

## **Settler Colonialism, Environmental Justice and the Media:**

A Thematic Analysis of the National, Regional, Local, and  
Indigenous Newspaper Coverage of the Keystone XL Pipeline in the  
United States

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this thesis is to explore what thematic frames national, regional, local, and Indigenous newspapers have used when reporting on the Keystone XL pipeline in the United States. Specifically, by analyzing the newspaper articles which were published in six different newspapers, the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, Omaha World-Herald, Lincoln Journal Star, and Indian Country Today, over the course of 12 months, this thesis discusses to what extent the media coverage can be an example of settler colonialism as the conflict surrounding the Keystone XL has largely been located to Indigenous land across several states, including Nebraska.

**Methodology** – By using collected data from newspaper articles, this thesis processed more than 200 articles which included the search term “Keystone XL” in order to label the various articles with a thematic frame. Multiple frames could be used in any given article, but one main frame was assigned to each article. The descriptive statistics break down the different thematic frames per newspaper. Then, excerpts from the different articles were extracted and prescribed into the four main thematic frames that emerged from the analysis. Each thematic frame also contains sub-themes which support the overall main thematic frame.

**Findings** – Four main thematic frames were identified in the newspaper coverage of the Keystone XL pipeline: ‘Politics and Economy’, ‘Climate’, ‘Grassroots Mobilization and Indigenous Opposition’, and ‘Foreign relations.’ The thematic frames contextualize the dispute surrounding the expansion of the Keystone XL oil pipeline in different manners, in the different newspapers to cater to the different audiences. Notably, it was mainly the local and regional newspapers in Nebraska which reported on the local opposition and the alliance of white farmers, landowners, environmentalists, and Indigenous people.

**Originality** – This thesis uses the Keystone XL pipeline as a case for studying settler colonialism in American newspapers, by arguing that settler colonialism is more than physical land acquisition and genocide. The way settler media refers to ecological violence on native land are present-day forms of settler colonialism. Acknowledging this is an important step both towards decolonization, and to work for environmental justice for Indigenous communities.

*Keywords:* settler colonialism, Keystone XL pipeline, Nebraska, ecological violence, grassroots mobilization, environmental justice, energy infrastructure, newspaper coverage, thematic analysis

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## List of Abbreviations

In chapters 4 and 5, references are made to the various newspapers which the data was collected and analyzed, using abbreviations:

IC	Indian Country Today
LA	Los Angeles Times
LJ	Lincoln Journal Today
NY	The New York Times
OW	Omaha World-Herald
WS	Wall Street Journal

Keystone XL pipeline is also be abbreviated to “KXL” in some of the excerpts in chapter 4.

## Preface

Being an American means reckoning with a history fraught with violence and injustice. Ignoring that reality in favor of mythology is not only wrong but also dangerous. The dark chapters of American history have just as much to teach us, if not more, than the glorious ones, and often the two are intertwined.

These are the words of filmmaker Ken Burns (2021). As I have worked on this master thesis for the better part of the past two years, these words have lingered in the back of my head as I have struggled with how I could tell the story about the ‘Unlikely Alliances’ between Native Americans and white rural farmers across the Great Plains region in the United States of America, including the State of Nebraska. Perhaps some readers would even ask themselves why I would even choose this as a topic for my master thesis. While personal motivation is important in general, a personal connection to a topic may also be beneficial. I have spent 1,5 years living in Nebraska, and my connection to the area runs through close friendships with people who have lived and farmed in the state for generations. However, they belong to what would be considered the white settler demography, and thus, my own connection to Nebraska is indeed influenced by the history of colonialism and all its associated ramifications. This perspective is necessary to acknowledge at the beginning of this thesis, because I do believe it is possibly the most influential source of bias that this project is prone to.

These ‘Unlikely Alliances’ have opposed the Keystone XL oil pipeline, while proving that it is possible to overcome a history of violence and hostility, and work together across ethnic, social, and economic divides to achieve common goals. It is also key to understand the context in which these alliances came to be, as it is the very history of violence and injustice between the white settlers and the Indigenous population across the American Midwest that makes the joint efforts to fight against the Keystone XL oil pipeline even more remarkable. The stories of these unlikely alliances serve as an example of how hostility and a history of injustice does not unavoidably translate into more injustice and violence, but rather into a story of collaboration across ethnic and cultural divides that bridges the differences and brings people together for a common cause.



However, we should be careful to assume that the challenges and violence that settler colonialism has contributed to in the American society are simply overcome or forgotten because of the success stories of the inter-ethnic, *unlikely* alliances. Yet, at the same time these stories of success give us reasons to be hopeful for long-term changes in the United States and elsewhere, despite the fact that the successful outcome for the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline rests heavily upon the fact that the interests of white rural farmers coincided with those of environmentalists and the Indigenous communities. This might not necessarily be the case for the next combat for land or resources where the interests and priorities of the white settler demographic might come in conflict with their privileges or standing in the society overall. As you continue to read this thesis, I urge you to have these perspectives in mind.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Keystone XL Pipeline

On Inauguration Day in January 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to terminate the expansion of the Keystone XL pipeline. Keystone is a network of oil pipelines, constructed by TC Energy, which transports crude oil from the oil fields in Alberta, Canada, to oil refineries in Texas and Illinois. The proposed expansion of the Keystone XL pipeline through Montana, South Dakota, and Nebraska – which Biden cancelled – would cut through areas where Indigenous people live and would also pose environmental risks to the surrounding farmlands and aquifers. To the Indigenous people, land is more than the physical space in which they live – it is also important to their spiritual livelihood (Middleton, 2015).

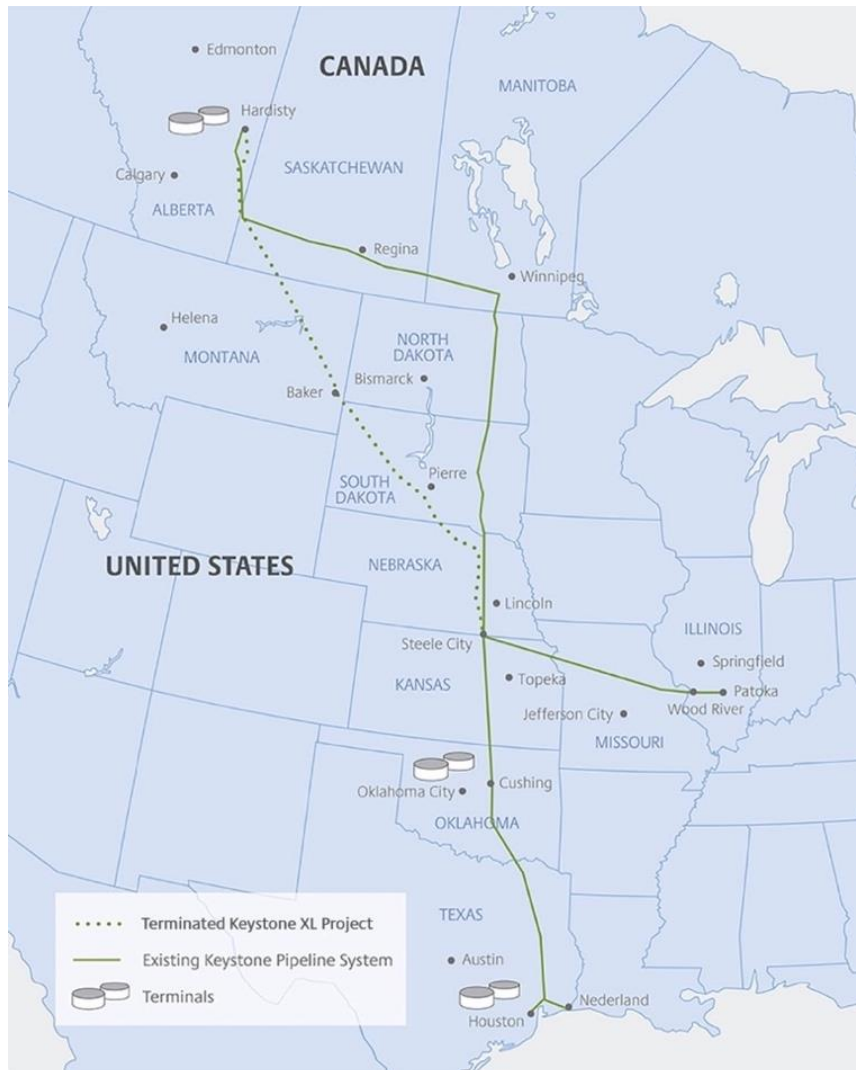


Figure 1: Map of the Keystone XL

Source: KeystoneXL (n.d)

Annexation of Indigenous and private land with the intent to construct oil pipelines or accommodate for the extraction of commodified natural resources, does not only contribute to environmental degradation and anthropogenic climate change. It has also been argued that it is a present-day example of the ongoing settler colonial violence in North America (Bacon, 2019). This thesis proposes that the newspaper coverage of the Keystone XL pipeline itself is an example of settler colonialism and ecological violence, through both misrepresentation and erasure of Indigenous voices and perspectives.

The Keystone XL pipeline has become a monumental example of environmental injustice and the disproportionate price Indigenous people around the world have to pay when facing the consequences of the expansion of energy infrastructure. Whether that is fossil fuel pipelines in the United States which threaten the water, land and livelihoods for Indigenous communities across the country, or wind power projects in the Arctic which threaten the Sámi reindeer herding practices, energy infrastructure projects continue to disproportionately impact Indigenous peoples. Environmental injustice is not only about the direct impact of energy infrastructure like the Keystone XL pipeline – it is also about the detrimental consequences that climate change will have on Indigenous peoples around the world, as the world is scrambling to combat climate change through green transition. A big question lingers – how can this transition happen in a sustainable and equitable manner when the Indigenous people no matter what, will directly suffer the consequences?

Opposition against the pipeline has united two historically conflicting groups: white rural farmers and Indigenous tribal nations, into what has been characterized as ‘Unlikely Alliances’ that have bridged inter-ethnic divides in the Great Plains region of the United States (Grossman, 2005). These alliances, such as Bold Nebraska (Ternes et al., 2020) and the Cowboy Indian Alliance (Grossman, 2014), have transcended the historic divides shaped by settler colonial violence, genocide, and racism, and together, they have joined forces against the perceived threat from their common, external enemies: the fossil fuel industry, and the U.S. federal government. The relationship between Native tribal nations and the U.S. government is not the least shaped by how vulnerable Indigenous communities are in terms of political, economic, and social aspects, to policies enacted by the U.S. federal government (Bacon & Norton, 2019).

## 1.2 Background and Research Rationale

At the time of writing this thesis, the topic of energy infrastructure has unfortunately become all too relevant, given the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the energy crisis in Europe – including, but not limited to, the rising energy prices, Russia's chokehold on European gas reserves, low water levels in Norwegian hydro power infrastructure and the explosion on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea, to name a few.

Around the world, opposition against fossil fuel extraction and energy infrastructure has come from many Indigenous nations, but the opposition from Indigenous peoples rarely receive media coverage (Spiegel, 2021a). While the reasons for this are multifaceted, the issues related to the Keystone XL pipeline can indeed be problematized using the lens of settler colonialism, especially in a country such as the United States which cannot deny its settler colonial history and the many ways this history prevails throughout the American society to this very day. This is because it has been argued that any discussion on conflicts related to land usage and resource extraction in the U.S. necessitates a contextualization which includes settler colonialism (Bacon, 2020).

Settler colonialism has been defined as an ongoing process in which the settlers aim to replace the Native population, with the intent to secure settlers' access to land and territory (Lahti, 2017; Wolfe, 2006). By relying on this definition of settler colonialism, coupled with an analysis of the newspaper coverage of the Keystone XL oil pipeline, this thesis argues that the newspaper coverage itself can be viewed as an example and continuation of the structures from settler colonialism by both misrepresenting Indigenous perspectives and by suppressing Indigenous voices in the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline. This thesis also provides support for the argument that the green transition which is required for the world to avoid a catastrophic climate disaster, requires us to reflect on issues both in terms of Indigenous rights as well as environmental justice. If the end goal is environmental justice, we as a society should ask ourselves: for whom, and to what cost, both economically and socially?

The context of how an issue is presented in the media, has an impact on the public's conception of opinions, as well as the policy-making processes (Miller & Riechert, 2000). However, this study does not examine how the perception of the public is to the news coverage of the Keystone XL pipeline. Instead, this study investigates how the media is framing its reporting

on the issue, which according to Miller and Riechert (2000) in turn will have an impact on the public's perception of the issue. Therefore, this study is important because it can shed some light on how the reporting contributes to sustained settler colonial structures in media narratives, and consequently among the public.

### 1.3 Research Context

The geographical context in which this thesis situates itself, is on settler colonial land. The U.S. federal government has always viewed Indigenous land in the American Midwest as a source of wealth (Proulx and Crane, 2020). The Dakota Access Pipeline and the Keystone XL Pipeline are two contemporary examples of how the Indigenous peoples in the Great Plains region of the United States have been dispossessed of their land, caused by fossil fuel extraction and energy infrastructure (Proulx and Crane, 2020). Despite treaties, such as the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1851 which declared that “land and property [of Indigenous tribes] shall never be taken from them without their consent” (Proulx and Crane, 2020, p. 51) which established the Great Sioux Reservation, fossil fuel pipelines like the Dakota Access and Keystone XL cross the 1851 treaty land area. However, they do not cross the current reservations, which is a clear example of how treaties have deteriorated over time (Proulx and Crane, 2020).

Then we can ask ourselves: But *why* does this research matter? This thesis makes the argument that we should, as a society, move towards more fair environmental decision-making processes (Johnson, 2019). “New processes must prioritize community involvement, decentralized energy solutions, and local control over energy systems in order to address the disproportionate burdens currently shouldered by marginalized communities in developing American energy infrastructure.” (Johnson, 2019, p. 15). However, how can these objectives be reached in a society where the news reporting is heavily skewed against the Indigenous population in general, by misrepresenting their perspectives or outright ignoring them in their media narratives? Environmental justice is not just a step towards decolonization, but it is also a step to create a system that does not disproportionately disadvantage the Indigenous population in the U.S in terms of climate change and environmental degradation. It becomes clear that environmental justice cannot happen when the news media misrepresents and subdues Indigenous interests by neglecting their relative importance in the fight against environmental

degradation and towards a more equitable distribution of benefits and burdens in the green transition.

As the Keystone XL pipeline is a significant example of, energy infrastructure often comes in conflict with many different stakeholders, including Indigenous people, but this is not only an issue in the U.S.. In Sápmi, Norway, onshore wind projects are in violation with Sámi reindeer herders' human rights, according to a 2021 Norwegian Supreme Court ruling (Buli and Solsvik, 2021). Another example is the graphite extraction on the island of Senja in Troms, Norway, where the mining company argues it can extract the “worlds' cleanest graphite” (Moe, 2017), but where the extraction takes place in an area where reindeers migrate during the summer months. In order to extract crystal graphite to assemble electric vehicle batteries, the environmental, social and economic burdens are placed on the Sámis, as the extraction will directly impact their reindeer herding practices. While Norwegian-Sámi relations are not directly comparable to the relationship between the U.S. federal government and the Indigenous population, it is important to acknowledge that the Indigenous opposition both on Standing Rock with the Dakota Access and across Nebraska with the Keystone XL pipeline are examples of Indigenous opposition, which transcend geographical and historical contexts, to infrastructure expansion which directly impacts and burdens Indigenous communities. For example, in the 1970s, Máze in Sápmi became the central town of opposition where the Sámi people opposed the construction of a dam and a hydropower plant in the Álttáeatnu (Alta River) (Utsi, 2020). Thus, the construction of energy infrastructure and energy production are questions of global relevance, but with different local peculiarities.

As both Keystone XL and the windmills in Norway demonstrate, the Indigenous population will have to both experience the environmental degradation that comes from these energy infrastructure projects, as well as the devastating effects from anthropogenic climate change. In this sense, the Indigenous people will always be at a disadvantage given the current political priorities, and the question is then, who are the beneficiaries of energy infrastructure projects, whether that is fossil fuel infrastructure like the Keystone XL pipeline, or renewable energy such as the windmills in Northern Norway?

There already exists some research on this topic related to the opposition against the Dakota Access Pipeline. In order to build on that research, in particular the PhD dissertation of Beckermann (2019), this thesis will use the Keystone XL pipeline as a case to examine the

settler colonialism in media surrounding the opposition against the expansion of the pipeline. Different stakeholders will have varying or even conflicting interests in the development of oil pipelines, and they may also rely on different media sources. Because the media environment is so polarized in the U.S. (Jurkowitz, Mitchell, Shearer and Walker, 2020), a closer look at how different newspapers frame the reporting on the Keystone XL pipeline is important in order to better understand the inter-ethnic opposition against it, and to move towards environmental justice for all in relation to energy infrastructure expansions.

#### 1.4 Research Questions and Study Objective

Given the context in which this thesis has come to be, two main research questions have been developed:

- 1) What thematic frames do national, regional, local, and indigenous newspapers use when reporting on the Keystone XL pipeline?
- 2) In what ways are these frames examples of settler colonialism in the present-day U.S.?

By thematic frame, this thesis relies on the definition by Miller and Riechert (2000) who defines framing as how the journalists focus on certain aspects of an issue and contribute to shape the public discourse on that issue. Newspapers can frame social and cultural phenomena in a way that their audience recognizes, and the journalists achieve this by defining and interpreting issues in a certain manner (Baylor, 1996).

Based on the above-mentioned research questions, the objective of this study is to examine how newspapers prioritize their news coverage of a salient political conflict which is interdisciplinary in nature. While a media analysis can contribute to various outcomes, this thesis aims to connect the thematic analysis of the newspaper articles to development questions more broadly, but in particular to the specific case of the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline.

## 1.5 Overview and Structure

In chapter 2, I present relevant literature on settler colonialism, the ‘Unlikely Alliances’ and media framing of environmental movements. Settler colonialism is defined, explained in the U.S. context, and its applicability as an academic framework is discussed. The ‘Unlikely Alliances’ are introduced and contextualized within the frames of environmental justice and the Indigenous population in the U.S. The concept of ‘frames’ is defined and literature on how the media frames environmental issues is presented.

In chapter 3, the rationale behind what data sources I have used in this thesis is presented, and the six different newspapers used in the analysis are presented: The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, Omaha World-Herald, Lincoln Journal Star, and Indian Country Today. Furthermore, a description of the method of analysis and an overview of the data are presented.

Chapter 4 contains the findings from the six newspapers, including two tables with an overview of the four main identified themes in the newspaper coverage sorted by newspaper source. Furthermore, the four main themes are presented with examples and excerpts from the articles.

In chapter 5, I discuss the findings from chapter 4 in the context that this introduction chapter as well as the literature review provide. Each identified theme is explicitly discussed (related to research question 1), and I also discuss whether or not the newspaper frames are examples of settler colonialism (research question 2). Moreover, a comparison of the themes present in the six different newspapers is discussed, and finally a discussion of how the case of the Keystone XL pipeline and the inter-ethnic opposition against it is relevant in a broader context of sustainable development and environmental justice.

Chapter 6 gives a brief conclusion of the overall thesis and discussion, and discusses the limitations of the thesis, in addition to giving direction to future research.

## 1.6 Clarification on Terms and Wording

As this thesis makes an attempt at showing, words matter. The deliberate wording choices made in this thesis should therefore also be addressed at the beginning of this thesis. While some



researchers have used 'Native' and 'Indigenous' interchangeably, this thesis aims to consistently use the term 'Indigenous.' Exceptions are made when referencing or directly quoting other sources.

Additionally, it is important to understand what a settler is and how that term is used and defined in this thesis. Lahti (2017, p. 8) argues that "settlers aim to replace the Natives/previous residents and capture terrestrial and maritime spaces with the intention of making them their own." However, an important distinction should be made clear, as we should not mistake migrants for settlers. As Veracini (2015) notes, settlers are 'beneficiaries' while migrants are targeted by assimilatory processes.

## 2 Literature Review

The literature review is divided into three subchapters. First, the analytical lens used in this thesis, settler colonialism, is introduced, defined and exemplified in a U.S. context. Its applicability to research is also discussed. Second, the concept of the *Unlikely Alliances* is introduced, along with environmental justice, the media and sustainable development. Finally, previous research on media framing of social and environmental movements is presented.

### 2.1 Settler Colonialism

#### 2.1.1 Introduction

Settler colonialism as a framework offers the opportunity for researchers to understand how “histories of peoples, regions, nations, and empires are inextricably linked rather than independent of each other” (Lahti, 2017). In the context of the United States of America, settler colonialism has been defined as an important factor which has shaped the country’s eco-social relations since the European colonization (Bacon, 2019). Furthermore, Bacon (2020) argues that discussions on the conflict of land and natural resources within the U.S. requires us to consider the context that settler colonialism provides.

For this thesis, settler colonialism is used as an analytical lens to explore the media framing of the highly contested and politically salient issue of the Keystone XL pipeline, and the opposition against its expansion, in several U.S. newspapers. It has been suggested that news media frames of opposition to the pipelines should be understood in the context of Indigenous resistance against settler colonial ecological violence and other harms done by the settlers to the Indigenous population, both ecologically and socially (Bacon, 2019).

#### 2.1.2 Definition

Settler colonialism destroys to replace. (Wolfe, 2006)

Settler colonialism is an ongoing process in which the settlers aim to replace the Native population, with the intent to secure settlers’ access to land and territory (Lahti, 2017; Wolfe, 2006). Its consequences continue to influence settler colonial societies, like the United States of America, to this date (Glenn, 2015). Lahti (2017, p. 8) defines settler colonialism as “a

distinctive form of colonialism where the settlers aim to replace the Natives/previous residents and capture terrestrial and maritime spaces with the intention of making them their own.” Dispossession is a central tenet of settler colonialism and is enabled through “discursive strategies aimed at curtailing indigenous entitlement to land” (Giminiani et al., 2021, p. 82). Settler colonialism goes beyond other types of colonialism, where the main objective is the exploitation of labor and natural resources, and rather has an element of “reproduction of one’s own society on what used to be other people’s lands” (Lahti, 2017, p. 8).

Whyte (2017, p. 158) further specifies settler colonialism as the social processes which occur when the settler society

(...) seeks to move permanently onto the terrestrial, aquatic, and aerial places lived in by one or more other societies who already derive economic vitality, cultural flourishing, and political self-determination from the relationships they have established with the plants, animals, physical entities, and eco-systems of those places.

Permanent occupation and settlement of land, as opposed to colonization that is primarily concerned with the extraction of natural resources or labor, are what differentiate settler colonialism from other types of colonialism (Glenn, 2015). Wolfe (2001) distinguishes between settler colonialism, and franchise-colonial relationships – exemplified with the Dutch East Indies and the British Raj – where the colonizers would extract local natural resources and exploit natives for their labor. Instead, the aim of settler colonialism is to replace the natives on their own land and expropriate the native owners from their own land (Wolfe, 2001). Another example outside of the U.S. of settler colonialism is found in Australia with the British colonizers’ assimilation policies which separated Aboriginal children from their families (Wolfe, 2001). As an extension of the differentiation of the term settler colonialism from other forms of colonialism, Whyte (2018, p. 125) uses the term *settler colonial dominance* to describe the violence that “disrupts human relationships with the environment.” Furthermore, settler colonialism in the U.S. context is not simply an historical event or one-time occurrence, but rather a structure that continues to influence the society to this date (Glenn, 2015). Wolfe (2006, p. 387) argues that while settler colonialism is “inherently eliminatory”, it is not perpetually “genocidal” in the sense that the motivation behind the elimination is not necessarily based on race, religion, or ethnicity, but rather to gain access to territory. European colonizers gained access to land inhabited by Native Americans and granted the Natives hunting and gathering rights to the land that the Europeans had ‘discovered’ (Wolfe, 2006).

Settler colonialism can also appear in many different settings. For example, it has been argued that the appropriation of public land and wilderness through pictures used for marketing purposes for recreational brands such as Patagonia, are a way of appropriating land and dispossessing the Indigenous population of their land and resources (Whitson, 2021). Settler colonialism is neither unique nor limited to the European colonization of North America, as it can occur in any historical or geographic context, and to any race or ethnicity (Lahti, 2017). Despite the differences in historical and geographic contexts, settler colonialism can be said to follow certain patterns in these different contexts. In the next section, I will discuss the peculiarities of settler colonialism in the United States, and the different structures that characterize settler colonialism in that context.

### 2.1.3 Settler Colonialism in the U.S.

The United States is a settler colonial state, and its history of colonialism continues to influence American culture and lives today (Hixson, 2017). Since the European colonization from the Spanish, French and British, the Indigenous population in North America has experienced what has been argued to be a “continuous history of settler colonial ethnic cleansing” (Glenn, 2015, p. 56). The Indigenous populations of the United States have experienced warfare and forced removal from their ancestral lands, assimilation policies which included boarding schools for children where it was prohibited to speak their native languages, or to practice other Native cultural or religious rituals (Glenn, 2015).

In the context of the U.S., the components of settler colonialism are white supremacy, massacres against Indigenous people, slavery, and the exploitation of land and natural resources through violence (McKay et al., 2020). European colonizers, and subsequently the U.S. government, have deprived the Native Americans of their ancestral land and left the Natives with hunting and gathering rights on the land that the Europeans had ‘discovered’ (Wolfe, 2006). The Indigenous population was then allocated small areas in reservations which often were of poor agricultural value (Bacon & Norton, 2019). Settler colonialism also involves racist discourse that aims to eliminate Indigenous nations politically, culturally, and socially, and, therefore, racism and settler colonialism in the U.S. context both inform and reinforce each other (McKay et al., 2020).

At the expense of Indigenous land, people, and culture, the United States continued to geographically expand westwards as the population grew due to European immigration (Wolfe, 2006). When the white settlers moved westward, their goal was to seize land and property rights, by eliminating the Indigenous population through both direct and indirect violence, including genocide (Glenn, 2015). In this sense, settler colonialism is inextricably tied to the acquisition of land (Wolfe, 2006), which consequently leads to continued Indigenous dispossession (Wolfe, 2013). As such, the concepts of land and territory cannot be ignored in relation to settler colonialism (Bacon, 2019). Settler colonialism manifests itself in various forms and unevenly so across regions and tribal nations in the U.S., producing divisions within the Native communities as much as it creates division among the settlers (Wolfe, 2013). Additionally, the disproportionate environmental sufferings that the Indigenous peoples in the United States have experienced are due to both climate change as well as settler colonialism (Whyte, 2017).

Despite the clear relation between settler colonialism and injustice against the Indigenous population in the U.S., it is not a law of nature to utilize settler colonialism as an analytical tool when examining environmental injustice in general or the Keystone XL pipeline in particular. Therefore, I will in the next section discuss the use of settler colonialism as an academic framework, and why this thesis relies on this framework for the analysis of the newspaper coverage of the Keystone XL pipeline.

#### 2.1.4 Critique of Settler Colonialism as an Academic Framework

Settler colonial studies have been criticized by some Indigenous scholars who argue that theorizing settler colonialism should be done in a manner that also contribute to advance enduring indigeneity as a concept, to counter the operating modus of settler colonialism, which is to eliminate the native (McKay et al., 2020). Lahti (2017, p. 8) notes how “some might reason that settler colonialism is used so freely by scholars that it risks becoming a generic concept that flattens out complex historical processes, demonizes white settlers, and erases Native agency.” However, Veracini (2021) argues that colonial studies do not eradicate Indigenous studies, because unlike land, knowledge as a resource can be shared without becoming scarce. Lahti (2017) also argues that before writing settler colonialism off, scholars should try to understand settler colonialism and what research opportunities it offers. This is also to say that we should be aware of the pitfall that McKay et al. (2020) warns us of: to not use settler

colonialism as the one and only frame to address any issue related to Native-settler relations. For example, the problems experienced in many Indigenous communities such as sexual violence, housing crisis, and low rates of school graduation, should not, when noticed by non-Natives, be put in the bag of “the ‘Indian problem’ school of analysis” (Bacon & Norton, 2019, p. 326). Rather, the “economic, social cultural, political, and personal vulnerability experienced by Native people in the United States” (Bacon & Norton, 2019, p. 326) should be viewed in consideration to the colonial structures that still exist within the U.S. society today (Hixson, 2017; Bacon & Norton, 2019).

Relatively speaking, Native American studies occupy a very limited role in contemporary American studies, compared to studies on Black history (Wolfe, 2013). This is not to say that Black studies and Black history are not important in contemporary American studies, but rather to criticize the relative devaluation of Native studies in comparison (Wolfe, 2013). Both the injustices against the Native Americans with settler colonialism, and the Black Americans with slavery, are at the very foundation of how the United States became a settler nation, and how these injustices continue to perpetually influence the U.S. society, culture and political institutions to this very day (Wolfe, 2013). In fact, the Natives and Blacks were both colonized by the white settler society, in different ways, and “Indian removal and plantation slavery were two sides of the same coin” (Wolfe, 2013, p. 4). It is then perhaps a bit troubling to see how little relative importance Native studies have in academia. Simply because the United States of America was founded on both the elimination of Natives, as well as exploitation of labor through slavery, does not mean that one of these injustices cancels out the other in terms of how much attention it should receive academically, or in society-at-large (Wolfe, 2013).

Bacon (2020) argues that any analyses pertaining to conflicts over land and resources in the United States also need to consider settler colonialism as a backdrop. Consequently, we must consider the history of dispossession that Indigenous peoples in America have experienced because of settler colonialism, to also understand the oil pipeline conflicts (Proulx & Crane, 2020). Considering these different arguments for and against using settler colonialism as a framework, this thesis aligns itself with Bacon (2020), Beckermann (2019), and Proulx and Crane (2020) and uses settler colonialism as a framework when analyzing the media coverage of the Keystone XL pipeline. Like Proulx and Crane (2020, p. 49), this thesis understands settler colonialism as “an ongoing process emerging from discourses that facilitate a long-term pattern of dispossession.” This is also in line with Glenn (2015) who argued that settler

colonialism does not simply exist in a historical perspective but is a structure that continues to influence the U.S. society today. Furthermore, this framework is not strictly limited to be applied to the context of the United States of America, because settler colonialism as a framework can explain how race relations are continually shaped in all “first world nations that were established through settler colonialism” (Glenn, 2015, p. 52).

By answering the call from Bacon (2019) to utilize settler colonialism as a framework to understand the eco-social relations in present-day United States, this thesis is making an effort to advance the understanding of how newspaper articles contribute to frame the conflict over energy infrastructure which not only in this case disproportionately impacts Indigenous people, but also how the narratives presented in the newspapers are present-day examples of ongoing settler colonialism and ecological violence. In the next subchapter I will thus discuss settler colonialism in relation to sustainable development and environmental justice.

#### 2.1.5 Settler Colonialism, Sustainable Development and Environmental Justice

If settler colonialism is a type of ecological violence in the U.S. as argued by Bacon (2019), then we need to further understand how burdens and benefits are asymmetrically dispersed in society, among the settlers and the Indigenous. Arguably, settler colonialism is a factor in unsustainable development because the premise that settler colonialism holds is that the Indigenous population should be erased and not necessarily consulted when affected by development initiatives such as the construction of energy infrastructure. Even though the structures and circumstances may differ from case to case, “the pattern remains: settlers expropriate land and resources from Indigenous people, disrupting Indigenous cultures, economies and conceptions of kinship and personhood” (Bacon, 2019, p. 4). The mechanisms of settler colonialism are deeply connected to land and how land and resources are “redistributed, privatized, polluted and renamed with generally no input or consent on the part of the original inhabitants; the value of places and beings are redefined by the culture of the colonizers” (Bacon, 2019, p. 5).

The protests against fossil fuel pipeline infrastructure in Canada and the U.S. over the last couple of years have been directly linked to the defense of Indigenous rights and saving the climate for the coming generations (Spiegel, 2021b). As settler societies are attempting to find ways to combat anthropogenic climate change, they are doing so while also “grappling with

the violent legacy of colonization, as well evolving types of colonialism in technocratic, market-oriented, neo-liberal environmental policies and practices” (Jacob et al., 2021, p. 10). In the Western world, there is a tendency to view the natural world as a ‘commodity, property or resource’ (McGregor, et al., 2020, p. 35). On the contrary, in Indigenous cultures, the Earth is viewed as alive with intrinsic values (McGregor et al., 2020).

When viewing the fight for Indigenous rights in the light of a fight for the climate and the world’s population overall, it becomes clear that it is critically important to incorporate Indigenous values into the green transition. Furthermore, Jacob et al. (2021, p. 10) argue that “decolonization cannot be a metaphor, but rather must continue to center the repatriation of Indigenous land, upon which Indigenous cultural values are based.” Injustice to Indigenous people is not limited to equity, but also related to the injustice regarding lack of recognition – that the settlers do not recognize the harm they are inflicting upon the Indigenous populations (Mascarhenas, 2007). Spiegel (2021a) argues that by viewing the fossil fuel extractive practices as something inevitable and in the nation’s best interest, we are facilitating the dispossession of Indigenous land. To counter this narrative, we should strive to contest the structural relationships that settler colonialism has put in place, by providing ‘alternative visions for energy futures and solidarity-building’ (Spiegel, 2021, p. 16). In this thesis, I make the argument that the inter-ethnic environmental alliances which have emerged in the American Midwest are catalysts for this type of change. In the next subchapter, these ‘Unlikely alliances’ will be presented.

## 2.2 The “Unlikely Alliances” – Inter-ethnic Environmental Alliances

### 2.2.1 Introduction

Given the history of settler colonialism in the United States, it would perhaps seem quite unlikely that Indigenous people and their white settler neighbors would find any common ground to come together in an alliance to oppose an oil pipeline. But that is exactly what has happened.

Despite a history of deep conflicts over natural resources, some Native Americans and their white rural neighbors have established grassroots alliances to protect their land and natural resources (Grossmann, 2005). The inter-ethnic alliances are remarkable and ‘unlikely’ due to



the history of settler colonialism in the United States. The underlying dynamic which has united the Indigenous communities and white rural settlers, is the common history of mistrust that both groups have towards the U.S. federal government (Grossman, 2005), coupled with a common external threat – namely environmental degradation (Ternes et al., 2020).

In the United States, these inter-ethnic alliances can trace their history back to the 1970s when white rural farmers and Indigenous communities in South Dakota came in conflict over the rights to land and water in the surrounding areas of tribal reservations (Grossman, 2003). However, contention over land and water rights are not the only sources of conflict. For example, fishing rights (Cantzler and Huynh, 2016; Grossman, 2005), low-level tactical military flight training, bombing ranges, nuclear power plants and gold mining (Grossman, 2005) are also examples of situations where Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have come in conflict over the years.

Specifically, Bold Nebraska have managed to gain support from both the Indigenous communities and white rural farmers against the Keystone XL pipeline, by connecting the expansion of the pipeline to private property rights and the risk for oil spills which would pollute the farmlands and water sources (Ternes et al., 2020). This resonated well with rural, conservative white farmers, but was not in itself enough to gain community-wide support for their cause (Ternes et al., 2020). Specifically, as a social movement, Bold Nebraska was successful in bridging the environmental and property rights concerns among the white settler communities, with the Indigenous communities' concern for land and the environment (Ternes et al., 2020). To gain support from the conservative, Republican population in rural Nebraska, for the 'progressive' cause of environmentalism, Bold Nebraska reframed the topic from a politically liberal agenda of anti-fossil fuel, to incorporate property rights and the threat that the Keystone XL pipeline posed to the rural farm communities (Ternes et al., 2020).

As a part of the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline in Nebraska, the Cowboy Indian Alliance re-emerged and reconciled some of the tensions that still exist between white rural farmers and the Native American tribal nations, due to settler colonialism (Ternes et al., 2020). These inter-ethnic environmental alliances have taken a different approach than focusing on political or social dividing lines, but rather on the "common places of environmental, economic, or cultural value to their residents" (Grossman, 2005, p. 28). Even though the joint efforts of these inter-ethnic alliances ultimately culminated with the signature from President

Biden on the Keystone XL executive order on Inauguration Day, it should be noted that the stories of success are the exceptions and not the rule, when it comes to the outcomes of these alliances (Grossman, 2005). For example, over conflicts on fishing rights in Washington, the outcome indicated that those alliances did not have the sufficient success-factors to sustain a long-lasting relation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, due to lack of cooperation at the local level, and instead relied too heavily on government level cooperation (Grossman, 2005).

Similar to Glenn (2015) who argues how settler colonialism is a structure, Svirsky (2017) argues that resistance is also a structure. The ‘Unlikely Alliances’ can then be viewed as a structure towards decolonization, which “involves rendering ineffective the elimination of Indigenous life” (Svirsky, 2017, p. 34). As an opposing force to the Keystone XL pipeline, the inter-ethnic environmental alliances in Nebraska have taken significant steps to not only bridge the intra-community racial and cultural divides, but also exemplifying for other communities that it is indeed possible to oppose energy colonialism forcefully and effectively on the quest for environmental justice.

### 2.2.2 Environmental Justice and the Indigenous Population in the United States

Environmental justice can be defined as “the equitable distribution of resources, environmental risk, and access to the natural world, and to expand environmentalist concern to encompass those environments in which communities “live, work, and play” (Johnson, 2019). Consequently, environmental injustice is the exact opposite, where vulnerable populations are exposed to the risks and burdens of the energy extraction activities (Ordner, 2017). As the opposition to both the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Keystone XL pipeline are examples of, effective participation from the public may become increasingly difficult when such environmental disputes involve Native Americans (Johnson, 2019).

It has been argued that fossil fuel extraction contributes to what has been coined *energy sacrifice zones* (de Onis, 2018, p. 1; Ordner, 2017, p. 162) where people who have been colonized have to carry the burden of the effects created by fossil fuel-dependent societies, while those societies do not compensate the colonized through transforming the colonizer’s societies into consuming other forms of energy sources (Johnson, 2019). Energy sacrifice zones threaten the livelihoods of people who live in that area, and the population pays the price for

the expansion of energy infrastructure with increased health risks from pollution (Ordner, 2017). The Indigenous people in the U.S. have for as long as fossil fuel extraction practices have occurred, been exposed to disproportionate health hazards, including pollution and environmental degradation (Johnson, 2019).

### 2.2.3 Media Coverage of Social Movements and Inter-Ethnic Alliances

When resistance against the expansion of oil pipelines or other energy infrastructure have surfaced, the opponents of such infrastructure have often been characterized as “extremist anti-fossil fuel outsiders” (Proulx and Crane, 2020). This type of demonization of the opposition against oil pipelines could be argued to be a way which settler colonialism materializes in the public discourse.

The media coverage of social protests and movements are not necessarily strictly about successful attempts to change the public’s opinion or policies, but often framed as successful due to the prospect of the movement’s members to express their thoughts and attitudes (McLeod and Hertog, 1992). As such, the successful outcome of a protest was the media coverage of social movement’s exercise of their first amendment rights, and not necessarily that the public opinion or government policies were affected (McLeod and Hertog, 1992). Therefore, it can be argued that, despite the success story of the ‘Unlikely Alliances’ against the development of the Keystone XL pipeline, it is not the outcome itself (i.e., the cancellation of the pipeline by the Biden administration) where the pipeline extension was terminated, that determine the success or failure of the inter-ethnic alliances, but rather that the historically deep divides have been bridged by the movement, and how they have accomplished this despite a great variety in culture, values and interests (Grossman, 2005).

Additionally, these social movements have managed to put environmental justice and degradation back on the agenda and remain robust ‘last lines of defense’ for the environment and Indigenous communities, despite facing a multitude of challenges (Ternes et al., 2020). While agenda-setting and policy victories are critical, it is also important to consider the media environment in which these outcomes occurred, and how media has framed these accomplishments. Therefore, the next section will discuss the media framing of social and environmental movements.

## 2.3 Media Framing of Social and Environmental Movements

### 2.3.1 Introduction

Media has an irrefutable, yet not unrestricted power to shape the trajectory of social movements (Baylor, 1996), and news coverage of any social movement is essential for a movement's existence (Kilgo & Harlow, 2019). The attention that a social movement gains in the news media is important to the movement because in addition to spreading awareness about the cause, it also can put pressure on government officials while shaping the debate to advance the movement's goals (Hunt & Gruszczynski, 2019). Media frames function as the organizing principles which are commonly and persistently perceived by a group, to make sense of the social world (Reese, 2001). Unless the media frames exist over a period of time, they are of little relevance for research (Reese, 2001). Furthermore, frames that are present over time, should be considered for closer examination by researchers (Reese, 2001).

However, when researching media framing and media coverage of conflicts related to oil pipelines in the United States, researchers must also be cognizant of what the media *does not* report on, because of “the settler-colonial structure's reliance on invisibilization for the legitimization of settler claims to place” (Bacon, 2020, p. 8). The editorial decisions that determine what is worthy of news media coverage is often a result of “many inter-related, competing principles from contending sources and media professionals themselves. The framing principle may generate a *coverage blackout*” (Reese, 2001, p. 7). Researchers should therefore consider what is being omitted from the reporting, as the erasure or mischaracterization of the Indigenous relationship with land is also considered colonial ecological violence (Bacon, 2020). However, it is also worth considering that the most frequently used frame may not be the most important frame (Reese, 2001).

### 2.3.2 Media Framing

Media framing as a concept involves how a text can communicate power (Entman, 1993). The media can frame issues by presenting social and cultural phenomena in ways that are recognizable to their audience, by interpreting and defining issues in a certain manner (Baylor, 1996). Entman (1993, p. 52) gives the following definition of framing:

To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition,*

*causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described.

Thus, according to Entman (1993), an important factor in framing is salience, which means that the journalist makes, consciously or subconsciously, decisions about what pieces of information they choose to include in their reporting. However, salience is also a result of the interaction between the sender, the communicative text, and the receiver, which means that even though a researcher might find certain aspects of a news article to be influential, the audience of the news story, i.e., a newspaper's readership, might not find it to be influential (Entman, 1993). Framing means that the journalists focus on certain aspects of an issue and contribute to shape the public discourse on that issue (Miller & Riechert, 2000). Frames are inherently about asymmetrical power structures and interests, and the power to frame an issue rests up the framer's "access to resources, a store of knowledge, and strategic alliances" (Reese, 2001, p. 12). An analysis of news media frames can contribute to understand how the news media influence human consciousness (Entman, 1993).

Due to the media bias and the commercialization of media, it can be difficult to gain media attention, which has forced many social movements to generate some sort of drama to spark media's attention to their cause (Baylor, 1996). When stakeholders are competing for media coverage, they are exploiting the rules in which journalists operate under, which often is to report on the conflicts that exist between the stakeholders (Miller & Riechert, 2000). This creates a paradox, because media coverage of protests often demonizes the social movements, leaving the movement's voices marginalized and not focusing on their demands or their agenda (Kilgo & Harlow, 2019). Additionally, different stakeholders in a community are non-homogenous, and have diverse priorities, interests, or values, which can contribute to tensions within the community (Angeles & Gurstein, 2000). Therefore, when a stakeholder in an environmental issue is promoting their understanding of the issue, they are participating in the framing of said issue (Miller & Riechert, 2000). The way in which the issues are framed is largely a result of various social and institutional interests (Reese, 2001).

It has also been argued that media coverage of social movement protests contributes to further marginalization of the social movements themselves (McLeod and Hertog, 1992). For example, it was found that mainstream media outlets often focus on illegal activities by protestors in most of their coverage (McLeod & Hertog, 1992). Furthermore, it has been suggested that

protests in relation to discrimination against Indigenous people often receive news coverage which can be delegitimizing to the cause (Kilgo & Harlow, 2019).

### 2.3.3 Media Framing of Environmental Issues

Bacon (2020) studied the media framing of the Dakota Access pipeline protests and found that the main framing of risk did not sufficiently cover the ecological risks and threats that the pipeline posed to Indigenous treaty rights and their livelihoods. According to Proulx and Crane (2020, p. 62), to view the land mainly as an opportunity for production and extraction, is an extension of settler colonialism which “continues to legitimize the dispossession of Indigenous people.”

Miller and Riechert (2000) argue that the way news media frame certain issues can be seen as a function of contending stakeholders and their relations with journalists. With the climate crisis as a backdrop, it has become increasingly evident that stories about environmental risks are important to society, but it often takes some sort of event or conflict to propel the issue into the public’s eye and onto the news agenda (Miller & Riechert, 2000). As was the case with the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, Bacon (2020, p. 1) found that media frames related to ecological risk were connected to images of “savagery versus civilized” to undermine the opposition from Indigenous peoples and to self-legitimize the ecological violence by not only oppress but also misrepresent those who opposed the Dakota Access pipeline as a “threat to the nation and to the environment.”

The development and construction of energy infrastructure occurs in a larger societal context and is therefore open for interpretation (Wright & Reid, 2011). News media coverage can “amplify, facilitate, or orchestrate public concern about a particular event or situation, thereby contributing to consensus, resistance, or even moral panic” (Wright & Reid, 2011, p. 1391). But the news media coverage does not occur in a vacuum, as much as the discursive context in which it is presented in is also impactful on the public’s opinion and on politician’s decision-making processes (Miller & Riechert, 2000). The underlying context to the news coverage of the Keystone XL oil pipeline, is that anthropogenic climate change currently impacts nearly every aspect of society (Ternes et al., 2020). In a study on media framing of the U.S. biofuel industry, Wright and Reid (2011) found that the media uses frames of economic development, the environment, and national security to shape the public discourse on the subject. Frames

become interesting to study when they add up to something more than an individual news article, as opposed to reducing the frame to mean something about the journalist's stance on a given issue (Reese, 2001).

### 3 Methodology and Data

This thesis has conducted a thematic analysis of newspaper articles, to explore how the newspapers have framed the issue of the Keystone XL pipeline. The data was collected through a selection of several different U.S. newspapers with distinct characteristics of geographical reach, readership, and political bias. The newspapers selected for the analysis were the New York Times (NY), Wall Street Journal (WS), Los Angeles Times (LA), Omaha World-Herald (OW), Lincoln Journal Star (LJ) and Indian Country Today (IC). The selected newspapers are both widely circulated in their respective media markets and are mostly reporting factually accurate information.

#### 3.1 Selection of Newspapers

The newspapers were selected because they represent different types of newspapers in the American news industry. As mentioned above, the newspapers' geographical reach, readership and political bias were important considerations when including them in the sample. The different geographical reach of the newspapers will impact how they report on an issue like the Keystone XL, from different perspectives or scales. Intuitively, a national newspaper would likely focus more on national concerns, while a local newspaper would focus more on local issues. As is the case for the Keystone XL pipeline, it represents an environmental issue not only on a local level, but also on a regional, national and even global scale. Thus, to have different newspapers in the sample with different geographical focus was a deliberate choice when conducting the data collection.

Additionally, it was also important to consider a variety among readership and political bias. These two considerations are perhaps related, as news consumption habits in the United States have been found to be connected to voting behavior (DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Martin and Yurukoglu, 2017). Furthermore, the editorial decisions made by the different newspapers on what stories to report on, and how to frame the issues, are also influenced by who the readers of those newspapers are. Therefore, some diversity among the newspapers in the sample is necessary to both see how the different newspapers are framing the issue of the Keystone XL pipeline to begin with, as well as a way to compare the thematic frames identified across the different newspapers.



The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal were selected due to their national reach, while the Los Angeles Times was selected based on being an important regional newspaper, and to counterbalance the east coast-based newspapers which The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal are examples of. Since much of the contestation of the Keystone XL pipeline occurred in Nebraska due to the planned route going through the state, this thesis has also included Nebraska's two largest local newspapers, the Omaha World-Herald and Lincoln Journal Star. Similarly, since a lot of the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline has come from Indigenous communities, this thesis follows Beckermann (2019) in including the Indigenous non-profit online newspaper Indian Country Today in the sample.

Data for this study was collected from the newspapers by conducting searches for the keyword "Keystone XL". The time frame in which the article search was conducted was from May 1, 2020, to May 1, 2021. This 12-month period includes any coverage from when then-presidential candidate Joe Biden made cancelling Keystone XL a campaign promise in May 2020, as well as about four months into his presidency after he had signed the Keystone XL executive order on Inauguration Day. Additionally, the time frame also incorporates the newspaper coverage of the nomination and subsequent confirmation of Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, who was questioned during her confirmation hearing in the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources specifically on the Keystone XL pipeline and other fossil fuel infrastructure. According to Google Trends, the search interest in Keystone XL in the United States peaked during the week of President Biden's Inauguration in January 2021, and geographically the interest was the highest in Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska, and the District of Columbia.

While a one-year window of analyzing articles on the Keystone XL pipeline, which has been a contested political issue for several years, from select publications, only gives us a brief glimpse of the entirety of the media coverage on this issue, this research situates itself within the one-year period from when President Joe Biden made cancelling the Keystone XL pipeline a campaign promise, and into his first few months as President. The number of articles in the newspapers which mentioned Keystone XL in this time frame was considered sufficient for this research, furthermore, the peak of the reporting was around the time of the Biden Inauguration, with fewer articles in the months prior to Inauguration.

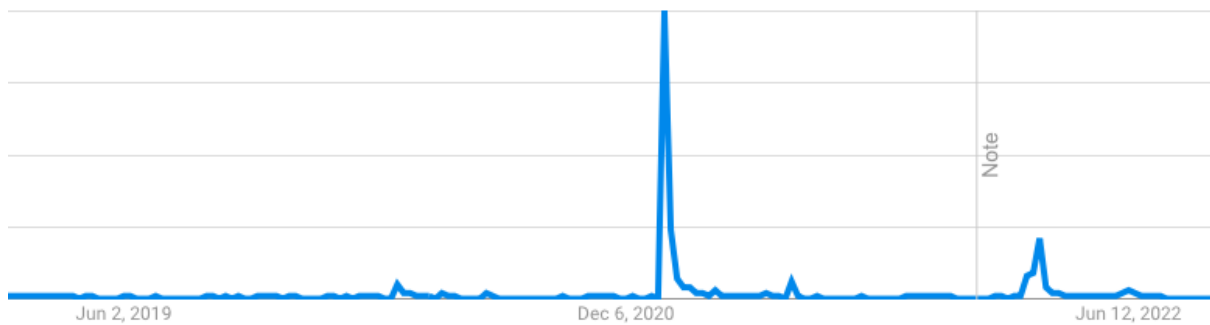


Figure 2: Google Trends Interest Over Time June 2019 - June 2022: "Keystone XL"

As Figure 2 indicates, the search interest on Google peaked during the Inauguration period in January 2021, and a smaller peak again in February and March of 2022 after some American politicians called to revive Keystone XL in the days following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, as they urged Biden to reduce the foreign dependency on fossil fuels (Tuttle and Natter, 2022).

This thesis looks only on news media coverage in American newspapers, with no international newspapers in the sample. This was a practical consideration, due to the time constraints and the scope of the thesis. However, it should be noted that the New York Times, for example, has more than 1 million digital subscribers outside of the United States (The New York Times, 2021), an indication that the reporting in this paper reaches a large international audience as well.

### 3.2 Presentation of Data Sources

In the following sections, the six newspapers will be presented, including the readership, political bias and the degree of factual reporting according to the Media Bias Chart. Despite some of the criticism that the Media Bias Chart has received (e.g., Benjes-Small, 2021), for example that the chart "promotes a false equivalency between right and left", and "a political 'center' as being without bias", this thesis will still use it as a reference to specify that the newspapers that have been used in this analysis comes from a specter on the political bias scale. However, most importantly, the Media Bias Chart is used to ensure that the data sources are newspapers which are renowned for factual and accurate reporting. Furthermore, the newspapers' presidential and congressional endorsements from the 2020 general election will

be used as a proxy to identify political biases. A 2021 Statista survey will also be referenced in relation to the public's perception of the newspaper's credibility.

### 3.2.1 The New York Times

As of late-2021, the New York Times reports that the newspaper has nearly 8.4 million subscriptions, 7.6 million of which are digital (Tracy, 2021). The New York Times is widely considered an a “frontrunner in national and international news, serving a large, educated readership that is primarily urban with identifiable economic and energy issues and sensitive to environmental concerns” (Wright and Reid, 2011, p. 1392). Additionally, the New York Times is also considered by many U.S. policy makers as an important newspaper for information pertaining to their legislative work (Wright and Reid, 2011). The New York Times is owned by the New York Times Company, which is controlled by the Ochs-Sulzberger family through a trust and is a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange (The New York Times, 2022). According to a recent survey, 52% of the respondents characterized the New York Times as very or somewhat credible (Watson, 2022a). Its political bias is center-to-left leaning, and the newspaper endorsed Joe Biden for president in 2020 (The New York Times Editorial Board, 2020).

### 3.2.2 Wall Street Journal

The Wall Street Journal is a well-regarded international business newspaper, which mainly focuses its reporting on business issues, the economy, and U.S. politics (Watson, 2021). The average daily circulation of the paper in 2021 was almost 3.5 million, where 2.7 million were digital-only (Watson, 2021). The paper is owned by Dow Jones & Co., a part of News Corp which is controlled by Rupert Murdoch (The Wall Street Journal, 2022). The political bias of this publication is slightly right-leaning, while the reliability is mostly factual reporting (Ad Fontes Media, 2022). The Wall Street Journal does not endorse presidential candidates and did not endorse any candidate in the 2020 Presidential election either, but their editorial board has criticized Biden and his policies for being too left leaning (The Wall Street Journal Editorial Board, 2020), which suggests that their perspective is more towards the right on the American political spectrum. According to a 2022 survey, 54% of the respondents viewed the Wall Street Journal as somewhat or very credible (Watson, 2022b).

### 3.2.3 Los Angeles Times

As of 2022, the Los Angeles Times has a combined print and digital subscription readership of 4.4 million, which makes it the largest metropolitan daily newspaper in the U.S. (Los Angeles Times, n.d.). The newspaper has a left-leaning political bias, and the reporting is mostly analysis with a left-leaning perspective, or a mix of factual reporting and analysis (Ad Fontes Media, 2022). The newspaper endorsed Joe Biden for president in 2020 (The Los Angeles Times Editorial Board, 2020). Los Angeles Times is owned by Nant Capital, which is an investment firm owned by an L.A biotech billionaire, Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong (James and Koren, 2018)

### 3.2.4 Omaha World-Herald

The Omaha World-Herald is a local/regional newspaper published in Omaha, the largest city in Nebraska, and is also the largest newspaper in the state by readership. More than 1.2 million users access the newspaper's website each month, and the Omaha World-Herald states that it is able to reach 80% of the adult population in the local area (Omaha World-Herald, n.d.). Until 2020, the newspaper was owned by Berkshire Hathaway, the company of Omaha investor Warren Buffet, but is now owned by Lee Enterprises which have acquired several dozens of local, daily newspapers across the United States in the past few years. The Omaha World-Herald's political bias is 'moderate', both according to Ad Fontes Media (2022) and when considering their 2020 endorsements. The Omaha World-Herald endorsed Joe Biden for president, while also endorsing Republicans Don Bacon (Nebraska's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District) and Ben Sasse (U.S. Senator) (Omaha World-Herald Editorial Staff, 2020). The newspaper also endorsed Democrat Kate Bolz (Nebraska's 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District).

### 3.2.5 Lincoln Journal Star

Lincoln Journal Star is owned by Lee Enterprises and is published from Nebraska's state capital Lincoln (Lincoln Journal Star, n.d.). The current circulation numbers are 76 000 daily, and 84 000 on Sundays, and the paper reaches 75% of the readers in the local area (Lincoln Journal Star, n.d.). The political bias is left-to-center, as the newspaper endorsed Joe Biden for President (Lincoln Journal Star Editorial Board, 2020a) and Democrat Kate Bolz for Congress (Lincoln Journal Star Editorial Board, 2020b).

### 3.2.6 Indian Country Today

Indian Country Today is an Indigenous, online newspaper. It is an independent non-profit organization which covers news, opinion pieces and entertainment from American Indians and Alaska Natives (Indian Country Today, n.d.). While the newspaper did not formally endorse any of the candidates in the Presidential election in 2020, the paper did publish an article about how Native American organizations were campaigning for Democratic candidates in Montana before the 2020 Election, and they also characterized Donald Trump as the “most anti-Native American president since Andrew Jackson” (Indian Country Today Press Pool, 2020).

### 3.3 Description of Method of Analysis

This thesis utilizes a thematic analysis as the qualitative research method. The idea behind a thematic analysis is to come up with themes and/or subthemes which are “recurring motifs in the text that are then applied to the data” (Bryman, 2012, p. 579). A theme can be described as a category defined by the researcher, which is applied to the topic of the research and is based off of codes or assigned meanings in transcripts or excerpts of text from the data collection (Bryman, 2012). A theme in the newspaper articles was developed after looking for repetitive topics or phrases which were commonly reproduced in a variety of different ways (Bryman, 2012). In particular, while reading through the articles, I looked for what Bryman (2012) calls ‘linguistic connectors’ which typically assigns causal connections to different words or topics. For example, in some of the articles, the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline was characterized in different ways, like “bitter” or “fierce” in relation to a coalition of people such as environmentalists, farmers or Indigenous people. These articles were later thematically labelled as ‘Grassroots opposition/Indigenous.’ A further explanation of the thematic frames is presented in chapter 4.1.

All the newspaper articles were read and collected in a database and were assigned either “context” or “analysis” tags. Furthermore, all articles that were assigned the “analysis” tag were then read one more time and assigned a theme. Multiple themes could of course be present in a single article, but the most prominent theme was the assigned theme for the purpose of the analysis. This was also in part guided by the newspapers’ own categorization of articles, such as filing them under “Climate” or “U.S. Politics”, because this underscores the editorial decision-making process in the media narratives.

The articles were collected and read in the period from December 2021 to March 2022. Some of the articles had been updated in this timeframe when the data collection took place, and it is difficult to assess what information was added (or withdrawn) from the article since the day it was published. However, it is not likely that this would have a major impact on the analysis of these articles. The articles were organized after what newspaper it was published in and added to the dataset in a chronological order based on publishing date. Articles from The New York Times were read and added first, then Los Angeles Times, Omaha World Herald, Lincoln Journal Star, Indian Country Today and finally articles from the Wall Street Journal.

In the dataset, data about the author, publishing date, date of update (if applicable), URL, category (news article, opinion, other), pictures used and excerpts from the article, as well as how many times the search phrase “Keystone XL” was mentioned in each article. Since this thesis analyzes the data in a qualitative manner, the number of mentions of Keystone XL is not necessarily indicative of how important or relevant the article is for the analysis, which follows the reasoning by Reese (2001) related to the issue of quantitative versus qualitative, which argued that the most frequently identified reported issue does not necessarily translate directly to it being the most important issue.

While a quantitative approach to themes identified in news reporting of an environmental issue such as the Keystone XL pipeline might be preferable to some scholars, it was noted by Reese (2001, p. 1) that “the qualitative turn of much framing analysis helps resist the reductionistic urge to sort media texts and discourse into containers and count their size or frequency.” Therefore, this thesis is a qualitative study which examines the themes present in various newspaper articles by analyzing the articles’ content coupled the newspaper’s classification of the article. For example, if the article was published in the ‘climate’ section of the newspaper, and if the article mentioned some climate perspectives, the theme ‘climate’ would be assigned to that specific article. To support the qualitative analysis, the data is also presented quantitatively in tables 1 and 2 to provide an overview of the collected data. While not necessary for the analysis itself, the descriptive tables provide a useful starting point for the discussion on comparing the themes across newspapers.

The identified themes in the dataset are intertwined and connected but are for the purpose of readability divided into four parts in this chapter. However, it should be noted that there exists an overlap between the themes, as well as it was often more than a singular theme present in

each article. Each article has been labelled with a main theme, after identifying the most prominent theme within the article. Even though the articles have been labelled with a main theme, findings from articles regardless of their assigned theme may be used in several of the other identified theme’s sections in the next chapter, as the analysis is based on qualitative methods rather than quantitative. The descriptive overview of themes is used as a departure point for the analysis, as well as a guide for the presentation of the findings.

### 3.4 Data Overview

The newspaper articles were all collected as the online versions of the articles from the respective newspapers’ websites. Access was granted through paid subscription which were paid for with own funds. The search term used was “Keystone XL” and articles that were collected were published within the date range of May 1, 2020, to May 1, 2021. In total, 248 articles were collected from the six newspapers. In the table below is an overview of the articles that contained at least one mention of the search term “Keystone XL.”

	<b>Total articles</b>	<b>News article</b>	<b>Opinion</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>New York Times</b>	<b>65</b>	32	13	20
<b>Wall Street Journal</b>	<b>56</b>	36	18	2
<b>Los Angeles Times</b>	<b>27</b>	16	3	8
<b>Omaha World-Herald</b>	<b>37</b>	22	13	2
<b>Lincoln Journal Star</b>	<b>37</b>	30	5	2
<b>Indian Country Today</b>	<b>26</b>	17	3	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>248</b>	153	55	40

*Table 1: Overview of data sources*

The dataset distinguishes between news articles and opinion pieces. This was done in order to facilitate a better understanding of who the author of the article was. For example, a conservative op-ed in a liberal or left-leaning newspaper should be understood as such, and not necessarily as a representative voice in that newspaper. All opinion pieces/opinion-editorials (op-eds) were clearly marked as such in all publications in the sample. However, some ambiguity was observed among the news articles, as some of the articles appeared as more of a news commentary but were not marked as opinions. These were ultimately labelled ‘news articles’, nonetheless. The ‘other’ category involves mainly newsletters, podcast episodes, and

daily summaries. The ‘other’ category was primarily found in the New York Times. For Indian Country Today, there were also press releases published, which were filed as ‘other.’

Out of the 248 articles which contained at least one mention of the search term “Keystone XL”, 118 of those articles were categorized as “for context” while 130 articles were labelled “for analysis.” The contextual articles were of less interest for the analysis because they were not focused on the issue of the Keystone XL pipeline. This was the case when an article for example mentioned the pipeline in an in-text reference to another article, in relation to other issues which were clearly the main theme of the article (such as COVID-19) or when the article briefly mentioned Keystone XL pipeline in relation to a person who had opposed the pipeline, but the article’s focus was on something completely different such as sports or a cultural event.



## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

Among the 130 articles used for this analysis, four main themes were identified as thematic frames used in the reporting which mentions the Keystone XL pipeline: Climate, Foreign relations, Politics/Economy, and Grassroots mobilization/Indigenous. An overview of the identified themes in the respective newspapers is found in table 2 below.

	<b>Climate</b>	<b>Foreign relations</b>	<b>Politics/Economy</b>	<b>Grassroots mobilization/Indigenous</b>
New York Times	14	4	15	3
Wall Street Journal	9	5	20	0
Los Angeles Times	2	3	6	1
Omaha World-Herald	0	2	9	5
Lincoln Journal Star	1	2	8	7
Indian Country Today	2	0	4	8
Total	28	16	62	24

*Table 2: Identified themes by newspaper source*

It is important to reiterate that these themes are intertwined, and in many instances more than one theme was present in any given article. However, for the purpose of this thesis and for the readability of the report, the main theme assigned to each article is reported and counted in Table 2 above.

The theme ‘Politics/Economy’ was assigned to articles which were mainly focused on either U.S. federal politics, or local politics, in addition to reporting on legal proceedings such as when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the Keystone XL, declining the Trump administration’s wish to revive the pipeline. Furthermore, reporting on the Keystone XL in relation to the economy was labelled under this theme, for example articles which focused on job creation.

The theme ‘Climate’ was identified through identification of similar presentations of the Keystone XL pipeline in a context which mentioned for example environmental degradation, other climate actions from the Biden administration such as rejoining the Paris Climate Accord, as well as the explicit mentioning of ‘climate change.’ One example of the overlap between the ‘Climate’ and ‘Politics/Economy’ themes, is the reporting on new green jobs, which arguably could be labelled as both. However, in these instances I opted to assign the theme ‘Politics/Economy’ due to the emphasis on job creation and the economy.

The theme ‘Grassroots/Indigenous’ was developed after seeing the repetitive use of words such as “opposition,” “coalitions” and “resistance” in relation to local groups such as Indigenous people and white rural farmers, in the reporting. This thematic frame was also assigned for articles which described Secretary Deb Haaland, a member of the Laguna Pueblo, as an opponent to the Keystone XL pipeline.

The theme ‘Foreign relations’ was assigned to reporting on U.S. foreign relations, especially with Canada. A lot of the reporting under this thematic umbrella was on the relationship between the U.S. and Canada, which was put under pressure during the Trump administration, and the Canadians were hopeful for a fresh start with the incoming Biden administration. Most of this reporting occurred in the days and weeks after Biden was inaugurated, and directly tied to the executive order which cancelled Keystone XL. Articles which mentioned foreign dependency on fossil fuels were also included in this thematic frame.

Table 3 below presents the identified themes by frequency. The most frequently identified theme is ‘*Politics/Economy*’, which accounted for almost half of all the articles which were examined (47%). ‘*Climate*’ was the second most frequently identified theme (21%) and ‘*Grassroots mobilization/Indigenous*’ the third most frequent (18%). ‘*Foreign relations*’ was the least frequently identified theme in the dataset (12%). However, as noted by Reese (2001), we should be careful to assume that the most frequently used theme is the most important one. Similarly, just because an issue receives media coverage, does not necessarily mean that the issue is a key issue, it may simply be that the issue is contested by political elites (Reese, 2001).

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Politics/Economy	62	47.69%
Climate	28	21.54%
Grassroots mobilization/Indigenous	24	18.46%
Foreign relations	16	12.31%
Total	130	100.00%

*Table 3: Descriptives table, themes by frequency*

In the following subchapters, a presentation of each of the four themes will be given, with examples from each of the six newspapers. The excerpt from each newspaper is presented with

the two-letter abbreviation, followed by a number which represents the assigned article number in the dataset. The abbreviations are as follows:

IC	Indian Country Today
LA	Los Angeles Times
LJ	Lincoln Journal Today
NY	The New York Times
OW	Omaha World-Herald
WS	Wall Street Journal

For example, article number 8 from the New York Times is referenced in the text as (NY-8).

## 4.2 Identified Themes

In the following sub-chapters, the identified themes in the newspaper articles will be presented with examples and excerpts from the articles. First, the theme ‘Politics and the Economy’ will be presented, then the theme ‘Climate and Environment’, the theme ‘Grassroots Mobilization and Indigenous Opposition’ and finally the theme ‘Foreign Relations.’ While there is some overlap between the themes and within the analyzed newspaper articles, the structure of this subchapter seeks to compartmentalize the themes as much as possible for the readability of the thesis. However, the reader should also consider that the overlap and intertwining of themes is indeed the case in most of the reporting, and that the individual themes associated with the various articles is used for readability and the structure of this thesis. This will be further elaborated on in the discussion chapter.

### 4.2.1 Politics and the Economy

The Politics/Economy theme was the most frequently identified theme among the analyzed articles. Included within this theme is also reporting on legal matters, such as Supreme Court decisions, as these reports also included comments on either President Donald Trump or President Joe Biden. The subthemes here include U.S. National politics and the political divides between Republicans and Democrats at a federal level, Keystone XL and the potential for job creation, as well as local political conflicts in South Dakota and Nebraska.

The pipeline had originally been permitted under President Trump (WS-14). When President Biden signed the executive order which effectively cancelled the Keystone XL pipeline on Inauguration Day, Los Angeles Times noted that the pipeline had been “controversial” (LA-21), which is also a term the Omaha World-Herald has used to describe the pipeline (OW-8). The Lincoln Journal Star characterized the pipeline as “disputed” without going into further details about “who” has disputed the pipeline (LJ-5).

In May 2020, the Omaha World-Herald published an article when a section of the pipeline was finished, and the article specifically noted how the pipeline was “disputed” (OW-3). Among other early mentions of Keystone XL of the included articles in the sample were news articles in the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times on July 6, 2020, when the Supreme Court rejected a request from the Trump administration which sought approval to continue to build the Keystone XL pipeline (NY-3). This exemplifies how the construction of the pipeline has been held up by court decisions, while also indicating the political support (and opposition) to the pipeline expansion.

Construction of the Keystone XL pipeline had also been rejected in a federal court in Montana, where a judge blocked the pipeline (NY-3). Environmental groups had opposed the project, by citing the Clean Water Act, and arguing that the Keystone XL would pose risks to endangered species in the area. Judge Brian M. Morris in Montana sided with the environmental groups and wrote in his decision that the government had failed to properly consult with wildlife agencies, and thus violating the Endangered Species Act. The Supreme Court then decided to uphold that decision, rather than overruling it, resulting in a failed attempt from the Trump administration to revive the pipeline.

Following the Supreme Court decision, Mr. Jason Bordoff from Columbia University’s Center on Global Energy Policy, published an opinion piece in the New York Times (NY-8), questioning whether the setbacks in the courts that the Keystone XL pipeline recently had faced would impact the construction of ‘Clean Energy Projects’ such as solar power and wind energy projects. Bordoff’s argument rests upon the environmental review process:

Environmental groups have developed sophisticated legal strategies to block the pipelines that get fuel to market. Major pipeline projects usually require federal permits, such as when they cross certain water bodies, wetlands or public lands. But before those permits can be issued,

federal law requires the government to conduct a review of the project's environmental impacts. This process has become increasingly expensive, time consuming and susceptible to litigation, especially for large energy infrastructure projects. (Bordoff, 2020, NY-8)

In addition to the legal battles that have been in courts of all ranks in the United States, some of the reporting also uses the argument made by pipeline proponents which is the number of potential jobs that could be created if the pipeline received construction approval. In one New York Times article, a representative of the National Association of Manufacturers criticizes the decision by the Supreme Court to deny the pipeline permit, stating that "it would have created 10,000 union jobs" (NY-28). After Biden signed the executive order halting the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, the New York Times published an article which noted that the decision was "met with swift condemnation from some business leaders" (NY-31) and that "the Chamber of Commerce called the move 'politically motivated' and said it would 'put thousands of Americans in the building trades out of work'" (NY-32). Oil lobbyists were also critical of the decision to cancel Keystone XL, noting that it had led to the elimination of "thousands of oil and gas jobs" (LA-13).

The Keystone XL decision was an indicator of some sort to mark the difference from the Trump administration to the Biden administration, and Democrats specifically called for more bipartisanship in Congress. Former U.S. Senator from Nebraska, Ben Nelson, a Democrat, said:

(...) it is long past time for the country to move beyond the polarized partisanship that for more than a decade has stalled significant progress on issues like immigration, energy policy and expanding health care coverage. (Cordes, 2021, LJ-27)

The Keystone XL executive order came during a turbulent time in American history and as Biden moved into the White House, he sought to bring some sort of stability and to a country which for the past year had experienced a deadly pandemic, job crisis, a disastrous vaccine rollout, an impeachment trial of a sitting U.S. President, and the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C (NY-55). Shortly thereafter, there was a major energy infrastructure crisis and power outage in Texas, when several natural gas pipes froze and left millions without electricity for days during several winter storms in February 2021 (NY-52). Despite all of this turbulence, American politics "feels quieter with Joe Biden in the White House" even though his first few weeks as President have been far from slow and quiet, policy-wise (NY-60).

#### *4.2.1.1 U.S. National Politics: Division Between Republicans and Democrats*

During the Trump presidency, many of the political decisions were made through executive orders and not passed as legislation in Congress. This meant that many of Trump's decisions faced the risk of being overturned the day he left the White House, which is what happened when President Biden signed the executive orders on climate (e.g., Keystone XL, rejoining the Paris Climate Accord and reinstating the ban on oil drilling in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge in Alaska). These actions can just as easily be overturned by the next administration, as reported by the New York Times (NY-33; NY-39). It was clear from the start of the Biden administration that his key priority while in the White House, is to combat climate change (NY-52).

The Biden agenda is being accused of being "radical left" (WS-28), and Nebraska Congressman Don Bacon, a Republican, was interviewed in the Wall Street Journal and argued how the decision to cancel the Keystone XL pipeline would cost jobs in his home state (WS-55). Congressman Bacon was also quoted saying: "I think we're going to have a bit of a tailwind because a lot of the Biden-Pelosi agenda is pretty far left" (WS-55), arguing further that he is better off electorally since he can represent the opposite of the Biden-Pelosi agenda, and distance himself from the Biden administration's policies such as the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline, which in his view would hurt the economy in Nebraska.

On a national political level, the Attorneys General of Texas and Montana, Ken Paxton and Austin Knudsen, argued that Biden had "overstepped his authority when he revoked the permit for the Keystone pipeline" when they filed a lawsuit against the Biden administration (LJ-40). The political tension within Congress does also appear in the newspaper reporting, for example when Senator Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia (Republican) stated that President Biden's "policies from day one hurt American workers and our economy" (WS-15). Senator Capito related this specifically to the Keystone XL decision and the rejoining of the Paris Climate Accord (WS-15). These statements coming from Senator Capito of West Virginia are significant in the sense that she represents a state which is dependent on jobs in the coal mining industry, and thus is electorally "forced" to actively oppose any policies that could impact her home state's economy negatively.

The opposition against Biden's executive order on the Keystone XL came largely from the Republicans but some opposition also came from his own party as well, as Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia urged Biden to reconsider his Keystone XL decision (WS-38). Within the opposition from the Republican party, were 14 GOP State Attorneys General who wrote in a letter to President Biden urging him to reconsider the Keystone XL executive order (WS-38). The united opposition within the Republican party should also consider the backdrop of the second Trump impeachment trial, where seven GOP Senators sided with the Democrats in voting to impeach Trump on the charge of inciting the insurrection on January 6, 2021 (WS-39). Thus, unity around a cause such as the Keystone XL was seen as important for the GOP as a political party working in opposition to the Biden administration (WS-39).

The Inauguration Day executive orders signed by President Biden were to a large extent the reversal of several controversial Trump policies. The New York Times noted:

The list of Trump initiatives that have been rolled back through Biden executive orders includes: Restoring the country's commitment to funding the World Health Organization; rejoining the Paris climate accords; reversing Mr. Trump's ban on immigration from several predominantly Muslim nations and halting immigration enforcement in the country's interior; stopping construction of the border wall; ensuring protections for L.G.B.T.Q. workers undermined by Trump appointees; killing the Keystone XL pipeline permit; reimposing the ban on drilling in the Arctic wildlife refuge; imposing new ethics rules and tossing out Mr. Trump's "1776 Commission" report. (Thrush, 2021, NY-39).

By explicitly mentioning Keystone XL in the list of Biden's Inauguration Day executive orders which ranged from climate action to immigration, to LGBTQ rights, and allowing transgender Americans to serve openly in the military (NY-39; NY-46), the New York Times elevates the issue of the Keystone XL pipeline from a local issue to an issue of national importance, and not only restricting it in terms of other climate actions taken by the Biden Administration. By signing all of these executive orders, the Biden administration ensured that people would notice a difference between the Trump administration and the Biden administration, through what could be argued as simply reversing much of the Trump-era legislation (NY-55).

In the Los Angeles Times, the Keystone XL executive order was mentioned in connection with the executive orders of rejoining the World Health Organization and revamping the restrictive immigration policies from the Trump administration (LA-22). Thus, the Keystone XL executive order is not simply viewed as an important climate action, but a significant political

decision overall. However, a lot of the reporting on the Keystone XL executive order, oftentimes mentioned the pipeline alongside other environmental and climate-related legislation, like the moratorium on oil and gas drilling on public lands and in the Arctic (NY-46) and the rejoining of the Paris Climate Accord (NY-55; NY-60).

Similarly, it was also mentioned in several articles towards the end of January 2021, that Biden's tasks during the first week in office was part of an "undo list" to reverse several of the Trump administration's policies (NY-55) and the Wall Street Journal highlighted the Keystone XL decision as part of Biden's environmental agenda and ending several other Trump-era environmental policies (WS-56). The Editorial Board at the Wall Street Journal also pointed out how Keystone XL has been a 'back-and-forth' issue ever since the Obama administration: an article titled "Didn't President Trump finally deliver Keystone from Barack Obama's regulatory purgatory?" (WS-3) was published in July 2020 when the federal court in Montana struck down the Trump administration's petition to revive Keystone XL. Another example of how much things have changed between the Trump and the Biden presidencies, is how "the President's Twitter feed hasn't gone dark, but it's gone dull. Biden doesn't pick needless fights or insert himself into cultural conflicts" (NY-60).

The Republicans are also using the Keystone XL executive order as political leverage when they argue that if the Democrats decide to get rid of the *filibuster*, which is the current 60-vote threshold in the U.S. Senate required for stopping a debate on a legislative bill, the GOP could easily overturn the Keystone XL pipeline (WS-53). Specifically, Republican Senator Barrasso of Wyoming argued that if the Democrats removed the filibuster, the Republicans would then easily, when in majority, complete the southern border wall, extract more minerals, oil and gas on federal land and approve the Keystone XL pipeline (WS-53).

#### 4.2.1.2 *Keystone XL, the Economy and Job Creation*

President Biden received critical remarks in the days following the Inauguration in January 2021. In a New York Times opinion piece, the author questions what exactly Biden's plan for healing and national unity is, or what he plans to do to make up for the jobs lost because of the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline (NY-44). The Wall Street Journal also noted how some skeptics argued that "killing the Keystone XL pipeline (...) is going to cost jobs (WS-33). TC Energy, the company behind the Keystone construction, even argued that the Keystone



XL pipeline expansion should have fit well with Biden's "Build Back Better plan" as it would bring jobs back to the economy which is still suffering from the aftermaths of the COVID-19 pandemic (LJ-17). Immediately following the announcement of the Keystone XL executive order, TC Energy responded by laying off 1000 workers (WS-41). It had been argued by union leaders that the Keystone XL project would create 10,000 unionized jobs, and that the environmental risks could be taken care of (WS-42). In an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal, a reader argued that the Keystone XL executive order was counterintuitive if Biden's plan is lower unemployment numbers (WS-48). However, the White House's response to these arguments was that the clean energy projects initiated by the Biden administration would "spur longer lasting job growth" (WS-52).

The political discourse in Congress was also part of the reporting from the New York Times, after Biden had announced a plan to construct more offshore wind power along the New York and New Jersey coastline, an effort which according to Biden would generate 'clean electricity to power 10 million homes' (NY-64). After this announcement, Republicans voiced their skepticism towards Biden's plans of creating new, green jobs (NY-64). Biden's national climate adviser, Gina McCarthy said in a statement that offshore wind is a "new, untapped industry" that "will create pathways to the middle class for people from all backgrounds" (NY-64). The Biden administration's plan to create new, green jobs have also been criticized by the Institute for Energy Research, an organization funded by fossil fuel companies, as the president of the organization expressed little faith in the promise from the Biden administration to create green jobs (NY-65).

The Wall Street Journal refers to the Keystone XL pipeline as a "\$8 billion initiative" (WS-9), which contextualizes the issue in terms of how big of an investment it is and puts what is at stake in terms of monetary value. The Wall Street Journal also focuses on how many jobs the cancellation of Keystone XL would eliminate, both directly, and indirectly (WS-9; WS-33; WS-52). Furthermore, a journalist in an op-ed in the New York Times argued that with the pipeline cancelled, the oil would still be transported from Canada to the U.S., by train, and that he did not understand the Biden administration's hostility towards fracking, as it had contributed to a shift in the U.S. from coal to natural gas (NY-48).

However, there also appears to be some movement among business leaders and corporations to go in a greener direction. In the Wall Street Journal, it was noted how many business leaders

now are ‘acting on climate change’ and are working actively to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, which is seen as a boost to the overall Biden administration climate agenda (WS-14). American labor unions met with Biden during his first few weeks in office, and discussed green job creation, clean technology, and alternative energy sources (WS-41). Unions are important for the Democratic party to mobilize voters in key states (WS-41) and the unions’ support for the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline should be understood in that context. However, as unions also understand the green job creation priorities of the Biden administration, businesses in the energy sector are willing to compromise and change their business models from relying heavily on fossil fuels, to now “acting on climate change, reducing their greenhouse-gas emissions and asking for government support, a boost to Mr. Biden’s agenda” (WS-14). The prevailing political winds impact the way business is conducted and shows how political agendas shape the economy. Therefore, as the Wall Street Journal reports, we are now seeing businesses in support of government actions to fight climate change (WS-14).

In support of the Keystone XL pipeline, a letter to the editor was published in the Wall Street Journal, where the author targets supporters of Biden’s agenda more broadly, and in particular his action on the Keystone XL, asking if “you” are happy about the unity that Biden has boasted throughout his campaign, considering that “you” might lose your job now due to the cancellation of the oil pipeline, while knowing that “your imminent joblessness is bringing the country together?” (WS-24). The author of the op-ed also expressed transphobic, white supremacist and misogynistic opinions (WS-24), which eloquently underlines his world view and values.

#### *4.2.1.3 Local Political Conflicts in Nebraska and South Dakota*

Tensions were high during the construction in South Dakota on a section of the pipeline that was completed before the Supreme Court shut down further expansion in 2020, and the Biden executive order (OW-3). South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem, a Republican, came in conflict on the issue of Indigenous sovereignty with two Native American tribes that opposed the Keystone XL pipeline. The conflict was also related to the Covid-19 pandemic as the tribes had put in place checkpoints along state and federal highways with the intention to limit infections in the reservations by limiting who were allowed to enter (OW-3). However, these checkpoints were also put up to block vehicles from the Keystone XL pipeline construction

company and TC Energy from using the highways into and through the reservations (OW-3). Governor Noem argued that “if we allow checkpoints to shut down traffic in this situation then we are setting precedent for that to happen far into the future in many other situations as well” (LJ-3). Noem’s argument seems to be aimed at reducing tribal sovereignty and self-governance in the reservations. The Omaha World-Herald reported:

The highways that the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribes are monitoring connect to several potential construction sites of the proposed pipeline route, which skirts tribal lands. The tribe has a policy of not allowing vehicles from any oil company on the reservation and with the checkpoints set up, they would stop those vehicles. (The Associated Press, 2020, OW-3)

This also exemplifies how Covid intertwines with many other contemporary issues, including the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline.

During the Presidential election campaign, the Keystone XL pipeline became a central campaign issue for Joe Biden, especially in Nebraska which is considered the “Ground Zero” in the pipeline debate nationally (OW-13).

There’s a curiosity along a country road south of Norfolk — an empty lot, ringed by brand-new chain-link fence topped with barbed wire, that’s watched 24/7 by a private security guard. The lot has been under guard for maybe three months. But the lot, which is intended to store segments of the 36-inch-diameter pipe needed to build the Keystone XL pipeline, still sits empty. Neighbors wonder, will it ever be used? That’s a question some Nebraskans, especially those with land along the pipeline route, are asking after the election of Democrat Joe Biden. (Hammel, 2020, OW-13)

In Nebraska, the opposition against the pipeline became organized into a group known as BOLD Nebraska, led by Nebraska Democratic Party chairwoman Jane Kleeb (OW-13). It was no easy task they were up against – as BOLD Nebraska and its allies with landowners, environmental groups and Indigenous communities were up against the Canadian government, labor unions and the fossil fuel industry (OW-13). When the news about President Biden’s Inaugural Day executive order on the Keystone XL pipeline emerged, Jane Kleeb expressed her excitement for BOLD’s win on Twitter:

A decade of fighting and a scrappy Dem from Scranton will be the one to hear the scrappy and very unlikely alliance of pipeline fighters. On. Day. One. #FingersCrossed #NoKXL (Jane Kleeb on Twitter, via Gaarder, 2021, OW-14)

Not everyone was equally excited as Kleeb, for example, in one op-ed in the Omaha World-Herald, a reader expressed his disappointment with the cancellation of the pipeline, citing concerns for “jobs, paychecks and benefits including health care for families” (OW-29). A letter from a reader in the Lincoln Journal Star also argued that the Democrats and Jane Kleeb of the Nebraska Democratic party are “overlooking the tax benefits and overwhelming safety of the pipeline compared to train or truck delivery” (LJ-31). Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts is also a pipeline supporter and has stated that “we want these great jobs and the property tax revenue the project would bring to our rural communities!” (LJ-40).

Another critic of the decision to cancel the pipeline is Congressman Don Bacon (Nebraska’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District) who also makes the argument that the Keystone XL would bring safer and more environmentally friendly transportation of the oil from Canada to the refineries in Texas (OW-35). In an op-ed, Bacon argues along with Sarah Chamberlain, the CEO of Main Street GOP, a Republican alliance that works on bipartisan legislation, that the Keystone XL debate has become “a microcosm of everything wrong in Washington today” and continues by saying that:

What should be a decision best informed by climate scientists and economic experts has instead been hijacked by extremists from both sides, who see it as either a symbol of support for the entire fossil fuel industry or the beginning of the end of the world, depending on which side you’re on. (Bacon and Chamberlain, 2021, OW-35)

Bacon and Chamberlain further argue that oil transportation will still take place, and that by cancelling the Keystone XL, extraction of fossil fuels will still continue (OW-35). Notably, they also argue that the pipeline affects “our economy, energy sector, and the livelihoods of so many” (OW-35). Additionally, Bacon and Chamberlain bring the issues of energy security into the debate by saying that “we need realistic (...) energy solutions that address climate-change risks and keep control of our energy future from China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia without hampering our economy” (OW-35).

Before the 2020 General Election, the Lincoln Journal Star endorsed Joe Biden for President, and cited the “legal limbo” which the Keystone XL pipeline was in during the Trump presidency, arguing that Trump has “broken many (promises) that have hurt Nebraskans” (LJ-13). However, it seems that the context in which this comment about the Keystone XL pipeline being in a legal limbo suggests that the Lincoln Journal Star Editorial Board believes that the

pipeline expansion through Nebraska would benefit the Nebraskan economy. In another editorial written by the Lincoln Journal Star Editorial Board, it was noted how Nebraska is better off without the Keystone XL pipeline going through the ecological fragile Sandhills in Nebraska (LJ-26). Democrats in Nebraska expressed their enthusiasm for the incoming Biden administration in the days leading up to Inauguration Day, as the Lincoln Journal Star reported from Holt County, Nebraska:

Holt County grassland owner Tom Genung, 76, who lives in Hastings, said he voted for Biden and is excited about reports that Biden may issue an executive order this week rescinding federal permits for the Keystone XL pipeline. (Sanderford, 2021, LJ-22)

#### 4.2.2 Climate and Environment

The climate frame used by the newspapers is very much evident from the reporting from the Biden inauguration, as some of the most prominent and frequently, publicly discussed executive orders were related to climate. Specifically, the reporting focused on how Biden with his signature made the United States rejoin the Paris Climate Accord and cancelled the Keystone XL pipeline (NY-20). It was also noted in some op-eds that climate action was Biden's key priority on Inauguration Day (NY-49), that President Biden "made combating climate change a key tenet of his administration" (NY-52) and that he "puts environmental policy at the center of his agenda" (WS-45). In a review article of Biden's 50 first days in office, the Los Angeles Times highlighted the Keystone XL executive order as one of the early actions Biden took to fulfill his campaign's pledges on climate (LA-4). The Los Angeles Times Editorial Board published an op-ed about Biden's first week in office, highlighting climate as one of the main priorities for the new administration (LA-12), and in a newsletter, the author even noted how "Biden did so much climate stuff in his first week that it's already hard to keep track" (LA-11).

##### *4.2.2.1 Climate Regulations and Pipeline Infrastructure*

The focus in many articles with the climate thematic frame were also on the regulatory review processes which the Biden administration had vowed to consider. In a New York Times opinion piece, Louise Erdrich, a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa wrote that

It's clear to me that with the Keystone XL pipeline on hold and Line 5 challenged in Michigan, Enbridge<sup>1</sup> is building as fast as it can to lock in pipeline infrastructure before regulatory agencies and governments institute rules on climate change. (Erdrich, 2020, NY-14).

Line 5 goes through an area of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa reservation in Wisconsin and is opposed by the tribe who wants the oil company to remove the pipeline from its land (IC-12). Erdrich also connects the regulatory and permit granting processes with Indigenous rights, while also addressing how the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected Indigenous communities:

This has been a brutal year for Indigenous people, who have suffered nearly double the Covid-19 mortality rate of white Americans. We have lost many of our elders, our language keepers. Covid has also struck an inordinate number of our vibrant young. Nevertheless, tribal people worked hard on the elections. The Native vote became a force that helped carry several key areas of the country and our state. On the heels of those victories, the granting of final permits to construct Enbridge's Line 3, which will cross Anishinaabe treaty lands, was a breathtaking betrayal. The Land of 10,000 Lakes is already suffering from climate change. Yet Minnesota's pollution control and public utility agencies refused to take the future of our lakes into account, or to consider treaty rights, in granting permits. (Erdrich, 2020, NY-14)

It was also noted in some articles how the Biden executive orders were aimed towards reversing the Trump-era climate actions, for example "He [Biden] then signed an executive order beginning the process of overturning environmental policies under the Trump administration, including rescinding rollbacks to vehicle emissions standards; (...) revoking the permit for the Keystone XL pipeline" (NY-21) and "Mr. Biden will issue a series of executive orders that start the process of rolling back some of the Trump administration's significant environmental decisions" (NY-22). Many of the Trump administration's major legislations included limiting the restrictions put in place to protect the environment, and to limit the environmental degradation caused by climate change (NY-21). By signing the Keystone XL pipeline executive order, Biden is signaling that he vows to undo most of Trump's legacy on climate legislation (NY-22).

Surprisingly, it appeared that some oil companies were positive to the swift climate actions of the Biden administration (LA-11). On the contrary, TC Energy argued how Keystone XL is "the most sustainable and environmentally friendly pipeline project that has ever been built" (WS-11). TC Energy also tried to convince the Biden administration to not sign the Keystone

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<sup>1</sup> Enbridge is the Canadian fossil fuel company behind Line 5 in Michigan.

XL pipeline executive order by announcing a commitment to use only renewable energy when constructing and operating the Keystone XL pipeline system (WS-11). Furthermore, the Wall Street Journal Editorial Board made an argument that “killing Keystone won’t keep fossil fuels in the ground. It will merely strand billions of dollars in Canadian investment and kill thousands of U.S. jobs” (WS-11).

Due to the division of power between the branches of government in the U.S., and the current political composition of the U.S. Congress, there is limited room for President Biden to act on climate change (NY-30). Biden instead has to rely on the tool of executive orders, which do not require congressional approval.

Mr. Biden will be able to use his executive authority immediately, for instance to cancel individual fossil fuel infrastructure projects or reinstate federal protections on distinct areas of land and water. He did that on day one when he rescinded the construction permit for the Keystone XL pipeline (...). (Davenport, 2021, NY-30).

#### *4.2.2.2 Climate Change and Keystone XL*

It became clear from the very first night that Biden was in the Oval Office that global climate change would be a key priority for his administration (LJ-27). Climate change is a global challenge, which requires transnational cooperation. This was expressed in an opinion piece published in the New York Times, where the author noted that this global challenge requires a global response, in which Biden’s decision to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord and cancelling the Keystone XL pipeline are seen as encouraging steps (NY-43). On the other hand, the Wall Street Journal editorial board was critical of both the cancellation of Keystone XL, and the 60-day freeze on new oil drilling leases on federal land, which they feared would become a permanent ban (WS-22). Many of the Trump administration’s major legislations included limiting the restrictions put in place to protect the environment and to limit the environmental degradation caused by climate change (NY-21).

Wording matters, and the Wall Street Journal characterized the oil exported from Canada to the United States as “dense, sticky” (WS-20), which leaves the reader with a certain impression of the type of oil, tar sand oil is. By signing the Keystone XL pipeline executive order, Biden is signaling that he vows to undo most of Trump’s legacy, in particular on climate legislation (NY-22).

The Wall Street Journal also expressed their concerns with Biden's appointments to various positions within the Department of the Interior, which is the department overlooking oil leases on federal land (WS-22). For example, they noted how Biden had a big pool of possible appointees to the position as advisor to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, a position which does not require Senate confirmation (WS-22), and eventually he picked Marissa Knodel:

“(...) she is a passionate advocate for climate and environmental justice through a just and equitable transition to a clean energy-based society, and resilient adaptation to a changing climate.” She was previously legislative counsel with Earthjustice advising on federal onshore, offshore, and Arctic oil and gas leasing regulation and “managed a campaign at Friends of the Earth to stop new fossil fuel development on federal lands and waters.” (The Wall Street Journal Editorial Board, 2021, WS-22)

The Wall Street Editorial Board argued that this appointment was an example of how Biden would put “progressive activists in charge” and further claims that other media outlets would not report on this because “most of the press agrees with the Biden agenda” (WS-22). By stating that Biden is ‘sidelining’ scientists and putting green activists in charge and arguing that this goes under the media’s radar also underlines a point made in the methodology chapter that the Wall Street Journal is a more right-leaning newspaper and is consequently also speaking to a more right-leaning audience, reflected in their reporting on this issue.

In an opinion piece in the New York Times, a reader from Canada expressed her satisfaction with Biden's climate action, specifically mentioning the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline (NY-40). The reader also expressed her relief knowing that the decision to cancel Keystone XL would not make it possible to exploit and extract tar sands, in which she referred to as being “disastrous according to climate experts” (NY-40). As the reader and author is Canadian, she weighs in on a policy made by the U.S. President which also impacts the Canadian economy and political sphere. However, climate change is a global issue and has to be addressed accordingly, and the op-ed ends fittingly with the sentence: “Yes, I live in Canada. But I also live on Planet Earth” (NY-40).

In Rural America, such as in Nebraska, there is a lot of skepticism about climate change (LJ-27). The President of the Nebraska Farmers Union, John Hansen, argued that even the decision to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord would benefit Nebraska and its agricultural economy, as the



U.S. works to reduce its climate gas emissions before 2050, would benefit Nebraskan farmers and “produce economic opportunities” (LJ-27). The skepticism towards climate change fades, argues Hansen, as “farmers who work the fields know in their bones they are seeing changing weather patterns – that’s climate change” (LJ-27). Perhaps the opposition from farmers and ranchers against the Keystone XL pipeline should be understood in this context, that the farmers in an otherwise conservative state such as Nebraska, fear the effects that anthropogenic climate change will have on their land, crops and livestock. At first it might seem contradictory to hear that the traditionally conservative white rural farmers in the American Midwest oppose an oil pipeline project such as the Keystone XL. However, farmers in that region are heavily dependent on the climate to grow their crops and to sustain their livestock. In turn, they are more likely to support legislation that aims to reduce the effects of climate change on their farmlands.

#### *4.2.2.3 Environmental Opposition and Biological Diversity*

The environmental opposition against the pipeline has been characterized as “fierce” (OW-4), and the Indigenous resistance as “bitterly opposed” (OW-3) in the context of the broad coalition that has emerged in fighting against TC Energy, the U.S. government, and the Keystone XL pipeline. The concern for the environmental damage that the pipeline could cause was expressed in Lincoln Journal Star, who referred to a Montana farmer who had witnessed a devastating flood in the area back in 2015, which broke a pipeline near the Yellowstone River, and caused 31 000 gallons of crude oil to spill and contaminate the river downstream, resulting in 6 000 people having their water supplies polluted (LJ-10). In 2010, a section of the Enbridge pipeline ruptured in Michigan, “spilling 1 million gallons of tar sands oil into the Kalamazoo River, one of the biggest inland oil spills in U.S. history” (IC-12). Despite stories like this, the fossil fuel industry has “avoided proposed safety regulations that would require companies to install costly automatic shut-off valves for pipelines” (LJ-10). Opposition against oil pipelines, which would rely on federal permits to be constructed, leads to construction delays and higher costs (LJ-10).

Biological diversity is also threatened by the Keystone XL pipeline, and an Arizona-based organization named Center for Biological Diversity said that they “will sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services over its move last fall to list the American burying beetle as threatened” (LJ-18). Since the late 1980s, the beetle had been classified as “endangered” and since the

endangered beetle was found in the Sandhills region of Nebraska, it created trouble for TC Energy (LJ-18):

The presence of the beetle in Nebraska’s Sandhills region — along with landowner concerns — prompted TC Energy to reroute its Keystone XL pipeline through part of the state. And last year, questions about the potential impact on endangered species, including the beetle and a fish called the pallid sturgeon, led a federal judge to cancel a key permit that would have allowed the pipeline to cross hundreds of rivers and streams along the route. (Funk, 2021, LJ-18)

The reclassification of the beetle from “endangered” to “threatened” might seem insignificant at first, but the consequence of this is that TC Energy would no longer need to consider the beetle’s existence in Nebraska when planning the route for the Keystone XL pipeline.

#### 4.2.3 Grassroots Mobilization and Indigenous Opposition

Indigenous resistance and opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline was noted in several articles. For example: “Strong grass roots coalitions, including many Indigenous groups, that understand both the legal landscape and the intricacies of the pipeline projects have led the pushback” (NY-4). This New York Times excerpt specifically includes and mentions the Indigenous resistance which occurred as part of the grassroots mobilization. This is notable, because not all articles which mention the local opposition, mention Indigenous groups explicitly. Thus, by including “Indigenous groups” in this article, the journalist acknowledges this as a central part of the resistance. It was also reported in the Omaha World-Herald how Native American tribes and environmentalists were “bitterly opposed to the [pipe]line because of worries that oil spills will occur and that burning the fuel would make climate change worse” (OW-3). However, this is not consistent in the reporting from Omaha World-Herald, as another article reported that “it [the Keystone XL pipeline] has faced fierce opposition from environmental groups, and some landowners, delaying the project” (OW-4), with no mention of Indigenous groups.

The Wall Street Journal have also specifically mentioned Indigenous groups as an opposing force to the Keystone XL pipeline, noting how Native tribes have, along with environmentalists and landowners worked against pipeline projects (WS-9). This exemplifies how important the Indigenous opposition, in addition to the environmentalists and rural farm owners, have been.

Biden has also faced calls to cancel the Dakota Access pipeline, which would be viewed as a victory for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in South Dakota and North Dakota (NY-54). In an obituary of Native American activist Debra White Plume who passed away in 2020, the New York Times mentioned her activism against both the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines (NY-13):

Ms. White Plume came to see that the biggest challenge facing Native Americans was in protecting their water supply. She and others feared that uranium mining, just outside the reservation, could contaminate water with radioactivity and chemicals like arsenic, used in the extraction process. And they saw two major oil pipelines in the works — the Keystone XL and the Dakota Access — as threatening not only ancestral burial sites but also aquifers. (Astor, 2020, NY-13)

The concern from Indigenous communities is not only limited to the pipelines, but also for the pollution hazard from mining and other extractive activities (NY-13). The concern for pollution from the Keystone XL was also shared by ranchers and farmers, in addition to the Indigenous groups in Nebraska (OW-28). The worry about leaks from the oil pipeline contaminating the “groundwater, an especially precious commodity in their part of the world” (OW-28) was a critical concern for Nebraskans.

In the Lincoln Journal Star, one article contextualized the uphill battle that the grassroots and inter-ethnic opposition faced when fighting against the pipeline, like this:

In the beginning, it was a band of rural landowners and Natives in Nebraska and a woman named Jane [Kleeb]. They were pitted against the Republican Party, the Canadian government, half the Democratic Party and the entire oil industry — the definition of a huge underdog with slim chances trending heavily toward no chance at all. (Walton, 2021, LJ-30)

The journalist also used the metaphor of “David vs. Goliath” when explaining the unlikely successful outcome of this opposition. Jane Kleeb also acknowledged how they had been “very naive”, stating that they were not “fully aware of all the political and corporate dynamics in play” (LJ-30).

In Indian Country Today, the journalist compared how the Trump supporters who stormed the Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup> apparently “appear poised to evade punishment” while “two young Native Americans from the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe in South Dakota have been arrested

and charged for peacefully protesting construction of the Keystone XL oil pipeline” (IC-2). A leader in the nonprofit organization Lakota People’s Law Project commented:

At a time when white rioters are being let off the hook after raiding the nation’s Capitol and driving legislators into hiding, Native Americans and other people of color are still being dealt harsh criminal charges for nonviolent acts of civil disobedience. (Press Pool, 2021, IC-2)

#### *4.2.3.1 Environmental Injustice and Ecological Violence Against Indigenous People*

In the *Indian Country Today*, an article was published on Inauguration Day which celebrated the victory for Indigenous communities and the Indigenous Environmental Network when Biden cancelled the Keystone XL project but urged its readers to “not forget about our relatives fighting Line 3, the Dakota Access Pipeline, and other fossil fuel projects poisoning our communities and fueling the climate emergency (IC-1). Furthermore, it was also argued that the Biden administration has a lot of work to do when it comes to restoring the relations between tribal nations and the U.S. federal government, and to “honor the government’s treaty and trust obligations (...) and promoting tribal sovereignty and self-determination” (IC-24).

In a letter published in *Indian Country Today* in July 2020, the authors urge allies of the Indigenous population to stand with the Indigenous people of Oceti Sakowin<sup>2</sup> against the Keystone XL pipeline, as they have started an eviction process to remove Keystone XL and Dakota Access from their homelands (IC-22):

This is an invitation for our allies and other Indigenous peoples from Oceti Sakowin to stand with us.

The Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota people have lived on these lands since time immemorial, long before the current settlers landed on Turtle Island. Lakota origins stories talk about a time when our ancestors emerged from the Black Hills, *He Sapa*, the center of everything that is.

We have clung to these lands despite the genocide imposed upon us, even when the settler colonial state signed treaties with us that, according to their constitution, states “treaties are the supreme law of the land.” (Press Pool, 2020, IC-22)

In an opinion piece in the *New York Times*, two columnists have an interactive conversation, where one of them stated:

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<sup>2</sup> Sioux or Oceti Sakowin, in Dakota: *Očhéthi Šakówiŋ*

What I don't understand is the logic of killing the Keystone XL pipeline: It just means that Canadian oil will continue to go east or west on rails rather than south through a pipeline, with a loss of blue-collar American jobs. (Collins and Stephens, 2021, NY-48)

As a response, the other columnist responded: "Ah, that pipeline. Lots of support, lots of opposition, including from many Native people who live in the construction area. My instinct is to always side with the folks who don't want to drill for more oil" (NY-48). The columnist who stated they sided with people who do not want to drill for more oil, acknowledged and recognized the resistance from Indigenous people, and how they would be directly impacted by the construction of the pipeline. Furthermore, the argument aligns itself with the environmentalist approach, by broadly confessing that they are generally not in favor of oil drilling projects. In a statement from the chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Harold Frazier, after Biden cancelled Keystone XL, he noted that "it is rare that a promise to our people is kept by the United States" (IC-6).

In a broader sense, the Los Angeles Times mentioned the Keystone XL executive order in the context of other Inauguration Day actions from the Biden administration to the benefit of Indigenous tribes, for example the restoration of Bears Ears National Monument back to its original size (LA-11). The Bears Ears decision received criticism from Utah Senator Mitt Romney, who was quoted saying "unilaterally restoring Bears Ears to its former size will only deepen divisions in this country" (LA-11). Tribal leaders on the other had showed signs of optimism, stating that "Bears Ears should be only the beginning of Biden's work to protect lands sacred to Native Americans" (LA-11). Contextualizing the issue of the Keystone XL pipeline with other important Indigenous issues, suggests that the LA Times might have a broader appeal in general to news and issues related to Indigenous rights. In Canada, TC Energy "announced a deal to allow Natural Law Energy, which represents four First Nations in Alberta and one in Saskatchewan, to invest up to \$1 billion in Keystone XL" (LJ-17). This move was done to urge the incoming Biden administration to keep the pipeline project alive, by emphasizing the support from Native investors, along with the creation of unionized jobs (LJ-17).

#### *4.2.3.2 Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland*

On March 15, 2021, the U.S. Senate voted to endorse Rep. Haaland as the next Secretary of the Interior. Four Republican senators cast their ballots in the affirmative. Indian Country has cause to rejoice. (George-Kanentiio, 2021, IC-25).

While also connected to the theme of “Politics”, the articles which mention Secretary Deb Haaland, a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, in connection with her confirmation hearing in the Senate and the questioning on her opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline, are found to also fit within the theme of Indigenous opposition. Secretary Haaland became the first Native American cabinet secretary in United States’ history after she was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as Secretary of the Interior. A New York Times article noted how Biden “acknowledged the country’s long history of failing the land’s first citizens” when he announced Haaland as his nominee for Secretary of the Interior (NY-54). In an op-ed in Indian Country Today, the Indigenous organization Land is Life proclaimed that “we believe that she [Deb Haaland] is uniquely qualified for this position, and we are confident that she has the vision and wisdom needed to usher in a new era of true government-to-government relations between the United States and the Native American Nations” (IC-24).

In a statement following the nomination of Secretary Haaland, President Biden said, “the federal government has long broken promises to Native American tribes who have been on this land since time immemorial” and continued by saying that “with her appointment, Congresswoman Haaland will help me strengthen the nation-to-nation relationship” (NY-54). Secretary Haaland faced criticism from Republicans in Congress during her confirmation hearing, as several senators “called her ‘radical’ ideas that include opposition to fracking and the Keystone XL oil pipeline” (LA-7). Haaland’s response during the confirmation hearing was rooted in her plea to listening to and to consult with tribal voices on issues that impact Native American tribes (LA-7).

The role as Secretary of the Interior involves oversight responsibilities over “500 million acres of public land and federal policies affecting the 574 federally recognized tribal governments. She would run an agency responsible for shaping policy on Native American education, tribal law enforcement and the use of the country’s natural resources” (NY-54). It was also noted in the same article that the use of federal land, and energy and environmental policies intersect in

many ways, and are closely related to the Biden administration’s agenda for tribal nations and the environment (NY-54).

In an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal, a reader noted, in the aftermath of the Texas electricity blackout in the spring of 2020, that “the problem is likely to get worse under President Biden, who has already canceled the Keystone XL pipeline and appointed Rep. Deb Haaland, an opponent of oil-and-gas exploration, to lead the Interior Department” (WS-39) In an op-ed in Indian Country Today, a reader wrote that “she [Haaland] is also an opponent of the Keystone pipeline which was designed to carry dirty Alberta tar sands oil from northern Canada to petroleum refineries in Texas” and that Haaland will be in charge of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and “direct the issuing of licenses for mineral and oil extraction on federal property and wield enormous power over the usage of the nation’s national resources” (IC-25).

#### 4.2.3.3 *The Unlikely Alliances*

Most of the reporting on the *Unlikely Alliances* is found in the local and Indigenous newspapers. Jane Kleeb, the Nebraska Democratic Party chairwoman is also the founder of “the anti-pipeline group Bold Nebraska” and has argued that “Republicans continue to use the Keystone XL to push a false narrative that it would provide “*energy independence*” and be a *panacea*<sup>3</sup> for job creation” (LJ-40). When President Biden signed the Keystone XL executive order, “opponents of the pipeline expressed joy over the actions (...) to revoke approval of the controversial oil pipeline set to flow through Nebraska” (LJ-23).

Jane Kleeb was labeled as an “anti-pipeline pioneer” (LJ-23) as she was interviewed by the Lincoln Journal Star after the Inauguration Day executive order and expressed her joy for the victory over “the Republican Party, Big Oil and half the Democratic Party” (LJ-23). By stating this, she was sending a clear signal to the more fossil fuel-friendly parts of the Democratic Caucus in Congress.

There are “lots of lessons” from that, she [Jane Kleeb] said, not only about perseverance, but also the strength of “friendships and unlikely relations,” combined with “tears and setbacks” along the way. (Olberding, 2021, LJ-23).

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<sup>3</sup> “A remedy for all difficulties”

These “unlikely relations” which Kleeb mentions are also referred to in other articles. For example, when the Lincoln Journal Star Editorial Board announced its position on Nebraska being better off without the Keystone XL pipeline, they referred to the “grassroots coalition of environmentalists, farmers, ranchers and property-rights advocates who fought the pipeline tooth and nail can celebrate, knowing their efforts weren’t in vain” (LJ-26). However, it should be noted that the editorial board failed to include Indigenous people when listing the various groups in the grassroots coalition. It was argued by the Indian Country Today that it is impossible to talk about the fighting for environmental justice and to protect land and water, in relation to the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline, “without addressing the impacts on Indigenous Rights” (IC-1). It was also argued that there could be spill-over effects from the successful opposition against Keystone XL, to other pipeline projects such as Dakota Access (IC-8). Tribal leaders from four Sioux tribes sent a letter to President Biden after he signed the Keystone XL executive order, urging him to take “quick and decisive action on the Dakota Access pipeline” (IC-8). With Biden in the White House, tribes feel like they are being listened to in many issues important to them (IC-10).

#### 4.2.4 Foreign Relations

When President Biden signed the Keystone XL executive order, it signaled a priority for domestic interests rather than those of United States’ allies (WS-19). Not only did the signing of the Keystone XL executive order mark a shift in U.S.’ priorities, but it was also a fresh start to the U.S.-Canadian relations “after a tumultuous four years under former President Donald J. Trump” (NY-38). The foreign relations theme in the reporting on the Keystone XL relates to both the relationship between the U.S. and its allies, but also goes into the issue of foreign energy dependency and the global response required to combat climate change.

##### 4.2.4.1 U.S.-Canada Relations

When President Biden took office, the first phone call he made to a foreign leader was to the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau. It was reported that the “cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline miffed Canadians” (WS-41) and “Mr. Biden (...) cancelled the Keystone XL pipeline to the disappointment of Canadian leaders” (NY-47), which indicates that the Canadians were far from unanimously pleased by the new U.S. President. Specifically, the premier of Alberta, Jason Kenney was disappointed by the Keystone XL decision, which is the province where the Keystone pipeline system originates (NY-38). Kenney said that “we hope



President-elect Biden will show respect for Canada and will sit down and at the very least talk to us” (LJ-21). Both Alberta and Ontario are important oil producing provinces in Canada, and the cancellation of the Keystone XL could potentially complicate the relationship between the U.S. and Canada (LJ-43). However, it is not only the Keystone XL pipeline which is a point of conflict between the two neighboring countries, as the conflict regarding Enbridge’s Line 5 “illustrate the conflicting priorities for two countries that have pledged to reduce fossil fuel emissions but still burn lots of oil” (LJ-43).

The U.S.-Canadian relationship was described as tense during the Trump presidency, because of “actions by the U.S. and disagreements that became public” (WS-50), and as a consequence, the inauguration of President Biden marked a fresh start to the relationship between the two neighboring countries. During the first phone call between Trudeau and Biden, Trudeau noted how “U.S. leadership has been sorely missed over the past years” and commended Biden on his swift Inauguration week climate actions, praising the move to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord (LA-8). Despite the Keystone XL decision causing some disappointment with the Canadians, officials stated that the phone call between Trudeau and Biden went well (LA-8). Trudeau also made it clear that the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline was a threat to Canadian jobs, but simultaneously, and perhaps not so clear to understand, commended President Biden on his agenda to fight climate change (WS-20). From a Canadian perspective, the Keystone XL is not that critical for their exports, given the decline in demand for oil following the Covid-19 pandemic (WS-20). However, oil exports from Canada to the U.S. account for 98% of all Canadian oil exports (WS-20), stressing how important the U.S. is to Canada.

In the New York Times, the frustration from the Canadian side was presented:

These conflicts are not new. Canadians have long felt more comfortable with Democratic presidents and their more liberal policies, even while chafing at the protectionism championed by the party in the name of American workers. The frustration among Canadians is with being taken for granted, with the U.S. government’s habit of taking actions that have considerable repercussions in Canada without deeming it necessary to consult Canada. That was evident in the headline of an editorial in *The Globe and Mail*, a national daily newspaper, on Mr. Biden’s Keystone XL decision: “By Blocking Keystone XL, Joe Biden Is Scoring an Easy Political Win — at Canada’s Expense.” (The New York Times Editorial Board, 2021, NY-47)

The Keystone XL pipeline is viewed an important part of the oil infrastructure in Canada and critical to the country's oil exports (LA-22) and "a key project for Canadian oil-sands producers that have been hamstrung for years by a lack of pipeline capacity" (LA-25). Prime Minister Trudeau has also been a supporter for the pipeline arguing that it is important infrastructure to ensure continued Canadian oil production (WS-47). However, to limit the possibility of increased tension between the two neighboring countries, Biden acknowledged the disappointment from the Canadians and Prime Minister Trudeau in their very first phone call, where Trudeau also "expressed enthusiasm for working with Mr. Biden" (WS-47) and that the Canadians are "prepared to work with Washington on other energy initiatives that could benefit both countries" (WS-50). When Biden and Trudeau met during a virtual meeting in February 2021, the cancelled Keystone XL pipeline was not mentioned during their joint remarks (WS-50).

#### *4.2.4.2 Foreign Energy Dependency and Energy Security*

While arguments in favor of the Keystone XL pipeline have tended to focus on decreasing the U.S.' dependency on foreign oil, it is also undisputed that the crude oil which would be transferred using the Keystone infrastructure is, indeed, foreign. As the Wall Street Journal noted, the decision to cancel the Keystone XL pipeline could push the Canadians to look to other trading partners for their oil, in particular China (WS-19). A letter from a reader published in the Omaha World-Herald, who opposed the Keystone XL pipeline executive order from Biden, argued that the decision to cancel the pipeline would "force us to rely on higher-cost petroleum from countries like Russia, Ukraine and those in the Middle East" (OW-26). The same author is also concerned with how this will affect the power balance between the U.S. and China, and also argues that the rejoining of the Paris climate accord will put a burden on Americans and the American economy, while not reducing the impacts of climate change (OW-26). The fear of Russia, the Middle East and China and the U.S. dependency on foreign oil from these countries in particular appear to be a red line in the arguments presented (OW-26).

Fighting global climate change became an early promise from the Biden administration with his Inauguration Day executive orders because combatting climate change is not only about climate change itself, but Biden's climate policy also intersects with the administration's foreign policy and national security priorities too (NY-61). For example, in the Biden

administration, former Secretary of State, John Kerry, serves as the presidential envoy for climate change, and he also has a seat on Biden's National Security Council (NY-61).

## 5 Discussion

This discussion chapter will engage with the findings presented in the previous chapter, and answer the research questions from chapter 1 while discussing the findings in light of the literature review presented in chapter 2.

Research question 1, “What thematic frames do national, regional, local, and indigenous newspapers use when presenting stories about the Keystone XL pipeline?” will be answered by discussing key findings in the sub-chapters 5.1-5.4. Research question 2, “In what ways are these frames examples of settler colonialism in the present-day U.S.?” will be answered through a discussion in sub-chapter 5.5. Lastly, a comparison of the themes across the newspapers is discussed in sub-chapter 5.6 as well as contextualizing the discussion so far with other contemporary development issues in sub-chapter 5.7.

### 5.1 Politics and Economy

Politics and Economy was the most frequently identified theme among the newspaper articles analyzed. As pointed out by Reese (2001), the most frequently reported issue is not necessarily the most important issue, because it can also mean that the coverage of the issue is a result of the issue being contested politically. Similarly, it might not be the case that the reporting on the Keystone XL pipeline which most frequently uses the thematic frame Politics and the economy’ is the most important, but rather that the editorial choices stem from profit-seeking priorities for the newspapers which generate revenue and readership through increased subscription rates.

Across newspapers, with perhaps the notable exception of the Wall Street Journal, one reoccurring characterization of the Keystone XL pipeline seems to be that it is ‘controversial’ and ‘disputed.’ Not only from an environmental or climate perspective, but also with how politically salient the pipeline has been in Congress, local governments and in the federal court system. The reporting on the Keystone XL pipeline has also clearly shown the differences from the Trump administration to the Biden administration, and it is an issue that is clearly driving the partisan lines in Congress in terms of support from the Republicans and opposition from the Democrats. Clearly, the reporting which used the thematic frame of politics made a point of the Biden executive order cancelling the Keystone XL pipeline on Inauguration Day, to

become a symbol where the Biden administration would prioritize to undo many of the policies which the Trump administration had enacted on climate change.

Just weeks before Biden was inaugurated, Trump was impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives, and a violent insurrection on the U.S. Capitol occurred. Shortly after the inauguration, a major energy infrastructure crisis emerged as gas pipelines froze in Texas and left millions without electricity for several days. To say that Biden had a turbulent start to his presidency is perhaps an understatement, but as he entered office, he was also met by demands for bipartisanship from Democratic politicians like former U.S. Senator from Nebraska, Ben Nelson, to ensure progress “on issues like immigration, energy policy and expanding health care coverage.” The decision to cancel the Keystone XL pipeline have to be understood in the political climate that existed in the United States at the time, as it was seen as a controversial move, and not one that sought to bring Republicans and Democrats together. Rather, the reaction to the Keystone XL executive order was split mostly along partisan divides, as Republicans heavily criticized the decision, while the Democrats mostly praised it.

#### 5.1.1 Job Creation and the U.S. Economy

Job creation is generally viewed as a universally positive impact on society. However, in the case of pipelines generally, and the Keystone XL in particular, the job creation would occur within an industry which contributes to more climate gas emissions and have a negative environmental impact on the communities where the pipeline will be constructed. A lot of the reporting on the impact on the economy that the decision to cancel the Keystone XL pipeline involved, focused especially on how many jobs would be lost due to this decision. The argument that the Keystone XL pipeline is important to build because it will bring “good-paying, unionized jobs” to the economy, which appear to be the main arguments for many Republicans, is almost impossible to argue against. By simply relying on the positive economic outcomes of a fossil fuel project like the Keystone XL, the politicians are effectively diminishing the relative importance of other concerns such as those from Indigenous communities, farmers and environmentalists. This is because arguing against the Keystone XL pipeline due to other legitimate concerns such as the risk of pollution and the appropriation of sacred land from Indigenous communities, then becomes easy to attack as being hostile towards job creation and the economy in general. It is not necessarily the case that people who are concerned for the environment and thus oppose the Keystone XL pipeline are against job

creation. Rather, they have other priorities such as clean drinking water, and protecting tribal treaties and Indigenous communities. In line with the findings from Wright and Reid (2011), the news media uses frames of economic development to shape the public discourse on energy infrastructure projects. Furthermore, economic priorities come in conflict with environmental justice because the burden of energy infrastructure projects is placed on vulnerable and marginalized populations (Ordner, 2017). The Indigenous population in the U.S. is thus a victim of energy sacrifice zones (de Onis, 2018), because they have been and continue to be disproportionately exposed to health hazards, pollution and environmental degradation (Johnson, 2019).

In a broader sense, if job creation is the superior argument above all else, I would argue we then have some major problems ahead. For instance, that means that economic concerns should be prioritized in any circumstance, even if that means human rights violations. We find these types of arguments in other parts of the world too with regards to the green energy transition. However, the arguments against windmills in the Arctic might not be as obvious as in the case of Keystone XL or other fossil fuel infrastructure. While the general notion among environmentalists seems to be that the green transition requires more energy from renewable sources, the construction of onshore windmills come in direct conflict with Sámi reindeer herding practices, which has been established as a human rights violation according to the Norwegian Supreme Court (Buli and Solsvik, 2021). In this case, it is not fossil fuel infrastructure up against Indigenous rights, but rather the supposedly environmentally friendly windmills up against Indigenous rights. A green and environmentally just transition constructed on a premise of violating Indigenous and human rights is neither green nor environmentally just.

### 5.1.2 U.S. Politics

When President Biden signed the executive order to cancel the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, he made a decision which is vulnerable to be overturned by the next President to reside in the White House. Ruling by executive actions is seen as vulnerable, but also a strong sign to the public that the Biden administration's priorities diverge from those of the Trump presidency. It could possibly be argued that the executive actions signed into law by President Biden on Inauguration Day represent the start of the new presidency, but also an intention by the incoming administration to clearly mark their differences from the Trump administration.

The statement from Biden’s national climate adviser, Gina McCarthy, where she argues for the planned expansion of offshore wind power in New York and New Jersey by saying it is “a new, untapped industry” (NY-64) reveals another issue with energy politics and self-justification for construction in vulnerable ecologies such as the coastal areas on the Eastern Seaboard. Perhaps it could be argued that green energy solutions are more self-evidently necessary than fossil fuels, but they could be equally damaging to the ecosystems that are directly impacted by the infrastructure. This suggests that there exists a hierarchy of what we as human beings can tolerate as acceptable energy infrastructure, which translates into oil pipelines equal “bad”, and offshore windmills equal “good.”

The Biden executive orders on Keystone XL and the Paris Climate Accord are two clear examples of how the Biden administration aims to be different from the Trump administration, not just in a narrow sense of climate action, but also how President Biden was trying to “undo” many of the policies and executive orders enacted by President Trump. Furthermore, the appointment of Deb Haaland as Secretary of the Interior, the first Native American cabinet secretary in United States’ history, serves as a historic reminder that despite the violent settler colonial history of the country, an Indigenous woman has been appointed to one of the highest offices in the nation.

## 5.2 Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

### 5.2.1 Environmental Degradation and Energy Infrastructure

Climate change and environmental degradation have in large part been driven by human activities. Regulations and protections to reduce the effects of climate change and environmental degradation are thus required. Biological diversity is also important in this regard, and as was seen in Nebraska, the existence of the American burying beetle in the Sandhills region, along with landowner concerns, was sufficient reasons for the government to require TC Energy to re-route the Keystone XL pipeline path (LJ-18). However, the concerns from Indigenous tribes across the U.S. towards energy infrastructure such as oil pipelines are seemingly not as important to consider. I would argue that it is indeed a caveat that considerations towards beetles, notwithstanding their importance to biological diversity, is

considered more important than those towards the Indigenous population by U.S. politicians and the society at large.

Construction of energy infrastructure such as oil pipelines is both an example of ecological violence as well as a lack of respect for tribal treaties. Despite the attempts from TC Energy to argue that the Keystone XL is “the most sustainable and environmentally friendly pipeline project that has ever been built” (WS-11), it does not address the ecological and environmental impact that the pipeline would have on land and water, nor the implications for Indigenous communities in the American Midwest. Rather, the statement completely ignores the Indigenous resistance overall and instead becomes a prime example of how settler colonialism has impacted how the U.S. federal government and the fossil fuel industry have viewed land and resources in the region for centuries.

### 5.2.2 Global Climate Policies

The coverage of the Keystone XL executive order did in fact often mention the decision alongside the decision by President Biden to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord. In that sense, the climate thematic frame did elevate the issue of the Keystone XL pipeline from a local conflict over land and resources, with roots in settler colonialism and present-day ecological violence from the U.S. government towards its Indigenous population, to a perspective which includes a global perspective on the issue. This is not to say that this type of thematic framing is in direct opposition to the framing which localizes the issue down to a question of tribal sovereignty or Indigenous rights, but rather shows that an issue can have both a local and a global perspective simultaneously. It is perhaps important that an issue which directly relates to the current anthropogenic climate change which the world is facing, can be reported on, and contextualize various levels of impact, from local to global. Rather than disconnecting the two perspectives, local and global lenses of viewing climate change might be needed for the necessary steps to be taken to combat it.

### 5.3 Grassroots Mobilization Against the Keystone XL and Indigenous Opposition

As noted by McLeod and Hertog (1992), the media often focus on the illegal activities of social movement protests, which can tap into the “villain of the story” narrative. When Indigenous people across the United States have fought against the Keystone XL pipeline, they have run



the risk of becoming the villain in the story of the United States' path to ensure energy independence and to build an economy which creates more domestic energy jobs.

### 5.3.1 Indigenous Opposition

In the Omaha World-Herald, the Indigenous opposition was characterized as being “bitterly opposed” and is thus contributing to making the Indigenous resistance an example of how the Indigenous people are the villains in the story. The word “bitterly” may have negative connotations. In another article, the Omaha World-Herald only mentions environmental groups and landowners as the opposition to the articles, and then, the opposition was characterized as “fierce.” It is remarkable how one article uses “bitterly” (when including Indigenous groups) but when the reporting is on environmental groups and landowners, their opposition is “fierce.” The words we use have power to shape the trajectory of how the audience will receive the message.

In another Omaha World-Herald article we can also read how climate change will disproportionately affect Indigenous communities, which shows the direct and indirect impact that the Keystone XL pipeline has on Indigenous communities in the United States. Whyte (2017, p. 166) argues that “we find that disproportionate suffering is produced both by changing environmental conditions – and once again – the machinations of U.S. settler colonialism.” As argued by Johnson (2019, p. 15), energy democracy and a more just environmental decision-making process require us to reorient our way of thinking about not only Indigenous rights, and rights of marginalized communities, but also “property rights, profit, and power/privilege in order to achieve climate justice.” Johnson (2019) urges us to think about how we can better involve communities and increase the local governance of energy infrastructure to address the disproportionate burdens placed on Indigenous communities by the construction of U.S. energy infrastructure. One step in this direction could be to involve and consult all stakeholders, especially Indigenous and marginalized communities when developing energy infrastructure.

The New York Times noted how the Biden administration's agenda on federal land, energy and environmental policies intersects in multiple ways, which also is closely related to Biden's agenda for tribal nations and the environment (NY-54). This finding supports the argument made by Bacon (2019), where they argue that the concepts of land and territory cannot be

ignored when discussing settler colonialism. However, most of the reporting in the non-Indigenous newspapers rarely mention the perspective or elevates the voices of Indigenous groups who fear the effects that the oil pipeline will have on their sacred land. Only articles in the sample from the Indian Country Today mention explicitly the settler colonial history and genocide which creates the dark backdrop for the opposition against Keystone XL. In order to achieve climate justice and a more just environmental decision-making process, as advocated by Johnson (2019), voices of marginalized and Indigenous groups need to be elevated not only in Indigenous and local media, but also on a national and international level. Thus, the media framing of stories involving energy infrastructure must include Indigenous perspectives, if not, the news media itself is an obstacle to achieve environmental justice.

However, the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline and other fossil fuel projects does not come from a completely unified Indigenous community in South Dakota and elsewhere (IC-16). Rather, some tribes such as the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation have urged the U.S. Government to allow for oil drilling on Native land (IC-10). The Ute Indian Tribe is a tribe which relies on the income from oil and gas extraction, as they “produce 45,000 barrels of crude oil per day and about 900 million cubic feet per day of natural gas” (IC-10). As such, it is important to remember the message from Bacon & Norton (2019) which warns us about labeling issues relevant to Indigenous groups immediately in one big bag of common perceptions and a school of analysis. There are more nuances to the Indigenous stance on Keystone XL than what might be portrayed in some newspaper articles, because not all tribes are necessary against the pipeline due to the economic importance it has for their tribe. As argued by Wolfe (2013), settler colonialism manifests itself in different and uneven ways across regions, which can contribute to tensions within the Indigenous communities as much as it contributes division among the settlers.

### 5.3.2 The Unlikely Alliances

The “Unlikely Alliance” in the story about the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline in Nebraska, includes white rural farmers, Native tribes, environmentalists and local politicians who fought the fight against “the Republican Party, the Canadian government, half the Democratic Party, and the entire oil industry” (LJ-30). While it makes sense that environmentalists oppose an oil pipeline project, it could be harder to grasp why the

traditionally conservative farmers in Nebraska opposed it. Perhaps the opposition from farmers and ranchers against Keystone XL should be understood in this context, that the farmers in a conservative state like Nebraska, fear the effects that anthropogenic climate change will have on their land, crops and livestock. However, farmers in that region are heavily dependent on the climate to grow their crops and to sustain their livestock. In turn, they are more likely to support legislation that aims to reduce the effects of climate change on their material livelihoods.

At the top of this unlikely alliance, reigns Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, who became the first Indigenous cabinet secretary in U.S. history. By nominating Haaland as Secretary, President Biden not only acknowledged the long-standing tragic history that the U.S.-Native American relationship holds. Haaland represents the Indigenous communities, while also being in charge of issuing extraction and drilling permits for fossil fuels. The nomination and subsequent confirmation of her as Secretary might be one of most thought-out decisions early on in the Biden era. Not only is an Indigenous woman now in charge of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the issuance federal drilling permits for fossil fuels, but it can also serve as an important marker of the change that has come to the federal level in U.S. politics where Indigenous voices are being listened to at the very top level.

## 5.4 Foreign Relations

The reporting which had foreign relations as a thematic frame was mainly concerned with the U.S.-Canadian relations, but also noted how the incoming Biden administration would mark a significant shift from the Trump, especially related to the complicated U.S.-Canadian relations which were tense for most of the Trump era. In the Lincoln Journal Star, it was noted how disappointed the Canadians were with Biden after he cancelled the Keystone XL pipeline, yet both Canada and the U.S. are committed allies in combating climate change by reducing fossil fuel emissions. Despite this fact, both countries are still burning “lots of oil” (LJ-43).

### 5.4.1 U.S.-Canadian Relations

The Canadians were disappointed with the Keystone XL decision in Washington, but not so much that they did not want to work together with their neighbors to the south to address other energy initiatives. Even though the Keystone XL pipeline is a significant part of the oil

infrastructure related to the Canadian oil and gas production, the Biden executive order was not enough to create more tension between the two neighboring countries. This is perhaps also a sign of just how tense the relations were between the U.S. and Canada during the Trump presidency, as even though the Canadians became visibly upset and Prime Minister Trudeau publicly expressed his disappointment with the Biden administration's Keystone decision, it was not detrimental to their relationship.

#### 5.4.2 Geopolitical Impacts and Energy Security

As stated in the introduction, energy infrastructure has unfortunately become all too relevant again after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The call for Biden to revive the Keystone XL pipeline to reduce foreign dependency on oil came from several Republican politicians, but the decision has not been overturned yet. To the Biden administration, the environmental impact as well as the respect for Indigenous rights outweigh the considerations for the dependency on foreign oil.

Foreign dependency on oil is a prominent narrative in the American political realm, and according to Proulx and Crane (2020), supporters of the Dakota Access pipeline used energy independence as one of their main arguments for their case. Similarly, proponents of the Keystone XL pipeline also use the argument of foreign oil dependency to advance their cause. However, this does not make much sense, because the Keystone XL is still dependent on Canadian oil to transport to the refineries in Texas. In this perspective, foreign energy dependency is perhaps a better argument for those who oppose the Keystone XL pipeline. As long as Canada and the United States remain allies and neighbors on good terms, there is probably a low risk involved in Canada shutting down its oil exports to the United States. However, with political shifts, nothing is unlikely, which is also why the Trump presidency challenged the Canadian-U.S. relationship in ways we have not seen before.

It became quite clear the President Biden and his administration views the intersection of climate change and national security as highly important. For example, by appointing John Kerry as a special Presidential envoy on climate change and granting him a seat at the National Security Council, Biden makes it clear that fighting climate change is also a matter of national security. However, the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline still stands, despite the increased geopolitical tensions following the Russian invasion in Ukraine, rising energy prices

and calls from politicians in Washington to ensure U.S. energy independence. I would argue that this means that Biden and his administration does not consider reviving the Keystone XL pipeline in the foreseeable future, given that the pressure for him to do exactly that has increased, and that the geopolitical situation has changed since January 2021.

## 5.5 Are the Newspaper Frames Examples of Settler Colonialism?

This subchapter will discuss research question number 2, which posed the question of how the thematic frames presented in chapter 4 and discussed in chapters 5.1 to 5.4 are examples of settler colonialism. First, this chapter discusses this using the lens of erasure as a central tenet of settler colonialism. Second, it discusses what could be called “the Missing Themes” which examines what the data collection showed that the newspapers did *not* report on. Then, it goes into the topic of self-justification with regards to the energy companies and U.S. politicians’ justification of the expansion of energy infrastructure, which in fact can be described as ecological violence, as it undeniably disproportionately affects the Indigenous people across the U.S. Finally, the discussion is framed around the different themes present in the various newspapers used in the data collection. By comparing the themes across different newspapers, I make an argument that the media coverage (or lack thereof) is an example of settler colonialism in the U.S. today.

### 5.5.1 Settler Colonialism and Erasure of the Natives

A central tenet of settler colonialism is erasure, whether that is genocide, cultural erasure, political erasure, or economic marginalization. As stated by Reese (2001), the media frames are a result of different social, individual stakeholders and institutional interests with different agendas. Thus, the media coverage is a result of competing forces fighting for the media’s attention. To gain the attention of media and the editors, stakeholders might engage in activities that might be viewed negatively by the public, resulting in some of them, regardless of the legitimacy of their claims to the cause, to be labelled as anti-heroes.

The newspaper coverage could also be argued to be a part of the “hegemony of particular ways of seeing the ancestral land of Indigenous people” (Proulx and Crane, 2020, p. 49) which is a fundamental component to settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is essentially about land acquisition (Wolfe, 2006) and is enabled through “discursive strategies aimed at curtailing

indigenous entitlement to land” (Giminiani et al., 2021, p. 82). When politicians talk about the oil pipelines being in the nation’s best interest, what they really are saying is that it is in the best interest of the white, non-marginalized, non-Indigenous population, and that they are willing to sacrifice the areas where the oil pipeline is built. This also relates to de Onis (2018) and their definition of “energy sacrifice zones.” The opponents of oil pipelines are often mischaracterized and demonized in media by being defined as “extremist anti-fossil fuel outsiders” (Proulx and Crane, 2020), and the media often choose to focus on illegal activities by protestors in most of their coverage (McLeod & Hertog, 1992). I argue that this type of demonization of the opposition against oil pipelines is a way in which settler colonialism materializes, as an attempt to silence, discredit, invalidate or erase Indigenous opposition to these energy infrastructure projects. This is also in line with Kilgo and Harlow (2019) who argued that this type of demonization is delegitimizing to a legitimate position on any given issue.

Narratives, themes or frames in newspapers could reinforce how the public and elected officials perceive and make sense of how the Indigenous people and their ancestral land are treated by the settlers. In particular, stories that eradicate the impact of how oil pipelines or other infrastructure specifically affect Indigenous people’s land and lives, contribute to a skewed perspective and the continued erasure of Indigenous people and their land, which settler colonialism as a structure rest upon (Wolfe, 2006). An argument could therefore be made that newspaper articles which lack the perspectives from the Indigenous people are not simply a result of the journalist’s or editorial board’s journalistic priorities, but an inherent function of settler colonialism that persists in the American society today. This is also in line with Wolfe (2013) who argued that the history of the United States as a settler colonial country, continues to influence the society, politics and culture to this very day. As an extension of this, the voices that news media choose to elevate in their coverage of issues especially significant to the Indigenous communities across the country, and the voices they editorially choose to ignore, are not just influenced by the settler colonial history, but more significantly the ongoing erasure of Indigenous people and their culture, political autonomy and history. Consequently, news coverage of land and resources at large, with or without Indigenous voices in the reporting, are inherently a result of settler colonialism.

Newspaper coverage is also about the audience because the newspapers are speaking to their target audience. In a commercialized media environment, media outlets seek to publish stories

that will drive audience engagement, increase readership and subscriptions, and, in the end, generate profits for the shareholders. Because stories that the media publish need to be recognizable to their audience (Entman, 1993), the way a newspaper presents an issue is also influenced by who their audience is. Therefore, it becomes clear why Indian Country Today reported more on stories related to the Keystone XL pipeline and directly referencing Indigenous lives and livelihoods, and why the national and regional newspapers such as The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and LA Times were reporting on other aspects of the pipeline such as job creation, national politics, foreign relations and climate change.

### 5.5.2 Missing Themes – What the Newspapers Did Not Report On

Even though a discussion chapter should discuss the findings, this thesis will also make a point about what the data collection did not in fact find, in particular what the newspapers did *not* report on. By reflecting on ‘missing themes’ I can also consider what was not reported on in the newspaper articles, as suggested by Bryman (2012). Furthermore, “the settler-colonial structure’s reliance on invisibilization for the legitimation of settler claims to place” (Bacon, 2020, p. 8) suggest that ‘missing themes’ might as well be just as important as those themes that were found in the reporting. The most frequently identified theme does not necessarily translate into it being the most important theme (Reese, 2001), but rather that those themes are what the newspapers view as relevant to their audience in order to increase subscriptions and ultimately deliver profits for their owners. Specifically, the profit-driven journalistic motives are important to consider and should also be noted in relation to the ownership structure of newspapers in the American media market. For example, it is noteworthy that both the Omaha World-Herald and the Lincoln Journal Star are now both owned by a large media conglomerate, namely Lee Enterprises. Thus, local newspapers are for better or worse not as local as they used to be in years prior. This shift in ownership might also affect what is reported on by the local newspapers.

I argue that the lack of reporting (or the limited reporting) on the Indigenous resistance against the Keystone XL pipeline in the national newspapers, is quite striking. Bacon (2020) found that the main framing on the Dakota Access pipeline protests did not sufficiently cover the ecological risks and threats that the pipeline posed to Indigenous treaty rights and their livelihoods. Even the newspaper articles which did mention the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline often failed to mention the Indigenous tribes which were essential to the

pushback against the pipeline expansion, by only mentioning local opposition from farmers, politicians and environmentalists. This could contribute to creating a skewed narrative, and since erasure or mischaracterization of the Indigenous relationship with land is also considered colonial ecological violence (Bacon, 2020), it could be argued that the reporting which fails to include Indigenous resistance and the limited number of articles which do in fact mention the Indigenous resistance, are two ways in which the media narrative contributes to settler colonial ecological violence. It is noteworthy that the newspapers fail to adequately report on Indigenous opposition to these types of energy encroachments because “the sphere of civil society and community mobilization are proving to be politically vibrant, effective lines of defense against environmentally risky extractive practices” (Ternes et al., 2020, p. 55). Additionally, the environmental alliances which have emerged over the last couple of decades prove that they can actually overcome the historical divides facilitated by settler colonialism and its structures which have contributed to the marginalization and oppression of the Indigenous population.

### 5.5.3 “Oil Transport is Self-Evidently Necessary”

Arguments from the proponents of the Keystone XL pipeline were very similar to those advocating for the Dakota Access pipeline, namely that the transportation of crude oil is an essential service which must be performed. It is almost like it is a universal truth that oil must be transported using these pipelines, because of oil itself being a necessity. Proulx and Crane (2020, p. 59) argued that the oil company behind the Dakota Access pipeline “never engages with or even acknowledges the position of their political adversaries that the extraction of raw materials is itself a source of environmental concern for affected communities.” The fossil fuel companies are thus relying on the public’s perception of oil transportation as an activity that must occur. If we as a society move away from the fossil fuel-dependency, we can render these assumptions and self-justifications from the fossil fuel companies and pipeline proponents as irrelevant.

In this sense, according to Proulx and Crane (2020), the pipeline company is self-justifying their actions by also arguing that constructing the pipelines is in the nation’s (the United States) best interest, because it would also reduce the foreign energy dependency. However, there is a major logical fallacy here for the case of Keystone XL, because the pipeline originates, and transports oil extracted in Canada. But also, as an extension of the argument proposed by Proulx



and Crane (2020), this self-justification is not only limited to the oil company itself, in the case of the Keystone XL: TC Energy. Rather, these are also lines of arguments that can be found in newspaper articles and editorials, as well as political talking points from the Republicans, and from Democrats who represent energy-rich states such as Joe Manchin of West-Virginia.

Senator Joe Manchin, who introduced the first Keystone XL bill back in 2012, argued that the “pipelines continue to be the safest mode to transport our oil and natural gas resources and they support thousands of high-paying, American union jobs” (WS-38). Like the arguments made in support of the Dakota Access Pipeline, the support for the Keystone XL pipeline was also argued to be the safest way to transport crude oil, compared to trains or trucks. When politicians make these comparisons in relation to what is in the best interest of the country, they are promoting the benefits which are in the best interest of a select few, and rarely (if ever) in the best interest of the racialized minorities in the United States (Proulx and Crane, 2020). In this sense, settler colonialism is inextricably connected to capitalism in the U.S., and the capitalistic economy of the United States enable both the continued exploitation of land and resources at the expense of the Indigenous communities, as well as facilitating the continued erasure of Indigenous voices, perspectives and priorities in media narratives. The Indigenous population in the United States is thus a victim of the energy sacrifice zones because of the overreliance on non-renewable energy sources (de Onis, 2018). Countries need to handle the dilemmas that the green transition poses with regards to energy infrastructure, which furthermore requires radical changes in energy consumption, policymaking processes and discourses.

## 5.6 Comparing Themes Across Newspapers

Even though we should not imply that the frequency of occurrence of a specific theme in a given newspaper is indicative of how important that frame is in the larger sense, it nevertheless does leave room for some discussion revolving the different focus and emphasis that the various newspapers in the data sample have. Specifically, it should come as no surprise that the newspaper Indian Country Today has the most articles containing the Indigenous/grassroots thematic frame. Furthermore, following the same logic, it is also not difficult to understand how for example the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal both have several articles containing the thematic framing of politics, in particular national politics. The New York Times, which is a newspaper which has a more left-to-center leaning audience, also have more

reporting containing the thematic frame “climate”, compared to the Wall Street Journal which has a more right-leaning readership structure.

What this might suggest is that newspapers cater to different demographics which make up their different readerships. Because of the commercialization of the news industry, newspapers are largely dependent on advertisement revenue as well as subscription rates. It could therefore be argued that newspapers might choose to focus editorially on issues and stories which are “good for business” as opposed to fulfilling their role as a government watch dog, or what has been labelled “the fourth branch of government” in a checks-and-balance type of democracy. Consequently, some newspapers might choose to not report on controversial issues among their readership demographic because it might be perceived by the audience in a negative manner.

Furthermore, the thematic framing of an issue might not be a deliberate editorial choice, because the thematic framing might be the result of coincidences or rather simply ignorance about an issue. The news coverage of the Keystone XL pipeline among the newspapers included in this study might suggest that while some of the reporting is deliberate in the editorial choices regarding thematic framing, many articles are also the result of ignorance towards the Indigenous population across the United States of America, and thus, an example of how settler colonial violence is still, indeed, present in the American society today.

Perhaps it is also a self-reinforcing vicious, circle where the white majority population in the United States does not know, or simply does not care, about racialized minority groups in their country. The prospects for profits for newspapers and their owners are directly related to readership, subscriptions and advertisements. The newspapers cater to the needs of their audience and might in some sense write and publish stories that their readers *want* to read about, rather than what is in the best interest of stakeholders in marginalized communities, the environment, or the Indigenous population in which their audience’s settler ancestors have literally and metaphorically attempted to eradicate. These competing factors are also what is driving the media narratives on energy infrastructure because the media will tend to write about the conflict rather than focusing on legitimate claims on a given issue. When the media writes about the conflict and the opposition from inter-ethnic alliances, their audience’s perception will be influenced by that reporting and shape their opinion on the issue. Consequently, when a newspaper writes about the Keystone XL and frames the issue in terms of how many jobs the project could potentially bring to a state or a region, their audience could view the project in

more favorable terms, because they care about their local communities and the economic growth that would come from bringing more jobs to the area. All of this would come at a cost of other stakeholders like the environmentalists or the Indigenous communities, which would render their legitimate claims and desires less important at the eye of the newspaper audience.

## 5.7 The Keystone XL Pipeline and Contemporary Development Issues

What can the issue of the Keystone XL pipeline in the American Midwest teach us about other contemporary development issues around the world? First, it reveals the unfair burden which is placed on the people and the environment where fossil fuels and minerals are extracted and transported. The world's dependency on fossil fuels also reveals injustices and the disproportionate impact that energy and energy infrastructure have on Indigenous communities (de Onis, 2018). In the context of the United States of America, a country which cannot deny its settler colonial history, settler colonialism is always a structure to consider on any issue related to land and resources (Bacon, 2020).

As settler colonialism destroys to replace (Wolfe, 2006), I argue that the newspaper coverage of the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline contributes to what Proulx and Crane (2020, p. 61) describes as how “ways of seeing and representing places reflect and contribute to historically and geographically specific conflicts around control over land and the meaning of place.” Media narratives on the Keystone XL pipeline contributes to how the settler society views Indigenous land and places, as settler colonialism is also tied to how the settlers view the land and resources. In the case of energy infrastructure in general, and in the case of the Keystone XL pipeline in particular, the settlers are transforming the ancestral land of the Indigenous communities to a commodified area of fossil fuel extraction and transportation. By expanding energy infrastructure on Indigenous land, the settlers and fossil fuel companies are attempting to remove the Indigenous connection to their land.

Whether that energy infrastructure is the Keystone XL pipeline in the American Midwest, or windmills or graphite extraction in Northern Norway, we continue to see how Indigenous communities have to fight for their livelihoods, rights and the environment. Indigenous values are critical to consider when we are transitioning into a new, green economy (Jacob et al., 2021), but also if we want to counter the legacies of settler colonialism. Similarly, when

moving towards the green transition and environmental development, conflicts over land and resources will undoubtedly emerge, which often leads to a disproportionate part of the burden being placed on Indigenous communities.

In the current geopolitical situation where nation states are struggling with both the consequences of climate change as well as facing the challenges of foreign energy dependency, it is likely that energy infrastructure conflicts will arise in the years ahead. While fossil fuel infrastructure might be easier to oppose from an environmentalist's point of view when it comes in conflict with Indigenous rights, this may not necessarily be the case when the energy infrastructure in question is a renewable energy project like on- or offshore windmills, or mineral extraction for electric vehicle batteries. I argue that energy infrastructure projects in the future will have to consolidate the concerns for climate change as well as Indigenous rights, which might prove difficult when nations are faced with multiple energy crises, demands for economic growth, and geopolitical instability. It also raises the question for whom development initiatives are benefitting economically and socially, and who are impacted in terms of human rights violations, pollution, health hazards and environmental degradation.

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis argues that the thematic frames used in newspapers on the coverage of the Keystone XL pipeline, is indeed an example of settler colonialism, because the reporting contributes to what Bacon (2020, p. 8) defines as “erasure and mischaracterization of Indigenous connections to place” through both the suppression of Indigenous voices in news articles, as well as media’s mischaracterization, misrepresentation and demonization of the inter-ethnic opposition, *the Unlikely Alliances*, against the Keystone XL. Furthermore, the structures which exist in the United States today are both directly and indirectly the remains of the settler colonial violence exerted on the Indigenous population during the European colonization, which also continue to influence the society overall, but in particular the media landscape, political discourse and the public’s perception of energy infrastructure projects. The thematic framing found in the newspaper reports is a result of the capitalistic, profit-seeking economy which the newspapers are a part of. Since voting behavior and media consumption are closely related in the U.S., these findings are significant because they can provide insight into how the public perceives energy infrastructure projects overall, and fossil fuel infrastructure in particular. This thesis expands on the work by Beckermann (2019) who found that media framing of the Dakota Access Pipeline is an example of settler colonialism. As an extension of this, I argue that the media framing of the Keystone XL pipeline is also an example of settler colonialism.

The thematic frame of “Politics and economy” provides insight into how the newspapers have used the reporting on the Keystone XL pipeline to indicate the shift from the Trump to the Biden administration. Furthermore, the thematic frame used the arguments from pipeline proponents related to how beneficial the pipeline would be for job creation and the U.S. domestic economy. The thematic frame of “Climate and environment” framed the issue on a global scale, by referencing both the executive order on the Keystone XL and the rejoining of the Paris Climate Accord in the same sentence or paragraph. This also elevates the issue from a local to a global concern. The opposition against the pipeline was also framed in terms of how white rural farmers, environmentalists as well as Indigenous communities came together to successfully oppose the pipeline, under the thematic frame which I named “Grassroots mobilization and Indigenous opposition”. Finally, the thematic frame “Foreign relations” contextualized the Keystone XL pipeline in terms of demands for U.S. energy independence and national security.

Furthermore, perhaps just as important as what is reported on, is also to consider what the newspapers did not report on. Since erasure is a central tenet of settler colonialism, I argue that any reporting about the opposition against the Keystone XL pipeline which does not explicitly include Indigenous perspectives, values or voices, is a clear example of settler colonialism in the media.

The arguments in favor of oil pipelines by the fossil fuel companies rely on the assumption that fossil fuel itself is necessary and that transportation of this type of energy is important. However, this is only true if we continue to rely on non-renewable energy sources. By moving forward with the green transition, we can render this assumption irrelevant and challenging the narrative presented by fossil fuel companies and pipeline proponents alike that the world does not need more fossil fuel infrastructure which contributes to the anthropogenic climate change, and the disproportionate burden placed on Indigenous communities.

Self-justification for actions that lead to climate change and environmental degradation implies that one might not fully understand the environmental and social consequences from the expansion of energy infrastructure. Furthermore, it underlines how politicians, when expressing arguments such as the pipeline being in “the nation’s best interest”, are only considering what is in the best interest of a select few, and rarely (if at all) in the best interest of Indigenous communities or marginalized minorities in the United States (Proulx and Crane, 2020). Similarly to when the mineral extraction company in Senja, Norway argued that they will provide “the world’s cleanest graphite,” proponents of the Keystone XL pipeline argued how the pipeline is the most environmentally friendly way to transport crude oil. These arguments are a product of settler colonialism by failing to adequately consider the impact these types of extractive activities have on Indigenous communities and the environment overall. This also taps into the question posed in the introduction: if the end goal is environmental justice in the name of a green transition, we as a society should ask ourselves: for whom, and to what cost, both economically and socially, does this transition impact? As this thesis has showed, the priorities, interests and values of the Indigenous communities in the United States have been ignored and misrepresented in some of the newspapers, when these priorities, interests and values have come in conflict with the fossil fuel industry. In conclusion, the media framing of the Keystone XL pipeline has contributed to sustaining the settler colonial structures in the American society. The way settler media refers to ecological violence on native land are present-day forms of settler colonialism. Acknowledging this is an important

step both towards decolonization, and to work for environmental justice for Indigenous communities.

## 6.1 Limitations

As with any research, this thesis also has its limitations. One major limitation is that I only included U.S.-based newspapers in the data sample, and only Nebraska local newspapers to represent local newspapers. Furthermore, the timeframe of the data collection is relatively short, with only 12 months of newspapers coverage. These were restrictions that I had to impose on the data collection process because of the constraints posed by the thesis and for the limited time I had to study this issue. Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the personal bias that I have in this case, as I noted in the preface of this thesis. My personal connection to Nebraska runs through longtime friendships and relationships with people who belong to the white rural demographic. Even though a personal connection can be important when researching a given topic, it can also be a source of bias. However, with the method of data collection and method of analysis, I believe that these concerns have been limited because I have not relied on other means of data such as interviews or access to spaces or people which would have been more prone to my personal bias.

## 6.2 Further Research

Given the new situation the world is currently in, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, more research on energy infrastructure and the diverging priorities that countries will face when dealing with ensuring sufficient energy supplies, while also having to navigate treacherous waters in terms of geopolitics, trade embargoes and warfare, is needed. As the green transition that the world is attempting to undergo has put us on a path which relies heavily on extracting minerals and expanding onshore energy infrastructure such as wind turbines continues to impact Indigenous peoples all over the world, from the Sioux in South Dakota to Ponca in Nebraska, to the Sámi people in Sápmi. A green transition which does not account for these considerations is neither green nor just. Thus, more research on these topics is needed to fully understand the impact that energy infrastructure has on people, places and the environment.

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