

The Earth Is Trembling and We Are Shaken

Governmentality and Resistance in the Groningen Gas Field

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Introduction

Increasingly, since the late 1980s, there has been seismicity induced by conventional natural gas extraction in the province of Groningen, an area with no naturally occurring earthquakes from fault-lines. The ‘big quake’, with its epicentre in Huizinge in 2012, led to hundreds of instances of reported damage and the official acknowledgement of the relationship between gas extraction and seismic events. It was also the beginning of the development of technopolitical measures to control the situation. It has been several years since the ‘big quake’ at the time of writing this chapter. A local man reflects on the anniversary in one of the local newspapers: ‘Huizinge changed everything, and at the same time it changed nothing’ (van Sluis 2017). This chapter recounts some of the unanticipated changes and the hoped for but unattained changes in relation to the earthquakes induced by gas extraction for people who live over the gas field.

At the time of the seismic event in Huizinge, I was conducting ethnographic research in the area on regional identity and learned that the experience of earthquakes had become intertwined in a complex manner with what it means to be from Groningen. The experience of earthquakes and the political processes surrounding extraction have rendered new ways of understanding oneself and new subjectivities. Moreover, extraction in Groningen is enmeshed in national

discourses of hierarchical differences and is related to experiences of cultural, political, and economic marginalization.

As Raminder Kaur also notes in this volume, extraction of natural resources and energy production frequently occurs in more remote areas and leaves most consumers unaware of these practices and of the impacts on the local residents (Jalbert et al. 2017). Established anthropology of mining scholarship has described these impacts from a global perspective, but in so doing has mostly focused on the Global South. More recent scholarship deals with the impacts of energy production and resource extraction in other locations. Among its many contributions, this body of work makes evident that mining and resource extraction has an effect on processes of identification and subjectivation. Thomas Pearson (2016), Anna Willow et al. (2014), Anna Willow and Sara Wylie (2014), and Rebecca Scott (2010) show that, through altering the landscape, resource extraction affects people's sense of self and belonging. The work of Rebecca Scott on Mountain Top Removal (*ibid.*) describes how in Appalachia, extractive practices exacerbate the experience of political, economic and cultural marginalization of its mining communities. People may experience that in political decision-making over resources, they and/or the place they call home are being sacrificed and that they are exposed to environmental degradation, threats to health and/or financial losses (*ibid.*). Being put at risk by industrial practices in general affects the wellbeing of communities and individuals, as well as ideas of nation and government (Erikson 1995). The political choices surrounding energy production and resource extraction influence how people understand themselves and their social relationships (Strauss et al. 2013). People may draw on oppositional identities in opposing the gas extraction, while new ways of identifying may also spring from collective action (Castells 1997; Jalbert et al. 2017).

This ethnographic chapter treats the Groningen gas field as a locus of power. In the tradition of Miller and Rose's work on governmentality (2008), and based on Foucault's writing (1979), it describes policy proposals and political programmes, devices and instruments, and the role of (various forms of and access to) knowledge in shaping the ways in which individuals understand and act on themselves in the context of the gas extraction in Groningen. The focus is on the daily lived experiences of people in the province, and processes of identification and subjectivation in the wake of the seismic events induced by the local gas extraction.¹

A ‘Remote’ Province

Groningen province is one of the least-populated provinces of the Netherlands and has merely one big city (population ca. 200,000) the eponymous capital, Groningen. The rest of the province is mostly rural with a few small towns. Locals call this area the *Ommelanden* (literally, the ‘lands around’). This province, even though it was once part of the Hanseatic League, developed very differently and quite apart from the densely populated and rich political and economic centre of the country in the west, called the *Randstad*. Instead, it remained a mostly agricultural province. Groningen province currently houses some of the poorest people of the Netherlands. Social hierarchies developed based on this geography of wealth and power, exhibiting centre–periphery and rural–urban antagonisms – within the province between city and *Ommelanden* and nationally between Groningen and the *Randstad*.

The rural and agricultural character of Groningen (as compared to the cultural, political and economic centre of the Netherlands) and its physical distance from the *Randstad* have developed into bases for the cultural and political marginalization of the people from Groningen. People from the *Randstad* view people from Groningen as hicks, poorly educated and speaking a less respectable form of Dutch. They disparagingly use the word farmers (*boeren*) for them, regardless of whether they are farmers by profession. In mainstream media, *Groningers* have often been caricatured and/or portrayed as poor and stupid. Many people from the *Randstad* see Groningen province as extremely remote and as a place in which one would rather not find oneself.

In this more or less peripheral position, some *Groningers* feel that national politicians have no interest in the region. They say that (national) politicians hardly ever come to the province and do not know what life is like there. Prior to the 2017 national elections, one of the big debates was hosted in Groningen and people commented with cynicism on social media that one only sees national politicians in Groningen during campaign time (‘when they need your vote’). They also feel unheard and underrepresented (together with people from other provinces outside of the *Randstad*).

Groningen Gas Field

In 1959, natural gas was discovered by the national gas company (at that time, oil company) the Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij

(NAM) during a survey drilling in the town of Slochteren, Groningen (Brandsma et al. 2016; VPRO 2016). The survey drilling indicated that underneath Groningen lay the world's tenth-largest extractable natural gas field and the biggest in Europe: the Groningen Gas Field. Since the Napoleonic Wars and the ensuing mining law (from 1810 and only revised in 2002, though not significantly changed in content), the deep layers of the soil and all mineral rights belong to the Dutch government.² According to the law, people who live over any minerals are obliged to allow for drilling for minerals on their land, provided that all the mandatory drilling permits are in order. Farmers who had to give up their land for drilling received one-off compensation.

Before the discovery of gas, the Netherlands was largely powered and heated by oil, extracted from Drenthe by the NAM, and by coal from the national mines (Nederlandse Staatsmijnen) in the south of the Netherlands. When the gas was discovered, the Dutch government saw the advantage of the cheaper, domestic gas and started a gasification programme (Brandsma et al. 2016: 27–53). To be able to extract, transport and sell the gas (e.g. on the international market), the government entered into a complicated joint venture structure with the NAM and private and semi-private companies called *gasgebouw* ('gas structure').³ Between 1963 and 1965, the whole country was outfitted with gas pipelines and distribution networks connecting the gas wells to every household in the Netherlands. By 1965, all of the coal mines were closed (VPRO 2016).

The gas is used to heat the entire country and it is for sale as an export product (gas exports have halved in the past three years and currently comprise 2% of the national exports (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek n.d.)). Massive infrastructure projects and a variety of social programmes were financed with the money made from the gas since the 1960s. The Dutch government has come to rely on this source of income (€300 billion total, €500 billion with inflation correction) (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2018; Aardgas in Nederland 2018).

Earthquakes

Small earthquakes have been occurring with increasing frequency in the province of Groningen since the late 1980s. The most notable one, with its epicentre in Huizinge, reached 3.6 on the Richter scale, bigger than any prior earthquake ever recorded in the region. The

many years of gas extraction and the volume of gas extracted have led to pressure drops in geological layers, which caused compaction. The compaction renders tension differences along various layers in the soil that can cause earthquakes. The quakes are small on the Richter scale (between 1 and 3), but tend to occur near the earth's surface (at a depth of about 3 km) and, as a result they travel far and can be felt more vigorously as naturally occurring earthquakes from faultlines of the same magnitude, which mostly occur deeper than 10 km (Haak and de Crook 1994). Many people describe these quakes as shaking furniture and light fixtures, 'as if a large truck drives right by the room' or 'as if the floor was rolling'. People remarked on startling loud sounds as well.

Most of these earthquakes have epicentres near the gas wells that are predominantly located in the *Ommelanden*. Many structures in this area are at least a hundred years old and are considered cultural heritage, and have never been secured to withstand earthquakes of any intensity. The earthquakes, combined with related subsidence in the area, have caused many of these structures to become damaged – some even beyond repair. Houses have rapidly dropped in value, and people who want to leave either have trouble selling their properties or are faced with rock-bottom prices and negative equity. Groningen had already been declining in population for a few years because of sparse opportunities for employment and because of it being more rural and further away from the cultural, political and economic centre of the Netherlands. The earthquakes have exacerbated this situation. Provincial and municipal politicians are concerned that the area is being drained, both in terms of population and finances.

Mineral Rights

The earthquakes have aggravated previously developed feelings of marginalization, of disenfranchisement and of being governed by far-away and uncaring leaders. An oft-heard complaint is that national politicians do not visit Groningen to see for themselves what the situation is really like. Like people impacted by fracking in Ohio, *Groningers* find that decisions are being made by distant leaders who do not understand the local situation and the consequences of their decisions (Willow et al. 2014: 60).⁴

One of the aspects that makes the relationship with the government and politicians particularly fraught is that the government owns all the mineral rights and, together with the gas extraction company,

is the largest beneficiary of the gas extraction. Government websites currently state that this construct of government and business ventures in the ‘gas structure’ (see above) was to ensure that the gas profits would benefit the entire population of the Netherlands.⁵ Yet, this construct has led to uncertainty regarding who is responsible for the negative impacts of the gas extraction and damage compensation schemes. The national government, particularly the Ministry of Economic Affairs, makes the executive decisions regarding the volume of gas to be extracted. There is a special governmental body to oversee all mining activities regarding safety, Staatstoezicht op de Mijnen (‘state supervision of the mines’), that advises the Ministry of Economic Affairs on the decision. The Ministry of Economic Affairs is also responsible for treaties and contracts related to the export of gas.

Since the quakes started in the late 1980s, quite a few *Groningers* were convinced that the quakes were caused by the gas extraction. This was denied by the government and the NAM. Researchers who had previously claimed that there was a relationship between gas extraction and earthquakes were not taken seriously (Brandsma et al. 2016). The earthquake in Huizinge in 2012 changed all that. In 2013, Staatstoezicht op de Mijnen produced a report that larger quakes were possible in the area due to extraction, and voiced safety concerns at the extraction rate applied at the time.

Technopolitical Measures

When it was officially acknowledged that the gas extraction over the years had caused movement and tension in layers of the soil, the first response of the government and the NAM was to initiate financial compensation to damaged houses. The procedures were handled on a case-by-case basis that lacked an underlying protocol. Cases were evaluated by NAM experts and took an increasingly long time. Damage kept accruing as the quakes kept occurring, and subsequent cases of damage and claims quickly accumulated. An independent National Coordinator was appointed by the Minister of Economic Affairs to oversee the situation and structure procedures. The government gave the coordinator funding to help with economic losses and to support projects that would boost the attractiveness of the area in the long term. Which projects qualified for funding out of this lump sum was negotiated through another institution, organized like a roundtable with local citizens, farmers, companies and organizations. This in-

stitution and the role and performance of the National Coordinator became increasingly criticized. People deemed him to be ineffective. Some people claimed he was trying to enlarge his sphere of influence, while others felt he was acting like a representative, whereas the people did not elect him.

The government also established a ‘centre for safe living’. This centre was meant to advise people who accrued damage, offer them support in getting the damage repaired, and offer them aid in having their house fortified against future seismic events. Over time, the centre has been criticized by *Groningers* as well: by some for its lack of competence and by others for its ties to the NAM and the government. Meanwhile, the government has continued to create new institutions. The various actions are ‘intended to manage the potentially unruly conduct of material assemblages, aligning them with broader economic and governmental objectives’ (Barry 2013: 142). These technopolitical attempts at providing victims with aid and assistance have not erased uncertainty; indeed, quite a few interlocutors perceive the procedures for damage reporting and compensation as unfair and inaccurate (see also below). The lack of a clear system or protocol for damage repair compensation procedures, the many years the procedures take, and the numerous and interwoven institutions and offices have also left many *Groningers* upset, as is evident from newspaper articles, TV interviews, blogs, social media groups and personal interviews.

Psychological Aid

In addition to material damage, physical and mental suffering have increasingly become a part of the narratives regarding the earthquakes. In City Council meetings and local meetings to discuss gas extraction, on social media, personal blogs, and in interviews with the press and with me, people say they suffer from psychological distress⁶ and physical complaints such as headaches, insomnia and dizzy spells. Consequently, this type of suffering also became part of the government’s attempts at aid and assistance. A research team was set up through the University of Groningen and surveyed a large number of respondents with questionnaires about their health situation, what type of doctor(s) they visit and how frequently, and how they see the future of Groningen (Postmes et al. 2017). The results were published expediently and are accessible to everyone.⁷ On Facebook pages, created by and for people from Groningen suffering

from earthquakes, commenters were critical of the research project. They claim they do not need more research; instead, they want the extraction to stop.

The government has appointed special psychologists to be available for people who suffer from mental health problems due to the earthquakes. These additions to the technopolitical management that address the suffering and complaints of the *Groningers* resonate with Aiwah Ong's work on spirit possession in factories in Malaysia. In Ong's work, spirit possession among the labour force during work hours is an expression of, and a way of dealing with, a rapid change to multinational production processes (Ong 1988). The work further showed that multinational companies hire exorcists to combat the possession of a culturally appropriate matter, but do not address the production process itself. The symptoms people are suffering from in Groningen can be understood as social trauma and a specific cultural symptomology to express distrust, unsafety, uncertainty and social rupture in light of Kai Erikson's work on populations exposed to risk and affected by natural, environmental and economic disasters (Erikson 1995). Making psychologists available may help people cope, but it also leaves the extraction practices as the origin of people's suffering unexamined and as such unhindered. When I asked my interlocutors about the psychologists, they mentioned that this help does not address their need for compensation or demand for the extraction to stop.

Research

Since the 2012 quake in Huizinge, the province has been the locus of a great amount of research by both the government and the NAM. In 2013, one of the pioneering reports investigated the change in property values and the damage to the image of Groningen (pertaining to its ability to attract investment to the region). It concluded that the inhabitants of the region should profit from the local economic activity and that the NAM and the government should have to pay a large sum to Groningen (Commissie Duurzame Toekomst Noord-Oost Groningen 2013). Other reports ordered by the government and the National Coordinator followed, investigating the threats to safety, how much it would cost to repair the damage, the maximum magnitude the earthquakes could possibly reach in the area, and whether and what structures in the area needed to be fortified, as well as how much this would cost.

Over time, the NAM ordered research to be conducted to establish categories for the kinds of damage in order to determine who can claim what kinds of damage from the earthquakes. Maps were drawn for those properties ‘within the contours of the quake area’, defining who could file legitimate claims for damage compensation by the NAM. A system of classification for different levels of damage was outlined and a large area was considered outside the contours of the earthquake area. People living in this area would not be compensated, but would receive a voucher for €1,500 to fix whatever damage they had suffered. This system has been challenged in the courts, as a group of locals who live around these contours of the quake area and suffered damage decided to fight it, claiming that the system was based on faulty and biased research: ‘earthquakes do not neatly follow borders drawn on to maps’. Research by the NAM into damage and damage compensation is continuous and ongoing.

The two (public) institutes for higher education in Groningen, the Hanze Hogeschool University of Applied Sciences and the University of Groningen, have also become hubs for research on earthquake-resistant construction and energy-neutral housing, and for new forms of energy production, and have established the Energy Transition Centre, the EnergyBarn project and the Energy Academy Europe. However, according to many of my interlocutors, this research has not produced results in terms of compensation, safety or reduction of earthquakes, etc., or improvements in living conditions for those who suffer from the earthquakes.

Many inhabitants in the area have lost faith in the outcome of the research ordered by the government and the NAM. They claim that it does not help them in any way. Within grassroots groups that oppose extraction and/or seek compensation and on social media, people claim that the research by the government and NAM is merely to postpone having to take action or that all this research is simply to appease the locals. Any research regarding damage ordered by the NAM is also highly contested; its value neutrality and objectivity are being questioned. When I shared research by the Energy Centre of Durham University on induced seismicity on social media, it was immediately dismissed by a grassroots group opposing extraction because it was ‘sponsored by the NAM’ (which, to interlocutors, means it cannot be trusted). Also, people said it had faulty data because one of the largest earthquakes was not recorded with the accurate magnitude. As one interlocutor put it: ‘This database can be put directly in the rubbish bin.’ Some interlocutors state that all this research makes them ‘research tired’. In interviews with me but also on social media,

locals opined that the researchers and students coming to Groningen for their research projects are yet another way in which the locals are being exploited or taken advantage of.

While reports have continued to accrue and institutions and organization have been brought to life, the political parties on the left of the political spectrum and part of the opposition in Congress have been putting gas extraction on the agenda in Congress ever since the earthquake in Huizinge. Their focus has been a significant reduction in the volume to be extracted from the wells (as is determined by the Ministry of Economic Affairs). The Minister's response was initially that heating the country and all the export contracts prevent a significant reduction from being achieved.⁸ Increasingly, more political parties from across the political spectrum are supporting a reduction in extraction, but have differing ideas about the extent of this reduction. What complicates matters is that the government has grown accustomed to using the gas money to cover diverse budgetary expenses. Currently, Congress is exploring fulfilling energy demand in alternative ways, mostly by wind, solar and hydrogen power. However, some politicians are reconsidering hydraulic fracturing in other areas, which was previously thought of as an anathema. These explorations of alternative sources of energy have led to new conflicts and debates (both inside and outside of the political arena) over the methods, locations and scales of (renewable) energy production. These political debates about extraction and energy production are ongoing.

Relationship with the Government

The attempts at managing the impact of earthquakes and damage compensation have led to a network of many institutions (all semi-government or related to the NAM) that are hard to navigate when seeking assistance or compensation according to my interlocutors. The narratives collected in the area and from the (social) media relay being sent from one organization to the next, only to be sent back again. Or, just when they are in the process of getting assistance or compensation, a new institution will be established that might make the procedures less clear or take longer. The murkiness of how to navigate the web of institutions is upsetting to many people who are seeking compensation. One interlocutor describes trying to get her complaints heard and to receive compensation as a process that has taken over her entire life and says she feels exhausted.

The collected narratives about dealing with all the institutions also reveal feelings of disempowerment. Some wonder aloud why it has to be so hard to find assistance and compensation. Others claim that the system is intentionally nebulous, or state that the government is incompetent or not interested in improving the situation. Recently, *Dagblad van het Noorden*, a regional newspaper for the Northern Netherlands, published articles about how many people are employed within the network of institutions and organizations, and what percentage of the money available for compensation goes to all the employees and experts; the ‘centre for safe living’, mentioned above, made a profit of millions of euros (van Hofslot 2018). These newspapers exposés spurred outrage among locals as well as left-wing politicians on social media, and protests followed (Trimbach 2018).

In Groningen, there is great and growing distrust towards the national government, the primary beneficiary of the gas extraction. From the start of earthquakes in the late 1980s until the 3.6 earthquake in Huizinge in 2012, it denied that the earthquakes were caused by gas extraction. Moreover, the government has made a large amount of money from this extraction, relatively little of which has flowed to the people who live over the gas field or have been impacted by the negative consequences of extraction.⁹ During my time in the region, the majority of my interlocutors who were suffering from the induced earthquakes stated that the government should protect them from harm, damage, etc., but instead saw a government that makes money from the gas extraction and does nothing to protect or help them. Damage compensation procedures are complicated, take years and are frequently carried out by contractors or organizations that are directly related to the NAM. Locals’ narratives in newspapers, on talk shows, on social media, and the language on protest signs echo these negative ideas about and experiences with the government.

Like other locations of energy production around the world, narratives about undemocratic practices and conspiracy theories have surfaced (Howe et al. 2015). In these narratives, politicians only care about financial gain and not about the people who live over the gas field. Some of my interlocutors even publicly accuse certain politicians of being ‘owned by the gas extraction company’. When the political party GroenLinks (Green Left) cancelled a discussion on how to deal with damage compensation – because they had to attend an emergency meeting with the other political parties and the National Coordinator – people wrote on social media that this conflicting agenda was all preplanned by the National Coordinator, or they otherwise accused the party of ‘being in cahoots with the National Co-

ordinator'. A few asked to be present at the meeting, but were told it was a closed meeting, which raised new suspicions about politicians trying to hide things from the local population.

Initially, upset *Groningers* were mainly suspicious of national politicians, but over time, many have started doubting the trustworthiness of local politicians too. When local politicians are not highly critical of (national) policy regarding gas extraction, they may be labelled as only caring about the money or as having been paid off. When the King came to visit the area to talk to people who had suffered damage, rumours surfaced on Facebook groups that he met with actors or with people who did not suffer as a result of the earthquakes.

Resource Colony

Even though Groningen is located over one of the world's largest gas fields, it is one of the poorer provinces of the Netherlands. The people of Groningen have not directly profited from the gas spoils, as most investments from the gas proceeds (such as large infrastructural projects) were made in other parts of the country. In addition, financial compensation for damage or economic loss is a slow and laborious process, and is not adequately done (in terms of coverage and scope) in the opinion of *Groningers*. Environmental scientist Jan Rotmans used the metaphor of Groningen as the ATM of the *Randstad*: the Netherlands can increase its riches simply by withdrawing and exporting more and more gas per day, yet the inhabitants of Groningen feel they do not get to partake in the spoils and only suffer the negative consequences (Rotmans 2013).

Some people mentioned to me – and grassroots organizers stated this in the media as well – that they feel like Groningen is merely a colony of the Netherlands, only good for extracting natural resources and sacrificed to benefit the rest of the country. In 2012, a faction of the Labour Party (PvdA) went so far as to suggest moving all the people out of Groningen and using the province for gas extraction and industrial practices only. Some people in the *Randstad* sometimes say this, half-jokingly, as well.

In April 2017, one of the grassroots organizations opposing extraction started framing the gas extraction in terms of human rights issues. Representatives of some grassroots groups had a meeting with the Human Rights Committee of the UN about the violation of human rights. Some *Groningers* who are active in the grassroots groups

opposing the extraction have started to refer to the region as a banana republic. During protests in the summer of 2017, there were a few people carrying signs that said ‘From grain republic to a banana republic’ (*van graanrepubliek naar bananenrepubliek*) – signifying that Groningen was once the powerful bread basket of the country and is now exploited by the government for gas.

Groningen is also a province with great potential for wind and solar energy. Following discussions about reducing gas extraction, these energy sources have become even more the focus of long-term policy plans. However, as, for instance, social media posts and town hall meetings illustrate, these initiatives are considered by some *Groningers* as yet more energy production infringing upon their living environment that benefits others only, and more sacrificing of ‘their’ space and wellbeing. The notion of Groningen serving as a resource colony for the rest of the country and the idea that the area is being treated as a sacrifice zone have aggravated the experience of marginalization of the region. Similar ideas and discourse are present in areas of resource extraction and energy production around the world (Erikson 1995), such as the rural population in Tamil Nadu fighting against a nuclear power plant in Kudankulam (as Kaur describes in this volume) and people who live in the coal-mining areas in Appalachia (Scott 2010).

The induced earthquakes have impacted the way in which many *Groningers* experience their relationship with the government and the rest of the country. Narratives by upset locals reveal feelings of disenfranchisement, disempowerment, exploitation and marginalization, and, as such, it has also become central to what it means to be from Groningen. As some of my interlocutors said ‘In the rest of the country they don’t care about us remote farmers’ and ‘if there were earthquakes in the *Randstad* the politicians would have taken action immediately’. These sentiments are similar to the experience of the Kurds in the aftermath of the earthquakes in Van, Turkey, in 2011 that Marlene Schäfers has described; Kurds find that the state would have dealt with the situation completely differently had the earthquakes happened in another part of the country where the inhabitants are mostly Turks (Schäfers 2016).¹⁰

Social Divisions

Not only have feelings of marginalization within the nation been exacerbated, and the relationship between *Groningers* and the gov-

ernment been altered, but social relationships have been affected in the aftermath of the earthquakes as well. In some villages, the underdeveloped and unclear damage compensation protocol has led to a situation where some residents are eligible for compensation and others are not. Neighbours who have experienced similar levels of damage might face a completely different reception of their claims. In some cases, this difference occurs among neighbours on the same street. Moreover, there are whole areas that were determined ineligible for compensation because the damage was considered ‘outside of the contours of the earthquake area’, even though seismicity has been recorded and the people who live here have experienced the earthquakes. Those who have been unsuccessful in getting compensation sometimes feel resentment, which may be directed towards the NAM and the government, but at times also towards the people who *have* received compensation.

What feeds this resentment is that frequently the people receiving compensation must sign nondisclosure or confidentiality agreements. This was the case for one local whose old farmhouse was damaged severely and was in negotiations with the NAM about repairing the damage for many years. The NAM refused to pay for the repairs and fortification because repairing the historical building and ensuring that it would withstand future earthquakes would be more expensive than the actual market value of the house. In the end, her family and the NAM agreed to tear down the house and build a new house paid for by the NAM. After some people heard about her getting a new house, she was accused on social media for having taken advantage of the situation; ‘getting a million-euro home in return for an old hovel’.

Similarly, there are also divisions between renters and homeowners when it comes to damage compensation and the fortification of homes. A lot of social housing cooperatives have been considered a priority for damage compensation. Social housing cooperatives have received money quickly to fortify structures and to switch all their apartments from gas to electricity. The homeowners who, in some cases, live right next door in historic farms have often not received anything yet. One of them told me angrily: ‘They even received new pot and pan sets!’¹¹

Another way in which the earthquakes and the unclear damage compensation protocol have worked divisively is that not everyone has equal access to or the ability to get the help and assistance they need. As mentioned above, the network of organizations to obtain help and assistance is difficult to navigate. There are people who simply do not know where to start. Also, not everyone is equally able to

fight for damage compensation and not everyone has the means to litigate, let alone to litigate for as long as it might take in order to gain compensation. One of the farmers I spoke to did not see the severity of the situation and thought that maybe some people were making it into a bigger deal than it was. He had some cracks in his barn, but had them fixed, which he said was paid for by the NAM ‘without any issues’. There are locals who claim that it is only ‘non-native’ people who are upset about the earthquakes. Some interlocutors in the area pointed out that longlasting societal tensions have emerged. According to a physician from the area, people are being impacted by something they cannot control and become part of a process¹² that they cannot control (van Sluis 2017). Some interlocutors believe that the social rifts are caused intentionally and speak of ‘divide and conquer’.

Acts of Resistance

Feeling like they have nowhere (trustworthy) to turn and experiencing a lack of government protection, *Groningers* are looking for ways to have their voices heard, to maintain control over their homes and villages and to resist. On a smaller scale, similar to civil disobedience, there are people who purposely do not fly the Dutch flag during national holidays to indicate that they feel as though they are not a part of the nation (or perhaps have been sacrificed for the nation, as described above) and that for them, there is nothing to celebrate. There are also some people who fly the Dutch flag or the regional flag knotted, called ‘in sjouw’. This was originally a sign of emergency aboard ships. In Groningen, it has become a symbol to express the exigency of the impact of the gas extraction. People also send angry letters to the CEO of the NAM or the King, or have protest signs in their front yards.

Opposition to extraction has also been exercised through the courts. There are a few people who suffered damage and took the NAM to court. What people find hard in such cases is that the NAM has several (high-profile) lawyers, while they have only one. Also, the financial burden of such cases is uneven and weighs heavily on most individuals. In 2016 there was a group of plaintiffs who sued the NAM for compensation for the loss in value of their houses and properties. In the same year, a (still larger) group of plaintiffs sued both the NAM and the Dutch state for diminishing their quality of life.¹³ In 2017, a group of petitioners together with two district waterboards, a collective for people who suffer from earthquake damages and the agricul-

tural and horticulture organization LTO Noord took their objection over the rate of gas to be extracted (as determined by the Minister of Economic Affairs) to the Administrative Jurisdiction Division of the Council of State (van Bokkum 2017; De Rechtspraak 2017).

Over the years, more collective action has been organized and protests have grown in size. There have been many protest marches and gatherings in front of the NAM extraction sites and NAM headquarters, and in front of and within various government buildings. Delegations of *Groningers* attend the many debates regarding the gas extraction in both the provincial government and the national government. The objective of many protests has been getting one's voice out there: being heard by national politicians and the rest of the country. The visual media (especially national primetime talk shows) and social media have become platforms to broadcast stories of those affected by the earthquakes. The situation in Groningen received national attention when a primetime talk show devoted an entire segment to the earthquakes in Groningen. Since then, other talk shows invited people from Groningen to discuss matters with national politicians, and the foreign media has picked the story up as well.

Another method to gain more attention for the situation in Groningen is the making of videos by locals to show the impact of the earthquakes and sharing them on YouTube and social media. There have also been attention-grabbing, unusual and 'playful' methods, like collectively knitting extremely large blankets to cover damaged historical houses, and the synchronized shooting of emergency flares throughout the region. Similar to the protests against the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant mentioned in Kaur's chapter in this volume, a hunger strike was organized more recently, which seemed to spur new negotiations about compensation and extraction volume between politicians and activists, but according to organizers was ineffective.

Groningers also use blogs, websites and social media groups to draw attention to the impact of the earthquakes on people's lives and to give voice to personal stories. The stories are mostly centred on the physical damages to people's houses and the interactions with institutions necessary to obtain damage compensation. The majority of these reveal that such interactions are frequently frustrating and upsetting, and in the aftermath of induced seismicity can alter one's sense of connection with the nation/community and government. Even though there has been more attention paid to the plight of those dealing with earthquakes, concrete action appears to have been inconsequential.

Community of Resistance

Several grassroots organizations opposing the gas extraction have emerged since 2012. As the earthquakes keep occurring, the resistance is growing. The opposition to extraction is very much a regional movement using the local flag, local dialect and the image of the farmer in its promotion materials and during protests. It draws on the region's difference from the rest of the nation and the marginalization of the region to form an oppositional group identity, fighting the oppression inhabitants of the region experience in which marginalization and gas extraction are very much intertwined (Castells 1997). In the community of resistance, local symbols and the image of the farmer have become a particular form of consciousness. This is similar to the women Seitz describes in coal communities in Appalachia who started using 'Appalachian', a term with a previously negative connotation and that works to demean and marginalize. Women activists drew on this 'Appalachianness' to develop a particular form of class and gender consciousness as they participated in acts of resistance (Seitz 1998: 215).

Some of these grassroots organizations collaborate with environmental protection or conservation organizations, as they both oppose the extraction of natural gas (although for different reasons). In the process of collaborating against extraction, *Groningers* have also become more aware of and/or interested in environmental conservation or protection. The environmental organizations are employing the resistance to extraction to reach their goal to switch to all renewables, with the least impact on the natural environment in the region. While trying to protect their villages and their homes from damage, and themselves and their families from insecurity and harm, local people have become 'coincidental' stewards of the environment. At times, the two groups' objectives clash, for instance, on the topic of wind energy production in the area, which some locals experience to be more exploitation or sacrificing of their direct living environment (see above). Yet, they have remained allies in their opposition against extraction.

There are several social media groups focused on the earthquakes in Groningen. In these groups, news articles are shared regarding the gas extraction, for instance, on new policy or damage compensation schemes. Also, they report earthquakes as they happen, with information on their epicentre and magnitude. Some posts are meant to expose bad practices by the government or NAM. Members of these groups complain about the government, but they also try to provide each other with support and offer a sense of community on social

media. Social media is also used to reach out people, and to organize and coordinate. Over time, the community of resistance is becoming increasingly better organized and coordinated in its acts of resistance. There has also been contact with resistance groups in other locales. In November 2017, activists opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline joined forces with *Groningers* for a protest gathering.

While in the beginning, action was aimed at drawing attention to the situation and the plight of *Groningers*, increasingly it has become aimed at resisting certain policies and measures. On social media, there have been calls to jointly reject particular aid packages. In 2017, a plan was voiced on social media to not pay any property taxes to benefit the local municipalities, after a local mayor was not critical of a new policy regarding the gas extraction. People argued that if the municipal government does not help protect one's buildings, one should not have to pay taxes on one's buildings. What distinguishes the movement from other Dutch political and/or social movements is its regional consciousness.

Conflicting Interests

People in the region wish to live safely in their homes and combat the deleterious effects of the gas extraction on their lives. Those who have suffered damage to their houses, financial losses or mental/physical problems want to be fully compensated by either the government or the NAM through straightforward and easy procedures. The community of resistance and the political parties on the left want the gas extraction to be cut to a level that ensures no more earthquakes. Yet, there is much uncertainty about what those levels would or should be. Therefore, quite a few people just want the 'gas tap to be turned off' (*gaskraan dicht*), which has become a slogan during protests.

Given the size of the gas proceeds and the reliance on this national income, as well as the international contracts the nation-state has with other nations, as mentioned above, the government is hesitant to reduce the gas extraction by much or to turn the gas tap off completely. The government planned to have access to natural gas until approximately 2050 and never anticipated having to reduce or halt extraction earlier than that, nor were there any financial provisions made for damage caused by the extraction. For years now, there have been negotiations about acceptable levels of extraction for both parties. Recently, there has been a reduction in the extraction rate, but earthquakes are still occurring on a regular basis (several a week).

Within the community of resistance, people express that they feel that they are perhaps being lied to regarding the rates of extraction, causing trust to be further eroded, and they are becoming progressively more concerned. An increasing number of *Groningers* want to halt the extraction entirely.

In many cases, damage compensation schemes have still not been fully developed, or not developed to the satisfaction of all parties involved. That this process has taken several years has led to much frustration and anger among people in the region. In Facebook groups, some claim that the NAM and government are trying to wear those seeking compensation and protestors out, playing a game of attrition and hoping that the people will give up. For those with damage, as well as some others, it is inconceivable that a company that has made so much money over the years from the gas cannot afford to pay for all the damage caused in the province from where the gas originated. Moreover, few of my interlocutors believe that it is truly so complicated to develop clear damage compensation schemes.

Conclusion

The earthquakes in Groningen have damaged structures, and livelihoods and social relations have come under great stress. As a beneficiary of the gas proceeds, the government has developed a continuously growing assortment of predominantly technopolitical measures in response to the earthquakes that penetrate the daily life worlds of inhabitants of the region. My interlocutors blame the government for focusing on the technological and not thinking about the inhabitants of the region. While aid is available, little concrete action has been taken to mitigate the impact of extraction. My interlocutors hold the government responsible for placing them in peril and uncertainty.

Groningers' relationship with the government has become redefined and, as a result, new political subjectivity has emerged in the wake of the seismic events. My interlocutors' narratives reveal perceptions that the government and the rest of the country do not care about the impact of earthquakes on *Groningers'* lives. In addition, some perceive the government as consciously exploiting the local people and sacrificing the area, their home, for economic gain and the benefit of the rest of the country. The use of such discourse as 'colony' and 'banana republic' points to the notion that people should not live under such conditions in a democratic and wealthy country. The comparison with a resource colony or sacrifice zone criticizes

the relationship between the region and the rest of the country, and evokes a sense of economic and political marginality (Scott 2010: 218). Upset *Groningers* have come to understand themselves as less important, marginalized or ‘second-class citizens’.

People frequently understand themselves in relation to their environment and in relation to others (Scott 2010: 221). *Groningers* experience to have become more distanced from the rest of the nation, or, less a part of the nation. Moreover, dealing with the damage caused by earthquakes and the pursuit of compensation have also caused people to see themselves as disconnected from their communities, neighbours or families. These shifts in identification are ‘materialized in geographies of inequality and the built environment’ (ibid.: 212–13).

Resistance against the gas extraction is growing. Within the community of resistance, experiences of marginalization form the basis for a collective oppositional identity. Activists draw on dialect and local symbols in opposition to the gas extraction. Regional affiliation is entangled in discourse on colonialism and being sacrificed (Scott 2010: 218–20). This collective (oppositional) identification simultaneously disidentifies them from the rest of the population of the Netherlands.

The struggles over damage compensation and extraction, and their impact on processes of identification and subjectivation, reflect larger national debates regarding energy production and shared meanings of wealth, wellbeing, sovereignty and citizenship (see also Scott 2010: 222). As such, studying the cultural context of extraction and energy production contributes to envisioning energy futures beyond technical and economic possibilities, while enhancing our understanding of contemporary power.

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Notes

1. This descriptive chapter foregrounds the experiences and narratives of the people who live nearby or over the Groningen gas field. These experiences and narratives were collected using ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews with fifty interlocutors spread over all municipalities in the province, participant observation, and the examination of social and other media from 2012 to 2017, and analysed using ATLAS-ti. Voices of employees of the gas extraction company are not included in this chapter.
2. Wetten Overheid. n.d. 'No Title'. Retrieved 1 January 2017 from <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0014168/2017-03-11>.
3. For instance, Shell is part of this structure.
4. Over time, more politicians have visited, and in 2017 the King visited the area as well. However, the experience of politicians being far away and uncaring remains.
5. Retrieved 1 January 2017 from <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/gaswinning-in-groningen>.
6. The people who complain about psychological problems sometimes explain that these problems stem from safety concerns, fair and uncertainty, or (similar to what Kaur mentions in her chapter in this volume) from the constant stress of having to deal with seeking damage compensation or attempting to halt the extraction.
7. It is unclear who has used these results besides the government or locals effected by the earthquakes, or to what end they have been used. Some of my interlocutors consider the research ineffective.
8. The Netherlands has committed to deliver gas to Germany, Belgium and France until 2030. In 2017, the country delivered 27 billion cubic metres of gas (Brans 2018).
9. Of the €300 billion total in gas proceeds, €1.2 billion has gone to Groningen to cover compensation. Most of the investments made with the gas proceeds were made in the Western Netherlands (de Waard 2014; Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2018).
10. It should be noted that Groningers refuse to see themselves as victims or to call themselves victims.
11. Renters of social housing had received pots and pans that were suitable to cook on their new electrical stoves provided by the social housing cooperatives.
12. She is referring to the process of gaining compensation or assistance.
13. 'Lees Terug: Rechtszaak Tegen NAM En Staat'. Retrieved 21 July 2020 from <https://www.rtvnoord.nl/nieuws/170516/Lees-terug-Rechtszaak-tegen-NAM-en-Staat>.

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