

PLACING THE POST-EXTRACTIVE MOMENT: EXPERIENTIAL
EVIDENCE AND HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS IN THE CENTRAL
APPALACHIAN COALFIELDS



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	MEANING
ACLC	Appalachian Citizens' Law Center
ADD	area development district
ARC	Appalachian Regional Commission
BSADD	Big Sandy Area Development District
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
KCA	Kentucky Coal Association
KFTC	Kentuckians for the Commonwealth
MACED	Mountain Association for Economic Development
SOAR	Shaping Our Appalachian Region
VISTA	Volunteers in Service to America
RECLAIM Act ¹	Revitalizing the Economy of Coal Communities by Leveraging Local Activities and Investing More Act

¹ Though the reference is to an act, the proposal has not yet become law in the United States Congress, though has been reintroduced in the U.S. House as of March 2019 (ACLC 2019b).

‘COAL BLACK GREED’: INTRODUCING THE APPALACHIAN CASE STUDY

all is black
coal black greed
no way to choose life
when greed
brings the constant
sound of death

-bell hooks, excerpt from ‘63.’ in *Appalachian Elegy* (2014)

Narratives of poverty in Appalachia and elsewhere: an introduction

In a relatively remote, small mountain village, crisis looms. There is no clean water. There hasn’t been for a couple decades at least, the taps surging brown and black colored liquid that often smells of chemicals akin to diesel fuel. The area is quite rural, quite removed from the rest of the country, but the age of better roads and technology has brought this small community closer to the rest of the world than before. Perhaps it’s why national and international attention has begun to cover the everyday plight of the village — a plight that has been happening invisibly to the outside world for twenty years or more. Environmental degradation is the least of this community’s problems, some might say, as it is just one of the many problems plaguing the area — massive unemployment, opioid drug overdoses, crumbling infrastructure and more. Industry has come and left the region, leaving in its wake a population of poor and impoverished people with undrinkable water.

This community isn’t halfway around the world, however. It’s in the heart of the United States, one of the wealthiest and most ‘developed’ countries in the world.² The community in hardship is called Martin County, Kentucky, located in the very heart of the Appalachian Mountain range that spans the eastern region of the country. The nightmarish

² This measure is according to the United Nation’s Human Development Index where the United States ranks 13. More information can be found here: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>

water crisis gained national attention in 2018 when CNN published a story titled ‘The Kentucky County Where the Water Smells Like Diesel.’ It follows the accounts of several local residents of Martin County and their own harrowing tales of the situation (Kounang 2018). But the article doesn’t end its exposé there: it also refers the reader to another time in Martin County’s history that captured national attention in the United States — President Lyndon B. Johnson’s declaration of the ‘War on Poverty’ in 1964.

The ‘War on Poverty’ represents the greater social and economic context that Central Appalachia is located within; a context that bears stark similarities to more traditional field-sites of development studies research. The ‘War on Poverty’ itself and the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) Program that sprung from it mirror the US Peace Corps interventions and other ‘development’ related initiatives in the then-called ‘Third World’. They mirror closely because both were conceptualized by President John F. Kennedy in the 1960s, and while he initiated the Peace Corps in 1961, he would not see the VISTA program come to fruition and his successor President Johnson launched the initiative in 1964 (The Peace Corps 2019; VISTA 2019). The ‘War on Poverty’ will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2; however, it is worth noting its parallel qualities to the Peace Corps and general ideology of 1960s international ‘development’ initiatives now. This contextual framework of looking inward at the domestic development policies of the US instead of outward to the rest of the world constructs a key theme of this work in that this study challenges intellectual divisions of what does or does not qualify as ‘development studies.’

While a case study in the United States may seem unorthodox for a dissertation in the field of international development, I assert that not only is this type of research useful, it is imperative to the discipline. I seek to dispel the intellectual dichotomy of ‘developed’ versus

‘developing’ countries³ where the ‘developed’ nations primarily *produce* research and the ‘developing’ *are* researched instead of the knowledge exchange flowing in both directions equitably. Thus, ‘reversing the gaze’⁴ is the intellectual setting of this thesis as it frames the Appalachian case study and how the region’s extractive history has produced the current moment of poverty and hardship. I argue that interrogating experiences of underdevelopment within traditionally under-studied regions — i.e. the ‘developed’ world — not only complicates our definitions of ‘development’ but also requires more vigorous research when it comes to development studies. Moreover, this intellectual setting seeks to center primary development concepts of ‘place’, power, and experiences of extraction in the analysis of the field data to offer a more nuanced understanding of post-extraction in Central Appalachia. Thus, the main research question of this study is *what are the primary features of the post-extractive moment in Central Appalachia as informed by power and place?* I consequently argue that post-extraction and power and place mutually inform and shape one another and ultimately conclude that post-extraction is a disruptive mechanism as it effects power and place in Central Appalachia.

The overarching caveat to this endeavor is that I do not claim for this thesis to be the single authoritative work on either challenging research paradigms or power and place in Central Appalachia. I find this study straddling the disciplines of international development and Appalachian studies equally. While authors such as John Gaventa (1980; 2018), Betsey

³ Here I invoke the term ‘developing’ world not to enforce the dichotomy of ‘developing’ versus ‘developed’, but to analytically organize the discussion. I leave ‘developing’ in quotes for this reason. The use of this term is only to facilitate a discussion of Appalachian narratives in tandem with other narratives in international development, but by no means is intended to either dichotomize or reduce these narratives into a single type — discussions of development narratives could be a dissertation in and of itself. For brevity’s sake, I will use ‘developing’ in this narrow sense, claiming that I make no assertions about the accuracy or appropriateness of such terms, in fact I often suggest arguments against them.

⁴ This phrase comes from the title of Amar Singh’s diary of experience in colonial India. I invoke this phrasing to connect this work with the rich history of the concept of ‘reversing the gaze’ that has existed in the 20th Century and beyond. Brilliant academics, authors, and community scholars have worked to reverse the academic gaze as well over the years, namely Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, John and Jean Comaroff among others.

Taylor and Herbert Reid (2010) among others bring these two disciplines into conversation with one another regularly, the interdisciplinary approach is still quite scarce — despite development studies being interdisciplinary by design. Thus, I am quite cognizant of the fact that this thesis — simply by lack of alternative information — may be assumed as *the* authority about Central Appalachia and the post-extractive moment.

Above all else, I caution against this extreme and polarizing view of this work. If there is to be one thing learned from this dissertation it isn't authoritatively about what 'place' and power means for Central Appalachia — in fact the discussions about these things are ongoing in the Appalachian studies discipline itself.⁵ Nor is the goal to assert that we should eliminate all labels of 'developed' and 'developing', 'North' and 'South', and so on in development research. The primary goal of this work is instead to center the interrogation of Appalachia within a framework of development concepts in order to critically consider the post-extractive moment in the region. A further goal in this analysis is to show *how* we may learn in reciprocal arrangements across the globe.

Thus, the importance and relevance of this thesis lies not only in the arguments to be made about 'place' and power in areas experiencing natural resource extraction and the flight of these industries, but also in what it says about development research in general. As I will discuss in the following chapters, certain aspects of experience in Central Appalachia are not what one would consider markers of living in a 'developed' country. Some of these aspects are as obvious as lack of access to water, joblessness, deteriorating health outcomes and other material aspects. However, some of these aspects are more nuanced: power concentration in the hands of corrupt elites, political manipulation of people, the use of 'othering' narratives of

⁵ See Billings and Kingsolver (2018), Reid and Taylor (2010), Fisher and Smith (2012), and Harkins and McCarroll (2019) for some of these dialogues. This is not an exhaustive reference of the academic discussion about place and Appalachia occurring at present, but these works catalogue many of the more recent debates and key thinkers in the discipline.

‘deficiency’ and ‘immorality’, etc.

To contextualize the study further, I will in the remaining sections of this chapter discuss narrative creation in Central Appalachia, define key terms, and outline the methodology and further chapters of this thesis. Before moving on, however, I will briefly return to the story of Martin County. It is one that should sound familiar to those who study development and frames the overarching discussion to be had in the remainder of this thesis. The county’s history of resource extraction, corrupt local politics, and corporate control mimic many markers of colonial practice — a parallel that has been critically examined by some factions within Appalachian studies⁶. By challenging the canon of the United States as a wholly ‘developed’ nation through the lens of Central Appalachia, this study seeks to make larger claims about what can be gained or lost in the rigid structures of research and how challenges to the power structures within research can broaden our understanding of the functional aspects of poverty.

Appalachian narratives: whose story gets told?

In the summer of 2016 and in the midst of political upheaval in the United States, a memoir was published titled *Hillbilly Elegy* (Vance 2016). There was nothing particularly remarkable about the memoir and had it been published another time the book may have stayed in obscurity. However, *Hillbilly Elegy* jettisoned to the New York Times Bestseller list and soon became one of the most popular books in the US at the time (Dore, Connor and Sinykin 2018). The title is a play on the term ‘hillbilly’, which references people who live in the ‘hills’ of Appalachia and often is used simultaneously as a derogatory term to reflect negative stereotypes of these remote, rural communities as well as to romanticize certain

⁶ See *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* (1978) by Helen Matthew Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins as well as recent responses to this framework of understanding Appalachian experiences: Catte (2018); Billings (2016); Fisher and Smith (2016).

simple aspects of the people (Harkins 2012). The term paired with ‘elegy’ and the following subtitle — ‘a memoir of a family and culture in crisis’ — have served to frame a certain narrative about Appalachians to the external viewer.

Vance’s memoir alone would not be worth mentioning in this dissertation, however how it has been operationalized since its publishing is quite relevant. Vance’s memoir serves many functions, but primarily these three: it perpetuates particular stereotypes about Appalachians, it highlights the continuous need of the rest of the United States to ‘understand’ Appalachians (often in order to pinpoint how to ‘help’ them), and it serves to further paint Appalachia as a region of social and moral deficiency in need of intervention. When Vance speaks of crisis and cultural woes, he often grounds his arguments in tired tropes and stereotypes about ‘hillbillies’ that circulate in the US mainstream media — i.e. hillbillies as drug addicted, morally deficient, unwilling to work, poor, ignorant, and in need of ‘saving’ either spiritually, economically or both.

I will further discuss *Hillbilly Elegy* in its historical context in Chapter 2, aligning it with other historical narratives about the region, but I bring up the memoir now to illustrate further the contextual framework of this thesis. *Hillbilly Elegy* for Appalachia is what much of the academic and creative literature have been for the ‘developing’ world in the 20th Century and beyond. For both areas — Appalachia and the ‘developing’ world — narrative creation has been used as a tool to craft certain conceptions about the regions as well as justify certain attitudes towards the regions themselves.

For Appalachia, narratives play a central role in the following discussion of place and post-extraction. Many of the interlocutors referenced in later chapters define and discuss their missions in terms of narrative reclamation and challenging the narrative of deficiency perpetuated about Central Appalachia. This suggests that narrative is a powerful force at play

both in the present and historically. However, despite general agreement amongst the interlocutors that narrative is vital to Appalachia's future, they often disagree about what that narrative should look like. This further highlights the complex nature of narrative creation in Central Appalachia today and will be addressed more explicitly in Chapters 3 and 4. Accounts like Vance's doubtlessly contain truth and are reflective of a certain experience in Appalachia, but as the reader will discover, experience in Central Appalachia is diverse and impossible to characterize in a single narrative. Much the same way that narratives of ignorance, deficiency, and helplessness fuel dangerous conceptions about the 'developing' world, similar narratives located in Appalachia serve to divorce the region from the rest of the United States and enable harmful action or inaction towards the region (Eller 2012; Eller 1982).

Further, the popularity of *Hillbilly Elegy* has made it somewhat omnipresent in the minds and story-telling of Appalachians, including the participants of this study. The memoir has become so ubiquitous in the American dialogue about Appalachia that it is nearly impossible to discuss the region without at least a cursory comment about it. For some, the book has become a litmus test for what 'kind' of Appalachian you are. It has prompted rebuttals from local scholars such as Elizabeth Catte (2018) and Anthony Harkins and Meredith McCarroll (2019), as well as revived interest in previously published memoirs such as *Creeker* by Linda Scott DeRosier (1999). Narrative storytelling is an integral part of Appalachian identity and culture and thus centering the conversation on narrative serves to orient the reader accordingly.

Beyond the functional aspect of *Hillbilly Elegy* as a single narrative, the memoir highlights that voices are lifted up according to what the US public and beyond *thinks* should be representative of Appalachia rather than what truly is. Specifically, the gendered divide of

these narratives is relevant here, but also divisions of race and socio-economic background. It is telling that Vance's memoir went 'viral' in 2016 reflecting the perspective of a white, middle-class male lawyer turned venture capitalist who never actually lived in the region (Dore, Connor and Sinykin 2018). By contrast, the narratives and literary work of women, especially women of color, have been locally published in the region for decades and yet receive little of the recognition that Vance's memoir has⁷. Further, the rise of Vance out of generational poverty into the middle class legitimizes his story in a way that narratives from the poor and working poor are not, as discussed more in depth by Harkins and McCarroll (2019).

Narrative and place, thus, are closely entwined in a rich tapestry of history, social organization, and power dynamics of the region. It is consequently impossible to discuss place without narrative and vice versa. For this reason, this dissertation is perhaps narrative in its own way, as I seek to tell a story about Appalachia that reflects the experiences of the interlocutors and gives deference to the complexity and diversity of the people who call themselves Appalachians. Making sense of complex stories of loss and hope, fear and joy, desperation and resilience does not come easy, but is vital in understanding how competing actors within Appalachia view and approach the region's future.

Scope and Methodology

I will now turn to outlining the scope and methodology of this thesis, including defining key terms, addressing positionality and the methodological ethos, and outlining the remainder of the thesis. For the purposes of clarity and organization I will begin this section by identifying the key terms. I will then describe the methodology, including commentary on my positionality as a researcher and general ethics concerns with reference to the

⁷ See Corriher 2017; hooks 2014; Slone and Slone 2009; DeRosier 1999; Slone 1987 among others.

interlocutors. Finally, I will lay out the remaining chapters and the intellectual roadmap of this work.

First, *Central Appalachia* is a term I have used thus far and will continue to use in the coming chapters. Primarily, this is referencing the coal-producing region of Appalachia located within eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, and southwest Virginia. The field-site consisted of a sub-region within Central Appalachia, located in the five easternmost counties of Kentucky — Floyd, Johnson, Magoffin, Martin, and Pike counties. Some of the material in Chapter 2 references ‘Southern Appalachia’ alternatively, as this has also been a historically used term to reference the greater region containing Central Appalachia. More precisely, Central Appalachia exists in an overlapping situation with Southern Appalachia in many senses — economic, social, political, etc. Figures 0.1 and 0.2 show these areas as defined by the ARC (Appalachian Regional Commission), displaying both the US federal definitions of the areas as well as the economic ‘distress’ levels of them. Notice that the Central Appalachian sub-region has the highest concentration of ‘distressed’ counties.

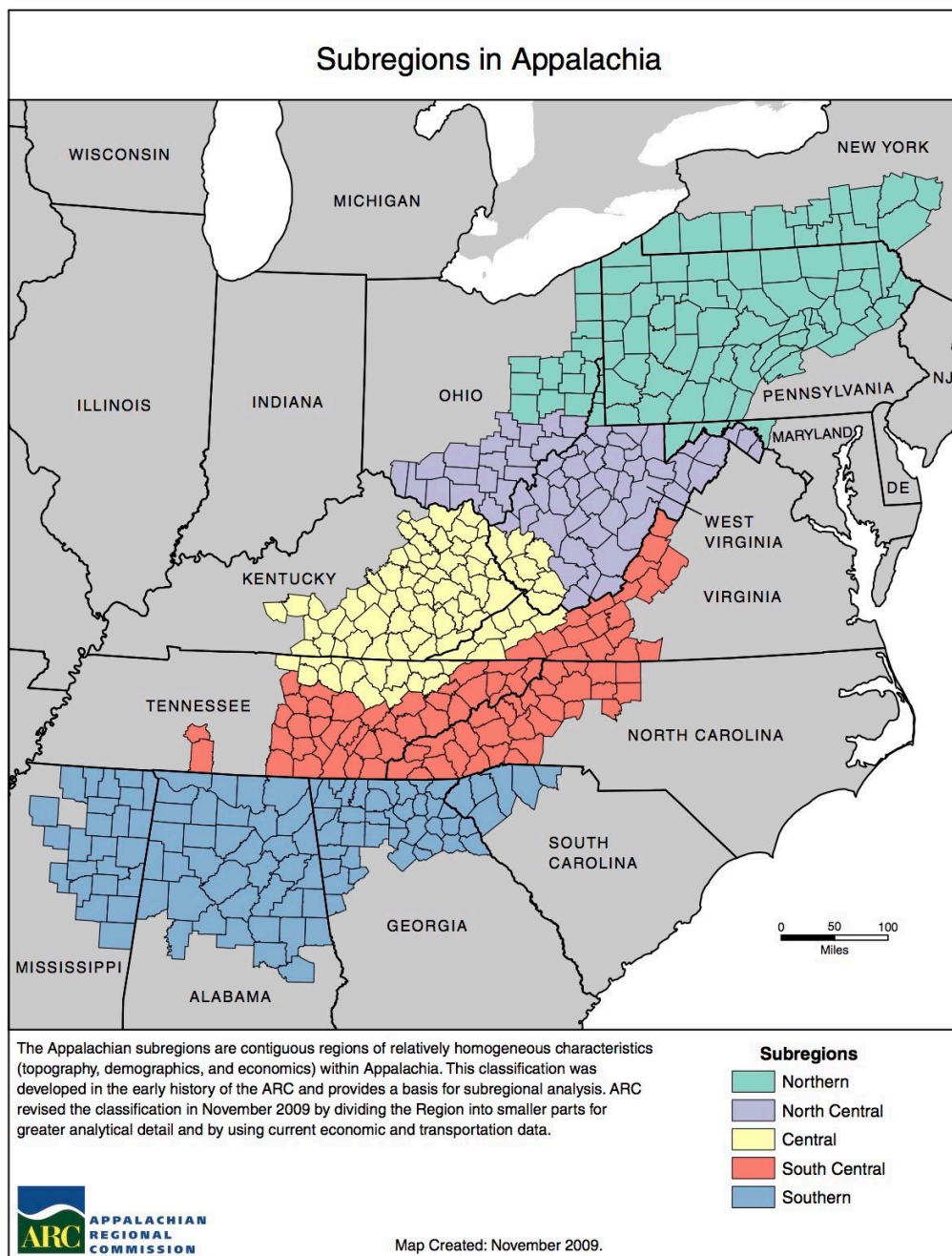


Figure 0.1: Map of the Appalachian sub-regions, Appalachian Regional Commission (2009), https://www.arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp?MAP_ID=31

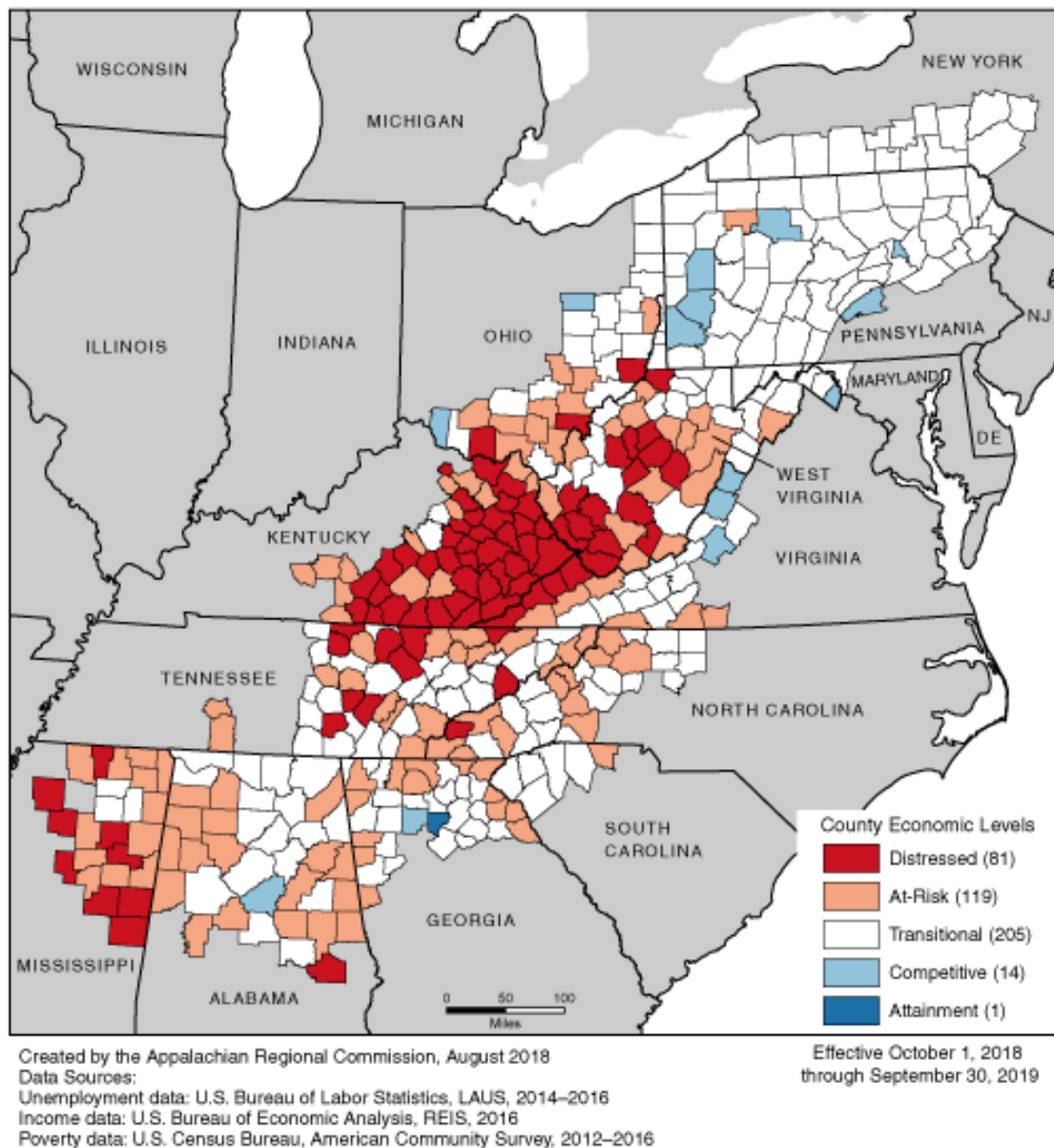


Figure 0.2: Map of Appalachian County economic status - fiscal year 2019⁸, Appalachian Regional Commission (2019), https://www.arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp?MAP_ID=148

As Central Appalachia’s major industry has been coal, coal production and its trajectory play a key role in the case study. I define Central Appalachia as existing in a *post-*

⁸ The economic status is an index comprised primarily of per capita income, poverty rate, and unemployment rate. ‘Distressed’ counties rank in the worst 10% of counties in the US comparatively. See ARC (2019) for more.

extractive moment, primarily meaning that profitable coal extraction is in terminal decline in the region. This categorization is grounded in empirical terms based on decreasing coal reserves and increasing extraction costs (MACED 2009). Coal seams in Central Appalachia are smaller and more costly to mine than seams domestically and internationally making the industry precarious at best and doomed at worst. While fluctuations may exist, particularly on a county-to-county basis, the general trend of coal production has been rapid decline — likely terminal — in the 2000-2016 time period (Bone 2017). Thus, post-extraction is the term I use to define this transitional period.

Also relevant to the discussion of coal is the *coal company* which I use to generally refer to the corporate entities who profit from coal extraction. These entities vary in size and organization, but most often simply refer to an industrial company profiting from coal mining as often opposed to *coal miners* who are the laborers producing the mined coal. *Coal operators* is also used in tandem with coal companies often, though both are with reference to elites in opposition to nonelite coal miners. In recent years, coal companies are increasingly owned by absentee owners who manage down into communities via middlemen and unstable contracts, instituting a culture of disembeddedness around them – see Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force (1983) and McEvers and Benderev (2018) for more.

Perhaps the most central term to this thesis is *place*. While place in and of itself is a difficult term to locate, and ever more difficult given the varying literatures surrounding it, I will define place as it relates here. This definition functions less as a formal limiting of the term and more frames it conceptually with reference to development themes. Within the language of development studies — as primarily informed by geographers and anthropologists — place references not only the physical and material location but also the social experience of a location (Cresswell 2009). The social character of place and its relation

to other locating terms such as ‘space’ is briefly recognized here as contested and varied. However, it is worth noting that I invoke *place* to refer to the multidimensional aspects of a geographic location. Further exploration of place based in the literature is considered in Chapter 1, informing the analytical framework that will be used to evaluate the field data.

Many of the concepts I intend to discuss are endlessly complex and can fill the pages of books. For this reason, I limit the frame of this work quite specifically — examining place in the post-extractive moment of the counties within the Big Sandy Area Development District of Central Appalachia. The situation in the region is also currently developing and as such, I limit my secondary data collection to March 2019 and will not be considering developments after this point for practical reasons. Further, while I have chosen to center the story here on place and power in Central Appalachia, this is not the only story that could be told from the data. Discussions of gender and place, coal and its commodity-life, industrial policy and post-extraction, and more are also compelling stories that could be examined through the data — stories that are being explored regionally (Billings and Kingsolver 2018; Harkins and McCarroll 2019). As the limitations of this thesis dictate, I will only be able to address one aspect of the post-extractive story in Central Appalachia and have chosen place and power as the framing mechanism for that story.

The empirical structure of the case study begins with an in-depth look at selected vignettes of the social and economic history of Central Appalachia. This section is covered in Chapter 2, which seeks to illuminate key historical themes that will inform the field data analysis. It should be noted, however, that much of Chapter 2 relies on a small number of historians. This is for a few reasons, namely that collected histories of Central Appalachia are very scarce, particularly histories that center Appalachia rather than discussing the region as an addendum. Much of the pre-1950 history has been collected by Dr. Ronald Eller, a retired

professor of the University of Kentucky and a former Director of the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center. His 1982 work titled *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers* is noted as one of the first collections of history on Southern Appalachia, bringing together the “obscure and widely scattered” pieces of Appalachian history into a coherent volume for academic use (viii). I am forever grateful for historians such as Dr. Eller who have worked to recover accurate tellings of Central Appalachian history, and hope that in the future more accounts of this history will be recovered.

The following chapters 3 and 4 will be primarily informed by semi-structured interviews conducted with participants who are either originally from or reside within the field-site, or work in the field-site in occupations loosely defined as ‘development occupations.’⁹ The original research design intended to gather equal numbers of community scholar interviews — i.e. nonelites — and community elite interviews. However, social pressures made community scholar interviews very difficult to attain. Access was difficult to acquire in these cases namely due to fear of workplace retribution, fear of community retribution, distrust of academic practice (often conflating academic study with unsolicited media attention), and time poverty.

In the field I offered anonymization of interviews to all participants and have given pseudonyms where requested, though most interlocutors did not wish to be anonymized. The balance of interviews weighs more on the community elite side; however, a variety of viewpoints and identities are represented amongst these interviews. Further, I access several oral history accounts taken in 2015 by a team from the University of Kentucky to add to the data collected in 2018. These oral histories revolve around political and economic issues in

⁹ ‘Development occupations’ in this context means any organization working towards the economic and/or social recovery of the region. These organizations vary across different methodologies, resources, access, and funding type. These differences will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 as they relate to the data analysis.

one of the counties in the field-site, and thus integrate well with the author-collected interviews.

I do recognize that many of these interviews are from local elites, and thus invoke a power dynamic and privilege certain viewpoints. ‘Elites’ in this sense generally engages the definition from Shore and Nugent (2002), defining elites as “those who occupy the most influential positions or roles in the important spheres of social life” (12). Within this thesis, I engage primarily with political, business, and professional elites and each interview is identified as elite or nonelite in the references. Elites are arranged differently with reference to their own proximity and personal histories with coal extraction in the region as well as their current professional occupations. Further, local elites themselves occupy difficult to categorize spaces with reference to how they interact with nonelites. For instance, some of the elites interviewed actively engage with nonelites in their work, while others are more apparently within the ethos of elite-led agendas to entice ‘development’ in Central Appalachia. More still, some elites occupy de facto elite-only spaces where the invitation to nonelites to join is open, however for many reasons nonelites do not participate in these spaces. A more in-depth discussion of place, space, and power in this sense will be laid out in Chapter 4 with specific reference to some of the spaces organized by elites in the region.

Further, I will often qualify elites as ‘local elites’ — which expressly refers to the fact that many of the interlocutors occupying elite spaces in Central Appalachia may not be considered elite in national contexts. Elites in the field-site thus occupy a spatial hierarchy to one another which must be considered alongside elite dynamics and power geographies in the field-site. I will attempt to illuminate this hierarchy further as it relates to the discussions in Chapter 4, however the spatial hierarchy of elites in Central Appalachia often that blurs lines between those with power and those without – a phenomenon that often directly

communicates with place-based and spatial politics as will be discussed with reference to work from John Gaventa (2018) in Chapter 2 and 4 on the multidimensional facets of power.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I will use media archives, published government and nonprofit literature, and other miscellaneous documents as necessary. This is to consider more fully how post-extraction is discussed within the field-site, as well as consider critically the geographies of power, the interaction between place and power, and the overall social conception of the post-extractive moment.

My positionality is also of note here with reference to the collection of interviews as well as access to the field-site. I am from the state of Kentucky and was raised in rural Kentucky by a family with deep social ties to Appalachia. Therefore, I straddle an interesting position within the project as my family's migration from the region during the 20th Century is evidence of the difficult choices Appalachians made in order to survive. Much of my own experience is analogous to the Appalachians encountered in the field here and there is a diaspora-like experience amongst migrant Appalachians and their connections to the 'homeplace'¹⁰. However, this removed aspect to my own experience, as well my elite status with reference to my position as an academic, does affect my positionality.

In many ways I occupied an insider-outsider position during fieldwork. Dependent on my kin connections in the region I often was able to access certain spaces that other outsider-outsiders may not have. However, I am quite aware of the fact that despite my history with the region and my rural upbringing, the distance of academic inquiry and credentials changed some of these relationships — if subtly — in that interlocutors may not have interacted with me as they would have if I were simply coming to the homeplace in a nonacademic sense.

¹⁰ Meaning the familial home or location, often not necessarily tied to material objects but the place in its entirety.

These reflections guide my interaction with the data and the themes at large, as I realize that I run the risk of misinterpreting or miscommunicating certain aspects of the Central Appalachian case study. Though I have practiced diligence in attempts not to essentialize experiences and center the diversity of experience in the region, I recognize that my positionality will affect how I interpret and communicate findings back to both my peers and the academic community at-large.

To briefly outline the remainder of this thesis, I will discuss the chapter structure as it follows from here. In Chapter 1, I will discuss and consider at length the theoretical framework to interrogate the empirical chapters that follow. Centering concepts of ‘place’ and power, I will consider how ‘place’ is discussed and how it can inform and structure our methods of understanding the post-extractive moment. Chapter 2 will then provide a historical overview of Central Appalachia, prioritizing the social and economic history of the region since 1880. This history is both incredibly vast and also sometimes underreported and under-discussed in the conversation about economic hardship in Central Appalachia today. Thus, I seek to center the history of coal in the region as well as highlight specific historical tensions that will serve to inform the following chapters.

Chapters 3 and 4 will work in tandem to consider the current accounts of Central Appalachians and how place and power interact in the post-extractive moment. Chapter 3 will primarily discuss the field interviews in depth, highlighting the connectedness of interlocutors to coal extraction in varying ways. Finally, Chapter 4 will more directly discuss the ramifications of place and power in the post-extractive moment and how this moment is disrupting and re-organizing Central Appalachia. This chapter will also endeavor to craft a full picture of how tensions of power, place, and identity are manifesting in these close mountain communities. Highlighting certain assertions about power and politics from

Chapter 1, Chapter 4 will bring together the framework and the field data more explicitly and consider what these accounts of place and transition may mean for the future of the region.

CHAPTER 1: FRAMING THE DISCUSSION: LITERATURES OF ‘PLACE’ AND POWER

The framework of this thesis is primarily informed by a major conceptual interaction between place and power. In this chapter, I will first discuss place at length as well as in tandem with the concept of ‘space’. The following section of this chapter will consider power as related to place. Finally, this chapter will outline the following empirical chapters and where the argument follows from this framework of place and power.

Place: locations, locales, and connectedness

While concepts such as ‘place’ and ‘space’ are not new, the interrogation of them through the social lens of human geography is relatively recent. The beginning of such discussion is generally recognized as the 1970s, where geographers began to critically examine how place is experienced and what ‘places’ actually consist of (Cresswell 2009). ‘Place’ in this more complex sense is comprised of “location”, meaning the precise physical attributes; “locale”, meaning the “material setting”; and the “sense of place”, which refers to the more social and less easily defined “feelings and emotions” of a place (169). Again, ‘place’ is a contested subject in many respects, but for the purposes of this discussion, I will operate from this basic definition.

The concept of a socially determined ‘place’ challenged conceptions of knowledge production and *how* we know what we know about the world. Historically, the preference of purely ‘rational’ scientific knowledge emerged with epistemological shifts begun by the Enlightenment. Thus, the conversation regarding ‘place’ and the more human aspects of geography emerged in such a way that elevated the experiential with the ‘scientific’ to challenge the ‘scientific’ epistemological arrangements (Cresswell 2009). The concept of ‘place’ complicated some aspects of geography as it challenged the notion of neutrality and universalism in geographic ‘locations’. In other words, by opening up the concept of ‘place’

to more social or philosophical interrogation, geographers in the 1970s and beyond have encouraged academics and others to consider how ‘place’ is determined — and consequently how it determines action, power, and identity (Cresswell 2009). This process of putting emotion and feeling into scientific endeavor has been controversial, but has provided some differing understandings about how individuals interpret the world around them.

Implicit in the discussion of ‘place’ is the nature of connectedness — and if connectedness of place refers only to the physical attributes of a location, or also the experiential, more complex social attributes of ‘place’. It is this concept of the connectedness of place that forms the main framework of this thesis, juxtaposing social connectedness of place with physical connectedness. Early considerations of ‘place’ emphasized the spatial aspect of it, leading academics to assert a strong conception of place that was quite physically located - in fact some would go so far to say that increased mobility of globalization has created ‘nonplaces’ or ‘placelessness’, owing directly to the loss of the spatial aspect (Cresswell 2009). However, if we recognize as Massey (1991) and others (Pierce, Martin, and Murphy 2011; Rice 1999; Pred 1984) do that place is a process and is not a static concept, then it is not adequate to accept the simple understanding of globalization as a displacing mechanism.

Massey (1991) references the social determination of place as exacerbated by globalization processes, emphasizing that it is not the mobility or lack thereof that determines a place, but the social and material linkages between that location and others (29). In this way, place does not have to be insular or exclusive. Rather, places are interconnected as they always have been, but the features of advanced society — air transportation, internet access, etc. — have shifted these linkages and revealed new places or altered old ones. Understanding place as a process allows for this interpretation. By recognizing place as

moveable, changing, and organically shifting, we can more critically consider how associations of place — indeed these *senses* of place — shape and are shaped by our social realities.

As referenced earlier, this alternative view of place emerged as a challenge to ‘scientific’ approaches to knowledge production in geography. This also reflects a more general challenge to Enlightenment-driven globalization and geographies of (development) power as well. In Sachs’ (2010) *The Development Dictionary*, which challenged ‘development’ as a series of neoimperial practices both materially and socially, he discusses the homogenizing aspects of ‘development’ at length. In this, he challenges the Enlightenment-driven notions that there is a single “science” and that it should rationally drive humankind toward a single, global “monoculture” (111-12). The recognition of globalization as a homogenizing force is not singular to Sachs, as other academics often reference the global space in such a way.¹¹ Critical theorists of globalization thus recognize that despite the promises of globalization — including promises of prosperity, progress, and ultra-modernity — the results have been much more culturally significant and perhaps damaging than originally intended.

Framing globalization practices in terms of neoimperialism has become more prevalent and raises questions about the harm caused by such policies. To bring this conversation in touch with place, I invoke arguments by Petras (1998) and Sachs (1998; 2010). The practices of cultural imperialism have been used in tandem with other globalization practices to depoliticize, desensitize, and thus conflate issues and confuse the general public via language and other cultural means. Petras (1998) discusses this in terms of mass media, arguing that the media has operated as an arm of political elites who are intent

¹¹ See Appelbaum and Robinson (2004), Esteva and Prakash (1998), Fuchs (2010), Scholte (2000), Petras (1998) among others.

on dominating subordinate classes. Through various forms the mass media turns language into a weapon to be wielded by elites, corrupting the public image of anti-imperialists into tyrants and tyrants into “reformers” and “innovating entrepreneurs” (185). The power of manipulation of media, dialogues, and political language has the potential to affect many aspects of social life, but for the moment I seek to consider the macro concept of media manipulation as a political force.

With reference to the case study, Petras’ (1998) arguments about manipulation of public dialogues is evident both in the history of coal extraction as well as the present political landscape of post-extraction. As will be discussed further in Chapter 2, coal mine operators have responded to challenges by workers and laborers by manipulating the public image of coal extraction and depoliticizing it to control labor disputes and uprisings via blurring the differences between the ruling coal elites and the mining or laboring nonelites (Eller 1982). In the present and more recent history, organizations use a depoliticizing narrative in a positive sense, arguing that an apolitical landscape is necessary and desirable for Central Appalachia to rebuild economically (Interview 3). The active nonprofit presence in Central Appalachia with reference to development initiatives is further evidence of this elite-created apolitical space that relies on disconnecting political discourse from the discourse of coal. Nonprofits in the US must abstain from “political campaign activity” or risk forfeiting their tax-exempt status as a nonprofit (National Council of Nonprofits 2019). As a result, nonprofits operate in a space where they are not able to directly politically support or challenge candidates.¹² Through these means and more, some elites in the area

¹² There are differing classifications within nonprofit law in the US that allows certain classes of nonprofits to engage in political activity, but this is not common amongst the organizations discussed in later chapters. While there is a vagueness to the law on this account, nonprofits in Central Appalachia often emphasize nonpartisan or apolitical status, and while sometimes messages from organizations are clearly in support of certain political objectives, the later discussion in Chapter 3 will show further how nonprofits can disseminate irresponsible messaging in manipulative ways seen as legitimate under the ‘technical’ space of a nonprofit.

have simultaneously detached coal extraction and political responses to it from development practice while attaching coal extraction to the identity of the region.

The push for an apolitical, “neutral” space links the case study and the discussion on place and space to Petras (1998) and Sachs (2010; 1998) in that these elite-created spaces seek to invoke a sense of neutrality while also ignoring that spaces are inherently political and shaped by the forces that create them. As I will later consider more in depth through Gaventa’s (2018) work, spaces are imbued with power in complex ways and cannot be simply considered neutral or *tabula rasa*.

Further, media imperialism through manipulative dialogues of coal extraction as a positive, desirable force has led to technical, nearly sterile considerations of ‘what’s next’ for Central Appalachia’s economy. In other words, the divorcing of coal from politics and the elite-led dialogue about the future of the Appalachian economy has introduced technical, industrial understandings of the future rather than ones that connect the history of extraction in Appalachia to the current status of poverty. This delinking and the disagreement about what ‘development’ should look like for Appalachia will be considered more in depth in Chapters 3 and 4, particularly with reference to embattled visions of development and the politics of place.

Sachs (2010) as well as Ferguson (1994) among others (Senarclens 1998) consider the delinking phenomenon at length as well, holding that cultural practices of globalization seek to delink the economic aspects of life from politics and create a ‘neutral’ – i.e. ‘displaced’ – space where technical knowledge is the authority. This language is loaded with meaning that often is constructive in nature, leading one to imagine a creative and often positive ‘neutral’ space built on consensus – akin to the space of nonprofits and the political act of ‘depoliticizing’ development efforts via this means. However, if spaces — such as this

supposedly neutral, technical ‘development’ space — can be created, then what practices perform this constructive process?

Here the nuanced language of space versus place are key to the understanding of the difference between them and their interactions. At first glance, they are quite similar — both literally refer to locations, often in the spatial sense but also as subject to social understanding. In tandem with the social aspects of place, space can be socially understood as well, perhaps most critically with reference to Harvey’s (1990) Marxian concept of the time-space compression, as he considers how globalization affects our experiences of time and space. Understanding space as well as place as socially experienced connects well to commentary that the world feels smaller than it ever has been, often referring to the figurative experience of space, augmented by the advents of technology.

Space also occupies political meaning, often referring to the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups and the emergence of figurative spaces that encourage or discourage certain behaviors accordingly. In terms of resistance, space is vital to the discussion. Oftentimes, space is used to describe abstract conceptual boundaries, such as ‘claimed’ or ‘invited’ spaces, the ‘third’ space (Bhabha 1990, 1994), and ‘public’ and ‘private’ spaces¹³. The variability of space is perhaps its only constant, as well as its relative consistency in referring to bounded abstract locations that adhere to certain principles and power dynamics.

However, given globalization’s penchant for flattening experience in favor of technical knowledge and ‘science’, the temptation to ignore ‘place’ in favor of the allegedly apolitical, neutral ‘space’ is appealing. In the Enlightenment-driven assumptions as

¹³ I particularly reference here the interrogation of the ‘public’ and ‘private’ by feminist theorists. Historically, feminist critiques of the public and private spaces and their gendered qualities are too broad to cite in totality here, however Arendt’s (1958) *The Human Condition*, ‘Chapter II: The Public and the Private Realm’ is often taken as one of the seminal perspectives on the matter as well as Butler (1993; 1990). Other more recent takes on the matter include Gómez Reus and Usandizaga (2008) and Oberhauser and Johnston-Anumonwo (2014).

referenced by Sachs (2010), experiential knowledge muddies conclusions, policies, and practices and therefore weakens society as a whole. If we assume that place and place-making is a reactionary process as some of the early geographers asserted, then the temptation to eschew place seems valid. Nativism and identity politics have been and can be the source of great conflict and violence as history has shown. However, to counter this assertion I return to Massey's (1991) discussion of a 'global sense of place'.

Thus far, I have discussed the basic understandings of place and space and how globalization has developed and affected both. To this point, it would be easy to conclude here that place-making is a dangerous practice that society reverts when ways of living are challenged by a seemingly open and global way of thinking. Even if we do not recognize the arguments of Sachs (2010; 1998) and his contemporaries that globalization is not such a positive process for the world over as it seems, the reactionary nature of place-making still should give us pause about blindly adhering to globalizing 'space-making' as a mechanism for positive change. Massey's (1991) 'A Global Sense of Place' gives us tools to combat this closed, introverted notion of place.

Massey states that

[instead] then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local (28).

In this way, Massey simultaneously broadens the definition of place while curating its content – highlighting not only the spatial notion of inclusion and exclusion, but connectedness. The linkages between a place and the world are just as important as the place itself, highlighting a

more nuanced view of sense of place discussed above. To illustrate an example of what I mean, I invoke the image of a small remote village in a rural area, connected to a roadway. Say the village produces corn and its roads are primarily used for the transport of corn during the harvest season. Experientially, we know that even as roads are built for certain purposes, their use often extends beyond those purposes. Soon the village may experience imports of certain kinds, and despite its remoteness, exchanges of information, goods, and services will take place. The village's place is not only determined by the material physicality of its location and locale — nor only the sense of place in terms of how the village people relate to themselves. The positioning of the village and the linkages the village has to the larger cities, the country, and the world at large is just as important to the experience of that place.

Not only this, but the linkages can be experienced differently between social groups within the village itself. The village businesspeople and leadership likely link with the rest of the world in different ways than say small farmers and tradespeople. Children, women and the disabled will have a different set of linkages themselves — thus a different sense of place. All of this is to illustrate that the naïve assumption that place is an insular and reactionary conception is just that — naïve. Globalization has — for better or for worse — altered the course of social and economic relations globally. However, instead of referring to these changes as displacing and creating placelessness, I would argue vis-à-vis Massey (1991) that globalization has simply altered senses of place in diverse ways that are analogous to understanding place as a process.

Place, space, and the interconnectedness of the world must be understood alongside each other to make sense of complex social organizations. I will use these conceptually to further understand the post-extractive moment in Central Appalachia as the social and economic groups navigate this relatively new terrain of a post-coal economy. By utilizing the

literature referenced above, I hope to make sense of the diverse — sometimes conflicting — responses of interlocutors from the Appalachian field-site. As I will discuss in Chapter 2 with a brief overview of social and economic history of the region, the diversity of backgrounds and experience is no less apparent or important in Central Appalachia than elsewhere. Senses of place are thus affected — largely by the capitalist encounter of resource extraction — and the social experience of Central Appalachia reflects these complexities.

Place and power: methods of domination and resistance

Understanding Central Appalachia through the lens of place not only encourages deep critical exploration of the social linkages within Appalachia and between her and the world, but also encourages interrogation of power dynamics in the region. As place and space necessarily inform and interact with one another, the arrangement of power that informs and constructs places and spaces is important. Individuals experience place differently and power implicitly and explicitly shapes the social world. Further, how place shapes spaces of domination and resistance is vital to understanding the post-extractive moment in Central Appalachia, and these concepts will provide a comprehensive framework for considering the responses of interlocutors as well as the landscapes of power in the region in Chapters 3 and 4.

To consider this further, I first turn to John Gaventa's (1980) work titled *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Gaventa's work, building on Steven Lukes' (2005 [1974]) radical reimagining of power dynamics contextualizes Lukes' concepts in the Central Appalachian region. Gaventa uses the case study of Appalachia to examine and explore how Lukes' third dimension of power is experienced. This third dimension of power seeks to include not only the "overt" and "covert" conflict of the governors over the governed, but also the "latent" conflict that poses

“a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the real interests of those they exclude” (28). In this sense, power not only includes both the overt use of persuasion between groups as well as the exclusion of certain groups from the decision-making and grievance process, but also consists of more sinister methods of manipulation employed by those in power to discourage those without power from taking action against the elites in the first place — indeed making the interests of the subordinate classes seem like they align with the interests of elites. (28).

This third dimension of power seeks to eliminate conflict and thus create a situation where the dominant classes encourage the subordinate classes to control themselves — a thesis that sounds quite similar to Foucauldian concepts of governmentality and biopolitics. Lukes (2005 [1974]) takes issue with the “productive” aspects of governmentality and Foucauldian perspectives of power though, asserting that Foucault over-exaggerates the productive power of the state (90). Regardless of Lukes’ issues with Foucault, both Lukes and Gaventa (1980) emphasize in this third dimension of power the constructive aspects of it as the dominant classes construct a reality where the subordinate classes perceive their interests as aligning with dominant elites, thus eliminating conflict.

Gaventa (1980) contextualizes this with reference to the Appalachian coalfields, making a scathing commentary on Appalachian political society and how it seeks to dominate its nonelite citizens. This work is nearly forty years old now, but the concepts remain relevant for studies of power to this day. In a more recent essay, Gaventa (2018) returns to his discussion of power and explicitly centers it within the terms of place and identity in Appalachia. Gaventa opens his essay with a quote from Fisher and Smith (2012) stating “the importance of place as a source for personal identity and motivating force in local and regional struggles” (vii). Indeed, place determines more than just identity and relation to a

location, as Gaventa (2018) goes on to discuss place as a shaping mechanism for both the “power to” and “the power within” of individuals (91). In this way, Gaventa and his contemporaries are explicitly drawing connections between power and place.

Further, if we understand place is a process, discussions of power are analytically necessary. Power is inextricably linked to the forces that construct a process and place is no different. Utilizing another concept of Gaventa’s (2018) — the ‘powercube’ — can enable us to examine more closely the role of place in geographies of power. Gaventa’s ‘powercube’ includes the original three dimensions he and Lukes considered — the visible, hidden, and invisible ‘forms’ of power — but goes further to includes ‘levels’ and ‘spaces’ of power as well. ‘Levels’ are described as local, national, and global and ‘spaces’ are described as ‘closed’, ‘invited’, and ‘claimed’ or ‘created’ spaces — combining with the ‘forms’ to construct the powercube as shown in Figure 1.1.

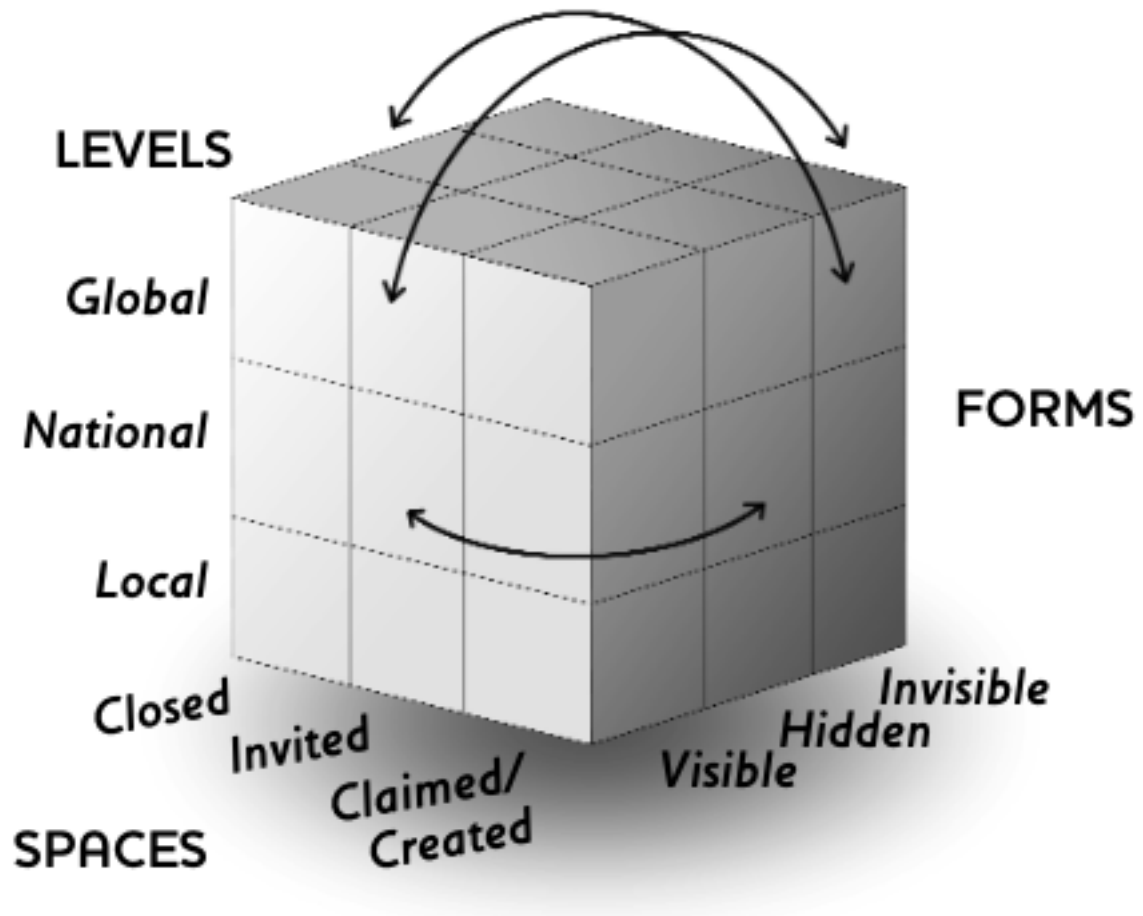


Figure 1.1: Visual representation of the ‘powercube’, see Gaventa (2006).

In some ways, it may seem that the ‘powercube’ changes little about power relations for the powerless. Arguably, those who would identify with Lukes’ third dimension of power would perhaps also be unable to access other spaces or levels of power. However, the ‘powercube’ captures certain aspects of power that the original three-dimensional approach does not. Gaventa highlights this expressly in the context of ‘spaces’, where those who cannot access the ‘uninvited’ spaces and who find the power differentials in the ‘invited’ spaces oppressive go on to ‘create’ or ‘claim’ spaces of their own. These ‘created’ or ‘claimed’ spaces are “often informal” and are spaces “where people can speak their minds, voice their concerns with their own vernaculars, without having to disguise them from those who sit in power” (102). This distinction of the differing spaces and politics associated with

them asserts where the powerless may find the tools to combat the powerful.

In the context of ‘levels’ Gaventa (2018) briefly discusses the importance of cross-sectional collaboration between local, national, and global levels. Again, the language of Massey’s ‘global sense of place’ is inherent here, combatting against the notion that place, by nature, is an introverted and exclusionary concept. Linkages between places, especially places that have been subjected to oppression, can prove to be a powerful tool for the powerless in terms of resistance against the dominant classes.

Further, within areas experiencing post-extraction, the geographies of power are complex and informed by the specific histories of extraction. For example, for Central Appalachia the power geography is primarily informed by the entrenched capitalist power dynamics of extraction — a concept that will be explored further in later chapters, expressly in the history and context of the coal industry in Chapter 2. Because of this, a location experiencing post-extraction like Central Appalachia affords a context ripe with ways to reflect on how capitalist power dynamics shape a location. This conceptually empowers the discussion of Central Appalachia in the context of international development as it further enforces the idea that as place shifts in the globalizing economy, linkages between places such as those experiencing extraction or post-extraction can inform and empower one another in the face of unequal global power geographies.

This literature of power and place can be taken together to further consider how place is affected by power relations and how place can also be a source of resistances for subordinate classes. Particularly when one is considering a place experiencing post-extraction, the shifting power geography can produce moments of disruption and reorganization as will be considered explicitly in Chapter 4. Place and power can — and evidently do — work in tandem at times for the benefit of subordinate classes in ways that

are nuanced and varied. In this way, place need not inform a nativist, exclusionary view of society — a view that invokes assumptions of ignorance and fear in the face of ‘global’ engagement. In fact, this corrupted narrative of place has been used historically to benefit the dominant classes as evidenced in part by the phenomenon surrounding *Hillbilly Elegy* and other elite-driven narratives of the region, both of which have been discussed briefly and will continue to be in Chapter 2. Further, the construction of the ‘globalized’ world as a ‘neutral space’ has fueled the assumptions that localizing efforts are necessarily insular and nativist, ignoring the complex reasons the powerless may appeal to place-specific visions of development in opposition to globalizing and potentially harmful visions of development.

Consequently, this exposition of place and power constructs a framework to consider the more nuanced aspects of post-extraction. As I will examine in Chapter 2, the historical ramifications of coal and capitalist expansion in Central Appalachia erected power structures that affect the region to this day. However, utilizing the framework of place and power as mutually informing and constructing concepts, I assess in the following empirical chapters how power dynamics have shaped present-day Central Appalachia as well as how these power geographies are being affected in the post-extractive moment.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY AND 'PLACE' IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

History shapes the present, and this is true of any place in the world. Just as humans are shaped by their upbringings and life histories, places are so shaped as well. Appalachia is no different, though the history of the region has often been overlooked in recent attempts to 'explain' Appalachia's current situation of poverty and hardship. Thus, this chapter seeks to outline crucial moments in Central Appalachia's recent history, outlining both the immediate pre-industrial moment and the capitalist encounter, then discussing anti-poverty interventions in the mid 20th Century, and lastly how history and 'place' have been entwined. This brief overview of historical moments in Central Appalachia serves to highlight some crucial social, economic, and political tensions. These tensions inform the post-extractive moment accordingly, marking trajectories of power and influence in Appalachia's recent history that engage with current efforts to outline Appalachia's economic and social future.

Pre-Industrial Central Appalachia and the Capitalist Encounter

The histories of a disputed area such as Appalachia are messy, ill-defined and riven with contestation. Current debates in Appalachian history revolve around reconsidering the pre-industrial era and how Appalachia looked socially and economically prior to the initial contact of speculation, and later the coal industry (Eller 1982; Scott 1995). Thus, this section will attempt to give a concise but in-depth consideration of Appalachia's social and economic history, primarily concerning coal, identity, and place from the 1880s into the present day while recognizing that the greater history of Appalachia is contested in many ways. This non-exhaustive historical overview will serve to both locate the case study in the greater context of the region and the United States industrial era, as well as provide key details that will inform the ethnographic accounts and discussion in the following chapters.

The Appalachian industrial moment is located within the larger American industrial context though it began much later than industrialization in the surrounding parts of the

eastern United States. It wasn't until the mid-19th Century and later that industrialization came to Appalachia due to the remoteness of the region and the difficulty of access to its natural resources, which protected the region from resource exploitation and industrial contact until then (Eller 1982, 4). Some regions of Central Appalachia such as Harlan County, Kentucky, were so remote that expansion into the region did not occur until the turn of the century into the early years of the 1900s (Scott 1995, 9). As a result, the experiences of this region are specifically located in the late-industrial era, with portions of the heart of Central Appalachia — namely Kentucky and West Virginia — experiencing the frictions of industrial expansion far later than the typical narrative of the Industrial Revolution. Having been educated in a rural Kentucky public school¹⁴ myself, I cannot recall learning about the divergent experiences of Appalachia in the industrial age of the country, suggesting a divorcing of Appalachia's industrial experience from the experience of the rest of the United States analytically. The lack of collected histories on Appalachia's specific industrial history support this analytical division further – see the methodology section for more on limited recorded histories of the region.

Prior to the industrial expansion into Central Appalachia, agriculture in the form of subsistence farming was the primary mode of economic activity (Scott 1995, 7; Eller 1982, 8). However, in contrast to other parts of the United States that also depended on agriculture up until the Industrial Revolution, the remoteness and isolation of Appalachian farms developed certain social arrangements that centered on kinship and produced networks of extended family in an otherwise isolating existence (Eller 1982, 7-9). Kinship was subsequently a defining mechanism of not only the economic unit of the mountains, but also the social unit. Kinship ties were strong and included much of the extended family through

¹⁴ 'Public school' refers to schools that adhere to certain state and federal standards of curriculum and are publicly funded through tax revenue.

marriage as well as experiential solidarity of homesteading and subsistence living. Concepts of kin and kinfolk are still apparent and integral to the social fabric of Central Appalachia into the present day.

The isolation of the pre-industrial and early-industrial societies in Central Appalachia can be seen as a deterrent to capitalist expansion, but this should not be normatively viewed as unsophisticated or primitive. Prior to capitalist expansion, Appalachia was known to be a subsistence society organized by kinship whose economy was organized by trade and barter and resisted the enclosure of the commons — all distinct mechanisms existing outside capitalist economic logic. However, despite the system including very little if any cash, it was managed in a sophisticated way by local merchants — which served to reinforce autonomy of local markets and communities (Eller 1982; Stoll 2017). The embeddedness of this economic system coincides with the history of kinship in the area, suggesting that pre-industrial Appalachia existed within a sophisticated, but pre-capitalist form of market exchange.

To summarize, pre-industrial Central Appalachia could be seen as autonomous, subsistence-oriented, and organized by kinship. These mechanisms formed an embedded society that was difficult to penetrate both materially and socially as will be discussed further in the continuing account of Appalachia after the industrial capitalist encounter. In order to access both the physical region of Appalachia for coal extraction as well as socially encourage an adequate workforce needed for the labor-intensive coal mining operations, coal companies would need to radically transform the social and economic institutions of the region as well as manipulate existing social arrangements to suit their capitalist purposes.

While one cannot identify one moment in time when Appalachia became ‘known’ to the general American consciousness, the turn of the 20th Century is often documented as the rough beginnings of contact between Central Appalachia and the rest of the US, primarily the

capital-driven northeast. I employ ‘contact’ here to reference a particular type of contact. As Eller (1982) describes, while Central Appalachia was isolated, Appalachians had access to major turnpikes and (at least Appalachian men) accessed the ‘outside world’ with relative ease along turnpikes, rivers, and waterways as well as with stagecoaches and regular mail deliveries (12-16). Of course, ease of travel differed due to remoteness from said turnpikes and waterways, but the conception that Appalachia was without access to the rest of the United States is false— particularly when considering the difficulty of travel at the time in general. Central Appalachia was not relatively any more or less easy to access than other parts of the nation.

Thus, I must define more closely what the ‘contact’ at the turn of the 20th Century is. In this way, contact was the intrusion of outsiders from the wealthier, more industrial, and more urban parts of the US — New York namely — into the Appalachian region for purposes of speculation and industrial expansion. By understanding ‘contact’ as more or less ‘capitalist contact’, this thesis seeks to unpack the false dichotomy of pre-industrial Appalachia as isolated, untouched, and pure; and post-industrial Appalachia as experiencing integration into the larger fabric of the emerging prosperous American society. This dichotomy can be used to assert that prior to capitalist expansion, Appalachia did not exist in the grander scheme of American history — a dangerous assertion to make that erases complex local histories. In fact, this dichotomized consideration of the Appalachian experience has served to fuel narratives of a people isolated in the mountains that needed to be rescued from their ‘backwardness’ and brought into the fold of the New Industrial America (Eller 1982, 40-2). Thus, it is important not only to recognize this false dichotomy as well as recognize the narrative crafted by turn-of-the-century journalists, authors, and capitalists that Appalachia was a mainly unpopulated and isolated region with endless potential that only needed to be unlocked – a narrative that would coincide well with general American narratives of

‘Manifest Destiny’ and taming of the wild frontier¹⁵.

However, this is not to romanticize life in the mountains prior to the capitalist expansion either. Instead, it is to assert that much of the capitalist expansion not only included the introduction of capital networks into the region from the wealthier parts of the US, but also to recognize the early narrative of Appalachia being home to people that needed to be ‘industrialized’ and ‘civilized’ with complete disregard for the social and economic systems already in place in the region. The accounts of ‘local color’ brought back to the industry centers at the turn of the century served to engender particular responses from the emerging middle class of America and justify the capitalist intervention into Appalachia (Eller 1982, 42-3). Some of the pieces even explicitly referred to Appalachia as being “on the eve of an astonishing development” and chastised the “feeble efforts” to capitalize on the “extraordinary mineral resources” – reporting Appalachians as “self-sustaining people, raising and manufacturing nearly everything required by their limited knowledge and wants” (Warner 1889). This condescending narrative of need encouraged the growing American middle class to support the capitalist expansion in Appalachia in order to provide much needed ‘civilization’ to these poor mountain farmers. This invokes an ever-familiar paternalist logic found throughout history but perhaps most poignantly in the calls for development aid for the ‘Third World’ in the post-World War II era.

While the history of contact between Central Appalachia and the rest of the United States is important for accurately recounting the timeline of coal extraction, it is also vital to understanding the history of narrative about Central Appalachia. Present day narratives of a lazy, addicted, jobless and homogeneously white Appalachia (MacFarquar 2016; Saward

¹⁵ Space and scope limits the discussion about how the Appalachian narrative weaves in with more general narratives in US history in the 19th and 20th centuries, but I recognize here that this interaction is complex and worth much more intellectual inquiry than this section will allow. See Eller 1982 for more on this interaction.

2016; Vance 2016) have their roots in these industrial era narratives both in content and purpose — to facilitate a particular image of a poor, ignorant region in need of intervention. Thus, political interests, media attention, and available capital converged in the 1880s and 1890s to make Appalachia of interest to the outside world for the first time in earnest with reference to capitalizing on the region's natural resource wealth¹⁶ (Eller 1982). In this way, elites at the turn of the 20th Century sought to claim Central Appalachia as a space unto their own, intent on rearranging the organic and 'disorganized' society that existed there into an industrial space. This shows specifically how space creation and the manipulation of a place are imbued with power – namely the power of capital in this case of early capitalists in Appalachia.

Within this time period, political interests in the region began to shift with lasting consequences for the coalfields. The arrival of capital and capitalists to the mountains formed new class distinctions or molded old ones to suit the new industrial order. In the post-Civil War years, political leadership in the American South began to shift its own identity from the agrarian fabric of Jefferson to the new industrial world they lived in. The 'New South' leaders supported industrial recruitment and development, playing hand-in-hand with outside investors and absentee owners to bring industry to the region (Eller 1982, 44-5). This gradual but definitive shift in the interests of the political elite of the South and by extension, Central Appalachia, made fertile ground for the coal industry to take hold in the region. This embedding of the coal industry in the political order would have lasting effects on Central Appalachia's social order and power dynamics which continue to be felt to this day as will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Political leaders worked with local media to spread this evangelical message of

¹⁶ The resources of Central Appalachia and their existence were well known prior to this time period, however the lack of ability to extract the resources hindered capitalists prior to this time. See *Eller* 1982 for more.

untouched, uncaptialized wealth in the mountains at the time. The *Courier-Journal*, a newspaper in the metropolitan city of Louisville, Kentucky and miles away from the mountains, often undertook this role with fervor. Its editor at the time, Henry Watterson¹⁷, served to proselytize about “the industrial development of Kentucky and the attraction of ‘Eastern Capital’¹⁸ to [the] state’s coal fields” (Eller 1982, 45). Thus, the turn of the 20th Century operationalized many interests that converged on Central Appalachia and worked in tandem to create a situation primed for capitalist exploitation. With the expanse of narratives from northern authors and even local ones,¹⁹ the local media operating on behalf of elite voices within and without the region, and politicians enabling capitalists’ expansion into the region legally, the once autonomous Appalachia was vulnerable.

Again, this account is not to reduce the ongoing debates about the pre-industrial history of Appalachia in its finer details. This is also not to portray 19th Century Appalachia as an egalitarian, ideal, and free wilderness untouched by exploitation, oppression, and hardship. The history of Native Americans and their interaction with Appalachian settlers as well as the presence of free Black Americans and their place in Appalachia remains contested to this day and is undoubtedly too complex to summarize in a few paragraphs. However, what is most important to gather from this section is prior to the initial contact of capital to the region, Appalachia enjoyed a relatively stable, autonomous existence with its own economy, markets, social arrangements, and way of life that was then interrupted. I hesitate to institute a dichotomous understanding of pre-industrial Appalachia and industrial

¹⁷ Watterson also had railroad interests and thus veiled interests in the coal industry coming to Kentucky.

¹⁸ ‘Eastern Capital’ in this context references the capital from the northeast coast of the United States, namely New York.

¹⁹ One of the more famous accounts is that of John Fox Jr., a Harvard graduate who returned central (non-Appalachian) Kentucky to help raise funds for his brother’s coal venture in the east. Fox’s story is not singular to the time and highlights that elite classes within Kentucky and other mountain states often enabled the exploitation and intrusion of predatory capital into the region — sometimes even profited from it. For more on Fox’s history, see Eller 1982 and Stoll 2017.

Appalachia, but I will use these terms to primarily refer to the contact of capital in the region rather than reduce the characteristics of Appalachia on either side of this arbitrary divide, or further support romantic, likely erroneous, accounts of pre-industrial Appalachia.

Industrial Appalachia: transition and conflict

Industry came to Appalachia bringing the promises of ‘civilization’ the emerging middle class of the United States thought was necessary to living a 20th Century life. The narrative of deficiency — both moral and material — in the region is one that will recur into the present-day accounts in later chapters. However, at the turn of the century this narrative was still a hopeful one of turning the seemingly scattered, isolated, culture-less people of Appalachia into ‘modern’ American citizens of greatness and plenty. As coal companies came into the region, setting up mines and the trappings of a ‘modern’ industrial outfit, they also needed to build infrastructure to house and provide for the labor force they were hoping to cultivate. Company towns served this purpose, and as these “privately owned” towns were established along the hills and hollers of the Appalachian coalfields they signaled a certain shift in the social lives of Appalachians (Eller 1982). Towns such as the one displayed in Figures 2.1 and 2.2 were constructed in a matter of a couple years to replace the scattered homesteads that blended into the landscape of the mountains rather than existing in organized towns.



Figure 2.1: Image of homes built for coal miners in Jenkins, Kentucky “Jenkins from County Road, 1914 June 5”, Guide to the Jenkins, Kentucky Photographic Collection, 1911-1930, undated, University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center.



Figure 2.2: Image of Jenkins from County Road, “New Houses, No. 201 Mine, 1913 September 24”, Guide to the Jenkins, Kentucky Photographic Collection, 1911-1930, undated, University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center.

Whereas kinship primarily organized associations and social arrangements in pre-industrial Appalachia, industrial Appalachia was thrust into new social arrangements of company towns and connections based not solely on kinship ties, but on work and employment. The organized development of company towns disrupted the existence of the

subsistence farms and communities that existed organically within Central Appalachia, invoking a sense of control by the coal companies as these built communities were wholly dependent on the companies and the coal industry itself (Scott 1995; Eller 1982). Similar to practices referenced by James Scott (1998) in *Seeing like a State*, the non-capitalist organization of organic communities ran antithetical to the needs of a consistent, available workforce that would labor in the coal mines, and thus reorganizing the living arrangements of these communities was chief among the priorities of coal mine operators and speculators who often framed the process in terms of providing modern essentials to the area such as churches, stores, roads, etc. (Eller 1982). In the 1910s and 1920s, these towns emerged in force and produced mixed feelings amongst Appalachians.

Company towns such as Jenkins in Letcher County, Kentucky were not met with the gratefulness ‘savior’ capitalists from the North perhaps expected. Instead, they were often considered dirty, poorly built, and a last resort for many of the laborers and young families in the area who could not make a living farming on the decreasingly available land in the region (Scott 1995, Eller 1982). These semi-feudal sites were also the location of social tensions as many towns had populations of white Americans, black Americans, and immigrants of varying, but primarily European backgrounds being forced together in these poorly built towns (Scott 1995, 11). As coal companies grew and needed more laborers, attracting low-wage working class people from all backgrounds, these company towns introduced forced diversity that created fierce tensions.

Along with company towns and the increasing influence of capital in the mountains, changes to the political arrangements happened rapidly. Whereas kinship dictated political allegiances before industrialization, industrial Appalachia introduced a new political order alongside the new capitalist one. Political systems can often reinforce economic ones and run

parallel to one another; thus, it is no surprise a new political order emerged to reinforce the new industrial order in Appalachia. As Scott (1995) references in her ethnography of Harlan County, Kentucky, industrialization “introduced new cleavages between local farmers and workers, on the one hand, and the local elite, on the other”. Further, she references historical accounts of the time that demonstrated these political changes as politicians increasingly forwent their allegiances to their “farmer cousins” in favor of “more powerful coal operators” (14). These changes to the power dynamics of the region foreshadowed a further division of power between workers and capitalists, also suggesting extraction would overtly rearrange power geographies in such a way to benefit the few at the cost of the many.

As the existing politics of the region changed, laborers organized to leverage more political power together than they had individually. Unionization and labor organizing came to Central Appalachia in the form of bloody, violent battles brought on by a decrease in the demand for Appalachian coal in the 1920s and 1930s and reflected the struggle between laborers and owners for primacy and ownership of labor. What had become a booming industry, with World War I and national demand for coal to build the rising industrial cities of America, dwindled in the 1920s causing layoffs and strife amongst workers (Scott 1995; Freese 2016). Some of the bloodiest union struggles in the Anglo-American unionization history occurred in the Central Appalachian coalfields at this time.

Owing somewhat to the kinship structures of Appalachia, the strikes became family and community affairs, mobilizing the efforts of miners and their families to pressure coal company owners into providing better conditions for workers. However, the union battles of the Central Appalachian coalfields varied in success and introduced divisions between union and nonunion workers that would haunt the region for decades. This divide was exacerbated by John L. Lewis — leader of the United Mine Workers (UMW) — when he denounced

‘wildcat’ strikes²⁰ at nonunion mines (Dubofsky and McCartin 2017). While coal miners were keenly aware of both the power of coal companies over them as well as the relative need to organize, divisions between workers would prove too difficult to overcome in many places (Scott 1995; Freese 2016; Dubofsky and McCartin 2017). Thus, labor organizing in the coal producing areas of Appalachia had a varied reputation as it both provided rights and power to some coal miners, but also exacerbated differences between union and nonunion miners. These differences would later cultivate resentment and allow coal operators’ and politicians’ power to grow in the absence of organized worker-led opposition.

While this is a very brief summarization of industrialization and unionization in the Central Appalachian coalfields, it is placed here to highlight more specifically the rapid and intense social changes industrial Appalachia experienced. Pre-industrial communities of subsistence farmers were drawn into the coal companies’ embrace and were reorganized into towns and social units much easier to control. This in tandem with the difficult and largely dismal history of labor organization in the region serves to both complicate and distill the picture of extraction in Appalachia as well as emphasize the rapid changes to the power geographies in the region. Whereas other skilled trade unions maintained their strength and prominence, failures in the coal miners’ union leadership motivated its decline into relative obscurity in the present day. Thus, the legacy of coal from 1900 until the 1960s was one of struggle, division, violence, and power — themes that continue to inform the narratives of post-extraction.

The 1960s ‘development’ era, Kennedy, and the ‘War on Poverty’

During the mid-20th Century, the fortunes of the coal industry destabilized and

²⁰ ‘Wildcat’ strikes are not authorized by union leadership. In this case, nonunion mines without union contracts with employers often engaged in them. Thus, Lewis was seen as selectively favoring labor organization and favoring the rights of coal operators over workers in some cases.

poverty in the region grew. This can be attributed to a multitude of circumstances, though the result of the unstable economy was exhibited most acutely in Appalachia of 1960. Three years after mass flooding that still left the angry marks on the mountain communities, Appalachia was in the midst of harsh back-to-back winters that put families in extreme hardships of food scarcity and many coal miners were out of work, exacerbating the issues (Eller 2012, 53). Appalachia had become synonymous with poverty and misfortune while remaining relatively ignored by the general public as resentment for the violent labor disputes softened into apathy for the plight of Appalachians. However, when soon-to-be President Kennedy stepped into West Virginia to campaign for the 1960 Democratic primary, Appalachia's need and hardship was re-exposed to the nation.

As national politicians pulled back the veil on Appalachian poverty, pressure on state politicians increased to address the needs of the region. Appalachia began to be referred to as an 'underdeveloped' region, mimicking much of the language that the United States, the World Bank, and other organizations were using internationally at the time (Eller 2012). This language of 'underdevelopment' encouraged the view that intervention in Appalachia was necessary to bring her into the present. This reinforced narrative of Appalachia being 'behind the times' rather than temporally placed alongside the mass prosperity of America's urban and suburban centers again divorced Appalachia's role in industry and 'progress' for the US at large. If this language sounds familiar, the reader is not mistaken — much of this language mirrored reasons used to justify the initial capitalist encounter in the region as described earlier in this chapter. Consequently, the 1960s saw the inception of several organizations in the region that sought to address poverty in Appalachia (Eller 2012; BSADD 2019; VISTA 2019). Many of these organizations remain active today and are regarded at best as organizations with limited success or at worst ones that have been useless or have harmed Appalachia more than helped (Eller 1982; Interviews 3, 4). This will be discussed further in

Chapter 3 as some interlocutors define their missions in the region often with reference to these ‘War on Poverty’ era organizations.

The logic of these initiatives had a very specific focus, located in the language of the capitalist economic order. According to elites in the 1960s, the application of ‘modern’ technology and resources could lift the region out of poverty — a condition seen as illogical given the growth of the US at the time. This served to link the economic situation in Appalachia to an exclusion from the “cultural changes that lifted the rest of the nation out of the Depression and placed it on the road to prosperity after World War II” (Eller 2012, 62). This narrative of exclusion again should ring as repetitive as throughout Appalachia’s documented history she has been treated as too different and too isolated from the mainstream American society — or seen as a ‘symbolic Other’ as Reid and Taylor (2010) describe. The ‘difference’ narrative²¹, as I will refer to this as, will be discussed more in the last section of this chapter as I reconnect Appalachia’s history to her present. However, it is worth noting that the narrative exhibits use of place as an exclusionary organizing factor that ignores the greater historical and social context of Appalachia – and more specifically Appalachian poverty. Proponents of the ‘difference’ narrative use the placing of Appalachia to remove her from the relevant histories of capitalism and extraction; thus, flattening the dialogue about Appalachian poverty.

Due in part to the difficulties with the ‘War on Poverty’ intellectually, this ‘war’ occupies a contested space in the history of Appalachia and the US. For many reasons, the ‘War on Poverty’ appears to be a positive moment in Appalachia’s otherwise bleak recent history. President Kennedy and President Johnson’s remarks on the region served to place a spotlight on Central Appalachia and her struggles. Initiatives were formed, task-forces were

²¹ The ‘difference’ narrative is also discussed at length by regional academics at present, see Harkins and McCarroll (2019), Catte (2018), and Eller (2012) for more.

created, and the ARC was formed to expressly deal with the effects of poverty on the region. However, recalling from the introduction the story of Martin County's water crisis, it is difficult to believe that fifty-five years ago the 'War on Poverty' was announced from the steps of a humble porch in that same county.

While the failures of the 'War on Poverty' are not fully known and cannot be discussed at length here, the 'War' is important to locate Central Appalachia's post-extractive moment. Not only did the 'War on Poverty' serve to shed light on the desperate situation in Appalachia, it also narratively adapted old language of deficiency and exclusion with regard to Appalachia's hardships (Eller 2012). In doing this, the ARC and its others ignored the role of coal companies in the impoverished status of the region and mostly served to address symptoms of Appalachian poverty instead of causes. This is not to say that the ARC, the ADDs and other emergent organizations from the time did not improve the livelihoods of Appalachians in some ways, but these improvements were limited. The social status of coal in the 1960s had never been larger, and this time period into the 1970s would precede what would be the most financially profitable, but also most extractive period of coal mining to date with the advent of mountain top removal mining.

Thus, the success of the 'War on Poverty' has been limited with reference to poverty itself, and has mostly served to mask the structural causes of poverty in Appalachia. These effects can still be felt today as organizations navigate the post-extractive moment, though this will be considered more in depth in Chapters 3 and 4. Roughly speaking, the 'War on Poverty' can be understood as a moment of great potential in changing the fortunes of Appalachians without much follow-through. It is this history that most development agents and local activists are working within today, particularly as several of the organizations from the 1960s — the ARC, the ADDs, VISTA, and more — continue to operate heavily in the

region.

‘Place’ in Central Appalachia: centering the local

As explored more theoretically in Chapter 1, place is a complex concept that is infused with identity, experience, location, locale, and more. The way that place communicates with and structures the social livelihood of a location has been considered at length by geographers, including Massey’s (1991) consideration of how place fits into a globalizing world. While this chapter has primarily been concerned with parts of the history of coal extraction Central Appalachia, I will return briefly to evaluate the social history of Appalachia with specific regards to ‘place’ and ‘place-making.’ The prevalence of ‘place’ in Appalachian studies is not a novel idea — many academics since the mid-20th century have sought to consider ‘place’ in Appalachia as a complex and necessary lens for evaluating the region’s past, present and future.²² As Billings and Kingsolver (2018) highlight in their edited volume of essays *Appalachia in Regional Context*, *place matters*. Place is implicit in each of the preceding sections as narratives of inclusion and exclusion are thematically involved in Appalachia’s social history.

Academics and activists such as Billings and Kingsolver (2018), Fisher and Smith (2012), and others (Gaventa 2018; Eller 2012; hooks 2012; DeRosier 1999) seek to challenge the homogenous narratives that have emerged from the region — an extractive production of elites parallel to the coal extraction in the hills and hollers. Through these critical cultural accounts, readers are forced to consider the purpose of homogenizing accounts about the region. However, despite this trend, narratives of poor, ignorant, culture-less hillbillies remain — *Hillbilly Elegy* (Vance 2016) is evidence of this. While memoirs such as Vance’s account of poverty, abuse, and violence in Appalachian families can be seated in truthful

²² See footnote 5.

experience, the viral nature of Vance's memoir highlights the continuing power and danger of these narratives of moral deficiency. *Hillbilly Elegy* immediately soared to the top of the New York Times' bestseller list, was added to summer college reading lists, and became the go-to book for reading groups and book clubs (Dore *et al* 2018). When narratives of moral deficiency and individual fault for structural crises are taken as the prevailing way to see Appalachia, the region is again silenced in a way that disregards its social complexity but also sanitizes the messy history of capitalist extraction and exploitation in the region.

This is of course not to say that Appalachians have not pushed back on their own accord as well. As soon as the swell of popularity around Vance and *Hillbilly Elegy* grew, there was an almost immediate counter movement of criticism by Appalachians about the account as well. Elizabeth Catte (2018), a historian from the region, published a book titled *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia* which serves as both a scathing rebuttal to Vance as well as a demonstration of the greater current context of Appalachians in the present day. Catte's volume performs multiple functions in this way, but perhaps most relevant to this thesis is its way of locating 'place' expertly without supporting common tropes of exceptionalism, familism, or ahistorical existence. Like Scott (1995) and Billings and Kingsolver (2018), Catte (2018) seeks to counter ideas of Appalachians as an 'exceptional' people, cut off by the mountains and existing in their own world. This language of exceptionalism that is often employed by authors and journalists alike when speaking about the region also has roots in the original 'local color' pieces written in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Eller 2012; Warner 1889).

Exceptionalism disserves Appalachians in multiple ways, but primarily in that it serves to distance Appalachians from history, revising the existence of the region to be outside of the capitalist system rather than a functioning part of it. The concept of

exceptionalism is not singular to Appalachia even in the American context, as others have described this phenomenon elsewhere (Elie 2007; Menchaca 1995). The ‘exceptional’ status of Appalachia in the American psyche enables both an othering of the people in order to dissect, interrogate, and investigate their lives at will (and often without consent; see *Stranger with a Camera* (2000)) as well as separate the region from the nation at large, classifying it as an internal periphery.²³ Much of this ‘difference’ thesis serves to symbolically organize how Appalachia is seen from the outside, indeed mirroring other ‘symbolic Others’ such as the ‘developing’ world (Reid and Taylor 2010, 43).

Despite these accounts of exceptionalism and moral deficiency — or perhaps in spite of them — there has been a trend in recent Appalachian history of reclamation and place-making as some concrete examples will be discussed in the following chapters. As has been briefly shown in the history of extraction and pre-industrial Appalachia, attachment and sense of place are both organizing and motivating factors for action and resistance. This is particularly true in the cases of those who have been subject to powerful oppressive tendencies by coal companies and capitalists — primarily coal miners, their families, and other working-class members of society — sought to maintain their place and livelihood in Central Appalachia.

Place is determined by a great many things; indeed, place is, as Billings and Kingsolver (2018) states, ‘experiential’, including race, socio-economic status, gender, and more. Further, place-making can serve as a challenge to the disconnected and globalized way of thinking about social and economic relations by reconnecting the social and the experiential. Place-making as informed by the academics cited here looks beyond the scientific gaze and invokes the deeper meaning of place. In turn, alternative understandings

²³ See Walls ‘Central Appalachia: Internal Colony or Internal Periphery?’ for more on this argument.

of a location such as ones experiencing post-extractive transition may emerge. By centering place in their work, current Appalachian scholars seek to locate and ground the social and economic issues of the region in a way that is both just and addresses several of the analytical issues previous discussions of Appalachian poverty have involved – such as the ‘difference’ narrative, homogenizing narratives, etc.

In the following chapter, I turn to ethnographic material to describe and interrogate current experiences in the post-extractive moment with particular attention to how the interlocutors place themselves with reference to coal and Central Appalachia. By employing the analytical frame of place, I seek to consider more acutely how sense of place and subsequently identity organizes how individuals relate to the post-extractive moment. As mentioned in the methodology section of the introduction, these accounts are limited in some ways, but despite the data challenges there is an interesting discussion to be had about how the post-extractive moment is affecting the social, economic, and political arrangements of Central Appalachia today. Further, the presence of coal within the participants’ comments serves as a background for discussing more critically the social aspects of coal and coal extraction in the region, as well as how the entwined narratives of place and power serve to complicate post-extractive discussions on climate change, transition, and the politics surrounding.

CHAPTER 3: EXPERIENCES OF 'PLACE' IN PRESENT DAY CENTRAL APPALACHIA

Today's Appalachia still bears many of the markers of her past, both physically and socially. As with most societies, the historical fabric of Central Appalachia weaves tightly with her current status, informing much of the present experience in the region. This chapter will primarily focus on the stories of other Appalachians from Eastern Kentucky, documenting their experiences in the region and attempting to 'place' their narratives accordingly within the greater context of coal and the extractive history in Appalachia. Finally, this chapter will examine the intersection of place and power with reference to climate change dialogues to further interrogate the politics of post-extraction in Central Appalachia.

By nature of the data collected, this chapter certainly depicts most explicitly the views of elites and uses limited community interviews and data to fill in the gaps as will allow — as previously described in the methodology section of the introductory chapter. I recognize that this is a risky process, but noting that oftentimes those without power — the powerless, the subordinate, the 'subaltern' — are also without the privilege of being able to take part in interviews and research, I seek to employ the accounts of several community members who work directly with these groups to offer as full a story as possible given the restrictions.

Despite these limitations, I hold that the discussion here is helpful to understanding the post-extractive moment in Central Appalachia from a micro level. While the narratives of elites, and most often political or business elites, are ubiquitous in the US mainstream dialogue about Appalachia vis-à-vis *Hillbilly Elegy*, the grassroots and grassroots stories are rarely heard and taken with similar authority. De-homogenizing the narrative about the region is the key theme of this chapter as it seeks to engage with stories from multiple sources, recognizing the intricacies and complexities that are present in Central Appalachia today.

‘Placing’ the persons: narrative context

While one cannot simply brush off the complexities and contradictions within and between the accounts discussed here as purely derived from experiences of identity and place, these concepts greatly inform how Central Appalachians place themselves in the post-extractive moment. Even the declining presence of the coal industry and views about its future differ between some of the accounts, suggesting that for some of the participants the discourse and dialogue they use discussing coal is heavily loaded with value signaling that is beyond its potential to be mined and provide economic prosperity. For instance, in the interview with the director of Shaping our Appalachian region (SOAR), one can hear the optimistic language about the future of coal as he refuses to say that coal is a dying industry, but one that should be part of a “diversified economy” (Interview 4). While some could consider this a message of ‘false consciousness’²⁴ the deeper complexity of how Appalachians grapple with post-extraction is of more importance, particularly when considering the historical success of coal companies embedding coal extraction into the identity of Appalachians.

Coal, which threads itself in and out of these narratives, has a complex history and relationship with the region as considered explicitly in Chapter 2 and will be considered further in the final section of this chapter. This relationship varies by socio-economic class, race, and gender, but entwines itself inextricably within the daily lives of those who live and work in Central Appalachia. Thus, coal occupies a space that is both physically and socially embedded in the region. Coal mining was forcibly entwined with the daily lives of Appalachian farmers in such an aggressive way that took a sparsely populated, subsistence-driven society of the commons and transformed them into coal miners within a generation

²⁴ See Harvey (1990)

through drastic social and economic reorganization. Thus, the coal industry is necessarily an analytically messy one to consider — both physically and socially. As I discussed in Chapter 2, coal's presence in Central Appalachia has been framed in very emotional terms, utilizing narratives of duty and social cohesion to craft a picture of the coal industry that reshaped Appalachia. It was rare to find a family who wasn't affected by coal extraction in some way and that remains true to this day.

Further, for better or worse, coal did change the immediate fortunes of many and remains a powerful social entity despite its economic decline. One cannot have a discussion about the future of the Central Appalachian economy without referencing coal in some capacity. This may be through a variety of stances — such as the need to diversify beyond coal but incorporating the coal industry, by permanently and forcibly disbanding the industry, or by any hybrid stance in between — but the fact remains that coal is still integral to the discussion of Central Appalachia's post-extractive economic and social future. Because of this demonstrated social role, the coal industry defines and shapes so much of the narrative of the region. Thus, reductive understandings of coal extraction run the risk of simplifying how Appalachians understand this transitional moment and claiming the difficulty with transition from a coal-based extractive economy is ignorance or denial.

With this in mind, I continue this chapter by exploring how differing perspectives of extraction and coal manifest in the participants of this study. In this way, this chapter seeks to consider more closely why, given the history of coal in the region and the empirical decline of the industry, coal continues to be one of the organizing frameworks for development discussions. The following sections will thus recount a cross section of the current public dialogue about coal and development, as well as consider the perspectives of individuals working and living in the region today. It is through this rich and diverse collection of data

that I chiefly consider coal as an actor that informs the decision-making landscape. This will then be considered more explicitly through the manipulation of coal narratives by special interests with reference to climate change. The climate change discussion will provide a point of departure to discuss how place and power interact in post-extraction and consider more explicitly the power geography of the post-extractive moment – a set up for a more nuanced discussion of place and power in Chapter 4.

Development ‘visions’: perspectives on the future of Central Appalachia

To begin this discussion of coal, I will first pan outward to frame the responses of interlocutors as well as the general public dialogue about development at present. These conceptions of ‘development’ are informed by the history of being located in a region that has been the host of ‘development’ efforts since the 1960s — as described with reference to the ‘War on Poverty’ in Chapter 2—and longer histories of intervention and intrusion framed by language of ‘modernizing’ and ‘civilizing’ as referenced in the history of the capital encounter in Chapter 2. This history of being acted upon rather than being actors in and of themselves frames the wider perspectives and visions of development agents and others in the region.

In the present day, many development organizations see themselves as striking away from the goals of the ARC and similar organizations formed in the ‘War on Poverty’ years, but this approach varies. For instance, SOAR’s executive director, Mr. Jared Arnett, asserted that the main goals of the organization were “changing the narrative” about Appalachia and developing a primarily economic plan for the future of the region (Interview 4). SOAR is recognized as a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization that was initiated by political leaders in 2013 as a bipartisan effort to address some of the development challenges in Appalachia — though it has further grown to have little oversight from political bodies and now enjoys

an independent status from political leadership (SOAR 2019; Interview 4). SOAR explicitly asserts its mission as differing from bodies like the ARC and VISTA, saying that “[u]nlike task forces and commissions that had analyzed Appalachia Kentucky for more than 50 years, SOAR was created as a platform for the people of Appalachia Kentucky to be engaged, embrace new ideas, leverage resources, and build capacity to create a 21st Century Appalachia²⁵” (SOAR 2019). The language of SOAR is worth noting here, highlighting that SOAR sees its goal as crafting a ‘new’ approach to Appalachia’s future, as well as asserting its goals of ‘creating’ a 21st Century Appalachia.

Mr. Arnett, as one of the key decision makers in SOAR, also recalled the organization’s key goals — or how they envisioned ‘development’ in Appalachia. Mr. Arnett explicitly stated that SOAR does not “necessarily do economic development, [but] lead[s] and coordinate[s] a movement to implement a plan” (Interview 4). The hesitance to accept the association between SOAR and ‘economic development’ signals that the language of ‘economic development’ in this context is loaded with meaning — particularly when paired with the understanding that much of the ‘economic development’ in the region had been conducted by top-down organizations with bureaucratic organizational schemes such as the ARC. In this way, ‘development’ for Mr. Arnett and SOAR is imbued with ideas of Appalachia being acted *upon* rather than acting *for* themselves, an assertion akin to post-development critiques lodged by scholars such as Ferguson (1994) and Esteva (2010) among others.

By comparison, organizations such as the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) have both aligning and diverging approaches to SOAR.

²⁵ While the language of ‘task forces’ and ‘commissions’ can see quite vague and referencing any number of organizations, within this context it refers directly to the history of the ARC and its others.

Also working within the history of the ARC and VISTA, MACED is explicitly looking to shift narratives about the Central Appalachian region (MACED 2019). A member of the MACED team, Ms. Ivy Brashear, discussed this work in detail, saying that her work as the Appalachian Transition Coordinator on the team is to “work on narrative and framing and messaging around...economic development in Eastern Kentucky. Trying to shift it from the more traditional industrial recruitment strategy...to more of the ‘we can build this ourselves and we have local assets we can invest in’” strategy (Interview 3). The similarities between these organizations are striking in that both focus on narrative explicitly, though perhaps in differing ways.

The fact that narrative and narrative shifting is prominent in the minds of professionals working on economic transition in the region says a lot about how the region’s history has shaped the current atmosphere of transition and development vision. SOAR and MACED both occupy an elite organizing space in the region, but are also oriented around shifting the narrative of Appalachia away from historical narratives of deficiency and need. The prevailing narrative *about* Appalachia, these organizations argue, is one that is not located in fact or manipulates real situations of hardship to mean that Appalachia is in need of external intervention and influence. This dominant narrative — as discussed in the introduction and Chapter 2 — is what these professionals are reacting to and trying to reclaim Appalachian identity from (Interviews 3, 4). This prominence on shifting narrative as a mechanism of change challenges conceptions that Appalachia is a location that should be paternalistically approached from the outside rather than enabled to develop itself. Indeed, the language of both Mr. Arnett and Ms. Brashear highlight this, as well as the public communications of both organizations. Further, the emphasis that organizations place on narrative suggests that narratives hold particular power and that the construction of an Appalachia divorced from her history as well as local efforts to improve circumstances in the

region is seen as a primary obstacle to change.

Nostalgia also plays a complex role in these stories of transition, envisaging both a romantic, almost idyllic view of Appalachia as well as intuitively associating the corporatization of coal with a sense of loss of place. Ms. Debra Fouts, a community scholar who was born in and has spent the majority of her life in the region, articulates this in her own stories of her childhood and adulthood in the region. Comparisons between her youth and the present day serve as foils of one another, rooting in experience the history of coal companies' gradual selling of the region into absentee hands (Interview 1). Ms. Fouts' account of her own experiences harken to other ethnographic accounts of experiences of poverty and rapid change of the industry in Central Appalachia.

Shaunna Scott's (1995) ethnography of Harlan County, Kentucky highlights some of these regional anxieties existing in the 1990s as well. The continuity of responses from interlocutors in the community is striking, leaving one to wonder what constructs this continuous experience—of disconnected loss and changing sense of place—for a span of over thirty years in some cases. Scott's interviews highlight anxieties from coal mining families about corporate power and greed, often rooted in terms of instability of work hours, disregard for health and safety, and general absence of coal operators and owners from the communities. The environment of instability that Scott highlights through these accounts is present in Ms. Fout's account, as well as others in the discussions on what communities in Eastern Kentucky feel like in the present. These accounts further serve to frame the post-extractive moment in Appalachia as continuous experiences of senses of loss of place and nostalgia suggest that some in the region seek an Appalachia reshaped in her former image — an image associated with stability and prosperity and community-based social arrangements. The conflation of stability with the boom era of coal extraction is a manipulation exploited by

some in the region as well, which will be further considered in the last section of this chapter.

As Ms Fout's accounted in her interview, there is a profound sense of loss existing in many of these rural Eastern Kentucky communities. Whereas early coal operators were locals and the communities and coal towns built around these mines were tight-knit — again a repurposing of pre-capitalist kinship structures as discussed in Chapter 2 — the spread of capital and the selling of many of the coal operations to absentee owners²⁶ has left a profound sense of placelessness to some. Ms. Fouts articulates this well, saying that the small towns of her youth have disappeared and that “[it’s] one of the reasons that I wanna [sic] sell something at the farmer’s market. You know, I’m not making any money at all really and it’s about to kill me, but you know it’s good. It’s good for the community” (Interview 1).

This small dedication by Ms. Fouts to support the local farmer’s markets is powerful in its own way. For her, the farmer’s markets are a way to connect and give back to the community she lives in — indeed a duty of a sort. This duty isn’t motivated by profit margins or amassing wealth, but instead by working to cultivate a sense of place that she misses. Ms. Fouts also compares this experience to her experience at farmer’s markets in larger cities in the state, saying the farmer’s markets were where she could gather with people who knew her way of life and spoke her language (Interview 1). The farmer’s market in this way operates as its own place, loaded with meaning and interconnectedness in the way Massey (1991) describes.

In a way, Ms. Fouts is participating in her own idea of development using her sense of

²⁶ For more on absentee landlords in Central Appalachia, see Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force (1983), Egerton (1981), and Scott (2009). These primarily reference the Appalachian Land Ownership Study conducted in 1979, which was a seminal study in participatory research about land ownership trends in Appalachia. Attempts are being made to update the land study and its knowledge as of 2019. At the time of the 1979 study, 40 percent of the land rights and 70 percent of the mineral rights were owned by private corporations. Participants in this current study made claims that if these percentages have changed much, it is likely that even less of Appalachia is owned by the people who live there than in 1979 (Interview 3).

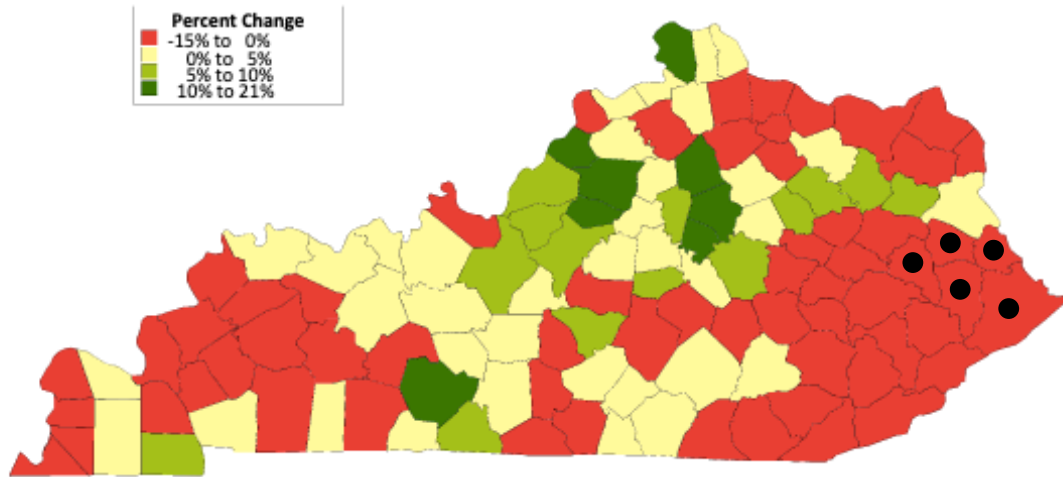
place to work towards a vision of what she perceives her community should look like. Place informs her actions, and the sense of loss of place — i.e. the closeness of the small towns of her youth — motivates her place-making practices. Ms. Fouts of course represents a particular demographic in her community — a white, middle-aged woman from a working-class background. Place-making practices would likely differ amongst other demographic groups — including but not limited to age, gender, race, and socio-economic status. This is subtly evident in the accounts of other elites referenced here — such as Ms. Brashear and Mr. Arnett who are both young elites in the region. Black Appalachians amongst other minority groups likely would experience differing place-making practices as well, and the diversity of these practices should not be ignored in this discussion.

However, while the differences between Ms. Fouts and Ms. Brashear and Mr. Arnett as well as amongst the region's population at-large may seem daunting, the practice of place-making from each is rooted in similar appeals to recovering a 'sense of place' in Central Appalachia that is recognizable to them. This is also not to say the place-making practices are analogous or even complementary – in fact they may be contradictory to one another at times. Mr. Arnett describes his mission in terms of “capacity building” and “collaboration” with a focus on industry, while Ms. Brashear describes her mission in terms of “just transition”, but they each in tandem with Ms. Fouts are attempting to utilize their tools to secure Appalachia's future to the sense of place they have for the region. The mechanisms they use are rooted in conceptions of what it means to be Appalachian, whether that is through simple understandings of community and farmer's markets or through grander conceptions of Appalachia taking control of her own future at long last.

Further, place-making operates as a tool for those who live in the region to reconcile the empirical hardships of life with the lack of desire to give up on the region and move

away. Migration itself in the region is a powerful force – particularly as employment opportunities in the region are slim and increasingly located within service industries that may not provide a stable or sufficient income (Minier *et al* 2019). General population change trends in the field-site are negative, with the greater region of coal producing counties in Appalachian (Eastern) Kentucky all experiencing negative population change with few exceptions. (See figure 3.1). Migration may be for several reasons, but the evidence remains; overall populations in these counties are shrinking. Thus, those who remain may be doing so for a variety of reasons including economic and social. Again for Ms. Fouts – who had migrated elsewhere in the state only to return to the region after – cited a particular sense of place she missed as one of her reasons for moving back (Interview 1). The intricacies of locals reconciling staying in the region against out-migration will be discussed again in Chapter 4 particularly with reference to local development visions and how they are being constructed in the post-extractive moment.

Kentucky County Population Change, 2007 to 2017



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 3.1: County estimate of population change from 2007 to 2017; emphasis added to denote counties in the field-site with black dots, (Minier *et al* 2019)

Regardless, place-making is vital to Central Appalachia in many ways, particularly when considering how local elites and nonelites are reconsidering both their role in the region as well as the region's future overall. This harkens back to the literature on place in Chapter 1 and the discussion of whether a place can be fully lost, or if place shifts and changes regularly in a processual sense. The accounts described in this section confirm place is a process and an iterative one, constantly creating and recreating a location in the image of its inhabitants. In this way, the post-extractive moment is perhaps just as creative as it is disruptive, enabling members of the community to recreate a development vision located in their sense of place. The post-extractive moment as a disrupting mechanism will be further discussed in Chapter 4, particularly with reference to power dynamics in the region, but its disruptive characteristics with reference to place and identity should be noted here as well.

Further, the place-making methods of individuals within Central Appalachia signal

difficult-to-capture qualities about centering place within discussions of development vision. Ms. Fouts highlights this via the healing quality to her place-making practices in the farmer's market, something that is difficult to capture with other ideas of development (Interview 1). In the post-extractive moment, specifically in the case of Central Appalachia, the environmental degradation of extraction has left scars on both the land and its people in varying ways. From contaminated water systems like Martin County's referenced in the introduction to senses of social discontinuity referenced in the accounts in this chapter, the cleanup in the wake of the coal industry incorporates far more than just cleaning up the physical mine lands after the industry has gone. In this way, the socially productive aspects of place-making may offer a more constitutive frame of thinking to consider the more complex social 'cleanup' surrounding post-extraction.

Despite the differing versions of development vision described here, coal is often centered in the discussion of Central Appalachia's future — the absence of it, the loss of the industry, the hopeful attitude towards an inclusive coal future, and more. The following section will deal more explicitly with coal narratives in the comments of the participants as well as the public dialogue, and further consider coal in relation to the politics of the region. As I have discussed in brief in the introduction to this chapter as well as in Chapter 2, coal's contested and embedded history have made coal occupy a space beyond simply being a natural resource commodity for extraction. Further, coal's political life and the politics of place are apparent in the region as discussed through the lens of climate change and how both the interlocutors and the general public dialogue responds to climate change in the post-extractive moment.

'The War on Coal': place, climate change, and political mythmaking

As discussed in Chapter 2, coal's history in the Central Appalachian region is fraught

with stories of oppression, violence, prosperity, hope, and more. Coal is woven into the experiences of most families in this region as the industry's gravitational pull attracted most into coal extraction in one way or another — whether through being a miner, supporting miners, being a mine operator or middleman²⁷, or being a mine owner. Thus, even in the waning days of coal extraction in Central Appalachia, it is impossible to have a discussion about Appalachia's future without discussing coal explicitly and recognizing its role in the community.

Individuals from the area vary greatly on how they interact with and engage with coal in the present. Mr. Arnett of SOAR stated in his interview “coal and economic diversification are not mutually exclusive” (Interview 4) while other development professionals in the region explicitly recognize coal is dying and preparations for coal's decline have not been properly taken (Interviews 2, 3, 5). Key development professionals and locals in the region also recognize there are difficulties surrounding post-coal transition, owing to the continued influence of interest groups who support the coal industry's presence in the region (Interview 2, 3). Of course, there is a contradiction even in these accounts — the lack of post-coal development plans seems counterintuitive when the professionals themselves often recognize the terminal decline of the industry. Visible in the contradictions of accounts here as well as the general narrative of coal and Central Appalachia is a complex mythology at work. This mythology has undergone several iterations throughout the 20th Century, but perhaps most recently and relevant to this thesis and the themes of place and power is the ‘War on Coal’ political myth²⁸.

²⁷ Mine operators hiring middleman-style contractors is a common practice in Central Appalachian mining industry with larger mining corporations employing local operators or managers to deal with the day-to-day business of mine operation. For more on what the life of these contractual operators looks like, see McEvers and Benderev (2018).

²⁸ The term ‘political myth’ is directly invoking the work of Bottici and Challand (2006) here and their discussion on modern political myths. Primarily, I invoke their assertion that a political myth is a narrative

While the ‘War on Coal’ myth may sound familiar with specific reference to President Trump and his agenda for the region and the US at-large (Brugger 2017; Estep 2018; Miller 2018), the structure and use of the myth itself has been in place for much longer. Though ‘War on Coal’ rhetoric spiked in the 2013 and forward with the announcement of President Obama’s clean energy policies (McCown 2013), instances of it can be found as early as 2009 in local statewide newspapers and media (Smith 2009; Young 2010). By 2015, when President Obama’s Clean Power Plan was announced, the ‘War on Coal’ was already a well-developed political myth. One of the lasting physical manifestations of the myth, the ‘Friends of Coal’ license plate (Figure 3.2), is directly linked to the most prominent organizations of coal operators in the region. In the state of Kentucky, the ‘Friends of Coal’ plate is the second most-used specialty license plate in the state (Kentucky Center for Public Service Journalism 2011; Peterson 2016). But more than its direct social presence, the ‘War on Coal’ also served to make express claims about climate change and politics of place, engaging in methods that served to connect even more concretely Appalachian and greater statewide identities with extraction. The myth has been used to widen urban and rural divides within the states and between Central Appalachia and urban areas of the US, as well as embattle environmentalists against local populations and blur divides between coal operators and coal miners once again.

that has become a myth when it “...coagulates and reproduces significance;...is shared by a given group; and...address the specifically political conditions in which a given group lives” (320). The literature around modern political myth is small and contested, but this specific context is how I employ the term in this section to reference the ‘War on Coal’ myth and place.



Figure 3.2: ‘Friends of Coal’ Kentucky specialty license plate, The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet License Plate Directory (2019), <https://drive.ky.gov/motor-vehicle-licensing/Pages/License-Plates.aspx>

Despite the decline of coal extraction in the region, the prominence of the ‘War on Coal’ rhetoric from organizations such as the KCA leads other organizations to resist asserting the terminal decline of the industry. This is the primary way the ‘War on Coal’ transcends simply being a narrative, in that it serves political interests of the KCA and other special interest groups. Again, invoking Bottici and Challand (2006), the ‘War on Coal’ myth operates in a way that ‘reproduces significance’ as it manifests a nearly spiritual message about being a ‘friend of coal’ and supporting the coal industry; it is a ‘shared’ set of beliefs amongst a particular group; and it makes sense of the ‘political conditions’ in Central Appalachia at present. The KCA continues to construct the myth by taking aim at clean energy and climate change activism explicitly. They do this primarily by delinking coal extraction from climate change while linking clean energy policy with anti-worker and anti-miner sentiment, going so far as to host a website (Figure 3.3) purely dedicated to ‘debunking myths’ about the coal industry in Kentucky and Central Appalachia at-large.

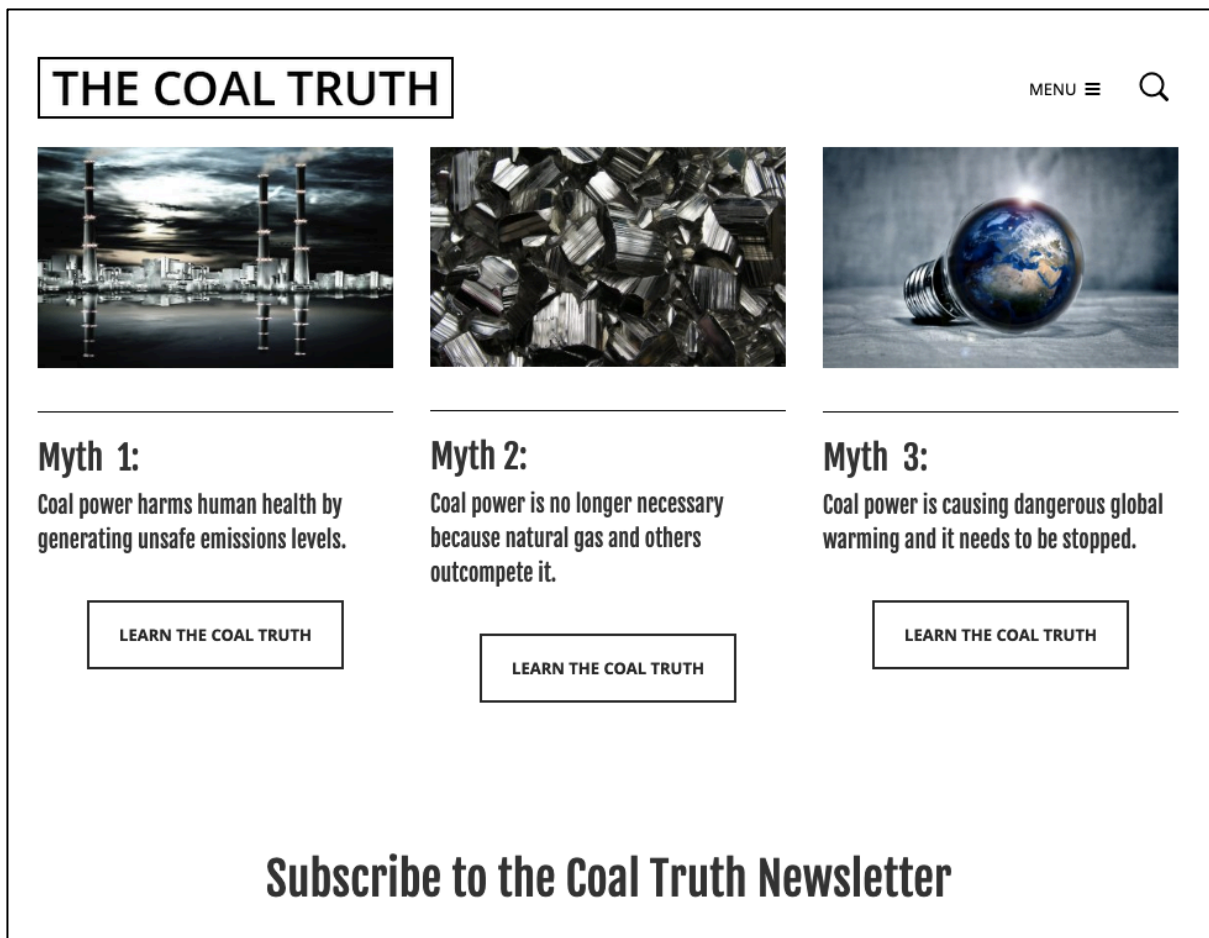


Figure 3.3: Screenshot from ‘The Coal Truth’ website hosted by the KCA, ‘The Coal Truth’ (2019), <https://thecoaltruth.com/>

The KCA claims coal does not create dangerous emissions or contribute to global warming explicitly and again poses both of these facts as ‘myths’ to be debunked (KCA 2019b). The organization occupies a space of power in the region and uses their professional organizational structure to misinform the public, further entwining power, space, and sense of place – in that the KCA determines what the dominant ‘sense of place’ should be – and is an example of the entwined interests of coal miners, coal operators, and the inadequacy of clean energy activists to challenge the power of such organizations. Further, the ‘War on Coal’ myth is perpetuated with the aid of prominent politicians from the region such as Senator Mitch McConnell. This marriage of interests — particularly considering the KCA is

dominantly an organization of coal *operators* and not coal miners (KCA 2019a) — suggests even as coal extraction as an industry wanes, the power of elite interests who profit from coal extraction’s continued presence in the region is still prominent.

Some of the manipulation of space and place through myth-making is evidence of the strength of coal companies in the early to mid 20th Century and the continued influence of coal companies socially. As discussed in Chapter 2, coal companies strategically aligned themselves with miners in the aftermath of labor uprisings in the early 20th Century, working to ensure their own survival in the region. In many ways they succeeded, primarily in attaching the livelihood of the coal industry with the livelihood of coal miners. Operationally, this linking of interests has manifested in multiple ways in the present day. As Gaventa (2018) discussed in his recent work, this linking has served to supplant the working class of the region into relative hopelessness and inaction where the companies are concerned, asserting ‘company land’ is an untouchable distinction of land that is impossible to challenge (100).

In short, an attack on coal extraction — or support for anything the KCA and its others deems as ‘anti-coal’ — places the offender squarely in the role of being ‘foreign’ – a stranger to the region and an enemy to be thwarted. Through the power of the ‘War on Coal’ myth to connect clean power policies to the decline of the coal industry despite other aspects that more explicitly contributed to its decline, elite coal interests maintain a chokehold on the power geography in the region. This manipulation of place and identity to serve political interests further informs the complexity surrounding coal in post-extraction, suggesting some power structures more than others have successfully embedded themselves in Appalachian identity and sense of place for some. For instance, organizations like the KCA use powerful imagery of identity to connect coal mining and support of the coal industry as distinctly

inherent to being Kentuckian or Appalachian (KCA 2019a). While I do not suggest the ‘War on Coal’ and its proponents are only to blame for the difficult relationship between Central Appalachia and environmentally-friendly conceptions of development, the myth does play an active role in what development professionals in the region see as solutions to Appalachia’s economic hardships.

A further addition to the difficult relationship between coal and climate change is exhibited in recent solar energy activism, culminating for many in events surrounding a pilot solar project that will be launched in in the field-site. The solar project is a collaboration between many political and corporate interests in the region, being primarily funded by the Toyota automobile manufacturing company. The project claims it will create around 200 contract positions and 50 permanent jobs and is framed in very specific industrial goals – making Eastern Kentucky a viable location for corporations such as “Apple, Amazon and Facebook, Google” to invest in (WSAZ 3 News 2019). While the project may sound like a positive shift towards more environmentally-friendly economic options for Appalachia, the project’s announcement coincides with another solar-related political move that calls this positivity into question.

During the 2019 General Assembly, the Kentucky state legislature passed what is known as a ‘net-metering’ bill which would restrict the incentives of solar use for individuals. Roughly speaking, the bill – which passed both legislative houses – would restrict the credit homeowners with solar panels receive for fueling energy back onto the power grid (Cheves and Deroschers 2019). By considering the new corporate solar project in tandem with the net-metering bill, an eerily familiar situation arises. The control of the benefits of solar likens to the turn-of-the century speculation for coal where knowledge gaps and gaps in the ability to control capital separated people into groups able to take advantage of the product and those

unable to. In short, though the energy process may have changed from coal to solar, corporate structures and the legal reinforcement of unequal benefits for energy generation threaten to jeopardize the positive aspects solar energy could have for Central Appalachia as a whole.

The precarious possibilities around solar transition in Kentucky are not unknown in the state and region though, as organizations seek to ensure a more just energy future for all. KFTC and MACED among others have actively been organizing for ‘just transition’ processes to ensure that economic transition benefits are not organized along existing unequal power geographies (KFTC 2019; MACED 2019). The bill cited above is only one example of how existing power dynamics in the region threaten to replicate the unjust organization of power from the coal industry. However, it represents a further issue between coal and climate change in that energy transition may not be so easily solved by a simple transition from coal to solar production or any combination of renewables because the social embeddedness of the coal industry remains and very well could be repurposed.

Thus, these tensions around climate change and coal in Central Appalachia serve to highlight how the politics of place are firmly embedded in the post-extractive moment and complicate how elites and nonelites interact with development visions. Whether via early 20th Century social integration efforts or via more recent use of political myth through the ‘War on Coal’, coal operators have been successful in linking themselves to coal miners’ and linking the identity of Appalachia to the continued extraction of coal. Further, the embedded social hierarchies of energy production threaten to potentially repurpose environmentalists’ activism into another corporate and extractive arrangement for Central Appalachia.

Above all else, one must resist reductive tendencies to simplify the actions of the interlocutors as ‘false consciousness’, ignorance, or any combination of normatively negative applications with reference to climate change. This reductive approach muddies the

intellectual waters and prevents one from intimately exploring the power relations and the calculated, reasoned actions of elites and nonelites in Central Appalachia. Further, a reductive perspective ignores the power of myth-making as a political tool and the embedded power structures that threaten to persist even as coal declines.

It is against this backdrop of place-informed perspectives on coal, development vision, and climate change that I proceed to discuss power and place in the post-extractive moment. As has been alluded to in this chapter heavily, a discussion about the post-extractive moment's explicit effect on geographies of power is necessary. Changes to political associations and the decline of capital in the region affects the power dynamics, and these effects will be further explored through a smaller case of disagreement and political upheaval in one of the communities in the field-site, Elkhorn City, Kentucky. Evidence of power imbalances and contradictions between development professionals, activists, and locals alike are prominent in this case, and thus Chapter 4 will seek to draw together these complex, sometimes contradictory experiences into a coherent understanding of power in the post-extractive moment in Central Appalachia.

CHAPTER 4: 'PLACE' AND POWER IN THE POST-EXTRACTIVE MOMENT

In the previous chapters, Central Appalachia's social history and the local experiential knowledge of individuals — both elite and nonelite — have been discussed to consider the experiential qualities of post-extraction. I will now pivot slightly to explicitly consider the power dynamics of Central Appalachia and how the post-extractive moment is informed by them. In the following sections, I will discuss how power is experienced via the conceptual mechanism of Gaventa's (2018) powercube as discussed previously in Chapter 1. From this mechanism I will then consider the shifting elite dynamics in the post-extractive moment, as well as how visions for development contest one another. Finally, this section will conclude with a brief discussion about how post-extraction is disrupting the existing power geographies of the region and reasons for increasingly active local civic participation.

Space, participation, and shifting elite dynamics

Briefly, I will return to Gaventa's powercube concept (Figure 1.1) and consider how it can illuminate certain aspects of the Central Appalachian case study here. Gaventa's transition from his earlier work — which considered a somewhat simplified version of the powercube notably shifts the conversation of power to include not only *how* power is expressed and distributed, but also *where* it is accessed both in terms of literal spatial access (closed, invited, and claimed or create) and levels (local, national, and global) of access. For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus more on the 'spaces of participation' to consider how place and power communicate within the Central Appalachian context.

As has been discussed in previous chapters, a single location can contain many different places. I would like to now extend this to say a location can contain many different *spaces* as well. Some of these spaces may be accessible, others may be inaccessible or limited access, and the nature of access can and does change between groups who may live in the

same location, but experience a different place. For Gaventa (2018), a single place can contain “many different types of spaces that affect the nature of people’s participation”. He goes on to note space and power are inextricably linked in that spaces construct differing power landscapes for people and are chiefly informed by the power dynamics that create them. To illustrate, Gaventa discusses a rural village and states if a woman from that village went to the World Bank, she may feel powerless, but also sending a World Bank operative to the village and “[surrounding] him with the highly organized village women” may also in turn make the operative feel powerless. In this way, Gaventa makes a claim saying, “power isn’t inherent in a person...[instead power] is related to the spaces in which people operate” (101). The spatial component to power is vital to the further discussion of power and place in Central Appalachia, as we can explore further through the experiences of the participants of this study.

First, to consider how spaces and elites’ senses of place interact with power and the development vision of Appalachia, we must consider how spaces function and operate in the Appalachian context. Gaventa (2018) defines ‘spaces’ as being one of three categories: ‘closed’ or ‘uninvited’; ‘invited’; and ‘claimed’ or ‘created’. These three types of spaces also denote certain types of interaction through the constructive power of them. While ‘closed’ and ‘claimed’ spaces are rather self-explanatory and were primarily discussed in Chapter 1, the ‘invited’ space is of more relevance now and requires a more nuanced conversation of how power defines these spaces. The ‘invited’ space by virtue of ‘invitation’ imbues the space with power and hierarchy as one must be the inviter and one must be the invitee. By being in the latter category, you are already beholden to the power of the inviter in some way.

Some seemingly ‘open’ spaces may fall into this category, invoking power dynamics that are hidden from view almost entirely. For instance, SOAR hosts a regional summit

annually, aimed at encouraging the attendance and participation of people from the Central Appalachian region who are passionate about improving Appalachia and shaping her future. The summit was described by Mr. Arnett as “innovative” and including high-tech equipment akin to any large urban conference, also saying it’s primarily a “showcase [of] all the awesome stuff that’s going on” in the region (Interview 4). The program itself feels both professional and explicitly connected to the mountains in that it balances quality presentations from members of the community with folk music, picturesque views of the region, and stories of success and ‘innovation’ from the area (SOAR 2018). The invitation is open and hosted annually on the organization’s public website for anyone to attend who wishes to (SOAR 2019). Generally, the summit looks and feels distinctly Appalachian as it evokes key images and traditions of the region that many would feel connected to while also pairing the more ‘traditional’ cultural elements with futuristic talks of innovation and technology. Mr. Arnett discussed its growth from 2013 into the present and stated the summit and SOAR as a whole has been designed to “create a space” for Appalachians to discuss the region’s future (Interview 4). While the sincerity and the passion of Mr. Arnett about the project was evident, the question remains about the type of space it has become and how the space is experienced.

In any space there are power dynamics at play and the SOAR Summit is no different. Over fifteen hundred people attended the first summit, according to Mr. Arnett, which suggests the summit or something akin to it was desired by the community. However, the question remains as to who was in attendance, and what sort of space SOAR maintains. Mr. Arnett himself was the CEO of the local chamber of commerce²⁹ and shifted to organizing

²⁹ ‘Chamber of commerce’ refers to a local organization that acts as an organizer of business interests in the area. The state of Kentucky has statewide and local chapters. Both state and local chapters are fueled by membership and typically lobby for legislation to advance the general business interests of their members. Typically, both the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and the local chambers are seen as focusing heavily on industrial and corporate recruitment as development strategies. For more see

SOAR during its early days. Mr. Arnett's background paired with his emphasis on industrial recruitment and the 'apolitical' nature of SOAR provides some context to the space that the SOAR Summit is (Interview 4). Further, general conversations about SOAR in the community yield mixed reviews, as some feel it is a "waste of time" while others support it as a necessary and long overdue reclaiming of Appalachia's future.³⁰ Despite the independence of SOAR as an organization, its beginnings were inherently political and its leadership dominantly from the business sector. This is not inherently good or bad, but one must recognize the certain power dynamics organizations bring with them when they design or create spaces like the SOAR Summit and SOAR itself.

This consideration of the SOAR Summit and the space it maintains simply serves to highlight some of the complexities of space-making. 'Invited' spaces can sometimes seem open, egalitarian, and devoid of politics or power dynamics, but this is a naive assumption reminiscent of the 'development' spaces contested by Sachs (1998; 2010) and others – which was discussed in Chapter 1. Gaventa (2018) also highlights this in his discussion on space, suggesting power and political arrangements organize spaces just as much when they are 'invited' as when they are 'closed'. While I define the summit as 'invited' on one level by virtue of the wide, but still formal invitation and registration structure, there are certain aspects that could be seen as 'created' when one thinks about the summit with reference to other levels of power such as national. Gaventa (2018) defines the 'claimed' space as one where "people come together on their own terms" (102). Is this not how the SOAR Summit seems to operate as well — defying certain aspects of the general Appalachian narrative of deficiency, ignorance, and incapability?

In a national sense, perhaps this is true. Again, the powercube's framework is useful

<https://www.kychamber.com/>

³⁰ Author's observations, August 2018-September 2018.

here to analyze the differing positions of the SOAR Summit with reference to the state of Kentucky as well as the US overall. In some ways, the summit can be seen as a general response to the perpetuation of certain narratives about Appalachia in the mainstream. This would be a valid consideration of the summit, particularly when recognizing Mr. Arnett himself described the effort of the summit and SOAR overall as “changing the narrative” about Appalachia and developing a primarily economic plan for the future of the region (Interview 4). Yet still, within the state, the summit itself is constructed by individuals with particular worldviews and particular development visions that are reflected in the programming and organizing of it. There is not enough data to make claims about how SOAR is experienced for everyone who attends – less even so for those who don’t attend for a variety of reasons – but the assertion that spaces can function in varying ways that both enable and disable individuals to action remains. In this way, one can see that how spaces are experienced can differ greatly depending on other factors at play.

SOAR is only a single example of this complexity, and I will turn to more general accounts now to further consider the linkages and discrepancies in the region. Representative Angie Hatton, another participant in the study and local legislative representative for some of the area in the field-site, highlighted these complexities in her own account of development in the region. In her interview she recounted how the economic decline of the region has forged partnerships amongst people in these communities who would perhaps not typically work with one another (Interview 5). This notion of collaboration between typically non-collaborating forces also signals a shift in power dynamics and overall disruption of the social arrangements and spaces in Central Appalachia. This concept of disruption in the post-extractive moment will be explored further throughout this chapter, but is worth considering for a brief moment now with reference to space, elites, and power in the region.

Amongst the elites cited here, a sense of tension and collaboration forms and reflects some of the more general anxieties in the region at present. Questions of motivation permeate the conversation as accounts from Ms. Brashear who focused on just transition and environmental stewardship implicitly battled accounts from Mr. Arnett about the importance of a diversified industrial economy. These tensions are quite real and permeating, and in between them are a plethora of nonelite voices that are either silent or expect elites to speak on their behalf where they do not have the privilege to.

When considering the elite accounts and the relative power of them, one must keep in mind while local elites cannot speak *for* local nonelites, they do reflect certain broad mindsets about the region. All of the elites encountered in this study are locals in their own right, many of whom were raised in the communities where they work now. Because of this, the local elites in this context navigate an interesting space of their own in that they have certain powers to create or maintain ‘invited’ spaces — as well as protect or dismantle ‘claimed’ or ‘created’ ones. Further, they can relate to community members in certain ways that can blur or distort the appearance of hierarchies of power. This relational aspect of local elites — who can operate much more closely with communities and enjoy a certain amount of trust — cannot be overlooked in considering the process of space-making and elite power in the region either.

Gaventa’s concept of the spatial aspects of power paired with the experiential evidence of shifting spaces in Central Appalachia forces one to consider more concretely how elite power functions in the region now. At one point in time, historically, the power consolidation in the region was concrete, brutal, and created such vast differentials that no voice other than coal companies and their local middlemen could be heard. As examined in Chapter 2, the extensive reach of that power made it difficult or impossible for any type of

dissent and over time degraded the appetite for outspoken resistance against such consolidated power. Much of this power was supported by the unequal economic power of coal companies, creating an elite class that was so economically far above the working class and working poor that no ‘invited’ or collaborative spaces needed to exist.

In the present day, the decline of coal has, as Rep. Hatton stated, perhaps been a “blessing in disguise” (Interview 5). Elites in the region are no longer so disproportionately in the pocket of a single industry, nor is the option of another monolithic industry available at present, and thus the need for collaboration is apparent in the region. Forced as it may seem at times, the collaboration of elites from vastly different backgrounds could have positive effects on the long-term status of the region. This is of course not to discount the difficulties in designing truly inclusive spaces however — and as the case of the SOAR Summit shows, this is a difficult process to undertake. This is particularly true when visions for development are vastly different and oftentimes invoke the anxieties of the future of the coal industry and what a 21st Century Appalachia should look like. In this next section I will consider these tensions more through the case of Elkhorn City — located in Pike County, Kentucky — and how the differing and dissenting voices of the community show the deeper and more complex issues of development vision in the post-extractive moment.

Power struggles over place and purpose: embattled visions of development

Located right on the Kentucky-Virginia state border, right in the heart of Appalachian coal country sits a tiny town called Elkhorn City, Kentucky. It’s located in the furthest reaches of Pike County, far enough from the county’s main city of Pikeville to feel as though the world of bustling highway traffic and rows of big box stores are a million miles away. The town is home to just over a thousand people (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). For all intents

and purposes, Elkhorn City is an average, sleepy little mountain town, home to a hardware store, a law office, a drug store and a winding highway that runs the length of the town — a true ‘if you blink, you’ll miss it’ kind of town. Despite its humble existence, Elkhorn City is playing host to one of the most intriguing confluences of history, place, space, and power in the region currently.

Running through the heart of Elkhorn City is the Russell Fork, a deceptively unassuming stream that is part of the larger Big Sandy River system. The Russell Fork is, however, home to some of the most challenging whitewater rapids in the United States when regular releases of the nearby dam in the fall create intense rapids for only the most skilled of kayakers and water-sports enthusiasts. The importance of the river for the city is so integral that plans for a whitewater park have been in discussion for the town (Interview 9). As the Russell Fork area has become a destination for such enthusiasts, a festival originally called the ‘Bluegrass Wildwater Association Fall Party’ but now known as the ‘Russell Fork Rendezvous’ began to celebrate the annual release of the dam. Since 1994, kayakers, paddlers, and general outdoors enthusiasts sought out the Russell Fork and the wonders of the Breaks Canyon annually (Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife 2019; Russell Fork Rendezvous 2019). Needless to say, this event brought large amounts of tourists — and with them decent influxes of cash — into Elkhorn City’s modest local businesses and created a relatively regular annual revenue stream.

Until 2017, the Russell Fork Rendezvous enjoyed being hosted by Elkhorn City for a number of years, providing a bright economic spot against an otherwise bleak picture with the decline of coal. However, in 2017 actions taken by local elected leadership changed how the Rendezvous would operate in the coming years. In October 2017, the last time the event was held in Elkhorn City, festival organizers accounted harassment and general aggression

towards the festival attendees from local law enforcement that forced the festival to close early. The main organizer, Mr. Bob Larkin, said the event, which usually enjoys a relaxed and peaceful atmosphere with minimal encounters with law enforcement was tense and eventually shut down on the basis of noise complaints (Little 2017). The early closure of the festival and tension between local festival organizers and local political leadership would prove the least of Elkhorn City's worries in the coming weeks.

Weeks later at the local council meeting for Elkhorn City, concerned local citizens spoke up about the treatment of festival goers by the local law enforcement and political leadership. The controversy about the Rendezvous and treatment of festival attendees drove the festival out of Elkhorn City for 2018 and back across the state border into Virginia. This also led to another event of national interest to locate elsewhere — consequently driving away revenue for the town. Tensions were high with local elected officials and law enforcement claiming noise ordinances and threats to public safety as reasons for the intervention, while local residents and festival attendees challenged these claims on the basis of no legal standing and the dubious nature of the threats (Forbes 2017).

Perhaps most damaging about the actions taken by local political leadership is the fact the city has lost considerable tourism revenue due to the differences in vision and lack of collaboration between the citizens and the city leadership. Distrust of local elected officials is also present in these accounts, as shown by the legal challenges put forth by Mr. Tim Belcher, a local attorney, who challenged the authority of the mayor to shut down the event on the basis of noise ordinance compliance (Forbes 2017). Further, in other more informal discussions with people from the area, the mayor had been known to be antagonistic towards adventure tourists, making claims he didn't want 'those kind of people' in his town.³¹ The

³¹ Author's observations, August 2018-September 2018.

mayor has also made evident his priorities lie in the industrial park and business recruitment for the city instead of in adventure tourism (Forbes 2018; Frost 2017). Mostly, these intense and conflicting accounts within Elkhorn City give rise to a more complex and underlying conversation about conflicting development visions and power in the mountains.

The people of Elkhorn City give a different vision of development than the mayor, often combatting the idea industrial recruitment will save Elkhorn City. Many active members of the community have pursued development visions around the river that would protect it and enhance its role in the community – breathing life into the city overall (Interview 7, 9, 10). Mr. Scott Sykes, a local resident of Elkhorn City, talks about the fallout from the 2017 Russell Fork Rendezvous saying “there are two philosophies for economic development [in the area]...[one] is that we will have industry coming into the industrial park and someone will be coming in on a white horse to save our broke city”, referencing the conventional wisdom coal will be replaced by an equally large industry that will fulfill all or most of the jobs lost in the decline of coal (Forbes 2018). Juxtaposing the concept of corporate saviorism with the active involvement of a dissenting group who support adventure tourism and other local means of development offers a rich backdrop to consider how sense of place can affect how individuals approach development.

Despite the struggles with local leadership and the combative responses from some, a group of locals in Elkhorn City are committed to seeing their town not only survive the decline of coal, but thrive. Mr. Scott Sykes, Ms. Amy Brashears, and Mr. Steven Ruth are amongst some of the most outspoken voices in the community about Elkhorn City’s future, in tandem with Mr. Belcher. While Mr. Sykes and Mr. Ruth are both natives to the Elkhorn City area, Ms. Brashears is someone who moved to Elkhorn City from a nearby county, expressly for the outdoor living and adventure aspects of the town (Interview 8). Recurrent in accounts

from concerned citizens intent on improving the city's social and economic future via centering the river's role and outdoor tourism in the community plans is the fierce pushback felt from local politicians (Interviews 7, 8, 9, 10). Mr. Ruth has explicitly discussed this, saying in response to low-cost plans for the whitewater park on the river and other enhancements to the natural river features, politicians struggle

to get their head around something that doesn't cost a lot of money, that is naturally done. [The politicians] can only see big projects. I once had a congressman tell me 'If you're not spending \$10 million, nobody will even talk to you'...they can't see that you can do something little to have a huge impact. They can't see that you can spend \$1 million and make \$30 million. They'd rather see you spend \$30 million and lose it all. Because that \$30 million went to somebody, somebody's getting paid. And that's all [the politicians] care about (Interview 9).

In this way, the embattled visions for development emerging from disagreement and tension between local citizen activists and local political leadership reflects deeper historical struggles around corporate involvement in communities. Further, the disagreement about what 'development' should look like is explicitly apparent here — whether it is a series of small, highly profitable projects or large capital-heavy projects that require large amounts of cash and technical expertise to fulfill. This again is a parallel to technical development responses in the 'developing' world, mirroring the criticism of Ferguson (1994) and others about the highly technical, capital-intensive plans that often drive 'developing' nations further into debt when sometimes simpler and more locally situated responses are more appropriate.

The darker side of politics at play in Elkhorn City and Central Appalachia as a whole is an undercurrent that is integral to understanding the post-extractive moment and plans for transition. As a lawyer and one of the outspoken concerned citizens of the town, Mr. Belcher recalls the darker side of political obstacles to preservation of the river and adventure tourism. In his words, there are development plans for Elkhorn City that center the river in

the growth and longevity of the community, but these plans have met local, state, and national opposition. For Mr. Belcher, this is because leaders such as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell — one of Kentucky’s senators and likely the most powerful politician in the state — are “bought off by the coal industry” and prevent plans and initiatives that would protect the river over the interests of the coal industry in the region (Interview 7). The tensions of development planning and political power are evident here, and suggest some key issues that permeate discussions of Appalachia’s future after coal.

Even during a time when coal production is on the decline with no show of revival in sight, politicians who profit from coal’s dark power in the region serve as formidable opponents. While the optimism evident in some of the interlocutor’s responses offers a more hopeful view of the future for Appalachia and post-extractive development, the coal industry’s power is still a force to be reckoned with in the region. Elkhorn City is a prime case of this — a city with concrete and economically sound alternatives for development beyond coal that are being thwarted continuously by power in the hands of an elite few. The sovereignty of these communities is also compromised, suggesting that all they can do is wait “until [coal] is dead”, as Mr. Belcher put it. In many ways, Elkhorn City’s local struggle invokes many of the key themes within the post-extractive moment in Appalachia at-large, suggesting a complex network of political and economic interests, local organizing, and place-based notions of development that inform the various parties.

In short, Elkhorn City as a place is one of ancient and unmatched beauty, but also one that continues to feel the claws of the coal industry today. During my visit to the city, I sat along a county road and gathered my notes after an informal conversation and proceeded to witness no less than half a dozen coal trucks passing through the center of the city in just a half hour. The coal trucks were nearly the only traffic that I had seen that entire morning, and

served as a stark reminder: even in the wake of coal's decline and passionate local visions for the future, conceptions of what that future would look like were embattled against the historic power of the coal industry and its proponents who would squeeze the region of every last dollar and haulage of coal available before yielding.

Changing power geographies: post-extraction as a disruptive force

Referencing the history of power in the region discussed in Chapter 2, the presence of coal and the coal industry not only solidified economic means in the hands of a few, but also created strong social institutions that collected power in these hands as well. Gaventa (1980, 2018) discusses this, directly considering how coal companies manipulated local working-class people in the third 'invisible' dimension of power. The historical struggles of unions and anti-capitalist movements also inform this vision, highlighting the power of the coal companies in the region to discourage resistance. The variable profitability of the coal industry over time engages with this trajectory of resistance in Central Appalachia, as the profitability of extraction directly influenced the ability of workers to resist — in times of high demand and lower available labor, workers had more power to negotiate while in times of lower demand and higher available labor, the negotiating power dwindled. However, as the majority of the capital from the coal industry has left the region, these power dynamics show evidence of renegotiating the terms of engagement, allowing for new and reborn methods of change in the region.

State Representative Angie Hatton discusses this with reference to how she sees the region changing today. As a local who was born and raised in Eastern Kentucky, left for post-secondary education, and then returned, Rep. Hatton's comments strike some clarity to the clear shifts in power that are happening at present. She says that "the citizens are becoming

the local officials. It's more grassroots, younger people, women, and it's young professionals that have started moving back to the area" (Interview 5). While this distinction may seem subtle, Rep. Hatton recognized that there was something different about the engagement now more than ever.

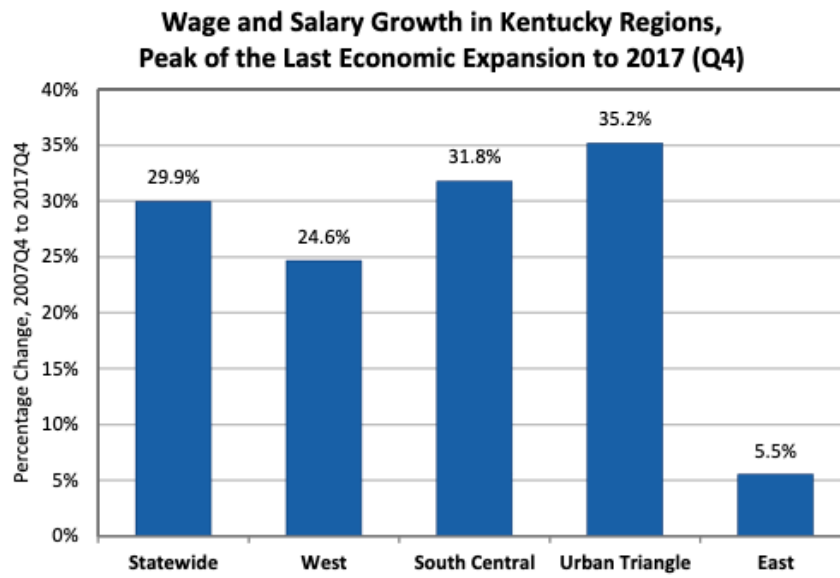
This reflects a general attitude from the participants of hope and change as well as collaboration. Rep Hatton among other participants recognized the need for collaboration and often collaboration between groups that may not have typically worked together (Interviews 5, 6). For example, Rep. Hatton discussed one of the newer efforts in the area, Sugarcamp Mountain Trails, as a collaboration between citizens and local leaders alike to help transform trails in Floyd County, Kentucky into world-class mountain bike trails for recreational and adventure tourism (Interview 5, "Sugarcamp Mountain Trails"). These collaborations signal a shift in priorities and efforts of local stakeholders in a concrete way, also suggesting a shift in the power geographies of these development discussions.

However, this point is not intended to simplify the struggles between said groups either, as discussed with regards to Elkhorn City's social and political struggles at present. Politicians who support the coal industry as well as other capital-heavy projects still have power in the region – as evidenced by the struggles around climate change policy and the 'War on Coal' myth discussed in Chapter 3. This power is located mostly in the form of setting development agendas as well as silencing discussion evidenced both in interviews used in this study as well as the difficulty in accessing local nonelite responses who cited fear of retribution politically and socially as reasons not to participate³² (Interviews 2, 7, 9, 10). Further, some of the tension between those focused on industrial recruitment and those focused on just transition remains (Interviews 3, 4, 6) – and existing unequal power dynamics

³² Author's observations, August 2018-September 2018.

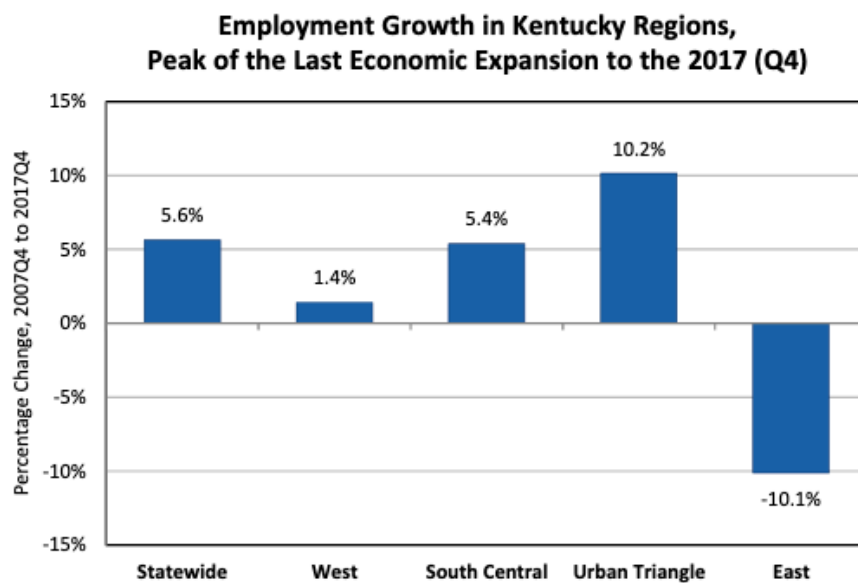
threaten to be repurposed in the post-extractive moment as the vocations of elites may change but not the power they hold over nonelites. However, a conversation seems to be happening, and fruitfully in some places. Rep. Hatton articulated this by saying that the dire economic straits from the decline of coal “caused people to have to work together, out of necessity — we don’t have any choice. The ones of us who are staying, who refuse to move and want to try to save [Eastern Kentucky] are being forced to work together” (Interview 5). Thus, the combination of a vacuum of options left by the coal industry as well as active local individuals who refuse to leave has cultivated an intriguing environment for shifting power relations in the area.

In this way, we can once again consider how place shapes the post-extractive moment. If one ignores place and its effect on people’s actions, the choice to stay in the Central Appalachian region makes little sense. As I have discussed in previous chapters and further shown in the following figures highlighting characteristics of Appalachian (East) Kentucky, economic realities are harsh for those who live in the region. Wage and salary growth is not competitive (Figure 4.1), employment opportunities are decreasing (Figure 4.2) and the general economic health of the community is in distress (Figure 4.3).



Source: Author's calculations using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (private, all industries, all sizes). See glossary for map of Kentucky regions by county.

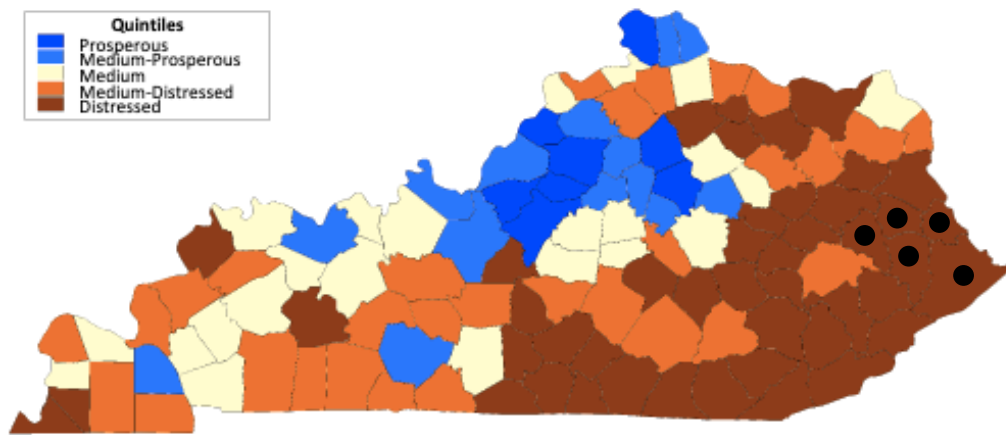
Figure 4.1: Wage and Salary growth from 2007 to 2017, (Minier *et al* 2019)



Source: Author's calculations using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (private, all industries, all sizes). See glossary for map of Kentucky regions by county.

Figure 4.2: Employment growth from 2007 to 2017, (Minier *et al* 2019)

Distressed Communities Index by Kentucky County, 2017



Source: Distressed Communities Index (DCI), Economic Innovation Group, www.eig.org

Figure 4.3: County economic distress levels³³ emphasis added to denote field-site, (Minier *et al* 2019)

Given all of the reasons that staying in the region seems irrational in an economic sense, one must consider why both in the participants whom are quoted in this paper as well as other locals decide to stay. Implicit in all of the conversations quoted in this paper, and explicit in some cases, is the importance of Central Appalachia to the identity of the participants. Most, if not all of the participants have experienced and pursued life outside of the region, only to actively choose to return to Appalachia or locate their work life there.

As a result, post-extraction has made for ‘strange bedfellows’ in the communities, bringing together groups that previously struggled to work together on the basis of their commitment to the community. In this way, the power landscape in Central Appalachia has

³³ The methodology determining distress levels focuses on these factors: “high school diploma attainment; housing vacancy rate; adults not working; poverty rate; median income; change in employment from 2011 to 2015; and the change in business establishments over the same time period” (Minier *et al* 2019, 49).

been altered, and while some remnants of inequality and power differentials remain, the balance appears to be shifting. Recognition of the importance of prioritizing Central Appalachia's natural beauty is becoming more prominent, and transition plans that not only incorporate but celebrate Appalachia's natural spaces are spreading (Adams 2019; Interviews 5, 7, 9, 10). Further, this signals a potential shift in the spatial aspects of power with reference to Gaventa's powercube, and shows that in some ways power differentials may be creating and revising spaces that are less forgiving of the coal industry and more intent on celebrating other visions of development. Thus, the continuing decline of the coal industry and its historical power in the region has produced fertile ground for transition to a diversified and just economy. However, this transition is not guaranteed, and while the disruptive nature of post-extraction has provided an opportunity, the difficulties of navigating the post-extractive moment remain.

As observed in the case of Elkhorn City and comments from other participants, concerns about what transition in Central Appalachia should look like in the region are prominent. Ms. Brashear of MACED highlighted these struggles at the heart of her comments, echoing general anxieties about land reclamation,³⁴ just redevelopment, and encouraging an economy that gives more than it takes from Appalachia's residents (Interview 3). The disembedding of the coal industry in Appalachia has produced new opportunities in the region and created spaces for creative economic solutions such as remote technology and coding jobs that have retrained and repurposed a small number of unemployed persons in the region (Interview 4; SOAR 2019). However, disagreements about the importance of the environment, differing political interests, and the continued power of some embedded

³⁴ Land reclamation refers to the clean-up and rehabilitation of formerly mined lands — typically lands mined by mountain top removal practices or strip-mining — for future use. Land reclamation is a key component of just transition defined by organizations in the area. For more information on land reclamation and the status of reclamation efforts in the region, refer to Citizens Coal Council (2019).

politicians in the region threatens to maintain unequal power and extractive economic arrangements. In other words, as the gravitational pull of the coal industry wanes, there remains a certain amount of racing to ‘discover’ the next industry or collection of industries to replace it — and with that comes staunch and impassioned disagreement about what the future of the region should look like.

Regardless of these trends, however, the post-extractive moment poses a particular challenge and opportunity for Appalachia. As can be seen in this chapter and Chapter 3, place, power, and the social landscape of Appalachia is shaping the post-extractive moment — as well as the post-extractive moment shaping Appalachia in turn. This shifting of conversations, dialogues, and even norms in some cases provides evidence that the post-extractive moment is disrupting Appalachian place, identity, and power dynamics in a way not observed in recent years. The complexity of this moment in the mountains cannot be overstated, but the essential tenets of social change and reorganization suggest that if anything, the post-extractive moment is one that *can* disrupt old, unjust institutions and reshape new ones.

‘LET A BLESSING COME’: CONCLUDING REMARKS FROM THE APPALACHIAN CASE STUDY

no crops grow
when dense clay dirt
packed solid
defies all manmade
intent to destroy
let a blessing come here

-bell hooks, excerpt from ‘11.’ in *Appalachian Elegy* (2014)

Though the research here is certainly not an exhaustive study of the complex social, political, and economic situation that is the post-extractive moment in Central Appalachia, it offers a nuanced and interrogative look into some of the main tensions in the region at present. I will briefly recount these arguments and observations here, reviewing the key takeaways of this study. I will then transition to considering a greater question with reference to the study at-large — *so what?* As briefly discussed in the introductory chapter, the choice of a case study in the United States for an international development thesis may seem unorthodox. However, I will discuss the potential impact of a study of this nature via the lens of post-development, as well as draw some conclusions and further questions that have been introduced by this work.

Place, power, and geographies of transition: an Appalachian transition story

History and context informs the material, and Central Appalachia is no different in this way. In fact, the main theme of this thesis could be summed up in highlighting just how ordinary Appalachia is in terms of its struggles of power and transition. The ‘difference’ narrative and ‘symbolic Othering’ that sets Appalachia apart from the rest of the US is something that many scholars and authors have grappled with in the written history of the region, as well as has been discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, thus I will not go too far in

depth there now³⁵. However, it is important to note that this study at its very core seeks not to flatten or homogenize the experiences of the participants into a single Appalachian narrative, but to highlight, emphasize, and embrace the complexities of the many narratives of experience in the region at present.

Organizing these narratives in the greater fabric of Appalachian history is not only useful but necessary to understand the trajectories of power, oppression, and resistance that inform Appalachia today. From the original capitalist encounter at the turn of the 20th Century into the present, histories of exclusion, exploitation, and manipulation scatter the literal and figurative landscape of the region. As described in detail in Chapter 2, Appalachia's coal history is of key importance to understanding her current struggle. The monopoly of power that coal companies had over the region continues into the present in some ways and also sets the general tone for current conversations of economic transition. By exploring how coal companies and other capitalists manipulated and changed the social fabric of Appalachia, we can see how the region was at best experiencing a partially beneficial, partially hostile occupation of the lands or at worst, experiencing hostile social and cultural occupation that draws similarities with colonization practices occurring in the rest of the world at that time³⁶.

Regardless of whether one believes the strong or weak version of the capitalist encounter in Appalachia, the lasting effects of that moment can be traced to the present day. In defining the current time period in Central Appalachia as 'post-extractive', I seek to delineate a distinct but permeable time in her history as the region moves away from coal extraction as the primary economic mode — indeed this shift has already occurred in that mining no longer comprises the bulk of Central Appalachia's economy and service and health

³⁵ See Catte (2018), Reid and Taylor (2010) and Eller (2008) for more.

³⁶ See Lewis (1978) for more.

industries are growing every year (Minier *et al* 2019). The coal industry has been in steep decline since long before the current moment, though how people living in the region react to the decline of coal varies and suggests that coal is more than simply an industry — it is an entity that also defines social arrangements and experiences of place in the region.

Despite the coal industry making up only a small percentage of Central Appalachia's economy at present, the role of coal in the modern narratives of what it means to be Appalachian is highly present. Even those who take more aggressive stances against the coal industry recognize the importance of coal in Appalachia's history. The nuance in how interlocutors refer to coal and coal miners suggests that regardless of the steep and continued decline of the industry, its role in the social arrangement of Appalachia and how Appalachia sees herself is prominent. The difficulty for coal dialogues to evolve is evidenced through the discussion of coal and climate change in Chapter 3, showing that powerful coal interests still maintain coal extraction's connection to Appalachian place and identity in many ways.

The differing attitudes on coal represent larger differences in development visions for the post-extractive moment in Appalachia. While some of the elites thus far hesitate to openly take what could be seen as 'anti-coal' stances,³⁷ others embrace the emerging narrative of cleanup, reclamation, and progress beyond Appalachia's extractive and destructive encounter with coal. While some interlocutors described this dichotomy as existing currently in Appalachia, others saw this dichotomy weakening and more diverse approaches to

³⁷ The definition of 'anti-coal' is variable and discussed further in Chapter 3 with reference to the KCA and the 'War on Coal.' 'Anti-coal' is often used by special interests such as the KCA and its supporters to denounce policies that emphasize a future beyond coal or ending the current coal production, small as it may be. As described in Chapter 3, the 'anti-coal' vs. 'pro-coal' debate is part of the 'War on Coal' myth primarily introduced by interest groups who were actively supporting coal companies' continued presence in the region. Organizations and individuals who described by these special interest groups as 'anti-coal' will often not describe themselves as such and instead emphasize they are actively promoting a post-extractive future that recognizes the work of coal miners and their histories, protects and supports ex-coal miners and their likely medical needs, and promotes cleanup and reclamation of abandoned mine lands (Interview 3; ACLC 2019a; KFTC 2019; MACED 2019).

development taking hold. As described in Chapter 4, these shifts in perceptions of development and the future of Appalachia suggest that a greater movement of place-based solidarity and revised power geographies is emerging. This further supports the argument that post-extraction is a disruptive moment in that the strength of historical power dynamics informed by the extractive industry — i.e. power monopolies instituted by coal companies in Central Appalachia — weakens over time as the power of the industry weakens.

These conclusions are not to say that this post-extractive moment is necessarily positive in a normative way either. As evidenced by the situation emerging in Elkhorn City, Kentucky in Chapter 4 as well as the tensions surrounding transition to solar energy in Chapter 3, the power of coal companies is waning but there are certain structural power imbalances entrenched in the legal and social codes of these areas. As long as local political representation is unwilling to pursue other forms of development and reinforces unequal power distributions, the region runs the risk of replacing the coal industry with something worse – either fragmented and unstable goods and services industries, another industry or industries that are just as exploitative as coal, or a grand combination of the two. Thus, while the post-extractive moment provides an opportunity for community growth and reallocation of power, the dangers of this situation being taken advantage of by the existing elite class are also quite real.

In short, the post-extractive moment in Central Appalachia brings together many complex social, political, and economic forces in ways that are as of yet not well understood. The relative power of elites to nonelites may be shifting and differing forms of elites may be emerging alongside or in place of capitalists and industrial enthusiasts in the region. However, this fledgling moment must be regarded with caution. Appalachians quoted in this study as well as others encountered during the fieldwork have such diverse conceptions of

both what Appalachia is and is not as well as what Appalachia's future should be that it is impossible to draw a neat conclusion about the next steps the region must take. These conceptions are so interwoven with the experiences of place in Appalachians themselves that it is also negligent to consider Appalachia's dire economic situation without reference and consideration of the grander social history of the region. However, regardless of the fluid nature of this moment in Appalachia's present, the possibilities as described by interlocutors and others from the region alike are defined in terms of hope, pride, narrative reclamation and a sense of ownership over the future.

'Development' and spheres of 'exclusion': lessons from the Appalachian case study

I will now pivot these concluding remarks to more explicitly discuss, after consideration of the Central Appalachian case study, the greater implications of this sort of research for the development studies field as a whole. Development studies has been and continues to be a contested interdisciplinary field comprised of anthropology, geography, social and political history, and more over the years. Owing that the history of development studies is broad and unable to be covered briefly here, I would like to focus primarily on the critiques and ideological concerns of the post-development scholars in brief.

Though not the first to lodge these intellectual concerns and certainly not the last, the class of post-development scholars including Arturo Escobar, James Ferguson, James Scott, Marianne Gronemeyer and more sought to generally challenge some of the taken-for-granted positions of development studies. Knowledge production was chief among these, in that post-development scholars generally challenged the position that in order to develop, certain knowledge must be crafted and encouraged. Further, they also challenged assumptions that this knowledge was produced equitably with the best interests of the community in mind to bring impoverished communities out of poverty into the modern, prosperous global economy

(Esteva 2010; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997; Sachs 2010). Among these criticisms were ones specifically lodged by Ferguson and others about the technocratic organization of ‘development’ (Ferguson 1994). Though post-development writers vary both in terms of ideological focus as well as strong or weak conceptions of ‘development’ as an apparatus,³⁸ the main concept that the goals of growth-centered ‘development’ were no longer convincing as an aspiration for the global community is a unifying theme that maps closely onto the experiences in Central Appalachia.

As referenced in the background and history of the coal struggle and ‘War on Poverty’ in Appalachia, the domestic efforts to ‘develop’ the impoverished regions of the United States coincided with the US’s expansion around the world in the name of progress and anti-poverty measures. The Peace Corps’ foil and domestic twin — VISTA — is a chief example of the domestic face of ‘development’ in the 1960s and beyond. However, beyond VISTA and its contemporaries, the general philosophy about Central Appalachia can serve as a foil of how the ‘developing’ world was discussed and treated by the US and its allies during the height of ‘development’ practice. Similar narratives of moral deficiency, savior mentalities, ahistorical displacement, and more are common in the Appalachian story as discussed in the introduction and Chapter 2, and can be traced within the international development sphere as well. While I recognize that to a certain extent I, too, am essentializing the ‘developing’ world as a singular entity, this is more or less to draw on the parallels between the treatment of the region epistemologically and the treatment of Central Appalachia in the same vein. Though both the ‘developing’ world and Appalachia are large, heterogenous areas with divergent experiences, narratives, and cultural practices within them, both have been operationalized as large blocs in need of intervention who are capable of only

³⁸ A concept originally outlined in Ferguson (1994) but dealt with by other post-development scholars also.

being acted upon instead of actors in and of themselves. For Central Appalachia this is evident in the interviews referenced in this study as interlocutors constantly anchored their experiences within a language of challenging ‘dominant’ narratives and loudly and unapologetically claiming a space where Appalachia is capable of her own future as Ms. Brashear blatantly put, “We can build this ourselves, and we have local assets we can invest in” (Interview 3).

Another nuance to take into account here is the membership of ‘the West’ and the subtle social lines that are drawn around the concept of ‘Western’ society. As discussed in Chapter 2 at length, Appalachia’s history has been one of cultural intervention and assimilation by the wealthier parts of the United States. Here we can see a dynamic emerging that likens Central Appalachia and other socially and economically adjacent regions of the United States — i.e. Native American reservations, South Side Chicago, Flint, Michigan, the Mississippi River Delta region, etc. — to being excluded from the American gospel of prosperity and plenty. In this way, even being located within the ‘West’ is not enough to be ‘Western’ — otherwise Appalachia would be treated differently than she has been historically. From the recent history of Appalachia into the present, the treatment of the region has general been framed in disgust for local traditions and ways of living and a need to ‘civilize’ the region — as evidenced by the accounts on narrative referenced in Chapter 2. This ‘civilizing’ mission parallels the methods of missionaries and later development agents in the ‘developing’ world, suggesting that there is something inherently connected between the two diverse and complex regions. Chiefly, the interconnectedness of capitalist extraction and cultural neoimperialism draws a distinctive thread between Appalachia and the ‘developing’ world that exhibits how areas that flout capitalist, ‘modern’ modes of

production and consumption are seen as in need of intervention — either ‘peacefully’³⁹ via organizations like the Peace Corps and VISTA, or in more aggressive occupational forms.

In the case of Appalachia, the actions of the aid industry in the US suggests that while Appalachia is physically located in the ‘West’, it culturally is not and this is seen as unacceptable. Continued efforts to ‘understand’ and essentialize the region demonstrate this in that the national elite class of journalists, politicians, business leaders, and other elites often refer to Appalachia with the kind of paternalistic intent prevalent in much of the rhetoric regarding the ‘developing’ world.⁴⁰ This paternalism is not a new approach to Appalachia — which has historically seemed to exist at the margins of US society for centuries. This culturally marginal existence has also historically allowed for speculators, capitalists, and later developers to approach Appalachia with a somewhat evangelical purpose, connecting social integration into the ‘civilized’ society of America with the capitalist encounter of exploitation and extraction.⁴¹

Despite popular narratives of ‘including’ Appalachia into the mainstream of American society, Appalachia is already part of the social and economic system of the US and to suggest that the major hindrance to the development of the region — both human and economic — is an exclusion principle is to misunderstand the history of the region itself. Indeed, this harkens to concepts driven by post-development scholars that ‘development’ and its intent to ‘include’ the ‘excluded’ is based on an ahistorical interpretation of flows of capital and resources in the industrialized, globalized world. Narratives about the region seek to place Appalachia in this ahistorical, traditional sense as a region stuck in the past and in

³⁹ ‘Peacefully’ is located in quotes here because the peacefulness of these organizations could be drawn into question when one considers the practices of them. There is not scope for this discussion here, but I recognize this nuance and possibility for further discussion.

⁴⁰ Evidence of this paternal attitude toward the region is available in multiple forms, but Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy* and the account of narrative manipulation in the introduction and Chapter 2 provide a background of these practices with reference to Appalachia.

⁴¹ This is covered more in depth in Chapter 2 in consideration of the history of coal in the region.

need of ‘modernizing’ assistance. This narrative necessarily excludes the systemic and structural mechanisms at work that continue to keep the region in the bottom ranks of development indicators across the board as well as ignores Appalachia’s historical role in the wealth and development of the US at-large. This narrative of Appalachia should once again sound familiar, as much of this ‘modernizing’ approach has been exported for use by the development community globally for decades.

I have sought here to emphasize the similarities between Appalachia and the ‘developing’ world in order to consider more explicitly what use the Appalachian case study is at-large. While differences are vast within both Appalachia and the ‘developing’ world and between them, important similarities in their roles socially with reference to the ‘development apparatus’ are worth noting. These similarities suggest stronger structural barriers to development that span the globe and are transnational in nature. Further, the similarities between the two and the experiences in the Appalachian case study give further credence to the post-development scholars’ work — specifically ‘development’ as control and a reallocation of imperial power.

Place is a process, as Massey (1991) stated, though what happens if similar processes of cultural imperialism and capitalist extraction shape two locations far from one another? It would take far too many liberties to suggest that the challenges faced in Central Appalachia and the mining communities of eastern India or South Africa are precisely the same, however Massey’s theory of global sense of place suggests that certain similarities and thus solidarity could be found between them. In this way, development studies continues to have work to do if it hopes to accurately challenge struggles of poverty globally — which is an admirable and necessary endeavor. However, when anti-poverty rhetoric shields cultural neoimperialism and arbitrarily organizes the world into ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ or researcher and

subject, the admirable quality of development efforts are compromised and the usefulness of ‘development’ organizations and practices comes into question.

Concluding remarks: what’s next?

Overall, the two-fold endeavor of this study was to consider critically the experiences of the post-extractive moment in the Central Appalachian region of the United States, and to consider more acutely what this case study suggests about the study of international development at-large. For Appalachia, ‘placing’ the post-extractive moment serves to highlight critical nuances about the region and how Appalachia views herself. The diversity in responses from local participants of both elite and nonelite backgrounds provides a somewhat limited, but intriguing view into post-extraction. Obviously these accounts are only a portion of the possible responses to post-extraction, but the interlocutors cited here serve as a cross-section of the population and their narratives form an important core of knowledge about the region’s approach to the future. As coal companies and their capital retreat from the region, the traditional loci of power in Central Appalachia diffuses outward. As discussed both earlier in this section and at length in Chapter 4, the reallocation of this power may not necessarily be equitable or just — a fact highlighted and implied in several of the accounts cited in this study — but the possibilities for the region are perhaps more open and fluid than they have been in over a century.

The importance of place, narrative, and power is evident in these accounts – as both a response to the homogenous narratives being exported from the region as well as a long social memory of these narratives of exclusion, deficiency, and need. Appalachia in the present, as described by the field informants, is not thriving but certainly is not in need of pity or paternalism. Instead, frank recognition of structural barriers to development and community-based collaboration were often cited as necessary for a bright future in

Appalachia (Interviews 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10). The interaction between narratives written *about* the region and narratives written *from* the region is integral in the conversation of place and power as well — a fact recognized in that nearly all of the interlocutors referenced their role in development as some form of narrative reclamation practice.

Just prior to the finalization of this thesis, a book was locally published in the region titled *Appalachian Reckoning: A Region Responds to Hillbilly Elegy* (2019). The volume is a collection of edited essays, academic works, poetry, prose, and photographs from the region in response to the flattening narrative put forth by J.D. Vance (2016). *Appalachian Reckoning* can itself be seen as a product of this post-extractive disruption in that Appalachians are once again struggling for control of their narratives and challenging the arrogance of writers like Vance who claim to speak for the region nationally and globally as well (Glancy 2017; Heller 2017). Within Appalachia there has always been hardship and struggle, but also intense pride and an unwillingness to simply let the powerful seize control without a fight. This is evident in the violent labor histories of the region as well as the production of *Appalachian Reckoning* which challenges directly the power imbalances at play in the region. It is the presence of these challenges and the commitment to re-embedding Appalachia's story within the greater fabric of her history that in part defines the post-extractive moment in the region today and gives hope for the future of the region as a whole.

However, it is integral to recognize the post-extractive moment itself is a process ongoing in the region. In Central Appalachia, questions of power, purpose, and vision for the future loom heavily on these communities with very little revenue of their own to leverage for development projects in the region. Efforts are being made by locals in the area to pursue community-led projects, but the question of how power will be reallocated as the coal companies retreat from the region is still vital to Appalachia's long-term survival. The

possibility of replacing coal with an industry or industries just as extractive and exploitative is ever apparent, and must be recognized. Thus, the post-extractive moment in Central Appalachia can be seen as one of hardship, struggle, and instability, but also hope, disruption, and resistance as those who have been acted upon for more than a century seek to claim space as actors themselves.

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2. Interviewee A (development professional, elite), interviewed by author, August 21, 2018.
3. Brashear, Ivy (development professional at MACED, elite), interviewed by author, Lexington, KY, August, 1 2018.
4. Arnett, Jared (development professional at SOAR, elite), interviewed by author, Pikeville, KY, 22 August 2018.
5. Hatton, Angie (local elected official, elite), interviewed by author, Jenkins, KY, August, 22 2018.
6. Curry, Mikaela (community activist, nonelite), interviewed by author, Pikeville, KY, September, 5 2018.

Oral histories accessed via the Elkhorn City River Oral History Project⁴³

7. Belcher, Tim (community activist and local lawyer, elite), interview by Justin Goff. April 11, 2015, Elkhorn City River Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries.
8. Brashears, Amy (community scholar, nonelite), interview by Sarah Abbott. 2015. Elkhorn City River Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries.
9. Ruth, Steven (community activist and former local elected official, elite), interview by

⁴² As necessary, interviewee details have been anonymized to protect the identity of those interviewed

⁴³ These oral histories were collected by the University of Kentucky in 2015 in the Elkhorn City area, which was a primary location of study in the field-site. With the methodological difficulties referenced in the introduction regarding original interview acquisition of community scholars, these interviews are used as needed to support the data collected during fieldwork by the author in 2018. Special thanks to Dr. Shaunna Scott of the University of Kentucky for collecting and archiving these oral histories to preserve the stories of Appalachians for others to use.

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