

*Bolsonaro's denial of the 2019
Amazon Day of Fire and the
COVID-19 crisis*

BRAZIL'S CRISES IN AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERALISM

MSc Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Since the former army captain Bolsonaro became the 38th president of Brazil in 2019, the ecological, social and health conditions in Brazil have become alarming. Instead of dealing with these problems, Bolsonaro has been waging a governance of denialism, looking at the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis. Through denialism, Bolsonaro empowers himself to pursue anti-environmental neoliberal extractivist practices, remove legal, human or structural barriers that hinder this, while capitalizing on both events. This study investigates the relationship between the governance strategy of denialism, the rise of authoritarian neoliberal leaders and disaster capitalism by looking at the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis in Brazil. With an integrative literature review supplemented by newspaper articles, the thesis argues that during both disasters Bolsonaro deploys a governance strategy of denialism as a distraction to reinforce his authoritarian neoliberal regime by increasing extractivist practices. At the same time, opposing figures are removed and opposing structures are dismantled. This reflects deepening crises in neoliberalism which is the breeding ground for the emerging climate and health crises which are capitalized on by Bolsonaro. Denialism as a governance strategy thus facilitates authoritarian neoliberalism which contributes to the magnitude of crises that impacts society and vulnerable people the most. This thesis views Bolsonaro's denial as a way of capitalizing on both the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 disasters, which contributes to an accelerated process of neoliberalism.

Keywords: *Denialism, authoritarian neoliberalism, disaster capitalism, Bolsonaro, Brazil, COVID-19, Amazon*

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INTRODUCTION

On the 1st of January 2019 the former army captain Jair Bolsonaro was installed as the 38th president of Brazil. At that time, Brazil counted almost 13 million unemployed, a lack of sufficient social security and the world's highest homicide rates (Chagas-Bastos, 2019). Since Bolsonaro has been president, the situation in Brazil has grown even more sour, looking especially at the increased deforestation of the Amazon and the COVID-19 health crisis. Instead of acknowledging these problems, Bolsonaro has actively been waging a governance of denialism that contributes to a deepening social, ecological and health crisis in Brazil.

Fraser (2019) explains that by voting for an authoritarian populist in general, people hope for an alternative to the neoliberal hegemony. Though, instead of providing this alternative, Bolsonaro's governance has been characterized by scholars as authoritarian neoliberal which results in a strengthened manifestation of neoliberal reproduction and decreased democratic structures (Saad-Filho and Boffo, 2020). The increase of authoritarian neoliberal structures in Brazil with the election of Bolsonaro contribute to Brazil's political economic context in which real crisis such as the 2019 Amazon 'Day of Fire' and the COVID-19 unfold. However these crises have not become turning points. On the contrary, instead of being a motivation for change, the COVID-19 and the climate crisis seem to be opportunities to capitalize on

Neoliberalism is defined as the 'current stage, phase or mode of existence of global capitalism. [Its] most significant feature (...) is financialization, meaning the subordination of economic and social reproduction (...) to interest-bearing capital' (Saad-Filho, 2020a, p.133). Neoliberalism has been linked to worldwide inequality, poverty and vulnerability that results in disasters and climate change (Loewenstein, 2018; Fletcher, 2012; Rogers, 2014). Saad-Filho (2020a) develops this critique of the neoliberal system by coining the term Crises In Neoliberalism (CIN) with which he refers to the 1) *political crisis in neoliberalism: a deepening crisis of political systems* and 2) *economic crisis in neoliberalism: a deepening crisis of neoliberal economies*. Furthermore, since the Great Economic Crisis in 2008, we have entered a new phase of neoliberalism called *authoritarian neoliberalism* which is characterized by fiscal austerity and increased repression and exclusion politics (Saad-Filho, 2020a). And, as a result of Crises in Neoliberalism, authoritarian neoliberal figures have increasingly been rising to power all over the world (Deutsch, 2021).

In line with Barros and Silva (2020) and Fraser (2019), the rise of right-wing authoritarian populists such as Bolsonaro is argued to be an expression of a political crisis in neoliberalism and a response to the hegemony of neoliberalism. Fraser (2019) broadens populism also to left-wing politics by distinguishing between reactionary and progressive populism to neoliberal distribution and recognition. Reactionary populism is associated with right-wing (extremist) politics like Trump and Bolsonaro and agrees with a neoliberal market distribution and conservative and exclusive social recognition. Progressive populism relates to more left-wing progressive politics, examples are former Brazilian president Lula and US democrat Bernie Sanders, that aim for more social equal distribution within the neoliberal

market and inclusive recognition (Fraser, 2019). Bruff (2014) mentions authoritarian populism being an *Authoritarian Fix* that provides a quick-fix alternative to neoliberalism. Nevertheless, these leaders often have their own authoritarian neoliberal agendas that deepen neoliberal structures and decrease democracy. So, both political left and right-wing reactions to neoliberalism do not structurally change the system but might even strengthen the reproduction of neoliberal systems. I argue here that in Brazil, Crises In Neoliberalism (CIN) is first embodied in neoliberal extractivism that resulted in a progressive post-neoliberal reaction under Lula in 2002. Secondly, after Lula, CIN is embodied by Bolsonaro's reactionary authoritarian populism. Building on Saad-Filho's (2020a) concept of CIN, I address the greater Crises In Neoliberalism since Bolsonaro's presidency in 2019 by the term *Crises In Authoritarian Neoliberalism* (CIAN).

Crises In Authoritarian Neoliberalism refers to the increased inequality, poverty, vulnerability as a result of deepening Brazilian political and economic crises in neoliberalism. This thesis will display that both Bolsonaro's denial politics and disaster capitalism facilitate and contribute to CIAN. This argument is illustrated in chapter 3 and 4 through the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis. The 2019 Amazon 'Day of Fire' or 'Fire Day' is a name constructed by the media to refer to August 10, 2019. On this day Brazilian farmers, loggers and land-grabbers planned and illegally set fires to Amazonian pasture and forest in Pará, Northern Brazil (Camargos, 2019). President Bolsonaro personally responded to the Day of Fire by *denying* the intentional fire setting, called the fire statistics and data 'lies' and untruths and fired the people responsible (Phillips, 2019; Phillips, August 13 2020; Brant, 2019). Apart from lying, the Bolsonaro government has actively favored capitalist landgrabbers, farmers and their deforestation practices through legislation and inactivity in prosecution. This, at the expense of conservation and protection of the Amazon and indigenous lands and communities (Monteiro, 2019). This 2019 Amazon Day of Fire situates in the larger problem of increased deforestation of the Amazon under Bolsonaro and his extractivist authoritarian neoliberal policies.

The COVID-19 crisis shows similar behavior from Bolsonaro. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bolsonaro *denied* its severity and called it a 'common cold'. Even with a death rate of 260,000 deaths by March 2021, the president says people need to stop 'wining' (Phillips, 2021). Orsini and Ortega (2020) speak of a polarized opposition between states and municipalities that have installed COVID measurements and the Bolsonaro government that actively opposes nationwide COVID measurements. After contracting the virus himself, he thanked his swift healing process to his fitness and treatment by hydroxychloroquine, despite it not having a scientific base (Phillips, 2020). By not stepping up as president in response to this pandemic, the virus is still spreading vigorously in Brazil, impacting marginalized Brazilians the most (Orsini and Ortega, 2020). Bolsonaro's inactivity, denial and lack of governance, displayed in both cases, contribute to accelerated processes of neoliberalism by reinforcing neoliberal extractivism and dismantling opposing structures. Scholars like Deutsch (2021), Fraser (2019), Wodak (2015), McGoey (2012, 2019) and Orsini and Ortega (2020) have already connected authoritarian leaders and their particular

behavior as a governance strategy that dismantles democratic, environmental and social structures. This thesis adds to this discourse that specifically Bolsonaro's governance strategy of denialism contributes to the dismantling of such structures in favor of neoliberal extractivism and to reinforce his authoritarian regime.

Extractivism is the large scale extraction of natural resources for the global economy, thereby the engine of Brazil's economy and plays an integral role in Brazil's development trajectory (Merino, 2019). Critical studies associate extractivism with colonialism, displacement of local and indigenous communities and irrevocable ecological degradation (Gudynas, 2018). Various authors link extractivism and anti-environmental policies with authoritarian regimes (Deutsch, 2021; McCarthy, 2019; Neimark et. al., 2019). I extend their reasoning to authoritarian neoliberalism and denialism by looking at *disaster capitalism*. Naomi Klein's (2007) concept disaster capitalism explains how shock during crisis-situations is used as an opportunity for reinforcing neoliberal capitalist structures through privatization. Fletcher (2012) further develops this concept and displays with the climate crisis that crises are also perceived as business opportunities.

In Brazil disaster capitalism is visible in Bolsonaro's privatization policies during COVID-19. Multiple media sources show that these policies counteract the protection and conservation of the Amazon forest in favor of agriculture companies and loggers (Reuters, 2020; Phillips, May 6 2020). Bolsonaro has thus capitalized on the COVID-19 crisis to open up more extractivist development in the Amazon which relates the COVID-19 crisis to the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire. Furthermore, disaster capitalism influences the response to these two events. Bolsonaro's denialism reinforces neoliberal practices that profit from the disasters while at the same time this denialism impacts the health of the Amazon and millions of Brazilians (McGoey, 2012; Orsini and Ortega, 2020).

By analyzing the Brazilian 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis, this research shows how neoliberal capitalism is manifested into Brazil's right-wing president Bolsonaro who has used denialism to not respond to both the climate and the COVID-19 crisis. Instead his policies capitalize on this chaos and thereby reinforce the continuous loop of neoliberal practices. Bolsonaro's response thus contributes to the magnitude of both crises that hit marginalized groups the hardest. The theoretical intersection of denialism, authoritarian neoliberalism and disaster capitalism is used to look at both events. By studying the role of Bolsonaro's denialism during these two events, a deeper understanding of the problem is achieved. By better understanding the link between denialism, authoritarian neoliberalism and disaster capitalism and how this impacts society, counterstrategies can be thought of that counter this deepening Crises in Neoliberalism. Therefore, the questions addressed in this study is:

Why has the Bolsonaro government been demonstrating denialism in response to the 2019 Amazon 'Day of Fire' and COVID-19 crisis?

METHODOLOGY

This chapter certifies and explains what inspired me to write this thesis and how I approached this method-wise. First, my inspiration for the thesis topic is explained, followed by a COVID-19 disclaimer. Secondly, the methods used for data collection and analysis are explained, followed by some comments on validity, risk and setting.

This thesis was inspired by courses - Studying Crisis, Natural Hazards and Disasters and Sociology in Development: Towards a Critical Perspective - that were part of my MSc curriculum. These courses introduced and elaborated on the concepts of disasters, the discourse of neoliberal capitalism and disaster capitalism which inspired to search for topics related to sociology of disasters, political economy and capitalizing on disasters. In deciding which disaster to look at I was triggered by the current pandemic COVID-19 which led me to Brazil due to the extensive news articles written about that particular context.

After getting acquainted with the Brazilian context of the covid-19, I was intrigued by Bolsonaro and his inactive response to this crisis. This resulted in specifying my search to the right-wing president. During this search, I encountered the many newspaper articles written on the Amazon deforestation and illegal fire setting that have increased again since Bolsonaro's presidency. Since the deforestation of the Amazon is a very broad and complex issue, my supervisor advised me to narrow it down to the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire. Articles by Saad-Filho (2020), McCarthy (2019) and Deutsch (2021) resulted in specifying from neoliberal capitalism to authoritarian neoliberalism. This led me to investigate both the COVID-19 and the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire by exploring the intersection between denialism, authoritarian neoliberalism and disaster capitalism.

MSC THESIS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

I added this section to methodology since the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 crisis in The Netherlands influenced the writing and methods of this thesis. Without COVID-19 my preference would have been to study this problem with a more ethnographic approach. In a previously written minor thesis I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews which I really enjoyed. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic that at this moment still limits global traveling, this method was not possible. However, this provided me with the opportunity to challenge myself in using and applying a different method. And I decided to do a full theoretical thesis which has both been challenging and instructive. Challenging, because especially at the start of the research it took some effort to remain focused towards the scope of the thesis, especially concerning the alternation between specific and general arguments. Additionally, I had to get used to remain concentrated behind a desk all day. Yet, these challenges have also become a pleasant learning experience for me. First, I enjoyed gaining a deeper understanding of the Brazil and Bolsonaro discourse. Second, I noticed my own development concerning this method. Apart from developing personal working skills I also learned from writing this thesis content-wise. Having performed this literature review, I have learned more than I would have using an

already known method. I improved in analytical and systematic reading and writing and developed in structuring this thesis, the arguments mentioned and the literature used.

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

LITERATURE STUDY

The method I used during this thesis project is a theoretical literature study, supplemented by information from newspaper articles. Academic literature on the concepts mentioned before have been achieved through WUR Library and Google Scholar and categorized according to the theoretical concepts they apply to. This categorization helped me to stay focused on the concepts and not get distracted. The search-terms used during the literature study are based on the theoretical concepts, such as: populist right-wing authoritarianism, Bolsonaro, government denialism, disaster capitalism, neoliberal capitalism, disasters. After acquiring literature concerning these keywords, I often used the snowball method to look for other relevant articles in the bibliography. The approach to this literature review has primarily been integrative (Snyder, 2019). This means that I aimed at bringing together and critically analyze the literature surrounding denialism, authoritarian neoliberalism and disaster capitalism to see what correlations are visible by analyzing the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis. Also, the integrative review method allows for studying both mature and new topics (Snyder, 2019). Hereby, it allowed for an analysis that combined a much discussed, mature, topic such as (authoritarian) neoliberalism and new, recent, topics relating to denialism, COVID-19, the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and Bolsonaro's presidency. Snyder (2019) furthermore mentions that information surrounding new topics are often creatively gathered. This explains my choice in also selecting newspaper articles to supplement the information from academic literature.

Online newspaper articles were looked at especially to acquire information on the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis. Search terms used concern the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire, Bolsonaro and covid-19 in Brazil. Both international news outlets, such as The Guardian, and national news outlets were used, such as O Globo and Folha de São Paulo. Since national news outlets are in Brazilian Portuguese, the Google Translate extension was used. While reading newspaper articles I was aware of the risks. Misinterpretation, wrong translation or subjectivity have been carefully examined while thoroughly reading. Also, information from newspapers may be politically charged which had to be closely monitored. Still, this thesis has been subjected to the subjectivity from both me and all the authors of the information sources.

DATA ANALYSIS

The theoretical concepts in chapter 2 can be viewed as an additional study in this thesis with the aim of displaying the already existing literature concerning denialism, authoritarian neoliberalism and disaster capitalism. Additionally, other (relating) theoretical concepts, such as extractivism, populism and vulnerability, are analyzed to get a better understanding of why Bolsonaro has shown denialism in response to the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the

COVID-19 crisis in Brazil. Chapter 2 is the base line against which I mirrored the literature on Brazil. For example, the analysis of Fraser (2019) on populism and progressive neoliberalism on American politics are displayed in chapter 2. In chapter 3 and 4 Fraser's arguments were analyzed and compared to the situation in Brazil. In chapter 2, I further categorized the theoretical concepts by Saad-Filho's (2020) notions of Crises In Neoliberalism and Crisis Of neoliberalism with the intent of structuring this chapter. Chapter 3 and 4 are also analyzed according to this principle. In chapter 3 I mirror the theoretical concepts discussed under the heading Crises In Neoliberalism against the discourses in Brazil. In chapter 4 the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis are studied with concepts under the heading 'Crisis Of neoliberalism' in chapter 2. In most cases, the theoretical concepts of chapter 2 were already written before writing the analysis in chapter 3 or 4. Though, in some cases new discourses emerged while researching and writing chapter 3 and 4 which led to an additional concept in chapter 2. This occurred for example with the concept of extractivism. By allowing both ways of analysis, it enhanced my understanding of denialism, authoritarian neoliberalism and disaster capitalism in relation to Brazil and therefore strengthened the research in general. The analysis in chapter 3 was done by connecting academic literature on Brazilian politics since Lula with the theoretical concepts of chapter 2. The analysis in chapter 4 is mostly based on newspaper articles and a few academic sources on Bolsonaro's denialism (during), the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and COVID-19. This is the most important chapter of this thesis and aims at connecting the theoretical concepts of chapter 2, the Brazilian Crises in Neoliberalism of chapter 3 and the two events in a final analysis that answers the research question.

TIME SCHEDULE

The proposal of this thesis was developed and presented by the end of March 2021 and the actual research and writing started in period 6 (May 10, 2021) due to a course in between. The research and writing process eventually endured from May 10, 2021 until September 13. This thesis was presented on September 6 and content-wise defended on September 16, 2021.

SETTING OF RESEARCH GROUP

This thesis has been supervised by dr. Robert J. Coates, part of the chair Sociology of Development and Change at Wageningen University and Research.

DATA

Since this literature consists only on free accessible literature, there is no issue of confidentiality or anonymity concerning the data. An earlier mentioned concern is the translation of Brazilian news articles via Google Translate into English or Dutch, that needs to be closely monitored to not misinterpret. By using multiple news sources to research a certain phenomenon, the correctness of the data will be checked as well. Lastly it is important to make valid assumptions concerning the data found especially in news articles. Conclusions made based on these sources need to be specific.

2. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

This chapter explores the theoretical concepts that are later used to unpack the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis in Brazil. The first part of the chapter explains the concept of *denialism*. In section 2.2 I apply Saad-Filho's (2020a, p.133) concept of Crises in Neoliberalism (CIN) to first go into the deepening political crisis in neoliberalism and the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism with the aim of understanding Bolsonaro's election and governance as part of the authoritarian neoliberal crisis in chapter 3. Secondly, the economic and ecological crisis in neoliberalism are highlighted. In 2.3 the concept of disaster capitalism will be explored in relation to the political, socio-economic and ecological CIN. Finally, this chapter ends with a conclusion. Continuing this thesis, the acronym CIN (Crises in Neoliberalism) will be used both for readability purposes and to signal that when used, it refers to the concept of Crises in Neoliberalism as explained in the introducing chapter and section 2.2.

2.1 DENIALISM

This thesis focusses on the role of denialism as an authoritarian governance strategy in the context of Brazil. An online dictionary defines denialism as: "the practice of denying the existence, truth, or validity of something despite proof or strong evidence that it is real, true, or valid" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This definition shows the persistent intention behind denying an existence, truth or validity. At the same time it also shows that denialism is multi-faceted. At some point in our human lives, everyone has come into contact with some form of denialism. Think of turning off a TV due to the gruesome images of animal or human suffering; a child denies having grabbed a cookie while both the parent and child know it did; or people denying climate change. A range of academic literature now also unpacks the various angles from which denialism can be approached (McGoey, 2019; Cohen, 2001, Norgaard, 2011). Thus, denialism as a concept is multi-faceted and can occur in different layers of society and can be approached from various disciplines. Therefore the following sections will go into the concept of denialism, starting from a social and psychological angle, followed by a political economic analysis.

A sociological reaction of denial is when people purposely ignore or block the information they receive because it is too shocking, disturbing to fully acknowledge (Cohen, 2001, p.7). The author distinguishes between three forms of denialism, which will be used in chapter 4 to analyze Brazil's situation. These are 1) literal – 'it is not true, it did not happen', 2) interpretive – facts are not denied, but interpreted differently or 3) implicatory – facts are not denied, but no mental or physical action is taken. The earlier definition by Merriam-Webster could for example be categorized under literal denialism. The difference between this and other two forms are related according to Cohen (2001) to a conscious and unconscious acknowledgement of facts.

Norgaard (2011) explains denial by the *double reality* notion which is explained as the tension between having knowledge and awareness of for example climate change versus

living your everyday life and not taking action. This results from cognitive traditions which are socially constructed ideas on what to think about and what to ignore. This dichotomy seems to be a conflict between a person's individual life and the social world you live in. This relates to Mills's (2000) sociological imagination. In his original work of 1959 he distinguishes between these two spheres by mentioning a personal sphere in which you deal with individual troubles versus the public environment that has transcending issues. Sociological imagination is needed to understand and connect the two. Though, I agree with Norgaard (2011) that having knowledge or understanding of the public sphere does not necessarily result in social action in your individual life. Yet, following an example of Mills (2000), when for example climate change affects a lot of individual lives, it becomes automatically a public issue. This could be connected to crises in neoliberalism and the rise of populism which will be explained further in the next section. The argument here is that if people are facing the negative consequences of neoliberalism in their personal lives – economic vulnerability and insecurity, cultural value change, inequality – it seems understandable they will vote for someone that promises to improve their individual situation or that directs their frustration towards a scapegoat population. While, at the same time their vote could contribute to a decrease of democratic values and even worse socioeconomic conditions.

Denialism is also related to political economy according to Norgaard (2011). From an economic perspective it is reasonable that for example environmental denialism derives from the enormous national incomes from pollutant industries. This will be further investigated in chapter 4 concerning extractivism in Brazil and Bolsonaro's denialism. Because of economic incentives and national incomes, politics are also involved. Most people can recall the various statements of authoritarian leaders like Trump or Bolsonaro in the media in which they openly attack media, political opponents, science, international organizations and minorities like the LGBT+ community, immigrants, and indigenous people. These attacks take shape in the spreading of untruths, fake news or denial of facts with the aim to shape and manipulate the truth and are part of a post-truth context. Post-truth refers to an alternative movement, challenging the scientific knowledge and truth upon which the entire western development has been built since the Enlightenment in the 18th century (McIntyre, 2018; MacDonald, 2016). Rather than scientific facts and rational ideas, post-truth "...relates to circumstances in which people respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts" (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.).

According to scholars, denialism as part of a post-truth era has been connected to political governance strategies, especially among authoritarian leaders (Fraser, 2019; Wodak, 2015; McGoey, 2019; Orsini & Ortega, 2020; Deutsch, 2021). Denialism within strategic ignorance is such a strategy that McGoey (2019) defines as: "...actions which mobilize, manufacture or exploit unknowns in a wider environment to avoid liability for earlier actions. But (...) also (...) situations where people create or magnify unknowns in an offensive rather than a defensive way, to generate support for future political initiatives rather than to simply avoid liability for a past mistakes" (p.3). This definition relates to the earlier mentioned definitions

of denialism and the intention behind purposely, consciously denying something (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Cohen, 2001). Within political strategy, denialism can thus be seen as a tool in accumulation of resources, to manage risk, as a form of emancipation to dogmas, as a commodity and power enhancer (McGoey, 2012). This for example varies from a person turning off the TV due to the horrible images of a crisis, which can be perceived as a micro form of purposely ignoring, to denial of facts within a macro post-truth context of political leaders such as Trump and Bolsonaro who have hidden agendas. Deutsch (2021) mentions for example the successful weakening of environmental legislation as a result of Bolsonaro's governance strategy.

The link between power and denialism among authoritarian leaders is explained as *oracular power* which relates to treating a person or entity as an enlightened, spiritual or mystical authority who has the ability to shape social consensus about truth and untruths (McGoey, 2019, p.61). So, within an authoritarian political context, a political leader spreading lies, fake news and denying facts could be related to a purposeful governance strategy with the gain of increasing power, diminishing power of others and controlling the legitimacy of their position. To be able to understand the authoritarian behavior of denialism, a further analyses of the political economy behind populism and authoritarianism is needed.

2.2 CRISES IN NEOLIBERALISM (CIN)

Saad-Filho (2020a) refers to an economic and political paradox when referring to the crises arising in neoliberalism. The economic paradox is explained as increasing favorable neoliberal economic structures alongside increasing economic vulnerability and crisis. The political paradox entails undermining of democracies' foundations by institutionalization of neoliberal democracy (p.134). This is expressed mainly in what he calls the third phase of neoliberalism: *authoritarian neoliberalism*. A mode of neoliberalism that was initiated in the aftermath of the 2008 Great Economic Crisis (GEC). As a reaction to the political crisis in neoliberalism, anti-systemic forces such as authoritarian populism gained political support all over the world. This section aims at analyzing the CIN by looking at political processes involved. First, the concept authoritarian neoliberalism is unpacked, followed by sections on the associated political and economic processes which are needed to analyze the Brazilian situation in chapter 3. The second part of this second looks at the economic and ecological crisis, specifically zooming in on extractivism and the climate crisis.

POLITICAL CRISIS IN NEOLIBERALISM

AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERALISM

Authoritarian neoliberalism can be understood as the paradox of a rising anti-neoliberal movement under to the idea of providing an alternative to the neoliberal hegemony but in the end reinforces and deepens the hegemonic system. As mentioned before, authoritarian neoliberalism is argued to be the third and current mode of neoliberalism and has been in place since the 2008 crisis (Saad-Filho, 2020a). Bruff (2014) also argues that post-2007 the world has experienced an increase in authoritarian neoliberalism "...which is rooted in the

reconfiguring of the state into a less democratic entity through constitutional and legal changes that seek to insulate it from social and political conflict (p.113)'. The decline of democratic structures such as attacking media, rule of law and attacking political opponents is an example of the eroding structures as a result of neoliberal crisis (McCarthy, 2014).

Why then do people support these paradoxal movements? I agree alongside other scholars that the reason why people support these anti-neoliberal movements is because people do not identify with the hegemonic neoliberal political practices and desire change. Fraser (2019) mentions Gramsci's notion of distribution and recognition in relation to the failure of political parties to provide alternatives to the neoliberal politics of unequal distribution and recognition. Bruff (2014) adds to this argument that even left-wing social democratic politics are so intertwined with the neoliberal capitalist system, that after the 2008 crisis, these parties were not able to provide an alternative. He further states that because political parties fail to offer this alternative, people go for the *Authoritarian Fix* (p.125). This means voting for populist leaders, which he describes to be a plaster to the neoliberal wound. I would even add to the metaphor that it is a sticky plaster that when removed, tears open an even bigger wound.

Ironically, the instalment of authoritarian neoliberal leaders does not diminish Crises In Neoliberalism (CIN). Instead, the installment of these authoritarian leaders actually deepen and intensify neoliberal practices (Bruff, 2014; Fabry and Sandbeck, 2019). Saad-Filho (2020a) further mentions that the political agendas of authoritarian leaders push radical neoliberal policies that increase globalization and financialization of society. Deutsch (2021) also shows that all countries with modern day examples of authoritarian neoliberalism – Russia, China, India, Turkey, Philippines, Mongolia, US, Brazil and UK - have '...political economic trajectories [that are] characterized by the failure of neoliberal reforms to address deepening crises of socioeconomic inequality, unemployment, and poverty (Deutsch, 2021). So, due to the lack of counterhegemonies or feasible alternatives, authoritarian neoliberal political parties have been able to attract voters with the aim of addressing the CIN and to provide an alternative. Unfortunately, these Authoritarian Fixes do not fix these crises. Instead, these political and economic crisis in neoliberalism are deepened and reinforced.

AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM

Since 2008 an embodiment of the Authoritarian Fix is visible in the rise of populist right-wing parties. While *populism* has been defined in multiple ways, Norris and Inglehart (2019) distinguish between first- and second order political principles when defining populism (see table 1)

Table 1 – Definition of populism (Norris and Inglehart, 2019)

"Populism (...) is a style of rhetoric reflecting first-order principles about who should rule, claiming that legitimate power rests with 'the people' not the elites. It remains silent about second-order principles, concerning what should be done, what policies should be followed, what decisions should be made. The discourse has a chameleon like quality that adapts flexibly to a variety of substantive ideological values and principles, such as socialist or conservative populism, authoritarian or progressive populism, and so on (p.4)".

Deiwiks (2009, p.2) mentions three core characteristics that are crucial in populism and are visible in the definition above as well: 1) the people. The importance of a cultural community is stressed with the aim to exclude minority groups, scapegoats and immigrants. 2) The betrayal of the people by the established elite by corruption and power abuse and 3) power needs to be transferred back to the People by removing and substitution of the elite by populist leaders. Another characteristic that relates to Deiwik's first core principle is the creation of a minority scapegoat that results in the creation of fear politics, such as islamophobia, antisemitism, that advocate an arrogance of ignorance (Wodak, 2015).

The definition of populism above furthermore shows the question 'who should rule' and 'who has the legitimate power to rule' which are heavily politically loading styles of rhetoric that does not necessarily belong to the right-wing according to Fraser (2019). She mentions a left-wing influenced *progressive populism* and a *reactionary populism* in relation to the elections of the United States in 2016. She explains populism to be a political reaction to the hegemony of *progressive* and *reactionary* neoliberalism by using Gramsci's concepts of 1) *distribution* - how society should distribute goods and income - and 2) *recognition* - how membership and belonging to that society is arranged and recognized. An overview of these characteristics can be found in table 2. Together, the neoliberal politics excluded non-liberal movements to the margins and left collapsing industrial communities to their own devices. The deindustrialization and declining living standards resulted in a political gap and building tensions among people who couldn't identify with neoliberal politics which continued during Obama's 8 years in office. With no other alternative to neoliberalism than populism, a war for the political power was waged in 2016. Nevertheless, Sanders' loss to Hillary within their political party removed progressive populism out of the equation, resulting in reactionary populism - Trump - winning the elections (Fraser, 2019, p. 13).

Table 2 Forms of populism (Fraser, 2019)

	Distribution	Recognition	Political leaders
Progressive Neoliberalism	Neoliberal market distribution. Wealth and value to the upper class Hollowing out working- and middle class	Incorporate values of new social movements Diversify social hierarchy, not demolish it	Reagan, Clintons, Obama – Democrats
Reactionary Neoliberalism	Same as progressive neoliberalism	Exclusive social structures based on pro-Christian, anti-immigrant, patriarchal, homophobic, etc. ideas	Republicans
Reactionary Populism	Working-class: Nationalist and protectionist	Exclusive structures based on nationalism and protectionist racism, anti-immigrants, pro-Christian views	Trump (Republicans)
Progressive Populism	Working-class / Pro-working-family politics: criminal justice reform, Medicare, LGBTQ+ rights	Inclusiveness	Sanders (Democrats), Lula? (see chapter 3)

This example from the United States highlights that populism is not just a right-wing matter, but can also include left-wing and progressive values. The definition by Norris and Inglehart (2019) therefore suits this example as populism is not necessarily an extreme right-wing phenomenon but adapts to values and principles with the aim of creating a community, attacking the ruling order and bring back power to the people. This results in reactionary and progressive populism.

AUTHORITARIANISM

Authoritarian populism is distinguished from other forms of populism by its values and not per se by its rhetoric style. So, in addition to populism that focusses on first-order principles – *who should rule*. Thus, populism deals with legitimate authority. Authoritarianism focusses also on second-order principles – *how it should be done* –.

“Authoritarianism is not just the rhetorical veneer of ‘people power’, but also what second-order principles leaders advocate. (...) Its values prioritize collective security for the group at the expense of liberal autonomy for the individual. Authoritarian values prioritize three core components: 1) the importance of *security* against risks of instability and disorder (...); 2) the value of group *conformity* to preserve conventional traditions and guard our way of life (...); and 3) the need for *loyal* obedience toward strong leaders who protect the group and its customs (p.7)”.

Table 3: Definition of Authoritarianism (Norris and Inglehart, 2019)

The definition above describes three core values which are (1) security, (2) conformity, and (3) loyalty. Security is desired as a fear reaction to insecurity that aims for protection against outsiders or a particular threat. This stems according to Inglehart (2018) from a deep-rooted response to threatening conditions related to a survival security which human faced throughout most of our history. Group conformity focusses on conventional traditions, rules and ways of life for a group. Hereby establishing a group, the 'Us', that allows for excluding the 'Other', or the 'them'. Therefore, authoritarianism is often associated with racism, xenophobia and scapegoating (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Loyalty means the legitimacy and respect of the people towards the authoritarian leaders and conventional institutions that protect them and the conventional way of life. (example of the 2021 storming of the Capitol by Trump loyalists).

Authoritarianism thus seeks to restore to a controlled conventional past, though, it also seem to bring forth two paradoxes: First, the authoritarian reaction to neoliberal cultural backlash and economic insecurity. Though, authoritarian populism weakens structures that allow for compromises which in turn allows for even more neoliberal practices which Bruff (2014) calls *authoritarian neoliberalism*. Secondly, the core element of bringing the power back to the people leads to strong authoritarian leaders who in fact diminish personal freedoms and grassroot movements, thereby diminishing people's power.

AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNANCE STRATEGY OF DENIAL

Denialism functions as a tool within in authoritarian neoliberalism to push neoliberal policies. By denying the problems of inequality, unemployment, etc. a leader elopes responsibility and avoids liability to address these issues and legitimates neoliberal policies that reinforce neoliberal structures in society. At the same time plays denialism an significant role in people's voting behavior. As mentioned before, is populist voting behavior influenced by cultural backlash and economic insecurity. This can be related to Norgaard's (2011) *double reality* and denialism as cultural backlash and economic insecurity influences the reality of people's everyday lives. So, by voting for authoritarian leaders, people choose the reality of their everyday life over the reality of Crisis In Neoliberalism, either consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly. At the same time, the denialism of bigger issues, such as climate change and migrants, is also the political agenda of these political leaders who pursue power and neoliberal agendas. This continuing loop of neoliberal reinforcing structures adds to the vulnerability of socioeconomic and democratic institutions in society and creates real crisis situations, which the next section will further analyze.

ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL CRISES IN NEOLIBERALISM

The failure to address the growing inequality and deepening crisis of political systems and neoliberal economies result in societies and systems that are vulnerable to crises, such as disasters. This section first explains vulnerability in relation to authoritarian neoliberalism, followed by a political ecological analysis of the climate crisis and extractivism.

VULNERABILITY

In section 2.2 it became apparent that neoliberalism creates crisis within political, social and economic structures, such as authoritarianism. The failure to address the growing inequality and deepening crisis of political systems and neoliberal economies and the reinforcement of neoliberal structures through authoritarian neoliberalism result in societies and systems that are vulnerable to crises, such as disasters. Vera-Cortés and Macías-Medrano (2020) argue that due to globalization all societies have become more vulnerable to disasters due to an increased dependency on neoliberal, monetary, structures. As mentioned before, the most significant feature of neoliberalism is financialization which means 'the subordination of economic and social reproduction (...) to interest-bearing capital [and](...)[t]he core of financialization is the transfer of control over resource allocation from the state to a globally integrated financial system, dominated by institutions' (Saad-Filho, 2020a, p.133).

The neoliberal restructuring of society since the 1970s mentioned before also encompasses a changed relationship between the Market, the State and society. Jones and Hameiri (2021) call this a change from government to governance which means a change from a hierarchical authority state government to a regulatory state that 'only' steers. Resources, authority and responsibility are outsourced to private stakeholders (p.3). As a result, social securities have been diminished and health care, education, etc. have become more privatized. Not only is the relation between state and market changed, but states and governments have been depleted in favor of efficient short-term financial market structures (Saad-Filho, 2020a).

EXTRACTIVISM AND CLIMATE CRISIS

Apart from a growing socioeconomic inequality, the intensified neoliberal market structures lead also to a growing ecological degradation. Fletcher (2012) mentions that neoliberal production, consumption and extractions patterns result in an on-going and reinforcing loop that results in ecological degradation. Fraser (2019) adds that neoliberalism hereby eats its own tail by depleting the very resources it needs for production and profit. Yet, the disruption of social and ecological reproduction are also interrelated phenomena. Neoliberal exploiting policies are responsible for increased vulnerability in nations that are rich in natural resources. The development trajectories in for example Latin America, are heavily dependent on the large scale appropriation of raw materials such as agricultural products, minerals, etc. which is called *extractivism*¹. Extractivism is a complex term that entails the destination of resources, the intensity and volume of extraction and is nowadays mostly large scale and requires large machines, water use and resources to extract a big volume of resources. Decolonial scholars have also argued that extractivism is rooted in colonialism as economic engine of accumulation (Merino, 2019). As a result, local and indigenous communities are being displaced, and disregarded and natural areas, biodiversity and soils are being destroyed (Gudynas, 2018). This large scale extraction thus impacts Latin

¹ Extractivism is a very complex concept that is intertwined with big discourses and political economies in Latin American societies. Since the focus of this thesis is not extractivism, my explanation won't cover the full extent and complexity of the concept but will solely address it in relation to Brazil and this thesis' scope.

American societies as it contributes to an ecological crisis that has both social and environmental impact.

The socioeconomic and environmental discourses surrounding extractivism are even more challenging concerning authoritarian regimes. First of all, denialism in post-truth neoliberal authoritarian governance has been linked to the rejection of environmental politics that are based on scientific truths. As mentioned before, the denial of truths exonerates oneself from not dealing with a crisis, is a form of risk management or is a power tool to legitimize alternative facts (McGoey, 2019). An example of this is Trump's anti-environmental politics. Just inaugurated to office in 2016, he withdrew from the Paris Agreement, appointed anti-climate officials and cut environmental budgets. His arguments for calling climate change a 'hoax' and his anti-environmental politics are formed by neoliberal economic reasoning. He acted in favor of the local American economy – "America first!" - and his traditional republican followers are affiliated with the oil industries and other large neoliberal companies (Zhang et. al., 2017).

Neimark et. al. (2019, p.617) also argue that climate change framing ensembles powerful institutions, actors and capital surrounding the political economy of oil. McCarthy (2019) further links extractivism with authoritarian values and behavior concerning resource nationalism. One of the values of authoritarianism in section 2.2 speaks of group conformity against the Other. In terms of extraction, authoritarian resource nationalism means that 'the resources are ours, don't say we can't exploit them'. This resonates with Trump's argument that the Paris Agreement is bad for 'our economy' thereby clearly distinguishing between 'them' and 'us'. Another value of authoritarianism is loyalty which resonates with Trump's oracular power when denying climate change. By providing alternative facts, that are backed up by big neoliberal players, Trump legitimizes his anti-environmental policies and reinforces powerful neoliberal practices. The authoritarian crisis and denialism in neoliberalism thus contributes to ecological crisis in neoliberalism that causes irreversible damage to local (indigenous) communities and the(ir) living environment. This is why neoliberal authoritarianism increases the vulnerability of both society and the environment.

2.3 DISASTER CAPITALISM

The increased vulnerability as result of neoliberal authoritarianism and denialism has far reaching consequences when a sudden shock occurs which can turn into a disaster. A disaster is often associated with a natural hazard, such as an earthquake, tsunami or pandemic. Though, the vulnerability of society is what defines the magnitude of a disaster. This is for example visible in the difference between the number of deaths by an earthquake – collapsing buildings etc. - versus the casualties that result from that earthquake - dehydration, sickness, shortage of food and water, lack of health care structures etc. Wisner et. al. (2004) define vulnerability by all of society's social, political and economic structures. This includes the before mentioned neoliberalism and neoliberal authoritarianism. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the most 'advanced' countries like the US and UK performed the worst

because they were insufficiently prepared, in terms of health care supplies, as a result of years of government privatization policies (Saad-Filho, 2020a; Jones and Hameiri, 2021). Though, efforts are not being made to reverse a crisis or disaster in the wake as a result of neoliberalism. Rather, disasters and crises such as COVID-19 and the climate crisis are perceived as business opportunities which relates to Naomi Klein's (2007) concept *disaster capitalism*.

Disaster Capitalism describes how a shock or crisis is used by neoliberal leaders and institutions to use the confusion of the moment to further privatize and capitalize public services (Klein, 2007). Klein's example below perfectly illustrates a disaster in Honduras as a result of a hurricane which is exploited by 'benevolent' aid-givers in Washington:

In the two months after [hurricane] Mitch struck, with the country still knee-deep in rubble, corpses and mud, the Honduran congress passed laws allowing the privatization of airports, seaports and highways and fast-tracked plans to privatize the state telephone company, the national electric company and parts of the water sector. It overturned progressive land-reform laws, making it far easier for foreigners to buy and sell property, and rammed through a radically pro-business mining law (drafted by industry) that lowered environmental standards and made it easier to evict people from homes that stood in the way of new mines. (Klein, 2007, p. 395).

Fletcher (2012) calls this phenomenon capitalizing on chaos, which comes down to making money out of a crisis situation. Within the climate crisis, new business opportunities are visible in the commodification of natural resources, such as the carbon market. A previously external entity, nature and natural resources, are now turned into a market commodity that can be traded, bought and used for making profit. Thus, a crisis can be used for increased financialization and capitalization of society. And governments actively contribute to this by using the confusion during a crisis to push through neoliberal policies. Klein (2007) talks about the privatization of education during the crisis surrounding Katrina hurricane, but also mentions US president Trump when referring to coronavirus capitalism who pushed through several legislations in favor of large companies (Klein, 2020). Also, subsidies during the pandemic have not been distributed evenly. For example, polluting airlines have been given lots of subsidies, while employees with flexible contracts in mostly the hospitality sector were laid off (Sullivan and Wolff, 2021). This example not only shows the political preference for financially important sectors, but also supports climate change in the long run. As a result, neoliberal (financial) actors become more powerful and further strengthen neoliberal structures at the expense of the most vulnerable in the society and the environment.

On top of vulnerability to a crisis and capitalizing on crisis, authoritarian regimes add another layer in the form of denialism. Just like in the climate crisis, the seriousness of COVID-19 has been debated by authoritarian and far-right political figures. Bolsonaro in Brazil, Trump in the US, Johnson in the UK and Baudet in the Netherlands, all deliberately refute scientific epidemiology advice. Not because they take in other considerations, but because they openly doubt the seriousness of the virus. Falkenbach and Greer (2021) mention that all populist radical right politicians they researched responded the same: denial of the seriousness of the virus or distracting from the pandemic by focusing on themes like migration and security. Thus, on top of the current health crisis, this type of behavior has led to even more deaths that could have been prevented, especially among the most

vulnerable groups (Orsini and Ortega, 2020). Saad-Filho (2020) perfectly sums up the role of authoritarian leaders in the context of societal crisis: "They cannot stop or their popularity must decline, since they cannot resolve actual problems: they can only perform (p.3)". This indicates that authoritarian neoliberalism inevitable results in further political, economic, social and/or, ecological crisis.

2.4 CONCLUSION

To conclude, denialism within society is a multi-faceted concept that can be studied from multiple disciplines. A sociological and psychological approach relates denialism to an intentional or unconscious blocking of too shocking or disturbing facts. Norgaard's (2011) double reality concept explains that knowing facts is another reality to the reality of living your daily life and actions taken. This could be related to people's voting behavior. Scholars with a political economic approach relate denialism within a post-truth context to authoritarian governance strategy. Denial of facts could be a tool for these governments to avoid liability, generates power and support for its leaders or act in favor of economic incentives.

As argued, (authoritarian) populism and authoritarian neoliberalism are a responses to crises in neoliberalism. This crisis is complex and situation dependent but parallels can be drawn according to theory. Economic and political crisis in neoliberalism drive people towards an Authoritarian reflex or Fix because they desire political change. Established political parties are too intertwined with the capitalist system that they cannot offer an alternative. This is why populist parties attract voters for new, strong, charismatic, authoritarian leaders. Though, these leaders often embrace authoritarian neoliberal policies which reinforce neoliberal structures instead of providing alternatives. These crises in neoliberalism eat its own neoliberal tail by weakening sociological, economic, political and ecological reproduction on which its foundations are build. The social and ecological reproduction is interrupted, becomes more vulnerable and contributes to disaster prone societies.

It is argued that denialism could also be linked to people's voting behavior. Cultural backlash and economic insecurity that result from neoliberalism provide the context for the reality of people's everyday life and the incentive behind populist voting behavior. By choosing for authoritarian leadership, denialism is involved. Voters consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly deny the paradox of authoritarian neoliberalism and contribute to this by voting from their own everyday reality. At the same time the denialism of voters mirrors the opinion of authoritarian leaders who exert their power of denialism in their favor. In line with other scholars I therefore argue that denialism can indeed be an authoritarian neoliberal governance strategy, either purposely or aimlessly pursued that adds to a society's vulnerability by undermining democracy and destructing socioeconomic structures. Neoliberal governance strategies further contribute to vulnerability by extractivist practices and the responses to the climate crisis and the covid-19 pandemic. Authoritarian regimes, denialism and distraction result in worsened disasters as millions of deaths could have been

prevented. Denying climate change and scientific facts for the benefit of economic opportunities relates to the concept of disaster capitalism which is profiting of a crisis. A crisis hereby becomes a business opportunity instead of a risk and attracts the private sector that takes over public services. Not only is a crisis profitable for the neoliberal market, a crisis and its confusion is also used to push through legislation that allows for further neoliberal practices. Thus, denialism is a governance strategy that has emerged among authoritarian neoliberal leaders as a result of crises in neoliberalism. At the same time, denialism also contributes to reinforcing neoliberal structures that result in deepening crises in neoliberalism. Vulnerability and real crisis that emerge are perceived as business opportunities and excuses to further privatize public services through disaster capitalism. This vicious circle is reinforced by denialism of authoritarian leaders who silence alternatives and who continue strengthening the neoliberal capitalist system.

3. CRISES IN NEOLIBERALISM IN BRAZIL

This chapter focusses on the Crises in Neoliberalism (CIN) in Brazil and starts with an analysis of the (so-called) post-neoliberalism under the Left political movement in Latin America at the beginning of the 21st century, and its links to extractivism. Secondly, the election of Bolsonaro and the rise of populism and authoritarianism is explained, drawing on the theories detailed in chapter 2. This chapter concludes with a summary of authoritarian neoliberalism and the crises it creates in Brazil which is a build-up for the next chapter on denialism and disaster capitalism.

3.1 TURN OF THE CENTURY: PROGRESSIVE POST-NEOLIBERALISM IN BRAZIL

This section analyses the rise of Jair Bolsonaro towards the presidency in Brazil and how this can be explained as the unfolding of neoliberal authoritarianism.

POST-NEOLIBERALISM IN BRAZIL

This section explores the transformation of politics in Brazil that led to the election of right-wing populist Bolsonaro. Before Bolsonaro, the majority of Latin American countries, including Brazil, had elected left-wing parties. This movement originates from the 1998 election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela which has been called populist socialism and often viewed as part of a larger *post-neoliberalism* in Latin America (Macdonald and Ruckert, 2009). As seen in the previous chapter, populism is a reaction to the failure of neoliberalism which has been explained by the US as an example. In Latin America, post-neoliberalism was a reaction to neoliberalism that dominated Latin America since the crisis in 1970s and 1980s (Taylor, 2009). Thus, a comparable reaction has been visible in most countries in Latin America, though very different at the same time. Though, even if post-neoliberalism refers to one movement, in practice the situation per nation varied from radical to responsible social-democratic. In Brazil, post-neoliberalism took form under the President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva and his Workers Party - Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) - in 2002 (Macdonald and Ruckert, 2009). Hereafter denoted by 'Lula'.

Post-neoliberalism refers to the search for and range of change in policy direction, breaking with the past and commitment to progressive socialist policies that aimed to address poverty and inequality as a result of neoliberal practices while remaining fiscally traditional (Macdonald and Ruckert, 2009; Heidrich and Tussie, 2009). Characteristics are state-led economic stimulations and transformation to improve the domestic market – especially in natural resource sectors - and improve democratic practices and institutions to improve social equality. And with success, between 2003 and 2008 the Brazilian economy flourished from a so-called *commodity boom*, of iron, ethanol, and soy, which allowed the government to increase social spending and pay off debts (Antunes, 2019; Schmalz and Ebenau, 2012; Saad-Filho and Boffo, 2020). Data of 2014/2015 shows that Brazil became the largest extractivist on the continent, reaching for example the level of 440 million tons of minerals (90 percent correspond to iron ores), and 95.5 million tons of soybean (Gudynas, 2018). As a result, Lula was re-elected in 2006.

NEO-EXTRACTIVISM

The Brazilian economic success due to Lula's progressive post-neoliberal policies are strongly related to extractivism, explained in section 2.3. The development trajectories of Latin American nations have been heavily dependent on the large-scale extraction and trade of natural resources which have resulted in social and ecological degradation. Also in Brazil this commodity boom happened which can be argued to be an ethical trade-off between neoliberal extractivism and Lula's progressive social policies. Scholars mention a decrease of poverty and increased economic development in Latin America due to *neo-extractivism* (Merino, 2019; Burchardt and Dietz, 2014). At the same time extractivism causes negative social and ecological consequences. Neo-extractivism relates to the series of new development projects based on large scale extraction of raw materials under the progressive post-neoliberal governments in Latin America. The state plays a more active role in the redistribution of surplus from extraction into social projects (Gudynas, 2009). An important difference with classic extractivism is the conversion of privatized export into a state-market collaborative commodity export and the use of surplus for social impact (Burchardt and Dietz, 2014). So, basically it came down to Lula building alliances with big extractivist companies that increased extractivism, while using the resulting economic wealth to improve social conditions.

POST-NEOLIBERALISM OR PROGRESSIVE NEOLIBERALISM?

Following Fraser's (2019) argument on left-wing populism and the previous section on extractivism, it can be debated whether post-neoliberalism under Lula breaks from neoliberalism and its extractivist practices. In line with what Burchardt and Dietz's (2014) analysis, it is evident that Brazil under Lula still continued to be a neoliberal economy of extraction, extractivism was even intensified. However, opposed to the classical neoliberal model, extractivist practices were regulated by both the public and the private sector. Taylor (2009) also argues that despite the changes under Lula, neoliberalism remained the hegemonic system and reshaped power relations. Due to the political concessions Lula had to make with the opposition, changes were restricted. Another reason for limited change, are the profits from extractivism that were needed to fund the social policies (Stewart et. al., 2020).

As mentioned in section 2.2, Fraser (2019) uses Gramsci's notions of recognition and distribution to explain the differences between progressive and reactionary populism and neoliberalism. Analyzing the post-neoliberal movement in Latin America, including Brazil, it becomes clear that post-neoliberalism mirrors progressive neoliberalism looking at distribution and recognition which is visible in table 4. At the same time I would argue that the post-neoliberal movement is a progressive reactionary movement to previous neoliberal practices. Post-neoliberalism could thus also be described as reactionary progressive neoliberalism. A combination of state and market-led extractivist development trajectories distribute goods and income according to neoliberal market principles, while progressive socialist policies recognize the marginalized population and are incorporated.

	Distribution	Recognition	Political leaders
Progressive Neoliberalism	Neoliberal market distribution. Wealth and value to the upper class Hollowing out working- and middle class	Incorporate values of new social movements Diversify social hierarchy, not demolish it	Reagan, Clintons, Obama Democrats
Post-Neoliberalism / Reactionary progressive neoliberalism	Combination of both state and market-led Neo-Extractivism. Wealth to upper class and state. Surplus used for social impact.	Progressive social policies to improve social equality	Lula, Rousseff
Reactionary Authoritarian Populism	Increased neoliberal market distribution through privatization and extractivism. Wealth and value to the upper class Hollowing out working- and middle class	Exclusive authoritarian structures based on nationalism and protectionist racism, pro-Christian views	Bolsonaro, Trump

Table 4 Progressive and Post Neoliberalism (Fraser, 2019)

Nevertheless, in referring to the earlier mentioned trade-off, Lula's progressive social policies did contribute to improved socio-economic conditions in Brazil such as the establishment of minimum wages, increased access to (higher) education and the *Programma bolsa familia* which improved household purchasing power (Stewart et. al., 2020). Schmalz and Ebenau (2012) even believe these changes to be the reason why Brazil swiftly recovered after the Global Economic (neoliberal) Crisis in 2008.

However, the failure of the left-wing movement in Brazil to address and change the root problems of neoliberalism, while pursuing extractivist practices, together with the economic recession around 2014, inspired a reactionary authoritarian neoliberal movement under Bolsonaro. It has been argued that big neoliberal projects, such as mining, soy and hydrocarbons, stood in the way of decreasing social inequality (Katz, 2018). Saad-Filho and Boffo (2020) further mention that ...'political stability depended on the delivery of gains to almost everyone, which (given Brazil's low productivity growth) was possible only by riding a worldwide tide of prosperity' (p.3). This explains why as soon as the economic crisis of 2008 hit Brazil in 2014, this system failed.

3.2. BRAZILIAN AUTHORITARIAN FIX: FROM POST-NEOLIBERALISM TO AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERALISM

When Dilma Rousseff became president in 2011, the popularity of the PT party declined, which eventually led to the election of Bolsonaro in 2018. So what happened in these four years?

High expenditures for the Olympics and the World Cup angered the middle classes which resulted in the 2013 June protests which reflected the frustration within Brazilian society (Saad-Filho and Boffo, 2020). Despite the critique, Dilma was re-elected for a second term in 2014. But her position was fragile. A negative GDP growth and economic recession hit Brazil due to the Great Economic Crisis (GEC) Furthermore, during the re-election campaign, the PT had focused on the political left. Yet, during government formations, Rousseff appointed neoliberal elites, such as banker Joaquim Levy (Saad-Filho and Boffo, 2020). The need for fiscal austerity as a result of the economic recession, the political value abandonment and dismantling of public spending by the new government, led to a drastic decline of Rousseff's popularity. The final blow came in 2014, when the Office of Public Prosecutions and the Federal Police launched a corruption investigation which led to a disputable parliamentary coup, Dilma's disposition and impeachment in 2016. The Carwash corruption scandal – Operação Lava Jato – includes bribery of key staff of the state oil company Petrobras. Allegedly, the bribes ended up with members of the PT. After the impeachment of Rousseff, her vice-president Temer took over until the next presidential elections in 2018 which were won by Bolsonaro (Antunes, 2019; Stewart et. al., 2020).

Saad-Filho and Boffo (2020) display that the Carwash corruption scandal must be understood within Brazil's political economic history of corruption and extractivism. By incriminating the PT with a corruption scandal, Brazilian democratic politics itself was attacked and seen as corrupt. As discussed in chapter 2, page 18, populist leaders play into these sentiments of elite corruption which is exactly what happened in Brazil. Rapid politicization of right-wing movement used these accusations and added fuel to the fire to label the PT as criminal and corrupt against their own anti-corruption, moral virtue and social order values. The next section will further analyze and unpack the dynamics behind the rise of right-wing authoritarian populism in the context of Brazilian authoritarian neoliberalism by using the theoretical concepts of chapter 2.

AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM

The discourse surrounding the rise of authoritarian populism in mainly Western society was analyzed in chapter 2. Relating to these theories, the rise of right-wing authoritarian populism is discussed in this section. First, Bolsonaro is introduced, followed by an analysis of Brazilian authoritarian populism. Hereafter, authoritarian neoliberalism is discussed in relation to the Brazilian crises in neoliberalism.

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Bolsonaro, or the tropical Brazilian Trump, was born in 1955 near São Paulo as third of six children (Phillips, 2018 April 19). He attended the Agulhas Negras Military Academy and served for 17 years during which he rose to the rank of Captain. In 1988 he exchanged the military for politics when he was elected into Rio de Janeiro city council. Two years later he entered the federal Chamber of Deputies as representative of Rio de Janeiro where he worked in various committees and multiple themes. He shifted multiple times from political party but eventually was elected president with the Social Liberal Party in 2018 (Wallenfeldt, 2021). His military background had a large impact on his political career and presidency. Stewart et. al. (2020) refer to him as a *Caudillo*, a Spanish or Latin American military dictator who wields both political and military power, which seems not far off regarding his background and ruling style which will be further explained later on. Also, his views have been often labelled sexist, homophobic, racist and conservative (Barros and Silva, 2020). With a stern voice, Bolsonaro mentions the importance of conservative values such as family and Christianity during a national speech (Bolsonaro, 2019). In Chapter 4, Bolsonaro's quotes and speeches are unpacked further with regard to denial and the discrimination of indigenous populations.

AUTHORITARIAN FIX

A first clear visible component of populism in Brazil is the reactionary component as defined by Fraser (2019). Earlier this chapter, the rise of the post-neoliberalism movement in Latin America and in Brazil under Lula was mentioned as a reaction against neoliberal extractivist practices. I argued in line with other scholars that post-neoliberalism shows similar characteristics to progressive neoliberalism as the continued neoliberal and neo-extractivist practices prevented real social change. The corruption scandal *Lava Jato* (Carwash) and resulting political vacuum plays an important role in the rapid politicization and ideologization of the right. The carwash scandal shattered the last trust in the progressive PT party. It is assumed that the key staff of oil company Petrobras was bribed to secure resources and services. Allegedly these bribes were passed on to the political parties which inspired massive protests in 2013. Also, the PT reacted quite hostile to these protests due to their ties to large enterprises and bankers (Antunes, 2019; Katz, 2018). Thus, the failure of progressive policies under Lula to provide an alternative way of neoliberal distribution and recognition in combination with the economic crisis and corruption scandals led eventually to the popularity of an Authoritarian Fix, the reactionary populism of Bolsonaro. In table 4 on page 28 an overview can be found of Brazil's political systems under Lula and Bolsonaro defined by distribution and recognition (Fraser, 2019).

As discussed in chapter 2, populism as political rhetoric style focusses on first-order principles about 'who should rule' and 'who has the legitimate power to rule'. Also, the three core characteristics of populism discussed are: 1) focus on people, particular community with the aim of exclude minority groups, 2) betrayal of the people by the elite who are corrupt and abuse power and 3) the power needs to be transferred back to the people

(Deiwik, 2009). To answer the question who should rule, shows the authoritarian character of Brazil's populism. Not only because the June 2013 protests asked for military dictatorship, but also Bolsonaro himself rules according to authoritarian military principles. The authoritarian second-order principles are also visible in Brazil (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

In the campaign that led up to the elections in 2018, Bolsonaro and his party saw '...their chance to announce loudly their exacerbated hatred for the communists, their disgust toward the poor and black, their excuses for misogyny and femicide, and their efforts to exterminate LGBT and indigenous communities' (Antunes, 2019). Also newspaper articles and other scholars mention his ableism and other statements that witness discrimination and aversion to marginalized, weak and indigenous people (Orsini and Ortega, 2020; Phillips, 2020, March 25). This clearly shows that the authoritarian characteristics of Bolsonaro's governance as discussed before (Chapter 2, page 20) focusses on traditional and conventional neoliberal values. Also, exclusion politics are visible that can be linked to the authoritarian core value of conformity. Furthermore, Bolsonaro has transformed the government into an authoritarian neoliberal government by installing military ministers and business owners on important parliamentary places (Stewart et. al., 2020). Thus, to answer both questions of authoritarian populism theory (Norris and Inglehart, 2019): *Who should rule and how should it be done in Brazil?* (militarized) Authoritarian neoliberalism is that answer.

AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERALISM

Authoritarian neoliberalism in Brazil reinforces and deepens neoliberal structures, while removing democratic systems. As a result, the crises in neoliberalism become enlarged which I denote by crises in authoritarian neoliberalism (CIAN).

The political crisis in neoliberalism that entails the political decline of the PT resulted in the election of Bolsonaro with the hope that he would bring positive change to Brazil. Yet, Bolsonaro has been intensifying neoliberal practices that result in social and ecological degradation. As briefly touched upon before, it is important to understand the political situation prior to Bolsonaro elected president in 2018. Multiple authors declare that authoritarianism already started under vice-president Michel Temer who "under the pretense of fighting corruption, undermined the constitution, normalized a state of exception, brought the armed forces back into politics, protected gangster-politicians, and imposed an accumulation strategy based on an unprecedentedly exclusionary, authoritarian, and internationalized variety of neoliberalism" (Saad-Filho, 2020b, p.21; Antunes, 2019).

Saad-Filho and Boffo (2020) mention the political corruption of democracy under Bolsonaro, thereby referring to the dictatorship in the 1960s. This is in line with Bruff's (2014) argument that authoritarian neoliberalism is rooted in the reconfiguring of the state into a less democratic entity (p.113). Apart from eroding democratic structures, neoliberal structures are strengthened. Since Bolsonaro came into office in 2019, his has been pushing through neoliberal policies and expanded capitalist extractivist markets at the expense of

social and environmental protective legislation (Boffo et. al., 2018). It becomes clear that Bolsonaro is a result of Crises in Neoliberalism (CIN). The political crisis and economic crisis resulted in the election and establishment of authoritarian neoliberalism in Brazil. Bolsonaro's governance since 2019 is the embodiment of authoritarian neoliberalism and under his rule, the crises of authoritarian neoliberalism (CIAN) become visible. In the next chapter I aim to show that these enhanced authoritarian neoliberal structures, accompanied by Bolsonaro's denialism, even more contribute to the magnitude of crises in authoritarian neoliberalism, by looking at two examples: the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and COVID-19 in Brazil.

3.3 CONCLUSION

The rise of authoritarian neoliberalism in Brazil is a result of the Crises In Neoliberalism. The political and economic crises in neoliberalism, direct people towards an authoritarian populist Fix, which is visible in Brazil. Post-neoliberalism under Lula failed to change neoliberal structures by focusing on neo-extractivist practices, while improving social conditions. Post-neoliberalism therefore shows similarities with Fraser's (2019) progressive neoliberalism in terms of distribution and recognition. The extractivist commodity boom under Lula is an example of and evidence for a neoliberal market distribution. This Brazilian case further highlights the core value of the neoliberal market, which is to prioritize capital, and not people. So, by working with the neoliberal global market, Lula's progressive change was already limited and fragile at the start. An economic recession, criminalization of progressive politics shows a neoliberal change from progressive neoliberalism to authoritarian neoliberalism with Bolsonaro as Authoritarian Fix. Instead of working on restoring Brazil's society, he displays authoritarian neoliberalism by privatization and militarizing the government. Crises In Authoritarian Neoliberalism (CIAN) – the increased inequality, poverty, vulnerability as a result of deepening Brazilian political and economic crises in neoliberalism - hereby contribute to a continuing and worsening loop of crises that reinforce and deepen neoliberal structures which in the next chapter will show by increased extractivism and the dismantling of democratic and environmental legislation. By looking at the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and COVID-19 crisis in Brazil, I will show that denialism and disaster capitalism are part of the crises in authoritarian neoliberalism and have far reaching consequences.

4. BRAZILIAN CRISES OF COVID AND CLIMATE CAPITALISM

So far the thesis has shown that due to Crises In Neoliberalism (CIN), authoritarian neoliberalism has emerged in Brazil. CIAN is the current expression of CIN and refers to even bigger inequality and deepening crisis of political systems and neoliberal economies under neoliberalism. This crisis in the system itself, shapes the conditions for real socio-economic, ecological and health crises that contribute to the reproduction of neoliberalism. This chapter first displays the two cases: 1) the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and 2) the Covid-19 crisis, followed by a section on the role of denialism in these two cases. The chapter ends with the concept of disaster capitalism and extractivism applied to the COVID and climate crisis, followed by a conclusion.

4.1 THE 2019 AMAZON DAY OF FIRE AND COVID-19

'O DIA DE FOGO' IN THE AMAZON

The Amazon Day of Fire – *o dia de fogo* - is a name given by the media that refers to the event of purposely fire-setting on August 10 and 11, 2019. On this day Brazilian farmers, loggers and land-grabbers planned to and succeeded in illegally setting fires to Amazonian pasture and trees in Pará, Northern Brazil. The INPE (Brazilian space research institute) satellites measured 431 fires in the Jamaxim National Forest and the Nascentes Serra do Cachimbo Biological Reserve, all surrounding the highway BR-163. These areas surround the four cities Novo Progresso, Altamira, Sao Félix do Xingu and Itaituba (Camargos, 2020, March 24; Folha, 2019 August 14). I would even argue that the event of 2019 Amazon Day of Fire can be linked to proceedings of the INPE publication on increased fires in June and July 2019 which inspired an international reaction. The Deter data (Deforestation Detection in Real Time) in the report shows an increase of 90% deforestation in June 2019 and 278% in July 2019 compared to the year before (Watanabe,

Timeline Day of Fire	
jul-19	Publication Deter INPE data
jul-19	Bolsonaro doubts INPE data
jul-20	Galvão has critique towards Bolsonaro
aug-01	Bolsonaro threatens to fire Galvão
aug-02	INPE director Galvão fired
aug-10	Amazon Day of Fire

Table 4 Timeline Day of Fire

2019). This created a conflict between the Bolsonaro government and the INPE, wherefore director Galvão was sacked on August 2, 2019. In the timeline in table 4 this can be visualized. This timeline displays Bolsonaro's particular behaviour concerning the Amazon Day of Fire which will be closely looked at later on. But it also shows the events that according to newspaper Folha (2019, August 14) moved the fire setters to show their support for Bolsonaro and willingness to light fires on August 10, 2019. Their willingness to do this relates to the earlier mentioned economy of extractivism and the agricultural sector offering incentives to convert rainforest into productive and fertile agricultural grounds for the global market (Fujisaka et. al., 1996). This will be explained later on.

After the 2019 Amazon day of fire, critique arose from various angles. First of all from international actors. Both Germany and Norway suspended their donations to the Brazilian Amazon Fund and France and Ireland set trade blockages (Ismar, 2019; Boffey, 2019; Borger et. al., 2019). Secondly, before August 10, IBAMA (Brazilian Environmental and Renewable Natural Resources Institute) was notified of this event but no actions were undertaken to prevent the fire setting due to the lack of support from military police (Shalders, 2019). Furthermore, two years after the Amazon Day of Fire no arrests or prosecutions have occurred which Camargos (2020) argues have led to other fires. Lastly, the local journalist from Novo Progresso, Adécio Piran, who first reported on the 'Amazon Day of Fire' has been threatened. Also, violence and threats against environmental activists and journalists are common in the Pará region (CPJ, 2019). Placing the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire in a larger context, reports show that the Amazon has been under increased pressure since the political unrest in 2016 (Monteiro, 2019). Large companies that are connected to the extractivism of Brazil's natural resources have been pushing against environmental regulations, protected natural reserves and indigenous habitats. And while discussions about the Amazon continued, a new threat entered the world: COVID-19.

COVID-19 CRISIS IN BRAZIL

Since 2019 the whole world has been in the grasp of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS_CoV-2) which originated in China and still spreads and mutates anno 2021. On the 25th of February 2020, the first COVID case was reported in Brazil (Souza et. al., 2020). When researching the COVID-19 crisis in Brazil, lots of newspaper articles speak of Bolsonaro not taking the virus seriously, him lacking national safety measurements, as well as high death rates and vaccine corruption scandals (Phillips, 2020, March 23; 25; April 13; Paton Walsh et. al., 2020; Philips and Barretto Briso, 2020; Brasilia AFP, 2020). The described situation resulted in more than 530,000 deaths and over 19 million confirmed cases by July 2021. In terms of deaths, Brazil ranks second after the US and at the moment of writing ranks first in terms of weekly death rates (WHO, 2021). This large number of deaths and infections have resulted in a burnt out health care system and mass burial sites.

Additionally, governmental policy remains divided between the central government and state governors which hinders a united public health leadership (Orsini and Ortega, 2020). Not only has the government response influenced the COVID-19 situation in Brazil, moreover it highlights social vulnerability, because the pandemic impacts some people more than others. Between 12.7 and 18.2 million Brazilians are living in poor conditions in the *Favelas*, informal settlements, where access to basic public services and hygienic measurements were already often insufficient (de Freitas et. al., 2020). Also indigenous communities are more affected by the pandemic. Brazil counts 896,917 indigenous people. Due to little health care and the already present risk of diabetes, malnutrition, hepatitis B and tuberculosis, these communities are more vulnerable to the virus. Additionally, the increase in illegal exploitation of their living environment by miners, loggers, etc., who also bring in covid,

further worsens this situation (Cupertino et. al., 2020; Palamim et. al., 2020). This will be touched upon more later on.

4.2 DENIAL OF 2019 AMAZON DAY OF FIRE AND COVID-19

Based on the evidence presented in the literature and media, we can argue that part of Bolsonaro's behavior concerning the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and COVID-19 can be linked to a governance strategy of *denial* that assists his authoritarian neoliberal governance. This obstructs crisis response and contributes to Crises In Authoritarian Neoliberalism (CIAN), the political, social-economical, ecological and health crises in Brazil. Following the main question, this section explains why Bolsonaro would demonstrate denialism in response to the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis. This section starts with an analysis of denialism in relation to the two cases, followed by possible denial incentives. The last part focusses on the economic incentive of denial – extractivism – as a bridge to section 4.3 on disaster capitalism.

2019 AMAZON DAY OF FIRE DENIAL

To return to Cohen's (2001, p.7) definition of denialism as I explored on page 15, it can occur as 1) *literal denialism* – it is wrong, it did not happen -, 2) *interpretive denialism* – facts are not denied, but given a different meaning - or 3) *implicatory denialism* – both facts and interpretation are not denied, but the implications that (should) follow are themselves denied or distorted. Looking at both academic and other information sources it illustrates that most of Bolsonaro's behavior concerning the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis in Brazil is *literal* denialism – the fact or knowledge is not true; it did not happen.

This is certainly true for the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire – the name for intentional fire settings on August 10 and 11 – an event which Bolsonaro has denied since its occurrence. He denied the validity of the INPE scientific deforestation data, fired the person who published the data and challenged international critics to fly over to see for themselves (Reuters, 2020; Brant, 2019). Furthermore, Bolsonaro spread lies that contradict his denial response by blaming environmental NGOs and US actor Leonardo DiCaprio for setting fire to the Amazon (BBC, 2019; Deutsch, 2021). Bolsonaro also calls upon international leaders not to interfere as Brazil is able to protect its own Amazon during a VN speech:

"...our' Amazon is essential for our history, our identity, biodiversity and natural resources. Protection is our duty. Amazon fires are part of our environment due to our dry climate. This year's burns are no different. Spreading unfounded data in and out of Brazil does not help the problem, it lends itself for political use and misinformation. It cannot be a source of international sanctions..." (Bolsonaro [video, English subtitles], 2019)

In this speech he not only denies the intentional fire setting, he also insinuates that other people lie, the data is untrue and that the Amazon is 'ours' which illustrates interpretive denialism. The fires are not per se denied by Bolsonaro, but the meaning is. Bolsonaro denies the intentional fire setting and he denies the truth of the data published, hereby shifting the focus from the Amazon fires, to a message of 'mind your own business' and the

media spreading untruths. Further, looking at the Amazon Day of Fire in a larger context of increased fire-setting in 2019 it is dubious having a neoliberal such as Ricardo Salles as Minister of Environment. Salles is a key figure in the deforestation and dismantling of protective legislation concerning the Amazon since 2019. He met with the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) who lobby for the denial of climate change (Phillips, 2019, September 13).

The denial of climate change by the former Brazilian minister of the Environment Ricardo Salles clearly shows the anti-scientific attitude of Bolsonaro's government concerning the environment. Moreover, the Bolsonaro administration literally attacks the environment and its protective institutions. Deutsch (2021) connects Bolsonaro's allegations against environmental NGOs and DiCaprio to the overall phenomenon of the Bolsonaro administration who is skeletonizing environmental administrative bodies (p.7). To me, this is a crystal clear example of Bolsonaro using the governance strategy of denialism politically to discredit opposing structures that he wants to dismantle. Hereby, I mean that the environmental NGOs and Leonardi DiCaprio are both advocates for environmental protection. This hinders and opposes Bolsonaro's extractivist agenda. So, by dismantling this opposing structure, he gains (more) control over the natural resource which links to authoritarian neoliberalism.

COVID-19 DENIAL

Looking at the COVID-19 crisis in Brazil, I would argue that both *literal and interpretive denialism* are clearly visible. In the table overview below, random various quotes and indirect information sources show Bolsonaro's behavior concerning COVID-19 crisis in Brazil:

1	"COVID-19 is a little flu" (Paton Walsh et. Al., 2020),
2	"We are thinking of a strategy to best deal with the coronavirus, but that hysteria needs to be prevented. (...) The media does the opposite, they spread panic (...) and feeling of dread. Jobs must be kept, families sustained. (...) State and municipal authorities must give up the scorched-earth policy (...) of mass quarantine, businesses closed and public transportation closings. Risk group for the virus is above 60, (...) so closing of schools is not necessary. 90% of infected does not develop symptoms. (...) I won't become ill due to my athletic background. (...)Hospital in Sao Paul looks for efficacy of Chloroquine treatment. (...) I believe in God to stand by the doctors and scientists" (Bolsonaro [video-file], 2020 March 25)
3	"COVID-19 is a media trick. In my particular case, because of my background as an athlete, I wouldn't need to worry if I was infected by the virus. I wouldn't feel anything or at the very worst it would be like a little flu or a bit of a cold" (Phillips, 2020 March 23; 25).
4	He encourages people to go out without a mask, is defiant about keeping distance which poses a bad example (Phillips, 2020, April 13)
5	His response is anti-scientific (Phillips and Barretto Briso, 2020)
6	He is skeptical about the working of vaccines and does not want one himself. It could turn you into alligator or result in bearded women all you know (Brasilia AFP, 2020)
7	"The most pernicious effects [of the virus] are being felt among communities already experiencing marginalisation, namely Black and Indigenous communities" (Orsini and Ortega, 2020, p.1263)

Table 5 Selection of Bolsonaro's response to COVID-19

The table above shows the spreading of lies and denial of the seriousness of the virus according to scientific data. In his speech on the COVID situation (number 2 in the table) Bolsonaro is critical towards the media and preventative measurements. This is in line with what Orsini and Ortega (2020) mean by the polarization of national and state governments. In comparison with the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire, Bolsonaro does not completely deny the COVID-19 pandemic itself, but moreover the meaning of it, which can be called anti-scientific interpretive denialism. It needs to be mentioned that regulations concerning COVID-19 are to some extent interpretative in itself and have varied across states which might be an interesting study in itself. Yet, Bolsonaro's interpretation of the regulations can be characterized as opposing (from others within the government), anti-scientific as he disputes scientific advice and purposely obstructs some measurements with literal denialism. This is visible in him attacking media who report differently, other state authorities who decide differently and his denial of vaccination effectiveness which is illustrated in quote number 2.

Orsini and Ortega (2020) call the ignorance of Bolsonaro concerning the COVID-19 crisis a deliberate 'non-governance'. The deliberate denial of scientific facts concerning COVID-19 they argue is beneficial for Bolsonaro's regime as it challenges the truth and enables Bolsonaro to shape the truth to his will. This is in line with the political reason for denial as explained in chapter 2, page 16 that denial as part of Bolsonaro's authoritarian governance allows him to gain power by shaping the truth. Furthermore, denial of scientific COVID-19 data allow him to remove opponents. This time the opponents are two health ministers (medically educated) who he removes within a month to be temporary replaced by a military general who enabled treatments – use of chloroquine - that have not scientifically been confirmed (Orsini and Ortega, 2020). The use of denialism as a political tool is thus again visible in the removal of opponents which is a characteristic of authoritarian neoliberalism.

AUTHORITARIAN DENIALISM

The 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis illustrate that Bolsonaro uses denialism as part of a governance strategy to reinforce his neoliberal authoritarianist regime by increasing extractivist practices and dismantling opposing views. The following section will explain how the authoritarian governance of denialism contributes to the dismantling of opposing and democratic structures.

As touched upon in chapter 2, page 17, Bolsonaro's denialism, the dismantling of opponents and authoritarian neoliberalism are interrelated. Authoritarian neoliberalism seeks to reconfigure the state into a less democratic entity through attacking democratic structures like (political) opponents, media, rule of law, etc. (Bruff, 2014; McCarthy, 2014). Since the dismantling of opponents and democratic structures are part of authoritarian neoliberalism, denialism functions as a tool to achieve this. Denial of science and scientific facts during both events, allows Bolsonaro to shape truth, silence opposing voices, with the aim of strengthening his support and going against the established order (Norris and Inglehart, 2019, MacDonald, 2016).

McGoey (2012, 2019) further defines denialism as 1) exonerating oneself from responsibility, 2) avoiding liability, 3) generate support, 4) accumulation of capital (economic, political, natural) and 5) managing risks. The denialism of the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire certainly scores on most elements as does the COVID-19 crisis. By literal denial of the Amazon Day of Fire, Bolsonaro exonerates himself from and avoids liability of his responsibility to protect the Amazon from illegal fire setting and indirectly the worsening climate crisis. It provides him with the excuse for firing people who spread 'untruths'. The denial of the seriousness of COVID-19 and the spreading of untruths, such as that (allegedly) healthy, sporty people like himself are no match for the virus, displaces responsibility for the health crisis from the government towards the assumed to be unhealthy, at risk population. And, on top of that, the denial of the events gives him the excuse and distraction to increase illegal extractivist practices in the Amazon which will be explained further in section 4.3. The denial of illegal activities, environmental deregulation, seriousness of COVID-19 and obstructing measures and opponents are all part of Crises In Authoritarian Neoliberalism (CIAN). The next section briefly touches upon Brazil's social crisis in authoritarian neoliberalism as millions of livelihoods are endangered by Bolsonaro's authoritarian governance.

BRAZIL'S SOCIAL CRISIS IN AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERALISM

Both the denial of the Amazon and COVID-19 events contributed to an increased socio-economic and ecological crisis in Brazil which affects Brazil's already vulnerable population – indigenous communities, favelas, other minorities - the most. Due to this thesis' focus and enormity of this social crisis, this section will only explain the social impact for the indigenous communities.

In Brazil, 896,917 people are counted among the indigenous population who are dependent on the biodiversity of the Amazon forest for food or economic sustenance (Evangelista-Vale et. al., 2021; Palamim et. al., 2020). This population is thus directly negatively impacted by illegal fire setting and subsequent ecological degradation of the Amazon forest. But also COVID-19 contributes to the increased vulnerability of Brazil's traditional communities (Praeli, 2021).

Bolsonaro has been called the worst president for the indigenous communities in the Amazon (Watts, 2020). The president literally mentioned he views them as an obstacle to economic development and has been opening protected reserves to mining and agriculture business. This has led to a spike in resource conflicts and indigenous resistance (Menton et. al., 2021). During an interview with the Guardian, Yanomami David Kopenawa, an author, activist and Yanomami spokesperson says:

"(...) in the past year [2019] Yanomami lands (which stretch across Brazil's border with Venezuela) had been invaded by the biggest wave of illegal miners since the 1980s. "They are poisoning our rivers, killing our fish, and our people are starting to get sick with malaria again," (...) Although the president had made matters worse, he said, mining companies from Canada, China and Japan were behind the push for resources. "Our politicians are

selling our wealth. This brings no benefit to our people, just destruction. Who is getting rich? It's the foreigners. The big companies are behind this." (Watts, 2020)

Kopenawa shows that since Bolsonaro's presidency began in 2019, illegal activities in the Amazon have intentionally increased, not only causing ecological damage but also endangering indigenous livelihoods. Bolsonaro is to blame for this as he actively deregulates protective legislation in order to open up lands for extraction. For example, the decisions concerning protected reserves have been moved from the FUNAI (National Indigenous Affairs agency) to the Ministry of Agriculture (Jamasmie, 2019). The easier access to these lands is a double danger as illegal miners and loggers are also spreaders of diseases. This phenomenon has become even more problematic since the COVID-19 pandemic hit Brazil and counted 25,931 deaths in December 2020 (Praeli, 2021).

These traditional communities already have increased health risk due to the lack of access to health care facilities, medicines and increased smoke inhalation during fire season, but since the COVID-19 pandemic, they have been dealing with increased risk of contamination and increased risk to their living environments (Camargos, 2020). You could say they are faced with triple vulnerability: increased vulnerability under Bolsonaro's neoliberal policies, increased vulnerability under COVID-19, and increased vulnerability due to increased fire setting. Scholars have already referred to this tragedy as genocide by omission, or as 'necropolitics' (Orsini and Ortega, 2020; Menton et. al., 2021). I won't go further into these arguments, but they highlight the plight of especially indigenous communities in Brazil who are the real victims of all these crises in authoritarian neoliberalism and arguably intentional for the purposes of extractivism.

4.3 TOTAL EXTRACTIVISM AND CRISIS CAPITALISM

In this section I will go into Bolsonaro's (hidden) agenda of capitalizing on both the COVID-19 and climate crisis, using Klein's concept of disaster capitalism. In chapter 2 and 3 extractivism and neo-extractivism have been explained as concepts that are closely related to Brazil's development trajectory and include the large scale extraction of natural resources that result in socio-economic and ecological degradation. Extractivist practices under Lula's post-neoliberalism have been dubbed as neo-extractivist that included a community boom, economic growth under increased extraction of natural resources (Burchardt and Dietz, 2014). Since the right-wing politics have been dominating Brazil again in 2016, extractivist practices have again intensified and become privatized. And while the discourses surrounding the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis scream for change, Bolsonaro capitalizes on crises thereby contributing to the magnitude of Crisis Of Authoritarian Neoliberalism.

TOTAL EXTRACTIVISM

Michél Temer started in 2016 on depicting previously protected (indigenous) lands for developmental projects, while cutting down budgets of INCRA (National Institute for Colonial

and Agrarian Reform), FUNAI and IBAMA which is seen as the start of environmental deregulation and the demolition of family farm fundings (Menezes and Barbosa Jr, 2021; Soyer and Barbosa Jr, 2020). Since Bolsonaro's presidency in 2019, the deregulation and demolition of protective structures have even intensified. While this is still being researched, Soyer and Barbosa Jr (2020) argue that neo-extractivism has been turned into total extractivism² under Bolsonaro which enables large scale monoculture extraction for export and unlimited support for agribusinesses, while prosecuting opponents, paralyzing agrarian reform, and distinguishing institutions (p.541). The prosecution of climate activists, like reporter Adécio Piran who first mentioned the Amazon Day of Fire, could be viewed as an clear example of this policy. Furthermore, "...spaces for participation and the conditions for the contradictory are reduced under the Temer and Bolsonaro governments" (Soyer and Barbosa Jr, 2020, p.539). These exclusions and sometimes violent prosecutions of opponents could be an argument for defining extractivism under Bolsonaro as a new distinguished form - such as total extractivism - instead of referring back to 'old' extractivism before Lula. Moreover, it is a concrete example of the decline in democratic structures as a result of authoritarian neoliberalism. Total extractivism could therefore be the political economic reasoning behind Bolsonaro's governance strategy of denialism. A strategy that allows for further implementation in crisis situations due to disaster capitalism.

COVID AND CRISIS CAPITALISM

This chapter started with an analysis on the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis in Brazil and explained how Bolsonaro's denialism contributes to these crises. Earlier this chapter (page 37, 38) I argued that the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis display that Bolsonaro uses denialism as part of a governance strategy to reinforce his neoliberal authoritarianist regime by increasing extractivist practices and dismantling opposing views. The dismantling of opposing views has been discussed and also the previous section highlights that that a arguable total extractivism under Bolsonaro is part the neoliberal motive behind his governance strategy of denialism. This section argues that not only Bolsonaro's governance strategy of denialism facilitates greater crises in authoritarian neoliberalism, it also allows for capitalizing on these political, economic, social and ecological crises.

The disaster capitalism concept by Naomi Klein (2007) explains how a crisis 1) becomes an opportunity both for (1) states to push through privatizing legislation that further capitalize a society and for (2) making money out of a crisis which Fletcher (2012) calls 'capitalizing on chaos'. Both the COVID-19 crisis and the increased fire-setting of the Amazon show the capitalizing on a health crisis and impending climate crisis by the government administration. How Bolsonaro has capitalized on the COVID-19 crisis and the Amazon is

² *Total extractivism* is defined as the spirit and amalgamation of violent technologies comprising the totalizing imperative and tension at the heart of the present catastrophic trajectory. Total extractivism denotes how the techno-capitalist world system harbours a rapacious appetite for all life—total consumption of human and non-human resources—that destructively reconfigures the earth (Dunlap and Jakobsen, 2020, p.1).

twofold. Firstly, the chaos surrounding the COVID-19 is used, to further capitalize on the Amazon. Secondly, the COVID-19 crisis itself, is capitalized on.

First, Bolsonaro capitalizes on the Amazon (thus on the climate crisis), by using the COVID-19 crisis as a distraction. I debate whether COVID-19 is the full culprit of the weakening of environmental protections, or that Bolsonaro's governance is to blame since the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire shows that the weakening of environmental protection already started before the pandemic. Nevertheless, in line with Vale et. al (2021) and Severo et. al. (2021) it is clear that the COVID-19 crisis is seen as an opportunity to further weaken environmental protection and implement privatization policies. Various scholars and news outlets mention a ministerial meeting of April 2020 that showed Minister of Environment, Ricardo Salles, advising to take advantage of the press attention directed towards COVID-19 to simplify the rules and environmental protections of the Amazon (Vale et. al., 2021; Stewart et. al., 2020; Spring, 2020).

This April 2020 meeting shows direct evidence of the Bolsonaro government capitalizing on the chaos surrounding COVID-19 and using this chaos to push through neoliberal policies. According to CNN, Salles also stepped down in June 2021 because he was accused of obstructing police investigation concerning illegal logging (Pedroso and Yeung, 2021). Previously, he had sacked the IBAMA head of enforcement, Olivaldi Azevedo, who successfully broadcasted the raids on illegal mining operations on indigenous lands (Stewart et. al., 2020; Spring, 2020). These actions show that Bolsonaro's administration is directly involved in capitalizing on natural resources.

Secondly, the COVID-19 health crisis itself has also been capitalized on by Bolsonaro. This means that a crisis is perceived as a business opportunity and provides capital (Fletcher, 2012). Phillips (2021, July 1) and Rezende (2021) report of vaccine corruption scandal by the Bolsonaro government. This literally shows making illegal money out of capital meant for vaccines. Analyzing the information concerning the climate crisis in the Amazon and COVID-19 since February 2020 it can thus be said that a both the role of the Bolsonaro's administration and the COVID-19 crisis have created opportunities to capitalize on the health and climate crises.

The 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis have shown that Bolsonaro uses the governance strategy of denialism to reinforce his neoliberal authoritarianist regime by increasing extractivist practices and dismantling opposing views. Denialism further facilitates disaster capitalism, by using the chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic to increase illegal extractivist practices in the Amazon. This enables a quicker process of authoritarian neoliberalism by hasten the deregulation of environmental regulations and increase extractivism.

4.4. CONCLUSION

In this thesis I argue that the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis illustrate that Bolsonaro uses denialism as part of a governance strategy to reinforce his neoliberal authoritarianist regime by increasing extractivist practices and dismantling opposing views. Part of the answer why Bolsonaro shows denialism relates to authoritarian neoliberalism. As explained and illustrated by the two crises examined, Bolsonaro, like other authoritarian leaders, pursues his own authoritarian neoliberal agenda after being elected. Bolsonaro's response to the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and COVID-19 crisis can therefore be placed in this discourse. Therefore, The mostly direct denial of Bolsonaro during and after this event seems to be motivated by political and economic motives of (total) extractivism.

Denialism during the COVID-19 pandemic is also part of Bolsonaro's agenda which relates more to the authoritarian part of authoritarian neoliberalism. The incentive of direct and indirect denial mainly comes from gathering power and attacking opposing and critical structures such as media, politicians, the weak and science. This relates to earlier mentioned authoritarian characteristics such as the dismantling of democratic and opposing structures as mentioned on pages 37-38. Thus, both denialism during the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis can be regarded as part of Bolsonaro's governance strategy with the aim of reinforcing his neoliberal authoritarian regime economically and politically.

The denial of these two disasters for authoritarian neoliberal purposes result in real social, health and ecological vulnerability. The indigenous communities and other social marginalized groups are most affected by the increased illegal Amazon activities and COVID-19 crisis. Even though the dismantling of environmental legislation already began before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bolsonaro government has used the chaos surrounding the pandemic as a distraction to further/hasten the weakening of protective structures and increase illegal activities. Using the chaos of COVID-19 to push through neoliberal practices, while making money from both the pandemic and increased extractivism, is a form of capitalizing on COVID-19, the Amazon and its inhabitants, and ultimately capitalizing on an impending climate crisis.

Thus, both the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis in Brazil illustrate that denialism as part of Bolsonaro's governance strategy contributes to the magnitude of Crises In Authoritarian Neoliberalism (CIAN) with the aim of pursuing extractivist practices, while dismantling opposing and protective structures. Denialism, driven by authoritarian governance and neoliberal extractivism thus contributes to capitalizing on the Amazon, its vulnerable inhabitants and the COVID-19 crisis.

5. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In this thesis I aimed at analyzing Bolsonaro's denialism in response to the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis in Brazil. By doing so, I place these cases in a larger discourse which includes denialism, authoritarian neoliberalism and disaster capitalism. This section concludes and discusses *why Bolsonaro has been demonstrating denialism in response to the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 Crisis*.

In this thesis I argue that the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis illustrate that Bolsonaro uses denialism as part of a governance strategy to reinforce his authoritarian neoliberal regime by increasing extractivist practices and dismantling opposing views. Denialism as a governance strategy facilitates authoritarian neoliberalism - increasing the power of Bolsonaro's authoritarian regime and contributes to dismantling opposing structures with the aim of reinforcing neoliberal extractivist practices. This contributes to the magnitude of Crises In Neoliberalism as defined by Saad-Filho (2020) - deepening crises of political and economic systems, vulnerability, inequality and poverty. These greater crises under authoritarian neoliberalism is what I call Crises In Authoritarian Neoliberalism. CIAN contributes to real ecological, social-economic and political crisis. These crises are again capitalized on and present themselves as a vicious circle.

The authoritarian governance strategy of denial exonerates Bolsonaro from taking action or/and gives him the excuse to let the situation continue - because 'it did not happen' or 'it is not that bad'. Additionally, Bolsonaro removes people who oppose him or dismantles NGOs or other environmental protective structures. With the removal of these barriers, Bolsonaro is able to increase his neoliberal extractivist practices. Therefore, by using denial in such a way, Bolsonaro not only reinforces neoliberal extractivist practices, it also contributes to disaster capitalism. The intensified extraction of natural resources and increased illegal activities in previously protected Amazon regions contribute to the already present climate crisis. Furthermore, using COVID-19 as a distraction, the Bolsonaro government further capitalizes on this pending climate crisis. Thus, Bolsonaro capitalizes on both crises through denial which is integral to disaster capitalism by driving forward authoritarian governance and neoliberal extractivism.

This research contributes to the already existing studies on denialism, authoritarian neoliberalism and disaster capitalism. Authoritarian behavior, such as denialism, within a governance strategy has been researched from various angles by Fraser (2019), Wodak (2015), McGoey (2019), Orsini and Ortega (2020) and Deutsch (2021). This research contributes to this work by looking specifically at denialism during two disaster events in Brazil. Hereby, explaining denialism within the context of neoliberalism and disaster capitalism. The literature used on authoritarian neoliberalism connects to studies on political ecology and extractivism (McCarthy, 2019; Neimark et. al., 2019); and disaster capitalism (Klein, 2007).

Saad-Filho (2020) and Saad-Filho and Boffo (2020) already analyzed the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism in Brazil. This thesis contributes to their analysis and discusses neoliberal change in Brazil: from Lula's progressive neoliberalism to the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism with Bolsonaro and the resulting reinforcing neoliberal structures visible in the Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis. Outstanding in Brazil's neoliberal change, is the role of extractivism which develops alongside the change from progressive to authoritarian neoliberalism. Extractivism and authoritarian governance is touched upon by McCarthy (2019) who displays the connection of authoritarian regimes to nature and environmental politics. He refers to Gramsci and Williams by stating that 'hegemony over society cannot be separated from hegemony over nature: They function through the same political formations' (McCarthy, 2019, p.305).

Burchardt and Dietz (2014) mention that during Lula's progressive 'post-neoliberal' governance, neo-extractivism and the commodity boom inspired economic and societal development. For this reason, I argue alongside other scholars that post-neoliberalism in Brazil could still be characterized as progressive neoliberalism due to the still large scale neoliberal economy of extraction (Fraser, 2019). This thesis further connects this argument to Fraser's (2019) analysis of progressive and reactionary populism and neoliberalism. The author uses Gramsci's notions of distribution and recognition to show that populism occurs on both the political left and right. Following this reasoning, Lula's post-neoliberalism could be identified as leftist progressive neoliberalism or populism as a reaction to previous neoliberal governments. With the shift from Lula to Bolsonaro, neoliberalism in Brazil changed into authoritarian neoliberalism, characterized by the aggressive dismantling of environmental, democratic and opposing institutions with the aim of enabling increased extraction. A recent study from Menezes and Barbosa Jr. (2021) associates this type of extraction by *total extractivism*, the engine of the authoritarian neoliberal economy, characterized by a totalizing, violent and aggressive drive to colonize and consume all - plant, animal, mineral, human, etc. - life (Dunlap and Jakobsen, 2020).

Naomi Klein's (2007) concept of disaster capitalism entails making use of the chaos surrounding a crisis to further privatize public services. Fletcher (2012) expands the concept to 'capitalizing on nature' by distinguishing between 1) perceiving the climate crisis as a business opportunity and 2) using the climate crisis for further privatization of the public sphere. This thesis contributes to this debate by showing how both the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis are examples of disaster capitalism. Further, disaster capitalism can be argued to be inherently connected to extractivism since extractivism capitalizes on the climate itself. The increased extractivist practices that are linked to authoritarian neoliberalism - Bolsonaro - can therefore be viewed as disaster capitalism. And because denialism accelerates authoritarian neoliberalism - the dismantling of protective structures and the increase of extractivism - by distracting from or undermining the truth or real events, it can be linked to an increase in disaster capitalism. By using the distraction of the COVID-19 crisis, the Bolsonaro government creates opportunities to further profit from extraction, illegal Amazon deforestation and fire-setting. Thus, this thesis extends theory on

disaster capitalism by including its links to denialism and new forms of (authoritarian) neoliberalism, illustrated through Bolsonaro's behavior concerning the 2019 Amazon Day of Fire and the COVID-19 crisis in Brazil.

How this will end for Brazil cannot be known because at the moment (August 2021) Bolsonaro is still president and both COVID-19 and Amazon deforestation are still part of Brazil's reality. Also, the political crisis in authoritarian neoliberalism might deepen looking at recent news that warns of a probable military coup by Bolsonaro and his supporters, inspired by the US Capitol attack under Trump (Wintour, 2021). Further research is needed to demonstrate the implications of Bolsonaro's behavior on the environment and Brazilian society and make the world aware of its meaning. Let us not be stuck in denial as well but keep our eyes wide open to these neoliberal structures at play and the crises they cause. As long as an authoritarian leader rules society, neoliberal structures are reinforced and opposing forces dismantled. Total extractivism will stop at nothing. It might lead to a further crises in neoliberalism which will inspire even more anti-system sentiment and produce real ecological, social or economic crises. Or, are people able to unite and push through this negative authoritarian neoliberal spiral and create positive change in the coming elections? Time will only tell.

6. REFERENCES

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