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Remaking Resistance: Cultural Meaning and Activism in the SOA Watch Movement

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CULTURAL MEANING AND ACTIVISM IN THE SOA WATCH MOVEMENT

by

KEVIN MCGUIRE

Under the Direction of Jennifer Patico, PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of the symbolic dimensions of activism in the SOA Watch movement, which seeks to close the School of the Americas (SOA), a U.S. training facility for Latin American military and police. Through historical analysis, participant observation, and ethnographic interviews with activists, I examine the practices of activism in the SOA Watch movement and the systems of meaning that inform them. As activists in the movement engage a system of power they seek to change, they construct and locate this system in space and time. By inserting themselves into the history and geography of the SOA through practices of resistance, activists construct and enact their own agency.

INDEX WORDS: Resistance, Activism, Cultural Meaning, Power, Agency, SOA Watch movement

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DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Mary McGuire, and "The Great" Tom Samway

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1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Walking Together

As I was putting one foot in front of the other on Fort Benning Road, the thought that struck me at the moment was existential. I was surrounded by such a variety of people: activists, students, journalists, police, nuns, bumper sticker peddlers, soldiers, hippies, Catholics, artists, Americans, immigrants, and more. Each group and every person carried with them uniquely imagined worlds, even as we all walked through the elusive "objective" one we shared. I wondered what effect the former had on the latter as I and the majority of those around me walked in protest. Even though all who were there stood on the same physical ground, activists in the School of the Americas Watch (SOA Watch) movement imagined a world made heavy by the weight of things we hoped to change, by its difference from the world we desired to create. The desired world was one in which the School of the Americas (SOA), a notorious military training school linked to violence and U.S. imperialism in Latin America, was closed. The former, the world in which it was open, was the one we strived to change. Lost in such thoughts about thoughts and the intricacies of the present, I turned my mind to the past.

When I first came to the School of the Americas Vigil, the yearly protest of the SOA Watch movement, I was not an activist or a researcher; I was just a teenager tagging along with my family. I came with my grandparents, my aunt Maureen, my sister Caitlin, and my Great Uncle Tom. My sister and my aunt take after my grandmother, all three of them fierce (and eccentric) activists in their own right: my grandmother an addiction counselor, my aunt a journalist and newscaster, and my sister would go on to be a teacher and advocate for those with special needs. My grandfather, for his part, stands out for his kind, calm intellect and his deep and sincere conscience. Once on his way to join the priesthood, he left seminary to become a

high school principal and family man. The last person on the list, my Great Uncle Tom, was the reason we were all there. Tom is a practical and uplifting man, relentless in his activism before and since his days as a Catholic priest living and working in Peru. Besides observing some of the consequences of U.S. intervention in Latin America first hand, Tom's connection to Maryknoll—an order of Catholic priests, nuns, and lay people that focuses on mission work—was his entry point into the SOA Watch movement. He was even friends with many lead activists including the movement's founder, Roy Bourgeois, also a former Maryknoll priest.

This time at the SOA Vigil was my first going alone and as an academic and a researcher. As I marched to the gate of Fort Benning, where the SOA is located, I recalled a prayer that Tom once told me during a family dinner. After the formal blessing of the food, Tom leaned over to me and said, "Yeah, yeah, so all that was good," brushing off what he seemed to think was high-minded poetic stuff. "But here's a prayer that we like to say," he looked up to confirm that I was listening and I realized it was something he hoped I would learn and take with me. "It goes like this: For those that are hungry, may they have food. For those that have food, may they have a hunger for justice." On Fort Benning Road, I thought about the entire world that this simple prayer implied. I recited it internally as the names of dead and missing people were recited aloud as part of the litany for victims of the SOA. Years before I had walked on that same pavement, but the world had changed under my feet and so too had the one in my head. As part of this unfolding, I imagined myself and my actions as a continuation of the resistance my family had enacted and embodied before me. Against my rationalist sensibilities, I felt like they were with me, and that we were walking together.

1.2 A Whole Made of Parts

Activists in the SOA Watch movement are both diverse and dispersed, yet as a movement they have formed an evolving network of people joined in the conviction that the United States should not be training, funding, or otherwise supporting violence in Latin America (or elsewhere). The School of the Americas (SOA) is a training facility run by the United States Department of Defense that has trained tens of thousands of Latin American military and police since its founding in Panama in 1948. Many SOA graduates have been implicated in human rights violations and obstruction of democracy. They include dictators, generals, commanders, and soldiers. Now located in Fort Benning, a U.S. Army base adjacent to Columbus, Georgia, the SOA was closed in 2000 in response to criticism led by the SOA Watch movement. In 2001, the school was reopened under its current name, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security and Cooperation (WHINSEC). Activists in the SOA Watch movement continue to call the institution the SOA, as do I in this thesis. The movement seeks to close the SOA and to end the broader system of violence and U.S. imperialism in Latin America that it facilitates and represents.

The compounding of U.S.-supported violence in Latin America during the Cold War eventually grew to include the massacre of a churchwoman, her daughter, and six Jesuit priests by graduates of the SOA in El Salvador in 1989. This event is often cited as having spurred the movement against the SOA. Led by then Maryknoll priest and Vietnam Veteran, Roy Bourgeois, the annual protest occurs on the anniversary of the massacre. The movement grew throughout the 1990s as Bourgeois and other dedicated activists studied, spread information about, and protested against the school. Lesley Gill's (2004) ethnography of the School of the Americas includes an exploration of the SOA Watch movement during this period, tracing its influence on the SOA. Gill firmly establishes the entanglement of the opposing sides in the "interpretive battle" (to

borrow a term from Ginsburg 1989) over the legitimacy of the SOA and the "field of force" that both sides inhabit (Gill 2004: 61), yet her overall focus remains on the school rather than the movement. Besides updating Gill's history and analysis of both the movement and the school, this thesis differs in its focus on the way activists themselves imagine and engage the system of power they seek to influence. This line of exploration is one that Gill (2004:243-244) opens up when she writes that the movement runs the risk of "becoming a victim of its own success": in influencing the school to sanitize its image, it may dissolve the focus of its resistance. This thesis then explores how activists have renegotiated their focus and how their practices have allowed them to sustain the movement.

I went to the SOA Vigil four times throughout the past ten years before deciding to make the SOA Watch movement the subject of this thesis. As I learned about systems and theories of power in my coursework, I developed new questions about the practices that I had seen and experienced at the Vigil. Several overarching questions emerged to organize my research. First, how do activists in the SOA Watch movement imagine the system of power they are trying to change, and how do they imagine their own capacity to change it, their agency? How do systems of cultural meaning—that is, "culturally constructed and historically specific guides, frames, or models of and for human feeling, intention, and action" (Ortner 1997:136)— influence the practices intended to effect change? What does resistance mean to SOA Watch activists, not as a trope, but as a set of practices and positions opposed to U.S. imperialism in and militarization of Latin America? In other words, how do they reflect upon these practices and use them to relate their own life stories to broader historical and political events? These questions took on new significance in light of a major event in the SOA Watch movement. After quarter century of activism centered on the Vigil at the gates of Fort Benning, lead organizers from the SOA Watch

had announced momentous change: the Vigil of the following year, 2016, would move to the U.S.-Mexico border in order to focus attention on the "plight of the immigrant." Thus, another question emerged: how have the meanings and practices of activism in the SOA Watch movement been remade and what do these changes signal about the broader system of power within which the movement operates?

1.3   Going Forward

In Chapter 2, I lay out a framework for understanding resistance in the SOA Watch movement. After defining resistance on a basic level as sets of practices meant to disrupt systems of power, I build on two key ideas: first, that resistance is not separate or opposite to power (Abu-Lughod 1990) and second, that power and resistance are cultural (Ortner 1995, 1997). These ideas set up the task of examining power as it exists within and outside the awareness and intentions of social actors. Towards that end, I develop the idea of "social terrains": histories and geographies that are structured through power, but also exist within the understandings of activists. I examine ideas and examples of performative and narrative resistance to show how activists resignify these terrains to construct "heterotopias": inversions of dominant histories and geographies (Foucault 1986). The reflexivity of this process, I argue, includes the construction of agency. With this framework in mind, in Chapter 3, I outline the methods I used to examine how resistance, as such, plays out in the SOA Watch movement. These methods include historical analysis, participant observation at the 2015 Vigil, and interviews with activists. Before delving into the details of these, however, I analyze my own position for the way it affected my approach, findings, and analysis.

In Chapter 4, I examine the history of the School of the Americas and the movement to close it. I pay special attention to the evolving and dialectically opposed discourses used to

legitimize or to delegitimize the existence of the SOA and conversely the SOA Watch movement. I examine how broader shifts in systems of power work in conjunction with internal shifts and events in the movement to set the stage for the move to the border. This "macro" historical perspective puts into context the "micro" moment in the movement that I examine in Chapter 5. In that chapter, I describe and analyze the 2015 SOA Vigil weekend as a collective performance and negotiation of change in the movement. I examine how the practices of the Vigil collectively construct and engage spatial and temporal understandings of power. I look to see how the announced move to the border is publicly understood within the structure of the Vigil.

In Chapter 6, I detail the perspectives of four SOA Watch activists. These offer more personal and individual understandings of the movement, the move to the border, and the interplay of meaning and activism. I pay special attention to places, moments, and people they referenced as components of the movement: what I call *points of resistance*. I argue that activists' narratives serve to make these points continuous within their own emic models of themselves, the movement, and the world. These points and the connections between them once again underline the temporality and spatiality of power and resistance. In the final Chapter 7, I reflect on the implications of my findings for the future of the SOA Watch movement and the challenges it faces in its relocation. I argue that the reproduction of U.S. imperialism is equally challenged by the remaking of resistance involved in the move to the border.

2   MODELLING RESISTANCE

2.1   Introducing Resistance

What is the relationship between SOA Watch activists' understandings of the world, themselves, and their activism—their systems of meaning—and the practices they enact to effect

social change? In this chapter, I build an understanding of resistance as a set of practices that socially constructs the meaning of power, locates it in time and space, and engages it accordingly. I begin by tracing a line of thinking about resistance that reveals its relation to power and its entanglement with cultural meaning. I examine two models of power (discourse and practice) in order to understand the context within which resistance occurs, how power involves meaning, and how power structures social organization (often unequally) through what I call *social terrains* of space and time. I then shift to an exploration of performance and narrative as windows into power as it is imagined and understood. These not only reveal the meanings of power that activists enact, but also resistance as a process of social construction. I argue that activists reconstruct social terrains to be heterotopias: alternative terrains that are dually a part of and disruptive of the systems of power they seek to influence (Foucault 1986). This process, I argue, is ongoing and self-referential, revealing the changing ways that activists construct themselves and their own agency.

Resistance is a fundamental category of human behavior and experience that has occupied the thinking of anthropologists and social theorists alike. As I explore below, the concept and analysis of resistance has been problematized, even to the point of critiquing its overuse and asserting its meaninglessness (Brown 1996). However, it is my view that while resistance should not be reified simplistically, it is still worth holding onto as a category for investigation, not least of all because it holds importance to people outside of academia. It is also important to note that while resistance is an idea and category of action used in the SOA Watch movement, its use is not universal, nor universally compelling among SOA Watch activists. However, by "resistance," I mean to signify individual or collective practices that disrupt or attempt to disrupt dominant systems of power and thereby shape society in a new or different

way. The practices and aims of the SOA Watch movement are congruent with this definition as activists involved attempt to disrupt a system they understand as U.S. imperialism and militarism in Latin America (Gill 2004). While resistance, as such, may exist in less visible forms, organized collective activism remains a useful context for its study. Social movements such as the SOA Watch movement are particularly well-suited for this inquiry because the systems of power being contested (as activists understand them) are made explicit in the goals of the movement.

2.2   Focusing Resistance

Resistance has been a topic of interest for a very long time, such that any review of the subject must begin somewhere and accept the impossibility of being comprehensive. Still, it seems important to begin with the work of Karl Marx for the influence he has had in academia and global politics in general. Marx, along with his friend Friedrich Engels, famously described systems of social organization as defined by modes of production, or more specifically, by which social class controls the means of production (Marx and Engels m1964 [1848]). Marx and Engels' model of societal change posited an evolutionary process in which resistance emerged, almost naturally, from economic tensions (Marx and Engels 1964[1848]). Arguably, throughout the twentieth century, the influence of Marx's focus on material conditions translated into a theoretical divide between thinking about power and material conditions on the one hand (as in neo-evolutionism and cultural materialism) and in thinking about culture and meaning on the other (as in symbolic/interpretive anthropology) (Erickson and Murphy 2008: 46-47,159).

This theoretical divide between material and meaning began to be bridged early in the twentieth century in the work of Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's ideas, however, remained fairly obscure to anthropologists of the U.S. and U.K. until the 1970s and 80s when

they became hugely influential after translations and increased publications (Hobsbawm 2000:

11). Gramsci developed the idea of hegemony to explain the lack and/or failure of communist

revolutions in the early 20th century (Forgacs 2000:189). Gramsci (2000:211-212) defines

hegemony as a system of domination in which the dominated strata of society continually submit

to their position by subscribing to elite understandings of the way the world is, and in turn

receive limited economic benefits. The notion of hegemony suggests that hierarchical social

organization is not merely top-down coercion, but implicates consent on multiple levels of

society. It problematizes the inevitability of historical and social progress in its portrayal of

domination and resistance as hinging upon nonmaterial systems of belief.

While hegemony became influential in anthropology later in the twentieth century,

especially by establishing the entanglement of culture with power, anthropologists quickly began

to adapt, build, and complicate this model of power in the contexts of the marginalized

"nonwestern" populations they had specialized in studying (Urla and Helepololei 2014:431). The

book, *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), by political scientist, James Scott, is a major influence and

example of this. The "everyday resistance" of the Southeast Asian peasants Scott studied

complicates the totality of hegemony by showing the lapses in complicity of subaltern groups

(Scott 1985:317) Anthropologists since Scott have similarly examined the agency and resistance

of subaltern groups in the so called developing world, many focusing on resistance to

encroaching capitalistic and neoliberal systems of power (e.g. see Freeman 1993:182 and Ong

1987). The focus on resistance however, has also been met with criticism.

Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) critiques what she considers to be a tendency to "romance

resistance" in studies on the subject. Anthropologists, she argues, rendered resistance as "hopeful

confirmation of the failure—or partial failure—of systems of oppression" (Abu-Lughod

1990:53). This romanticism falsely portrays resistance as an antithesis to power, rather than existing within and drawing from power. Any social and political situation, Abu-Lughod (1990:52-53) argues, should instead be analyzed as a composite of various "fields of overlapping and intersecting forms of subjection whose effects on particularly placed individuals at particular historical moments vary tremendously." Resistance, therefore, should be understood as utilizing and referencing systems of power that, while perhaps not dominant in a given situation, are equally capable of producing subjects unequally. Further, resistance does not always function to overthrow dominant systems but may even (and ironically) "run along the same tracks" (Abu-Lughod 1990:49-51). Abu-Lughod (1990:42) argues that resistance should therefore be analyzed as an entry point into—a "diagnostic" of—the overlapping systems of power that it draws on and/or intends to change.

A second important refinement in thinking about resistance is Sherry Ortner's (1995) call for ethnographic "thickness" in studies on the subject, that is, for detailed attention to cultural meaning. Ortner argues that the failure to do so results in several misrepresentations. Firstly, it results in a "sanitizing of politics" that reduces power and resistance to a binary opposition that overlooks internal ambiguity and divisions (similarly to Abu-Lughod's argument) (Ortner 1995: 177-179). Second, it results in "thinning culture": the portrayal of a lack of awareness or understanding of power on the part of subjects (Ortner 1995: 180-183). Third, it results in "dissolving subjects": reducing them to socially determined "effects" of power (Ortner 1995:183-186). Ortner (1995:186-190) argues that these tendencies result in part from the postmodern fixation with deconstructing authorship of social contexts and social actors. In focusing on structural effects of social categories, studies sometimes fail to elucidate how actors construct agency despite inhabiting, and even drawing upon, systems of power (Ortner

1995:186). Such studies evoke again the power/culture divide. Ortner's later (1997) work, "Thick Resistance" on the agency of Sherpas, the ethnic group historically hired to guide Western mountaineers in the Himalayas, exemplifies the sort of focus she calls for. In it, she shows how Sherpas' religious and culturally shaped worldviews provide a cultural model of power that informs their enactment of agency (Ortner 1997:146). Sherpas understandings of mountain deities and the demands they are able to make of them for their own benefit, provide a model for the demands they can make of climbers hiring their services (Ortner 1997:147). Sherpas resist their employer's control of the climbing encounter through religious practices such as visiting monasteries, prayers, songs, offerings, and enforcing dietary restrictions (Ortner 1997: 149-154).

This entanglement of practice and meaning in power and resistance is not something unique to the nonwestern contexts traditionally studied by anthropologists. Nor is it only present in "everyday resistance." Like culture, it exists everywhere, including the "West" and in organized social movements. The focus on resistance as entwined with power and inherently cultural, begun by Gramsci and developed further by Abu-Lughod and Ortner serves as a reminder to look for power as it exists and functions both within and outside actors' systems of meaning. It is necessary then, to take a cue from Abu-Lughod and examine power as it functions unconsciously, beyond the awareness of actors, even if it involves their awareness. This must be done in order to understand the environment within which resistance occurs and the structures of power that it engages. It is also necessary, following Ortner's insight that power is cultural, to examine how insiders' models of power, as part of their worldviews, inform this engagement, even as they are constructed through it. I take on these two tasks in the next two sections,

respectively, in order to see how I may read the meaning of practices in the SOA Watch movement and assess their engagement with U.S. imperialism in Latin America.

2.3   Contextualizing Resistance

Discourse and practice are useful concepts that help to elucidate the way power involves yet functions beyond the awareness, intentions, and actions of individuals. Neither discourse nor practice is synonymous with power, but both present ways in which power works. I begin with discourse, which in many ways intersects with hegemony, with its focus on thought, knowledge, belief, and communication and their effect on material conditions. Discourse is prominent in the works of Michel Foucault and his theorization of power. Foucault defines discourse as a system of "relations between statements" (1972[1969]:31). More than singular statements or actions (e.g., of "thinking, knowing, speaking…"), discourse is the "field of regularity for various positions of subjectivity" in which statements and actions occur (1972[1969]:55). Foucault's work is largely marked by the deconstruction of discourses of modernity and progress and the unveiling of the negative effects that they obscure. In *Madness and Civilization*, for instance, Foucault (1965) traces how discourses of reason and science, emerging from the Renaissance, obscured the regression in treatment of those considered to be insane, resulting in their institutional confinement in the modern era. Elsewhere, Foucault (1982) describes power not as a singular form or act of domination or resistance, but more as a socially emergent field within which these forms or functions take place. Discourse can thus be thought of as both cause and effect, emergent from and constructive of systems of power.

Fields of power are not merely abstract or ethereal, but take the form of spatial and temporal social terrains: selectively inclusive and exclusive geographies and histories. A classic study that illustrates the way in which discourse can constitute subjects is Edward Said's

Orientalism (1979) in which Western discourse representing "the East" was shown to shape and be shaped by, Western imperialist projects with the effect of othering, exoticizing, and patronizing those it portrayed. The capacity of power to produce subjects through discourse also takes spatial form as Teresa P.R. Caldeira (2000) shows in her study of discourse in São Paulo, Brazil. She examines how the discourse of crime/fear/security manifests spatially in the form of "fortified enclaves": securitized residences with guards, gates, and surveillance and how this spatial organization reinforces social division (Caldeira 2000:19-52, 256-296). Similarly, but emphasizing the temporal effects of power, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) explores how power "produces" history in his examination of the discursive silences surrounding the Haitian revolution. He argues that the "unthinkableness" of the only successful slave revolution in the Americas to colonial governments has reverberated through time and is visible in contemporary accounts of the past (Trouillot 1995: 70-107). These spatial and temporal terrains of power are important contexts and interfaces for resistance, but as the next model of power shows, they are not solely constituted through discourse.

Like discourse, practice is a useful model of power because it also implicates culture in the functioning of power. Practice refers simply to human action, and practice theory is a loose category of thinking about human action and its role in the reproduction/change of social structures (Ortner 1984). Pierre Bourdieu was a seminal figure in practice theory as he set forth his model of habitus. Habitus is a process by which sets of "dispositions" (tastes, preferences, styles, etc.) of a social group shape their practices, which then get selectively rewarded or punished based on social context, thus, reproducing/maintaining the differences between social strata (Bourdieu 1972,1984). Bourdieu (1972:72) defines habitus as a system of "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures." Like discourse, habitus portrays the

circularity of power as actions shape social organization that in turn shapes action. Adrie Kusserow's (2004) examination of classed types of individualism in the U.S. provides a great example of how practice/habitus reproduces social terrains. She finds that in lower socioeconomic status neighborhoods, children are socialized to understand and elicit a "hard individualism" that emphasizes endurance and stoicism. The practices that emerge from this socialization get discouraged or punished in upper and middle class neighborhoods (and schools) where a "soft individualism" that emphasizes feeling and expression is rewarded (Kusserow 2004:57, 81-84,183-185). Like discourse, practice illustrates how social actors unwittingly produce and reproduce unequal social organization, part of which are the inclusions and exclusions of social terrains, somewhat ironically through the exercise of their own thought and action.

The work of Sherry Ortner once again provides a relevant perspective worth mentioning here. In her review of anthropology since the sixties, for which she finds practice to be a unifying focus, Ortner (1984) takes scholars to task for simultaneously valuing and downplaying agency in their models of power. She writes for instance, "that although actors' intentions are accorded central place in the model, yet major social change does not for the most part come about as an *intended* consequence of action" (Ortner 1984: 157). While Foucault and Bourdieu convincingly establish that power is not merely a linear "top-down" conspiratorial system of exploitation, they posit a fairly cynical self-exploitative system in its place. Ortner suggests that people not only understand power and agency, but those understandings enable them to enact agency and influence systems of power. As Ortner's later work on resistance (discussed above) exemplifies, models of power should reckon with "the actor's point of view" if they are to take agency seriously (Ortner 1984: 130,144).

2.4 **Reading Power, Writing Resistance**

The call by Ortner (1997) for "thick resistance" is a reference to symbolic and interpretive anthropology, particularly, Clifford Geertz' (1973) methodology of "thick description." Thick description is a way of accessing systems of cultural meaning, "the ensemble texts" that is the stuff of culture according to Geertz, through careful attention to the particularities of social interaction (Geertz 1973: 6, 452). Geertz' attention to meaning and his method of reading it is well met by Victor Turner's (1967:36) attention to the processual aspects of meaning: what symbols themselves "do" socially and their influence on practice. Similarly, I am interested not only in the display of meaning on the part SOA Watch activists, but how meaning is constructed and changing, and how it influences the practices of the movement. This section zooms in from the models of discourse and practice to the related concepts of performance and narrative as windows into cultural meaning and its influence on practices of resistance. I also review examples of performance and narrative to show that resistance often takes the form of the constructing, locating, and resignifying spatial and temporal terrains.

Social events like the Balinese cockfight, which Geertz (1972) explored as a display of Balinese cosmology, fit the general idea of performance as an organized presentation involving an audience and a focus of attention. Performance, however, has also been applied in the social sciences to describe more everyday scenes, and not only as a presentation, but a constructive act. J.L. Austin (1975[1962]), for instance, describes the performative capacity of language to not only present a description of the world, but also to construct or affect the world through "speech acts." Austin (1975[1962]:5) uses wedding oaths, the bequeathing of property written in a will, and the making of bets as examples of this performative capacity of language to *do things*. Judith Butler (1990) illustrates the political implications of this capacity in her study of how everyday

language and practices construct gender through "gender acts" (and by extension, other identities/social categories) by consistently referencing normative categories of gender. As such, these languages and behaviors construct the meaning of social categories by acting them out and giving them social reality (Butler 1990:530). What then, is the social reality constructed through such acts as those that make up a social movement?

Protest is a performative context which illustrates that resistance is not merely an expression of disagreement; it is also the location of power in space and time. Further it is a constructive resignification of these social terrains and the power they are understood to embody. I have shown that the spatial terrain of the built environment/geography is "ordered" by the functioning of power through discourse and practice. Protest demonstrates that this ordering is not static, determined, or merely constraining. Emanuela Guano (2014) illustrates this in her analysis of the 2001 G8 Summit in Genoa, Italy. During this meeting of heads of state, the fortified zones implemented by the Italian government and police were resignified by protestors to symbolize the inhumane exclusivity of global capitalism (Guano 2014:78-79). Guano (2014:75, 84) describes how the multiple opposing perspectives in Genoa performed their imaginations of the world in the streets of Genoa with the effect of reciprocally substantiating their positions. In the case of activists this meant symbolically or literally transcending the fences and barriers marking the zones. In the case of the government/police, this meant methods of crowd control that escalated to lethal violence in the name of security. Similarly, Faye Ginsburg (1989:94) describes how the site of an abortion clinic in Fargo, North Dakota became an "interpretive battleground" over the categories wrapped up in the abortion debate (womanhood, the fetus, pregnancy, etc.). She describes how demonstrations by anti-abortion activists figured the clinic and the space around it as one of death and failed womanhood, and transformed it to

one of prayer and protest (Ginsburg 1989:94-100). In both Genoa and Fargo, resistance took the form of casting meaning onto spatial terrains, prescribing them to be the embodiment of the systems of power that protestors sought to change, and disrupting those systems through practices of occupying space, making statements, crossing barriers, marching, and praying. While from a broad perspective, these spaces are drawn through the functioning of power via discourse and practice, performance allows us to see how actors themselves envision and impact that drawing.

Reading systems of meaning through the window of performance is complemented by a second, somewhat entwined mode of engaging and constructing meaning of the world: narrative. Eleanor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996:20-21) examine how "personal narrative simultaneously is born out of experience and gives shape to experience," making it inextricable from the sense of "being-in-the-world" that constitutes the self. Narrative does this by taking otherwise voluminous and disparate pieces of information and condensing and connecting them (Ochs and Capps 1996:24, 28-29). Jerome Bruner (1991) similarly describes narrative as a cognitive and social toolkit used to construct more than just the self, but all of reality. Describing the social function of narrative, Bruner (1991: 16) argues that narrative "is designed to contain uncanniness rather than resolve it" so that change is "made interpretable." The implication is that narrative is not only a way of navigating the uncanniness of reality, but like performance, it is a way of constructing it.

Yet how do narratives of resistance both challenge and resignify power? Part of the answer lies in narrative's "temporality" (Ochs and Capps 1996) or "diachronicity" (Bruner 1991), which refers to the way it both represents time. It is therefore a primary way that activists engage systems of power as they exist or as they located, to use a geographic metaphor, in the

social terrain of time. Narrative is also set within time: its delivery and reception always affect the present. That certain selective narratives of the past are granted, through discourse, the status of "history" is a structure of power that also serves to legitimate social conditions in the present (Trouillot 1995). Yet as Trouillot (1995:2) writes, "human beings participate in history both as actors and narrators," suggesting that actors can narrate the past in ways that may disrupt the social conditions of the present. Narratives may be considered resistance when they contradict or resignify the details of dominant narratives, including who or what once was excluded, and thus, destabilize their legitimizing effects. Narrative is so ingrained in social experience that one does not need to look far to find examples of its use as resistance.

It is evident in ethnography itself. Volumes such as *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and *Women Writing Culture* (Behar and Gordon 1995) contain works addressing how the narratives that anthropologists produce affect the positions of those they represent or exclude. In so doing, they challenge the system of anthropological authority. Narrative resistance is also evident in alternative histories such as Howard Zinn's (2010[1980]) *A People's History of the United States* or Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz' (2014) *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States.* These challenge social inequality in the U.S. by reevaluating its development through time and emphasizing the (classed, racialized, and othered) perspectives that are downplayed in dominant versions of history. Another example of narrative resistance can be found in the many Truth Commissions conducted in the aftermath of Latin American "Dirty Wars." One of Guatemala's two commissions, Recovery of Historical Memory (1999), collected the narratives of victims of that country's 36 year long civil war in its report, *Guatemala: Never Again!* By vocalizing these otherwise hidden or silenced instances of violence, and thus unveiling the silences of dominant narratives, Guatemalans were able to challenge the legitimacy of the

various political and military elites that dominated throughout the war. Like practices of protest, these narratives locate systems of power temporally: in past situations, people, and happenings that connect to current social conditions.

The resignification of geography and history in the examples outlined above illustrates that activists utilize meaning in their attempt to reshape social organization. This process constructs social realities that engage and affect dominant systems of power even though they do not totally replace them. The realities that are constructed through this resignification resonate with Michel Foucault's notion of the heterotopia. Foucault (1986:24) describes heterotopias (literally, "other places") as dually real and imagined; they are "counter-sites," in which all other sites of a society are "represented, contested, and inverted." While heterotopias describe and emphasize space, they are also entwined with "heterochronies": representations of time that likewise contest and invert dominant or normative ones (Foucault 1986:26). For example, Foucault (1986:25-26) describes cemeteries and museums as places that reverse normative understanding of time, even as they are set within time as normatively understood. Each place collects and contains slices of time in the form of bodies or artifacts and sets them apart in a space that is rendered timeless. Contexts of protest and the telling/receiving of alternative or critical histories are likewise real and imagined "places" in which opposition becomes *the* position, and "counter-discourses" (see Terdiman 1985) become *the* discourse.

The point of difference, or at least clarification, is that the inversions of resistance, while condensed in scenes of performance and narrative, are not contained there. In one sense they are fleeting because they do not completely replace the systems they contest. In other words, they do not achieve dominance (lest they cease being resistance). Yet in another sense, they do endure by folding back into the systems of cultural meaning that informed them to begin with. Ortner

(1997:155) makes this point when she writes that, while any cultural model of power "establishes a series of power differentials, it also embodies a model for overcoming them." Latent in systems of meaning, resistance can emerge and reemerge in space and time. Wherever and whenever activists insert themselves literally and figuratively into social terrains, they not only engage power as they understand it, they also enact their understandings of their own agency. The optimism of this reflexivity is tempered by Abu-Lughod's (1990) demonstration that resistance is not utopian, that it always contains its own capacity to subject. Still, while limited in this way, the reflexivity of resistance suggests that activists may also be aware of their own negative impact and attempt to mediate it. Activists in the SOA Watch movement, for their part, have demonstrated an awareness of and responsiveness to this capacity. The findings I present in the following chapters explore how this reflexivity unfolds in the history, practices, and perspectives of the SOA Watch movement. First however, it is necessary to present the methods I employed to examine this process.

3   APPROACHING RESISTANCE

This chapter has two objectives. The first is to explore the complications of my position in relation to the SOA Watch movement in light of anthropology, activism, and the overlap between the two. I examine how my position may have affected the logistics of my research and my representation of the SOA Watch movement herein. The second objective of this chapter is to lay out the methods I have employed to examine the meanings and practices of activism in the SOA Watch movement. My approach consists of three different methods: historical analysis, participant-observation, and ethnographic interviews. These three methods, each with their benefits and limits, allow for different windows into the movement, and together they allow for a more holistic picture of resistance in the SOA Watch movement.

3.1 Researching Activism and Activist Researching

In accordance with postmodern critiques of the passive, objective observer, it has become standard for anthropologists to articulate their own subject position in relation to those they study in order to consider how their own identity affects their understanding of their informants and their informants understanding of them. Not only is the anthropological encounter between the researcher and her subjects shaped by this positionality, but as Abu-Lughod (1991) points out, it is a fundamentally unequal relationship, as the anthropologist occupies a privileged position as the producer of knowledge. Examining positionality, therefore, is not just an analytical attempt at striving for more objectivity (by owning up to subjectivity); it is a practical attempt at minimizing the inequality of the anthropological encounter. As such, it is just one of several other strategies to do this, such as: reaffirming the importance of long periods of involvement with studied groups (Schultz 2014), allowing informants to actively collaborate in the production of knowledge about them (Field 1999, Low and Merry 2010), studying people in positions of power (Ho 2009), making oneself both the subject and object of study (Ellis 2004), and taking on advocacy roles when studying marginalized groups (Field 2004, Hale 2006, Starn 2011).

Many of these strategies are employed in studies variably labeled as applied, public, engaged, or activist anthropology which emphasize the accountability of the researcher to those they study (Checker et al. 2014). On a surface level, this may seem to compromise a level of objectivity in research. Yet as David Graeber (2009:12) argues in his study of the global justice movement (of which he is a committed activist), given that objectivity is impossible to achieve in any study, it follows that one can still produce valuable and critical knowledge despite open alignment with the object of study. Still, the emphasis on applicability of research findings are met, sometimes with tension, by a previous emphasis on analyzing/theorizing activism and

resistance in a way that is not as immediately applicable to research participants (Urla and Helepololei 2014). I agree that absolute objectivity is impossible to achieve, but it is also my view that a balance can be found between ethical imperatives of research and critical analysis. As someone who supports the goals of the SOA Watch movement, but also strives to think critically about its cultural dynamics, this has been my objective.

My position in the SOA Watch movement, while supportive, is also ambiguous in ways that likely affected my interactions with informants. Besides my field work in November of 2015, I have attended the annual SOA Vigil weekend five times off and on in the past ten years. Some of the trips, such as my first, have involved a relatively high level of participation. Other years have been less involved though equally important for me. For instance, the last year my grandmother was able to attend involved relatively little participation, mostly in going to the main demonstration. In large part, this was because of health complications that made participation difficult for her. Despite these trips being incredibly meaningful and providing the impetus to conduct this research, I have struggled to feel like an "insider" in the movement in the gaps between Vigils. This results in part from the fact that my family members involved in the movement are spread out geographically, leaving me less of a day-to-day community of SOA Watch activists surrounding me. More recently the demands of school have been consuming. So while I do not necessarily consider this thesis a product of strictly "activist anthropology" (Speed 2006, Hale 2006), I do hope that it could be used in part as such, at least by disseminating knowledge of the important issues the movement faces and by sharing and valuing some of the perspectives that have shaped it. In this sense (and as I discuss in Chapter 2), anthropology can be thought of as a form of activism in its own right. Further, as the name of the method suggests, participant-observation involves not only observing but participating, and certainly I have been

an activist in that sense: by protesting, listening, discussing, and sharing in the moments of social meaning making that I reflect on here.

There are several social dynamics that have kept me from being more consistently involved in the SOA Watch movement, and these may have also impacted my interactions at the Vigil and in interviews. The activists that make up the movement come from a variety of religious positions and those I have encountered include Catholics, a variety of Protestant groups, Buddhists (including a group of monks who walk from Atlanta to Columbus each year), indigenous belief systems (such as a Maya man who publicly offers a prayer to the four directions before the main protest), and like me, some secular, atheist/agnostic people. One informant characterized the movement as "normative Catholic" and I agree with this assessment though I might broaden it to "Christian." The influence of Christian theology and practice in the founding, history, and the practices of the movement are explored more in the following chapters, but the point here is that my lack of affiliation with a religious organization, or any social justice organization, did influence my interactions at the Vigil. I was often asked, "Who are you here with?" That I was on my own as a researcher seemed to prompt a small amount of friendly suspicion and I could not help but wonder if activists suspected me of being an FBI spy (which indeed, was a relevant concern; see Chapter 4). Nevertheless, this difference was quickly overcome by my expressed interest and knowledge and, more often than not, it mostly resulted in people attempting to recruit/include me into their groups.

One other issue that likely affected my interactions with activists was my privileged position as a white middle class man and a U.S. citizen. As such, I have never been a direct victim of U.S. militarism or foreign policy as have some activists in the movement. This is not to say that white middle class activists of the SOA Watch movement have not been direct victims

of this system, but that they are not de facto victims like lower socioeconomic status Latinos throughout the Americas. In interacting with people who have experienced torture or who have had loved ones killed or disappeared, there was a sort of experiential gap that I think inhibited the amount and depth of interactions. This is a common problem, not just for anthropologists trying to relate to their subjects, but for activists in solidarity movements trying to advocate across national, racial, class, and gender boundaries (Sundberg et al. 2007). I examine some of the ways activists have addressed this issue in Chapter 4. On the other hand, I was able to relate more to activists who, like me, were in relatively privileged positions of U.S. citizenship. Unlike me however, many of these activists had afforded or been funded to go on somewhat expensive "delegations," witness trips, and even stints as missionaries in Latin America (interestingly, not unlike anthropological fieldwork). In both cases, I lacked the cultural capital, that is, the shared experiences, mannerisms, and language to deeply relate (Bourdieu 2011[1986]), yet my commonalities with the latter group meant that I interacted with them the most at the Vigil (with some exceptions) and in the interviews. This thesis, then, cannot be understood as a conclusive statement on the SOA Watch movement as a whole. Instead, it is an exploration both limited and enabled by my finite perspective.

3.2   Historical Analysis

The past and its meaning is an interpretive domain that is itself contested in the SOA Watch movement as activists assert a history that accounts for the role of the U.S. in creating violence throughout Latin America. In order to examine the current moment of the movement, and the perspectives of individual activists, it is necessary to trace the history of the movement. In particular, it is important to trace the changing ways and influential systems of meaning that activists have used to engage the social terrain of time. This "long view" analysis also helps to

contextualize the categories of meaning that activists engage with and enact (Ginsburg 1989:12).

This is the focus of Chapter 4, in which I recount the history of the SOA, the emergence and

growth of the SOA Watch movement, and the development of both in the 21st century.

In this effort I rely on a variety of sources including Lesley Gill's (2004) ethnography of

the SOA (that includes the SOA Watch movement), articles produced by the SOA Watch

organization and posted on their website, other books/articles by journalists and religious figures,

as well as studies of U.S. militarism and activism. In particular, I pay close attention to the

political and theological discourses signaled throughout the history of the SOA Watch movement

and its precursors. I also look at the evolution of discourses the U.S. military and government

have used to legitimize the existence of the school through time. Discourses of resistance can be

thought of as "counter-discourses" formulated in dialogue with the dominant language,

narratives, and media used to justify that which is being resisted (Terdiman 1985). Yet, like

resistance generally, counter-discourses are inseparable from the discourses they seek to

dismantle; the conversation between them is what drives the evolution of both. A historical

accounting of both the SOA Watch movement *and* the SOA is essential to understanding the

practices and perspectives of either.

However, these practices and perspectives, while historically situated, should not be

considered to be historically determined in an absolute sense (Ginsburg 1989:12). In other

words, the micro-context of individual lives is not merely the product of the macro-context of

history or society. Social reality is produced and organized through the continuous interplay

between the micro and the macro. This processual nature of meaning making is exactly what this

thesis magnifies as it occurs in the SOA Watch movement. Historical analysis then, allows for

seeing how the long view articulates with the cultural complexities of specific scenes and perspectives that I encountered in the movement.

3.3   Participant Observation at the SOA Vigil

Attending the Vigil weekend made up the participant-observation component of my research. Participant-observation has a history traceable to the early days of anthropology and sociology and is now used in many other fields of social science (Bernard 2006: 342-346). Bernard (2006: 344) defines it as a strategy of fieldwork that involves cultural immersion "where the action is," so that the anthropologist is not just spectating, but also experiencing through participation in the lives and practices of those she studies. Despite the limits of my positionality described above, by involving myself in the actions of the Vigil weekend, I was able to establish rapport with many individuals there and to familiarize myself with the details of the event, which served well in interviews. Though the Vigil weekend was only three days of activity, the days were saturated with rich social experiences. Working within such a short timeframe put even more of an onus on "thick description": extreme attention to and recording of detail (Geertz 1973:7) as I attempted to recognize the sometimes tacit meanings and functions of particular practices there. I also relied on some of the elements of "focused ethnography," such as prior familiarity, media recording and analysis (such as songs and speeches), and intensive data collection and analysis (Knoblauch 2005:14-29) that allow for fruitful short-term field work.

I partook in a range of activities at the Vigil weekend, from mundane conversations with activists to the collective actions upon which the event centered. A large part of the weekend involved going to workshops at the convention center in Columbus. These were seminars and meetings, usually about an hour long, which served a variety of purposes such as providing information on issues important or connected to the movement, providing practical information

about demonstrating or committing acts of civil disobedience, strategizing and reflecting on the movement as a whole, and raising money for particular projects of the movement. Other events at the convention center included film screenings, an inclusive Catholic service, musical performances, and larger general gatherings at the close of the first two nights. The weekend centered on two main collective acts of protest. The first was a demonstration at a nearby immigrant detention center in which undocumented immigrants were detained, which included a 1.5 mile march from the town center of Lumpkin, GA to the facility. The second demonstration was the main Vigil for which the weekend takes its name. This was the protest at the gates of Fort Benning on the last day of the weekend that included activities such as speeches and testimony, music and dancing, and a "funeral" march to the gate. During both demonstrations, I paid special attention to the way temporal and spatial categories such as history, memory, progress, territory/property, and the built environment were evoked/contested, particularly in relation to the announcement of the move to the border. Sometimes I would take field notes during events or in the lulls between them. Each night I would review these and fill in the gaps with additional thoughts and observations. In sum, participant-observation allowed me to see how the historically situated meanings of activism/resistance were collectively enacted and reworked in practice at an important moment in the SOA Watch movement.

3.4   Reading Activist Narratives

The performative scenes of the Vigil, while important, allow only limited access to activists' individual perspectives, daily lives, and life histories. Interviewing activists in a more structured form provided access to more personal evaluations of meaning and everyday practices of activism (Ginsburg 1989:133). To that end, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with a total of four activists (I interviewed one activist twice). Since the activists that responded to my

research did not live close enough to me to reasonably meet in person, I interviewed people over the telephone and/or Skype. The interviews lasted 1-2 hours and occurred throughout the months following my field experience at the Vigil. I allowed activists to decide whether or not they wished to be identified in writing and, with one exception, everyone I formally interviewed indicated that they did. Besides these individuals as well as public figures in the movement's history, the activists that are included herein, such as those I met at the Vigil, are given pseudonyms and have had identifiable information withheld. I formally interviewed two women and two men, middle aged or older, all U.S. citizens. They all had fairly long experiences of involvement with the SOA Watch movement and thus, were able to provide me with "expert" knowledge (Bernard 2006:147) that I found useful in detailing the movement's history and mission.

Most of those I spoke with shared my interest in how their cultural contexts, systems of belief, and life histories related to their practices of activism and the movement. My familiarity with the Vigil proved useful in that regard, as I could relate to their experiences, perspectives, and what the practices of activism at the Vigil and elsewhere have meant to them. Conversely, I was also able to capitalize on my ignorance when discussing other areas, prompting interviewees to expound on their detailed thinking about themselves, the movement, and history. In so doing, they helped me to clarify my thinking. The general arc of the interviews tended to begin by me asking activists to describe their biographical information such as their upbringing, education, occupation, and whatever other details they wanted to share. Interviews then tended to move to their activism within and outside of the SOA Watch movement. From there I would focus questions to their particular experiences at the Vigil and other events, as well as how activism was incorporated into their everyday lives.

As activists concerned enough with social conditions to try to change them, informants would often discuss political situations in seemingly far-away places. Yet I came to realize that these distant places were actually formative to activists' conceptions of themselves in time and space. In other words, the "macro" social processes they described were very much embedded in the personal narratives that they shared with me. Activists' personal narratives provided a window into the formulation of resistance by demonstrating their own understandings of the history of the movement, the practices of the Vigil and other activist contexts, and their own place as a part of the movement. When pieced together with historical analysis and participant observation, interviews allowed for an approach to resistance that helped mitigate the limits of my position as part researcher/part activist and a white male U.S. citizen. This thesis, a result of these three strategies, is my attempt to honestly balance the nuanced perspectives and a general rendering of the movement.

4   WALKING FORWARD WITH THE PAST

This chapter traces the history of the SOA Watch movement and its counterpart, the School of the Americas. Because resistance exists within and draws on systems of power (Abu-Lughod 1990), I do more than simply outline a series of events. I also examine how resistance in the SOA Watch has functioned, as a subset of power, through discourse. Discourses of resistance used by the SOA Watch movement have been used to delegitimize the SOA and U.S. imperialism as activists understand it. Yet, they are also shaped and limited by their dialogue with dominant legitimizing discourse of the SOA and this system (Abu-Lughod 1990, Terdiman 1985). For this reason and similarly to Gill (2004:61), I pay close attention to how this two "sides" have been effected and shaped one another. This evolution of this conversation between opposing discourses sets the stage for the moment of the movement that I examine in Chapter 5.

Tracing the history of the movement is also complicated by activists' engagement with the social terrain of time, that is, the discursive representations of the past that are structured to selectively include or exclude "what actually happened" through the functioning of power (Trouillot 1995:18). Activists in the movement have utilized narratives of resistance that unveil the silences, temporal gaps, and absent perspectives that structure dominant discourse of U.S.-Latin American history. The accounts of the past put forth instead, both shape and are shaped by the various cultural systems of meaning that have informed ongoing practices of resistance in the movement (Ortner 1995, 1997). I therefore also examine how the counter-discourses of the movement have been grounded in various systems of cultural meaning, and how these systems have informed the practices of the movement.

4.1   The United States, the School, and the Americas

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the School of the Americas is a military training school for Latin American military personnel that is run by the United States. It is located in the military base of Fort Benning which is adjacent to the city of Columbus, Georgia. The school is currently officially titled Western Hemisphere Institute for Security and Cooperation, called by its acronym, WHINSEC. This rebranding evinces the effect of the counter-discourse waged by the SOA Watch movement, even though activists consider it to be a superficial change. As mentioned, activists (myself included) continue to call the school the SOA. When the SOA was first established, however, it went by yet another name, the Latin American Ground School, and was located not in Georgia, but in Panama (Gill 2004:62). The school was established in 1946 in the aftermath of WWII. U.S. involvement in this war appealed to a pre-existing discourse of "readiness" but was largely justified through a burgeoning discourse of globalism: that the fate of the U.S. was inextricably linked to all other places on the planet and could not isolate itself (Lutz

2001:47-48). As European countries turned their attention inward to rebuilding, the U.S. for the first time in its history, did not demobilize as it had done after previous wars (Lutz 2001: 85). Instead, the U.S. sought to reinforce its new status as an international superpower by "securing the hemisphere" from outside, namely Soviet, influence (Gill 2004: 62-64). Military interest overlaid economic interest as the U.S. supplied arms symbolizing its power, the training to use those arms, and the ideology that presented "the American way of life" as superior (Gill 2004:65-71). Though nuclear capability meant an emphasis on "deterrence" rather than fighting other world powers, a different form of warfare, counterinsurgency, was directed at the "third world" (Lutz 2001:92-94). Between its founding and 1959, Nicaraguan soldiers made up the largest portion of students at the SOA (about a quarter) and were sent there under the rule of Somoza family whom the U.S. had supported since the 1930s (after the rebellion of Agosto César Sandino was put down) (Gill 2004:72).

The Cuban Revolution in 1959 bolstered the legitimacy of the SOA (at that point renamed the U.S. Caribbean school until it was named the SOA in 1963) by substantiating the fear of communism and therefore justifying the support of state violence to suppress its real or perceived growth (Gill 2004: 73-75). Indeed, anti-communism has been the legitimizing discourse for the majority of the SOA's existence. In the 1960s and 70s, Cold War growth in military aid, training programs, and intelligence operations maintained the SOA as a component of support for the repressive dictatorships and "dirty wars" that marked that period (Gill 2004:78). At the same time, political and economic disenfranchisement that stemmed all the way to the days of colonialism was magnified by the global economic crises of the 1970s, spurring leftist revolutionary resistance in much of Latin America (Smith 1996:12-17). SOA graduates were key figures in the violence and repression in many countries. In Bolivia, SOA graduate

Hugo Banzer ruled throughout the 70s while in Chile, Dictator Agosto Pinochet came to power

through a coup carried out with U.S. support and with the help of many SOA graduates (Gill

2004:79-80). In Panama where the school was located, the military was granted favors for

housing the school in the form of free training at the school (Gill 2004:82). Later, the once

"friendly" Panamanian dictator, Manuel Noriega, would form nebulous alliances and make

demands of the U.S. leading to the invasion of Panama in 1989. It should also be noted that the

SOA has not only been justified in an explicit way through these discourses, but also through

general obscurity surrounding the institution and its graduates (especially in the U.S. and prior to

events of the 1980s and the rise of the SOA Watch movement in the 1990s). Many people, still,

simply do not know that the SOA exists. That said, some of the anti-militarism sentiment and

activism prior to the SOA Watch movement had a slightly reverse effect on U.S. military

"support" to other countries (of which the SOA was a part).

The distrust of U.S. government in the post-Nixon and post-Vietnam War era, while

resulting in some progressive (and marketable) turns within the military (Lutz 2001:166-170),

also served to justify the School of the Americas at that time. By training and equipping other

countries' militaries, the U.S. could effectively outsource the enforcement of its economic and

military interests and avoid sending in U.S. troops into conflicts (Lutz 2001: 166-170). As

Catherine Lutz (2001: 222) points out, this ongoing military strategy also fits well within

neoliberal "laissez-faire" discourse. Resulting from several factors such as its ouster from

Panama (resulting in part from soured relations with Noriega) and local lobbying, the SOA

relocated to Fort Benning in 1984 (Gill 2004:26-27). This was a time when disenfranchisement

and attendant conflicts were at a height, particularly in Central America (Smith 1996). Honduras,

with its own military rule, became a springboard from which the U.S., under the Reagan

administration, tried to bolster the regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala and undermine the Sandinistas in Nicaragua (Gill 2004:83). Graduates of the SOA were involved in these campaigns as evinced by their presence in notorious death squads and counterinsurgency forces such as the Atlacatl battalion in El Salvador, Battalion 3-16 in Honduras, and the Contras in Nicaragua (Gill 2004:85-89). The end of the Cold War meant that the SOA faced a crisis of legitimacy as the discourse of anti-communism ceased to be as relevant. Yet as the SOA Watch movement grew throughout the 1990s, it had to reckon with new dominant discourses that emerged in its place.

4.2   The Rise of the Movement to Close the School

Why did the SOA Watch movement emerge in this post-Cold War era, when the SOA was not as relevant? This is the question Lesley Gill (2004:198-232, 209) explores in one chapter of her ethnography about the SOA. What Gill (2004:201-202) and I, in my own experience, have found, is that the movement did not emerge spontaneously. Rather it drew on preexisting movements and discourses that came before, many of which shaped the changing discourses of U.S. militarism I just outlined (see Lutz 2001:216). The global discourse that justified U.S. involvement in WWII for instance, was met with an equally global discourse of humanity and a shared planet that discouraged war (Tsing 2002 [cited in Graeber 2009]) and continues to fuel the ongoing post-WWII anti-nuke movement. In speaking with activists, I have also found the various movements of the 1960s and 70s, especially anti-Vietnam War, Civil Rights, Chicano, and Catholic Worker movements to be influential in shaping the practices of the SOA Watch movement. They have especially informed the discourses of nonviolence/pacifism and civil disobedience and their attendant practices (marching, chanting, music, sit-ins, purposeful arrest, etc.). A major influence to the SOA Watch movement that emerged during this time, was the

discourse of liberation theology with its emphasis on the union of faith and activism (see Chopp 2007). Many activists that would go on to form the SOA Watch movement had been influenced by liberation theology during stints working in Latin America. In Chapter 6, I detail this intersection of belief and activism in the perspectives of some of the activists I interviewed. The point here is that the practices of helping the poor, impoverished, and disenfranchised that liberation theology influenced was easily and often cast as communist support by U.S. and Latin American authorities (Klaiber 1998). This clash of discourses can be seen in several instances of violence against church people living and working in Latin America. These highlighted how liberation theology and anti-communism were mutually opposed yet reinforcing discourses, a similar relationship to the worldviews that Guano (2014) describes at play in the 2001 G8 summit protests. Immediately preceding and overlapping with the SOA Watch movement were U.S.-Latin American solidarity movements prominent in the 1980s (Gill 2004:200, see also Smith 1996). One of them was Witness for Peace; a movement that organized delegations to conflict ridden countries in order to witness firsthand the effects of violence supported by the U.S. (Smith 1996:60-70). Another was the Sanctuary movement, which strived to provide safe havens in the U.S. for Latin American refugees who were designated illegal aliens (Smith 1996 70-78). Out of this milieu of discourse, activism, and experience in Latin America, the SOA Watch movement was already taking form.

When the relocation of the SOA to Fort Benning had been announced in 1983, it was met with an act of protest that would foreshadow the SOA Watch movement. Vietnam Veteran, then Catholic priest, and future leader of the SOA Watch movement, Roy Bourgeois and two of his friends had learned that members of the U.S. supported Salvadoran military had raped and killed a group of nuns, including Bourgeois' friend, Ita Ford (Hodge and Cooper 2004: 61). They snuck

onto the base at night (by impersonating military personnel), climbed trees with speakers in tow, and amplified a recording of the last sermon of Oscar Romero to the sleeping Salvadoran army soldiers (just prior to SOA relocation, the soldiers were already receiving training on the base) (Hodge and Cooper 2004:1-4). Another act of protest against the U.S. supported violence would occur in 1990 and come to be considered the starting point of the SOA Watch movement. One year after yet another massacre in El Salvador, in which a church woman, her daughter, and six Jesuits were killed by SOA graduates, Bourgeois staged another protest on the base, this time with the brothers Charlie and Patrick Liteky (Charlie Liteky, also a Vietnam Veteran and former priest who would go on to purposefully return the Medal of Honor he received) (Hodge and Cooper 2004:136-137). This time they snuck into the SOA headquarters where they splattered activists' blood before laying down on the ground outside to symbolize victims of the school and await arrest. For the next 25 years, the SOA Vigil has occurred on this anniversary.

Informed by preexisting discourses of resistance and drawing from preexisting activist networks, the SOA Watch movement grew throughout the 1990s. Through the determined work of Bourgeois and other activists, it eventually included a national organization, local chapters, and thousands in attendance at the yearly Vigil (Gill 2012-213). The tradition of civil disobedience continued each year at the Vigil as activists crossed onto the base. In their interpretive battle over the legitimacy of the SOA (Ginsburg 1989:94), the movement pointed to the arrests and prosecution of activists as more evidence of the school's penchant for violence and repression of dissent (Gill 2004: 214). Revelations of controversial documents bolstered the SOA Watch's interpretation by providing proof of the school's connection to Cold War violence. First there was the release of a list of over 60,000 graduates obtained by the newly formed SOA Watch organization through a Freedom of Information Act request in 1993 (Hodge and Cooper

2004:143). Activists posted the list on their website and combed through it to find the names of dictators, assassins, and soldiers implicated in massacres, disappearances, coups, and other instances of violence (Gill 2004:211) Then in 1996, the Pentagon released training manuals used at the school in the 80s and early 90s that revealed torture, targeting civilians, and extrajudicial killings were part of the school's counterinsurgency curriculum (Hodge and Cooper 2004: 163-167). These revelations caused an international outcry and in turn, the movement drew more support and participation.

They also spurred a public relations campaign on the part of the SOA in order to downplay the mounting proof of its link to Cold War violence in the previous decades. Yet, despite the ostensible end of the Cold War (conflicts in Latin America continued well into the 1990s), the school continued as a function of new discourses of U.S. militarism: the "War on Drugs" and the seeds of the "War on Terror." In tandem with these changes, the movement also underwent a discursive evolution as its growth brought in new perspectives. One influence that emerged at this time was the global justice movement, which critiqued the more nefarious implications of post-Cold War global economics and saw the SOA's role in that system (Graeber 2009). Global justice activists brought new practices such as a performance with massive papier-mâché puppets, dancers, and stilt walkers to the Vigil, as well as more secular worldviews (Gill 2004:230-231). Whereas Catholic activists could in some sense dodge political/economic positioning by appealing to religious discourse, global justice activists brought an explicitly anti-capitalist discourse to bear on the SOA (for better and worse). The influx of these and other activists into the movement renewed pressure on the school resulting on its near closure through a 1999 budget cut that passed in the House of Representatives but narrowly failed in the Senate (Gill 2004:215). Though surely a result of the movement's efforts and effects on the social

terrain of time, the "closure" of the SOA in 2000 was not considered a victory for the movement. Activists saw the school reopen with its current name, WHINSEC, and with the implementation of what were seen as superficial changes.

4.3   Resistance in the New Century

Lesley Gill's history of the SOA and the movement to close it largely leaves off at this point. Acknowledging the limited victories of the SOA Watch movement (in bringing awareness to the SOA and in pointing out the silences of U.S.-Latin American history), Gill (2004:243) wonders how the movement will evolve as it tries to articulate resistance against a system of power of which the SOA is only a small piece. How broad or narrow should their focus be? The attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the launch of the War on Terror, and the massive loosening of legal constraints on executive war power and government surveillance have come to mark the new century in which the movement operates. Yet as Nancy Schepher-Hughes (2004:225) notes, the massive, explicit violence of 9/11, and I would add, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that have followed, are inseparable from the less explicit "militarization of everyday life" that fills the gaps between such events. The movement in the new century has been marked by a refinement in thinking about and experiencing the entanglements between explicit instances of violence in Latin America and the implicit everyday violence within the United States.

For instance, the political climate of anti-terrorism has allowed courts and judges to justify harsher sentences for those committing acts of civil disobedience at the yearly Vigil. This has meant a steep decline in the number of activists "crossing the line" throughout the 2000s (many have served 6 months in prison) though thousands still attend the Vigil. According to the SOA Watch website (2016), no one has crossed onto the base since 2012. More recently it has

also been revealed, again through a FOIA request, that the FBI had been surveilling the movement for a full decade after 9/11, using its counter-terrorism authority to do so (see Verheyden-Hilliard 2016) When I was at the 2015 Vigil, this announcement was made at a large gathering and one man stood up. Waving his arms up and down, he addressed the crowd, "If anyone here is with the FBI or any other law enforcement agency, stand up and identify yourself!" Like the revelations of the 1990s, this one seemed to strengthen activists' solidarity and commitment. However, it was not that shocking to many people in light of the political climate and other revelations of government surveillance of civilians in recent years (see Smith et al. 2013).

The movement has also shifted in the twenty-first century according the influence of new social movements that have emerged and the systems of power they "diagnose" (Abu-Lughod 1990). The Occupy movement, for instance, has diagnosed the U.S. financial system and its role in wealth/income inequality. New environmentalist/food movements have diagnosed industrial capitalism and its role in exploitative food production and environmental degradation. The Black Lives Matter movement has diagnosed the institutional racism of U.S. police, court, and prison systems. SOA Watch activists of the new century have crossed hairs with these movements, which has led to certain shifts. In my evaluation, movements with more local focuses have led the SOA Watch movement to have a more domestic focus, even if in ways that appeal to its transnational/global discourse. This is most clearly evident in the recent shift in focus to the treatment of immigrants. Movements emerging in Latin America such as environmental and indigenous rights movements have also pushed the SOA Watch movement to reflect on its discourse of "solidarity." Just like anthropologists, solidarity movements engage the politics of representation when advocating across national, racial, class, and gender boundaries (Sundberg

et al. 2007). This has meant a new impetus on reckoning with the movement's identity politics and a push for diversity in the movement.

While Catholic tradition and discourse continue to provide roots to the movement, there has been a general shift toward religious and ethnic diversity that has toned down the influence of liberation theology. Besides influence of other movements and shifts in power, two key events influenced this. The first was the move of the Ignation Solidarity Network's social justice event from the Vigil to Washington, D.C. This coalition of Jesuit schools, universities, and other institutions withdrew in part due to the liability of harsher punishments for civil disobedience that many students felt compelled to commit. The second event was Roy Bourgeois' excommunication from the Catholic Church for his ordination of a female priest in 2008, which continues to be divisive amongst some of his Catholic supporters. As one activist told me, these shifts were positive in the sense that they allowed the movement to be more inclusive and, I would add, to realize more fully the discourse of solidarity. For instance, according to the SOA Watch website, the staff of the SOA Watch organization, now includes a majority of immigrants from Latin America and the movement also strives to foster transnational relationships with social justice activists on the ground in Latin America through its *Equipo Sur* or "southern team." These changes in the social makeup of the movement are not just the influence of new perspectives or the continuation of the SOA. They also suggest the reflexivity on the part of the activists: an awareness of and responsiveness to being entangled with the system of power they are trying to change and activists' own capacity to subject groups of people (Abu-Lughod 1990).

The movement has seen mixed successes throughout the 2000s. It has gained political alliances in Latin America and successfully pressured six countries to withdraw their troops from attending the SOA. In 2012 the movement, with the help of supportive congressman James

McGovern, was able to set up a meeting at the White House between activists and then National Security Advisor (now White House Chief of Staff) Denis McDonough. In the meeting they shared testimony with McDonough and attempted to convince the administration to write an executive order to close the SOA. While McDonough was "moved and respectful" he did not support closing the school (Quigley 2016). This event that brought the movement so close to the executive power to close the school was undoubtedly hugely disappointing. While it signaled a willingness to be heard by the administration, it also suggested how difficult it still would be to achieve closure of the SOA. Yet like the beginning of the movement, other factors besides specific triggering events were also at play in prompting the coming changes. The influence of new movements, discourses, and understandings of power signaled a reevaluation of the strategies of the movement. Together these provide the context for the moment of change that I entered into at the 2015 Vigil.

5 A MOMENT IN THE MOVEMENT

5.1 On the Way to the 25th SOA Vigil

Not often throughout the year am I drawn into the sprawling, flat, forested swath of land south of Atlanta. Living in a suburb just north of the city, it is easy to get the illusory sense that allows one to commit synecdoche, mistaking this piece of Georgia for the whole of the state. Nevertheless, it was a beautiful temperate November day to drive south on Interstate 85 to Columbus for the 25th year of the SOA Vigil. As I drove I drew on memories of past Vigils to think about what the next few days would bring, not just for me, but for the movement itself. I knew there were changes to be announced in relation to the growing concern over the treatment of immigrants in the United States. At that point in 2015, a surge of immigrants, many of them children, had been fleeing violence in Central America to the United States for several years. In

the U.S. they faced detention, lack of legal representation, and deportation (Werner 2016). In the context of all of this, the Vigil weekend was going to be accompanied by a demonstration at a nearby immigrant detention facility in the town of Stewart, Georgia.

How would activists rework their understanding of the movement in light of the current moment in its history and these new social issues? How would they make sense of the soon to be announced moved to the border? How would they fit new forms of resistance into their broader cultural understanding of power and the established rituals of the event? The history explored in the previous chapter demonstrates that the movement has adapted its own oppositional discourses to the changes in the dominant discourses of U.S. militarism and other political focuses. In this chapter, I draw on participant-observation at the Vigil weekend in order to answer these questions, to magnify activists' collective engagement with U.S. imperialism, and the constructive capacity of resistance.

5.2   Introductory Rites

I arrived in Columbus, Georgia, the city adjacent to Fort Benning, a city in its own right, with a military population in the tens of thousands. I was careful to not make any wrong turns, as I had been warned that I would be arrested during the Vigil weekend if I accidentally pulled onto the base. The ease with which I checked into one of the city's budget motels was evidence that although thousands continued to participate in the Vigil, the numbers had declined in recent years. I did spot an older activist woman whom I helped get into her room. "You good at opening doors?" she asked from across the parking lot. I opened my own imagining the activists who had likely done the same in the past. I looked over the itinerary for the next day, a Friday, and the first day of any formal gathering of the SOA Vigil. I pulled up the local news to see how the protest was being cast there. One report said that federal officials in the area were asking

Columbus residents "to be vigilant" in light of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, but that there had been "no threat connected to the SOA Watch gathering this weekend" (Owen 2015). This seemed like an attempt to create disharmony, suspicion, and perhaps create some local backlash to the movement, but I knew many Columbus residents by this point were dismissive of the movement, if they did not see it as a business opportunity (Gill 2004: 216-218). Not too troubled, I drifted off to the hum of the room's mini refrigerator.

I arrived early the next afternoon at the Columbus Convention and Trade Center, a large brick building converted from a nineteenth century ironworks factory, of which the SOA Watch rented out a small section for the weekend. A small marketplace of bumper stickers, pins, t-shirts, pamphlets, political books, petitions, email lists, and a host of other items were being set up in the entry hall. After more people arrived and set up, I walked from table to table, each one representing an organization that was participating in the event. There was a group organizing trips to Latin America, a summer camp for children of immigrants, several religious groups (mostly Catholic or other Christian denominations), Veterans groups, and other organizations with social justice focuses. Early on, I spoke with Alfred, a good humored man that seemed to be around my age who was setting up the table for Shut Down Stewart, the Atlanta group that was organizing the Saturday demonstration against the Stewart Detention Center. He told me that the Shut Down Stewart movement had been ongoing for several years and had more recently partnered with the SOA Watch. After exchanging information, I promised to attend the workshop about Stewart later that evening to learn more.

Many activists I spoke with at the Vigil and in interviews told me that the educational value of the workshops was one of the most impactful components of the weekend. I attended two workshops on the first day of the Vigil and more the next. In them I was able to witness and

experience the junction of education and inspiration that my informants described. The first workshop I attended was about the kidnapping of 43 student activists the year before in Iguala, Mexico, or the Ayotzinapa massacre as it has come to be called (referring to the name of the school the students came from). The panel of activists told about the massive protests that followed in Mexico and the organized movements to find the bodies and hold those responsible accountable. Both gangs and government corruption were implicated in the kidnapping, cover up, and presumed massacre; and here at the Vigil, so too was U.S. foreign policy. The workshop featured a new member of the SOA Watch organization's "Equipo Sur": a college age woman from Mexico who related the events of Iguala to the audience, her own experience protesting, and her frustration with the U.S. She and the other panelists described how the United States was implicated in several ways: by treating the corrupt Mexican government as legitimate, through the international economic "agreements" (namely, NAFTA) that were seen as keeping Mexicans impoverished for the benefit of consumers to their north, and most of all, through the funding and training of Mexico's corrupt security apparatus.

The Ayotzinapa workshop served as a pretext for the Shut Down Stewart workshop that followed. Alfred, whom I had met earlier, was hosting it, but I quickly realized another man, Robert, was a leader in the Shut Down Stewart movement. Robert's speech at the workshop was a slightly toned down version of the even more charismatic one he would give later that night at the general gathering. Still, it was full of dramatic pauses and details about the conditions inside the center, its corporate for-profit structure, and its shallow justification as a job provider for the most impoverished county in Georgia. Importantly, the victimization of immigrant families was rendered as part of a system of power in which people were pushed out of Latin America by U.S. supported violence and pulled into the U.S. by the promises of the American Dream. This

understanding was fortified by the testimonies of two special guests: women whose husbands had been detained at Stewart, torn away from them and their children, and deported like almost all of those that get detained there. One of the women recited a poem in the style of spoken word about the false promise of opportunity in the United States and her efforts to keep struggling and remain defiant. Her testimony called on "all o' you," presumably the U.S. citizens that were there, to put our privilege to use to change the system. The workshop ended by Alfred revealing that a group of activists would cross onto detention center property the following day and be arrested in an acts of civil disobedience. Robert hinted at a religious understanding of these acts in his reappraisal of civil disobedience, as "divine obedience."

Robert's fully laid out speech later that night at the plenary gathering seemed to multiply people's enthusiasm for the demonstration set for the following morning. The inclusion of the Shut Down Stewart movement in SOA Vigil also served as a clear and practical illustration of the way activists in the movement were adapting the meaning of resistance to new social conditions. This was made especially clear as Roy Bourgeois took the stage to announce to the crowd of activists that the SOA Watch organization had made the determination that the 2016 Vigil would "follow the SOA to the border." The details were still in the works, but the logic was made clear: the border between the U.S. and Mexico was being militarized and the SOA was already being implicated in the training of border security: they had already sent at least one person there. Also, the violence that sent people fleeing to the U.S. was the result of the exploitative foreign policy that the SOA symbolized and had indeed facilitated. In response to the messages Bourgeois and fellow activists had been hearing in their trips to Latin America, the movement would focus its efforts on "the plight of the immigrant." There would still be a "presence" at the gates of Fort Benning, but a much smaller one, and it would continue to be in

conjunction with Shut Down Stewart movement. I was not surprised by the announcement which seemed practical in at least two ways: it allowed activists to focus their resistance on a new avenue in which they may be able to achieve more tangible results and as a way for staying relevant in the political context and internal shifts of the movement. From my experience in previous years and from everything I read, I knew that the Vigil at the SOA had taken on significance that many felt was sacred. Did this change violate that sacredness?

5.3 Liturgy of the Word

The next morning I woke early and went to the motel lobby for breakfast. The lobby was full of activists getting ready to drive south for 45 minutes to Lumpkin where the Stewart Detention Center was located. The night before, organizers had enlisted drivers, myself included, to shuttle activists. So I asked some people gathered in the lobby if they needed a ride, which was how I met Bruce and Shauna. After seeing if anyone else was looking for a ride at the convention center, we set off for Lumpkin. On the trip I learned that Bruce, a quiet yet enthusiastic man, was with a Methodist group from Michigan and had been coming to the Vigil for years. Shauna, also enthusiastic, was quirky and talkative. She was originally from Brazil, but moved to California as a teenager. She had been sponsored by a Catholic women's group to attend the Vigil for her first time. She and I would spend much of the day together.

We arrived in the Lumpkin town square to a growing crowd of maybe a hundred or so people. I chatted with some of those gathered, thankful for the clear sky overhead despite a forecast of rain. There was a small trailer and a sound system being set up for music and announcements. As the crowd continued to grow, songs were sung, information about the detention center was shared, and declarations about who we were and what we were there for were made. We then began the 1.5 mile march to the center. During the march, I saw that there

were people positioned along the road, and later found out that, according to their count, we had reached several thousand. Robert had also said that he hoped the mile long march from the square to the detention center would allow activists to witness the systemic racism and poverty in the town. Indeed many of the houses were marked with signs of decay: chipping paint, rusty chain link fences, broken down cars, etc. Curious residents watched from their driveways. As we walked, many activists shouted protest chants, sometimes in Spanish sometimes in English.

After passing the ironically named "Liberty Street" we turned onto "Cca Drive" named after the private company that ran the facility. The view of the facility had been blocked with the buses used to transport detainees. Alfred took the stage to chants of "Shut it down!" and introduced several speakers: one of the women from the night before, a young man who had been detained there despite his US citizenship, and a tearful teenage girl whose brother had been detained and deported. Whenever a disturbing detail was shared, activists in the crowd would boo, or sometimes shout "shame!", or "shut it down!" As a group of eleven activists were preparing to cross onto the center's property and get arrested, we were told to "cross over" the barriers with our voices and whatever else we had to make noise; all in the hope that those inside would know that we were there supporting them—the direct victims of U.S. militarism and immigrant policy. As the activists were processed by the police, they became symbolic victims of the system of power that directly victimized those inside—experientially verifying their solidarity. The crowd marched back to the square. After shuttling some people to their cars, I caught back up with Shauna (Bruce got a ride with some friends) and we drove back to Columbus for another night of workshops and gatherings at the convention center.

Shauna, about my mom's age, seemed to have latched onto me in a motherly sort of way. After a ride full of conversation about her life in Brazil and California, Catholicism, girls, etc.,

she demanded to buy me lunch in exchange for the ride. During lunch I told Shauna that I was planning to go to the inclusive Catholic service. Once at the convention center I found out that she, playing the matchmaker, had volunteered me to actually help out with the service as she introduced me to Carrie, a woman around my age that was in charge of organizing the event. Reminding myself of the duties of participant observation, I somewhat reluctantly agreed. To start, Carrie had Shauna and I greet people as they entered the large meeting room. We also propped up a sign for the event which announced defiantly that women priests would be in attendance. The service began with some songs and greetings, after which, Carrie gave me the nod signaling that it was time for my second duty, which required that I actually go up on stage. As different speakers read out passages, she and I lit candles on either side of the altar. I had to laugh, somewhat nervously as the first candle refused to light and then as I had to manage embers from the oversized matches we were using. What kind of thesis project would this turn into if the altar were to go up in flames on my watch? I made sure that didn't happen, even though it meant some minor burns on my palm. Relieved that my duties were over, I went back to my seat, but only for a few minutes.

I left the service early to attend the Maryknoll meeting, which had an overlapping time slot. Admittedly, I was a little nervous to attend the more intimate gathering, which was sure to include Roy Bourgeois and other dedicated activists, many of which knew my Great Uncle Tom and family. I admired Bourgeois and the others for their passion and the work they had done, and especially for their bravery in facing arrest and sometimes worse. I felt like a lightweight activist in comparison. In hindsight, it seems silly that an aging group of priests, nuns, and missionaries could incite such nervousness, especially as I was met with such a warm welcoming. Sitting in a large circle, everyone introduced themselves, many citing where they had spent their years of

service around the globe and what was going on in their lives currently. Last of all, Bourgeois also introduced himself briefly, before launching into a reflective monologue about the movement and the move to the border.

I quickly realized that this meeting served as a sort of thermometer for him, a place where he could both test his loyal supporters, but also receive their council. It went the other way as well, as activists were able to receive an important message from an important leader. First Bourgeois reflected on the years of activism and resistance outside of Fort Benning and ensured everyone that they would continue to "keep the memories of victims alive" but that it was necessary to "turn our attention to the living." The demonstration at Stewart Detention Center that day reminded him of those early days, he said, before laying out the case for the shift to the border. Even now, I can hear his somewhat strained thoughtful tone and his signature Louisiana accent as he described the almost spiritual calling to the border as a response to the suffering of the people. When he opened the floor up for comments and questions, everyone seemed to be supportive. One woman, a former nun who had worked in Asia, thought it was a good idea to reframe immigrants as refugees, citing a UN report. Another woman reaffirmed Bourgeois' point that they would need to carefully work with activist groups already on the border, rather than just insert the Vigil there. Another had already been doing just that and offered her position as a starting point out of which to grow collaborations. Others simply lamented the power structures and political climate that was making the move so relevant.

5.4   Communion

After a long and eventful day, I slept well throughout my last night in Columbus. I woke to another chilly morning, so I brought an extra cup of hot coffee with me on my way to the main Vigil. I arrived to the blocked off Fort Benning Road with a strange sense of preeminent

nostalgia, imagining what the next year and those that followed would look like. While this was a day focused on continuity in the movement, in which activists would practice resistance in a setting they had come to know, it also may be the last of its kind. Walking past the police, I wondered what they made of the announced changes that had now filtered into the local papers and media outlets. The police and military presence was still strong, but some things were missing from previous years, such as a loud helicopter hovering above or a loudspeaker repeating a warning in English and Spanish that crossing onto the base was a federal offense. A sizable crowd was already gathered and I saw familiar faces as I made my way to the stage near the gate. I recognized one woman from the Maryknoll meeting and struck up a conversation at a quiet enough distance from the protest songs that were beginning to fill the air.

Janis was a retired lay missionary who had spent years working in Asia, but now lived in Connecticut with her husband. A dedicated Catholic, she inquired about my position, but did not blame me for giving up on my Catholicism. Janis admitted that she really struggled with some of the official church hierarchy and positions. Still she felt a little divided about some of Bourgeois' actions that led to his ouster from the Church. It was clear she loved and supported him, but she felt that he had cast undeserved if unspoken criticism on those of his supporters who were not as "radical" as he. This attachment to her faith, yet readiness for change, mimicked her somewhat hesitant support of the move to the border. Like some of my interviewees would later describe in detail, she had come to feel that this was a sacred space. She hoped the Vigil on the border would be able to recreate that sacredness and that it would continue at the SOA despite the vaguely "smaller presence." Her perspective demonstrated the individual and collective tensions that accompany change. I bid Janis farewell to go collect one of the small wooden crosses for the funeral procession.

The cross I picked up was inscribed with a black marker: "Unknown Child Age 2."

Meanwhile on the stage, a woman whose father had been killed by graduates from the SOA was

introduced. She told her and her father's story through a translator, the horrific details of which I

struggled to take in as they compounded with those of all the other testimonies I had heard

throughout the weekend. It felt as though it was difficult to make sense of the world in light of all

of the violence: in some way, all that was left was action. I was beginning to experience what

others had described as sacred or more simply, "powerful." The ritualized protest of the main

Vigil was dually affective and contemplative—a seemingly self-affirming practice in the

moment of its doing. As the crowd gathered, the musicians and presenters on stage announced

that the funeral procession would start. They began the familiar litany song as activists lined up

for the march to the gate. Bourgeois and other significant figures and groups appeared at the

front holding banners as well as crosses. The procession took form as singers took turns reciting

hundreds of names of victims. "Maria Anna Ortega 37 years old" one of them read. Like all of

the others, it prompted the crowd to raise their crosses and sing "presente" (present). Each name

was followed by a deep drum beat. With this sequence, we marched to the chain link fence, into

which we placed the crosses, an act that felt like the crescendo of the weekend.

I walked back around to the front of the stage and listened until the procession also

reached a peak and the crowd sang "no mas, no more, we must stop the dirty war..." Then

Bourgeois and another lead organizer took to the stage to once again address the moment of the

movement, this time to the largest crowd the weekend had seen, including those listening from

the media and the SOA itself. They traced the reasons for the move: the explicit need conveyed

by those they had met in Latin America, the trenchant violence in Central America and the recent

surge of immigrants, the militarization that was steadily growing, the revelation that at least one

SOA personnel had been sent to the border. "To the SOA/WHINSEC," Bourgeois raised his voice, "We see you. And we will follow you, to the border!"

5.5   Concluding Rites

Activists were encouraged to bring the Vigil home with them as it came to a close, "to build a culture of peace and justice in your communities." After saying some goodbyes, I stuck around with a few others and volunteered to help break down the stage. Packing up mics and wires seemed like an abrupt break into the mundane world. This feeling lingered even as I returned home, exhausted and sunburnt (I had neglected to bring sunscreen despite spending a lot of time out in the sun). Coming back from such an intense few days to suburbia, my dog, the gym, and even school felt like entering into a world where I could largely ignore all the knowledge that I had just translated into action so meaningfully. This break signaled the intensity of the ritual space of the Vigil and the challenges the movement faced in recreating that intensity in a new place.

The first day of the Vigil weekend set the tone and theme of the weekend, bringing together issues and people, preparing them to practice, in this case resistance, in the days ahead. The workshops of the first day demonstrated Ortner's (1997) argument that power exists within cultural systems of meaning. In them, activists both communicated and constructed their understanding of U.S. imperialism, affirming their location of it in the spatial terrain of the SOA, and connecting it to new terrains (namely, the space of the Stewart Detention Center and the U.S.-Mexico border). They also exhibited their ability engage power in the social terrain of time through their dual participation in and rendering of history (Trouillot 1995). Activists collectively evaluated the historicity of dominant SOA discourse and asserted their own in its stead. Further, through various symbolic markers of activism such as the items laid out in the

entry hall, through the prompts of lead organizers, and through testimony that hailed those gathered, a community of activists was also constructed and located in the activists that were present. The first day was a collective designation of the social terrains of U.S. imperialism that set the groundwork for the practices of resistance to follow.

The second day of the Vigil began the practical encounter with power as it had been reconceived to include the Stewart Detention Center. It was also a reading of this engagement as a test of the movement's ability to incorporate and adapt new terrains. The demonstration at the detention center brought activists into contact with that which they were resisting as they had formulated it the previous day and as it had been shaped throughout the movement's history. The songs and declarations, the marching and shouting, the testimony and the crossing onto the base were acts that expressed opposition. They were also performative acts that were constructive (Austin 1975, Behar 1995) of solidarity and unity between different activists and also with the victims imagined inside. The Catholic service functioned to ground the incorporation of the Shut Down Stewart movement and the move to the border in the foundational traditions of the movement. Lastly, the Maryknoll gathering and the strategizing over the move to the border served to construct consensus about the past and future of the movement. In sum, the day tested the movement's ability to fold the changing terrains of power into the established practices of resistance and foreshadowed the even larger change of the move to the border.

For many in the movement, as I understood it, the main demonstration was the political and spiritual climax of the Vigil weekend. All of the knowledge imparted and exchanged throughout the weekend was condensed into practice. For many activists this practice functioned to disrupt the geography and history of domination and violence that it had located, in its model of power, in the SOA. By marching, chanting the names of victims, and placing the cross in the

fence, activists inserted themselves into the social terrains drawn by the SOA. For most this was understood and experienced as a resignification of domination to resistance, and for many, of worldliness to sacredness. It also meant a similar transformation of history as silences of the violent history of U.S. imperialism were actively remembered, spoken, and substantiated during the funeral procession. Activists enacted their own agency and imagined it to be continuous with other activists and even victims. This transformation—from worldly to sacred, from silent to spoken, from domination to resistance, from individual to collective—was sanctified in the act of placing the cross in the fence. The main demonstration, perhaps more than any other scene of the weekend, resembled Foucault's (1986) notion of the heterotopia. In it the terrains of the SOA, both real and imagined, were "represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986:24). While the Vigil only lasted three days and the main Vigil less than one, multiple long lasting forms and systems of power and resistance converged in the Vigil weekend. As U.S. imperialism was changing, so too was activists' understanding of it, of themselves, and the movement.

6   POINTS OF RESISTANCE

In this chapter, I recount the narratives of each of the four activists I interviewed. I pay close attention to what I understood to be the defining themes of their activism. While participant observation at the Vigil provided a window into the collective performance of resistance in the SOA Watch movement, I still had many unanswered questions about the perspectives of individual activists. After the Vigil, I was eager to investigate personal understandings and experiences of activism, to see how life stories articulated with history more broadly, and to examine how SOA Watch activism fit into people's daily lives (Ginsburg 1989: 133-134). As each of these activists reiterated, no single one of them represents the diversity of the movement; indeed, I was struck by how diverse their perspectives and practices were. The various and

otherwise disparate people, places, and moments collected in activists' narratives are what I call *points of resistance*. Though different activists recounted different points of resistance, their narratives connected these points in similar ways. Demonstrating the constructive capacity of narrative, activists each rendered continuity between themselves, the movement, and even existence (Ochs and Capps 1996, Bruner 1991). The ways in which they made these connections informed how they understood change in the movement.

6.1 The Reformist

Tom Luce's involvement in the SOA Watch movement was an extension of his previous activism. It also grew out of interpersonal connections he had made as a former Catholic priest of the same order as Roy Bourgeois and my Great Uncle Tom. Tom Luce grew up in Vermont where his ancestors had lived for many generations. He told me that despite Vermont's mostly white demography, his hometown was fairly cosmopolitan with its sizable population of immigrants and refugees who worked in the quarries there. After graduating from high school, Tom decided to become a Maryknoll priest. Looking back on it now, he saw this as a vocational choice influenced by his family more than a religious calling; however, he did note having been inspired by some of the work of missionaries working in faraway "exotic" places. Somewhat self-critical, Tom laughed at the thought as he looked back on it and recognized the colonial undertones of much missionary work.

Tom became a priest around a moment of progressive reform in the Catholic Church, yet he told me his "radicalization" came just as much from the political climate outside of the Church as it did from within, especially with Civil Rights and Vietnam becoming major issues. He looked back on that period as one of somewhat naïve optimism: "We were going to save the world, bring everybody together and bring peace," he told me. Tom was assigned to work at a

sort of a dual training school for new priests and boarding house for retired priests in Massachusetts. This was where he met the up-and-coming priest, Roy Bourgeois. Tom remembered him as quite conservative at the time (well before the SOA Watch movement had begun). As a priest in Massachusetts, Tom also got involved in civil rights activism, particularly against segregation. Seeing the work that some families were able to do, Tom felt that the imposition against priests marrying was without merit and actually hindered his activist efforts. After he wrote a letter to higher-ups that called for the Church to ease up on its marital restrictions, Tom was "let go" from the priesthood. He got married several years later.

Tom and his wife became involved in U.S.-Latin American solidarity movements throughout the 1980s and through these, he maintained contact with Bourgeois and other Catholic activists he had worked with. These relationships drew him into the SOA Watch movement when it began and he attended the Vigil in the early 90s. There he participated in civil disobedience, and was arrested for crossing onto the base at a time when the punishment was not as serious. Later on, as the sentences became harsher, his commitments to family and other projects kept him from doing so again. Tom emphasized his work outside of the Vigil, including organizing chapters of activists, representing the SOA Watch organization in different panels and groups, and in lobbying work. He seemed particularly proud of pressuring the movement to focus on the history of the SOA in not only Latin America, but also the Caribbean, where he had become involved in teaching and running a school.

Like priesthood, Tom told me that the Vigil, in particular, and organizing work for the SOA Watch had partly lost its luster for him. Though he was still happy to represent the movement in various contexts and still supported its goals, he now focused most of his efforts on the school in Haiti. He reiterated that he was grateful for his experiences with the Church and the

movement and inspired by the work of many religious activists. Nevertheless, his "people first" approach and eventual break from Christianity led him to not get too attached to organizations. I sensed that Tom, like my Great Uncle Tom, had gone through his own sort of personal reformation. After pushing the organizations and movements he was a part of in certain directions, he broke away in order to maximize his impact. At one point, I asked Tom to describe how his faith has changed and how it has affected his activism, to which he responded:

> The substance and commitment that you develop is immense. Some missions where whole families and kids go into dangerous places, it is powerful and deep. But my faith has developed, I can't support the Catholic Church, its organization and its tenets. It is clear to me that it is a human institution just like all the others. I am a freewheeler inspired by my time in service, but I don't subscribe to any religious stuff tied up in humanity. I am in debt, but I guess what I am guided by, what I believe is, that we love our fellow brothers and sisters, we live and die for them. It's the same underlying principle.

Tom's thinking about and practices of activism had clearly developed in new directions. The points of resistance in Tom's narrative correlated to his location of power in social terrains that he felt were overlooked, and he shifted his efforts accordingly. His narrative is one of ongoing reformation that demonstrates that the systems of cultural meaning are not static, nor are the practices they inform. Yet while his beliefs and motivation for resistance had become more secular and his life situation had changed, he was able to make the various points of resistance connect within his life story. He was able to see the changes in the movement through the same lens, including the move to the border, which he described as "practical and necessary."

6.2   The Witness

Gwen Watson also felt that the Catholic Church needed reform, yet she remained a dedicated Catholic and hoped to do what she could to push the Church in a progressive direction from the inside. Beyond the hierarchy of the Church, Gwen was also troubled by what she perceived to be complacency among members of her local parish, especially in regards to some of the issues she had taken up in the SOA Watch movement. Indeed, I quickly sensed Gwen's enthusiasm for sharing her experiences with someone interested in these issues. She thanked me for motivating her to find some of the articles she had written about her experience in a 1999 SOA Watch delegation to Mexico and Guatemala, and before I could even ask about her biographical details, she began to describe her trip.

During the delegation, Gwen and 22 others from the U.S., Germany, and Canada began at the site where Guatemalan Bishop Juan Gerardi had been assassinated in Guatemala City. There they learned about the truth commission he had spearheaded which recorded thousands of instances of violence and even the genocide of indigenous groups. They also spoke with forensic teams about their experiences exhuming mass graves and returning bodies to family members. The delegation then went to the Quiche province which had seen some of the worst violence of the Guatemalan Civil war, and met with survivors. The other half of the delegation was in Chiapas, Mexico, where they visited the town of Acteal, the site of a 1997 massacre. The town was targeted for merely being a possible source of support for the rebel Zapatistas. Gwen described how the tattered community that remained struggled to work the fields with the loss of help. In one of the articles Gwen shared with me, she wrote that she "left feeling I had been on sacred ground. These were holy people who had suffered greatly." She said that at first she did

not know why she went on the trip, but as she told me about her life and her faith, it was easy to see how it fit in with her Catholic worldview and understanding of activism.

Gwen spoke with a Cajun grace that she acquired in her youth in Louisiana right outside of New Orleans. "I sort of carry my faith with me wherever I go," she told me as she recounted growing up Catholic. After attending Catholic high school, she went to Louisiana State University where she majored in secondary education and minored in Spanish. There, she met her husband to be, a geology major who would go on to work for an oil company. Gwen told me that her husband was "not a typical oil baron" and had been equally involved in faith and activism until his death. She and her husband lived in Spain as lay missionaries for some time before moving to California, where they were active in social justice groups. It was in these groups that Gwen first heard of the SOA. She met Bourgeois at a demonstration in Washington and he encouraged her to come to the Vigil. Though she was afraid of being arrested, Gwen decided to go anyway.

When we spoke, Gwen had been to the Vigil over a dozen times, and felt that it was "the most spiritual event all year" for her. Despite her fear of arrest, her first time there she felt so moved that she actually did end up committing civil disobedience and was arrested, though never prosecuted. She felt a sense of solidarity and empowerment by marching, demonstrating, and getting arrested at the Vigil. In contrast to other religious contexts, for Gwen saw the Vigil as a place "of truth" where "the truth doesn't go unspoken." The practices there went beyond intellectual or financial support for victims of the SOA, into a support that was very much embodied and experiential. Accordingly, she understood resistance to violence as being incompatible with violent resistance. "Antiviolence has to be nonviolent," she emphasized "we show our hearts, our love, we have to leave what we find."

Gwen told me that like her faith, she carries the knowledge of what she gains through her activism into everyday life where it "gives roots" to her actions. Gwen's narrative is marked by accounts of witnessing and translating the knowledge she has gained into actions such as writing articles, attending the Vigil, and crossing the line onto Fort Benning. Gwen struggled at times with knowing that others, such as the Church hierarchy or members in her congregation, were not similarly moved to action. Yet witnessing and all it entailed was both informed by her belief system and an expression of it. It helped her to locate a system of power in its negative effects. Like the performative resignification of the Vigil, Gwen's narrative resignified these points of domination to be points of resistance by acknowledging, connecting them, and making them known to others. Her experiences at the Vigil were like religious experiences, in which her worldview, complete with its understanding of power, was reaffirmed and enacted collectively.

6.3   The Educator

Jim McGarry's Catholic faith also underlaid his practice and understanding of activism and he spoke in detail about the way he interpreted social justice activism theologically. Jim emphasized that he was raised a "Vatican II" Catholic and was thankful that he grew up in a family and community that took the progressive message of the council to heart. Jim said that he "held onto" his faith "by the skin of [his] teeth" throughout college and graduate school where he studied religious studies and theology. After graduating he began a career as a teacher at Catholic high schools, where he taught his students about "morality, social justice, and scripture and everything that contributes to understanding a theology of solidarity with the poor." For Jim, liberation theology was not a radical reinterpretation of scripture, but a "recovery of tradition, the real orthodox Church." This understanding of faith, which emphasized action and engagement with the poor, led Jim to be involved with social justice movements in the 70s and 80s prior to

the SOA Watch, such as the United Farmworkers movement, which were formative to his activism.

Jim was teaching at a Jesuit high school in 1989 when he heard about the Jesuit massacre in El Salvador. Led by the principle of the school, he and a group of faculty and students immediately went to the federal building in San Francisco to hold a Vigil there. Even before that moment, he said he would sometimes take his class to spot the ships leaving the coast and sending military supplies to Central America. So it was not a difficult decision to participate in the Vigil when he learned of it. Jim said that the first act of civil disobedience on Fort Benning by Bourgeois (in which he and several others climbed trees and played Oscar Romero's last speech to members of the Salvadoran army housed at the school) was one of the most brilliant in history. When we spoke, Jim had been to the Vigil four times. Two of those times he brought students along with support from the schools where he worked. Jim described the Vigil and his organizing to go to it as follows:

> When I pitched it for funding and support I would always tell people that the workshops were amazing, the learning there, but that the Vigil at the gate was the most profound religious event I had ever attended, where the names of these insignificant, so to speak, peasants, their names all on white crosses and read aloud and chanted "*presente*": the profundity of that. I'll never forget after one woman gave testimony of being tortured, when she got to the gates and saw all those names there, she wept. She couldn't believe there was anyone in the world to remember people who she knew to be peasants where she lived, that people in North America were remembering them by name. So I always have described it that way to people.

He spoke in detail about his understanding of the SOA Watch movement, and the history of violence in Latin America that it engaged, as synchronous with the story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. He likened practices of activism to "rolling back the stone" of the tomb where Jesus' body was laid. Jim told me that activism, for him, was a struggle for resurrection.

When I asked Jim how he viewed the idea of progress in the movement and in the world in general, he told me how he considered "worldly success" to be entirely different from "theological success." Worldly success is measured by outcomes, he said, and the movement had seen some "small victories": by gaining political allies, getting countries to stop sending troops to the SOA, and by nearly having the school shut down. On the other hand, theological success is less empirical, according to Jim, and is instead measured by perseverance. Jim wondered whether such a model of progress could be apprehended in social science. Theological perseverance for Jim, was a matter of "doing the right thing and letting the chips fall as they may." In some ways, the idea served as a way of reconciling the imperfection of the world with a continued "worldly" struggle for progress.

What then of the move to the border? Could it be rendered as a theological success? Further, would the Vigil retain the same sacredness that Jim had found at the gates of Fort Benning? Jim told me that the sacredness of the Vigil was not inherent in the space, but in practices of the Vigil. "We were never really close to the school," he said, "and the space has been increasingly confined." Still, there was a specialness to it that he said he hoped could be "carried" to the border. For Jim, the border was even "closer to the heart of darkness, and perhaps even more profound." He thought demonstrating there would be more difficult in some ways, not just strategically, but in terms of achieving worldly successes, of accepting immigrants or refugees into the United States. Theological success there would mean striving to "erase the

border" similarly to the gate at Fort Benning. Like Bourgeois at the Maryknoll meeting, Jim also commented that the incorporation of the Shut Down Stewart movement has made the move to the border even more logical.

As with Tom and Gwen, Jim's resistance was multifaceted. Yet in our interview, I quickly realized that activism for Jim had a lot to do with learning and teaching. As an interviewer I felt like one of his students as he explained the juncture of theology and activism. His understanding of resistance highlights the influence of liberation theology, and its temporal and spatial engagement, in the movement. As an educator, Jim was adept at articulating his system of belief in a transposable way and of the interviewees, he was the most explicit about how it informed his activism. As he described it, the worldly system of power being resisted in the movement was subsumed into and inferior to the theological system of power he and others drew upon. For Jim, the points of resistance that he connected to form the geography and history of the movement were narratively unified to be the exact same space and time of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

6.4 The Ethnographer

The informant that I spent the most time talking to was Valentina Robbins (for whom I am using a pseudonym). As someone who had been active in the SOA Watch organization for a number of years, Valentina had a lot of insight into the movement. Her observations and reflections on the history, logistics, and rituals of the movement demonstrated the reality that studied groups, especially activists, utilize anthropological thinking and practice (Urla and Helepololei 2014). While Valentina offered a great deal of reflective analysis of the movement, with some poignant exceptions, she seemed to be slightly guarded about the details of her personal life. I did not press for too much more information. While she was very active in the

various "hands on" practices of the movement, I found her narrative to be marked by ethnographic reflection.

Valentina did share some details of her life. Like the others I interviewed, she grew up in a Catholic family and went to Catholic school. She did not consider herself to be a Catholic at the time we spoke, "at least not in standing with many parts of the Church." After studying biology in college and grad school, she spent time living in South America. There, Valentina learned about the historical impact of U.S. policy, militarism, and economics on the people she lived with and the social conditions of the area. She also learned of the SOA Watch movement from a friend there. After returning to the U.S., Valentina settled into a "day job" and quickly became involved in the SOA Watch organization as well as a whole network of other social justice focused groups. Through these Valentina has helped plan delegations, demonstrations, media releases, and has even worked on legislative teams.

One of the times Valentina broke into talking about the specifics of her personal experiences was when I asked how her activism related to her belief system. She did not report the same religious significance of her activism as Jim or Gwen, but she did articulate its significance in other ways. She defined her belief system simply as "kindness," but then added, "perhaps with a broad sense of community." Then she told me about another activist who was her close friend. Her friend was also involved in the SOA Watch movement and he was getting older. He was struggling with health problems and in fact, seemed to be nearing his death. Valentina felt that she was continuing the struggle that her friend and other activists had led before her. "We are part of a larger plan and you, maybe as an individual, will only do one part but other individuals will pick up the pieces and go along," she told me. Valentina understood the movement similarly as "picking up the pieces" left from past struggle and "going along."

One of the main functions of the movement, she told me, is to legitimate the memories of victims of the SOA, living and dead. Though she did not view the world through a lens that was strictly religious or theological, Valentina's narrative signaled a system of belief in the temporal unity of the points of resistance that constituted the movement. Her practices of resistance connected her to that unity.

Valentina also shared with me a lot of the history that I trace in Chapter 4 as well as the symbolic structure of the Vigil as Mass that I utilize in Chapter 5. She understood the changes in the movement as shifts that were still unfolding as the movement developed through time. The move to the Vigil was a part of this trajectory, but she also saw it as continuous, very much within the fold of the movement's goals. Valentina's narrative construction of resistance was very contemplative. She was careful to note the diverse perspectives of the movement and that she was not a representative. Yet despite, or perhaps because of this, she was able to offer reflective nuanced portraits of the movement. Like the word religion, Valentina hesitated to use the word "resistance." She thought that there should be equal emphasis "on more than just resist, resist, resist, but also create, create, create."

6.5   Connecting Points, Creating?

Each of the activists with whom I spoke understood power and practiced activism in unique and personal ways according to their various life experiences and systems of belief. Tom's resistance was an ongoing process of personal reformation undertaken to stay focused on making change. Gwen's resistance was a process of witnessing the wrongs of the world and making them known. Jim's resistance was a process of education, teaching and engaging power through the lens of his faith. Lastly, Valentina's resistance stood out for being contemplative and ethnographic: attendant to and focused on the social and historical elements of the movement.

For all of their differences, activists had made similar negative evaluations of a system of power—U.S. imperialism—and located its geography and history. They each resignified these social terrains of U.S. imperialism by perforating them with what I have called points of resistance: the moments and spaces where activists have practiced resistance (teaching in classrooms, witnessing in Guatemalan and Mexican villages, demonstrating on the street outside the SOA, gathering in the Columbus convention center, researching and writing at home, among others.)

The points of resistance in activists' narratives also include spaces and times beyond their immediate experience and beyond U.S. imperialism altogether. Jim and Gwen's Catholic systems of belief make their resistance continuous with a biblical, existential struggle. Tom and Valentina identified less with organized religion, but also signaled an understanding of their own activism as continuous with a system of power beyond themselves: part of the human story. In doing so, activists demonstrate the way heterotopias fold back into systems of cultural meaning. The norms contested and inverted in more singular instances such as the Vigil are likewise inverted in activists' worldviews. Activists' narratives demonstrate the heterochrony ("other time") entangled in heterotopias (Foucault 1986) by asserting a past that inverts and contests dominant versions of U.S.-Latin American history. Whether religious, secular, or otherwise, activists' worldviews not only *in*form, but also *give form* to practices of resistance as such (again, as practices that disrupt or attempt to disrupt systems of power). Activists' worldviews are not only models for locating and constructing power, but, reflexively, their own agency (Ortner 1997). They enable activists to create points of resistance from their ever-evolving counterparts: points of domination, resignifying them within even broader conceptions and models of power. By categorizing the SOA Watch movement within a broader level of struggle,

they allow for an understanding of the flexibility of themselves and the movement, to change and yet remain continuous.

7   CONCLUSION

In form and function, this thesis is much the same as the activist narratives I presented in the previous chapter. I began my own narrative by recollecting my experience walking in protest on Fort Benning road, outside of the School of the Americas. I recalled how, during that walk, I reflected on the fractal nature of imagining how others imagined the world and wondered what effect this imagining might have on the very real, embodied effects of power. This complexity became a little more tangible when I recalled the simplicity of a prayer my Great Uncle Tom once shared with me: "For those that are hungry, may they have food. And for those that have food, may they have a hunger for justice." For me, this prayer served to matter-of-factly illustrate the continuum between the tangible, material, experiential, realm associated with power and the symbolic, intellectual, imaginative, experiential, realm associated with cultural meaning. In this thesis, I have attempted to unpack what this prayer so simply demonstrates: the interplay between these two mutually constituting realms as it occurs in the SOA Watch movement. I have found that a principal way that meaning is utilized in resistance is the resignification of the people, places, and times that form the simultaneously real and symbolic spatial and temporal terrains of power.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed academic literature on resistance in order to refine my own understanding and approach. I came away with several important insights. First, I found that resistance is not separate from power but exists within it, and therefore functions similarly. Discourse and practice serve as helpful models for the way power, and thereby resistance, function and involve cultural meaning in the forms of thought and disposition. Importantly, they

also reveal how systems of power manifest spatially and temporally in geography and accounts of the past. I then examined performances and narratives of resistance as two important ways to assess activists' understanding of power. I found that social terrains, structured through power, are likewise engaged by resistance directly in the form of contested meaning and legitimacy.

With this framework for thinking about resistance and power in mind, I examined my position in relation to the SOA Watch movement in Chapter 3. I found some overlap and some disjuncture brought about by my status as a researcher, however supportive, and as a white man from the U.S. I then outlined the methods I would use to retrieve and analyze information about the movement. The three chapters that followed are organized according to these methods respectively: historical analysis that focuses on evolving discourse (Chapter 4), participant observation at the 2015 Vigil (Chapter 5), and interviews with activists (Chapter 6). Each method progressively magnifies SOA Watch activists' engagement with power.

In Chapter 4 I examined how discourses that functioned to legitimize the SOA evolved throughout history, in response to the dialectically opposed discourses activists put forth to delegitimize the school, and vis versa. That the SOA has shifted its discourse from anti-communism to the War on Drugs and the War on Terror, is not only of its own doing. They evince the impact of counter-discourses of shared humanity, liberation theology, human rights, and solidarity that the SOA Watch movement has utilized. This "conversation" has also prompted the movement's own self-evaluation and changes in its constituency and focus. As the SOA Watch movement has become more diverse and less grounded in liberation theology/Catholicism generally, it has redirected its focus towards more domestic (though still transnational) issues and people. These changes, and underlying formulations of power, predicated the move of the 2016 Vigil to the U.S. Mexico border.

The collective performative context of the 2015 SOA Vigil that I explore in Chapter 5 magnified this historical process of balancing understandings of power with practices of resistance. It clearly revealed the temporal and spatial components of this process. I analyzed the symbolism and social functions of the various practices of the Vigil, finding that they were more than a contest of power over SOA. They were also a negotiation of the movement itself as activists responded and made sense of internal and external changes. They strived to fit these changes into the familiar rituals of protest that have become established at the Vigil. Through the Vigil, the SOA Watch movement had come to locate a system of power in the space and history of the SOA. Through the performance of protest, activists inserted themselves and reconfigured the social terrains of the SOA to form a heterotopia that made resistance normative. Interviews with activists allowed me to magnify even further, to an individual level, the interplay of meaning and practice in resistance. In their own way, each of the activist narratives I explored in Chapter 6 strung together multiple points of resistance: the people, places, and moments that make up the SOA Watch movement. The constructive capacity of narrative demonstrated activists' ability to fit themselves, the movement, and U.S. imperialism into even broader models and conceptions of power. Like the performative resignification at the Vigil, activists' narratives and the worldviews they elicited resignified the history of the SOA. In their heterochrony, they demonstrate the way heterotopias created in scenes such as the Vigil endure by folding back into activists worldviews. This heterotopic folding and unfolding is self-referential: it continually transforms the changing effects of U.S. imperialism into the connective tissue of activists' selves and the movement itself.

The "meaningfulness" of resistance is that it constructs and locates power in its effects. Activists engagement with the social terrains—their resignification of the structures of time and

space— makes cultural meaning apparent in this process. More than resignifying and contesting domination, resistance also constructs and enacts agency, reflexively locating it in the activists themselves. Surely, as Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) points out, resistance is limited and *self*-limiting because of its existence within systems of power. The SOA Watch movement is no exception. It is constructed from within U.S. imperialism. Certainly, this system privileges some activists in the SOA Watch movement as it does some non-activists. Certainly, activists also contribute to its reproduction in ways they are likely unaware of. Yet it is also true, as this thesis has demonstrated, that activists continually evaluate their own effects on and within U.S. imperialism. Even from the inside, activists attempt to use it to disrupt the overall system in part by reflexively evaluating and seeking to change themselves. In this sense, systems of power are also self-limiting because of the resistance they harbor. For a quarter century activists in the SOA Watch movement have remade resistance in their efforts to disrupt a system of power which they have located in the SOA, and as I have argued, in themselves. The changes the movement has effected in U.S. imperialism are a testament to this systems' reliance on secrecy, ignorance, and complacency. While the move to the border tests the capability of the SOA Watch movement to remake itself, it also tests the ability of U.S. imperialism to do the same.

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