

Fighting Invasive Infrastructures

Indigenous Relations against Pipelines

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■ **ABSTRACT:** In the settler colonial context of so-called Canada, oil and gas projects are contemporary infrastructures of invasion. This article tracks how the state discourse of “critical infrastructure” naturalizes the environmental destruction wrought by the oil and gas industry while criminalizing Indigenous resistance. I review anthropological work to analyze the applicability of the concept of infrastructure to Indigenous struggles against resource extraction. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Indigenous land defense movements against pipeline construction, I argue for an alternative approach to infrastructure that strengthens and supports the networks of human and other-than-human relations that continue to make survival possible for Indigenous peoples.

■ **KEYWORDS:** anthropology, Indigenous relations, infrastructure, pipelines, settler colonialism

Critical infrastructure refers to processes, systems, facilities, technologies, networks, assets and services essential to the health, safety, security or economic well-being of Canadians and the effective functioning of government. . . . Disruptions of critical infrastructure could result in catastrophic loss of life, adverse economic effects and significant harm to public confidence. (PSC 2018)

In Unist’ot’en territory in northern British Columbia, Canada, clan members of the Wet’suwet’en people have built a permanent encampment in the pathway of numerous potential and proposed pipelines. In response to the characterization of these pipeline projects as “critical infrastructure,” the camp’s spokesperson, Freda Huson, notes that the pipelines were proposed to run through the clan’s best berry patches. By resisting pipeline construction, she explains, “what we’re doing here is protecting *our* critical infrastructure.” The language game of the response inverts the promise and inevitability of settler infrastructures but does not replace it with a network that works within the same epistemological and ontological relations to land and kin. When I asked Freda to describe the difference between industry conceptions of critical infrastructure, and the infrastructures that sustain Indigenous life on Unist’ot’en *yintah* (territory), she told me this:

So industry and government always talk about critical infrastructure, and *their critical infrastructure is making money, and using destructive projects to make that money*, and they go by any means necessary to make that happen. . . . So for us, our critical infrastructure is the clean drinking water, and the very water that the salmon spawn in, and they go back downstream



and four years, come back. That salmon is our food source; it's our main staple food. That's one of our critical infrastructures. And there's berries that are our critical infrastructure, because the berries not only feed us, they also feed the bears, and the salmon also don't just feed us, they feed the bears. And each and every one of those are all connected, and without each other, we wouldn't survive on this planet. . . . For example, the bears will eat the berries and they'll drop it, and the waste that comes out of the bear, it's got seeds in it, so that germinates and we get more berries. We need the bears in order to keep producing our berries, and same with the salmon. The bears eat the salmon as well, because once the salmon spawn, they end up dying anyways, and that becomes food for the bears, so it's not being wasted. All of that is part of the system that our people depend on, and *that whole cycle and system is our critical infrastructure*, and that's what we're trying to protect, an infrastructure that we depend on. And industry and government are pushing these projects that would destroy that critical infrastructure, most important to our people. (emphasis added)

Here, Freda appropriates the term “critical infrastructure” to index the interconnected networks of human and other-than-human beings that sustain Indigenous life in mutual relation. This network stands in stark contrast to the critical infrastructures of government and industry—infrastructures that are meant to destroy Indigenous life to make way for capitalist expansion. By contrasting these two meanings under one term, she brings attention to the underlying driving force of industrial infrastructure, exposing the lie that these projects are creative/productive and instead insisting that they are regressive/destructive and embedded in a capitalist system that is fundamentally at odds with the cycles and systems that make Indigenous survival possible.

Infrastructure vis-à-vis Settler Colonialism

How, then, can an anthropology of infrastructure address the radical vision of Indigenous resistance to settler infrastructures? In a 2013 review article in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Brian Larkin defines infrastructures as:

built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space. As physical forms they shape the nature of a network, the speed and direction of its movement, its temporalities, and its vulnerability to breakdown. They comprise the architecture for circulation, literally providing the undergirding of modern societies, and they generate the ambient environment of everyday life. (2013: 328)

Larkin advocates for a systems analysis of infrastructures, and stresses that infrastructures are networks that cannot always be reduced to the technologies or materials that make them up: “infrastructures are matter that enable the movement of other matter . . . they are things and also the relation between things” (329). As such, infrastructures “create the grounds” of operation for other objects. Looking at infrastructures as systems, Larkin argues, allows us to attend to how the definition of an assemblage as infrastructure works to categorize the world. This act of definition “comprises a cultural analytic that highlights the epistemological and political commitments involved in selecting what one sees as infrastructural (and thus causal) and what one leaves out” (230). As the Canadian government's definition of “critical infrastructure” above makes clear, these political commitments may come into conflict, as infrastructures are proposed across territories that Indigenous peoples have never surrendered to the Canadian state. This article links literature in the anthropology of infrastructure, settler colonial studies, and critical Indigenous studies to understand the emergence of “critical infrastructure” as a settler colonial technology of governance and expropriation in lands now claimed by Canada.

An anthropology attentive to settler colonial power relations must consider not only “our” analytic categories (as anthropologists) but also the categories that wield and carry the authority (and violence) of the settler state. The government mobilizes the language of “critical infrastructure” to transform oil and gas infrastructures from industry projects into crucial matters of national interest. That authority is buoyed further by the genealogy of the concept of infrastructure itself, which Larkin shows is the genealogical descendant of Enlightenment ideas about modernity and progress. While the categorization of oil and gas technologies as “critical infrastructure” is a relatively recent move, the discursive positioning of infrastructure as a gateway to a modern future has been used in state-building projects around the world for some time now. The conflict over oil and gas infrastructures, however, is more than a disagreement about what “counts” as infrastructure and what does not. Embedded in Larkin’s definition of infrastructure is a tacit assumption that infrastructures, as “things and also the relation between things,” are inanimate, are not alive. Freda Huson calls attention to the salmon, the berries, and the bears that form “our critical infrastructure.” This living network is not an assemblage of “things and relation between things,” but rather a set of relations and things between relations. These are relations that require caretaking, which Indigenous peoples are accountable to. And they are relations that are built through the agency of not only humans but also other-than-human kin. The bears and salmon create and maintain the assemblage as much as (or more than) humans do. Infrastructure, then, attempts but fails to capture the agentive and social network through which Indigenous life is produced.¹ These assemblages exist whether or not they are framed or captured by anthropological theory.

The comparison between oil and gas infrastructures and Indigenous assemblages, however, helps to illuminate how the binaries of civilized/savage and culture/nature continue to operate within anthropological theory to code the built environment of “modern societies” as a mark of progress and a space of political reckoning while obscuring the Indigenous relations these infrastructures attempt to replace. If the infrastructural is what is seen as causal, and if the definition of the infrastructural does not capture Indigenous assemblages that sustain life, then what do we make of the causal force of other-than-human relations (the water, the bears, the berries, the salmon)? Put another way, how do Indigenous peoples mobilize relational systems—or how are Indigenous peoples mobilized by commitments to these systems—against oil and gas infrastructures when these are naturalized as the “ambient environment of everyday life?” To answer these questions, I make two central assertions. First, the characterization of oil and gas pipelines as “critical infrastructures” constitutes a form of settler colonial invasion, and second, Indigenous resistance to oil and gas infrastructures, through suspension, disruption, and blockages, protect our relations against the violence of settler colonial invasion, and open alternatives for living in good relation to our territories. I address each assertion by turning to a set of field insights followed by an engagement with relevant literatures in settler colonial studies and the anthropology of infrastructure.

Field Insights: Critical Infrastructure

I visited Unist’ot’en Camp for the first time in the summer of 2015. I responded to the people’s call for support on the ground after increased industry pressure and police presence threatened to breach the borders of their territory and begin construction of pipelines on their land. The atmosphere at the camp was tense, in part because the stakes of participation in Indigenous resistance to pipelines were both raised and unclear. For the first few days, I sat by the fire alone, feeling the distrust and fear in the gaze of the Indigenous peoples gathered. In a matter of weeks,

these people would grow to be my dearest friends, but in those first tense and heated days, they could not afford to trust a stranger. In May of that year, the Canadian legislature had passed Bill C-51 (House of Commons of Canada 2015), which redefined “activity that undermines the security of Canada” as “any activity . . . if it undermines the sovereignty, security, or territorial integrity of Canada or the lives or the security of the people of Canada.” Activities explicitly listed include “interference with the capacity of The Government of Canada in relation to intelligence, defense, border operations, public safety, the administration of justice, diplomatic or consular relations, or the economic or financial stability of Canada,” “terrorism,” and “interference with critical infrastructure.” An emergent category for the governance of crisis, critical infrastructure is defined by the Canadian government as the “processes, systems, facilities, technologies, networks, assets and services essential to the health, safety, security or economic well-being of Canadians and the effective functioning of the government” (PSC 2009: 2). The United States operates under a similar definition of critical infrastructure as “systems and assets, whether physical or virtual, so vital to the United States that the incapacity or destruction of such systems and assets would have a debilitating impact on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination of those matters” (WHOPS 2013). Canada and the United States also coordinate to protect and maintain cross-border critical infrastructures, which facilitate the flow of goods, capital, and people between the two countries. Because the discourse of critical infrastructure is tightly linked to one of “national security,” as well as “economic well-being,” there is discursive and legal space open for an understanding of oil and gas pipelines as critical infrastructure because of the economic reliance of both the United States and Canada on revenue from fossil fuels. Threats to pipeline projects, then, can be cast as threats to national (economic) security, and these definitions of critical infrastructure make it possible to place resistance to fossil fuels in the same category as domestic terrorism. Even though the reoccupation of traditional territory at Unist’ot’en Camp has always been peaceful, in 2015 supporters worried that they could be cast as terrorists simply by helping the Unist’ot’en people to reestablish a home on the territory for which they have cared for thousands of years.

This concern was amplified by the apparent coordination between oil and gas industry personnel and police. Supporters on their way to Unist’ot’en Camp were surveilled; police checkpoints stopped cars on the logging road and issued tickets for broken taillights and cracked windshields. In between police visits meant to intimidate supporters, industry executives attempted to “negotiate” entry onto Unist’ot’en territory. These tactics mirrored the industry-police collaboration that was made clear in a leaked report from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Critical Infrastructure Intelligence Assessment Team entitled *Criminal Threats to the Canadian Petroleum Industry*. The report’s key findings draw attention to “a growing, highly organized and well-financed, anti-Canadian petroleum movement, that consists of peaceful activists, militants and violent extremists, who are opposed to society’s reliance on fossil fuels,” and the capacity of “violent anti-petroleum extremists” to “engage in criminal activity to promote their anti-petroleum ideology” (RCMP 2014:1). The report’s dismissal of environmental concerns with climate change and environmental destruction as “anti-petroleum ideology” is matched with an uncritical ventriloquism of industry statements and concerns. The report is particularly concerned with “violent aboriginal [*sic*] extremists,” and their ability to garner wide national and international support for actions against oil and gas incursions into Indigenous territories. An unmarked binary operates throughout the report: privatized oil and gas technologies and pipelines are “critical infrastructures” in need of increased securitization and protection, while protection of Indigenous lands and ecologies is extremist ideology.

In the lands now occupied by Canada, the state’s approach to Indigenous protest has shifted under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s government, which has fully embraced the politics of

recognition with its accompanying reconciliation pageantry. On National Aboriginal Day in 2016, the Trudeau administration released a statement on the government's approach to Indigenous peoples, saying: "No relationship is more important to our government and to Canada than the one with Indigenous peoples. Today, we reaffirm our government's commitment to a renewed nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples, one based on the recognition of rights, respect, trust, co-operation, and partnership" (PMO 2016). Despite these statements of "recognition," Indigenous peoples remain in a deeply subordinated relationship to Canada, and political claims to land and self-governance are repeatedly squashed in favor of cultural exchange (Coulthard 2014, A. Simpson 2014). The prime minister's statement of recognition itself embodies this by reciting the language of a nation-to-nation relationship as the route to reconciliation but ending with the facile suggestion that reconciliation can be practiced by Canadians reading more books by Indigenous authors: "I invite you to join the #IndigenousReads campaign to help raise awareness and understanding through shared culture and stories and encourage steps toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples" (PMO 2016).

While the government shifts the focus to "shared culture and stories" and away from Indigenous claims to land and sovereignty, oil and gas infrastructures have continued to operate as emblems of national progress and resource wealth. Resource extraction is coded as "critical" to national well-being and is normalized as unavoidable common sense. While the veneer of cooperation and negotiation has thickened under Trudeau, the underlying approach to the oil and gas industry has remained consistent with past governments. In the Speech from the Throne presented by Stephen Harper's government in 2013, the Government of Canada highlighted the role of resource extraction in Canada's future: "Canada's energy reserves are vast—sufficient to fuel our growing economy and supply international customers for generations to come. . . . A lack of key infrastructure threatens to strand these resources at a time when global demand for Canadian energy is soaring. . . . Canada's natural wealth is our national inheritance" (LOP 2013). In a continuation of this approach to oil and gas, Trudeau gave the keynote speech to a meeting of oil and gas executives in Houston, Texas, noting, "No country would find 173 billion barrels of oil in the ground and just leave them there" (Berke 2017). His speech was met with a standing ovation. The naturalization of oil and gas extraction and the securitization of pipelines as "critical infrastructures" serve to link industry profits to national security, criminalizing Indigenous dissent and recasting destructive infrastructure projects as natural outgrowths of the settler state. Given the use of the term "critical infrastructure" to legitimize extractive projects that have not received the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous nations guaranteed under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNGA 2008), the intersections between official state definitions of "infrastructure" and the tactics and technologies of settler colonialism merit further explanation.

Invasive Infrastructures

This article takes up Patrick Wolfe's (2006: 388) assertion that settler colonial "invasion is a structure not an event" and turns to one of invasion's contemporary material forms: oil and gas infrastructure. In North America, the expansion of oil and gas networks is tightly linked to the continued displacement, pacification, and expropriation of unceded and treaty-guaranteed lands historically inhabited and cared for by Indigenous peoples. Pipelines, like other modern infrastructures, are not events, but they are eventful: rooted in a settler future, they enable a material transit of empire (Byrd 2011), and this movement is hailed as an inevitable and necessary pathway to progress. Pipelines become a key link between the expropriation of Indigenous

homelands and industrial expansion, environmental crisis, and imperialist war. Oil and gas flow out of occupied Indigenous territories and fuel the maintenance of environmentally and socially devastating ways of life. Despite this imperial “transit,” settler state discourse imagines “critical infrastructures” as assemblages that serve the Canadian public, need protection, and reimagine the social good in terms of the aggregate economy (Mitchell 2011; Murphy 2017). Yet as Unist’ot’en spokesperson Freda Huson makes clear, Indigenous resistance to “critical infrastructures” contests the very category of infrastructure itself, asserting alternative ontological and epistemological modes of relating to assemblages that move matter and sustain life.

As the “undergirding of modern societies” (Larkin 2013), critical infrastructures are infrastructures of invasion. By facilitating capitalist exchange, reproducing and encouraging new forms of white land ownership, and cementing settler ontologies that naturalize the existence and domination of the nation-state, colonial dispossession travels through infrastructures, as they are used to extend settlements’ reach into Indigenous territories that remain unceded, unsurrendered to the Canadian state, or protected under treaty agreements with Indigenous nations. The settler state is built through a network of infrastructures, which must be normalized and maintained to assert settler jurisdiction toward nation-building projects (Pasternak 2014).

Infrastructures that transport people have been identified as formations of settler colonization. The railroads that facilitated westward expansion onto Indigenous territories in Canada and the United States were deeply colonial projects that required the labor of Chinese immigrants and the displacement of Indigenous peoples in order to build capital and deliver settlers to the West (Day 2016). Manu Vimalassery describes how the land grants underwriting the Central Pacific Railroad link the assertion of settler sovereignty to underlying Indigenous claims to land; the practice of “counter-sovereignty” in this case uses railroad infrastructure to both build on and replace preexisting Indigenous sovereignties to shape and expand colonial geographies (2014: 88). Other transportation infrastructures operate this way as well. As Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox (2015) make clear in their book *Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise*, roads and highways are fully entangled in politics at both the micro and macro levels. Madhuri Karak (2016) uses the case of Odisha, India, to trace how roads are used to aid counterinsurgency efforts to remove guerrillas and facilitate land grabbing. The association of roads with military presence led local people to take paths, avoiding the shiny asphalt highway even if this was an added inconvenience. And as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz notes, the extensive roadways used by North American Native peoples as trade routes before colonization have been paved over, forming the major highways of the United States and obscuring the mobility and presence of Native peoples, both historically and presently (2014: 28–30). Thus, in crucial ways, the concept of modern infrastructure elides the supposedly “nonmodern” assemblages of Indigenous peoples that were transformed into settler property and infrastructure. Settlers acquired their “modernity” as infrastructures facilitated dispossession while disavowing their roots in Indigenous organizations of space. If settler colonialism is a structure that “destroys to replace” (Wolfe 2006), then transportation infrastructures are themselves settler colonial technologies of invasion.

These transportation infrastructures intersect with oil and gas projects, as both are increasingly grouped under the definition of critical infrastructures secured by the state in Canada and the United States. Furthermore, the danger of transporting oil by rail is often used to argue for the construction of “safer” pipelines, ironically acknowledging the possibility of the railroads creating contamination, death, and disaster (as if they didn’t cause these things from their inception), while pushing oil pipelines as further incursions onto Indigenous territories in the name of “public safety” (Wilt 2017). Since the very beginning of the settler colonial project in

North America, infrastructures have been sites of contact, violence, tension, and competing jurisdiction. Deborah Cowen (2017) emphasizes not only the temporality of infrastructures that reach toward aspirations of their completion but also their entanglement with the past:

Infrastructures reach across time, building uneven relations of the past into the future, cementing their persistence. In colonial and settler colonial contexts, infrastructure is often the means of dispossession, and the material force that implants colonial economies and socialities. Infrastructures thus highlight the issue of competing and overlapping jurisdiction—matters of both time and space.

The infrastructures that support oil and gas development form a network of completed and proposed projects that are embedded in the national imaginaries of settler colonies while also reaching beyond international borders. They enable the material transit of energy, as well as the ideological claims of settler sovereignty over Indigenous territory.² In the case of Unist'ot'en Camp, pipelines currently proposed through the unceded territories of the Wet'suwet'en nation in northern British Columbia, Canada, rely on fracking fields to the northeast and on the construction of liquefied natural gas (LNG) export facilities on the coast. The controversial proposed Keystone XL pipeline would transport oil from the Athabasca tar sands across the US border to meet up with existing pipelines in Nebraska. Michael Watts (2015) has referred to this network as an "oil assemblage," and anthropologists have attended to the material and political consequences of oil as it travels through these networks (Rogers 2015). In the case of Indigenous resistance to oil and gas assemblages, these pipeline infrastructures also carry the work of jurisdiction and the assertion of political claims to territory and resources. Proposed pipelines assume and assert settler jurisdiction over the unceded Wet'suwet'en territories in British Columbia in order to usher in prosperity for the Canadian public, and they do so in concert with transportation infrastructures. When police approached the border of Unist'ot'en territory in 2015, they told us that our actions were not allowed because we were blocking a "public highway" (a logging road). Hence, the language of infrastructure is used to delegitimize Indigenous claims to territory by replacing them with allusions to the legality of "public" access. The extraction of oil and gas is normalized, and the petro-economy invades Native lands in the name of the settler public, extending the net of economic relations reliant on oil and gas and making it harder and harder to imagine and live into relations outside of capitalism.

As Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) has pointed out, settler nation-states are steeped in "possessive logics" that dispossess Indigenous nations both historically and presently through the enduring reproduction of white possession. Material infrastructures such as the buildings, roads, pipes, wires, and cables that make up cities are built alongside and on top of Indigenous sovereignties. These sovereignties, Moreton-Robinson insists, still exist but are "disavowed through the materiality of these significations, which are perceived as evidence of ownership by those who have taken possession" (2015: xiii). Indigenous peoples who are resisting the infrastructures of oil and gas recognize the power of a pipeline to reinscribe white possession on their territories.

These are also infrastructures of white supremacy. For the Unist'ot'en clan of the Wet'suwet'en nation, resistance to the construction of pipelines in their territory is resistance to the invasion of the Canadian state onto territories that they have never ceded or surrendered to the province or the crown. Unist'ot'en people regularly remind visitors to their land that it is not Canada, it is not British Columbia: it is unceded Wet'suwet'en territory. Oil and gas companies, on the other hand, publicize their projects by hailing settler publics through possessive investment in Indigenous territories as a pathway to prosperous settler futures. Oil and gas extraction and infrastructure reproduces the settler state, not only through the dispossession of Indigenous

peoples but also through the generation, maintenance, reproduction, and naturalization of settler ontologies. In the case of pipelines, the land through which pipelines are built is not owned by oil and gas companies but drawn into the oil and gas assemblage as a form of white dominion: Indigenous sovereignty stands in the way of oil and gas infrastructures by asserting a prior jurisdiction over territory. While oil and gas companies strive to present their projects as just another national infrastructure—TransCanada’s (2017) Coastal Gaslink pipeline is even pitched as a boon to other infrastructures: “Annual property tax revenues generated from the project can also help build important infrastructure that we rely on every day like roads, schools and hospitals”—white possession continues to naturalize projects that cut through Indigenous territories in service of the national interest.

As Indigenous feminist scholars continue to remind us, the work of white possession in settler states traffic in patriarchal notions of ownership and property that have implications for ways of relating beyond heteropatriarchal settler normativity (Arvin et al. 2013; Barker 2017; Goeman 2013; Hall 2009). Reclaiming relations beyond invasive infrastructures means acknowledging the violence done by prioritizing technical and technological infrastructure as the work of national progress. The settler state shapes narratives around infrastructure projects that make them out to be a part of the natural advancement of the nation-state while masking the violence they cause to Indigenous land and bodies, especially the bodies of women and girls (Dhillon 2015; Jensen 2017; A. Simpson 2016; L. Simpson 2017). Oil and gas extraction, in particular, creates spaces of unchecked white masculinity in which incidents of violent abduction, abuse, and rape of Indigenous women and girls have skyrocketed (Gibson et al. 2017; Jensen 2017; WEA and NYSHN 2016). Attention to alternatives would recognize the work done by generations of women and Two-Spirit people to protect and maintain the assemblages that sustain Indigenous life in the face of settler colonial invasion³—work that the Dakota scholar Kim TallBear (2016) calls caretaking relations. In spaces of land defense and Indigenous resistance across Canada and the United States, women have led movements to protect the land and water and to reinvigorate alternatives to infrastructures threatening destruction of land and Indigenous ways of life (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014).

Anthropology of Infrastructure

Infrastructure is by definition future oriented; it is assembled in the service of worlds to come. Infrastructure demands a focus on what underpins and enables formations of power and the material organization of everyday life in time and space. Cowen (2017) offers an expansive definition of infrastructures as “the collectively constructed systems that also build and sustain human life,” and terms the alternatives to state systems “fugitive infrastructures.” While fugitive infrastructure may not be an obvious place to start, anthropology must break from the reification of infrastructure’s stated purpose and imposed coherence. Fugitivity calls our attention to the ways in which time, space, and the material world are organized by power yet constantly disrupted and remade. An analysis that dwells in “fugitivity” attends to that which can be gleaned from spaces of power (Moten and Harney 2013).

With Cowen’s frame of “fugitive infrastructures,” we can draw attention to the material, social, and economic networks that flourish in the space opened by industry pressure and the threat of environmental devastation. The concept of “fugitivity,” however, has temporal and theoretical limitations in relation to Indigenous movements. While Indigenous movements may disrupt settler infrastructures and the capitalist relations they sustain, these movements are not transitory, fleeting, or temporary (Spice 2016). Furthermore, Indigenous peoples are not fugitives

“on the run” from settler governance. Instead, resistance to invasive infrastructures requires standing in place, in our territories, and insisting on our prior and continuing relationships to the lands, kin, and other-than-human relations that those infrastructures threaten. Indigenous blockades, checkpoints, and encampments slow and disrupt flows of extractive capital and the ideological project of settler sovereignty while also strengthening alternative relations that tend to the matter beyond what is usually considered the “built environment.” As such, these are not simply spaces of negation (as the oft-repeated phrase “no pipelines” might suggest), but also spaces of radical possibility under Indigenous leadership and jurisdiction—possibility that is deeply threatening to the continued operation of the capitalist settler state.

As Larkin (2013) notes, the Enlightenment underpinnings of “infrastructure” root the term in the building of modern futures. Indigenous blockades of “critical infrastructures” disrupt the reproduction of settler futures through assertion of Indigenous jurisdiction, placing the settler future in suspension. Shiri Pasternak and Tia Dafnos describe how blockades trigger state securitization: “Simply put, Indigenous peoples interrupt commodity flows by asserting jurisdiction and sovereignty over their lands and resources in places that form choke points to the circulation of capital. Thus, the securitization of ‘critical infrastructure’—essentially supply chains of capital, such as private pipelines and public transport routes—has become a priority in mitigating the potential threat of Indigenous jurisdiction” (2017: 3). Pasternak and Dafnos draw attention to the particular circuitry of oil and gas infrastructures in the global system of capitalist “just in time” production. The attention to systems, here, considers the materiality of oil and pipelines but insists that the pipeline infrastructure be understood within the particular networks of circulation it enables. When the Canadian state steps in to protect “critical infrastructures” by securitizing risk, we might ask, “Critical to what and whom?” What subjects and publics are hailed into infrastructure projects, and how are they reproduced?

Managing “critical infrastructures,” then, is primarily about colonial governance. Pasternak and Dafnos argue that this shift in governing strategies has positioned industry and corporations as partners in national security, marking Indigenous jurisdiction as a “risk” to be mitigated. This shift in governance reinscribes settler colonial dispossession through the legal and material network built to support pipeline infrastructure. Movements to block critical infrastructures, such as those enacted across the country during the Idle No More movement (the “Native winter” of 2012–2013), highlight the ability of dispersed Native nations to significantly alter the circulation of capital by shutting down highways, bridges, and railroads. By participating in the politics of blockades, Indigenous activists are correctly identifying the reliance of the petro-state on energy infrastructure and forcing open the contradiction between proposed and presumed energy infrastructure on stolen land.

The naturalization of resource extraction projects alongside the suspension of Indigenous life through settler infrastructure projects combine to mask the ways in which the language of infrastructure itself can work to legitimize “modern” assemblages like pipelines while rendering invisible the living assemblages that would strengthen Indigenous sovereignty and lifeways. If, following Larkin, we turn to “what one sees as infrastructural (and thus causal) and what one leaves out” as a window into state aspirations and intentions, the Canadian context of oil and gas extraction returns the following conclusion: in the eyes of the Canadian state, oil and gas pipelines count as infrastructural, while the relations of rivers, glaciers, lakes, mountains, plants and animals and Indigenous nations are the natural resources to be modernized as commodities or subjects. Here, Larkin’s note that infrastructures “literally provid[e] the undergirding of modern societies” (2013: 328) raises a crucial question. If those modern societies have settled, colonized, and attempted to eliminate existing Indigenous nations and political orders, does the word infrastructure itself denote an apparatus of domination?⁴ Here, the very act of defining

infrastructures as tools of the state takes for granted the state's ontological claims. "What one leaves out" of the definition of infrastructure is a world of relations, flows, and circulations that the settler state has attempted to destroy and supplant.

Many scholars have connected infrastructures to state promises of modernity, progress, and nationhood (Bear 2007; Coronil 1997; Ferry and Limbert 2008; Gledhill 2008; Mrazek 2002). The promise of oil, Fernando Coronil (1997) explains, allows the state to perform all kinds of "magic"; Andrew Apter (2005) explores this magic through the dramaturgy and spectacle underlying oil and the mirage of progress in Nigeria. Oil infrastructures in particular also produce spectacular forms of breakdown. As Susan Leigh Star (1999) notes, infrastructures often become "visible upon breakdown" (382). The Deepwater Horizon and Exxon Valdez oil spills bring the particular materiality of infrastructures (a "leak" in an oil rig, the crash of a tanker) into high relief. But the focus on breakdown reinforces a slippage between actually existing and future infrastructures—a slippage that is both enforced by oil and gas companies who operate as if pipelines are already built and therefore inevitable and by environmental activists who operate on the assumption that the pipeline *will* break (they always break). But what of infrastructures that do not yet exist? How might spaces of anticipation, spaces slated as "energy corridors," work as transit to capitalist petro-futures? And how might these futures be disrupted?

While anthropological definitions of infrastructure carry the political weight of state and industry projects, they have also made space to investigate the affective, social, and temporal aspects of infrastructure. Akhil Gupta (2015) compels anthropologists to look to the temporality, not only the spatiality, of infrastructure. Gupta explains that infrastructure can illuminate social futures, since state infrastructure projects are often long-term investments. Infrastructures "tell us a great deal about aspirations, anticipations, and imaginations of the future . . . what people think their society should be like, what they might wish it to be, and what kind of statement the government wants to make about that vision." Gupta's attention to temporality can also help to articulate how visions of the future within a nation are fractured and competing. If we refuse the idea that there is one unified "society" (and the attendant epistemological and ontological claims of what "society" is vis-à-vis the state, nature, morality, and technology) for whom infrastructures are meant to function, we may start to see how infrastructures materialize temporal logics.

Pipelines, then, become an inevitable harbinger of social progress, and they are proposed across territories as if they are already bringing the benefits of their completion. The temporality of infrastructure construction further brings with it reorganizations of experience. The new socialities and relations formed through infrastructures are themselves worthy of study. AbdouMaliq Simone's concept of "people as infrastructure" explains that attempts to govern through the built environment or to separate distinct populations through networks of services often fail; Simone pays attention to the actually existing material and social networks on the ground in inner-city Johannesburg, South Africa, noting that "the growing distance between how urban Africans actually live and normative trajectories of urbanization and public life can constitute new fields of economic action" (2004: 428). In the suspension, failure, or rupture of government intentions to govern through infrastructure, other social and temporal worlds develop.

Governments intending to extend settler colonial control over Indigenous lands through pipeline construction face the continued resistance of Indigenous peoples, forcing oil and gas projects to linger for years between proposal and completion. Gupta (2015) characterizes this state of suspension: "Suspension, then, instead of being a temporary phase between the start of a project and its (successful) conclusion, needs to be theorized as its own condition of being. The temporality of suspension is not between past and future, between beginning and end, but constitutes its own ontic condition just as surely as does completion." For many Indigenous

peoples, the completion of pipelines includes the inevitable spill, the environmental catastrophe, the destruction of ways of life. Holding projects in suspension, then, is a key tactic of Indigenous resistance.

Indigenous feminist perspectives, however, point to how suspension also characterizes Indigenous life under settler occupation. As the Southern Paiute anthropologist Kristen Simmons (2017) explains, “suspension is a condition of settler colonialism—it suffuses all places, and keeps in play the contradictions and ambiguities built into the colonial project.” Simmons explains how settler colonialism creates an atmosphere of violence, through both the suspension of toxic chemicals in the air, and the ways in which these suspensions create the “normal” conditions of Indigenous life. Settler colonialism preys on our porosity and vulnerability to toxicity; it wears on our health and bodies while chemically altering our atmospheres. Simmons theorizes this combination of chemical suspension and the suspension of Indigenous life as “settler atmospherics.” The normalization of settler colonial violence is accomplished through shifts in our atmosphere and discursive regimes. Here we can also look to Traci Voyles’s (2015) Indigenous feminist-informed *Wastelanding*; Voyles shows how the discourses about land in the Southwestern United States shape settler colonial violence: the land is cast as already wasted, allowing the continued settler appropriation of resources and reckless contamination of land and water. The settler accumulation of energy, capital, and territory is reliant on the parallel distribution of toxicity and violence to Indigenous nations, and forms of immediate state violence (like the militarized response to Standing Rock Indian Reservation water protectors) are tied to the slow environmental destruction of Indigenous homelands (Montoya 2016).

The uneven distribution of infrastructures also draws attention to who is seen as part of a society worth reproducing and who is not. Recall Harper and Trudeau advertising the future of Canada through pipelines and energy infrastructures while minimizing the threats to Indigenous sovereignty and the environment required to complete these state-building projects. The effects are dramatic abandonments and exclusions from the social benefits promised by modernity’s infrastructures in order to secure resource extraction. As Tess Lea and Paul Pholeros (2010) point out in the settler state of Australia, outward appearance of infrastructure can be deceiving. In their discussion of state provision of housing for Aboriginal people in Australia, they document the systematic disrepair, incompleteness, and poor design of Aboriginal housing. Houses provided for Aboriginal families may look like houses, but they are not. Their pipes lead to nowhere and are constructed with cheap and crumbling materials. These “not-houses” draw attention to the way in which infrastructure can, through its pull to the literal, mask the material conditions lurking just underneath the surface. Infrastructures in settler states like Australia, the United States, and Canada keep Indigenous nations in suspension as a condition of settler colonial expansion and extraction, while infrastructures of resource extraction roll in with government approval and corporate money.

Larkin, Gupta, and Lea and Pholeros emphasize the temporality of infrastructure, and the contingent link between proposed infrastructure projects and their materialization. Like many infrastructures that are subject to state investment, oil and gas infrastructures are aspirational. They anticipate the circulation of certain materials, the proliferation of certain worlds, the reproduction of certain subjects. But, sometimes, their bluster hides their tenuous nature, and their future focus creates an opening in which other possibilities can assert themselves. While Trudeau has heralded his government’s approval of two major pipeline projects, another was canceled after many years of Indigenous resistance and a lack of proper consultation with Indigenous peoples (Tasker 2016). If Indigenous resistance forces pipeline projects into suspension, futures might grow in the space between proposal and completion (a space that, if Indigenous land defenders have their way, leads to the reversal of settler colonialism).

Field Insights: Relations against Pipelines

Before heading out to Unist'ot'en Camp for the second time (in 2016), I drove a rusting Toyota truck up to the Yukon territory, following my parents along the Alaska Highway and stopping to camp along the way. My mother grew up in Whitehorse, Yukon, and left home to go to school in Alberta when she was 18. We were going up to attend a memorial service for her cousin, a man who she says was like her brother growing up. We were also going to meet and remeet my family.

I was nervous. Having grown up on Treaty 7 territories in southern Alberta, I felt like an interloper and outsider. The day after we arrived in Whitehorse, my auntie had a barbecue for family. Put the word out, expected a handful of people. Suddenly, the house was full. Dozens of people, all related to me. All my relations. I sat outside with a moose burger in hand, talking to a maybe-cousin of mine. "So," he says, "how are we related?" Um, I don't know. "Someone told me you're an anthropologist?" Yeah, you could say that. "Uh . . . shouldn't you know?" He convinces me to make a kinship chart. I find a piece of paper and sit down on the deck. People gather around, and I map out our relations. A giant, sprawling tree. Over the next week, I go over the chart, adding in forgotten relatives, piecing it together. When I see my relatives in the streets of Whitehorse, they ask me how my anthropology project is going. They introduce me to others: "This is Anne, she's an anthropologist, you're cousins." I am unquestionably part of this family. Here it is, on paper in front of me. Here it is, in the way I am addressed: Lee's daughter. Lori's niece. All of us are descendants of my great-grandmother Jenny LeBarge, though we can now trace the tree back further, back a few more generations to ancestors whose names are all Tlingit or Southern Tutchone, not the names of the places the colonizers found them. Our family name—LeBarge—is a misspelled tribute to Lake Laberge, which was named for a French-Canadian explorer. So we're named for a place that was named for a white man—not that there weren't names for us, or the lake for that matter, before all that. The lake: Tàa'an Män, Southern Tutchone; Kluk-tas-si, Tagish; Tahini-wud, Tlingit. And my people weren't even really from there; we migrated in from the coast of Alaska. White explorers were lazy historians.

After a week in Whitehorse, in the area that my people called Kwanlin (Southern Tutchone for "water running through a narrow place"—the Yukon River running through Miles Canyon), I drive down through the neighboring territories of Tagish, Kaska Dena, Tahltan, Gitksan, Wet'suwet'en. Arriving on Unist'ot'en yintah, I am exhausted and reeling. I arrive in the midst of preparations for a northern Indigenous youth art camp and busy myself with preparing food, helping to lead activities, and making the youth feel welcome and supported in that space. During the final week of the camp, after a trip out berry picking with all the youth, we get a moose. After it is shot, we run up to where it fell. I see its breath stop. All the youth gather around to help skin and gut it, and I work to do this myself for the first time.

After we get the moose and get back to camp, after the moose is tucked into the smokehouse, after all the youth are in bed and everyone else is sleeping or out watching the northern lights, I reflect on what this means for me as a neighbor of the Wet'suwet'en people. Skinning the moose, I've never felt so sure that I was in the right place. Here, on the territories of others, my ancestors are teaching me. That moose is my relation; this land is my responsibility. Much of my time left at camp is taken up with the work of butchering the moose with an Indigenous (but not Wet'suwet'en) friend. I feel entirely bound up in my responsibilities to the moose, and when a bowl of moose meat spoils after we give it to some supporters to pressure can, I am sick with sadness and anger. Next time, we tell each other, we won't let this happen. This is when I realize I have wholly committed myself to a "next time," and the pull back to the land is so strong that when I arrive

in NYC I am ill for weeks, heartsick as my connection to both territory and people wears under the strain of distance, the fast-paced crunch of capitalist time, the pressing need for me to make my “summer research” legible and theoretical and fundable.

It has become clear to me that spaces like Unist’ot’en Camp are doing more than blocking pipelines. The work of undoing settler colonial invasion requires blocking, resisting, and suspending the infrastructures of oil and gas and the systemic dominance of capitalism. It also requires attending to and caring for the networks of relations that make Indigenous survival possible. These are the relations that linked my nation to the Wet’suwet’en people before our territories felt the first footsteps of white settlers. These are the relations that bring Indigenous youth back onto the land and into material relation with the other-than-human beings that share their territories. These are the relations that connect me to other Indigenous peoples as we struggle to regain ancestral skills that we have lost. These are the Indigenous assemblages that recognize our dependence on other-than-humans for our survival as peoples. These are the relations threatened by invasive infrastructures and their toxic consequences. If the moose, the berry patches, the salmon, and the bears are destroyed, then so are we.

Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff (2008) detail how “critical infrastructures” in the United States became objects of national security as events threatening infrastructures over the course of the twentieth century were increasingly understood as threats to “vital systems” supporting the collective life of the United States. In both Canada and the United States, these systems are sometimes threatened by the jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples, whose land forms the conditions of possibility for collective life on this continent. When Indigenous land defenders point to “our critical infrastructures,” they are pointing to another set of relations that sustains the collective life of Indigenous peoples: the human and non-human networks that have supported Indigenous polities on this continent for tens of thousands of years. Indigenous peoples reject the idea that the way of life supported by pipeline infrastructure should be accelerated or intensified, and instead step into the vulnerable and volatile space between the proposal and potential completion of pipelines to protect the land, water, air, plant, and animal relations instead. By doing so, they attend to the “vital systems” that form alternatives to capitalist exploitation, alternatives to oil-soaked futures, alternatives to the unquestioned occupation of the settler state.

By performatively “seeing like an oil company” (Ferguson 2005), land defenders appropriate the language of infrastructure to question the terms of industrial invasion onto their territories. And by building alternatives based on Indigenous relations of ethics and care in the aspirational space of proposed pipeline routes, encampments like Unist’ot’en Camp challenge the destructive teleology of settler petro-futures. At Unist’ot’en Camp, the hosts remind visitors, “this is not Canada, this is not British Columbia: this is unceded Wet’suwet’en territory.” If the space of the camp is not Canada today, then perhaps it is an opening into a more reciprocal Indigenous tomorrow, beyond the perpetual incursions of settler colonial domination. Yet an analysis of how these futures are anticipated and brought into existence is only possible if we center Indigenous feminist methodologies that work against the inevitability of settler modernity and make room for the resurgent infrastructures that sustain human and other-than-human relations. We must critically analyze the tactics and strategies of colonial domination while strengthening our relations. We can do this by supporting spaces of resistance like Unist’ot’en Camp, by holding each other accountable for the relationship-building work that underlies everything we do. We can challenge the inevitability of settler colonial invasion by returning to the networks that have sustained us for tens of thousands of years on our territories and by living into better relations with each other and our other-than-human kin. We pick the berries, skin the moose, protect the water. We feed *our* critical infrastructures, in hopes that they will flourish again.

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■ NOTES

1. These productive networks are better described by Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2017) concept "infrastructures of feeling." Asking how structures of feeling are produced and relations rearranged, she suggests that the Black radical tradition and other revolutionary knowledges are formed and maintained through connections that arc toward freedom and challenge the structures of racial capitalism.
2. For an excellent report on the political context of pipeline infrastructures and their claims to Indigenous territories, see Mazer (2017).
3. The emerging *Voices: Indigenous Women on the Frontlines Speak* project compiles Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people's stories in a book and zine series. For more information, see <http://voicesbook.tumblr.com/about>.
4. *Gunalchéesh* (thank you) to a reviewer for pointing out that this is also true of the word "sovereignty." For a discussion of Indigenous appropriations of sovereignty, see Barker (2006, 2017).

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