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# Comfort Food: Protest Politics from a Kitchen at Standing Rock



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The Standing Rock protests were a novel model of resistance to the spread of the U.S. oil assemblage, a model that combined social media, mass mobilization, and the selectively bellicose occupation of disputed and culturally meaningful space. Beyond simply adopting an anti-pipeline stance, the Standing Rock protesters developed a contemporary American oil politics based on affirmation and reverence of certain socially produced spaces and materials: water, territory, and the environment. Informed by Indigenous, particularly Sioux, history and by concerns of the U.S. environmental movement, the ideological foundations of the protest camp were no mere denunciation of the externalities of capitalism. Instead, they expounded and affirmed complex understandings of the requirements of life, the imperative to defend them, and the appropriate means of doing so.

In this talk, I focus on a kitchen at the Oceti Sakowin camp. Putting my brief ethnographic engagement in conversation with approaches to the social production of space, and with studies of oil and environmental politics, I seek to develop “comfort” as a necessary complement to Sloterdijk’s (2009) concept of terrorism, defined in part as “attempts on the environmental conditions of life.” In this kitchen, run by a Lakota woman and staffed in part by non-Indigenous activists, the daily preparation and distribution of food, at times for hundreds of people, became an effective means of imbuing the environment with the conditions of life. This praxis of comfort manifested the ideals and goals of the protest itself—to foster and maintain those vital conditions—making the provision of food inextricable from the protection of water.

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