

OIL CULTURE

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and
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editors

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Gendering Oil

Tracing Western Petrosexual Relations

SHEENA WILSON

By employing a feminist lens to “follow the oil” and trace “the webs of relations and cultural meanings through which oil is imagined as a ‘vital’ and ‘strategic’ resource,”¹ I wish to interrogate the relationship between human rights and gender and racial equality and the petro-discourses that are newly oriented around ecology in our contemporary moment.² As with many cultural transformations and their associated ideological turns, women’s relationship to oil, to the environment, and to the petrocultures of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the West is portrayed in the mainstream media in a limited number of largely superficial ways: first, through embedded feminism and women’s rights as they intersect with human and ethno-cultural rights; second, through consumerism; and third, through the recuperation of the female body as a canvas on which to spectacularize politics—largely with explicit consumer aims.

The latter half of this article focuses on representations that either neutralize or trivialize women’s political and economic relationship to oil, through an analysis of the Ethical Oil media campaign that began in 2010 in Canada, a Beyond Petroleum commercial of the early millennium, the *Vogue Italia*’s August 2010 fashion spread called “Water & Oil,” and the general discourse about eco-fashion and greening beauty regimes. These instances demonstrate the way women’s identities have been intentionally constructed to naturalize a particular relationship between Western women and oil. The narratives and gender constructs that inform many advertising and fashion images also function to undermine contemporary women’s more serious engagements with the environment, and as such contribute to a broader array of cultural, rhetorical, and legal efforts currently under way to criminalize environmentalists

and activists in legislation as well as in the popular media.³ The first half of this essay discusses the media reception of two examples of contemporary women's environmental activism—the Idle No More protests in Canada and Chief Theresa Spence's subsequent hunger strike in December 2012 and January 2013—in order to establish the cultural and ideological context in which recent representations of women and oil intervene. By examining these forms of activism, I will show how Aboriginal women's political activism in the context of mainstream media is reconstructed to the detriment of the resistance movements and to other community members—namely, Aboriginal men and youth, who risk being constructed as terrorists in discourses of petro-violence.

CHIEF THERESA SPENCE AND IDLE NO MORE:

PETROPOLITICS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TERRORIST

In the current dominant discourses circulating in Canada and the Western world, environmental messages are acceptable when they are controlled and shaped by petro-invested governments, industry organizations, and corporations. These environmental messages articulate concerns about health and safety, environmental stewardship, and performance, all within the context of a neoliberal discourse of increasing expansion and exploitation of resources. Within this paradigm, environmentalism, environmentalists, environmental science, and scientists—especially women and minority citizens acting on behalf of environmental agendas—become the targets of media attack, perceived not only as potential obstacles to oil extraction but also as threats to the proliferation of capitalism itself, since oil and capitalism are imagined as symbiotic.

In our contemporary moment, environmental activists are increasingly constructed as environmental terrorists, both through counterterrorism units and associated mainstream discourses. In Canada, on February 9, 2012, the federal government responded to left-leaning environmental movements resisting oil sands extraction through a sliding semantics that identified these groups and their actors as terrorists. The government-authored report, "Building Resilience Against Terrorism: Canada's Counter-terrorism Strategy," contends that "although not of the same scope and scale faced by other countries, low-level violence by domestic issue-based groups remains a reality in Canada. Such extremism tends to be based on grievances—real or perceived—revolving around the promotion of various causes such as animal rights, white supremacy, environmentalism, and anti-capitalism."⁴ By May 1, 2012, Canadian environment minister Peter Kent had also used criminalizing rhetoric to characterize the activities of Canadian environmental groups, claiming that these organizations had been used "to launder offshore foreign funds for inappropriate use against Canadian interest."⁵ And, as Aboriginal communities have begun to mount more organized protests against the

infringement of their treaty rights that are linked to issues of environmental protection and that include barricades and other forms of demonstration, it is important to remain cognizant of what feminist scholar Heather M. Turcotte has already identified as the slippages within “academic and state representations of petro-terrorists, petro-gangs, and victims of gender violence . . . that produce the figure of the petro-terrorist-gang-member” for public consumption and foreign policy.”⁶ It is imperative to consider how these discourses use conflicting representations of women and of feminism in the West that have ramifications not only for women in Western petrocultures but also for ethno-cultural communities and other marginalized groups.

Media and advertising tactics performed to minimize women’s relationship to the environment are in direct contrast to the very serious involvements of women actively engaged in environmental movements in Canada and around the world. Robert R. M. Verchick, for example, points out that many of the “most visible and effective environmental justice organizations are led by and consist mainly of women. . . . Thus, while ‘environmental justice’ describes an environmental movement and a civil rights movement, it also describes a *women’s* movement . . . a *feminist* movement.”⁷ In Canada, as around the world, a significant percentage of female environmental activists are women of color or women from minority communities—especially Aboriginal women who are disproportionately impacted by environmental changes.

In her work on the Niger Delta, for example, Heather Turcotte has found that women in petropolitics are typically invoked only as objects of law who struggle against violence in their communities. She theorizes that activist women are naturalized as mothers and grandmothers in mainstream discourses—maternal protectors of the environment “rationalized as unpolitical and external to the political economy.”⁸ She argues that women’s protests are rearticulated “in ways that omit deeper histories of interconnected state violence and women’s anti-imperialist engagements with state power.”⁹ By contrast, racialized men are constructed as “terrorists” when active in these same petro-resistance movements that are sometimes initiated or led by women.¹⁰

The Idle No More movement went public at a November 10, 2012, Saskatoon teach-in organized by four women activists—Nina Wilson, Sheelah McLean, Sylvia McAdam, and Jessica Gordon. These activists were concerned about the effects of a Harper government omnibus bill C-45 that infringed on Aboriginal rights.¹¹ Nonviolent political events then proliferated across the country and around the world. Chief Theresa Spence of the Attawapiskat band in northern Ontario intensified public attention when she endured a forty-four-day hunger strike between December 11, 2012, and January 24, 2013. These two actions, often conflated, led to broad public discussion of environmental and Aboriginal issues. Idle No More continues to gain momentum. Chief Spence has made headlines fighting for better educational opportunities

and living standards for her community since she became a chief in 2006. In spite of this, the media configures her in a formulaic manner—as an incompetent and possibly corrupt politician. Alternatively, as part of the recent petro-political resistance, she is for the most part a symbolic figure. Media attention tends to confine her principled political activism to health-related issues related to dietary regimes rather than to the long traditions of nonviolent civil disobedience and the hunger strike in particular. Twelve of the thirteen demands that she made to the Canadian government have been largely overwritten. Only one demand became highly visible: her desire to meet with Prime Minister Harper and Governor General David Johnston. This became the subject of much public debate and deflected focus from the issues at the heart of Spence's protest, positioning her as somewhat obstinate. Like the Idle No More movement, the remainder of Spence's concerns were centered on the omnibus bills C-38 and C-45, which undermine aspects of Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution, and Aboriginal treaty rights and ways of life in Canada. However, they were rarely, if ever, fully explained by the media.

Meanwhile, the mainstream media provided space for male Aboriginal leaders to declare that “It's time for the men to step up.”¹² And the political discord within the Aboriginal movement and its leadership was given significant attention. This media focus rhetorically constructs Aboriginal struggles and debates as signs of the inability to organize and an ethno-cultural group turning in on itself—as opposed to the very common leadership conflicts any group faces when dealing with political issues. The Idle No More youth movement that Chief Spence inspired is currently being undermined through reports that its leaders “appear to have little control over the direction of the movement,” and as of the end of January 2013 the movement itself is being increasingly linked to violence:¹³ violence initiated by “aggressive elements within the existing [A]boriginal leadership structure” and violence against Aboriginals that rhetorically blames the victims for stirring up racist reaction.¹⁴ Newspaper headlines read, “PM Harper believes Idle No More movement creating ‘negative public reaction,’ say confidential notes.”¹⁵ The gang-rape of an Aboriginal woman in Thunder Bay, Ontario, on December 27, 2012, which initially received minimal attention from mainstream media, was finally reported on *The Current*, a major Canadian radio broadcast on January 25, but it was contextualized by an introduction that places the onus on the movement and not on the history of colonialism and racism: “Idle No More is inflaming long-standing tensions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. In Thunder Bay, police investigate a possible hate crime and the mayor regrets that his plan to keep people safe has failed.”¹⁶ This rape is relevant to the Idle No More movement because, as it was reported, “During the attack the men allegedly told the victim it wasn't the first time they had committed this type of crime and ‘it wouldn't

be the last.' She [the victim] told police they [the attackers] also told her, 'You Indians deserve to lose your treaty rights,' making reference to the recent Idle No More events in Thunder Bay.¹⁷ This attack and another alleged "starlight tour" reported in the CBC broadcast,¹⁸ while part of a long history of violence against Aboriginal women and men, are now inspiring fear in Aboriginal communities and being used to suggest that youth might be safest distancing themselves from the activism of the Idle No More movement.¹⁹ The violated female body, in association with the Idle No More movement, functions to spectacularize and market petro-violence to the media-consuming public as a reaction to the Idle No More resistance movement rather than as endemic to the legacies of colonial logic, human rights abuses, and gender-sexual violence on which Western petrostates are founded. This is but one manifestation of how the appropriation of women's political power can create dangerous outcomes for entire communities. The foundations for these practices are outlined in the following section, which analyzes how the frameworks of consumerism and embedded feminism have defined women's relationships to oil in such a way as to naturalize imperial and neoliberal agendas.

WESTERN PETROCULTURES, WOMEN, AND MINORITIES

The histories of feminism and oil are intertwined.²⁰ In the century and a half since oil's potential as a major energy source was first discovered and harnessed, a world oil industry has emerged to transform the distribution of world power between nations, the everyday lived reality of all citizens of the Western world, and increasingly the daily experience of people across the globe. The age of oil in the West is virtually synchronous with the women's rights movement:²¹ after similar periods of development, both the oil industry and the Western women's rights movements had gained significant momentum by the early twentieth century. In this same moment, photography began to be used as a tool to construct new feminine identities for the public imaginary that have promoted certain concepts of beauty, domesticity and housewifery, motherhood, personal and family hygiene, and women's autonomy. Alternately affirming and contesting these concepts, women's rights movements and women's lives have transformed over the last century of the age of oil; many of these transformations can be attributed directly to industrialization and the petroleum-related innovations that came to define gender dynamics and gender roles in Western petroculture(s). The age of oil is rife with ironies that have resulted in both feminist advances as well as the reinforcement of long-standing patriarchal conceptualizations of woman as object and as property, popularized through the pervasiveness of the female image as it has been recuperated by capitalist, consumerist, neoliberal discourses of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

There are a number of visual and rhetorical tropes that position women's relationships to oil—particularly Western, white, middle- and upper-class women's relationships—in consumer terms. These tropes build on historical practices that have linked women to social and cultural developments by targeting them as consumer and as commodity—the “consumer consumed.” Women have long been identified as major consumers of petroleum products—fashion products being one example. “Ecofeminism” in mainstream popular media has come to be signified by reductive and trivial issues. Magazine and new-media headlines ask questions such as “Are you a Green Beauty?” “What’s your clothing’s footprint?” and “Are you an eco-fashionista?”²² Advice is given about “How to Go Green: Fashion and Beauty.”²³ In the Western cultural practice of reducing women's social engagement to consumerism and the neo-liberal practice of Starbucks logic, as Slavoj Žižek has called it, consumerism and social justice are collapsed into one act through “products that contain the claim of being politically progressive acts in and of themselves . . . [and in which] political action and consumption become fully merged.”²⁴ And this logic—Starbucks logic—expresses itself in gendered ways. Specifically in relationship to petroleum and oil, this logic reinforces patriarchal social, political, and economic norms.

This consumerist logic is neither new nor restricted to a surface resistance of oil and the petroleum industry. Similar instances might include anti-animal testing labels on cosmetic products, or the grunge movement's ironic or distorted cultural refraction of the global antipoverty movements of the last several decades, whereby designers sell a spectacle of scarcity. These trends disguise consumption as political awareness or even activism and elide discussion of the more systemic and infrastructural processes that imbricate oil, our capitalist economy, and our culture in ways that are much more complex to untangle than simply purchasing petroleum-free mascara.

This practice of both objectifying women, particularly middle- and upper-class white women, as consumable products and supposedly empowering them as consumers themselves, through fashion and beauty products, translates into a performance of political engagement both as the eco-fashionista with a *green* wardrobe and *green* cosmetic bag and as the often dehumanized object onto which social resistance is draped, projected, and performed as a commercial strategy in the guise of political resistance. Western women's relationships to petroleum have been constructed in the social imaginary as a site of spectacle through which resistance to petroculture is signified yet undercut.

CANADA AND THE ETHICAL OIL BILLBOARD CAMPAIGN:
GENDER, SEXUAL RELATIONS, AND COLONIALISM AS PETRO-DISCOURSES
Ezra Levant, a conservative Canadian media personality, published the book *Ethical Oil: The Case for Canada's Oil Sands* in 2010.²⁵ This book promotes a right wing,

pro-Canadian-oil-sands vision for the country. In fact, Levant was at one time, around the new millennium, a political candidate in the same party as Stephen Harper—current prime minister of Canada.²⁶ Furthermore, Levant uses polemical and prejudiced vocabulary to characterize foreign interests and the nationals of multiple countries. In fact, Levant has a history of publishing pejorative material.²⁷ Furthermore, the book targets certain ethnic groups within Canada, including Aboriginals. The rhetoric first promoted by this book has been sustained through a website, EthicalOil.org, started by Alykhan Velshi. In 2011, Ethical Oil also ran a media campaign that included billboards and television commercials (also made available online). The campaign explicitly rebranded Canadian oil/tar sands oil as an ethical source of oil.²⁸ This is relevant at this particular historical moment because it, at least temporarily, reoriented the public debate in Canada away from a discussion of the environment and toward a discussion of oil's foundational and integral role in Canadian national identity, by fetishizing oil as a national resource linked to Canadian pioneerism and innovation, ingenuity, and integrity, as well as Canada's international reputation as a liberal democratic peace-keeping nation with an excellent human rights record.²⁹

The campaign links what are apparently disparate issues in ways that rely on the preexisting sociocultural fetishization of oil as a thing, with powers that make it capable of changing the nation. In this case, the Ethical Oil campaign imbues the oil sands with the potential to redirect power toward good and ethical ends—the propagation of multiculturalism, for example, or the advancement of the Canadian dream, a ubiquitous myth linking economic expansion with personal and financial fulfillment. Playing on historical identity tropes and the myth of the Canadian nation, Levant simply affirms what Canadians wish to believe about themselves, and he does so by weaving oil into the social, political, and economic fabric of the nation.

These popular beliefs about multiculturalism and racial and gender equality became the focal point of the Ethical Oil billboard and television campaign of 2011, which employs images meant to represent foreign female nationals, as well as white and nonwhite Canadian women, as a strategy to reinscribe oil into the nation myth. The concept of saving foreign women in this campaign invokes a power-discourse that rhetorically positions and visually reinforces for all Canadians the narrative myth of nation whereby Canadians are benevolent, tolerant, democratic protectors of human rights. One of the billboards juxtaposes the images of two women. The image on the left of the billboard appears under a red-banner heading that reads "Conflict Oil" with a secondary red-banner message, "Conflict Oil Countries: Women Stoned to Death," superimposed over the black-and-white image of a burka-clad woman who is being buried alive in preparation for stoning. The image on the right half of the billboard is a color photo of the graduation-gown-clad female mayor of Fort McMurray, the

largest urban center in the oil sands region of Northern Alberta.³⁰ Her picture appears under the green-banner message “Ethical Oil” and the second green-banner message superimposed over the middle of the image reads “Canada’s Oil Sands: Woman Elected Mayor.” Her identity is emphasized in the fine print in the bottom right-hand corner of the graduation photo that reads “Mayor Melissa Blake.” By contrast, the woman in the left-hand photo is not similarly identified. According to various sources, this image dates back to either the 1970s or 1980s, and the female subject is an Iranian woman. However, the billboard itself provides no such context.³¹ This burka-clad woman simply stands in as a synecdoche for the perceived oppression of women in Muslim areas of the world. The visual rhetoric of this billboard not only situates foreign women in a position of victimization whereby they must be rescued,³² a form of embedded feminism whereby women’s rights are used to justify foreign policy, often in the form of political or military intervention by Western nations into the affairs of Eastern nations—but it also validates the status of Western women. In this paradigm, women’s liberation from traditional private-sphere roles becomes the only evidence required or necessary to demonstrate the superior status and civilization of Western nations, despite the ongoing feminist struggles of women in the twenty-first-century West.

This billboard promotes a variation on the themes of embedded feminism and consumerism as social justice. At the bottom of the billboard, another green-banner message reads, “Ethical Oil. A Choice We Have to Make.” The color codes of red and green make evident that viewers are being encouraged to choose—or rather that they have no choice but to choose—Canadian oil-sands oil for ethical reasons that link Canadian Oil, by proxy, to women’s rights. The billboard is not a direct call for war or invasion in the name of women’s rights, although one could easily argue that it is a tentative step toward that, as political-media attention has increasingly highlighted tensions with Iran over its nuclear program and “the threat posed by Iran to Middle Eastern oil supplies”;³³ however, as a reaction to women’s oppression, it calls for embargo, even if only at the level of individual consumer choice. The use of the Iranian woman’s image is an example of what Turcotte theorizes as the “uncritical representation of gender violence in other geopolitical locales [that suppresses] the state’s simultaneous and daily consumption and violation of women for its own nation-building practices.”³⁴ The use of the foreign burka-clad woman is part of a larger rhetorical practice that fails to read and understand exceptional moments of gender violence in Other contexts as such, and instead invokes these images of violence against women because they sustain the Western narratives of foreign-woman-as-victim. As Turcotte argues in regards to the United States, locating violence against women in other places “obscures and denies the dismal histories of gender and sexual

violence endemic to the United States”—or, as I would argue, in the West in general—and the “consequent ‘rescue narratives’ demand victimized ‘third world women’ . . . must be saved from ‘ethnic’ perpetrators.”³⁵ In the Canadian context, the Ethical Oil campaign is written into an accepted history of petropolitics that justified the suppression of Other peoples (domestically and internationally) and the invasion of foreign nations—for the purpose of gaining control of petroleum resources—by invoking the national myth of Canada as a defender of human rights. This billboard implies, through its false logic, that Canadians can choose continued security and freedom not only for Canadian women but also for foreign women by supporting Canadian oil. Resisting the oil sands industry, within this visual rhetorical frame, becomes akin to supporting female repression in other regimes, to supporting terrorism as it has been loosely defined in the post-9/11 era, and to forsaking the advances of Western feminist movements. The consumer “choice” provided by the artificially constructed parameters of this campaign justifies the perpetuation of Western oil-consuming lifestyles driven by current petro-economies as a strategy to shift the discussion away from environmentally focused critiques of the oil sands industry and its planned expansion.

Considering this billboard campaign within the context established by the book *Ethical Oil: The Case for Canada's Oil Sands*, with its blatantly racist, imperialist, and sexist language, adds another layer of meaning to the visuals. Take, for example, the billboard that juxtaposes the image of a beautiful and smiling Aboriginal woman dressed in oil-rig garb: her head tilted and looking beatifically upward to the left from under an Esso hardhat, protective industrial eyewear, earmuffs, and overalls. The green-banner messages read “Ethical Oil” and “Canada's Oil Sands: Aboriginals Employed.” This is juxtaposed with the red-banner messages of “Conflict Oil” and “Sudan's Oil Fields: Indigenous Peoples Killed” superimposed on the image of militiamen walking through the desert with a human skull in the forefront of the image. The Aboriginal woman's presence in the billboard campaign appropriates her identity at two levels. Her sexuality and ethnicity are employed simultaneously as a tool of erasure in at least two ways: by preempting potential criticism of the rampant gender inequality in the oil industry by creating a simplified visual claim that women do benefit financially from oil-field employment; and by undermining the ongoing collective criticism and resistance against oil industry expansionism coming from Aboriginal communities in Northern Alberta and elsewhere in Canada. This image visually reinforces Levant's scathing criticism of Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) resistance to the oil sands as hypocritical and unjustified because he claims that the oil industry provides jobs and fiscal return for Aboriginal communities.³⁶ This image of the young Aboriginal woman reinvents the Canadian oil industry, and by proxy

Canada itself, as a site of gender equality, in contrast to the alleged misogyny and sexism found in other countries. The image also aims to create doubts about the pervasiveness of anti-oil sands attitudes among Aboriginal peoples, and to raise questions around the legitimacy of these communities to resist treaty breeches that disrupt traditional practices on Aboriginal lands. However, by this same economic logic, all citizens of the global West, if not the entire world, can be silenced into complicity due to the way petroleum has shaped our daily lives and the global economy. This is not the case, nor should it be, in light of increasing evidence of environmental impact that has inspired a demand for change from across the political spectrum. Nevertheless, this oversimplified visual and rhetorical strategy attempts to weaken public sympathy for Aboriginal resistance against the environmental impacts of the oil industry.

Prior to and during the period of the Ethical Oil billboard campaign, a number of Aboriginal communities publicly resisted industrial encroachment on their land and exposed the impacts of air, water, and land pollution in the area of Northern Alberta. There were also a number of environmental groups and activists making headlines with their anti-tar sands protests both in Canada and around the world at the time of the campaign. Rather than address these issues that involve both human rights and environmental concerns within Canada, the Ethical Oil campaign resituates petro-violence and human rights abuses outside the Canadian context. Situating the Aboriginal body—both the beautiful female in the “Aboriginals Employed” billboard as well as the ethnic male, potentially Aboriginal, in the “Good Jobs” billboard discussed below—within the neoliberal infrastructure of the petroleum industry serves to erase the invisibilized Indigenous body that resists the oil sands and the oil industry. In doing so, petro-protests that demand social and eco-justice can be redefined as petro-violence. The activists in these movements are also easily reinscribed as terrorists.³⁷

The racist underpinnings of the appropriation of the Aboriginal female figure and Aboriginal identities in general become even more explicit within the context of the other stereotypical and reductive billboard messages in the campaign. First is a billboard that, on the left, declares “Conflict Oil” and “Dictatorship” over a collage of the flags of Saudi Arabia and Iran, with faint superimposed images of Ayatollah Khomeini and President Ahmadinejad overlaid on the flag of Iran, all contrasted against the message on the right side of the billboard that features the Canadian flag flying behind green-banner messages of “Ethical Oil” and “Democracy.” Another billboard represents the dichotomy of the red-banner messages, “Conflict Oil” and “Forced Labour,” with an image of Hugo Chavez, versus the green-banner messages of “Ethical Oil” and “Good Jobs” visually supported by the image of a young pleasant-looking man, quite possibly Aboriginal. Yet another billboard presents the idea of “Conflict Oil” and “Degradation” illustrated with an image of a black man walking through a muddy or

oily field gesturing toward a large fire burning in the background, likely in the Niger Delta, which is then contrasted with the green-banner messages of “Ethical Oil” and “Reforestation” and the image of someone standing in a wooded area—possibly meant to represent one of the people responsible for the Syncrude reforestation project in Northern Alberta. Yet another set of red-banner messages reads “Conflict Oil” and “Funds Terrorism,” juxtaposing a photograph of the back of someone’s head, clad in a Saudi-Arabian keffiyeh and looking into the distance at an oil rig, with the adjacent green-banner messages “Ethical Oil” and “Funds Peacekeeping” superimposed on the image of a Canadian peace-keeping monument. Photographed from below so as to heighten its majestic appearance, this sculpture is silhouetted against a blue sky and accompanied by a Canadian flag blowing in the wind. A final billboard pairs “Conflict Oil” and “Persecution” substantiated by the image of two blindfolded men being prepared for hanging, on the left, paralleled by the green-banner message on the right-hand side that reads “Ethical Oil” and “Pride” visually substantiated by two interlocking male hands, clasped together, each with a rainbow bracelet at the wrist.

In these simplistic binary arguments, the Ethical Oil campaign reveals the gendered and racialized messages that have been naturalized as part of Canadian, and even Western, petrocultural narratives. Read together, the various billboard images situate in bas-relief the identity-based fantasies of the entire Ethical Oil campaign, whereby foreign women of color are figured as victims of horrific violence, Canadian Aboriginal women are recuperated as symbols of Western gender and ethnic equality and representatives of the progressive employment practices of the oil industry, and white Canadian women are celebrated as civic leaders and symbols of democracy. These images obfuscate the historical, ongoing systemic and cultural racism against First Nations peoples in Canada and overwrite the very low percentage of female politicians.³⁸ By focusing on gender-sexual violence and inequality elsewhere, the campaign accomplishes what Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg has identified as the practice of creating markets of violence for consumption that erases these issues within the nation-state.³⁹

BP TELEVISION COMMERCIAL: TRIVIALIZING WOMEN’S RELATIONSHIP TO OIL

The use of women’s images in the Canadian Ethical Oil campaign is one manifestation of a larger petrosexual discourse that recuperates the images and roles of Western women in reductive ways that trivialize women’s relationship to both oil and the environment. The ongoing cultural narrative defines women as either consumers or as bodies onto which politics can be projected and performed. Therefore, the popular media inundates women with a barrage of petroleum consumer products and services that they should wear, buy, or surgically implant; more recently, this also includes

media messages around what products women should not consume, thereby defining ecofeminism not as a political stance that requires serious engagement and action, but as a consumer choice.

One such example is a BP television commercial of the early millennium that revises a series of identity tropes to promote the fantasy of the “new BP,” no longer “British Petroleum” but “Beyond Petroleum.” This media campaign was designed to reinvent BP’s image as a good corporate citizen, part of the global environmental solution, and part of a team of social and technological innovators. The commercial both begins and ends with slight modifications on the phrase “beyond darkness there is light,” represented through a light bulb in the opening sequence and by placing the viewer in the position of a speeding train rushing through a tunnel and bursting into daylight, suggesting invention, modernity, and progress. However, within this visual and narrative frame, the viewer is also presented with a number of problematic racial and gender stereotypes. Innovation and environmental citizenship are constructed in relationship to women and people of color in anything but new or forward-thinking terms. The commercial’s initial image is of a young woman, in black alternative-style dress, wearing black lipstick, her hair dyed black, and with multiple piercings and tattoos. The narrator explains that “behind a thorn, there is a rose.” Through a rapid time-lapse sequence we see this same woman stripped down and transformed to her natural self: a young, smiling, blond beauty, whose pouty glossed lips and subtle head movement seem to suggest that she is flirting with the camera. Both identities are stereotypical, but the one that resists conformity is ironically reinvented according to classic (read: white, youthful, innocent) female beauty standards. Another time-lapse sequence illustrates an increasingly pregnant woman who eventually holds a child, looking down on it in the classic mother-child embrace—like Mary gazed on Jesus. This is paired with the message “Beyond patience, fulfillment,” which visually establishes motherhood as the ultimate goal for all women. Furthermore, this mother is a woman of color depicted in the nude—symbolic of a proximity to nature, a common but stereotypical representation of women of color in advertising. This, in direct contrast to the white woman, in the “Beyond Pain, Joy” sequence, who embodies artifice and represents a higher class. For the white woman, “pain” is represented by breast-implant surgery, and “joy” by standing in a low-cut black cocktail dress—objectified as the camera zooms in, focusing on her cleavage. But realistically speaking, implants are not the “joy” of the woman. The woman herself will almost certainly have no sensation in her nipples after surgery, thereby making her an object and not a subject of the experience of erotic pleasure, if “joy” refers to sex. If it does not, then in this heterosexual visual economy of male spectatorship, “joy” must refer to her presumed enjoyment at being admired as an object of beauty.

Race in this commercial is represented in equally problematic terms. The graceful dancer in the commercial appears to be a nonwhite male. The fastest runner is represented by a black male. All the faces flashed in sequence during the word “disease” are Asian, as is the young male doctor featured during the word “cure.” This commercial would have been produced in the first few years of the new millennium, when the predicted Asian flu pandemic of 2000 that never materialized was worldwide news for months. By contrast, white men in the commercial have either trivial problems—one is out of toilet paper and the other has locked his keys in the car—or they are visually signified as important, located as part of the military industrial complex, through terms of “power” and “responsibility,” and visually associated with a nuclear explosion.

This commercial, which claims innovation and progress as part of BP’s branding campaign, in fact makes recourse to the accepted status quo, particularly as it pertains to gender roles and stereotypical ethnic and racial identities within the neoliberal complex. Innovation is not required; merely the implication thereof is enough narratively and visually to invent an identity linked to innovation—Beyond Petroleum.⁴⁰ These rhetorical moves function to bolster the mythical value of oil, to fetishize oil, by crediting it more generally with the wonders of life, both those that are natural manifestations (motherhood, for example), as well as those attributed to science and innovation (nuclear energy). This discourse reinforces the value of BP’s role as an oil and energy provider: sustaining life as we know it and life in all its infinite possibilities. In claiming that it is providing energy, the very stuff of life, to us in groundbreaking new ways, BP insinuates itself into multiple discourses that suggest the possibilities of innovation, including environmentalism (à la corporations). This rhetorical strategy allows corporate interests to redirect and co-opt the zeal of eco-movements in ways that satisfy consumer guilt but do little to disrupt business as usual.

VOGUE ITALIA’S “WATER & OIL”

Much as visions of women in professional roles are marketed as proof of “ethical oil” and women’s bodies are represented as objects (not subjects) of petrocultural pleasure, so too are women’s bodies used to market fashion by staging a spectacle of political engagement against oil. The August 2010 issue of *Vogue Italia* contained a photo spread shot by Steven Meisel, featuring the model Kristen McMenamy.⁴¹ The photo spread was a reaction to the BP oil spill that flowed for three months in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. In this fashion editorial, the female body is recuperated through the guise of political activism to promote consumerism.

Kristen McMenamy, a white female model, is represented in some instances as an oiled and dead bird, and in others as a woman covered in oil. In one particular photo the model’s gloved and feathered hand is transformed into an oiled bird. The female

figure is dehumanized not merely through the compartmentalized focus on one part of her body, but also through her transformation into an animal in other shots. This fashion spread, as a bid to suggest political engagement, builds on long-standing fashion and advertising usages of the segmentation of women's bodies, women depicted as animals (especially women of color), the stalked or raped woman, the murdered female corpse, and the dehumanization of women to sell high fashion. In only one image is the model explicitly human. However, where the model is alive, she eerily resembles a zombie or a recently traumatized civilian victim of war—namely, an Eastern woman, signaled by a headscarf, quite possibly that of a Muslim woman. This photo editorial makes no call to action but merely aestheticizes female death and female victims of violence—albeit this time glamorizing big oil as the aggressor. Furthermore, representing women's disempowerment in relationship to oil via a white supermodel in a *Vogue Italia* exposé, a high-fashion magazine targeted at middle- and upper-class women, contextualizes oil and environmentalism as First World issues with First World solutions.

Intermingling deep-rooted icons of misogynistic violence (the female corpse), environmental devastation (the oiled bird), and gothic horror (the nonhuman zombie), the *Vogue Italia* photo spread contributes to a much broader cultural discourse of disaster circulating through Western popular culture that reimagines the oil spill as a monstrous exception. As Alain Badiou has argued, "We live within an Aristotelian arrangement: there is nature, and besides it right, which tries as much as possible to correct, if needs be, the excesses of nature. What is dreaded, what must be foreclosed, is what is neither natural nor amendable by right alone. In short, what is *monstrous*."⁴² It has become acceptable to respond to oil spills as moments of exception and to the associated symbols—the bird, for example—with expressions of empathy and outrage. This carefully constructed response ensures that the broader oil assemblage goes unquestioned: like the representation of women as victims of violence and civilian casualties of war, like the disregard for Aboriginal treaty rights and traditional ways of life, oil has been entirely naturalized. Despite the fact that the air and water pollution from daily industrial activity around the oil sands in Northern Alberta over the course of a year is equivalent to that from a major oil spill every year, this activity has been naturalized. By contrast, the monstrous oil spill is perceived as something that needs to be brought under control and disciplined.⁴³ Therefore, it becomes culturally acceptable to protest the impacts of oil only at the moment of crisis. And, of course, the irony is that this protest, just like the *Vogue Italia* fashion spread, is socially condoned and therefore not a resistance against the system but part of its *natural* cycle of cannibalizing women's bodies in a bid to promote capitalism and the petro-economy.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the role of gendered petro-relations as they have been historically constructed and as they continue to be perpetuated by Ethical Oil, the *Vogue Italia* fashion spread, related eco-fashionista discourses, and mainstream media representations of resistance movements such as Idle No More reveals the degree to which Western neoliberal petro-discourses are invested in promoting specific female identities and definitions of Western feminism. These iterations justify our current oil-consuming lifestyles as an issue of women's rights through basic rhetorical strategies that reinforce women's relationship to petroleum products in consumer terms and that recuperate the female body as a canvas on which to spectacularize and perform politics. Furthermore, the export of these specific female identities brings with it the promise of new female consumer markets. Therefore, empowered feminist identities outside those sanctioned by the mainstream neoliberal petro-discourses are depoliticized and renegotiated in the public sphere. Women activists and women activists of color who refuse to conform to the eco-fashionista consumerist identities marketed to them, and whose agendas to protect the environment will potentially disrupt industrial development and business as usual, pose a particular threat to established forms of hegemonic power and therefore risk becoming the target of violence,⁴⁴ just as the men that align themselves with these women also risk being framed by discourses of petro-violence and marked as terrorists. It is not merely the threat of alternative energies that is being resisted. Reliance on wind and solar energy will not, in and of themselves, reconfigure power relations, nor eliminate racism, sexism, and class disparity, any more than oil in and of itself causes wealth, poverty, war, or militarism.⁴⁵ Therefore, as we make the necessary moves toward alternative energy sources in the twenty-first century, it is valuable to consider how we might be simply fetishizing these energies, as we have done with oil, in ways that perpetuate the capitalist status quo, and the web of associated relationships and power dynamics of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Rather than succumb to the fears of what the end of cheap oil might mean for the future in general, or for feminism in particular,⁴⁶ it may be more productive to reevaluate current discourses around oil and alternative energy sources for their potential to disrupt rather than to simply reproduce intersectional social inequalities.⁴⁷

NOTES

1. Matthew T. Huber, "Oil, Life, and the Fetishism of Geopolitics," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 22, no. 3 (2011): 32-48.

2. *Ibid.*, 36.

3. In 2012, a counterterrorism unit was established in Alberta to protect the energy sector. See “Counter-terrorism unit to protect Alberta energy industry,” *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, June 6, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/story/2012/06/06/rcmp-counter-terrorism-oil.html>. And over the summer of 2012, the media reported on concerns of environmental terrorism. An article published on July 29, 2012, in *The Canadian Press* cites a “newly declassified intelligence report” stating that there is a “growing radicalized environmentalist faction” in Canada that is opposed to the country’s energy-sector policies: “The RCMP criminal intelligence assessment, focusing on Canadian waters, cites potential dangers from environmental activists to offshore oil platforms and hazardous marine shipments, representing perhaps the starkest assessment of such threats by the Canadian security community to date.” See “Radical environmentalism on the rise, RCMP report says,” *Canadian Broadcasting Association*, July 29, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2012/07/29/pol-radical-environmentalism-growing-intelligence-report-warns.html>.

4. “Building Resilience Against Terrorism: Canada’s Counter-terrorism Strategy,” *Public Safety Canada*, last modified December 4, 2012, <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/ns/2012-cts-eng.aspx#s3>.

5. Quoted in “Environmental charities ‘laundering’ foreign funds, Kent says,” *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, May 1, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2012/05/01/pol-peter-kent-environmental-charities-laundering.html>.

6. Heather M. Turcotte, *Petro-Sexual Politics: Global Oil, Legitimate Violence, and Transnational Justice* (Charleston, S.C.: BiblioBazaar, 2011), 213.

7. Robert R. M. Verchick, “Feminist Theory and Environmental Justice,” in *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism*, ed. Rachel Stein (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 63.

8. Turcotte, *Petro-Sexual Politics*, 208.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. “Idle No More: How It Began,” *The Province*, January 7, 2013, <http://www.theprovince.com/news/bc/Idle+More+began/7780924/story.html>.

12. Bruce Campion-Smith, “Idle No More: Spence Urged by Fellow Chiefs to Abandon Her Fast,” *Toronto Star*, January 18, 2013, http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/01/18/idle_no_more_spence_urged_by_fellow_chiefs_to_abandon_her_fast.html.

13. Deveryn Ross, “Idle No More’s Real Challenge,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 24, 2013, <http://www.winnipegfreeP.com/opinion/westview/idle-no-mores-real-challenge-188173011.html>.

14. Ross, “Idle No More’s Real Challenge,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 24, 2013.

15. Jorge Barrera. “PM Harper believes Idle No More Movement Creating ‘Negative Public Reaction,’ Say Confidential Notes,” *APTN National Notes*, January 25, 2013, <http://aptn.ca/pages/news/2013/01/25/pm-harper-believes-idle-no-more-movement-creating-negative-public-reaction-say-confidential-notes/>.

16. Duncan McCue, “Idle No More and Tensions in Thunder Bay,” Special edition of *The Current*, CBC Radio, January 25, 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Canada/Audio/ID/2329105939/>.

17. Valerie Taliman, “Rape, Kidnapping Being Investigated as Hate Crime in Thunder Bay,” Indian Country Today Media Network, January 7, 2013, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianet.com/article/rape-kidnapping-being-investigated-hate-crime-thunder-bay-146797>.

18. "Starlight tours" refers to the unofficial police practice of dropping people, often Aboriginals or other marginalized individuals, outside of city limits in what are often intemperate and life-threatening Canadian weather conditions, forcing them to walk back to the city or home. On January 7, 2013, CBC Radio ran a report about a local man who was driven to the edge of town by police in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The report speaks of the history of this practice. See "Starlight Tours," *Superior Morning, CBC Radio*, January 7, 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/superiormorning/episodes/2013/01/07/starlight-tours/>.

On January 21, 2013, a young First Nations man in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, was reportedly driven outside the city limits and told by officers to "Idle No More." See David Giles, "Saskatoon Police Investigating Alleged 'Starlight Tour,'" *Global News*, January 22, 2013, <http://www.globalnews.ca/saskatoon+police+investigating+alleged+starlight+tour/6442793549/story.html>.

19. "No More Stolen Sisters: Justice for the Missing and Murdered." *Amnesty International Canada*, n.d., <http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/indigenous-peoples/no-more-stolen-sisters>.

20. The Seneca Falls women's rights convention was held in New York in 1848. See "Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, NY," *The Susan B. Anthony Center for Women's Leadership*, n.d., <http://www.rochester.edu/sba/suffragewomensrights.html>. Ten years later, in 1858, the first commercial oil well was established in Oil Springs, Ontario. See "Black Gold: Canada's Oil Heritage," *County of Lambton Libraries Museums Galleries*, n.d., <http://www.lcmg.org/lcmg/Museums/OilMuseumofCanada/BlackGold2/OilHeritage/OilSprings/tabid/208/Default.aspx>. A year later, an oil rig in Pennsylvania struck oil. See "The Story of Oil in Pennsylvania," *Petroleum Education: History of Oil*, The Paleontological Research Institution, n.d. <http://www.priweb.org/ed/pgws/history/pennsylvania/pennsylvania.html>.

21. It is important to note that there have been other class and race/ethnic struggles during the petroleum era, which this essay also references, and cannot escape referencing, because of the manner in which popularly naturalized discourses around oil and new-energies are situated in relationship to women, women of color, and other marginalized groups.

22. "Quizzes: Fashion & Beauty," *Planetgreen.com*, n.d., <http://planetgreen.discovery.com/games-quizzes/quizzes-fashion-beauty.html>.

23. "How to Go Green: Fashion & Beauty," *Planetgreen.com*, n.d., <http://planetgreen.discovery.com/go-green/green-index/fashion-beauty-guides.html>.

24. Slavoj Žižek, "Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a New Opium for the Masses, part 1," *Lacan.com*, n.d., <http://www.lacan.com/zizecology1.htm>.

25. This section borrows and builds on ideas previously published in Sheena Wilson, "Ethical Oil: The Case for Canada's Oil Sands, Review," *American Book Review* 33, no. 3 (2012): 8–9.

26. In 2002, Levant was nominated as the Canadian Alliance candidate in the Calgary South-west riding, but he stepped down so that Stephen Harper, who had been elected party leader, could run in that riding. This led to the eventual election of Harper, leader of the Canadian Conservative Party, as Prime Minister of Canada. See Jane Taber, "Meet Harper's Oil-Sands Muse," *Globe and Mail*, September 10, 2012, <http://m.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/ottawa-notebook/meet-harpers-oil-sands-muse/article1871340/>.

27. Lavant has had various complaints brought against him: both human rights complaints for the publication of the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2006 and for making false claims about George Soros, to name two examples. And again in March 2014, yet another

lawsuit was filed again Lavant, this time for \$100,000, related to blog posts he made that allegedly damaged the reputation of a Saskatchewan lawyer by labeling him a “jihadist and a liar.” <http://www.winnipegfree press.com/canada/sun-news-host-ezra-levant-sued-for-libel-lawyer-seeking-100k-in-damages-248219811.html>.

28. The Ethical Oil organization misappropriates terms and ideas, such as “grassroots” and “fair trade,” that are typically associated with left-leaning social justice agendas, for the purpose of supporting a right-wing neoliberal agenda focused on promoting the expansion of the oil industry in Alberta. For more details on the book, see Wilson, “Ethical Oil,” 8–9.

29. This redirection in public debate was certainly evident in Alberta and in Canada starting at the time of the book’s release in the fall of 2010, and for the subsequent two years, 2011 through 2012. The book and its author received significant attention at the time of the book’s release and the ethical oil message was further perpetuated by the associated EthicalOil.org website. The site’s “About” page explains that “EthicalOil.org began as a blog created by Alykhan Velshi to promote the ideas in Ezra Levant’s bestselling book *Ethical Oil: The Case for Canada’s Oil Sands*.” See <http://www.ethicaloil.org/about/>. Furthermore, in mid-2011, the Ethical Oil organization released a billboard campaign and, later that same year, a thirty-second television advertisement that, by early September, had attracted international attention and a response from the Saudi government for the way that it juxtaposed women’s rights in the two countries and through this faulty logic thereby asserted the superiority of Canadian-produced oil as ethical, stigmatizing Saudi oil as conflict oil.

The billboard images can be viewed online. See “IN PICTURES: Ethical Oil Ad Campaign,” *Globe and Mail*, July 28, 2011, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/ethical-oil-ad-campaign/article637242/>. The television ad has been uploaded on YouTube. See “Ethical Oil TV Ad, Saudi Arabia (The ad Saudi Arabia doesn’t want you to see),” YouTube video, 0:46, posted by “Ethicaloil.org,” August 26, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SjZlqbDudI>.

30. Fort McMurray is not officially a city but part of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo in Northern Alberta.

31. According to a July 20, 2008, news article published by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty online, the article is from the 1980s. “Nine Iranians sentenced to death by stoning,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 20, 2008, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,IRN,,,4889do86c,o.html>. However, a major Canadian newspaper, *Globe and Mail*, claimed the image was from the 1970s. See “IN PICTURES: Ethical Oil Ad Campaign,” *Globe and Mail*, July 28, 2011.

32. For a more specific discussion and definition of “embedded feminism,” albeit in a different context, see the following: Helmut W. Ganser, “Embedded Feminism: Women’s Rights as Justification for Military Intervention? (presentation at “Coping with Crises, Ending Armed Conflict: Peace Promoting Strategies of Women and Men,” the international conference presented by the Gunda Werner Institute of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin, November 15, 2011), Gunda Werner Institute, n.d., <http://www.gwi-boell.de/web/un-resolutions-helmut-ganser-embedded-feminism-presentation-2953.html>.

33. Oliver Wright, “Britain Meets Gulf Allies over Growing Tensions in Iran,” *The Independent*, January 24, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/britain-meets-gulf-allies-over-growing-tensions-in-iran-8278101.html>.

34. Heather M. Turcotte, “Contextualizing Petro-Sexual Politics,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 36, no. 3 (2011): 204.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Levant provides an inflected critique of Chief Al Lameman, and by proxy all other Aboriginal people who contest the oil sands, in the book *Ethical Oil*. Levant writes: “Of course, oil sands firms are careful to make sure they stay on good terms with Aboriginals in the area, even if a few noisy malcontents like Beaver Lake Cree chief Al Lameman figure they’d rather sue the industry. . . . They’ve unilaterally declared themselves to be the sole ‘keepers’ of an enormous swath of land that crosses the border between Saskatchewan and Alberta. But Lameman and his reserve are not keepers of that massive swath of land in any meaningful way; they don’t tend to it; they don’t look after it or protect it; they don’t improve it or develop it, and they certainly don’t work it. They just claim it for themselves. Keepers is right. If Al Lameman has his way, he’ll end up keeping thousands of Aboriginals from improving their lives, getting an education, escaping poverty. All of those jobs, all that education, all those opportunities ended, all for one band” (213–15).

37. Turcotte discusses at length how, in the context of the Niger Delta, the reporting of and even the academic analysis of “ethnoracial, national, and gender-sexual inequalities within and between Nigeria–U.K.–U.S. relations” have misidentified petro-protests as terrorist activities, in part because there has been a failure to recognize the degree to which these movements “developed out of strategies of community justice within women’s organizations. These were neither ‘terrorist acts’ nor the community ‘turning in on itself’ but, rather, expressions of justice often supported by male youth groups, which created spaces through which community engagement could address inequalities.” “Contextualizing Petro-Sexual Politics,” 208.

38. According to the database for “Women in national parliaments” compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union based on information from 190 countries, last updated October 31, 2012, Canada ranks 47th in the world for female participation in the “lower or single house” with a percentage of only 24.7. Afghanistan, by contrast, ranks significantly higher in 37th place, with 27.7 percent participation. *Inter-Parliamentary Union*, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

39. See Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg, *Beyond Terror: Gender, Narrative, Human Rights* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

40. Peter Hitchcock, in his article “Everything’s Gone Green: The Environment of BP’s Narrative,” explains in detail how Lord John Browne, CEO of British Petroleum, during the Beyond Petroleum rebranding campaign “reads corporate responsibility as ‘showing willing’ about fighting climate change,” with little transformation to the corporate practices. Special issue, *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* 3, no. 2 (2012): 110. http://www.csj.ualberta.ca/imaginations/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/001_Full_V2_3.2.pdf.

41. “Steven Meisel,” *art + commerce*, n.d., <http://www.artandcommerce.com>.

42. Alain Badiou, *The Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 176–77.

43. “In 2010, a pair of studies from University of Alberta ecologist David Schindler concluded that [the oil sands] industry [in Northern Alberta] was releasing heavy metals and hydrocarbons at levels that were, in some cases, already toxic to fish and equivalent to a major oil spill every year. Schindler’s work was later backed up by a provincially appointed review panel.” Bob Weber, “Government-funded Study Concludes Toxic Hydrocarbons from Oilsands Pollute Lakes.” *Global Calgary*, January 7, 2013, <http://www.globalvcalgary.com/government-funded+study+concludes+toxic+hydrocarbons+from+oilsands+pollute+lakes/6442783562/story.html>.

44. “Women Human Rights Defenders,” *Association for Women’s Rights in Development*, n.d., <http://www.awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Women-Human-Rights-Defenders>; Inmaculada Barcia and Analía Penchaszadeh, “Ten Insights to Strengthen Responses for Women Human Rights

Defenders at Risk.” *Association for Women’s Rights in Development*, 2012, <http://www.defending-women-defendingrights.org/pdf/WHRD%20Ten%20Insights%20ENG.pdf>.

45. Huber, “Oil, Life, and the Fetishism of Geopolitics.”

46. Sharon Astyk has written and blogged about how “the women’s movement has never fully acknowledged the degree to which women’s social roles have changed not just due to activism, but due to energy resources. This comparative blind spot means that we have also failed to grasp how vulnerable those gains are.” While Astyk rightly indicates that women’s lives have been transformed by the petroleum-derived energy sources, the oversimplified cause-and-effect relationship drawn between oil and feminism fetishizes the power of oil and fails to acknowledge the many other socioeconomic and political power relations that have played a role in the feminist advances of the last two centuries. See “Peak Oil Is Still a Women’s Issue and Other Reflections on Sex, Gender, and the Long Emergency” (blog post), *Casaubon’s Book*, Scienceblogs.com, January 31, 2010, <http://scienceblogs.com/casaubonsbook/2010/01/31/peak-oil-is-still-a-womens-iss/>.

47. For more information on the notion of intersectionality, see Sheena Wilson, “Petro-Intersectionalities: Oil, Race, Gender, and Class,” in *Fueling Cultures: Politics, History, Energy*, ed. Imre Szeman, Jennifer Wenzel, and Patricia Yaeger (forthcoming).