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The ANWR landscape: a geographical analysis of rhetoric and representation

Jessica Renee Moyer

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THE ANWR LANDSCAPE:
A GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF
RHETORIC AND REPRESENTATION

By

Jessica Renee Moyer

Accepted in Partial Completion

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

Moheb A. Ghali, Dean of the Graduate School

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MASTER’S THESIS

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A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Jessica Renee Moyer
November 2008
ABSTRACT

For over 40 years now, a remote piece of land in the northeast corner of Alaska has been the focus of a highly publicized and extremely controversial debate. This contested landscape, known as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), is valued for its striking vistas and unique wildlife as well as for its substantial petroleum reserves. As a result, environmentalists and oil industries have long been engaged in heated debate over its land use and resource management, and in particular over whether or not the refuge should be drilled for oil. While these two national interest groups have dominated the public dispute, however, a much broader pool of actors with varied perspectives and priorities are heavily invested in and vigorously debating the issue as well, including two indigenous groups whose ancestors have resided within the refuge for thousands of years.

In this thesis, I explore how environmentalists, oil industries, the Gwich’in Native Americans, who oppose drilling for oil, and the Iñupiat Eskimos, who support it, have constructed ANWR for policy-makers and the general public, both in contrast to one another and across ‘for’ and ‘against’ delineations. I also provide an in-depth and critical analysis of four prominent discursive themes employed by each of these stakeholders, which include society and nature, sovereignty and security, luxury versus livelihood, and past, preservation, and future. Through the above methodologies, I demonstrate that the values and perspectives of the native tribes share many similarities, despite the different conclusions to which they have ultimately led, whereas those of the national interest groups are polarizing and antagonistic. Further, a close examination of the various relationships between these four stakeholders reveals the imbalance of privilege and power that continues to fuel ANWR’s “drilling debate”.

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Chapter 1:

*An Introduction to ANWR as a Contested Landscape*

Too many environmental issues are portrayed in stark, black-and-white (or black-and-green) terms. The continued debate over oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge provides a timely example of trapped-in-time environmentalism versus tone-deaf development policies. (Wisconsin State Journal 2002)

For over 40 years now, a remote piece of land in the northeast corner of Alaska has been the focus of a highly publicized and extremely controversial debate. This contested landscape, known as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), is valued by many individuals and groups for a variety of different reasons. The proposition of oil drilling in the region, however, has wedged a clear divide between stakeholders who are ‘for’ and those ‘against’. This thesis raises several questions about the appropriation of ANWR and its many resources in an attempt to reveal the diversity of perspectives and values held by participants in the drilling debate and to dispel the myth that land use in ANWR is a black-and-white environmental issue. Most notably, who does ANWR belong to, not only legally but in practice? Who has influence over the decisions that impact and define it? In particular, do the agendas of environmentalists and oil industries who have been allowed to dominate the public debate weigh too heavily into relevant policy-making decisions and edge out the agendas of ANWR’s native peoples, among others, as a result? Further, how do the many stakeholders who have laid claim to the Refuge view and value it differently from one another, and where do their particularized ideas stem from? What larger agendas do their contrasting notions about the nature and worth of the region serve? Similarly, how is ANWR represented and communicated to the general public by its stakeholders, and how do such
representations weigh into the drilling debate? Finally, this thesis explores the implications of the debate and the various images of ANWR it involves for the stakeholders themselves, their relationships to one another, and their respective continued involvements in decision-making for, as well as the use and management of, ANWR.

**Background**

Approximately the size of the state of South Carolina (USFWS – Alaska 2006), ANWR extends to the Beaufort Sea to the north and borders Canada’s Yukon Territory to the east, as shown in Figure 1.1. Its 19.6 million acres of varied and extremely diverse terrain encompass Arctic Coast, the Brooks Mountain Range that runs horizontally through the middle of the Refuge, the Tundra Plain at the mountains’ base, and the Yukon River Basin forests to the south (Figure 1.2). Additionally, these multiple ecosystems support a plentiful and vast array of flora and fauna, including polar bears, porcupine caribou, and muskoxen, as well as numerous species of fish, sea animals, and migratory birds (Banerjee 2003). For this reason, naturalists and environmentalists are especially enamored with ANWR’s striking vistas and unique wildlife (NRDC Website 2008).

![Figure 1.1: Arctic National Wildlife Refuge](Connelly 2001)
Because of its cold and fragile climate, ANWR’s physical geography is very sensitive to climate change and has already suffered noticeably from human-induced global warming. For example, the permanently frozen soil, or permafrost, that underlies much of the region has begun to thaw in areas. Additionally, changes in precipitation, glacier melting, and increased winter temperatures of between five and eight degrees Fahrenheit have been recorded since the 1960s. Accordingly, ANWR’s growing season has been extended, while its glacial season has been shortened (M.I.T. 2007). In response to human activities that
negatively impact or alter the environment and that have caused the events described above, environmentalists have expressed their investment in the ANWR landscape by vowing to preserve and protect it from development, which they fear would bring it further harm (NRDC Website 2008).

In addition to the ecosystems and inhabitants mentioned above, the ANWR region is also extremely rich in a variety of other natural resources, including ore minerals, such as zinc, lead, copper, and gold (Kropschot 2006), as well as substantial petroleum reserves. According to a study conducted by the U.S. Geological survey in 2001, the reserves within ANWR’s coastal plain alone are estimated at between 5.7 and 16.0 billion barrels of oil (USGS 2001), an assessment that has drawn to the region the acute interest of industries seeking to recover the petroleum believed to lie beneath its surface. In aspiring to develop ANWR by introducing oil production and establishing drilling sites within its borders, however, petroleum industries have positioned themselves in direct opposition to environmentalists who view drilling as a potential threat to the region’s natural value and ecological health. As a result, these two interest groups and their allies in both the state and federal governments have long been engaged in a heated “drilling debate”, as it has been termed. While feuding environmentalists and oil industries have dominated the public dispute over ANWR’s land use and resource management, however, and in doing so painted the drilling debate in “black-and-white terms”, as the quote that introduces this chapter describes, a much broader pool of actors with varied perspectives and priorities are heavily invested in and vigorously debating the issue as well.
Included in the pool of actors that are less prominent, but equally involved, in the drilling debate are the indigenous populations who have lived in the territory now recognized as the U.S. state of Alaska for thousands of years. For the most part these groups have retained their traditional livelihoods, values, and customs, including subsistence use of the region’s land, water, and other natural resources. While many are either nomadic or at least minimally transitory, the Gwich’in subset of the Athabascan\(^1\) Indians and the Iñupiat\(^2\) Eskimos are the two indigenous peoples who primarily occupy the ANWR region in Alaska’s northeast corner, as shown in Figure 1.3, which depicts all twenty of the state’s native language groups.

While the Gwich’in and Iñupiat tribes share the ANWR region as well as many traditional practices and values, they do not see eye to eye on the issue of drilling within the

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1 Also spelled “Athabaskan”, “Athapaskan”, or “Athapascan”.
2 Iñupiat (with a “t”) is a noun and the plural form of the word describing this native people, whereas Iñupiaq (with a “q”) can be used as a noun referring either to a single member of the tribe or to the native language, or alternatively as an adjective, as in “Iñupiaq values”.

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coastal plain. The Gwich’in are aligned with environmentalists in that they oppose oil drilling within the Refuge, whereas the Iñupiat support this form of development and are therefore aligned with the oil industry. These alignments, however, are as complex, problematic, and even deceptive as they are convenient, as the specific attitudes and arguments put forth by these Native groups on the issue of drilling differ greatly from those of their extra-local counterparts.

Given the various investments in ANWR held by the interest groups and native populations described above, and the uproar they have sparked, it is of concern whether the current methods for deciding upon and implementing land management practices are adequately inclusive, thoughtful, or just. The specific questions outlined at the beginning of this chapter demonstrate the systematic approach this thesis takes in unpacking the rhetoric of the drilling debate and examining the role that such rhetoric plays in influencing public perception and ultimately public policy. They and others can be encompassed by the following three general questions that I address in the chapters that follow. First, how is the ANWR region perceived and represented by each of the four stakeholders under discussion? Second, what actions, or inactions, are endorsed by each of these representations? Third, which of these actions have been taken, and which have not?

In pursuing these questions and closely examining the way ANWR is portrayed by the Iñupiat and the Gwich’in tribes, as well as by the national campaigns led by oil industries and environmentalists who are also heavily invested in its management, I have selected specific organizations that are representative of each of these two latter groups to stand in for their respective pro- and anti-drilling campaigns. They are Arctic Power, a lobbying group in
support of oil development in ANWR, and the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmentalist organization in opposition to it. These characteristic organizations have been very carefully and strategically chosen by the way their memberships, views, and principles typify those of the larger groups they represent, as described in more detail later in this chapter.

I have further identified four themes, society and nature, sovereignty and security, luxury versus livelihood, and past, preservation, and future, that are central to the debate in order to draw out important distinctions, as well as some surprising similarities, between the perspectives of each of the stakeholders mentioned above. In doing so, it reveals that the drilling debate at the national scale offers conflicting representations of the ANWR landscape and proposes management plans that are diametrically opposed and therefore cannot coexist, whereas the perspectives, positions, and values of the stakeholders at the local scale share a vast area of common ground. More generally, this thesis supports the claim that the drilling debate is not simply a clash between two polarized factions and their competing land use agendas for northern Alaska, as it is portrayed by national interest groups to be. Rather, it is the manifestation of a series of complex and multifaceted conflicts that are rooted in socio-cultural, economic, and political difference, as ANWR’s stakeholders do not share the same priorities, occupations, or perspectives. As such, the drilling debate is fueled more by competing claims to legitimacy, entitlement, and power, than by divergent perspectives on land use and management. The findings of this thesis leave little doubt as to the clout and influence enjoyed by both environmentalists and oil industries, but denied to the Gwich’in
and Iñupiat tribes, however it remains to be seen which national organization’s allies in the U.S. Congress are most persuasive.

**Conceptual Terrain**

In order to address the questions laid out above, it is useful to consider the work of scholars who have explored similar issues through a variety of theoretical frameworks that prove extremely useful in analyzing socio-environmental issues such as that of ANWR. To begin, I invoke the core ideas and principles of critical geography as a means of unpacking the rhetoric, propaganda, sensationalism, and contrasting representations of the ANWR landscape that, as I demonstrate in detail in Chapter 3, are pervasive in the drilling debate.

In aiming to research and record the various places and spaces that exist across the earth’s surface, geographers consider these defining components of the world compare to one another and change over time, and observe the many patterns and processes that play out in them. We have also long been studying the ways in which these places and spaces are relevant to human existence. However, it is only within the last twenty years that we have come to realize how differently these places and spaces are understood and experienced by particular individuals and groups (Haraway 1988; Tuan 2003). The impetus for a revised epistemology that gives consideration to such particularities, and utilizes an array of corresponding methodologies, was the introduction of an empowering and revolutionizing commitment to provocative, inquisitive, and engaged scholarship that emerged out of a collection of movements that were started in the 1970s, such as feminism, humanism, Marxism, post-modernism, post-structuralism and others, and has come to be referred to today as critical geography.
As the drilling debate supports and perpetuates numerous assumptions or perceived norms, for example with respect to indigenous rights, development practices, energy policies, land use and management, and even the nature of the ANWR landscape itself, critical geography serves here to expose, and even to dispel, several of them. One particular norm that is often sustained, endorsed, or even bolstered by discussions of the natural world, is the notion that humans and their physical environment are separate entities that can be considered and examined independently from one another. A theoretical framework proposed by scholars and critical geographers (see Castree and Braun 2001 and Schlosser 2006 among others) in which to problematize and decode this aspect of environmental language and rhetoric, is known as social nature. Social nature embraces the idea that society and nature are not entirely separate realms, as notions of an ‘external nature’ and even ‘common knowledge’ suggest (Castree and Braun 2001), but rather inextricably linked phenomena that profoundly impact and help define one another. This framework is important because, in asserting that human-nature interactions and relationships are not only appropriate but inevitable, it encourages the drafting and implementation of environmental policies and practices that give ample consideration to the role that society will play in implementing them as well as the impact that such policies and practices will have on human lives in return. Whereas testimonials presented in environmental debates often resort to the use of dichotomies, for example “society and nature”, as a way of simplifying and communicating compound issues such as those associated with ANWR’s drilling debate, I invoke social nature in this thesis to unpack the complexity of the highly debated subject, to
explore relationships between its seemingly opposed forces, and to acknowledge the malleability of its associated language.

The profound and varied relationships between human beings and their natural and built surroundings become especially apparent through the examination of landscapes, such as that of ANWR, where the two conspicuously intersect. Landscapes carry a range of meanings and cultural associations. In particular, they reflect the range of ways in which different groups view and value, as well as impact, the environment, which are influenced by such things as their particular livelihoods, levels of affluence or poverty, belief systems, and traditions. Landscapes fill the roles of both home and work; evoke both pleasure and pain, fear and comfort. They are a tangible, integral, and necessary component of daily life for some and an escape from it for others. They are often kept at a distance and sometimes even reserved for the imagination. Landscapes are maps, providers of both sustenance and recreation, sources of identity, manifestations of history, and perhaps most importantly, sites for both belonging and exclusion (Duncan and Duncan 2001; Fyfe and Law 1988; Sparke 1998).

The dissimilar perspectives of the stakeholders under discussion here, which include environmentalists, oil industries, the Gwich’in Native Americans, and the Inupiat Eskimos, stem from their different and conflicting ideologies regarding the ANWR landscape and, therefore, of appropriately corresponding land use and management practices. Specifically, the position each group takes on the issue of whether or not ANWR’s coastal plain should be drilled for oil is determined by that group’s particular geographical imagination of the ANWR landscape. Geographical imaginations, as discussed in detail by Derek Gregory in
his book by the same title, describe the very specific ways that individuals or groups see, think about, and value a landscape, and more practically, how they determine its appropriate role in human society (Gregory 2004). The numerous geographical imaginations of ANWR are created through various experiences, exposures, associations, and cultural as well as religious influences, and then communicated to others through portrayals of the ANWR landscape.

Photographs, paintings, and other images are frequently used to convey particular geographical imaginations of ANWR, but the spoken and written language that describes the landscape has an equal capacity to paint vivid pictures in the minds of its beneficiaries. Such pictures provide detailed renderings of the natural environment and even the societies, cultures, and people who live there by narrating the attributes, utility, and essence of each of them. In this way, the words used to communicate the ANWR landscape are instruments of expression and illustration and, accordingly, the language associated with the drilling debate serves as an effective means of visual representation. For these reasons, visuality is key to the following investigation of the ANWR conflict, as it not only considers the source of a given depiction, but also acknowledges the context in which it was produced and, more specifically, the positionality of its producer (Kwan in Moss 2002; Massey 1994; Rose 1997).

In examining the role of imagery in the drilling debate, and specifically, in the representation and communication of ANWR, it must be acknowledged that the material landscape of the region itself possesses aesthetic properties. As John Urry describes, one of the four primary ways in which people and the environment intersect is through visual
consumption (1992, p.178). Visual consumption is achieved “through constructing the physical environment as a ‘landscape’ not primarily for production but embellished for aesthetic appropriation” (1992, p.178). While such aesthetic appropriations may seem purely visual and therefore innocent, however, they are in fact poignant expressions of social and cultural positionality. This is evident in the fact that ANWR is widely valued aesthetically, most notably by environmentalists who tout its charm and beauty (NRDC Website 2008), and at the same time devalued aesthetically, for example by proponents of drilling who suggest that such an ugly and uninviting region must have other redeeming qualities (ASRC 2008; ANWR News 2005). Consequently, examining the ANWR landscape with the critical and analytical rigor employed by Blair (1996), Butler (2000), Rose (2001) and others to dissect imagery, and in doing so treating the landscape as an image itself, serves to unveil certain qualities and intricacies of the many interrelationships between the cultures and physical environments it reflects. This is because landscapes, as images, are never detached, static, or unbiased forms of representation, but rather, as Fyfe and Law (2001) point out, “site[s] for the construction and depiction of social difference” (in Rose 2001, p.10). The ANWR landscape must therefore be critically deconstructed in order for its contextual significance and potential as well as actualized effects to be acknowledged, articulated, and understood rather than concealed, obscured, or misused.

Many critical geographers (see for example Rose 2001 and Butler 1997, 2000) have explored the relationship between power and visual representation. In treating the ANWR landscape as an image and analyzing its many attributes and implications, I adopt the premise of these scholars that images are never purely aesthetic or benign illustrations. Rather, they
are influential, revealing, and dynamic reflections of human society. Particularly in an ocularcentric society such as that of any Western culture (Rorty 1979, p.38 in Barnes 2001 p. 549; Rose 2003, p. 212), images are extremely important, both because of what is displayed within their frames as well as what is left out of them, either explicitly or inadvertently. They can be provocative or anecdotal, endearing or repulsive (Blair 1996). More significantly perhaps, a single image can be interpreted in numerous ways by its various audiences. Additionally, such audiences are often targeted intentionally, while others are deliberately denied access. To these ends, this thesis employs a critical approach to interpreting the ANWR landscape by, in short, heeding Gillian Rose’s advice to take it seriously (Rose 2001, p.15).

Landscapes, as images, elicit individualized evocations and associations as well as collective responses. Aesthetic appreciation, after all, is a reflection of both personal preference and learned valuation (Duncan and Duncan 2001, p. 392). As a cultural geographer, however, my “traditional concern is with the group” (Tuan 2003, p. 878). Fortunately, just as each individual can be situated in the context of his or her own particular experiences, beliefs, background, perceptions, values, and geographical imaginations, so can every cultural, religious, or other group be situated within the context of its own history, identity, and undertakings. Likewise, groups in addition to individuals possess situated knowledges (Kwan in Moss 2002; Massey 1994; Rose 1997) of the world’s people, places, and processes. My intention, therefore, is to consider those constructions and perceptions of the ANWR landscape that demonstrate cultural values as opposed to individual ones that promise “no productive generalization, only endless itemization of difference” (Tuan 2003,
In doing so, I am able to distinguish the organizations and cultural groups that are invested in ANWR’s land use and management from one another, and to better understand their various attributes, value systems, roles, and interrelationships.

Discrepancies between multiple situated knowledges are frequently at the root of social, political, and even environmental conflicts, however they have remained unidentified, unrecognized, and invisible throughout much of the history of geography and formal scholarship in general, and likewise, out of political analyses of the drilling debate. It is, therefore, an explicit objective of this thesis to bring the situated knowledges of ANWR held by its stakeholders, as well as the positionalities of the stakeholders themselves, into the light and make them “visible” (Rose 1997). As Mary Gilmartin (in Moss 2002, pp.31-42) describes, “[i]t is important for us to question the history of geography, and to ask about the stories we have neglected or the perspectives we have ignored” (2002, p.37) as a means of realizing situatedness. In the same way, attention to the messages and perspectives of the various stakeholders in the drilling debate, particularly those who have received little recognition in the past, enables a more comprehensive, intimate, and unprejudiced understanding of the ANWR landscape.

While scrutiny of the various renderings of the ANWR landscape that are fed to the general public reveals a great deal about the particular groups that are invested in its management, it also serves to identify and expose the power relations embedded in the production of knowledge of the region. That is, consideration of ANWR’s various depictions makes apparent who exactly is included in, as well as excluded from, scientific and philosophical discussions that interpret and explain its physical environment and material
worth. Such considerations are not only key to answering the questions posed in this thesis, but also critical to ongoing movements in social justice in that they aim to specifically identify the groups that are empowered versus marginalized by the practices of representation (Butler 1997; Cope 2002; Falconer and Kawabata 2002; Moss 2002; Valentine 2002).

Along these same lines, close examination of the physical landscape itself serves to divulge which of the stakeholders in ANWR’s land use and management have been empowered to implement the particular practices they endorse. In this way, landscapes are both reflections and instruments of power. As articulated by Duncan and Duncan, “landscapes become possessions for those with the wealth and power to control them” (2001, p.387). In the case of ANWR, the range of land use practices that have been proposed, which stem from corresponding geographical imaginations and ideologies concerning the natural world, are disproportionately represented in the landscape. As such, it is evident that the many stakeholders in the drilling debate do not enjoy equal shares of either money or power.

It follows from the above discussion that visuality, a term that is used to characterize the collision-fraught intersection of power and representation, describes far more than what we see. As Hal Foster (in Rose 2003) cleverly articulates, “[v]isuality [is] how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein” (p. 213). This thesis strives to understand these various ‘how’s in the context of the drilling debate and, specifically, with respect to environmentalists, oil industries, the Gwich’in and the Iñupiat, as each of these groups harbor agendas and yield varying degrees of influence with which to implement them. In plain terms, if seeing is believing (Rorty 1979; Barnes
2001; Bunkse 1981; Jay 1992), then access to representation, and indeed certain representations themselves, are power.

Finally, in recognizing the inescapable ties between representation and power, it is critical to address the role of scholarly research, such as that which is presented in this thesis, in communicating, interpreting, and representing the ANWR landscape, and to acknowledge the potential influence carried by the knowledges it produces. It was common practice in previous decades for the findings of studies in geography, among other disciplines (Di Leonardo 1991; Ingraham 1994; Scott 1991), to be presented as slices of unveiled truth that were immune to criticism, amendment, or qualification, and for which the authors and presenters were unacknowledged and considered unimportant (Barnes 2001). Critical geographers today, however, employ reflexive methodologies (Cope 2002; Kwan 2002; Moss 2002) in order to hold themselves accountable for the assertions they make, the knowledges they produce, and the implications of their claims.

Reflexivity involves careful examination and acknowledgment of the researcher’s own positionality, which encompasses such characteristics as race, gender, socio-economic status, and religious background, but more importantly the experiences, exposures, and situated knowledges that color his or her perspectives, values, and worldview. Accordingly, the particular elements of the researcher’s positionality that must be revealed in a particular situation depend heavily on how closely they pertain to the topics and issues in question, which I take into consideration throughout this thesis. Reflexivity is a valuable technique for exploring why others see, think, and feel differently from us, and in turn how we can better relate to one another. It gives careful consideration to the distinctions between cultures,
peoples and perspectives, but also strives to understand the profound importance of sameness and identity (Kwan 2002, “Quantitative Methods”; Massey 1994; Rose 1997). For this reason, reflexivity is fundamental to answering the questions posed in this thesis, and an integral component of its findings.

In order to be mindful of and forthcoming about my particular situated understanding of the ANWR landscape and its various depictions, as well as of the drilling debate and its participants under discussion, I implement reflexive principles and practices throughout this thesis. Specifically, as reflexivity “requires that the researcher identify and locate herself, not just in the research, but also in the writing,” (Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata in Moss 2002, p.114) I feel free to write in the first person, and in doing so take personal as well as cultural responsibility for my assertions, characterizations, and claims. Additionally, I acknowledge my own positionality as a self-identified environmentalist who enjoys a lifestyle made possible through the consumption of petroleum among other non-renewable natural resources. As a member of none of the stakeholder groups discussed in this thesis, I do not presume to fully understand or relate to any of their messages or experiences, no matter how closely I examine their own words and images. However, as a U.S. citizen, voter, activist, and producer as well as distributor of knowledge, I am a member of the audience targeted precisely by the material distributed by all four stakeholders.

Reflexivity is problematic in that one can never entirely step out of his or her perspective to look back on it through purely objective, or “transparent” lenses. Gillian Rose describes this phenomenon by saying that “the search for positionality through transparent reflexivity is bound to fail” (Rose 1997, p.311). She remains a staunch advocate of
reflexivity, however, and, along with many others who also admit its inherent deficiencies, myself included, endorses it as a crucial component of any geographical methodology. As I have thoughtfully, rigorously, and comprehensively investigated the representational material that each of the stakeholders in the drilling debate has produced in order to portray the ANWR landscape in a way that make its case either for or against oil development, I am well positioned to offer the following analysis as a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion of how best to communicate as well as interact with the ANWR region. It is no more an objective or definitive breakdown of the issue and its players than any other examination can ever be, but rather a careful and critical interpretation of them.

As described above, landscapes, particularly in an aesthetic sense, are not similarly utilized or valued by, nor are they equally accessible to, all cultures and classes of people. Accordingly, I examine the ANWR landscape as an image as well as a region in this thesis. Further, through invocation of the theoretical frameworks described above, I dissect ANWR through social, cultural, political, and economic lenses in order to identify the cultural particularities and social injustices that its physical nature and multiple representations reflect.

Interpreting the ANWR Landscape and its Interpreters

Having laid the conceptual groundwork for this thesis, the following section describes its specific methodological approach. Principally, as a means of exposing the complexity of the drilling debate as well as the ways in which its various arguments and positions have been polarized, I provide a discourse and image analysis of both written and visual materials produced by four of its most prominent stakeholders. As the term discourse describes the
contextual and comprehensive treatment of a subject matter by all of the various forms of verbal, textual, and visual media through which it is communicated, I consider how all of the above forms of publicity are employed to represent the ANWR landscape, its perceived values and proposed management practices.

The materials produced by Arctic Power, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Gwich’in, and the Iñupiat that are examined here include more than twenty sources from each of the stakeholders and are comprised of newsletters, websites, published as well as unpublished reports, newspaper and magazine articles, pamphlets, charts, maps, photos, speeches, and press releases. Such written, transcribed, and visual materials serve to comprehensively, if not exhaustively, demonstrate the vocabulary and tone of the positions, characterizations, and assertions of each of the stakeholders. Further, in analyzing these materials I identify four discursive themes that are employed emphatically and persistently by all of the stakeholders. They include society and nature, sovereignty and security, luxury versus livelihood, and past, preservation, and future. As it is “through discourse that objects of debate – such as people and place – are demarcated and placed in relation to each other,” (Dixon and Hapke 2003, p.1) this thesis ultimately reveals four distinctly different portrayals of the ANWR landscape that are provided by each of the stakeholders under consideration and, even more importantly, identifies the people that are affected and the agendas that are served by each of them.

As mentioned earlier, I have chosen Arctic Power and the Natural Resources Defense Council to stand in for the pro-drilling campaign of industries and the anti-drilling campaign of environmentalists, respectively, in the discourse analysis of the ANWR debate presented
here. In order to demonstrate that these two organizations are in fact comprehensively, appropriately, and accurately characteristic of the larger groups and positions they represent, an in-depth discussion of how and why they were selected follows.

Support for oil development on Alaska’s north slope, where ANWR is located, comes primarily from industries, and in particular energy companies, including such organizations as the Alaska Support Industry Alliance, Alaska State Chamber of Commerce, Resource Development Council, Alaska Trucking Association, Alaska Oil & Gas Association, Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, Alaska Miner’s Association, Alveska Pipeline, and Exxon Mobil. The argument offered by these organizations and their fellow drilling proponents is, in short, that America is in need of a domestic source of oil and that developing ANWR would provide this while also creating jobs, exercising innovative technologies, and generating revenue (Alaska Support Industry Alliance 2008; Arctic Power Website 2008; Resource Development Council 2002).

Arctic Power is a self-proclaimed “grassroots, non-profit citizen’s organization” that represents all of the above companies and pro-industry establishments, among numerous others. It wholly endorses their pro-drilling argument, as 100 percent of its lobbying efforts are aimed at garnering support by both citizens and elected officials for opening ANWR’s Area 1002 to oil development (Arctic Power Website 2008). The group’s creation in 1992 was enabled by the support of the state government of Alaska as well as such oil industry giants as Exxon Mobil, ChevronTexaco, BP, and ConocoPhillips (Cassidy 2005). Its current membership and support base are comprised of 10,000 members including The Energy Stewardship Alliance, which is backed by the Petroleum Councils of 27 U.S. states (Arctic
For this reason, Arctic Power’s position and participation in the drilling debate emphatically reflect those of oil industries on the whole, and therefore serve to characterize them in the discourse analysis presented in this paper.

In contrast, support for the continued prohibition of drilling comes primarily from environmentalists and animal rights groups including such organizations as Oil On Ice, Arctic Protection Network, Alaska Conservation Foundation, Alaska Wilderness League, Arctic Wildlife, Defenders of Wildlife, Arctic Connections, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, Sierra Club, U.S. Public Interest Research Group (Alaska), and World Wildlife Fund. These organizations refute the above argument of drilling advocates by claiming that oil development on the North Slope would needlessly threaten the region’s unique and fragile flora and fauna to recover a minimal amount of energy, the demand for which should be reduced rather than met (Defenders of Wildlife 2008; NRDC Website 2008, Sierra Club Website 2008).

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is a self-named “environmental action organization” that enthusiastically supports and ardently reiterates the above anti-drilling argument. NRDC is staffed by scientists, lawyers, and policy-analysts among other professionals, and supported by 1.2 million members and activists (NRDC Website 2008). It has been at the forefront of the campaign to maintain the protected and development-free status of ANWR for over thirty years and is referenced by numerous other environmental groups, media outlets, and scholarly journals reporting on the issue, including Grist Magazine (Little 2005), The New York Times (Egan 1991), Government and Policy (Ember

The drilling debate is so central to lobbying efforts by the NRDC that the organization has identified ANWR as one of only twelve high priority “unspoiled wildlands in the Americas under threat of destruction,” (NRDC BioGem Website 2008) and featured it in their BioGems Initiative to help ensure that it remains undeveloped. Additionally, whereas other environmentalist groups focus their attention on an individual aspect of the drilling debate, such as protecting the region’s large animals, warning against the projected risk of oil spills, or assessing the negative impacts of proposed development to native residents of the area, NRDC is broadly representative of the position of environmentalists because it is concerned with all facets of the ANWR issue, which encompass “its people, its plants and animals, and the natural systems on which all life depends” (NRDC Website 2008). For these reasons, the discourse around ANWR employed by NRDC and analyzed in this thesis serves to exemplify that of environmentalists collectively.

The discourses created by the Iñupiat, the Gwich’in, Arctic Power, and NRDC are especially key in the establishment of norms and knowns surrounding the ANWR landscape, as the majority of investors and participants in the drilling debate have never and will never experience it firsthand. As the textual and visual representations of the landscape these four stakeholders offer serve to not only portray norms, but also influence norms, and, by default, reject or exclude those who are not included in the norm (Rose 2001), the first goal of the discourse analysis provided here is to expose the most pertinent and prevalent norms and knows surrounding this issue.
Secondly, this analysis serves to situate the selected stakeholders within the debate by highlighting the context in which each of them experiences the ANWR landscape and its resources. For example, whereas the geologists, biologists, and engineers who work closely with Arctic Power can cite that caribou from three different arctic herds share genetic material (Arctic Power 2002) and that the maximum summer temperature ever recorded in ANWR is 86 degrees Fahrenheit (Arctic Power Website 2008), Iñupiat Eskimos are able to recognize the smells that signal changing arctic seasons and know how to fend off polar bears if necessary. All of the situated knowledges of ANWR are legitimate and serve their own particular purposes, however, they differ from one another so dramatically that, in striving to understand the many and diverse roles that ANWR is asked to fill by its various stakeholders, it is crucial to qualify and distinguish between them. In short, the particular situated knowledges of the four stakeholders discussed here influence the way they live, think, value, and interact with the land, and thus, the way (and what) they argue in the drilling debate, and are therefore embedded in their respective discourses which are under investigation.

Thirdly, the discourse analysis that follows explores the intimate, opportunistic, strained, and at times, acrimonious relationships between these stakeholders, and exposes the complicated power dynamics that prescribe them. In doing so it considers themes of entitlement, privilege, power, and exploitation, and it identifies whose situated knowledges are imposed upon, and therefore reflected in, the ANWR landscape versus whose are invisible (Duncan and Duncan 2001). As the ideas and priorities projected through representation can be efficiently and effectively communicated to voters and thus to our
elected representatives, and then transformed into public policy or written into formal legislation, it follows that visual influence translates directly into political power. This thesis demonstrates how Arctic Power and NRDC have depicted for the American public at large images of ANWR that now exist as prominent caricatures of the landscape and inform its associated political debate. In doing so, they have presumed the responsibility of representing their respective yea or nay positions in the broader political debate and on behalf of the many other involved and invested groups, for example the Iñupiat and Gwich’in peoples. As such, the images of the ANWR landscape and associated positions on drilling in the region that are held by these native groups remain either reiterated by their higher-profile counterparts in the debate as it is convenient for them to do so, otherwise exploited, or even obscured altogether, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

As the perspectives and positions in the drilling debate of the Iñupiat and Gwich’in native peoples are profoundly historically situated, I devote the second chapter of this thesis to a critical synthesis of secondary literature as well as native accounts concerning the concurrent but distinctly different lifestyles and land use practices of these two groups as they have evolved over the thousands of years since their arrival in the continent now known as North America. The chapter also recounts the various stages at which “outside” entities, as the native peoples refer to them (GRRB 2007; Tagarook 2003), which include both oil companies and environmentalists, entered into the picture and began laying claim to particular regions and resources within their traditional homelands, a poignant example of which was the very establishment of ANWR. The chapter concludes with a description of
current indigenous land use practices as well as of the opportunities and challenges associated with them.

In Chapter Three I address divisive topic of land use in ANWR at both local and national scales. Through a detailed analysis of the discourses created and employed by the Iñupiat, the Gwich’in, Arctic Power, and NRDC, I illustrate their four distinctly different and highly particular geographical imaginations of the ANWR landscape. In doing so, I highlight society and nature, sovereignty and security, luxury versus livelihood, and past, preservation, and future as the predominant discursive themes shared by all four groups. These themes draw out important distinctions between the ways of valuing, communicating, and experiencing the ANWR landscape and its many resources employed by the stakeholders who argue on the same side of the drilling debate. Likewise, these themes draw attention to commonalities between stakeholders on opposing sides of the issue. In this way, chapter three demonstrates how the geographical imaginations of all four of the stakeholders have manifested themselves in their respective positions within the drilling debate as evidenced through their discourses, but even more significantly, how their specific views and arguments fail to line up neatly on either side of the aisle as might be expected.

Finally, in Chapter four of this thesis I summarize the positions of each of the above stakeholders. In doing so, I illustrate the primary cultural, economic, and environmental challenges that face each of them as the drilling debate persists, and as the number and breadth of its participants grow. I also address the most pertinent social and environmental justice issues at stake in the debate and propose an approach to continued deliberations on ANWR land use and management that give them careful consideration. In conclusion,
through a discussion of the limitations of the research presented in this thesis as well as suggestions for how it can be furthered and expanded upon, I describe a reflexive and culturally sensitive approach to examining the ANWR landscape as its greatest value and intended contribution to the practice of critical geography and, ultimately, towards a resolution of the drilling debate.
Chapter 2:  
A History of Culture and Land-Use in ANWR

The views and values held today by both the Iñupiat and Gwich’in native tribes are deeply rooted in the histories of their people, their lands, and their sacred and long-held beliefs. Iñupiat and Gwich’in children are taught by their elders about the lives and experiences of their ancestors, including their missteps as well as accomplishments and hardships as well as pleasures. They are also taught in their local schools about the social and political circumstances of those who came before them, and members of all ages within both tribes continue to draw on events in distant as well as recent histories to describe their present cultures, customs, and various relationships, and to explain their priorities, perspectives, and dispositions more generally (North Slope Borough School District 2008).

As both the Iñupiat and the Gwich’in are subsistence-based tribes, the issue of land use in particular has been at the heart of decision-making and tradition for both groups since their arrival on the land that would not become known as ANWR for thousands of years to come. Likewise, the positions of each of these native groups in the present-day drilling debate are historically situated. For this reason, the following chapter provides a vital cultural history of the greater ANWR region that leads into a political history of the region, as national politics in recent years have become an extraordinary influence on native cultures, customs, and land use practices. Specifically, I offer a critical synthesis of secondary historical literature on the Iñupiat and the Gwich’in, but also tie in contemporary native responses to such literature as well as native historical accounts whenever possible, in order to set the stage for the discourse analysis of the current drilling debate that is found in
Chapter Three. In doing so, I provide a few critical pieces of understanding about the debate’s earliest participants who have perhaps the most at stake in its eventual outcome.

**A Cultural History of the Greater ANWR Region**

For thousands of years, and in contrast to European-Americans, both the Iñupiat and Gwich’in tribes embraced an exclusively oral tradition in which they communicated with one another and passed their wisdom and stories from one generation to the next. Even as these groups began to develop methods for transcribing their language in as early as the 1870s, it was at the urging of Euro-American missionaries and under their guidance (ANLC 2008). As a result, the overwhelming majority of written accounts of native peoples and cultures have been recorded, interpreted, and made available by non-native scholars, ethnographers, and historians. Further, as interest in ANWR and its natural resources has become widespread and increased dramatically in recent decades, so has interest in the people of ANWR and with it, the quantity of literature produced by extra-locals on the region’s cultural geography. Likewise, much of the history and culture presented in this chapter was acquired from non-native sources.

While historical accounts of the indigenous groups of ANWR often highlight the particular qualities and aspects of their cultures that most clearly distinguish them from Euro-American culture, these are not always the same characteristics that tribal members themselves would consider to be most defining of or central to their cultural identity (ANKN 2008). Their inclusion here, therefore, provides a detailed albeit exterior glimpse into the lives and traditions of the Iñupiat and Gwich’in peoples, as well as demonstrates the ways in which these groups have been characterized and “constructed”, as elaborated on by Proctor
(1998), by particular factions of American society throughout history, and oftentimes in order to serve specific agendas. Additionally, the cultural history that follows incorporates native input whenever possible and relays certain responses of native populations to having been spoken for and about rather than with for so long, as they have become more engaged in the documentation of their people and ways in recent decades.

![Figure 2.1: Iñupiat and Gwich’in Homelands](image)

*Figure 2.1: Iñupiat and Gwich’in Homelands*  
*(Banerjee 2003, p.134)*
Iñupiat Eskimos are believed to have been the first humans to set foot on what is now Alaska when they followed ice-age mammals across the Bering Sea land bridge as many as 15,000 years ago (Naske 1994, p.11, 22). As the word “Eskimo” denotes, the Iñupiat people originally belonged to a Yupik language group that encompassed tremendous sub-cultural diversity. By approximately 1,000 B.C. however, they had broken off from this group and established their own identity, culture and communities along the northern coast, as shown in Figure 2.1, marked primarily by unique whaling practices (Hulley 1970, p.19; Naske 1994, p.23, 24) in which the tribes continues to take great pride (Hess 1999; ANKN 2008; ANLC 2008).

Approximately 5,000 years after the Iñupiat, and also by way of the Bering Sea Land bridge, the Athabascan Native American tribe arrived in Alaska. They quickly moved into the northeastern interior of the state, as shown in Figure 2.1, as well as the northern and northwest regions, respectively, of what are now the Yukon and Northwest Territories of Canada, where they lived in the drainages of the Yukon River (Naske 1994, p.17; Tetrault 2004, p.4). The Gwich’in Indians were the northernmost subset of the Athabascan tribe occupying the greater area of modern day ANWR, although their semi-nomadic lifestyle, which endures, involved perpetual migration and resettlement (Hulley 1970, p.27). Likewise, Gwich’in homes, which were large structures made of animal hide-covered logs or poles that typically housed multiple nuclear families, indicated impermanence—each involving more or less elaboration depending on the level of mobility of its inhabitants (Naske 1994, p.18, 19).
Constructed from soil and moss rather than ice, as were the igloos of other Eskimo populations, Iñupiat homes were semi-subterranean (Hulley 1970, p.20). Each was built to house a single nuclear family, which served as the primary unit of their social structure. Marriage within the community was conducted, and men and women filled very particular and distinctly different roles within the household. Additionally, they each had an obligation to provide for the community as a whole, as their shared culture was subsistence-based and labor-intensive. Men, for example, were expected to volunteer on whale-hunting crews. The combining of family land or sharing in the ownership of goods, however, was strictly prohibited (Naske 1994, p.23, 24), and continues today, for example, in the form of village corporations that are individually owed and separately managed (ASRC Website 2008).

As practitioners of hunter-gatherer subsistence, the Gwich’in enjoyed a diverse diet of roots and berries as well as moose, caribou, grizzly and black bears, wolverines, sheep, fish, the eggs and young of several bird species, and other small game (Hulley 1970, p.28). Those individuals with superior hunting skills were revered by their communities and entrusted with leadership roles, which were often the prizes of inheritance in other native traditions (Naske 1994, p.17-20). The value of animals to the Gwich’in people and culture, however, ran much deeper than that of corporeal nourishment and sustenance. Tribal members today confirm that this has been the case “since time immemorial” and remains so (GSC 2005, “A Moral Choice”). Although their religion emphasized individual rights over community interests (Naske 1994, p.20) and such values as independence and individuality continue to define their culture, relationships between hunters, animals, and fellow tribe members were all sacred to the Gwich’in. As in the Iñupiat religious tradition, they were also considered to be

The Potlatch, a ceremony that endures today in certain Native American cultures in which the dead are honored, gifts are exchanged, and prestige is attributed to tribal leaders, was one of many spiritual practices of the Gwich’in. Other customs and complex mythologies perpetuated by religious leaders, known as shamans, included animism, worship of multiple animal and other worldly spirits, and a belief in reincarnation that took both human and animal forms. Such beliefs are said to have blurred the distinction between people and animals (Naske 1994, p.20), which is no clearer today than it was then (GSC 2005 “A Moral Choice”).

The religion of the Iñupiat, which also revolved around the intimate and cherished relationships shared between the hunter and the hunted, involved similar beliefs in supernaturalism, tribal animism, and animal spirit worship (Chance 1990, Fast 2002, p.52, Freeman 2000, p.136, and Naske 1994, p.24 in Tetrault 2004, p.6). Likewise, in addition to being central to the spirituality of the Iñupiat people, the fish and game of the arctic region were also invaluable as providers of their food, clothing, shelter, and many other material goods, as corroborated by the tribe today (Nageak 2008; Tagarook 2003; Creed 1988).

A traditionally maritime tribe, the Iñupiat Eskimos are believed to be the first to hunt the bowhead whale. They also harvested salmon, cod, seal, and walrus for food. When an animal’s life was taken by the Iñupiat, nearly every part of its body was used to support their lifestyle and survival, which remains common practice and a source of pride and identity for
the tribe today (ANKN 2008). Animal oil was burned for warmth, fish skin and walrus intestines were sewn into waterproof clothing, hides were stretched across large pieces of driftwood to form umiaks—rafts that carried sea hunters and travelers, and sun goggles were crafted from ivory tusks and wood. The Iñupiat were also very skilled at decorative tusk and bone carving, as their early small-tool tradition trained them to be (Hulley 1970, p.19, 20; Naske 1994, p. 23).

The Iñupiat Eskimos and Gwich’in Indians shared many similar religious beliefs and environmental values, but also held opposing cultural views and engaged in distinctly different livelihoods. As they occupied lands in close proximity to one another and utilized certain natural resources in common, their relationship was marked by both kinship (Hulley 1970, p.18) and hostility (Hulley 1970, p.28), dependence and fear. Although the Iñupiat in particular enjoyed advanced weaponry, both tribes were trained extensively in warfare (Hulley 1970, p.20; Naske 1994, p.20).

While many important distinctions between Gwich’in and Iñupiaq cultures are drawn out in this section, such attention to detail has not been common practice throughout much of the written history on these tribes. In fact, the two groups are often painted in similar lights or even clumped together entirely. For example, extensive literature has been produced to address Alaskan Natives generally (Freeman 2000; Liebner 2006; Norris 2002; U.S. Congress 1971). Further, native peoples are frequently portrayed collectively, for example as “noble savages” who know better than whites how to live in harmony with and care for the environment (Redford 1991), as most often reiterated by environmentalists who aim to reintroduce such minimally invasive land use practices as the ones described above, or as
members of a primitive culture that, as Rossiter and Wood describe, are thought to have effectively “lost their rights to the land because over the last century they have done nothing to protect them” (2005, p.357). Both characterizations, however, are incomplete, presumptuous, and imposing, and in this way appropriately analogous to the relationships, as experienced and relayed in recent years by both the Gwich’in (GSC Website 2008; GSC 2005 “A Moral Choice”) and the Iñupiat (ANKN 2008; Nageak 2008), between these native groups and Asian- and European-Americans ever since the latter groups first came to encounter the former.

The Political Making of the State of Alaska

The homelands of these Northwestern American natives was discovered by Russians in 1741, who immediately partook of its many unique arctic natural resources including fur, minerals, fish and other sea mammals (Norris 2002, p.1; Naske 1994, p.27). During their reign, the livelihoods and resources upon which the native populations depended were disturbed and intruded upon such that the overall native population was cut in half (Creed 1988, p. 3). Almost one hundred years after the arrival of Russians in Alaska, New England whalers who were hunting in the Bering Sea (Naske 1994, p.1) set foot on its shores as well, which sparked the substantial maritime fur trade of the 1840s (Norris 2002, p.1). In the interests of resource and land acquisition, which were rampant during this period of heightened nationalism and territorial expansion (Potter 1921), the United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867 for the extremely modest price of 7.2 million dollars (Campbell 2004, p.3). The decision was a controversial one, however, as the region was considered by some to be “a worthless territory of ice and snow” (Naske 1994, p.57). Aside from the fact
that natives were never consulted about this business deal, nor did they receive any share of the profits (Creed 1988), the above characterization of the land held serious impacts for the Iñupiat and Gwich’in tribes as it perpetuated the notion that the inhabitants of such deserted and useless lands could only be primitive and barbarian savages. The notion that native land use has been perceived by colonial powers, explorers, and frontiersmen as inefficient, inept, and “chaotic” has been noted by scholars of numerous other regions of the world (Kirsch 2002, pp.551, 555). This damaging reputation would rest with the Iñupiat and Gwich’in tribes and foster skepticism of their credibility and legitimacy as both decision-makers and environmental stewards far into the future (Kendall 1989).

For the succeeding twenty years, the acquired land was leased to the Alaska Commercial Company, who initiated a sealing industry as well as built and operated ships used to transport people and supplies to the area. In this way, the region was being constructed as a center for industrialism and commercialism, which existed in tension with traditional native subsistence and localized trading practices. A similar diminishment and distrust of native resource management practices, specifically in Africa, as well as the comodification and pricing of “natural assets” that has been introduced there and elsewhere by whites is explored by Harvey (1996). After several years, the Alaska Commercial Company began providing medical services, establishing schools, and maintaining law and order for the region’s growing population, which further marginalized close-knit and independent native communities.

In 1879, in response to an outbreak of violence between natives and whites, the navy assumed all governing responsibilities. The first Alaskan delegate to the U.S. congress was
elected in 1881, but it wasn’t until three years later that military rule finally ended there and a civilian government was established, which led to such developments as the implementation of an official education system (Naske 1994, p.61-65). Natives, however, were granted no political representation, nor were they afforded an executive or even participatory role in the establishment of the newly founded school system (ANKN 2008).

In the late 1800’s, Alaska’s economy was driven primarily by the fur trade, fisheries, mining and increasingly, ivory (Naske 1994, p.62). Aggressive exploitation of natural resources by industry threatened whale, walrus, and other sea creature populations (Naske 1994, p.66). Despite their continued dependence on the land and sea for subsistence, Iñupiat Eskimos demonstrated an ability to accommodate the economic system introduced by whites that was far greater than that of their aboriginal counterparts (Hulley 1970, p.21). The Gwich’in tribe, on the other hand, suffered the harshest adjustment as the last of the natives to come in contact with whites in the mid- to late 1800s, by which point the latter’s dominant influence and authority in the region had already taken hold. The comodification of natural resources that ensued, however, and the integration of Alaska into the industrial economy of the United States, profoundly impacted both populations (Hulley 1970, p.27; McKeenan 1954, p.54 in Tetrault 2004, p.7).

The increasing rates of resource consumption, development, and trade not only severely diminished the food supply of indigenous tribes, but also disrupted their traditional practices of killing animals only in the amount needed to provide for their community, and making use of every part of those that had been sacrificed. (For a related study that focuses on the crowding out of native peoples and their livelihoods by modern civilizations and
colonial powers, see Kirsch 2002, p. 558.) Under the systems of production and trade that accompanied the newly adopted market-based economy (Tetrault 2004, p.7,8), natives were forced to become the disadvantaged and outnumbered economic competitors of whites. This dynamic led to poignant and angry accusations by natives of corruption and mistreatment (Civil Rights Digest 1969; Naske 1994, p.66).

The 1890s marked a period of attempted reconciliation, charity, and goodwill by the Euro-Americans towards the natives, although their efforts were certainly selfishly motivated and often egregiously misguided. The Alaska Commercial Company, for example, designed a conservation program intended to stabilize the seal population and thus sustain the sealing industry (Naske 1994, p.68). A fervent effort was also made to bring Christianity to the natives (Naske 1994, p.64, 66; ANLC 2008), and in 1898 the Homestead Act of the United States congress was extended to Alaska, thereby instituting a system of private land ownership and the allocation, as opposed to sharing, of resources (Naske 1994, p.78). This new system was considered by both the Gwich’in and the Iñupiat to be an affront to native values and practices, which did not involve written or legal appropriations of land (Creed 1988).

Congressional interest in Alaska increased significantly in the early 1900s (Naske 1994, p.78). Regional agriculture was developed (Naske 1994, p.79) and the Alaska Road Commission was established (Naske 1994, p.82), but even more consequential were the area surveys and exploration missions financed by the U.S. government and carried out in response to a rise in the value of gold production (Naske 1994, p.1). In 1906, delegates from Alaska were invited to represent their region in the U.S. congress, although they were denied
voting privileges (Naske 1994, p.133). As Alaska was becoming incorporated into the legal and political systems of the United States, however, and also serving as a site for the realization of government sanctioned projects and activities, the stage was being set for future territorial disputes between the region’s natives and its formally established governing bodies (Blomley 2003).

Also in 1906, in the vein of legitimizing regional practices and procedures through legalization, the Native Allotment Act issued unclaimed plots of land to natives, turning them from hunter-gatherers into title-holding homesteaders (Naske 1994, p.198). Natives, however, largely viewed this as an assault on their livelihoods and traditional land claims, rather than the gracious gift it was professed to be (ANKN 2008; Creed 1988). Six years later, Alaska was afforded territorial status that was accompanied by state rights (Naske 1994, p.134), and by the following year the first territorial legislature had been formed (Naske 1994, p.91). By this time Alaska’s non-indigenous population was booming, local fisheries as well as gold, copper and other mineral industries were thriving, and nearly 500,000 acres had been designated as native lands (Naske 1994, p.198), although it was begrudgingly that the Gwich’in and Inupiat accepted their shares (Creed 1988).

While the U.S. government envisioned industrial progress and commercial success as the greatest potential achievements for Alaska in the first half of the twentieth century, the nation’s general public clearly held a very different geographical imagination of the region, and one that involved an appreciation for its unique and charming physical features. The National Park Service ran a recreational survey in 1950 with the intention of identifying natural areas and features of particular interest or value, in which the Alaskan arctic was
named (USFWS - Alaska 2008). This was no surprise, as the region’s vistas and wildlife had long been admired and recorded by naturalists and conservationists (USFWS – Alaska 2006), but the economic incentives for consuming natural resources were increasingly overpowering environmentalists appeals to preserve them. Seven years after the survey was conducted, with the discovery of Alaska’s first oilfield, interest in extracting the region’s profitable natural resources had grown to an unprecedented level. Alaskans in particular had high hopes for prosperity in light of this new finding and held expectations that it would stabilize their local economy (Naske 1994, p.130, 131).

The now lucrative, populous, and highly commercial Alaska region was granted statehood in 1959 under President Dwight D. Eisenhower (Naske 1994, p.154). The Alaska statehood act explicitly declared that utilization, development, and conservation of all land, water, and other natural resources were to be carried out with careful consideration of maximum benefit for all people (Naske 1994, p.169), however both Eskimos and Native Americans feared that their traditional hunting and trapping practices would be restricted under new political organization (Creed 1988). Concerns that native hospitals would be shut down, federal welfare payments would be suspended, and the exploitation of natural resources would be enabled under federal control were also widespread. In line with native fears and predictions, Alaska’s first oil and gas lease, to the tune of four million dollars, took place in the same year of the state’s inauguration (Naske 1994, p.157, 169).

In the following decade, tensions between industry, military, environmentalist, and native land-use agendas in Alaska became palpable. Oil and gas industries struck a ten-billion-barrel oilfield in Prudhoe Bay and leased it for $900 million (Naske 1994, p.183).
They also built a 789-mile pipeline from the North Slope to the port of Valdez (Naske 1994, p.195). The U.S. military proposed an additional North Slope operation as well, named Project Chariot, which involved the release of atomic energy as a means of blasting out sections of earth that could then be reconstructed into a man-made harbor at Cape Thompson. Both Native groups were vehemently opposed to the Project Chariot operation, however the Iñupiat in particular feared that it would endanger their nearby village (Naske 1994, p.205).

**The Establishment of ANWR and Appropriation of Alaskan Lands**

In 1960, after more than a decade of persistent lobbying by naturalists and conservationists, including forester Robert Marshall, National Park Service scientists George Collins and Lowell Sumner, Wilderness Society President Olaus Murie and his wife Margaret, the Arctic National Wildlife Range was formally established under the direction of President Eisenhower “for the purpose of preserving unique wildlife, wilderness and recreational values” (USFWS - Alaska 2008) and signed into law by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior as Public Land Order 2214 (U.S. Congress 1960).

As individual native tribes increasingly felt their influence in the decision-making processes about allocation and use of resources and lands dwindle, they banded together in defense of their entitlement to a say. The Iñupiat Eskimos formed a regional native organization in 1961, called Iñupiat Paitot, which dealt with such issues as the tribe’s social and economic development, land claims, and continued subsistence practices (Fairbanks Daily Miner 1961 in Liebner 2006, p.31). Similarly, the Gwich’in people sought representation by the Association on American Indian Affairs, a New York-based charity who had recently achieved non-profit status (AAIA 2008). By 1966, the Alaska Federation
of Natives had been formed for the purpose of uniting the effort to achieve what they considered to be fair settlements of native land claims (Creed 1988, p.3).

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, which was enacted by President Richard Nixon, attempted to appease concerns of indigenous groups as well as settle financial claims brought to the U.S. government by them. It offered natives a greater role in the development plans at work in the region, as well as attempted to bring them aboard the effort to protect conservation lands that had been designated as particularly valuable (Naske 1994, p.195). ANCSA awarded natives $962.5 million and legal title to 44 million acres of land within ANWR (U.S. Congress 1971). It also provided for the establishment of 13 additional regional corporations, one of which was the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation that enabled the Iñupiat village to invest in petroleum development on the North Slope, and more than 200 village corporations, among other ventures (Creed 1988, p. 3). This same corporation joined forces with another Eskimo enterprise, called Nunamiut Corporation, as well as the National Park Service just three years later in order to co-manage certain designated lands according to principles agreed upon by all involved parties.

Although it was considered by many native communities to be ethnocentrically Euro-American and therefore severely flawed, the Iñupiat generally agreed that ANCSA was the best compromise they could expect from the vastly more resourced and powerful United States government, particularly because the new corporate system awarded them outright ownership of what they already considered to be their own land. As John Creed (1988), an author and transcriber of native historical accounts points out, however, “As with any diverse group, Natives […] do not view their lands and corporations in a uniform way” (p.7). Iñupiat
natives disagreed, for example, on whether corporate shares should be allowed to be sold on
the open market versus legally required to remain under native ownership. Moreover, the
Gwich’in village, a characteristically close-knit tribe and independent people, chose not to
participate in compromising business or political endeavors with the government and opted

Under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980,
which was backed by President Jimmy Carter, the Arctic National Wildlife Range became
the Artic National Wildlife Refuge, as it is called today (U.S. Congress 1980). While a
detailed explanation for this semantic adjustment is not offered in the Public Law that
effected it, the change does give some indication that the ANWR landscape, which had once
been a little known and relatively uncontested space, had become a highly sought after region
thought, at least by some, to be in need of sanctuary. ANILCA nearly doubled the landmass
of ANWR and also established specific regulations for natural resource and land use within
the Refuge. At the same time, however, it mandated exploration of ANWR’s coastal plain in
an effort to assess the region’s oil potential and biological resources. The stretch of land
along the Beaufort Sea that was appropriated for exploration, as articulated by Section 1002\(^3\)
of ANILCA (U.S. Congress 1971), is represented by the yellow region in Figure 2.2.

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\(^3\) The coastal plain of ANWR is often referred to as “Area Ten-Oh-Two” after the Section of ANILCA that
spelled out the federal government’s intentions regarding oil assessment within this region.
In 1983, ANWR’s size was increased again by nearly one million acres, but it wasn’t for another five years that its boundary was finally extended under pressure by environmentalists to encompass its current total area of 19.6 million acres, including three wild rivers and a wilderness area "where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man” (USFWS – Alaska 2008). As federally owned land, ANWR is currently managed by the United States Department of Fish and Wildlife and subject to the restrictions and regulations of the National Wilderness Preservation System (USFWS – Alaska 2008).

While the coastal plain of ANWR may not be drilled for oil unless the United States congress explicitly “opens” it for that purpose, as required by the same Section 1002 that
mandated its exploration, over seventeen billion barrels of petroleum have been recovered from several areas just outside ANWR’s borders, as exhibited by Figure 2.3. Reserves within its coastal plain region, which includes approximately eight percent of the entire Refuge, are estimated at between 5.7 and 16.0 billion barrels of oil (USGS 2001). According to the Energy Information Administration, the United States currently consumes just over twenty million barrels of oil per day, although that number is projected to reach 28.3 million barrels of oil a day by the year 2025 (EIA 2004).

Figure 2.3: Oil Drilling in Northern Alaska (USGS 2001)

Within Area 1002 of ANWR, the only region that is even being considered for oil development currently, there is a single native settlement and it belongs to the incorporated Iñupiat village of Kaktovik. This small coastal city with a population of just 300 is uniquely
acquainted not only with the drilling debate, but with the entire ANWR region, as described below.

To fully understand Kaktovik and its people, it is helpful to try and see the world from our perspective. Living as we do on both land and sea, we often find ourselves looking south, where our homes and animals lie and with our backs to the water. (Kaktovik Website 2008)

In fact, as maps often serve as powerful and persuasive representations of identity, particularly when the people whose cultural and political homelands are being represented have a say in their illustration (Sparke 1998), the official website of the city of Kaktovik offers the map pictured in Figure 2.4 to depict their homelands from this “unique point of view” (Kaktovik Website 2008).
Figure 2.4: Map from Iñupiaq Perspective
(Kaktovik Website 2008)
While there are no human inhabitants of ANWR’s Area 1002 other than the Kaktovik, this coastal plain region does provide calving ground for the Porcupine River Caribou herb whose population is estimated at 130,000 (Gildart 2002). Moreover, as this caribou herb provides the Gwich’in tribe with their cultural, spiritual, and physical sustenance, the coastal plain is of vital importance to the Gwich’in as well.

The desire to preserve and protect the Porcupine Caribou is the driving force for resistance to oil drilling in ANWR by the Gwich’in, who are also known as the “caribou people” (Gildart 2002). In 1988, the entire Gwich’in Nation assembled in a traditional ritual of solidarity to express their collective opposition to development as a united front (Gwich’in Nation 1988). Also at that time, they formed an organization known as the Gwich’in Steering Committee whose explicit purpose was to shield “the sacred place where life begins” (GSC Website 2008), as they call the coastal plain, from drilling.

The map shown in Figure 2.5, which was created by the Gwich’in Steering Committee, provides a critical piece of evidence as to how profoundly Gwich’in lives and communities are defined by the caribou.

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4 This expression in the native Gwich’in language reads, “lizhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit” (GSC Website 2008).
It clearly demarcates the traditional homelands of the tribe as well as depicts the habitat and migratory route of the Porcupine caribou, and the close resemblance of the outlines of their respective stomping grounds is far from coincidence. Gwich’in settlements, in fact, were strategically and precisely established to intercept the caribou in transition (Gildart 2002).

The findings of scientific studies on the coastal plain do not agree as to how exactly, or to what extent, drilling for oil could impact the Porcupine Caribou. Some reports indicate that the caribou would be severely harmed (National Academy of Sciences 2003), whereas other sources claim that they wouldn’t be negatively impacted at all (Arctic Power Website...
It is even suggested that information about the caribou and their habitat that has been obtained in conjunction with the extensive research conducted on prospective oil development itself has led to an increased understanding and awareness of the species that could positively affect the herd (Arctic Power Website 2008). As the Gwich’in culture, lifestyle, and continued existence depend upon the caribou, however, the tribe does not want to risk doing them any harm.

The Gwich’in are persistently appealing to their Senators and Representatives to address this issue, and have established rapport with certain government officials. Representative Ed Markey, a democrat from Massachusetts, for example, has introduced several anti-drilling bills on behalf of the Gwich’in (Grist 2006, “Fun and James”). Similarly, the Iñupiat have established allegiances with particular congressmen and women, for example republican senator Pete V. Domenici from New Mexico who led a congressional delegation to Alaska to discuss the prospect of oil development in ANWR with Iñupiat natives who live on the North Slope (Domenici 2005). The influential individuals who have developed ties with one of these two natives groups, however, rarely initiate any interaction or contact with, or even acknowledgement of, the other.

In addition to the native tribes, several other stakeholders, lobbyists, and interest groups on both sides of the aisle in the drilling debate have worked to ensure that this party-line issue frequently resurfaces as an add-on to congressional bills. Further, through the geography of discourse, which is described by Dixon and Hapke (2003) as “the production, dissemination and consumption of ideas, concepts, theories, and understandings” (p.142), their efforts have been relatively effective. Initiated either by Republicans seeking to open
the refuge to drilling or by Democrats interested in making its protection from development permanent, bills that contain passages addressing land use in ANWR are occasionally passed by either the House or the Senate. Once in fact, in 1995, legislation authorizing oil drilling in ANWR was passed by both houses of congress. The bill, however, was vetoed by President Clinton and never overridden by congress or signed into law.

Of the many contested spaces within the broader Alaska region, the ongoing dispute over the possession and use of lands within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has been among the most notorious, soliciting the attention and involvement of numerous extra-locals, and it has certainly been the most enduring. The state of flux and contention described in this section has characterized ANWR debate for several decades and will likely define its legacy.

**Present-Day Indigenous Land Use and Resource Management**

Today, Alaskan natives are the third largest landholders in the state, ranking just below the state and federal governments (Creed 1988, p. 7), and their respective positions in the drilling debate have come to define their land management practices and ideologies in the eyes of extra-locals. The Iñupiat, whose current population in Alaska is estimated at nearly forty-five thousand (ANLC 2008) project themselves as a progressive, pro-development people (ASRC Website 2008; Kaktovik Website 2008; NANA Website 2008). Iñupiaq enterprises, such as the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation and its subsidiaries, have invested heavily in petroleum as a highly valued commodity, and therefore enthusiastically support the opening of ANWR’s coastal plain to drilling. Additionally, many of them support other industries, such as tourism, commercial fishing, construction, mining, transportation, engineering, financial management, publishing, and communications. Iñupiaq corporations
today employ native as well as non-native Alaskans, are sustained by more than nine thousand shareholders, and own title to five million acres of land, ninety-two thousand of which are beneath the surface of the coastal plain and therefore believed to contain vast petroleum reserves (ASRC Website 2008; Kaktovik Website 2008; NANA Website 2008).

In ambitiously pursuing business avenues and partnerships, the Iñupiat continue to stress the fundamental importance of their traditional values, including respect for one another, their land, elders, history and culture, all of which continue to guide their personal as well as professional actions and relationships. Another value they express repeatedly, however, and teach in their native schools, is “avoidance of conflict” (North Slope Borough School District 2008). In the case of developing ANWR, this stated value translates into making the concessions necessary to avert the disaster that could ensure from engaging in a culture clash with extremely powerful Euro-American groups and corporations. Without conceding the customs and morals that are most sacred to them, the Iñupiat are working to thrive within a socio-economic system that was imposed on them, rather than rejecting it only to intensify hardship for the tribe.

Like the Iñupiat, the Gwich’in reiterate emphatically in both written and spoken words that the cultural and environmental principles and beliefs laid out by their ancestors, which focus on caring for one another and honoring their elders and the earth, are as relevant today as they have ever been. In contrast, however, these similar values have led the Gwich’in down a very different path from that of the Iñupiat, as they have chosen to defy the dominant North-American capitalist system that has increasingly been imposed on Alaskan natives. As they believed during the time of ANILCA’s creation that their independent
culture and traditional livelihoods would have been too compromised if they had entered into business agreements sponsored by the federal government (GSC 2004), their much smaller population of just eight thousand (GSC 2005, “New Report”) is not associated with any native corporations, nor do they own highly valuable sub-surface lands that are sought after by petroleum companies. As a result, a major difference between the Iñupiat and the Gwich’in is that the former stand to profit significantly from oil development, whereas the latter only stand to lose. Likewise, the Gwich’in continue to oppose drilling as an operation that would encourage further invasion of the land they have called home for thousands of years, threaten their independence, and potentially endanger the porcupine caribou among other wildlife species and resources upon which the tribe subsists.

In recent years, the Gwich’in have made efforts to dissuade drilling advocates from pursuing development agendas by promoting the idea that increasing oil production would not be the best, and is certainly not the only, way to meet rising energy demands. As Sarah James, a prominent anti-drilling spokeswoman for the Gwich’in community, describes, “the only way to take care of the last of the wilderness is through education” (Grist 2006, “Fun and James”). In accepting that to a certain extent they must “live in two worlds: modern and traditional,” (Grist 2006, “Fun and James”) the Gwich’in have endorsed many forms of alternative energy, and even installed solar panels over laundry mats and other central locations in the small Gwich’in town of Arctic Village (Grist 2006, “Fun and James”).

Thus, numerous subdivisions of the northeastern Alaska region have been valued for a variety of reasons by particular cultural, political, and economic organizations. The ANWR landscape in particular has been the subject of numerous and oftentimes conflicting
geographical imaginations held by native as well as non-native groups. It has passed through multiple hands over time, however, and as the region’s earliest inhabitants and stewards, the Iñupiat and Gwich’in tribes have frequently been at the relinquishing end of such handoffs. Nevertheless, both tribes have fought hard to retain some degree of entitlement to the Refuge and to its resources, and to maintain at least a participatory role in its evolving and increasingly complicated management. According to the Center for Alaska Native Studies, which is an ally for both the Iñupiat and Gwich’in tribes among many other native groups, “the Native challenge today remains the blending of centuries-old cultures with profit-making corporate structures and village tribal governments. And the ultimate concern always will be protection of the key to aboriginal survival: the land” (Creed 1988, p. 7). While this assessment rings true for both of the native tribes of ANWR, as evidenced in this chapter, the ways in which they approach this challenge and the alliances they form to foster support along the way, are profoundly dissimilar.
Chapter 3: 
The Drilling Debate at the National and Local Scales

Then came the issue of ANWR, whether or not to drill for oil and gas on what was once our homelands. That proved the biggest storm of all, and it has been raging here for well over two decades now. In that time Secretaries and Legislators, most of Congress, reporters, photographers and video crews from all over the world have come rushing in, asking us questions and sharing concerns that are all conceived in places far away from here. (Kaktovik Website 2008)

Introduction to the Debate

The current debate over whether or not the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska should be drilled for oil is an impassioned and highly publicized one. It is also extremely polarized, as the ‘for’ and ‘against’ campaigns are driven by industry representatives and environmentalist lobbyers, respectively; two groups whose discordant core principles frequently lead them to political opposition. While the “storm” they have stirred, as described by the region’s Iñupiat tribe in the quote above, has served to characterize the ANWR landscape in recent years, however, the local native Iñupiat and Gwich’in groups that have joined the pro- and anti-drilling campaigns respectively, do not share the extreme and antagonistic views held by their national Arctic Power and NRDC counterparts.

Through an analysis offered below of the contrasting discourses and images employed in spoken, written, and visual materials produced by these four groups, I identify certain critical distinctions as well as commonalities between their positions on the issue of how the ANWR landscape should be valued and managed, including whether or not it should be opened to oil development. Surprisingly, I find that many more distinctions can be found between the local and national stakeholder groups than between those in favor of drilling...
versus those opposed to it, and also that the groups’ most prominent commonalities traverse ‘for’ and ‘against’ delineations. Specifically, I identify the four discursive themes of society and nature, sovereignty and security, luxury versus livelihood, and past, preservation, and future, which are common to the discourses of all four stakeholders, although take very different forms in each of them. These themes reveal that subtle distinctions between the positions of the two native groups led them to opposing side of the drilling debate, whereas the polarized perspectives and arguments of the national interest groups exist in stark opposition to one another and make no allowance for compromise. Further, in exploring the both intimate and strained relationships between actors on the same side of the drilling debate, I illustrate the way such stakeholders are often pressured to join forces with one another despite their conflicting views or values in order to effect a common desired outcome, thus perpetuating the polarization process.

A Discourse Analysis

In his article “U.S. National Security Discourse and the Political Construction of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge,” Kolson L. Schlosser (2006) makes the convincing case that ANWR has been the object of multiple and often contrasting representations by each side of the drilling debate. He provides numerous examples of the ways in which language necessarily abstracts the refuge, which is a complex and dynamic place, by boiling it down into words that effectively simplify and stabilize its nature and meaning. Further, Schlosser explains that such discursive processes of abstraction are subject to the biases, both deliberate and unidentified, of whomever is leading the discussion. As one example of this, pro-drilling activists inform us (with 50% probability) that a whopping 20.73 billion barrels of oil lie
under ANWR’s 1002 area, whereas drilling opponents report that a mere 2.03 billion barrels of oil are estimated to be technologically and economically recoverable (Schlosser 2006, p.7). Both of these statistics are accurate representations of the USGS (2001) report from which they came, however they paint two distinctly different pictures of the status of ANWR’s oil reserves, which is a sure factor in the decision of whether or not extraction would be worthwhile.

In the discourse analysis that follows, I examine representations of ANWR’s nature that have been produced by the four stakeholders described above, and in doing so, shed light on the various lenses through which they view the landscape and therefore the issue of drilling for oil in ANWR. Specifically, I draw on the themes listed above, which highlight differences between the local and national stakeholder groups with respect to environmental codes of ethics, political concerns, cultural priorities, and future aspirations as being even more substantial and consequential than the differences between groups arguing on opposite sides of the drilling debate.

*Society and Nature*

One particularly important distinction between the discourses employed by the four actors under discussion that is made apparent through consideration of social nature as a theoretical framework, is their contrasting characterizations of the relationship between humans and the environment. A society-nature dualism, analogous to that described by Castree and Braun (2001), serves as the foundation of both NRDC’s and Arctic Power’s positions in the ANWR debate. It is contradicted, however, by consistent and emphatic
claims by both the Iñupiat and Gwich’in tribes that their peoples are deeply integral components of the natural world with intimate connections to the caribou, all other species, and the land.

NRDC seeks “to establish sustainability and good stewardship of the Earth as central ethical imperatives of human society,” (NRDC Website 2008). In doing so, it makes the claim that it is a responsibility of humans to manage and protect natural resources through “Western” notions of environmentalism, as described by Urry (2001, p.178). As such, NRDC positions humans as stewards and caretakers of the earth rather than projecting the relationship between society and nature to be one of interconnectedness, egalitarianism, or rapport.

In further constructing a power differential and detachment between humans and the natural environment, NRDC portrays ANWR as a bountiful landscape filled with exotic and fascinating flora and fauna, but devoid of people. It refers to the Refuge as “nature in its wild state”, “a pristine landscape,” and one of “America's last remaining untouched wildlands” (NRDC website 2007), promoting the idea of an external nature, which Smith (1984) describes as “pristine, God-given, [and] autonomous” (p.2). In doing so, NRDC not only suggests that humans do not belong in ANWR, but further implies that humans are not there, which is simply untrue.

NRDC’s construction of ANWR as described above is supported by the fact that its website displays a number of photos of the region, the overwhelming majority of which depict landscapes or wildlife species but exclude people. It lists many different creatures that inhabit the refuge, and discusses in detail the impact that oil extraction will likely have on
their breeding patterns, migration routes, and habitat. The website’s only mention of the native people who inhabit the region, however, is under a section entitled “Oil development would threaten caribou survival” where the organization boasts that the Gwich’in tribe stands with it in support of the preservation of caribou habitat (NRDC Website 2008). In explaining that “the Porcupine caribou herd has been central to the culture of Gwich'in Indians in Alaska and Canada for 20,000 years” (NRDC Website 2008), NRDC’s focus is on the wildlife rather than on the tribe, and it does not elaborate any further on the possible effects of oil extraction on the Gwich’in people or way of life.

In corroborating the demarcation between society and nature that is drawn by NRDC’s representation of ANWR, Arctic Power maintains that, with advances in human technology, it is now possible for industrial development to take place without affecting the surrounding ecosystem or inhabitants at all. To support this, Arctic Power’s website quotes former Alaska senator, Al Adams, in alleging:

> We know from the experience at Prudhoe Bay that oil development in this day and age will have minimal – if any – negative impact to the wildlife, to the native people and to the environment. (Adams 1997)

Adams makes the above claim in an effort to convince the American public that it is “[t]ime to ignore the 1002 rhetoric,” presumably generated by anti-drilling activists, and in spite of the extensive development activities proposed in ANWR, which would include an exploratory well located on a five-acre drilling pad, an ice road, and an ice airstrip (Arctic Power Website 2008). Similarly, Arctic Power is apologetic of the “footprints” left by the oil industry in the past, and proud to announce that they are consistently growing smaller with
advances in technology (Arctic Power Website 2008). The group’s portrayal of the ANWR landscape as “inherently nonsocial and nonhuman” (Castree and Braun 2001, p.6), therefore bears a striking resemblance to that of NRDC.

Also in discussions of ANWR, Arctic Power indicates that the natural world is only of value insofar as it serves to benefit human society, which Urry (2001) refers to as a relationship of exploitation (p.178). For example, in an effort to devalue the ANWR landscape as little more than a repository for highly valued petroleum, Arctic Power poses rhetorically, enclosing the NRDC’s own words in quotes to emphasize the sarcastic tone of the question, “how many people actually visit this ‘national treasure’, ‘America’s Serengeti’?” In responding to its own question, Arctic Power answers,

Not many. For most of the year, ANWR is unbearably dark and cold. For several weeks the sun doesn’t even rise and leaves the windswept landscape a very inhospitable environment. (Arctic Power Website 2008)

This description suggests that the region is hardly livable, and certainly not inviting, charming, or enjoyable, and therefore broadly undesirable to humans.

Both NRDC and Arctic Power represent nature, including the ANWR landscape, as merely a backdrop for human society that exists independently of people but provides the venue and resources required to sustain them. As such, these groups endorse images of the relationship between society and nature that starkly contrast those of the native tribes who live in ANWR.

By contrast, in declaring that “[i]t is our belief that the future of the Gwich’in and the future of the caribou are the same” (GSC 2005, “A Moral Choice”), the Gwich’in
demonstrate their vulnerability to changes in the earth’s processes, and their view that
humans and the environment belong to the same partnership of interdependence and work
toward a common good. Subankar Banerjee, a photographer whose portrayals of the Arctic
landscape and peoples appear in books, magazines, and galleries around the world, is also a
spokesman for the Gwich’in nation and co-creator of the Gwich’in Steering Committee’s
website. His paper on the circumpolar arctic and its peoples, entitled “Land As Home,”
describes how “the environmentalists of the dominant culture continue to frame the Arctic as
a place untouched by man, […] a place unconnected with the contradictions and
complications of our human society” (Dunaway in Banerjee 2007, p.2). In this way, the
Gwich’in have distanced themselves from NRDC as an environmentalist group that
subscribed to the dominant culture that Banerjee describes, but reclaiming the Arctic as a
place that is touched, connected, and complicated.

Just as the NRDC website does, the Gwich’in Steering Committee website displays
several photos, however the majority of these exhibit and celebrate the people of northeast
Alaska. Gwich’in tribal members are depicted wearing clothing made of animal pelts,
playing drums made of stretched caribou hide, eating locally harvested foods, and performing
the Raven Dance5 among other traditional ceremonies intended to show appreciation for their
fellow species and remind themselves about the role they play in the earth’s natural systems
the earth and its people with the following quote by Karl Jacoby, a history professor at

5 The Raven Dance is a ceremonial tradition of the Gwich’in in which they honor their relationships with raven,
caribou, and their other fellow species. It also serves as a reminder to the tribe’s hunters to appreciate the
sacred value of each of their kills and to make use of all of their parts in order “to keep the earth clean” (GSC
Brown University. “We need, in short, a history that regards humans and nature not as two distinct entities but as interlocking parts of a single, dynamic whole” (Jacoby in Banerjee, p.1). While this sentiment does not resonate with NRDC, however, it is shared by the other native residents of ANWR.

Like that of the Gwich’in, the identity of the Iñupiat is defined by their physical and spiritual relationships with the earth, and wrapped up in their inseparable ties to the land. The former mayor of the Iñupiaq North Slope Borough claims that,

> Long before the riches of this land and its seas were “discovered” by outside cultures, the Iñupiat built a world that centered on their interdependence with the vast and diverse animal life found in their seas, skies and land. (Nageak 2004)

The Iñupiat not only value the physical world around them for more than the “riches” it provides human society, as the above passage articulates, but they also consider the role of people in ecological processes to be one of integration and accountability. In contradiction to efforts by Arctic Power to downplay and downsize its ecological footprint, former Iñupiat Mayor Nageak boasts, “[o]ur footsteps are all over the North Slope and we are proud of them” (Nageak 2008).

Former Mayor Nageak further rebukes Arctic Power’s characterization of ANWR as “dark, cold” and “inhospitable” by extending the following invitation to readers of an article of his on the subject of drilling on the North Slope. He offers,

> I hope that someday you will get an opportunity to visit the North Slope and see the wonderful people of the Arctic. My people have been inspired by its breathtaking beauty for thousands of years. I think you would be too. (Nageak 2008)
In this way the Iñupiat, like the Gwich’in, have tremendous respect and reverence for the earth and for the valuable and integral role that humans play in its processes. Most importantly, these two native groups embrace the notion that the social and natural worlds are inextricably linked, whereas NRDC and Arctic Power look to the environment from a detached and disembodied perspective to provide for or otherwise serve humans.

**Sovereignty and Security**

The positions of NRDC and Arctic Power on the issues of sovereignty and security with respect to ANWR are similar in that they both serve national agendas. The positions of the Iñupiat and the Gwich’in, on the other hand, are concerned with security and sovereignty on a tribal level. NRDC, for example, promotes the ANWR landscape as “an American treasure”, “America’s premiere wildlife sanctuary”, “an American Serengeti”, and one of “America’s remaining wildlands”, (NRDC website 2008). Schlosser (2006) addresses the notion that the above characterizations implicitly, but never explicitly, prioritize the sovereignty of the nation with respect to ANWR over the sovereignty of individuals, of local communities, or of a global society (p. 9). In doing so, NRDC renders decision-making bodies at these and other scales as erasures (see Schlosser 2006; Butler 1997, 2000; Massey 1994; Rose 2001), despite the fact that their important interests and priorities potentially differ from those of the nation. Erasures describe persons or aspects of an issue that become obscured from view by relevant discourse, which instead draws other persons or competing aspects of the issue into focus in their place. In the case of ANWR, global, sub-national, and
native tribal sovereignty are erased, as they have been omitted from the drilling debate through NRDC discourse on the refuge as a national resource.

Additionally, NRDC focuses its discussions of ANWR and security on the country’s dangerous dependence on petroleum. It asserts that, “[o]nly by reducing our reliance on oil - foreign and domestic -- and investing in cleaner, renewable forms of power will our country achieve true energy security” (NRDC Website 2008). In fact, NRDC refers to this reliance as an addiction and stresses repeatedly that, “[w]e have a suite of solutions on hand that can help free us from oil addiction. By using better fuels, better cars and creating more livable, walkable communities, we can help usher in a clean, secure energy future for America” (NRDC Website 2008). In claiming that “oil dependence is bad for America’s national security” and suggesting a decrease in oil consumption overall as the solution, NRDC not only alleges that the drilling debate is relevant to national security, but reaffirms the ANWR landscape as a resource to be either used or preserved at the discretion of the United States.

The NRDC Website further asserts that “if America made the transition to [energy efficiency and conservation], far more oil would be saved than the Arctic Refuge is likely to produce” (NRDC Website 2008). It then asks, “[d]oesn't that make far more sense than selling out our natural heritage and exploiting one of our true wilderness gems?” (NRDC Website 2008). With the above remarks, NRDC contends that the most worrisome risks posed by oil drilling are those than threaten U.S. sovereignty and security. Moreover, it insists that the nation, the interests of which are of greatest import, would benefit most from the region by protecting it from development so that Americans can continue to enjoy its
idyllic, sentimental and, for most of the country’s population, symbolic rather than perceived natural beauty and value.

Like NRDC, Arctic Power considers ANWR to be a valuable national resource, the management of which is critical to the protection of U.S. sovereignty and security. Specifically, it claims that the security of the United States depends upon the recovery of domestic petroleum to meet the country’s energy needs. Further, in asserting that, oil from ANWR is America’s best and most sensible option to bring relief to our skyrocketing dependence on foreign oil [and] increase our national security, (Artic Power Website 2008)

Arctic Power contends that our current foreign oil supply poses a security threat that could be alleviated to some degree by supplementing our domestic supply with that available in ANWR.

Schlosser (2006) provides a comprehensive discourse analysis of the following argument offered by drilling advocates, and as I discuss here, Arctic Power specifically. That is, Recovering oil from ANWR is necessary for U.S. national security. Discussions of national security necessarily allude to a potential threat to the nation, although that threat may not always be clearly identified or even fully understood by its discussants. For this reason, Schlosser (2006) addresses what could be considered intended versus alternative interpretations of the word “threat” in the context of ANWR (pp. 10,11). Specifically, the implied threat in the national security argument presented by Arctic Power is one posed by hostile foreigners, and political in nature. Schlosser further breaks down the “us and them” dichotomy resulting from the argument’s obscured suggestion that some “them” or other
poses a threat to “us”, which we need security from (pp. 9-10). It is often not made clear, however, who exactly constitutes “them” or even who constitutes “us”.

One particular reference to obscure security concerns with respect to ANWR, although not devoid of insinuation, involves an entry in the timeline of the refuge’s “important dates” provided by Arctic Power and entitled “Political History of the Arctic Refuge”. It reads, “Sept. 11, 2001: America is attacked by terrorists, the worst terrorist attack in [the] history of the United States” (Arctic Power Website 2008). This entry is found among a list of 25 others, all of which refer to congressional hearings on ANWR and associated proposed legislation in either support of or opposition to oil development on the Coastal Plain, implying that the events of 9-11 are somehow equally as integral to and explanatory of ANWR’s political history as the debates and proposed legislation devoted to its management. No explanation, explicit or otherwise, for the inclusion of the terrorist attack in this timeline is offered, however, nor is its connection or relevance to the drilling debate at all, thus perpetuating the vague yet acute dualism between us and them.

The closest Arctic Power comes to identifying “them” is when it situates a particular “them” in a designated region of the world. It declares that “[h]eavy reliance on foreign oil, especially from the Persian Gulf, leaves the U.S. increasingly open to trouble. Any mischief by OPEC, for example, could wreak havoc with our economy” (Arctic Power Website 2008). While “their” corner of the world is disclosed by this remark, however, their intentions to engage in “trouble” and “mischief” remain markedly ambiguous and evocative. Rather than articulating arguments or demonstrating a case, such discursive tactics serve to instigate,
abstract, and detract from the substance and complexity of the issues of ANWR land management.

An additional effect of employing the phrase “national security,” as Schlosser points out, is that it grants the state, and therefore national organizations, the authority to intervene in the environmental affairs of ANWR by presenting it as a national issue (p. 10). That same phrase, however, also marginalizes individuals and local or tribal communities whose various security interests, which might involve things like ensuring access to reliable food sources or maintaining cultural traditions and livelihoods, compete with security interests at the national level. In this way, environmental discourses, and the drilling debate specifically, have the capacity to both empower and marginalize.

Finally, the entangled relationships between national organizations, government entities, and energy industries serve to further justify and secure Arctic Power’s managerial role over the ANWR region. The most striking illustration of this is in the way oil companies represented by Arctic Power laud their adherence to environmental regulations and assert that that the rigorous system in which they operate ensures responsibility and accountability. Arctic Power’s website, for example, quotes the former Senator of Alaska, Al Adams, in touting the,

extensive tiers of environmental regulation that direct oil development in Alaska. Oil producers must comply with stringent state, federal and local laws and regulations, which provide the most restrictive circumstances for oil development in the world (Adams 1997).

Arctic Power may begrudge the strict environmental regulations that hinder its operations, yet, as the above quote reveals, the organization points to its own adherence to them to
substantiate its claims of legitimacy, competency, and the capacity for effective and responsible land management. In this way, such regulations serve as a test that, when passed, effectively reinforces and secures the entitlement of Arctic Power and its constituents over the ANWR landscape. In this way, the relationship between government and industry is characterized not only by the competing aims of the two groups, but also by their shared commitment to finding common ground so that each of their respective interests can be met. This relationship is reinforced by the government subsidies enjoyed by Arctic Power, which compliment private membership and donations (Arctic Power Website 2008; Cassidy 2005).

A similar rapport between government and native groups, however, does not exist.

Native sovereignty is of sacred as well as practical importance to both the Gwich’in and Iñupiat tribes, as it has long been for the native tribes in other regions of North America (Rossiter and Wood 2005, p. 357) and around the world (Slattery 1991). For this reason, the two tribes native to the ANWR region address issues of sovereignty and security as critical components of the drilling debate. Specifically, in their representations of the ANWR landscape, the Gwich’in and Iñupiat vehemently and persistently defend their rights to life and land, which they perceive to be under severe threat.

The Gwich’in feel that their sovereignty is most encroached upon when they are forced or otherwise persuaded to change their culture in order to adapt to the ways and wisdoms of non-natives. Simply put, accommodating outsiders by adopting their values and lifestyles threatens the security of their own. An informational booklet printed by the Gwich’in Steering Committee refers to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, the
establishment of native corporations, and the transformation of native ancestral lands into "corporate assets" as prime examples of this phenomenon. It also explains that as Gwich’in, we have an obligation to our future generations to uphold the integrity of our spiritual beliefs as well as our ancestral way of life that has been handed down one generation to the next (GSC 2004),

and further avows that, “[w]e honor and uphold the wisdom of our ancient spiritual values and laws” (GSC 2004). Sarah James reaffirms this message in explaining,

> We want to be able to continue the way of life that we have known since time immemorial. We hope that through our work, people will become better educated about the Arctic Refuge and tell their friends and the decision makers why it needs to be protected for them and for future generations. (Grist 2006, “Que Sarah, Sarah”)

For this reason, the Gwich’in are reassured by the environmental protections and restrictions lobbied for by such groups as the NRDC. It is due to such regulations that the wilderness areas of the North Slope are safeguarded from the invasion of North American businesses and development activities, and enabled to remain largely as it has been for thousands of years (U.S. Congress 1960, 1971, 1980). In the eyes of the Gwich’in, ANWR is indeed a refuge.

Similarly to the Gwich’in, the Iñupiat tribe feels that their sovereignty over the ANWR region is under threat. They allege that, “[t]he ANWR issue […] is about imperialism, about taking the lands and water of someone else and making them your own” (Tagarook 2003). While both native tribes feel pressured, impacted, and threatened by Euro-American culture, however, they experience its influence very differently.
The Iñupiat value their sovereignty just as dearly as do the Gwich’in, however for them it does not translate into an ability to be shielded from change or adaptation. On the contrary, the Iñupiat perceive of exclusion, of being left out of potential technological advances and societal improvements, as the greatest infringement on their sovereignty. As the City of Kaktovik website describes, “[I]t is against the culture of the Kaktovikmiut to speak for other people and to assume what may be right for them, or to presume their intentions” (Kaktovik Website 2008). In this way, the residents of Kaktovik, among other Iñupiat, fight for inclusion as a means to secure and strengthen the voice and vitality of their people.

The Iñupiat further explain that they created the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) in defense of native rights to sovereignty. ASRC served the need to translate acreage entitlements granted them by ANCSA into “meaningful economic asset[s]” that held up in the emerging corporate system imposed on them by Euro-Americans. Thus, in the interest of their own security, the Iñupiat agreed to “expand traditional concepts of land and resource utilization to include the concepts of corporate land ownership” (ASRC Website 2008). The following excerpt from ASRC’s five-year strategic plan describes the sentiment behind this decision.

We are the Iñupiat of the Arctic Slope. For centuries we have survived by adapting to change that is conducive to our livelihood. Our ancestral gift of adaptability will keep us going strong in our endeavors to grow, move forward, and succeed. (ASRC 2007, p.9)

It follows that the same environmental restrictions and regulations that were applauded and appreciated by the Gwich’in, were met with anger and hostility from the Iñupiat who felt
they hindered not only their traditional subsistence practices, but also their ability to make progress. The following is an angry recollection of the initiation of such regulations, which were believed by the Iñupiat at the time to be merely disguised as protections and unjustly imposed upon the ANWR landscape by “outsiders”.

Step by insidious step outsiders pushed us aside, set up rules that made it harder and harder for us to use our lands and waters. The worst thing they have done is to declare part of our homelands wilderness. Not only is that a massive insult, to say that places where we are have no people, as if we do not even exist, but also the management rules for such places make it impossible for us to continue to use them. (Tagarook 2003)

In further addressing the language used in creating environmental regulations such as those described in the above quote, George Tagarook, the vice-mayor of the Iñupiat city of Kaktovik, retorts that “[i]t is marvelous rhetoric, a stunning incursion of alien perspectives and language into a world never before visited by such seemingly noble sentiments” (Tagarook 2003). The former Midnight Sun borough mayor chimes in to assert that the Iñupiat who live on the coastal plain know better than any other group what is in the best interest of their culture, land, and resources. He professes that, “ANWR is in the land of the Iñupiat and we have a right to do what is best for us. […] We can be trusted to use it wisely while still preserving it for generations to come” (Nageak 2008). As this quote demonstrates, the issue of governmental regulation is clearly an inflammatory one for the Iñupiat, but it is also one that draws out a significant contradiction between the tribe and their fellow pro-drilling campaigners at Arctic Power. Whereas the latter’s entitlement to management privileges over ANWR are strengthened by their observance of environmental rules and regulations, the former views these restrictions as a threat to their sovereignty.
In spite of the obvious interests they share with the politically connected and well-endowed Arctic Power, the Iñupiat have been fighting an uphill battle to have their own perspectives and priorities, which center around sovereignty and security, recognized by the national interest group. They lament that getting the respect they deserve, has not always come easy. [...] The fact is we often had to demand it. We have worked long and hard to gain oversight regarding any outside activity, from the petroleum industry or otherwise. Our land, animals, and the culture we hold dear depends on it, and that is something we will never sacrifice. (Kaktovik Website 2008)

As these words make apparent, the Iñupiat have struggled to convince their opposition as well as their allies that they can and should be entrusted with the responsibility of managing their own lands and resources. Ultimately though, as shareholders of the incorporated city of Kaktovik, which is located within the 1002 Area of ANWR, put it, “[t]hose who chose to listen realized the best way to operate in Kaktovik is to include us in the work they do” (Kaktovik Website 2008). That is precisely what the oil companies represented by Arctic Power are doing, and the relationship has proved mutually beneficial.

In return for their support of drilling on the coastal plain, the Iñupiat and their native corporations, such as that of the city of Kaktovik, have brought in revenues that have, in turn, enabled the installation of such amenities as clean water and sewage services (Nageak 2008). Even more importantly, native shareholders of these corporations have generated enough money through property taxes paid by the oil industry in recent years to establish school systems that offer studies beyond the eighth grade, which was not possible before. As a result, children are able to stay in the area with their families, to learn the subsistence practices of their elders, and to participate in as well as perpetuate their traditional culture.
while earning a formal education. As the former mayor of the Midnight Sun borough points out, “Revenues from oil development have been directly responsible for the revival of [Iñupiaq] tradition, language, and dance” (Nageak 2008). In this way, Iñupiat sovereignty and oversight ability, which oil companies are helping them hold onto, are precisely the tools that will ultimately enable the tribe to protect the things they cherish most: their culture and their land.

As the above paragraphs reveal, the Gwich’in and Iñupiat are both trying to hold on to sovereignty and to ensure the security of their people. In this way, their positions most closely resembles one another’s, as each tribe is struggling to retain their ability to make the resource management decisions it deems necessary for its own survival and security. For both of these native tribes, therefore, the notion of properly caring for the ANWR landscape is neither a lofty nor a luxurious one to be considered at a national level along with the input of those who have never set foot in the region, as it is for Arctic Power and NRDC, but rather a serious, local, practical, and vital one.

**Luxury versus Livelihood**

While the ANWR landscape provides daily sustenance to both the Gwich’in and Iñupiat native tribes and therefore enables their very survival, the region’s value is largely emblematic for both national campaigns on either side of the drilling debate. Specifically, ANWR is portrayed by NRDC as an icon of the natural world’s magnificence and grandeur, and by Arctic Power as a symbol of potential, progress, discovery, and growth. In this way,
the refuge is represented by the native groups as a means of livelihood, as well as by these national organizations as a luxury.

The NRDC website, which designates ANWR as a “biogem”, introduces the drilling debate to its viewers with a quote by Wallace Stegner, an American historian, environmentalist, and author, who wrote that “you do not have to travel to a wilderness to know that it is worth saving – simply knowing such a wild sanctuary exists is enough […]” (NRDC BioGem Website 2008). It is immediately clear from this excerpt that, for NRDC, ANWR’s extraordinary value is symbolic more than tangible. It even identifies the region as “an icon of [sic] hope” (NRDC BioGem Website 2008). The same webpage goes on to describe the landscape’s rushing rivers, thundering caribou, greening tundra, and trotting wolves, noting that “[n]atural diversity at this scale is something most of us will never see”. This remark is neither glum nor apologetic, but rather matter-of-fact if not cheerful, as the following sentence reads, “[b]y preserving it, we preserve the hope that our children will know that wildness and conservation still exist in our land” (NRDC BioGem Website 2008). In this way, ANWR represents not only a pristine and unique corner of the natural world, but also a very particular environmental ethic – namely, conservation of an idealized, intangible, and external nature, as upheld primarily by self-identified environmentalists with Euro-American ideals (Smith 1984, p.2). Such “neocolonial representations” of nature and of indigenous groups themselves, as discussed in detail by Rossiter (2004), have marginalized native peoples in many regions of the world. They have done this in part by suggesting that the specific role of native people within the natural environment is one of subsistence,
minimalism, and tradition, and therefore unfit to incorporate modern-day use or management practices.

Posted on NRDC’s website are numerous photos and even a video of rolling hills, snow-covered mountains, flowered and grassy tundra, many enchanting wildlife species, all of which are ripe for visual consumption as described by Urry (2001, p.178), and only a single photo of a clean-cut Native Alaskan posing next to the flag of the Gwich’in nation. There are no images of tribe members performing subsistence activities, harvesting resources, hunting animals, or otherwise engaging with the landscape. In this way, NRDC portrays the relationship between humans and the physical environment of ANWR as one of admiration from a distance rather than intimate interaction.

Like NRDC, Arctic Power represents the ANWR region as one defined more by the luxuries it provides than by the livelihoods it supports. In particular, it does this by characterizing oil as an extravagance, albeit an indispensable one. Arctic Power claims that petroleum has enabled incredible scientific discoveries and inventions, and made the lives of millions of people around the world easier as well as more comfortable, efficient, and convenient. The organization reminds its audiences that oil is essential to the high standard of living of modern society in the developed world, primarily because it enables and enhances such major operations as transportation, agriculture, and commerce (Arctic Power Website 2008). In this way, oil is portrayed by Arctic Power as critical to sustaining the luxurious lifestyles of the world’s most affluent and prosperous individuals, and of Americans in particular. Consequently, Arctic Power represents ANWR itself as a catalyst in the movement to propel the country into an age of unsurpassed discovery, achievement, and
acclaim. Accordingly, the lobbying group presents a vision of ANWR that equates its landscape with luxury rather than with livelihoods and its resources with the potential for innovation and growth rather than subsistence; one in which development complements rather than threatens wildlife. Figure 3.1 below clearly illustrates this vision, as does Arctic Power’s assertion, which accompanies the photo, that, “[t]he truth is that the [oil] industry and the environment can coexist” (Arctic Power 2008).

Figure 3.1: Caribou Amass Near Prudhoe Bay Drilling Site
(Arctic Power 2002, 2008; Defenders of Wildlife 2008)
Figure 3.1 depicts the Central Arctic caribou herd contentedly reclining on the grasslands just outside of the Prudhoe Bay oil field, which lies to the west of ANWR’s coastal plain.

Interestingly, this same photo is also displayed on the website of a parallel environmentalist organization and staunch ally of NRDC in the drilling debate, the Defenders of Wildlife. The Defenders of Wildlife argue, however, that the image evidences the dangerous proximity of constructed oil fields to caribou habitat. Nonetheless, NRDC’s message that development, despite the appealing luxuries it promises, will inevitably threaten the lives and livelihoods of the region’s inhabitants does have one thing in common with Arctic Power’s message that they go harmoniously hand in hand. That is, the luxuries and livelihoods in question do not belong to either organization, but rather to affluent citizens and the native groups of ANWR, respectively.

Both NRDC and the Gwich’in tribe are vehemently opposed to oil development within ANWR’s coastal plain. Perhaps the most profound distinction between their positions, however, is that the former is campaigning for the preservation of an extravagant and prized natural treasure, or “biogem”, while the latter is campaigning for the preservation of its humble home. The impacts of the petroleum industry on the coastal plain would be disheartening for the 1.2 million members of the NRDC, among other environmentalists, as well as destructive to the notion of an idealized arctic wilderness, however these impacts would carry specific, personal, and severe consequences for the Gwich’in nation. The latter are not concerned with protecting a luxury that affords “spiritual retreat” and a “romantic nostalgia of land lost elsewhere” (Banerjee 2007, p.2), but rather preserving a culture and livelihood that afford sustenance and survival. For them, nature is not a gem to be admired
from a distance, but a system that fully encompasses and supports human lives among all other life forms.

In the eyes of the Gwich’in, ANWR is in need of saving, however, for them it is precisely because people do see, experience, and live in it that this is the case. As such, the Gwich’in subscribe to the notion of a universal nature, which exists in contradiction to that of an external nature and is described by Castree and Braun as “encompassing everything there is – humans included” (2001, p.7). In disputing pro-drilling notions of ANWR as a frozen wasteland as well as mainstream environmentalist notions of it as a utopian landscape, Banerjee writes that, for his indigenous friends of northern Alaska, the land is “just home. To us, it’s home” (Matthiessen in Banerjee 2006, p.2).

In particular, this arctic region has created a home for the Gwich’in people because it is also home to herds of Porcupine Caribou. These caribou provide the Gwich’in with food, clothing, and tools, and are central to their cultural and religious practices. The following is the first declaration outlined by the Gwich’in Niintsyaa, a resolution in protest of oil and gas development on the coastal plain:

For thousands of years our ancestors, the Gwich’in Athabascan Indians of northeast Alaska and northwest Canada, have relied on caribou for subsistence, and continue today to subsist on the Porcupine Caribou Herd which is essential to meet the nutritional, cultural and spiritual needs of our people[.] (Gwich’in Nation 1988)

It is clear from this excerpt that the Gwich’in consider ANWR, and specifically the caribou that live there, to be a staple rather than a symbol. For them, the region is equally ordinary and vital, but not at all extravagant or romanticized. In contrast to those of the NRDC,

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6 In a 2005 senate debate, Ted Stevens (R-AK) said of ANWR, “I defy anyone to say that is a beautiful place that has to be preserved for the future. It is a barren wasteland, a frozen wasteland” (ANWR News 2005).
materials distributed by both the Gwich’in tribe depict unspectacular landscapes and a variety of people performing everyday tasks, for example cutting meat off of a recently slain moose (Figure 3.2), and hanging fish carcasses to be dried (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.2: Gwich’in Hunters Butcher a Slain Moose
(Banerjee 2003, p.148)
Figure 3.3: Northern Pike Skins Hang to Dry at Gwich’in Camp  
(Banerjee 2003, p.144)

These and other similar images depict ordinary activities and aspects of native Gwich’in life. In this way, each photo offered by the tribe is an intimate and unassuming portrayal of a place and a people, as opposed to the idealized and caricatured images offered by NRDC.
The Iñupiat do not argue on the same side of the drilling debate as the Gwich’in, but the contributions of both tribes to the debate do bear an especially striking and salient resemblance. That is, rather than campaigning on a set of ideals or answering a call to public service, as their allies at the national level claim to be doing, these two native groups are fighting for the very lands in which they work, play, and live. Likewise, the Gwich’in sentiment of ANWR as a home rather than an idea or commodity is echoed by the Iñupiat. As the founder of ASRC, Edward E. Hopson, plainly states, “[w]e are the stewards of this great arctic land. We Iñupiat have a strong sense of place. This place is our home” (ASRC Website 2008). Further, in expressing anxiety about the uncertainty of the future management of ANWR, the Iñupiat residents of Kaktovik affirm, “[o]ur concerns are real, not theoretical, as we are the ones who will be most affected by anything that happens here” (Kaktovik Website 2008). It is clear from these claims that, for the Iñupiat, the value of ANWR is rooted in its familiarity, functionality, and authenticity.

ASRC’s stipulations on land use reiterate the above position in that subsistence activities that support the livelihoods and cultures of local peoples are allowed on ASRC land, whereas recreational activities such as sport fishing and hunting are not (ASRC Website 2008). Similarly, the Iñupiat oppose listing the polar bear, a unique large mammal of the arctic, as an Endangered Species (Buck 2007). While NRDC and other environmentalist organizations claim that this action must be taken to protect the polar bear from human activities, it would also threaten certain subsistence practices of the Iñupiat as well as hinder development potential of the native groups who share the polar bear’s habitat. The President and CEO of ASRC, Bobbi Quintavell, for example, explains that,
Everything from subsistence, village development to local resource development would be impacted. Playgrounds, gravel pits, landfills, airstrips, campsites, hunting areas and village expansions are just some examples that are at risk of being limited by the subjective process invoked by the Endangered Species Act. (ASRC 2008, p. 2)

In this way, the idealism and “Western environmentalism” (Smith 1984) that serve as driving forces behind conservation activism marginalizes the native Iñupiat people and puts a strain on their way of life.

Additionally, portrayals of ANWR provided by the Iñupiat, such as the following, offer further evidence that the region is valued as a means of livelihood rather than luxury for the native people in contrast to both national campaigns involved in the drilling debate.

Our homeland, although beautiful and rich in resources, can also be a very inhospitable place. It has taken us thousands of years to adapt to life here year round. Photos you may see taken around the southern portions of ANWR during the summertime are not very reflective of the place in which we live. (Kaktovik Website 2008)

The last sentence of this quote refers specifically to the images of ANWR that are represented by NRDC and other environmentalist organizations that regard the region as picturesque and pristine. Such aesthetically pleasing images of simplicity and serenity, however, neglect to reveal the common or even coarse realities of native life in the refuge, such as Iñupiat carving meat from a bowhead whale (Figure 3.4) or celebrating a successful whale hunt (Figure 3.5).
The photo in Figure 3.3 was taken by Bill Hess, a photographer of Alaskan landscapes, wildlife, and native peoples since 1981 and founder of the magazine Uñiq, which is dedicated to the coverage of Iñupiat life and communities.
Just as these up-close and personal images exist in contrast to the scenic photos and visual arguments of the national organizations, which are depicted at a distance and from disembodied perspectives, the former also counter idealistic and romanticized notions of ANWR and its resources that are put forth by both NRDC and Arctic Power. The detached view of ANWR held by both national organizations is accompanied by their shared disposition that, in either supporting or opposing oil development in ANWR, they are providing a service and even performing a moral duty to others, be they the residents and citizens of Alaska, the American population at large, or even the global community. Both indigenous tribes, however, acknowledge their own personal investment in the region, and take ownership of the fact that they are campaigning for land management practices that serve their own interests. For them, it would be a luxury to not have their livelihoods on the line.

_Past, Preservation, and Future_

In determining, articulating, and promoting their own interests within the drilling debate, both the Gwich’in and the Iñupiat emphasize the importance of the preservation of ANWR, in particular as a link between the past and the future. In contrast, NRDC looks narrowly back on the past to determine its position in the debate and Arctic Power only looks straight ahead toward the future, but neither national organization stresses the importance of the link or relationship between these two time frames. Likewise, preservation and its opposing forces as a discursive theme takes on very different forms for NRDC, Arctic Power, and the Gwich’in and Iñupiat native tribes.
Preservation is a value expressed by NRDC, as by many environmentalists groups, however in their context the word refers specifically to the preservation of natural resources (Schlosser 2006, p.13). As a result, other competing forms of preservation are veiled by their discourses, inexplicitly prioritized beneath environmental preservation, and incidentally omitted from the debate. Most notably, the appeal of preserving the current standard of living for Americans, which is a stated priority for Arctic Power and one that currently depends upon petroleum consumption, is not addressed by NRDC.

In promoting the preservation of land and natural resources, NRDC idolizes the past as an example for which the future should strive. This philosophy applies specifically to its position on ANWR, as the organization marvels that, “the Arctic Refuge continues to pulse with million-year-old ecological rhythms. It is the greatest living reminder that conserving nature in its wild state is a core American value” (NRDC Website 2008). They also explicitly state their intentions to perpetuate this legacy by professing that “[h]anding on to future generations a wild, pristine Arctic [would be] priceless” (NRDC Website 2008).

In contrast to those of NRDC, the discourses employed by Arctic Power are filled with forward-looking words and phrases such as ‘innovation’, ‘growth’, and ‘exciting breakthrough’. For example, number five on its list of “Top Ten Reasons to Support ANWR Development” is that the Coastal Plain is “American’s best chance for a major discovery” (Arctic Power Website 2008). Arctic Power also touts its own “rapidly developing technology” and “innovative techniques” including “[a] full-circle well, to be drilled 360 degrees, [that] is planned for the near future” and a prediction that “soon ‘extended reach’ wells out to four miles will be possible on the North Slope.” (Arctic Slope Website 2008)
Such language romanticizes the future, and thus rejects the past as dull, inferior, and obsolete.

Arctic Power utilizes modern technology to strengthen its case in the drilling debate in another way; that is, in producing, enhancing, manipulating, and disseminating persuasive imagery. As a result, Arctic Power’s visually crafted arguments, similar to those discussed by Blair (1996), yield even greater power than the already influential messages of all images, which, as Gillian Rose points out, are so compelling because “they confirm the truth of our words” (Rose 2003, p. 216). For example, computer-generated images displayed on Arctic Power’s website serve to downplay the impact of oil recovery operations through such techniques as depicting the proposed drilling area as a small symbol on a large-scale map of the area (Figure 3.6), or depreciating the total acreage of the coastal plain as compared to the entire contiguous United States (Figure 3.7).
Figure 3.6: Area 1002 Drilling Site
(Arctic Power Website 2008)

Figure 3.7: Area of Coastal Plain Compared to Contiguous U.S.
(Arctic Power Website 2008)
Additionally, the use of visual technologies in producing the above maps among numerous other charts, figures, and diagrams serves to legitimize Arctic Power as a contemporary and informed authority on the subject at hand (Driver 2003). A consequence of this effect, however, is the diminished legitimacy of groups whose knowledges are communicated in less impressive or extravagant ways, for example through the oral traditions of the Gwich’in and Iñupiat tribes.

Nevertheless, Arctic Power exercises its influence to perpetuate the notion that technology is equivalent to progress. Further, in associating technology with energy, it asserts that “[w]e must utilize the technology that has brought us into the computer age to take us into the next energy age” (Arctic Power Website 2008). It does not suggest, however, that the next energy age is one of renewable or alternative sources of energy, or of decreased energy dependence, as NRDC suggests we need (NRDC Website 2008). In fact, Arctic Power argues not only that “conservation and alternative energy sources alone cannot possibly meet the demands of the current growing economy,” but it goes so far as to reason that “a growing population and the technology revolution require more energy” (Arctic Power website 2008). More importantly though, while it points out that energy use enables numerous developments in technology, and also recognizes that technology, in turn, requires energy, Arctic Power neglects to address the inter-causal and mutually escalating nature of the relationship between the two. Such negligence serves to underscore the failure of Arctic Power to acknowledge the similarly coupled relationship between the past and the future of ANWR.
Unlike NRDC and Arctic Power, the native peoples of ANWR see a profound connection between what was and what will be, and therefore strive to preserve those components of traditional native life that will ensure and enhance their lives and prospects for years to come. Only a slight discrepancy exists between precisely what each of them is seeking to preserve. The Gwich’in, for example, are striving to hold on to their sacred traditional culture, values, and livelihoods, while the Iñupiat are more concerned with retaining their sense of identity and community, despite whatever changes or adaptations the tribe’s culture and livelihoods may undergo. As such, the Gwich’in envision the perpetuation of their culture in a way that closely resembles their treasured history, whereas the Iñupiat see themselves as a link between their valued past and a progressive future.

The language of the Gwich’in resembles that of NRDC in that it holds the past in the highest regard, but the tribe also aspires to a future that reflects without mimicking it. A reoccurring example of this is the way members consistently look up to, honor, and emulate their elders, both in their everyday lives and through traditional ceremonies, as shown in Figure 3.8, in which Gwich’in children are pictured wearing clothing made of caribou hide.
As dances such as this one communicate, the Northeast Alaskan region is believed by the Gwich’in to be a remarkable land with a sacred history. Their Steering Committee’s website describes the muskox that lives there as an ice-age relic, and the Dall sheep as a year-round resident of the Refuge since the Pleistocene era. Porcupine caribou, in particular, have met the subsistence needs of the Gwich’in people for millennia, and so their calving ground on
the Coastal Plain is known to the Gwich’in as “Iizhik Gwats’an Gwandii Goodlit,” which translates into English as “The Sacred Place Where Life Begins” (GSC Website 2008). This sacred place, however, is also where abundant life continues.

ANWR is said by the Gwich’in to be a place of wildness, “where timeless ecological and evolutionary processes continue in their natural ebb and flow” (GSC Website 2008). In this way, its past is thought to provide a guide into the future. Likewise, all fourteen Gwich’in villages stood together in 1988 to urge the United States Congress and President to “recognize the rights of our Gwich’in people to continue to live our way of life by prohibiting development [on ANWR’s Coastal Plain]” (Gwich’in Nation 1988). Further, they reached this consensus in their “traditional way” through a Niintosh, which is a resolution enacted by the Gwich’in nation as a whole only after advice from the elders is sought and a decision is unanimously agreed upon allowing the tribe to “speak with one voice” (Gwich’in Nation 1988). This ceremonial resolution is held up by the tribe as a symbol of their unity and an achievement that credits the wisdom and guidance of Gwich’in elders and ancestors (GSC Website 2008).

While both NRDC and the Gwich’in value land use and management practices of the past, their incentives for doing so are not at all similar. Whereas NRDC’s attachment to the past involves a sentimental, nostalgic, and symbolic remembrance of simpler and easier times, the Gwich’in are invested in maintaining their lifestyles and customs because they are convinced that such traditions offer the most secure, predictable, and sustainable protections for the future, evidenced by the way they have sustained the tribe for thousands of years already. In this way, the Gwich’in do not resist the future or reject development altogether,
but rather look behind them for reassurance that they are headed in the right direction, and in the spirit of practical, intentional, and proactive forward-thinking, as the slogan on the T-shirt of a young girl depicted in Figure 3.9 demonstrates.

![Figure 3.9: Gwich'in Youth Represent the Future of the Tribe](GSC 2005, p.18)

The Gwich’in may aspire to retain aspects of their ancestral and traditional culture, but, as the phrase “we are tomorrow” articulates, they do not shrink from the responsibilities of actively shaping and engaging their future.

Like the Gwich’in, the Iñupiat also place a great deal of emphasis on the importance of honoring and respecting their elders, as well as seek wisdom and guidance from their ancestors. Unlike the former, however, the Iñupiat do not explicitly hold the tribal members who came before them up as strict examples for future generations. Rather, they seek to benefit from the lessons learned by their predecessors, and to employ the knowledge and
experiences they gained in order to advance, adapt, and better the lives of Iñupiat individuals and communities to come.

Edward Hopson defends the notion that, even in having embraced certain technologies and Euro-American amenities, the Iñupiat have not sacrificed any of the defining characteristics of their culture, nor their commitment to caring for the earth. He explains, “[W]e have adapted our hunting practices to include the use of rifles, motorboats, and snowmobiles. This does not mean, however, that we have lost touch with tradition. We still respect the environment. We respect the lessons of our ancestors and elders. We are the link between the past and the future” (Lukin & Hilscher 1991 on ASRC Website 2008). In fact, for the Iñupiat, ensuring a successful future for themselves and their tribal community is a direct means of honoring their past.

In securing a business plan that will meet the economic needs of future generations, Iñupiat tribe members and ASRC report, “one of the greatest challenges facing us today is how to blend the old with the new; how to live in a moneyed economy without losing our roots in the land.” (Nageak 2008). This challenge, however, has manifested itself in the stated business objectives of many regional corporations. NANA, for example, is a regional corporation for the Iñupiat of Northwest Alaska whose Annual Reports are given titles such as “Inspired by our Values” (2007) and “Bridging Tradition and Business Success” (2003). This philosophy of reconciliation between the past and the future is also evidenced by the photos depicted on corporate pamphlets and documents. Figure 3.10 below, for example, illustrates a clear cultural progression from primitive to state-of-the-art technologies through a series of three photos.
Finally, the NANA logo (Figure 3.11) effectively sums up the Iñupiat decree to preserve what is sacred and modify what can be improved upon. The description provided next to it reads,

> Our symbol is an Iñupiat hunter moving aggressively toward a successful future in a vast, beautiful and sometimes harsh world. [...] The same qualities of courage, confidence, humility, respect, integrity and sharing that have allowed our people to survive as great hunters in a harsh climate are necessary for NANA to be successful. (NANA Annual Report 2003, p. 40)
While the Iñupiat strive to honor their past by looking ahead with cautious ambition, as the above excerpt indicates, Arctic Power and its constituents, on the other hand, have leapt eagerly into the future without looking back.

It is clear from the above analysis that the four stakeholders discussed here hold distinctly unique perspectives on the ANWR landscape and how best to manage its resources. The conversation tactics and debate strategies they employ are centered around the same issue-defining themes, although their respective takes on them span a broad spectrum, from NRDC, who endorses the notion that human impacts to the ANWR landscape need to be restricted, mitigated, or even reversed, at one end, to Arctic Power, who envisions a series of ambitious and futuristic social and technological developments within the region, at the other. Most importantly, as participants in the same heated debate over land use in ANWR, whether in agreement or opposition, they are all bound by the intense passion they share for this issue.

**Strategic Affiliations and Dissociations**

Certain perspectives and arguments of the stakeholders examined in this chapter bear resemblance or even overlap while others directly refute one another. As such, they serve as conspicuous analogies for the many complicated affiliations and affecting relationships, both intimate and contentious, that are shared among these integral groups. While the prospect of drilling in ANWR does not carry the same implications for NRDC as it does for the Gwich’in people, nor evoke the same arguments or response from each of them, these two groups do share an important common denominator. In their commitment to fighting legislation that would allow oil development to take place on the coastal plain, both NRDC and the Gwich’in
concede, or at least overlook, certain particularities of their own positions in order to join forces with the other and strengthen their unified stance in the debate.

I mentioned earlier that NRDC does not address the possible consequences of drilling for the Gwich’in people. They do, however, cite the Gwich’in as an indigenous Alaskan tribe that also opposes drilling. They also display the photos of Subankar Banerjee on the NRDC website—without mentioning Banerjee’s criticism of the portrayal of the arctic as untouched, of course. In prudently aligning themselves with a group that clearly has a legitimate claim to the land, NRDC can frame its understanding of the issue to be one of intimacy and experience, ultimately validating their own position in the debate.

Similarly, the Gwich’in, who are a small, remote, and little-known people, seek support for their campaign from the NRDC, who has a well-established reputation, a large membership and support-base, and enjoys a great deal of political clout and media coverage. The two groups have often lobbied together and verbally backed one another (Wald 1991) and, while the Gwich’in do not reinforce the specific arguments of NRDC, they do consistently reiterate its overall message that ANWR must be protected from drilling. They also list NRDC on their Steering Committee website, and refer supporters to them for further information about the issue and to learn how to donate to the cause or get more involved.

A parallel relationship to that of the Gwich’in and NRDC exists between the Iñupiat and Arctic Power. In sharing the same desire to open ANWR’s coastal plain to oil development, they have put aside differences in their particular agendas and perspectives in order to establish a mutually beneficial liaison. ASRC asserts that “Arctic Power has played an essential role in educating policy-makers and opinion-makers on this important issue, and
will play an increasingly critical role as the Congress considers whether to take action on this issues this year” (ASRC Website 2008). They even go so far as to “recommend” to the State government of Alaska that they financially support Arctic Power (Arctic Power Website 2008), and in doing so align themselves with a powerful and well-connected entity that will widely and effectively communicate their pro-drilling position.

In return, Arctic Power claims that the “Iñupiat view has been ignored in the debate” as a gesture of solidarity intended to increase empathy for the tribe. It also refers to the “phenomenal national press coverage on the Gwich’in Indian ANWR position” as a means of painting the position of the Iñupiat, which they share, as one of superior legitimacy but negligent underrepresentation (Arctic Power Website 2008). The direct relationship between the two native tribes at the center of this controversy, however, is slightly more complicated.

Both the Gwich’in and Iñupiat clearly feel a degree of disappointment, puzzlement, and frustration with the other’s position in the drilling debate, however the comments they direct toward one another also imply empathy for the other’s perspective and predicament. Specifically, each tribe views the other as a victim of coercion and, in the some cases, a puppet for the larger pro- or anti-drilling campaign with which it is affiliated. The following excerpt from an Iñupiaq statement evidences this dynamic.

[R]eality is that real Native people do not intrude into the homelands of other Native people. In the old days it was a matter of life and death. Today that respect remains an honored tradition throughout Alaska. And so when we hear about Native people from someplace else with plans for our homelands, we know we are not hearing real native voices. We know someone else from some other place wrote the language. (Arctic Power Website 2008)

The above allegations are countered by the Gwich’in who claim that it is only a select handful of Iñupiat who have benefited from development activities along Alaska’s North
Slope. They suggest that “few who live in the North Slope Borough are directly employed by the oil and gas industry” and that the only positions available to them are “menial” or “token jobs” (GSC Website 2008). Moreover, they assert that the “Iñupiat at Prudhoe Bay find they are a small minority in a primarily white workforce that can sometimes express hostility toward Alaska Natives” (GSC Website 2008). In suggesting that the Iñupiat have been duped or exploited by the oil companies they have aligned themselves with, the Gwich’in join the Iñupiat in portraying the national organizations and campaigns of the drilling debate to be the advantaged aggressors and, conversely, both native groups to be their sidekicks without much clout or leverage of their own. For this reason, they reserve the fervor of their accusations and hostilities for industries and environmentalists across the aisle.

In referencing the actions and positions of the most influential national stakeholders with which they disagree, both the Gwich’in and Iñupiat express sentiments of animosity and resentment. The former, for example, describe with disgust that “multinational oil corporations have turned over 1,000 square miles of Alaska's North Slope into an industrialized oil field maze” and that “[t]heir record of environmental abuse ranges from the largest oil disaster in American history\(^8\) to the daily despoiling of Alaska's land” (GSC Website 2008). Further, they bemoan that this “history of wreckage” (GSC Website 2008) continues despite the profusion of Gwich’in protests and testimonials that shed light on the death and destruction that has already been suffered.

Iñupiat protesters voice similarly antagonistic complaints about national stakeholders whose agendas they oppose, however the substance of their remarks is entirely different.

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\(^8\) This comment refers to the devastating 11-million-gallon Exxon Valdez oil spill that severely damaged 1,500 miles of shoreline along Prince William Sound (GSC Website 2008).

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They claim that “[m]any groups, most of whom have never even been to our place, were making efforts to seize our land by putting more names to it and creating more rules and regulations. […] Most of these people continue to talk their talk, and they do it very far from this place (Kaktovik Website 2008). This accusation of imposition and appropriation is frequently directed towards environmentalists specifically, such as in the following quote.

National environmental groups, their Gwich’in allies and member of the media have created a false reality of this issue, and those of us with any real knowledge of the coastal plain are left stunned, confused and defensive. We stand to be hopelessly defeated by ruthless liars. (Arctic Power Website 2008)

Through the remarks above it is clear that anger and bitterness characterize the sentiments of both native groups toward the national campaigns who not only oppose their views, but thwart their efforts and threaten the viability of their participation in the debate.

In responding passively to the hostile and severe claims of native tribes, national organizations often neglect to counter-reference or even acknowledge their indigenous opposition forces. The Iñupiat, for example, assert that “[f]or a variety of reasons, people have always shown an interest in this place we call home. Sometimes we were included in their pursuits, and sometimes not” (Kaktovik Website 2008). The above quote is a reference to the fact that the Gwich’in Native Americans are referenced extensively by NRDC among other environmentalists as ANWR natives who agree with them that development would be harmful and irresponsible, whereas the Iñupiat Eskimos, whose position would counter this argument, are utterly ignored.

Correspondingly, the Iñupiat receive an enormous amount of attention from supporters of oil drilling, such as Arctic Power, who fail to address the involvement of, or potential impact to, Gwich’in. As one example of this treatment, a headline on the Arctic
Power Website’s homepage claims that “Alaskan Natives Support Development” (Arctic Power Website 2008), inaccurately implying that all natives take this position. It is the high degree of political and financial clout enjoyed by both NRDC and Arctic Power that enables them to usurp the positions of the indigenous peoples of ANWR as a whole the way they do, and that skews and polarizing the debate in the process.

Finally, the majority of claims and arguments made by both NRDC and Arctic Power are aimed specifically at countering those of the other. This is because, as fierce, high-profile competitors with equal but opposite forces behind them, each of them poses the greatest threat to the other. Interestingly, however, they seldom mention one another by name, so as not to contribute to the promotion or prominence, of one another’s agendas. Instead, they refer to each other more generically, for example, in the way that NRDC describes that “Big Oil has long sought access to the refuge's coastal plain, a fragile swath of tundra that teems with staggering numbers of birds and animals (NRDC Website 2008). Similarly, Arctic Power asserts that “A decision authorizing development could help revitalize the state and national economy, but the outcome is far from certain as environmental groups, fostering a perception of Alaska far removed from reality, gear up to influence public opinion and the national media (Resource Development Council 2002). The members of “Big Oil” or particular “environmental groups”, however, are never made explicit.

Another subtle tactic used by both Arctic Power and NRDC is to refute particular arguments that are central to the other’s campaign without addressing the argument’s source. In one instance of this, Arctic Power explains that, “as for the perception of a ‘six month’ supply, such an argument is based on a scenario where all oil consumed in American would
come from one field – an impossible assumption” (Resource Development Council 2002). The above is a reference to NRDC’s assertion that “[e]ven if drilling occurs, the oil would meet U.S. demand for only six months” (NRDC Website 2008). Similarly, in response to Arctic Power claims that “[i]f oil is discovered, less than 2000 acres of the over 1.5 million acres of the Coastal Plain would be affected” (Arctic Power Website 2008), NRDC insists that “[w]hile proponents of drilling insist the Arctic Refuge could be developed by disturbing as little as 2,000 acres within the 1.5-million-acre coastal plain, a recent analysis by NRDC reveals this to be pure myth […] [b]ecause U.S. Geological Survey studies have found that oil in the refuge isn't concentrated in a single, large reservoir” (NRDC Website 2008). As evidenced here, in accusing one another of proposing inappropriate and irresponsible management plans for ANWR, neither mentions its opponent by name.

As this chapter broadly demonstrates, the drilling debate around ANWR involves multiple cases of borrowed language, usurped positions, and interpreted views. More importantly, it reflects an extremely personal, passionate, and deeply rooted struggle for legitimacy and power. Arctic Power and NRDC strive to maintain the elevated status of their socially and politically connected organizations, and in doing so drive a wedge between their respective supporters and effectively polarize the issue. At the same time, the Gwich’in and Iñupiat work to have their cultures, livelihoods, and priorities validated by the world outside of their communities, and in doing so, have been persuaded to join forces with much more influential national groups. As a result of these allegiances, however, the native groups have been pitted against one another and made to contribute to a national political system that encourages dualism and dissuades compromise.
Chapter 4:  
Conclusion

While critical geography has become a significant and progressive influence within the broader discipline as well as academia more generally over the past thirty years, its objectives are not yet common practice, nor are they even completely solidified. In correspondence with its aim to be persistently critical and continually open to dissolving assumptions and breaking silences, it is a dynamic and evolving practice. A constant in critical geography, however, and its driving force, is vigilant attention to both difference and sameness within the creation of knowledge, the distribution of power, and the articulation of the human experience.

Through the critical analysis of the ANWR landscape, its people, and the debate over its land use presented in this thesis, I have demonstrated that, like any other controversial environmental issue, the debate over land use and management in ANWR is rooted in socio-cultural difference. It is for this reason that the drilling debate has become exacerbated over time and, more specifically, under the influences of globalization (Friedman 2000), as decisions about land use and management are no longer reserved for a particular region’s local inhabitants. Rather, the ideas and agendas of increasingly more, larger, and even further removed groups must be reconciled in order to resolve the now inflamed dispute. As a result, both the relative measure of common ground between stakeholders and the percentage of them with moderate perspectives are diminishing, thus polarizing, escalating, and perpetuating the debate.
In this concluding chapter, I summarize the positionalities of each of the four stakeholders closely investigated in this thesis. I then tie them together by providing a synopsis of the cycle of injustice and conflict that continues to fuel the drilling debate, and that would easily merit an entire thesis of its own. I go on to offer suggestions for how the research presented here may be furthered, and in doing so describe its most significant limitations. Finally, I reiterate the intended contribution of this work to a broader body of geographical knowledge, addressing both the value of its invocation of critical methodologies and the potential application of its inductions to the resolution process of the drilling debate itself.

[H]alf the world seemed to be […] intent on building a better Lexus, dedicated to modernizing, streamlining and privatizing their economies in order to thrive in the system of globalization. And half the world—sometimes half the country, sometimes half the person—was still caught up in the fight over who owns which olive tree. (Friedman 2000, p.31)

In the above quote, Friedman invokes a Lexus luxury sedan and a gnarled olive tree growing in an area of volatile contention between Palestinians and Israelis as metaphors for prosperous modernization and the sacred anchor of cultural identity, respectively. He also identifies both as universal and fundamental objects of human desire, and describes that aspirations for the two frequently exist as equally powerful but opposing forces. This metaphor clearly illustrates the most significant dilemma faced by the Gwich’in and the Iñupiat today, as by all present-day cultures with deeply rooted beliefs and traditions. Essentially, these two tribes are struggling to retain the most cherished and defining characteristics of their traditions, values, and people in the midst of increasing, and oftentimes extremely enticing and potentially beneficial, extra-local influences.
The Gwich’in have effectively given in to the first of these two impulses, as the lifestyles and livelihoods of their members today very closely resemble those of their ancestors. They continue to resist pressure from external forces to modify their economic system so that it is compatible with that of the rest of the world, or to adopt certain amenities enjoyed by many other cultures, or to accommodate outside interest in their land and resources, even for compensation. Accordingly, the Gwich’in people have remained fairly isolated. Their close ties to the land as well as their standard of living, particularly as compared to that of the rest of the continent on which they live, have remained traditional.

As the trends and forces of globalization pick up weight and speed, however, it will likely become increasingly more difficult for the tribe to maintain its current independence and relative simplicity. More importantly, if at some breaking point the Gwich’in have no choice but to adapt their lives and culture to the world outside of their tribal community, they may well be unprepared and ill-equipped to abruptly and successfully do so. As a result of this phenomenon, it is the unrelenting challenge of the Gwich’in, in addition to observing and promoting the land use practices they deem most appropriate for ANWR, to open their lines of communication and broaden their cultural traditions such that they will gain the more wide-spread recognition needed to secure their continued, or even increased, participation in the public drilling debate.

In contrast to the Gwich’in, the Iñupiat have embraced many forms of assimilation into extra-local cultures, economies, and social systems. In establishing and operating multiple native village and regional corporations, for example, they now operate within the same infrastructure as the most wealthy and renowned businesses in the world, abiding by
state and federal government regulations, networking with consumers as well as partner organizations, formulating legal written contracts, and striving to earn a profit while meeting market demands.

These developments, however, have brought with them a host of implications for Iñupiat culture and people. Time-honored subsistence-use practices, for example, have declined as livelihoods have diversified. Additionally, by adopting a new system and relinquishing many of the traditions that have sustained them for thousands of years, the Iñupiat have become extremely vulnerable to the fluctuations and hazards of modern life and business, and at the same time accustomed to the comforts and amenities it provides.

Specifically, the Iñupiat are restructuring their economy to be dependent upon an exhaustible resource, oil, whose industry is highly lucrative but also extremely temperamental and therefore risky. They will, at some point, have to alter their economy and livelihoods again, either when the oil on their land has been depleted, or when the energy needs of its current consumers shift. The Iñupiat are attempting to safeguard themselves against this eventual collapse to a certain extent by committing a percentage of the resources from their native corporation to industries outside of petroleum development, such as construction, engineering, and communication (ASRC Website 2008; NANA Website 2008). However, in adapting their economy to that of the developed world they have committed themselves to functioning in a constantly changing and modernizing system from which there is no turning back. The challenge of the Iñupiat now is to keep up with global market demands and to further develop both the skills and prominent standing in the world that are required to meet them, as these assets increasingly sustain their people and way of life. At
the same time though, they must be careful not to sacrifice the qualities, practices and beliefs that are essential to their core Inupiat values and cultural identity.

Consideration of Friedman’s Lexus-and-olive tree analogy in the context of ANWR sheds light on how dramatically the power dynamics at play in the region have not only colored interactions between the stakeholders discussed here but also changed over time. Accordingly, this thesis raises a series of in-depth questions about the experience and exercise of power, or lack thereof, throughout ANWR’s history of land use and resource management. For example, how has colonization shaped relations between natives and non-natives? What contrasting notions of the natural world did it introduce? Further, what is the specific role of the currently dominant capitalist socio-economic system in shaping the debate and determining its participants as well as outcomes?

The challenges faced by the Gwich’in and the Inupiat do not at all resemble those of their extra-local counterparts, as Arctic Power and NRDC already share the majority of the public and political clout with respect to land use in ANWR, in addition to numerous corporate as well as government endorsements, thousands of members, and millions of dollars each. In fact, these two lobbyist giants and their respective agendas are threatened only by one another. As compared to both the Gwich’in and the Inupiat, however, the positions and perspectives of both Arctic Power and NRDC are not only prominent, but disparately opposed and extremely polarized, as evidenced through each of the discursive themes explored in this thesis. As a result, the threat each poses to the other is amplified and the rift between them is widened.
The philosophy of Arctic Power is that the United States must move aggressively toward a future of ever-expanding, developing, and modernizing technologies and innovations. They are unconcerned, however, with the potential unsustainability of such an impulsive and unpredictable socio-economic system that demands increased energy use, the supply for which is rapidly diminishing. On the other hand, NRDC is so concerned with environmental sustainability that it risks being blind-sided by the evolving social and cultural forces that will inevitably continue to influence and alter the natural world. Likewise, their attempts to keep development in check and environmental impacts to a minimum for the sake of future generations are incompatible with a globalizing world and economy. In fact, they may even be hindering the very socio-economic progress and productivity that would offer inheritors an increased standard of living and higher quality of life.

The challenge of these two highly influential interest groups, therefore, is to reconcile the drive for social and technological advancement with a desire to honor and maintain the most essential and enjoyable qualities of nature. Broadly speaking, it is this reconciliation between differences in priority and perspective that offers the greatest promise for a resolution to the debate over land use and management in ANWR. Alternatively, any outcome that reflects only the views and values at one end of the spectrum and is imposed upon the landscape without input from its many invested individuals and groups will be wrought with injustice and therefore encourage defiance and ill-will, and ultimately be bound to fail.

As environmentalists and industries currently monopolize wide-spread recognition, political clout, and influence on public perception with respect to the drilling debate, and as
they also offer the most outlying and uncompromising representations of ANWR and proposed use and management practices, the effect of their being able to characterize the drilling debate is to perpetuate the cycle of inequality and continued conflict mentioned above. The severe positions of national stakeholder groups force investors, for example, to decide if social issues or environmental issues are more important to them, to choose between emulating the past or being propelled into the future, and to prioritize the sovereignty of the nation against that of individual communities. Such dualistic attitudes have served not only to perpetuate but to degenerate the debate over land use in ANWR, as well as to prolong its resolution. Additionally they beg further investigation into who exactly ANWR belongs to, and who should ultimately reap the benefits of its abundant and extraordinary resources. It is this issue of entitlement that is at the root of all contentions surrounding the drilling debate.

As environmentalist and industry campaigns are most concerned with sovereignty at the national level, and as they are the ones in the spotlight, the drilling debate has been usurped at the national level. As a national issue then, both Arctic Power and NRDC are better positioned to assert which management plans of an “American treasure” and “domestic energy source” would be most appropriate. This phenomenon not only legitimizes and empowers national organizations, but in doing so marginalizes the Iñupiat and Gwich’in, thus propelling the same old cycle of inequality, injustice, polarization, and conflict.

Interestingly, it is precisely the low-profile, minimally influential indigenous tribes who have succeeded in finding common ground between their differing ideologies and stances in the drilling debate, and who have exhibited a capacity to accommodate multiple,
simultaneous, and durable land use practices within the ANWR region for thousands of years. If the voices of the natives could be heard by the general population, and their far more moderate, compassionate, and nuanced perceptions of and appreciations for the ANWR landscape could be better understood, it is possible that reconciliations between the opposed campaigns of environmentalists and oil industries could be achieved. Further, investors at large could be encouraged to appreciate the subtle connections and interdependencies between the seemingly dissonant representations of ANWR, and to recognize value in the breadth of perspectives and opportunities they offer. Rather than fight over whose property ANWR is, its many stakeholders could feasibly accept shared responsibility and profit.

While the focus of this thesis is the contrasting values, views, and representations of ANWR held and shared by native tribes versus national organizations, there are many other stakeholders involved in the drilling debate and to varying degrees, and as Gilmartin (in Moss 2002) suggests, “[i]t is important for us to question the history of geography, and to ask about the stories we have neglected or the perspectives we have ignored” (p.37). Further research that considers the debate at other scales and examines the positionalities of additional stakeholders, therefore, would be an extremely valuable continuation of the discussions and insights gained here.

It would be particularly beneficial to explore the ANWR issue at a regional level, seeing as how the Refuge sits adjacent to Canada, and therefore shares its ecosystems across the political border. There are many Canadian individuals and organizations that are impacted by U.S. management practices within the area, and which therefore have important opinions to express concerning the drilling debate. Their standpoints, however, are not
readily projected for the American public to see, nor are they explicitly made visible to voters or congressmen and -women. Similarly, the non-native Alaskan population represents an involved and distinctly implicated stakeholder group, as residents of the state would benefit more directly from revenues of oil development than would residents of the contiguous U.S., and they would also be more intimately exposed to its potentially harmful environmental impacts.

Most importantly, the issues of social as well as environmental justice that are raised in this thesis, but by no means exhausted, are ripe for future and further studies at the global scale. All environmental controversies are rooted in, and therefore have implications for, social and cultural relations. Further, all environmental issues are also ultimately global issues, as ecosystems, air currents, and the tides of the ocean do not acknowledge much less adhere to political or other man-made borders. As just one example of this point, Figure 4.1 below depicts the flight patterns of many of the migratory birds that inhabit the ANWR region.
The ways in which the lives, habits, and physical conditions of these birds are affected or altered during their time in the Alaskan arctic, therefore, carries implications for each of the other regions to which they travel. Likewise, the natural resource management practices of every individual and group in all regions of the world are connected, as their reverberating effects carry implications for one another, the entire planet, and all of its inhabitants.

A significant limitation of the research presented in this thesis is that it does not address such grandiose notions as the one presented above. Rather, it frames the debate as a local and national issue, and closely examines just two participants at each of these scales. In doing so, it obscures the complexity of the difficult matter in question, as well as isolates and abstracts the notion of land use in ANWR. Additionally, my close examinations of the two
organizations that already enjoy the most publicity and prominence with respect to the drilling debate have served, however insignificantly, to further embellish their privilege, recognition, and renown. Most unfortunately, although inevitably, my efforts here to expose the polarized nature of the current drilling debate have also contributed to its continued polarization, as I have explicitly drawn attention to the two dominant and contradicting representations of ANWR that characterize its duplicity. In acknowledging these shortfalls, I offer this critical work as an important contribution to thoughtful and ongoing discussions of social justice, land use, natural resource management, and the profound relationships between all three.

In conclusion, the critical analysis of the debate over oil in the Artic National Wildlife Refuge presented here provides a poignant case study in which to illustrate the notion that all environmental issues are social issues as well. It is my assertion that management decisions involving the environment only become controversial issues when they reflect sources of tension or conflict between groups that have differing images, perceptions, and ideas about nature and the ways that it should or shouldn’t be utilized. Therefore, it is the intention of this thesis to demonstrate that by examining environmental issues with the above understanding, increased empathy for others can be achieved, our collective sense of diversity awareness and appreciation can be heightened, and conflict resolution can be made possible.
Cited Literature:

Primary Documents


**Secondary Documents**


