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INTRODUCTION

AFFECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURES OF POPULIST ENVIRONMENTALISM

A LIVELY POLITICAL GENRE of ecological and climate politics has grown in recent years: populist environmentalism. Rather than advocating individualistic behavioral changes, incremental national or international policy shifts, or radical cells fostering direct action or sabotage, we have seen desires for a mass movement of the people to confront the climate crisis. Consider the student climate strikes of September 2019, inspired by Greta Thunberg but led by a bevy of the youth of the world. Or the push for a transformative Green New Deal, sparked by the savvy politics of the Sunrise Movement and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who says she “first started considering running for Congress, actually, at Standing Rock in North Dakota” (Solnit 2019). Maybe you attended an iteration of the People’s Climate March in New York City or elsewhere in 2014 and 2015, or perhaps earlier cycles of struggle that inspired these, such as the 2010 World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, held in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Indigenous peoples led these marches, youth from small islands and coastal environmental justice communities spoke of the extermination of their places and languages, migrants diagnosed the connections between rising waters and rising border walls. At these events, you might have heard “righteous Left-populist rage about the havoc that corporations and the wealthy have wreaked on our lives” (Aronoff et al. 2019, 178). You might have learned about “people power,” about reclaiming

our institutions, about the theft of our future by corporations, politicians, and the rich (Prakash 2020). At these events, what was at stake was not so much a new definition of nature. It is even possible, as Naomi Klein suggests, that such actions “shouldn’t be referred to as an environmental movement at all, since [they are] primarily driven by a desire for a deeper form of democracy” (2014, 295). You might have even heard Klein speak these words at one of the above events.

These scenes of climate uprisings take part in a populist genre of politics, more so than other sorts of so-called environmentalism; public figures like Klein acknowledge this when they hope for a “sustained and populist climate movement” (2014, 157). By *populist environmentalism*, I wish to indicate a generalized antielitism or antiestablishment character of these movements that sought change not through technoscientific policy but through a multiracial coalitional politics of grassroots mass democracy: a politics of “the people.” This book seeks to understand one of the key events through which the populist genre of environmental politics emerged: the struggle against the Keystone XL (KXL) and Dakota Access (DAPL) oil pipelines on the Great Plains. You may already know that contestation of these pipelines gathered in resistance a coalition of progressives, farmers and ranchers, environmentalists, and Native Nations, though not necessarily always with the same objectives in mind. These two pipelines were proposed, respectively, to bring bitumen from the Alberta tar sands and fracked light crude from North Dakota to refineries on the Gulf Coast and in Illinois. But in planning routes across the sparsely populated, politically conservative Upper Midwest region (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa), infrastructure corporations might not have expected organized political opposition. Between 2009 and 2016, the grievances against these pipelines were organized into a series of moments and then movements that pitted the people against the pipelines. Though aspects of this story are undeniably true, it is a partial and at times uncomplicated portrait. This book argues that there were and remain difficulties in successfully constructing such a left-populist environmentalism. Reflecting in detail on the complexity of these struggles is crucial for climate activists, especially since the broader politics of populist environmentalism often ties their theories of change to lessons learned from this movement (e.g., Prakash 2020). It is further critical, of course, because we cannot ade-

quately address the root causes of the climate crisis that underpin such pipeline build-outs without reflecting on political strategy.

Below, I will argue that there are sufficient reasons to evaluate one tendency of the movement as populist based on its rhetoric and action (including that some individuals and organizations called themselves “populists”). First, however, I want to be clear upfront: not all pipeline opposition draws upon the generic scenes of populist environmentalism. The field of political-ideological struggle over pipelines and climate politics alike is dynamic and fractured; even within the Global North there are, as Guha and Martinez-Alier (1997) influentially argue, numerous “varieties of environmentalism.” For example, most of the so-called Big Greens approached pipeline struggles with their old tools: petitions, litigation, membership drives. On another hand, anarchists and other radical environmentalists, anticapitalists, and co-conspirators in decolonization sought to prevent pipeline construction through direct action. Native Nations opposed the pipelines on the grounds of tribal sovereignty, land-based modes of life, anticolonial and socialist traditions, and opposition to colonial sexual violence. There are good reasons to account for each of these elements in ways that do not flatten their different orientations. Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have rightly centered what Nick Estes (Kul Wicasa) calls “the long tradition of Indigenous resistance” in the wake of the massive and inspiring blockade of DAPL (Estes 2019; see also Estes and Dhillon 2019; Gilio-Whitaker 2019; Grossman 2017; Whyte 2017). Indigenous struggles augur the broader transformations needed for addressing the roots of ecological crisis, which entail not a separate ecological new social movement but an increasingly concatenated radical dismantling of the interlinking and differentiating world systems of racial capitalism and settler colonialism.

Although the orientations of Big Greens, Native Nations, and radical anarchists and anticapitalists are not populist, they sometimes overlapped with—and sometimes contradicted—more populist political genres. So, attending to the populist tendency of pipeline resistance enriches our understanding of the stakes and struggles of contemporary climate politics. In the Midwest, pipeline populism emerged from and mobilized desires to defend private property from eminent domain, to relocate political power in grassroots participation, to demonize the

involvement of Canadian oil corporations and Chinese finance, and to develop practices of intervention in scientific review. *Pipeline Populism* argues that these politics were shaped by “affective infrastructures”—underlying emotions emerging from spaces and situations—that produced a collective sense of “the people.” My analysis of populist environmentalisms examines the promise and pitfalls of such a political genre composed by scenes in which a mass movement of “the people” reclaims democracy from elites, corporations, and the political establishment: Rural landowners do not always possess the same understandings of land and stewardship as Native Nations. Individuals and groups across the political spectrum approach institutional processes like public participation meetings and evidentiary hearings with different levels of enthusiasm and forms of political organization. And the enemy of the opposition groups was sometimes located in a foreign outsider. If it is a desire for deeper democracy that increasingly orients populist environmentalisms, then this book asks: Out of what relationships did such desires and grievances that form pipeline populism emerge? What do these affective infrastructures tell us about populism and environmentalism, respectively? And with what consequences not only for environmentalism but also for building a strategy for a “popular” international socialist revolution desperately needed for adequate climate justice?

Answering such questions helps explain how a populist environmentalism can concurrently transform regressive aspects of ecological politics and defend aspects of the status quo of settler colonialism. Environmentalism has long had a sordid relationship with Indigenous movements for emancipation and decolonization. Settler environmentalists have turned toward Native Nations for spiritual, political, and ethical guidance, seeking alternative modes of relation with the earth and its nonhuman inhabitants, but they have not frequently done so with adequate respect. As Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes) explains, settler environmentalists of the 1970s “unconsciously brought with them worldviews and behavior patterns that were inconsistent with Indigenous paradigms and tried to fit Indigenous worldviews and practices into their own cognitive frameworks” (2019, 104). Geographer Andrew Curley (Diné) shows how dominant settler interpretations of Indigenous political struggle as environmentalism displace the centrality of anticolonial political sovereignty to Indigenous resis-

tance to pipelines and related movements (Curley 2019; see also Harkin and Lewis 2007). This is important because the framing of such struggle contributes to perceived or real solidarity with Indigenous movements—or lack thereof (Mott 2016; Curnow and Helferty 2018). Commenting on KXL resistance in a 2015 interview, political theorist Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) said this struggle should “not be framed as simply an environmental issue but one of decolonization and framed through the lens of indigenous sovereignty. It’s too easy for environmentalists to play their ally card in a very instrumental way” (Coulthard and Epstein 2015). By separating environmentalism and even environmental justice from broader spheres of Indigenous, anti-capitalist political struggle, settlers can produce reductive, limited, and harmful engagements with the normative relational grounds that Indigenous struggles uphold. This does not mean that collaboration between Indigenous nations and settlers is impossible. Rather, the political and ontological frameworks through which that collaboration is understood need to be broached in a conscious and nuanced manner (Larsen and Johnson 2017).

To say *Pipeline Populism* is a study of only environmentalism is thus a partial description, especially since many pipeline opponents understood themselves as populists rather than as environmentalists. Instead, this book is a study of populism as one of several dynamic varieties of settler environmental politics. Although populist environmentalisms frequently criticize the elite, white, settler environmentalisms of the past, they do not inherit a blank slate or innocent subject, easily claiming the “ally card,” as Coulthard puts it. By posing the solution to climate injustice in mass movements of “we the people” reclaiming democracy, populist environmentalism risks renewing a different format of whiteness. In this situation, it is not (white) elitism but the popular “we” that, though aspirationally coalitional, still allows white settlers to think of themselves as transcending history. Demonstrating the failures of settler politics might seem all too easy from an external position, reinforcing critical distance, melancholia, or even racial nihilisms that I do not espouse. Furthermore, academic language and modes of analysis can reinforce charges of elitism that populists decry. Consequently, I attend to populist aspects of the movement by showing how the genre’s openness and flexibility sometimes presaged internal contradictions,

such as grappling with the limitations of democracy in the context of ongoing settler colonialism. As described in the preface, I have no liberty for critical distance anyway, given my involvement with climate politics and background in South Dakota.

But why analyze this tendency of environmental rhetoric and activism as populism? *Populism* is a contemporary buzzword. Liberal pundits and political theorists use populism to describe, diagnose, and dismiss all manner of demagogic politicians, left and right, who seek to represent the will or interests of “the people” as corrupt or out-of-touch elitists. Raised in South Dakota, I understood populism to instead hearken back to the subjugated history of grassroots, progressive struggles beginning with the Farmers’ Alliance of the late 1800s, which was particularly potent in the prairie states of the Upper Midwest. When describing populist environmentalism, I am interested instead in the principled reaction against the elite, institution-driven discourse on science and policy by an aspirationally multicultural, grassroots, transnational struggle for climate justice using the language of “the people.” Populist environmentalism can be understood as a kind of left populism, described by Chantal Mouffe (2018) as a “strategy” for radicalizing democracy, a flexible, open-ended, but realistic movement to reclaim popular sovereignty in a time of global reaction. Left populism has a fundamentally different understanding of “the people,” democracy, and political leadership than the right, which always mobilizes “the people” against not only the elites but some outside group.

Inverting a pundit’s negative ascription of populism, the journalist Thomas Frank retorts that “populism isn’t the name for this disease; it’s the cure” (2018; see also 2020, 6). Though many reasons to critique liberal antipopulism exist, I argue populism is more complicated than either disease or cure: its power to transform the subjects it produces depends on the contextual situation in which it emerges. Advocates of left populism desire to be popular, but in doing so they explicitly create disciplinary mechanisms that hinder the creation of anticapitalist and revolutionary socialist struggles—which they take to be self-evidently unpopular (Mouffe 2018, 50). While such left populists understand the central role of affect to politics, they posit desires as relatively unchangeable. Thus, they orient their politics to an imagined “regular person” or “common man”: invariably nationalist in some way, skeptical of the left,

uninterested in radical tactics. Left populists argue that radicals would rather be right than win.

Though some populists think of themselves as socialists, political Marxists today are skeptical that “the people” is the subject capable of producing transformative political culture and material redistribution that is desperately needed. By refusing to name a particular, properly political subject like the proletariat, populism is argued to be too vague to enact an exact justice (Swyngedouw 2010, 224). Defenders of left populism today also largely agree they are not Marxists. Thomas Frank says of U.S. populism that “it is *our* radical tradition, a homegrown Left that spoke our American vernacular and worshipped at the shrines of Jefferson and Paine rather than Marx” (2020, 33). Though this book will defend Marxist ideology critique, I admit that Marxists can move quickly to denunciation, forgoing analysis that would explain how and why populism might emerge rather than (or alongside) a working-class movement for socialism. Rather than positing a simplistic class struggle, we should aspire to the classic analysis of populism in Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. In this text, we do not find a simplistic bifurcation of class interests, but as Stuart Hall (2016, 96) reminds us, a series of dynamic “social movements, social groupings, alliances, and blocs.” Marx offers a complex (and not entirely optimistic!) portrait of the class influences on political struggle. Yet the Marxist framework remains, in my mind, the crucial analytic for pinpointing the structural source of ecological destruction in rapacious colonial and racist exploitation of land and labor (J. Moore 2015; Barca 2020).

Given the latter is apparent to many around the world, why do we not have a more popular mass mobilization against fossil fuels and the governments that entrench their use? As with populism, Marxist scholarly and popular assessments of environmentalism and ecosocialism—and why they are not more popular—have not always been convincing. Marxist theories of ideology sometimes posit that the masses have been hoodwinked, and thus all we have to do is unmask the villain in a Scooby-Doo cartoon to see—a ha!—it was capitalism all along. This book resuscitates a different version of ideology critique by elaborating upon Lauren Berlant’s provocative suggestion that “affect theory is another phase in the history of ideology theory” (2011, 53). Accounting for the entanglement of emotion and politics forms one of the oldest

political quandaries. In the seventeenth century, the philosopher Baruch Spinoza grappled with understanding why it seems that people fight for their servitude as much as their freedom. His immediate answer was superstition (a form of ideology) misleads or distorts the truth. This argument has made his thought appealing to rationalists and liberals, enduring in our era where distrust of the masses prevails. But behind this shorthand explanation, Spinoza gives a far more complex account of the interplay of bodies, ideas, and emotions. Though we desire collective emancipation, we also are condemned to fight for what we think will make us free or provide us joy. We are torn asunder by the inconstancy of the relationship between thought (ideas, imaginaries, concepts) and extension (collectively composed bodies, social and more-than-human). Consequently, our imagination is always fluctuating because it is never fully adequate to the dynamic world, frequently allowing obscure and confused causes to appear real. The latter beget sad passions, like fear of doubt, failure, or death.

If this is the case, scholars of emotion and affect ought to benefit from an engagement with historical materialism, and vice versa. Ideology critique untangles the affective infrastructures of populist politics, allowing us to become more conscious and aware of the many determinations that compose our thoughts, actions, and, ultimately, our world. Rational reflection and collective communication are still important methods for attenuating sad affects for Spinoza, who devoted scathing criticism of the ignorance produced by carelessly following (only) emotion, imagination, or ideology—making his work the “matrix of every possible theory of ideology” (Althusser 1997, 7). We must struggle for what Spinoza called “common notions”—collective ideas more adequate to explaining the world around us and how its dynamic components compose our emotions. Ideology critique thus entails a “search for a strategy of collective liberation, whose guiding motto would be *as many as possible, thinking as much as possible*” (Balibar 1998, 98). This is a collective critical-reflective project by which we ought to investigate and modify the material causes of our imaginary states, creating—hopefully—more adequate common notions that could stave off ignorance and ideological servitude and instead produce concatenated empathies and solidarities. Such struggle is never simply accomplished; fluctuations always persist because no one (other than God, who, for

Spinoza, is Nature) can understand the full concatenations of the universe. Translating this problem into the language of Marxist ideology critique, theory is not as a set of guarantees but a test of “the net of constraints, the ‘conditions of existence’ for practical thought and calculation about society” (Hall [1983] 2021a, 115). As the adage goes, the point is to change it.

As infrastructures, affects condition political collectivity, but they do not determine its outcomes. So, the description of these affects contributes to such practical thought and calculation about society, which I argue requires a socialist and anticolonial future on this planet. *Pipeline Populism* poses a question to political movements: How could we reflect on these affects, which emerge from material situations, so they might be institutionalized otherwise? I return to posit some answers in the conclusion of this book. The rest of this introduction outlines two contributions that ground the following four substantive chapters. The first section examines the historical roots of populist environmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s, before describing how it became reinvigorated in climate justice politics from 2009 to 2016. The second part of the introduction develops a conceptual framework for understanding populism as formed by affective infrastructures, as a genre, and as a transition. My research methods and the description of the rest of the book follow. Rather than exemplifying affective infrastructure in general, each of the chapters of *Pipeline Populism* names and develops a precise affect: territorialized resentment, resigned pragmatism, heartland melodrama, and jaded confidence. These descriptions are tools for thinking with populist environmentalism’s possibilities and diagnosing its shortcomings.

Elitism and Populism in U.S. Environmentalism

The first contribution this book makes concerns the relevance of a concept of populist environmentalism, which stands in contrast to the frequently critiqued history of U.S. environmentalism as provincially elitist. In this section, I seek to elucidate the historical meaning of *populist environmentalism* by tracing its emergence in a dialectic oscillation with North American elitist environmentalism since the 1960s. I conclude this section by making a secondary argument that the period from 2009

to 2016 saw an upsurge in populist environmentalism in reaction to the failures of global climate politics in 2008–2009. Historicizing populist environmentalism helps reveal that the struggles of our contemporary moment are not unique but an inherited legacy.

From its earliest inceptions in the conservation movement, U.S. environmentalism sought to consolidate power in particular visions of nature that both stemmed from and benefited settlers. Historians of early environmental movements of the 1920s frequently contrast conservation and preservation, with the former elaborating an enlightened management of natural resources for human use and the latter rooted in the idea that unspoiled nature should be maintained separate from the areas of civilization and humankind. Yet both orientations rested on an erroneous idea that although cities were important sites of commerce, statecraft, and culture, man must regularly travel to the wilderness to reinvigorate his blood and prevent the white race from degeneration. Teddy Roosevelt, Madison Grant, Henry Fairfield Osborn, and Carl Akeley (among others) built this eugenic vision through many of the primary institutions of early conservation: the Forest Service, the U.S. National Park System, natural history museums, and zoos. The writings of John Muir and the photographs of Ansel Adams rested on visions of natural landscapes depopulated of Indigenous peoples. These visions did not just preserve or conserve natural spaces for white settler men; such actions also required that poor people, Native Nations, women, Black people, and immigrants be differentially restricted, subjugated, or exterminated (Day 2016; Gilio-Whitaker 2019; D. Taylor 2016). Scientific and political authority were central to the attempts to produce this ideology, while desires for racial purity and fears of outsiders were only shallowly beneath the surface, if at all.

It is sometimes assumed that the eugenic and xenophobic elements of this movement were rendered taboo by the postwar transformation of conservation and preservation toward planetary concerns with pollution. Numerous scholars have demonstrated that this was not the case: both the elitism and racial supremacy of early movements transformed into new (and demonstrably fictional) concerns that “overpopulation” was resulting in planetary resource scarcity (Hartmann 1999; Hultgren 2015; Murphy 2017). Much like earlier discourses of conservation, overpopulationists like Paul Ehrlich, Garrett Hardin, and John Tanton

relied on scientific authority to couch thinly veiled fears of Black and brown people—especially women. Their policy recommendations reinforced the consolidation of elite power, as in Hardin’s proposal for a triage or “lifeboat ethics” in which he recommends that “rich countries” should solidify their borders while allowing the global poor to die of hunger without aid (Hardin 1974). Though Hardin, of “tragedy of the commons” fame, has come to bear sustained criticism for the overlooked racism and nativism that played into his foundational role alongside Tanton in the U.S. nativist/anti-immigrant movement (Denver 2020, 29), it is less frequently noted that Hardin’s theories were explicitly anti-Indigenous. He ends the lifeboat ethics essay with a claim that a restoration of Indigenous land sovereignty would be a form of *reductio ad absurdum*, arguing that “we Americans of non-Indian ancestry” should not be obligated to “give back the land” because “the logical consequence would be absurd.” The conclusion of such a line of thinking would be that “since all our other wealth has also been derived from the land, wouldn’t we be morally obliged to give that back to the Indians too?” (Hardin 1974). That Hardin finds such a claim unthinkable provides one window into settler colonialism’s role in elitist environmentalism.

Elite environmentalisms thus were premised upon a defense and consolidation of settler power at home at the same time as they emphasized the imperialist subjugation of populations abroad. The existence of social movements like Zero Population Growth and the decades-long debates about overpopulation and sterilization within the Sierra Club demonstrate that such fears and the desires they authorized were not confined to scientists (Park and Pellow 2013). The legacy of settler colonialism was an explicit pillar of elite environmentalism.

THE NEW ENVIRONMENTALISM

Consolidated environmental elitism was certainly not the only environmental ideology of the twentieth century. Like today, these periods were characterized by a messy field of varieties of environmentalism. Throughout the twentieth century, grassroots movements emerged against toxins and waste as working-class movements struggled for better collective living conditions, frequently led by Indigenous, Black, and migrant workers. The twentieth century—and especially the last half

century of Black-, Indigenous-, Asian American-, and Latinx-led resistance to racial capitalism, colonialism, and ecological crisis—could be read as a “long” environmental justice movement, provided that environmental justice is understood critically and expansively rather than as a narrow “interest” (Nishime and Williams 2018; Pellow 2017; Sze 2020).

Alongside environmental justice struggles and elitist environmentalisms, populist groups formed another aspect of the muddled field of environmental ideologies and political formations in the 1960s and 1970s. Galvanizing events like the Santa Barbara oil spill, the revelation by Rachel Carson that the pesticide DDT was endangering the American eagle (among other species, including humans), and the first Earth Day resulted in an increasingly popular ecological movement, rather than simply an elite-driven edifice. While the old conservationist organizations like the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society looked on with feelings ranging from wariness to shock, a novel form of what became known as “the new environmentalism” began to emerge, coalescing around opposition to industrial pollution, resource consumption, and the destruction of urban green space (Gottlieb 2005; Rome 2013; Sale 1993). The new environmentalism was not necessarily coherent in political orientation, organized initially as community-based and local responses to toxins, waste, consumerism, resource extraction, and endangered species. Nonetheless, its rhetorical form—emphasizing the grassroots and localized environmental impacts—applied populist conventions.

Historians describe the environmental movements of the post-1970s period as primarily divided in their strategies and their visions of nature (e.g., Sale 1993; Bevington 2009; Woodhouse 2018). But populist environmentalism can also be seen in several aspects of the intensive space of this new environmentalism. The language of “the people” bled in from antiwar, counterculture, Black Power, and New Left organizations. The contemporary emergence of the Public Interest Research Group network in the early 1970s, led by Ralph Nader, coalesced an anticorporate message with the idea that people ought to be active participants in governance. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the massive antinuclear and peace movement sought to break out of siloed issues by bringing together antiwar, environmental, rural farmer and rancher,

and Red Power and Indigenous activists across the world, including in the Upper Midwest (Grossman 2017; LaDuke and Churchill 1985; Stock 2017). And while it was somewhat ignored and marginalized by the Big Greens, the 1970s saw an explosion of grassroots environmental groups operating at local and regional scales, many of which we would today recognize as oriented toward environmental justice.

Critics saw in the new environmentalism a lingering antipolitics (Gottlieb 2005, 139). Elements of the new environmentalism were also implicated in the countercultural politics of the hippies, the back-to-the-land and New Age movements, and the appropriate technologies and Whole Earth movements. As Gilio-Whitaker argues (2019, 105), aspects of the new environmentalism took an appropriative and reductive stance toward Indigenous cultures, one of Native Nations' bases for skepticism toward environmental coalitions. In any case, in the wake of Earth Day, legislation passed by the Nixon administration seemed aimed to dispel this energy (Dryzek et al. 2003, 59), as new environmentalist organizations reoriented citizens and activists toward litigation, lobbying and legislative advocacy, watchdog activities, and electoral work. Though such professionalization would come to be absorbed into a new kind of "mainstream environmentalism" by the 1980s, these social struggles and their resultant political gains should be understood as complex and contradictory rather than as simply part of one undifferentiated history of elite, white environmentalism (Purdy 2019).

Organizing against coal and uranium mining, nuclear weapons, and militarization in the Dakotas in the 1970s and 1980s exemplifies how populism stretched beyond the confines of typical environmental ideologies. The North Central Power Study of 1971 suggested a massive build-out of coal and uranium mines in the Black Hills region. Minuteman missile silos peppered the plains with hidden nuclear weapons. Farming and ranching economies were both busting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as a drought combined with low commodity prices to shave already thin profits. In 1979, the Black Hills Alliance was formed as a coalition of "Lakota, grassroots environmentalists, Black Hills residents, and about twenty to thirty off-reservation ranchers and farmers opposed to corporate plans for the region" (Grossman 2017, 154). It was one of several progressive organizations in the region formed to fight resource extraction and militarism in the Great Plains, including

the Western Organization of Resource Councils, *High Country News*, and the South Dakota Peace and Justice Center (Ferguson 2015; Heefner 2012). Later in the 1980s, the Cowboy and Indian Alliance first formed to oppose munitions testing in western South Dakota.

The popularity of this opposition movement peaked in the early 1980s. In 1979, the Black Hills National Gathering of the People drew several thousand activists to western South Dakota. Just a year later, at the height of fears of nuclear meltdown, the Black Hills Alliance and Women of All Red Nations (WARN) organized the Black Hills International Survival Gathering, which brought an estimated twelve thousand people to camp on the private Black Hills land of Marvin Kammerer, oft-described “cowboy populist.” The basic issue of the Survival Gathering, one attendee told me, was “land and the control of land.” But the event was multi-issue, featuring the full array of antiwar, environmental, feminist, punk, queer, Native, back-to-the-land, and renewable energy activists. These events sometimes drew on the language of “the people” to try to create a united-front coalitional radical politics. Though we might see the foregrounding of treaty rights and extraction as environmental justice issues, these were stitched to economic and geopolitical relations, broadening the coalitions. This led to a cross-pollination with the inheritors of the rural progressive populist movements of the earlier part of the century, such as PrairieFire, the North American Farm Alliance, United Family Farmers, and Farm Aid. I was always chuffed to find that a pipeline opponent would reveal in an interview that they had attended the Survival Gathering thirty years prior.

Aspects of this political collective drew on populist histories, rhetoric, language, and organizing tactics “to publicize that farmers had protested before, and that those protests had helped” (Pratt 1996, 33). A *New York Times* article from the time suggested that “virtually all” of these farmer groups “describe[d] themselves as ‘populist’” (quoted in Pratt 1996, 25). Likewise, the “environmental political culture” of South Dakota foregrounded a “populist anti-corporatism, which shunned large-scale development by external entities that disrupted the community’s interactions with the land” (Husmann 2011, 241–42). As one activist put it, “Isn’t it also a question of selling a natural resource, a birthright if you will, to a private company, rather than using this scarce

resource for the benefit of the people?” (quoted in Husmann 2011, 256). Such assessments also could be found in grassroots environmentalism across the country. The Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste described itself in 1986 as “an old-fashioned Movement that addresses old-fashioned American values of neighbor helping neighbor, of grassroots democracy where the people lead and the leaders follow” (quoted in Szasz 1994, 82). The director of the Big Green organization Natural Resources Defense Council described such organizing somewhat fearfully as “a real populist grassroots movement” in the face of which the Big Greens were “in real danger of becoming obsolete” (quoted in Dowie 1995, 147).

Though principles of environmental justice were upheld by these grassroots organizations, their somewhat race-neutral language did not always work to construct the mass movement they imagined it would. The *New York Times* covered a 1996 meeting on populism that spawned the Alliance for Democracy, attended by such figures as self-described populist humorist Jim Hightower and historian of populism Lawrence Goodwyn. The paper of record described that “many in attendance fretted over the minuscule number of African-Americans, Hispanic people and other minorities at the event” (Verhovek 1996). Emergent populist environmentalisms further resonated with the “new populism” or “neo-populism” of the era (e.g., Boyte 1986), though similar problems connecting race and class bedeviled them. These situations also mirrored another, sometimes-forgotten line of academic theorizing associated with the *Telos* journal, which rejected globalization and Marxism alike from a self-described “populist” perspective that merged aspects of the left and the right in a manner inspiring to some environmental thinkers (e.g., Luke 1995; Klein 2014, 117; see also Frankel 1997). These contradictory legacies continued to influence “left populism” in ensuing years.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE RISE OF NEOLIBERAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

Populist environmentalism was somewhat quelled by the dark period of the late 1990s and early 2000s, in which complex environmental problems like climate change loomed large simultaneously as neoliberal politics became dominant. A depoliticized and paternalistic ecological

politics contributed to this impasse. For the neoliberal technocrats of the 1990s, regular people were not important environmental actors; grassroots organizing was “at best helpful, at worst an embarrassing sideshow” (Dowie 1995, 5). Instead, neoliberal environmental governance asked: How can policy produce positive environmental outcomes given the economic self-interest of individuals and corporations in a marketplace? Within this ideological framework, compromise among corporations and policymakers was more impactful than creating a popular environmentalism. Such an environmental politics is sometimes described as “postpolitical” because it emphasizes the transcendence of political disagreement concerning socioenvironmental values through building consensus toward administering regulative changes (Swyngedouw 2010; Wetts 2020). Knowledgeable elites would be responsible for steering the masses toward proper environmental outcomes, mediating any dissent or disagreement between industry and people. To the extent that people should act, it would only be by voting or making personal consumption choices. This form of neoliberal environmentalism sometimes explicitly framed itself as antipopulist, contributing to the long-standing and ongoing liberal project to define populism as a threat to democracy.

A prototypical example of the antipopulism of neoliberal environmentalism is the now infamous essay “The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World” by Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger in 2005, an argument they expanded into the book *Break Through* published in 2007. The authors offer a scathing indictment of the transformation of environmentalism into a place-based, small-scale, moralistic movement with little chance at achieving meaningful political change. Their political end is not primarily a world of radical equality and justice but rather to demonstrate that U.S. environmentalism’s focus on capital-*N* Nature diverts focus from policies such as emissions standards. These policies would not fundamentally require change in regular peoples’ interests in consumption and economic growth, but they would result in better environmental outcomes and supposedly be in the economic interests of U.S. firms and workers alike. Rarely addressed in many critiques of the essay is the key division for Nordhaus and Shellenberger between such smart policy approaches, on the one hand, and populist anger, on the other (though

see Meyer 2008). Comparing contemporary environmentalism to 1890s agrarian populism, Nordhaus and Shellenberger note that both decried the inequalities of their eras. But populists rhetorically emphasized that producers were victims of forces beyond their control and thus were unable to construct an affirmative social vision. This narrative of “the fall,” the authors argue, bears a structural similarity with that of environmentalism’s tragic (or apocalyptic) tale. Contra those who would be inspired by radical agrarian organizing of the 1890s, Nordhaus and Shellenberger find populists to be “insecure, desperate, and often quite mean and prejudiced” (2007, 159). Though the authors frame their argument as a departure from the norms of U.S. environmentalism, their position actually exemplifies the antipopulist trend in dominant climate politics of the period (Wetts 2020).

If prior to the mid-2000s, addressing climate change seemed to be the province of the Big Greens (Ciplet, Khan, and Roberts 2015, 169), then this began to change in the mid-2000s as global justice organizations took the United Nations as a site of struggle. Organizing surrounding these meetings facilitated important political and tactical cross-pollination from leading Global South organizations such as La Via Campesina, a transnational peasant and farmer movement, that resulted in a more robust climate justice movement (Featherstone 2012; Tokar 2014). Organizing at the transnational level also led activists to pressure national organizations, as some of the more amenable Big Greens such as the Sierra Club were finally persuaded to foreground climate change and the impacts of fossil fuels. Working within, against, and beyond the Big Greens, the goal of many in the Youth Climate Movement at the time—including myself, as a young organizer—was to popularize environmental justice along with more radical, confrontational tactics. Regulatory compromise with fossil fuel industries was not possible in a climate justice framework.

The Copenhagen Summit’s weak results and the failure of the Obama administration to pass a comprehensive climate change bill caused self-reflection within international climate justice politics. These failures were not solely due to the missteps of the Youth Climate Movement: increasing fossil fuel political lobbying and the global shakiness of neoliberal political consensus after the financial crisis contributed. Yet, the movement against climate change became even more split at

the activist level between policy- and lobbyist-oriented strategies and those of grassroots climate justice organizing. Despite the foregrounding of climate justice, many environmental justice organizers were frustrated by the persistent whiteness of the climate movement, its focus on national policy mechanics, and its tendency to neutralize transformative political critiques emerging from Black- and Indigenous-led organizations. The latter also included more radical actions emerging from the Global South, notably a refusal to compromise at Copenhagen led by the left-leaning delegates from Bolivia, Nicaragua, Cuba, Ecuador, and Venezuela. At the Copenhagen meeting, Bolivian president Evo Morales invited delegates and activists to Cochabamba, Bolivia, the following year to create a different kind of agreement outside the strictures of the U.N. process. Some thirty thousand activists, peasants, and Indigenous people gathered for the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, hashing out what would become a People's Agreement rooted in principles of anticapitalism and anti-imperialism (Featherstone 2012, 236–38; Tokar 2014, 66). In this context, youth organizers Russell et al. describe the North American climate movement during this period as “flailing and fractured,” having failed to “unif[y] around common opponents” (2014, 167). Goodrich, another organizer, also describes the situation as an impasse, assessing this moment in retrospect: “By failing to commit to the agonism of politics, which attempts to unite a diverse cross-section of the electorate against an identifiable enemy, the climate movement opted for marginality” (2019).

THE POPULIST GENRE AND THE MOVEMENT AGAINST THE PIPELINES

By 2010, the climate movement in the United States was at a crossroads. Focusing on climate policy at a national level seemed like a losing battle, while the United Nations stage also seemed a dead end. But at the same time, on the Great Plains of the Upper Midwest, a new and different movement was forming. Antipipeline sentiment had been bubbling in the Dakotas and Nebraska, where farmers, ranchers, Native Nations, and conservationists, among others, were increasingly disgruntled by the sudden appearance of TransCanada in their communities. Emerging antipipeline sentiments coalesced into organized opposition to KXL. These groups' strategy of coalition building populist

alliances across difference appealed to many of us who had organized in the Youth Climate Movement. While media exposure and financial support were funneled from the Big Greens to some of the antipipeline groups, the strategy of coalitional left-populist opposition stands out as transforming U.S. environmentalism from a postpolitical orientation back toward mass political struggle. Rural populist organizing, scholars and organizers hoped, could serve as an alternative to burgeoning movements of the far right (e.g., Campbell and Linzey 2016; Cadieux et al. 2019; Koenig and Scralia 2019; Roman-Alcalá, Graddy-Lovelace, and Edelman 2021; Patel and Goodman 2020). The KXL and DAPL struggles exemplify these complex tendencies.

The Keystone pipeline system is a series of proposed and partially completed pipelines that would bring diluted bitumen over two thousand miles from the Canadian tar sands near Hardisty, Alberta, across the continental United States to refineries near Port Arthur, Texas, and Patoka and Wood River, Illinois. The route of its first phase, Keystone I, was proposed from Hardisty to Illinois via Steele City, Nebraska, in 2007 and completed in 2010 with minimal local opposition. Another leg, the Cushing Extension, traveled from Steele City to storage facilities in Cushing, Oklahoma, and was completed in 2011. The KXL phase of the system was formally proposed in 2008 and included another route from Hardisty to Steele City, but instead traversing a shorter route through Montana, South Dakota, and Nebraska in order to connect to the Bakken field in Montana and North Dakota. (A second part of the Keystone system, from Cushing to Port Arthur, Texas, was originally part of the XL project but later cleaved into a different project after the heightened controversy surrounding the northern, international portion of the pipeline. This rebranded Gulf Coast Extension was completed in 2014 despite significant opposition in Oklahoma and Texas.) The so-called tar sands transported by the Keystone system are named as such for their mixture of bitumen (a heavy crude oil) with sand and/or clay. Because of this state, tar sands surface and in situ mining uses more energy and water than conventional oil extraction techniques, produces more by-products (like petcoke) when refined, and produces more carbon dioxide when burned. Such unconventional oil only becomes profitable when the price of oil is high. It is speculated that oil pipelines transporting bitumen—which must be diluted with a

mixture of light petrochemicals in order to flow—might be subject to more corrosion and thus cause more frequent leaks.

As the name suggests, Keystone XL was a larger pipeline, at thirty-six inches in diameter, designed to transport around 830,000 barrels per day of oil (of which up to 100,000 barrels per day of light crude would be from the Bakken Formation). While oil, natural gas, and other pipelines crisscross most parts of North America, KXL would be the first to cross stretches of western South Dakota. Its route deftly avoided the administrative boundaries of South Dakota's nine Native American reservations. As TransCanada would quickly discover, however, the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota—collectively known as the Oceti Sakowin Oyate—have legally contested the entire portion of western South Dakota stretching back to the Treaties of Fort Laramie signed in 1851 and 1868. In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the appropriation of this land was unjustly compensated, but the Oceti Sakowin have refused to accept the financial settlement, instead pursuing return of the land (Ostler 2011).

The groundwork for KXL began in 2008, as TransCanada's contracted land agents worked their way from Montana to Nebraska collecting easements. Residents recall that TransCanada quickly and quietly conducted business, seemingly to prevent communication and organization among property owners. As I discuss in chapter 1, some landowners first heard of the pipeline from the appearance of contractors surveying their land from public roadsides. It seemed to landowners that there was little choice in signing easements, and most did not object to the financial compensation package. TransCanada reportedly presented those signing voluntary easements with bonuses, while holdouts were promised a legal challenge through condemnation of property by eminent domain. In South Dakota, many landowners had signed easements in 2008 and 2009.

However, there were some holdouts. A group of landowners formed Protect South Dakota Resources and successfully negotiated more beneficial easement agreements for its members who settled by 2014. In Nebraska, by contrast, rumors of the pipeline's arrival preceded the land agents who were traveling the route of the pipeline from the north to the south. This, some organizers suggested to me, allowed Nebraska landowners extra time to prepare. In Nebraska, 16 percent of property

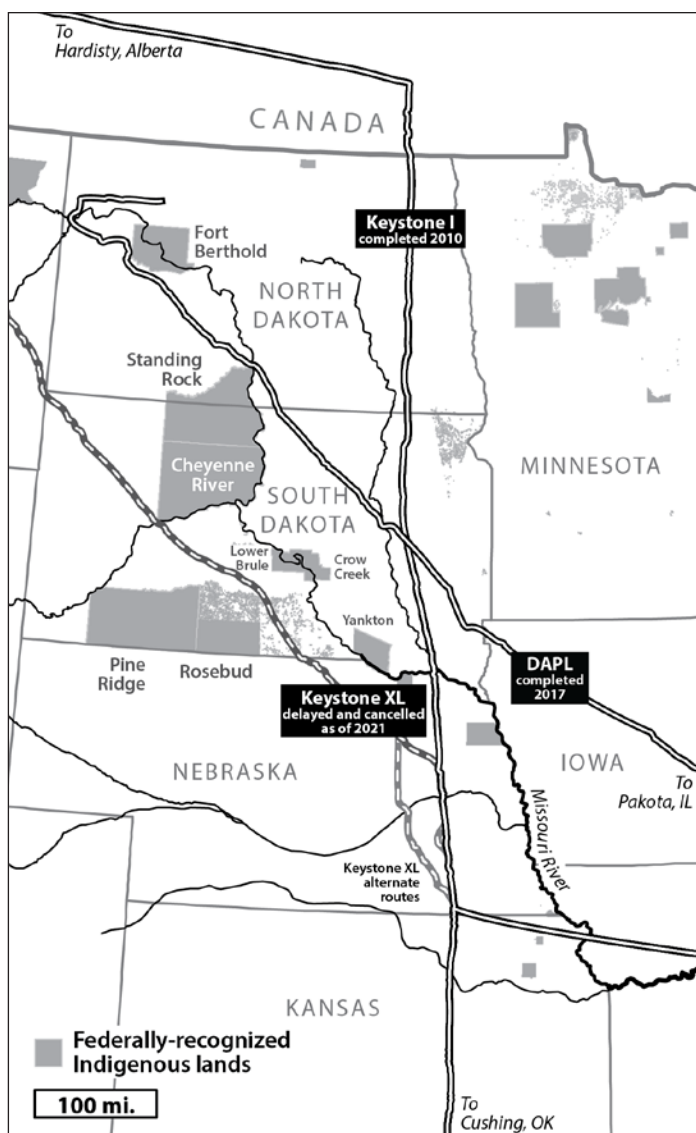


Figure 1. The routes of three major pipelines in the Upper Midwest region. The administrative boundaries of federally recognized Native American reservations are included here in part to demonstrate the attempt to skirt their edges, but the contestation of land by these and other Native Nations does not end at these state-drawn borders, especially given the Fort Laramie treaties of 1851 and 1868, among others. Map by Timothy Stallmann; Keystone XL pipeline data courtesy of Thomas Bachand; DAPL and Keystone data via Energy Information Administration.

owners along the pipeline's route refused to sign easements and many engaged in litigation with TransCanada. Prior to a 2012 rerouting, a portion of KXL passed through the Sandhills region, a sensitive and unique ecological region characterized by grassy sand dunes, a high water table that flows through permeable soil, and unique wetland flora and fauna. The Sandhills are also the northernmost portion of the massive Ogallala Aquifer, which stretches geographically south to Texas and provides drinking and irrigation water to millions of people.

Following the official announcement of the pipeline proposal, TransCanada filed for state-level permits with the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, while filing with the U.S. State Department for an environmental impact statement (EIS). Numerous rounds of public comment sessions and evidentiary hearings ensued (see chapters 2 and 4) as the pipeline became increasingly mired in a series of controversies. By 2010, organizing against the pipeline began to accelerate on the Great Plains. Dakota Rural Action, a member-based progressive advocacy organization, had initially advocated for better easements for landowners whose property was crossed by the pipeline. But driven by increasing membership disapproval, the group increasingly began to veer toward full opposition to Keystone. It joined with Native-led organizations to form the NoKXL Dakota coalition. Bold Nebraska began to organize an antipipeline campaign in their state based on contesting the use of eminent domain for private gain. Bold Nebraska also organized coalitions with Oceti Sakowin and Ponca people. Chapters of national conservation organizations such as the Audubon Society and Sierra Club also began to take harder stances against the pipeline, especially its threat to the Nebraskan Sandhills. Environmental justice groups like Plains Justice, Honor the Earth, and the Indigenous Environmental Network had been organizing against Keystone I and continued legal, financial, and administrative support against KXL.

This organizing against the pipeline was only later (and somewhat reluctantly) picked up on by national environmental groups. A vanguard was James Hansen, the head of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, who began to prominently and repeatedly suggest that any infrastructure that would facilitate the combustion of the tar sands would be “game over” for the global climate (Hansen 2012; Romm

2011). Hansen would, in intervening years, occasionally describe his favored third-party approach and cap and dividend program as populist. He also sought to lend his testimony to the South Dakota PUC (this, and all other climate discussion, was denied by this institution). The leadership of Native Nations against the pipeline was initially somewhat ignored by national environmental organizations and the mainstream press; the latter would continually reframe KXL as another “jobs versus the environment” issue despite obviously visible Indigenous leadership (e.g., Johnson and Frosch 2011). Though opponents of the pipeline sometimes clashed with individual supporters and some construction unions in Nebraska, the character of pipeline support in South Dakota at the time was mostly passive and led by politicians and the media.

By 2012, the antipipeline campaign had become the highest profile environmental struggle in the United States. Pipeline opposition represented a fundamental change in model and strategy for organizations focused on climate change. As mentioned above, many within the climate movement felt that focusing on climate policy at a national and international level was responsible for alienation and failure, as such policies were overly technical and did not connect to people’s experiences or values. However, direct action models derived from environmental justice coalitions “seemed more capable of keeping carbon in the ground than lobbying efforts” (Russell et al. 2014, 168). Climate organizers correctly saw that what was inspiring about such coalitional organizations, especially led by First Nations in Canada and Native Nations in the United States, was that they catalyzed mobilization through action rather than bickering over complete agreement concerning principles or tactics. In the Midwest, this led pipeline opponents to at times follow the St. Paul Principles, an outline of mutual respect for a diversity of tactics developed in the context of opposition to the 2008 Republican National Convention.

The broad-based “unlikely alliances” model served as a framework for the Reject and Protect protest that brought the Cowboy and Indian Alliance to Washington, D.C., and the People’s Climate March in New York City, both in 2014. The peripheries of the latter event featured radical offshoots, including the ecosocialist coalition System Change Not Climate Change and an action called Flood Wall Street, which

referenced Occupy Wall Street and the global movement of the squares. Despite a diversity in their political orientations, both supporters and critics of the march frequently drew on populist generic forms in assessing its success, or lack thereof (Bosworth 2020). Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, released the same month as the march, lauded "a rich populist history of winning big victories for social and economic justice in the midst of large scale crises" (2014, 10). The book described the opposition to KXL as "a movement so large it revived (and reinvented) US environmentalism" (303).

The strategies of the left edge of the Big Greens were partially shaped by the actions, rhetoric, and concrete relationships with antipipeline organizers in the Great Plains. But the choices made by organizations such as 350.org—now understood as a new Big Green—were not always received kindly by political organizing on the front line of the pipeline's route. It seemed odd that such large organizations were now claiming grassroots political organizing as their own. The financial benefits of this shift in focus were unequally distributed to different organizations who were on the ground in the Great Plains. Political and financial connections empowered the supposedly grassroots organiza-



Figure 2. Protesters hold signs reading "People Power" and "People over Profit" at the 2015 People's Climate March in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Photograph by the author.

tions that were most legible to outsiders—those that were least radical, most online, and most amenable to a nonprofit campaign strategy. This led to an uneven geography of visibility and political orientations. For example, some I spoke to in South Dakota were annoyed that Bold Nebraska received all the fame (and financial support) from the now-repopularized Cowboy and Indian Alliance, which had historic roots not in Omaha but in western South Dakota. Rumors frequently swirled about from whom and to whom foundation and nonprofit money was traveling. The most cynical analysis I heard claimed that Bold Nebraska was being funded by Warren Buffett via the Tides Foundation to manipulate pipeline opposition to consolidate oil transportation via his railways.

But most folks, in a classically Midwestern manner, made a more roundabout critique of Bold Nebraska for the glitz and glamour of their well-branded campaigns. An organizer named Sheila told me that the fame gained by others ultimately did not bother her, because “we did the real, tough work of organizing.” When asked about national environmental organizations, Rick, a rancher, told me that he read almost all of the materials that they put out online. But he told me that “a lot of it’s garbage.” The major benefit of their involvement, which Rick joked was completely self-interested, was that he might get to meet Daryl Hannah. Regardless of any individual’s or group’s reasons for participating, the coalition held through 2014, and KXL seemed tantalizingly close to being canceled. The success of the movement also led to further popularity of its strategies and messaging. In South Dakota, Rick Weiland unsuccessfully ran for the U.S. Senate on a campaign that projected a folksy “prairie populism” alongside “aggressive opposition” to KXL. Weiland would argue that outsiders “just don’t get our state. . . . It’s more of a populist state than a red state” (Sargent 2014). Bold Nebraska leader Jane Kleeb would reflect in an article titled “Let’s Get Rural: Middle America Wants Less Establishment, More Populism” that “a movement of We the People, in the Heartland of America, still exists and is one of the big reasons we stopped a pipeline” (Kleeb 2016).

In the fall of 2015, the northern portion of KXL was ultimately rejected by the Obama administration. In a statement, President Obama lamented that the pipeline had become “a symbol too often used as a campaign cudgel by both parties rather than a serious policy matter”

(Obama 2015). As with so many of his administration's policies, this seemed to be a cry for a return to the mythic depoliticization of neoliberalism, a rationally adjudicated process in which the pipeline was not supposed to represent the nation's commitment to oil, the climate crisis, or Indigenous dispossession. But as the KXL victory seemed more and more likely, similar issues would bedevil another pipeline, the Dakota Access Pipeline. Proposed by Houston-based Energy Transfer Partners (ETP), DAPL is a 1,722-mile-long pipeline designed to bring Bakken crude from western North Dakota across South Dakota and Iowa to southern Illinois. Because DAPL did not cross any international borders and its environmental impact was deemed to be lesser (a decision since challenged in the courts), its permitting process was much less stringent. Whether for financial or national reasons, ETP also took a different strategy than TransCanada with regard to permitting and public relations. TransCanada adhered to the global industry standards of corporate social responsibility, which try to give the appearance of transparency, responsible infrastructure governance, community relations, Indigenous and community consultation, and democratic decision-making. ETP, by contrast, did not seem to care much about community relations or social responsibility. Its goal was to get the pipeline in the ground as quickly as possible.

The arrival of a rapacious petro-PR machine on the scene around 2015 and 2016 intensified, at times, disagreement about the direction that populist strategy might take, for appearing unified in message and strategy appeared tantamount. This was most visible in Iowa, where pipeline populism was more intensely split between, on the one hand, top-down community organizations and, on the other hand, small-scale grassroots organizers, many of whom were younger, more attuned to social justice, and had worked on the Bernie Sanders campaign. Both groups were loosely organized into the No Bakken Coalition, which included some twenty organizations with varying levels of involvement in organizing pipeline opposition. In an interview, one organizer further described the split as coinciding with gender as well. "It just seems like the men really like giving stump speeches behind the mic without actually listening to what people are saying on the ground." The Midwest Alliance for Infrastructure Now, an oil industry coalition, attempted to discredit grassroots organizers as fraudulent and antidemo-

cratic. This context made it difficult to resolve the real and important political disagreements in the group, which in part stemmed from the populist paradox itself.

In contrast to Iowa, in South Dakota I found less collective organizing against DAPL than I expected. Although some of the same organizations and individuals from the KXL battle opposed DAPL in South Dakota, the organizational infrastructure of non-Indigenous groups was not quite as strong due to lack of funding and some discord within some of these organizations. Consequently, when talking to many landowners, I was astonished by the extent that their opposition had been individualized. For example, one landowner said she spent over ten hours a week for the last six months conducting research and had “a whole room full” of boxes of printed documents and news articles. She was aware of, but had not organized with, any structured opposition group. Although the Indigenous Environmental Network and several Native Nations strongly opposed DAPL, its path through the eastern part of the state (along with neglect of consultation processes by ETP) seemed to make their popular involvement more difficult. In the summer of 2016, I speculated that the lack of opposition might be, in part, because the pipeline crossed through farmland instead of ranchland and thus engaged a slightly different political landscape than the more fiercely independent and libertarian western part of the state. I expected to write a postmortem about the failure of pipeline opposition to sustain itself, flaming out in opposing KXL and building little capacity for the future.

This thesis could not have been more wrong. In April 2016, a DAPL opposition camp popped up on the corner of the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota, within a mile or so of the pipeline’s Missouri River crossing near the South Dakota border. Over the next few months, organizing would expand and then explode. Thousands of individuals and groups from around the world—among them, representatives from hundreds of Native Nations—streamed into North Dakota. The philosophy of *mni wiconi* (water is life) and the reframing of protestors as water protectors marked the rise to prominence of anticolonial environmental justice movements and antiextraction movements within the global climate justice movement. The events and impact of the DAPL blockades have been told in books, movies, and

blog posts that center Indigenous history, politics, land, language, and experiences (Estes 2019; Estes and Dhillon 2019; Gilio-Whitaker 2019; Keeler 2021; LaDuke 2020; Sze 2020; Whyte 2017). And as Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabe) poetically writes, as much as “social scientists and historians can always identify the conditions that made it possible,” the blockade evidenced a “mysterious spark that eludes all attempts at analysis” (2020, 95).

Despite such a mysterious spark, the movement’s peak during the fall of 2016 and Obama’s final months in office did not offer a saving grace. Though the Obama administration flirted with a DAPL reroute or even a rejection, they ultimately only turned against the pipeline’s shoddy permitting process. Subsequently, both DAPL and KXL were revived by President Trump, who, more amenable to taking advantage of the symbolic importance of oil pipeline struggles, made their approval his first act as executive officer in January 2017. Shifts in the oil market alongside litigation have prevented KXL construction, and DAPL has been further challenged in courts. As of 2021, four years later, KXL’s construction has been halted as President Joe Biden revoked the pipeline’s presidential permit yet again, and it appears that the Trudeau administration of Canada will not seek a challenge in free trade courts associated with the North American Free Trade Agreement. TC Energy (née TransCanada) has finally terminated KXL, citing permitting risks.

With this historical context in mind, should we identify some pipeline opponents as populists? First, they broadly used the language of “the people” pitted against a corrupt elite, corporations, or the state. Public discourse, from protest signs to testimony, frequently displayed slogans such as “People Power,” “People > Pipelines,” and “We the People . . .” as grounds for opposition. Second, due to the political culture of the Upper Midwest, their political formation sometimes drew on the history of progressive populism in the region. Bold Nebraska, for example, cited Nebraskan populist William Jennings Bryan as a predecessor, while South Dakotans drew on a long tradition of land-based struggles associated with populism (Fite 1985). Finally, as I document in the chapters below, some explicitly and affirmatively called themselves populists. In fact, many would be more amenable to being called populist than environmentalist! Though “populist environmentalism” is still

more of an exogenous than endogenous ascription, I believe it is an appropriate and clarifying lens of analysis.

Is the rejection of KXL a victory for pipeline populists? Much of the media and scholarship would point instead (correctly, in my mind) to Indigenous leadership. Nonetheless, a conventional narrative summary of pipeline opposition sometimes goes like this: progressive populism helped groups come together across different identities and social positions to defeat a common enemy. Through gathering their diverse—sometimes contradictory—grievances against the pipeline, people were able to break out of the social isolation of U.S. individualism and begin to reactivate collective forms of social struggle. The name of “the people” helped affirmatively stitch together these social demands into a shared commitment, while “the pipeline” symbolically stood not just for oil but also for corruption, elitism, and the shortcomings of contemporary democracy.

There is truth to this story, and I do not begrudge the grievances or strategy at face value. But in taking a critical approach, I also examine how the scenes that populate the populist genre tend to produce some key roadblocks for achieving transformative justice through social revolution. Reclaiming popular sovereignty (the “power of the people”) presumes a form of politics that risks erasing historical difference by accepting that although settler colonialism must be critiqued, it can be superseded by a state that lives up to its ideals. Civic nationalism (tolerant and inclusive in the interest of the people) must still accept transnational difference, whether via geopolitical competition or global economic leadership. In composing a normative subject, populism was liable to reproduce generic conventions of whiteness. The emphasis on building unlikely alliances—including among Native and non-Native, rural and urban, left and right—was strategic in scope. But this strategy also created an inertia of demands in which a pluralistic lowest-common-denominator consensus was seen to be crucial to build the broadest movement possible. This level playing field of demands and grievances meant that critiques of the settler colonial state and capitalism, for example, were seen to risk the unity of the movement for being too radical. Such contradictions are too frequently ignored in shorthand histories.

The chapters in this book examine how such negotiations take place in desires for land, scientific expertise, political participation, and

energy independence. In tracing these processes, this book challenges the supposition that left populism—because it has progressive aims or values—is especially well-suited to transforming the political trajectory of North American environmentalism away from its history of white elitism. But there are also wider implications for theories of populism. If movements participating in a populist tendency face similar problems, this can and should inform the strategies and tactics we choose in producing an adequate response to the climate crisis as an expression of racial capitalism and settler colonialism. The next section explores what conceptual tools we need to assess populist environmentalism and left populism more generally.

Theorizing Populism as Genre and Transition

The second contribution this book makes is to describe populism as a genre and transition, using the concept of affective infrastructures to elucidate the oscillations of populist movements. The concept of populism emerged in the late nineteenth century to describe progressive “people’s movements” in the United States and Russia. In an era of extreme class inequality and gilded democracy, the U.S. People’s Party sought to (re)claim from wealthy landowners, corrupt politicians, and parasitical corporations what they imagined to be a democratic power for the people. This power was political insofar as it sought to reorient decision-making power from elites to the common people. It was also economic, as it saw the uneven distribution of wealth as a pillar through which ensconced elites retained decision-making over poorer people. Finally, it was actively constructed: “the people” as an identity did not preexist its assembly. Historians have developed detailed studies of the character of populism as an agrarian movement whose power centers were in the South and the Upper Midwest, including South Dakota, Nebraska, and Minnesota.¹ The Farmers’ Alliance and, later, the People’s (or Populist) Party was strong in Dakota Territory and the newly minted state of South Dakota, absorbing the Democratic Party and even electing a governor. Many nineteenth-century populists, including in South Dakota, were or became socialists after populism’s demise.² Yet this radical edge did not prevent populism from historically extending settler empire by “justifying a particularly intense commitment to In-

dian expropriation” (Rana 2011, 130). This section first describes how critical scholars have explained the ambivalences of the history and concept of populism. I examine how both Marxist and radical democratic approaches paradoxically fall into similar problems understanding the internal complexity of this political formation. I then describe how Spinozist-inspired affect theory and Marxist ideology critique, when taken together, provide important conceptual toolboxes for evaluating the role of emotion and affect in populist politics.

POPULISM IN CRITICAL THEORY

Despite massive definitional debates, to me the populist genre is rather simple to outline: populism is a genre of political performance that stages a fundamental difference between the people and the elites, diagnosing social ills as stemming from the power imbalance between these two groups that ought to be rectified. Yet liberals, radical democratic theorists, and Marxists have differed in interpreting the implications of this political genre.

Liberal scholars take populism as necessarily entailing antipluralism or illiberalism, seeing the attack on elites as unjust. They commonly suggest that populist movements, including its nineteenth-century originators, are defined by demagogic authoritarian leaders using anti-immigrant rhetoric to sway ignorant, overly emotional masses in an explicitly antidemocratic manner.³ While these thinkers could admit that the rise of populism might require introspection about the representational challenges of liberal democracy, instead they propose a rigorous defense of liberal parties and the depoliticized, rational institutions they supposedly protect. Suffice to say, the liberal position is not particularly relevant to the analysis of the movements this book examines. Since its emergence in the mid-twentieth century, the liberal discourse has been countered by what Laura Grattan calls a “persistent counter-refrain” (2016, 19). In this reading, the populist movement of the 1890s, and populism more generally, evidences the possibility of a radical “democratic culture” (Goodwyn 1978). Populism could be democratic if it aims to seize and redistribute the universal promises of equality and freedom—promises that liberalism supposedly grants to all but in fact uses to reinforce racial and class strata. Some political theorists suggest that populism might have an experimental democratic

spirit or an aspirational praxis, insofar as populist rhetoric seeks a redistribution of political power in an egalitarian fashion (Grattan 2016; J. Frank 2017).

Marxist scholars throughout the twentieth century also saw in populist politics some inchoate class struggle, although some assessments retain an amount of skepticism. The historian Norman Pollack argues that in the nineteenth-century U.S. Midwest, “Populism described the results of ideology, and Marx the causation” (1976, 92). Similarly, the Jamaican British cultural theorist Stuart Hall describes the 1960s New Left in the United Kingdom as “populist in the [Russian] ‘Narodnik’ sense of ‘going to the people’ and in terms of what they/we might become” ([1990] 2017, 139). Despite writing strongly against what he famously termed “authoritarian populism”—a “deliberately contradictory term” ([1985] 2021b, 285)—Hall emphasizes throughout his writing that “the discourses of ‘populism’ and of ‘democracy’ . . . do not belong intrinsically to any single class. They can, as the outcome of particular ideological struggles, be differently articulated in different conditions” (1980, 174–75). But many Marxists since have practiced a principled opposition to populism as a strategy. As Jodi Dean puts it, populism elides class politics by overly relying on a flexible identity, thus “effacing the fundamental antagonism at the heart of capitalism” (2017, S43). The rhetorical split between the people and the elites, however useful it might be to historical or contemporary proletarian movements, is not the same as the material antagonism between workers and capital that Marx diagnosed as the “capital relation” (1976, 763).

Despite their different aims and methods, Marxist and radical democratic analyses frequently understand left populism as fundamentally ambivalent or split between a potentially more hopeful and more reactionary side. The best of the Marxist accounts of populism tend to come from readers of Antonio Gramsci, like the aforementioned Hall and geographer Gillian Hart (2014, 2019).⁴ The Gramscian approach emphasizes that the political struggle for hegemony also takes place within popular cultural forms and the “common sense” that inheres in everyday social existence. This includes the languages of everyday resignation and the works of literature, media, and religion that interpret social and class formations. As a communist, Gramsci’s analysis is aimed

at understanding this terrain in order to transform it. His work is further important for providing a pathway for critical intellectual activity to be seen as both emerging from and transforming heterogeneous and confused “common sense” by drawing out the elements of “good sense” that lie jumbled within it (Crehan 2016, 57). Gramscians thus understand populism as a form of emergent mass politics that engages in a counterhegemonic struggle for political power with the historical bloc that currently rules. As argued above, the hegemony of technocratic and antipolitical neoliberalism at least partially explains the appeal of a populist environmentalism explicitly emphasizing the divide between elites and people. Rather than conforming to a preexisting theory, populism could be taken to be one of those “most bizarre combinations” that defines the reality of political struggles (Gramsci 1971, 200).

Though sometimes influenced by Gramsci, radical democracy approaches emphasize populist desires to enact democracy as popular sovereignty—the rule of the people—through grassroots movements. Sometimes these approaches also draw some amount of inspiration from the pathbreaking—though not always Marxist—work of Ernesto Laclau (1979, 2005) and Chantal Mouffe (2000, 2018), alongside other traditions of democratic theory (e.g., Canovan 1999). Within grassroots movements for radical democracy, Grattan sees a split between “rebellious” and “democratic” populist aspirations and those more “reactionary” and “cruel.” Rebellious aspirations are not so much organized left resistance but “incipient” and “frustrated desires” that critically indict undemocratic structures of social life (2016, 41). Reactionary and cruel aspirations are those critiques that “distort people’s aspirations for power” (40), blame minorities and outsiders, place faith in a strong leader, and suggest individualism and ethnonationalism will liberate the people. The best of radical democratic theory refuses to divide everyday life from moments of hotter resistance; the approach in *Pipeline Populism* similarly sees frustrated desires emerging from structures embedded in everyday life. These readings of contemporary populism are again crucial for helping us understand why populist politics might emerge in the wake of—and against—neoliberal political cultures that have individualized and depoliticized democracy. The material conditions of everyday austerity and both individual and global debt leveraged during the last forty years have further created feelings of

resentment and woundedness that are mobilized in left and right populisms alike.

Yet even when contradictions among its aspirational elements are acknowledged, both Gramscian and radical democratic approaches sometimes seem to suggest the rebellious and reactionary elements of populism are historically or structurally distinct. We might be left with the sense that reactionary populisms are simply distortions of authentic rebellious aspirations. The problem with such an argument is that democratic aspirations of a populist movement might emerge from material conditions like landed private property, which maintain the status quo of white supremacy and dispossession. The subject instituted by populism might imagine themselves to innocently escape their conditions (Grattan 2021). Such a gesture toward a liberatory “transparency” would entail the counterposition of racial subjects who are still “affectable” in their determinations (Silva 2007). Popular sovereignty in action could entail a practice built through a version of erasing prior, ongoing, and unextinguished Indigenous sovereignty (Tuck and Yang 2012). The antagonistic play of forces on the stage of politics, it could be argued, rests on political-economic and libidinal economies of anti-Blackness (Bledsoe and Wright 2019; Wilderson 2003). So long as these structural elements are disavowed, populism’s democratic aspirations would therefore be cruel aspirations, without formal or analytic separation. The failure to fully critique such populisms except as exclusionary seems symptomatic, to me, of liberal theory and method that overemphasizes discourse as an autonomous sphere of politics rather than one that becomes efficacious only recursively through the material and spatial arrangements of political-economic flows. A populist environmentalism would thus remain an ambivalent political program even if (and perhaps because) it states a desire for multiracial or multicultural coalitions, which would emerge primarily through a liberal politics of inclusion (Melamed 2006).

None of this is to suggest left analyses of actually existing populism fall into the form of ethnonationalist equivocation that liberal critics take. Nor do I wish to be mistaken for producing a nihilistically critical or mean-spirited account of the shortcomings of movement building, which is extraordinarily difficult. As I explain in the following section, the point of ideology critique is to understand from what conditions

such shortcomings emerge rather than simply judge and hastily dismiss them as inadequate. The goal is to understand “the rich totality of many determinations and relations” (Marx 1973, 100) or “the problematic field” (Deleuze 1994, 165) that begets the emergence of a populist environmentalism rather than another kind of movement solution. *Pipeline Populism* shows how the supposedly progressive elements of populism—such as democratic imaginaries, territorial belonging, and antielitism—expose major fault lines in U.S. environmentalism and everyday political life precisely through the affective infrastructure through which they emerge. Populists do not solve or exhaust the problematic field (of left or socialist organizing in a reactionary context) because the problem “insists and persists in these solutions” (Deleuze 1994, 163). Ultimately, “radical democratic” populist strategy will not be able to adequately address and redress the structural issues outlined above if they reject class analysis (as a theory) and class struggle (as a practice) in favor of liberal constructions of “the people.” Marxist analysis leads us to believe that populism must be superseded by a movement that rearranges the material and thus affective infrastructures that maintain settler colonialism and racial capitalism by mediating our collective understandings of these as our conditions of existence. The next section develops the Spinozist-Marxist conceptual architecture that I see as a crucial (though not exhaustive) contribution to that project.

AFFECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURES OF GRASSROOTS POPULISM

Though I remain influenced by the Gramscian and radical democratic theoretical schemas for understanding left populism, without a theory of desire they struggle to fully explain why populist movements either wax or wane. We must instead examine how and which affects emerge in material relations and are channeled into different political formations so that we can reflect on and transform them. It is axiomatic to Spinoza that “desire is man’s very essence” (1985, 531 [EIIIDI]). The composition of social life through the passions helps us develop an answer to Spinoza’s political question posed earlier in this introduction: Why is it that people sometimes fight as much for our servitude as our freedom?²⁵ In the context of this project, we might reshape this question: Why is it that the aspirations of populist environmentalisms seem to resecure aspects of liberal, racial capitalism when many involved in such

movements wish to surpass these? And why did populist pipeline opposition emerge alongside but separate from revolutionary socialism or anticolonialism?

Traditional Marxist emphasis on economic and class interests in maintaining the status quo can partially explain people's investment in the mythos of U.S. liberal democracy. The U.S. American emphasis on "We, the People" was, as Ellen Meiksins Wood argues (1995, 219), an attempt by Federalists to appropriate a veneer of popular sovereignty to shore up federal power and imperial government. Subsequently, this ruling class has since invested everyday meanings of democracy with an atomizing individualism to the point they become "common sense," as if they were timeless reality or human nature rather than historically constructed social formations.

Yet people frequently betray their collective interests and common sense and fight against them instead. Pipeline construction unions fight on behalf of their jobs and employers rather than a livable future for all. Or, conversely, white settler farmers and ranchers betray their accumulated inheritance by returning their land back to Native Nations. So too do subjects frequently act against our class interests even with the knowledge—rational or common sense—that it is against our interest to do so. As W. E. B. Du Bois argues, class interests do not suffice to explain the cruelty of white supremacy or the lack of solidarity among poor white and Black workers either prior to or in the wake of the U.S. Civil War (1935, 27). In addition to their actual wages, Du Bois famously theorizes that white workers also receive a "psychological wage" in the form of preferential treatment over Black workers in both industrial and social spaces (1935, 700). The problem Du Bois sought to highlight with this concept was eminently Spinozist: why did poor whites in the south not immediately see formerly enslaved Black people as members of the working class? Interest or knowledge, as formed by history and ideology, could only provide a partial understanding of the complex determinations that can lead to either political antagonism or quiescence. "But what on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it?" Du Bois asks. "Whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!" ([1920] 1999, 18; see Myers 2019). Spinoza, Du Bois, and others suggest that ownership or dominion not only imparts self-interest or collective interests but also is formed through an infrastructure of desire that constructs political subjectivities.⁶

Desire, emergent from the material arrangements of violent racial capitalism and settler empire, produces subjects who are invested in upholding these systems—sometimes economically, sometimes ideologically. Desire helps explain populism’s power expressed in the people’s collective imaginations of their own self-identity, their ascriptions of the systemic failures of capitalism to demonized individuals, and their utopian dreams of a better or different world. In short, produced by people’s life histories and everyday engagements with an uneven landscape shaped by inequality, desire forms the matrix through which populist ideology comes to make sense. When combined with Marxism’s materialist analysis of political economy and method of ideology critique, such an account of affect can offer meaningful explanations for why cruel aspirations persist among populist environmentalism and how they might be reconstructed otherwise.

Though populism is sometimes definitionally described by critics as an overly emotional form of politics, Spinoza helps us see that collective affects shape every political subject. Affect comes to shape our more or less conscious political decision-making in a nondeterministic fashion, but such “forces of encounter” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 2) still produce tendencies.⁷ For the purposes of writing political affect, *Pipeline Populism* allows *affect* to capaciously designate perceived and felt states that can be named and described (Chen 2012, 11–12). In contrast to more measured yet apolitical investigations of affect, I follow Berlant (2011, 53) in taking “affect theory [as] another phase in the history of ideology theory. . . . It enables us to formulate, without closing down, the investments and incoherence of political subjectivity and subjectification in relation to the world’s disheveled but predictable dynamics.” Consequently, heterodox Marxist political theory can be re-evaluated as crucial to dissembling the affectability of white subjects who would otherwise be posed as free and transparent. In an expansive study of theories of race and subjectivity, Denise Ferreira da Silva argues that in those moments “when writing consciousness as an effect of material production” of “actual conditions,” Marx and Engels “opened up the possibility of a critical analysis of the social in which spatiality—where ‘being and meaning’ emerge in exteriority-affectability—became the privileged moment of signification” (2007, 192). Though Silva’s arguments concerning the stakes and sites of “exteriority” are too complex to explore here, I interpret this statement as indicating a materialist

analysis that sees emancipation in affectability rather than as a transcendence of it. Affectability, in this reading, would be akin to what Ajay Skaria (2016, 26) proposes as “a will and freedom without autonomy” as a potential mode of exiting from European imperialism, rendering European thought a (self-destructive) gift. These thinkers, in my mind, demonstrate the importance of an analysis of affect for critical, Marxist scholarship and revolutionary socialist, anticolonial political struggle.

The concept of affective infrastructures pries open the significance of affect as one of many determinations that undergirds political struggle.⁸ Affective infrastructure, for me, highlights how emotion emerges from political-economic contexts and material landscapes, nondeterministically conditioning political struggles. The infrastructural relation in affective infrastructure denotes not so much a strong determination, as if given affects determine a politics. Instead, the infrastructural relation ought to be understood as a topology of desire, a recursive spatial relationship that offers a certain amount of plasticity within a fuzzy range (P. Harvey 2012; Saldanha 2017, 136). And while one might worry that such a concept ungrounds us from “real” infrastructures, the genealogy of “infrastructure” unveils that accusations of vagueness and metaphoricity accompanied the concept’s emergence and use (Carse 2016). As affective infrastructures generate social opposition, the latter modes of dissent recursively work to reinterpret those very affects. Naming affects can help us become conscious of how they might be channeled otherwise. A caution: while affective infrastructures help explain how populist environmentalism emerges in a space and time, they do not explain the totality of many determinations of the political situation. The affective infrastructures described in this book need not result in populist environmentalism. Many of these—such as territorial resentment or heartland melodramas—could be rerouted through either reactionary or liberal politics (or antipolitics, for that matter).

Affect theory can benefit from engaging the sharp tools of Spinozist-Marxist ideology critique concerned with understanding the complex determinations among a material, economic infrastructure and assemblages of political ideologies. By *ideology*, I understand “the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between [people] and their real conditions of existence” (Althusser 1969, 233–34).⁹ The Marxist use of the concept of ideology has often been

understood as a denunciation of people's seemingly contradictory political stances as false consciousness, as if ideology tricked or duped ignorant people into holding incorrect and hurtful political stances. Certainly, this seems to have been Spinoza's stance when he appears to denounce the superstitions of the masses. However, the point of the concept of ideology is not a rebuke of the falsity of superstition from the position of reason. Given the contradictory way affects shape all collective life, we are all subject to various ratio of affective forces.¹⁰ The imaginary relation at stake is not transparently representational; it also includes, in Spinoza's words, "only a confused and mutilated knowledge of itself, of its own Body, and of external bodies" (1985, 471 [EIIP29Cor]). This confusion is an effect of desire, as the spatial arrangements of bodies produce combinations of joyful and sad affective resonances in one's imagination that escape our full knowledge. Nonetheless, the affective realm continues to constitute every attempt at rationality, the development of adequate ideas. It does not distort, because it contributes to adequate ideas "with the same necessity" as it determines inadequate ideas (1985, 473 [EIIP36]). There is no form of thought that does not emerge from this play of forces, no free thinker who escapes the world. Thought emerges not from the subject but from the interrelation of bodies and the interrelation of ideas.

From a poststructuralist perspective, ideology critique is sometimes said to rely on a nonrelative or absolute truth hiding behind ideology, grounding it in the materiality of the political economy in the last instance. Thus, ideology critique is understood to be foundationalist or essentialist (Foucault 1980, 118), especially if positing a theory of false consciousness. Furthermore, it can seem like all critique does in or to the world is destroy. Ideology critique is said to be mean-spirited in its approach to social worlds, and thus primarily reproduces sad affects such as paranoia, suspicion, or the seeking of personal glory (Latour 2004; Braun 2015). Ideology seems to describe the social as too airtight, too structural, too deterministic, a world with no wiggle room or agency for its subjects.

Such critiques of critique are important to acknowledge for pointing out the limits of an ideology critique without humility or self-reflection. But Spinozist and Marxist critical practice exists not to destroy worlds but to reconstruct the genesis of their representation. "The point of

critique is not justification but a different way of feeling: another sensibility” (Deleuze 1983, 94) such that critique can be “relocated . . . immanent to the experiment itself” (Braun 2015, 110). For Spinozists, critique exists not just to demonstrate the inadequacy of certain ideas but as an ongoing project of building alternative modes of attention to those determinations that compose us. As Antonio Negri puts it, the Spinozist critique relies on the articulation of the destructive “internal critique of the ideology” with an ethical-constructive “identification of the critical threshold of the system in the emergence of the irreducible ethicality of the world” (1991, 84). In short, Spinoza finds politics in the relations that seek to comprehend and compose a common world in that very world. This is how Spinozists analyze political orientations via a resolutely and complexly “materialist” method even as they investigate ideas, forbidding, in Hasana Sharp’s assessment, “any kind of exit from thought to matter, insisting upon the irreducibility of one to the other” (2011, 62).

Though the focus of affect theory is sometimes on affect-as-such, Spinoza also offers us a rich yet nonexhaustive inventorial practice of naming affects, which I rely on throughout this book. Spinoza’s tack is to, as best we can, rationally investigate what certain affects do to bodies and their powers and name the particular forms that these take in order to better understand how bodies and powers can be ordered differently. If inventory can help us understand the material arrangement, and if the material arrangement can help us change the affects that are produced, then through conscious reflection and collective action, we can better augment what sorts of activities increase or decrease our collective powers. This is to say again, as Jason Read argues, “critique cannot be separated from construction” of a new ontology and politics (2016, 21). A critical method attending to affective infrastructure compels us to examine the composition of political subjects not only by knowledge and common sense (without downplaying their importance) but also by prepersonal and unconscious forces that underlie and condition them.

Here, I am riffing on the practice developed by contemporary feminist and queer theorists examining the work that affective performances in intimate and social spaces accomplish in congealing or disrupting complex social subjectivities. Sara Ahmed, for example, points us to how affects can “align individuals with communities—or bodily space

with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments” (2004, 119). Ahmed shows how bodily-affective relationships are understood to be more complex in mediating the relationship between individual and collective in specific historical-political contexts. Even more germane to this study, Mel Chen (2012), Shiloh Krupar (2013), and Nicole Seymour (2018) each seek to dislodge what Spinozists would call the “sad affects” of environmentalism, such as anxiety, fear, and moral righteousness. Instead, these scholars see more open-ended environmental justice possibilities in critical performances of absurdity, toxicity, humor, and irony. Such analyses help demonstrate that in its genre conventions “environmentalism is itself a performance, one with very strict codes” (Seymour 2018, 36). To say that environmentalism is a performance does not mean that it is “fake,” of course, but actually that it is open to being recomposed through performances of all sorts (Vasudevan 2012).

If the codes and conventions of climate action sometimes subsume emotion to instrumental political or scientific projects, awareness and reflection of this work can create spaces for reconstructing what Lida Maxwell (2017) calls an “environmental politics of desire.” This would be emergent from a variety of potential place-based and multispecies social relations and affectations. In describing such a politics, Maxwell further allows us to see that desire need not be an unconscious restraint to our politics but also, as Eve Tuck (Unanga^x) puts it, that “desire constitutes our expertise” (2010, 646). Environmentalism, beyond its populist form, is surely produced through a repertoire of scenes and zones that collectively constitute a generic affective infrastructure. In reflecting on the constitution of our desires as a pedagogical project, feminists and queer theorists argue that we can augment these to make environmentalism into a more just project of flourishing.

Following from the theories outlined above, an examination of the affective infrastructures of populist environmentalism helps illuminate populism as a genre and transition. Scholars of populism examine its “political style” or “performance” (Canovan 1999; Ostiguy, Panizza, and Moffitt 2021); in Moffitt’s estimation (2016, 29), the stylistic approach is a major step forward from theories that render populism a discourse or strategy of the political. Yet Moffitt’s (2016, 38) definition of style emphasizes the traditional language of performance studies

(e.g., leaders on stage performing speech acts for audiences) in a somewhat restrictive manner. Marino (2018, 21) productively extends our understanding of performances of populism as “merg[ing] the sensorium with social practice and the environment in the mechanics of *doing*: in backstage production, the rehearsals, the planning, and the networks that make up the performed act.” Much like my assessment of performances of environmentalism above, such an analysis of populism does not indicate it is phony because it is theatrical or affective, as in some liberal assessments. Instead, analyzing populism’s performance again shows us its genesis in, relationships with, and transitions toward other forms of politics.

I contend that it is not style but genre, however, that describes the formal elements—affective scenes or zones—that organize compositional elements of political styles.¹¹ By *political genre*, I understand “an aesthetic structure of affective expectation, an institution or formation that absorbs all kinds of small variations or modifications while promising that the persons transacting with it will experience the pleasure of encountering what they expected, with details varying the theme. It mediates what is singular, in the details, and general about the subject.” (Berlant 2008, 4). Berlant highlights that genre is “repeated, detailed, and stretched while retaining its intelligibility, its capacity to remain readable or audible across the field of all its variations” (4). To be in a “populist moment” means not just the stylistic element of rhetorical persuasion but why that persuasion historically makes sense. Drawing on genre and performance theory, Shannon Davies Mancus argues that “environmentalists can and do use genre as part of a contest among themselves about the correct politics of relating to the environment, because generic conventions quickly convey what the viewer should perceive as right and wrong” (2016, 11). Populist environmentalism makes sense to subjects because it works through the generic conventions through which (some) social subjects come to understand their everyday lives, their political landscapes, and the broader spaces that they—and others—inhabit.

Following the effects of genres of politics is especially illuminating, Elizabeth Anker writes, because they “double back, challenge themselves, fail in their intended deployments, blend with other genres, and depict the same situation in multiple ways” (2014, 20). This approach

highlights that despite hanging together, genres can be transitional. Studies of populism sometimes hypostasize it as an object or discrete social formation, in which individual people or groups are “populists.” Instead, this book seeks to take populism as more distributed—in its genesis from everyday lives, transformation in political collectivity, and internal and external contradictions and supersessions. I offer scenes through which affective infrastructures of generic populism emerged and describe how its counterhegemonic battle faded from view in favor of other approaches (e.g., liberal, decolonial) or tactics (e.g., lawsuits, pipeline blockades). Without suggesting a teleological trajectory, each chapter highlights the swelling of populist sentiment, its growth into more vocal pipeline opposition, and the problems that the latter encountered in building coalitions, confronting white supremacy and settler colonialism, tarrying with the state, and locating its enemies. The open question, which I return to most clearly in this book’s conclusion, is whether these affective infrastructures can be routed elsewhere.

NOTES ON METHOD

The initial research question of this project was “How does pipeline populism, as a collective social phenomenon, emerge from and transform contemporary ideologies of environmentalism?” The question delimits an interest in grasping the singularity of populist responses to the pipelines within the field of different approaches to environmental politics. This meant that I did not examine as direct objects of study the Big Greens themselves (excepting local chapters of the Sierra Club), the state (except as it interfaces with populist groups), or radical left groups. Similarly, although questions I ask in this work are in conversation with critical Indigenous and environmental justice scholarship, *Pipeline Populism* does not claim to foreground Indigenous anticolonial organizing or epistemologies/ontologies. I remain most interested in the self-understanding of white settlers in antipipeline opposition and environmentalism more broadly. As explained in this book’s preface, the genesis of the project was in an immanent critique of my own political background as a climate activist and uninvited settler in South Dakota. One risk of this sort of analysis is that it recenters white settler ways of knowing and organizing politics and consequently could thus decenter “Indigenous peoples’ own articulations of Indigenous-settler relations,

their governance, legal, and diplomatic orders, and the transformative visions entailed within Indigenous political thought” (Snelgrove, Dharmoon, and Cornthassel 2014, 26). I do not claim that this research contributes directly to a political project of decolonization. Instead, I describe adjacent individuals and movements in ways that help us understand where and how affective infrastructures contribute to the reproduction of racial capitalism and settler empire within environmental and antipipeline mobilizations.

For these reasons, it is important to state quite clearly that I do not see this book as a work of scholar-activism. Following Tuck and Yang, situations exist wherein “research may not be the intervention that is needed” (2014, 813) by on-the-ground political movements. I have devoted time and energy to opposing pipelines via extra-academic methods, including spending some six weeks in total in July, August, and October 2016 at the Sacred Stone Camp on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota. I conducted no research activities while there, deciding that such activities were unnecessary for ethical, political, and security reasons. Nonetheless, the politics of the blockade deeply condition what, why, and how I think. Following Sylvain Lazarus and Alain Badiou (see Badiou 2005, 50), thought is conditioned by (rather than entails) such struggle. These authors argue that Spinoza’s statement “*homo cogitat*”—“people think”—is an axiomatic statement that thinking is by no means reserved for philosophers. Ideology critique is still indispensable, I believe, to the project of demonstrating the conditions that block thought from happening, drawing our attention to different scenes than we would expect. But this process of the “selection” of different affects, Deleuze reminds us in reading Spinoza, is “extremely hard, extremely difficult” (1997, 145). Such knowledge is not privative or final but expansively formed by collectives within, against, and beyond the university, and at risk of attenuation and capture therein (Casarino 2019). I recognize this can be unsatisfying, though thankfully no shortage of generous Indigenous scholars have undertaken work framing DAPL and other pipeline struggles.

Methods of humanistic and qualitative social science inquiry ground this account of pipeline populism, including interviews, participant observation, and analysis of documents and media. I conducted a total of twelve months of empirical fieldwork in South Dakota, North

Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa, a timeline that allowed me to respond to the changing political landscape of pipeline opposition from 2013 to 2016. In the summer of 2013, I lived in Winner, South Dakota, a small town of around two thousand people near the southern border with Nebraska. In the summer of 2014, I lived in Rapid City, South Dakota, the most populous city in the western part of the state. This allowed me to travel north to Harding County, east to the state capital of Pierre, and to sites along the KXL route. In the summer of 2016, I lived in Brookings, South Dakota, in the eastern part of the state, to track opposition to the newly proposed DAPL and to be able to drive to research sites in both North Dakota and central Iowa.

The broad parameters of pipeline populism afforded numerous sites of research and interlocutors. I interviewed members of, attended events organized by, or analyzed documents or discourse from around twenty nonprofit organizations, informal citizens' groups, and activist collectives. Although only a few of these organizations, such as Bold Nebraska, explicitly used populism as a moniker, the populist generic form saturated these groups. I also used ethnographic methods to examine campaigns against pipelines in public spaces. These included observation of the "spatialities of contentious politics" (Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008), mobilizing strategies for studying emotion in protest (Gould 2009, 2010; Brown and Pickerill 2009; Clough 2012; Routledge 2017).

While interviews were very important to elucidating the political field and strategy behind the scenes of political melodrama, I found that observing these spaces of collective action and subjectification was most relevant. These include, first, participant observation in public participation meetings and evidentiary hearings associated with the federal environmental impact statement and South Dakota Public Utilities Commission reviews. I also drew from recordings, transcripts, and news accounts of meetings I was unable to attend or that preceded my field research. Second, I attended around thirty public gatherings not interfacing with state institutions. These included three protest concerts, seven marches, four potlucks, three blockades or direct actions, one direct action training, and one eminent domain condemnation hearing. These events took place across the research area in South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Iowa.

Third, I conducted twenty-three semistructured interviews with key individuals in the pipeline opposition movement. These included community organizers, landowners, lawyers, activists, and environmentalists. One group interview was conducted with four interlocutors. I also interviewed some marginal participants in the pipeline opposition, including an attendee of but one public meeting, a pipeline skeptic who became a supporter, and a vehement pipeline opponent who was not connected to any political organization. Despite its aspirations, the movement against the pipelines on the Great Plains was not a massive mobilization. To protect individual identities and sensitive information, all names of interlocutors, as well as some identifying details, have been changed in the narrative book.

Finally, a vast array of documents and online relationships were important to this analysis. I surveyed the written comments of several thousand unique submissions made on the 2013 draft supplemental EIS, consisting of six documents totaling over six thousand pages. I did not read and then code all of these comments in order to inductively discover discursive patterns, but instead sampled based on keywords derived from a close reading of the first five hundred pages. I closely followed texts, flyers, pamphlets, email blasts, social media conversations, and other electronic documents through which social movement organizing over large distances of space is increasingly communicated. I have included some analysis of the way in which local, national, and environmental media and literature represent pipeline populism. Taken together, these sources allowed a rich if nonexhaustive analysis of the changes in public discourse and strategy of pipeline opposition from its inception to the present.

Outline of the Book

This introduction began by situating the movement against the pipelines in the history and contemporary field of environmental politics in North America. The following chapters more closely follow individuals and groups in the Dakotas, Iowa, and Nebraska, with occasional reference back to those broader climate politics. Each chapter further historically situates populist environmentalism in relation to private property, democratic institutions, scientific processes, and the politics of oil. In

doing so, each also proposes a named affect: a loose feeling that I argue plays a role in the many determinations that led to the emergence—and problems—faced by populist generic forms. Overall, these chapters trace the waxing and waning of populist environmentalism, contributing to the argument that populism here must be seen as genre and in transition.

Some of the most strident settler opponents of the pipeline were landowners whose property was likely to be crossed by the KXL pipeline. Chapter 1 examines how the material and performative perforations of private property by land agents conditioned a feeling of territorialized resentment. Interpreted as a politics of land, this affective infrastructure set the conditions for landowners engaging in collective action, forming landowner groups, and engaging in coalitional, oppositional politics. Anxieties of property congealed into the social demands of pipeline populism. However, territorialized resentment also meant that private property reappeared in the movement against the pipelines in a manner that posed contradictions for which “people” and “land” were at stake. Some settlers compared the individual, white experiences of eminent domain to the historic and ongoing dispossession of Native Nations by suggesting pipeline firms and the state were “treating us like Indians.” To account for the eventual limits that populist environmentalisms face in building common coalitions, I argue that we must understand how its oppositional politics link to both economic interests and political desires—in this instance, for the maintenance of landed private property.

Forums of public participation in environmental permitting and review were centrally important spaces for the raising of demands like the restitution of property rights. But they were also important staging grounds for populism’s metaconcern with a supposed deficit in democratic decision-making and the corrupt influence of oil. Historically, Midwestern populism has a strong commitment to both public participation and radical democratic governance. But like desire more generally, populism is never satisfied with the actual performance of public participation. Chapter 2 analyzes the supposed insignificance of official public participation to the actual decision-making processes of environmental permitting. I demonstrate how spaces and norms of public participation are another source of frustration that cohere into populist

environmentalism. Here, I am interested in why pipeline opponents kept returning to these spaces and demanding more participation despite the knowledge that participation is ineffective. Rather than understand these subjects as duped by democracy, I argue that they approach public testimony with resigned pragmatism. Populists do not think public participation constitutes “real democracy” (and there are good reasons to think they are right). But they do feel like institutional avenues must be exhausted before moving elsewhere. In showing the tension between idealized democracy and its actual performances, this chapter challenges scholars and activists alike to think through whether participation in democracy is exhausting or prefigurative of more radical politics.

Central to desires for security expressed by some pipeline opponents was a sense that the heartland, taken to be a particularly important and threatened part of the nation, was being exploited by foreigners. Chapter 3 scrutinizes how populist rhetoric structured an interior part of the United States in opposition to a foreign power through melodramatic affect. The pipeline corporation TransCanada and the Canadian government alike represented the corrupt power of foreign oil, while the export of oil to other parts of the world—especially East Asia—seemed to betray “energy independence.” This chapter first shows that heartland melodrama has a long history, stemming from the populist reaction to the globalization of oil and agriculture in the 1970s. Yet pipeline opponents in the 2010s brought “the foreign” into heartland melodrama in new ways, focusing on new regions like Canada and new arenas of the supply chain, like consumption and transportation rather than simply production. Opponents compared the supposed invasion of foreign oil corporations to colonialism and the defense of the American Revolution. At the same time, they reconstructed an image of the rural Midwest as a geopolitical and economic breadbasket of the nation. Ultimately, I argue that heartland melodrama in progressive populism relies upon and reproduces anti-Asian sentiment as a symbol of abstract capitalism, thus securing the concrete grounds of opposition in national settler colonial control of land while forming the latter as a global, competitive project with other settler nations.

Antiexpert sentiment is crucial to populist rhetoric of all kinds, but environmentalism’s reliance on ecological science might seem to pre-

clude it from such a structure. In chapter 4, I address this contradiction by demonstrating how populist political identity was predicated on a particular experience of the affect and disaffection of performed expertise. In evidentiary hearings, pipeline opponents attempted to prove through collection of knowledge and evidence and the development of expertise that the pipeline should not be built. Although they were staunch in the belief of the truth of their position, the frequent dismissal of scientific evidence in evidentiary review proved to be the last straw for many. Cynically, opponents increasingly viewed expertise as simply a matter of money. But rather than simply oppose expertise to common sense, pipeline opponents instead began to use the knowledge and collective practices—"minor sciences"—accumulated in these spaces even as they took leave of the institutional process. This chapter demonstrates the utility and limits of contesting evidence via counter-expertise in a landscape where knowledge is seemingly available for purchase and facts seem to be contingently constructed.

How should we evaluate the ambivalences of pipeline populism in its attempts to create a mass movement to address climate change? The conclusion of *Pipeline Populism* reflects on how the concept of affective infrastructure can help reveal the limits of left populism. In particular, I attend to how "the desire to be popular" can constrain liberal, progressive, and even socialist imaginations in ways that might throttle possibilities for a revolutionary socialist transformation necessary to adequately confront the climate crisis. The substantive chapters of this book demonstrate both tremendous potential and crucial limits to the scenes through which pipeline populism emerged. Reflecting on the affective infrastructures from whence our desires are shaped can help us become more active composers of our movements and their spatial politics, thus emphasizing the transformative potential of political struggle.

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