present during the eviction. They replied they had nothing to do with it and were only there to ensure there was no "breach of the peace"; they did not comment on my interlocutors telling them the eviction was possibly illegal. One reading of the situation is that the local police force was attending a significant event in the region, providing assistance should anything disturb the public peace. However to my interlocutors, *the eviction* was disturbing the public peace and, ironically, was obstructing the public highway, and the police enabling it.

Perceptions and experiences relating to the eviction of the camp echo what I explored in the previous chapter. On the roadside, activists saw themselves as holding Cuadrilla to account for breaching industry regulations, with no apparent reaction from environmental regulators. An ambiguous role reversal was also apparent here. My interlocutors had informed themselves about the law surrounding land occupation and had followed it. Yet officers claiming to uphold the public order in the face of disruptive protests seemingly did not.

The eviction, together with the brutal police behaviour experienced by my interlocutors on the roadside highlighted the conflicting conceptualisations of personal and collective responsibilities at the frontline, and brought systemic issues home for activists. The involvement of different entities and private interests on the frontline was perceived as dubious. Three camp residents recognised two of the bailiffs from another protest camp eviction, as well as from a protester cut-off team at a direct action elsewhere.<sup>77</sup> It later transpired that they were from a Bristol-based private enforcement service, and probably been sub-contracted and deployed by the police in other counties. Further, my interlocutors said that they had spotted police drones flying over the camp at regular intervals, just a

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<sup>77</sup> This is the team responsible for removing people from lock-ons with specialised equipment. The website of the private enforcement service which carried out the eviction stated they did indeed specialise in protester removal.

few days before the eviction. They believed the police had provided footage to the private enforcement company to assist them; a news article covering the event stated that the eviction had been carried out “in consultation with the local constabulary” (Hayhurst 2019i). They placed such instances in a broader network of “collusions” reflective of a ‘system’ threatened by dissenters.

Sam was a fellow camp resident at PNR. She had previously been involved with other anti-fracking campaigns. A little older than me, she was distant in our interactions at first, and could be quite blunt and frank. But she was a warm, caring and friendly character. Towards the end of my fieldwork, she agreed to meet me for an interview with another camp resident in a nearby pub. She explained her initial distance with me - she did not expect most people who come by the camp to “stick around” for long. She also offered some insight into the broader culture of secrecy and suspicion that permeated my fieldwork experience, explaining that people were very wary of covert agents, be they industrial spies or undercover police officers. She talked about the “healthy dose” of suspicion towards any newcomer, as Lubbers (2012) also describes.

In a detailed review of undercover policing and corporate infiltrator case studies in the UK and elsewhere, Eveline Lubbers traces a history of covert corporate surveillance in tandem with official police forces.<sup>78</sup> She describes instance of private companies hiring security consultants with close ties to police departments, or having built a career in law enforcement prior to setting up their own surveillance agencies. Her book also draws on stories of police infiltrators such as Mark Kennedy, infamously known in activist circles as having posed as an environmental activist for years, developing long-term romantic relationships with two campaigners (Jones & Wilson 2015; Lewis & Evans 2011; Lubbers 2012: x–xi, 194). He was discovered by one of his partners and initially depicted as a rogue agent by the police. In fact, there is a history of undercover police agents systemically infiltrating social justice campaign and protest groups, forming relationships and participating in protest and rallies – sometimes as core organisers (Lewis et al. 2013; Lewis & Evans 2020; Lubbers 2012: xii–xiv; Syal & Wainwright 2011). Conor Woodman suggests that “the two units dedicated to undercover infiltration of political organisations – the Special Demonstration Squad and National Public Order Intelligence Unit – cannot be viewed as ‘rogue’ aberrations. They [are] part of a long-running political policing apparatus designed to bolster the status quo against dissenters” (Woodman 2018). In two reports entitled “Spycops in Context”, Woodman outlines the historical systematic covert policing of political campaigns, quoting E.P. Thompson:

It was the fond belief of the English people that the employment of spies in domestic affairs was un-British, and belonged to ‘the continental spy system’. In fact it was an ancient part of

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<sup>78</sup> Lubbers describes how activists are often wary of police or “industry” disrupters attempting to gain information from their social circles, and at times actively sowing seeds for conflict in the activist community in question.

British Statecraft as well as of police practice” (Thompson 1966: 488; also cited in Woodman 2018: 2).

Thompson dwells on the “lucrative trade” (Thompson 1966: 485) encouraged by the government during the industrial revolution, whereby networks of spies were paid for reporting information about Radical reformers. According to Thompson, spies were incentivised to encourage escalation and further ‘radicalisation’ in the groups they had infiltrated. My interlocutors told each other similar stories of infiltration, and told me to look out for people who encourage others to escalate situations during protests: they could be police infiltrators. Covert surveillance straddles a very fine line on the edges of legality, denounced by organisations such as the Network for Police Monitoring (Netpol) as impinging on people’s privacy and campaigning rights in democratic societies.

Interlocutors who had been involved in environmental and political campaigning for many years would say: “The police are just liars. They do whatever they want and can get away with”. The Police Liaison Officer (PLO) mentioned at the beginning was almost more disliked and treated more suspiciously by interlocutors than other officers. The PLO’s official role includes community engagement and liaising with people involved with the protest to resolve any issues and maintain a peaceful atmosphere. It was often the same PLOs stationed on the frontline; they recognised protesters and protesters recognised them. Officers regularly engaged in personal interactions with protesters, asking about their lives and their habits. Yet, what may seem like inconspicuous personal questions at first were ways to gather information about protesters. I recall telling a PLO in December 2018 in a brief chat that I had Italian origins – many months later, in Spring 2019, a different PLO called out to me as I walked towards gatecamp “You’ll be able to go back to Italy once it all goes back to normal!”. Friends on the frontline recounted how they would be called by their names by other officers when attending protests in other regions, or how they would be asked about how relatives were doing. Such personal interactions were perceived as intimidating and dishonest; PLOs worked to come across as personable and engaging public servants, yet they were also representative of the state apparatus and part of a large systemic network of surveillance and intelligence gathering resources.

The eviction thus exacerbated perceptions that the police were delegitimising the interests of those challenging a controversial project, they may have aided an illegal activity in doing so. The pattern emerging from their experiences on the roadside meant that police officers who were “just doing their job” were held responsible for perpetuating wrongful and harmful realities and supporting ‘the matrix’, where harm against the environment was lawful, where local decision-making was overturned, where the climate crisis was fuelled. Thus, whilst some interlocutors may have initially felt that officers were at best ambiguous and unclear in enacting their duties, they increasingly perceived the police force as purposefully deceitful. In my interlocutors’ eyes, officers were doing more than supporting ‘the matrix’, they were purposefully bringing that reality into being. Protesters thus felt marginalised and purposefully targeted for attempting to disrupt a wrongful reality.



“It’s by design”

“They hate us. They just want to get rid of us, they want to squash us like bugs” Sam said on the day of the eviction, while those with her at the community hub nodded their heads in agreement. If it was so difficult for my interlocutors to feel as if their voices were heard and respected in the current ‘system’, what was the point of learning about and following rules and regulations? In their concerns about the illegality of the eviction and their protests against police brutality, interlocutors felt they were in effect upholding the ‘system’ they were fighting against. This was frustrating, as it was a ‘system’ which they not only felt was wrong but which also marginalised them for saying so and for attempting to build alternative realities. Sam elaborated further in my interview with her:

To be honest, I saw the way the police were and that was what got me. It was like: the police were stalking the camp, they were following people to the shop. (...) They were looking at anti-frackers as terrorists. (...) They had Anti-Terror Units following people around, they had CID following people around.<sup>79</sup> So yeah for me, one of the reasons I got more involved was because of the way the police were treating people.

I earlier examined how my interlocutors drew on a double history of the ‘system’ and of protest to situate their own struggles on the right side of history, feeling an affinity with protesters marked out as “Radicals” during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. My interlocutors felt like they were being targeted as “radicals” in their own time, and tracked by anti-terror units in a ‘system’ intent on policing movements threatening the established status quo. “We’re domestic extremists!” I would hear people joke on the roadside; I then realised it was not a joke. My interlocutors were angered as much, sometimes more, by how they felt they were seen by the police and by the ‘system’, as they were by the actual treatment they received at PNR or the fracking itself.

Advocacy groups focused on monitoring policing procedures and having worked at PNR have denounced how campaigning groups, including the anti-fracking movement, were depicted as forms of “domestic extremism” in policing strategies (Netpol 2016, 2018, n.d.). My interlocutors, emphasising the peaceful nature of their disruptive actions, were angered that the political label of “domestic terrorist” was being applied to their truth-making practices. They felt that the kind of ‘evidence’ which covert police officers would look for was designed to marginalise protest communities, signalling that they deserved repression. The search for such ‘evidence’ was not truthful; it offered a distorted account of peaceful protests and intimidated protesters.

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<sup>79</sup> The Criminal Investigation Department; plain clothes officers are often attached to this department.

These views were echoed by many in my fieldwork; people largely agreed that the camp eviction had been carried out primarily as a symbolic move against the anti-fracking movement and against people on the margins of mainstream society. Indeed, the camp was a place of both residence and resistance. The camp was atypical, not only by virtue of it being on squatted land. It was set up as a resistance hub against a fracking project, a place where people discussed and researched fracking issues, where people lived in garden sheds and shacks, heated themselves with wood-burning stoves, where lights were powered off grid by the solar panels and the wind turbine, and where woodstoves and fires were used to cook. It was owned by everyone, and by no-one in particular. When I stayed there, people would not usually comment on the camp being an explicit or active challenge to the ‘system’ – it was just there where it was needed.

Towards the end of my stay, however, as the fracking moratorium came into effect, there were more spontaneous discussions over the future of the camp. People debated whether to maintain it as a “base” for other campaigns and an alternative to the housing system – or whether to clean everything up and move on to the next protest site. People involved in the campaign but who did not live there often said it was an important project to support as it offered “a wonderful example of a different kind of life”. Sam, in her involvement with previous anti-fracking campaigns, had already experienced police officers’ attitudes to protest encampments; an attitude which she felt reflected that the government, via the police force, saw no place for “this different kind of life” and wanted to “squash protesters like bugs”. That is, it was a police action against people who were perceived as a “terrorist” threat to mainstream society. Many interlocutors suggested the police must have put pressure on the landowner to go through with the eviction out of spite, as a means of quashing anti-fracking protests and of crushing what was seen as a threatening way of life.

Claudia, one of my close friends on camp and central to many of my ethnographic descriptions in previous chapters, expressed similar views. She felt people on the margins of society, who struggled to build a livelihood in ‘the matrix’ or who aspired to an alternative way of life, were being purposefully targeted by the government and the police. In October 2019, Claudia drove me and another camp resident to London to take part in the two-week long XR protests (mentioned in Ch. 2). On the evening of the second day, one group of protesters had been cleared by the police from Millbank, and forced to pick up their belongings and join the Scottish group, camping at the junction of Broad Sanctuary and Victoria Street, facing Westminster Abbey.<sup>80</sup> Claudia, my partner and I sat down to eat the hot meal provided by the Scottish “rebel kitchen”. We looked up at the magnificent historical Abbey, which had seen all British coronations since 1066, contrasted by the modern glass

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<sup>80</sup>I have briefly described how XR operates in Ch.3 about the climate and ecological crisis. It is a broad movement, formed of different local groups as well as more central national working groups, or teams. For the “Rebellion” action planned in October, different local groups assembled by region, and each region was then responsible for holding a specific place in central London. I spent quite a bit of time with the Northern crew, as up to then I had been following Manchester-based XR meetings, as well as a handful of Preston ones.

Queen Elizabeth II conference centre opposite it. Claudia started reflecting on her years getting involved with various activist groups:

It's definitely become harder and harder to protest I think. It's also gotten harder and harder for the less enfranchised people to do things in society... It's an accumulation of things that adds up to this whole system. (...)

But it's done by design. It's like benefits being gradually taken away, so people don't notice. It's when it hits the middle classes that people start taking notice. You know, if you don't stand up for them [poorer people] it will come back at you later on. It's this racist rhetoric from the Tories, demonising people, creating fear....

My partner asked Claudia whether she really felt these measures were all connected, or were being taken independently perhaps, and not by design. She replied without hesitating:

I think they sit there, and think "What is the minimum we can give them and get away with?" It's really about greed ultimately. That's the way I see it at least.

(...) They want the people at the bottom of the pile to go away and die. That's why benefits are scrutinised to the max! The people at the top might forget to declare a house or a bit of revenue somewhere, and they don't get anything. But oh boy, it's really important to check on the people at the bottom!

The rest of the conversation veered to how people viewed the value of different kinds of work, and whether perhaps some of these policies were the result of flawed thinking but by well-intentioned people. This discussion definitely stuck in my mind and reminded me of many moments at the roadside at PNR, when witnessing police behaviour against protesters, or when monitoring the activities on the fracking site and listening to press releases from Cuadrilla's PR departments. On those occasions, Claudia would angrily comment "They're at the top, they have all the power and money, and yet they still need to cheat and lie their way out of everything!!". Claudia strongly felt that the interests of people in more difficult positions, at PNR and elsewhere, were persistently ignored, demonised, or received brutal responses, whilst wealthier corporations and people "at the top" were being prioritised – hence her satisfaction with holding up the banner "Climate Struggle = Class Struggle" during the XR action in the City. Claudia often criticised the governments of the last few decades for dismantling the safety net that previous generations had fought for, entering years of austerity and resulting in huge cuts to public funds. In this sense, my friends' protest on the roadside at PNR *truly* meant being on "one big frontline".

Another interlocutor held this sentiment even more strongly. With severe joint pains and other medical conditions, he had to use a walking stick to move around; he was “differently-abled” as he liked to say. This meant he was on disability benefits and had a mobility car. Shortly after I moved to PNR, the police provided hours of footage from their CCTV cameras installed at the roadside to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). This particular interlocutor had allegedly been seen to participate in illegal activities using his mobility car; in addition to this, the DWP claimed he had failed to inform them of a change in his situation, given evidence of him being more mobile than declared. Eventually the DWP removed his blue badge for disabled parking, as well as the mobility car. He also ended up in an on-going legal challenge with the DWP for benefits fraud. A few months later, he received a letter by the DVLA asking him to undergo a medical examination after a “third party” had got in touch with the Department to question his ability to drive a car.<sup>81</sup> The letter stated they could not disclose the identity of the third party – however after he took an eye examination and went through administrative proceedings to clear this with the DVLA, he was told that it was the police. Adding this to the physical police brutality at the roadside, it was hard to forget Sam and Claudia’s comments: “they want to squash us like bugs”; “they want the people at the bottom of the pile to go away and die”. Such was the truth of the reality my interlocutors were witnessing in their involvement with the anti-fracking movement.

The way the police force operated was inscribed within a broader ‘system’ that was seen by Claudia and other interlocutors to oppress those whose interests did not match the “interests of the state”, as Patricia had told me during our walk from gatecamp to the PNR community hub. Claudia once told me, as she shared her views on the increasing criminalisation of protest: “They’re watching – oh, they know very well what they are doing”. The use of the term “they” was very common amongst anti-fracking campaigners, and whilst it carried a broad conspiratorial tone (which I elaborate on in the conclusion), it took on a very detailed meaning after my thirteen months of fieldwork on the frontline. Grouping police officers with politicians and industry representatives, “they” designated the historical establishment exploiting the Many, fuelling the climate crisis, restricting the “margins of the law”, brutalising and covertly monitoring those who were re-articulating *what is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do*. In this context, and as I explore in my next chapter, my interlocutors were trying to understand how to distance themselves from “them”.

In her work with environmental activists protecting a forest from the extension of a lignite coal mine in Germany, Krøijer (2020b) suggests that the activists frequently conceptualise the world as a “dystopic civilisation”, in a temporal (and spatial) dynamic locating the crisis very much in the present. The effect of this is that “liberating oneself [from the dystopia] becomes a constant labour of transformation [and] calls for a particular form of endurance that requires minute attention to every single action” (ibid: 57). In doing so, the activists distance themselves from specific places, practices

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<sup>81</sup> Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, the government department responsible for holding the database of registered drivers and vehicles in the UK.

and people which are contributing to the dystopic civilisation, and constitute their places and practices as the utopia. The dystopia becomes the “result of the desire of ‘others’”, the other’s utopian project which has “gone wrong” and which “‘works’ for only parts of the world’s people and beings” (ibid: 57–58).

In my fieldwork, being targeted by the government and the police, treated and designated as “terrorists” and marginals, was a confirmation for my interlocutors’ of how “dystopian” the ‘system’ was. It triggered them into taking further action against the ‘system’ which “works for only parts of the world’s people and beings”, and to distance themselves from it in doing so. “I probably would have been a keyboard warrior for a lot longer if I hadn’t got so angry about what had been done to somebody I knew” said one camp resident. “So, the way I think about it, *it was really the police that radicalised me*, not the cause [emphasis added]” she said. After witnessing a particularly brutal encounter between an officer and one of her friends at PNR, this interlocutor had chosen to spend all her annual leave living on the camp and taking action on the roadside. She loved her life on camp, and was always miserable when the end of her annual leave came; “it’s like leading a double life. But I prefer this one”. Her and other interlocutors were on the frontline to collectively witness both “the system that says fracking is okay” and the behaviour of the police force, which they felt was bringing that system into being.

## Conclusion

It became apparent through my fieldwork that my interlocutors’ experiences and specific brutal encounters with the police force – and by proxy with the government and the state apparatus – pushed them to question fundamental aspects of the society they lived in. Many had been traumatised by the brutal behaviour of the constabulary on the roadside, and their apparent lack of accountability for it. Police officers often invoked having to “just do their job”. They were responding to safety incidents on the roadside, to how protesters acted, and to Cuadrilla’s disrupted lawful right to work; they were responding to what, for them, *truly was* happening on the roadside.

However, as I have shown in this chapter and throughout the thesis, *what truly is* is ethically entangled with *what ought to be* and *what to do* – consciously so for my interlocutors. As the latter increasingly made connections between their realisations about climate change and the ‘system’ exacerbating it, their daily activism at PNR meant facing a police force who were seemingly not making these connections. Encounters with police officers who were seemingly “just doing their job” were experienced as biased and often brutal. My interlocutors’ thus perceived police actions as aligned with systemic realities but not as “truthful” actions. Being truthful implied witnessing harms and being willing to transform a harmful ‘system’; it meant being committed to collectively realising scientific, moral, and emotional truth.

In Ch.1, I suggest that committed truth is witnessed and realised in the eyes of others; it can thus be dangerous with the 'wrong audience' (see Foucault 1983 for the centrality of risk and danger in ethical truth-telling). My interlocutors' truth-making practices risked their being targeted by the state apparatus and the constabulary. Protesters found that representing their interests in a way that was recognisable and deemed worthwhile by the 'system' was a brutal challenge which required them to weave in and out of visible and official contexts. As such it often seemed conflicting for them to uphold the very 'system' they were seeking to act against; living in marginal conditions, they noticed and experienced forms of oppression and inequality which pushed them to see things starkly, even more so considering their existential realisations around climate change and its consequences (see Ch.3).

This chapter has looked at how truth and responsibility are intertwined, and how my interlocutors' understanding of 'the matrix' was changed or radicalised by interaction with the police. The next chapter examines relationships between activists at PNR and their conceptualisations of work and employment, and how this also led them to challenge, and be challenged by, 'the matrix' they were entangled with. In light of my interlocutors' existential concerns about climate change and intersecting forms of social injustices, how did they making a life worth living on the frontline?



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## CHAPTER SIX – THE WORK OF ACTIVISM: A LIFE WORTH LIVING ON THE FRONTLINE

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“Reduce the hours that you’re working for the system”

Iris was a joyous and very reflective character. She was easy to laugh with, but could also be deep in thought; she considered at length what her opinions were before speaking them. She read books whilst sat on the tarmac at the entrance of the fracking site, exchanged giggles with her friends whilst holding placards, and stood her ground solemnly in front of vehicles and police officers. Iris had gone from being a teacher, to working in local administration, to living full-time on the protest camp at PNR. When I met her in 2019, she had left PNR to care for a relative, but returned when she could to support the movement. She had been involved in direct actions and had been arrested on the roadside; one of her charges led to a trial she lost. She appealed and – a rare occasion according to my interlocutors – won. Despite her win, she had found the whole process emotionally and financially tough. As quoted in the previous chapter, she told me “I just wanted to scream to the courts, how else am I supposed to save the planet?!”. Iris agreed to be interviewed towards the end of my fieldwork, and kindly shared her reflections with me. She vividly described the profound ways in which her time on the frontline had impacted her:

I've gone on a long journey because 10 years ago I was a teacher, I really believed in being a part of society as it was. I didn't question how it was, and I went into teaching – it was very idealistic, thinking I can help people have a better life, [but] it was too much about feeding them into a structure that was designed, really, for other people's satisfaction rather than [for] the average human being. I didn't feel that what was happening in schools was (helping) humans reach their full potential. It was a hard experience to lose my professional middle-class idealism (...). For me, it's about not cooperating anymore. There's so much bad stuff going on. Whether it's environmental destruction, whether it's social structures that are breaking people (...) There's so much happening that isn't okay, and you don't have to go and be on a camp to rise up against it (...) For people like me, we were doing a boring, vaguely middle-class kind of job, I totally think you should make an effort. I think you should stop aligning yourself with supporting the power structure, which is what we've all been educated to do. Cut down your outgoings so you're living on less, so you don't need so much income, and then reduce the hours that you're working for the system. For the hours that you are not working for the system, do something useful, like get involved with community projects, get involved with resistance.

Being part of the anti-fracking movement was a crucial part of Iris' "journey". Her resistance to fossil fuels and to a specific energy infrastructure drove her to the roadside, but her opposition – and that of the majority of my interlocutors' – to fracking was manifold. Her underlying concern for nurturing "human potential" and for opposing "social structures that are breaking people" came to guide her. On the frontline, she witnessed what fracking *truly was* as well as coming to understand what the 'system' truly was. As demonstrated throughout the thesis, the "system that says fracking is okay" was experienced as exploitative and unfair. The 'system' was also experienced as something they were inextricably entangled with, 'the matrix' they could see the truth but that they were part of. How could they disentangle themselves from it?

In *The Matrix* film trilogy, Neo, one of the protagonists, begins part of his journey of awakening and leaving 'the matrix' at work, in his office. Sat at a desk in a non-descript cubicle and open-plan work space, he receives a phone call which offers him a way out from 'the matrix' – away from the drudgery of work and routine and towards the truth. In an apt parallel, I take my interlocutors' conceptualisations of work and employment as a focal point with which to explore the rightful reality people were attempting to build at PNR (see also O'Brien 2020 on this topic, one of my blog posts on *The Energy Blog* at the Centre for Energy Ethics). Indeed, my interlocutors formed a diverse ecosystem of people working across the different physical spaces of the frontline. The community there included people living on and off the protest camp, some in full-time employment and others with no form of income. Some activists were dedicated to being physically present at the roadside, while others donated food, equipment and money as a way of contributing to the physical fight. As mentioned in Ch.1, my interlocutors came from different backgrounds in Lancashire, from deprived areas of Blackpool and the Fylde to more affluent smaller villages dotted around the region and beyond. They held in common, beyond their opposition to fracking, an engagement with "processes involved in making a living", where 'living' extends beyond employment relationships to include "physical, social, spiritual, affective, and intellectual dimensions" (Narotzky & Besnier 2014: S6). By focusing on work, labour and responsibility, I ask myself: how did "the imperative to earn a living" and the impulse to live a truthful life meet on the PNR frontline (Denning 2010: 80)?<sup>82</sup> What did the 'work of anti-fracking activism' involve? What tensions and contradictions did life on camp entail? What expectations did camp residents hold of themselves and others, and what transitions did they go through on the frontline? In doing so I examine how livelihoods are formed within and outside of 'the matrix'. In this way, I bring together findings from previous chapters to show that the PNR frontline was an experience of polarisation between different truths, different realities and how to bring them into being. These realities were not limited to energy sources and forms of extraction; it was all "one

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<sup>82</sup> The distinction between work and labour merits reflection. I mention this briefly in this chapter through Arendt's notion of work for example. However, I will be using both terms interchangeably throughout the chapter.

big frontline”. These realities implicated people’s fears, hopes, identities, their relationships with one another, their livelihoods, how they made sense of the world.

I start by describing the work of activism and examine how anti-fracking interlocutors interrogated the value of their activities in relation to common conceptualisations of employment. I show how the “power of the collectivity” enabled them to endow the work of activism with notions of responsibility in ways that challenged the practical and conceptual usefulness of employment within ‘the matrix’ but did not leave them detached from it. I then highlight interlocutors’ attitudes towards monetary compensation and the ways in which they grappled with funding the work of activism. They endeavoured to morally distance themselves from the monetary dynamics they perceived to be fuelling fracking, and to contribute to creating a different reality through their activities on the roadside. This endeavour was a constant practice fraught with tensions and contradictions as they asked themselves the kind of reality they were responsible for bringing into being through the work of activism. It was not a reality free from conflicts and disagreements, rather it was a reality where the capacity and willingness to act were built through finding one’s place in powerful but tense webs of responsibilities.

### The work of activism and the “spectre of the wageless life”

Whilst sitting at gatecamp during a monitoring shift and squinting my eyes to make out potential movements on the site, I jumped at the sound of: “Get a job!!”. The invective came from a young child, head poking out of a vehicle driving past. Looking satisfied, the child sat back down inside the car and closed the window. Claudia, on shift with me, sighed: “that’s one of the top insults around here”. She then declared softly: “there is a lot of work to do – but there are no jobs”. Before I could reply, a familiar car pulled up on the curb and a local activist’s face appeared in the window. She gestured towards the back of her car: “I’ve got the drinking water containers! A hand unloading?”. Claudia and I got up and went to work unloading the containers, but her remark stuck with me. On frequent occasions, passing drivers would pull in by gatecamp and ask about fracking and the movement opposing it. A recurrent question that struck me, also asked by journalists interviewing activists, would be: “what do you all do in life? Do you work?”. These reflections, alongside the “get a job” refrain, formed part of a broader canvas of encounters I was part of at PNR, wherein various envisaged relations between anti-fracking activists and employment surfaced.

My interlocutors often described the “activist line of work” to me. They had monitoring “shifts” to attend to, marches and rallies to plan, blockades to organise – activities which they often described as going “to work” or “putting in the hours”. They would joke about “knocking it off the wages” when people showed up late for a monitoring shift. Aileen told me once during a shift: “I have had four different jobs before this one. But I’m putting in so many hours now, probably many more than people going to work every day!”. The 24-hour monitoring at the roadside, described in depth in Ch.4,

required people to spend many hours at the roadside, and sometimes doing several nightshifts in a row. Come the morning, the “bustling” on the roadside could also be arduous work, alongside potential lock-ons, rallies and events. A grassroots media collective was also formed to document events at the roadside and share footage online with additional commentary and research. Dealing with the legal consequences of protest (see Ch.4) could also require significant amounts of time and work: finding evidence, writing statements, attending case management sessions or hearings, attending the actual trial, waiting for the case to be processed, and sometimes having to be dismissed from the courtrooms when the case was adjourned on the day with no advance notification. Alongside this, general housekeeping tasks needed to be done on the roadside and on the camps. These included sourcing wood logs to keep warm, unloading it from vehicles and storing it, filling up and transporting water containers, tidying, cleaning and washing up in communal spaces, provisioning people with food and drinks, cleaning the compost toilets, building and repairing the wooden constructions, and tending to the vegetable patches. My interlocutors oscillated between being on their feet all day and being sat down for hours, monitoring the fracking site and watching cars rush by at gatecamp as they prepared coffees and chatted together. When there was no visible activity on the site to log, keeping presence on the roadside and on the camps was a form of work in itself: it ensured the occupation of the shared spaces and thereby sustained the constant opposition to the fracking site.

Cuadrilla’s security guards, when interacting with activists at the entrance to the site would comment: “benefits and pensions, the lot of you!”. Their critical tone not only indicated that they thought activists were unable or unwilling to find employment, but also that the work of activism did not qualify as valuable activity; it seemed activists could only be people who did not want to work, who were not able to, who could not find employment, or who were not of working age. In November 2018, the UK Clean Growth and Energy Minister addressed the House of Commons, announcing her intention to visit the shale gas site to meet those “exploiting the resource to create jobs” as well as those opposing the site. She stated: “those of us on Government benches believe in jobs, not mobs” (Hayhurst 2018f). Jobs versus mobs; her words seemed to echo the frustrated shouts from angry drivers and security guards. Her statement formed part of a common trope that my interlocutors felt imposed on them by outsiders to the campaign, namely that activism is not a valuable and valued activity and does not qualify as work. This trope can be linked back to depictions of the mob during the Industrial Revolution discussed in Ch.2, whereby the mob consisted of people “out of steady employment” and surviving by illicit means (Thompson 1966: 55–56).

Over the last centuries in Europe, employment has become a social, political and economic organising principle in a “society of laborers and jobholders” (Arendt 1958: 46; Denning 2010; Kasmir & Stasch 2018; Komlosy 2018; van der Linden 2014). In a euro-centric narrative, where selling one’s labour power in return for monetary compensation has become a “defining condition of humanity”, employment can be empowering for labourers, extirpating people from the feudal relationships of dependence of the middle ages and opening up autonomous possibilities (Chang 2014: 347). However, this narrative also casts unpaid activities in an unworthy light, relegating them to

marginalised demographics (Komlosy 2018: 9, 16–18). Unemployment becomes a “situation of lack, the space of exclusion” in a global narrative equating paid activity with work and singling out (un)employment as a condition in need of political interventions which “contain the spectre of the wageless life” (Denning 2010: 80, 84; Komlosy 2018: 9). In this way, employment and professional occupations have become categories defining people. The question “what do you do” is commonly used to introduce oneself to other people, something which my interlocutors rarely did. I noticed they would actively refrain from asking the question when meeting someone new, and would discuss such issues together at times emphasising that people should not “just be their job”.

The anti-fracking movement at PNR included people of all ages, and a large part was formed by pensioners – lending some credence to the security guards’ comments. However, in addition to this retired demographic, the delineation between people of working age who were unemployed at the time of my fieldwork, with those working in short-term jobs or temporary opportunities was not always clear. Several of my interlocutors on camp were of working age and had actively left full-time employment to dedicate themselves to the campaign. I found their situation particularly interesting considering the negative comments I heard on the roadside, and I focus on them here. Sam, introduced in Ch.4 and 5, and Charlie were two of these interlocutors. When I met Charlie at PNR, he had a lengthy “career” (as people commonly said) in activism under his belt and was still living on the protest frontline. He had been involved with anti-fracking campaigns at different protest sites across the UK for a few years already and had carried out several direct actions. He had quit his full-time job to spend more time campaigning and living on camps. He told me:

People say they are grateful for what we do, because we have given up our employment, we have paused our life to fight this thing [fracking]. But my life is not paused – this is my life! I don’t have any other. This is what I am doing.

Charlie and other activists in his situation would rely on short-term cash jobs offered by people they knew in the anti-fracking movement, and material and financial donations from the network of supporters. Yet in their characterisation of their activities, they would actively seem to resist any suggestion that a life “without any form of income, nothing from the state or anything like that”, in Charlie’s words, was lacking. Sam put things this way:

When you're full-time campaigning, working would just be impossible. It [campaigning] just becomes like a job. Well, what an average person considers a job. But with this, well, the thing you're passionate about becomes... You live it, you breathe it – you wake up and it’s always there.

The work of activism for Sam and Charlie *is* making a living, fully and completely, with its share of difficulties and contradictions. In Ch.1, I presented Arendt's conceptualisations of human activities making up the 'vita activa': "the human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something" (Arendt 1958: 22). Arendt designates *labour* and *work* as "life-sustaining activities", respectively corresponding to satisfying "bodily necessities" and the making of a liveable environment in which humans can live (ibid: 170-176). *Action*, Arendt's third category, has been extensively discussed throughout the thesis as a creative "beginning" constituting the "web of human relationships" (Arendt 2000 [1964]: 179). *Action*, as it is delineated in Arendt's framework, was highly valued by my interlocutors. *Action* marked people's ethical responsibilities, at once firmly embedded in the "web" of human sociality and marking the emergence of something individual. Taking Arendt's framework, activists living the wageless life at PNR carried out practical "life-sustaining" activities closely intertwined with creative and collective action opposing the shale gas industry, sometimes in indistinguishable ways. The common motto "everyone is crew" was indeed meant to include a wide range of activities as part of the work of opposing fracking.

Security guards and industry representatives often qualified my interlocutors' activities as being opposed to the job opportunities pro-shale actors promised to offer to a deprived region. As Claudia said, "there are no jobs here" – Cuadrilla emphasised "putting Lancashire first" in its mission statement to boost employment in the northwest and contribute to the creation of a skilled labour force. Yet my interlocutors rejected these arguments, not least based on disagreements on predicted employment figures (see FoE 2015) – the work of fracking was not one they welcomed. If fighting it required taking up campaigning on a full-time basis, many of my interlocutors felt that was the right thing to do. Being "unemployed" for the work of activism was needed and valuable. Living in this way was difficult not least given the apparent reticence many of my interlocutors had for monetary compensation in relation to activism, and more broadly.

### Life under evaluation

My interlocutors rejected the space of activism being characterised as *lacking* due to falling outside formal employment, and actively tried to distance themselves from formal employment in their activities on the roadside. People mocked "jobbos" working in 'the matrix' – a term interlocutors used to designate people or themselves when in full-time employment. Monetary compensation in particular was deemed problematic as people sought to contain the "spectre of the *waged* life". Alongside the "get a job!" insult, the accusation of being a paid protester was very offending for most, if not all, of my interlocutors.<sup>83</sup> The prospect of being rewarded financially for the work of activism

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<sup>83</sup> People also joked about it amongst themselves; "did you not get your brown paper envelope today? I'm waiting for mine from Russia", to which the reply came "Oh, I'm waiting for one from Greenpeace!". Such



was a perilous prospect to be carefully negotiated, rather than an appealing solution. The wage itself was not necessarily the issue at play, it was rather the overall web of relationships and responsibilities in which this wage was being paid and received.

Harry, a long-standing anti-fracking activist explained to me how he had been treated suspiciously in his early days in the campaign: “people were accusing me of being paid by NGOs! I was already getting accused by people out there of being paid, why get it from the inside?”. A few campaigners had told me Harry worked really hard and was a great activist to have around; but he was “only in it for a job”. The thought that he would receive monetary compensation for his activism or use his experience to get salaried work disturbed them. One young activist in particular was appalled. He explained: “I would never get paid for my activism! It would stop being activism then”. He was vocally critical of XR organisers who were paid for their work – “they have these huge fundraisers and then some of them are even paid, they have a salary!”. I asked the activist what made him so uncomfortable with the idea and he explained that as soon as money comes into play, peoples’ motivations are wrong and they become corruptible. He continued: “You don’t believe in it, you only do it because you are getting paid”. This activist was ethically appraising paid labour as a matter of concern (Latour 2004) for activists engaged in resisting unconventional gas extraction. For him, it seems that the true work of activism emerges from necessity and moral obligation rather than as a response to monetary incentives. This made him reluctant to endorse accepting money for the work of activism as he felt he would question himself and his motivations. He also felt it would signal to other activists that his sense of responsibility was wrong and that he was thereby bringing the wrong kind of reality into being.

His comment related to activism but denoted a broader concern about the effects of monetary compensation. It reminded me of occasions when research from scientists with ties to oil and gas industries (either directly working in or undertaking consultancy) were perceived as wrong by my interlocutors. In February 2019, an open letter signed by about 50 scientists urged the government to review the Traffic Light System (TLS).<sup>84</sup> The letter called the TLS limits too “conservative” and set to much lower levels than for “comparable” industries in the UK (Gabbatiss 2019). The letter was published shortly after the head of seismology at the British Geological Survey and a researcher from University of Liverpool specialising in engineering seismology both agreed the limits could be raised safely (Sharman 2019).<sup>85</sup> In the days following the publication of the open letters, an article on *Drill or Drop?* pointed out that “the signatories described themselves as ‘practising geoscientists working

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reflections to me also had to do with historical depictions of the mob – whereby groups of people were said to be hired to carry out a third party’s interests (see discussions in Ch. 2 on Thompson 1966: 68 and Rudé 1959).

<sup>84</sup> The TLS were introduced in Ch.1, p.50. It was drawn up by representatives from the government, the regulators and the industry, and required fracking operations to cease for eighteen hours should a seismic event induced by fracking go over 0.5ML on the Richter scale, in order to check the integrity of the gas well.

<sup>85</sup> They have both worked to advise the Oil and Gas Authority – now the North Sea Transition Authority – the industry regulator, in the past. Brian Baptie in particular, the head of seismology at BGS, was part of the team who originally established the TLS.

in UK universities and institutions'. But they did not give details of where they worked or what were their roles. (...) Of the 48 names, we found evidence that at least 14 worked for consultancies, some of which offer services to the oil and gas sector or are supportive of it" (Hayhurst 2019j).

My interlocutors talked about this amongst themselves disapprovingly, calling the scientists "frackademics" and commenting on how unsurprised they were by this "collusion of interests" that seemed to dictate the scientific 'evidence'. The scientists' capability in speaking the truth was contested. Receiving money thus entailed forming relations with the money giver; what kind of mediating entities do each party become to one another and to others, with what effect on the capacity to act truthfully? These concerns closely mirror the notion of alienation captured by Marx in his writings about the capitalist wage system and how it harnesses – or rather in Marx terms', exploits labour power (Marx 2000b [1941], 2000a [1932]). When "the activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity (...) It belongs to another and is the loss of himself" writes Marx, decrying the condition of labourers working for those owning the means of production (Marx 2000b [1941]: 89). These early writings from Marx convey his humanist view of "vital activity" and the creative capacities of humans to create worthy lives, a capacity thwarted by the alienation of waged labour (ibid: 89, 90, 93).

Monetary compensation thus seemed to carry the potential for initiating a shift in people's sense of responsibility, a 'journey' in which people's capacity and willingness to act truthfully was eroded. As examined in the previous chapter, my interlocutors perceived police officers "just doing their job" as a harmful attitude. They commented on officers taking up extra time on the roadside for better pay with no consideration of their responsibilities to act to protect locals from harm. It was an attitude which activists felt either signalled foregoing a sense of responsibility altogether, or actively mediating on behalf of an entity which was wrong – resulting in a wrongful reality. Instead, getting involved on the frontline and possibly foregoing the responsibilities of formal employment was the start of a "journey" (in Iris' words) where the truth of 'the matrix' is recognised, and a different web of relationships emerges. Indeed, activists perceived their work to be in opposition to the dynamics driving the shale gas industry forwards and sustaining 'the matrix'; after all, they were on the "right side of history" whilst the shale industry was a form of "extreme energy" sustained by sacrifice zones (see Ch.1). The dynamics of extreme energy were expansive and harmful; the dynamics of the anti-fracking movement were right and truthful. As Josh liked to remind me:

People like saying money is the root of all evil. They forget the actual quote from the bible – it says that the *love* of money is the root of all evil!" (...) Capitalists are *solely* looking for excess value, and profit is the downfall of it all. Ultimately, all these industries, oil industries and fracking industries, and any industry - it's all there to make money. They don't give a shit about whether your Nana's heated in her house or not.

Underlying oil and gas projects, Josh perceived a logic of accumulation which was not helping the local communities, despite the industry's claim to the contrary. In Josh' eyes, people working in such industries were in an agentic relationship with money, rather than with the local community. In the eyes of my interlocutors and in the context of being on "one big frontline" where an unequal and unfair 'system' is confronted, monetary accumulation thus enabled the iteration of a wrongful reality where harm is perpetrated on the natural environment. It also enabled the continuation of a 'system' benefitting the "Few" and harming the "Many".

I pushed one of my fellow camp residents on the point of monetary compensation. Sat in the communal together one afternoon, I reminded him that my PhD allowance enabled me to spend time at PNR; in some ways, I was paid to be there. He replied that my position was different given that research and documentation are important; forms of witnessing were valuable. More than that, he said that I was not being paid: I was being funded. He went on to explain that funds or grants are different, not only with respect to research but also as collective funding for a campaign. In relation to his own situation, he brought up the example of Lush, an environmentally conscious cosmetics brand that had given a grant to the camp as a whole to support the work of activism. In this instance, the money was for a specific aim, a specific kind of work, and it did not go to one individual in particular but was rather shared. Sam, present during this conversation, agreed:

Funding is a lot different to anyone being paid. You're not paying someone by the hour. You're not paying someone's holidays. You're not paying somebody to get up in the morning and get out of bed. It's more 'We need money to build this toilet' (...) You know what I mean? You're not paying people to earn a wage. (...) Any funding you apply for within activism, will clearly state, that they will not pay people's wages. (...) It's entirely different, entirely different.

In my interlocutors' eyes, this kind of funding did not pay individuals; rather it funded tasks or causes. Completing a task in this sense required direct reflection on webs of responsibility related to the anti-fracking cause, rather than relying on what one individual's personal motivations might be. The amount of funds also did not rely on how long or how quickly something was achieved; hourly rates did not convert time into money. Sam's conceptualisation of funding thus established a way for the anti-fracking activist to act responsibly within the community by avoiding the accumulation or misappropriation of money - once the toilet was built, the task was done and the money was accounted for. For Sam then, the prospects of receiving monetary compensation in the context of activism often indexed harmful excessive and accumulative tendencies and an attrition of responsibility, as opposed to receiving specific amounts of funding for a specific task. The issue at

hand was not whether work was remunerated or not but whether there was a careful reflection on the webs of responsibilities which actions (remunerated or not) exist in and contribute to.

Activists had to continuously work out the contradictions arising from conflicting responsibilities in relation to the money funding the work of activism. On one occasion at gatecamp, a local supporter tried to give a camp resident a twenty-pound donation. The latter refused, stuffed the note back into the donor's hand, and walked away to stand with a placard further up the road. The donor handed the money to me and said "you do it, they'll accept it from you!". I tried, without any success, and unwilling to hold onto it myself, placed it back onto the donor's bag as they shook their head. On another occasion, I returned from a few days away from the frontline and was picked up by Claudia and Sam at the station. I was nervous to come back, wondering whether people would even notice me gone and how easy it would be to pick up my relationships where I had left them. The atmosphere in the car was great though, and we all seemed excited to see each other – and to have more numbers on the frontline. We went to fetch groceries for the camp, and when I paid at the till, Claudia announced we should pay with camp funds, or split it. I insisted that I wanted to contribute, to which Claudia replied: "you don't have to pay your way back you know". In the car, Sam gave me some money back for the shopping, but I suggested we could just put that money in the camp funds. She seemed annoyed and confused and said she could put part of it in the funds but wanted to pay me back. "Because I have to contribute as well..."; she trailed off mid-sentence. "We have camp funds but they are not being used, and well I worry about it". Shortly after this episode, a group of us from camp planned to travel to London for an activist gathering. Following conversations within our travel group and on behalf of them, I was tasked to ask the person who usually dealt with the finances whether some funds could be used for travel. The request was not met enthusiastically, and I felt embarrassed at my selfishness, even though I thought I was speaking on behalf of others as well. After some clarifying discussions, it turned out the money pot had never been used to fund such travels, as it would set a difficult precedent to follow each individual activist's travel wishes. Eventually however, camp funds were used for the travel, indicating the situated ethical and economic quandaries activists were engaged in their daily lives – responsible activist work was not a fixed state of affairs but rather a daily practice which recognised the rightful allocation of responsibility.

### Webs of responsibility and the "power of the collectivity"

As much as people mocked 'jobbos' and considered monetary employment problematic, many who closely supported camp were indeed 'jobbos'. They were in full-time employment, or were self-employed working full weeks, or were retired 'jobbos'. As Sam recounted to me:

It's not this idyllic fucking world where you're living without money or without capitalism or without plastic. That's bullshit because you still rely on supermarkets. The people that bring

you food, the people that are donating food and donating things, they're still earning a wage and paying taxes to bring you those things, so you're still stuck in that system. (...) You do get people who don't get the bigger picture of how camps are maintained with funds, funding - and cooking food and washing up!

'Jobbos' supporting the camp were thanked and respected for their help and support, and close friendships were formed. However, Sam found it frustrating that the 'matrix' stuck to everyone, whether 'jobbo' or not. Whilst camp residents were free from certain constraints tied to formal work or housing, they relied on others who were. Distancing oneself from 'the matrix' through the work of activism was thus a matter of keeping the capacity and willingness to take action as central to people's practices whilst also carefully navigating and tending to webs of responsibilities towards others.

There were no official rules to follow in this web of responsibilities. Life at the roadside and particularly on camp revealed a rejection of formal, systemic forms of governance and organisation which people attributed to 'the matrix'. After all, in their experiences on the frontline, formal rules and regulations in the legal system and in the hierarchical police (see Ch. 4 and 5) force led to foregoing a sense of practical ethical judgement and awareness of intersecting crises people witnessed. Thus, when attempting to form an alternative reality, people valued flexibility, fluidity, and autonomy as organising principles. There were no "minimum" numbers of shifts one had to take up at gatecamp, no "obligations" to take part in a direct action. Similar dynamics operated on the protest camp too. When I first moved there, I recall asking Claudia, "do you reckon I could plant my tent there [an empty space] for a few days?", to which she replied "Do *I* reckon? You can do what you like Sarah [original emphasis]". Furthermore, throughout my stay on camp, camp meetings were talked about but did not happen on a regular basis. When someone felt they wanted to discuss certain 'household' issues, for example whether camp funds should be used to buy wood, or to discuss a fair distribution of cleaning chores, they would haphazardly convene with others to try to arrange a collective meeting. Sometimes the meeting happened; often it would not, or the date and time would change without everyone being informed.

The informality and flexibility of life on camp, combined with the constraints of an unwaged, full-time campaigning life resulted in much inter and intrapersonal tension. I suggest that the rightful or wrongful allocation of responsibilities for different activities, and communicating these responsibilities appropriately, underlined many of the conflicts. Indeed, daily sharing and borrowing in such communities can mean navigating difficult and at times asymmetric responsibilities, managing requests from people who have less access to certain resources, being able to accept help from others, and recognising and managing vulnerabilities of ourselves and others (see Martin 2021; Neumark 2017; Strathern 2011; Widlok 2021).

These sorts of dynamics were present within the anti-fracking community where waged and unwaged work connected in a vast ecosystem of roles and practices rich with concerns around meaningful

activity, fulfilling expectations and being a fulfilled, responsible member of the community. People's descriptions of "what really happened" related to how they allocated or restricted responsibility. For example, I often found myself listening to conversations where people complained about residents not signing up to monitoring shifts at gatecamp, not spending enough time washing up or splitting logs. Accusations of selfishness also emerged against someone building the camp up in a certain way without asking, as if that person were taking sole responsibility for what the camp should be like. I recall asking the activist in question about their building spree which I personally had not witnessed, and they replied: "I'd see the commitment that Claudia for example put into camp and thought I was doing it for her. Because of the commitment she put into the camp and the effort; I felt like that had to be reciprocated". The activist valued the capacity and willingness to take action, and also felt responsible for reciprocating the labour that Claudia had put in their common place of work and residence. Hearing this from him provided an interesting counterpoint to the many times I had been told about strong "egos" in the campaign. People complained about certain individuals wanting to do everything on their own terms, seemingly not caring about other people's places at PNR. Here however, my interlocutor's "selfish" building work was a way of being responsible on camp by acting on behalf of his relationship with others. Perhaps the activist in question did not pick up on other activities he would neglect - cooking and making sure there was food in the kitchen for example. I often heard different sides of an argument on camp between camp residents, conflicts that could be summed up with the phrase I saw scribbled in a few places in the camp: "everyone wants to save the world, no one wants to do the dishes".

The importance of these collective responsibilities tied in with the high value placed on the willingness to take action. As mentioned in the disagreement about building above, the activist justified himself by emphasising the need to reciprocate Claudia's actions on the camp. Taking action was what distinguished formal employment and 'the matrix' with life on camp and at the roadside. I clearly recall the sign stuck on the camp kitchen wall which emphasized the "active" nature of the camp and urged residents to act in accordance with this, to take part in the running and maintaining of the camp and be respectful of those who contributed materially and financially to it. As part of a group of people trying to distance themselves from 'the matrix' and where taking action was a central value, people did not want to be seen or feel as if they were not contributing. These reflections tied in with fears of being seen by others as someone who could afford to simply forgo employment, or who avoided work opportunities to shirk the responsibilities of stable employment in the job market. Instead, Charlie and Sam for example were both at pains to point out that they could not rely on any form of financial security net. Proud of their working-class roots, they deplored how people often assumed that camp residents must be from privileged financial backgrounds. This was not the norm for long-term camp residents at PNR, as voiced by Sam:

A lot of grassroots activists come from working-class backgrounds. I've never had money. I've never had things. I've never had privilege. I haven't had that. So not having it now is not



any different to me not having it when I was a kid. It's the same, except before I lived in a house.

Sam emphasised that whilst she might suffer financially from foregoing work opportunities, she was still willing to take action. Interlocutors feared being seen as enjoying a “free ride”, as if freed from financial constraints due to wealthy backgrounds, or living off donations from campaign supporters to avoid the constraints of a more formalised life involving rent, mortgage, and a job. Josh for example sometimes worried that he could be seen this way; “I haven’t done so much [direct action or lock-ons] this year, I don’t really have anything to show for it”. When I discussed “free-riding” with Sam, she recognised certain people may be “free-riding”; but to her that was rare. She also added: “It's not an easy free ride. If you were just doing it for a free ride and didn't really care about the protest, I'd say there are probably easier ways to go about having a free ride!”.

Josh was not the only one fearful of “no doing enough” – it was a very common worry among my interlocutors. Claudia frequently put her name down on the monitoring rota for a vast number of consecutive shifts, despite her visible exhaustion. People admired her for this, and for her commitment. However, they also wanted to help and relieve her from what they perceived as tiring stints on the roadside; they would text her or call her to say they were staying on from their shift so she did not have to come. Claudia often missed the explaining message and came up anyway only to discover in frustration she was not needed. Or she would see the message in time and yet still be angry someone had taken over her monitoring shift. As she later explained to me, she wanted to feel like she was “doing her part”, and sometimes she could not be there for a period of time, so wanted to make sure she “put her hours in” when possible. Yet people both inadvertently disrupted her schedule, as well as diminished her contributions to the movement, by taking on her shifts in a bid to help her. Iris had told me once: “I worry about people on camp, wanting to show they are strong and capable, independent, you know. I wonder how much of this is wanting to give back as much as possible, as well as prove one’s resourcefulness in being able to live this kind of life”. For Claudia, it seemed the willingness and capacity to take action were not in opposition but were valued in their complementarity in a form of ‘virtuous circle’ so to speak. For Iris, this was “worrying” at times.

Indeed, whilst Sam felt that people were stuck in ‘the matrix’, whether in formal employment or not, Iris, with whom I opened the chapter, told me that she feared getting stuck instead in “this kind of life”. She discussed her reticence to completely embrace the work of activism and living on camp without any form of income:

I lived on the camp full-time, eating into my savings. But you know, I was reticent to completely step into the “anarchist system” I guess you could say. I don’t know that I have it in me (...) Even moving around became difficult. I had to rely on the *power of the collectivity* [emphasis added], on other people to give you a lift, rather than being able to pay for my own

transport. I guess I was scared of the feeling of being stuck, and relying entirely on other peoples' capacities and goodwill (...) It's difficult, I was embarrassed at first. But I guess it depends if you are okay with your lifestyle impacting other people you care for, family that need you – you know, being able to pay for travel to go see them, do things for them.

I found Iris' mention of the term “power of the collectivity” intriguing. ‘Collectivity’ can denote a group of people or a “whole taken collectively”; yet it can also be used to more specifically to describe “a collective state or quality” (OED n.d.). In other words, it can refer to *the act* of living and acting collectively. By joining the anti-fracking movement, Iris was able to, through the collective, make a living and act on the deep responsibility she felt towards resisting the shale gas industry. Her willingness to act meant she found capability to do so in the “power of the collectivity”. Yet she also had to navigate the other “places of responsibility” (Arendt 2003 [1964]: 47) in her life that were not directly tied to the campaign, such as visiting relatives and taking care of them. She also wanted to live a good life for herself, sometimes separate from responsibilities towards others. Getting used to acting and living collectively took time and meant she had to think about what responsibilities mattered to her; as mentioned earlier, there was no fixed rule for her to follow to do so.

The power of the collectivity emanated from the “anarchist system” she refers to in her quote. She meant by that the messy but resilient and friendly ecosystem of people co-habiting on the camps, committed to the cause, and distanced from formal governance systems, where many struggled with unwaged livelihoods. Her use of anarchist terminology reveals the values, principles and modes of sociality which were significant for activists. Her use of the word seemed in stark contrast with common understandings of it in ‘the matrix’. In April 2019, INEOS' Chief Operations Officer (COO) declared: “We respect peaceful protest, but we must stand up to the militants who game the legal system with intimidation and mob rule. We stand for jobs and opportunity. They [anti-fracking activists] stand for anarchy in the UK” (Evans 2019).<sup>86</sup> Reading this statement in an online article as we sat in gatecamp monitoring Cuadrilla's operations, the interlocutors on shift with me were appalled he was calling activists out for “gaming the legal system” (see Ch.4). However, they also laughed at the mention of anarchy: “well at least he got something right!”.

The COO's understanding of anarchy was a pejorative one: a form of chaos brought on by the unruly anti-fracking mob, a chaos incompatible with much needed job opportunities tied to the shale gas industry. A few of my interlocutors explicitly identified as anarchists, whilst others developed more sympathy and understanding of anarchism after their experiences on the frontline. However, the vast majority did not explicitly subscribe to “anarchism” or “anarchy”, but subscribed to some of the

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<sup>86</sup> INEOS Group is mentioned in Ch.1 and Ch.2, as reputedly one of “the biggest player in UK onshore shale gas sector” (INEOS 2022) . The COO's statement was in response to the overturning of the legal injunction granted to the company in 2017, which prevented protesters from engaging in forms of protest in the vicinity of eight of INEOS' sites (see Evans 2019, also Hayhurst 2019c).

values which form part of anarchist traditions. I mentioned these in Ch.1 by referring to mutual aid, diversity, autonomy, and collective consensus-making for example. To me, these notions crucially implicate the willingness and capacity to take action by reflecting on the webs of responsibility which action emerges from and contributes to. Iris missed this ecosystem when she was away from PNR; “If I hadn’t had to leave, well... I might have just gone full in” she confided in me. She also really struggled when she was part of it; the web of relationships, tensions and conflicts was its own form of arduous work and could be draining physically and mentally.

Indeed, such feelings of responsibility towards and within a collective could be heavy and were at times tied to notions of guilt. People told me how they felt guilty for not committing enough time or energy to the campaign, for not spending enough time roadside, or spending too much time on the roadside and neglecting other responsibilities and relationships in their lives, guilty for leaving friends at the side of the road, for not doing enough shifts. Claire and her husband, with whom I would live when not staying on the camp, had covered practically every Saturday morning shift for the better part of two years. Yet, when they did not do so for two weeks in a row because they wanted to go hiking or attend to other commitments, Claire told me she felt really guilty for “abandoning” her shifts. In this way and as demonstrated throughout the chapter, conflicts were not necessarily linked to people overtly disagreeing with each other’s behaviour, but from a sense of responding to, or failing to responsibilities towards people or causes they felt in an agentic relation with. Given that the ‘collectivity’ could enable them to feel agency not only over their willingness to act, but also over their capability to act, not acting could thus be personally experienced as an act of failure on many fronts. Jack, one of the interlocutors mentioned in Ch.2 and who had delivered the XR presentations I attended, discussed these feelings with me as we sat in a park in his home city. He summed up what I had heard from many interlocutors:

I would always feel a huge amount of guilt every time I might have been able to get a successful lorry surf but didn't, or didn't proper throw myself in the way of a convoy when I could have done. I would always feel really torn up inside about that and feel like I wasn't trying hard enough and I wasn't committed enough and I was just being selfish and that's quite mentally wearing and you shouldn't feel like that obviously – but you do and I did. (...) The stresses of living on a camp at the best of times are difficult, but when there's this constant, mentally exhausting, difficult thing to deal with... (...) I wasn't really doing it because I thought it was fun or wanted to be there because I would find it actually quite difficult. But I just felt like I had to be there and especially once you've established personal connections, it's not just about... Well, it's beyond just the cause at that point, you've got friends who are there and you feel like you're abandoning them when you leave, you feel like you're not there for them. You want to be there for them.

Webs of responsibility thus pulled Jack, Iris, and many other interlocutors in opposite directions. Relations of responsibility linked people employed in ‘the matrix’ and those seeking to make a life outside of it, as they worked together to defeat fracking and disrupt a harmful ‘system’. On the one hand, they were closer together as they needed and enabled each other to make a living and to prevent the development of the shale gas industry. They also became friends, celebrating and supporting each other’s actions on the frontline. On the other hand, they were pushed further apart as they struggled with disentangling themselves from formal structures, commitments and obligations (such as formal employment, or renting accommodation for example). They also aspired to be autonomous yet to act responsibly within a collective. People were thus personally conflicted as they reflected on their own values and commitments on a frontline where a wrongful reality was being challenged and transformed.

When I discussed conflicts between activists and camp life frustrations with Sam on one occasion, she sighed and said “if we were at work, there’d be a sort of conflict resolution mechanism or something right? Like something we could do or someone to go to to mediate or something”. However rather than aspiring to formal mechanisms, she often wondered about conflict mediation workshops people engaged in activism could attend; “that’s what we really need!”. Being truthful and making rightful realities on the roadside meant working to reconcile personal autonomy with the collective dimension of truth-making practices. It also meant accepting that truths and responsibilities can be forged through conflicts and disagreements on different scales - between people and their environment, between people on seemingly opposite sides, between people campaigning together, and within one person. My interlocutors did not aspire to conflict, but they did not shy away from it either. Rather than seeking formal mechanisms to coordinate and harmonise activities among anti-fracking activists, or pushing for people to agree with one another, interlocutors had to establish their own ethical techniques of existence through action and responsibility. They valued (and grappled with) respecting and being in solidarity with another. Solidarity and respect did not necessarily mean agreeing with one another, but it meant honing a continuous practice of valuing each other’s “unique beginnings” (Arendt 2000 [1964]: 178–179) and supporting each other to be part of the collective each in different ways. In this sense, collective and personal actions and responsibilities were conceptualised as indissociable for preventing fracking and transforming the “system which says fracking is okay”. Jack aptly ended our conversation above by reflecting:

You know, you read about stuff in the national press and you understand that this has international consequences. Our days on the roadside.... It's a really big deal what happens here! You're here, sat with one other person at Gatecamp, and it's so... small scale? We do this kind of weird game [protest at the roadside] and it can feel so absurd; but it has such massive consequences. And it's stressful and exhausting. It's so bizarre when thinking... Well that it actually has such massive ripples.

Jack put into words what many of my interlocutors were experiencing on the frontline. The stakes felt high for my friends, and the “ripples” were consequential. At stake was not only a source of energy: it was a reality they did not want and that they were attempting to change whilst being “stuck” in it. The transformations they aspired to were not limited to climate policies, infrastructural transitions, or changes in democratic institutions, they were matters of personal and collective responsibilities in a “constant labor of transformation [calling] for a particular form of endurance that requires minute attention to every single action” (Krøijer 2020b: 57). Whilst Iris thought she perhaps she “didn’t have it in her” – as per her quote earlier on – to be comfortable with the power of the collectivity and the responsibilities it entailed, she also recognised she was on a ‘journey’. In the quote with which I opened this chapter, she acknowledged the personal transition she had gone through on the frontline. Whilst it had been difficult, contradictory and conflicting, she realised that such tensions were what the journey entailed: practices to be experienced collectively. She felt anyone was capable of starting that journey if they were willing.

## Conclusion

Getting involved with the anti-fracking movement for my interlocutors entailed resisting “the system that says fracking is okay”, a harmful system exploiting the “Many” and damaging democracy, and which resulted in a terrifying climate crisis. It was a system where legal rules and regulations were maladapted to a time of climate crisis, and were experienced as operating through rigged dynamics. Confronting the ‘system’ entailed violence and criminalisation which exacerbated the socio-economic inequalities forming the British landscapes. In their opposition to the ‘system’, my interlocutors sought to distance themselves from the ‘matrix’, the network of practices and values which they perceived to be sustaining a wrongful reality. My interlocutors took up the work of activism to disrupt the latter, and found themselves confronting common notions of formal employment.

Work and labour are not fixed entities in a web of sociality but are rather better understood as practices related to the realisation of a “wealth of human values” (Kusimba 2020: 173). The work of activism centred on the willingness and capacity to act responsibly as part of a collective. Through witnessing in the form of protesting, monitoring, and maintaining a presence on site, interlocutors ethically and materially attempted to separate themselves from the hydrocarbon extraction and ‘the matrix’ which it fuelled and from which it emerged. Activists thus endeavoured to live and work together, to form and negotiate places of responsibilities within and outside of the work of activism. They had to grapple with the powerful but at times tense collective life on camp and in the movement, often with no form of income or by relying on those who had one; the ‘matrix’ was hard to disentangle from.

Forms of monetary compensation were associated with the ‘matrix’ and deemed ethically problematic; but interlocutors attempted to nevertheless make a living resisting fracking through

processes of collective recognition and attributions of communal responsibility. Through the work of activism, my interlocutors were negotiating their agentive relations with others, living and non-living entities, people and causes. These processes were integral to the ethical orientations on which the collective was built and the rightful realities which people aspired to create. The value of the work of activism for my interlocutors was thus in its institution of meaningful realities articulated around truth, action and responsibility. In this way, anti-fracking activists were deeply engaged in questioning not just the kind of energy we use to fuel our work and society, but also what kind of work and society we want to fuel.



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## CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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### “Creating the facts” of a world without fracking

It was over a month since the earth tremor in August 2019 led to a suspension of fracking operations on the site.<sup>87</sup> The activity on the roadside had quietened down. There were fewer deliveries to and from the site, and less bustle – although mid-month had seen a one-day blockade organised by XR activists (see Hayhurst 2019k). As the weeks rolled by, and CLG members reported on on-going discussions between Cuadrilla and regulators regarding the seismic activity, it seemed like a silent stretch would lie ahead regarding the site. People discussed what was next for the campaign, what to do with the monitoring station, whether to keep it running or pack it up temporarily. My interlocutors were hopeful that the end of fracking would be announced but remained “*cautiously optimistic*”, as many repeated. They were also exhausted by years of continuous and consuming campaigning.

Late September brought the 1,000<sup>th</sup> day of protest, and people gathered on the roadside. They took it in turn to grab the microphone and share their reflections on fracking, the campaign, what had been achieved so far and what might come next. Putting down her flask of tea and knitting needles, Patricia took the microphone:

Can you hear me? Oh right, closer to the mike... Ok [She paused and sighed]. I can never go back to being what I was before. It [being involved in the anti-fracking movement] has changed me from what I was before. I think... I think that applies to all of us. We've realised that the world is not what we thought it was, that society and how things operate are not as we thought it was [sic] – and we can never go back.

As the crowd cheered, she gestured to the site behind her and exclaimed:

When this is gone – and it will go! When it is gone, it's not the end. I can't go back to the life that I had before. What is going on with Cuadrilla is only a tiny part of a much bigger battle that we are in. And we have to be part of that.

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<sup>87</sup> The indefinite suspension of operations ordered by the regulators eventually led to a moratorium on fracking in November 2019 (see timeline in Ch. 1, Figure 9).

People clapped their hands as Patricia brought her reflections to a close. People congratulated her as she passed the microphone along, prompting more speeches which followed similar lines of thought.

Beyond the fracking site shutting down, what would a victory for the movement look like for Patricia? For many of my interlocutors, taking part in direct action and other protest activities as part of the anti-fracking campaign meant taking on broader issues far beyond the physical site. Preventing fracking from going ahead at PNR and aiming for the “fracking rig” to come down was a powerful uniting symbol for my interlocutors who sought, more widely, to prevent the fracking industry from gaining a foothold across the UK. Indeed for many, their aim was to have a “frack free” world. As they battled for this, their engagement with energy infrastructures took them in different directions: the forming of unexpected but resilient friendships and communities, engagement with local and national bureaucracies, tense relationships with the police force, direct action, legal proceedings, physical and mental stresses, existential realisations about climate change, and historical legacies of protest. For them, fracking at PNR tied all these experiences together. The site was the concrete and stark manifestation of an overall “unjust” social and political system fuelled by hydrocarbons and sustained by sacrifice zones.

Across the patchwork grassroots movement and the histories they drew on, across the different visions for the future that they feared, hoped for, or embraced, and across the precarity of current human and other living beings’ livelihoods, my interlocutors apprehended the PNR frontline as “one big frontline”. The frontline marked moments, locations, identities, responsibilities, ways of knowing and ways of establishing truthfulness and forms of truth. In this way, the energy frontline at PNR – a space of conflict, disruption, forms and instances of power asymmetries, climate and environmental anxieties – was an onto-epistemic frontline as well. While some drilled shale gas exploration wells and tested the flow-back, others inscribed and witnessed harm in the shared landscape through shifting responsibilities, protest, direct action, and the other activities making up the work of activism. Truth, action and transition have been the three anchoring and interrelated concepts with which I have explored the onto-epistemic PNR frontline in this thesis. With a strong emic presence, these three notions cut across the protest dynamics that my interlocutors were engaged in, enabling me to “cut” my field site accordingly (Strathern 1996). In Ch.1, I showed that in a polarised national debate on the benefits and harms of the shale gas industry, truths and realities were in conflict. Technical depictions of fracking were contested and clashed with moralised accounts of the industry. I thus suggested exploring how conflicting truths are mediated in the field (Bråten 2016: 283) and examining the realisation of truthfulness in its ethical sense: the context in which truths are represented, transformed and imagined. Moving through the chapters, the thesis shows my interlocutors engaged in truth-making practices on multiple scales, making or challenging connections between actions, agents, and values. They established, evidenced, and contested truths through personal and collective practices on the frontline. Their truthfulness was underpinned by a sense of personal and collective responsibility, and the capacity and willingness to take action.

In Ch.2, I situated the conflicts on the PNR frontline in a broader history of labour and democratic struggles which my interlocutors proudly drew on in their own protest activities. They identified with the “Many” standing up to the wealthy “Few” and re-claimed the centrality of protest movements in British (hi)stories. In doing so, I demonstrated how certain historical truths are challenged, celebrated, denounced or created – and how actions can reinforce or challenge (hi)stories. I also showed how protest spaces carve out affective possibilities for change and re-articulating *what is*, *what ought to be* and *what to do*.

Ch.3 focused on the deep-seated fears that my interlocutors had regarding the climate and the ecological crisis that they felt and knew to be living through. They feared and denounced continued hydrocarbon extraction as driving devastating on-going and impending losses. I showed how the disrupted temporality of a times of crisis weighed heavy on their present lives. Within the anti-fracking movement and beyond, they learnt about, circulated, and grieved the consequences of the climate truth embedded in scientific, moral and emotional dimensions. Recognising and representing climate truth necessarily meant connecting these dimensions. It also entailed taking responsibility for the collective and personal transformations required when acting “as if the truth was real”. I further demonstrated how interlocutors criticised and enlarged climate truth in relation to intersecting social and economic crises in contemporary Britain, building directly on the historical discussions in Ch. 2. I suggested that my interlocutors’ notion of *‘the matrix’* was a way of grappling with this wrongful status quo and served to situate them as both entangled with and striving to escape it.

Having situated the temporal and existential stakes of the anti-fracking frontline, I then focused on the legal arena in Ch.4 to examine direct confrontations with ‘the matrix’ and the “system that says fracking is okay”. Faced with Cuadrilla’s seeming disregard for legal rules and regulations, my interlocutors’ monitoring on the roadside served to collectively evidence the harmful realities resulting from fracking operations. On the frontline, they witnessed and confronted the brutal truths emerging from ‘the matrix’, as well as engaged in imagining and transforming reality. They felt engaged in a truthful endeavour to prevent harm and defend the natural environment around them. In doing so, my interlocutors saw themselves as revealing the “margins of the law”, interrogating perceived exclusive relations between morality, legality and harm inside the courtrooms. Many protesters became cynical about the relevance of the current legal system in times of anthropogenic climate change, particularly given the asymmetries between the perceived “Many” and the “Few” regarding access to legal representation. Such asymmetries led them to further question their entanglement with ‘the matrix’ they were fighting against. The more they felt marginalised and pushed to the side by the ‘system’, the more they felt angry, frustrated and “radicalised” in their involvement with the anti-fracking movement.

Such dynamics were apparent in their encounters with the police force, which I examined in Ch.5. They experienced physical brutality in their interactions with officers, compounded by a lack of accountability and a sense that the police force was enabling Cuadrilla’s work whilst quashing activists’ right to protest. Given my interlocutors’ existential fears of climate, environmental and

social collapse, their anger towards the police was exacerbated by officers' justification of "just doing their job". Moreover, they felt the police were unduly enacting ambiguous responsibilities in the course of their duty, blurring the edges of legality, and sustaining a wrongful and harmful reality. Interlocutors thus felt targeted and further marginalised in their protest, designated as unlawful protesters for challenging 'the matrix'.

By examining my interlocutors' conceptualisations of work and labour, the final chapter expanded on the interrelation between responsibility and bringing realities into being. In taking up the work of anti-fracking activism, my interlocutors realised how, through their opposition to 'the matrix', they remained entangled with the "system that says fracking is okay". Many of my interlocutors, who lived on camp and campaigned full-time, felt that formal employment and monetary compensation sustained the hydrocarbon livelihoods in 'the matrix'. Yet they also understood that they themselves were part of 'the matrix'. They tried to distance themselves from the latter by relying on webs of relationships within the anti-fracking movement, and by forging their own techniques of existence on a resistance frontline. Their alternative lives on camp and on the roadside combined the capacity and willingness to take action, with their commitment to being a responsible entity of a collective – being truthful in this sense was difficult and constraining but enabled them to ethically transform reality.

Within national and international discourses of energy transitions and climate tipping points, my interlocutors' experiences on the frontline resulted in a form of personal and collective transition. They said 'no' to and took action against fracking as a form of energy extraction, establishing it as a "non-negotiable" wrong (Klein 2015: 336). In doing so, they delineated what mattered in saying 'no'. Realising truth in this sense led to conflicts and disagreements, co-existence, or harmony on the frontline and beyond. In highly valuing the ability and willingness to take action, my interlocutors also understood that what seemed fixed was not absolute: the 'system' needed to change, peoples' responsibilities towards one another and their environment needed to shift. Truth was a matter of "making" rather than solely uncovering it "out there". Being truthful entailed drawing on truth as a matter of representation, whilst persuading others of the transformational effect of truth and its capacity to put the world in motion. It also entailed questioning ethical delineations of how to live; what should be kept essential, stable and fixed? What should be destabilised and transformed?

I see my interlocutors' concern with representative truths, as well as truths as matters of transformation and persuasive imagination, as a form of realism tending to "matters of concern" (Latour 2004) – perhaps a form of ethical realism. Latour suggests that acknowledging that "matters of facts" are beyond representation does not mean they should be disparaged and destroyed. Rather, he says, "matters of fact" should be acknowledged as fragile and thus "in great need of care and caution" (Latour 2004: 246). He suggests that forms of critique which tend to "matters of fact" should seek to carefully "add" to a "fair" reality rather than be engaged in a dynamic of "debunking" reality (ibid: 243, 246). My interlocutors' practices of witnessing and forms of direct actions could thus be seen as attempts towards carefully "creating the facts" (Lambek 2013: 147) of a meaningful and fair world without fracking. These facts were created by purposefully bringing together a range of

dimensions; scientific findings on their own would not put the world in motion, nor would moral assessments. Rather, wilfully combining moral, emotional, and scientific dimensions was my interlocutors' way of bringing about realities in which and with which they wanted to live.

Their stark position about a “broken” system was thus contrasted with their creative and conflicting practices of activism on frontlines; they aspired for such transformations to create a fair reality, or to “add to reality” in Latour’s terms. Challenging ‘the matrix’ meant caring, experimenting, trying. It often seemed as if the main prescriptive aim was the ethical process itself – even more so in the context of grassroots movements which explicitly reject formal organisation or leadership. Truth in its multiple dimensions could be evident and obvious, and experienced personally and affectively on the frontline. It could also be a matter of connecting and researching different dimensions of truth in witnessing and documentary practices. Truth-making also entailed forging agentic relationships with others, and persuading others of the legitimacy of the truths they witnessed. Truth could thus be both perceived and experienced as inevitable, and also emerging from much hard work.

The PNR frontline serves as a reminder that energy issues do not only concern energy sources but also intersect with fundamental ethical interrogations. I have shown how truth and truthfulness emerged from multi-dimensional struggles on “one big frontline”, and how a certain ethics of conflict can be found within the anti-fracking movement to ask constructive questions about our collective futures. Truth as an emic and etic value provides a fruitful bridge between the ethics of energy, political anthropology, legal anthropology, the anthropology of the future, the anthropology of ethics, and economic anthropology.

### Truth, action, and transition beyond the PNR frontline

In a context of urgently repeated calls for global and local energy transitions, I found it important to examine sources of potential conflicts. The resulting threads of inquiry I have woven together open possibilities for future research. I thus conclude my work by examining its broader relevance for future research, highlighting the topics of conspiracy thinking, notions and practices of spirituality, principles and ideologies of de-growth, and possibilities of green and ethical capitalism.

#### *Conspiracy thinking*

I once spent an afternoon in gatecamp together with one of my interlocutors going through pictures of the fracking site that he had taken. Having retired from a career as a health professional, he took regular weekly monitoring shifts and often had his camera with him. He had photographed the rig from many angles and had close-up shots of police officers, delivery trucks and the equipment they

carried. As we scrolled through the photographs, I noticed a series of pictures that were mostly of the sky at different times of the day and in various locations. My interlocutor giggled nervously and looked at me, seemingly embarrassed: “Oh yeah, that’s not the site is it... I have a bit of a thing for keeping track of this, I’ve been documented it for a long time now”. When I inquired as to what “this” and “it” designated, he explained he was keeping an eye on the trails in the skies above us. “Chemtrails, yes... I don’t really talk about it often, people think it’s crazy”.

I had heard from other people in the movement that there were several “conspiracy theorists” involved in the anti-fracking campaign, or that some people subscribed to “conspiracy thinking”. Chemtrails were apparently a “classic” conspiracy theory whereby people believed trails crisscrossing over our heads and left by airplanes or jets are chemicals being sprayed on state orders for geoengineering purposes (Bell 2018; Dunne 2017). On several occasions, discussions on the roadside veered into such theories: chemtrails, false moon landings, and rumours around motives for installing 5G networks across the country. People also mocked those who subscribed to these “outlandish tales”, as some interlocutors referred to them. Others were annoyed at it given that “they make the rest of us look bad!”. Aileen told me, “That’s why we have to be very careful about the information we put out there [on public anti-fracking social media groups]. Sometimes people post all sorts of rumours without knowing, and there goes our credibility!”.

Where critique of an industry, and the wider system of which it forms part, ends and conspiracy theories begin is not clear and obvious (Manley 2019). I recall discussing this with one person on camp, as we tried to unpick what healthy critique of powerful entities would be, versus “unmoored” opinions which would perpetrate damaging and divisive views on specific people and issues. It seemed there was a clear sense of what conspiracy theories consisted of and that they were to be distanced from. Yet forms of “conspiracy thinking” emerged in forms of critique and witnessing on the roadside. The circulation of information amidst activists and on online fora also meant there was much exposure to peoples’ various “truths” and opportunities to share suspicions. Viveiros de Castro (2011: 137) suggests that:

[Anthropology should be] refraining from actualizing the possible expressions of alien thought and deciding to sustain them as possibilities, neither relinquishing them as the fantasies of others, nor fantasizing about them leading to the true reality.

Similar reflections form part of anthropology looking at “the repugnant other” (see Harding 1991) and how to conduct research with people who hold seemingly radical different values to us. What happens when people accuse others of hiding and concealing what to them is an obvious truth? What kinds of relationships and responsibilities are being called into being or being negated? Is truth being used as something essential or as a venue for change, creation and flexibility? Such questions, already explored in this thesis with regards to an activist frontline, could bring insightful findings when

applied to conspiracy thinking across all political spectrums. This avenue for research is particularly timely considering debates around the prevalence and consequences of the “post-truth” era, and that “extreme”, far-right or far-left, political groups are renewed subjects and objects of attention in research and the media.

### *Spirituality*

In Ch.2, I discussed the affective temporalities of climate change. My ethnographic data showed that realisations about the climate crisis were often experienced and described as acts of “revelation”, akin to a form of spiritual conversion. The terminology around acts of revelation and witnessing carries much religious resonance. Witnessing does not only indicate watching or observing, but also entails an active stance recognising the truth. It indicates one’s commitment in acknowledging that truth, and at times taking responsibility for sharing that truth. Indeed, climate activists shared their personal and collective fears and worries in communities of practice, not unlike religious communities discussing truth, faith, doubts and practices in rich “cultures of belief” (Mair 2012). Witnessing truths have also been a long-standing theme within studies on religion, as practices invoking a call to action for many spiritual groups (Evans 2016). Fruitful insights on contemporary conceptualisations of truth, action and transition may be gained from analytically bringing together the religious act of witnessing with other political and environmental forms of witnessing (see for example Chua 2021).

Moreover, the role of religious practitioners on protest frontlines is striking and merits further research. For example, people affiliated with *Quakers in Britain* held an active role throughout the anti-fracking campaign in Lancashire (Quakers in Britain 2017a, 2017b). Local quakers held an open silent vigil at the entrance of the site every Friday, and many of them were also active with XR mass gatherings in London. I was often told of the climate direct action plans initiated by the group Christian Climate Action; this group seems to be a lasting fixture in the British environmental protest landscape (see CCA n.d.) I also noticed a distinct strand of eco-paganism running through the anti-fracking movement, which was also found in the anti-nuclear protests in the 1980s and the road protests in the 1990s, and which I do not elaborate on here (Dixon 2016; Feraro 2019; Harris 2008, 2011; Letcher 2001; McKay 2015; York 1999). These practices entailed a spiritual connection to the land and other natural elements, inspiring climate activism also in my fieldwork. One of my most prized gifts given to me by a PNR activist was the wooden figure of a “Green Man” which hung in my cabin on the camp (see Figure 62). This mythical figure, often depicted as a foliate head, plays an intriguing role in British folklore, as a symbol of nature, fertility, and regeneration across Pagan and Christian traditions. Many of my interlocutors also displayed tattoos of the “Warriors Call Sygil”, created by a network of pagans calling to fight against fracking (Dixon 2016). The symbol combines representations of the air, the water, and the land, marking my interlocutors’ bodies as active Earth protectors (see Figure 63 below).





Figure 62: Wooden Green Man figure given to the author during fieldwork, 2019. Credit: author's picture

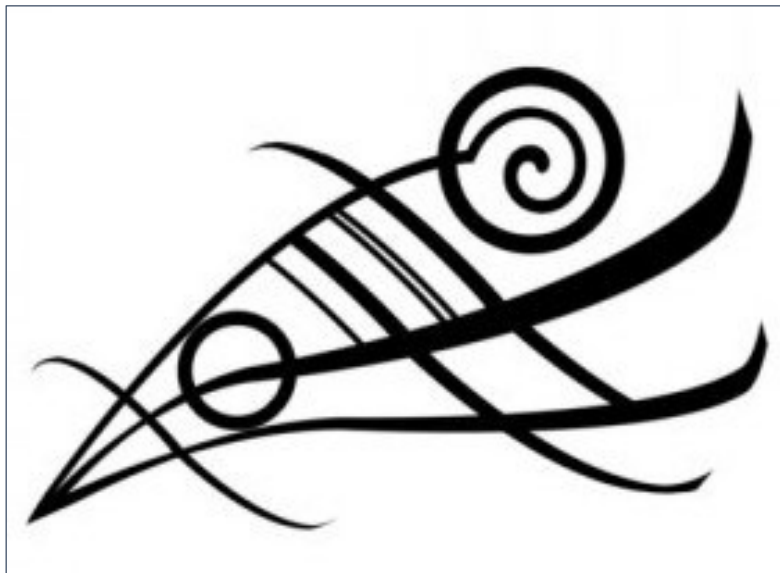


Figure 63: The Warriors Call Sygil (Dixon 2016)

Whilst not all activists with the Sygil tattoo would describe themselves as eco-pagans, and many others often ridiculed or made sarcastic comments about holding spiritual ceremonies and rituals at the entrance of the fracking site, they were visibly influenced by paganist practices, beliefs, and terminology. This cosmology served to build common ground also with indigenous movements at

other fossil fuel resistance sites, establishing connections through sacred water, land and earth that helped build solidarity across these spaces.

I do not wish to cluster these groups and systems of belief together in a way that erases their distinctive features and histories. As doorways on the frontline which I was not able to expand on in the thesis, I mention them here to signal areas for further research. Conceptualisations of climate change that are inscribed in cosmologies foregrounding the agency of natural elements, and our responsibilities towards them, have informed much of the anthropology of climate change (see for example work in the Pacific region: Bertana 2020; Crook & Rudiak-Gould 2018; Efi 2018; Hermann 2020; Rubow & Bird 2016; Salmond 2018). This literature has helped to understand the localisation of climate change as an inner and interrelated dimension of human experience. It has also enlarged the inner dimension of spirituality and religion to a network of relationships and dimensions that are not necessarily centred on humans – providing an interesting counterpoint to Morton’s (2012) secular notion of climate change as a ‘hyperobject’. These themes merit further investigation, particularly regarding how different cosmologies co-exist in contemporary Britain and across protest movements, and how this informs ethical sensibilities, notions of change, action, and responsibility.

#### *De-growth and decarbonisation discourses*

Decarbonisation and energy transition imperatives marked in official state policy or international agreements rarely centre structural and systemic transformations regarding the demand side of energy systems – the focus is often on ‘managing’ demand through a reliance on technology and on securing energy supplies. Protests at the PNR roadside were physically located at the point of energy extraction and production; however, as I have demonstrated throughout the thesis, my interlocutors’ concerns revolved around broader notions of rightful realities at a time of climate crisis. Questioning their own energy consumption, they perceived fossil fuel supply to be driving demand. De-growth in this sense concerned both stopping the expansion of the fossil fuel industry and reflecting on the kinds of livelihoods being fuelled. My research project could therefore also inform further research on lived notions of and policies around de-growth, as a mobilising concept for the formation of sustainable landscapes.

Recent research exploring such issues has used the anti-fracking movement in Lancashire as case in point to close the gap between ideologies and de-growth frameworks, exemplifying “the enactment of degrowth-minded activism within real world complexities” (Lloveras et al. 2021: 1). Indeed, space-making on the frontline is a useful starting point to explore how de-growth is lived in “real world complexities”. The squatted protest camp was for example a space to explore different ways of making a living, as discussed in Ch.6. The camp served a functional purpose as a place for rest and quiet when the roadside became too tiring or stressful. It also allowed more activists to live in the proximity of the physical frontline, making the resistance more effective in this way. Gradually

becoming a space of residence, this space also served for some as an exemplar of “living on less”, re-using materials for creating the built environment, harnessing the wind and the sun through communal solar panels and a wind turbine installed on the roof of the communal living room. The camp served as an example or experiment for what the energy demand side could look like.

Of course, my interlocutors did not romanticise living on camp. It was harsh throughout the winter, as indicated by dwindling resident numbers, and many thought living on camp actually made the resistance unsustainable given the work involved to maintain the camp, stay healthy, and maintain their own energy levels. As discussed in Ch.6, the camp was also maintained through its entanglements with other local residents and their higher energy lifestyles. Nevertheless, many of my interlocutors who did not live on camp shared how the camp had inspired them to live differently. Spending time on camp with residents made them pay close attention to the direct impact of their daily practices on the environment around them; and reciprocally, some local residents taught camp residents about allotment gardening or wild foraging. I also discussed lifestyle changes with interlocutors who had become vegetarian or vegan, or who had started to become more aware of their household waste arrangements following their involvement on the frontline.

As mentioned earlier, people also connected their own sense of place and space with that of other fossil fuel resistance sites. One of my interlocutors had once told me: “I often get accused of being a ‘Not in My Backyard’ person, a NIMBY you know. But you know what? The world is my backyard!”. ‘NIMBY-ism’ was rarely apparent on camp and on the roadside; rather, boundaries of a space one should care for and be responsible for were broadened (see Lloveras et al. 2021).

Discourses of economic growth and continued fossil fuel extraction in one part of the world were intimately felt to ripple through these other sites, particularly in light of existential realisations on climate change as discussed in Ch.3.<sup>88</sup> In this way, the anti-fracking movement demarcated and connected spaces, which allowed residents to think and act away from a fossil-fuel and growth-based real economy. In this context, keeping fossil fuels in the ground was considered innovative and progressive thinking, rather than fossil-fuel driven innovations responding to energy demands.

Such reflections become particularly meaningful considering the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces on the orders of the Russian president Vladimir Putin in February 2022. Energy security and independence had been keywords when David Cameron’s UK government pushed for the “Dash for Gas”, as mentioned in Ch.1; ‘home-grown energy’ discourses mobilised investment and support for developing shale gas. With the rapidly escalating Cost of Living crisis, such preoccupations have gained further prominence in 2022 in public and government attention following the war in Ukraine, and as shown by the recently released UK’s energy strategy (see BEIS 2022). The government paper

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<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Klein (2015: 298) suggests the notion of “Blockadia” as the “multiplying [resistance] frontlines” which emerge in response to the frontiers of “extreme energy”. She writes that “Blockadia is not a specific location on a map but rather a roving transnational conflict zone” which emerges with “increasing intensity” in response to extractive sites (ibid: 309). Connections across such Blockadia ‘frontlines’ could signal a collective impulse to challenge the growth dynamics within energy systems.

explicitly outlines keeping an “open-mind” about onshore oil and gas reserves, mentioning the commissioning of a report on “the geological science of shale gas and (...) reviewing any scientific updates” that will inform and might change the government stance on the current moratorium (ibid: 15).

It is important to tend to matters of energy production. However, this moment could be harnessed in light of the messages and principles of anti-fracking activism to not address supply as separate from demand. Aside from reflections and advice on stabilising and securing energy supplies, the IEA reacted to the war in Ukraine by releasing a ten-point plan focused on reducing demand, explicitly stating that “demand restraint (...) is one of the emergency response measures that all IEA member countries are required to have ready as a contingency at all times – and that they can use to contribute to an IEA collective action in the event of an emergency” (IEA 2022: 15). The focus on the demand side in the plan is apparent. However, whilst narratives of ‘crisis’ can be transformational, as discussed in Ch.3, they can also result in policies which respond “to the potential loss of a status quo (...) over a review of first principles and historical ontologies”(Masco 2017: S73). Rather, *systemic* and *enduring* transformations on the demand side of energy systems and changing the “choice environment” would be sensible responses to the scale of the climate emergency (Szeman et al. 2021).<sup>89</sup> Spaces built and sustained by the anti-fracking activists, whilst entangled with fossil fuel consumption, take de-growth imperatives very seriously as first principles to make lives worth living. Rather than *decoupling* growth from carbon emissions, these spaces invite us to think about the possibilities of *coupling* de-growth principles with decarbonising imperatives.

### *Possibilities of green and ethical capitalism*

In my fieldwork, people often tied the damaging aspects of growth to living in a capitalist society. In a climate camp organised by RTP in June 2019 and which I attended with a group of interlocutors, there was a session entitled “Capitalism is not your friend – Just in case you were in any doubt”. In the social event that evening, people danced and sang to anti-capitalist slogans. Inscribed on the re-usable wooden infrastructures, amidst a sea of handwritten note and messages, a brief conversation between two strangers was captured:

We need to smash toxic fossil capitalism!

[Below, in a different handwriting and colour, someone had written:]

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<sup>89</sup> I deliberately use the term *sensible* to convey the interrelation between meaning, reason, thought, temporality and affect – *sense* in its many dimensions.

No, we create alternative spaces for people to walk towards.

Although many of my interlocutors would have agreed that both strategies were necessary, two different theories of change were here pitted against each other. For many of my interlocutors, capitalism was to blame for the environmental, social, and political woes they witnessed. People seemed to know what *capitalism* was. Capitalism meant exploitation, fossil fuel extraction, inequality, racism, and imperialism. It was an institutionalised and damaging ‘system’, incentivising greedy and excessive behaviours, pursuing relentless profit and accumulation – economic growth at all costs. It was almost described as a ‘hyperobject’; on the same magnitude as climate change – a real object that sticks to us and expands in space and time. Much anthropological literature has revolved around exploring the shapes and forms of capitalism and neoliberalism, with an underlying sense that capitalism is indeed a hyperobject moulding and affecting ecosystems, our selves, and livelihoods.

Investigating “capital-isms” and features of capitalist societies has resulted in research strands focused on affective subjectivities and forms of governmentality, labour regimes, circulation of goods and commodities, historical trajectories of capitalism, amongst others (Appadurai 2013; Elyachar 2005, 2012; Ferguson 2010; Foucault 1991; Foucault et al. 1991; Gershon 2011; Harvey & Krohn-Hansen 2018; Mollona 2005; Ong 1988; Wolf-Meyer 2019). Authors have also questioned the place of morality within capitalist societies, enriching as much the research on capital-isms as offering reconceptualisations of ethics and values (Field 2022b, 2022a; Graeber 2001, 2011; Hart & Ortiz 2008; High 2019; Ho 2009; Miller 2002; Miyazaki 2006; Ortiz 2013; Polanyi 2001; Thompson 1971; Zaloom 2006).

Ch.6 on work and labour was a window into exploring the articulation of economic and social life in contemporary forms of capitalist societies, in the shadow of a fossil fuel site. However, I believe that this thesis fits within a broader inquiry on capital-isms, particularly in the relatively recent advent of ethical and green capitalism (see Barry 2004; High 2022). Forms of ethical capitalism signal a theory of change to be considered alongside the two scribbled on the climate camp’s walls, seeking to shift capitalist society “from the inside” so to speak. My fieldwork was initially going to explore the overlaps and contradictions between parts of the financial and monetary sectors in London seeking to “go green” in the face of climate change concerns, and the people resisting the shale gas industry in the UK. Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England, has repeatedly pointed out the financial risks associated with climate change, as well as the opportunities this creates for the financial industry. Terms such as “stranded assets” and “carbon bubble” have been used to assess impacts of climate change on the profitability of the fossil fuel industry (Ansar et al. 2013; Caldecott et al. 2014; Carney 2014; CTI 2013; Shankleman 2014). The impacts of climate change on the financial industry (and reciprocally) have resulted in an extraordinary growth in climate finance initiatives and research, shifting and questioning the roles and responsibilities of actors within monetary and financial

infrastructures (Chartered Banker 2018; CBI n.d.; Positive Money n.d.; IEN n.d.; Kiernan 2009; Matikainen 2017; Mok et al. 2020; ShareAction n.d.; TCFD n.d.; Tripathy 2017; Tripathy et al. 2020). The terminology and discourses underlying such initiatives range from assessments of financial risks and profitability to a concern with what is morally right or wrong to do in the face of climate change concerns. There is also a proliferation of narratives linking both these aspects together, overlapping with activist groups emerging from climate justice movements and pushing for fossil fuel divestment and ethical investment strategies (Bagley 2012; Douglass 2014; Go Fossil Free n.d.; McKibben 2012; positive+investment n.d.; Rimmer 2013; Telemacque 2015).

Whether capitalizing on green terminology with little fundamental change in investment practices, narratives and principles, or explicitly advocating for a shift in the ethical values underpinning our financial and monetary infrastructures, at stake for actors intervening in the green financial scape is a critical appraisal of capitalism. How do principles of sustainability, ethics and morality interrelate with the valuation of energy sources at a time of exacerbated climate crisis? Research in such spaces is timely, as the coalition between certain finance groups and environmental activists seems unprecedented and potentially indicative of larger shifts in how we envision economic and environmental life (and, indeed, collective decision-making). Research in this direction also invites reflection on the varied regimes of ethics within “ethical capitalism”, examining how people demarcate the “various ‘greys’ residues behind [the] green” (Rajković 2020) in a world where climate change is increasingly recognised and harnessed by corporate capitalist entities.

### Epilogue: “when the last leaf falls”

In November 2019, a group of camp and local residents gathered solemnly at Maple Farm. After a brief meeting, the decision was taken: gatecamp should be dismantled. The moratorium on fracking had been introduced, New Hope camp had been evicted, and a fair amount of equipment had now left the fracking site. People felt that it was time to stop the monitoring. We made our way up to the roadside and proceeded to take down the shelter which had protected us from rainy downpours, icy nights, and scorching heatwaves. After a couple of hours of work, the woodstove was the last object left standing in the middle of the pavement and we waited together for Martin to come to pick it up. We were excited, happy, nostalgic, nervous, confused all at once. PNR’s living room and workplace was no more. At times it had seemed gatecamp would last forever, until people realised they had long been awaiting the day it would no longer exist. The seemingly never-ending night shifts, the hours spent laughing, talking, crying, the journeys to other geographical and ideological spaces in our conversations, the terror and anxiety which fracking brought, the deep existential fear of climate change, the adrenaline of bustling moments followed by the hatred and disgust for police officers: gatecamp and its people had truly witnessed a world of many realities.

I looked at Claudia standing in the sunshine. She was artfully leaning on the woodstove, in a way that would probably look uncomfortable for anyone else but somehow seemed elegant when she did it. After the camp had been evicted a few weeks ago, I had cautiously asked about what would “come next” for her. I knew that she fortunately had a place where she could live. I also knew her staunch determination to “take action” for a range of causes, from anti-racism campaigns to helping those with-no-fixed abode. Her reply was vague – she was exhausted and needed some time. Her pensive look crossed mine and I noticed she had teary eyes – many emotions seemed to be flooding through her. I smiled, tearing up as well, as she grunted slightly in embarrassment and tried to wave her tears away. She accidentally pushed Aileen with her hand and apologised with a giggle. Aileen looked up at the tree under which gatecamp had been nestled. I recalled what she told me a few months ago during a night shift: “I think that when the last leaf of the tree falls, it will be time to go; you’ll see”. Staring at the naked branches marking our clear transition into winter, I wondered if she was thinking back on that moment too. The last leaf had indeed fallen. It was “time to go”; but where to? Patricia had so clearly spoken what many others felt: that they could “never go back”. In light of the truths they had realised, the responsibility that people felt to act seemed firmly established. I looked up at the branches again wondering what Aileen, Claudia, and others would do when the first leaf grew back again.



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## ANNEXES

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Annexe 1: Notice displayed on gatecamp and at the entrance of the protest camp

This notice asserts the rights of the occupiers of a squatted site to remain on the land. It states that the site in question was not a “residential building” prior to it being occupied. Therefore, squatting the site does not constitute a criminal offence (Advisory Service for Squatters n.d.; HM Government n.d.)

### **THIS IS A NON-RESIDENTIAL BUILDING** **Section 144, LASPO does NOT apply**

This is NOT a “residential building” within the meaning of section 144, Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 because it was NOT designed or adapted, before the time of our entry, for use as a place to live (ss (3)(b)).

*insert reasons why the above applies if not physically obvious:*

**The provisions of section 144 are therefore NOT APPLICABLE to this building or to our occupation of it.**

**Part II, Criminal Law Act 1977  
(As amended by Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994) DOES APPLY**

### **LEGAL WARNING**

#### **TAKE NOTICE**

**THAT** we occupy this property and at all times there is at least one person in occupation.

**THAT** any entry or attempt to enter into these premises without our permission is therefore a criminal offence as any one of us who is in physical possession is opposed to such entry without our permission.

**THAT** if you attempt to enter by violence or by threatening violence we will prosecute you. You may receive a sentence of up to six months' imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £5,000.

**THAT** if you want to get us out you will have to issue a claim for possession in the County Court or in the High Court.

The Occupiers

N.B. Signing this Legal Warning is optional. It is equally valid whether or not it is signed.



University of  
St Andrews

# Participant Consent Form Coded Data

**Project title:**

**Sustainable future(s): Exploring visions of energy transitions in the City and among environmental activists in the UK**

**Project funder:**

European Research Council (ERC)

**Researcher's name and contact details:**

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**What is this research project about?**

It is a 4-year PhD study led by Sarah O'Brien, and is part of a larger research project taking place at the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of St. Andrews led by Dr. Mette High. The project takes its starting point in people's own perceptions of and experiences with energy sources. We are keen to understand how people value energy both ethically and financially in their own lives and more generally. Rather than taking a political standpoint, this project is driven by a desire to approach something so fundamental to our everyday lives in an explicitly apolitical and non-judgemental way.

It is a project that understands how research entails personal and moral relationships, trust and respect between researcher and research participants. It therefore strives to strictly observe the disciplinary ethics guidelines as set forth by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth, the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics as well as the European Research Council's Horizon 2020 funding scheme.

University of St Andrews also attaches high priority to the ethical conduct of research and protecting the privacy of research participants. If you have any concerns about this research, you can read a full outline of the procedures governed by the University Teaching and Research Ethical Committee at: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/Guidelines/complaints/> If you have any questions about how the University protects your privacy and/or how you can exercise your rights available under UK and EU data protection legislation, please email [dataprot@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:dataprot@st-andrews.ac.uk)

To ensure that you are happy to participate in this research project, we would like to ask you to consider the following points before signing this form.

### **How is data collected?**

This project relies to a large extent on open-ended interviews. Through these interviews information that relates to and identifies research participants will be collected. Such data is referred to in EU and UK privacy legislation as personal data. These interviews may be audio recorded if you consent to this. Alternatively the researcher will take notes during the interview. These notes will then be typed up on a computer which is encrypted to the standard set by the UK Data Protection Regulatory Authority – the UK Information Commissioner – and the notes will be confiscated without delay.

### **How is the data stored and for how long?**

This project uses only Coded Data, which refers to data where personal identifiers, such as names and location, have been removed. Your identity thus becomes confidential to the researcher and the data becomes anonymous at the point of entry. The researcher, however, retains a 'key' to the coded data which allows the researcher, and no one else, to re-connect individual participants to their data at a later date. The data is stored on the centrally managed University network for integrated security and protection, which is governed by University policy and regulation governing Data Protection and Information Security. The retention of data will be reviewed every 15 years.

### **Why is personal data anonymized?**

If personal data was not anonymized, research participants could risk personal information entering the public domain. This would breach the rights to respect for privacy, work and family life. Our project therefore anonymizes personal data at the point of entry in order to fully protect your identity and privacy. This also helps enable the transfer of non-identifying data between field locations within and beyond the EU.

### **How will the data be used?**

The data will be used to produce the researcher's doctoral thesis, and other academic publications, such as journal articles, book chapters etc. These publications address the purposes of the research project, which are: 1) to examine how people conceptualise and influence energy markets; 2) to understand the linkages and frictions between these different valuations of energy; 3) to investigate how energy valuations relate to political reforms and new climate economic initiatives.

### **Data Protection Legislation, the General Data Protection Regulation ("the GDPR") and the Data Protection Act 2018 ("the DPA 2018")**

For the purposes of the GDPR and the DPA 2018 and any personal data volunteered to the University during this research, the University of St Andrews is the Data Controller. Any questions about the operation of the DPA can be directed to the University at [dataprot@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:dataprot@st-andrews.ac.uk)

As noted herein your personal data will be used to support this research project and associated activities such as the production and publication of academic papers and/or conference materials. The publication of research data will be in an anonymized form. Where it is necessary to share data with academic/research partners, then those data will be shared in anonymized form.

## Consent

The purpose of this form is to ensure that you are willing to take part in this research project and to let you understand what it entails. Signing this form also provides a record of your consent for the University to collect and make use of your personal data via interview as described herein. Consent is also the legal basis that the University will rely upon to lawfully make use of your personal data. You are free to withdraw at any stage.

Under the GDPR and the DPA 2018, you have a number of rights over your personal data, these include the rights of access, rectification, erasure and objection. Full details of those rights are and how they can be exercised, including details of how to make a complaint to the UK data protection regulator are available from the University Website: <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/terms/data-protection/rights/> or by contacting the University DPO, who can be reached via [dataprot@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:dataprot@st-andrews.ac.uk)

### Please answer each statement concerning the collection and use of the research data.

- |   |                              |                             |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time without giving an explanation.                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I understand that my data will be confidential and kept as 'Coded Data'   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I have been made aware of potential risks associated with this research and am satisfied with the information provided. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I agree to be audio recorded for the purposes of data collection.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I agree to take part in the research project.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and your consent is required before you can participate. If you decide at a later date that data should be destroyed, we will honour your request in writing.

**Name in block capitals** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_



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