

Title

Fracking, resistance and belonging: What can we learn from South Africa?

Abstract

This paper investigates processes of ‘belonging’ in relation to ‘fracking’, in the South African Karoo region. In belonging, people relate socio-culturally and psychologically to their environment, using emotional and spiritual ties to claim autochthony. This is influenced by the current threat of fracking, which is a new, controversial technique to extract natural gas. The exact environmental, psychological, economic and social risks and consequences of fracking are yet unclear, but many actors in the Karoo consider it a threat to their lifestyles and (the way they belong to) their environment. Resistance to fracking is therefore substantial, with the potential to create uncommon and unequal bedfellows or to diverge groups further apart from each other. White farmers, who have been leading the resistance, now ask solidarity from marginalised groups, such as farmworkers, ‘emerging’ small-scale farmers and indigenous groups. The latter are in a process of re-inventing their indigeneity, which makes their case important because this relates strongly to belonging. All these groups belong to the Karoo disparately and their claims to autochthony are challenged differently by fracking plans. The aim is to create insights from this South African case that can function as input for research on fracking and belonging in a world desperate for energy. Focusing on the crucial yet under-researched link between belonging and (the effects of) resource extraction, this paper explores how the very different and unequal groups in the South African Karoo frame and articulate their resistance (or support) to fracking in the public debate and how this is influenced by perceptions of belonging.

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Short biography:

Stasja Koot, PhD, is affiliated to the Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University, the Netherlands, as a postdoctoral researcher. He did his MA in anthropology on the Bushmen hunter-gatherers in Namibia. In addition, he finished an MA in Environmental Sciences. Afterwards, he lived and worked with Bushmen from 2003 until 2007. Based on this he published his first articles. He then did his PhD on Bushmen, conservation and tourism, resulting in the dissertation *Dwelling in Tourism: Power and Myth amongst the Bushmen of Southern Africa* (2013). In addition to his on-going work on Bushmen, he is currently doing research into the political economy of conservation in online and Southern African environments. Expanding his current activities he is now engaging in research about fracking in the South African Karoo, for which he has recently submitted a VENI funding application. His latest publication is *White Namibians in tourism and the politics of belonging through Bushmen* (2015), in *Anthropology Southern Africa*.