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RED DIRT RESILIENCE
ENDURING NARRATIVES OF OKLAHOMA ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

BY

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Abstract

My research explores the relationship between dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity and counter-narratives of Oklahoma identity. I consider how the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity is constructed in relationship to the oil and gas industry, a powerful force in Oklahoma life. The dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity frames oil and gas as a source of resilience, progress, and a benefit to all. Histories and experiences of people who have challenged or been persecuted by the oil and gas industry are often silenced or erased. Examples of this are histories of Indigenous peoples, oil workers, socialists, and many different activist communities. Environmental activists working within Oklahoma employ multiple strategies to illuminate counter-narratives of Oklahoma history and identity; however, the powerful presence of the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma creates challenges for activists. Not surprisingly, at times activists reproduce dominant narratives of statehood unknowingly and struggle to effectively organize in the face of repression and social and cultural control. Despite this, environmental activists challenge dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity through counter-narratives and action.

Chapter One

Introduction: Red Dirt Research and Activism

My grandmother lived in the same house for the entirety of her life, the house that she was born in. She lived in a small town in central Oklahoma for 88 years until she died of cancer in 2015. The house began as one room and a foundation. Throughout her life the house grew and changed and so did the land surrounding it. A railroad and highway brought jobs, and the construction of another highway took them away. Mass agriculture brought drought that destroyed lives and land, and people tried to bring the land back by planting rows and rows of trees, trees that cast happy shadows on much of my childhood. Approximately 50 years later, the 1999 May 3rd tornado, the largest tornado in recorded history, stole the trees away again. A cellar had been dug in the red clay earth; flash floods filled it with red dirt water. During the tornado my grandma and my pa-pa were stuck in the flooded cellar. A tree fell on top of the cellar trapping them in the little space left between at least six feet of water and the cellar door. I remember that night vividly. My father called me and told me that he was trying to get to my grandma and pa-pa, but he could not because all the roads were blocked off. After the tornado, my grandparents were able to get out of the cellar, and eventually my father was able to find a path to them. We were lucky; the house was not too damaged. We lost part of the roof, a shed, and almost all of the trees. The majority of the town was not lucky. Most of the houses were destroyed, the old downtown buildings were nothing but rubble, the elementary school was left in shambles, and the water tower toppled down flooding our neighbor's home.

For months after the tornado, my grandma and pa-pa went to get water and food from the Regional Food Bank tent set-up in the downtown area of town. One day while we were getting lunch, my pa-pa boasted to his friends because he was quoted in the paper. The Daily Oklahoman, Oklahoma City's main paper, told the story, quoting my pa-pa, "Lo and behold, it [The cellar] was full of water," he said. "We could get down four steps and squatted down and stayed there for about 20 minutes and then everything got quiet." (McNutt 1999). I was proud, having my pa-pa and grandma in the paper, even if it was for something tragic. We mourned many things that summer but nothing more than the trees and the old downtown buildings. The shapes that danced over us were different after that. When my pa-pa first saw the trees mangled and fallen over he said to me, "It's going to be a hot summer." In just my short lifetime, the land surrounding my grandma's house has changed drastically. Ten years after my Papa's passing, the area that once was garden is covered with junk literally sinking into the earth and is being taken over by trees and plants. The forests that I explored as a child have been mostly cut down. There are new oil tanks, pump stations, and injection wells. The house itself sits empty cracking and falling apart. From the highest point of my grandma's town, the hill behind my grandma's house, you can see for miles: farmland, churches, the new water tower, seemingly endless rolling prairie, and the most beautiful spring colors. You can watch thunder storms roll in and see Oklahoma sunsets, stars, and fireflies light up the night sky. In recent years, you can increasingly see fracking flares, injection wells, and hydraulic fracturing sites, as well.

From 2012 to 2014, Logan County, the county where my family's hometown is located, increased in saltwater disposal intake volume by 2507% (Monies 2015), and oil

wells began popping up all along the land. Earthquakes quickly began to rise as well, and even my conservative grandma said to me in private, "You know, they say it's the drilling causing the earthquakes." The *they* that she spoke of was unclear. Perhaps, she heard about the correlation between earthquakes and fracking on the news. Maybe, someone in town mentioned it to her, but she said this statement to me in a whisper as if it was something she should not say. She also said it to me with some amount of uncertainty because while the correlation seemed strikingly obvious to people living near disposal wells, powerful state leaders employed multiple strategies to confuse people about the relationship between hydraulic fracturing and earthquakes.

From 2008 to 2016, earthquake occurrences dramatically increased in Oklahoma. Before 2008, Oklahoma had one to two earthquakes greater than 3.0 magnitude per year. In 2014, Oklahoma experienced 585 earthquakes greater than 3.0 magnitude. In 2015, Oklahoma averaged two earthquakes of 3.0 magnitude or greater per day (Galchen 2015). The state is now considered the "earthquake capital of the world" (Prupis 2016). Scientists attribute this dramatic increase in earthquakes to the rise in injection well disposal of wastewater produced from hydraulic fracturing (fracking) (Wertz 2015). Geological evidence suggested this correlation as early as 2010. There is evidence that industry officials working in collusion with the state government, University of Oklahoma (OU) President David Boren, and the Oklahoma Geological Survey (OGS) strategized and utilized rhetoric that obscured the correlation between injection well disposal and earthquakes up until 2015 (Soraghan 2015).

The information of this cover-up came to light through the investigative reporting of Mike Soraghan who utilized Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests

to obtain access to e-mails between state leaders. The e-mails exposed the ways in which industry leaders influenced rhetoric and media strategies surrounding the cause of earthquakes in Oklahoma (Soraghan 2015). The majority of oil and gas development in Logan County occurred from 2012-2014, after industry leaders were already aware of the impacts of wastewater injection well disposal. Now, the state has officially recognized the correlation between injection well disposal and earthquakes (Delatorre and Givens 2015); however, years of politicized rhetoric obscuring the correlation have impacted how many people in Oklahoma understand the rise in earthquakes. These media strategies have led to confusion about the relationship between earthquakes and oil and gas, and this confusion persists today.

I have great love for my grandma's hometown, a place that I consider home. The earth surrounding that place has changed dramatically over the past 100 years, even the past 20. The town and land around it have changed due to many things: the forced relocation of Indigenous peoples, weather, temperature, industry, natural disaster, economics, politics, power, human migration, and time. Despite the clear ways in which humans have transformed the environment in Oklahoma, many people still doubt that humans are capable of causing large-scale impacts like climate change and earthquakes. Progressives in Oklahoma and the U.S. more broadly attribute this perspective to religious "duping" or lack of education. However, these explanations are overly simplistic and do not account for how powerful the oil and gas industry is in influencing dominant narratives of statehood and shaping how people relate to their environments and understand the world.

My research explores the relationship between dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity and counter-narratives of Oklahoma identity. I consider how the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity is constructed in relationship to the oil and gas industry, a powerful force in Oklahoma life. I argue that Oklahoma residents hold varying relationships and loyalties to the oil and gas industry; however, these diverse perspectives are marginalized as a result of the discourse that oil and gas is inextricably tied to Oklahoma identity. Narratives, histories, and experiences that do not fit within the hegemonic narrative of Oklahoma identity are often silenced or erased. Activists working within Oklahoma employ multiple strategies to illuminate counter-narratives to the dominant narrative of statehood and identity. Activists utilize history, art, direct action, social media, and religion to creatively counter dominant state narratives; however, the powerful presence of the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma creates challenges for activists. Not surprisingly, at times activists reproduce dominant narratives of statehood unknowingly and struggle to effectively organize in the face repression and social and cultural control. In this thesis, I seek to illuminate the relationship between the oil and gas industry and dominant narratives of Oklahoma history and identity. Additionally, I hope to shed light on Oklahoma environmental activists' counter-narratives and actions.

The Time and Place

When I began my research in 2013, Oklahoma was experiencing an economic boom. This boom occurred largely because oil prices made what the industry refers to as "unconventional" drilling technologies more viable: horizontal drilling[1], hydraulic

[1] Horizontal drilling is drilling that begins as a vertical bore extending from the surface to a subsurface location above the oil or gas reservoir. From this "kickoff point," the well then is drilled at a near-

fracturing[2], and tar sands mining [3](Zuckerman 2013). I began my research by attending public events and participating in environmental activities as an activist foremost. I spent the years of 2013 and 2014 attending public events and engaging in activism, and I spent the year of 2015 conducting interviews and doing participant-observation with residents of Oklahoma who have been out-spoken against or have been negatively impacted by the oil and gas industry. I chose these communities because I am primarily interested in how dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity and the oil and gas industry lead to actions that repress other voices and silence experiences that do not coincide with the dominant narrative that ties statehood to industry. I wanted to address two core questions: How does the dominance of industry impact the formation and circulation of dominant narratives of identity, and how do these dominant narratives create repression of activism in the state?

During the first two years of my research Oklahoma experienced the construction of a large and controversial tar sands pipeline, the southern-leg of the Keystone XL, and a dramatic rise in hydraulic fracturing and disposal well sites. The last year of my research, Oklahoma experienced an economic bust resulting in large part from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) decision to maintain high oil output, resulting in lower oil and gas prices globally and undercutting a main source of revenue for the state. In Oklahoma and many parts in the U.S., hydraulic fracturing is only profitable if oil and gas prices are high. This is largely because

horizontal attitude. Horizontal drilling makes it possible to target a significantly larger amount of oil and gas than vertical drilling (Energy Information Administration 1993).

[2] Hydraulic fracturing is a process of oil and gas extraction that utilizes high pressure fluid power to fracture rock formations deep underground and release gas and crude oil (Holloway and Rudd 2013).

[3] Tar sands (or oil sands) is a combination of sand, bitumen, and water. It is extracted through mining or in-situ drilling (Humphries 2007).

remaining oil and gas deposits are relatively small in Oklahoma, and the technologies required to extract and transport oil and gas are costly. Additionally, the U.S. maintains labor and environmental policies that make oil and gas production an expensive endeavor.

Production has significantly declined in the past year, and scrutiny of the industry is on the rise. This bust has resulted in layoffs and funding cuts for many community projects. Throughout my research, I witnessed the rhetoric of the boom and the rhetoric of the bust, rhetoric that has been employed throughout the state's history as Oklahoma has experienced multiple booms and busts. This is one factor that affected the general climate of my research and influenced the kinds of narratives that industry leaders and activists circulated.

Activism and Anthropology

As an activist and a scholar, I have learned that anthropology is a controversial field of inquiry. Rosemary Radford Reuther identifies its sexist roots (Reuther 1975) and Vine Deloria, Jr. highlights its contributions to Native American stereotypes (Deloria 1988; Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997). I cannot pretend that anthropology does not have a daunting and discouraging past. Anthropologists have at times contributed to oppressive and violent ideologies (Asad 1995; Trouillet 2003). My activist friends repeatedly remind me of this, and often ask me how and why it is that I study anthropology.

While anthropology's legacy is burdensome, it also possesses the potential to be enlightening and uplifting. It is important to remember that anthropology is a broad field with varying trends in thought and research methods. The activist tradition in

anthropology is rich. Franz Boas, often described as "the father" of modern American anthropology, arguably engaged in anthropology as an activist, working on behalf of participants' interests (Hyatt 1990). Boas identified the scientific basis for race as a myth rooted in cultural bias, and he argued for cultural relativism in anthropologist work (Boas 1982). Further, Boas recognized the importance of researcher standpoint and trained women and people of color as anthropologists in order to more fully realize what Boas believed the goals of anthropology to be. Boas's students, Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Mead, Edward Sapir, and Ruth Benedict (to name a few), carried on the tradition of activist anthropology utilizing anthropology not merely to observe culture for the sake of observing and reporting cultural norms, but rather, to support disenfranchised communities and utilize cultural analysis to pose engaged cultural reflections and challenge social assumptions held within one's own culture and society (Benedict 1934; Hurston 1942; Mead 1935; Sapir 1949). The theoretical tools that Boas developed and employed are foundational to activist anthropology today. I want to clearly state that I am not presenting this tradition to counter or diminish the harsh realities of many anthropologists' malpractice in dehumanizing research participants. Additionally, I am not implying that any anthropologist's work or activism is beyond criticism. Rather, I present this legacy and this history in order to contextualize the trends in thought which influence my own activist anthropological approach.

I am drawn to anthropology because I believe that culture is powerful, pervasive, and a worthwhile area of study. I believe that the study of culture possesses the potential for realizing and more effectively reshaping our worlds in positive ways. In other words, my interest in anthropology is shaped by my devotion to social justice

and self-reflection. However, anthropology's many critics remind me of anthropology's potential to perpetuate harm even if anthropologists have good intentions. For this reason, it is important to me that I constantly interrogate my own intentions, my own assumptions, and my own expectations. Further, it is important to consider how my presentation of research can potentially affect my research participants' lives. I am committed to engaged anthropology that practices conscious self-critique and works in service to support communities (Low and Merry 2010; Smith 1999; Thomas 1956).

Contemporary anthropology in many ways attempts to address and make up for its past failings (Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997). Anthropology practiced within the U.S. today places a strong emphasis on activism and politically engaged ethnography (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003). Multiple anthropologists provide frameworks for considering the many challenges posed to activist anthropologists. Charles Hale juxtaposes cultural critique and activist research arguing that scholarly practitioners of activist research hold loyalties to both the academic tradition and to "a political struggle that often encompasses, but always reaches beyond, the university setting" (Hale 2006: 100). Activist research does not solely exist for the academy but further exists in a place of productive tension having to deal with complex contradictions while being held accountable to both academia and the activist community (Hale 2006: 104).

Jeffrey Juris expands on Hale's approach arguing that, "although politically engaged and action oriented, Hale's conception still relies on the kind of clear distinction between researcher and object that militant ethnography seeks to overcome" (Juris 2008: 319). Juris's "militant ethnography" is grounded in collaboration that seeks to challenge the divide between researcher and activist. Juris states that visioning,

analysis, and reflection involve "engaged, practice-based, and politically committed research carried out in horizontal collaboration with social movements" (Juris 2008: 23). Juris acknowledges increased corporate influence and heightened institutional constraints within university settings, but argues that the university still provides a productive space for discussion and learning (Juris 2008: 23).

Following Juris's militant ethnography, my approach is as an activist entangled in the multidimensional commitment to a political cause. Jeffery Juris describes militant ethnography as a response to Bourdieu's observation of the "intellectual bias" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 39). Intellectual bias suggests that researchers' positions as outside observers lead researchers to present the world as a set of symbols in need of analysis rather than as "concrete problems to be solved practically" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 39). Juris writes that in order to represent and practice a militant ethnographic method, "one has to build long-term relationships of commitment and trust, become entangled with complex relations of power, and live the emotions associated with direct action organizing and transnational networking" (Juris 2008: 20). Juris argues that militant ethnography leads to an "embodied and affective understanding" of direct action organizing and activism (Juris 2008: 20). Juris states that militant ethnography serves to support practical organizing and activist efforts through an emic lens of cultural understanding.

While Hale seeks to highlight the failures of cultural critique in serving activist communities, Juris skirts the complex contradictions highlighted by Hale by simply claiming that there is no "pure" or "authentic" site of scholarship or activism (Juris 2008: 23-24). While I agree with Juris that Hale's methodology maintains a potentially

hazardous divide between researcher and object, Juris's militant ethnography fails to adequately deal with and acknowledge the complex contradictions of funding, academic misappropriation of activist knowledge, and utilization and reproduction of systems of oppression that exists within activist arenas. For the purpose of my research, I argue that it is of critical importance to consider these complex contradictions. I develop a methodology that engages Juris's militant ethnography but accounts for the complexity of the activist researcher existing within a tense and contradictory space by employing reflexivity and at-times an auto-ethnographic gaze. My reflections on my personal and family connection to issues of the land and people of Oklahoma are essential to my research.

Similarly, my research was engaged and critical activism. My research synthesized my own contextual relationships and embodiment as an activist. The past several decades have seen increased anthropological research following Nader's suggestion that we "study up", that is conduct impassioned anthropological research on communities that hold relatively higher access to power and wealth in our society (Nader 1972). I studied up by researching the rhetoric and discourse of the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma, and I conducted "ethnography from below" by participating in activist communities that were disenfranchised in Oklahoma (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003). I am engaged in collaboratively making observations that aid in activists' "realization of new policies, new subject position, and the emergence of new political possibilities" (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003: 176). Many activists and anthropologists are considering the unique advantage of conducting research within one's own community. If we acknowledge identities as relational and contextual (Barth 1969; Hall 1996), the

extent to which someone belongs is often unclear. As a simple example, my family is from Oklahoma, my grandparents were born here, my mother and father were born here, my sister and brother were born here, but I was born in Dallas, TX while my mother was in seminary. My family returned to Oklahoma when I was 6 months old. In reporting on my activism, the media in Oklahoma has used this fact to imply that I am somehow not Oklahoman. My mother is also a divorced, lesbian-woman. Some people view me as not fully Oklahoman based on this fact alone. In the context of an imagined community (Anderson 1983), such as Oklahoma, my belonging is at times contested depending on my relation to and one's understanding of what it means to be Oklahoman. The extent to which I belong is quite simply disputed. This speaks to the lack of facile explanations in identifying belonging in Oklahoma while simultaneously speaking to the rigidity of dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity.

My research exists at a unique point of tension, bridging multiple methodological arguments because my research attempts to study up in my home as an activist and a scholar. I am accountable to this place that I call home and all of the baggage that comes with that. I am accountable to my activist friends and community. Additionally, I am in pursuit of understanding and exploring questions within the world of academia. Because of this, I cannot simply cast away the complex contradictions that come with studying the effects of the oil and gas industry in the heart of oil and gas country with funding from oil and gas while fighting oil and gas. These contradictions exist and are evidence of the pervasive reach and dominance of oil and gas in Oklahoma. It is possible to argue that we all live in complex contradictions of complicity.

As Oklahoma activists, we struggle with our own participation in the economy that is so heavily dependent on the oil and gas industry. We are complicit with the problem of environmental devastation in certain ways because we use petroleum products, and we depend on the Oklahoma economy to survive. There are various ways that activists in Oklahoma cope with this. One activist explained to me that they feel unconventional drilling to be "different" than oil production in the past. However, most activists that I spoke with argued that claiming that all Oklahoma people are "complicit" is overly simplistic. This became apparent when a New York lawyer came to Oklahoma to present on the possibilities of banning fracking. New York has successfully banned fracking in the entirety of the state. Activists and industry representatives attended the presentation hearing about the way that New York residents enacted a fracking ban. The event was both inspiring and discouraging for many Oklahoma activists. One activist argued that oil and gas holds more power and prominence in Oklahoma, so what the lawyer suggested does not make sense in the Oklahoma context. This activist exclaimed, "Where do you think New York gets its oil? From here." The activist expressed frustration that Oklahoma is perceived as guiltier of environmental devastation when most of the oil and gas that Oklahoma produces leaves the state. The idea that Oklahoma people are wholly complicit oversimplifies the varying relationships that different groups of people hold with the oil and gas industry.

Activists understand oil and gas as something that does not significantly benefit them considering the environmental and social consequences of reliance on oil and gas. While it is possible to argue that Oklahoma activists are complicit in fossil fuel reliance, many activists argue that the benefits that they receive are relatively small and

inconsequential in relationship to the negative effects of the oil and gas industry's presence. Activists describe oil and gas as a burden imposed on them, and many activists believe the entirety of the United States to be complicit in the burden that Oklahoma carries. For this reason, activists in Oklahoma describe feeling a heightened responsibility to critique and resist the dominance of the oil and gas industry.

For me, as an activist and a researcher, I feel conflicted and complicated feelings regarding the oil and gas industry. At times I feel rage. It is hard to describe the rage that I felt the last time that I visited my hometown and saw a Plains Pipeline, L.P. sign that read: "Danger: Contains Benzene, Cancer Hazard" at a pump-station located beside the creek that I played in as a child. At times, I feel bitterness. I feel bitter every time I drive down the highway and see a new hydraulic fracturing site. I feel bitter because I rely on the road, the gas, and the car, but I know the cost of these luxuries. I also feel conflicted because the buildings that I enter on campus and the ballet school that I attended as a child are funded by oil and gas. I do not know how to reconcile these contradictions. Part of my research is attempting to acknowledge these complexities and to make sense of them. My research exists in a place of tension that requires self-reflection and full engagement with the emotional labor of engaged activist anthropology. I write about my anger, my bitterness, my frustration, and feelings of conflict because as an activist and an anthropologist this is the only honest way to report my experiences.

Language, Ethics, and Power

In presenting my research, I take great care to protect the confidentiality of individuals who participated in activist endeavors in Oklahoma, while also working to

give credit to individuals who are deserving of and desire acknowledgement for the work that they have done. This is a difficult tension. Historian Katja Guenther explains that names are powerful and argues for more engaged discussions of the decisions that academics make in choosing how to name research participants (Guenther 2009). How we choose to name individuals and groups of individuals holds implications for how research is interpreted, received, and presented. For instance, anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes suggests that the use of pseudonyms potentially results in carelessness and lack of empathy in how we present our research participants because it relieves us of accountability (Scheper-Hughes 2000). For my research, I employ different strategies depending on the desires of research participants and the importance of standpoint in articulating the significance of particular conversations, encounters, and experiences. The majority of the people that I interviewed desired confidentiality. For this reason, I do not provide names of participants unless they are noted public figures and expressed the desire to have their accomplishments attached to their names. In order to protect anonymity, I only provide information about participants that is necessary to understand certain contexts. I utilize "they" pronouns for all research participants unless their gender is relevant in understanding a particular experience. I understand that for many people "they" is an identity in itself that holds particular meaning and power. I do not mean to devalue or disempower this identity, and I fully respect "they" as an important pronoun that holds significance not in neutrality but as a marker of identity and subversion. However, within the limits of Standard American English "they" is the most suitable pronoun that I have found to maintain anonymity in spite of the prescriptive grammatical problems of agreement.

I choose to use the actual names of institutions, public figures, and activist groups. I do this partially because I want to maintain accountability to the people that I am representing. When they read this, they will know who they are if they are situated in relationship to a particular group. I am accountable to these people. Further, activists asked me to share their work because they want their stories to be remembered as part of an enduring legacy of activism in Oklahoma. For this reason, I think it is important to use the real names of groups and organizations doing work in Oklahoma. I will at times withhold organizational information in order to protect the anonymity of particular individuals who have experienced extreme repression and fear for their safety. Lastly, I strategically provide information about individuals without providing names because the individuals' names are not as important for my analysis as the processes of repression and control that differently affect people in the state of Oklahoma.

Red Dirt Research

I have chosen the titled "Red Dirt Resilience: Enduring Counter-Narratives of Oklahoma Environmental Activism" for multiple reasons. First, Oklahoma is known for having red dirt, and the phrase "red dirt" has come to symbolize the physical embodiment of Oklahoma identity. Red dirt means different things to different people. I explore some of these multiple meanings of red dirt throughout each chapter. Secondly, people within the state of Oklahoma take pride in their resilience, a point that will be developed further in coming chapters. Additionally, I want to emphasize that Oklahoma environmental activism is not new. Rather, contemporary activists draw on historical narratives to both frame their activism and situate themselves within enduring narratives

of Oklahoma activist identity. Environmental activists demonstrate resilience as they endure in a hostile, oil and gas dominated political climate.

I have divided my research findings into seven chapters. Chapter Two discusses the dominant narrative of Oklahoma history. I provide context for many Oklahoma historical narratives that are circulated in Oklahoma. Chapter Three focuses on dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity. I identify reoccurring themes and discourses that form and uphold the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity. I present some of the ways in which these narratives are circulated through language and symbols. Chapter Four highlights activist counter-narratives through history, art, and religion. Chapter Five illustrates the kinds of actions that activists take situating themselves in relationship to both dominant and counter-narratives of Oklahoma history and identity. Chapter Six presents the varying ways that repression occurs in the state of Oklahoma and considers how social and cultural control affects activist groups and organizations. I conclude by reflecting on my own experiences and the things that I personally learned as an activist in Oklahoma. I argue that the unique historical and social context of Oklahoma complicates activist activities and endeavors and erases the varying relationships that people hold to the oil and gas industry. I consider what this information means for activists, and illustrate a re-imagining of Oklahoma identity that incorporates activists' narratives and experiences. I argue that oil and gas industry is a powerful force in Oklahoma life that shapes the kinds of narratives that activists build and the kinds of actions that activists take.

Chapter Two

Red Dirt and Black Gold: Oklahoma History

Many people in the United States acknowledge April 22nd as Earth day. I did not learn this until I was an adult because in Oklahoma, Earth Day is overshadowed by Land Run Day, sometimes called 89ers Day in commemoration of the first land run in 1889. I remember in Kindergarten wearing a bonnet and oversized "pioneer dress," attending my low-income, public school in Oklahoma City and learning about the past of my supposed ancestors. To my knowledge, none of my family members participated in the land runs, and yet all of us – young white kids, Latino kids, Black kids, Asian-American kids, and Native-American kids, we attended school and celebrated Oklahoma's settler-colonial past. The Land Run describes methods by which land was acquired by settlers. On April 22nd, 1889, people came from different parts of the U.S. These people lined-up and raced to claim land. This was the first of many land runs to take place between 1889 and 1893. I do not remember the re-enactments, moments in which children play out a mock version of the Land Run. I do remember churning butter, making cornmeal mush (something my grandparents still ate), and seeing beautiful quilts made by Native Americans. These days were honestly somewhat special to me.

I did not understand the broader significance of the Land Run. I did not learn that Indigenous people were displaced to make this land available. I did not learn that the land was considered a wasteland, and I did not learn that the land was opened for settlement largely because of a desire to transport mineral resources via railroad and a desire to explore production possibilities after the discovery of oil. I now look back at

these enactments as somewhat sinister, but I still cherish churning butter and learning about a way of life that felt very distant but at the same time close to me. I was taught to understand this as my past, as *our* Oklahoma past.

The Land Runs are a pervasive part of narratives of Oklahoma history. Contemporary Land Run narratives normally frame the settlers as down-and-out pioneers seeking opportunity through land acquisition. In contrast, contemporary counter-narratives frame settlers as villains who stole Indigenous land. The role that the federal government and industry played in opening the land for settlement is normally obscured, along with histories of Indigenous peoples, Black communities, socialists, labor organizers, and Earth Day. Today activists are attempting to replace these celebrations with Oklahoma History Day[4], a day in which children learn a more complete history of Oklahoma (Stewart 2014).

I imagine that the founders of Earth Day had no idea in 1970 when they established Earth Day, that April 22nd was already a celebrated day in Oklahoma. Maybe, they thought Earth Day would trump 89er day, or maybe they thought, as I have heard time and time again, that "Oklahoma is a lost cause." However, I imagine that they simply knew nothing about Oklahoma and did not even consider the significance of the day to Oklahoma history. Either way, the dominance of 89er day has obscured Earth Day celebrations and forced social justice activists to devote energy towards countering pro-land run narratives rather than focusing explicitly on Earth Day.

[4] Indigenous activists in Oklahoma are organizing to replace Land Run Day with Oklahoma History Day. Activist Sarah Adams-Cornell has been outspoken in favor of this change. Activists believe that Land Run Day celebrates genocide and disenfranchises Indigenous students (Chahta Summer 2014).

The unique context of Oklahoma leads to particular battles on specific fronts that might not make sense or seem environmentally focused to national environmental organizations. However, in Oklahoma, amplifying narratives that counter a simplistic pro-settler narrative of the Land Run is intrinsically part of an environmental movement that seeks to realize environmental justice in Oklahoma. History has become an environmental and social justice battleground. The erasure of particular communities' histories and how history is taught are at the forefront of activists' endeavors to shift dominant narratives of Oklahoma. Examining how the oil and gas industry is framed in historical and contemporary discourses, it is possible to see the significance of historical narratives in shaping experiences of Oklahoma residents today. Dominant narratives of the past and present are discursively linked through the reproduction of the idea of the oil and gas industry as not only inevitable but even more so as tied to notions of Oklahoma identity.

Reproducing Narratives

Narratives of Oklahoma history center on multiple events: The Trail of Tears, the Land Run, the Oil Boom, the Dust Bowl, the Bombing, and the horizontal drilling boom. To someone who is not from Oklahoma these events are probably insignificant or even unrecognizable. I briefly outline how these historical markers are generally defined. The trail of tears is the term attached to the forced relocation of multiple Indigenous communities to designated "Indian Territory," present-day Oklahoma. The land run marks the moment in which a portion of "Indian Territory" was opened for settlement by non-Native settlers. The first oil booms occurred in the early 1900's. People came from across the nation in hopes of gaining oil riches. The dust bowl

occurred in the 1930's when drought left the western part of the state dry and barren. Drought and wind resulted in dust storms that covered towns and homes in thick layers of dust. On April 14th, 1935, a dust storm occurred that blackened out the sun, the day has been remembered in history as "Black Sunday." The day after "Black Sunday," was the first day that the term "The Dust Bowl" was used to refer to the region. It was during this time that the term "Okie" emerged. This term initially described poor, white people who traveled to California to escape the drought and find work. The term was applied to all people affected by the Dust Bowl, even those who were not from Oklahoma. Today, Okie is used as a term of pride for many people in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma City bombing occurred on April 19, 1995. At the time, it was the largest domestic terrorist attack killing at least 168 people. The horizontal drilling boom developed over a large span of time, but is officially recognized as taking off in 2008 when drilling technologies of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing were utilized to extract natural gas from the Marcellus Shale. This boom resulted in increased drilling across the United States.

In April, Okies remember the Land Run, Black Sunday, and The Oklahoma City Bombing. For this reason, many Oklahoma residents hold superstition about April and May, times that bring Oklahoma tornadoes and memories of the past. All of these markers of history can be framed as positive or negative; however, dominant narratives of Oklahoma history illustrate the Land Run and the booms as forces that positively shaped and creatively worked against the "wildness" of Oklahoma. The Trail of Tears, the Dust Bowl, and the bombing serve as reminders of Oklahoma hardships and instability. The dominant narrative of Oklahoma history frames petroleum production as

a form of resilience, a source of progress, and a benefit to *all* that makes like in Oklahoma possible.

Each of these historical events in Oklahoma mean different things to different groups of people and are contested in representation. I expand on Oklahoma historical narratives to highlight how certain historical narratives are accepted as truth, while others are erased. Irvine and Gal define erasure as "the process in which ideology renders some persons or activities invisible. Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away" (Irvine and Gal 2000: 38). The dominant ideology of oil and gas in Oklahoma works to erase alternative narratives of oil and gas development. The oil and gas industry as benefitting the state acts as a discourse that informs how production is regulated and shapes how the oil and gas is framed in historical narratives of statehood. Contemporary narratives of the past oil boom and current fracking boom represent a shift in which cultural control is exerted through the establishment of a dominant discourse that works to erase certain histories from the dominant narrative of Oklahoma history.

Foucault describes subjugated knowledge as "the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization" (Foucault 1980: 81). The narrative of the oil and gas industry as progress, resilience, and benefitting all leads to the subjugation of knowledge. This dominant narrative of Oklahoma history disguises the role that the oil and gas industry has played in exerting social control by taking lands through legal force and coercion. The dominant narrative of the Dust Bowl ignores the role of agricultural practices in impacting drought. Oil boom narratives ignore the disproportionate risk and reward extended to both oil field

workers and communities experiencing extraction or refining. The dominant narrative of oil and gas history in Oklahoma acts a form of cultural control that establishes oil and natural gas as an intrinsic and inseparable part of Oklahoma identity.

The dominant narrative of Oklahoma oil and gas history contains several major themes: oil and gas as resilience, oil and gas as progress, and oil and gas as benefitting *all*. These narratives are reproduced by contemporary oil and gas companies. By alluding to the past and reproducing these narratives, a dominant narrative of Oklahoma history and identity is formed. The dominant narrative of Oklahoma oil and gas not only makes the economic and political domination of the energy industry seem inevitable, but establishes a social history of Oklahoma that constructs oil and gas loyalty as inseparable from what it means to be "an Okie." This silences other narratives, including those of communities who have suffered or been directly persecuted as a result of the industry.

Oil and Gas as Progress and Resilience

A pervasive part of many oil and gas discourses is the construction of Oklahoma time and space. Time and space is constructed differently depending on the rhetorical argument being made; however, in almost all mainstream discourses surrounding oil and gas development, time and space are expressed in a way that suggest that Oklahoma came into being through oil and gas development. Bakhtin used the term chronotope to illustrate "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (Bakhtin 1982: 84). Bakhtin establishes that the effectiveness of this term lies in its ability to convey "the inseparability of space and time" (Bakhtin 1982: 84). Time and space have a specific utility in discourses of history and colonialism in that the beginning of a place

both create space and time in the imaginary of the recipient of information. Chronotope then lends itself to establishing authority through phrases like “since the beginning of statehood” or “as long as Oklahoma has been in existence.” By claiming that oil and gas has “always” been a part of Oklahoma history, a sense of inevitability, reliance, and even pride is instilled in the oil and gas industry as being bound up in what brought us into being in our current time and space. This is evident in historical narratives that depict Oklahoma as being defined by oil and gas. As part of the centennial celebration of statehood, Former Governor Brad Henry wrote, “To a great extent, both in 1907 and 2007, Oklahoma is defined by oil and gas. My hope is that the ‘can do’ spirit of Oklahoma oilmen – and women – will keep us at the leading edge of energy exploration and production for another 100 years” (OERB 2007). The past, present, and future of Oklahoma as a space are thus bound together through the presence and persistence of oil and gas.

The dominant narrative of oil and gas history suggests that Native American people, white-settlers, and Black Freedmen arrived in Oklahoma for various reasons and all struggled against the land, until the discovery of oil. The discovery of oil is framed as bringing wealth and prosperity to Oklahoma residents. In 1938, C.B. Glasscock published a book titled, “Then Came Oil: The Story of the Last Frontier.” Glasscock writes that “Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory were still the last frontier, with many of the hardships, most of the inconveniences, some of the savagery and nearly all the opportunities of the frontier still before them. A decade was to pass before oil was to revolutionize the life and outlook on the frontier” (Glasscock 1938: 119). This sentiment is repeatedly circulated in Oklahoma discourses and notably

appears on the "The History of Oklahoma" Wikipedia page, a poor source of history, but a source of discourse that illustrates the prevalence of this idea: "Statehood came to the poor ranching and farming state in Oklahoma, but soon oil was discovered and new wealth poured in" (History of Oklahoma 2016). The notion that oil was discovered after Oklahoma statehood partially exists because the Boom occurred after statehood. The Boom was possible once settlers secured the legal ability to acquire and profit from oil and gas leases. In actuality, oil was first discovered in Oklahoma in 1859, nearly fifty years before statehood (Boyd 2002: 98). Drilling technologies were explored, and "a pioneer oilman from Missouri organized Oklahoma's first petroleum enterprise the Chickasaw Oil Company, in 1872 and drilled on promising land near Winchester Colbert's home; however, the refusal of federal officials to recognize non-Indian leases doomed the attempt" (OHS 2016). This occurred ten years before the first Land Run. The first successful commercial drilling well was constructed in 1896 near Bartlesville, OK, ten years before Oklahoma statehood. From 1897 to 1907, "Oklahoma became the largest oil-producing entity in the world" (Boyd 2002: 98). The dominant narrative of Oklahoma history circulated in many public discourses suggests that oil was discovered after statehood. This narrative fails to fully represent the role that the discovery of oil played in bringing "pioneering oil men" to Indian Territory prior to the Land Runs and statehood (OHS 2016).

According to the Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS), "Oil ushered Oklahoma into the twentieth century and gave it an economic base that for decades allowed continued development" (OHS 2016). Oil is described as intimately tied to Oklahoma progress. In a public school history textbook one of the chapters is titled, "How did

Oklahoma deal with the Great Depression?" (Geary Schools 2016). The next page features a picture of an oil gusher. The chapter argues that oil production combined with the economic strategy employed by the local government helped Oklahoma survive the Great Depression when agriculture failed. This narrative is reproduced again and again. Many people held onto their land because they owned mineral rights. However, the stories of people who were forced to leave Oklahoma and the devastation that occurred in Oklahoma is hardly mentioned. This same narrative is employed in contemporary discourses of natural gas. In 2014, oil and gas companies argued and national media outlets claimed that natural gas made Oklahoma recession proof. This is particularly ironic in 2016 because as already mentioned, we are now experiencing a bust in Oklahoma.

Present discourses of oil and gas development invoke language that both alludes to senses of the past and appeals to notions of what it means to be Oklahoman. Julia Kristeva defined the concept of intertextuality, largely in relationship to Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. Kristeva describes intertextuality writing that, "If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its 'place' of enunciation and its denoted 'object' are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated" (Kristeva 1986: 111). Intertextuality is the use of signifiers that can be interpreted in a multitude of ways (a heteroglossia), but that are recognizably pulled from or referencing a shared thought or idea from the past.

Barthes elaborates on and clarifies Kristeva's definition, "The intertextuality in which every text is held, itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be

confused with some origin of the text" (Barthes 1978: 160). Intertextuality following Bakhtinian dialogism suggests that discourse is not contained with a beginning and end, rather symbols, words and images are signifiers entangled in meaning. Johnstone elaborates, "Texts can bear intertextual traces of other texts in many ways, ranging from the most direct repetition to the most indirect allusion" (Johnstone 2008: 164). By making intertextual references to Oklahoma's past while reproducing dominant narratives of the oil and gas industry as being tied to Oklahoma success, the oil and gas industry positions itself as intrinsically part of what it means to be Okie. Employing language that resonates with the dominant narrative of Oklahoma history appeals to Okie senses of identity upholding the power and legitimacy of the oil and gas industry.

Intertextuality is a pervasive part of present-day oil and gas development discourses. I focus on the use of intertextuality in one promotional video that acts as a form of discourse and rhetoric, using both symbol, performance, sound, and utterances to align the endeavors of the oil and gas industry with Oklahoma resilience, progress, and identity. The discourse that suggests that Oklahoma resilience and identity are entangled with the oil and gas industry is reproduced in a multitude of ways, "As everyday lives become more pervasively textually mediated, people's lives are increasingly shaped by representations which are produced everywhere" (Fairclough 1992: 150). I choose to focus on one promotional video as it illustrates both intertextuality, pioneering masculinity, and chronotope.

` On November 21st, 2014, the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber posted a video to Facebook accompanied by the phrase, "Forward-thinking companies, innovation and an energy revolution combine to turn OKC into America's new energy HQ" (Great

Oklahoma City Chamber 2014). The video begins with the image of a bull and bull rider. The image of a *wild*, bucking bull and bull rider is juxtaposed against text that reads: "Welcome to the city that bucked convention unleashing a revolution and an urban reinvention" (Great Oklahoma City Chamber 2014). The video then shifts away from the bucking bull and shows images of basketball games, contemporary art, the city skyline, and river rowers. The text continues, "In Oklahoma City unconventional is Beautiful" (Great Oklahoma City Chamber 2014). A narrator's voice picks up where the text leaves off and describes the oil and gas industry as "recession proof," "riding a renaissance," "raising the chorus," and leading to Oklahoma City having "no down sides" (Greater Oklahoma City Chamber 2014). Shifting videos feature ballet dancers, children playing in an orchestra, and museums.

The images and phrasing suggest that oil and gas brings culture and civilization to the Oklahoma frontier and maintains Oklahoma's resilience in the face of adversity. The bucking bull represents the past, the taming of nature, and the wild frontier. The images suggest that urban development and a particular kind of culture is achieved through oil and gas development. Further, the promotional video suggests that the oil and gas industry has made Oklahoma resilient through the phrasing "recession proof." The words "renaissance" and "revolution" are employed to signify a time of cultural progress brought about through oil and gas development. The video places rural life and rural, Oklahoma culture in the past, leaving behind a large number of people in Oklahoma, even most of the oil field workers. Most of the people who actually work in the oil fields themselves do not identify with urban culture. The video assumes a

preexisting loyalty from rural communities, attempting to target urban residents and developers.

The video continues by referring to the oil and gas history in Oklahoma as "legend" and telling the story of one man, George Mitchell. George Mitchell is described as a "visionary" who believed that it was possible to produce natural gas from shale rock formations. Mitchell is described facing disbelief and criticism by the major oil and gas developers who said, "It can't be done." Mitchell had faith and pursued extraction technologies at the Barnett Shale. Devon Energy is described as believing in Mitchell and supporting him in developing the technology to produce natural gas from shale rock formations.

Chesapeake Oil Company then realized that if this form of drilling works in Oklahoma and Texas, shale exists everywhere, and they "started a Land Run around the country" (Greater Oklahoma City Chamber 2014). Chesapeake, Continental Resources, and Devon Energy are described as "three pioneering companies" that are leading "regional independence." Harold Hamm is featured in the video stating, "We're not outsiders we're insiders here in Oklahoma." The video then describes the oil and gas industry as leading an "urban transformation" (Greater Oklahoma City Chamber 2014).

The image of Mitchell, a "pioneering" man who innovatively did the unbelievable is intertextual in that it reproduces and is bound up in discourses that praise the individual, pioneering man. Perhaps the most notable instance of intertextuality in this promotional video is the use of the word "Land Run" to describe the extraction of natural gas from places in the United States. In the book Oklahoma: Where Energy Reigns, "the Land Runs" are described as a time "which fostered a belief

that the good times will never end and that the next boom is just around the corner" (OERB 2007: 11). The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber's use of the term "Land Run" holds deep meaning in Oklahoma that draws on an intertextuality of historical context and significance. Calling the current oil boom a land run embodies the idea that oil and gas development is part of the continuation of Oklahoma progress and civilization.

Discourses surrounding oil and gas display an intertextuality that alludes to a nostalgic past that constructs oil and gas as intrinsic to the creation of Oklahoma as a state, Oklahoma resilience, innovation, and identity. These discourses silence and subjugate knowledge and histories of people who have experienced persecution or systematic violence as the result of emerging boom towns and land runs.

Oil as Benefitting All

Despite the persistence of the narrative that oil and gas results in prosperity for *all* Oklahomans, evidence indicates that many Oklahomans do not benefit from the industry. An article published by the Wall Street Journal listed the wealthiest states in the United States in 2013. This was during Oklahoma's recent boom. Wealth is qualified as having the highest per capita median income, lowest percentage of people below the poverty line, access to health coverage, and lowest unemployment rates. Oklahoma was ranked 41st. In other words, Oklahoma was listed as the 9th *poorest* state (in terms of United States' conceptions of wealth). The results for Oklahoma echoed the narrative of oil and gas as resilience stating, "Between 2008 and 2012, the national median income fell by nearly $4,000, but in Oklahoma the drop was just slightly over $1,000. With the state's economy heavily reliant on the energy industry, rising oil prices helped cushion the effects of the recession" (Sauter, Hess, and Fraulic 2013). Even in reporting that Oklahoma is the 9th poorest country in the nation, the narrative of the oil

and gas industry as resilience is utilized. The article attributes Oklahoma's lack of decline in national median income to the presence of the oil and gas industry, without considering that Oklahoma did not start at a point from which there was much room to decline. Oklahoma is still the 9th poorest state in the nation even after other states were negatively affected by the recession. This study highlights that one of the United States' leading producers of oil and natural gas is among the nation's poorest.

This sentiment was felt and expressed by Okie historian, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, in her memoir *Red Dirt: Growing up Okie*,

> "About eight miles east of Piedmont on the way to Edmond sat the SOHIO oil refinery and company housing. When I was growing up in Oklahoma a hundred thousand wells pumped three billion barrels a year valued at four billion dollars; Oklahoma was the Saudi Arabia of North America. I learned that in school, where my teachers took great pride in oil, it being the only thing Oklahoma was first in and known for except for the Dust Bowl and the Broadway musical. No one in Piedmont had piped-in natural gas, although a few, families we considered rich, had propane tanks" (Dunbar-Ortiz 1997: 39).

Dunbar-Ortiz illustrates a reality of Oklahoma life that is echoed by many throughout Oklahoma history and amplified by voices and actions of individuals today: the riches of oil and gas have not been for everyone and are directly experienced by very few. Further, environmental and work hazards disproportionally have placed burdens on those who benefit least from the industry.

At the time of the expansion of oil production, a small percentage of people who lived in Oklahoma worked in the fields. Most of the oil field workers traveled long distances to come to Oklahoma in hopes of finding riches or at the very least some work. Despite the narrative of oil and gas bringing progress and wealth to the poor

tenant farmers and Native American communities of Oklahoma (Glasscock 1938), "In this period, oil extraction increasingly overshadowed agriculture in east-central Oklahoma's economy. This transformation intensified battles between tenant farmers and landlords and between wage laborers and employees" (Chang 2010: 176). The results included hostile, even violent reactions between oil workers, agriculturalists, and industry leaders.

The oil workers were targeted, and in 1921, these tensions led to attacks on oil workers by the KKK (Chang 2010: 198). The KKK physically attacked non-black oil workers and accused them of shaming their "race" because they worked and unionized alongside people of color (Chang 2010: 199). "Klansmen attacked working class whites to teach and enforce whiteness." (Chang 2010: 199). Historian of race and ethnicity, David A. Chang argues that low-income, white people were punished by the KKK if they organized around issues of class rather than issues of race (Chang 2010: 199). Despite this persecution, oil field workers, Black, white, and Native unionized and formed the Working Class Union (WCU), sometimes misrepresented by media outlets as the IWW or the Oil Workers Union. The WCU at times held more than 20,000 members in Oklahoma (Chang 2010: 185). Unionizing did not help the oil workers in their pursuit of just treatment. "Like most labor-intensive enterprises which rely on keeping wages low to keep profits high, Oklahoma's petroleum industry hated unions" (Joyce 1994: 133). Oil Workers who unionized were targeted by the government, industry leaders, and the KKK.

Union members staged strikes and many were fired for their participation in union demonstrations (Joyce 1994: 134). In 1917 heightened tensions led to increased

violence and unrest. "When on October 29th, a bomb exploded at the home of J. Edgar Pew, a manager for the Carter Oil Company" (Joyce 1994: 135). Local press immediately accused the IWW, and encouraged violence against "any man who attempts to stop the supply" of oil (Tulsa World 1917). In an article titled "Get Out the Hemp" the Tulsa daily newspaper, the "Tulsa World," published:

> The attempt of the I.W.W. or any other organization to decrease by so much as the infinitesimal fraction of a barrel the oil supply of the government should be sternly repressed. More than ever the government needs oil. More than ever the allies of the government need oil. Any man who attempts to stop the supply for one-hundredth part of a second is a traitor and ought to be shot! (Tulsa World 1917).

The press encouraged the assumption that the WCU attacked Pew's home and encouraged a violent response in defense of the oil industry.

After much speculation, 12 men were brought to trial for the act of bombing Pew's home. None of the men had police records, and the court failed to tie them to the bombing (Joyce 1994: 137). None of the men were found guilty of the crime, but one man was found guilty of not owning a Liberty Bond, a bond to help finance World War I. As an act of solidarity, the other eleven men had agreed that the decision in one person's case would apply to all of them. Another 5 witnesses were found guilty, as well. The men were sentenced to pay fines; however, the police restrained the men and turned them over to a group that called itself "The Knights of Liberty." These men tied the oil workers to trees, beat them with hemp until they bled, covered their wounds in hot tar and feathers, and left them to be a site of humiliation (Joyce 1994: 137-138). On November 10, 1917 the Tulsa World's front page headline read "Flogged, Tarred, and Feathered" (Tulsa World 1917). In large letters, the paper published a warning, "WARNING IS ISSUED TO COMPANION. Placards Order Immediate Departure

from Tulsa of All Seditious People" (Tulsa World 1917). This series of events became known as "The Tulsa Outrage."

The National Civil Liberties Bureau responded to the event stating that "the evidence shows it was a straight out-and-out attack upon labor by employing interests – the profiteers of oil" (NCLB 1917: 3). Tenant farmers, oil workers, and landowning agriculturalists expressed a strong distrust of industry leaders and their motivations. The incident and the way it is framed by worker advocates suggests an understood divide between workers and "the profiteers of oil" (NCLB 1917:3). These incidents demonstrate the power that oil leaders held in collusion with government officials.

The discourse of oil and gas benefitting *everyone* and increasing quality of life for *all* is the discourse perpetuated and sustained by those who held power through industry and government. The story of the workers who challenged and were systematically persecuted by Oklahoma elites demonstrates that the dominant narrative of Oklahoma oil and gas history fails to represent many of the lived experiences of those working for the oil industry in early Oklahoma statehood.

The most persecuted group by the oil and gas industry is arguably Native Americans. The history of Native Americans and oil and gas in Oklahoma is dense. Books have variously outlined the systematic taking of land from Native communities for the purpose of resource extraction (Debo 1943; Dunbar-Ortiz 2014; Sandlin 1988; Wilson 1985). Most famously, Oklahoma historian, Angie Debo uncovered documents demonstrating that the government systematically broke treaties and took land from Indigenous communities for the purpose of gaining access to oil rich lands (Debo 1943). This was done by forcible relocation, coercion, fraud, and declaring Indigenous people

"incompetent" (Sandlin 1988). I will not elaborate on this taking of land. Rather, I focus on the discourses that continue to overshadow these histories.

Despite the work of historians discovering mounting evidence that the state of Oklahoma worked with the oil and gas industry to steal Indigenous peoples' lands, the perpetuation of two interrelated discourses allow the oil and gas industry to deny its role in the violence of colonization: 1) the discourse of wealthy oil profiteering natives and 2) the discourse that native communities benefitted from resource extraction. Both of these frameworks ignore the history as told by Native scholars and Native communities and deny varying tribal communities their unique historical relationships with the oil and gas industry.

Perhaps the most famed tribe to profit from oil exploration is the Osage. Referring to the Osage tribe, Glasscock titles one of his chapters: "Indians Have the Last Laugh," (Glasscock 1938: 144). Glasscock suggests that oil discovery served as a kind of redemption for the Osage. This echoes the dominant narrative of oil and gas as resilience. Glasscock suggests that the down-and-out Native Americans triumphed because of the discovery of oil. However, this narrative fails to fully represent different tribal communities' relationships to the oil boom.

In Where Courage is Like a Wild Horse: The World of an Indian Orphanage, Sharon and Manny Skolnick (OKEE-CHEE) write about experiences growing up in a Native orphanage in Oklahoma. The story is told from the perspective of Linda Lakoe, Sharon Skolnick's birth name and the name that she went by in the orphanage. Linda, an Apache tribal member, recounts an experience in which a young Osage girl, Rachel,

explains why Osage tribal members are the only Indigenous peoples allowed into heaven:

> It's because the only way to get into heaven is in a car. The rainbow is the road to heaven. And you got to get yourself a big old Chevy, or even better, a Caddy and drive on up to heaven when your time is come. The only ones who can afford cars like that is rich white folks and us Osages. That's because of the oil money (Skolnick and Skolnick 1997: 22).

Skolnick highlights the belief that Osages have wealth due to access to oil. The afterlife is conceived by Rachel as accessible to only the wealthy. This narrative highlights the belief that Osage people possess greater access to wealth through oil rights and as such greater closeness to whiteness. This idea was persistent even in young minds at a Native orphanage. Further, Skolnick highlights stark divides that existed between different Native tribes based on access to oil and wealth. Skolnick describes intensified scrutiny, negativity, and isolation at the orphanage because she was Apache. According to Rachel's narrative, the Kiowa, Cherokee, Apache, and other tribal members in the orphanage did not have access to heaven because they did not have access to oil money and in turn did not have access to cars. However, as Linda Lakoe later points out, "Obviously her family had no oil money, or Rachel would enjoy better lodgings than Murrow (the orphanage) could provide" (Skolnick and Skolnick 1997: 129). Rachel is empowered by her connection to the Osage as an imagined community. Osage association with wealth through oil rights provides her with a sense of superiority, even though Rachel does not actually experience the benefits of oil wealth.

Native American Studies scholar, Terry P. Wilson elaborates on the experiences of the Osage and their nuanced rewards and struggles in dealing with the oil and gas industry. Wilson states, "Oil merely gave Osages more money for white men to grab"

(Wilson 1985: xii). Often when Natives did strike oil their land was taken from them by often illegal means or they were ridiculed by both the press and white upper-class society. "Newspapers and Magazines nationwide reported on what they considered an absurdity: uneducated Indians, men like Jackson Burnett, 'The World's Richest Indian,' who did not speak Standard English and had always lived a simple rural life, found themselves the targets of non-Indians eager to get a hold of their revenues" (Chang 2010: 146). It was rare for tribal members to attain great wealth through oil and gas. The decision to lease land or participate in the industry was often the result of attempts to hold on to as much autonomy as possible. Native tribes hoped that leasing their land would bring in revenue without sacrificing what land they had left and further sacrificing their ways of life. However, "Most allottees did not have oil under their lands, and most of those who did benefitted from oil royalties without becoming wealthy" (Chang 2010: 146-147). Oil and gas wealth was experienced by relatively few tribal communities.

Further, it is important to address the implicit assumptions that facilitate the effectiveness of discourses surrounding wealthy oil-profiteering Natives. Why does the narrative that "*even* Natives profit from oil and gas in Oklahoma" work to silence narratives of struggle? The most obvious assumption here is the expectation of what anthropologist Paul Nadasdy refers to as the "Ecologically Noble Indian," "This common stereotype is based on the assumption that Indigenous people live in perfect harmony with the environment, more *of* nature than *in* it" (Nadasdy 2005: 292). Utilizing the example of Native tribes profiteering from oil juxtaposes the idea of Indigenous people as being closer to nature with the idea of Indigenous people as

reaching “civilization” and wealth through the oil and gas industry. Rather, history as told by revisionist historians and many tribal communities represent Native people as being *people* entangled in colonial struggles and unique histories that led to varied experiences with the oil and gas industry. The dominant narrative that emphasizes that *even* Native people benefit from oil and gas in Oklahoma attempts to silence narratives of resistance and struggle that highlight the deliberate taking of land and breaking of treaties that occurred in Oklahoma for the purpose of gaining access to mineral rights and resources (Debo 1943; Dunbar-Ortiz 2014; Sandlin 1988; Wilson 1985).

However, it is important to acknowledge that some tribal members did benefit from the oil and gas industry. Just as in the case with any gold rush or economic boom, while some benefitted, the majority did not. The mainstream discourse that illustrates Natives as being among the “everyone” who benefits from oil and gas, fails to fully consider the multiple lived experiences of diverse tribal communities, histories, and cultures. This discourse serves to hide and disguise the role of oil, gas, and resource extraction in facilitating land theft, broken treaties, and colonization.

Dunbar-Ortiz illustrates contemporary oil and gas development resulting in further displacement of Indigenous people, “The early twenty-first century has seen increased exploitation of energy resources begetting new pressures on indigenous lands. Exploitation by the largest corporations, often in collusion with politicians at local, state, and federal levels and even with some Indigenous governments, could spell a final demise for Indigenous land bases and resources” (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014: 10). The *fracking* boom and tar sands development have led to further displacement of Indigenous people and destruction of Indigenous tribal lands. Devon Energy, based in Oklahoma and

known mostly in Oklahoma for its role in hydraulic fracturing, has been named the "Oil Sands Producer" of the year 5 years in a row. Oil sands is an industry euphemism for tar sands oil. Tar sands is a form of unconventional crude that has been highly protested in Oklahoma and many parts of the United States. Oklahoma and the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma profit from the extraction of tar sands in First Nation's unceded land in present-day Alberta, CA. Further, hydraulic fracturing has led to legal battles in Oklahoma. Many tribal members and non-tribal community members are being forced to allow energy companies onto their lands for the purpose of hydraulic fracturing through eminent domain. These examples highlight Dunbar-Ortiz's observation that resource extraction continues to burden and displace Indigenous communities.

The dominant narrative of Oklahoma's early oil boom and the current fracking boom suggest that the oil and gas industry practices philanthropy that benefits all. This narrative silences many Indigenous narratives of the past and present. Early oil development led to the opening of Indian Territory for settlement and the forcibly or coercively stealing of Native peoples' lands (Debo 1943; Dunbar-Ortiz 2014; Sandlin 1988; Wilson 1985). Today tar sands development and hydraulic fracturing are negatively impacting many Indigenous communities in both Canada and Oklahoma. The discourse that *even* Native people benefit from the oil and gas industry assumes that Native people, as being more ecologically noble, should somehow be exempt from or overcome the struggles of consumption, dependency, and cultural control that are symptomatic of colonial violence. However, the history of oil and gas as tied to colonization in Oklahoma illustrates that many Native communities have experienced continual struggle with extractive industries. By employing specific narratives that

frame oil and gas as resilience, progress, and benefitting all, counter narratives become subjugated and even erased in mainstream discourses.

History and Power

The production and reproduction of oil and gas narratives in present-day Oklahoma highlight the relationship between knowledge and power. Since the beginning of statehood the oil and gas industry has constructed an identity drawing on symbolism of heroic, enterprising colonialists and pioneers. The production of what it means to be an Oklahoman has been intertwined with the identity of the oil and gas industry in dominant narratives of history and statehood. "Business worked to invent a culture that fitted the needs of a new industrial society; the industrial process stretched that culture into the communities and structures in which workers lived" (Nader 1997: 719). In Oklahoma, the maintenance of this culture can be observed through discourses that suggest that the oil and gas industry is a form of progress and resilience that benefits everyone in the state. This dominant narrative of Oklahoma history functions as a true discourse that subjugates and erases alternative narratives of the past and present. Foucault refers to the relationship between power and knowledge through the use of the term "true discourse" (Foucault 1980: 94). "In another way, we are also subjected to truth in the sense in which it is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power" (Foucault 1980: 94). True discourses work to establish control by asserting certain discourses as inherently true. These discourse build on and contribute to the ideology that sustains the dominance of the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma. Mark P. Leone states that "ideology takes social relations and makes them appear to be resident

in nature or history, which makes them apparently inevitable" (Miller and Tilley 1984: 26). The history of oil and gas as it is framed in dominant narratives of Oklahoma history make the oil and gas industry seem inevitable because energy production is framed as intrinsically part of Oklahoma history. Additionally, petroleum exploitation is characterized as part of Oklahoma culture that is not only inevitable, but for many has come to be a meaningful part of identity and resilience.

The dominant discourse surrounding Oklahoma oil and gas leads to the continuation of practices that disregard or silence the voices of those who have negatively experienced the oil and gas industry or have been systematically persecuted by the oil and gas industry. The dominant narrative of oil and gas exploration in Oklahoma as a form of resilience and progress disguises and silences the multiple and varied experiences that different groups of people have had with the oil and gas industry. Activists are working to counter these narratives in a multitude of ways. From supporting Oklahoma History Day to physically blockading construction sites, activists are drawing increased attention to counter-narratives of Oklahoma identity and experience.

Chapter Three

Sooners and Wildcatters: Oil, Gas, and Oklahoma Identity

There are a few different ways to get to Norman, OK, where the University of Oklahoma is located, from my grandma's hometown. The fastest is undoubtedly I-35, a highway that cuts through the center of Oklahoma. Starting in my hometown, I take the old highway passing houses that probably look like shacks to wealthy people and trailers that replaced houses after the May 3rd tornado. I pass a trailer that was once a store and a building that was once the only restaurant in town. They are both boarded up and covered with "For Sale" signs. Stray cats scurry behind homes as my car passes by. I pass sheep farms, wheat fields, and cows grazing. There are oil wells and disposal wells and fracking flares burning in the distance, but I still see the beauty here. I have trained myself to remember the beauty here. Oklahoma colors will always be intensely beautiful to me. Spring time means greens, purples, and pinks. Summer is brown and red in dry years and maybe pale green in a rainy year. Fall is orange and red and gold and purple. Winter is normally brownish red. Red dirt is my favorite color.

As I pass through town and countryside and I am eventually greeted with huge potholes before I take the on ramp to the highway. I drive for about an hour, until I see the marker of Oklahoma City looming in the distance, the Devon Energy building. The building is by far the tallest building in downtown Oklahoma City. It can be seen for miles outside of the city. It is one of the only buildings in downtown Oklahoma City that was built to withstand earthquakes (Ogle 2014). As I get closer to the city, the oil and gas company billboards greet me. I notice a billboard that reads: "The Light Bulb. Flight. The Internet. Horizontal Drilling." The advertisement markets Continental

Resources and oil exploration as a form of innovation. I laugh at a billboard that features a cartoon caricature of the Devon Energy Building; I think it is hilarious because the first time I saw it I thought the cartoon caricature was a "dementor" from the Harry Potter book series, an evil creature that comes down from the sky and sucks the happiness out of living beings leaving shells of people filled with despair to walk and roam the earth. Fitting, I think to myself. As I pass through downtown Oklahoma City and enter the city of Moore there are hydraulic fracturing rigs lining parts of the highway. It is impossible to make the drive without feeling the presence of the oil and gas industry.

The landscape of Oklahoma has been shaped by the energy industry. Cultural geographer David Robertson writes, "The oil well, identified at the surface by the presence of a derrick or pumping unit, is a symbol of the state's livelihood that is firmly entrenched in the Oklahoma imagination" (Robertson 1996: 17). Dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity and Oklahoma history are informed by the presence of the oil and gas industry through language, symbols, and landscape. In this chapter, I identify some of the central ideas and themes that form and uphold the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity as it relates to the oil and gas industry. I present some of the ideological frameworks that sustain this narrative and provide examples of ways that this narrative is circulated through discourse.

Core Themes of Oklahoma Identity

The first two weeks of March 2015, the state of Oklahoma made sensational news headlines for two seemingly unrelated events. First, Unheard, a group of student activists on the University of Oklahoma campus, released a video of SAE fraternity

members singing a racist chant. To counter the claim that racism no longer exists, Unheard shared the video publicly with the university president, David Boren, accompanied with the text "Racism is alive at The University of Oklahoma" (Franklin 2015). The video of the racist chant garnered national media attention. Just days before, Oklahoma was in the media spotlight for another reason. Journalists leaked information verifying that the Oklahoma Geological Survey had concealed information regarding the connection between the disposal processes of hydraulic fracturing and manmade earthquakes for more than five years at the urging of industry officials (Soraghan 2015).

The process of buffering and dispelling the negative media attention began shortly after both incidents. President Boren claimed that "Real Sooners aren't racist." Boren expelled two students involved in singing the racist chant, and President Boren e-emailed the student body writing that, "To those who have misused their free speech in such a reprehensible way, I have a message for you. You are disgraceful. You have violated all that we stand for. You should not have the privilege of calling yourselves 'Sooners" (Worland 2015). The term "Sooner" has a deep political history that is tied to Oklahoma state identity. Sooners were originally people who entered Oklahoma territory before the Land Run began in order to have an advantage in claiming land. Today, it is a term of endearment and the University of Oklahoma's mascot. Every child in Oklahoma is taught a confusing message that sooners cheated by disregarding the rule to wait for the starting time, but yet, we should still take pride in the name. The implication is that sooners are heroic because of their initiative and enterprising spirit even though they disregarded respect for fairness. They are admired because they got away with something that helped them get ahead of others.

In response to the exposure of the Oklahoma Geological Survey and industrial cover-up of the link between hydraulic fracturing and earthquakes, oil and gas industry leaders emphasized the role of the oil and gas industry in boosting the Oklahoma economy and the necessity of the oil and gas industry for Oklahoma's economic survival. Alluding to the Great Depression and the Dustbowl, the regulatory chairman of the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association, Kim Hatfield, told one reporter that ending oil and gas production in Oklahoma 'will make 'The Grapes of Wrath' look like a cheery movie." (Oppel Jr. and Wines 2015). In Oklahoma, The Grapes of Wrath (book and movie), the Dustbowl, and the Great Depression stir up deep emotions because of the impact that these events had on Oklahoma life and the national perception of "Okie" identity.

Growing up, I always loved John Steinbeck; he described the ocean the way that I experienced the prairie. However, many people in Oklahoma hate him. In high school, my English class read "Grapes of Wrath" at the same time that my History class studied "The Dust Bowl." My English teacher praised Steinbeck, but my History teacher mocked him, saying something like, "He got it wrong. He got it backwards. We aren't backwards; he is." My history teacher was referring to the landscape of Oklahoma. The Dust Bowl occurred in the Western panhandle, not the eastern part of the state where the book begins. Many people feel that Steinbeck portrayed Oklahomans as backwards and uneducated people. I appreciate the bitterness that Oklahomans feel towards Steinbeck because, like some early anthropologists who claimed knowledge about cultures that they did not fully understand, Steinbeck misrepresented us. However, I agreed with my English teacher. He got some things right, and he represented

Oklahoma with compassion. He even captured our socialist and Christian legacies in the embodiment of Jim Casey, a representation of Jesus Christ as a pastor with socialist leanings and alcoholic tendencies. When our English teacher pointed out this parallel many of my classmates were outraged. They found the portrayal of Jesus Christ as a socialist drunk to be unfair. My English teacher found it poetic. His work represents tension within Okie identities and has shaped the way that the broader United States perceives Oklahoma.

In order to fully explore some of the dominant narratives of Oklahoma state identity, it is necessary to contextualize Oklahoma as a state within broader narratives of United States identity. Anderson's concept of "imagined community" is useful for exploring the construction of both the United States as a nation and Oklahoma as a state. The nation may be described as imagined because membership is not based on personal interaction but rather on a discourse of shared experience, practice, or being (Anderson 1983: 6). The nation is imagined as limited or boundary dependent, sovereign and possessing some kind of innate or earned power, and "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail," the nation is imagined as a community (Anderson 1983: 6). Control or power over understandings of population, sovereignty, and history lead to an imagined shared community that exists within and in relationship to a plurality of identities and imagined others (Anderson 1983: 184). The nation emerges through discourses of distinctness that are dependent on an imagined shared experience and/or practice, history, and community. The state within a nation, as part of the national project, follows similar processes of construction and reproduction. As a result, many of the reoccurring discourses that contribute to the dominant narrative

of Oklahoma state identity can be situated within the dominant narrative of national identity.

Steinbeck's works attempt to capture aspects of United States culture and identity. Grapes of Wrath shapes the ways that people understand Oklahoma in the United States, while East of Eden influences the way that people understand what it means to be "American" in the United States. The narrator of East of Eden explores what it means to be "American":

> We all have that heritage, no matter what old land our fathers left. All colors and blends of Americans have somewhat the same tendencies. It's a breed - selected out by accident. And so we're over brave and over fearful - we're kind and cruel as children. We're overfriendly and at the same time frightened of strangers. We boast and are impressed. We're oversentimental and realistic. We are mundane and materialistic - and do you know of any other nation that acts for ideals? We eat too much. We have no taste, no sense of proportion. We throw our energy about like waste. In the old lands they say of us that we go from barbarism to decadence without an intervening culture. Can it be that our critics have not the key or the language of our culture? (Steinbeck 2003)

Steinbeck illustrates multiple contradictions and highlights a romantic ideal of a pioneering culture that always longs for more. The central factor that creates a connection between all "Americans" is not characterized by race or homeland, but rather a "heritage" of contradictions, struggle, and longing for more. The narrator describes a desire for more, acting on ideals with "no sense of proportion." In East of Eden, "Americanism" is characterized by consumption. While Steinbeck's writing is both playful and poetic, "America" is imagined here as a shared community based on how we consume, not what we consume, but our attitudes towards obtaining and accessing a seemingly never-ending *more*. Steinbeck highlights several core themes of

national identity that re-emerge in discourses surrounding Oklahoma state identity: the rugged individual, the frontier, resilience, desire to produce and consume, and heritage.

In the Oklahoma context, the rugged individual takes multiple forms and can be characterized in terms of hegemonic masculinity. The frontier becomes an everlasting and renewable frontier. Resilience and heritage are often described in terms of the energy industry. Production of energy becomes synonymous with commitment to national identity and patriotism. In the following section I provide an analysis of symbols and performance in order to illustrate these themes. I consider the relationship between these narratives, the oil and gas industry, Oklahoma identity, and United States national identity. Lastly, I discuss the relationship between the dominant narrative of Oklahoma state identity and cultural control through discourses of what I call "Oklahoma Shame."

The Rugged Individual

In 1908, Sheldon Washburn recounted a story he was told about the Land Runs of 1889. He presented the story as a poem titled "Story by a Sooner." The poem tells the story of Mr. B. Stewart, a rancher and draft resistor, who lived in present-day Oklahoma before the Land Runs. The poem reads:

At the time, there were two unpopular men;
They were the Sooner and the Squaw man.
The Squaw man was one who married an Indian for land;
And the Sooner, who was there before the Run began.

We moved to Oklahoma twelve years after the Run.
Our neighbor was B. Stewart, living in Cashion.
He was a Sooner and proud of the name,
On the Cottonwood River he staked his claim. (Washburn 1908)

In Oklahoma, the word "Sooner" is recognizable and employed as a source of pride and triumph. Many people outside of the state are unfamiliar with this term. While working and living in Chicago, I noticed one of my co-workers wearing a red "Sooner" shirt featuring a covered wagon. I commented on the shirt enthusiastically, excited to see something reminiscent of my home. She replied something like, "I don't even know what it means. I got it at a thrift store." I told her that a Sooner was a person who entered "Indian Territory" before the Land Run in order to claim land before the Land Run began. She was appalled that the state would celebrate the stealing of Indigenous lands. I became irritated and commented on the fact that Chicago was also once Indigenous land, and that many of the people residing in Oklahoma at the time of the Land Runs had been relocated from areas surrounding Lake Michigan. I argued that Oklahoma is no guiltier of colonization and genocide than any other state. I made this argument in defense of the word Sooner and its meaning to my home. Looking back on this moment, I am not sure why I became upset at her attack. I agree with her now, and I did then: the word Sooner is highly problematic. Perhaps it was my frustration with urban, liberal arrogance. Or, perhaps, I was just homesick, and it hurt that my friend attacked a place that I longed for. I am unsure where my feelings came from, but I knew at that moment that the word Sooner had become a part of Oklahoma identity that meant something to me, even as a critic of the word.

Oklahoma is known as "the Sooner State," and the University of Oklahoma proudly calls its football team and student body "The Sooners." The terms Sooner, Pioneer, Wildcatter, and Squaw man are all tied to narratives of masculinity, oil, gas, Oklahoma statehood, and Oklahoma identity; however, while Pioneer, Wildcatter, and

Sooner are used frequently and with pride, the term "Squaw Man" has been mostly forgotten. It is unclear why this term is no longer common in Oklahoma, but one possibility is that the term emphasizes Oklahoma's guilt in perpetuating genocide. It is also possible that people still use this term pejoratively; however, I have never heard it in my lifetime. Even so, the Squaw Man is still a persistent part of discourses surrounding oil and gas history and the present fracking boom. The Squaw Man is alluded to through symbol, performance, and rhetoric. The words Pioneer, Wildcatter, Oil Man, and Sooner fit within an authoritative discourse that celebrates oil and gas in Oklahoma as tied to statehood and Oklahoma identity. These words are bound up in the construction of the rugged individual that celebrates men as innovative and individualistic. These words also entangle oil and gas with an Oklahoma identity and resilience. The celebration of the terms Sooner, Oil Man, and Wildcatter, and the erasure of the term "Squaw Man" is representative of the subjugation of knowledge and narratives that highlight the relationship between oil and gas development, statehood, and stealing Indigenous lands. I present Squaw Man, Oil Man, and Wildcatter discourses as examples of how rugged individualism is constructed in dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity.

Anthropologist Evelyn Blackwood argues that gender is often a complicated category of study because of the conflation of two different but related processes: "gender as cultural category and gender as subjective experience" (Blackwood 1998: 492). Blackwood suggests that gender as a cultural category reflects our normative expectations and understandings of gender that are shaped by both social structure and ideological processes (Blackwood 1998: 492). Gender as subjective experience reflects

the negotiation, resistance to, and experience of the dominant cultural categories. Blackwood applies a practice theory framework to our understandings of gender construction, characterizing dominant cultural categories as structuring, both enabling and limiting our agency (Bourdieu 1977).

A central theme of practice theory is the relationship of the individual to structures as both an agent of shaping society and a product of the structures and context of society (Ortner 2006; 4). Bourdieu and Ortner represent some shared focus on the individual and groups of individuals, as well as some contrasting understandings of the individual as an agent and the individual as a reflection of society and culture. Bourdieu understands power as created through a relationship between agency and structure that sustains power structures. Bourdieu argues that there is a normalization process that perpetuates certain social acts and thoughts. "Habitus" is the word that Bourdieu uses to define the normalization of certain social actions and practices. Ortner defines Bourdieu's habitus as "a deeply buried structure that shapes people's dispositions to act in such ways that they wind up accepting the dominance of others, or of 'the system,' without being made to do so" (Ortner 2006: 5). Bourdieu states, "Every established order tends to produce the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important and the best concealed is undoubtedly the dialectic of the objective chances and the agents' aspirations, out of which arises the sense of limits, commonly called the sense of reality" (Bourdieu 1977: 164). Habitus addresses how the individual factors into social relations through agency. Bourdieu expresses that habitus is not the result of freewill alone or solely defined by structures. Habitus is characterized by an ongoing relationship between both individual

agency and structure over time, always affected by and constructed in the context of historical past constructions of thought and cognition as both symbols and structure. In this way, Bourdieu sought to mediate the arguments competing to credit construction of the world to either individual agency or structured, social processes. Rather, Bourdieu attempted to show the interconnectedness and dependence of agency and structure as a duality in constructing and upholding power within a social context. Bourdieu attempts to bridge the subjective experience and the objective experience as competing understandings of cultural development. Bourdieu exemplifies the construction of thought and cognition as being restricted within a "normalized" framework through the constant legitimizing framework of agency and structure constructing the boundaries in which agency can be employed through habitus constructing sense of reality. Understanding gender as a normative cultural category provides a framework for considering how certain constructions of gender categories hold hegemony influencing how gender is experienced, both limiting and enabling agency.

Gramsci used the term hegemony to describe processes of power and control in which persons become complicit in their own subordination (Gramsci 1999). Gramsci used the term "subaltern" to refer to individuals or groups of people who do not hold the highest authority or power within a political or social context. Raewyn W. Connell applies Gramsci's notion of hegemony to theorize masculinity arguing that "there is generally a hegemonic form of masculinity, the most honored or desired in a particular context. The hegemonic form may not be the most common form of masculinity. Many men live in a state of tension with, or distance from, hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 1999: 39). Connell states that hegemonic masculinity can persist in multiple ways; it

"may be quiet and implicit, but it may also be vehement and violent" (Connell 1999: 39).

Discourses surrounding the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma construct hegemonic masculinity based on the framing of historical discourses that can be violent, implicit, or confirming depending on one's positionality in relationship to the oil and gas industry. Understanding the narrative of the rugged individual in terms of hegemonic masculinity demonstrates the relationship between gender, the oil and gas industry, and controlling processes. Dario Llinares writes that, "The embedding of a specifically masculine ideal can be understood as a discursive process, sanctioning boundaries concerning the perception of gender." (Llinares 2009: 12). Similarly, to the dominant narrative of the state, hegemonic masculinity is a construct established through multiple processes that creates an ideal that impacts residents' ideas of success, power, and possibility. The dominant narrative of oil and gas as it contributes to the narratives of the rugged individual and American ingenuity becomes part of the process by which hegemonic masculinity is constructed within Oklahoma state identity. The dominance of this narrative and its impact on Oklahoma life becomes more evident through examples of symbols, heroes, and performance. I provide multiple examples of both contemporary and past discourses of oil and gas that are entangled in constructions of Oklahoma masculinity as innovative and risk-taking (the wildcatter/oil man) and masculinity as "white" culture dominating *nature* and *savagery*, often framed as "progress" (the squaw man).

The Squaw Man

The "squaw man" simply stated was a white man who married an Indigenous woman for the purpose of obtaining access to native land. In the early years of Oklahoma statehood, this definition was elaborated on, the squaw man was a white man who married an Osage woman for the purpose of obtaining wealth through oil royalty shares (Howell 2014). After marriage it was not uncommon for the woman to end up mysteriously dead. The most notable case of this is the death of Anna Brown, her mother, and two of her sisters by poisoning (Howell 2014). This case was notable because it was one of the only cases in which legal accountability for the murders was pursued.

While this instance is violent, the squaw man discourse is in many cases subtle. Through performance, rhetoric and symbol, the squaw man discourse suggests that oil and gas as a form of *pioneering masculinity* brings progress and civilization to the "last frontier" (Glasscock 1938). Anthropologist Sherry Ortner argues that in western culture nature is discursively linked to femininity (Ortner 1972; 1997). Ecofeminist scholars and activists echo this sentiment arguing that through capitalism, hegemonic Western masculinity is bound up in notions of scientific dominance and industrial control of nature (Merchant 1980; Ruether 1975; Shiva and Mies 1993). Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Andrea Smith (2005), and many other scholars argue that this discursive link applies to any perceived *other,* including many communities of color, people with disabilities, and low-income, rural communities. Considering these frameworks in relationship to anthropological discussions of cultural evolution (Morgan 1877; Dunnell 1989; Ingold 2002; Nadasdy 2005), it is possible to argue that while femininity is

discursively linked to nature within Western cultural discourses, indigeneity and non-white, non-Western femininities (and masculinities) are also represented as being linked to *savagery* and *nature*. Even within environmentalist and decolonizing activist endeavors the idea of indigeneity as being closer to nature is evident in the discourses of the "Ecological Noble Savage" (Nadasdy 2005). The squaw man discourse is entangled in the idea that white men bring progress to native people through domination.

This is most evidently witnessed through the performance and symbolism of the Oklahoma Statehood Wedding Ceremony. When "Indian Territory" was opened for the Land Run in 1889, present-day Oklahoma was divided into two territories: "Indian Territory" and "Oklahoma Territory." On November 7, 1907 in Guthrie, OK, Anna Catherine Trainor Bennett, a Cherokee descendant, was wed to C.G. "Gristmill" Jones, a white and wealthy businessman, in a mock wedding ceremony that was intended to symbolize the marriage of Miss Indian Territory to Mr. Oklahoma Territory. Oklahoma journalist Glenda Carlile, has written several books on "the many women who played prominent roles in Oklahoma history" (Oklahoma Digital Prairie 2016). Carlile writes, "the joining of the two territories was indeed like a marriage, even to the bride taking the groom's name" (Carlile 2008: 11). The performance is still re-enacted today at Statehood celebrations, and a statue stands in Guthrie, OK, representing a Native American woman wearing a "stereotypical Indian outfit" and a white settler joining hands (Carlile 2008). Carlile explains that Bennett would be shocked by the representation of the native woman: "A cultured educated Cherokee, her dress would have been the same as any society lady of the time. In fact, only the plains Indians would have dressed in Buckskin" (Carlile 2008: 13). Carlile's narrative, reenactments

of the wedding ceremony, and the symbolic representation of the wedding as a statue illustrate the squaw man discourse. Oklahoma Territory, as being opened for settlement largely because of a desire for resource extraction and transportation, marries and acquires the native and wild land of Indian Territory. The squaw man discourse embodies the rugged individual in pursuit of more. Through marriage the squaw man is portrayed as acquiring property and access to wealth through oil riches.

The Sooner

Sooner is a word that was originally used to describe individuals who crossed into Oklahoma territory before the official start of the Land Runs to gain access to the most valuable land. In other words, Sooners were individuals who more or less cheated at the Land Run. In 1946, George Milbourn wrote, quoting the official state guidebook, "for a long time the term Sooner was one of reproach, but with the passing years the word began to lose its original connotations. As its origin was gradually forgotten, it eventually came to mean one who is alert, ambitious, and enterprising" (Milbourn 1946: 516). The University of Oklahoma, which proudly refers to its student body as the "Sooners," echoes this sentiment. The University of Oklahoma's "Brand History" webpage states,

> As time went on, 'Sooner' came to be a synonym of Progressivism. The Sooner was an 'energetic individual who travels ahead of the human procession.' He was prosperous, ambitious, competent, a 'can-do' individual. And Oklahoma was the Sooner State, the land of opportunity, enterprise and economic expansion, very much in the Progressive spirit that engulfed the old South in the 1920's (Brand Guide 2015).

The Sooner represents a particular aspect of hegemonic masculinity that embodies the pioneering individual narrative. The Sooner is both an innovator and an entrepreneur, but for many Oklahomans, particularly Native American communities, the word persists

as a negative term that represents thievery and cheating. Even with these criticisms, the state motto is "The Sooner State," and the dominant narrative of state identity is clearly connected to the ideology of the "Sooner" as a positive force moving towards modernity.

The Sooner is also important in that the Sooner is discursively detached from oil and gas exploration. The caricature of the Sooner detaches responsibility from the nation in opening Oklahoma territory for settlement and further detaches that decision from the discovery of mineral resources and the desire to transport mineral resources through lands previously promised to Native communities. The emphasis and blame for settlement becomes displaced on settling individuals rather than on systems and institutions of power as they were and are attached to industry. The narrative of the pioneering individual obscures the relationship between industrial power and governmental decisions leading to many of the contradictions that we see in representations of Oklahoma state identity.

The Wildcatter and the Oil Man

In addition to the Sooner, the Wildcatter and the Oilman together work as symbols that highlight the relationship between oil and gas, pioneering resiliency, and valued group membership. The terms wildcatter and oilman are lesser known and less widely distributed in Oklahoma. These terms are only used for a select few. The term wildcatter was used in early statehood to describe risky business men who attempted to find oil in previously unexplored areas. A wildcatter can be characterized as a gambler who wins, and is in contemporary discourses to describe the heroes of hydraulic fracturing (Zuckerman 2013). The term oilman described wealthy, oil-profiteering men

who held positions of prestige. Today the two words are interchangeable, demonstrating the conflation of wealthy, business men with risky gamblers. The term Wildcatter has been expanded to include the development and expansion of hydraulic fracturing technologies to extract oil and gas from shale rock formation deep underneath the earth's surface. Despite a shift in technologies and the ability to determine the presence of oil before drilling, the term wildcatter is still used to characterize these endeavors.

In *The Greatest Gamblers*, Ruth Sheldon Knowles reiterates a common saying in the early days of statehood, "A wildcatter can't quit" (Knowles 1959: 139). Wildcatters were considered gamblers, but the term has come to be celebrated as demonstrated by the OERB's description of these men:

> Just as important as their skills were their collective aptitudes for taking risks, a characteristic best personified by rugged individualists known as wildcatters who were always looking for the next big strike, hungry for the thrill of discovery and willing to gamble everything to have one more chance for the find of a lifetime (OERB 2007: 15).

The wildcatter represents the pioneering individual that always seeks more and creates new and innovative ways to access and obtain previously out of reach resources.

Two contemporary figures embody the wildcatter and oilman narratives: Harold Hamm of Continental Resources and David Chernicky formerly of New Dominion. Harold Hamm and David Chernicky both represent different aspects of the Wildcatter and Oilman identity, and narratives surrounding both their successes and failures illustrate the persistence and circulation of aspects of the dominant narrative of Oklahoma rugged individualism.

As part of a discussion series titled Powerful Prose, Full Circle Bookstore in Oklahoma City hosted a discussion of *The Frackers* by Gregory Zuckerman (2013).

The discussion was led by Robert C. Henry, the President of Oklahoma City University and a board member of Devon Energy. Promotional materials for the event read:

> Things looked grim for American energy in 2006. Oil production was in steep decline and natural gas was hard to find. The Iraq War threatened the nation's already tenuous relations with the Middle East. China was rapidly industrializing and competing for resources. Major oil companies had just about given up on new discoveries on U.S. soil, and a new energy crisis seemed likely. But a handful of men believed everything was about to change. By experimenting with hydraulic fracturing through extremely dense shale–a process now known as fracking–the *wildcatters* started a revolution. In just a few years, they solved America's dependence on imported energy. (Powerful Prose Series 2014; emphasis added)

This narrative memorializes and signifies the role of the "wildcatters" as heroes that contribute to national security and an economic "revolution". Harold Hamm is perhaps the most famous of these wildcatters. He is the richest man in Oklahoma, and his endeavors, both personal and professional, are often the focus of local news headlines and books such as *The Frackers*. In an article titled "The Last American Wildcatter," Forbes Magazine describes Hamm as a man who perseveres. Nathan Vardi writes, "Despite a 70% drop in the price of oil since July, Harold Hamm, the 63-year-old chief executive of Continental Resources, is still a believer. 'You can find oil if you have the will to look for it,' he drawls. 'A lot of people have lost the will to look for it in the United States'" (Vardi 2009). Despite Hamm's wealth, Hamm is characterized as a rugged individual who does not give up in the face of adversity. The phrase "he drawls" highlights a national idea of what it means to be an Oklahoman and an "American Wildcatter." Hamm embodies the narrative of hegemonic masculinity in the constant desire for more.

David Chernicky similarly embodies this narrative, but through Chernicky the othering of non-masculine identities and the relationship between the oil and gas industry and the *other* becomes more evident. In an article published in Bloomberg titled, "Can this Oil Baron's company stand another quake?" Elgin and Phillips preface the hardships that David Chernicky is experiencing due to the evidence that earthquakes are linked to the disposal processes involved in hydraulic fracturing:

> One of the most productive oil fields ever discovered in Oklahoma lies directly beneath its seat of government. A 32-square-mile underground reservoir, the Oklahoma City oil field was first tapped in 1928, a decade after the State Capitol building was finished. Some of its earliest wells were famous gushers, spouting oil hundreds of feet into the air for days before being brought under control. Over the next three decades the field produced close to a billion barrels of oil, helping Oklahoma weather the Great Depression and Dust Bowl and securing its ties to the energy industry (Elgin and Phillips 2015).

This narrative clearly demonstrates the construction of the oil and gas industry as a source of resilience and survival. The industry is characterized as helping Oklahoma endure the Great Depression and Dust Bowl, rather than recognizing it as a time that resulted in the death and displacement of many people in Oklahoma. Further this narrative prefaces its depiction of Chernicky by alluding to the presence of oil derricks on the state capitol grounds as evidence of the relationship the oil and gas industry and Oklahoma history and identity.

David Chernicky is famous for reviving old oil wells through the process of hydraulic fracturing. Chernicky is quoted saying "I try to pick the ugly girl at the dance," (Elgin and Phillips 2015). Elgin and Phillips describe Chernicky as having a "bawdy streak," He names his well sites in relationship to sexual symbols, "Deep Throat" being but one example (Elgin and Phillips 2015). Chernicky has recently

gained notoriety because his wells demonstrate the strongest correlation with earthquake activity. The mainstream media has characterized Chernicky as a controversial playboy, emphasizing his contributions and his charisma. Narratives that focus on Chernicky's hardships still center on the pioneering individual, but reframe him, referencing the Sooner discourse. Chernicky is causing damage by creating earthquakes, but "the kinds of disposal wells Chernicky pioneered have been instrumental to Oklahoma's fracking boom, which has doubled the state's oil production in the past five years" (Elgin and Phillips 2015). This narrative contributes to discourses of Oklahoma identity and masculinity. Through the narrative of the pioneering individual Chernicky is relieved of culpability for the role that his wells play in causing earthquakes. His bawdiness is celebrated and constructed through the diminishment of women. Feminine and sexual symbols (the ugly girl, deep throat) become representative of creative control and domination of nature.

The narratives surrounding Hamm and Chernicky echo and affirm the dominant narrative of Oklahoma state identity. Hamm embodies the working class man that without education used ingenuity to rise to the top. Chernicky represents the educated and successful playboy who has creatively reinvigorated previously dried up wells. These examples demonstrate the perpetuation of these narratives of rugged individualism and the relationship between Oklahoma and national narratives of hegemonic masculinity.

The Everlasting Frontier

Contributing to the persistence of the pioneering individual is the narrative of *the everlasting frontier*. In *The Culture of Oklahoma*, authors Stein and Hill argue that a

boom and bust culture persists in Oklahoma due to the presence of the Oil and Gas industry. Stein and Hill state that if there is a boom there will be a bust, and the ups and downs of the oil and gas economy have historically characterized boom and bust culture romantically painting the illusion of Oklahoma as "as a perpetually renewable frontier" (Stein and Hill 1993: 129). The boom and bust culture is more than just economic cycles. Rather, the boom and the bust come to represent a continual push and pull between triumph and hardship. The frontier exists metaphorically in the bust, and Oklahoma resilience is symbolically tied to our abilities to endure the bust or other forms of hardship. The boom and bust cycle creates a culture in which instability and resilience are central to understandings of Oklahoma identity. Stein and Hill argue that the core aspects of Oklahoma's boom and bust culture are "individual initiative, group fellowship, and the search for something always just out of reach" (Stein and Hill 1993: 129). The everlasting frontier maintains the construction of a particular rugged individualistic masculinity that is always longing for something more. The narrative of Oklahoma as a particularly difficult place to live, with residents enduring tornadoes, the Dust Bowl, and the bombing of the Federal Murrah Building, echoes the idea that Oklahoma is wild and in constant need of taming.

In Oklahoma, engineering and land development is framed as maintaining control of the uncontrollable and "wild" frontier. Structural development creates an attachment to land and place and establishes authority over who is and who is not deserving of the land. Describing settler logics in Zimbabwe, McDermott Hughes writes that, "Engineering fostered an unstable, ephemeral feeling of entitlement and belonging" (Hughes 2006: 269). Similarly, in Oklahoma, a desire to engineer is framed

as worthiness of ownership. As Oklahoma historian Angie Debo illustrates, this logic has been historically used to disempower Indigenous people and further take lands away from communities who did not desire to develop mineral resources (Debo 1943). A desire to construct things becomes a core boundary between what it means to be Oklahoman and outsider within the narrative of the perpetually renewable frontier. Those who do not want to build structures or extract resources are framed as contributing to the frontier or the hardships rather than the idea of modernity and progress. People who do not support the oil and gas industry are framed as contributing to the bust and disempowering the boom. The narrative of the everlasting frontier and the production of otherness has been particularly significant in cases of repression in the state. The narrative of everlasting frontier will be more fully explored through an analysis of symbols, heroes, and performance.

Oil and Gas as Resilience

Building on the narrative of the everlasting frontier is the narrative of resilience and survival. The concept of resilience is perhaps the greatest source of Oklahoma pride. A famous quote by former Governor Brad Henry circulates in Oklahoma describing what he calls the *Oklahoma Standard*: "Resilience is woven deeply into the fabric of Oklahoma. Throw us an obstacle, and we grow stronger" (Phillips 2015). In a chronotopic analysis of the way in which this quote is employed by healthcare facilities in Oklahoma, Ryan Blanton writes, “The *Oklahoma Standard…* is, undoubtedly, a common narrative within Oklahoma. From the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, to the Oklahoma City Bombing of 1995, and the May 10th, 2003 and May 20th, 2013 tornadoes, Oklahomans have faced down harsh circumstances” (Blanton 2014: 103).

Blanton noticeably leaves out the May 3rd tornado, demonstrating that even in portraying Oklahoma struggle, Oklahomans from different regions of the state understand different dates and moments in history as signifiers of hardship. The idea that Oklahoma is a particularly difficult place to live contributes to Oklahoma pride because of the resilience and perseverance that it is implied is required to stay.

The relationship between oil and gas and the construction of Oklahoma identity is evident through multiple symbols of statehood on public display, ranging from billboards to monuments. Symbols that are visible on the Oklahoma state capitol grounds demonstrate the interconnectedness between multiple narratives that together contribute to the dominant narrative of Oklahoma state identity. The state capitol is part of the Oklahoma landscape that informs how people understand themselves in relationship to industry and environment. "Landscape is historical: it is about collective memory and about how people's sense of the past influences their sense of place" (Willow 2011: 265). The Oklahoma state capitol grounds represent ideals of Oklahoma heritage and identity.

The State Capitol Grounds has at least three visible and noticeable monuments: Oil derricks, a statue of a Native American "Guardian" on top of the capitol dome, and a statue of a Native American woman. Additionally, the Oklahoma state capitol had one symbol that has been highly controversial in national news, the Ten Commandments monument, which was recently removed from the capitol grounds. The monument is still highly contested and holds symbolic meaning of Okie identity for many Oklahoma residents. Further, there is one monument that almost goes unnoticed, a memorial tree for African American communities in Oklahoma. I present some of the narratives

surrounding these monuments to illustrate how the state capitol grounds represents the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity.

Cultural geographer David S. Robertson writes, “For many Oklahomans, the petroleum industry's imprint on the landscape is as indelible an image of ‘Oklahomaness’ as the '89er, Native American culture, and college football.” (Robertson 1996: 17). The oil derrick has come to be a symbol of what it means to be Oklahoman, but as Robertson explains, the decision to drill in Oklahoma County was actually quite controversial and met with great resistance. Oklahoma City residents’ resistance to drilling suggests that Oklahomans’ did not unanimously support drilling as many historical narratives suggest. On March 28th, 1936, in an article titled, “Oil War Waged in Oklahoma,” *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* explained that the Oklahoma City Council opposed drilling within city limits because they feared for public safety and well-being; however, the governor at the time, E.W. Marland, firmly supported drilling and threatened to declare martial law in order to allow drilling on the capitol grounds (United Press 1936). Robertson writes, “Marland held true to his earlier threat by proclaiming martial law over the Capitol Grounds. Without the approval of Oklahoma City residents, and with military force, the Oklahoma State Capitol Grounds were opened to oil development” (Robertson 1996: 31). Robertson explains that there was no threat of violent opposition to the drilling, but rather Marland’s action was symbolic of his power and his willingness to take action.

Marland’s symbolic power was reinforced through advertising campaigns that framed him as unwavering and unwilling to compromise. Working in collusion with industry leaders, the state began boasting about the many benefits of oil development:

jobs, national security, and progress. The National Film Preservation Foundation has uncovered and shared with the public one of these advertisements titled, "Governor Marland Declares Martial Law," and describes the short clip as "a political ad disguised as a newsreel" (National Film Preservation Foundation 2015). The clip begins by displaying images of laborers involved in the drilling process and a narrator proclaims, "A visitor to the state capitol of Oklahoma may see thousands of men working tirelessly in the surrounding oil field. These thousands (pause) were unemployed Oklahoma men who came to the capitol due to increased activity and were put to work in the capitol area." The narrator then introduces E.W. Marland, "Ladies and Gentleman, the man who defied the Oklahoma City civil authority that opened the state capitol area to drilling, the Governor, E.W. Marland." Sitting behind the Governor's desk and describing his action of declaring martial law, Marland states, "In order to protect the interests of the state, protect the state land, I declared martial law and ordered out a squad of National Guard to prevent civil authorities from interfering with our operation" (National film Preservation Foundation 2015). Marland describes drilling operations as an act of protecting state lands, and defiance of residents' wishes is framed as an act of state protection.

The clip demonstrates the relationship between hegemonic masculinity characterized as the unyielding pioneer who will not quit and always desires more. Marland argues that he is protecting the interests of the state and the land, despite the presence of organized opposition at the city level. This becomes of particular relevance in analyzing the contemporary battle over municipal zoning regulations in the chapter focused on contemporary action and hydraulic fracturing. Today, this history is mostly

forgotten, and the symbol of the oil derrick on the Oklahoma State Capitol grounds has come to symbolize the relationship between oil and gas and Oklahoma State identity. Very few people know that Oklahoma City residents fought drilling on the capitol grounds. The derricks illustrate that Oklahoma economy and notions of identity are intertwined. The derricks represent oil and gas as part of Oklahoma heritage and patriotism despite the reality that many people in Oklahoma opposed the drilling process and now resist reliance on fossil fuels.

The Ten Commandments monument further represents aspects of Oklahoma identity and history. The Ten Commandments Monument has received national attention because the current Governor, Mary Fallin, refused to remove the monument from the capitol grounds. Residents responded in a number of ways. Some residents proposed building a satanic monument on the grounds, while anti-death penalty activists held rallies centered on the commandment "Thou Shall Not Kill." Activists attempted to bring awareness to the hypocrisy of the Oklahoma state government (Oklahoma executes more prisoners per capita than any other state in the U.S. (Death Penalty Information Center 2016). The Ten Commandments is significant in Oklahoma because Oklahoma is associated with conservative, fundamentalist Christianity in both national and local media. Further, Governor Fallin echoes Marland's refusal to give in.

In addition to the oil derricks and the Ten Commandments Monument, the capitol grounds feature two Native American figures: "The Guardian" that stands above the capitol dome, and a statue of a Native American Woman that is titled, "As Long as the Waters Flow." "The Guardian" statue stands atop the capitol dome. The statue was designed by Native American artist Enoch Kelly Haney. The 17 feet statue represents a

Native American man holding a staff that reaches 22 feet into the sky. The Oklahoma Arts Council describes the dedication and revealing of the statue stating:

> The Guardian embodies the diversity within the proud and strong population of Oklahoma while serving as a reminder of our tumultuous times. The sculpture signifies the thousands of Native Americans that were forced from their homes during the 1800s and the sons and daughters that survived the devastating Dust Bowl. The towering statue exemplifies the valor of Oklahomans and their ability to overcome the most horrific catastrophes such as the bombing at the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City. The Guardian is a reminder that just below him within the halls of our grand Capitol, the true guardians of Oklahoma, our legislators, are working everyday to improve this already magnificent state. (Oklahoma Arts Council 2011)

The statement highlights both Oklahoma struggle and resilience by referring to the bombing and the Dust Bowl. Additionally, the statement ensures that its readers understand that the "true guardians of Oklahoma" are Oklahoma legislatures. The statue symbolizes the role of legislators as guardians. Juxtaposed with the history of drilling on the state capitol grounds, these contradictory symbols represent both the use of government force to protect oil and gas interests despite citizen's opposition and the idea that Oklahoma government serves to protect *us*.

The statue of the Native American woman titled "As Long as the Waters Flow" further illustrates the contradictory symbols present on the capitol grounds. The statue of the Native American woman stands thirteen and a half feet tall. The statue was created by Chiricahua Apache artist Allan Houser and is a tribute to Native Americans. The title of the statue references President Andrew Jackson's promise that Native Americans would have control of their land, "as long as the grass grows and the rivers run" (Oklahoma Arts Council 2011). The juxtaposition of the oil derrick alongside the statue featuring a plaque that reads, "As Long as the Waters Flow" represents

Oklahoma's complicated history and contradictory promises. This is made possible because of the discursive separation between industry and government in constructing a dominant narrative of Oklahoma history and identity. The role that the industry and government has played in displacing Native American communities is not acknowledged. The symbol of the derricks represents oil and gas heritage. The role that the oil and gas industry has played in influencing political decision-making is downplayed.

Identity and Performance

Narratives of Oklahoma identity are demonstrated through performance in public spaces in the presence of decision-making bodies. On April 20th, 2015, hundreds of people gathered in Payne County, OK at the Stillwater Municipal building in anticipation of the City Council's decision as to whether or not to further regulate oil and gas in Oklahoma. Environmental activists and industry leaders from across the state, as well as local residents filled the city council meeting. A public hearing proceeded in which environmental activists, residents, and industry representatives spoke on behalf of their interests. All individuals who desired to speak were required to sign-up in advance and were given five minutes to express their viewpoint. The speeches are performances of identity as individuals attempted to establish commonality with their audience and each other. The dominant narrative of what it means to be Oklahoman became very clear in this context where multiple people expressing multiple viewpoints attempted to appeal to a broad Oklahoma audience. I want to preface my analysis of these presentations by saying that I am in no way arguing that these statements are insincere, rather, I am arguing that as speech acts, speakers'

statements reproduce dominant narratives of Oklahoma state identity that have real consequences for how many residents experience Oklahoma.

J. L. Austin identifies that words not only transmit meaning, but utterances can also do things (Austin 1975). Speech acts are words or utterances that act in the world. Austin builds the concept of speech acts by addressing the idea of performative utterances (Austin 1975). Performative utterances take action in the world. Judith Butler expands upon Austin's concept of speech acts by saying that, "If a word in this sense might be said to 'do' a thing, then it appears that the word not only signifies a thing, but that this signification will also be an enactment of the thing" (Butler 1996: 200). Butler provides injurious speech as an example of a kind of speech act. Butler analyzes the components and players in the formation of "words that wound" (Butler 1996: 202). Butler considers Robert Cover's essay, "Violence and the Word," and explains that judicial prosecution of "hate speech" exercises punishment in the form of a speech act or prosecution. In this context, the historically situated and positioning of the judiciary system allows the court to enact speech acts that can possibly lead to and signify imprisonment and possibly death (Butler 1996: 202).

Butler states, "In shifting the emphasis from the harm done by the state to the harm done by citizens and non-state institutions against citizens, a reassessment of how power operates in and through discourse is also at work" (Butler 1996: 203). In this analysis, Butler demonstrates what speech acts are and how speech acts can function. Utterances of hate speech must be situated in a particular ideological framework in order to not only be understood but in order to carry the weight of action. Similarly, the judge has the power to enact speech that does something. The utterance of hate speech

and the utterance of prosecution both do things, and their ability to do things is historically, socially, and culturally situated. Butler further extends the definition of speech acts to not only include utterances, but other forms of discourse. Butler provides the example of burning a cross as a kind of hate speech. Speech acts can be either symbolic gesture, images, or utterances that carries the weight of action or signifies action.

Similarly, statements made by oil and gas representatives act by shaping how the oil and gas industry holds dominance in peoples' lives. In the case of Payne County, drilling near homes was mediated by the statements made by both residents and city council representatives. I focus on three of the statements made by individuals arguing against regulating oil and gas because they most clearly illustrate how the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity is circulated through speech acts. Speakers representing the interests of the oil and gas industry ranged from relatives of industry officials, to business and engineering students, industry geologists, and CEOs of oil and gas companies statewide.

A business student at Oklahoma State University voiced the following sentiment:

> Just like the previous speaker, I'm also a student at Oklahoma State. I'm excited about my future. And I want to be Oklahoman. I love this state. I grew up here. I grew up on a cattle and wheat farm in Tuttle. And. Just we were blessed to have the minerals underneath our feet. In years though we had drought. The minerals are what helped pay the bills. My grandpa often said it's the best calf on the farm and that's certainly rang true here in the last several years when we've had extraordinary drought in this state. But I don't want to talk to you about my past. I want to talk to you about my future. And the future I hope to have in this state, and I want to be involved in the energy industry and here's why. The United States energy industry is crucial to our country, and it's crucial to Oklahoma. We need it. It keeps the lights on in this room. I'm sure all of us drove here this evening. We had to put fuel in our cars to get here. Oil is vital to our state, our state's economy. 1 out of every 4 jobs

> directly related or indirectly related to the oil and gas industry. 1 out of 3 tax dollars in this state generated from oil and gas.

The speaker first established his relationship to Oklahoma through a relationship to agriculture and oil and gas. These two industries have historically competed, and at times have been hostile to one another, and yet persist as defining characteristics of Oklahoma. The role of industry in establishing Oklahoma identity represents Oklahoma's worth in the national imagination. Oklahoma provides something specific to the nation, and this idea becomes part of the foundational discourse that links oil and gas development to Oklahoma identity and American patriotism. The speaker continues by addressing that Oklahomans experience hard times in a unique way. Alluding to the Oklahoma struggle through periodic drought, mineral resources become the savior and key characteristic of resilience. Oil and gas is characterized as vital to the nation and the state. Oil and gas is vital to the nation because a specific way of life (cars, lights, etc.,) depends on it, and it is uniquely vital to Oklahoma because it provides us with a commodity that in turn provides us with jobs. This narrative builds on the idea that Oklahoma is an everlasting frontier that needs oil and gas for Oklahoma survival. Oil and gas becomes characterized as Oklahoma resilience and a vital part of Oklahoma identity.

A geologist employed by Devon Energy and living in Edmond, Oklahoma also shared his experience. He spent the first minute of his speech discussing his commitment to national service through the military. He argued that regulating oil and gas would in turn impact foreign relationships, national security, and the well-being of families in Oklahoma:

> America and every modern nation needs petroleum to survive. We either drill here or over there. If we drill over there we have to send our soldiers

> over there to protect our national interests. We send our sons and daughters overseas to protect our natural interests. History has proven that when we are over there we have to defend our petroleum resources. We defend our petroleum resources with our sons and daughters.

This statement connects the relationship between oil, gas, and notions of patriotism. The speaker uses emotional appeal to emphasize the importance of oil and gas development in Oklahoma. Oklahoma's ability to produce oil and gas is described as preventing international extraction and potential armed conflict. Further, the use of the word "our" signals the belief that engineering leads to ownership. By engaging in oil production in other places the resources become framed as "ours." The speaker demonstrates a key relationship between power, energy production, and ownership.

Lastly, the following speaker described herself as a mother. She expressed her concern for the future of Oklahoma. She described the many benefits of oil and gas in that the industry provides jobs for "family and friends." She focused on the belief that oil and gas are tied to American ingenuity and Oklahoma creativity stating, "Since 2000, American ingenuity has changed the face of the industry not only in Oklahoma but worldwide. Many say you can't save the world but with the energy industry we sure can." She is particularly referencing the boom made possible through the expansion of drilling technologies that incorporate hydraulic fracturing with horizontal drilling. She stated that with the energy industry we can "save the world." Her statement further suggests that Oklahoma identity is linked to oil and gas through resilience, progress, and pioneering individualism.

The dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity is constructed in relationship to both the construction of national identity and the framing of several core concepts: oil and gas as resilience, pioneering individualism, and oil and gas as heritage. The

dominant narrative acts as a form of cultural control that permeates the ways in which arguments are framed and action is taken leading to social reproduction and a sense of inevitability.

Considering a similar political climate in Alaska, anthropologist Chelsea Chapman describes the process by which energy has come to signify certain social relationships and obligations between both human and nonhuman beings (Chapman 2013: 97). Chapman writes:

> The ecological politics of inevitability present in Alaska depends in part on defining energy resources as at once scarce (existing in a state of geographic and economic precariousness that demands ever-greater production efforts) and stranded (trapped in the landscape but ready to be liberated by newly emerging technological or economic arrangements) (Chapman 2013: 97).

In Oklahoma, a politics of inevitability is similarly constructed, but on different premises. Oil and gas is constructed as necessary for survival, a part of Oklahoma heritage, and a form of perseverance in the face of adversity. At times, energy is described as *stranded* by national politics or progressive environmentalists, but in Oklahoma, energy is rarely framed as *scarce*. Oklahomans understand oil as scarce from national discourses, but local discourses focus on the abundance of development potential that Oklahoma possesses but has failed to tap into. The dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity leads to a politics of inevitability in which residents who challenge or express concern with the energy industry are criticized for not being committed to Okie ideals. This occurs subtly, as in the geologists suggesting that a fracking ban would threaten the lives of "our sons and daughters." It also happens overtly. While working on this thesis, I was approached by an old friend who asked me if "I oppose that pipeline." I had no idea what they were talking about because there are lots of

pipelines in Oklahoma. I said something like, “Which pipeline? The Red River Pipeline?” because I have recently been organizing with folks around the Red River Pipeline. They said, “I don’t know that one that Oklahomans’ love.” I told them that I did not know which pipeline they were referring to but that I did oppose many pipelines in the state. They then asked me, “Are you anti-Oklahoman?” Research participants whom I interviewed described similar instances, sometimes much more extreme, which I will discuss further in the chapter on repression. All of these instances illustrate that the framing of oil and gas as intrinsically part of Oklahoma identity creates a hostile environment in which Oklahoma residents who disagree or challenge the industry are perceived or labeled as not fully Okie.

Oklahoma Shame

Many people in Oklahoma blame John Steinbeck’s Grapes of Wrath for the framing of Okies as “backwards” in national narratives. However, people from Oklahoma were belittled in national narratives before Grapes of Wrath was published. Part of the reason that Steinbeck wrote the novel was to give humanity to a group of people that he believed was being dehumanized (Mishan 2008). The Great Depression and Dust Bowl forced many Oklahomans to travel in search of jobs, and like the migration of many Latino/a people in North America today in search of work (Urrea 2005), Okies were met with animosity and violence. A stereotype emerged of what it means to be “Okie” that negatively portrayed people from Oklahoma. Oklahoma Shame has been a pervasive part of Oklahoma identity ever since.

In the 1940’s, author George Milbourn, was somewhat famous largely for his caricatures and critiques of Oklahoma culture. Milbourn writes of Oklahoma’s

"fickleness", invisibility, and hypocrisy. Milbourn notes, "As a matter of fact, an outline map of Oklahoma looks like an index fist that arbitrary sign printers use to mark items worthy of special note. The finger of Oklahoma points in the other direction" (Milbourn 1946: 515). Milbourn uses this metaphor to describe Oklahoma's backwardness and waywardness. Milbourn was praised nationally for his criticisms of his birthplace.

The narrative of shame is not new. It has existed in Oklahoma perhaps since before statehood, when Oklahoma was deemed a wasteland by the broader United States. Milbourn writes, "A hundred years ago Oklahoma was turned into a vast concentration camp for Red Indians, because it was such worthless land. (Milbourn 1946: 515). Oklahoma was considered to be "worthless land." People arrived here for various reasons. Native Americans were forcibly relocated, black freedman established settlements, and many people described as white today came to Oklahoma in an attempt to escape persecution in other areas. The idea that Oklahoma land – and even Oklahoma people – are worthless persists today. In the national imaginary, Oklahoma was and in many ways continues to be characterized, by both people that identify as conservative and progressive, as a wasteland. This depiction of Oklahoma maintains the oil and gas industry's dominance in Oklahoma because it facilitates the narrative that oil and gas acts as a form of Oklahoma resilience and vitality. Oil and gas is portrayed as the way in which Oklahomans have survived in this *wasteland*. This reproduces oppressive and narrow ideas of Oklahoma people that continues a historical national othering that relied on stereotypical ideas of Indigenous peoples, African Americans, and poor, rural peoples. In many ways, these are the same ideas that led this conglomeration of people to end up in the place that we call Oklahoma today, either through displacement or

settlement, and these are the same ideas that allow industry to uproot communities without consequence.

Contemporary discourses portray the entirety of Oklahoma as rural, empty, and occupied by backwards, white folks. Oklahoma progressives circulate images on Facebook that say things like, "Oklahoma: 0 Days Without a National Embarrassment." While Austin, TX has coined the slogan, "Keep Austin Weird," residents of Oklahoma have jokingly began using the phrase on bumper stickers, shirts, and social media, "Keep Oklahoma Awful." People within Oklahoma attempt to distance themselves from a perceived backwards Oklahoma by critiquing particularly low-income, working class people.

In a recent opinion piece titled, "An Open Letter to Oklahoma Voters and Lawmakers," an Oklahoma high school teacher wrote, "You, the representatives, senators, and governor of Oklahoma are creating a population of ignorant peasants fit only to work in the oil field and factories you bring to this state by promising those businesses won't have to pay their fair share of taxes" (Wedel 2016). In attempting to critique the politicians in Oklahoma, this teacher insults and belittles the general public of Oklahoma. This teacher is attempting to speak out against the oil and gas industry and government, but he does this by creating a hierarchical relationship in which he is more elite than the majority of Oklahoma, including the parents of the children who he teaches.

These narratives are common amongst white, Oklahoma progressives in which Oklahoma progressives deploy Oklahoma shame to distance themselves from *other* white people. Similarly, people outside of Oklahoma deploy a very similar tactic in

which people who have left Oklahoma or people who are not from Oklahoma enact shame to distance themselves from people here. What is lost and forgotten is that Oklahoma is a diverse place both in terms of bioregions and people. This is one of the ways that the narratives and work of activists in Oklahoma are subjugated and erased. The narrative of Oklahoma Shame facilitates the belief that Oklahoma is valueless above ground, and only holds value in its mineral resources. By perpetuating narratives of Oklahoma Shame, activists reproduce the dominant framework that maintains the oil and gas industry's dominance. Oklahoma Shame is a theme that I will address repeatedly throughout this thesis.

Oklahoma identity is largely constructed in relationship to the oil and gas industry. This dominant narrative acts as a controlling process that serves as a form of repression and cultural control leading to a politics of inevitability. The dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity as it relates to the oil and gas industry is also constructed within the framework of national identity. Oklahoma identity is characterized by pioneering individualism, the everlasting frontier, oil as resilience, oil as heritage, and oil as patriotism in that oil serves as a commodity product that benefits the greater national project. The historical depiction and current illustration of Oklahoma as a wasteland contributes to the rhetorical devices that the oil and gas industry uses to perpetuate the framework of the everlasting frontier. Oil and gas is directly tied to the dominant narrative of what it means to be Okie.

Chapter Four

Red Dirt Resistance: Uncovering Counter-Narratives

My mother is a feminist, lesbian, and pastor in Oklahoma, and loves to tell the story of the first time that I met a male pastor. My mother had been relocated from a church in Edmond to a church in Oklahoma City. My family moved to a parsonage in Oklahoma City. I was fairly young, probably four-years-old. My parents were still married, so I could not have been older than five. My mother introduced me to some neighbor children whom I became close with. I came home from playing at their house one day, and my mother said something like, "Their dad is a minister too. Isn't that cool?" I was astonished and proclaimed, "Men can be ministers?!?" My mother still turns red with laughter when she tells this story today; I turn red with embarrassment.

When I got older, my mother explained to me that this moment made her overwhelmingly happy because of the years that she spent as one of the only women pastors in the Methodist denomination in Oklahoma. She was happy that her daughter seemed to be growing up knowing the world in a different way than she grew up knowing the world. Despite my mother's optimism, I still learned many of the cultural norms that she abhorred. I slowly gained consciousness of many cultural norms that other people perceived as natural. When I was about eight or nine, I went to a summer camp with my cousin in Minnesota, and I told our cabin mates that my mother was a pastor. I thought nothing of this fact, and I only told them because we were introducing ourselves and talking about our parents. One of them said something like, "Your mother is a pastor?!? Women can be pastors?!?" The other kids ostracized me from that point forward. They implied that my mother was blasphemous, and they teased me

relentlessly. I did not understand. Up until that point in my life, I had never received this kind of ridicule because of my mother's profession. It was not until I was much older that I experienced isolation because of my mother's activism in Oklahoma.

As I got older, maybe 10 or 11, I learned that there are still denominations of churches that deny women leadership roles in churches. My mother was eventually asked to leave the Methodist denomination because she performed holy unions for lesbian and gay couples. Folks rallied around her and formed a United Church of Christ (UCC) church in Oklahoma City that works to support marginalized communities in Oklahoma. When I was in high school, my mother's church held a conference titled "Homosexuality and the Scripture." My siblings and I did not stay in our house that week because the KKK threatened our mother and our home. I now better understand why it delighted my mother so much that I was oblivious to sexism and oppression in pastoral work as a child.

The first place that I learned about issues of social justice was my mother's church. I remember reading the book AIDS: You Can't Catch It Holding Hands by Niki de Saint Phalle (1987) in the nursery room at church. In the early 1990s there were very few churches in Oklahoma that welcomed persons living with HIV/AIDS. I grew up with at least some consciousness of discrimination based on HIV/AIDS, income, ethnicity, citizenship, country of origin, race, sexuality, ability, language, and gender. Through my mother's church and activism, I had the opportunity to meet Clara Luper, Padre Miguel d'escoto Brockmann, and Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr. I grew up attending rallies and marches and hearing adults around me talk about complex and interlocking systems of oppression, most of which did not make sense to me at the time.

This is part of my Oklahoma experience. My Oklahoma experience had little to do with oil and gas wells until very recently. When I think of Oklahoma, I do not think of Harold Hamm or horizontal drilling or the bombing or the Dust Bowl. I think of geodes, watercolor sunsets, rose rocks, socialism, sit-ins, tamales, Kiowa dolls, Cherokee quilts, Maria Tallchief, Jim Thorpe, Will Rogers, Woodie Guthrie, Clara Luper, Karen Silkwood, intricate leatherwork, jazz and folk music, historically Black towns, pecan trees, and red dirt. I will never associate the thunder with a basketball team, and I will always associate thunder with rolling Oklahoma thunder storms.

The dominant narrative of Oklahoma history and identity does not represent the multiple ways that people experience life in Oklahoma. My mother's activism has roots in Oklahoma, and so does mine. Oklahoma activism has a legacy here, and activists draw on this legacy to illuminate counter-narratives to the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity. Activists find strength and support in these counter-narratives that sustain their work. Despite the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity as being intrinsically tied to the oil and gas industry, activists highlight counter-narratives of Oklahoma identity through historical narratives, art, and religious discourses. In this chapter, I document examples of these counter-narratives through examples of public events and activism as evidence of how activists situate themselves in relationship to enduring counter-narratives of resistance.

Historical Counter-Narratives

Meeting in a Mennonite Church in 2014, activists and progressives from multiple generations came together to watch the film *Silkwood*. The film tells the true story of Karen Silkwood, a whistleblower who stood up to one of the most powerful

energy companies in Oklahoma in the 1970s: Kerr-McGee. Silkwood spent months compiling documents and talking with union officials attempting to expose Kerr-McGee's malpractice. On November 13th, 1974, armed with documents proving Kerr-McGee's guilt, Silkwood drove from a local union meeting to meet with a national union official and a *New York Times* reporter. Before driving to meet them, Silkwood called and said that she had the documents and was on her way. She never made it to her destination. She was found dead having supposedly driven off of the road. The documents were never recovered; however, witnesses testified to seeing Silkwood leaving a union meeting with a large file of documents. Her death resulted in further investigation into Kerr-McGee and the exposure of Kerr-McGee's malpractice. In many ways, these incidents led to the Black Fox Nuclear power plant protests.

What was special about this particular film showing was not solely the story of Karen Silkwood; most of us in the room had heard the story before. What was unique about this moment is that we were sitting in a room with people who were present when these historical events happened. We were surrounded by people who knew the story intimately and could elaborate on it in ways that we were completely unaware of. Among the audience was a reporter who covered the Silkwood story in the 70's and activists who were involved in the fight against nuclear energy during the Black Fox Anti-Nuclear Campaign. It was on that day that I learned that activists entered the Kerr-McGee building, the largest building in downtown Oklahoma City at the time, and hung a banner from the side of the building that read: "Who Killed Karen Silkwood?" It was the first time that I heard stories about the unfounded arrests of reporters who covered the Black Fox protests. In that moment, I began to understand contemporary

environmental activism as part of an enduring counter-narrative to dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity and experience.

Activists highlight historical narratives to draw attention to Oklahoma's progressive and radical past. These narratives normally center on different moments in history or activist groups: The Green Corn Rebellion[5], the Katz Drugstore sit-ins[6], Mennonite Churches as war resistors[7], and the Black Fox Nuclear power plant protests. While many of the activists that I spoke with would argue that all of these events and groups work towards the goals of environmental justice in some way, I focus on the Black Fox Nuclear power plant protests because activists repeatedly referenced this event as a site of triumph and inspiration. Activists of my generation find strength in the history of prior activism at events like the film showing and discussion. At countless events like this that usually do not become part of the dominant narrative of Oklahoma history, counter narratives are constructed and transmitted.

In the Fall of 1978, the Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO) began constructing the Black Fox nuclear plant near Inola, Oklahoma. Carrie Dickerson and her organization, CASE (Citizen's Action for Safe Energy) embarked on a legal battle to stop the construction of the Black Fox nuclear power plant. A group of students and community members formed the Sunbelt Alliance, a group of predominantly young people who argued that nonviolent direct action was a necessary tactic in combatting the power plant. The Sunbelt Alliance held a nonviolent civil disobedience training to

[5] The Green Corn Rebellion was a tenant farmers uprising that occurred in 1917 (Chang 2010; Dunbar-Ortiz and Womack Jr. 2010; Sellers 1998).
[6] The Katz Drugstore sit-ins occurred in 1958 when the NAACP Youth Council of Oklahoma City staged acts of civil disobedience in a segregated drugstore. These acts of civil disobedience began the sit-in movement of the 1960s (Frady 2007; Luper 1994).
[7] Mennonite churches have a long history in Oklahoma of war resistance and peace activism dating back to WWI and WWII (Kroeker 1994).

prepare people for a planned day of action. The Sunbelt alliance organized three separate acts of nonviolent civil disobedience, and more than 700 people were arrested protesting the construction of the power plant (Barlow 2007). The actions of these protestors shaped how Oklahoma environmentalists situated themselves in Oklahoma history. A young activist explained to me:

> I think that whenever I'm older I'm going to look back on my life and I'm going to see that… My hope is that what we did, even if our names aren't recorded… I don't give a shit if our names are recorded. I just would like what we did and what we said to be recorded because as it turns out there is a long history of resistance in this state. And so, I don't want to toot my own horn or get… like delusions of grandeur over here. But to think that like if our resistance falls in line with things like Karen Silkwood, and things like the Green Corn Rebellion and the Black Fox Nuclear Energy protests, I'm so glad that I'm a part of that legacy, rather than if I just had stayed within the realms of the official state history and didn't get outside of those lines."

This activists' statement demonstrates that historical counter-narratives provide a framework for people in Oklahoma to perceive themselves as part of an enduring counter-narrative. Despite the dominant narrative of Oklahoma, histories of resistance carve out a place in which Oklahoma residents found counter-histories and found new understandings of what it means to be Okie.

Empowerment and Resistance through Okie Figures, Art, and Song

After the official state recognition that oil and gas disposal wells do cause earthquakes in 2015 (Wines 2015), activists rallied to call for action from the state government. Folks from across the state gathered for "Induced Seismicity Day." Standing together on the steps of the capitol, activists joined together in singing "This Land Is Your Land," by Oklahoman, Woody Guthrie. Activists employed the song strategically to highlight Oklahoma's leftist heroes and to illuminate Oklahoma's radical and socialist past. When the song started, an activist friend of mine turned to me

in the crowd and rolled their eyes. I had heard the argument before from certain parts of the anti-fracking and activist community that "This Land is Your Land" perpetuates settler colonialist ideas of occupation and ownership. I found this argument ironic in this context because the person leading the song was a Native woman. I was curious to see how my activist friend would frame their critique in this context. Instead, the activist turned to me and expressed frustration that people in the crowd were only familiar with the parts of the song that seemingly celebrate ownership. The important parts to this activist are often forgotten:

> As I went walking I saw a sign there
> And on the sign it said 'No Trespassing.'
> But on the other side it didn't say nothing,
> That side was made for you and me.
> In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,
> By the relief office I seen my people;
> As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking
> Is this land made for you and me?

The activist told me to watch the crowd when these lines emerged. People hummed and tried to keep up, but the activist was right. Most people were not familiar with that part of the song. In a conversation later, I learned that for this activist this omission signified the omission of Oklahoma's radical past. This activist argued that people often misinterpret the song in Oklahoma. The activist argued that the song is not about ownership and optimistic notions of belonging. The song takes the United States rhetoric of equality and juxtaposes it against exclusion and inequality persistent in capitalism within the United States. The activist argued that the song is about commonwealth, shared access, and resistance to private property. This activist observed that people embrace the easy parts of the song, but let go of the parts of the song that challenge notions of ownership and private property and the parts of the song that ask

people to think critically about equal access to food and general well-being. Often times these words are left out entirely when the song is sung at public events and celebrations. The singer leading the song knew these words and sang them passionately, while the audience awkwardly mumbled through.

Anti-fracking activists utilized this song to highlight Oklahoma's radical past and to bring to light an enduring counter-narrative. This activist's observation highlights the common critique of art as activism: with varying interpretations of art and music, can artistic expression facilitate social change? While I cannot attempt to fully take up this question in this paper, I do argue that activists consciously utilize creative mediums to connect with environmental struggle. Art and music play multiple roles in activist communities. These forms of artistic expression represent a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative of oil and gas that is meaningful to activists and activist communities. Activists I interviewed indicated that artistic expression and the acknowledgement of an Oklahoma legacy of artistic resistance holds deep meaning for activists attempting to situate themselves within the context of Oklahoma activism and resistance. Social media expands the reach of these forms of artistic expression creating broader networks of support and communities of resistance. There are many examples of this creative use of song and art amplified through social media. I provide two examples of this and emphasize how the use of art and music in combination with social media form a discourse of resistance and facilitate senses of belonging for Okies who are critical of the oil and gas industry.

Activists utilize songs as a means of challenging the dominant narrative of the oil and gas industry. Song-making became an important part of belonging for different

anti-fracking activists. Following the folk tradition, activists with Stop Fracking Payne County (SFPC), an activist group in Stillwater, OK, adapted various folk songs to highlight anti-fracking resistance. A revised version of Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" and a suggested variation of John Prine's "Paradise" emerged on the Stop Fracking Payne County (SFPC) Facebook Group page highlighting the relationship between political folk music and Oklahoma experiences of environmentalism.

At a SFPC meeting and picnic, one activist performed a revised version of Loreena McKennitt's "Breaking the Silence." The lyrics had been modified to include SFPC's slogan, "They underestimate the persistence of our red dirt resistance." The slogan itself draws attention to Oklahoma resistance through an emphasis on red dirt, something Oklahoma is known for. In Oklahoma, red dirt represents a connection to the land and a physical embodiment of Oklahoma.

By juxtaposing red dirt alongside the word resistance and particularly resistance to the oil and gas industry, activists with SFPC challenge people to consider anti-fracking activism as part of Oklahoma experience and identity. Activists utilize this song and these lyrics to situate themselves within a persistent activist tradition embedded in Okie identity. Activists' artistic and musical creations present a counter-narrative of what it means to be Okie.

In 2015, the Oklahoma state senate passed SB 809, a state bill that would prevent all attempts to ban fracking in Oklahoma. In other words, it was a bill to protect oil and gas interests to continue expanding the use of fracking. This bill was proposed largely because Denton, TX, a town in north Texas, had effectively voted to ban fracking. The state of Texas responded by enacting a restriction on local oil and gas

regulations. Oklahoma's proposal of SB809 occurred in response to Texas's method of dealing with activists attempting to ban fracking. Shortly after the Oklahoma state senate proposed SB 809, a stenciled graffiti image began showing up in different areas of Oklahoma. The image featured Governor Mary Fallin's face dripping with oil accompanied by the phrase, "Let them drink oil!" The image alludes to Marie-Antoinette's famous remark in the face of poverty and hunger, "Let them eat cake." As early as May 22nd, 2015, the day after the House and Senate approved SB 809 and days before Governor Fallin would sign the bill into law, the image emerged on Facebook. Someone had taken a photo of the graffiti work and posted it on their Facebook. The image was shared widely accompanied with comments and conversation about the messaging and its meaning. This is one example of an artistic act that was used in direct opposition to the dominant pro-oil and gas industry narrative.

The picture seemed to resonate with people who do not identify as activists because it was shared on numerous Facebook pages of people and news articles who had previously not been active in criticizing oil and gas. Perhaps, individuals shared the image because it resonated with their experiences targeting government rather than industry. Facebook user comments demonstrated that the image allowed people to criticize the government's pursuit of oil and gas profits without targeting oil workers. Even further, the image provided an analysis of social class. Commenters related to the image because it provided a space to both analyze and consider the depth of artistry within the context of Oklahoma. The image challenged people to think critically about power dynamics within Oklahoma. By sharing the image on social media sites, people felt a part of the critique by engaging in analysis and conversations about the relevance

of the image to Oklahoma life. The illustration highlighted a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative of oil and gas in Oklahoma. The graffiti art critiques the powerful alliance between industry and government and how it disenfranchises communities. At the same time, the graffiti art is an artistic construction and performance of an enduring counter-narrative of resistance.

Religious Discourses and Counter-Narratives

On November 20th, 2014, The Norman Tea Party hosted an event titled, "A REAL frac forum." The event was framed as "real" implying that environmental activist organized fracking forums were "not real." The event was hosted at the First Assembly of God Church in Norman, Ok and was open to the public. As part of my research on the scope of attitudes regarding the controversial issue of fracking, I attended the event as an observer. As the event opened, the audience was instructed to stand and pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. After saying the pledge of allegiance, we were asked to join in prayer. The person leading the prayer thanked god for providing us with the bounty of mineral resources. The person implied that it is a Christian responsibility to fully explore and reap this bounty. I was shocked for multiple reasons. First, I had never heard the pledge of allegiance at Church, and secondly, this framing of Christianity was contradictory to my entire conception of the Christian tradition. Contrasting the event at the Mennonite church, where generations of activists shared experience regarding environmental protests, with this event to protect the oil and gas industry interest in fracking, this instance illustrated for me that Christianity is experienced in vastly different ways for many people in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma is sometimes referred to as "the buckle of the bible belt." As previously stated, Oklahoma has gained national attention because Oklahoma's Republican Governor Mary Fallin has launched a campaign to restore a Ten Commandments monument on the state capitol grounds (Johnson 2015). This is but one example of why many people in Oklahoma understand Christianity to be synonymous with conservativism. In activist meetings and gatherings, I repeatedly heard people say things like, "Organizing is hard here because this is the Bible belt." Many activists perceive Christianity's dominance in Oklahoma as a stumbling block for Oklahoma progressives. One activist explained to me that they believe Christianity is often used as a tool to promote submissiveness in Oklahoma's general public:

> It's easy to manipulate a population who believes that Jesus is going to return… before 2050… And so if you've got a population who thinks that god is in control, that Jesus is going to come back before 2050 anyway, then why would you get involved, you know? Why would you get upset about climate change because it doesn't really matter? It's all going to be over. So I think… they play on that. So when Inhofe says things like "God is in control of the climate." They hear that, and they… "Yea! Of course, God's in control of the climate. We're just human. There's nothing we can do to change the climate. God wouldn't let… You know? God's going to do what god's going to do." So I think that adds to the submissiveness.

While many churches in Oklahoma represent conservative viewpoints, there is a long tradition and history of radical and progressive churches in Oklahoma. Many activists believe particular interpretations of Christianity to be important parts of progressive activism in Oklahoma. Activists present a counter-narrative of Christian churches that not only challenges the dominant narrative of Oklahoma history but argues that it is a Christian responsibility to act on the side of environmental justice.

Many of the environmental activists that I interviewed came to be involved in environmentalism through Christianity or Christian groups. Activists describe being introduced to environmentalism at local seminaries and national Christian gatherings. Multiple activists described their commitment to environmental causes and issues of social justice as following the tradition of the "revolutionary Jesus" or a commitment to the human community. Activists represent an understanding of biblical text and the Christian tradition that is rooted in a non-literal interpretation of the bible. One activist that I spoke with described their calling to activism as rooted in an interpretation of the bible that perceives Jesus as a figure who fought for justice and was persecuted because of it. This activist explained that, "When I was doing (activist) stuff… (I was) reading biblical studies… and one of them was a commentary on the gospel of Mark that laid out Jesus's ministry as a direct action campaign." This activist described feeling a sense of connection to activism through a counter-narrative of Christian tradition. Another activist stated,

> Religion is about doing those things that will reconnect us as a human community, reconnect us to the larger ecological community and really rekindle that sense of connection with all that is. And that has nothing to do with heaven or hell or my religion being better than someone else's religion. I think there are persons across… different faiths who understand and see that divine connection that we have with each other as human beings and with all that is.

Christian activists present counter-narratives of Christianity that root activism as part of a spiritual tradition. Activists site historical examples of Christian churches' involvement in activist endeavors. They argue that interpretations of Christianity can represent meaningful counter-narratives that draw activists into movements and help

activists understand themselves as part of a counter-narrative of Christianity within the state of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma Shame and Oklahoma Activism

While environmental activists creatively and strategically work to counter dominant narratives of the oil and gas industry as being intrinsically part of the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity, people at times unknowingly reproduce hegemonic narratives that facilitate the dominance of the oil and gas industry. The two narratives that are most commonly circulated are interconnected: *Oklahoma Shame* and the energy industry as providing value to the "worthless" land.

I have characterized *Oklahoma Shame* as an aspect of Oklahoma identity that rests on the idea that Oklahoma is somehow less valuable and less worthy than other parts of the United States. This internalized form of oppression dates back to Oklahoma being deemed a wasteland prior to statehood and carries on in the national imagination of Oklahoma as a backwards, rural wilderness. For many progressives, this shame includes circulating the idea that people in Oklahoma are less aware, educated, or conscious than other people in other parts of the United States. Progressives in Oklahoma attempt to distance themselves from people that they associate with "backwardness." Many progressives outside of Oklahoma attempt to distance themselves from Oklahoma entirely, including many people born in Oklahoma who have traveled to other places. Additionally, this plays out when Oklahoma, the state possessing the most diverse terrain in the United States, is narrowly depicted as barren, flat plains (Mai 2007). Oklahoma has mountains, rolling hills, and cross timbers forests, as well as, seemingly endless rolling plains and semi-arid desert-like regions.

The idea that Oklahoma is worthless was the basis for both displacing Indigenous peoples to Oklahoma and displacing Indigenous peoples within Oklahoma through the land runs. The idea that Oklahoma has no value is what gives oil and gas value and dominance. Oil and gas has been represented as Oklahoma's only path to "civilization" and "progress." Activists who circulate these discourses normally do so with the intention of distancing themselves from other people in Oklahoma or supporting a progressive cause. The result is the reproduction of oppressive notions of Oklahomans as "simple" and "backwards" "country folk" occupying a "wasteland."

These narratives were reproduced by Oklahoma activists on multiple occasions. An example of this is the "Save Lake Hefner" anti-fracking protests. In December of 2013, Pedestal Oil Company proposed a new hydraulic fracturing well near Lake Hefner. Lake Hefner is a water source for many people in Oklahoma City, and Lake Hefner is a recreational site located near predominantly wealthy and white communities. "Save Lake Hefner" emerged to challenge Pedestal's proposal. Local activists and politicians called a protest to protect Lake Hefner from fracking. Hundreds of people attended the protest including SFPC activists who drove hours from Payne County and anti-fracking activists who drove from other counties to Oklahoma City to support the cause. Kelly Ogle, a local, television anchor and social commentator argued against the hydraulic fracturing proposal stating:

> Let's face it, when it comes to natural beauty, Oklahoma City kind of got hit with the ugly stick. The landscape is flat and brown. But in typical Oklahoma City style the people who settled here and live here now weren't happy with that and through the decades, and especially in the last 20 years we've given Mother Nature an assist with the landscaping here (Ogle 2014).

Ogle used this framing to argue that Lake Hefner, as one of Oklahoma City's only places of beauty, should be protected from oil and gas development. This article was widely circulated by activists on Facebook and activists utilized the language of this article at protests. Ogle's statement highlights the relationship between narratives of shame and worthlessness and the everlasting frontier. The "worthlessness" of Oklahoma is described as something Oklahomans creatively work against. In Ogle's statement, Ogle suggests that settlers engineered beautiful landscapes. Engineering by settlers becomes one of the means by which this is accomplished, and sovereignty is established. Ogle suggests that Lake Hefner is part of the beauty that settlers provided to the landscaping in Oklahoma. Interestingly, Lake Hefner is named after an oil and gas lawyer who reportedly made his fortune from oil and gas development. He is one of the principle proponents of natural gas as a clean energy source. The idea of Oklahoma as a worthless place is largely connected to the relationship between the oil and gas industry's reproduction of narratives that suggest that Oklahoma is dependent on oil and gas. By perpetuating this narrative, the idea is sustained that the only commodity that Oklahoma can produce and thrive on is oil and gas.

While activists unintentionally reproduce aspects of the dominant narrative of Oklahoma state identity and history, many activists and activist groups are taking action to highlight counter-narratives. Activists in Oklahoma build counter-narratives of Oklahoma identity through historical narratives, religious discourses, and art. Utilizing cultural mediums, activists illustrate an alternative legacy of Oklahoma that offers ways for activists to see themselves as part of an enduring Oklahoma tradition, an Okie tradition of activism and resistance. By documenting these examples of counter-

narratives in activities within religious discourse, art, and music, I demonstrate the resistance to the dominant narrative imposed by the oil and gas industry. This is evidence of the diversity of ways of being Oklahoman and evidence of an enduring counter-narrative of environmental activism in Oklahoma.

Chapter Five

Red Dirt Activism: Transforming Narratives into Action

In the early hours of February 11, 2013, an activist walked onto the Keystone XL pipeline easement in rural Oklahoma and climbed onto a piece of construction equipment. The activist attached a banner to the piece of machinery that read, "But woe to you who are RICH for you have already received your comfort. – Jesus, Luke 6:24." The activist blockaded construction of the pipeline while emphasizing a political interpretation of biblical literature. The activist's messaging connected their actions to an enduring counter-narrative of Christianity. This activist was both inspired by and part of enduring counter-narratives of resistance in Oklahoma. Similarly, many other activists situate themselves within narratives of resistance that empower them to take action. Activists continue the legacy of Oklahoma resistance by engaging in various kinds of action. I highlight actions taken by three different groups of Oklahoma activists and situate these actions within the context of counter-narratives of Oklahoma experience and identity. I focus on anti-fracking activists, anti-tar sands activists, and climate justice activists. It should be understood that many of these activist groups overlap and perceive their struggles as part of a collective climate and environmental justice movement.

Anti-Tar Sands Activists

On April 9, 2013, with Woodie Guthrie's song ringing in my ears, "That side was made for you and me," I crossed the threshold from a public road onto a pipeline easement. After taking that small step, the insignificance of the barrier seemed apparent. I was reminded of the years that I spent hiking and exploring, unknowingly crossing

onto land that was not mine. In rural Oklahoma, hunting and hiking often means crossing onto someone else's property. On this particular day, I crossed the line and suddenly felt at ease. How many times had I crossed these invisible lines in Oklahoma? I walked onto the easement with a 79-year-old Oklahoma grandma, as she locked her neck to a piece of construction equipment with the intent of blockading the construction of the southern-leg of the Keystone XL pipeline. Her image was powerful as she sat locked to construction equipment with a banner hanging above her head that read "No More Sacrifice Zones." Sacrifice Zones are areas that have been repeatedly targeted as sites of toxic waste disposal and other environmentally devastating practices (Lerner 2010). These areas are typically low-income, communities of color and low-income, white and rural communities (Lerner 2010). Many activists that I spoke with believe that the sites of the Keystone XL tar sands project are all in part sacrifice zones: extraction (First Nations' lands in Alberta, CA), transportation (parts of Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas), and refining (the community of Manchester in Texas). This woman's banner was meant to emphasize and challenge the disproportionate ways that communities are targeted based on race, region, and class.

I offered her a peanut butter sandwich and some water. We sat, talked, and ate our sandwiches as the sun came up. The Oklahoma sky cast down oranges, pinks, and purples across the bare red dirt. I walked back to the public road because I did not want to be arrested on this day (legally, you are only trespassing in Oklahoma if a "No Trespassing" sign is present, or if a landowner or police officer asks you to leave the premises and you refuse). I imagined the woman's anxiety, her nerves. I had no idea at

the time that a few weeks later, I would be the one locked down and blockading the Keystone XL. My focus was on this woman, her strength and bravery.

I stood with other activists on the public road holding banners and baring witness when the police arrived. The woman was extracted fairly quickly, and she was then taken to jail. She was bailed out shortly after, and we all waited for her release. This woman was one of more than 20 people who were arrested blockading the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline in Oklahoma as part of the Great Plains Tar Sands Resistance (GPTSR) coalition. This woman's courage and dedication was motivated by profound passion and values that are part of an enduring counter-narrative.

The national narrative of tar sands resistance in the United States has primarily focused on the construction of the Keystone XL (KXL), a transnational tar sands transport pipeline. Tar sands (sometimes referred to as Oil Sands) is a mixture of sand, water, and bitumen, a thick, hydrocarbon that can be converted into oil. The largest known tar sands deposits are located in Alberta, Canada underlying the Boreal Forest. The Boreal Forest contains more freshwater in wetlands and lakes than anywhere else on the planet, represents a quarter of the Earth's remaining original forests, and is home to numerous First Nations communities. Mining of tar sands requires clear-cutting these forests and strip mining the dirt underneath.

On May 9th, 2012, the New York Times published an article by NASA Scientist James Hansen, titled, "Game Over for the Climate." In the article, Hansen made an argument that he had made many times before, but this particular piece garnered significant attention for the Keystone XL resistance movement. Hansen argued that the

exploitation of tar sands would facilitate and exacerbate the global climate crisis (Hansen 2012). Hansen writes, "Canada's tar sands, deposits of sand saturated with bitumen, contain twice the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by global oil use in our entire history" (Hansen 2012). Hansen's statements became evidence and a rallying cry for activists who opposed the construction of the KXL. Activists expressed that the construction of the KXL would facilitate further tar sands production, "open the floodgates" for tar sands exploitation, and contribute to climate change.

Pointing to Hansen's writings, many activists in Oklahoma cite "Climate Justice" as a primary reason that they oppose the KXL pipeline project. Climate Justice is defined by 350.org as acknowledging climate change as an immediate threat that is already being felt:

> People all over the world are feeling the impacts, from island nations that are going underwater, to Indigenous land being exploited for fossil fuel extraction. The fight against climate change is a fight for justice (350.org).

Climate Change is understood by Climate Justice advocates as unfairly and systematically further marginalizing already marginalized communities globally. Oklahoma activists that I interviewed referenced the water crisis in Syria, the impact on Oklahoma Indigenous communities, and other global crises as examples of this.

A lesser focus in national narratives, but still present, is the focus on eminent domain. Eminent domain is the compulsory acquisition of private lands for public use. Eminent domain was utilized by TransCanada to access private lands in both Oklahoma and Texas to construct the KXL. Landowners in Texas came into the national spotlight because of their refusal to allow TransCanada to access their property. Many landowners claimed that they were bullied into accepting offers made by TransCanada.

Activists describe the injustice of the use of eminent domain to serve a transnational companies interests as a primary reason for opposing the KXL.

Interestingly, many activists with GPTSR expressed frustration with both of these narratives. One activist from outside of Oklahoma described the climate change narrative as inaccessible to residents of Oklahoma because they believed people in Oklahoma did not believe in or immediately feel the impacts of climate change. One of the core organizers with GPTSR expressed this stating one of their primary goals was shifting the national narrative away from climate change:

> And definitely shifting the national narrative too of the Keystone XL was… a goal. Not talking about it as climate change. Not talking about it in this completely inaccessible way to a lot of people. Talking about it in ways that didn't continue to marginalize the people that were already… or *are* already marginalized.

Not all activists with GPTSR agreed with this analysis. Some activists within GPTSR argued that people in Oklahoma are capable of holding and connecting with multiple narratives of injustice. Many Indigenous activists in Oklahoma argued that their communities were already experiencing the negative effects of climate change. While activists with GPTSR disagreed about the extent to which it was appropriate to employ climate justice and landowner narratives for the purpose of the anti-KXL campaign, activists shared the desire to highlight narratives of environmental racism in relation to the KXL pipeline project and tar sands exploitation in general.

Environmental Racism and the Keystone XL

In order to fully represent the logic behind GPTSR's actions, I present an extended definition of environmental racism and the KXL pipeline project. Environmental racism is the disproportionate placement and formation of toxic waste

sites and environmentally devastating production processes near low-income communities and communities of color (Lipsitz 1998). In the late 1980's Dr. Benjamin Chavis Jr. of the NAACP and United Church of Christ acknowledged the disproportionate ways in which industrialization develops and occurs, privileging white, wealthy communities and disadvantaging low-income communities and communities of color. He observed that waste facilities and production companies are typically located in or near low-income communities of color. Chavis believed that this resulted in negative health consequences and challenges for these communities. Chavis called this practice Environmental Racism. (Bullard 1993). After Chavis drew attention to environmental racism as a systematic practice and social phenomena, The United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice formed and conducted studies to determine whether or not Chavis's observations were scientifically valid.

The studies conducted by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice displayed "a consistent national pattern: race is the most significant determinant of the location of hazardous waste facilities" (Godsil 1991). While income status plays an important role, race is the most significant determining factor in the disproportionate distribution of environmentally hazardous practices. Many possible explanations have been given for why this phenomenon occurs. The most predominant are: 1), the belief that communities of color are intentionally targeted because corporations assume that these communities lack the resources or community support to defend themselves, influence political decision-making, or make their circumstances publicly known; 2), people of color are more greatly burdened by segregated housing patterns leading to higher concentrations of African-Americans and Latin Americans in low-income and

consequently environmentally devastated areas; 3), the reluctance of white people to purchase land in or near communities of color leads to decreased land value in and around communities of color, so corporations are able to secure land relatively cheaply; and 4), hostility towards the installation of waste sites near upper-class, predominately white communities. Communities do not want to be burdened by or have to witness their waste, and "because hazardous waste sites must go *somewhere,* they are frequently placed in poor, minority communities" (Godsil 1991).

All of the possible explanations given for the disproportionate placement of hazardous waste are based on corporate greed and the idea of a predominantly white majority that wants to distance itself from its own production of waste, as well as distance itself from communities of color. The result of this is that "environmental hazards are inequitably distributed in the United States" such that people of color and low-income people bear the brunt of environmental pollution, while predominantly wealthy and white communities experience the financial gain from these projects (Cole and Foster 2001: 10). Environmental activists in Oklahoma have observed that these patterns are evident in Oklahoma as well. This connects the interests of people in Oklahoma with people in other geopolitical regions affected by the pipeline.

The practice of tar sands exploitation, through extraction, transportation, refining, and shipping, exemplifies how environmental racism functions at the local, national, and global levels as affected by global political economy and the global market place. Tar sands extraction requires clear-cutting and strip-mining the Boreal Forest, which has led to one thousand three hundred square-miles of forest being clear cut and mined, polluting water, destroying aquatic ecosystems, and polluting wildlife

that are necessary to the sustenance of Indigenous ways of life and meaningful cultural practices in the region. The development of tar sands extraction has polluted ecosystems that First Nations rely on leading to increased dependence on social services as a means of existence. At the site of extraction First Nations communities are directly impacted while United States' and Canadian transnational corporations experience an overwhelmingly disproportionate economic gain.

Moving beyond the tar sands extraction point to tar sands transportation and refining further illuminates the systematically racist practices inherent in the tar sands industrial project. There are multiple corporations involved in transporting tar sands across Canada and the United States. Tar sands oil is transported by truck, railroad, and pipeline. Because of its ties to the Oklahoma economy, its recent popularity in the media, and my connection to the environmental activist community in Oklahoma and Texas, I will primarily focus on the TransCanada Corporation and the Keystone XL pipeline. However, it is important to note that TransCanada is responsible for multiple tar sands pipelines and is proposing new pipelines in addition to the Keystone XL for the purpose of transporting tar sands oil (TransCanada 2014). The Keystone XL was proposed in two segments: the northern-leg and the southern-leg. At present, the southern-leg of the Keystone XL pipeline is already in the ground, crossing numerous tribal lands and waterways.

The northern-leg of the pipeline has not yet been completed and has generated a great deal of resistance and national media attention. Lakota Grassroots leader, Deb Whiteplume was arrested protesting the construction of the Keystone XL stating:

> Our Lakota people oppose this pipeline because of the potential contamination of the surface water and of the Ogallala aquifer. We have

> thousands of ancient and historical cultural resources that would be destroyed across our treaty lands. It's my responsibility as a woman to stand with Mother Earth against corporate male dominated greed.

Pipeline construction grants transnational corporations access to tribal sovereign lands through eminent domain perpetuating the destruction of their ways of life and culture. Pipeline paths are strategic and intentional, primarily passing through rural, low-income, agricultural communities and communities of color.

The southern leg of the Keystone XL transports the diluted bitumen to the Valero Refinery in the community of Manchester near the Houston Ship Channel in Houston, TX, where it is refined and exported to be sold on the global market. The community of Manchester is predominately Latino and represents one of the most polluted neighborhoods in the United States. "A University of Texas study revealed that children living in a two-mile radius of the Houston Ship Channel have a 56% greater chance of developing Leukemia than kids living outside of a ten-mile radius" (TejasBarrios.com 2014). The community of Manchester is inescapably surrounded by industrial toxic waste and toxic production. A car crushing facility, a water treatment plant, a train yard for hazardous cargo, a Goodyear rubber tire plant, Lyondell Basell Oil Refinery, Rhodia Chemical Plant, Texas Petro-Chemicals, and the Valero refinery are all located within the community of Manchester.

Beside the Valero Refinery is a playground; however, children are rarely seen playing there. Cameras are not allowed on the playground premises, which is enforced by Valero Refinery security. "Children who play for too long here often start to cough. They go back inside, leaving an empty swing set in the shadow of a nearby oil refinery"

(Moe 2013). Yudith Nieto, a Texas resident and activist describes the situation in Manchester, living near the Valero refinery:

> There are no zoning laws in Texas, so they can build a school right down the street from it [the Valero Refinery], and that's the school I went to. And then there's another school they just built not too long ago. And these kids go to school so close to the refineries, but not just that, they go back home into Manchester. So they're never out of proximity to the refinery. So they're constantly breathing, day in and day out, these cancer-causing carcinogens. It looks like they have not hope to getting out of there. And you know, the community has tried to put pressure on Valero to buy them out, to buy their properties and send them far away from there. But of course, because of Valero, the property value goes down, so they want to give them the minimum they can give them for property. So people are pretty much forced or trapped to stay there. They can't leave. (Tejasbarrios.org 2013)

Many Manchester community members feel themselves to be specifically targeted because they are low-income and Latino. They feel that corporations assume they cannot and will not have the resources to make their voices heard as they experience the effects of the toxic waste sites, oil refineries, and chemical plants.

From the Indigenous communities impacted at the point of extraction to the Indigenous treaties broken in the transportation process to the impact on low-income communities of color at the points of refining and export, tar sands exploitation and specifically the Keystone XL displays how industry disproportionately impacts low-income communities of color. Activists understand tar sands exploitation as a dangerous endeavor that will potentially negatively impact all human life through global warming and water pollution; however, GPTSR specifically sought to highlight how the KXL affects Indigenous communities, communities of color, and low-income rural communities through the systemic practice of environmental racism.

GPTSR and Action

Activists with GPTSR understood the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline to be an issue of social justice. As early as 2005, Oklahoma activist Earl Hatley, became aware of tar sands as posing a devastating threat to First Nations in Canada. On September 19th, 2008, TransCanada applied for a permit to construct the Keystone XL pipeline through Oklahoma. The Keystone XL was part of the extensive Keystone pipeline system. The Keystone Pipeline was completed in June of 2010 and transported tar sands oil from Hardisty, Alberta to Patoka, IL. The Keystone Extension was completed in 2011 from Steele City, NE to Cushing, OK, securing TransCanada's ability to transport tar sands from Canada to storage hubs in Cushing. Cushing, OK is located in Payne County and is commonly referred to as "The Pipeline Crossroads of the World." Cushing holds large reserves of petroleum and holds one of the largest oil storage facilities in the world. As previously stated, the Keystone XL pipeline project was divided into two segments: a southern-leg and a northern-leg. The northern leg of the pipeline would transport tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada to Steele City, NE. The southern segment would transport tar sands from Cushing, OK to Nederland, TX. If the northern-segment was not approved, TransCanada would still be able to increase production and transportation volumes via the Keystone Pipeline, Keystone extension, and the southern-segment of the Keystone XL.

In an interview, Hatley stated that once he became aware that TransCanada, "was putting in this line to go through… the U.S. and especially through Oklahoma… that's when I started on the tar sands fight." Hatley stated that he worked with Tom Goldtooth and the Indigenous Environmental Network to oppose tar sands extraction in

Canada by raising awareness in Oklahoma and seeking out local opposition to the pipeline project. Despite holding educational events and public meetings, Hatley struggled to mobilize a large number of people to oppose the pipeline project. Hatley described the challenges that many Oklahoma organizers face in doing state-wide organizing. The dominant narrative of the oil and gas industry makes it difficult for organizers to effectively challenge pro-oil and gas rhetoric.

While Hatley struggled to gain local support in opposing tar sands extraction, the Keystone XL gained national media coverage. In 2011, more than 10,000 activists traveled to Washington DC to protest the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. Among these activists were various Oklahoma and Texas residents, including local activist Mary Francis who was arrested participating in an act of civil disobedience at the White House in opposition to the Keystone XL. The work of Hatley combined with acts of civil disobedience led to awareness raising in Oklahoma.

In 2012, President Obama came to Cushing, Oklahoma and gave a speech on energy policies. He stated, “I'm directing my administration to cut through the red tape, break through the bureaucratic hurdles, and make this project a priority, to go ahead and get it done” (White House 2012). President Obama explained that the Northern-segment of the Keystone XL pipeline posed a risk to the drinking water and safety of people in Nebraska. He stated that the decision would wait as to whether or not the Northern-segment of the Keystone XL pipeline would be built. He then proceeded to say, “So the southern leg of it we're making a priority, and we're going to go ahead and get that done. The northern portion of it we're going to have to review properly to make sure that the health and safety of the American people are

protected. That's common sense" (The White House 2012). President Obama's statement was not accepted as common sense by all communities in Oklahoma. Underlying President Obama's statement are multiple assumptions, most evidently, that the pipeline would not meet resistance or would meet less opposition in the South. Secondly, it is implied that somehow the pipeline poses a risk to northern people's health, but not to southern people's health, and/or Southern people's health and safety is not as much of a consideration as Northern people's health and safety.

Hatley joined forces with another local environmental activist, Barbara VanHanken to oppose the KXL; the two founded Clean Energy Future Oklahoma. Shortly after President Obama's visit, Sierra Club Inc., Clean Energy Future Oklahoma and the East Texas Sub Regional Planning Commission filed a joint complaint against the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers claiming the approval of the Southern-segment of the KXL pipeline did not uphold a provision of the Clean Water Act. The complaint failed to postpone the pipeline project. Despite the efforts of lobbying combined with acts of civil disobedience, construction began on the southern-segment of the KXL. With very little hope left for the legal process, communities in Texas turned to direct action.

On August 28th, 2012, seven people were arrested in Livingston, TX, blockading a KXL pipe truck. A group called Tar Sands Blockade (TSB) began promoting a series of direct actions in Texas aimed at raising awareness and stopping construction of the KXL pipeline. These actions caught the attention of Hatley who stated that he contacted TSB seeking support in Oklahoma. He specifically asked for the group to provide training for Oklahoma activists.

Activists provide varying accounts of the formation of GPTSR. Hatley claims that he visited Texas, and that shortly afterwards a group of activists came to Oklahoma. They began holding public meetings, eventually formed the GPTSR coalition, and began doing direct actions against the pipeline. Hatley was integral to the formation of GPTSR; however, he was unable to fully be a part of GPTSR's daily organizing around the Keystone XL because he was actively involved in many other environmental projects. Additionally, he lived several hours away from the core organizational body.

The activists who came from Texas described the formation of GPTSR as being fraught with tension. One activist explained that there was a push within TSB to reach out to people in Oklahoma. Two different groups are said to have come to Oklahoma to do outreach and connect with folks. The groups were essentially separate groups of friends that both represented TSB, but as one activist stated in an interview, "one group… was *here* for like a couple weeks, I think, and were like, 'Fuck it. Like there's no hope here. No one here will resist." The activists who stayed in Oklahoma worked to build more meaningful relationships. They claim that the group who left Oklahoma was interested in direct action, but did not want to do the harder and longer work to form relationships with people in Oklahoma.

The group that stayed described three primary reasons for GPTSR's formation: 1) A desire to work in Oklahoma because the pipeline goes through Oklahoma, 2) A lawsuit that was filed against TSB that resulted in a settlement which all participants in TSB did not agree upon, and 3) ideological differences between the founding members of GPTSR and TSB. For all of these reasons, the people who came to Oklahoma broke from TSB and formed GPTSR. In this narrative there is very little mention of Hatley.

These activists acknowledged that they met Hatley prior to coming to Oklahoma, but they did not describe him as fully part of GPTSR's organizational body. The organizational body of GPTSR changed and grew throughout its duration until its demise. However, throughout the formation and life of GPTSR the notion of who was and who was not a part of GPTSR is still contested and incomplete. The GPTSR coalition included Coyote Creek Center for Environmental Justice, Cross Timbers Earth First!, Owe Aku (Bring Back the Way), Oklahomans Against Tar Sands, Oscar Romero Catholic Worker House, and many participants in Idle No More Central Oklahoma. While participants with GPTSR disagree about who was and who was not a part of GPTSR, it is indisputable that local activists in Oklahoma were involved in multiple ways in resisting the KXL pipeline. By going to Texas and meeting with TSB, Earl Hatley played a significant role as an organizer in connecting activists from different regions and generations.

Throughout 2013 and 2014, Oklahoma activists with GPTSR were involved in organizing speaking tours, holding public events, organizing non-violent direct action (NVDA) trainings, and participating in non-violent direct actions. At one of these NVDA trainings, Oklahoma activists met individuals who participated in the Black Fox Nuclear power plant protests in the 1970s. Activists gained encouragement and empowerment as they understood their actions in relation to a broader Oklahoma history. Anti-tar sands activists understood their actions as connected to enduring narratives of what it means to be an Oklahoma progressive.

Despite the work of GPTSR in Oklahoma in 2012 and 2013, the construction of the pipeline continued, without the awareness of most citizens of Oklahoma. The

southern segment of the Keystone XL pipeline was completed and began transporting tar sands oil in early 2014. In November of 2015, President Obama officially vetoed the northern segment of the pipeline project stating, "America is now a global leader when it comes to taking serious action to fight climate change, and frankly, approving this project would have undercut that leadership" (Labott and Berman 2015). The rhetoric surrounding this veto suggested a win for environmental activists and suggested that the project in its entirety was rejected. In Oklahoma, activists who had fought the pipeline had conflicted feelings about whether or not this was a win. Activists expressed hopefulness that this veto sends a message of optimism to grassroots organizers and activists, but most activists with GPTSR did not feel an overwhelming sense of optimism. One activist with GPTSR stated:

> It's like nationally there was a victory in the sense of the Obama administration struck down the KXL pipeline, and we should all celebrate that. And, we should pat ourselves on the back and be proud of what we did and think that it was a victory, but I can't help but think that it's some kind of a false victory… because within the boundaries of Oklahoma that pipeline's here, and it might as well have been approved for as far as Oklahoma is concerned.

Activists expressed feelings of victory but also sorrow. While activist's endeavors in Oklahoma raised awareness about the pipeline project and led to the veto of the northern-segment of the Keystone XL, we watched the southern-segment go into the ground. Activists feel as if the national narrative implies that the southern-leg was never constructed. Activists perceive this as continuing the tradition of sacrificing and disregarding Oklahoma and many other southern states.

Recently, I attended an environmental meeting in Oklahoma and activists at the meeting were unaware that the southern-segment of the Keystone XL was

constructed. For those of us facing charges and dealing with legal consequences for our involvement in protesting the Keystone XL, it feels disheartening to know that people are unaware of the pipeline's construction. While this is discouraging, many activists with GPTSR are still proud of their actions and feel moved by the enduring legacy of Oklahoma resistance. Activists with GPTSR understand their actions as important sites of resistance embedded in Oklahoma history and narratives of Oklahoma identity.

Anti-Fracking Activists

On January 15th, 2016, activists and concerned citizens gathered in the State House of Representatives' House Chamber to hold a public hearing on earthquakes. Occupying the seats of the House Representatives, community members came forward and stated their concerns, their anger, and their frustrations regarding human-made earthquakes in Oklahoma. This hearing was the result of multiple occurrences. The glut in oil and gas prices leading to an economic bust combined with the surge in seismic activity in Oklahoma, led many Oklahoma residents to question the intentions, viability, and accountability of the oil and gas industry. However, the role of Oklahoma activists in shifting state narratives and garnering national media support played a significant part in raising awareness and providing a space in which residents of Oklahoma felt supported in sharing their grievances and challenging the role of the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma. Utilizing social media as a tool of community organizing, anti-fracking activists in Oklahoma have effectively challenged many dominant narratives created by the oil and gas industry. I illustrate many of the ways that anti-fracking activists have creatively and strategically taken action through community organizing and educational events.

The most visible and vocal anti-fracking group in Oklahoma is Stop Fracking Payne County (SFPC). Payne County encompasses both Cushing and Stillwater, OK. Stillwater, OK is home to Oklahoma State University (OSU) and multiple businesses. The presence of the university shaped the kinds of organizing that SFPC did because multiple professors were involved in SFPC.

One of the founding members of SFPC explained that SFPC began when a group of people began meeting and expressing concerns about fracking. At first, this group ranged in size from only three to five people regularly showing up at events. This group attended public meetings held by Devon Energy and other corporations. This activist stated, "They were showing where they were going to frack, and we were going to have a well every square mile… It looked scary, and they were pretty flip with our concerns." This activist explained that the emergence of multiple drilling sites in Payne County combined with research on hydraulic fracturing and a lack of satisfactory response from corporations regarding residents' concerns led to the formation of SFPC in April of 2014.

SFPC worked on multiple projects ranging from consciousness raising to zoning regulations. SFPC did extensive work to raise awareness and shift dominant narratives of the oil and gas industry through social media and reaching out to local and national media for support. SFPC gained a large following on the internet and helped other counties create their own groups. The first year was spent primarily trying to highlight the correlation between earthquakes and wastewater disposal injection wells. SFPC activists explain that they worked with reporters to bring the correlation and cover-up to light. A battle of knowledge ensued in which activists described their

observations and personal experiences, while oil and gas disregarded their experiences as inadequate and not scientifically based. A tension emerged between various kinds of knowledge. This tension played out in city council meetings and local news media.

Between April 2014 and March 2015, activists with SFPC struggled to be taken seriously because the Oklahoma Geological Survey (OGS) was still denying that a correlation existed between waste water disposal wells and Oklahoma earthquakes. "Lack of science" was a repeated phrase utilized to silence concerns. SFPC held multiple fracking forums in which they hoped to raise awareness and educate the public about the dangers of hydraulic fracturing. They found one geologist who seemed to be the most honest and open regarding earthquakes and injection wells, Todd Halihan. Todd Halihan openly admitted that injection wells do cause earthquakes. Residents and activists already believed this to be true. While Todd Halihan confirmed that earthquakes in Oklahoma are linked to wastewater injection wells, previous Oklahoma state seismologist Austin Holland argued for the need to continue fracking and continue disposing of wastewater because he believed that scientists needed to do more research to discover how we can prevent earthquakes. This was often met with fury from residents, and at a fracking forum in Edmond, OK an individual shouted from the audience, "We are not your lab rats!" OGS representatives argued that the science was incomplete and that other factors should also be considered. Repeated statements from the state government and industry that "the science isn't in," effectively obscured public knowledge regarding induced seismicity.

On March 3rd, 2015, Mike Soraghan of the Energy Wire began publishing what would become a series of articles exposing a cover-up process that began as early as

2010 (Soraghan 2015). Devon Energy, Continental Resources, David Boren, and Mary Fallin were all implicated in attempting to detract from and deny the correlation between injection wells and the rise in Oklahoma earthquakes. Activists with SFPC were overjoyed. They believed that now that the cover-up was exposed, the government would have to respond. SFPC shifted its focuses away from science and onto the stories of those impacted in order to seek accountability of the oil and gas industry.

Perhaps, SFPC's most visible battle was fighting for stricter zoning regulations in Stillwater, OK. Over the course of more than six months, members of SFPC attended multiple city council meetings arguing for the importance of increased regulations of oil and gas near communities. Activists repeatedly showed up at city council meetings, told their stories, and argued for increased zoning regulations. At first, it seemed as though they were gaining some sympathy and support from city council representatives, but eventually industry representatives began showing up to challenge the activists' narratives. One activist explained to me in an interview how this negatively impacted their campaign,

> We would show up, and we'd show up. The industry didn't really start showing up and fighting until halfway through it about. Or several months in, and that's when the lobbyist were hired. And then… I think Devon actually had people on the payroll because they would eat dinner, they would eat some meal at Brooklyn's, the parking lot would be packed with white trucks, and then all the sudden by three-thirty they would be in the city council room taking up and holding down their seats… Which made it harder for people that had to work and couldn't come [until later].

Activists suspect that industry representatives intentionally arrived early and occupied space in the meeting room. This activist believed that this deterred working people from participating because they could not get seats or sign-up to speak by the time that they

got off work. This activist also expressed frustration because industry representatives did not begin speaking at the meetings until it seemed like decisions were actually going to be made. SFPC worked tirelessly to connect with other people who were willing to speak out, to attend multiple meetings to bring the issue to the forefront, and repeatedly tell their stories at the city council meetings.

On April 20th, 2015, hundreds of concerned residents and industry representatives gathered in Stillwater, OK for a city council meeting to state their support or disapproval of the newly proposed oil and gas zoning regulations. People ranged in age, socioeconomic class, and education level. Multiple residents spoke on the negative impacts they were experiencing in their communities. Multiple industry representatives made claims regarding the necessity of oil and gas, but one industry representative and CEO of an oil and gas company said to the city council, "I know I'm late to the game, but what I've witnessed as a spectator" is that there is no "scientific reasoning or any reasoning at all" from either side. This representative argued that we need to have a "much more scientific" conversation, and that stakeholders should collaborate to develop a "more comprehensive and practical approach that is also scientifically based." The emphasis when this representative spoke was repeatedly on science. They argued that the city council should wait to make any decision until more scientific evidence is presented. At the city council meeting, this was of particular significance because a sociologist and sociology student had on occasions shared findings in the city council meetings regarding environmental hazards and stressors on communities. This was not received as scientific knowledge by industry representatives who repeatedly argued that residents were making arguments without scientific

knowledge. Community experiences were not perceived as fully legitimate in the face of industry's claim that a particular kind of scientific knowledge was lacking. Lack of science is used as an argument to keep on drilling. Peoples' concerns are repeatedly dismissed because of a lack of *science*; while industry's interests are protected because of a lack of *science*. The city council members decided to wait to make a decision. The inaction meant the action of fracking could continue until a decision was made. This inaction protected the interests of the oil and gas industry.

On May 29th, 2015, the Oklahoma state government took a preventative measure to protect industry from local regulations. SB 809 was approved by Governor Mary Fallin. As previously mentioned, this bill limited the amount of control and the kinds of regulations that local municipalities could set in place for the oil and gas industry. The new law states that "reasonable" ordinances may be enacted by local municipalities. This bill became known in public discourse as the "ban on bans." Despite and perhaps in response to this state action, activists continued to fight for stricter oil and gas regulations in Stillwater. On July 20th, 2015, the city council unanimously approved new regulations on oil and gas. As of yet, these regulations are being upheld as reasonable.

The anti-fracking activists' win is noteworthy. However, some activists with SFPC still feel that the regulations are not enough, "We worked really hard at the city council. We were successful as in we got zoning. But the scientist said 2000 ft. setbacks; it was 650." Activists desired that a protective area of at least 2,000 feet from businesses and homes be protected from fracking sites. However, the city council only required a safety zone of 650 feet. Interestingly, SFPC also placed a great deal of

emphasis on science. The response from both the state and municipal governments demonstrates that science was not and is not really the issue. Science is used as a diversion by industry and government to shift narratives away from local communities and local experiences of industrial projects.

SFPC's ability to successfully issue these regulations is incredibly important considering the hostile environment in which legislatures worked to protect the oil and gas industry and obscure scientific findings in the face of local opposition. SFPC actions combined with investigative journalism successfully challenged the dominant narrative of the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma by exposing how the government and industry worked in collusion to silence opposition. This exposure led to increased hope and more vocal local journalism. One activist expressed this optimism stating:

> I think that provides an opportunity to make the case more strongly that, look, it's these same companies that are telling you, you can't accept the clean power plan because it will ruin us. It's these same companies that are saying climate change is not really happening, or if it's really happening, it has nothing to do with human activity. These are the companies that told you flat out that they had nothing to do with these earthquakes and made people feel silly for making the connection. And then… you know it's like the old. The quote that's attributed to Gandhi, 'First they laugh at you, and then they fight you, and then you win.

Activists and community residents found increased opportunity to challenge the dominant narrative of the oil and gas industry through the exposure of the industry's malpractice. This win led to more and more people coming forward and challenging the role of the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma.

Climate Justice Activists

Anti-tar sands activists and anti-fracking activists are part of a broader climate and environmental justice movement. I discuss activist trials and educational events to

emphasize the ways in which activists utilize counter-narratives of Oklahoma history and religious discourse to take action. On October 23rd, 2014, people came from across Oklahoma and Texas to the Atoka County Courthouse in Atoka, OK. Alec A. Johnson was to stand trial for two misdemeanor charges, trespassing and obstruction of an officer of the peace. Johnson faced a maximum of two years in jail and one thousand dollars in fines. On the morning of April 22nd, 2013, Earth Day and ironically also the so-called Oklahoma Land Run day, Johnson walked onto TransCanada's pipeline easement in Tushka, OK, and locked himself to a piece of machinery in order to block construction of the southern-segment of the Keystone XL pipeline. The trial was momentous because it was the first time that a defendant used climate change as a necessity defense to claim innocence in Oklahoma. Johnson's attorney, Doug Parr, argued that the imminent danger of climate change has created a higher moral law that citizens must abide by in order to protect the Earth for future generations.

As the trial played out, the courtroom became a space of activism. Johnson attempted to utilize the trial to raise awareness and consciousness about climate change. Additionally, Johnson and Parr attempted to set a legal precedent centering climate change as posing an impending threat that required immediate citizen action. In preparation, Johnson prepared a 19-page statement outlining his reasoning and justification for his actions, and Dr. James Hansen, the NASA scientist who had been outspoken in opposition to the Keystone XL, prepared a statement on climate change to be entered into the courtroom as evidence. The judge, Judge Preston Harbuck, did not allow the necessity defense and denied the admittance of Hansen's statement into evidence.

Through the Voir Dire process, a process by which lawyers question and select jurors, and the trial as a whole became a site of action. During the Voir Dire process, defending attorney Douglas Parr and prosecuting attorney Max Stubblefield asked a series of questions of the potential jurors. The key witness in the trial was the county sheriff who arrested Johnson. Most of Stubblefield's questions focused on knowledge of the defendant, the case, and the key witness. Many of the jurors admitted to knowing the sheriff personally. These potential jurors reported relationships with the sheriff in some capacity ranging from having hunted together to being "kin through marriage." Some of the potential jurors knew of the pipeline and the case. One of the potential jurors had helped build the pipeline and another potential juror was informed about the protests by a parent. Parr's questions focused more on questions of environmental responsibility and ethics. Parr first established himself as an Okie, and then asked the potential jurors, "Who owns the air, rain, and ocean?" Every potential juror responded with "God," except one potential juror who said "Mother Earth." Parr asked the potential jurors who they believed to be responsible for caring for the Earth. The potential jurors identified both people and the government as holding responsibility for caring for the Earth. Some of them expressed distrust of corporations because they are not honest and open about the chemicals that they use. Parr continued by asking if the potential jurors believed in climate change. Most of the potential jurors said that they were unsure. Some said yes, but some said that they did not believe it was caused by human activity. One potential juror specifically said that they did not believe in "all that Al Gore stuff."

Parr then proceeded to ask if it was ever justified to break a law. He first provided the example of changing a car lane without using a blinker to avoid a potential collision. The jurors agreed that in this instance it would be justified to break the law. Parr then provided the example of women going to voting polls and demanding to vote prior to women's suffrage. Answers varied. Some potential jurors said that they should still have been punished by the law, while others expressed that it was more complicated, and they were not sure. One of the more outspoken jurors firmly stated something like, "If you do the crime, you have to do the time." It seemed that while the potential jurors believed the earth's care to be the responsibility of humans and the government, the actions that humans could take were bound within legal limits. The entirety of the defense's case rested on proving that climate change posed an imminent threat and arguing that civil disobedience was an appropriate action in response to corporate facilitation of climate change.

Johnson ultimately was found guilty of both misdemeanor charges. He was fined the maximum, but he received no jail time. Many of the jurors seemed sympathetic, but they did not accept the argument that his action was out of necessity. They did not perceive Johnson's action as necessary, and they did not believe that breaking the law was justified. However, the jurors and people in the courtroom were challenged by the defense to think critically about the earth, ownership, responsibility, and civil disobedience. The trial became a site of activism that challenged people to more fully engage with questions of environmental ethics. Johnson's trial meant a great deal to many local activists because it marked Oklahoma as being a space in which people took a stance against climate change.

While Johnson's arrest and trial both stand as sites of climate justice activism, many activists in Oklahoma utilize educational and religious spaces as sites of activism and climate justice organizing. One group in particular gives presentations at different moderate churches, seminaries, and community spaces in central Oklahoma. This group attempts to encourage people to make small changes in their lives in service of climate justice. The presentations do not address climate science, but rather challenge people to think about their lives and their everyday actions:

> We never approach the subject of is it true or not, climate… global warming. We just, we go in knowing that it is. And then we just have them connect at a personal level from their experience, and then *they* begin to talk about why it's important morally to not abuse the earth and how they could live differently. So somehow by-stepping, sidestepping the whole political denier thing, which I know comes from special interest, gives them an opportunity to not have to pick a side or even… We ask them not to, we say we're not going to talk about the science here. If you want to talk to us, we will later, but we're going to talk about your personal experience and your personal response to changes in the climate.

By addressing people's lived experiences, these activists challenge people to let go of their political alliances and rather focus on other aspects of experience and identity. At each church that this group of activists visits, they print off and read the denominations' statement on environmental responsibility. The activists with this group explained to me that almost all church denominations have some kind of environmental ethics statement. By reading this statement, activists challenge church-goers to think about the relationship between religious ethics and environmental responsibility. Activists utilize churches as activist cites to highlight the religious discourses that argue for climate justice action.

Counter-narratives of Oklahoma history and identity provide a space in which activists take action and understand themselves as still part of an Oklahoma narrative.

Activists both draw on and continue counter-narratives of environmental activism. In taking action, Oklahoma activists sustain Oklahoma resistance and create new ways of understanding and experiencing Oklahoma identity. Activists utilize counter-narratives of Oklahoma history and religious discourses to ground their actions in legacies and traditions of Oklahoma resistance. Anti-fracking, anti-tar sands, and climate justice activists take actions that are rooted in counter-narratives of Oklahoma history and identity.

Chapter Six

Red State Repression: Oil, Gas, and Controlling Processes

On December 13th, 2013, I was put in the back of a cop car and told that I was being arrested. The cop stated, "for something terrorism, I'm not sure what." I later learned that I was being booked into the Oklahoma County Jail under the felony charge Terrorism Hoax, which carries up to 10 years in prison, because I hung up a banner as part of a protest at the Devon Energy building in downtown Oklahoma City. The banner had glitter on it. The glitter fell off the banner, and the cops stated that the glitter could have been a hazardous substance. The Devon Energy building is open to the public. It is the tallest building in downtown Oklahoma City. The building has a restaurant and lobby that is open to the public, so it is very common that tourists and Oklahoma locals enter the building. For these reasons, when I entered the building, I was not legally trespassing or to my knowledge, breaking any laws. With time, it came to light that the Joint Terrorism Task Force, TransCanada Corporation, and the Oklahoma City Police had met together prior to the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline to strategize ways to prosecute environmental activists as terrorists. This kind of overt repression and social control has occurred sporadically throughout Oklahoma history. Social control is compounded by cultural control. Laura Nader writes, "Anthropological research on domination and resistance has shown the power of cultural control. Cultural control when it is hegemonic is impersonal, embedded, and often invisible" (Nader 1997: 720). In this chapter, I consider the relationship between the oil and gas industry and dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity as they relate to cultural control, social control, and the persistence of multiple forms of repression that act together as a

controlling process that maintains industry power and subjugates activist narratives in Oklahoma. I consider how repression manifests itself within environmental activist communities, leading to internal conflict and group struggle, further complicating activist work in Oklahoma.

Following my arrest, I learned more about how environmentalists experience repression largely due to the label of "terrorism." The FBI lists environmental activists as posing a domestic terrorist threat [8]even though no person has ever been killed in the United States as a result of environmental activism. The discourse of environmentalists as violent radicals shapes how the general public understand and receive environmentalists' actions. Any message that activists attempt to convey is obscured or dismissed because of the ways in which the government prosecutes environmental activists (Potter 2011).

Months after my arrest, I sat in a graduate anthropology class at the University of Oklahoma. We were discussing activist movements and forms of resistance. The professor began discussing contemporary activists, and the professor proclaimed that environmental activists have been among the most violent activists and have engaged in "terrorist" behavior. I felt the color drain from my face. One of my peers asked the professor if we need to complicate the definition of terrorism. What about when terrorism is used to describe interference with economic gain? Should we call that terrorism? The professor decisively stated that does not happen. The professor provided no evidence for these claims. The discourse of environmental activists as terrorists had

[8] Increasingly, environmental activists have been targeted as terrorist threats. Journalist Will Potter details and describes what he calls a "Green Scare" in his book Green is the New Red: An Insider's Account of a Social Movement Under Siege (Potter 2011).

permeated my anthropology class. I was frustrated to say the least, but I was also overtaken with fear. I did not say anything. I wondered if the professor knew about my arrest. I wondered if my classmate knew about my arrest. Was my classmate looking at me when they asked the question? I remained silent.

After my arrest, I felt fear most places that I went. I have always been shy in classroom settings, but after my arrest, I felt anxiety in a way that I had never felt before. After all, my mugshot had been featured on almost all local news outlets accompanied by the word "terrorism." Through interviews with people in Oklahoma, it is obvious that I am not alone in the fear and intimidation I experienced. From people who engage in direct action to people who do educational outreach, activists that employ multiple strategies experience intense feelings of anxiety and fear because of the work that they do. This is largely because of narratives and experiences of repression within the state of Oklahoma.

Activists' stories act as social forces establishing repression as part of activists' narratives and experiences. Their stories circulating within activists' communities, contribute to activists' belief in repression as a social fact. For some of these examples, activists provided me with documentation verifying their stories because it was important to them that I believe them and understand their experiences of repression as truth. In contrast, some activists merely told their stories without providing substantiating evidence, and I heard them repeat their stories multiple times in different settings and in front of other activists. Anthropologist Paul Rabinow writes that "what is currently taken as 'truth' is dependent on prior historical events – the emergence of a style of thinking about truth and falsity that established the conditions for entertaining a

proposition as being capable of being true" (Rabinow 1986: 237). Activists understand narratives of repression as truth because historical infiltration and surveillance is known to them. Activists' narratives serve as reminders of the repression that activists' feel and experience within the state.

In order to illustrate experiences of repression and its impact on activist work, I highlight three examples of repression in Oklahoma: academic repression, activist surveillance and infiltration, and alienation from friends and loved ones. I consider how these forms of social repression impact activist organizations, at times resulting in repression within activists' internal group dynamics.

Academic Repression

Oklahoma's fracking boom was largely facilitated by governmental tax incentives. At the height of the boom, oil and gas companies were taxed 1% for the first four years of horizontal drilling compared to the standard national tax rate of 7%. With these economic benefits, companies were able to contribute large sums of money to community projects and earn further tax credits. As a result, Oklahoma public schools, art museums, local theatre companies, and even outdoor recreation is funded in some part by oil and gas. Anthropologist Suzana Sawyer illustrates a similar phenomenon in Ecuador. Sawyer describes, "a twofold process under neoliberal rule whereby the state increasingly assumed the role of a fiscal manager geared toward facilitating transnational capital, and private enterprise selectively assumed a pastoral role. As the state retreated from its role of caring for the well-being of its subjects, ARCO (Atlantic Rich Field Company) stepped in" (Sawyer 2004: 9). Sawyer explains that gifts and development projects were granted to communities by a private company.

These gifts were relatively insignificant, "incidental expenditures" for the company that spent millions on oil and gas exploration, but these gifts were of enormous value to the marginalized communities who received the gifts (Sawyer 2004: 9). In Oklahoma, a similar process has occurred. The government has facilitated profitable business endeavors for oil and gas companies, while disenfranchising communities through government funding cuts. Oil and gas companies and oil and gas funded state agencies step in to fill the role of providing community support, while gaining both financially and rhetorically in the process. One activist that I spoke with described this phenomenon:

> They get all these tax cuts, but they give a few million dollars to the United Way. And they get all these tax cuts, and they give money to the arts… Allied arts and to the Civic Center and Lyric. And so, you go to Lyric Theater, and every single practice room is named after an oil company or an oil executive. You go to any lyric production and its Devon and Chesapeake. You go to an NBA basketball game, you're surrounded for three… hours by oil and gas propaganda, literally surrounded by gas flames… The Chesapeake arena… they have along the rim of the top of the lower level… these videos… basically these TVs that are all together, it looks like one big thing, and they are constantly playing this video of natural gas flames. All lit up around you.

People who attend NBA basketball games are reminded constantly who funds the presence of the Thunder basketball team in Oklahoma City through visual imagery of natural gas flames. By donating gifts of money and funding community projects, oil and gas companies secure not only social control in mediating what kinds of projects are funded and what kinds of educational opportunities are supported, but the oil and gas companies establish cultural control. The oil and gas industry surrounds people as they engage in artistic endeavors and recreational activities. By giving gifts to local communities, the oil and gas company is able to exercise multiple forms of control over communities and write it off their taxes.

In 2014, the Oklahoma Policy Institute published an article titled, "What the horizontal drilling tax break is costing your kids" (Blatt 2014). The article argued that the tax break results in a loss of state revenue that could go towards funding Oklahoma's under-funded, public education system (Blatt 2014). The article stated that these tax breaks were projected to cost the state more than 252-million-dollars in the year of 2015 alone. On July 1, 2015, the tax went up to 2% for the first three years of production, still noticeably under the standard 7%. In the winter of 2016, the state announced that prisons, public education, and many state agencies would have their budgets cut to make up for a $235-million-dollar deficit accumulated in 2015. In 2016, $110 million will be cut from Oklahoma's already struggling schools. Mid-April 2016, several public school districts were forced to switch to four-day school weeks in order to save money. Local news outlets and community residents have begun to speak out about the apparent ways that oil and gas has impacted funding for public schools. With the current oil and gas bust, the oil and gas industry can no longer fulfill the role of community caretaker. The exercise of cultural control is becoming more apparent as oil and gas companies and the government are reaching a point in which they cannot provide satisfactory support for Oklahoma communities.

While education funding cuts have received some attention in local news media, the impact of oil and gas on the kinds of education that students receive has been lesser explored. Through threats of funding cuts and job loss, university professors are censored in the kinds of things that they can comfortably say and the kinds of resistance that they can reasonably engage in. Public school teachers at all levels often are forced to apply for grants from oil and gas companies to fund educational projects and field

trips. As a result, education and educational experiences are mediated through the oil and gas industry. This begins in early childhood education and extends to graduate level research.

The Oklahoma Energy Resource Board (OERB) is a well-known state agency in Oklahoma. OERB is entirely funded by the oil and gas industry, and states its mission: "To use the strength of *Oklahoma's greatest industry* to improve the lives of all Oklahomans through education and restoration" (OERB 2016; emphasis added). The OERB provides educational programming for public schools as well as funding for field trips and other educational opportunities. OERB's Homeroom website features links to educational programming for K-12 education, including high school language arts, social studies, science, and math curriculum that teaches students about the oil and gas industry. While many people in Oklahoma feel gratitude towards the OERB for providing funding for enhanced opportunities for public school children, there are many Oklahoma teachers and parents who are dissatisfied with this system. One middle school teacher explained to me that they feel as though they have to beg the OERB for basic funding that the state should provide. Additionally, they explained that they have to teach oil and gas curriculum in order to get funding that should already be granted. Some parent's express frustration at how oil and gas ideology is indoctrinated into young children's minds.

The OERB holds partnerships with many local museums, including the Science Museum Oklahoma in Oklahoma City. Students attend the museum where they have the opportunity to explore hands-on exhibits and educational programming, and all of the students watch the show "Petro Power." At the show, students are taught about the oil

and gas industry and given warnings about the dangers of playing near oil and gas wells. At the beginning of the show the lights in the auditorium go black, there is an explosion, and children respond by screaming. The lights come back up and the performer proclaims, "You all sound like a bunch of girls at a One Direction concert!" These presentations extend beyond the reach of simply teaching about the dangers of playing near oil wells. Rather, they teach cultural norms and values. In this instance, an oil and gas presentation is facilitating normative ideas about gender and re-enforcing hegemonic masculinity. One parent explained to me that her male child was very upset by this interaction. He thought it was insulting to both boys and girls. Through these presentations, children must navigate difficult terrain between the values that they are taught at home and the values of the oil and gas industry. These presentations teach a glorified history of oil and gas that reinforces dominant narratives of oil and gas as intrinsically part of Oklahoma identity. Through the promise of a field trip and funding, children are exposed to a particular oil and gas ideology annually.

Social and cultural control exerted by the oil and gas industry extends into the university setting, as well. My second year of graduate school, I received a teaching assistantship in the Women's and Gender Studies program at OU. I was delighted by this appointment. As the time neared for my first day of classes I grew more and more excited. A few weeks before classes began I looked up the building location of one of the classes that I would be working in as a teaching assistant. The class was located in the Devon Energy building on campus. I thought to myself, "Is this a joke? This can't be real." I felt nervous entering the building. It has a similar aesthetic to the Devon Energy building located in downtown Oklahoma City. I was reminded of my arrest and

felt a small amount of panic. I entered the classroom and introduced myself. Again, I feared that someone in the classroom knew about my arrest.

In the class, we read a book titled *Exile & Pride* by Eli Clare. One of the chapters in the book focuses on clear-cutting and logging in Oregon. Clare describes how logging is common-place in Oregon, a normal part of rural life. Many of the students wrote about how outrageous it is that people in Oregon do not care about the environment and casually accept logging as normal. I could not help but point out that we were standing in the Devon Energy building, surrounded by other buildings named after oil and gas companies and oil and gas entrepreneurs. This is relatively normal on many Oklahoma campuses because almost all major universities in the state receive a great deal of funding from oil and gas. Additionally, it is not uncommon for oil and gas executives and entrepreneurs to sit on the boards of Oklahoma universities, and university presidents to sit on oil and gas company boards. The most famous of these are probably Harold Hamm of Continental Resources and David Boren of the University of Oklahoma who allegedly conspired to cover-up the correlation between hydraulic fracturing and the rise in earthquakes in Oklahoma (Soraghan 2014). However, the University of Oklahoma is not the only university with these kinds of relationships. The presence and economic power of the oil and gas industry over university life directly shapes how university professors engage in activism, teach classes, and speak out in public life.

One university professor that I spoke with described job threats, loss of funding for their department, and surveillance of their online communications because they had openly talked about climate change and had critiqued the relationship between a

particular oil and gas company and the university's president. This professor works at a local university. The professor explained that the university president at their university is invested in oil and gas and sits on the board of an oil and gas company. The CEO of the same oil and gas company sits on the board of the university and contributes significant funds to the university's School of Business. The dean of the School of Business at this university is also invested in oil and gas. At the time, this professor held a high-ranking administrative position in addition to being a tenured professor. It came to this professor's attention that the university president was creating a research program to do research for the oil and gas company that would later be used to lobby politicians. The professor openly expressed their belief that this represented a conflict of interest:

> I pointed out that I thought that was not appropriate… It's not good for the academic integrity of the institution for professors and students to be doing paid research for a for-profit company and then having that research be used to lobby for things that would enhance their bottom line… especially when the president of the university is a paid member of their board, and the dean of the school of business has all of these economic interests in relation to oil and gas as well.

This critique was met with animosity from the university president.

Shortly after this incident, this same university organized an oil and gas conference in downtown Oklahoma City. A number of university alumni, students, and community members protested the event, and someone distributed flyers on the university campus. The flyers implied that the CEO of the company should be criminalized for the ways in which his company has negatively impacted local communities and communities outside of Oklahoma. The flyer described the CEO as a "wanted" criminal. The research team at the oil and gas company "investigated" the link

between the protest and the university. The CEO sent an e-mail to the university president that was later forwarded to this university professor. The e-mail detailed how the oil and gas company had investigated the relationships between this professor and the people who attended the protest. Several names were mentioned, and one student was identified as the person who circulated the flyer on campus. The professor was identified by the oil and gas company as being the link between these various groups. The university president called a meeting with this professor at which their job was threatened. The professor explained,

> At one point in the conversation (they) says to me, (they) goes, 'you know I don't know if you're part of the problem, but if you as (administrative title) ever go down and protest at (the specific oil and gas company) you're no longer going to be (administrative title). You're just going to be tenured professor.

The professor's high-ranking, administrative position was threatened because of a supposed link that the oil and gas company found through investigating the professor's relationships with community members. There was no evidence outside of maintaining social media and networking relationships with particular people that the professor had any involvement in the protest. Even if they had been involved in the protest, it was a legal and permitted act of free speech. Additionally, there was no evidence that the particular student who was accused of circulating the flyers had anything to do with the creation or circulation of the flyers.

The professor was asked to tell the student that they broke campus policy by circulating the flyers. The professor initially agreed to this, but then later decided not to speak with the student because there was no evidence that the student circulated the flyers. The university president also told this professor that the oil and gas company was

working with the FBI, and that the flyers constituted a threat because they described the CEO of the oil and gas company as a "wanted" criminal. The professor explained, "They were talking about how the FBI was telling them that they needed to be on increased alert… That there could be violence perpetrated against them… And (they were) trying to make the case that (the flyer) was some kind of threat." This university president utilized pressure from an external for-profit company to threaten a university administrator and professor in order to restrict the kinds of actions that they could take and the ways that they could speak out about environmental concerns.

The professor went through a complaint process after this incident, but says, "it wasn't handled appropriately. I can't, I won't really go into details there." Eventually, this professor stepped down from the administrative position and changed roles because they felt that they could not fulfill the goals of their academic work while holding that position. This professor strongly believes that their outspokenness led to funding cuts for their unit on campus. The professor explained:

> As I was going through this… we were simultaneously going through a prioritization process here at the university. And the leadership here, they couldn't go directly after me for the complaints that I was making, so what they did was they went after the [professor's unit] in the prioritization process. And, people that were close to the president were basically slandering me with the trustees, who I'm not allowed to talk to in relation to the prioritization process or about anything. You know, we're not really supposed to talk to the trustees. And [the university president] created this environment of fear that if you talk to the trustees you know, you are in deep trouble, but [the university president] was having [their] inner circle basically trash me and other people close to me during that whole process as a way to retaliate without it being a direct retaliation.

The professor believes their unit was targeted. This example demonstrates the multiple ways that the oil and gas industry exerts control over university life and educational

experiences. Not only was a professor directly censored, funding for particular university programming is perceived as correlated with those programs that demonstrate the strongest loyalty to the oil and gas industry. Again, activists believe that this example could take place at multiple Oklahoma universities. The professor explained, "When you have 3 of the top 4 universities in the state with presidents who have been paid directors of oil companies while they're president you have a serious risk of conflict of interest." The presence of the oil and gas industry results in academic censorship which in turn shapes how students are taught and the kinds of messages that college students receive throughout their university experiences.

Surveillance and Infiltration

Academic repression touches on issues of surveillance and infiltration. I still wonder what that oil and gas company meant by "investigating" the professor. The company explicitly referenced tracing relationships and online networks; however, other activists and I suspect that more intrusive surveillance is not out of the realm of possibility largely because other activists describe clear experiences of surveillance and infiltration by private investigators and the police. I focus on two examples: the infiltration of GPTSR's Action Camp and surveillance of community organizers. I focus on these two examples to demonstrate that activists engaging in direct action, as well as, activists engaging in community organizing experience similar forms of political repression.

Members with GPTSR describe minor incidents of repression that escalated until the eventual event resulting in my Terrorism Hoax arrest. At first GPTSR participants explained, "The cops… knew of us and knew us. And, we got pulled over

all the time and stuff like that but that was mostly benign." Another participant stated, "The librarian in Cushing used to call the cops on us." What began as minor incidents escalated over time.

As one of many organizing strategies, GPTSR held an Action Camp in Oklahoma in the winter of 2013. Action Camps are a common organizing strategy in environmental campaigns. Basically, an action camp involves activists from different parts of the country (and sometimes the world) coming together to share skills. The Action Camp in Oklahoma included various workshops and trainings. One of these trainings was an Anti-Oppression (AO) training facilitated by a transwoman. She introduced herself and discussed the importance of asking people for their pronouns[9] and the importance of being conscious of the ways that trans-misogyny [10]is pervasive in our society. This was one of many of the workshops included at the gathering. At the end of this particular action camp, the organizers had planned a blockade in which people would intentionally put themselves in situations in which they could be arrested for the purpose of raising awareness and delaying construction of the Keystone XL. When organizers arrived at the action site, police were already there, and the action was not carried out. There is no way to explain how the police could have known about this action at this time unless someone provided them the information. Organizers discussed

[9] Many transgender and queer activists argue that gender is fluid and peoples' gender identities and pronouns are self-defined. Asking everyone their pronouns is both an act of subversion that highlights self-definition in expressing gender identity and a means of creating safe spaces for Trans people. There is a great deal of complexity within trans and queer communities and people hold varying ideas about the ways in which gender is experienced and defined (Cromwell 1999; Sylvia Rivera Law Project 2015; Valentine 2007).

[10] Transmisogyny is a form of oppression that targets transfeminine and gender non-conforming people. It exists through discrimination, systematic violence, and cultural norms (Kacere 2014). Many Trans and queer activists argue that mainstream activist communities exclude transfeminine and gender non-conforming people.

the possibility of infiltration, and identified some potential infiltrators. One of these people was a man who attended the AO workshop.

Months later, GPTSR staged a blockade in which two people blocked a construction site. One of these people sat on top of a forty-foot tower positioned in the middle of the construction site; the tower was anchored by ropes that were strategically tied to construction equipment. If the ropes were cut, the tower would come crashing down. The other person locked themselves to a piece of construction equipment on the ground. The police approached activists on a public road who provided support for the two blockaders. One of these activists described being approached, "One of the local sheriffs came up to some of us and mentioned some other members of our group by name and then mentioned that he had been at the action camp we hosted." The police officer specifically asked where the woman was who hosted the AO training. One officer said something like, "I use 'it' pronouns," demeaning the organizer and the AO training. The officer enacted hegemonic masculinity, specifically targeting feminine and queer forms of gender expression as a means of belittling members of GPTSR. Another activist described their fear in the situation,

> You're like on a country road in the middle of the woods somewhere, and there's… cops in ski masks that you wouldn't… be able to identify… combing the woods and… making us… sit all in the ground in a row and taking IDs and being like, "Where's this person? I went to your AO training in Ponca City."

Cops strategically referenced infiltration to incite fear in the activists, and particularly targeted a transfeminine person as a means of mocking activist endeavors. Another activist described intense fear because they were concerned for their friend's life. The activist explained that police officers in ski masks held large knives and stood by the

ropes that supported the activist that was more than 40 feet in the air. This occurred in the same moment when activists discovered that their action camp had been infiltrated. The activist was eventually extracted from the tower safely. With time, GPTSR learned that the Joint Terrorism Task Force was investigating them.

As previously stated, on December 13, 2013, GPTSR staged a protest at the Devon Energy Building in downtown Oklahoma City, often referred to as the Devon Tower. Two activists locked their necks to revolving doors as a symbolic blockade. The building had multiple entrances and exits, and the activists were not actually blockading anything. Additionally, GPTSR members hung up two banners in the atrium of the Devon Tower. After hanging up the banners, protesters exited the building and stood on the sidewalk to support the people who had locked their necks to the revolving doors. Police arrived and put all protesters standing on the sidewalks in cop cars. There were a few other supporters in the park across the street. One of these supporters had previously been arrested doing non-violent direct actions with GPTSR. They were sitting on a park bench when a man approached them and casually asked them what was going on. The activist gave a vague response. The man told them that they should be careful because their work endangers people. The activist explained to me that the language utilized by this man was reminiscent of the language utilized by police officers when they were arrested with GPTSR. The activist asked the man who he was, and the man replied that he was with the FBI. The activist felt intense fear because they had been identified and approached out of all of the people in the park. The similar use of the word “endanger” led this activist to believe that police and FBI were circulating a particular kind of language to target protesters and silence dissent.

The Oklahoma City police initially denied in press and media that they had met with the JTTF and TransCanada to discuss ways of dealing with anti-KXL protestors. However, through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request and interviews it came to light that the Oklahoma City police had met with the JTTF and TransCanada to discuss environmental activism as a terrorist threat (Griffin 2014). The Terrorism Hoax charges have not yet been officially filed largely due to this evidence and an outpouring of community support. Activists with GPTSR perceived the emergence of this evidence as a partial win because we were able to expose the ways in which government and industry were working in collusion to silence dissent; however, some activists with GPTSR wonder if it was worth it because we still feel the intense effects of being branded terrorists and labeled radicals. These effects include difficulty finding employment and housing and alienation from friends and loved ones.

It is certainly possible to argue that because activists with GPTSR were engaging in acts of civil disobedience that police response was necessary and acceptable. What is difficult for Oklahoma activists to understand is how and why industry is protected over individuals and communities. How did non-violent protestors become the targets of investigative pursuits over industry leaders that commit much more damaging crimes? One activist expressed this sentiment in an interview stating, "An acid spill isn't terrorism, but glitter is?" Activists who do not engage in civil disobedience also experience intense repression for speaking out against the oil and gas industry, such as the before-mentioned professor.

One local organizer who does not currently engage in acts of civil disobedience described experiencing physical threats and wire-tapping. This organizer has founded

many environmental organizations in Oklahoma and openly speaks out against the oil and gas industry. They primarily focus on using environmental law to clean-up and shut down environmentally hazardous sites. They told me that on numerous occasions they have received threats and described one interaction with a private investigator who had been asked to investigate them.

> So, I'm standing there, and the guy in front me turns around and looks me over and he introduces himself, and I give him my name. And he looked at me and he laughed and he said, "I should have known (you) would have a ponytail." And I said, "What? Do we know each other?" And he said, "Well, I know you, you don't know me." And he pulled out his card and handed it to me and it said, "Private investigator." And I said, "Oh! You know me?" He goes, "Well yea." I said, "So, how do you know me" And he said, "Look man there's a lot of people around this building (the state capitol) that want to know all about you" I said "How do you know that?" He said, "Because they've tried to hire me, they call me all the time. They want you investigated."

This particular private investigator refused to investigate the community organizer because they both ride motorcycles. The private investigator looked into this organizer prior to accepting the job and discovered their shared community, and so he refused. They warned the community organizer, "but you got to watch your back."

The community organizer had a sweep done of their office and discovered that their phone had been wire-tapped. When asked, the phone company told the community organizer that, "Corporations aren't allowed to do that." So the organizer concluded that, "it was probably the FBI." The organizer's office was broken into on multiple occasions, and they experienced multiple threats. Throughout this organizer's career, they have experienced surveillance and scrutiny from the government.

In addition to directly being targeted, this organizer explained that the communities where they worked were also targeted. The organizer described a

particular campaign in which a low-income, black community was targeted by the police because they spoke out about environmental impacts on their community. The incident occurred in a small town in Oklahoma where a smelter was causing residents to get sick. The organizer explained,

> I was called to come and investigate. Their yards were contaminated with lead and zinc and cadmium and other heave metals from the smelter… The frontline was the black community, and then it filtered down to some of the poor whites that were the next edge… I had to fight Phillips petroleum on that because it's a one-company town. Phillips is in charge of the town.

After holding a meeting at the local community center, the organizer got in their car and drove to the edge of town. They were "pulled over and held at gunpoint for (nearly) 45 minutes" while police officers went through the black neighborhood knocking on doors and threatening residents. The activist explained, "The cops told me… 'You see what you started? We're looking for dope in that neighborhood, and we're going to arrest everybody." The organizer said that they couldn't help but retort, "Well, you know, I hope you're going through the Southside where all the rich people are because that's where the dope is." The police were not happy with the comment, but they eventually released the organizer.

The organizer said that the police did not find much, and many people refused to allow the police to search their homes. Still, the organizer said a few people were arrested and later released. The organizer explained that they were using legal environmental frameworks to protect communities. Even though they were operating within the law, the organizer was still treated like a criminal because they posed a threat to the economic success of the energy industry. This particular community felt enraged by the ways the police targeted them and became even more involved in the fight to

shut down the smelter. However, in other instances, the circulation of these sorts of stories informs communities' willingness to engage in resistance and their willingness to trust environmental organizers.

Alienation from Friends and Loved Ones

The idea that oil and gas is an intrinsic part of Oklahoma identity leads to multiple forms of repression within the state. For me and many other participants that I spoke with, the most difficult form of cultural control is alienation from friends and loved ones. Almost every participant that I spoke with discussed tension or difficulty relating to family members after being involved in resistance efforts. The power and persuasion of oil and gas ideology leads to tension within families and difficulty finding familial support. Often times, activists' reasoning for doing activist work is related to supporting or fighting for their families. For me personally, it is very difficult to do work that further separates me from the people that I love the most. Activists described these experiences in a number of ways.

One activist with GPTSR expressed that their family was afraid of them after they became politically active stating,

> They didn't know how to relate to me, and I could tell that they were like afraid of me in some ways. Like I can always tell when my brother is afraid, socially afraid in a situation, and any time we would interact in a situation after I became an activist, he had that look in his eyes… It's like. Like growing up Christian, it was the way that I saw Christians interact with like atheists or gay people or Satanists or anyone they thought had some kind of like spooky, weird disease or power, like the look on their face. That's what I was getting from my family. Who like, even though I had come out [as gay] … They didn't even treat me that way after I'd come out… They knew… that I was… not content with the way the world is, but as soon as I became active in that… and then the state labeled me as a dissident, then they felt unsafe around me.

This activist's statement highlights that their family was more uncomfortable with their stance as an activist than their sexual orientation. This activist described intense feelings of alienation after participating in GPTSR and talking about it with their family.

Activists with SFPC expressed similar sentiments. One activist described conflict within families saying, "Family members have bullied other family members." This activist explained that members of SFPC have broken relationships with family members because they have spoken out against the oil and gas industry. Activists describe friendships and relationships being mediated by their stances in relationship to energy production. Activists that engage in multiple forms of resistance describe experiencing alienation as a result of their activist endeavors.

Repression and Internal Group Dynamics

Repression is not new to Oklahoma or activist communities. Activists employ multiple strategies to protect themselves from government scrutiny and direct social control. At times, these tactics lead to conflict and repression within groups. The clearest example of this occurred within Great Plains Tar Sands Resistance (GPTSR). Within GPTSR, this largely happened through "security culture." Security culture is a tactic employed by activists to protect themselves from infiltration and other forms of government surveillance. This normally involves using a name that is different from your birth name and disclosing very little information about yourself. The use of security culture within GPTSR exacerbated insider/outsider dynamics because infiltration attributed to fear and distrust within the group. One activist described this, explaining that repression "can lead to paranoia and that's like a part of government repression, you know, is not trusting each other." This distrust led to fear that

newcomers to the group were infiltrators. Often times this resulted in anyone who was not visibly a part of the subculture of GPTSR (young, wore black, went by a name different than their birth name, etc.) being excluded and distrusted.

This also led to internal group repression because people who came from outside of Oklahoma did not fully disclose their identities, while people from Oklahoma were fully exposed. The people who came from outside of Oklahoma held power in anonymity, while local activists often times had to prove themselves. Anonymity has become valued in many activist spaces, but in the case of GPTSR, as one activist stated in an interview, this anonymity "bred distrust and hierarchy." The local activists were fully exposed, housing the outside activists at times and allowing them to meet their families. However, the locals knew very little about many of the outside activists. Some locals viewed this as no longer a practice of security in the face of state repression, but rather, a dynamic of group subculture that was unnecessary for "an above ground" organization. A practice that emerged as a means of combatting state repression resulted in the marginalization of local activists' voices.

Security culture exacerbated group power dynamics leading to exclusion and misrepresentation of local, Oklahoma activists. Oklahoma activists felt this exclusion to be centered on divisions of region and class. One of the Oklahoma activists explained:

> I felt like my comrades had a lot of language and they had a lot of analysis for class, but they didn't have a lot of experience being a part of class that wasn't considered normal, that being middle class. So, I actually had very negative experiences around my identity within GPTSR because of insensitivities towards class.

This activist particularly discussed feeling like their story and their voice was appropriated by activists who did not fully understand the complex dynamics of Oklahoma and the oil and gas industry. The activist stated:

> I didn't like the way they talked about oil workers because I at one point in my life was employed by the oil industry, and my dad was always employed by the oil industry in some way, and my brother had also worked for the same industry, and so I couldn't help but feel like… well they're talking about people like me who don't know of other options. Like… we aren't told that there are other options. This is our… this is our existence… to work for oil, like that's our purpose. And it's sold to us as being a proud purpose, something you should be proud of, something you should pursue and something that can make you great and to think negatively about it is biting the hand that feeds you and you are ungrateful… if you are critical of oil in any way.

This activist expressed frustration because oil and gas is a part of their family story and history. On many occasions, Oklahoma activists expressed a desire to maintain positive relationships with oil workers, while critiquing the dominance of the industry. Some of the activists from outside of Oklahoma perceived this as "weak" or not "radical" enough. Oklahoma activists who expressed contrary opinions felt as though they were being silenced on the grounds that their opinions were not informed by radical enough politics. Oklahoma activists expressed feeling like their concerns about their lasting relationships were disregarded. Their lived experiences in Oklahoma were not fully valued as sites of information that could inform group strategies. This ultimately resulted in Oklahoma activists feeling intimidated and struggling to speak up in group settings. This activist continued to describe feelings of alienation and discomfort speaking up:

> And so to see members of the group I was in not respect those feelings and just be completely clueless of those feelings… was definitely a problem for me, but also, I didn't feel comfortable speaking up… because of the way they had expressed things, and so I thought… if I do

> say something they're just going to call me out or they're going to alienate me or even… or even wondering sometimes because of the way they talked about class and then having my class experience thinking like, "Am I a token? Like… Am I a class token here?" Like… "Oh! Here we have a born Oklahoman who… like grew up poor, depended on oil and here they are resisting." And yea that is part of my story, and I'm really proud of that and I want that to be part of my story, but what I don't want is people who don't understand why that's a big deal using my story in order to further their own cause and continue to be clueless and use it to bolster their own self to be like "look how cool we are, we're hanging out with poor people, look at me mom and dad!"

This activist emphasized the unique relationship that low-income people in Oklahoma feel towards the oil and gas industry. This activist expressed frustration at people who did not understand the significance of challenging oil and gas in Oklahoma, and they questioned whether or not their story was being fully honored and respected. They wanted their story and narrative to be shared but on their terms, with respect to the complexity of relationships that people in Oklahoma hold with the oil and gas industry.

In many ways, both outside activists and local activists were reproducing narratives of Oklahoma Shame. The activists from outside of Oklahoma did not fully understand the complexity of relationships that people hold with the oil and gas industry. They did not perceive people in Oklahoma as having or holding worthwhile contributions to the group because they unconsciously dismissed Oklahoma. One of these outside activists acknowledged this in an interview:

> The North does really look down their nose at places like this. So, I definitely like you know consciously or not brought that here, and I think that's like changed a lot, or I've been changed a lot by being here in ways that I probably didn't realize at the time but realize now.

The dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity and history led to repression within an activist group. This repression silenced the contributions of local, Oklahoma activists. This resulted in many Oklahoma activists feeling disempowered and at times disengaged

with GPTSR. Outside activists and local activists unknowingly carried a narrative of Oklahoma with them that resulted in internal group repression and ultimately limited the successes of the group.

Environmental Activists and Controlling Processes

The dominance of the oil and gas industry acts as a controlling process that establishes the industry as part of cultural experience, a social necessity, and something that if questioned poses severe consequences. This results in the oil and gas industry holding dominance in the state of Oklahoma, where activists' stories and histories become subjugated. The dominance of certain narratives over others is directly tied to power and control. These narratives act as a form of cultural control that impacts activists' relationships with family and friends as well as work and educational opportunities.

Anthropologist Laura Nader contributes a helpful distinction between social and cultural control. "The distinction between social and cultural control allows for the distinction between control over groups or relationships and control of the mind, both part of any controlling process" (Nader 1997: 719). The oil and gas industry in collusion with the Oklahoma state government have exerted both social and cultural control in the present and past. However, contemporary narratives of the past oil booms and current fracking boom represent a shift in which cultural control is exerted through the establishment of a true discourse that works to subjugate knowledge and at times erase histories that challenge the dominant narrative of the oil and gas industry. Historical narratives of oil and gas frame Oklahoma identity as being intrinsically bound up in the oil and gas industry. Through social control these narratives persist in

Oklahoma's education system, recreational sites, and artistic centers leading to cultural control and the presence of oil and gas as being symbolically tied to almost all areas of Oklahoma life.

According to Nader, cultural control occurs incrementally, fostered by multiple institutions (Nader 1997; 722). Oil and Gas as a part of Oklahoma identity and culture occurs through multiple institutions including specific Christian churches, the state government, the education system, media, and corporations. The cultural control of the oil and gas industry requires maintenance and ongoing production and reproduction of new narratives that employ and parallel narratives of the past. The production and reproduction of oil and gas narratives in present-day Oklahoma highlight the relationship between knowledge and power. In Oklahoma, the maintenance of this culture can be observed through state repression as it works to subjugate and disempower activist endeavors. By labeling activists as terrorists and holding power over institutional funding, oil and gas companies create a culture of distrust that leads to alienation of those who engage in environmentalist endeavors. These actions in turn impact activists' internal group dynamics by fostering distrust within activist communities.

Terrorism and the Oklahoma Context

Stefan Warner and I were arrested for hanging up a glittery banner and threatened with the charge of "terrorism hoax." We were booked into the Oklahoma County Jail and initially held with no bail. When I entered the county jail and was going through the booking process, an outspoken man who was also waiting to be booked into the jail said to one of the detention officers, "Where'd ya'll pick her up?

The library?" I laughed along with others going through the booking process. The man asked me what I was being arrested for, and I said, "Nothing really. Terrorism supposedly. Because of glitter." The man turned to the detention officer and said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Arresting this girl for terrorism 'cause of glitter. Shameful!" The detention officer turned to the man and said something like, "Not all terrorists look like terrorists. Think about Timothy McVeigh." I was speechless. Was I really being compared to Timothy McVeigh because of glitter? The man retorted, "Come on, man! She ain't no Timothy McVeigh! Ya'll should be ashamed of yourselves." I agreed and felt a great amount of gratitude for this man who stood up for me.

One activist said to me that the terrorism hoax charge frightened them the most specifically because of the context of Oklahoma. This activist explained,

> The terrorism… was the only time I was ever surprised by the reaction of the state to what we were doing just because it felt like… just like this insult, like this comic insult… being from Oklahoma and having… been a child when the bombing happened and to think like… whenever I travel and tell people I'm from OKC… it's like before the Thunder (basketball team) … it was always, "Oh! The only thing I know about that place is the bombing." And that's like a site of tourism for us… this like… terrorism attack that happened and killed people that most people from around here knew… To see the state… use that same language and claim what we were doing was in the same vein as what Timothy McVeigh, just seemed outside of the realm of possibility… but also that could totally play into the way people reacted to us, that people are scared."

This activist describes the painful irony that the state of Oklahoma worked in collusion with the oil and gas industry to persecute peaceful activists as terrorists because we know terrorism here.

I remember when the bombing shook my body. I actually thought it was thunder. The playground equipment at my elementary school shook, and my friends started being pulled out of class to receive news of their loved ones. Many people lost their parents, their siblings. When we talk about Oklahoma resilience, people often mention the bombing alongside tornados, the Dust Bowl, drought, oil busts, and wild fires. Three years after my arrest, media is focusing on Oklahoma resilience to endure yet another oil bust. By calling Oklahoma activists terrorists, the oil and gas industry is employing cultural control by referencing a real life terrorist attack that happened here. Comparing environmental activists to terrorists cannot be detached from Oklahoma history or Oklahoma identity. Employing the dominant narrative of resilience in the face of terrorism, the oil and gas industry and state and federal government employ a controlling discourse that subjugates activists' messages and creates further turmoil and distrust within activist groups.

It is still overwhelming to remember sitting in the Oklahoma County Jail less than a mile from the bombing site, and hearing a detention officer compare me to Timothy McVeigh to silence someone who was defending me. In many ways, the act is parallel to the actions of the state and the actions of the oil and gas industry employing the label terrorism to silence environmental activists. It is infuriating to think that the man being booked into jail who defended me was probably perceived as less sane than the detention officer who compared me to Timothy McVeigh by most of the workers in the jail.

When I finally reached the front of the line, I was read my charges, and the woman who read the charges looked at me in shock. She said something like,

“Terrorism hoax? What did ya’ll do to get that?” I told the story once again. She laughed and said something like, “Well, ya’ll better get that worked out because that sounds ridiculous.” Another detention officer overheard the story and said, “You talking about that drunk girl covered in glitter?” I shook my head; I did not know what they were talking about. I was moved to the holding cell where I actually met a young woman who was covered in glitter. No one suspected her of being a terrorist.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Revisiting the Color Red

When I began interviewing people for this project, I did not ask Oklahoma environmental activists: "Why do you stay in Oklahoma?" because I had been asked it many times before. When I am asked this question by people from outside of Oklahoma, I often feel like the question embodies Oklahoma shame. Would a person from California be asked this question? However, after having long conversations with research participants in which they detailed their experiences with repression, most research participants told me why they stayed in Oklahoma without me asking. I came to realize that the narrative of "staying" has become a meaningful part of many Oklahoma progressives' understandings of themselves precisely because of the repression and alienation that we face. This narrative echoes the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity: struggle and resilience.

Research participants provided a variety of reasons for staying in Oklahoma. Many people said that they stay because they feel as though they have no other option, and leaving means leaving loved ones behind. Some of us stay because we find paradise in the colors and movements of the rolling prairie. I personally stay because my grandparents were born here and are buried here, buried down the road from my grandma's house. I stay because my niece and nephew will grow up here, and I want to be in their lives. However, many of my research participants expressed staying because they say that "you have to fight here, where it is hardest." Many activists describe staying because they perceive Oklahoma as a necessary battleground for progressives in the broader United States, and they take pride in being able to endure it. It is part of the

Oklahoma narrative: Oklahoma resilience, Oklahoma persistence. Many Oklahoma activists see themselves as the ones who fight despite the hardships. Activists acknowledge that Oklahoma is looked down upon by the rest of the U.S. The dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity and statehood both outside of Oklahoma and within shape how many progressive Oklahomans understand their own choice to stay in the state.

While the narrative of Oklahoma resilience persists within Oklahoma activist communities, many Oklahoma progressives do leave the state for various reasons. Some of us do not plan on staying. Some of us want out of Oklahoma. One of my research participants told me that they planned on leaving, while another believed and stated in an interview that at least part of the reason organizing is hard in Oklahoma is because "all the progressive people leave." However, "all" of the progressive people do not leave. Many of us stay. Oklahoma activists spend a great deal of time talking about staying in the state. Oklahoma poet and activist Lauren Zuniga expresses the need for people to stay in Oklahoma in a poem titled, "A Poem to Progressives Plotting Mass Exodus,"

> Do not let them drive you away.
> Here is where you are needed the most.
> Here is where the sunset stretches its arms wide as forgiveness across stolen plains.
> Here is where Clara Luper [11]sat down at the Katz lunch counter and asked to be served.
> Here is where black and white soldiers fought alongside each other for the first time.
> Where Kate Barnard [12]was elected before she could even vote.
> Where hippies squatted in Paseo until it became an art district.
> Here is where Charlie Christian [13]learned guitar.

[11] See Luper 1994.
[12] See Musslewhite 2003.
[13] See Goins 2005.

Where Wayne Coyne [14]keeps the bubble.
Where Woodrow Wilson Guthrie [15]played the harmonica for sandwiches.
Here is where the healing has to take place.
Tell them you are not moving.
Oklahoma is worth the wait.
Sometimes evolution feels like
the stinging cramp in the back of your knees when you grow too fast for your outdated bones.
Sometimes it feels like a house in the city
with three goats, 10 chickens and 12 wild kids.
Tear up the sidewalk.
Plant a garden.
Bake a squash casserole and invite
all your terrified neighbors over.
Say "As-Salamu alaykum" to everyone you meet.
Fill out all government forms in Español.
Check all the boxes for your race.
Ride your bike to work. Make art in the streets.
Feed people without a license.
Go to city council meetings.
Sit in at the state House and Senate.
Wear a purple boa. Don't apologize for your presence.
Write love letters to mothers and fathers in prison.
To the wardens, the police officers, the judges.
Write love letters to queer kids and their bullies.
Tell them you are staying here for THEM.
Kiss a Republican on the cheek.
Show them how to love someone you don't understand.
DO SOMETHING with that tight fist.
That broken heart.
That liberal mouth.
Progress is a series
of small bold moves.
Don't leave.
Here is where
we need you. (Zuniga 2010)

This poem has become an important work of art for many Oklahoma activists because it validates and sustains their work. Zuniga's poem highlights Oklahoma's activist past

[14] Wayne Coyne is the lead singer of the band The Flaming Lips. The band has gained national success, but Coyne continues to live in Oklahoma (Mecallef 2011). Many people are proud of the band's success and view it as a representation of Oklahoma success.
[15] See Kaufman 2011.

and asks Oklahoma progressives to stay here, "where you are needed most." As one of my research participants stated, "If you can't change Oklahoma, you can't change America." Emphasizing the importance of Oklahoma on the national stage, there is a lot of talk about the need for people to stay. People talk about "getting out." People talk about "fighting where your home is." We are encouraged to leave by some, asked to stay by others, and then asked, "Why do you stay?" The narrative of Oklahoma resilience underlies many of the discourses surrounding staying and going. Of all of the themes present in dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity, the themes of struggle and resilience are most clearly reproduced by environmental activists. It is difficult not to reproduce these narratives because in many ways living in Oklahoma is difficult. I have begun several chapters of this thesis with a personal story; almost all of these stories are stories of hardship. I have described my family's personal struggle with cancer, tornadoes, repression, and the KKK. Additionally, I have emphasized activist narratives that frame the Land Runs and the dominance of the oil and gas industry as sites of conflict and difficulty. The dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity and history frames the Land Runs and the energy industry as resilience; whereas, activists frame the oil and gas industry as one of the many hardships in Oklahoma that we must employ Oklahoma resilience to overcome.

Dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity shape experiences of Oklahoma life. These narratives are informed and reinforced by the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma. Dominant historical narratives and contemporary discourses of what it means to be Oklahoman are bound up in the oil and gas industry. Environmental activists highlight counter-narratives in order to amplify multiple ways of being Oklahoman and

experiencing Oklahoma life. These counter-narratives act in Oklahoma by creating a space in which activism and action can be understood as part of an enduring counter-narrative of Oklahoma identity. Repression in the state works to challenge and suppress Oklahoma counter-narratives and preserve dominant discourses of Oklahoma identity and experience. Narratives, histories, and experiences that do not fit within the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity are often silenced or erased.

As in many places, historical narratives shape experiences of Oklahoma life today. Dominant narratives of the past and present are discursively linked through the reproduction of the idea that the oil and gas industry is tied to notions of Oklahoma identity. Oklahoma history draws on symbolism of heroic, enterprising colonialists and pioneers involved in oil exploration. The dominant narrative of Oklahoma history centers three main themes: oil and gas as progress, resilience, and a benefit to all. The history of oil and gas as it is framed in dominant narratives of Oklahoma history make the oil and gas industry seem inevitable because energy production is framed as intrinsically part of Oklahoma history. Historical narratives and media rhetoric frame petroleum exploitation as part of Oklahoma culture that is not only inevitable, but for many has come to be a part of Oklahoma identity and resilience.

Oklahoma state identity draws on and reframes themes reproduced throughout the United States, especially in "the West": the rugged individual, the frontier, and resilience. In the Oklahoma context, the rugged individual takes multiple forms, most especially in discourses of the "Wildcatter", the "Sooner", the "Squaw Man", and the "Oilman." The frontier becomes everlasting and renewable because Oklahoma is portrayed as "wild" and untamable. This occurs through discourses of hardship.

Tornadoes and drought or “The Dust Bowl” are two examples of this. The bombing becomes part of this discourse through rhetoric that frames “The Bombing” as an Oklahoma hardship that highlights Oklahoma resilience. Media sources and governmental projects repeatedly frame “The Dust Bowl” and “The Bombing” as being evidence of Oklahoma resilience. The example of “The Guardian” that stands above the Capitol building is but one example of this. Historical narratives and media rhetoric often identify the energy industry as a source of Oklahoma resilience in the face of these hardships. These narratives of identity are reproduced through rhetoric, symbols, and performance in everyday Oklahoma life.

These dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity and history fail to fully represent the multiple ways in which different groups of people understand and relate to Oklahoma. Among their efforts, environmental activists work to highlight counter-narratives of Oklahoma identity situating themselves in relationship to enduring counter-narratives of Oklahoma identity. Oklahoma activists employ historical narratives, art, and music to amplify counter-narratives of Oklahoma experience. Oklahoma activists draw on narratives of past resistance: Black Fox nuclear power plant protests, Karen Silkwood, the Green Corn Rebellion, and oil worker unions.

Rather than allowing resistance to be painted as un-Oklahoman, activists’ counter-narratives inspire action and situate activist endeavors within an enduring legacy of Oklahoma activism. Utilizing direct-action, community organizing, and religious discourses, activists challenge the dominance of the oil and gas industry in the state and counter dominant narratives of the oil and gas industry. Anti-tar sands, anti-fracking, and climate justice activists employ multiple strategize to resist the dominance

of the oil and gas industry. One activist explained to me that they felt victorious after doing direct-action because they proved Harold Hamm wrong when he said that environmental protests do not occur in Oklahoma because more people are getting rich here (Dokoupil 2013). This activist emphasized that an important outcome of direct action was countering dominant narratives of Oklahoma. Activists in Oklahoma are both inspired by and inspiring action.

To suppress both counter-narratives and the actions inspired by them, those who benefit from the dominant narratives actively seek to repress Oklahoma activists. The relationship between the oil and gas industry and dominant narratives of Oklahoma identity relate to cultural control, social control, and the persistence of multiple forms of repression. Dominant narratives of Oklahoma history and identity display social control and act as a controlling process that maintains industry power and subjugates activist narratives in Oklahoma. Repression takes multiple forms: academic silencing, surveillance, infiltration, and alienation from friends and loved ones. Accounts of these forms of repression circulate among activists which in turn shape the kinds of actions that activists are willing to take. Repression and cultural control influences conflict within environmental activist communities. This occurs in at least three ways; the hegemonic narrative of Oklahoma identity informs activists' perceptions of *themselves* and *others*, activists fear infiltration so they exclude certain people from decision making bodies, and activists from outside of Oklahoma do not fully understand the complex context of Oklahoma resistance.

While writing my thesis, I received news of both the indictment and death of Chesapeake Energy founder and former-CEO Aubrey McClendon. On March 2, 2016,

McClendon died in a single car crash less than 24 hours after he was indicted for allegedly conspiring to rig bids for oil and natural gas leases. Suicide has been hinted at, but very few media outlets have openly used the word. After his death, the charges were dropped and news headlines began celebrating the life of McClendon as a "Visionary." Headlines include "How Aubrey McClendon Led Today's Energy Revolution" (Gold 2016), "Pioneering Oklahoma Energy CEO dies in fiery crash" (Murphy 2016), and "Remembering Aubrey McClendon" (Jackson 2016) to name a few. All of these headlines draw on and contribute to the dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity. By alluding to McClendon as a "Visionary" and "Pioneer" that "Led Today's Energy Revolution," media rhetoric continues the discourse of oil and gas as a form of progress, resilience, and a benefit to all, despite the economic downturn that Oklahoma is experiencing because of the recent "Bust." The day after McClendon's death Chesapeake Energy's stocks climbed 26%, a significant increase considering the current bust in oil and gas development.

In the wake of these developments, I kept hearing one of my research participant's statements replay in my head, "They are Oklahoma elites, and their legacy is everything to them. And, their reputation is everything to them, and they tend to be incredibly narcissistic. And, you know we had concerns of what they might possibly do to protect their legacy." This activist described fear for their own life and safety because of their activism. With evidence from the crash suggesting suicide, McClendon appears to have been willing to take his own life to protect his legacy. Oklahoma media does not accept this evidence as an admission of guilt. Rather, the media has focused on the life and legacy of McClendon as a "Visionary." McClendon swerved into a wall in broad

daylight going over the speed limit without his seatbelt on hours after he was indicted for stealing from Oklahoma people. Oklahomans who defend the "Sooner" slogan claim that the word no longer represents thievery of land. However, the media has celebrated the life and legacy of McClendon despite the allegations that he stole land from Oklahomans. Bid rigging oil leases results in acquiring land for lesser sums of money than the land is worth. Following the "Sooner," the oil and gas industry continues to celebrate rugged individualism despite the laws and rules which are broken through endeavors to profit from land acquisition and resource extraction.

On March 9th, 2016, the Oklahoma Gazette, a free arts and entertainment weekly publication, printed a political cartoon featuring the image of Aubrey McClendon sitting on a cloud in heaven looking over Oklahoma City. McClendon's gifts to the city are depicted: The Thunder basketball team, The Food Bank, and the river trails. Beneath the cartoon are the letters to the editor, one of which the paper titled, "Sen. 'Stupid." The author from Wilmington, North Carolina wrote:

> I've never been to Oklahoma, but I've seen pictures. It looks like a nice place. I'm sure the state has plenty of smart, thoughtful people living there.
> That's why I have to scratch my head about how you folks keep electing Jim Inhofe your U.S. Senator, a man who bases his denial of climate change on the breathtakingly stupid premise that the activities of man can't change the climate. Based on that comfortable notion, we could all just spew whatever we want into the air and dump whatever we want in the water, because, after all, nothing we can do will have any ill effect.
>
> That's almost as stupid as the idea that each person's vote won't have any effect on the outcome of an election.
>
> Or that one person can't make an entire state look foolish. (Wilson 2016)

The letter reproduces the national narrative that Okies are backwards or stupid. The author displays a lack of understanding of the power and the persuasion of the oil and

gas industry in Oklahoma life. Inhofe has received $1,961,329 in campaign contributions from the energy industry (Oil Change International 2016). Elected officials in Oklahoma typically represent the interests of oil and gas as though they were the interests of the people. Because oil and gas is portrayed as a part of Oklahoma identity, challenges to the dominance of the oil and gas industry are scrutinized or obscured by politicians. The juxtaposition of this letter with the cartoon praising an oil and gas tycoon reveals a contradiction in Oklahoma discourses on electoral politics and industrial power, a contradiction that facilitates the industry's dominance in the state.

Considering how Oklahoma is repeatedly oversimplified through rhetoric, it is necessary that activists both within and outside of the state of Oklahoma who wish to influence Oklahoma politics are careful to consider the complex history of Oklahoma. Counter-narratives and action within Oklahoma cannot be fully understood outside of the context of dominant narratives of Oklahoma history and identity in relation to the oil and gas industry. During the course of my fieldwork, Oklahoma activists provided a great deal of advice for future activist movements in Oklahoma. This advice centered on five main ideas: listen to people and respect difference, share knowledge and power, build communities and get organized, practice self-care, and let go of Oklahoma shame.

Environmental activists in Oklahoma acknowledged that they at times struggled to fairly represent and relate to people from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. In interviews, activists suggested that organizational bodies work to consciously gain knowledge and respect differences in experience. Activists who held relatively less power in activists' spaces felt like knowledge and skills were withheld from them. This happened when men refused to share skills with women and queer

people. It also occurred when white people did not fully acknowledge the contributions of Indigenous people and people of color. Additionally, many younger activists and older activists both felt as though they were not fully shared with or that they could have done better to share skills and listen. One activist expressed this stating,

> "I think that people that have been doing this a long time, the seniors in the movements and that have been there, done it, during the 60s and 70s. They need to be much more interested in mentoring the people and letting the younger ones be the face and help guide them versus being slightly jealous and angry and upset."

This activist described the need for experienced activists to share skills, but also, identifies jealousy as one of the reasons why activists withhold power. Activists repeatedly described internal group conflict because certain individuals received more media attention than others. Many activists acknowledged that this was related to media like-ability, so activists pointed out that typically spokespeople held relative privilege in groups. However, one activist suggested that more effective organizing and skill-sharing would help address this conflict. This activist believed that identifying and collectively deciding on a specific spokesperson would help alleviate feelings of jealousy.

Another activist further argued for better organization and community building. This activist stated that "door knocking… knowing who everyone is, following up with one-on-ones, trying to identify leaders along the pipeline route and extending that into different communities," would have made the anti-Keystone XL movement stronger in Oklahoma. Some activists that I interviewed stated that they would have liked to more effectively organize, but they struggled with self-care. This was particularly true of activists with GPTSR, many of whom ate food mostly from dumpsters and lived out of

vehicles because they had no secure funding base. In order to organize around the pipeline full-time, they could not work full-time. An activist explained that it is "very discouraging to be hungry and to be cold and to be alienated all at the same time and wonder if it's worth it." Activists argued that environmental activists need to build long-term organizing projects with funding bases outside of the oil and gas industry. Activists argued that we should practice better self-care. One activist stated, "like taking time to go beautiful places that you are trying to protect and spend actual time in those places and with each other."

The last suggestion that Okie activists made was letting go of Oklahoma shame. An activist with GPTSR advised Oklahoma activists to be more vocal and to find confidence in the knowledge that they hold. This activist stated, "I think if I had advice I would go back, and I would tell the Okies to speak up… Don't be afraid. If they don't get it, then they don't get it, and they should go." Through activism, many Oklahoma environmental activists found pride in being from Oklahoma and viewed their unique standpoint as an organizational advantage. By letting go of Oklahoma shame, Oklahoma activists can more effectively organize and contribute to activist projects in Oklahoma and the United States more broadly.

Re-Imagining Oklahoma

Part of letting go of Oklahoma Shame requires understanding Oklahoma as a complex and diverse place. The dominant narrative of Oklahoma identity, constructed in relationship to the oil and gas industry, does not fully represent the multiple lived experiences of many people in Oklahoma. Dunbar-Ortiz explores the complexity of Oklahoma experience through the symbolism of the color red. She explains that

Oklahoma is characterized as a "red state," or a politically conservative place; however, when she wrote her memoir Red Dirt: Growing Up Okie, the reductive and totalizing "red state" label did not yet exist. Dunbar-Ortiz chose her title to reflect three other meanings: "the red soil in Canadian County," her descent from "the 'Redman" forcibly relocated to Oklahoma, and her relationship to the "Reds," socialists and Wobblies that resided in Oklahoma in early statehood (Dunbar-Ortiz 2007: 229). Dunbar-Ortiz writes, "That is where the irony comes in: Oklahoma has gone from 'Red' to 'red" (Dunbar-Ortiz 2007: 229).

Contemporary national narratives of Oklahoma characterize Oklahoma as a very "red state," meaning politically conservative. In 2008, Oklahoma was the only state in which every county voted Republican, making the entire state solid red in election maps. Zuniga writes of Oklahoma progressives struggling in the conservative political climate, "You resent even the dirt for being so damn red" (Zuniga 2010). While the dominant discourse of "red-ness" has changed, Oklahoma activists attempt to continue the legacy of progressive-ism in the state. Multiple meanings and interpretations of the color "red" still exist. However, repression within the state makes it difficult for activists to organize and effectively challenge dominant narratives of statehood and identity. The work of Oklahoma environmental activists in both illuminating and continuing the legacy of Oklahoma counter-narratives is an act of resistance that challenges and expands the definition of what it means to be "Okie." These re-imaginings empower action by situating activism in relationship to an enduring counter-narrative of Oklahoma resilience. Environmental activists challenge people to consider the complexity and significance of Oklahoma as a place.

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