



Subterranean Estates: Life Worlds of Oil and Gas

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“Oil is a fairy tale, and, like every fairy tale, is a bit of a lie.”—Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Shah of Shahs*

The scale and reach of the global oil and gas industry, valued at several trillions of dollars, is almost impossible to grasp. Despite its vast technical expertise and scientific sophistication, the industry betrays a startling degree of inexactitude and empirical disagreement about foundational questions of quantity, output, and price. As an industry typified by concentrated economic and political power, its operations are obscured by secrecy and security. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the social sciences typically approach oil as a metonym—of modernity, money, geopolitics, violence, corruption, curse, ur-commodity—rather than considering the daily life of the industry itself and of the hydrocarbons around which it is built.

Instead, *Subterranean Estates* gathers an interdisciplinary group of scholars and experts to provide a critical topography of the hydrocarbon industry, understood not solely as an assemblage of corporate forms but rather as an expansive and porous network of laborers and technologies, representation and expertise, and the ways of life oil and gas produce at points of extraction, production, marketing, consumption, and combustion. By accounting for oil as empirical and experiential, the contributors begin to demystify a commodity too often given almost demiurgic power.

Subterranean Estates shifts critical attention away from an exclusive focus on global oil firms toward often overlooked aspects of the industry, including insurance, finance, law, and the role of consultants and community organizations. Based on ethnographic research from around the world (Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Oman, the United States, Ecuador, Chad, the United Kingdom, Kazakhstan, Canada, Iran, and Russia), and featuring a photoessay on the lived experiences of those who inhabit a universe populated by oil rigs, pipelines, and gas flares, this innovative volume provides a new perspective on the material, symbolic, cultural, and social meanings of this multidimensional world.

Contributors: Hannah Appel, University of California, Los Angeles; Andrew Barry, University College London; Mona Damluji, Wheaton College; Elizabeth Gelber, Columbia University; Jane I. Guyer, The Johns Hopkins University; Peter Hitchcock, City University of New York; Matt Huber, Syracuse University; Leigh Johnson, University of Zurich; Ed Kashi; Hannah Knox, University of Manchester; Mandana E. Limbert, Queens College and The Graduate Center, City University of New York; Arthur Mason, University of California, Berkeley; Douglas Rogers, Yale University; Suzana Sawyer, University of California, Davis; Rebecca Golden, Women’s Institute of Houston; Michael J. Watts, University of California, Berkeley; Sara Wylie, Northeastern University; Saulesh Yessenova, University of Alberta; Anna Zalik, York University

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Maria Gardner:

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Melanie Finnegan:

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Manuel Rose:

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