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Contemporary Populism and the Environment

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Abstract

This review engages with literature on authoritarian populism, focusing specifically on its relationship to the environment. We analyze hybrid combinations of authoritarianism and populism to explore three themes from the literature: environmental governance, social and political representations of nature, and resistance. In the environmental governance section, we analyze how governments have increasingly resorted to populist politics to expand extractivism; certain commodities with national security implications have become key commodities to be protected; and borders, frontiers, and zones of inclusion/exclusion have become flash points. In the social and political representations of nature section, we analyze settler colonialism and sacrifice zones as organizing principles for relations with the environment. In our final section on resistance, we review literature highlighting pushback to authoritarian populism from peasant, indigenous, and worker movements. Variants of populism and authoritarianism are likely to persist amid increasing competition over resources as components of responses to environmental and climate crisis.



Contents

AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT	1.2
POPULISM, ENVIRONMENT, REPRESENTATION, AND RESISTANCE	1.3
Governance	1.4
Borders, Frontiers, and Zones of Inclusion/Exclusion	1.7
Representations	1.8
Resistance	1.12
CONCLUSION	1.17

AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In recent years, there has been a rise in national leaders around the world who might be described as authoritarian populists, and a corresponding rise in literature discussing the problematic concept of populism and attempting to explain the phenomenon. Global competition for resources in response to environmental and climate crises is likely to intensify in the future. Will the authoritarian populist politics that have increasingly facilitated such extractivist strategies persist too? In this review, we use the term authoritarian populism not strictly in the sense that Stuart Hall (1) deployed the term (see 2), but loosely to mean a political perspective and hybrid set of practices by which a leader or party seeks unchecked political power through emotional appeal to the defense of “the people,” land, and territory against an external enemy. This external enemy is alternately framed in terms of ethnicity, race, class, minority status, citizenship, or otherwise. The rhetorical appeal taps into long-held fear, prejudice, and anger, although the rhetoric is not always and everywhere matched by either authoritarian control or populist political practices. Furthermore, we extend our analysis to include populists across the class and political spectrum. This review engages specifically with the literature on the relationship between populism and the environment. A review of this literature suggests that leaders who combine elements of authoritarian and populist rule attempt to control environmental resources in order to secure their political and economic power while placating and controlling human populations. This results in top-down forms of resource extraction, framed as necessary to defend local, regional, or national sovereignty. Populists often challenge environmentalists, environmental scientists, and climate change advocates, labeling them as elites or outsiders (3). Populists secure political legitimacy by tying extractive strategies of capital accumulation to job creation, economic development (4), and national prosperity (5).

For the purpose of this analysis, we reviewed several special issues and forums that have addressed the issues above, including those in *Third World Quarterly*, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *the Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, *the Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Geoforum*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, *the Journal of Rural Studies*, and *Latin American Perspective*. We supplemented this review by identifying articles that clarify the relationship between authoritarian and nationalist populists and particular key issues, such as resource extraction and climate change policy. Finally, we reviewed analytical papers on the conceptual framework of populism itself (2, 6–11).

Three themes emerge as critical in a review of the relevant literature: governance, representation, and resistance. In the section on governance, it is evident from the literature that authoritarian populism is particularly likely to emerge in periods of economic distress and to employ extractivism as a complementary development strategy. Leaders in this group tap into social discontent with distributive policies to encroach on protected areas under indigenous control/occupation that was previously protected. Individual commodities are framed as

Authoritarian populism: a political perspective and hybrid set of practices by which a leader or party seeks unchecked political power through emotional appeal to the defense of “the people,” land, and territory against an external enemy

Resistance: active and passive creative action that opposes or proposes alternatives to dominant political action

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important for national security or cultural importance and garner outsized government support. As a result, authoritarian governance over national territory, with a particular emphasis on the margins (frontiers, borders, and zones of exception), is a key element of control. In recent years, climate change has become highly politicized, with populist leaders utilizing bombastic rhetoric to demonize climate change scientists, foment skepticism and frame environmentalism as antipoor. In the section on representations, we analyze the ways in which representations of nature, ecology, and the environment have become politicized. We identify settler colonialism and sacrifice zones as organizing principles for relations with the environment, even as environmental justice has emerged as a counterweight to those processes. Under resistance, we outline the literature detailing the ways in which peasant, indigenous, and worker movements as well as supranational organizations such as the United Nations have organized against authoritarian populism. We conclude with a discussion of the responsibility that scholars have in analyzing and addressing these hybrid combinations of authoritarianism and populism.

Natural resources and the environment constitute critical arenas of contestation and resistance, and political leaders utilize populist rhetoric to legitimate their control over these resources. The smaller the political leader's base of support, the more authoritarian and ardent the appeals to an undifferentiated and unified mass of "people" seem to be. In this review, we find that (a) authoritarianism and populism coconstitute in the current global conjuncture, and emerge unevenly and in diverse forms across societies, over time; (b) this political dynamic can be seen partly through the overlapping spheres of environmental governance, social and political representation, and resistance; and (c) political struggles around nature and the environment necessarily require struggles against all possible combinations of authoritarianism and populism.

POPULISM, ENVIRONMENT, REPRESENTATION, AND RESISTANCE

Increased scholarly attention to both authoritarian governance and populism suggest that we are in the midst of a global moment that, if not new, is newly relevant. Leaders such as Trump in the United States, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Duterte in the Philippines, Putin in Russia, Modi in India, Xi in China, and so on are often included in the list of authoritarian populists. Many scholars, however, critique any lumping together of disparate figures such as Evo Morales and Donald Trump. Bernstein (8) argues that we should avoid the ambiguities of the term populism by distinguishing class dimensions, distinctions between rural and agrarian, economic and cultural scales, and frames of temporality and scale.

Hybrid forms of authoritarian populism have particularly caustic implications for rural communities. McCarthy (12) sums up the link between populism and the rural world nicely: "Populist and authoritarian politics and regimes often arise directly from tensions between rural and urban areas; assert 'blood and soil' claims of indissoluble links between the nation and the biological and physical environment; deploy resurgent tropes of territorialized bodies politic, contagion, and disease; exploit national natural resources to buy political support and underwrite their political agenda; attack environmental protections and activists to give extractive capital free reign; eliminate or attack environmental data and science in a 'posttruth' era; and are especially dysfunctional political responses to the security threats, fears, and divisions associated with climate change (p. 302). Leaders who call on populist rhetoric often signal the removal of environmental protections, denial of climate change, violence toward environmentalists, and the conflation of nature and nation (12). They favor big development projects like dam building and river rerouting that modernize landscapes while at the same time preserving valued, so-called virgin landscapes (13). Ultimately, authoritarian populists all share an expressed attachment to and defense of "the people," whom they are protecting from various ills such as cosmopolitanism (8),

Environmental governance: political policies and rhetoric that pertain to the use, conservation, production, and trade of environmental resources



marginalized others, foreigners or other outsiders, and activists who would impose distributive goals over national strength. National strength, in turn, is often framed through development, which serves as “the solution” to societal problems (6, p. 262). For many, the rise of this set of political actors was no surprise, preceded, in the United States for example, by long histories of nationalism, exclusionary extraction, and racism and more recent histories of neoliberalism and abandonment of the working class (14). Post-truth politics ushered in through social media and new media exacerbate the situation by polarizing public opinion, particularly around climate change action, sustainable energy transitions, and migration (15). These disinformation campaigns build “commonsense” explanations of complex realities that often favor big industry (16), just as mass media manufactured antiworker commonsense in the past century (17). Hart (14) counters Bernstein and argues that thinking about the rise of specific, located authoritarian regimes only makes sense when we think about them together, globally. In this review, we attempt to do just that by outlining global dimensions of authoritarian populist practices, mechanisms, and tactics by analyzing governance, representations, and resistance.

Governance

Authoritarian governance and neoliberal policies are sometimes twinned as governments prioritize gross domestic product (GDP) growth over populist concerns. Resource extraction bolsters GDP and international export growth, but increasingly depends on authoritarian and populist strategies to pacify, remove, and silence local communities as well as civil society and media (18). Appeals to the common good and the populist cause are aimed at disguising the top-down implementation and maintenance of extractive policies, whether, for example, they are infrastructure projects that encroach upon indigenous land in Bolivia under Evo Morales (19) or in the United States under Donald Trump. In the name of “the people,” populist leaders support extractivism, prioritize development, and neutralize environmentalist critics.

Infrastructure has come into greater focus for geographers and anthropologists. For Mullenite (20), “banal aspects of everyday life such as flood control infrastructure can play a significant role in the rise and persistence of authoritarian regimes” (p. 503). In low-lying Guyana, 90% of the population and most of the arable land is located below sea level; thus, flood management and irrigation are of primary importance. Control of this infrastructure supports a plantocracy over peasant farmers and deepens divisions between classes and ethnic groups. In seeming contradiction, authoritarian regimes also have the power to not govern resources, creating gray zones of environmental chaos (21). In Alexandria, Egypt, failing urban infrastructures allowed a 2015 storm to quickly flood parts of the city and left seven dead; the military-backed regime (22) blamed terrorists, shifting blame from government neglect and climate change to outsiders (23).

A contradictory balance between authoritarian control and liberal market-based freedoms is common in the latest global turn to populism. In the United States, for example, the Trump regime has maintained commitments to the market and neoliberal governance (invoking both as necessary components of “freedom”) while rearticulating and reterritorializing these policies in nationalistic terms (24). The Trump administration has resisted what it sees as Obama-era resilience (disaster preparation, climate change action, sustainability) and instead protects specific racial and class-defined communities and managers of capital. This policy of “abandonment of the more vulnerable” is covered in more detail in the section on sacrifice zones.

Illiberal democracies (those where the label of democracy is disputed or at least in question), including Italy, Hungary, Turkey, Poland, Russia, China, Slovenia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Egypt, and parallel movements in the United States, United Kingdom, Austria, and France, are representative of what Erik Swyngedouw (25) calls postdemocratization. The characteristics of this “trend” include the economization of everything, depoliticization of the economy, rescaled



autocratic governance, the rise of unauthorized political actors, technomanagerial governance, and a permanent state of emergency (25). Swyngedouw (26), urges us to rethink the climate question in particular as a “question of democracy and its meaning” and a recuperated democracy as “the terrain (space) for expressing conflict, for nurturing agonistic debate and disagreement, and, most importantly, for the naming of different possible socioenvironmental futures” (p. 229).

The balance between control and freedom becomes messier with competing alliances between “the people” and business classes at play. In the Philippines, President Duterte pays rhetorical lip service to improving mining-related environmental problems, reducing the power of elites, and bolstering the livelihoods of fisherfolk while enacting policies that favor extraction (27). Participants in populist movements, such as the Gujarat Model of India’s Narendra Modi, present themselves as neutral technocrats who are progrowth and prodevelopment but in practice support business elites, depend on top-down power, elevate strongmen, and are founded on violent nationalism (28–29).

A significant aspect of populist environmental governance is undemocratic management of resources. Fisherfolk in Uganda, for example, lost their right to collectively manage their fishing resources with a stroke of President Yoweri Museveni’s pen (30). Officials cited community-level corruption and exploitation and claimed that intervention would create an environment of peace and security. At the same time, officials shifted blame for underdevelopment on the cultural practices of impoverished fisherfolk—they declared that the fisherfolk were at fault for eating “young fish, which depletes fish stocks in the lake” (30, p. 448). For Kantel, both fisherfolk and government officials claim legitimacy over natural resources and natural resource governance. What fisherfolk call elite power-grabbing, government officials call peace and security. Yet, tight control over resources is not universal in undemocratic or authoritarian governments. The Chinese state, for example, deploys relatively liberal market practices with certain resources, such as “going with nature and the seasons” (drought-resistant crops) and climate adaptation as a drought management policy. Clarke-Sather (31) argues that we must view authoritarian environmental governance through practices enacted rather than a liberal versus illiberal framework.

As Graddy-Lovelace (32) argues, much of environmental policy is agricultural policy. US President Trump framed farmers as both creating the nation and feeding it: “Our continent was tamed by farmers. So true,” and “Our armies have been fed by farmers and made of farmers.”¹ The Trump administration took an already production-focused agricultural policy and further reduced regulations that had previously stemmed overproduction and overexploitation, in favor of individualism, corporatization, and America First rhetoric. Admittedly, what Graddy-Lovelace (32) refers to as the “kernel” of progressive agrarian populism, “rooted in grassroots movements for dignity, agrarian justice, and land-based life,” is in fact embedded in sedimentary layers of settler colonialism and capitalism (32, p. 408).

Resource nationalism is a political discourse around commodity production, which brings together authoritarian controls over production and the populist protection of national prosperity (33). Commodity-centric landscapes, such as the wide expanses of soy across much of the Brazilian Cerrado (34), are created out of government support for particular, usually exported, commodities that complement national economic interests and therefore represent either support for national growth or feeding the country, or both. Resource nationalism and the protection of so-called king commodities are framed at the level of national prosperity and growth, often excusing the effects on the landscape, the environment, and the people (5).

¹Available at <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-american-farm-bureau-annual-convention-nashville-tn/>, as cited in Graddy-Lovelace (32).



At the same time, resource nationalism, for example copper mining in Mongolia, may also be a form of resistance to neoliberal reforms and grievances against the market. Myadar & Jackson (35) argue that rather than “manipulated mindless masses,” the case of Mongolia demonstrates resistance to external forms of extraction through the election of a strong supporter of the nationalization of copper. In Ecuador, the Correa regime enacts petro-populist discourses to stake claims of authority and legitimacy based on the state’s ability to game volatile oil markets (36). In a regional environment where the pink tide states renegotiated, but rarely nationalized foreign oil companies, it was the management of resources and their markets, rather than actual production, that allowed states to claim legitimacy in shaky global markets. Tanzania’s President Magufuli used public dissatisfaction with the governance of extractive industries and dissatisfaction with liberal policies to take greater control over the extractive sector and portray the opposition parties and multinational corporations as incompetent and predatory (37).

Energy sources are a prime example of resource nationalism. Reliable electricity access in India is a long-held aspiration for citizens and a routinely made promise for political parties. Clientelism dominates both electricity infrastructure and supply and even private, market-based solar micro-grids. Far from apolitical resources, energy access depends on citizenship claims and patron-client relations (38). The struggle with particularly authoritarian-populist regimes is often framed in terms of appropriation of land, ethnic rights, and ecological destruction, but the emotional struggle also affects people’s everyday lives. Graybill (39) shows that the emotional attachment some Russians have for energy extraction is the result of ruthless state efforts to connect extraction to progress and progress to wellbeing. Oil and gas production in Russia is heavily controlled by the state and is part of Vladimir Putin’s push to rebuild a powerful Russia; in 2016, Russia led global production in crude oil and was the second largest producer of natural gas. Russian media reminds listeners and readers of the importance of energy production and its role in rebuilding Russia; many take these lessons to heart. An urbanite in the Volga region told Graybill, “Oil and gas is the most important part of our economy. It is our future and we should do everything we can to develop it” (39, p. 387). A geographer in Vladivostok pointed North and shouted, “Let the Arctic melt! Then, then we can go and develop it all, and all for Russia. Then we won’t be behind anymore!” (39, p. 387). A laborer in a port of Vladivostok said, “We are waiting for the ice to melt. Then we can build our ships here and they will command the north. You’ll see. It will be great, work for everyone again” (39, p. 387). A college student working as a bookkeeper brushed off concerns for climate change, saying, “any climate change is good for Russia! It means greater development in the north, which will assist us in achieving our energy development goals, and then we will be a truly global leader. . . . When I am near a rig, I can smell our power and I have hope—no, I know!—that everything will be alright” (39, p. 387).

Urban Russians in Graybill’s article express interest in improving rural Russia through both development and accelerated global warming, yet rural Russians also express support for the potential economic incentives of Vladimir Putin and his regime’s extractivist policies (40). These perceptions suggest that energy extraction is not only acceptable in Russia, but multifunctional in creating both wealth and a warmer (and better) climate for the country. Furthermore, their earnest excitement about extraction suggests that state support for extraction is successful in building up popular support. Thus, for Graybill (39), “emotional narratives about extractive development are created by an authoritarian government and are reproduced by society with strong emotions and affect” (p. 92). While we see popular resistance to energy extraction and transport in the pipeline protests in the United States (41) we see oil market expertise used as a legitimizing tool in Ecuadorian politics (36). This difference in responses to energy extraction are partially related to the common complaint of least developed countries that climate change action translates to



economic slowdowns for countries more dependent on fossil fuels and less able to pay for energy transitions (39).

The power dynamics around energy in the Philippines are particularly interesting as communities have rejected coal mining through mobilizations and attempts to center better human relationships with nature (42, 43). Those in power provide rhetorical support for environmental protections while at the same time fostering increased extraction. Activists expressed optimism that incoming president Rodrigo Duterte supported their actions, but his tenure has been marked by a continuation and escalation of extractivism (27, 42–45).

Borders, Frontiers, and Zones of Inclusion/Exclusion

Although each of the following examples is grounded in particular local conditions, all of the articles on the rise of authoritarian populism reflected on the interwoven relations of class, race, and ethnicity that constitute and structure populist rhetoric and action in and around the environment. Borders, frontiers, and zones of inclusion/exclusion are flash points in which this rhetoric and action take place.

Control over borders invokes both authoritarian measures and populist rhetoric, with an often contradictory embrace of the free movement of goods and unfree movement of humans. If energy extraction is about nation building, borders and frontiers signify politically charged spaces of exclusion and inclusion. European and US politicians frequently make characterizations of an endangered “us” and a dangerous “them,” but the importance of the border itself depends on the discursive subject. Lamour & Varga’s (46) analysis of Viktor Orbán’s discourse on the border, “us,” and “them” reveals a preference for a broader European “we” in discussions of open European borders and a narrower Hungarian “we” when discussing non-European refugees. One sees the same shifting demarcations in US discourse around open trade markets and closed borders (47). Supporters of the border wall between the United States and Mexico see the structure as important in stopping illegal activity, but also in distinguishing “anglo-dominated US territory from its Latin American others” (47, p. 513). The emphasis that authoritarian populist regimes place on land sovereignty rarely extends to sovereign borders of indigenous territory, however. In Brazil (48) and the United States (49), indigenous territory has become the focus of extractivist nation-state expansion.

Concern for national sovereignty extends easily into climate change in terms of both concern for international intervention into domestic matters and the extension of climate change across political borders. Popular opinion on climate change is complicated. There is a strong popular movement in favor of immediate, massive action against climate change (50), but climate mitigation strategies are often used as an excuse for increasing authoritarian or central control. In Myanmar, official strategies to address climate change mitigation and adaptation are a trigger for land grabbing, a tool of legitimization for land grabs, and a tool to delegitimize grassroots efforts to mitigate climate change (51).

Climate change opinions are correlated with both race and racial resentment (52) and while far-right parties support protecting the countryside and rural landscapes (epitomized as representing national beauty), they reject global climate action (53). In the United Kingdom, individuals who support populist attitudes tend toward skepticism of climate change and climate change action, primarily due to concern that it is both a project of elites and of global (over national) interest (54).

Populist work to delegitimize climate change science and paint its adherents as elites has led farmers and ranchers to question government-led climate action despite often seeing its effects close-up. Liz Koslov (55) finds a spectrum of action and belief related to climate change and its effects, arguing that many take a position of “agnostic adaptation” in which people move homes



and farmers change farming practices without recognizing climate change explicitly. For example, one agnostic adaptivist told her, “I’m not jumping on any theory bandwagon” (55, p. 573). Another said, “I don’t care what you think the cause of climate change is, but now we’re getting more storms” (55, p. 574). These responses were not apolitical, as they led to talk of the politics of development and land use, but they did deemphasize the need for alliances and ceded large-scale action to the already powerful. Meanwhile in 2019 Dutch farmers led massive strikes and unrest in response to perceived agribashing in which the public blamed farmers for increased pesticide, fertilizer, and energy use. The movement fought for a continuation of an agroindustrial complex and the logic of capital while resisting action or discourse on climate change–mitigating farming strategies (3).

Unsurprisingly, the rise of politicians who can be described as populists in recent years has led to stalled action on climate change. Donald Trump invoked his feelings as more authoritative than scientific studies when explaining his perspective on the supposed trade-off between economic growth and climate change (56): “I think right now . . . well, I think there is some connectivity [between climate change and human activities]. [. . .] It depends on how much. It also depends on how much it’s going to cost our companies. You have to understand, our companies are non-competitive right now.”² The Trump administration withdrew from the Paris Agreement in 2020 (57), denting both the credibility of the largest global polluter, and the prospect of maintaining a strong alliance. However, despite the threat to long-term action, short-term goals of working toward low-carbon solutions remain feasible (58). Aldy (59) argued that while Trump’s intention of dismantling climate change mitigation largely failed due to prevailing headwinds (a growing energy economy, the economics of renewable energy, checks and balances, and polycentric climate governance), we may look back at this period as four lost years of progress.

For Zhang et al. (58), the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement suggests that national governments will become less relevant than local governments and nongovernmental agencies working for localized, material innovation and cooperation. Of course there are many exceptions to this. For example, the Chinese government has developed a comprehensive set of policy outputs, including the National Climate Change Program, the Renewable Energy Law, and a national target of reducing CO₂ emissions by 40–45% by 2020 from 2005 levels.³ However, implementation of these policies is the responsibility of local and provincial governments who were simultaneously pushed by their constituents and the national government to favor economic growth and local development. Thus, whereas climate change policy outputs (laws, agreements) have been strong in China, practical outputs (real reduction in CO₂ emissions) have not been (61).

Although many contemporary populist regimes undermine climate change action and adaptation, even those who actively engage with climate-friendly resource production often do so in a way that leaves behind renewable, but unlivable landscapes (62). In Guatemala, growing dependence on renewable energy is made possible by the rise of sugar cane and palm oil production, benefitting the few who are able to gain employment through plantations or processing plants and those who can capitalize on agricultural land. Those less lucky (and even those lucky ones already mentioned) are left with denuded landscapes and few socioeconomic benefits.

Representations

The environment itself is often mobilized discursively by populist leaders to support economic and political projects. Sometimes they argue for protection of land and environment from migrants

²Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/23/us/politics/trump-new-york-times-interview-transcript.html>, as cited in De Pryck & Gemenne (56).

³By 2020, China reduced carbon emission by 48.4% compared to 2005 levels (60).



or other targets and sometimes they argue for extractivist policies on protected land for “the people.” Whether arguing for conservation or extraction, the representation of nature through political and discursive narratives of what “the environment” is and who its natural resources are for holds great importance. The stakes are both material, in terms of wealth and access to resources, and epistemological, in terms of the meaning of nature itself. Political positions on resource control draw on representations of nature intended to demonize others, such as Brazilian President Bolsonaro’s decrying of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian territorial claims as a waste of valuable resources. The economized visions of nature are perhaps best represented in Graybill’s research with Russian workers on the impact of extractivism—interviewee statements celebrated economic growth, the productive capacity of land, and the sacrifice of environments for the greater good of Russia (39). These celebratory comments remind us that environmental destruction is sometimes more than simply an “unavoidable feature” of development; it is often celebrated on its own. White nationalism and environmental degradation go hand in hand in the United States via what Pulido and others call spectacular racism (49). Spectacular racism is highly visible and sensationalist racial attacks that target indigenous people and people of color, often in the form of Tweets for leaders like Trump, but Pulido and others show that this tactic obscures more material action in the form of massive environmental deregulation of protected land and environmental toxins. Policy changes (rollbacks, streamlining reviews, reconsidering energy rollbacks); political appointments such as Scott Pruitt, Nancy Beck, and Ben Carson; and executive action (support for Keystone and Dakota access via President Trump’s Memorandum, expanding offshore drilling) opened up the environment for destruction under the cover of spectacular racism.

Resistance to authoritarian populism and spectacular racism is not just a political position, but a defense of a way of seeing nature (63). For Afro-descendent communities in Ilha de Mare of Brazil, port blockades, agroecological practices, and nonmarket economies present alternative visions of value and nature (64). For Forsyth (65), these perspectives on nature are more than narratives or discourse; rather, they speak to epistemologies—epistemologies that offer counterexamples of how humans relate with “nature.”

The Belarusian regime uses references to the environment and working landscapes to appeal to older populations (66); Erdoğan in Turkey uses the environment in similar ways (67), placing emphasis on economic progress over ecological health. In Turkey, “catching up with the West” entails “blind commitment to rapid economic growth, along with unquestioning confidence in scientific and technical processes, their application to economic processes, and human mastery of nature” (68, p. 106).

We see this same kind of alternative epistemology in Latinx home gardens in the US South where weed killing, homogeneity, and uniformity are rejected in favor of colorful heterogeneous lawns interspersed with statues and assemblages of cultural materialities (69). Garden plantings of corn, avocado, prickly pear, and mango constitute placemaking for many Latinx families in North Alabama who subtly reject the nostalgia for clean orderly lawns preferred by their white neighbors.

Populists in Spain reframe protected area legislation in terms of private landholder interests in which landowners can elect to protect environments but are not obligated to do so (70). This reframing redefines the environment as a private good in private hands. In the Mountain West region of the United States, people also reject government intervention in terms of climate change mitigation, protection of gray wolves, and governance of resource extraction as an infringement on individual land rights and collective identities of independence (71). Community members commented that, “You’re threatening some of the things, like, ‘going green,’ not using wood, for instance. This is a logging community, so you’re threatening their livelihood by doing that. People are going to be a little bit more defensive about it” (71, p. 699). In Putsche et al.’s (71) study, a rancher voiced opposition to all government programs: “Oh, you name it. If it deals with anything



that has to do with the timber industry, the fisheries, the wildlife biology, anything that deals with any aspect of government control. [It's] because of the big scare tactics and the noncompliance. They can have all the meetings they want and we're not going to listen to you. And then they go out and sneak a bunch of wolves in. It riles the folks up" (p. 699). For the rancher, the wolves themselves threaten ranching livelihoods and the cattle that occupy the grasslands, as well as the government's apparent lip service to public comment. The speaker's violent opposition to wolves represents a relatively common tendency to choose livestock over nondomesticated species (72). This discourse stems from the earlier rise of the "wise use movement" in the US West, which centered on opposition to the environmental movement and opposed environmental regulations and any government regulation on land use (73).

In few regions are views on nature as politically charged as in Brazil, especially following the rise of Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency (74). There, the Atlantic forest and Cerrado biomes have been largely turned over to agribusiness and both are on fire. Jair Bolsonaro has placed the environmental ministry under supervision of the agricultural ministry, appointed ruralists to prominent environmental positions, and dismantled environmental protection mechanisms in favor of growth and extraction (75). Bolsonaro has said that "not a single centimeter of land will be demarcated for indigenous peoples and that both 'conservation units' (protected areas for natural ecosystems) and indigenous lands should be open to agriculture and mining" (76). He has denied human-induced climate change, and since his rise to power acts of vandalism against landscapes and indigenous communities have risen sharply. As Ferrante & Fearnside (74) show, "In one case, loggers carrying pro-Bolsonaro placards forced IBAMA inspectors to flee a town in the state of Amazonas" (p. 262). In another case, "land-grabbing 'grileiros' invaded the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau indigenous land in the state of Rondônia. These grileiros threatened to kill the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau's children if the tribe tried to recover their lands, and they claimed that the natives would no longer be entitled to anything now that Bolsonaro had won the elections" (74, p. 262). A striking account of conducting research in the Amazon during the time of Bolsonaro describes an angry and violent countryside with boatloads of illegally harvested acai palm hearts, burning forests, terrified drivers, badly eroded pastures, and angry soy farmers demanding "you are not from an NGO, are you?" (77, p. 1083). This opposition to environmental protection is complemented by the proposition that agribusinesses are the real environmentalists. From the ruralist perspective, it is the large-scale landholders who follow environmental regulations because of stricter enforcement, and it is they who are engaging with the environment in a productive way. A soy farmer in Santarem reflected that "The environmentalists should understand that we are going to plant rice, and we are going to plant soy, because we are in a privileged position, geographically, behind only the farmers along the Mississippi, I believe, and compared to them, we are better with nature, so we only need to worry about the radical environmentalists, those who will say 'no' to anything" (78, p. 91). These elite, large-scale soy farmers do not take an oppositional view to the environment, but rather one that places themselves as both conservationists of land and producers of soybeans. In other words, the Brazilian state and Brazilian farmers have designated the Brazilian Cerrado as a sacrifice zone.

Sacrifice zones are a manifestation of authoritarian views on nature. As summarized by Edelman (79), sacrifice zones can describe both hollowed-out, economically abandoned regions, such as the so-called rust belt of the United States (80), or landscapes that are deemed suitable for extraction, degradation, and discard, such as the landscapes of the Cerrado, Chaco, and Amazon that have been turned into soy fields. Sacrifice zones are areas of economic colonization in which people and resources of so-called underdeveloped regions are exploited in destructive ways for the benefit of national growth and the consolidation of state power.



We see sacrifice zones as left-behind regions in Europe (81) and the United States (82). In the United States, the sacrifice is carried out through structural-social crisis, government neglect, and corporate financialization (77). This abandonment creates swathes of white voters who feel economically hopeless, racially antagonistic, and politically outcast (83, 84). Ulrich-Schad & Duncan (85) describe a dire landscape in the rural United States: “The mines, mills and plants are laying off workers or closing operations entirely. Where new industries have emerged, the jobs are not of the same caliber as those in the past. Out-migration has increased, and younger workers especially are leaving in greater numbers. While some communities are faring better than others, rural working-class communities are in distress. With the notable exception of oppressed minorities in chronically poor areas, those who stay are nostalgic for the ‘heritage’ of what used to be. These are people and communities who feel left behind by a new globalizing economy. Political leaders and policymakers have failed to respond to their plight” (p. 76).

In a reflective and personal essay about returning to a sacrifice zone and “catching up,” Adam Jadhav describes a game of “what used to be here?” in which interlocutors described missing “grocers, clothing outlets, a Sears Catalogue store, five-and-dime-type general stores, an appliance retailer, a pharmacy, diners, bars, hardware stores, an ag supply, law offices, banks, insurance companies, multiple barbers, a florist, a Dairy Queen, an American Legion hall, the town library and a swimming pool” (86 p. 554). Jadhav describes both a racist defense of whiteness and a “genuine sadness” at play and thoughtfully argues for scholars to analyze both (87).⁴

This first definition of sacrifice zones describes people who have been discarded and neglected; the second describes places that have been directly targeted as disposable and in need of either improvement or removal. Disposable places and people in California are hosts in a parasitic relationship with oil and agribusiness companies who extract energy, water, and soil fertility and leave behind little besides contaminated sites and abused workers (88).

In Brazil, the Amazon and Cerrado biomes have been treated as sacrifice zones even for those arguing for environmental conservation. The argument is that by intensively managing already cleared land in these regions, or even by pushing farmers to farm in the Cerrado rather than the Amazon, some valuable environmental land can be spared (89). Since the election of Bolsonaro (90), this notion of sacrificing people and places in the Cerrado and Amazon for the good of national wealth has only deepened. His tenure has been associated with verbal attacks on Afro-descendant and indigenous communities (91, 92), increased physical attacks on the same communities (93), and increased deforestation (94).

Populist environmental governance often rests on violence toward indigenous people and workers (95) as they impose control over territories and ecologies. Populist rural organizations face violence for their advocacy of peasants, indigenous people, and the land. From 2010 to 2017, 128 land and environmental defenders were killed in Honduras (96). This violence was a response to peasants working for agrarian reform and recognition of collective farmland and of activists resisting new logging, mining, and dam projects.

In societies where race is a key axis of difference, race plays an important role in the justification and distraction of environmental governance. Pulido (49) and others point to spectacular racism

⁴As cited in Jadhav’s piece, Keeanga-Yamahhta Taylor reminds researchers to remember that our research can help us acknowledge the “anxieties, stresses, confusions, and frustrations about life world today are not owned by one group, but are shared by many. It would not tell us that everyone suffers the same oppression, but it would allow us to see that even if we don’t experience a particular kind of oppression, every working person in this country is going through something. Everyone is trying to figure out how to survive, and many are failing. If we put these stories together, we would gain more insight into how ordinary white people have as much stake in the fight for a different kind of society as anyone else” (86, p. 569).



as a cover for more drastic environmental governance changes. In Brazil, for instance, Bolsonaro declared that he would take land back from quilombola and indigenous communities: “Bolsonaro’s campaign depended on reifying anti-Blackness and clearly resonated with sectors of the Brazilian electorate, further evidencing the salience of anti-Blackness in Brazil. Moving forward, commitment to, and solidarity with, Black Brazilian activists and social movements are necessary, as the devastation of Black communities continues to play a central role in Brazilian governance and thus requires an organized political alternative” (97, p. 168).

Ethnic land is often the target of development projects. Parts of Central Kazakhstan have been designated as wastelands with phrases like “sparsely populated” and excused from environmental protection and the ideal site for rocket launching (and associated waste) (98). This labeling of waste is a well-used tactic that opens up land for degradation or improvement without regard for present inhabitants (99). Experts dismiss criticism as far-fetched concerns by the miseducated, saying “But fall zones are chosen because they’re sparsely populated. This is done on purpose to prevent public harm. Accidents are exceptions, and we respond to these. But cosmophobia can create real medical conditions or exacerbate existing ones. People who live in stress, or anticipation, especially in rural areas, can develop anxieties—these can turn into real physical conditions. They [the general public] are drawn to rumors. The media or activist groups only inflame peoples’ worries. Our technicians can look pretty scary in the field. One of our jobs is to educate” (98, p. 563).

Integrating race with class in the study of ecological or environmental crises is key, as these stem from the same processes of colonialism and capitalism (100, 101). In a special issue of *Antipode* (102), authors find that American Indians face colonial marginalization and dispossession through water rights (103), black communities face environmental injustice and targeted pollution (104), white settlers complain of “being treated like Indians” in pipeline disputes (105), antiblack violence produces environmental injustice (106), soil surveys function as tools for agricultural modernization and entrench white planters’ interests (107), indigenous memories and histories are financialized along with their land (108), recognition falls short (109), and green cities ignore racist histories and presents (110). In the conclusion to the special issue, Sharlene Mollett (111) argues that political ecologies of race are hemispheric, that race and coloniality condition the lives of indigenous and black peoples in the Americas, and that intersectional forms of power shape the land and are material and relational.

Resistance

While the spread of both authoritarian governance and authoritarian populism and their pervasive impacts on the environment have sown a sense of hopelessness among many, environmental activists, peasants, indigenous peoples, scientists, and even bureaucrats resist, thwart, and impede the spread of authoritarian populism. This is not easy work. Defenders of the climate, land, and people have come under threat—2020 was the worst year on record for lethal attacks on environmental activists and more than half of these attacks took place in the Philippines, Mexico, and Colombia (112). A longer-term study of the threats posed to land defenders underscores the violence environmental defenders face. The authors identified at least 1,734 killings in more than 53 countries from 2002 to 2018. Most killings occurred in Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and the Philippines (113).

In this section, we outline ongoing work on environmental justice that counters attempts to extract and exclude (114). As Mamonova et al. (81) argue, understanding the local social, economic, and political context is necessary to analyze the emergence and mechanisms of populism as well as the potential of various countermovements. In many of the following cases, we see countermovements that mount populist defenses of their right to land and existence. Afro-Brazilian



communities in Brazil have been under assault by the leftist Workers' Party (PT) as well as by the Temer and Bolsonaro administrations. Extractivism in this context is explicitly antiblack. In the Afro-Brazilian community of Ilha de Mare, extraction is seen as incompatible with Afro-Brazilian understandings of nature predicated on mutual dependence and respect. Ilha da Mare was identified by leftist and right-wing governments as a sacrificial place with nothing to protect and therefore a site of oil discharge without consultation and with forced relocation for the construction of a navy-built dam (64). Capitalist ideas of development and progress create an environment in which a local reflected that "we're not seen as people" (64, p. 498). However, local activists have resisted in both recognizably powerful ways and through what James C. Scott (115) would possibly call "weapons of the weak." They blockaded nearby ports to gain a seat at the negotiation table and continue to plant, cultivate, and harvest traditional subsistence crops. They share seeds, help each other clear land, and demonstrate that alternatives to extractivism are still possible.

This role of both defending the land and demonstrating alternatives is essential to preserving both the land and other ways of thinking and being. For example, Waorani people in Amazonian Ecuador have engaged with national courts and won legal battles in defense of not a pristine, unblemished landscape, but in defense of Waorani Land and the people's right to *Buen Vivir* (Living Well) (116). This resistance requires the invocation of stereotypes of Amazonian people and essentialization of the Amazon itself in order to court alliances with environmental coalitions and at the same time defends Waorani notions of nature and culture that reject both extractivism and essentialism.

Other land defenders fight extractivism with environmental populism as a counterhegemonic movement (50). Popular resistance to the construction of oil pipelines by indigenous communities, environmental activists, and landowners has created broad environmental coalitions that defy class and political factions. Resistance presents a science-based counter-expertise and, in so doing, "can produce conditions of possibility for subjects willing to go beyond the status quo" (50, p. 589).

Devalued landscapes such as Ilha de Mare, the Amazon, and the US prairie, be they sacrifice zones as discussed above or wastelands, are prime targets for development and progress. They can also be a refuge for escape. Wright (117) explicitly connects landscape characteristics as ideal for those who seek to "escape racial oppression, gender-based violence, and capitalist exploitation" via the concept of *marronage* (p. 1134). *Marronage*, emergent collectives created by formerly enslaved people to escape bondage, thrives in what Wright (117) calls, "those difficult terrains that marginalized, hunted, and exploited people have made habitable" (p. 1135). These landscapes are a place of possibility. This relationship between landscapes, exploitation, and escape is complicated—wastelands and sacrifice zones are often excused from environmental protections in favor of industrial or agricultural development and foreign investment (118, 119), yet when they avoid the eye of developers, they may become a refuge for humans and nonhumans. They are also places of biological and cultural diversity.

The border wall (e.g., proposed by Donald Trump to be built across the Mexico–United States border and paid for by Mexico) is a prime example of the twinned ecological (material) and symbolic (social) life at the intersection of authoritarian populism and the environment. The proposed United States–Mexico border wall was opposed by an alliance of groups concerned about the irreversible damage to ecologies along the national border, the inability of a physical barrier to stop migration or illegal activity, and/or the racist intention of the wall (47). Anti-wall opposition sprang from these disparate dissatisfactions, but created or fortified broad-based alliances that intersected capitalist, ecological, and racial interests, even as those most directly affected by the proposed wall had greater concerns: "It's ugly, but it's on their side. The real issues here are jobs, drugs, and water. That affects everyone on this border. Both sides. You should be asking questions about those things. Not about what I think of this stupid wall" (47, p. 516).



Within the context of peasant and indigenous communities, the generation and cultivation of alternatives to populism speak directly to human-environmental relationships. As Rojas et al. (63) argue, authoritarian populism is not just productive of monocultural and extractivist landscapes, it is also produced by them. The authors argue that whereas monocultures produced authoritarianism in Brazil (by providing the means for a small group of elites to impose their will over indigenous and poor Amazonians), agroecology resists it. Brazilian ruralistas, for example, attempt to court support for large-scale monocultural agriculture by framing themselves as “the people,” who feed the world and further the national interest. Meanwhile, peasant-led agroecology programs in Brazil “establish mutualistic relations with seeds, soils, and plants” (63, p. 959). A soybean farmer and politician of the ruralista coalition provided the following:

“The prior [Worker’s Party] government was more concerned with the common people,” he said. He then elaborated: “They advanced welfare programs but they did so to the detriment of *produtores* [producers]. This is the reason why, even if the new [unelected] government [of the 2016 coup] has very low popularity, the things they are doing are necessary for the well-being of the producers and of the country as a whole.” (63, p. 960, annotations on original)

Accordingly, ruralistas build the concepts and relations of monoculture agriculture to generate a brand of authoritarian populism that values productive landscapes and elite landholders while devaluing diverse ecologies, peasants, quilombola communities, and indigenous territory. Agroecology initiatives in Brazil focus on improving soil fertility, reforesting land with native fruit-bearing trees, and building coalitions. “Despite the pervasive, profoundly destructive impacts of monoculture cultivation, it is possible to carve out alternatives to authoritarian populism through acts of multispecies cultivation. . . The idea is that such mutualistic relations may one day offer an alternative to destructive flows of chemicals, capital, and political favors” (63, p. 977).

Agroecology as an alternative to monoculture is a source of hope in resisting both authoritarian populism and the landscapes of monoculture that align with it (120). Agroecology has the potential to provide an alternative to authoritarian populism and monocultural production and may even have the potential to repair this destructive food regime. Repair itself, like care, offers a radical alternative to productivist mentalities (121). Moreover, although peasant-led repair work, including climate change-mitigation strategies, may mitigate the material consequences of climate change (and government inaction) and suggest new pathways, these strategies are insufficient without broader policy changes (122).

Although many discussions of authoritarian populism speak to decidedly social categories of ideology and class, the intersection of environment and authoritarian populism calls for a discussion of the social and ecological realities of authoritarian populism. As many authors demonstrate, the contradictions of the current moment create both episodic and long-lasting political schisms and alliances. Crisis can lead idealists to compromise principles in order to reduce environmental damage. David Rojas (123) writes that “unavoidable ecological destruction” in Amazonia has created a frame of “crisis progressive” in which environmentalists participate in controversial environmental programs and alliances in order to limit (not avoid or reverse) environmental damage. They abandon ethical purity and embrace compromise and uncertainty (123).

Moving away from the land itself, the creation of broader, stronger, more collective political coalitions also offers hope in contesting authoritarian populism. Using the case of Brazil, Andrade warns against reinforcing left-wing populism as the answer to the rise of right-wing populism. She reflects that while the PT emerged as a representative of the working class, once in power it came to defend the interests of landed and political elites (124). A good example of this is the President’s enthusiastic support for PROSAVANA, an agricultural development plan intended to bring Brazilian agribusiness interests and techniques to Mozambique (125). PROSAVANA



activities in the Nacala Corridor of Mozambique were expected to marshal Brazilian expertise and Japanese funding to research large-scale farming systems, develop new seed varieties, and develop new soil management practices, primarily directed toward introducing and expanding the production of soybeans (126). PROSAVANA generated considerable resistance through a combination of direct action from below; cross-sectoral civil society alliance and segregated processes of resistance; communication, publicity, and media strategies aimed at transnationalizing the struggle and mobilizing solidarity; and alternative proposals to confront dominant narratives. Resistance combined with the surrounding political and global economic environment (crises and government unpopularity, Brazil's instability and Japan's democracy, global commodity price trends) to bring an early end to the project (127).

Rather than creating nation-wide coalitions, environmental defenders have found success in organizing and acting locally. Farmers in the rural United States marshalled their own expertise in animal husbandry and hog production to directly confront outside agribusinesses and form relationships of mutual aid (128).

A concerted effort that works at the level of direct action and at the level of the state may be the most effective for long-term and radical change. Bolivia's Movimiento de los Campesinos Sin Tierra (MST-Bolivia), a sister organization to Brazil's Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST-Brazil), uses a dual strategy in which activists work to redistribute land locally and create autonomous, collective agricultural spaces while also engaging the state in order to recognize and support broader land and economic reform (129). This convergence and alliance between social movements and the state works as long as political goals are shared and not incompatible as in the case of indigenous and peasant organizations splitting with the governing Movimiento al Socialismo party over shifting fears of neoliberalism to extractivism (130).

In a special issue of *Globalizations* (131), contributors document the importance of coalition building. They argue that grassroots, feminist direct action coalitions that find convergence spaces (spaces for sharing ideas and strategies and for building coalitions, conducting political campaigns, and creating autonomous political spaces) are of central importance in collective resistance to authoritarianism and capitalism. Knuth (132), meanwhile, demonstrates that coalition building has promise, but labor-environmental alliances fighting for green jobs can also be divided in terms of typical red-green divides as well as race.

Working inside existing political institutions is another method of resistance. Rights-based resistance to authoritarian populism depends on existing national and international law. Land and environmental regulations and agreements can become subject to dismantling, or populist governments can simply refuse to enforce or recognize them. The case of Brazil, as discussed above, of course demonstrates the potential for governments to simply leave land and environmental regulations unenforced. Nonetheless, land and environmental rights offer some potential.

After the peace agreement between the state and the FARC in Colombia, the right-wing populist government has had difficulty enacting its agrarian political economy aspirations due to the existence of two legal pillars: the Land Restitution Law of 2011 and the Comprehensive Rural Reform included in the Peace Agreement of 2016. Coronado (133) argues that these institutional land and human rights have upheld alternatives to productivism (or "efficiency" as Coronado prefers) and property rights for rural lands. The United Nations' Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests (UN Tenure Guidelines) has similar potential for upholding land and environmental rights with sympathetic governments despite strong contestation by elites, corporate actors, and foreign investors.

A special issue in the *Third World Quarterly* features several papers that directly address the potential for rights-based discourse and policy for improving land access. The issue focuses on the converging climate, agrarian, political, and environmental crises and the emerging alliances



and battlegrounds for the resolution of these crises (134). Converging global crises of climate change and land justice may lead to new partnerships and alliances, but also new contradictions as agrarian justice “means pursuit of a livelihood for now through a contract growing arrangement with an oil palm plantation, even as a climate justice perspective reveals the perils of an aggregated large-scale oil palm plantation in environmental terms” (135, p. 1320). The special issue editors reflect on the paradox of fixing crises of capitalism with the mechanisms of capitalism. This is akin to trying to put out a fire with gasoline. The contradiction is fundamental, unmistakable, and foul-smelling.

Many cases of using existing rights frameworks to protect land against authoritarian policies depend on the resolution of the contradiction of using capitalist fixes for capitalist problems, much like the Brazilian MST’s use of the Brazilian Constitution (136). Land tenure provisions allow populist defense against elite land grabs even while they promote narrow modernist conceptions of property, citizenship, and productivity. In sub-Saharan Africa, rural communities mobilize the UN Committee on World Food Security (UN-CFS) Tenure Guidelines to resist land grabs and extractivism, as well as uphold land rights (137). As Franco et al. (138) state elsewhere, “democratic land control is inseparable from human rights” (p. 66). In Mali, communities use “benefit for all” provisions to enforce recognition of customary tenure systems and protect peasant, fisher, and pastoralists rights from criminalization (137). In Uganda, learning about the Tenure Guidelines has informed communities about the mechanisms of land grabs and the gendered dimensions of resource grabbing, and given them the tools to collectively assess their land tenure situation (137). In South Africa, fisherfolk have utilized the Tenure Guidelines to collectively draft their own regulations and protections for national-level guidelines. In Nigeria, the Tenure Guidelines are useful for providing a framework for lobbying and engaging with the government around appropriated lands. The authors conclude that while the UN-CFS Tenure Guidelines do not constitute legal doctrine in themselves, they can be used as an organizing framework to pressure governments to respect land tenure, land use, and land access. More importantly, they provide a framework to keep governments accountable when a need arises for land tenure protection, promotion, and restoration (137). But while laws and policies are passed, they neither self-interpret nor self-implement. Laws and policies are dependent upon implementation, especially the more proactive aspects, such as the promotion and restoration of rights. A food sovereignty or right to food framework (139) is only effective if it is enacted, and that often falls short when opposed by large-scale landowners, elites, and foreign land investors (140). Aitken et al. (141) argue for development in a time and place of rapid change as if marginalized farmers and their families mattered.

The 2020 farmer protests that began in Punjab India provide a prescient example of the potential and possibilities for farmers to achieve policy change. The protests began as a response to proposed agrarian laws that would open up commodity markets to commercial trade and remove the commodity regulatory framework that had been in place for decades. Farmers spent months sacrificing their incomes, bodies, and sometimes lives to demand change (142). The protests mark both a return to earlier cross-religious, cross-caste, and cross-class agrarian alliances (143) and support from nonfarmer elites for better farmer livelihoods (144). Thanks in part to widespread social media engagement, the protests gained global prominence and transnational financial, political, and moral support, showing that although social media can spread misinformation and right-wing political manifestos (145), it can also support populist causes of different political ideologies. In December 2021, the Indian government called off the previously announced agrarian reforms, bowing to the demands of the Indian farmers and their supporters (146). At the same time, farmer mobilization in India highlights the potential for various schisms across these class, caste, and religious alliances. Organized movements have advocated for pro-farmer policies



that increase access to Green Revolution technologies, cementing in place the advantages of elite farmers. Landless farmers and workers have protested that platform, arguing for greater land distribution and local food sovereignty rather than engaging with global commodity markets. These factions reflect grounded realities in India, but have likely weakened the ability of farmers to make demands at the national or transnational levels.

CONCLUSION

Our review of contemporary populism and the environment finds hybrid forms of authoritarianism and populism amid a changing terrain of environmental governance, social and political representation, and resistance. We find that relations of class, race, and ethnicity shape populist environmental policies, practices, and access and that this populist moment emerges out of these relations. Yet while populism emerges out of local and regional divisions of class, race, and ethnicity and national priorities of extractivism and economic development, the simultaneous rise of these national and regional populist movements suggests that there is a generalized dissatisfaction with the global political economy. The environment is not only affected by populist policies, it is also defined by and becomes a political object in populist discourse. The challenge of this review is conceptualizing the many kinds of populism and their relations with the environment side by side. At the same time, in doing so, we hope to have illuminated the global moment by showing both difference and sameness across multiple sites, sectors, and societies. Bernstein (8) reminds us to distinguish between rural and agrarian populism, between economic and culturalist approaches, across scales and across time. This review, we hope, demonstrates some of these differences while retaining an appreciation for global linkages and similarities.

Given the persistent environmental and climate crisis and the pattern in responses to it, and that resource extraction governed through constantly evolving hybrid variants of authoritarianism and populism is likely to persist in the future, we find that in order to “break the chains of the present” as Moore (147) put it, we must “understand the forces that forged them.” As Scoones et al. (11) note, scholars need to confront land grabs and global capital; form and strengthen coalitions of social justice; support food sovereignty, environmental justice, and climate justice movements; reimagine postcapitalist economies; and enhance sustainability in rural places. Scholars advocate for ecological democracy, defined as deliberative and democratic ecological governance in which existing governing structures are reoriented toward democratic and sustainable environmental governance to promote ecological preservation (148) at scale (149). This means not only creating political space for deliberate discussion of the value judgments that are inherent in collective Earth-system responses (150) but also prioritizing expert opinions on biodiversity-preserving policies over local actor priorities and expertise (151). Mobilization for climate action, for example, can mutually support and be supported by grassroots movements (152) and create a foundation of environmental rights knowledge and action (153). This is a monumental set of goals, but one that social science approaches and methods are well-suited to address. Social scientists are well positioned to “study up” on the motivations, strategies, and tactics of elites as well as engaging with already existing social movements via ethnography, critical cartography, and visual ethnography. Working in regions that seem to support authoritarian governments allows scholars to engage with a place and reject simplified explanations such as “Appalachia is backwards.” Scholars also need to identify countermovements such as support for farmworkers and teacher strikes, and avoid reified understandings of right-wing politics (83).

This political moment is an opportunity for academics to listen for alternative political imaginations (154) and to unsettle our own disciplines (155). For many, the turn to populism was the culmination of a lived reality in which particular races or ethnic or religious groups enact



positions of supremacy and authority over the “other,” whether white supremacy in the United States, Buddhist populist nationalist versus Rohingyas in Myanmar, or elsewhere. The safeguards of a democratic system were compromised long before the Trump, Bolsonaro, or Duterte regimes took power. For Rosa & Bonilla (155) this is a period in which to ask ourselves how our own disciplining and teaching have limited our vision: “Unsettling anthropology might thus require recognizing its limits and accepting that other ways of knowing—particularly those coming of out Black studies, ethnic studies, and Indigenous studies—can at times more powerfully assess power dynamics that make the familiar strange and the strange familiar within the United States” (p. 206).

In the United States, land grant universities with mandates to serve both student populations and the economic needs of their communities are well-positioned to address authoritarian populism (156). Goldstein et al. (156) remind us of Hall’s identification of the educative role of the state in building populist consensus and call for a mobilization of land grant universities to engage with rural issues of urban flight, racial injustice, and agribusiness power through accessible and social justice-oriented research, teaching, and extension.

Academics also have a role in the foundational task of preserving data and findings through the duration of authoritarian regimes. Ecologists and conservationists have been under threat by authoritarian governments, from censorship and loss of funding in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Hungary, and Australia to imprisonment in Russia and Iran (157). The Environmental Data and Governance Initiative (EDGI) is a coalition of environmental researchers and scientists formed after the election of Donald Trump in 2016 to (a) archive web pages and environmental data from federal agencies, (b) interview employees at the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to track policy and practice changes within the agencies, and (c) analyze and document shifts in federal environmental policy (158). Creating what they call environmental data justice, EDGI associates kept critical feminist critiques of federal scientific data and data collection in mind while working to preserve the data at the same time. Their work was not just to preserve the data but also to empower citizens to preserve and collect data themselves using a toolkit with technical instructions, codes of conduct, and guides on creating and enabling a safe work environment.

Dillon et al. (158) identify a paradox of academics working against authoritarian populists in their defense of data of which they are also critical. Similarly, political ecologists trained to critique the role of western expertise in environmental conservation are also called to refute deniers of environmental degradation (159). These authors argue for a role for academics to expose powerful authoritarian states, individuals, and corporations by teaching in accessible forums and engaging through policy arenas and policy labs.

This review has covered a wide range of cases and topics in an attempt to analyze the literature on new forms of authoritarianism and populism and their relationship to the environment. There is much to be gained from this synthetic, global review. Perhaps most importantly, the review suggests that there is no singular manifestation or definition of authoritarian populism. Rather, the current moment has seen a rise in located, particularistic hybrid forms of governance and resistance that deploy both authoritarian strategies and populist ones. The environment, whether in the form of natural resources or territory, is a particularly salient battleground on which both authoritarian and populist rule plays out. In many countries, leaders who display these characteristics have been extremely effective in extracting resources, painting villains, and marginalizing alternative perspectives and populations. Resistance continues to be evident, however, as activists marshal social networks, rights-based frames, and so on, in defense of their land and environment. In the introduction to the groundbreaking special issue “Authoritarianism, Populism, and the Environment,” James McCarthy (12) concludes that the current global moment is “grim, but also



contains significant grounds for hope” (p. 311), based on evidence of resistance, including the role of academic researchers and teachers. We tend to agree.

SUMMARY POINTS

1. This review engages with literature on authoritarian populism, focusing specifically on its relationship to the environment.
2. We identify three key themes: environmental governance, social and political representations of nature, and resistance.
3. Extractivism has encroached on formerly protected areas, including indigenous control/occupation, while certain commodities deemed important for national security or cultural importance are protected.
4. Within extractivist policies, borders, frontiers, and zones of inclusion/exclusion become key flash points.
5. We analyze settler colonialism and sacrifice zones as organizing principles for relations with the environment and environmental justice as a counterwork to those processes.
6. Resistance to authoritarian populism has emerged in a wide set of political and material practices.

FUTURE ISSUES

1. Given the pattern in mainstream responses to environmental and climate crises, and the expectation that populist politics are likely to glide with it into the future, the current moment calls for a good understanding of the present if we are to tackle this question in the future.
2. New scholarship is needed on right-wing perceptions of justice, rights, and the environment, as we have much more research on the countermovements to date.
3. New areas of research on authoritarian populism will likely focus on climate refugees, control of arable land, and new Cold War geopolitics (particularly the United States versus China and the theater on which their disagreements unfold).
4. Transnational collaboration is expected to grow in resisting authoritarian populism as is collaboration among the populist leaders themselves.
5. We expect continued research on racial and social justice campaigns that promote alternatives to hegemonic forms of authoritarian governance.
6. As authoritarian populist leaders identified in this review leave power, ongoing further scholarship will be required to determine whether there are globally relevant links shaping their replacements.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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