

Introduction

On January 6, 2021, a mob stormed the US Capitol to stop the joint session of Congress from certifying the electoral votes cast for Joe Biden. The group had been encouraged by then President Trump to go to the Capitol and “fight like hell” against a “comprehensive assault on our democracy.”¹ However false these claims are, they underpin a racial construction of a people, who felt their right to rule threatened by Black and brown citizens, whose grassroots organizing gave Georgia and Arizona to Biden and secured his election as the 46th president of the United States.² *Democracy and Empire* argues that the force of the arguments that led Trump supporters to storm the Capitol on January 6 harkens back to

¹ Brian Naylor, “Read Trump’s Jan. 6 Speech, A Key Part of Impeachment Trial,” *National Public Radio*, February 10, 2021.

² While Trump mentioned fictitious maneuvers of voter fraud in several states that day, he was particularly personal with Stacey Abrams, whom he mentioned five times, arguing that the problem with Georgia’s results was “Fulton County, home of Stacey Abrams,” adding later that he had to fight against “Michelle Obama, Barack Hussein Obama, against Stacey.” Trump also focused his attention on Arizona, where he falsely claimed that “over 36,000 ballots were illegally cast by non-citizens” and that more votes were counted than there were actual voters. He went on to say that in Maricopa County 50,000 people registered after the deadline. These two states were won through grassroots organizing by Black and Latinx voters that was central to swing the states for Biden. This organizing had started years before, with Stacey Abrams’s gubernatorial campaign in 2018, or even a decade prior, with the campaign against Sheriff Joe Arpaio’s targeting of brown people and Arizona’s “show me your papers” 2010 law. *Ibid.*, Aída Chávez, “If Arizona Goes Blue, Look to Joe Arpaio – and the Latinos Who Organized against Him,” *The Intercept*, November 2, 2020, Hannah Miao, “Democrats’ Historic Georgia Senate Wins Were Years in the Making Thanks to Local Grassroots,” *CNBC*, January 9, 2021, Anoa Changa, “Grassroots Organizers Flipped Georgia Blue. Here’s How They Did It,” *Truthout*, November 12, 2020.

notions of the people that emerged in the context of empire, which – through settlement, slavery, conquest, and colonialism – built the racial formations that still frame US politics. These formations delimited the people and entailed the political rule and more intense capitalist exploitation of nonwhite people-qua-workers. These workers, located both at home and abroad, produced the wealth that was politically declared to rightfully belong to white collectives.

By describing the crowd as “the most amazing sight,” “the real people ... that built this nation,” and by setting a militaristic tone by thanking “the police and law enforcement” and praising his own record on the military and “our vets,” Trump put forward a particular picture of the people and its relation to the global. This group, with its extraordinary love for “this amazing country,” was contrasted with Biden, who wanted to end the “America First” policy, and with others who “tore down this nation” and its monuments. These claims issue a historically intelligible call for a white democracy, one that, relying on the military and the police, can assert its global stature against the declining legitimacy of the American empire and resist challenges by nonwhite groups at home.

Democracy and Empire reconceptualizes central notions in political theory to make sense of these claims and the real system they reference and defend: imperial popular sovereignty and self-determination. The book goes beyond existing accounts of white democracy by theorizing the material and ecological components of this form of rule and conceptualizing it as a properly transnational imperial form. This requires tracing the racial capitalist logics that marked the historical emergence of claims of popular sovereignty in western polities and their reliance on imperial forms of extraction. The book makes the case that popular sovereignty and self-determination were underpinned by popular claims that demanded *collective* access to wealth obtained by imperial means and required the exploitation of nonwhite subjects. These structures still organize global accumulation, whose terms are the subject of contemporary authoritarian outbursts affecting wealthy democracies.

The book relies on the Black radical tradition, including the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Martin Luther King, Hortense Spillers, and Saidiya Hartman to trace how imperial logics were absorbed by democratic polities operating within empires, imbuing emancipatory notions and practices of popular sovereignty and self-determination. Through these thinkers, and in conversation with Indigenous and Latino political thought, I put forward a three-part theory of the joint operation of

racial capitalism, empire, and democratic politics.³ First, *Democracy and Empire* conceptualizes *popular* sovereignty as a declaration demanding a part of a stock of wealth obtained through imperial violence that subjects others outside the collective. In other words, rather than distribute the wealth obtained collectively by a group among their members, imperial popular sovereignty demands to violently appropriate the wealth of others. Second, the book analyzes historical moments and emancipatory claims made by white groups to show that popular claims themselves were imbued with notions of white self-government that had affinities with imperial thinking. This step specifies further the racial ideologies that underpin popular claims and constitute the people *while* legitimating wealth extraction from racialized groups and regions deemed backward. In a third step, I attend to the basis of popular sovereignty in imperial polities, namely, the reciprocal interaction between a variety of regimes of racial domination, which evolved in articulation with each other to sustain privileged groups. To understand these processes, I zoom into how the racialized political claims and structures conscripted racialized labor *and* nature to facilitate the social reproduction of western societies. Political resistance and partial liberation within polities, I argue, led to negotiation, adjustment, and mutual rearticulation of regimes of racial oppression that targeted and target Africans and African Americans, Indian and Chinese indentured workers, Indigenous peoples, and Latinos in the United States.

This approach conceptualizes the mutual articulation of structures of racial oppression targeting differently racialized groups while attending to the heterogeneity of the institutions that enforce such oppression and their evolution in response to crises and resistance. This mutual articulation pushes against the taxonomic divisions between global and domestic realms, which blind us to the continuities between land dispossession, slavery, migration control, and overseas expropriation of nature. I disrupt the commonsensical character of the domestic and the global by showing

³ This path to theorizing racial capitalism is not the only one possible. Anibal Quijano's framework of the coloniality of power offers an alternative framework with many affinities with the one I pursue. Quijano positions race as "the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society's structure of power" through labor control. Labor came to be organized in multiple forms, which included slavery and serfdom but also modes entailing reciprocity and/or based on wages. Quijano, moreover, diagnoses these sociological and historical formations as novel and articulated with the capitalist production of commodities for the world market, even though they were also structured around local conditions. Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla* 1, no. 3 (2000): 535.

that racial and possessive forms of popular sovereignty organize both realms, thus transforming, but not overcoming, imperial structures of mobility and labor control, which continue to structure subjection and global struggles in the present.

Notably, this mutual articulation entails social separateness, i.e., the disjuncture or deactivation of relations between humans and humans and nature that stand in the way of capitalist accumulation. Thus, articulation is best understood as a multidimensional process of separation/interconnection. First, capitalism works through technologies of antirelationality or partition to extract subjects from collectives that are life- and nature-sustaining to then conscript them into unequal and separate functions determined by race, whose interrelation advances capital accumulation.⁴

Such a framework, by recognizing the active role of popular sovereignty in channeling imperial logics, recasts racial emancipation as needing a thorough reconfiguration of political formations rather than inclusion into a given polity. This reconfiguration must disconnect existing circuits of accumulation and reconnect collectives through a new language of popular sovereignty and emancipation that is not organized around racially exclusive communities sustained by the twin extraction of racialized nature and labor for profit. Only these new arrangements can recast politics as the search for a racially-egalitarian, socially-centered, and nature-regenerative democratic solution to exploitation and violence. Such a future would break off the parceling out of responsibility entailed by the organization of the world in sovereign states and envision a popular emancipatory discourse that encompasses the transnational dialogue and joint action of radical movements of Indigenous, Black-diasporic, migrant, and expropriated groups around the world.

DEMOCRACY, DOMINATION, AND TRANSNATIONALISM

Democracy and Empire contributes to the imagining and charting of alternative futures by clarifying the forms of entanglement, the continuities in forms of subjection, and the nodes of connection between apparently distinct realms of racial oppression. It then ties these formations

⁴ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography," *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (2002): 161, Jodi Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 78, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Partition," *Keynote at Decolonize the City! Decoloniale Perspektiven auf die Neoliberal Stadt* September 21–23 (2012): cited in Melamed, "Racial Capitalism."

to the efforts of dominant *democratic polities* to moderate the effects of capitalism over themselves, while reinforcing hierarchies to delimit the reach of any gains attained. This is accomplished both by denying full subjectivity to racialized subjects and by conscripting these same subjects *and* nature to intensively exploitative conditions to boost their *commonwealth*. This book thus theorizes both the articulation between racial regimes of capitalist oppression and their connection to popular sovereignty. In terms of the regimes of exploitation, Indigenous land dispossession created the “need” for enslaved labor, whose freeing led to the import of indentured labor from India and China, whose ban in the early twentieth century intensified the use of brown labor in the United States, also intensified by internal migration and the abandonment of farm work by emancipated Black laborers in the United States. These *needs* respond to capitalist accumulation priorities but are shaped by a racialized politics of white emancipation that partakes of the gains from and contributes to the organization of despotic rule over economically racialized others to separate them from the riches they produce.

By linking popular sovereignty as a form of government to the extraction of forced racialized labor and nature that is its condition of possibility in practice, this framework conceptually and historically links problems of exploitative work to political problems of rule. This means that instead of decrying the invasion of political realms by economic logics, it reconstructs how, historically, white *political* emancipation was intimately entangled with the management and distribution of *economic* wealth through the political rule of nonwhite laboring masses.⁵ In so doing, *Democracy and Empire* integrates several literatures that tend to analyze popular sovereignty, empire, labor, immigration, ecology, and racial capitalism in isolation from one another. The study of these regimes as self-contained or exclusive of each other limits our understanding of the global past and present. These realms operate in coordination

⁵ This concern animates recent contributions in critical theory, including Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), Regina Kreide, “Democracy in Crisis: Why Political Philosophy Needs Social Theory,” in *Transformations of Democracy: Crisis, Protest, and Legitimation*, ed. Regina Kreide Robin Celikates, and Tilo Wesche (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018). See critical readings by Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, “Refurbishing Liberal Democracy?: On Wendy Brown’s Undoing the Demos,” *Theory & Event* 20, no. 2 (2017), Samuel A. Chambers, “Undoing Neoliberalism: Homo (Economicus, Homo Politicus, and the Zōon Politikon),” *Critical Inquiry* 44, no. 4 (2018), Lisa Tilley and Robbie Shilliam, “Raced Markets: An Introduction,” *New Political Economy* 23, no. 5 (2018).

and according to continuous logics, responding to popularly supported demands to appropriate resources to sustain white groups' lives and well-being. This book traces how these regimes are synchronously articulated with each other but also reveals their dynamism and rearticulation following moments of partial liberation, geopolitical crisis, and – ultimately – the onset of neoliberalism. In the rest of this Introduction, I explicate further how and why this divide is theoretically distortive and re-join at the seams these realms of study to produce a more whole, as well as transnational, picture of racial capitalist oppression and (post) imperial popular politics.

THEORIZING THE MATERIAL INSIDE/OUTSIDE OF POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

Democracy and Empire intervenes in the dynamic literature that addresses how concepts and practices of sovereignty, US democracy, freedom, and the political are limited by settler projects and/or the systematic exclusion of slaves and their descendants.⁶ This point is also sustained by scholars of white democracy and the racial contract, who consider western democratic formations *Herrenvolk* democracies, where peoples collectively agree to exclude racialized others from a community of reciprocity, an account more recently extended to encompass the global.⁷

My focus on popular sovereignty and self-determination as curtailed principles of collective organization echoes these concerns but substantially expands the purview of the inquiry. First, to accounts that acknowledge the global character of white supremacy as an institution and circulating ideology, this book adds a more careful conceptualization of the political character of this rule and its material background. In so doing, it directly addresses and problematizes the predominant theorization of popular sovereignty and self-determination in isolation from

⁶ See, respectively, the accounts of Joan Cocks, Adam Dahl, Aziz Rana, and Karena Shaw. Karena Shaw, *Indigeneity and Political Theory: Sovereignty and the Limits of the Political* (London: Routledge, 2008), Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), Joan Cocks, *On Sovereignty and Other Political Delusions* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), Adam Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018).

⁷ Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), Charles W. Mills, "Race and Global Justice," in *Empire, Race, and Global Justice*, ed. Duncan Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

its entanglements with despotic global orientations and racial capitalism. Specifically, the book connects these two core political concepts to the coercive organization and extraction of labor, land, and resources for social reproduction; these are both incorporated into capitalist circuits of accumulation and make possible white democracies' collective political claims. To do this, I rely on a more expansive archive than previously engaged, including the reading of canonical scholars in the Black radical tradition, imperial archives, and the historiography of moments when imperial structures smoothly metamorphose into domestically grounded "democratic" regimes. In tracing the intersection of democratic and imperial moments and structures, I follow Lisa Lowe in tracking the "intimacies of four continents," that is, the relationality and differentiation of peoples and their contemporaneity, thus traversing distinct and separately studied areas.⁸ I extend the study of these intimacies by centering the *politics* of these moments of imbrication between different racialized groups, their mobilities, and their location within the division of labor. I theorize the moments of reorganization of these groups vis-à-vis each other, and the continuous but distinct institutional mechanisms of marginalization and labor control that target them. Finally, in this reconstruction, I further integrate questions of migration and ecology into the frameworks of popular sovereignty, racial capitalism, and empire, two pressing contemporary issues that are relatively overlooked within these traditions.

Thus, the critical reading of the entanglement between democracy and empire proposed here could not be further from the well-known analysis of this couplet by British liberals at the turn of the century. While these scholars did critique the claim that empire was guided by a beneficent spirit to teach the British "arts of governance," they did not delve into the hierarchy that grounded the supposed need for such a transfer.⁹ Most importantly, J. A. Hobson did not turn his critical eye toward self-governing colonies themselves, highlighting them instead as

⁸ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 5–6.

⁹ Leonard T. Hobhouse, "Democracy and Empire," *The Speaker*, October 18 (1902): 76, Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, 116–17. See also further discussion of this question in Chapter 1 on "democratic despotism" and Robert Gooding-Williams's comparative reading of Du Bois and Hobson, which highlights the former's departure from the latter's trust in trade unionism and socialism as the path to ending "the new imperialism." Robert Gooding-Williams, "Democratic Despotism and New Imperialism," in *Abolition & Democracy*, ed. Bernard Harcourt (New York: Columbia Center for Contemporary Critical Thought, 2020).

exceptional within the British Empire because rather than being ruled autocratically, they were ruled by “responsible representative government” and thus were the one space where true democratic government within empire was taking place.¹⁰ In contrast, the analysis that follows argues that self-governing settler colonies exhibited the most duplicitous forms of imperial democracy. This form obscured their dependence on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and slave labor, and gradually went on to expand the reach of its formal or informal dependence on their own imperial possessions, all the while developing a democratic discourse of self-government and popular sovereignty whose seductive power exceeded Hobson and other liberals of his generation. This book argues that this political form is not an aberration but the single most prevalent regime in the western world, worth studying and conceptualizing because its reconstruction is necessary for undoing it, that is, in order to re-theorize popular sovereignty in ways that can dismantle its imperial form.

Because the claims of the emancipation of an increasingly vocal white working class at the turn of the century demanded access to imperial wealth, their aspiration cannot be separated from the exploitation of nonwhite workers and nature that this entailed. So even while British settler colonies and the United States came to be seen as progressive and democratic projects that eschewed the autocratic features of the other British dominions, these collectives were outwardly despotic because they depended on stolen land, enslaved labor, and other imperial forms of extraction. In European metropolises, meanwhile, colonial wealth and migration to settler colonies were also explicitly conceived of by elites and working-class leaders as vehicles for social enfranchisement and upward mobility for the impoverished.¹¹ Acknowledging these entanglements

¹⁰ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: Gordon Press, 1975 [1902]), 114–15, Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 357. This recasting of settler colonies as promising sites of representative democracy and progressivism takes place at the turn of the century, as Duncan Bell and Marilyn Lake note. Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*, Marilyn Lake, *Progressive New World: How Settler Colonialism and Transpacific Exchange Shaped American Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

¹¹ As Paul Hindenburg, who would preside over Germany from 1925, put it: “Without colonies no security regarding the acquisition of raw materials, without raw materials no industry, without industry no adequate standard of living and wealth. Therefore, Germans, do we need colonies.” Cited in Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 98. See also Chapter 2.

requires thinking anew about the material underpinnings of popular sovereignty, and investigating how declarations of peoplehood are imbricated with affective attachments to wealth and status enabled by imperialism. Imperialism, as a form of outward domination, is the “very means of existence” of racial capitalism, meaning that dominant capitalist countries depend on the “assured complement of backward areas and their resources.”¹² Thus, embedding collective declarations of peoplehood in empire means detailing their dependence on transnational networks of mobility and racial capitalist extraction that resulted in a variety of political formations facilitating these flows. Hence, the goal is not to reconstruct a bounded or harmonious whole, but the combined waves of political domination, instances of partial liberation, and the racial ideologies that supported them, all of which operated and operate transnationally to support imperial democracies. This focus on democracy and the imperial political formations that supported its material basis through capitalist accumulation is sympathetic with but distinct from Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò’s *Global Racial Empire*, which names the “global economic structure,” whose basis was racism and colonialism, and the resulting *social* system of “linked cumulative advantage and disadvantage processes.”¹³ By centering popular politics, *Democracy and Empire* brings home the imbrication between imperial capitalism and *political* languages and institutions of democratic government, including popular sovereignty, self-determination as a founding principle of international order, regimes of migration control, and alienation from nature as key aspects of modern democracies.

My approach also contrasts with accounts of people-making that explore moments of constitution of the people and the transformation of the multitude into a political collective. Even if these approaches do not minimize the violence and decisionism that are contained in these moments of constitution, their focus on undecidability leaves out what precisely these violent structures amount to, and why the multitude happens to be racist, two facets at the core of this book’s account.¹⁴ As such,

¹² Oliver C. Cox, *Capitalism as a System* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), 136.

¹³ Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 23–31.

¹⁴ See also Ben McKean’s critique of Laclau’s failure to account for and problematize the attachments to racist populist discourse and the form of subjectivity entailed. “Toward an Inclusive Populism? On the Role of Race and Difference in Laclau’s Politics,” *Political Theory* 44(6), 814.

these approaches are less interested in connecting this violence to race or the imperial wealth that the people – once constituted – appropriates.¹⁵ Other approaches theorize the people as a process which both moors state institutions and allows for “change, surprise, and innovation,” thus solving the problem of indeterminacy.¹⁶ A processual account, however, cannot easily accommodate changes that require dismantling the dependence of the previously enfranchised group on those excluded and rebuilding polities in a transnational key, as this book argues is necessary, because in such cases the turning upside down of the people’s foundations is required for any broad emancipation. Scholars also focus on popular assemblies as privileged sites of political representation and moments in which rebellious aspirations to share power in egalitarian ways are cultivated.¹⁷ Yet the possibility of nurturing these moments requires us to understand that aspirations to share power and access to wealth too often depend on conscripting others to satisfy the people’s well-being. None of these approaches, moreover, puzzle over the fact that the power and well-being that popular movements wish to access in the wealthy world requires transnational networks of exploitation as a condition of possibility. These shortcomings mean that, by not theorizing its material background, theories of popular sovereignty hide the very substance of what the people aim to access and distribute, and the relationship political subjects establish with the labor and natural resources that sustain them as a collective. Was this entanglement possessive and extractive, or reciprocal and regenerative? If the former, then popular sovereignty becomes the means to distribute ill-gotten gains, and omitting this feature disavows the imperial projects that boundedly progressive movements support (see Chapter 2). Instead, *Democracy and Empire* theorizes this imperially truncated form of emancipation as a proper form, one worth studying to better understand it and how it could be dismantled. This account of imperial

¹⁵ Bonnie Honig, “Between Decision and Deliberation: Political Paradox in Democratic Theory,” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 1 (2007). For other critiques of this approach see Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, “Agonized Liberalism. The Liberal Theory of William E. Connolly,” *Radical Philosophy* 127, Sep/Oct (2004), Regina Kreide’s “Democracy in Crisis: Why Political Philosophy Needs Social Theory,” 42–43.

¹⁶ Paulina Ochoa Espejo, *The Time of Popular Sovereignty: Process and the Democratic State* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), Laura Grattan, *Populism’s Power: Radical Grassroots Democracy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), Jason Frank, *The Democratic Sublime: On Aesthetics and Popular Assembly* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

popular sovereignty transnationalizes and systematizes a recent crop of work that traces how racialized violence can ground moments of constitution of the people.¹⁸

This does not mean, however, that the proposed framework explicates only a sub-standard regime of popular sovereignty, leaving popular sovereignty in its ideal form unscathed as a theoretical concept. Because all existing forms of popular sovereignty emerged in either imperial regimes or postcolonial contexts, an “ideal” model of popular sovereignty needs to conceptualize forms of collective politics that are not only emancipating themselves from monarchs or nondemocratic elites, but also founding regimes that do not dispossess others. The proposed account also recasts popular sovereignty in the postcolonial context (Chapter 5), where emancipation following decolonization is not only from colonial powers, but also properly from authoritarian rulers of a particular kind, i.e. coopted postcolonial leaders who steer the polity toward the funneling of resources to former metropolises, meaning that the constitution of the people requires the recuperation of the *commonwealth* from predatory actors at home and abroad. This shows that not considering the material underpinnings of popular sovereignty and the transnational despotic entanglements that they entail cannot but result in its mis-conceptualization, that is, its conceptualization in ways that disavow harms inflicted or suffered by the collective demanding self-government.¹⁹ Ultimately, an ideal popular sovereignty is one that is anti-imperial, one that remains vigilant of its possessiveness rather than silent on its relations to its outside. This stance also forces us to rethink democracy and emancipation in transnational terms, knowing that otherwise it is impossible to fully account

¹⁸ Fred Lee *Extraordinary Racial Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018), Michael Gorup, “The Strange Fruit of the Tree of Liberty: Lynch Law and Popular Sovereignty in the United States,” *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 3 (2020), Inés Valdez, “Socialism and Empire: Labor Mobility, Racial Capitalism, and the Political Theory of Migration,” *Political Theory* 49, no. 6 (2021). Nazlı Konya also scrutinizes authoritarian efforts to emulate the desire and insurgency of democratic movements to cement their rule in “Making a People: Turkey’s ‘Democracy Watches’ and Gezi-Envy,” *Political Theory* 49, no. 5 (2021).

¹⁹ Elisabeth Anker’s recent theorization of “ugly freedoms” is a helpful parallel here. By calling certain varieties of freedom “ugly,” she emphasizes “how a celebrated value of nondomination or uncoerced action can be practiced as brutality” in a way that discounts this brutality. Elisabeth Anker, *Ugly Freedoms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 6. In my case, every account of popular sovereignty that does not ensure its material background is not dependent on despotic transnational ties is ugly in Anker’s sense.

for connective lines of injury that make possible the well-being of privileged polities, to assume responsibility for these harms, and to undo them. These tasks of accountability, acknowledgment, and reparation must take place at the transnational rather than inter-state level, if they are to undo regimes of democratic despotism and their capitalist entanglements and refund them as thoroughly transnational regimes. In other words, as I argue in Chapter 5 and the Conclusion, no project of popular sovereignty can proceed soundly without the establishment of transnational solidarity ties and a global anti-oligarchic orientation.

Rethinking and undoing popular sovereignty is necessary because despite changing conditions, imperial democratic trends remain recognizable in the neoliberal refashioning of development discussed in Chapter 1, in right-wing populism, and in the authoritarian practices of state racism, such as the family separations and child detention at the US southwest border analyzed in Chapter 4. This does not mean minimizing the transformations that global and domestic institutions have undergone since the historical junctures studied in in this book, but taking these trajectories seriously to clarify the forces and structures of power that remain and stand in the way of emancipation.

Reconstructing continuities amidst transformations means that, rather than accept taken-for-granted markers of progress such as the New Deal, decolonization, or the civil rights movement, *Democracy and Empire* holds that the imperial democracies that took shape and expanded at the turn of the century, reached a zenith with the golden age of the postwar welfare state, and were threatened by decolonization during the Cold War, remain imperial. In other words, the imagery of the New Deal or the golden age of the welfare state, which is implicitly or explicitly invoked and contrasted with the neoliberal logics that prevail today by progressive actors and academics,²⁰ should serve less as a contrast to neoliberalism's ravages than as an instance of imperial social enfranchisement that helps explain the racist reaction that has accompanied the deterioration of standards of living among a portion of the white working class. Without centering these racialized and imperial processes

²⁰ This appears explicitly in Steve Klein's recent book but is also the background condition that neoliberalism operates over in the work of Nancy Fraser and Wendy Brown, among others. Wendy Brown, "We Are All Democrats Now ..." *Theory & Event* 13, no. 2 (2010), Nancy Fraser, "Legitimation Crisis? On the Political Contradictions of Financialized Capitalism," *Critical Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (2015), Steven Klein, *The Work of Politics: Making a Democratic Welfare State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). I engage with this literature in more detail in Chapter 2.

of formation of popular politics in the west, contemporary approaches beg the question of why precisely the reaction today is taking the racist turn that it does.

As noted in subsequent chapters, the genealogy proposed in this book acknowledges and theorizes these racist populist outbursts as not foreign to the popular political tradition of imperial western polities (and not limited to the fascisms of 1930s Europe). It also studies the transformations that neoliberal globalization has brought to the myths and realities of imperial popular sovereignty²¹ to consider this less as a novel deterioration of a foundational principle than a bringing into relief of logics of difference and selective inclusion and exclusion that allow racial capitalism to thrive.²² Thus, the hope is to prompt theorists of the people and democracy who reflect on the current crisis to better scrutinize the supposedly progressive historical formations of peoplehood that they implicitly contrast with the crisis *du jour*. The goal, in other words, is to problematize the implicit reference to past moments of popular emancipation being newly tainted by neoliberalism or other ills, as if this past was not already tainted by racialized and imperial entanglements that reappear in metamorphosed shape. To contribute to this project, *Democracy and Empire* offers a historically grounded analysis of how these imperial formations imbued central concepts of political theory and traces the implications for contemporary politics and political theorizing.

This analysis is particularly important because socialist and popular discourses and practices of the white working classes and trade unions directed against capitalism coexisted with imperial ideologies of racial hierarchy, which diluted the radicalism of these proposals.²³ This amounted to accepting capitalism as long as it could better cater to white workers' well-being, an equation that required the continued hyper-exploitation of racialized labor, as Chapters 1 to 4 make clear.

²¹ Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 68–69.

²² Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000 [1983]), 26, Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

²³ Thus, my claim about the imperial character of socialist discourse is limited to a subset of this field, and does not include socialist discourse and practices that were actively anti-racist, including those of the thinkers that my project builds upon. Notably, Du Bois, who witnessed and critiqued the imperial progressive discourse at the turn of the century, which I cover in Chapters 1 and 2.

ARTICULATED RACIAL REGIMES AND
IMPERIAL POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

The literature on racial capitalism closely tracks the racial directions of the “development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society” and the social structure that emerged from it, including how ideologies of racialism permeated the class consciousness of white workers.²⁴ This framework offers a historical account of how capitalist imperatives advanced partly through the creation and manipulation of ideologies of racial difference in ways that created pockets of more or less intense exploitation and the political institutions to police their borders. There is disagreement regarding the particular relation between racism and capitalism in this literature, however. While some scholars see racism as intrinsic to capitalism, others see racialization as a factor that shapes the capitalist social order, and a third group considers racism and capitalism as independent, though articulated, systems of domination, alongside patriarchy.²⁵ The latter camp allows for autonomous logics of capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy, arguing that these regimes become mutually articulated to produce particular historical regimes of domination.²⁶ I repurpose the notion of articulation to conceptualize the shape and mutual relationships between the multiple racisms depicted in *Democracy and Empire*. Precisely because of how capitalism works through hierarchies based on racial difference, differently racialized groups are manipulated to fulfill needs for exploitable labor in ways that play them against each other and make up for the changed status of one group by subjecting another. This manipulation is accomplished through continuous techniques of subjection that confine these groups, commodify their kinship structures, subject their bodies to strenuous work, and appropriate their land. Because racial ideologies play a role

²⁴ Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2, 3.

²⁵ Here I rely on Michael Dawson’s account of the literature, which categorizes Cedric Robinson and Jodi Melamed as proponents of racial capitalism, Nancy Fraser as a theorist of racialized capitalism, and himself and collaborators as instead putting forward a framework of race and capitalism. Michael Dawson, “Hidden in Plain Sight II: Why Race and Capitalism,” *Manuscript on File with Author* (2021), Fraser, “Legitimation Crisis? On the Political Contradictions of Financialized Capitalism”, Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, Melamed, “Racial Capitalism”, Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*.

²⁶ Michael C. Dawson and Emily A. Katzenstein, “Articulated Darkness: White Supremacy, Patriarchy, and Capitalism in Shelby’s Dark Ghettos,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2019).

in sustaining these structures, and these discourses themselves are ridden by internal tensions and contradictions, it is difficult to argue for a singular and constant relation between racism and capitalism.²⁷ The contradictions, renegotiations, and transformations of racial hierarchy are particularly visible when the category of racism itself is opened up to theorize distinct forms of racialization that emerge in intimate relation with each other, and whose operation exhibits both continuities and contradictions, as this book does.²⁸ To account for these junctures, I theorize the domination of different racialized groups in dynamic interaction with each other and with the exploitation of nature, and make sense of their role in capitalist accumulation. These reciprocal effects extend to the mediating role of white popular politics in processes of racialization and regimes of oppression.

Vis-à-vis the literature on racial capitalism, my contribution is to draw the connections between different racial regimes and capitalism, on the one hand, and collective democratic practices and concepts such as popular sovereignty and self-determination, on the other. This illuminates how racial capitalist formations owe their existence at least partly to collective emancipatory discourses and actions sustained by white collectives. This is what I mean by the “material underpinnings” of popular sovereignty, a theoretical dynamic that I illustrate with three historical forms of articulation between racial regimes. The first concerns the racial oppression that followed and became articulated with the partial emancipation of slaves in the British Empire and the United States, namely territorial colonialism in Africa as a newly preferred mode of bringing land and labor together to produce raw materials. The second is the forced recruitment of Chinese and Indian indentured laborers, which fueled planters’ efforts to maintain labor control after emancipation. A third form of articulation took place decades later with the ban on Asian migration into the United States, which reshaped the articulation of the US racial regime and racialized brown Mexicanos, through the heightened reliance on exploitable Mexican labor facilitated by US and Mexican racial/political formations, and the hierarchies between the two countries. All of these formations were in turn articulated with and grounded on land obtained through Indigenous dispossession, to the extent that the racial filtering of migration in the settler colonies and the United

²⁷ Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (New York: UNESCO Press, 1980), 334.

²⁸ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4–5; Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*.

States contributed to both settlement (by accepting white migrants as settlers) and the reliance of settlers on forced labor (through slavery and the hierarchical incorporation of nonwhite laborers). In a parallel process, the territorial dominion of Africa, while not always replicating the settler model of South Africa, nonetheless utilized the land and labor of natives for the purpose of accumulation. By tracking the imperial articulation of the domination of different racial groups and further connecting mobility and changing modalities of colonialism to transnational re-adjustments, this book expands on racial capitalism by contextualizing its predominant focus on transatlantic slavery and its US aftermath on the global arena, and by attending to how these racial formations prompted and were in turn shaped by others.

Thus understood, racial domination is a composite that emerges out of the encounter of different trajectories – including changing geopolitical conditions and resistance and/or partial emancipation by other racialized groups – which shape and orient the capitalist drive to extract nature and labor to fill the demands of workers/consumers and machinery. These processes are akin to what happens when waves overlap, bend, and spread out when they encounter an obstacle or one another.²⁹ In this way, the role of race and racism in capitalism can be understood as “unstable” in the sense that it is durable but also historically contingent.³⁰ Thus, rather than presuming bounded realms of domination – such as “colonialism” and “migration” – and studying them separately, *Democracy and Empire* focuses on how boundaries between realms are produced in the entangled operation of political demands, imperial mobilities, and differential modes of racial oppression and resistance. Two implications follow from this approach. First, race and racial difference are here theorized as thoroughly historical.³¹ Second, by tracing the emergence of difference, rather than presuming this difference and letting it determine our foci of study, democratic politics, empire,

²⁹ Donna Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 300, Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 28–30.

³⁰ Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” *The Black Scholar* 12, no. 6 (1981), Gilmore, “Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography,” Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Marxism and the Antinomies of Racial Capitalism, After Marx* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

³¹ Hall, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance,” 308.

migration, and ecology are revealed as entwined domains whose logics are continuous and whose narratives of legitimation are strategically and deceptively deployed by elite and popular actors in constructing racial boundaries. Thus, foreignness is only a marker of exclusion when augmented by nonwhiteness, and nonwhite Indigenous and slave descendants who are formally citizens can be targeted by tools of confinement and labor control that find echoes in both migration regimes and overseas colonialism. These combinations of realms, narratives, and techniques allow for multiple entangled forms of racial subjugation that must be studied as such.

MIGRATION, NATURE, AND RACIAL CAPITALISM

A central contribution of *Democracy and Empire* is to theorize, historicize, and carve a place for migration and ecology within the theorization of popular sovereignty, as noted earlier, but also to integrate them into our thinking about empire and racial capitalism. Regarding migration, this means departing from treating migration politics as an autonomous realm or issue area within democracies. On the one hand, analytical philosophers theorize the rights of migrants to admission and membership and the duties owed to particularly vulnerable migrants and refugees as if this was a semi-autonomous realm within democratic politics to which normative principles can be applied.³² This group of scholars seldom historicize the question of migration, with the consequence that they do not consider its racialized aspects as anything but regrettable features that should be normatively condemned, rather than as constitutive of the patterns and functions of mobility. This also means that they do not theorize the entanglements between migration and transnational structures of labor control or grasp its role within the regimes of social reproduction that this book studies. On the other hand, when critical approaches to democratic politics and capitalism grapple with migration – typically prompted by its political salience in the current, at the time or writing, rise of right-wing politics in the west – they tend to consider migration as an external shock of sorts, that is, a recent phenomenon associated with neoliberal globalization, which, alongside other factors, contributed

³² Michael Blake, “Immigration, Jurisdiction, and Exclusion,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 41, no. 2 (2013), Joseph H. Carens, *The Ethics of Immigration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), Anna Stilz, *Territorial Sovereignty: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

to authoritarian backlashes against a diversifying population.³³ Thus, despite their genealogical or critical-historical orientation, they offer presentist accounts of migration, and eschew theorizing migration itself and anti-immigration forces as historically central to shaping popular discourse among the white working classes. This account is problematized in Chapters 2 and 3, by recasting racialized migration control as a component part of settler colonialism and as foundational to white democracies in the west, and migrant populations as central to guaranteeing the social reproduction of white citizens.

Nancy Fraser's historical framework is notable in this regard, in the sense that it remains limited, despite acknowledging the limitations of left politics and rightly embedding migration within imperial relations and relations of expropriation. Fraser notes, first, that polities in the core depended on (neo)imperial relations to fund their social entitlements, and this they achieved through "politically enforced hierarchies of status" and "ongoing racialized exploitation in the periphery and the core."³⁴ She echoes feminist scholars such as Silvia Federici and Maria Mies in asserting that the western care gap was filled by importing migrant workers from poorer countries, typically rural women from poor regions who were obliged to transfer their own caring responsibilities to even poorer caregivers.³⁵ Yet Fraser's framework still stops short of recognizing the intimate entanglements between migration and founding political moments. Moreover, her framework remains at too high a level of abstraction to properly consider the dynamics of this hyper-exploitation, which she terms "expropriation." When pressed for

³³ Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 179–83. See, for contrast, Jacqueline Stevens's examination of anti-immigrant hostility as grounded in the violent attachments to birthright citizenship and kinship that constitute the nation or Paul Apostolidis's analysis of precarity among migrant workers as a critical entry point to critique neoliberalism and Trumpism. Jacqueline Stevens, *States without Nations: Citizenship for Mortals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 25, 75, Paul Apostolidis, "Desperate Responsibility: Precarity and Right-Wing Populism," *Political Theory* 50, no. 1 (2022). These critical approaches, while not necessarily casting migration as a dimension of imperial regimes, do consider migration as a constitutive aspects of nation states or neoliberal logics, respectively.

³⁴ Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, 189, Nancy Fraser, "Capitalism's Crisis of Care," *Dissent* 63, no. 4 (2016): 110.

³⁵ Fraser, "Capitalism's Crisis of Care", Silvia Federici, "Reproduction and Feminist Struggle in the New International Division of Labor," in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2012), Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*.

specificity, Fraser claims that the politics of expropriation amount to hierarchical power relations that distinguish subject peoples (including unfree chattel slaves and dependent members of subordinated groups) from rights-bearing individuals.³⁶

But power relations that are hierarchical and reproduce power differentials potentially comprise a wide variety of distinct arrangements. As Michael Dawson notes, Fraser's characterization of racial subordination as a mark that allows expropriation does not appropriately explain the meaning and experience of being a racially subordinate group living under white supremacy.³⁷ In other words, the focus on the distinction between exploitation and expropriation, as facilitated by social difference generally, or race in particular,³⁸ does not specify the heterogeneity of the political formations that further differentiate the experiences of those expropriated and how the institutions that ensure this subaltern position are created, in ways inextricable from both empire and moments of democratic founding. As Chapter 2 shows, this generalized account of racial expropriation does not account for the entanglement between white enfranchisement and the exclusion of nonwhite migrants, and how racialized foreigners were recruited to "solve" problems of labor control raised by the partial emancipation of Black slaves. Chapter 3 further showcases the heterogeneous regimes of domination devoted to labor control by embedding the regulation of nonwhite immigration into a longer genealogy of popular politics that governed brown laborers in the United States (through conquest and settlement, irregular migration, guest work, and mass interior policing and surveillance, subsequently) and ensured the social reproduction of white citizens. What is missing is the theoretical work that mediates between concepts and the specific structures of power that oppress,³⁹ and the connection between these two and the political narratives that legitimate it and the institutions that organize them.

While indebted to Fraser's careful mapping of contemporary capitalism, this book attends to the theoretical work needed to understand the *political* conditions of possibility of capital's "cannibaliz[ation of] labour, disciplin[ing of] states, transfer[ing of] wealth from periphery to core, and suck[ing of] value from households, families, communities and

³⁶ Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, 41.

³⁷ Dawson, "Hidden in Plain Sight II: Why Race and Capitalism," 11–12.

³⁸ See also Go's reliance on this distinction. Julian Go, "Three Tensions in the Theory of Racial Capitalism," *Sociological Theory* 39, no. 1 (2021).

³⁹ Lois McNay, "The Politics of Welfare," *European Journal of Political Theory* (forthcoming): 9.

nature.”⁴⁰ The extraction of nature, in particular, is another area in which *Democracy and Empire* recasts the problem. While Fraser characterizes nature as one of the “hidden abodes” of capital accumulation, I theorize the political productivity and expansiveness of this divide, showing that the nature/technology binary both centrally shapes politics and organizes the racial divisions that sustain capitalism. Hence, Chapter 4 shows that the identification between western societies and technology alienates political subjects from the utter dependence of their bodies, polities, and economies on nature. In this way, popular politics proceed *as if* the technological superiority of western countries meant their emancipation from nature, contributing to the hubristic orientation toward its exploitation and the racialized labor that performs strenuous work in proximity to it. The chapter shows that the tying together of racialized labor and natural resources to be extracted was a central task of empire, and one that democratic polities inherited and remains pressing today. A central part of this project was/is the racialization of those who are conscripted to do the work of extracting raw materials, which proceeds by constructing their bodily capacities and dispositions as opposed to whites’ technological abilities and their mastery of nature. This careful work of reconstructing how the extraction of nature is entwined with the creation of racial hierarchies that justify the treatment of nonwhite subjects, their families, community spaces, and land helps specify how structures of oppression work and create meaning, making it easier to identify the most promising instances of resistance and disruption.⁴¹

Differently put, Fraser’s framework of capitalist contradictions provides a helpful background to the contemporary crisis of capitalism and democracy, but its theorization of politics remains too abstractly concerned with how capitalism truncates democracy by handing political issues to market forces and restricting the political autonomy of subjects and their ability to be joint authors of collective life.⁴² Instead, I argue that capitalist logics of economic, natural, and labor extraction do not simply invade, or replace collective logic but are always in fact foundationally embedded in political processes, and thus work through them and through “the production of political subjectivities.”⁴³ Without recognizing this, we risk repairing the regime of popular sovereignty rather

⁴⁰ Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, 113.

⁴¹ Ana Muñiz, *Police, Power, and the Production of Racial Boundaries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 122.

⁴² Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, 131.

⁴³ Chambers, “Undoing Neoliberalism: Homo (Economicus), Homo Politicus, and the Zōon Politikon,” 706.

than recognizing it as the particularly possessive, technologized, and racialized form of rule reconstructed in this book.

To trace these multiple transnational racisms, the first part of the book reveals popular sovereignty and self-determination as emancipatory languages dependent on racialized understandings of family well-being and material prosperity reserved for white workers and upwardly mobile whites, who in demanding the expansion of the franchise racially delimit the people, while mutually agreeing to derive their subsistence from the exploited work of those excluded worldwide. I trace how the forms of exclusion evolved in response to changing working-class discourses of anti-capitalism, partial emancipation of certain groups, and the conscription of new racialized subjects to maintain labor control. The second part of this book zooms into the destructive drives of capitalism, on which democratic collectives within empires depend. The collective demands for better wages and working conditions, the aspirational model of the bourgeois patriarchal family, and the technological advances that transform workplaces all have as their counterpart the continued reliance on racialized workers for the work of social reproduction and raw material extraction. Chapter 3 shows how regimes of conquest and settlement, informal migration, guest work, and surveilled undocumented work subsequently facilitated the caring work and work of social reproduction. Chapter 4 illustrates how the appropriation of labor in the colonies is the other side of the coin of the appropriation and destructive exploitation of nature. The third part of the book explores the possibility of anti-imperial popular sovereignty, bringing together anti-imperial discourses in the core and the postcolonies to reconstruct a transnational anti-oligarchic solidarity that rejects the predatory dependencies described here. In closing, the book considers how anti-imperial solidarity requires attending to the articulations between the oppression of different racialized groups and the continuities in the techniques of control, so that political actors understand their place in anti-imperial resistance. Such an understanding must recognize nature as the base of all life, and – based on this – recast desirable political relations between all humans and nature as necessarily reciprocal, rather than extractive.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The questions and claims elaborated earlier set the stage for the arguments pursued in the chapters that follow, which theorize a popular sovereignty suffused with both an affective attachment to wealth and a collective agreement to dominate others abroad to secure that wealth. Imperial capitalist logics also turn the notion of self-determination from

a formal entitlement of peoples to self-govern toward an excessive entitlement to dominate others in the colonies and, later, the Global South (what I call “self-and-other-determination”). This collective agreement is racial, in the sense that it welcomed white Europeans arriving in settler colonies to a polity that gave them access to land, while excluding from this same compact nonwhite arrivals, who were instead conscripted into strenuous labor to sustain the white polity alongside other groups located in the colonies. This process was both “democratic” and imperial, in the sense that it was grounded in political collectives that claimed a right to popular government; such collectives were, however, grounded in stolen land and abided by logics of racial separation and capitalist extraction organized at the level of empires. These imperial features, moreover, were absorbed by avowedly “democratic” institutions, including those of immigration control, now sheltered by their status as legitimate features of sovereign, self-determining polities. Systems of migration control, in turn, worked together with other structures of racial regulation of local labor, conquest, and bilateral guest worker programs to consolidate and sustain over time the political and economic exclusion of racialized populations within settler colonies. This arrangement conscripted the exploited labor of these subjects into the protection and nurturing of the relatively privileged white groups, that is, their social reproduction, while threatening the destruction of the kinship structures and bodily integrity of racialized subjects. This “democratic” regime of internal and external oppression predicated on racial hierarchy evolved and consolidated around the global division of labor between the industrialized west and the rest of the world, in charge of the extraction of raw materials. This process fueled the identification of whiteness with technology and had as its counterpart the relegation of nonwhites to strenuous jobs performed close to the surface of and underground the land, facilitating a more intense and destructive exploitation of nature. In this scheme, ecological destruction and racial oppression go together, facilitated by the alienation of western subjects from nature and nonwhites, even as their high-technology way of life would not be possible were it not for raw materials and the racialized labor that extracts them.

This picture offers a bleak historical outlook of popular sovereignty as a praxis, but it also clarifies the mechanics of these popular claims to theorize and found a positively anti-imperial popular sovereignty, one that can track and act against the articulated oppression of different racial groups, who, in coalition, can lead an anti-oligarchic critique of transnational structures of injustice. This critique does not miss the domestic level of

politics as the site where these global structures are grounded and, at the same time, actively disavowed through the language of popular sovereignty and self-determination, but leverages the points of commonality in differently located realms to craft a radical politics of solidarity.

The chapters that follow develop these arguments in three parts: the first theorizes the entanglements between popular sovereignty and its material bases, which depend on a world-spanning capitalist empire of resource extraction and the control of racialized labor. The second part theorizes the forms of political rule that guarantee domination by creating the conditions of racialized labor exploitation that ensure social reproduction and the appropriation of nature overseas. The third part conceptualizes resistance, by exploring the emancipatory possibilities that remain within popular sovereignty and the alternative forms of attachment and collective action that exist to ground a radical politics of solidarity, its horizon located beyond accumulation through racism and ecological destruction. The argument thus proceeds from the conceptualization of the material background of self-determination and popular sovereignty, through its specification in the analysis of two realms of appropriation, and toward the identification of promising anti-imperial accounts of popular sovereignty to support transnational emancipation.

Chapter 1 of the book examines W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of democratic despotism to illustrate the entanglement of popular sovereignty and empire through an excessive form of western self-determination and theorizes how features of this formation remain – while transformed – in neoliberal arrangements. Democratic despotism implies that – in western democracies at the turn of the century – popular sovereignty was an impulse to partake of the wealth and resources obtained by racial capitalism in ways enabled through imperial domination. Rather than a self-contained unit, western democracies issued a claim to determine themselves (democratically), as well as others (despotically), that is, “self-and-other-determination.” I rely on the writings of Frantz Fanon and Saidiya Hartman to conceptualize how the transformations of formal imperial arrangements do not prevent racial affective attachments from continuing to actively organize relations between the west and the rest of the world. In closing, I show that this critical approach to self-determination illuminates the contemporary rise of right-wing populism.

Chapter 2 expands on the imperial entanglements of popular sovereignty by focusing on the encounter between imperial elite narratives of racial hierarchy and white working-class emancipatory discourse, which

develops as white and nonwhite migrants flocked to settler colonies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This I reconstruct through the socialist writings of Henry Hyndman and the discourses and actions of national and transnational union organizing, the world historical writings of Charles Pearson, and archival documents of the British imperial bureaucracy. I make sense of how white self-government in settler colonies calls the state to regulate nonwhite migrants in a way that absorbs imperial functions of labor control. This account recasts state migration controls, routinely mistaken for attributes of sovereign states in the contemporary literature, as rehabilitated imperial functions that ensure both the continuation of the settler project (by admitting European migrants and excluding or marginalizing nonwhites) and a racial capitalist regime of labor control that guarantees access to hyper-exploited labor by racial others, which allows for capitalist profit and the well-being of an upwardly mobile white working class.

Chapter 3 homes in on a particular aspect of the material background of popular sovereignty: the regimes of labor control that facilitate the social reproduction of western subjects. This chapter theorizes how the continuous subjection of brown families was enabled by shifting institutional formations throughout history. I build upon the work of Spillers and Hartman on kinship; Indigenous political thinkers Shelbi Meissner, Anne Mikaere, and Kyle Whyte's writings on the family; and Latinx scholars Kelly Hernández, Mireya Loza, and Ana Rosas's work on migration, gender, and families to trace the intersecting effects of racial capitalist projects in Mexico and the United States on the *brown family*. I argue that the reliance of US social reproduction on racialized families required their construction as abject and the decimation of their resources for self-care and reproduction. I reconstruct this process by recasting conquest, settlement, guest work, and heightened immigration surveillance in the US Southwest as *distinct* regimes of domination guaranteeing a *continuous* system of labor control that facilitated access to cheap social reproduction for white waged labor. Coercive labor regimes were facilitated by the uneven relationship between Mexico and the United States, which brought their respective projects of modernization into conflict, given their parallel aim of conscripting brown/Indigenous labor to their cause. This disciplining was centrally about threatening and disallowing the integrity of brown families through ever-changing forms of exposure to potential or actual family separation, most recently in the mass separation of families and detention of unaccompanied children in 2018.

The focus on racialized labor in Chapters 2 and 3 as the material basis of popular sovereignty shows that the construction of race entailed scripting nonwhite subjects to perform strenuous labor that engages the body in particularly intensive ways. Chapter 4 expands on this by tying the domination of racialized bodies to that of nonhuman nature, with which they combine to produce raw materials to feed industrial machinery. An ecological reading of W. E. B. Du Bois's writings on empire and development shows that racism maps onto a nature/technology divide, which positions technologically advanced societies as uniquely able to rule and dictate the fates of nonwhite peoples and the land they occupy. This stance devalues nature and alienates western societies from it and from the racialized subjects who labor on the earth's surface and underground. Du Bois reconstructs this racial theory of value and counters it by turning upside down the relationship between race and technology. Against accounts of white Europeans as uniquely technologically advanced, Du Bois posits racism as a convenient way of securing raw material and labor at null or negligible costs to feed European industrial machinery. Further, Du Bois critiques the technological mindset and the unsustainable speed of development imposed by (neo)colonial linkages, which prevents countries' pursuit of slower development oriented to satisfy societal needs. This results in a political rift that maps into the ecological rift created by global capitalism.

The first four chapters build a picture of polities whose emancipatory language and aims disavow their imperial aims of capital accumulation and racial domination. Yet they also offer a genealogy that illuminates fault lines and openings for abolition and political reconstruction. Such a project, I argue in Chapter 5, requires an anti-imperial popular sovereignty that differentiates peoples' popular will from elite projects of outward domination and withdraws demands for well-being that depend on the exploitation of others. Based on Martin Luther King Jr.'s writings on the US war in Vietnam, I reconstruct a tradition of popular sovereignty that urges worldliness and historical awareness among western peoples and extends anti-oligarchic discourses of peoplehood to criticize unholy western alliances with elites in the developing world. I juxtapose this account with Frantz Fanon's writings on postcolonial democracy and national consciousness, which tackle the problem of coopted postcolonial elites. This renewed language of popular sovereignty allows for the identification of potential radical affinities between differently located collectives struggling against oligarchic actors in both dominant and peripheral states.

The Conclusion considers the common imperial technologies of confinement and destruction of kinship that target Indigenous peoples, African and African American groups, and Latinx and other migrant subjects as a jumping-off point to examine the confluence in diverse languages of emancipation that emerge from these articulated but distinct and spatially grounded forms of subjection. It recovers from Marxist, Black, and Indigenous thought the centrality of relations of care and reciprocity vis-à-vis land, not simply as a technical matter that dictates the sustainable use of natural resources within a capitalist system, but as an acknowledgment that land is core to cultural, social, and political relations and foundational for life. On this basis, this section outlines an ecological popular sovereignty, in which the construction of a *we* depends on differently located subjects who acknowledge relations with each other and nature, whose sustenance is imperiled by imperial popular sovereignty and its authorization of racial capitalist accumulation.

In summary, my project begins by highlighting the despotic threads in the tradition of popular sovereignty and self-determination and traces how these despotic regimes transition from formal empire to an unequal postcolonial world. I then show that claims of popular sovereignty and the imposition of racial immigration control separated foreigners arriving at settler colonies between those who, because of their race, could join these projects as political subjects, and those to be exploited for the well-being of the former. Via Black, Indigenous, and Latinx scholars I theorize the commodification of kinship and the destruction of brown Hispanic/Mexicanas/Latinx families, conscripted into the social reproduction of privileged families, and return to Du Bois to explore how nature, joined with racialized labor, maintains the bodies and machines that underpin wealth and well-being in the western world. I conclude by recovering an anti-imperial script of popular sovereignty in King and Fanon, and go on to trace the coalitional possibilities of an ecological popular sovereignty by engaging with Indigenous political thought and practice.